

## ZEBREGS&RÖELL FINE ART AND ANTIQUES



A Chinese export porcelain Amsterdam decorated 'plantation owner's' spittoon

China, circa 1720-1740, over-decorated in Amsterdam

H. 9 x Diam. 13.5 cm

**A Chinese export porcelain Amsterdam decorated 'plantation owner's' spittoon**

China, circa 1720-1740, over-decorated in Amsterdam

*H. 9 x Diam. 13.5 cm*

Amsterdam played a key role in global trade during the 17th and 18th centuries, benefiting greatly from international commerce, including the trade of enslaved Africans who worked on plantations in Suriname. Many wealthy Amsterdammers were shareholders in the plantation economy and amassed large fortunes. Their wealth enabled them to collect luxury items, such as Chinese

porcelain, and they created extensive wunderkammers (cabinets of curiosities) filled with objects from distant lands, reflecting their status and connections to global trade. The original porcelain was made in China and exported to Europe, highly valued and often imported by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Some pieces were further decorated in the Netherlands with European scenes, often in Amsterdam. This additional decoration aimed to cater to the tastes of wealthy European collectors and increased the value of the porcelain.

The spittoon depicts scenes of plantation owners, likely European men enjoying their wealth (and tobacco), reflecting the involvement of the Amsterdam elite in the plantation economy and tobacco industry. The depiction also shows enslaved Africans as putti (small cherub-like figures), creating an allegory for the tobacco industry from production to consumption. The over-decoration was done using "encre de Chine" (Chinese ink) or other enamel paints applied over the glazed porcelain and fired again. This required great skill to avoid damaging the porcelain. Chinese porcelain was already considered a luxury item, but the over-decoration in Amsterdam added exclusivity and status, making it a symbol of wealth among affluent collectors. Only the wealthiest could afford such objects.

The Rijksmuseum has two similar spittoons made of Delftware, which were less exclusive. The owner of this Chinese porcelain spittoon may have seen the Delft versions and decided to commission something even more exclusive. This piece is unique. Could it have been painted in Amsterdam? It is likely that it was decorated in Amsterdam due to the refined quality. The city was a major center for porcelain over-decoration at the time, with several workshops specializing in such work.

This object is not only an artwork but also a symbol of the wealth, power, and global trade networks of the time, combining Chinese craftsmanship with European social themes, enhancing the influence of Amsterdam's elite in world trade.