

feel amazement when we read in O. BLOCH's recent *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* (II, 170) that the word referred to « a white ceramic imported from the East » only in the 16th cent. and acquired its modern meaning only in the 17th (I must own, by the way, that I do not see much difference between these two). This is one more illustration of the sad fact that Polo's French text has too often been ignored by French lexicographers.

Such neglect may be partly responsible for what I am afraid was a frequent misunderstanding of the true meaning of « porcelain » in mediaeval inventories. It has been denied that it refers to china-ware, but no agreement has been reached as to its true meaning. LABORDE (*Notice des émaux*, II, 465 sq., and *Rev. archéolog.*, 1853, No. 1, 238-252) believed it was mother of pearl; LABARTE (*Inventaire du mobilier de Charles V*, 220 sq.) has pronounced in favour of a milky agate; some additional texts have been published by BELGRANO (*Atti della Soc. Lig.*, IV, 184); HEYD (II, 678) is non-committal. BLOCH (*Dict. étymol.*, II, 170), who gives *Cypraea* as the original meaning of « porcelaine », says that its « nacre » (= mother of pearl) was used in the 13th cent. to make various objects; so the derived meaning would be « mother of pearl of cowry ». GODEFROY, s. v. *porcelaine*, gives only the meaning « purslane »; in the Supplement, the following meanings are listed : 1. The cowry shell, with a reference to Polo; 2. The mother of pearl (« nacre ») of the cowry shell, with references to « un tableau de pourceline » (1363) and « un tableau quarré de pourcelaine enchassiez en or » (1380); 3. The same « nacre » « worked into ceramic » (« travaillée en poterie »), with references to « un pot a eau de pierre de pourcelaine a un couvercle d'argent » (1372), « un pot a vin de pierre de porcelaine plus blanche » (1372) and « plaz de pourcelaine » (1471); 4. Ceramic made of kaolin, « ung grand flacon de porcelaine » (1534); 5. « Fluorine » (this is a gas; I suppose GODEFROY meant fluorite, i. e. fluor spar), « Pourcelane est un sable noir duquel l'on use à Rome ».

What can we make out of these quotations? I must leave out the « pourcelane » of Rome which is a « black sand », on which I have no information, and I accept without hesitation that the « flacon de porcelaine » of 1534 was china-ware. But I am nonplussed by the explanation « mother of pearl worked into ceramic » adopted for the « jugs of stone of porcelain » of 1372 and the « porcelain dish » of 1471. Mother of pearl of whatever kind it may be cannot be fired to become a ceramic, and it seems evident that we have to do here with china-ware, as in the example of 1534; as a consequence, these examples of the 14th and 15th cents. bridge the gap between Polo and the more frequent use of the term in the 16th cent.

The « pictures » (« tableaux ») of 1363 and 1380 are more embarrassing, especially the « square » one, and I readily admit that they do not suggest china-ware. But I wonder whether we must suppose that they were either of agate, or of mother of pearl, and particularly of « mother of pearl » of the « cowry ». We have seen that, in the Middle Ages, cowries were imported to Venice from the East, and, although HEYD did not say so, it may be that the « pictures » of « porcelain » were at the back of his mind when he suggested that, perhaps, cowries were imported to Venice « to be worked up by a special industry ». But cowries are very small gastropods, which would not yield any appreciable plane surface of mother of pearl; mother of pearl comes from bivalves, particularly from those of a certain size, and from big gastropods the outer layers of which have been ground off. We do not know what the cowries brought to Venice were meant for, but we may imagine at least two solutions.