

Early Meissen Coffee and Tea Sets in the Collections of the Museum of Warsaw – Introductory Remarks

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EARLY MEISSEN COFFEE AND TEA SETS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE MUSEUM OF WARSAW – INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Abstract

The 18th century was a period of intensive cultural changes in Europe. For Poland, this was the beginning of the reign of a new dynasty – the Wettins. As a lover of art and collector of Far Eastern porcelain, the first king of this dynasty, August II, led to the establishment of the first European porcelain factory in 1710 in Saxon Meissen. Early Meissen products include coffee and tea sets as an expression of socio-cultural changes related to changes in culinary habits. The work aims to present early Meissen products as evidence of the rapid development of consumption of new beverages, as well as to announce the interesting phenomenon of the occurrence of a relatively large number of vessels from early manufacturing activities in Warsaw, which will be confronted with analogies from other cities in present-day Poland.

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KEYWORDS

- Tea and coffee sets
- Meissen porcelain
- archaeology of Warsaw
- Saxon Palace
- Castle Square

INTRODUCTION

The 18th century was a period of intensive cultural changes in Europe, significantly influenced by the development of science, art, philosophy, and social and political changes. For Poland, the beginning of the 18th century brought the rule of a new dynasty – the Wettins. Augustus II, known as 'the Strong', and as a lover of art and collector of Far Eastern porcelain,¹ led to the establishment of the first European porcelain manufacture in 1710 in Meissen, located near the Saxon capital – Dresden. The early Meissen products included coffee and tea sets as an expression of socio-cultural changes related to changes in culinary customs and, consequently, also table customs. The appearance of new products, such as coffee or tea, forced the appearance

of new, specially dedicated vessels, such as cups, tea bowls, saucers, mugs, teapots, and sugar bowls. Eighteenth-century Meissen products are known from museum and private collections, but the fragments of such vessels from archaeological excavations are published much less frequently.

EARLY MEISSEN COFFEE AND TEA SETS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE MUSEUM OF WARSAW

The collection presented below comes from several archaeological sites in Warsaw and is a part of the archaeological collection of the Museum of Warsaw (Fig. 1). The work aims to present early Meissen products as evidence of the rapid development of the consumption of new beverages,² as well as to present an interesting phenomenon: the occurrence of quite large quantities of early Meissen

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¹ Kowicka 1991.

² For the selection criteria, see: Wendland 2008, 198-213; Oniszczyk 2013, 63-82; Szkurłat 2024.



Fig. 1. Location of archaeological sites on the map of Warsaw from 1772: 1 – Castle Square; 2 – Saxon Palace; 3 – Dung Hill. Computer processing: E. Więcek-Bonowska.



products in Warsaw, which will be confronted with analogies from other cities in present-day Poland.

The analysis refers to the Warsaw Museum collection acquired during excavations from three well-defined sociotopographic contexts. A total of 24 vessels discovered at the archaeological sites discussed below were analysed:

1. Vessels from the houses of wealthy burghers located at today's Castle Square. The collection includes vessels from latrines functioning since the mid-18th century.³

2. Ceramics obtained during excavations of the Saxon Palace – the royal residence of the Wettin family. The group consists of vessels obtained from latrines operating in the first half of the 18th century and from layers dated to the second half of the 18th century.

3. A single find from the city midden, the so-called Dung Hill (*Góra Gnojowa*) was included in the analysis because it is highly probable that it is part of the tableware from the Royal Castle. The author bases this assumption on her earlier research, which showed that some of the finds from Dung Hill should undoubtedly be associated with the Castle. For example, this is a series of Meissen plates bearing the additional signature of King Stanisław August Poniatowski.⁴ Part of this set was found during the 1960s research on Dung Hill and is now

part of the Museum of Warsaw's collection: *Eighteenth-century coffee and tea sets from Meissen*.

In order to present the discussed artefacts more clearly, a division based on the decorative pattern criterion was used. One of the oldest Meissen vessels is a set of vessels decorated with a Far Eastern landscape painted with cobalt and covered on the outside with brown glaze, called Capuchin bronze. This glaze was the first coloured glaze introduced into Meissen. It was developed by Samuel Stölzel in 1720, and from that date, we can date the finds of such vessels made in Meissen.⁵ The decorative motif referred to Chinese porcelain, which from the end of the 17th century was decorated by combining brown paint with a cobalt pattern inside (Fig. 2). These vessels were called Batavian after the East India Company port of Batavia – today's city of Java.⁶

The Warsaw Museum collections include the fragments of five vessels, including two saucers and three cups (Fig. 3:1-4) and three Batavian vessels, original, Far Eastern, which, as part of Augustus II's collection, could have been a model for Meissen artists (Fig. 3:5-7). Highly valued at the Dresden court, they also reached Warsaw very quickly. We know from written sources that they reached the Warsaw Meissen porcelain warehouse

³ Cf. Więcek 2017 for further details.

⁴ Szarek 1979, 157-158.

⁵ Weber 2013, 30.

⁶ Baoping Li 2012, 23.



Fig. 2. Bowl from the Wanjiao No. 1 shipwreck dated to the end of the 17th century. Underwater Archaeology Research Centre of China National Museum. Photo courtesy of Prof. Li Jian'an. Source: Baoping Li 2012.

as early as 1732, so from that time on, they were available to a wider group of users, of course, those with suitably large wallets.⁷ The cups in question are almost identical in shape, with walls formed into a slight rounding at the front, which turns into a foot. The spouts are slightly tilted outwards. These cups had a height of approximately 4.5 cm, a diameter of the spout of 7-8.5 cm, and a bottom of approximately 3.5 cm. The discussed collection can be dated to around 1730-1740.

Similar cups were also discovered at other sites excavated in Warsaw. One was discovered in the Witosłowski Palace, and the other in the Braniczki Palace.⁸ A cup and saucer were also discovered in the ruins of the Bank of Poland before 1765 the palace of Bishop Potocki.⁹ One small fragment of a saucer or cup was also discovered in the area of the manor house on Świętojańska Street.¹⁰ A set of vessels with Capuchin bronze is also present in the museum's collection at the Royal Castle in Warsaw.¹¹ In other Polish cities, this type of Meissen product was not recorded; however, in Gdańsk, original Batavian Chinese tea set vessels occur.¹² In Tykocin, a plate covered from the outside with brown glaze, resembling Capuchin bronze, also most probably of Asian provenance, was recorded.¹³ In Elbląg, several pieces of vessels covered with brown glaze on the outside were found, identified as Chinese Imari,¹⁴ as well as several dozen fragments identified as 'Batavia brown

style vessels', including elements of tea sets.¹⁵ A fragment of a thin-walled cup or bowl was also found in Poznań, and this vessel was identified as originally Chinese.¹⁶

The next early pattern applied in the Meissen manufacture was the 'bird-on-a-rock' motif, introduced to the canon around 1730.¹⁷ Here, the inspiration was Japanese porcelain decorated with a bird motif, primarily coffee and tea sets. The collection discussed here includes five vessels decorated with this motif. One saucer and a cup, with a very similar painterly line, were found on Castle Square – the saucer in the latrine of the Royal Pharmacy (Fig. 4:1), while the cup in the latrine of the Bochenkowycz family's property (Fig. 4:2). The remains of another cup were found in the latrine on the Samberger property at Castle Square (Fig. 4:3). The remains of two cups were found in the area of the Saxon Palace (Fig. 4:4-5). The earliest vessels decorated with a 'bird-on-a-rock' motif can be dated to the years 1725-1735 (Fig. 4:1, 3-5), while the cup (Fig. 4:2) is marked with a mark from Punktzelt.¹⁸ According to Röntgen, such a mark was used already in the 1740s,¹⁹ and one of the teapots from the Royal Castle collection has an identical signature, and the vessel comes from 1725-1730.²⁰ The diameters of the spouts of the cups oscillate between 7 and 8 cm, the diameter of the bottom and the height of the cups are only available for the cup from Castle Square, which is 3.9 cm and 6.7 cm, respectively. The saucer has a diameter of the spout of 13.3 cm, of the bottom 6.6 cm, and its height is 3 cm.

⁷ Weber 2013, 30.

⁸ Trzeciecki 2020, 113.

⁹ Zieliński 1995, 171; Klarecki 2007; Klarecki 2012, 110-113.

¹⁰ Biały 2019, 143.

¹¹ Szkurlat 2024, 80-83.

¹² Oniszczyk 2013, 64; Dąbal 2015, 253; Dąbal 2018, 323; Dąbal 2019, 76; Pudlis 2021, 176-177; Oniszczyk 2022, 272.

¹³ Bis and Bis 2013, 260.

¹⁴ Pospieszna 2015, 24.

¹⁵ Marcinkowski and Pospieszna 2016, 93-96.

¹⁶ Poklewska-Kozieł 2013, 125.

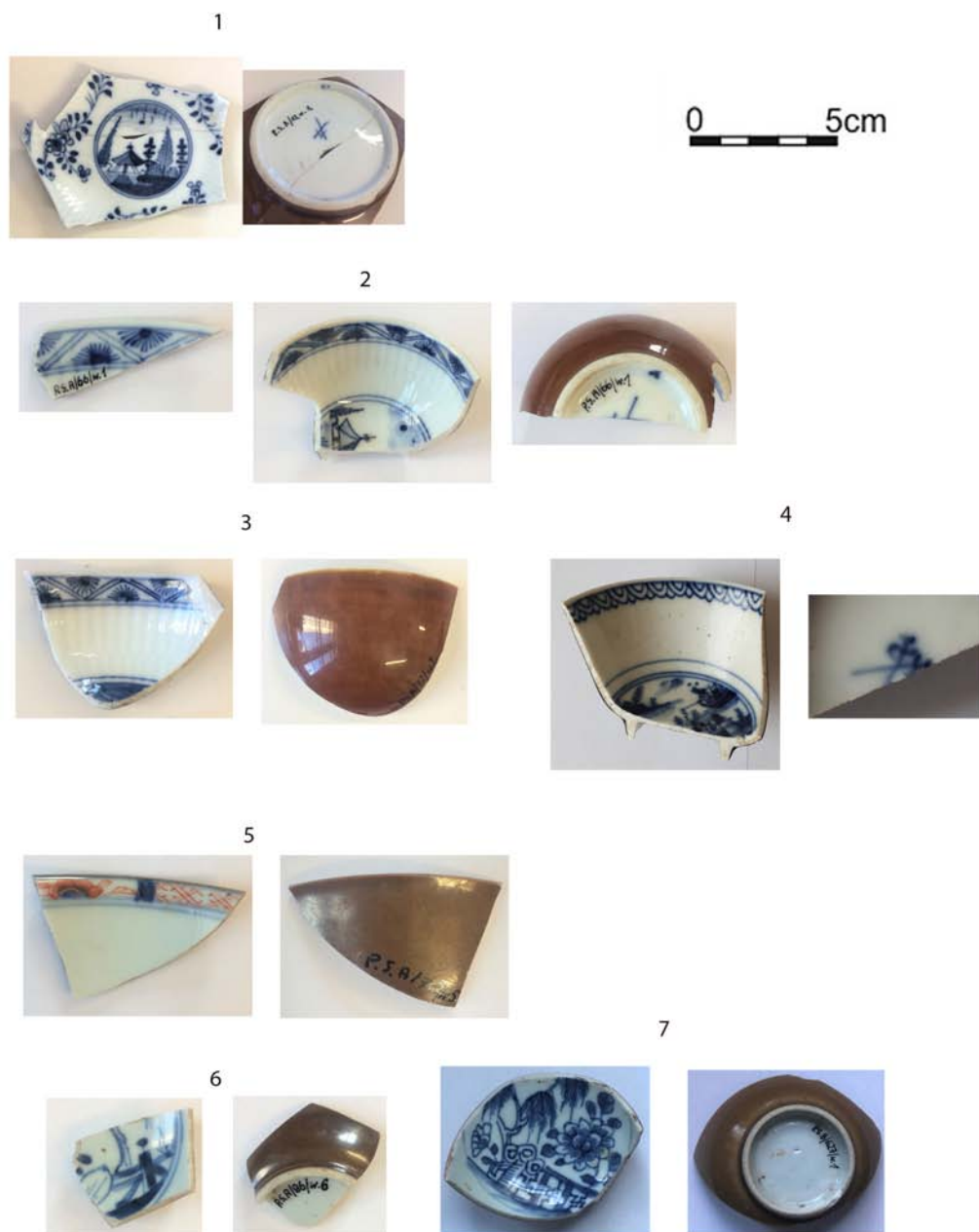
¹⁷ Szkurlat 2024, 72.

¹⁸ Danckert 2008, 392.

¹⁹ Röntgen 2007, 177.

²⁰ Szkurlat 2024, 74.

Fig. 3. ‘Batavian style’ cups and saucers.
Photo: E. Więcek-Bonowska.



A fragment of a bowl was found in the ruins of the Bank of Poland,²¹ and a saucer in the Jabłonowski Palace.²² The Royal Castle in Warsaw also has a collection of vessels decorated with a ‘bird-on-a-rock’ motif, including an almost identical saucer.²³ Similar decorations on Meissen porcelain have not been noted among finds from other Polish cities. Two cups and one saucer were decorated with straw glaze (Fig. 5) developed by the Meissen artisan Etzsch. The vessels were covered with this type of glaze from the outside, and inside a motif was placed, usually painted underglaze with cobalt, taken from Far Eastern decorations. Oftentimes, the walls of the

vessels were additionally decorated with a relief of the ‘broken stick.’²⁴ The finds discussed here should be dated to the years 1740-1750. The cups are semicircular on a low foot with dimensions determined for one of them, found in the latrine of the Royal Pharmacy at the castle square: height 6.2 cm, the diameter of the spout 7.6 cm and the bottom less than 3 cm (Fig. 5:3). The saucer found in the Saxon Palace has a hemispherical shape with a slightly rounded side, with following dimensions: height 3.5 cm, the diameter of the spout 13 cm and the bottom 6.5 cm (Fig. 5:2). The internal Far Eastern type motif is called ‘Indian flowers’ and consists of symmetrically arranged flower branches and one flower

²¹ Klarecki 2012, 110.

²² Starski 2013, 179-180.

²³ Szkurlat 2024, 72-79.

²⁴ Szkurlat 2024, 94.



Fig. 4. Cups and saucers decorated with a 'bird on-a-rock-motif'. Photo: E. Więcek-Bonowska.

in the centre of the composition. There is a decorative border at the edge. No vessels with a similar decorative motif have been discovered at other archaeological sites in Warsaw. But we can find them in the collection of the Royal Castle, which includes twelve sets of cups and saucers, three bowls and saucers, and a cup and saucer.²⁵ The motif of Indian flowers was recorded on a cup and saucer found in Gdańsk.²⁶

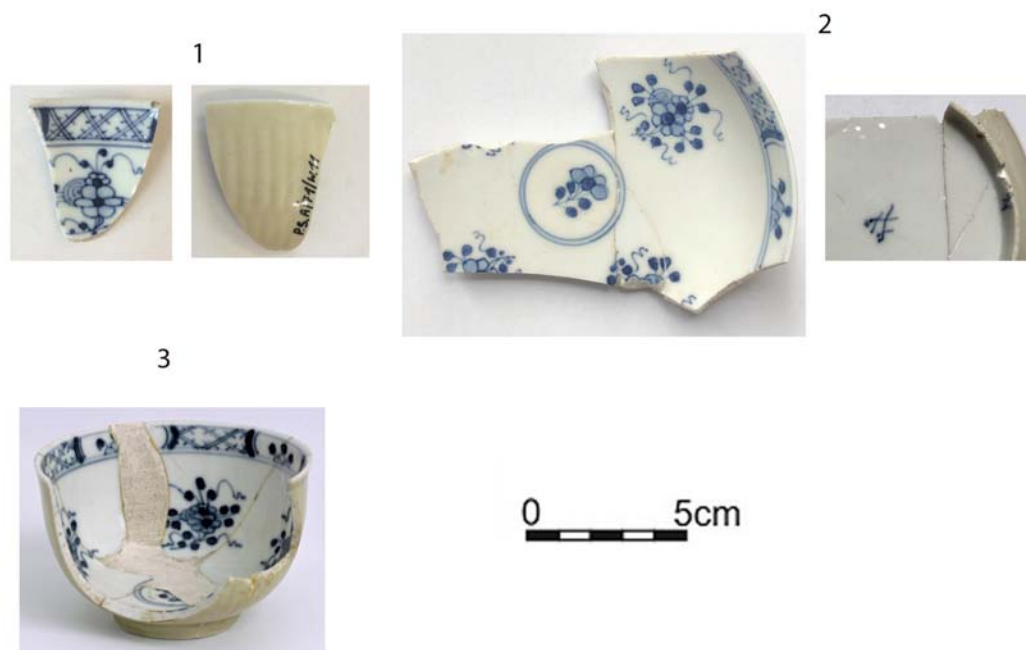
From around 1735, European motifs began to be introduced into Meissen designs. Far Eastern plants were replaced with native examples of flora. Inspiration was drawn from botanical atlases, but references were even made to earlier published scientific works from the 16th and 17th centuries.²⁷ An example of coffee and tea sets found in Warsaw, decorated in a European style, includes the finds of four saucers and one cup. All the finds

²⁵ Szkurlat 2024, 100-103.

²⁶ Oniszczyk 2013, 66.

²⁷ Szkurlat 2024, 208.

Fig. 5. Cups and saucers decorated with 'straw glaze'.
Photo: E. Więcek-Bonowska.



come from the Saxon Palace. They are decorated with a composition of single flowers (Fig. 6:1-4), additionally insects (Fig. 6:2), a plastic motif in the form of a 'broken stick' (Fig. 6:1-3) and Alt-Ozier braid (Fig. 6:5). The edges of two saucers are covered with gold paint (Fig. 6:4-5). The apogee of this type of decoration falls on the years 1735-1745, while later, those patterns were gradually replaced by bouquet compositions.²⁸ The diameter of the cup's spout is 7.5 cm, the bottom 3 cm, and its height is 4.5 cm. The saucers have similar dimensions: the diameter of the spout is about 13-14 cm, the bottom 7-8 cm, and the height varies between 3.3 and 3.5 cm. A small fragment of a vessel decorated with plastic ornaments in the form of a wickerwork was found on the premises of the Bank Polski. Mariusz Klarecki associates it with vessels decorated with painted floral decoration,²⁹ probably analogous to the finds from the Saxon Palace. In the collection of the Warsaw Castle, saucers and cups decorated with botanical flowers are represented as well.³⁰ Outside Warsaw, no finds of early Meissen vessels decorated with European flowers have been published so far.

The most numerous in the examined material are the remains of saucers and cups decorated with a pattern of dry flowers, the 'immortelle flowers.' This motif was introduced in Meissen before 1740, but it had been used in other European porcelain manufactures since the mid-18th century.³¹ Due

to its popularity, it is represented by the largest group of finds. The discussed collection consists of ten saucers, five cups and a dozen or so smaller fragments of coffee or tea tableware. All the finds are also decorated in relief, the 'broken stick' motif. The artefacts come from the Saxon Palace (Fig. 7:1-2, 4-9, 13), Castle Square (Fig. 7:3, 10-12, 15) and the Dung Hill in Warsaw (Fig. 7:14). The diameters of the saucer spouts range from 13 to 14.5 cm, the bottom 5.5 to 6.5 cm, and the height 3.5 to 4.5 cm. The diameters of the cup spouts range from 6 to 8 cm, the bottom 3.5 to 4 cm, and their height oscillates between 4.8 and 5.5 cm. These vessels are very difficult to date. It is also difficult to establish their provenance if they do not have a preserved manufacturer's signature. Although with some uncertainty, the author of this work assigned the presented vessels to the Meissen factory, primarily as a result of a comparative analysis of the decoration of fragments without a preserved signature to those with a preserved signature and to existing museum collections. On the other hand, the preserved signatures date these services quite broadly, from ca. 1740-50, through the Punktzeit (1763-1774), up to the time of the factory manager Camillo Marcolini (1774-1814) when Meissen products were additionally marked with a star.³²

Fragments of porcelain decorated with a motif of dried flowers are frequent in Warsaw,³³ and also appear in other regions of present-day Poland.³⁴

²⁸ Szkurlat 2024, 208.

²⁹ Klarecki 2012, 113.

³⁰ Szkurlat 2024, 208-220.

³¹ Weber 2013, 34.

³² Danckert 2008, 388.

³³ Klarecki 2012, 113; Starski 2013, 179; Trzeciecki 2020, 111, 114; Biały 2021, 230; Bis and Więcek-Bonowska 2021, 96.

³⁴ Mackiewicz 2012, 157-158; Oniszcuk 2013, 65.



Fig. 6. Cups and saucers decorated with European flora motifs.
Photo: E. Więcek-Bonowska.

However, the fragmentary state of preservation, and consequently, the frequent lack of a signature, poses problems with determining the correct provenance of the finds, as well as their appropriate dating.

Finally, there were four finds with different decorative motifs. Two small fragments constitute a set, a partially preserved cup and saucer decorated with a yellow lion motif (Fig. 8:1) – based on the yellow dragon – a decorative motif used in the 17th-century Japanese city of Arita. The Meissen pattern was developed between 1729 and 1730, and the first royal tableware with this pattern was created around 1731.³⁵ Early sets with this motif were quite true to the original, while later ones were much more fanciful and decorated additionally with plastic braid. The finds in question, although preserved in small fragments, can be assigned to some of the earlier products and dated to the 1730s, but it is difficult to determine their dimensions. This pattern, along with a similar red dragon motif, was reserved for the royal court of Augustus II,³⁶ while in the times of Augustus III, dishes decorated in this way were sometimes a diplomatic gift.³⁷ So it should not be surprising that no similar archaeological finds exist at other sites in Warsaw or other cities. However, elements of the sets can be found in the collections of various museums, including the Royal Castle in Warsaw,³⁸ Wilanów Palace,³⁹ the Royal Castle in

Wawel,⁴⁰ and the National Museum in Wrocław.⁴¹ Fragment of a saucer with a rim diameter of 12.5 cm (Fig. 8:2), covered on the outside with yellow paint, inside a fragmentarily preserved motif painted in purple and red, framed in gold. The decoration can be identified as ‘Laub- und Bandelwerk’, usually surrounding genre scenes copied from Far Eastern patterns, ‘chinoiserie.’ They were introduced to Meissen porcelain by Johann Gregorius Höroldt (1696-1775) in the 1720s,⁴² and this is a premise to the chronology of the saucer from the Saxon Palace. As in the case of tableware with the yellow lion motif, no analogy can be found in archaeological sources, while early Meissen vessels decorated in this way are present in museum collections, e.g., in the Royal Castle in Warsaw⁴³ or the Palace in Wilanów.⁴⁴ The same painter, Höroldt, also introduced the very popular above-mentioned ‘Indian flowers’ pattern. The last of the artefacts discussed, a saucer decorated with this motif painted overglaze with manganese purple (Fig. 8:3), with a diameter of the rim of 14 cm, a bottom of 8 cm and a height of 3 cm, was found in Castle Square in the latrine on the property of the Łazarewicz family.⁴⁵ This motif was created around 1725, and its popularity has not diminished for many years. The discussed vessel is marked with crossed swords and a star, which comes from the time when the factory in Meissen was managed by Camillo Marcolini.⁴⁶ A cup and saucer

³⁵ Weber 2013, 265.

³⁶ Klarecki 2012, 113.

³⁷ Szkurlat 2024, 128.

³⁸ Szkurlat 2024, 128-130.

³⁹ Sito 2012, 141.

⁴⁰ Piątkiewicz-Dereniowa 1983, cat. no. 72-74.

⁴¹ Sozańska 2002, cat. nos. 8 and 9.

⁴² Szkurlat 2024, 42.

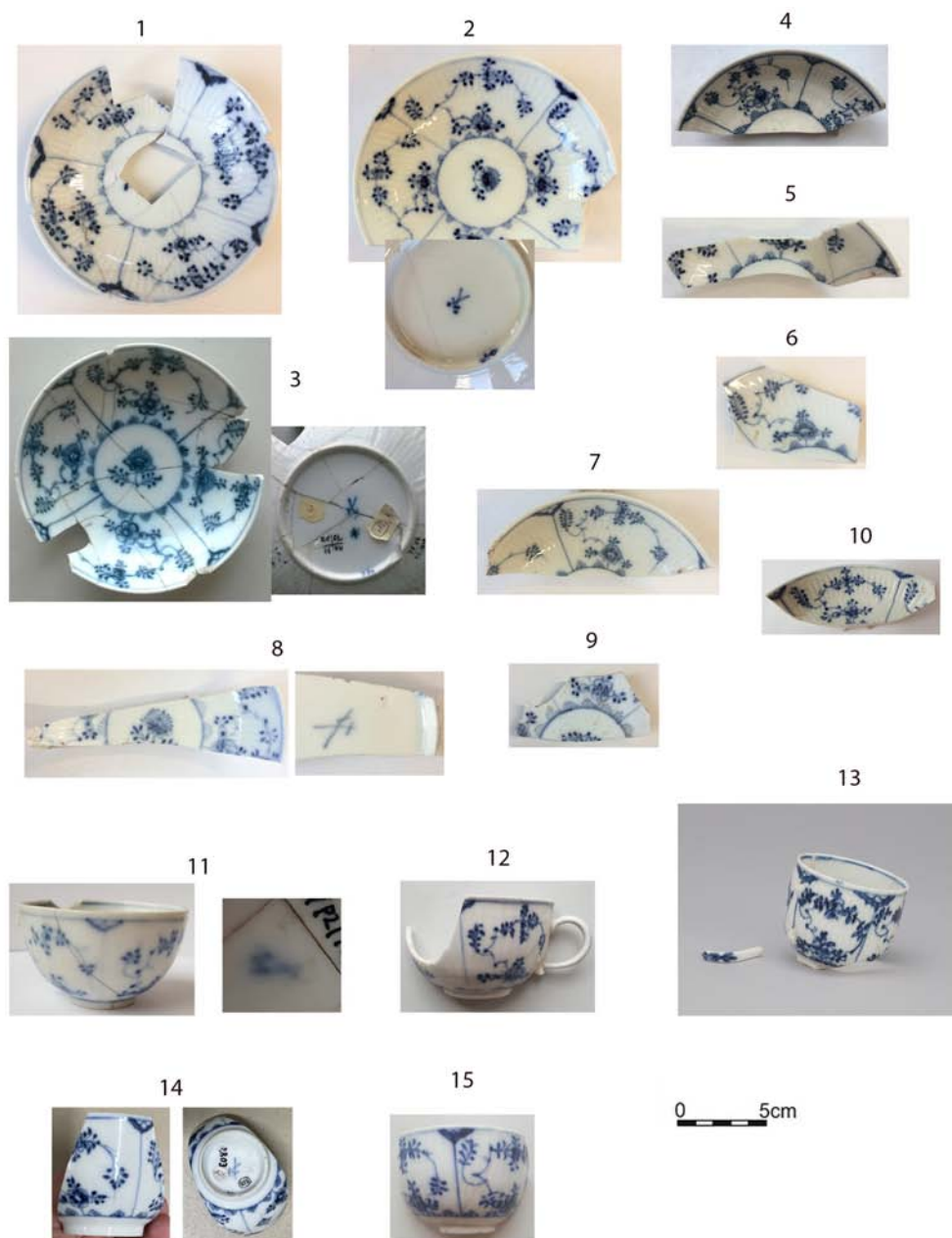
⁴³ Szkurlat 2024, 42-49.

⁴⁴ Sito 2012, 140.

⁴⁵ Cf. Meyza 2001.

⁴⁶ Röntgen 2007, 180; Danckert 2008, 388.

Fig. 7. Cups and saucers decorated with a pattern of dried flowers ('immortelle flowers'). Photo and graphic design: E. Więcek-Bonowska.



decorated with the 'Indian flowers' motif in purple were found during the excavations of the Ignacy Witosiński's Palace in Warsaw.⁴⁷ The signature placed on the bottom of the saucer indicates that these are relics of an earlier date than the discussed saucer from the Łazarewicz latrine. Considering the fact that the palace itself was built in the years 1771-1776, it cannot be ruled out that the relic is related to the manor house of Jan Aleksander Tarło, voivode of Lublin, which had existed in this place since the 17th century and was demolished in order to build the Witosiński Palace.⁴⁸ Outside Warsaw, they were found in Gdańsk.⁴⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The article aimed to introduce the topic of finds of early products of the Meissen manufactory in Warsaw and to present this issue in the context of other cities in present-day Poland. The obtained results indicate that Warsaw is a leader in this type of finds compared to other cities. We find relatively the most numerous analogies in Gdańsk, although it is still incomparably less than in Warsaw. An interesting issue that emerged during the analysis is the fact that in Gdańsk, in turn, there is a significant number of finds of Asian porcelain, compared to the discoveries in Warsaw. Asian ware was an inspiration for domestic, European manufacturers of both porcelain and cheaper faience. The uniqueness of Warsaw in terms of the number of finds of early Meissen products may result

⁴⁷ Trzeciecki 2020, 111, 113.

⁴⁸ Zieliński 1996, 219.

⁴⁹ Oniszczyk 2013, 66



Fig. 8. Cups and saucers decorated with another early decorative motifs. Photo and graphic design: E. Więcek-Bonowska.

from several reasons. The obvious fact that this city was a royal seat comes to the fore, and the manufactory in Meissen belonged to Polish kings. On the one hand, they equipped their residences with products from their own factory, and on the other hand, they offered porcelain sets to their supporters and diplomatic guests,⁵⁰ as evidenced by finds from Polish magnate residences. A Saxon porcelain warehouse was also established in Warsaw very quickly,⁵¹ which opened up the possibility of buying porcelain sets also for the wealthy bourgeoisie, such as the residents of the Castle Square.

However, the question arises of whether Warsaw was really so exceptional or maybe the obtained picture results from the lack of studies and publications. This has been one of the fundamental problems of historical archaeology for many years. I think this is an unsolvable problem at the moment and a direction for future, broader research in this field.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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⁵⁰ Szkurlat 2024, 128.

⁵¹ Weber 2013, 30.

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