



Platter from Dolores Hidalgo, 31 cm, ca. 1820.



Photos by Dante Barrera

Archangel, 17 x 17 x 52 cm, ca. 1900.



Plate with Chinese influence, 21 cm, second half of the eighteenth century.

TALAVERA A Symbol of Puebla

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The seventeenth century, the golden age of Puebla, saw its religious establishments prosper, Bishop Palafox y Mendoza¹ take vigorous cultural initiatives and people and capital flow in from Mexico City, fleeing from its constant flooding. This made for economic stability, fertile ground for many ceramics, glass, wax and ironmongering workshops to spring up.

Different religious orders —Dominicans, Augustinians, Franciscans and Jesuits— established themselves within the

city limits. It was the Dominicans who prompted artisans to come to Puebla from the Spanish cities of Puente del Arzobispo and Talavera de la Reina, after which the tin-based glazed pottery, today known as Talavera, is named.

Several chroniclers praised Talavera pottery, saying that it could compete with Chinese porcelain. Its good quality made it famous not only in New Spain, but in Guatemala and other parts of Central America.

The eighteenth-century chronicler Fernández de Echeverría y Veyría said, “The city has some very creditable factories that make the white china called Talavera.

With the white clay they use to make it they fashion...every sort of piece, polished, curious, well glazed and painted, that would compete with any brought from Europe, which they imitate perfectly.”² As is clear here, white china and Talavera were already synonymous.

According to Leonor Cortina, recently the hypothesis has been stated that the term “Talavera” began to be used in Puebla after several additions were made to the pottery ordinances in 1682.³ One of the new stipulations ordered that “fine china” should have the same qualities and characteristics as that from Talavera de la Reina. Until the mid-seventeenth centu-

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Vase with Ventosa and Pedro Sánchez schools influence. 18 x 26 cm.



Barrel. 26 x 28 cm, ca. 1870.



Pharmacy container, 12 x 25 cm, eighteenth century.

ry each potter in Puebla had fashioned his wares using only his own judgment and wishes. When the ordinances for the potters' guild were written in 1653, they specified the conditions for becoming a master potter and separated pottery into three categories, by quality: fine, ordinary and yellow, specifying mixes, proportions, decorative norms and details of manufacture.

HOW TALAVERA IS MADE

The manufacture of Talavera ceramics is simple. The clay is stirred and tamped down to remove any foreign bodies. Then it is shaped on a potter's wheel or manually, after which it is dried in the shade.

Later, it is fired for over six hours and then submerged in a recipient of glaze made of a four to one mixture of lead to tin, water, sand and a little molasses. Once it dries, the piece is decorated with metal oxides and fired again for over 36 hours.

One of the most attractive traits of this kind of ceramics —also known as Hispano-Moorish ware— was its decoration, which gave it a metallic sheen, acquired in fine china at the third firing.

The formula for this pottery is international; we find traces of it in Italy, France and Portugal. However, Mexico's closest influence was the pottery from Seville, a jumping-off point for emigration to New Spain and a teeming manufacturing center of pottery and tiles with Mudéjar influence.

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DISTINCTIVELY REGIONAL

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the age of the rise of Talavera. The maturity of its designs, the quality of its enamels and the beautiful proportion of its large china jars, tubs and oversized flowerpots took on their own character and became unmistakable.⁴

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Talavera tiles alternated with stucco and brick to adorn domes, facades, patios and the inside walls of religious and civic buildings. Puebla and its environs took on a chromatic identity. Several of the best examples of the religious use of Talavera are the dome of the Rosary Chapel (whose interior has been called "the eighth wonder of the world" because of its exuberant gold leafing); the San Francisco Church, whose sixteenth century structure is decorated with pilasters in the form of reversed pyramids and tiles; the El Carmen and San Miguel churches and the Santa Rosa and Santa Clara convents. An example of civic architecture is the so-called "House of the Dolls,"⁵ decorated by the Ovando family, whose facade represents different scenes from the life of Hercules.

DECLINE AND RESURGENCE OF AN ART

The turbulence of the War of Independence led Talavera china production to drop, and what was made lost much of its good taste and sheen. In addition, in 1832, a factory opened in Puebla to make

imitation Davenport china, which also hastened the decline.

For 60 years, both Talavera's quantity and quality deteriorated, until the talented Catalonian painter Enrique L. Ventosa gave it new impetus by introducing a mix of Gothic, Catalonian and Persian decorations with Mexican motifs. A contemporary, the Spaniard Pedro Sánchez, incorporated scenes of activities like bullfights and the figures of great men.



Center tile, 21 x 21 cm, seventeenth century.

INFLUENCES AND COLORS

Several very different influences, many from far-off lands, can be found in Talavera ware: Moorish-Andalusian, Spanish from Talavera de la Reina, Italian, Chinese and Mexican.

The Moorish-Andalusian influence has its roots in the Muslim presence in the Spanish province of Andalusia. It is characterized by geometric decorations with symmetrical, equidistant lines that form stars or polygons, and by its symmetrical profiles in a strong, opaque blue and intense black. The oldest, most admired pieces date from the mid-seventeenth century when the famous black lace decoration was in vogue, a simple but ingenious black design that looked like lace.

China from the Orient, Talavera de la Reina and Manila came to Mexico had great influence among Puebla potters, who imitated their colors and designs during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, the influence of Chinese porcelain from the Ming dynasty can clearly be discerned in the colors (blue and white) and the decorations: pagodas, mandarins, the mythological chimeras and even drawings of the Nao.⁶



Niche with ceramic items, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Majolica ware from Genoa and Savona via Andalusia made the Italian influence felt with the imitation of its styles and the typical multiple colors of the Renaissance that made constant use of greens and yellows tooled in black.

In the last third of the eighteenth century, when Talavera de la Reina china production dropped and therefore lost influence, Puebla artisans began to copy themes from the Alcora factory in the French

province of Castellón, whose potters left their mark with wreaths and apples.

The colors from these periods are extremely varied and close to an ultra-baroque: white and blue, blue, orange and manganese and the combination of yellow, blue, green, ocre and black. In the nineteenth century, rococo styles began to appear with prominent figures of the time like the first mayors in independent Mexico, *China poblana* women and *chinacos*, and the *Zouave*⁷ of the French intervention on a pearly blue background. In the twentieth century, the variety is enormous, with a renewed taste for the legacy of the past expressed in the talent of masters like Ventosa and "Pedrín" Sánchez.

The resurgence of Talavera production today is noteworthy and has left its mark on the products of workshops like those of Uriarte in Puebla and Gorky González and Capelo in Guanajuato, who have consolidated that ideological mixture of the nopal cactus, comets, stars and pagodas. ■■

NOTES

¹ Juan de Palafox y Mendoza arrived in Mexico in 1640 and soon became one of the most important figures of the city of Puebla and the vicerealty as a whole.

² Mariano Fernández de Echeverría y Veyta, *Historia de la fundación de la Puebla de los Angeles en la Nueva España, su descripción y presente estado* (Puebla, Puebla: Ediciones Altiplano, 1963).

³ The ordinances were the conditions, penalties and taxes stipulated by the viceroys to ensure each trade carried out its work properly.

⁴ At the same time, although for shorter periods, china of the Talavera style was being produced in the cities of Dolores, Hidalgo, and Sayula, Jalisco, as well as in the state of Guanajuato, particularly the green *chorreada* pottery (or "dripped," referring to how the glaze is allowed to drip down the sides) of the first half of the nineteenth century from Dolores, Hidalgo.

⁵ Today, this building houses the Autonomous University of Puebla's University Museum.

⁶ The *Nao de China* was a trading ship from the Philippines that unloaded its wares in the port of Acapulco.

⁷ *China poblana* refers to women dressed in colorful regional Puebla costume. *Chinacos* were irregular combatants who fought side by side with Juárez' liberal troops between 1857 and 1867. Later, all *juaristas* were called by that name. "Zouaves" was the name given to the French troops of occupation.