

The Ceramic Art of Ogata Kenzan

Masahiko
Kawahara



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translated and adapted by

Richard L. Wilson

Publication of this book was assisted by a grant from the Japan Foundation.

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Distributed in the United States by Kodansha International/USA Ltd., through Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, New York 10022. Published by Kodansha International Ltd., 12-21, Otowa 2-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112 and Kodansha International/USA Ltd., with offices at 10 East 53rd Street, New York, New York 10022 and The Hearst Building, 5 Third Street, Suite 430, San Francisco, California 94104.

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LCC 84-48818

ISBN 0-87011-717-3

ISBN 4-7700-1217-9 (in Japan)

First edition, 1985

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THE CERAMIC ART OF OGATA KENZAN

Japanese Arts Library

General Editor

John Rosenfield

With the cooperation and under the editorial supervision of:

The Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Japanese Government

Tokyo National Museum

Kyoto National Museum

Nara National Museum

KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL LTD. AND SHIBUNDO

Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco

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Note: This table, compiled by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Japanese Government for the arts and crafts, has been adopted for general use in this series. In this volume, the author has made further periodic distinctions related specifically to Ogata Kenzan's career, which spanned the period from 1699 to 1743. In addition to those objects given specific dates, Kenzan's works are assigned to three periods whose names derive from the location of Kenzan's workshop:

Narutaki (1699-1712)
Nijō Chōjiyamachi (1712-ca. 1731)
Edo (ca. 1731-43)

A Note to the Reader

Japanese names are given in the customary Japanese order, surname preceding given name. The names of temples and subordinate buildings can be discerned by their suffixes: *-ji*, *-tera*, *-dera* referring to temples (Tōshōdai-ji; Ishiyama-dera); *-in* usually to a subtemple attached to a temple (Shōryō-in at Hōryū-ji).

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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE AND AFTER KENZAN

From the late sixteenth through the mid seventeenth century, the work of the nascent ceramic industry of Kyoto reflected the taste and precepts of four successive generations of professional tea masters. The first teaman to have a direct impact was Sen no Rikyū (1522–91), a merchant who perfected *wabicha*, a form of tea ceremony built around a concept of simplicity and humility (*wabi*). A late sixteenth century letter from Rikyū to his disciple Seta Kamon mentioning that “the red tea bowls being fired for me by Chōji [Chōjirō, the first generation head of the Raku family of potters] are very fine” confirms that Rikyū was active in the design of the austere, low-fired red and black bowls which became known as Raku ware (pl. 1).

In the decades following Rikyū’s death, creative leadership in tea was assumed by several military men who had access to the highest circles of power and prestige. Furuta Oribe (1543–1615), a talented student of Rikyū, was a warrior active in cultural circles in Fushimi, the barracks town south of Kyoto. A 1605 entry in the diary of the merchant and teaman Kamiya Sōtan (1551–1635) mentions “a black tea bowl . . . made in Kyoto . . . distorted shape. . . .” That bowl was in all likelihood similar to the assertive, individualized type of ceramics then being manufactured at the Mino kilns to the east, presumably in the taste of Oribe (pl. 2).^{1*} The next figure to influence the ceramics of Kyoto was Kōbori Enshū (1579–1647), who from the fourth decade of the seventeenth century served as official tea master for the Tokugawa shogunate. Enshū is associated with a style called “beautiful” *sabi* (*kirei sabi*), which in ceramics meant thinly thrown, elegantly shaped and glazed wares—in particular those from the seven kilns that he is said to have favored (pl. 3).² Recent research has uncovered evidence suggesting that, through the offices of one Ōhira Gohei (?–1658), a respected broker of fine ceramics, Enshū lent his approval to the sophisticated imitations of Chinese tea caddies and Korean tea bowls then being made at the Kyoto kilns.³ The reputation of tea master Kanamori Sōwa (1584–1656) is inextricably bound with the emergence of Ninsei ware, made by Nonomura Ninsei at Omuro, northwest Kyoto, from the late 1640s. In addition to designing wares for Ninsei, Sōwa took an active role in promoting the wares of the kiln, many of which

*Numbered notes are to be found on page 136.



1. Red Raku ware tea bowl, named "Muichimotsu," by Chōjirō.
Diam. 11.2 cm. Late 16th century.
Egawa Museum of Art, Nishinomiya, Hyōgo Prefecture.
2. Black Oribe ware tea bowl. Diam. 11.9 cm. Early 17th century.
Itsuō Art Museum, Ikeda, Osaka Prefecture.



3. Takatori ware tea caddy. H. 7.4 cm.
Mid 17th century. Kobori Sōkei Collection,
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Nonomura Ninsei. Diam. 9.9 cm. Mid 17th century. MOA
Museum of Art, Atami, Shizuoka Prefecture.



featured ornate decoration in the newly developed overglaze enamel technique (pl. 4). In the seventy years that had passed since the time of Rikyū, Kyoto ceramics had developed from a few obscure workshops that worked directly with tea masters to an industry of technical diversity and distinctive style.

No dominating arbiter of taste rose to take the place of Sōwa after his death in 1656. One reason is that the tea ceremony itself had lost its creative vitality; indeed, even in Enshū's heyday, the tea ceremony was becoming gradually absorbed into a broader system of formal gift-giving and entertainment that had evolved under