

Josef Schwegel (1836–1914) and His Legacy: Vienna World’s Fair and its Connections to Slovenia

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Introduction¹

Josef Schwegel’s (1836–1914) involvement in staging the exhibitions of the “oriental”² countries at the Vienna World’s Fair in 1873 was undoubtedly a significant contribution to the cultural exchange between East and West during the late 19th century. Hailing from Carniola, today a part of Slovenia, he is still today one of the most recognizable and “famous” Slovenes working as a diplomat and politician in the 19th-century Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a person most knowledgeable about the Orient, he was (in his own words) tasked with putting together the Oriental Department at the Vienna World’s Fair, which took place in 1873.³ His official position was the head of the division for the Orient and East Asia in the directorate of the World’s Fair.⁴ The Oriental Department, or the *Orientalische Abteilung* (in older sources often referred to as the “Oriental pavilion”), was

a significant large exhibition space dedicated to showcasing the cultural and industrial achievements of the East.

The exhibition space was divided into different sections, each section was dedicated to showcasing the exhibition from each of the participating nations. Exhibition sections (or pavilions) showcased objects and artefacts from various Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures as well as North Africa, highlighting their artistry, craftsmanship, and cultural significance. Schwegel’s dedication to his organizational work aimed to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of Eastern cultures among fair visitors and, more importantly, to lay the groundwork for future fruitful trade relations with these places.

One of the lasting legacies of Schwegel’s work was the cooperative effort resulting in the establishment of the Oriental Museum in Vienna (later *Handelsmuseum*),⁵ which served as a repository for many of the objects displayed at the World’s Fair. The museum provided a valuable resource for scholars, collectors, and enthusiasts. However, the museum’s closure in 1907 and the dispersal of its collection posed a challenge for historians and researchers seeking to trace the provenance of these objects.⁶

In 2018, research commenced on the East Asian ceramics kept at the National Museum of

1 The research for this paper was carried out as part of the project *Orphaned Objects: Examining East Asian Objects outside Organised Collecting Practices in Slovenia* (2021–2024) (J6-3133) funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

2 The term geographically encompassed the large area spanning roughly from the Balkans, including north Africa and the Middle East, and all the way to East Asia (cf. Lukas Nickel’s paper (2024) in this monograph). Hereinafter the term “Orient” should be understood as such.

3 Schwegel 2007, 52.

4 Nickel 2024, (in this book).

5 Schwegel 2007, 54.

6 Museum of Applied Arts n.d. a.

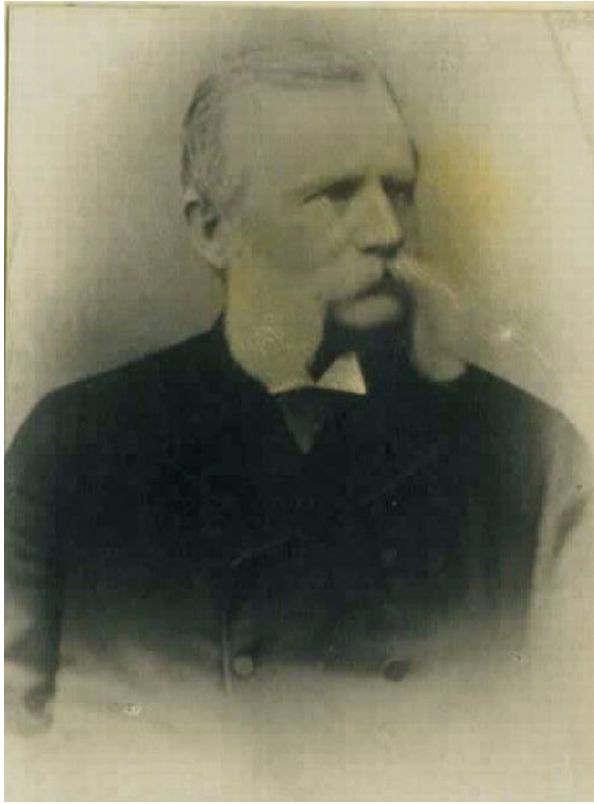


Fig. 1: Portrait of Josef Schwegel (1863–1914). Photograph. A collection of depictions of famous Slovenians NUK (Zbirka upodobitev znanih Slovencev NUK). National and University Library (NUK), Ljubljana.

Slovenia. It was discovered that the museum's Ceramics Collection houses approximately 240 pieces of Chinese and Japanese ceramics. The majority of the pieces fall into the category of export ceramics intended for Western markets dating from the 19th to the early 20th century. Among these objects was also a Japanese lidded cup from the legacy of Josef Schwegel. The discovery of this cup at the National Museum of Slovenia reignited interest in his contributions to the Vienna World's Fair and what happened following the Fair's success. Provenance research on the cup involved a meticulous examination of its design, markings, and materials, as well as comparisons with identical cups held in the Asia Collection of the Museum for Applied Arts in Vienna (MAK) and several tea caddies bearing the same type of label kept in the collection of the Vienna Museum of Technology.

Josef Baron von Schwegel: Diplomat and Collector

Josef Schwegel (fig. 1) (throughout different sources and publications we find several versions of his name, such as Josef Schwegel, Joseph Ritter von Schwegel, as well as Slovenian versions Jožef Švegel and Jožef Žvegel) was born to a peasant family in a small village named Zgornje Gorje near the town of Bled in today's north-western Slovenia, where he also attended primary school. Later, from 1846 to 1854, he attended secondary or grammar school in Ljubljana. To pursue his higher education, he relocated to Vienna, at first wanting to study medicine. Only later did he abandon the study of medicine to attend the Oriental Academy, a place for future Austrian diplomats. The Oriental Academy was founded in 1754 based on the Imperial Order by Empress Maria Theresa, with the intention of strengthening Austria's commercial and cultural ties with the Middle East and the Balkans.⁷ To prepare students for careers as diplomats and merchants, the curriculum placed a strong emphasis on general sciences, political science, and languages like Persian, Arabic, and Turkish.⁸ His studies there most strongly influenced his later life and work. In 1859, he finished his training at the Oriental Academy in Vienna and was employed as a diplomat of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.⁹

As Car and Kamin Kajfež write, in terms of diplomacy, he was an expert on Southeastern Europe and the African part of the Turkish Empire. His most notable career achievement, and what he is most known for, was serving as Austro-Hungarian consul in Alexandria, Egypt and Istanbul for ten years, all the way until his appointment as one of the key organisers involved in putting on the 1873 World's Fair in Vienna.¹⁰

Especially during his stay in Egypt, Schwegel established numerous contacts with influential political figures and bankers. In his memoir, Schwegel

7 Gruber 2014, 131.

8 Ibid.

9 Rugále and Preinfalk 2010, 170.

10 Car and Kamin Kajfež 2022, 31.

writes that during his stay in Egypt he “found and established his happiness”.¹¹ His great emotional involvement with the land of Egypt is also notable in his personal coat of arms, whose centre is dominated by the Egyptian sphinx.

In 1868, in Alexandria, Schwegel married Maria von Battisti di San Giorgio (1848–1933), and a year later their only child, a daughter named Maria (lovingly called Mici), was born in Egypt.¹² In 1869, Schwegel also bought a large property near his place of birth in today’s Slovenia. In Rečica near Bled, he bought a mansion with a large surrounding property called Grimšče (*Grimschitzhof*), named after the last owners, the Grimschitz family. He employed the well-known architect Max Fabiani (1865–1962) to repair and rework the mansion. Besides the Grimšče, Schwegel also owned a palace in Vienna and a seaside villa in Volosko, Croatia.¹³

At his later post at the embassy in Istanbul, he also mentions working with many of his colleagues from the Oriental Academy in Vienna.¹⁴ His connections, extended work in Egypt and Turkey, and his knowledge of the Middle East and East Asia undoubtedly helped him get the position among the organizers of the World’s Fair in Vienna in 1873. Recent research into the high decorations he received for his work shows that he was the most highly decorated official at the time whose origin was the area of present-day Slovenia.¹⁵ He was ennobled to Ritter in 1870 and later also acquired his noble title of baron in 1875 for his activities and achievements in the field of diplomacy and service to the state during the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.¹⁶ Among the higher titles and medals Schwegel received for his contributions to the World’s Fair and especially to setting up the Oriental Department, he also received a high decoration of the Order of the Rising Sun (*Kyokujitsu-shō*

旭日章).¹⁷ The Order of the Rising Sun was Japan’s first national decoration, created in 1875.

Interestingly, Schwegel as a student also worked at the Estate Museum of Carniola (*Krainisch Ständisches Museum*, today National Museum of Slovenia) and for a while even lived with Karl Deschmann (1821–1889), politician, archaeologist, and, at the time, curator at the Estate Museum of Carniola.¹⁸ His time spent there may have ignited a passion for collecting and preserving cultural artefacts, which manifested later in his life. Over the years, he amassed an impressive collection mainly of Egyptian artefacts, which he bought from sellers during the time of his service in Egypt.¹⁹

Schwegel died in 1914 with no surviving children of his own and therefore appointed his nephew Ivan Schwegel (1875–1962) as the heir of his fortune and properties.²⁰ In his will from 1914, he also chose to bequest his entire collection to the National Museum of Slovenia as a way of giving back to the Carniolan people and ensuring that others could continue to enjoy and learn from the items he had acquired through the years. In 1936, the National Museum of Slovenia received a sizeable bequest from Baron Schwegel with the final selection made by his widow.²¹ A large part of that bequest was represented by various Egyptian objects. His experience working at the museum as a young man might have played quite a significant role in his decision to leave such a meaningful legacy.²²

Schwegel, the Oriental Department, and What Came Next

In 1871, Schwegel (at the time consul general in Istanbul) was officially invited by Baron Wilhelm von Schwarz-Senborn (1816–1903) to take over

11 Schwegel 2007, 48.

12 The daughter passed away at the age of six of diphtheria (Rugále and Preinfalk 2010, 172).

13 Rugále and Preinfalk 2010, 170–72.

14 Schwegel 2007, 48.

15 Car and Kamin Kajfež 2022, 21.

16 Rugále and Preinfalk 2010, 170.

17 Car and Kamin Kajfež 2022, 29.

18 Bojc 2014.

19 Furlan 2018, 18; Car and Kamin Kajfež 2022, 21.

20 Rugále and Preinfalk 2010, 172.

21 Furlan 2018, 18; Šmitek 1986, 18.

22 Car and Kamin Kajfež 2022, 21.

the organization and management of the Oriental department, or so-called “Oriental pavilion”, of the Vienna fair. In preparation, Schwegel travelled to Egypt, Anatolia, and Syria in 1871 and 1872.²³ He expressed his excitement at the appointment, describing it as “a most excellent task”, especially from the viewpoint of further developing relations with the East.²⁴ It is confirmed by Bernhard Singer’s 1878 publication *Unsere Orient-Interessen* (*Our Interests in the Orient*), which discusses how Austria’s economic and colonial interests in the Orient not so much territorial ambitions, drove the country to present the Orient on such a large scale within the scope of the World’s Fair in 1873.²⁵

Schwegel volunteered to completely take over readying the pavilions for the Near East and East Asia, starting with Morocco, Tunis, and Egypt, following that with the pavilion for the Ottoman Empire, and finishing with China and Japan.²⁶ Returning to Vienna in 1872, he “invested all his strength into the World’s Fair,”²⁷ through which he also mentions numerous personal audiences with the Emperor discussing the Fair. About his work, he wrote:

I made connections with all the countries from Morocco to Japan, from Abyssinia to Persia, and inland Asia. It was a great pleasure for me to achieve the set goal to such an extent, as it had not happened at any of the previous World exhibitions, neither in London nor in Paris. Ex Oriente Lux was the slogan given to me by my patron Prokesch as he sent me on my way. I followed the

motto faithfully and saw with great satisfaction how the Orient, in all its splendour and charm, presented itself to Western Europe and, above all, to my homeland.²⁸

The World’s Fair in Vienna was held from 1 May until 2 November at the Prater, a park located next to the Danube. It stood apart from earlier international expositions due to its programming emphasis on international trade with the East, whereas the major exhibitions in Paris (1867) and London (1862) emphasized the portrayal of technological innovations and manufactured products in an attempt to showcase their host countries as leading colonial and industrial powers.²⁹ The main goal of the Eastern countries’ participation in the Vienna World’s Fair was to further develop and strengthen the trade ties made possible by the new maritime access to the Red Sea following the Suez Canal’s opening in 1869.³⁰

As regards this paper, Japan’s participation is of special importance. In January 1872, the Austro-Hungarian envoy sent a formal invitation to the Japanese government.³¹ With only a year and three months until the exhibition’s opening in Vienna, Japan did not have much time to prepare for the Fair. However, Japan succeeded in doing so, and with great success. The new Japanese government’s efforts to modernize the nation benefited greatly from the Vienna World’s Fair. Japanese participation at the Vienna World’s Fair was directed by the Exhibition Bureau (*Hakurankai Jimukyoku* 博覽會事務局).³² The Bureau’s primary responsibility was to choose Japanese masterpieces and noteworthy domestic goods for the Vienna displays, as well as handle the coordination of all aspects of the

23 Schwegel 2007, 50; Gruber et al. 2012, 45–46.

24 Schwegel 2007, 52.

25 Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 7–8.

26 Schwegel 2007, 52; in his memoir, Schwegel writes he kept extended correspondence regarding preparations for and later the success of his work on the Vienna World’s Fair, but it is not known if it still exists. Slovene ethnologist and anthropologist Zmago Šmitek writes that Schwegel’s correspondence was among the things bequeathed to the National Museum of Slovenia, but it is yet unknown if there were any letters regarding the above subject (Šmitek 1986, 18).

27 Schwegel 2007, 53.

28 Schwegel 2007, 52.

29 Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 8.

30 One of the leading figures in this project was also Josef Schwegel as the Austrian consul in Alexandria. He had been instrumental in the establishment of consular relations when the Suez Canal opened (Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 9).

31 Jahn 2004, 18.

32 Ibid.

Japanese exhibition between Tokyo and Vienna.³³ Gisela Jahn writes:

Such exhibitions required Japan to tailor its products to prevailing international standards. Initially, the country chose to represent the quality and character of its decorative arts by works specially created for the purpose.³⁴

The purpose of this enthusiastic participation was also an attempt to “bridge the gap” with the Western countries and in terms of arts and crafts this meant “preserving local styles and promoting the skills and needs of craftsmen and, on the other hand, catering for foreign taste by cultivating an ‘export style’”.³⁵ From Japan, a total of 72 people, including 41 civil servants and interpreters, 25 architecture builders and landscape gardeners, and 6 foreigners were sent to Vienna. All the members of the Japanese delegation travelled to Europe by way of sea and stayed in Austria for one whole year.³⁶ Traditional and ornamental artworks, including ceramics, cloisonne ware, lacquer ware, and textiles, were on display at the Japanese exhibition. Separate from the main display was a recreation of a Japanese garden, complete with a shrine, and, thanks to the growing interest in Japan at the time, it was said to be particularly popular with the visitors.³⁷

Regarding Japanese ceramics, it is said they “offered a great contrast to China”.³⁸ The Reports describe eleven different types of ceramics that were sent by the Japanese Association of Painters on Pottery and Porcelain, with its headquarters in Edo (in the records Anglicised as Yeddo), to be exhibited at the Vienna World’s Fair and show the work of its members.³⁹ The report on this part

of the exhibition concludes with the following words by Archer⁴⁰: “Altogether to the lover of pottery and porcelain, the Japanese collection was most interesting and instructive, and many medals were awarded.”⁴¹ The sentiment speaks to the impressiveness and positive reception of the exhibitions of pottery and porcelain of East Asian origin, which also seems to reflect the similar sentiments of which, in a more general sense, Schwegel also wrote in his memoirs.⁴² It is clear that Schwegel saw his finished work on the Oriental department as a great success (and apparently so did his superiors); however, the World’s Fair itself as a whole was hindered from achieving economic success due to a stock market crash on 9 May 1873 and the outbreak of cholera infections in Vienna at the time.⁴³

During the World’s Fair, he also established the Committee for the Orient and East Asia (*Comité für den Orient und Ost-Asien*) and put it in charge of examining goods for their suitability for trade and initiating new trade relationships.⁴⁴ The intention was to take as much advantage of the Exhibition as possible for the country’s economic and industrial interests.⁴⁵ In an effort to give the Austrian industry “a thousand ideas” the Committee for the Orient and East Asia was entrusted with scrutinizing the oriental and East Asian exhibits during the Fair.⁴⁶ The committee was part of a

33 Pantzer 2018, 27–28; Jahn 2004, 18.

34 Jahn 2004, 16.

35 Ibid., 19.

36 Cf. Agnes Schwanzer’s paper in this volume.

37 Tokyo National Museum, 2004-2024; Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 11.

38 Archer 1874, 149.

39 Ibid., 152.

40 Thomas Croxson Archer (1817–1885), professor and director of the Industrial Museum of Scotland (later Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art).

41 Archer 1874, 153.

42 Schwegel 2007, 52.

43 Gruber et al. 2012, 44–45.

44 Schwegel 2007, 55; Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 10.

45 His original intentions seem not to have been realized to his complete satisfaction, since he wrote in his later years, “But perhaps, on the evening of my life, I will finally be able to bring this institution, which was the fruit of my activity at the World’s Fair, by some other way than the one I originally intended, to the promotion and advancement of our economic and political interests in the East” (Schwegel 2007, 55; translation by author).

46 Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 19; Curatorium Österreichisches Handelsmuseum 1900, 9.

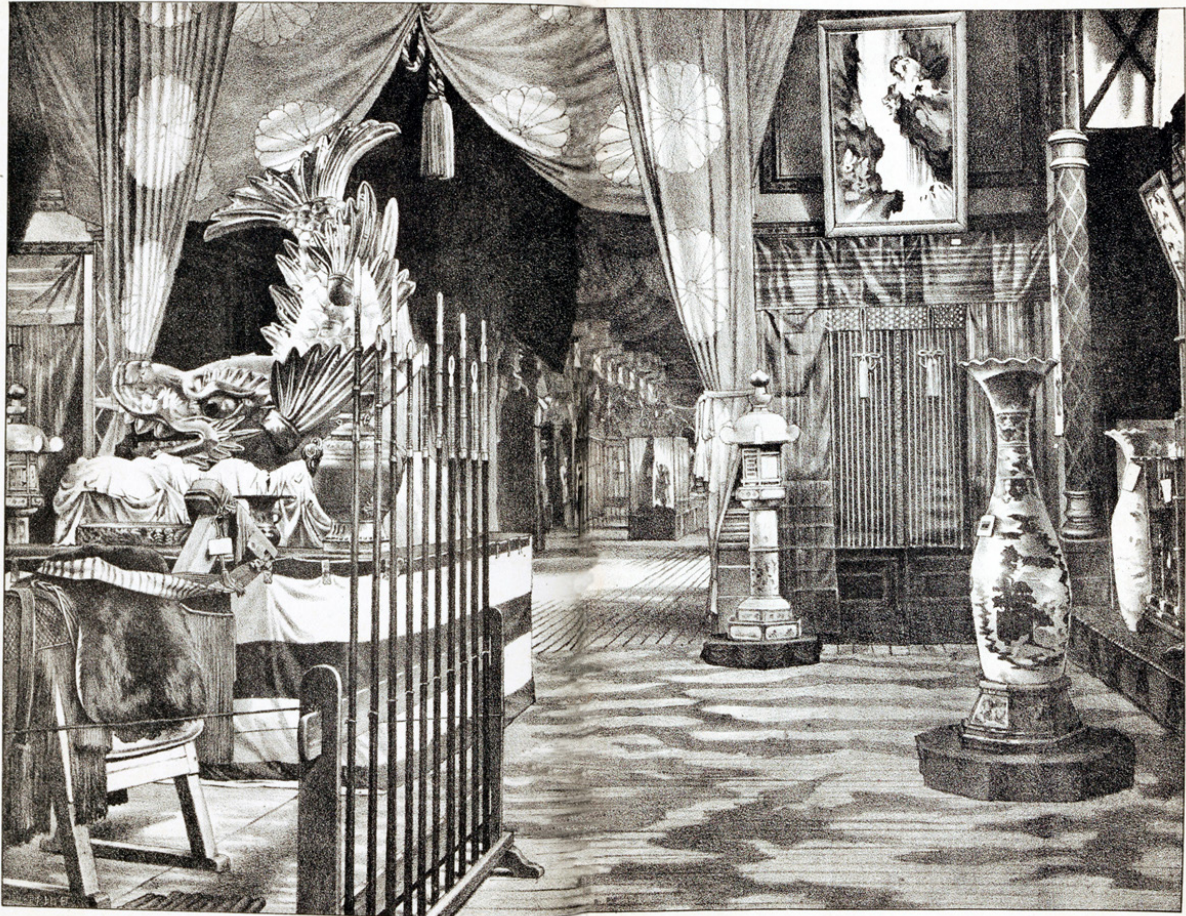


Fig. 2: Illustration of the entrance to the Japanese pavilion. Unknown author. Wikimedia, public domain (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Japanese_pavilion_in_Expo_1873.jpg).

larger association called *Cercle Oriental*,⁴⁷ consisting of diplomats, economists, manufacturers, and politicians.⁴⁸

After the Fair's end, the committee only grew bigger and stronger and presented the base for the establishment of a new museum.⁴⁹ On 21 October 1874, one year after the exhibition, the committee and the *Cercle Oriental* thus assembled again, this time going by the name of Oriental Museum

(*Orientalisches Museum*).⁵⁰ The museum was founded in Vienna with the intention of spreading knowledge about the Middle East and Asia. Its heart was a large pavilion, which originally stood at the eastern part of the World's Fair. It held a library, several galleries, and a collection of art objects acquired during the mentioned exhibition.⁵¹ China, Japan, Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Turkey all donated numerous objects from the exhibition to the museum.⁵² The museum received these objects either through exchanges or as gifts, most of them from the Oriental

47 *Cercle Oriental* provided both a house for the fair's trade delegation as well as an educational museum, demonstrating the potentials and varieties of oriental(ized) art (Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 21).

48 Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 19.

49 Schwegel 2007, 54.

50 Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 22.

51 Ersoy 2015, 47.

52 Schwegel 2007, 54.

and East Asian section of the World's Fair.⁵³ In 1886, the Oriental Museum's name was changed to Trade Museum (*k. k. Österreichisches Handelsmuseum*), which housed a commercial, an arts and crafts, and an oriental arts and crafts collection. As Gruber et al. write, the museum collections were regularly added to with exceptional items like rugs, silk garments, and metal and ceramic objects, and in 1892 even took over the rich Japanese collection of Heinrich von Siebold (1852–1908).⁵⁴

After the closure of the *Handelsmuseum* in 1907, the objects ended up at various other Austrian museums, and new connections are still being discovered. The majority of objects from the former Oriental Museum are today housed in the Asian Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts (*Museum für Angewandte Kunst*), in the collection of the Technical Museum Vienna (*Technisches Museum Wien*), and at the World Museum (*Weltmuseum Wien*) in Vienna.⁵⁵

While many of the paths that these objects took to these various museums are still unclear and in need of additional attention, the Vienna Technical Museum has conducted expansive research into objects that came to the museum by way of the Vienna World's Fair and later the *Handelsmuseum*. As Susanne Gruber et al. write:

The first indication that certain objects from the commodity collection of the Vienna Technical Museum were on display at the Vienna World Exhibition in 1873 came from labels on sample books with Japanese silk fabrics [...] Another clue was found on a label attached to wooden tea caddies. The accompanying pendant has "Cercle Oriental." printed on the back [...] It can therefore be assumed with a high degree of certainty that these two groups of objects come from the holdings of the 1873 World Exhibition.⁵⁶

53 Gruber et al. 2012, 51–52.

54 Ibid., 52.

55 Gruber 2013, 89; 2014, 132.

56 Gruber et al. 2012, 88.

Specific labels used by old museums can provide valuable information for tracing the provenance of individual objects or groups of objects, in this case, the objects that were originally exhibited at the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. By examining these labels, researchers can uncover important clues about the object's history and help us with objects' provenance research. This was also the case in researching a Japanese cup from the Ceramics Collection at the National Museum of Slovenia, which came to the museum as part of Schwegel's legacy.

Schwegel's Cup at the National Museum of Slovenia and the Connection to Vienna World's Fair

According to written sources, individuals and whole families belonging to the Carniolan nobility first started to acquire Chinese porcelain in the early 17th century.⁵⁷ To the higher Carniolan social strata, porcelain of East Asian origin was only available through trading networks within Europe and not through direct contact with China or Japan. Estate inventories⁵⁸ of wealthy noble and burgher families and individuals held at the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia allow us to trace the presence of porcelain in Carniola back to the early 17th century. The earliest document confirming the presence of porcelain is the estate inventory of Georg (Jurij) Bittorfer⁵⁹ (?–1618) from 1618.⁶⁰ Bittorfer was a lawyer living in Ljubljana who was ennobled in 1615, three

57 Kos 2009, 155.

58 Estate inventories were legal documents recording all material possessions of a certain, usually wealthy, person as well as what would happen to these possessions upon this person's death. The earliest document of this kind in Slovene lands is dated 3 June 1548. It must be noted that estate inventories were only necessary in cases where the descendants of the deceased person were still minors at the time of their ancestor's death, and a third person would be appointed as executor of the inherited estate until the descendant came of age (Žvanut 1994, 186).

59 In the few sources that mention him, both the German (Georg Bittorfer) and the Slovene version (Jurij Bittorfer) of his name is used, sometimes within the same document.

60 Kos 2009, 155.

years before his death.⁶¹ Among the items mentioned is one porcelain bowl. This is the first documented piece of Chinese (or any East Asian) porcelain in Slovenia. At the time, porcelain was mostly owned by the Carniolan aristocracy: they were the ones who could, at the time, afford such luxury objects of high prestige. Porcelain was, of course, considered a prestigious and exotic commodity because of its complex manufacturing process and because it had to be imported from East Asia until the 18th century.

Most of these porcelains and other ceramics gradually found their way to the museum. What is today known as the National Museum of Slovenia was founded as a regional museum for the Austrian region populated by a majority of Slovenes, namely Carniola. It was officially called the Estate Museum of Carniola (*Krainisch Ständisches Museum*).⁶² Soon after the museum's establishment, in 1823, the governor of Carniola Josef Kamilo Schmidburg (1779–1846) sent a formal letter to his “homeland's friends of science” (*An die Literatoren und Freunde der Wissenschaften in Krain*), asking them to donate objects for the new museum.⁶³ In this way, donating antiques, documents, and artefacts also became an expression of patriotic consciousness and a source of pride as well as a display of status. As a result, the museum received several hundred objects, including East Asian ceramics and other objects of East Asian origin.⁶⁴ These early donations mark the start of the collection of ceramics at the National Museum of Slovenia.⁶⁵ Under the directive of Emperor Francis I (1804–1835), the museum was renamed the Provincial Museum of Carniola or *Krainisches Landesmuseum* in 1826.⁶⁶

61 Žvanut 1994, 162.

62 For more on first established museums and their roles in the 19th century, see Kos (2020); Kos 2020, 17.

63 Kos 2020, 19–20.

64 Kos 2017, 153–54.

65 Berdajs 2023, 153.

66 In 1882, the museum was renamed the Regional Museum for Carniola – Rudolfinum (*Krainisches Landesmuseum – Rudolfinum*) in honour of the heir to the throne, later, in 1921 it was renamed the National Museum. In 1997 The National Museum was renamed the National Museum of Slovenia (National Museum of Slovenia n.d.).

At the time, museum inventory records were not kept regularly, so it is unfortunately impossible to fully document the types and numbers of objects. Starting in 1831, however, the museum published all monetary donations and object acquisitions in a special column entitled “Landes-Museum in Laibach” in *Illyrisches Blatt*, a culturally oriented weekly supplement to the paper *Laibacher Zeitung*.⁶⁷ East Asian porcelains soon began to appear on the published lists, together with the names of their original owners. While research on the objects themselves is still in progress, several porcelain pieces from the collection have been directly connected to members of the Carniolan aristocracy, including several prominent 19th-century individuals (for example donors such as Count (1771–1844) and Countess Hochenwart (1762–1853), Baroness Lazarini (1794–1833), and Viktor Smole (1842–1885), among others), as well as a single Japanese cup bequeathed by Josef Schwegel, today housed in the Ceramics Collection of the mentioned museum.

Ceramics of East Asian origin comprise only a smaller part of a bigger Ceramics Collection kept at the National Museum of Slovenia, however, it is still one of the biggest collections of East Asian objects in the country. According to current research and identification, it consists of approximately 240 objects of Chinese and Japanese origin. Of these, approximately two-thirds are of Chinese and one-third of Japanese origin. A majority of pieces identified to be Chinese or Japanese in origin fall into the greater grouping of objects made specifically for export to Western (in this case European) markets.

In recent years, when the research on the Ceramics Collection at the National Museum of Slovenia was underway, a Japanese porcelain cup was also found to have been a part of Schwegel's bequest. In 1936, the National Museum of Slovenia received a sizeable collection from Schwegel (mostly consisting of Egyptian statues), with the final selection having been made by his widow.⁶⁸ Among the documents and objects, the museum also received a small

67 Kos 2017, 154.

68 Šmitek 1986, 18.

Japanese bowl with a lid.⁶⁹ The cup (or bowl) and its lid are decorated in a somewhat atypical Japanese Imari style⁷⁰ with a repeating pattern of stylized floral motifs in overglaze red and gilt that strongly resemble heraldic signs (fig. 3).⁷¹ On the bottom of the cup there is also the small, stylized Japanese character *fuku* 福 (fig. 4) in underglaze blue, meaning “happiness”. The small *fuku* mark is a good indicator that the porcelain object was made in Arita 有田, a small town in the Saga 佐賀 Prefecture on the island of Kyūshū 九州 that is well known for its ceramics workshops throughout history. This type of porcelain was largely made according to the taste of the European aristocracy and therefore fits the category of export porcelain. Due to its popularity abroad, many companies made Imari-style porcelain, but almost none of it bears any markings indicating by who or where it was made.⁷²

There was some basic information provided with the lidded cup, which is still kept in the museum’s storage along with the object: a small printed label, damaged, but still providing information on the type of porcelain as being “Imari” (fig. 4).

Additional research on the object’s provenance can be conducted through information provided via the online collection of the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna. In their Asia Collection, we can find an identical lidded cup as well as some interesting information (fig. 6).

The MAK data states that the identical object found its way to their collection when the *Handelsmuseum* closed, and it is dated as old as “at least

1873”, which is the year the World’s Fair was held in Vienna.⁷³ In this case, the labels can give us additional insight into the object’s history. The bowl kept at MAK and the bowl kept at the National Museum of Slovenia both have old printed labels on brown paper added. The labels include an inscription reading “*Teeschale mit Deckel aus Imari*”, meaning “Tea bowl with lid from Imari”. While this gives us additional confirmation as to the object’s origin, it also confirms that both objects came from the collection of the former *Handelsmuseum*, as the brown labels match those used by the mentioned institution.⁷⁴

This fact can also through the extensive research conducted on the objects and labels connected to the Vienna World’s Fair and its legacy conducted by the Vienna Museum of Technology and Susanne Gruber (fig. 7).

Comparing the labels shows that they adhere to the same format and printing font, and have identically constructed inventory numbers in their upper left part, with the object’s name below. Upon confirmation that these kinds of labels were used in the former *Handelsmuseum*, we can confirm, that Schwegel’s Japanese cup (as well as the identical cup kept at MAK) was once a part of the collection of the Oriental Museum, where it most likely came via the Vienna World’s Fair in 1873. By researching the history of Josef Schwegel, his connection to the Vienna World’s Fair, as well as the different paths many objects took after the event, we managed to greatly enrich the provenance data of the lidded Japanese cup kept at the National Museum of Slovenia. It was made in Arita, Japan, most likely in the second half of the 19th century. Then it was transported to Europe, to Vienna, as part of the Japanese exhibition at the World’s Fair. Later, the cup became a part of the Oriental Museum’s collection and, in the end, somehow came into Schwegel’s possession. Schwegel’s bequest

69 At the time of writing, the mentioned Japanese porcelain cup is the only object of East Asian origins included in the collection of objects in the so-called Schwegel Collection held at the National Museum of Ljubljana.

70 Imari style is a decorative style of Japanese porcelain, which is named after the Japanese port of the same name (Imari 伊万里), from which, from the second half of the 17th century onwards, Japanese porcelain and other ceramics were exported to the port of the coastal city of Nagasaki 長崎 (and from there to Europe and later to America). The term is commonly used to describe porcelains made at the kilns near Arita.

71 Kos 2017, 302.

72 Impey 2003, 31–33; Rotondo-McCord and Buften 1997, 8–16; Schiffer 2000, 13.

73 Museum of Applied Arts n.d. b.

74 The labels were compared with the help of Dr. Bettina Zorn during an online workshop *East Asian Art in the Wake of the 1873 Vienna World’s Fair* (13 June 2023) on new research being conducted on the topic of the 1873 Vienna World’s Fair and its legacy.



Fig. 3: Lidded cup (or bowl). Glazed porcelain with red and gold overglaze decoration and a *fuku* 福 ("happiness") mark in underglaze blue. H: 8.8 cm; Ø: 11.5 cm. Japan. Meiji period. 18th or 19th century. Bequest of Josef Schwegel. Ceramics collection. N 15177 and N 15178. National Museum of Slovenia.



Fig. 4: *Fuku* mark on the lid. Bequest of Josef Schwegel. Ceramics collection. N 15177 and N 15178. National Museum of Slovenia.



Fig. 5: The torn label indicating the object has come from Imari or is decorated in Imari style. National Museum of Slovenia.



Fig. 6: Lidded cup (or bowl). Glazed porcelain with red and gold overglaze decoration and a *fuku* 福 (“happiness”) mark in underglaze blue. H (bowl): 6.1 cm; Ø (bowl): 11.7 cm; h (lid): 3 cm; Ø (lid): 10.1 cm. Arita, Japan. Meiji period. 18th or 19th century. Asia Collection. OR 975. Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna.



Fig. 7: Japanese tea caddies (4 pieces). Wood. H: 7.5 cm; W: 14.5 cm; D: 22.5 cm. Tokyo, Japan. Meiji period. 18th or 19th century. Warenkundesammlung. 78982 1-4. Vienna Museum of Technology (Technisches Museum Wien).

made it part of the Ceramics Collection at the National Museum of Slovenia, where it is still kept today. The question of how Schwegel actually acquired the cup, which was obviously once already part of a museum collection, remains unknown. In his memoirs, Schwegel notes that, along with the many accolades he received for the organization of the Oriental department at the Vienna World's Fair, he specifically mentions an honorary gift he received from the government of Japan, which included two porcelain vases and a lacquer box.⁷⁵ The cup seems not to be connected with the mentioned gift.

⁷⁵ Schwegel 2007, 54.

Conclusion

Through an overview of Schwegel's life and work and through the methodological approach of comparison, we were able to establish a connection between the cup from the National Museum of Slovenia and its complicated and dynamic provenance linked to the Vienna World's Fair, shedding light on its journey from Japan, to Europe, and finally its current location in Slovenia. This research not only highlighted the historical significance of Schwegel's work through analysis of reports and literature about the Fair, but also complemented these facts with a personal look at Schwegel himself through reading the parts of his memoirs where he subjectively described his work and his views of the project.

The lidded Japanese cup, which catalysed a more detailed and complete review of his life and his position among Slovene bequestors of East Asian objects that are today part of Slovene museum collections, is only one of the many different objects (but the only object of East Asian origin) Schwegel bequeathed to the National Museum of Slovenia. However, even just this one object showed the richness and complicated paths of object histories and provenances, and illuminated a direct connection between present-day Slovenia and the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. This newfound connection suggests that there may be more artefacts and objects from the Fair scattered across various collections at Slovene museums and other public institutions, waiting to be identified and linked back to this pivotal event in history. However, delving deeper into this topic requires extensive research and investigation, as the lack of sources and documentation presents a significant challenge to unravelling the provenance of many objects, even if their mere appearance strongly suggests the link to the World's Fair in Vienna.

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- že vseeno« (Josef Baron von Schwegel, a diplomat: "... I Have Awarded Abundant Orders, Among Them Grand and Small Crosses, and Decorations of All Kinds, Which Some People are Very Happy About, but Which I Eventually Grew to Not Care About")." *Argo* 65 (2): 20–31.
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