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George Salting (1835-1909) and the discovery of Islamic ceramics in 19th-century England

Isabelle Gadoin

Celebrating a collector of ceramics

- 1 When George Salting died on December 13th 1909, and bequeathed his art collection to the English nation, the specialist press and the daily papers seemed to vie for superlatives. The collection was called a “marvellous collection” (*Daily Mail*, Dec. 16, 1909), “a munificent bequest” (Roberts 1910, 203), “a magnificent legacy” (Read 251), “a splendid assemblage of works of the finest and rarest art” (*The Times*, Dec. 23, 1909, 7), or finally, in an expression that implicitly revealed the gratitude of the nation, “the noble bequest of Mr. George Salting” (Hill 311). In order to give the public an idea of the extraordinary scope of this collection, both *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* resorted to comparison with another of the great “Titans of collecting” (Hermann 266), Sir Richard Wallace: “The Mail says it is the greatest art treasure the nation has acquired by gift since the widow of Sir Richard Wallace bequeathed the Hertford House collection” (*Daily Mail*, Dec. 16, 1909). *The Times* was even more enthusiastic:

The opinion was unanimous that the bequest was a marvellous one, alike in the width of its range, in the number of the objects and in the uniformly high quality of almost all. It would be difficult for the keenest eye to discover half a dozen among these hundreds of objects which are not what they pretend to be; and we doubt whether there has ever been made a private collection of the same size, except that at Hertford House, of which the same can be said. (*Times*, March 23, 1911)

- 2 The public was thrilled and kept in intense suspense for a few days. Indeed, while Salting had privately confessed his wish to leave his collection to the nation, it was not immediately known whether the provisions of his will would allow the legal transfer to take place: “At the time of writing the fate of this priceless collection is uncertain”,

warned the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (n° 82, 189).¹ *The Times* seemed to report the same flurry on the part of the larger public: “The public anxiety with regard to the dispersal of the art collection of Mr. George Salting, an obituary notice of whom appeared in the time of yesterday, has had no parallel since the death of Lady Wallace, some few years ago, when it was much debated whether the treasures of Hertford House would be preserved for the nation or scattered to the four winds of the world” (Dec. 15, 1909). After running articles on the subject over a period of almost two weeks, *The Times* finally confirmed the bequest on December 23rd, with obvious relish: “All fears as to the fate of the late Mr. Salting’s collections are set at rest by the announcement we are able to make today...” (March 23, 1911). The plural form used here for the term “collections” was indeed required, since the samples of the decorative arts—the main portion of the collection—were to go to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the pictures to the National Gallery, and prints and drawings to the British Museum. It is quite fitting of course that the marvellous gift to the nation should have been carefully detailed and analyzed in the Christmas issue of *The Times*, dated December 25th! The only condition Salting had appended to the donation of his collections was that they be presented under his name, and “not distributed over the various sections, but kept all together according to the various specialties of my exhibits” (*The Pottery Gazette*, July 1st 1911, 798).

- 3 One may form an idea of the sheer profusion of objects bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum from the fact that these were counted at first in bulk, that is in terms of “glazed cases” rather than individually. The short list published by *The Times* on Christmas Day gives a first inkling of Salting’s major fields of interest: Oriental porcelain came first, filling up 29 cases, followed by Italian majolica (10 cases), Italian bronzes and reliefs (10 cases), Persian, Damascus and Turkish ware (5 cases) or Limoges enamels (3 cases). There were also illuminated manuscripts, portraits in wax and boxwood medallions, Chinese snuff-bottles, ironwork, damascened objects, Japanese lacquer work, Delft ware, Tanagra figures and groups, Palissy ware, knives, forks and keys, jewels, Silver, Japanese bronzes, Saracenic bronzes, carved wood groups and figures, and finally glass and ivories. And although this was already quite enough to make one’s head swim, the author of the article was careful to add that this “remarkable list [did] not exhaust all the features of the bequest”, which also comprised, albeit in lesser quantities, “leatherwork, furniture, textiles, arms, and so on” (*Times* Dec. 25, 1909).
- 4 *The Times* spoke of about 2,500 articles (Dec. 25, 1909); in the event it turned out to be 2657 objects which were listed in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum.² The staff must have been literally submerged with the bequest, and it took them more than a year—fifteen months exactly—to draw its full inventory and accommodate the objects within proper galleries. Even so, some of the first visitors reported their feeling that the collections were “unduly crowded,” (*Times*, March 23, 1911) when the Salting Collection was first opened to the public on March 22, 1911. Even today, it is a very impressive experience to go through the Chinese galleries of the V&A Museum and behold the dozens of pieces labelled “Salting bequest”—huge and magnificent objects which indeed may sometimes appear to be rather crowded within their glass cases... In the small handbook published by the museum as a visitor’s guide, under the title “Salting Bequest”, the objects were listed under 62 different entries covering virtually all the regions of the decorative arts, Western and Eastern.³
- 5 In comparison with this prodigious collection, the 192 paintings and other works which went to the National Gallery could almost have appeared as negligible, had not the

pictures represented all the very best of the Old Masters, some of which still unquestionably rank among the jewels of the National Gallery today⁴, like Robert Campin's *Virgin and Child before a Fire-Screen* (c1440),⁵ Hans Memling's *A Young Man at Prayer* (c1470), Jan Steen's *Oyster Feast* (c1660), Vermeer's *Young Lady seated at a Virginal* (c1670-75) or Rembrandt's *Portrait of an Old Man with a Cap* and *Diana bathing in a Landscape* ... Salting's paintings roughly fell within three or four major categories, with the Dutch and Flemish Masters coming first. According to the quick overview published by *The Times*, these comprised "10 or 11 Ruysdaels, two magnificent Hobbemas [...], three or four by Jan Steen", alongside with canvases by Gabriel Metsu, Peter de Hooch, Vermeer, Aart van der Neer, Aelbert Cuyp, Jan van Goyen, Peter Coddle, A. van Ostade, Paul Hotter, Franz Hals, Rubens, a Van Dyck portrait, etc. (Dec. 25, 1909). The second category consisted in (early) Italian pictures (Andrea del Sarto, Andrea del Solario, Ghirlandaio etc.); the third in German and English paintings—including more recent English landscape artists; finally the last group gathered works by contemporary French artists, mostly belonging to the "Barbizon" school (Corot, Baubigny, Rousseau, Millet...) (*Times*, Dec. 17, 1909)⁶. And this staggering list still remains incomplete, since a vast quantity of drawings and sketches were also offered to the British Museum, whose Trustees, like those of the National Gallery, were left free to select the works they thought fit. The tantalizing dimensions of the collection were perfectly summed up in the article of the magazine *Connoisseur*: "It is almost impossible to give, even in several articles, any coherent and systematic idea of the wealth of Mr. Salting's collection" (Roberts 1911, 24)...

- 6 Thus the Salting collection was absolutely unique, for its sheer magnitude; yet it was also very coherent with the development of taste in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, notably within the field of the decorative arts, and ceramics in particular. As is well-known, the movement away from industrial development and mechanical production, and back to medieval aesthetics and work structures, in the wake of the Arts and Crafts movement, may largely explain the rediscovery and rehabilitation of the decorative arts in the 19th century. However, it is clear that such a passionate collector as Salting could not be contented with merely following contemporary fashions. By progressively extending the range of his interests, and diversifying into then little-known areas of foreign arts, like Oriental and Islamic art, he opened up new avenues. And because his collecting strategy consisted in accumulating as much material as possible—without ever renouncing the criterion of excellence—he provided large, and therefore reasonably reliable, samples of foreign productions, which simultaneously attracted the attention of the growing bodies of specialists, and usefully provided them with a whole range of case-studies.⁷ In short, he helped create, and investigate, new provinces of knowledge.
- 7 One of the purposes of this article is to try and provide a short presentation of George Salting's life, of his buying habits and strategies, and of some of his contacts as a collector. In doing so, we will also venture into one of the artistic territories he explored, that of Islamic ceramics. This category, which was wholly new in Western collections and museums at the end of the nineteenth-century, was unfortunately overshadowed by the supreme quality of Salting's Chinese porcelain; but we shall see that the first forays into Islamic ceramics were probably closely linked to the already extant knowledge British collectors had of Chinese pottery. Salting of course was not the only British amateur to turn his eyes towards the Islamic Near East; other collectors at the same time started

putting together vast collections of Oriental art—including carpets, manuscripts, miniatures, etc. Behind the complex trajectories of particular objects, therefore, it is a whole artistic network which can be glimpsed, bringing together collectors, dealers, artists and museum curators or directors. Indeed it is one of the most striking, and constant, characteristics of the period that the major national institutions greatly relied on private amateurs for knowledge, expert advice, financial contributions and, in the last resort, donations. If the years 1875 to 1914 may be called “the golden age of private collecting,” (Rovers 159) they also formed the pivotal moment when collecting was promoted from private pastime to public effort (Rovers 159) in the constitution of national archives, memory, and history.

- 8 Due to the dearth of written testimonies, it is extremely difficult today to piece back together the various elements of this complex artistic puzzle. An interesting aspect of collecting psychology is that great collectors are very secretive about their “hunting” habits, or methods⁸—probably because of the competition and rivalry involved: as one of his biographers lamented, “[l]ike most other collectors, Mr Salting could have written a fascinating book of his experience as an art hunter, but like many other collectors, he omitted to do this. Writers on art do not, as a rule, collect, and collectors do not write” (Roberts 1911, 24). Official sources and documents are just as scarce as private memoirs, as far as the Victorian period is concerned: in the field of Oriental art, very few amateurs, if any, had a catalogue of their own collection made, and published; there were few reliable experts, and the specialist press was still in its infancy. Yet one may find the paths of individual collectors crossing at times. It appears that London’s Gentlemen’s Clubs may have played an important role here, by bringing together men with similar tastes, and allowing them to put up semi-private exhibitions, where objects could be seen, compared, and studied. Yet most of the talks and expert analyses must have taken place behind closed doors; so that, when attempting to recreate the various steps in the Victorian discovery of Islamic art, one has to rely very largely on the collectors’ biographies in order to try and write, in turn, the “biographies of objects” and collections (to use the title of Kopytoff’s article in *The Social Life of Things*).

The formation and methods of a collector

- 9 George Salting was born of parents of Danish origin⁹, Severin Kanute Salting and Louise Fiellerup, who migrated to Australia and made a fortune in a partnership called Flower, Salting & Co., which was involved “in the highly profitable import-export business, principally shipping wool from Australia, but also investing in sheep stations, sugar plantations, and other businesses in the young colony” (Coppel). Thus he could probably be considered as a minor example of those “Sugar Barons” who, like Henry Tate, amassed colossal sums in the sugar trade and used their fortunes to gather major art collections. He was first brought up in Sydney, but in 1848 he and his younger brother William Severin (1837-1905) were sent to England, and George entered Eton College. In 1854, however, poor health forced him back to Sydney, where he started attending university and took his B.A., showing particular aptitudes in the study of the Classics. In 1857 the family returned to England and George matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, but left after just one term, probably on account of his mother’s death. His grieving father decided to spend the autumn of 1858 in Rome—a decisive experience, during which the young man spent the whole of his time visiting galleries, churches and archaeological

monuments. Besides training his eye and appreciation, he also took up the practice of photography, an arduous task which then involved “pushing a cart with equipment, and black tent to develop the plates, through the streets of Rome” (Coppel). It is not known whether Salting later kept photographs of his art treasures, but the practice undoubtedly was part of the visual training and even the scopic impulse at work in the constitution of so many collections. This Italian education went on with visits of Naples and Florence in 1859.

10 Some of the most characteristic features of the avid discoverer already emerge from these early experiences: “Like Balzac’s ‘Cousin Pons’, he collected laboriously, and like that famous and well-defined character, he had ‘the stags’ unwearied legs, an idler’s leisure, a Jew’s patience” (Roberts 1910, 203).¹⁰ In later life, Salting never seems to have hesitated to make special trips to the Continent, in order to bid in person in the Paris auction rooms which then formed the centre of the European art world. He was present for the sales of the collections of such renowned amateurs as Ralph Bernal, Magniac, Frédéric Spitzer and Fountaine, and in the last two instances, we are told that “he spent several thousands of pounds” (Roberts 1911, 24). The fact that he stayed in Paris for about two months and a half—over 70 days—on the occasion of the “heroic”¹¹ Spitzer sale in 1893 gives a suggestion of his constancy and dedication, as well as his “idler’s leisure”... But he was also in Rome during the Torquato Castellani sale, or went to Friesland especially to buy five Imari vases (*Times*, Dec. 23, 1909), so that one may suspect that his purchases offered the opportunity for many other trips.

11 His early period of wanderings and artistic training came to an end when his father died in 1865. George and his brother being the sole heirs, they came into a considerable fortune, of some 30,000 pounds a year—a huge amount by the day’s standards for a young man who was barely thirty. George settled down to a life of ease, with collecting as his one and only occupation, to which he dedicated himself for more than forty years with almost professional application, and “to the exclusion of almost every other interest” (DNB, 1912 edition). He was a man of frugal habits, and lived in a two-room flat above the Thatched House Club in Lower St James Street—all the while investing colossal sums in the purchase of the most exquisite works of art. This fed the legend of a miser ready to do anything to get the pieces he coveted; but his friends were careful to deflate the myth and correct popular misconceptions: immediately after Salting’s death was made public, Lindo S. Myers sent his retort in a letter to the editor of *The Times*:

Your obituary notice of him was in one respect hardly just. It is perfectly true that he was of a meticulous disposition, and that no form of sports or politics interested him; but to say that the “queer miserliness [...] made him deaf to appeals” is, at least as far as my knowledge goes, not true. I have often asked him for help for people who deserved it, and he has very seldom stayed his hand in contributions. On two particular occasions at least he gave me not inconsiderable sums to aid poor and suffering persons.

His wit was great, and fulfilled an essential French qualification of being ‘surprising’. (*Times*, Dec. 17, 1909: “To the Editor of *The Times*”. NB: the letter is dated Dec. 16th)

12 In the obituary he published soon after in the *Burlington Magazine*, Charles H. Read also dryly denounced the stereotypes circulated in the national press: “George Salting is to be characterised as having lived in two rooms over a club, as having paid sixpence for his tea, or three shillings for a dinner, on the same day that he had bought a picture for £ 5,000” (Read 250). Turning the criticism into praise, he pictured Salting as a man who

lived “the simplest of lives”: “quiet, entirely without ostentation or pretension of any kind, he possessed a refinement of taste and knowledge of ancient art that is given to few [...] As a great collector of the most catholic sympathies he stood almost alone, and he has unquestionably left his mark on the connoisseurship of our day” (Read 251). The picture that emerges from these testimonies brought by close friends is that of a man who lived exclusively for his passion.

- 13 His daily life seems to have consisted in a routine round—his biographers speak of a “pilgrimage” (DNB 1912)—of the Bond Street dealers, whom he visited every afternoon for forty years... The “meticulous disposition” mentioned by L.S. Myers made him extremely cautious, even prone to “procrastinating”, and after studying the objects with utmost attention, he was always ready to engage in protracted negotiations with the dealers—even if we also read in contemporary testimonies that “price was no consideration or only a minor one, when he had set his mind on something of first-rate order” (Roberts 1910, 203). When in doubt, he would seek the opinion of enlightened friends or museum curators, like Augustus Wollaston Franks or Charles Hercules Read, Keepers of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities at the British Museum, or Wilhelm von Bode, the director general of the Berlin museums. Besides trying to procure the best pieces, his collecting tactics also consisted in systematically striving to improve the value of the collection, by “weeding out”—that is, re-selling or exchanging—the pieces that he had come to see in the course of time as less valuable, less perfect or simply less desirable. R.H. Benson, the Italian picture connoisseur, called him “the prince of weeders” (Coppel).
- 14 Salting had at first kept his treasures within his rooms, and at his death it was again a comparison with Balzac’s *Cousin Pons* which served to describe this crammed interior, “for every corner [was] filled to congestion with masterpieces of the great artists of Italy, Holland and England stacked up in every corner available” (*Times*, Dec. 15, 1909). But as the collection soon outgrew what little space was available in his two rooms, he decided to send the objects on loan to the South Kensington Museum, as early as 1874.¹² This policy of loans he pursued all along his life, which means that at the time of his death, several hundreds of the objects bequeathed to the museum had actually been there for decades... Contrary to collectors like Frederic Leyland or Lord Leighton, who had rooms or even entire houses built for the express purpose of accommodating, or even staging, their collections, Salting seems to have renounced any notion of private possession and display of his goods. This is a most interesting aspect of his practice as a collector, insofar as it partly contradicts what might appear as the purely acquisitive and even rapacious side of a life of never-ending purchases. Salting obviously did not conceive of art as a way of simply ornamenting an interior, or of visually proclaiming one’s social status;¹³ he must have had a higher, and more generous, conception of art as belonging to the nation, and having a part to play in educating the masses. Thus, his ideal must have been somewhere between philanthropy and self-glorification, to take up Eva Rovers’ terminology. The private motivations of collectors are always very complex. Strangely, Salting’s practice of lending his objects to museums also seems to go against the desire for control and power E. Rovers sees as a determining impulse for most collectors: “collecting appeals to the need people feel to create a world of their own, which they can control” (Rovers 160). On the other hand, Salting never married, so that he must have seen his collection as his natural—or artistic—offspring. Leaving it to the nation of course

added a form of immortality to this exceptional personal creation; and this desire to leave something behind him certainly was no small part of his motivations.

A tightly-knit community of fellow collectors

- 15 When reviewing Salting's formative years, few biographers failed to note the decisive influence played by other, more experienced, collectors, like Louis Huth: "Mr Salting, as is well-known, was a disciple of the late Louis Huth, in the matter of art collecting, and he could have had no more competent a mentor. Mr. Huth had for the most part formed his splendid collection (dispersed within recent years) before the pupil had seriously entered into the pursuit of objects of art" (Roberts 1910). As the Director of the London Assurance for Fire, Life and Marine Assurance, Louis Huth (1822-1905) may be defined simply as a City millionaire. Unfortunately, this capital figure of Victorian collecting has more or less sunk into oblivion: he is not mentioned in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the few elements of information that can still be unearthed about him have to be gathered piecemeal from occasional mentions here and there in other collectors' memoirs. Thus we learn from the biography of the art dealer Murray Marks that one of the dealer's first customers, as early as the mid-1860s, was the Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who became a friend. Rossetti quickly developed a passion for Chinese blue and white ceramics, and he introduced several potential buyers to the dealer: among them was Mr Huth, who was "speedily bitten" (Williamson 34) with what its enemies called "China mania"... As a man of considerable means, Huth could obviously afford much higher prices than Rossetti (Williamson 54), and he seems to have become a regular purchaser, who picked up some "extremely beautiful pieces" (Williamson 55): Murray Marks indeed "had to do with the purchase of perhaps the finest prunus jar that has ever been seen, the Huth example which realized over 5000" (Williamson 35).¹⁴ Interestingly, his rather regal buying methods seem to have differed radically from Salting's obsessive haggling—which suggests that there were as many profiles and practices among collectors as distinct personalities: "Marks said it was a characteristic of Mr Huth that he never asked the price, but as a rule, with only one exception, paid the sum that was invoiced" (Williamson 55).
- 16 It may have been through Rossetti that Huth also met the painter James McNeill Whistler; and he turned into one of the patrons and supporters of the latter, and of the Aesthetic movement thereby. We learn from Huth's private correspondence with Whistler¹⁵ that he owned the famous *Symphony in White, n° 3* (1865-67)¹⁶ and that he also commissioned to the artist a portrait of his wife, *Arrangement in Black, No. 2: Portrait of Mrs. Louis Huth*, dated 1872-73.¹⁷ These artists, dealers and collectors formed a rather small nexus of amateurs, which served to diffuse the taste for Chinese ceramics first spurred by Whistler, Rossetti and the Aesthetic movement. Within the London artistic and amateur circles, many works of art must thus have been privately circulated and exchanged. Unlike Salting's collection, the unity of which was preserved thanks to the bequest to the V&A Museum, Huth's collection was dispersed at Christie's¹⁸ after his death in 1905... but as it happens, one of the buyers was none other than Salting himself, who bought back a large number of the masterpieces formerly in Huth's possession!¹⁹
- 17 Other important friends and relationships of Salting's belonged to the professional category of museum curators and directors—or specialists working hand in hand with museum authorities. Among Salting's friends or contacts evoked in biographical notices,

one finds recurrent mentions of Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826-1897), the Keeper of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography at the British Museum and a member of the Society of Antiquaries, as well as Charles Hercules Read (1857-1929), his successor in the keepership at the British Museum. Both were fervent collectors of Oriental art and are reported to have served as advisors when Salting was wavering about a particular purchase. C.H. Read wrote Salting's obituary in *The Burlington Magazine*, which denotes a certain degree of familiarity with the man and his near-professional career as a collector of national scope.

- 18 Another name mentioned by Salting's biographers is that of Charles Drury Fortnum (1820-1899), one of the major Victorian specialists of ceramic art, notably of Italian Della Robbia ware. There may be a number of common elements in Salting's and Fortnum's training, since the latter's delicate health led him to migrate to Australia, where he spent five years, from 1840 to 1845. After this he travelled throughout Europe, "chiefly engaged in making his collections of works of art" (DNB 1912).²⁰ In Australia, he had acquired a good knowledge of chemistry and mineralogy, two prerequisites for a good analyst of the art of ceramics. On settling in England he became an authority on the subject, and compiled the first *Descriptive Catalogue of the Majolica, Hispano-Moresque, Persian, Damascus and Rhodian Wares in the South Kensington Museum* (1873)—in which he did pioneer work by trying to analyse the chemical composition of the paste and glazing of the objects under consideration.²¹ As Timothy Wilson underlined, Fortnum was a strange compound of the confirmed amateur and the budding scientist, and his writings "show a characteristic South Kensington concern with technique, together with the careful observation, meticulous data accumulation, and classificatory skill of a scientist; they remain landmarks in the study of their subjects" (Wilson, online DNB). Fortnum was also a member of the Society of Antiquaries, and may thus have been in contact with A.W. Franks and C.H. Read. He must have had an intimate and thorough knowledge of the exact contents of Huth's collection, since he referred to very precise examples in his presentation of Oriental ceramics—not only Chinese but also Near-Eastern—in his 1873 catalogue. It may be this ground-breaking work for the South Kensington Museum which brought him in close contact with its director Sir Henry Cole; and Clive Wainwright documents travels Fortnum and Cole made together in Europe, "shopping" for the new museum (Wainwright 1999, 171-185). Finally, like Salting, Fortnum bequeathed his remarkable collection to a national museum, Oxford's Ashmolean, for which he had already published an impressive *Descriptive Catalogue of the Majolica* in eight volumes (Oxford, 1897). To support this project, he provided the museum with an endowment of £ 10,000 "to enable the fast growing collections in the old Ashmolean to be rehoused in new buildings adjoining the University Galleries" (Wilson, DNB online). Some of his porcelain also went to the British Museum. Like Salting, and so many other collectors who turned into national benefactors, Fortnum was moved by philanthropy rather than self-glorification... Yet, contrary to Salting, he developed a thorough scholarly approach on the basis of his, and others', collections.
- 19 What clearly appears from those individual lives is the tight network of friendly *and* professional relations between, on the one hand, collectors whose appreciation seems to have been essentially aesthetic, like Salting, and on the other hand specialists equipped with a far more technical knowledge of ceramics, like Fortnum. Nevertheless, as Fortnum's career shows, those specialists were not necessarily museum curators or directors. Conversely, museum officials often relied for advice, and sometimes for

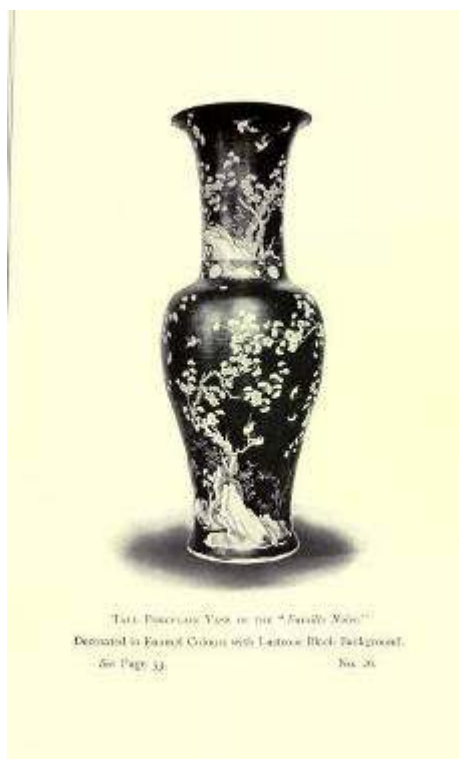
financial support, on dealers like Murray Marks, whose knowledge, his biographer G.C. Williamson writes, “was in constant demand at the Victoria and Albert museum, where he was a valued adviser” (Williamson 22). Besides this, Marks “subscribed considerable sums of money, usually quite privately, in order to assist in the purchase of other things, where the price asked for the particular object was beyond the reach of the museum” (Williamson 23). It was an extremely fine line, therefore, that divided enlightened connoisseurs and official scholars; and the discovery of Oriental ceramics must have been a very wide and inclusive type of venture, equally involving the amateur, the professional, and even the commercial worlds.

- 20 Within this extremely fluid artistic panorama, a major part was played by gentlemen’s clubs—not only the afore-mentioned Society of Antiquaries and Archaeological Societies, but over and above these, the Burlington Fine Arts Club, created in 1866, with Louis Huth as one of the founding members. Salting was elected a member soon after the foundation, on April 9, 1867, like many other collectors of the age, and the Club undoubtedly played a paramount role in advertising ceramic art, and disclosing the beauties of Islamic art in particular. Indeed, it seems to have organised the first “Exhibition of Persian and Arab Art” ever held in London (See Gadoin 2006). This took place in 1885, on the basis of loans from individual collectors; and among the most prominent lenders were George Salting, Louis Huth and C.D. Fortnum... The exhibition presented a little more than 600 different works of art—mostly ceramics, but also examples of Islamic metalwork, carpets and textiles, and miniatures—, several dozens of them were lent by George Salting, which already gives an idea of the range of his collections, some 24 years before his death.
- 21 Access to the exhibition was only allowed to Club members and their guests, which means that the impact on the larger public must have been rather limited. Yet for the first time a descriptive catalogue was published. The introduction and presentation of the various exhibits was the work of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, turned ceramic expert, Henry Wallis (1830-1916) (See Gadoin 2009). Wallis grounded his analyses on Fortnum’s categories, which consisted in “Persian, Damascus, Rhodian, Lindus, and Siculo-Arabian wares”, to which he added another type, denominated “Gombroon wares”, after the name of the Persian port (now Bandar ‘Abbās) from which such objects were known to have been exported. All these names were misleading because they relied on the places where objects had been *found* rather than on their exact sites of production. Thus pieces labelled “Damascus ware” actually proved to be examples of Ottoman pottery, mostly Iznik wares, which were sold throughout the Ottoman Empire—including Damascus—in the 16th century. The “Rhodian” category partly overlapped with the former, since it actually referred to a variety of Ottoman wares produced on the island of Rhodes, notably in the town of Lindus. As for the “Gombroon” class, it referred to a very fine type of white Persian pottery of the 17th-18th century, with underglaze incised patterning, which tried to copy the effect of Chinese “rice-pattern” porcelain.
- 22 In spite of these hesitations, the catalogue of the 1885 Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition is most valuable for us today, because it suggests possible links between the various collectors. An illustrated version of the catalogue was indeed published (Wallis 1885), with photographs of the various glass cases where the exhibits were displayed.

Catalogue of Persian and Arab Art, Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1885 – photo Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, bibliothèque, collections Jacques Doucet



Catalogue of Persian and Arab Art, BFAC – photo INHA, bibliothèque, collections Jacques Doucet



PLATES N° 10 AND 11B THUS SHOW TWO REMARKABLY SIMILAR "DAMASCUS" BOWLS, THE FIRST ONE BELONGING TO LOUIS HUTH, THE SECOND TO GEORGE SALTING. PLATE 8 SHOWS THREE FINE EXAMPLES OF IZNIK PRODUCTIONS, WITH TWO BLUE JUGS, VISIBLE ON EITHER SIDE OF A MAGNIFICENT OTTOMAN MOSQUE LAMP, RESPECTIVELY BELONGING TO C.D.E. FORTNUM AND L. HUTH.

Catalogue BFAC – photo INHA, bibliothèque, collections Jacques Doucet



Huth's piece was described in the catalogue as "Damascus jug: blue scale-work, with Maltese cross and rose, in turquoise, touched with puce, as are also the sides of the handle. A border of strap-work divides the neck and body as is repeated at the top".²² Interestingly, Huth's jug is now on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which means that it was part of the objects bought by Salting at Christie's during the sale of Huth's collection in 1905, which entered the museum within the context of the Salting bequest. The same thing could be said of a so-called "Rhodian plate" with "chocolate ground, white fritillaries and blue flowers", which was also part of the Salting bequest.²³ Finally, a huge Iznik bowl decorated in "spiral style", belonging to Huth, is shown between two Ottoman plates belonging to Salting.

Catalogue BFAC – photo INHA, bibliothèque, collections Jacques Doucet, Plate 11d



- 23 Many other examples could be given of striking resemblances between the various collectors' treasures, which obviously betray common tastes but also seem to point common sources and buying patterns, as well as personal exchanges.

From China to Persia and Turkey

- 24 Although it is difficult to judge from the black-and-white photos in the catalogue, it is probable that many pieces were examples of the type of pottery then called "blue and white". There is little doubt that most of the objects on Plate 11d, for instance, belonged to that particular group. Given the history of the constitution of collections such as Salting's and Huth's, one may surmise that it was the Victorian craze for Chinese blue-and-white porcelain which actually led to the (partly accidental?) discovery of Islamic blue-and-white pottery, and by extension, other Near-Eastern types of wares. The little that is remembered today about Louis Huth is that he was a collector of Chinese porcelain; and in most documents, Salting is presented in exactly the same way as his mentor: "The most numerous of the Salting contributions are the examples of old Chinese porcelain"; "Mr Salting was a beginner in collecting when he started buying Oriental" (*Times*, Dec. 23, 1909). But this interest never flagged and came to cover most of the history of Chinese pottery, so that W. Roberts could write after his death, in *The Connoisseur*: "The Salting collection may be briefly described as a comprehensive epitome of the history of Chinese porcelain" (Roberts 1911, 24).
- 25 In this passionate quest for Chinese plates, vases and pots, the dealer Murray Marks must have played a cardinal part. As Clive Wainwright observed, "Marks is, it seems, the only nineteenth-century curiosity dealer about whom a biography has been written" (Wainwright 2002, 161), and this biography is an invaluable source of information concerning art-collecting practices at the turn of the twentieth century. If we are to believe his biographer, G.C. Williamson, Marks was largely responsible for launching and sustaining the interest in blue-and-white ware, then called "Nankin" porcelain, after the

name of the Southern capital of China during the Ming dynasty (1368-1643): “Few were more intimately concerned in the development in England of the cult of Blue and White Nankin porcelain. Of course he did not originate its vogue. Perhaps that distinction may be attributed to Whistler, but Whistler could not have formed his collection in England without the assistance of Marks” (Williamson 31).

- 26 In the second half of the nineteenth century, the fashion for Asian arts and crafts seems to have started in Paris²⁴, before spreading to England. According to G.C. Williamson (32), it was the firm of Farmer and Rogers who first imported Chinese goods in London. These did not consist in ceramics only but included embroideries, screens, lacquer work and colour prints. Their manager, Mr Lazenby Liberty, later left the firm and opened his own business in Regent Street, which soon became famous for its Far Eastern riches. Yet Murray Marks had an incomparable advantage: his family came from Holland, a country long reputed for its passion for blue-and-white pottery, as is made obvious by Delftware productions. He travelled extensively on the Continent, and had kept many Dutch connections, “from whom he could readily obtain whatever Blue and White porcelain was required”—at a period of time when its prices were still “exceedingly low” (Williamson 33-34). Then Rossetti quite spontaneously came to play the role of intermediary with artists of his own acquaintance and their patrons; and it is the whole dynamics of a national craze that was started. Its major parameters were the global Victorian enthusiasm for exotic goods, an apt dealer who had a large if not near-complete monopoly of the market, artists who loved to picture their own Oriental pots within their canvases, like Rossetti and his *Blue Bower* or Whistler and his “Long Elizas”,²⁵ and finally, capping the whole commercial-and-artistic edifice, patrons like Frederic Leyland, who happened to collect *both* paintings and ceramics. It is not known exactly how Salting got acquainted with Marks, but the “finest pieces” in his collection are said to have come through the dealer: “Over two hundred pieces in the Salting collection, including most of the finest, appear, from a list retained by Marks amongst his papers, to have been purchased by George Salting, through him” (Williamson 34).
- 27 Among the blue-and-white ceramics procured by Salting for his Chinese collection, there may well have happened to crop up at times examples of Islamic blue-and-white ceramics, sometimes hardly distinguishable from the former. The links between Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and Islamic blue-and-white pottery are ancient, complex and very well documented now; and these links are far from one-dimensional. As early as the thirteenth century, China and Persia “were brought into close relationships” by the “Pax Mongolica” (Denny 76), when the Mongol chief Hulagu Khan ruled over Persia (1256-65), while his brother Kubilāi Khan was ruling over China (Bloom & Blair 282). At that time, the use of blue and black decoration in Islamic pottery was picked up by Chinese potters, who added blue to their “traditional white porcelains” (Brend 134).²⁶ Yet China had few sources of cobalt, the mineral necessary for the blue underglaze painting in blue-and-white pottery. Because its own resources were of poor quality and produced an inferior dull blue, China had to import cobalt from Persia, notably from Kashan, a city of central Iran, in the province of Isfahan. For this reason, Chinese potters used to refer to the pigment as “Mahomedan blue”, as Murray Marks was proud to claim, after discovering the phrase in his conversations with Chinese scholars:

the original Chinese name for the deep, violet blue used on early porcelain was Mahomedan blue, indicating that its origin must have been outside China; and Marks always claimed to have introduced this phrase into the parlance of the

collector, and to have stated in public, for the first time, that it was the right one to use, in reference to this particular blue. (Williamson 35)

- 28 Nevertheless the blue-and-white epic does not end here: “By the later fourteenth century the Middle Eastern potters in their turn had begun to imitate the Chinese wares, and they continued to do so in the fifteenth century and beyond” (Brend 134). Chinese pottery was indeed imported into Persia, where it was a synonym for courtly refinement and prestige, as attested by the presence of Chinese porcelain within miniatures representing courtly scenes and feasts (Denny 80). Both the Persian and, from the end of the fifteenth century, the Ottoman rulers, started gathering impressive collections of Chinese porcelains. Today, two of the three most important collections of Chinese porcelain outside China itself are to be found in Iran and Turkey. The first one lay in the shrine of Ardabil, a city of North-West Iran, close to the Caspian sea, and consisted in 1162 items—805 surviving today—out of which 618 were blue-and-white. Some were dedicated to the great Persian ruler Shah Abbas (1571-1629), and they were kept within a specially built *Chini Khaneh*—the Persian equivalent of classical “porcelain cabinets”. The other major collection was that gathered by the Ottoman sultans within the Topkapi Palace—more than 10,000 pieces (Denny 80-81). All these imports were largely copied, not only within the Islamic world but also in Europe, as attested by Dutch Delftware.
- 29 It must have been rather frequent for Victorian lovers of blue-and-whites, therefore, to chance upon Islamic pieces in their hunt for Chinese porcelain. Thus, one recognizes on some of the Iznik plates in the Salting collection the typical Chinese motifs of the wave-and-rock borders or, elsewhere, the cloud bands, lotus scrolls, peonies, and occasional dragons derived from Chinese models. In Islamic productions, which favoured formal and geometrical patterns, these motifs are severely stylized of course, and naturalistic elements are often turned into mere arabesque patterns. This global stylization often allows one to differentiate Islamic from Chinese productions; and when touches of the thick, bright “wax-red” pigment characteristic of Iznik potteries are to be seen, no doubt is left as to the origin of the piece. But in other instances, with colours reduced to various shades of cobalt blue, room may have been left for doubt. It would be an interesting exercise to study the catalogue of the Exhibition of Blue and White Oriental Porcelain organised by the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1895, to see whether examples of Islamic pieces could not be found among purely Chinese objects, at a time when individual collections were not all submitted to scholarly investigation... One may add that Chinese celadons were also copied by Islamic potters, and a beautiful example of this cross-cultural style of production, again belonging to Salting, was shown at the Burlington Fine Arts Club Exhibition. The Persian touch is visible in the motif of the cypress tree, but also in the addition of spots of blue and white to the global decoration, as signalled in the catalogue, which introduced the object as a “Persian rice dish”, with “Celadon ground, conventional cypress tree, flowers and birds in white, jewelled with deep blue spots. White chain work and blue line round margin” (Wallis 1885, item n° 57). The dish must have been all the more valuable in these days as there were very few other examples of Islamic celadons within the exhibition, or indeed within private collections.
- 30 Although too few direct testimonies are now available for us to assert this decisively, we may hazard the guess that such amateurs as Salting started out with highly-esteemed Chinese productions, and progressively branched out into the little-explored field of Islamic pottery, as Persian or Ottoman works of art intermittently appeared on the market. It is a well-known fact that the adjective “Oriental” was used for the largest part

of the nineteenth century in quite an inclusive way, covering virtually any type of art from the Far-East to the Near-East. Yet once the taste for Islamic art was launched, the movement of (re-)discovery must soon have gathered speed. The major marketplaces of Constantinople, Cairo or Damascus were far closer than any of the Chinese cities, and the colonial context obviously provided many opportunities for on-the-spot investigations—or downright looting! Men with an artistic flair like the painter Henry Wallis found altogether new territories for exploration there, conjoining the “Orientalist” fascination for exotic lands and customs, and an indubitable commercial acumen. Wallis is indeed a fascinating case, for he was both an entirely self-taught specialist of Islamic ceramics, and a sly and very resourceful merchant, who must have guided many collectors, and indeed many museum curators, towards true hoards of Islamic art. Thus the colonial context must have made a real difference in the respective fortunes of Chinese and Islamic art at the end of the nineteenth century. But once “discovered”, or more properly said, “re-discovered”, Islamic art headed towards a glorious future. If blue-and-white pottery was probably one of the springboards for Victorian collectors of Islamic art, other, more specifically Islamic techniques, like that of “lustre” pottery, soon attracted their attention. In the *Catalogue* of the exhibition of “Persian and Arab Art” at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, several plates were dedicated to specimens of “lustre” pottery, obviously priced as the jewel part of the exhibition. This technique, dating as far back as the 9th century in Persia and Irak, and later taken up in Egypt, consisted in imitating more prestigious examples of metalwork in silver and gold, by giving ceramic wares a particular metallic sheen, as a result of the firing of metallic oxides—of silver or copper. Here opens a new, thrilling, chapter within the story of Victorian collections of Oriental art: that of the hunt for “lustre pottery”, in which George Salting was a protagonist too—a chapter that still remains to be written...(Anon.). “The Salting Collection”. *The Pottery Gazette* (July 1911): 798-900.

Critical studies

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NOTES

1. As it turned out, Salting had carefully seen to the future of his collection, and his will was dated October 11, 1889—some twenty years before his death!
2. National Archives of Art and Design, "Salting Bequest", Letter (C.S. to J.P. Mellor) dated April 13, 1910.

3. See <http://www.archive.org/stream/saltingcollectio00victuoft#page/n1/mode/2up> (accessed Feb. 2nd, 2012)
4. On the site of the National Gallery, Salting's bequest is acknowledged as "the largest single gift ever made to the Collection", <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/salting-bequest> (accessed Feb. 5, 2012)
5. This painting nowadays is merely attributed to a follower of Campin.
6. "His Barbizon paintings, all recent acquisitions, are all first rate", *The Times* December 23, 1909. In the issue dated Friday, January 28, 1910, *The Times* offered a long list of "the Salting pictures"; but the article in the magazine *Connoisseur* (Vol. XXVI, Jan/April 1910) also gave a very complete enumeration of all the pictures. However, respecting Salting's ceramics (the jewel of the collection), no such inventory seems to have been published.
7. It is quite telling in this respect that a whole series of carpets of disputed origin, but first illustrated by examples in the Salting collection, came to be ranged simply within the "Salting group". Cf. Murray L. Eiland's article "Scholarship and a Controversial Group of Safavid Carpets", which presents "a group of Safavid carpets usually described as the 'Saltings'" (Eiland 97-105). See also Mills 1-17.
8. There are, of course, notable exceptions, like the Goncourt brothers.
9. His father had been born in Copenhagen in 1809, see the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1912 edition, entry "George Salting".
10. This expression is Balzac's, as translated by the author of Salting's obituary in the magazine *The Connoisseur*, and should not be understood as reflecting my views (IG). The quotation is from *Le Cousin Pons*: "[I] possédait les trois éléments du succès: les jambes du cerf, le temps des flâneurs et la patience de l'israélite", Paris : Garnier Flammarion, p. 61.
11. He is said to have spent £35,000 at the sale, and to have purchased almost one tenth of the 3369 lots (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., ref. cit.). The multiple receipts of the company "Chénue et fils, emballeurs et expéditeurs", kept in the Salting Archive at the National Archives of Art and Design, seem to suggest that more than 190 boxes were sent from Paris to London in the weeks that followed the Spitzer sale.
12. This was the name of London's Museum of Decorative Arts, which was renamed Victoria and Albert immediately after the Queen's death in 1901.
13. This of course would have to be mitigated: on the part of the son of newly rich parents, of foreign origin, moreover coming from the colonial world, collecting was obviously a means of securing a place within the typical upper middle class milieu who took up collecting as a way of emulating the practices of the old aristocracy... On this "self-defining" function of art collections, see Rovers 157-158 and 160.
14. What is referred to as "prunus jar" in the quotation was more commonly called "ginger jar" in the Aesthetic circles which were very keen on these highly decorative objects. These were round bulging vases, usually covered with a lid, and painted a deep blue, with prunus blossoms outlined in white.
15. See the Glasgow university website, where Whistler's correspondence may be read online: <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts/search/resultsn.cfm?NID=8978&RID=> (accessed July 10, 2012)
16. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_in_White,_No._3 (accessed Feb. 6, 2012)
17. <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?ID=18798> (accessed Feb. 6, 2012)
18. The sale catalogue is dated May, 17-18, 1905.
19. This practice of buying wholesale from fellow—or rival?—collectors' goods seems to have been part of the basic strategies of great collectors, and Huth himself also appears to have bought entire series, such as "the fine collection of the Baron de Monville" around the year 1867 (Fortnum 13).

20. See also the 2004 online edition of DNB: Timothy Wilson, "Fortnum, Charles Drury Edward (1820-1899)", <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9951>, accessed 5 Feb. 2012.
21. For a precise analysis of "The Contribution of C.D.E Fortnum to the Historiography and Collecting of Islamic Ceramics", see Vanke 219-231.
22. Wallis 1885, item n°522. This is numbered C2012-1910 in the Salting Bequest at the V&A.
23. Wallis 1885, item n°427, now C2010-1910. A very similar jug, in the possession of C.D. Fortnum, is now within the collections of the Ashmolean museum: cf. Allan 70-71.
24. The interest for "Chinoiserie" had of course started much earlier, and all along the eighteenth century the East India Company had brought to England a large amount of goods, including ceramics.
25. This is the way in which Whistler distorted the Dutch expression *Lange Lijzen*, which referred to the "lanky people" painted on the porcelain of the Kangxi era (1662-1722). See Merrill 683-690.
26. The use of black was precluded "by the high temperatures necessary in the Chinese porcelain kilns".

ABSTRACTS

This paper gives a biographical and artistic presentation of George Salting, a British art collector who bequeathed the large part of his collections to various London museums. Although Salting has now sunk into near oblivion, his life and collecting methods may be seen as representative of the tastes and practices of Victorian amateurs, and of their vision of the Orient. Indeed, around him can also be glimpsed the rather closed circles of amateurs and collectors of Oriental art. It is well-known that Salting's first passion was Chinese porcelain; but this paper argues that through Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, Salting probably became acquainted with "Persian and Arab" pottery—to take up the phrase then in use—which then led him to form an exquisite collection of Islamic ceramics.

Cet article propose un parcours biographique et artistique de la carrière du collectionneur George Salting, connu pour ses nombreux legs aux musées britanniques, mais dont l'intérêt pour l'art oriental a fait l'objet de très peu d'études approfondies à ce jour. Salting est pourtant emblématique des pratiques artistiques et marchandes des collectionneurs victoriens, et du regard qu'ils portaient sur l'Orient. Autour de Salting s'esquisse également l'image de la petite société, à la fois unie et fermée, des amateurs d'art oriental. C'est sans doute par l'intermédiaire de la céramique chinoise que Salting se tourna peu à peu vers la poterie islamique, faisant œuvre de pionnier dans la constitution de collections d'objets "arabes et persans", selon l'expression alors utilisée.

INDEX

Mots-clés: poterie bleue et blanche, porcelaine chinoise, porcelaine de Delphes, Clubs de gentlemen, histoire des collections, céramiques islamiques, art perse, orientalisme

Keywords: Burlington Fine Arts, Victoria and Albert Museum

personnescitees Charles Drury Fortnum, Augustus Wollaston Franks, Louis Huth, Murray Marks, Charles Hercules Read, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Salting, Henry Wallis, James Abbott McNeill Whistler

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