

CLAUDIA M. BONȚA¹
OVIDIU MUNTEAN²

THE COLLECTION OF FINE FAIENCE EARTHENWARE FROM THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSYLVANIAN HISTORY IN CLUJ-NAPOCA³

Abstract: This paper presents a series of fine faience pieces from the 19th century, forming a very interesting museum mini-collection. The objects of various shapes and sizes are succinctly described, their decorative, ornamental elements being attentively highlighted.

Keywords: patrimony, decorative art, fine faience, museum collections, 19th century.

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The patrimony of the National Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj-Napoca boasts a rich *Collection of Decorative Art*, totalling hundreds of objects of patrimony made of ceramic, porcelain and glass, among which there stands out a series of fine faience pieces from the 19th century. Of uncertain provenance, the pieces came into the possession of the National Museum of Transylvanian History through donations (the *Vass Otilia Donation to the Transylvanian Museum Association* from 1924-1929, two pieces) or by transfer (the *Târgu Mureș Museum of Decorative Arts*, in 1943; the *Technical Museum*, in 1942). Of different shapes, sizes and purposes, what the vessels have in common is, above all, a dual colour palette, grey-white and cobalt blue, two benchmarks that impart a sober elegance to the vessels and artfully tone down their ornamental exuberance. Glazed, with relief decoration, the objects use colour as a background through ingenious games of fulls and voids, incisions and relief ornaments that highlight the contrast between the vivid, bright blue and the lustreless, dull grey. The decoration is extremely rich and varied, with geometric, vegetal and animal elements, with bands, elegant volutes or sober metopes, with mascheroni and antiquated heads, with inscriptions of Gothic inspiration and bas-reliefs featuring an intriguing iconography, with rosettes, arabesques and vegetal garlands supported by processions of putti. The harmonious shapes and the dynamic balance between the composite decor and the sobriety of the colours give these vessels a special elegance that sets them apart (C.M.B.). The German mini-collection of fine faience from the 19th century contains 19 pieces:

¹ Museum curator, PhD, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, email bonta.claudia@mnit.ro. Text signed with the initials C.M.B.

² Museum curator, PhD, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, email ovidiu2505@yahoo.com. Text signed with the initials O.M.

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1. Chalice with lid⁴ (Fig. 1).

Faience, receding circular foot, cylindrical body, lid with a heightened knob. Decor in white relief against a cobalt blue background, in the shape of a roll that unfolds around the vessel, depicting historicised scenes, in alternation with texts in German. The texts with Gothic characters are incised on white slabs framed by arches of Gothic inspiration and they are rhythmically adorned with a vegetal motif consisting of three vine leaves between the arcades (C.M.B.).

2. Water tank with lid⁵ (Fig. 2).

Faience, rectangular tank, with four side volutes arranged in a 2-2 subsiding tandem, supporting two female antiquated heads in the corbel. The piece shows a rectangular front panel, resting on mouldings and baguettes, decorated with vegetal, floral and animal motifs, clustered around a rosette in relief. On the side, there are featured decorative vegetal arabesques. At the bottom, the decoration consists of a medallion comprising a lion's head in relief, flanked by vegetal motifs; the lion's gaping mouth serves as the flow point for the tank. The lid, in the shape of a truncated cone, is adorned with depth glyphs and vegetal motifs, over which reigns the grip, in the shape of two addorsed fish, with twisted tails bounded by a trident in the middle (C.M.B.).

3. Decorative plate⁶ (Fig. 3).

Faience, edge decorated in relief with human figures integrated into a stylised vegetal composition against a cobalt blue background. The well is defined by two bands in relief, one featuring the twisted rope motif and the other displaying entwined oval ornaments. At the centre there is depicted a scene with four mythological characters, placed in a rich natural setting, from which a castle may be seen (O.M.).

4. Decorative plate⁷ (Fig. 4).

Faience, decorated broad edge, with embossed decoration of leaves, stalks and flowers against a cobalt blue background, alternating with twelve oval recesses. At the centre, against a more intense background of colour, there is represented a medallion with stylised floral and geometric elements (O.M.).

5. Decorative plate⁸ (Fig. 5).

Faience, margin incised with a cobalt blue geometric composition; the well is marked with diagonal lines and the centre of the plate is incised with four floral medallions framing a stylised cross (O.M.).

⁴ D-mouth: 7.8 cm, D-base: 12.8 cm, H: 47.8 cm. Dating: 19th c.

⁵ Tank H: 32 cm, L: 24 cm, w: 11 cm; Lid H: 14.6 cm, L: 23.5 cm, w: 10.4 cm. Dating: 19th c.

⁶ D: 33 cm, H: 4 cm. On the back it has the series no. 765. Dating: 19th c.

⁷ D: 32 cm, H: 5 cm. On the back it has the series no. 755. Dating: 19th c.

⁸ D: 25.3 cm, H: 3 cm. On the back it has the series no. 753. Dating: 19th c.

6. Decorative plate⁹ (Fig. 6).

Faience, frame with circles, edge decorated with two flower models in alternation. The intensely coloured well is marked by a series of dots and a band consisting of entwined oval shapes and dots, and the field contains a flower with stylised petals, each being decorated symmetrically with three points in relief (O.M.).

7. Pitcher¹⁰ (Fig. 7).

Faience, pitcher with undulated grip and pedestal-type plinth. The grey-white decoration is highlighted against the cobalt blue background. An elegant, well-proportioned shape, its neck decorated with horizontal bands of geometric and vegetal motifs – buttons, glyphs, leaves and rosettes. The body of the vessel is decorated with stylised vegetal motifs (*fleur-de-lys*), arranged in long vertical registers, crowned by bands arched with volutes at the ends, decorated with simple incisions. The plinth-shaped bottom is also decorated with several horizontal bands, featuring geometric and vegetal motifs – buttons, glyphs, leaves and rosettes (C.M.B.).

8. Pitcher¹¹ (Fig. 8).

Faience, geometrical shape, spout, handle *accollé* adorned with bands and decorations in the shape of a twisted rope; receding circular bottom. The vessel features cobalt blue embossed ornaments on a predominantly grey-white background with a pearled texture. Dark blue horizontal bands finely punctuate the decoration consisting of bands decorated with geometric and vegetal ornaments, oblique flutes and simple strings. The body of the vessel is dominated by four medallions with embossed rosettes against a background of fine flutes, medallions punctuated by elongated vegetal ornaments, arranged in a mirror-image pattern (C.M.B.).

9. Pitcher¹² (Fig. 9).

Faience, predominantly white-grey background with blue embossed ornamentation. Handle *accollé* with stylised vegetal decoration, fine spout and flared circular bottom. The pitcher's neck is highly ornate, with bands featuring geometric and floral decorations, with ropes and flutes, in contrast with the sparse decorations on the body. Vegetal arabesques, slender stalks outline a stylish ornamental ensemble covering the body. At the base, a stylised band of palmettes makes the transition to the bottom, which is decorated with ribbons in two shades of blue, bands with buttons and geometric ornaments (C.M.B.).

10. Flower stand¹³ (Fig. 10).

Faience, circular bowl, resting on three solid corbel-type legs, in the decorative shape of a lion's paws. The decoration is featured on a broad frieze flanked by two mouldings with floral and geometric adornments. The mouldings, highlighted by

⁹ D: 24.5 cm, H: 3 cm. On the back it has the series no. 643. Dating: 19th c.

¹⁰ D-mouth: 8.4 cm, D-base: 11.7 cm, H: 38 cm. On the back it has the series no. 684. Dating: 19th c.

¹¹ D-mouth: 9.5 cm, D-base: 11.8 cm, H: 29.5 cm. On the back it has the series no. 635. Dating: 19th c.

¹² D-mouth: 8 cm, D-base: 10 cm, H: 28 cm. On the back it has the series no. 632. Dating: 19th c.

¹³ D-mouth: 21.8 cm, H: 15.8 cm. On the back it has the series no. 643. Dating: 19th c.

simple, dark blue ribbons, provide an elegant frame to the frieze, decorated with a series of four antiquated heads, two female and two male, between eight putti, arranged in pairs, holding rich floral garlands tied with ribbons. The base, slightly rounded, is decorated with simple flowers, flutes of different sizes and two mascheroni crowned with leaves, placed underneath the female heads. A graceful, slender shape (C.M.B.).

11. Flower stand¹⁴ (Fig. 11).

Faience, cylindrical vessel supported by a four-legged corbel, equipped with two handles accollé, surmounted by antiquated female heads. The wide lip is decorated with metopes containing geometric and vegetal ornaments in relief, white on bluish background, and bright blue oval embossed buttons. The decor of horizontal bands on the body alternates chromatically, grey-white with cobalt blue, combining, with maximum effect, the colour contrast and the ornamental layout: simple bright blue ribbons and grey-white heavily ornate bands, with geometric and vegetal decorations. At the bottom of the vessel's body there prevails a broad frieze laden with vegetal motifs, ribbons and free rectangular cartouches, each flanking two satyrs with banners on their shoulders, supporting, from the side, a medallion with a male portrait. The ornamentation is identical on both sides of the flower stand. The receding base of the vessel is decorated with two bands with geometric motifs and, respectively, with vegetal decorations in relief. The flower stand is equipped with a circular foot supported by four solid legs in the decorative shape of lion's paws. The foot is divided chromatically by the decoration, consisting of a wide, cobalt blue ribbon and a grey-white frieze with simple rectangular cartouches (C.M.B.).

12. Bowl with lid for storing tobacco¹⁵ (Fig. 12).

Faience, symmetrical decoration, with two medallions representing St. George slaying the dragon, surrounded by geometric elements, stalks, flowers and stylised birds. On the body are applied two lion heads in relief, each containing a clasping ring. The lid is decorated with geometric motifs, two dotted rows and blue petals, and the clasping knob is represented by a monkey that embraces a boot (O.M.).

13. Bowl with lid for storing tobacco¹⁶ (Fig. 13).

Faience, decor with claws on the three legs of the vessel, as well as with a composition of stylised leaves and flowers in relief, a row of dots and bands of great artistic refinement. The cover is decorated with two alternating patterns of embossed leaves against a blue background, and is fitted with a clasping knob in the shape of a stylised fir cone (O.M.).

¹⁴ D-mouth: 29.3 cm, D-base: 19.2 cm, H: 29 cm. Dating: 19th c.

¹⁵ D-base: 12 cm, H: 20.5 cm. On the back it has the series no. 884. Dating: 19th c.

¹⁶ D: 15 cm, H: 18.5 cm. On the back it has the series no. 751. Dating: 19th c.

14. Flower stand¹⁷ (Fig. 14).

Faience, massive shape with a wide, straight, grey-white rim, decorated with an embossed band, with an ancient Greek, cobalt blue wave. The body of the vessel is decorated with a bundle of baguettes symbolically bound with simple, crossing platbands, underneath which there unfolds a broad frieze with acanthus leaves, punctuated by stalks, each surmounted by three fleurs-de-lys, with cups arranged one above the other, in a subsiding pattern. The slightly flaring base features a decorative band consisting of elegantly knotted ovate shapes, with small rosettes inside (C.M.B.).

15. Flask-shaped container¹⁸ (Fig. 15).

Faience, missing handles, narrow neck with successive flutes, geometric decoration along the edge, with pairs of ornamented triangles, symmetrically flanking, from the side, a human figure in relief. The foot is decorated with string of entwined ovate shapes and dots, and on each flattened side of the vessel there is represented a stylised leaf medallion (O.M.).

16. Pitcher¹⁹ (Fig. 16).

Faience, white embossed decoration against a cobalt blue background, circular foot, handle accollé, spout. The neck of the flask is very ornate, with a number of bands with geometric motifs, flanked by fringes of white embossed buttons. Two simple blue ribbons confer heightened chromatic dramatism to the decoration, also marking the portion where the vessel's body is joined with the elegant handle. The body of the vessel is decorated with a band of geometric ornaments, underneath which lies the predominant decoration, featuring a series of five large rosettes with buttons, punctuated by ornaments accollé placed in a mirror-image pattern, winding contours in tune with the special shape of the handle (C.M.B.).

17. Chalice with lid²⁰ (Fig. 17).

Faience, receding circular foot, lid with knob adorned with blue ribbons and bands of buttons. An eclectic, cobalt blue decoration against a predominantly white background, bands with geometric and vegetal ornaments, pearlescent buttons and simple, cobalt blue ribbons border the wide frieze on the neck, containing two pearled medallions charged with a coat of arms, the medallions being surrounded by small string-shaped elements and flanked by two groups of three floral ornaments each. Flanked by two branches, the quartered shield-type coat of arms is surmounted by two front-facing birds, between which the year 1574 is engraved. The middle of the chalice is marked by a decoration with six embossed buttons in the shape of lion heads, punctuated by floral rosettes. The lion heads correspond, in a mirror, to four shells embossed on the foot of the chalice. The rosettes and the lion heads represent

¹⁷ D-mouth: 38 cm, D-base: 19.5 cm, H: 25.5 cm. Dating: 19th c.

¹⁸ D-mouth: 3.4 cm, D-base: 5.5 cm, H: 15.8 cm. Dating: 19th c.

¹⁹ D-mouth: 7.3 cm, D-base: 9.7 cm, H: 22 cm. On the back it has the series no. 668. Dating: 19th c.

²⁰ D-mouth: 7.5 cm, D-base: 10.2 cm, H: 31.5 cm. On the back it has the series no. 402. Dating: 19th c.

the starting points for long geometric ornaments, extending vertically to the bottom of the vessel. The foot of the chalice is decorated with three wide friezes containing geometric and floral ornaments, bordered by bands of buttons and simple, cobalt blue ribbons (C.M.B.).

18. Beer tankard²¹ (Fig. 18).

Faience, receding circular foot, adorned with two friezes and a series of decorative bands with geometric motifs. The top part is occupied by a historicised frieze, a rather confused amalgam of scenes, arranged in three metopes that depict different scenes. Illegible inscription, because of the poor quality of the die. The second frieze conveys a series of simple oval, two-colour cartouches, arranged in a contrastive, grey/blue pattern, punctuated by vertical geometric ornaments. Both friezes are framed by two string-type bands and are preceded by an embossed circular band, decorated with in-depth embossed circular medallions that adorn the tankard around the lip and at mid-level. The base of the tankard is decorated with a concave band decorated with geometric motifs, flanked by two simple, cobalt blue ribbons, accompanied by double tori. The simple, undecorated handle, with a loop at the base, is damaged, broken and glued in the upper part (C.M.B.).

19. Big pitcher²² (Fig. 19).

Faience, circular foot, large size. The vessel is fitted with a handle accollé and a spout adorned with a mascheron on the outside. The intricate decoration features circular friezes arranged in horizontal registers, separated by bands of ribbons, tori, twisted ropes or vegetal friezes. The high neck is decorated with a row of six rosettes, followed, at the base of the neck, by a frieze consisting of elongated diamonds with rosettes at the corners; a reticular ornament completes the decorations in this part of the vessel. The body is dominated by a historicised frieze showing the individual portraits of seven male characters, rendered in the space delimited by columns of leaves, with rosettes at the ends. The base of the vessel shrinks elegantly amid a background consisting of elongated ovate shapes and fine ribbons (C.M.B.).

²¹ D-mouth: 8.5 cm, D-base: 11.6 cm, H: 19.8 cm. Dating: 19th c.

²² D-base: 17 cm, H: 62 cm. Dating: 19th c.



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4

**Fig.5****Fig.6**



Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9

**Fig.10****Fig.11**



Fig.12

**Fig.13****Fig.14**



Fig.15



Fig.16



Fig.17

**Fig.18**



Fig.19