



*Plate 94 a, b The 'Plain' Princess Box*

A landscape on the lid illustrates the legend of the imperial concubine Zhao Jun who refused to bribe the painter Mao Yanshou to make the best of her. Being consequently represented as ill-favoured she was sent to become the wife of a Hun chieftain beyond the Great Wall. The deceit was discovered the painter executed and an attempt was made to repurchase the lady, but Zhao Jun died beyond the Great Wall. The lychee sides are unusual for the period. Probably Yongzheng. Diameter 16 cm, depth 8.5 cm. Private collection

hurried. The dish is a rather ill-informed attempt at reproducing a Xuande style. It has a foliate edge and a fairly standard landscape, but the edge is bound with pewter and there is a brass rim to the base. It was not intended as a forgery for it bears a strongly carved reign mark within a rectangular cartouche, but was aimed rather at a popular taste for the 'antique'. A more modest example from the same period, and presumably the same factory, is a rectangular box with a crowded landscape, floral sides in the trailing manner of Wanli, and a discreditable scratched reign mark on the damaged base.

Garner sought to show from the two dated pieces in the Victoria and Albert Museum a deterioration in technique symptomatic of a disastrous decline in the art. This was unjustified. The carving on the well-known throne in the same museum (Strange, 1925: Pls. 10, 11), which has been dated to about 1777 by Craig Clunas on historical grounds, may be tediously over-decorated but it is not technically incompetent. Very much better is the work on the boxes in plate 98, the sides of which are carved with opposed five-clawed dragons amongst close-packed clouds above a line of large humpbacked waves of a type found in many Qianlong pieces. The tops show similar dragons on either side of a rectangular cartouche containing inscriptions. At the base of the cartouche is a tripartite rock rising from waves, a familiar feature of Jiajing and Wanli lacquer but rare in Qianlong. The carving is meticulous but not deep and there is no contrasting tone of red. The interiors are black. These boxes were made to store scrolls painted by court artists in 1776 and although the event they illustrated, the Emperor's 'Southern Progress', took place in 1751 the boxes are likely to have been made when the scrolls were painted.

An even later piece is a large panel of a mountainous landscape through which marches the victorious army of General Agui reducing as it goes the massive stone forts of rebellious magnates (Pl. 99). The carving is in vermilion against a background of blue, brown and green. A large cartouche bears a long description de-



*Plate 95 a, b Polychrome Bowl*

Metal-lined. Carved with a poem written by the Qianlong Emperor and the date 1746. Presumably made to show off the Emperor's literary skill, of which he was proud. Plate 95 b shows the underside of the bowl with seal mark of the reign. Qianlong. Diameter 11.2 cm.

*Victoria and Albert Museum*



scribing the campaign. As the capture of the rebel strongholds was completed in 1776, it can be assumed that the panel was made after the General's triumphant return to Beijing. The deterioration would indeed have had to be sudden between this and the dish in the Victoria and Albert Museum of ten years later, but we are not comparing like with like. The boxes and the panel were made for the Emperor whereas the red-brown dishes (*Pl. 96*) were possibly made for export,

**Plate 97 Buddhist Altar Ornament**

Red and black over a dull yellow which is responsible for the green quality of the black. The form derives from a reliquary (Nara National Museum, 1982: Pls. 56, 57). Similar ornaments are known in metal and porcelain but this lacquer example seems to be unique. Possibly Kangxi. Height 16 cm, diameter of base 10.5 cm. *Private collection*

**Plate 98 Pair of Scroll Boxes**

Boxes of this type were made to store imperial scrolls painted by court artists. These are inscribed as containing paintings nos. 7 and 8 of the Qianlong Emperor's Southern Tour. The series would originally have numbered twelve (see also Moss, 1983: Pl. 146). Although the tour of the south took place in 1751, the scrolls were painted in 1776 and the boxes were probably made at that time. The quality is fine and the contrast in colour and carving between these imperial pieces and the commercial Qianlong product such as the 1787 dish in the Victoria and Albert Museum is great. Qianlong. Length 75.7 cm, width 16.7 cm, depth 16.7 cm. *Spink & Son Ltd*

**Plate 99 Landscape Panel**

A memorial panel showing the campaigns of General Agui who was sent in 1771 to suppress an uprising in the mountains of Sichuan. The rebels surrendered in 1776. Agui was personally greeted by the Qianlong Emperor on his return to Beijing and it is reasonable to suppose this magnificent panel was commissioned at the time. Qianlong. Length 77.5 cm, width 9.25 cm. *Spink & Son Ltd*

probably in Sichuan, and certainly for an unsophisticated market.

A distinctive group of late Qianlong lacquers is represented by a twelve-sided dish loaded with Sanskrit inscriptions in the Linden Museum, Stuttgart (*Pl. 100*) dated 1775; a begging bowl with gilded brass lion-head handles (*Pl. 101*), which has a heavy brass base engraved with pseudo-mantras in a passable imitation of Tibetan script; another begging bowl with similar handles in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; and yet another bowl of similar shape but without handles and carved with seven Buddhas in Beijing (Palace Museum, 1985: Pl. 354). A square tray on a brass core in the BASF Museum (*Pl. 102*), has a heavy brass inset on the reverse cast with a Qianlong seal mark, which relates it to plate 101. The dramatic swirling drapery of the figures on this tray connects it in turn with the round unmarked box in plate 103 on which an elaborate landscape is very deeply carved into a dull red body through a full red surface. The reverse has a handsome phoenix among flowers and the sides are covered with a close design of hawthorn blossoms. It is perhaps as deeply carved a piece of lacquer as exists. The clue to this generally neglected group lies in the inscription on the shoulder of the begging bowl in plate 101, which reads: 'Qianlong Department of Manufacture', clearly a commercial operation.

# CHINESE CARVED LACQUER

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