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## VIVACI TRASPARENZE / VIVID TRANSPARENCIES

*Yaozhou Ceramics from the Shang Shan Tang Collection*

Venice, Museum of Oriental Art  
7 September - 23 October, 2022

Curator: Sabrina Rastelli, PhD, Ca' Foscari University Venice

This exhibition celebrates the Yaozhou kilns, in northern China, whose surprising development can be defined as a story of technical challenges, punctually solved by the ingenuity of the local potters. Active from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Yaozhou kilns known mainly for their 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-century production, characterised by vivid designs carved or stamped under a transparent olive-green glaze. However in the course of their history, they also fired other types of celadon, as well as black and russet wares of excellent quality, and their evolution is surprising from any perspective: technological, archaeological and textual. From being a peripheral factory with a modest output in the early phase, they entered the imperial tribute system with their bluish celadon in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and in the 11<sup>th</sup> century they became the most influential kiln of the empire for the production of olive-green wares. This variety even earned it permission from the imperial court to erect the first stele dedicated to a ceramic deity in 1084.



***Ewer with peony design***  
Stoneware with blue-green  
glaze  
Yaozhou kilns  
Five Dynasties (907-960) or  
Northern Song (960-1127)  
H. 21 cm  
Shang Shan Tang Collection

To fully appreciate the production of the Yaozhou kilns, the exhibition is organised by themes, rather than in chronological order, starting with the technological one. This immediately reveals the sophistication of the experiments carried out over time by the Yaozhou potters, who were always ready to take up the challenges posed by the intrinsic characteristics of the local raw materials, to constantly innovate production and to adapt to the fashions of the moment. Some display cabinets are centred around the carved, engraved, or embossed decorative motifs that distinguish the Yaozhou celadons: peonies (a metaphor for female sensuality), chrysanthemums (a symbol of autumn and the wisdom one acquires over the years), lotuses (introduced with Buddhism), children at play (a wish for numerous offspring and unbroken lineage), mandarin ducks in a pond (emblem of marital fidelity), miniature sculptures of turtles applied to the bottom of small cups to give the impression that they are swimming in the liquid poured into them, mythological animals evoking extraordinary stories. Other showcases focus on the function of the shapes used in domestic, but also religious (especially Buddhist) contexts. One display case is dedicated to specimens marked with inscriptions, one of which, *guan*, proves that already by the time of the Five Dynasties (907-960), the Yaozhou kilns were included in the imperial tribute system. While the Yaozhou workshops are famous for their olive-green ceramics, it is important to emphasise that they also excelled in the production of the rust-red and black genres, the latter either monochrome or mottled in red with a very modern effect, and indeed a section is dedicated to these types.



Dish with goose and fish among waves. Stoneware with blue-green glaze, Yaozhou kilns Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). D. 18.3 cm. Shang Shan Tang Collection

The 96 pieces in the exhibition come from the **Shang Shan Tang, one of the most comprehensive collections of Yaozhou ceramics in the world**, illustrating the development of the kiln centre with examples of excellent quality. All the pieces are displayed in Room 12 of the Museum of Oriental Art, which in 1928 was destined to house the Chinese porcelain from what was once the collection of Henry of Bourbon. The historical setting, designed by Nino Barbantini in the 1920s, has been preserved since it harmonises the extraordinary Asian pieces with the character of a rococo apartment, adorned with eighteenth-century mirrors and stuccoes, creating a fascinating ambience.

The exhibition, made possible by the generosity of Mr Song Tao, is curated by Sabrina Rastelli, Ca' Foscari University Venice, and will run from September 7<sup>th</sup> to October 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Museo d'Arte Orientale Venezia (<https://orientalevenezia.beniculturali.it/>)

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