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S P E A K I N G P L A T E S —

PRINTED NARRATIVE SCENES ON 19TH CENTURY CREAMWARE
10 FEBRUARY 2017 — 21 JANUARY 2018

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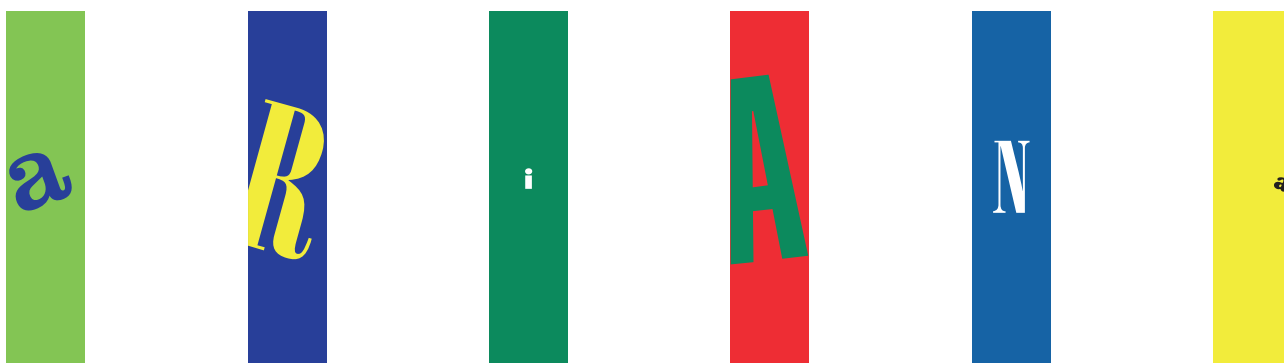
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Decorating workshop at the Sarreguemines pottery in 1923 (in C. J. Bolender, *Les assiettes imprimées de Sarreguemines : 1828-1838 : la période Utzschneider*, Paris, Ed. S.I.D., 2004, p. 112, © Bolender C.J.)



SPEAKING PLATES

PRINTED NARRATIVE SCENES ON 19TH CENTURY CREAMWARE

MUSÉE ARIANA, GENEVA, 10 FEBRUARY 2017 – 21 JANUARY 2018

A real fashion phenomenon in the 19th century, so-called “speaking” creamware plates are decorated with narrative designs and inscriptions on an extremely wide range of themes: military life, hunting, monuments, or the traditions of French urban and rural society. Fables, rebuses, proverbs and popular songs are also represented or inscribed on these often satirical or caricatural pieces. The plate wells are adorned too with solemn illustrations that reflect the glory and influence of France – commemorating military achievements or arousing patriotic feelings – as well as with humorous, less flattering scenes which poke fun at men, women, the middle classes, peasants and foreigners. No-one is spared! A mass propaganda medium, these printed narrative plates convey political, religious or educational messages.

The Musée Ariana has around a hundred pieces of this kind in its collections (enriched by recent donations), originating mainly from France and Western Switzerland. The exhibition presents some complete series, (one relating the transfer of Napoleon’s mortal remains in 1840, and another featuring the *Exposition universelle* (World Fair) in Paris of 1889), as well as some individual pieces that highlight the similarities between the products of the different and fiercely competitive creamware factories.

In France, the companies Sarreguemines, Utzschneider & Cie, Creil et Montereau, Gien, Choisy-le-Roi, Lunéville, Longwy, Clairefontaine, Vieillard and many others were famous for this type of ware. Examples are also found in Western Switzerland in the form of the speaking plates made in Nyon and Carouge. All these potteries produced series of narrative plates on a chosen theme (usually twelve per set), which were a resounding success with customers.

Their arrival on the market stemmed from the introduction in France and England of two new ceramic techniques in the mid-18th century. Firstly, the development of creamware – a fine, light-



France, 1840-1860
Earthenware, painted decoration with polychrome enamels
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"At the political windmill / Winds blow in all directions / Clients there are robbed"

coloured and highly malleable clay enriched with calcined flint and lime and covered with a transparent glaze. This "opaque porcelain" was much cheaper than the precious true porcelain. Secondly, the English invention of transfer printing, which consisted in engraving a motif on a metal plate and then transferring the decoration to a ceramic body. In keeping with the spirit of the industrial revolution, mechanization enabled large-scale manufacturing methods and mass-produced designs.

History

Whether on ancient Greek ceramics with their mythological scenes, Islamic siliceous clays with epigraphic decorations or Italian Renaissance majolica and its subjects inspired by engravings, ceramics have always been a medium used for writing or illustrating narratives.

17th and 18th century French earthenware – not only plates, but also shaped pieces such as pitchers, jugs, gourds, etc. – features painted decoration and inscriptions: political slogans, poems, proverbs, Masonic, religious or patronymic themes. From the start of ceramic printing in England, the decorations on the plates tell us stories. Doesn't one of the first images printed on English pottery, the Willow Pattern, evoke the tragic history of two lovers?

Speaking plates were therefore not a 19th century invention, but they did experience unprecedented growth in France at that time, thanks to mass-production of the designs, and they enjoyed widespread popularity.

Factories in England, Germany (Villeroy and Boch), Belgium (La Louvière) and elsewhere in Europe, produced series of their own.

The Plate, an Ideal Medium

In 19th century France, narrative designs were mainly printed onto small plates (averaging 20 cm in diameter). They offered an ideal medium with their circular shape (octagonal plates are rarer) and especially their smooth, flat central well. The main motif was applied to this well: usually a scene of around 10 cm in diameter (rectangular cartouches are less common), sometimes encircled by a thin black line.

The plate borders, known as "lips", (smooth, foliated, gadroon or scalloped), were adorned with an infinite variety of motifs, ranging from a simple line or coloured band to complex designs not always linked to the central subject: relief decoration, garlands, lambrequins, scrollwork, interlacing, cartouches, animals, human figures, objects, etc. The border was the part of the plate that remained visible when the dessert was served. After 1880, the lips disappeared to make way for flat, disc-shaped plates. These facilitated the application of the transfer sheet and made it possible for the entire surface to be decorated.



Box for speaking plates in poplar wood resembling those used for French camembert (Gien)

The development of special individual plates went hand-in-hand with changes in table decoration, notably the transition from the French to the Russian practice of serving dishes in the early 19th century. The eclecticism of the designs and borders reflect the potteries' desire to accommodate everyone's tastes, adapting their wares to attract a very broad clientele.

The Series and their Function

The series generally comprise twelve plates on a single theme (more rarely 6 or 24), which might be numbered, most often have inscriptions and sometimes a title. They form a kind of inventory in twelve illustrations, occasionally with a didactic element. Each plate makes sense both on its own and as part of the series.

Speaking plates were either ornamental or used for desserts. Some of the sets were collectors' items that took pride of place on dressers, mantelpieces or walls, while others were used for entertainment purposes, with the design gradually being revealed over the course of the meal. It's easy to imagine guests eager to see the centre of the plate or to turn it over to discover the answer to a puzzle. The inscriptions or riddles might well have been read out loud, stimulating enlivening dinner table discussion and debate and raising smiles.



Dresser and table setting (in Maité Bouyssy, Jean-Pierre Chaline (dirs.), *Un média de faïence : l'assiette historiée imprimée*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012, p.18)



PRINTED DECORATION

Invention and Inventors

Printing on earthenware was a major technical innovation that revolutionized ceramics by permitting the mechanical reproduction of designs. The advantages of this industrial process were an increase in production rates, cost reduction and wide-scale distribution.

Several inventors with slightly varying processes filed patents and disputed authorship of the discovery. The development and improvement of the technique was in fact the culmination of extensive research carried out simultaneously in England. The first inventor was John Brooks, an engraver in Birmingham who applied for a patent on 10 September 1751 and later used this technique in Battersea. The Bow and Worcester porcelain factories offered printed ware for sale as early as 1756, thanks to a process developed by a certain John Wall. In the same year, John Sadler and Guy Green transferred designs onto tiles in Liverpool and claimed

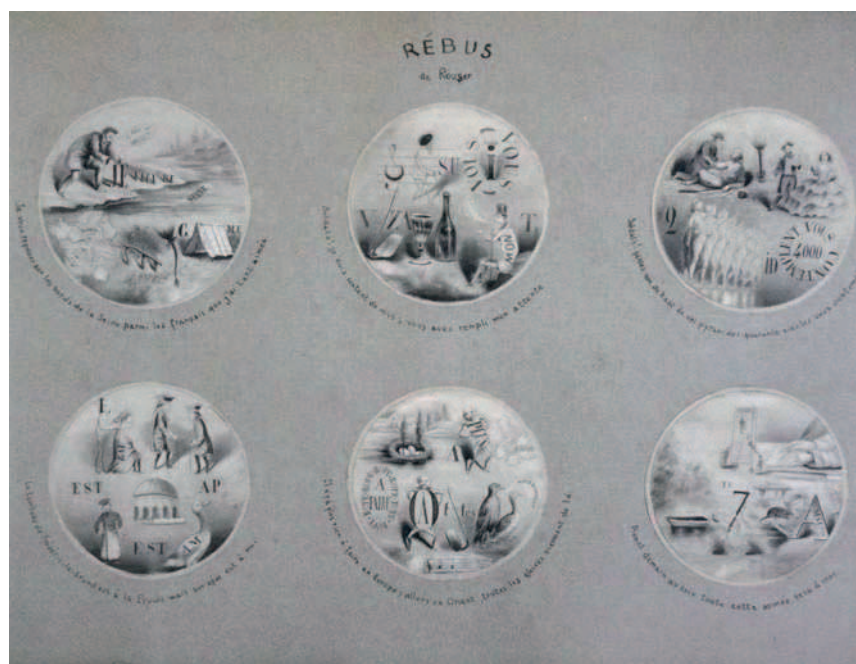


Plate of central designs “Rebuses” by Rouger (in M. Bouyssy, J.-P. Chaline, *Un média de faïence : l'assiette historiée imprimée*, Paris, 2012, p. 213, © Bibliothèque municipale de Bordeaux)

to have been working on the development of their invention since 1749, even before Brooks! Josiah Wedgwood, moreover, adopted their technique as early as 1761. In Switzerland, the Englishman Adam Spengler is thought to have begun printing designs onto Zurich porcelain in 1780. The technique crossed the Channel and printed plates were produced on an industrial scale in Paris from 1808 onwards. By 1830, the practice had become widespread.

Industrialised ceramic decoration and reduced production costs

Thanks to printing, it became possible to produce multiple copies of a design from a single engraved original without the need for ceramic painters. This meant considerable labour cost savings, as hand-painted decoration is more time-consuming and expensive. Only one artist was now required: the engraver. What's more, mechanization of the decoration process allowed the factories to vary the subjects easily and quickly to reflect the changing fashions and tastes of the day.

"It is possible to produce 10,000 medallions a day in a workshop of 12 men and 40 women and children, which provides the means to sell a dozen white creamware plates painted and fired at 9 f. and 12 for grey tones and the other pieces in proportions [sic]" (cf. Maddy Ariès, *Creil : faïence fine et porcelaine : 1797-1895*, Paris, Guénégaud, 1994, p. 72). Each worker (male or female), usually assisted by two children, could in fact produce hundreds of plates each day. Later, to further increase productivity and enable continuous decoration of the ceramics, the factories used machines known as printing rollers.

Process

The process described below is the one used by Stone, Coquerel et Legros d'Anizy in their printer-engraver's studio in the Rue du Cadran, Paris. They filed a patent of invention on 10 January 1808, enabling them to "print on earthenware or porcelain, or on any other material, engravings as clear as on the finest paper." (cf. Maddy Ariès, *Creil : faïence fine et porcelaine : 1797-1895*, p. 70)

1. The design is engraved with a burin onto a plate (usually copper), following an existing model or otherwise.
2. The engraved plate is inked with a mixture of metal salts (manganese sulphate, copper sulphate and Swedish cobalt), that is, vitrifiable colours
3. A piece of tracing paper or filter paper called a "Joseph" is soaked in water with added "carp gall and potash".
4. This is then applied to the engraved plate.
5. The paper with the proof is once more dipped into the liquid or "*mixture*".
6. The surface of the ceramic is prepared to receive the print by the application of a mordant (turpentine, resin and gum arabic) to facilitate the transfer procedure.
7. Next comes the transfer operation: the paper is applied to the already fired and enamelled item.
8. It is then pressed down with a pad or a sponge.
9. Lastly, an additional and final firing in a muffle kiln at 600 °C fixes the decoration.

Another technique rivalled this one: underglaze impression applied to the bisque, which eliminated the need for a third firing. This more economical process became the preferred technique. Another variation was introduced in 1883 when the Lunéville factory filed a patent for printed decoration in which the sheet of paper was replaced by gelatine.

Printing at the Factories and Subcontracting

Some manufacturers used external engraving workshops. This was the case for Choisy-le-Roi and for Creil et Montereau, who had items printed in their early days by Stone, Coquerel et Legros d'Anizy. Others had their own workshop where printing plates could be engraved, re-engraved if necessary due to wear and tear, or modified to rework a design.

The printing workshops supplied several of the potteries, and the source documents from which the engravers drew their inspiration circulated between factories, as did the engraved plates themselves. This explains the similarities between series produced by different companies, with occasional individual variations in terms of the inscription or border, etc. If a set was successful, competitors were quick to copy it. This practice of subcontracting is often identifiable by the presence of two distinct makers' marks, that of the engraving workshop (printed) and of the pottery (printed or inscribed in the ceramic body). Certain printer-engraver workshops or design makers purchased white creamware and added the decoration themselves.



A



B

Black printed designs were for long the most widespread. Monochrome decoration subsequently dominated, in blue, bistre, mauve, brown or green shades and sometimes with hand-painted or stencilled highlights on the well. Examples exist with a combination of a black central design and a coloured lip. Technical improvements meant that polychrome printing became possible and more widespread in the last third of the 19th century.

WHO BOUGHT THE SPEAKING PLATES?

The highly diverse clientele targeted by the pottery makers ranged from city dwellers to country folk. Street sellers or hawkers travelled the provinces with whole series in their trunks for sale. In Paris, it became possible to buy speaking plates in the department stores that opened in the second half of the 19th century: at the Bon Marché (1852), Printemps (1865) or La Samaritaine (1869).

While some sets were highly prestigious, other «cheaper» versions were of varying quality, with priority being given to speed of execution and quantity. The border of the plate opposite shows signs of overprinting (A) and a printing defect (B) where the tracing



Sarreguemines factory, France, 2nd half of the 19th century
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"Hunting the Doe"

had shifted. Indeed, after the latter had been used hundreds of times, the printing was of lower quality.

Towards 1830-1850, the middle classes gradually abandoned creamware in favour of the more luxurious porcelain. It was therefore less wealthy customers who then bought these speaking plates. Such items were accessible due to their modest selling price. In 1844, the cost of a printed plate was 1.50 francs at Sarreguemines, compared to the average daily wage of the factory's employees of 1.20 francs.

Sources

The popularity of the new illustrated magazines – and humorous ones in particular – went hand-in-hand with that of the plate as a medium for engraved images. The factory owners, as good tradesmen, were quick to tap into this lucrative market. Inspiration for the designs came from numerous sources: lithographic albums, prints, collections of engravings, the press or illustrated books. Such newspapers as *L'illustration*, *Le Charivari*, *Le Temps*, *Le Siècle*, etc., provided countless models and directly influenced the repertory of the potteries, whose printed plates reflected current affairs.

However, the designs were not always transposed identically, but were sometimes adapted to printing on ceramics by simplification of the details, reinterpretation or cropping. The extensive range of subjects made it possible to attract a broad clientele. It's difficult to know how long the production of a single series lasted (six months, a year or more?), or the number of examples produced, but they are intimately linked to the commercial success of the printed themes.



Creil factory, France, c. 1830 (in Yvonne Naudin, *Faïences Creil, Choisy, Montereau*, Paris, C.P.I.P., 1980, p. 83)

THEMES

Hunting and Fishing

In the 19th century, hunting ceased to be an aristocratic pastime and became more accessible to all. It was an integral part of leisure activities: game, bears, foxes, wolves, wild boars and hares were stalked by hunters and their dogs. No longer content with just the local fauna, amateurs also found new hunting grounds in the colonies. Exotic wild animals made prestigious trophies: as shown by the hunting of lions (*"Pour s'habituer à la chasse au lion"* / Getting used to lion hunting, Sarreguemines), tigers (Gien) or leopards (Creil). The law adopted on 3 May 1844 laid the foundations of the French hunting laws on which the current regulations are still based.

Hunting series appear to have been prized by collectors of speaking plates. Different moments and techniques of the hunt are represented: beating, tracking, the return of the hunt, etc. The Creil pottery produced a spectacular *"Pêche de la baleine"* (Whale



Baylon factory, Carouge, Switzerland, 1803-1843
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"The Arrest of William Tell"

Fishing) plate (c. 1830) featuring a printed design enhanced with colours.

The plates are illustrated with both classical hunting scenes and pastiches of the hunters. The Musée Ariana possesses examples notably from the Sarreguemines and Nyon potteries. This satirical dimension is to be found on humorous pieces such as "*Chasse à la biche*" (Hunting the doe) or "*Comment tirer sur un lièvre aussi galant ?*" (How can one shoot such a gallant hare?).

Several stories of the hunt are also found, including ones from lithographic albums, like the one by Francisque Martin François Grenier de Saint-Martin (1829-1831). For its part, the Creil factory made polychrome hunting plates (1830-35), inspired by the engravings of Carle Vernet.

Swiss Patriotic and Commemorative Creamware

With their borders edged with a simple line, the black-printed plates made by the Baylon pottery in Carouge are characterised by great sobriety. They represent scenes from Swiss history through heroic figures and emblems of freedom: William Tell, Arnold de Winkelried, the village woman of Schlinz and Stauffacher's wife.

A Swiss hero and symbol of its independence, William Tell is here represented at the time of his arrest. The famous scene in which he is forced to shoot with a crossbow an apple placed on the head of one of his children is illustrated on a plate with a richly decorated border.

In 1386, the Battle of Sempach saw the Habsburgs fighting the forces of Lucerne, supported by Uri, Schwytz and Unterwald. The story goes that by his sacrifice, Arnold de Winkelried enabled the Swiss Confederates to gain victory by allowing them to break through the enemy lines.

Heroines also have their place on printed speaking plates. During the Swabian War (1499) between the Swiss and the emperor Maximilian I, a village woman from Schlinz fooled an enemy spy and warned her people of an imminent invasion. The latter then seized the metal crosses from the cemetery to fight off the enemy.

The plate "*La femme de Stauffacher engage son mari à prendre conseil de leurs amis*" (Stauffacher's wife advises her husband to take counsel from their friends), describes the episode when his wife convinces Werner Stauffacher (Schwytz) to meet with Walter Fürst (Uri) and Arnold von Melchtal (Unterwald). On the Grütli meadow, these men swore an oath to free the three valleys from the tyranny of the bailiffs sent by the Habsburgs. The three Swiss oath takers, the representatives of the early cantons, are the heroes of the founding myth of the Swiss Confederation.



The Rue Caroline pottery, Carouge, Switzerland, 1830-1840
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"William Tell"

These patriotic and commemorative plates appear to have been designed as ornamental pieces, unlike some French series that were used as dessert ware. With their unifying themes, these highly affordable sets were a great commercial success among both ordinary people and the bourgeoisie. The pottery works of Western Switzerland (Nyon and Carouge) also printed series featuring traditional costumes, Swiss cities and monuments, the months of the year and coats of arms.

Military Themes

Military Achievements and Patriotism

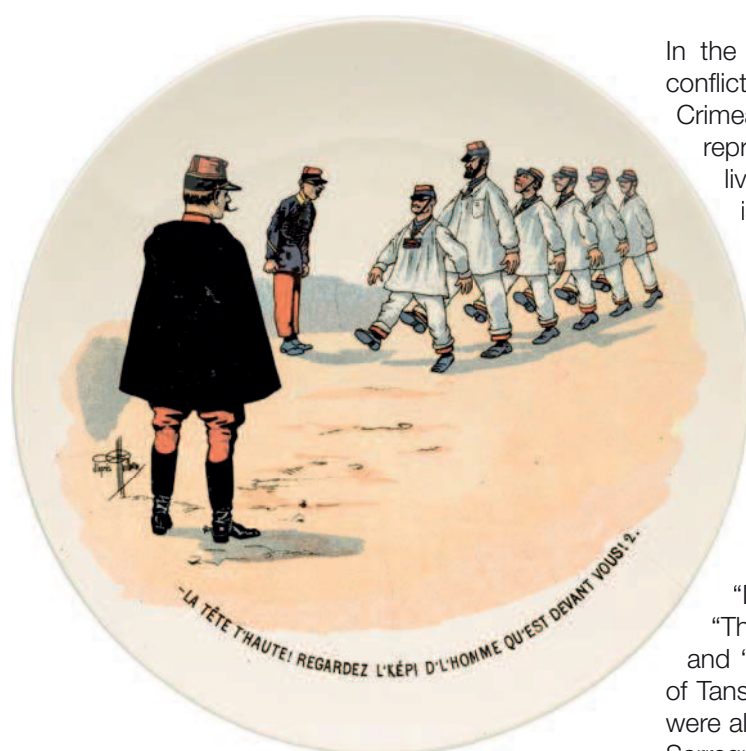
In the 19th century, France was involved in numerous armed conflicts (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Mexico, China, Italy, the Crimea, etc.). Whether near to home or far away, war was widely represented on speaking plates, as was the army and soldiers' lives on the battlefield. On creamware, the iconography of war is that of an official history that glorifies the army's greatness and depicts the leaders and soldiers as heroes. These were topical subjects, as the plates were contemporaneous with the events they illustrate.

The Musée Ariana has six plates in its collection from the series entitled "African Campaigns" made by the Lebeuf, Milliet & Cie pottery works and dating from 1840-1850. During the period in France known as the July Monarchy, the first attempt to capture Constantine in 1836 ended in failure, but a year later the city was besieged. The decoration of the plates was inspired by these events: "Death of General d'Amremont [sic] outside Constantine", "The Duke of Nemours during the first attack on Constantine" and "March on Constantine", to which were added the "Battle of Tansalmet" and the "Taking of Milian". The African campaigns were also the subject of sets produced by Creil et Montereau and Sarreguemines. They illustrate the military achievements of the French princes in Algeria and some are inspired by paintings in the Gallery of Battles at the Château of Versailles.

These representations of the global political influence of France aimed to inspire admiration and stir up people's feelings of patriotism. In the 19th century, such series of plates were used as political propaganda tools to express the glory of the army, the regime and the French nation as a whole.

Military Service

On the other hand, the scenes on plates depicting life in the army are caricatural: they bring a touch of humour that contrasts with the solemn character of the other military pieces. This was a common theme used by several creamware potteries. Some also enlisted the help of artists or designers. This was the case for Albert Guillaume (1873-1942), a famous caricaturist, whose drawings taken from the lithographic albums of 1896 *Mes 28 jours* (My 28 Days) and *Mon*



Utzschneider & Cie, Sarreguemines, France,
1896-1920,
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"Heads up! Eyes on the cap of the man in
front of you!"



Sarreguemines factory, France, 1850-1860
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"Before 3 months are out I'll break your monarchy as
I break this porcelain (1797)"



Printed maker's mark

Régiment (My Regiment) were adapted to form the central scenes for a series of plates made at Sarreguemines. They feature humorous texts such as: "*Sale section! Y en a pas un qui marche ensemble!*" (Second-rate platoon! Not one of 'em marches in step!) or "*D'abord on doit se taire quand on parle à un supérieur!*" (For a start you keep quiet when addressing a superior!). At the end of the 19th century, it became possible to print in several colours (lithography: the metal printing plate being replaced by a stone one) and over the whole surface, due to the changing shape of plates. With the disappearance of the lip, the design covered the entire plate and border decoration was rare.

The Napoleonic Era

Speaking plates were a propaganda tool at Sarreguemines, where a certain Alexandre de Geiger, Bavarian baron and personal friend of Napoleon III, took over the running of the factory in 1836. From 1840 onwards, he produced sets of plates on the life and military achievements of Napoleon I that continued to be made until the Second World War! Between 1850 and 1860, these were mainly original series created by Sarreguemines and not copied from other factories. Pottery thus became a medium to serve the ruling regime, since by praising the qualities of the emperor, the Napoleonic legend was kept alive: Napoleon III aimed to appropriate the glory of his uncle through kinship.

The Musée Ariana has five plates in its collections (Nos. 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7) from a set of twelve printed in black with the "N" of Napoleon, eagles and tricolour flags around the lip. They bear the following inscriptions:

1. General, tomorrow you will sleep at Toulon (1793).
2. Never on any battlefield will I again experience such emotion! (1796).
3. Before 3 months are out, I'll break your monarchy as I break this porcelain (1797).
4. Soldiers! From the height of these pyramids 40 centuries look down on you!
5. Soldiers! Remember that my habit is to sleep on the battlefield! (1800).
6. It's been three months since I lived in any other palace (Napoleon and the Austrian Emperor) (1805).
7. This letter is the only proof I have against your husband... Burn it, Madam (1809).
8. Honour to the courage of the unfortunate (1809).
9. Children! I'm counting on you! Yes, Sire, as on the old guard (1813).
10. Fear not, the bullet that will kill me is not yet cast (1814).
11. Soldiers, I cannot embrace you all, but I will embrace your General. Come, General Petit (1814)
12. Soldiers, if there is one among you who wants to kill his Emperor, here I am! (1815).



Creil et Montereau factory, France, c. 1841
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"N°6 - Entrance of Napoleon's funeral cortege into Paris under the Arc de Triomphe on 15 december 1840"

In most of the scenes, Napoleon addresses his officers and soldiers, creating a highly symbolic closeness. The evocation of a shared glorious past and military victories (at a time when France was engaged in new wars) aimed to foster the popularity of the existing regime.

During the reign of Louis Philippe, the Duke of Joinville was responsible for organizing the repatriation of the mortal remains of Napoleon I from the island of Saint Helena to Les Invalides in Paris in 1840.

The transfer of the emperor's body – known in French as the "*Retour des cendres*" (Return of the ashes) – was a frequently represented theme in prints and lithographs. Sets of plates were produced by a number of manufacturers (Creil, Gien, etc.) in black, blue, green and multicolour versions.

The complete set of twelve plates preserved at the Musée Ariana features written inscriptions, and they are all numbered in chronological order and bear the mark "opaque porcelain, gold medals 1834 and 1839, Lebeuf Milliet & Cie" on the reverse. The lip is decorated with a symbolic design depicting three eagles with outstretched wings holding garlands of laurel in their beaks.

Like a history book, these series are distinctive since they relate an event in the form of an illustrated account in several episodes or chapters. Here, each central scene represents a crucial (or anecdotal) stage in the repatriation of the emperor's remains. Once again, speaking plates have a political role to play as a mass propaganda tool for the glory of the regime.

Several series were inspired by the collection of lithographs published in 1840 by Jean-Victor Adam, Jean-Baptiste Arnout and Alphonse Bichebois entitled *Retour en France des dépouilles mortelles de Napoléon* (Return to France of the Mortal Remains of Napoleon). Their success was such that examples of this series were even printed in Belgium and Holland.

World Fairs

The exhibitions of industrial art and the national and world fairs were spectacular, popular and mediated events that inspired sets of speaking plates made by potteries such as Longwy, Sarreguemines, Keller & Guérin, Creil et Montereau and Gien. The palaces, exhibition halls and attractions – notably the Eiffel Tower – were represented on several series created especially for these occasions. An English tourist is shown exclaiming about the "Iron Lady" (with his English accent transcribed into French): "– Mais Mylord il y a autre chose à voir que la Tour Eiffel – Ah oh! Yes mais moa pas bouger d'ici ayant le hespoir de voir oune petite accident." [sic] (– But my Lord, there's more to see than the Eiffel Tower – Ah! Yes indeed, but I'm not moving from here in case I spot the slightest accident).



Keller & Guérin factory, Lunéville, France, 1889
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"At the World Fair – Rascal! Should've said your barrows were only for light women!"



Jules Renard known as «Draner», *Maison de la Belle Jardinière*, Exposition universelle de Paris, 1889



Choisy-le-Roi factory, France, 1824-1836
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"View of the large greenhouse at the Botanical
Gardens in Paris"

Produced at the time of the World Fair in Paris in 1889, this complete set of twelve plates "At the Exhibition" by Keller & Guérin (Lunéville) was highly successful. The engravings were by Jules Renard (1833-1900), who went by the name of Draner, and he created them for specialized workshops or collaborated directly with Lunéville. Very famous in his day, this Belgian illustrator was a notable contributor to the *Petit journal pour rire* and *L'Illustration*. This satirical series depicts the reactions of French and English exhibition visitors to the discovery of other ethnic groups, foreign countries, reconstructed villages and indigenous traditions. With a colonialist sense of humour that would today be seen as racist, women are shown exclaiming "*Faut-il que le soleil tape dur dans ce chien de pays-là pour leur z'y tanner la peau... comme ça à de si beaux hommes!*" (The sun must beat down hard on that awful country to tan 'em like that ... it's got such handsome men!) or "*Oh! Le chignon... c'est donc les femmes qui sont les soldats chez les Annamites?*" (Oh! Chignons ... the Annamite soldiers must be women then?). The many colours on these plates and their lenticular shape give them a very modern appearance.

The national exhibitions (industry and tourism) were also showcases for the rival potteries, who presented their latest creations on their stands to attract customers. The potteries continued to emulate one another: competitions and jury prizes were awarded for the whitest, most resistant ceramics or the most beautiful decoration.

Tourism

Inspired by accounts of voyages, tourist guides and widely-distributed illustrated publications, certain sets of plates feature monuments, châteaux and famous sites. They don't tell a story, strictly speaking, but bear written inscriptions and are sometimes numbered.

The craze for travel in the 19th century was stimulated by the industrial revolution and the development of means of locomotion such as cars, trains and steamboats. Journeys around the world, transport and progress were fashionable topics that inspired the creation of sets of plates. The famous novel by Jules Verne *Around the World in Eighty Days* was moreover published in 1872.

The pottery of Choisy-le-Roi produced a series with views of Parisian monuments: the Palais du Luxembourg, the large greenhouse at the Jardin des Plantes built in the 19th century, as well as the Austerlitz Bridge (renamed "The King's Garden Bridge") commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte. Exactly the same scenes were used for a set produced at Creil, though with a different border; indeed, both factories had their creamware printed by Stone, Coquerel et Legros d'Anizy. The potteries imitated each other: the Arch of Constantine is found on a plate by Baylon entitled "Arco di Constantino Magno" (1803-1829) and on another by Dortu with the inscription: "Arc de Constantin le Grand, à Rome" (1807-1813).



Niedermeyer & Mülhauser, Nyon, Switzerland,
1814-1829
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"The Wolf, The Goat and the Kid"



Charles-Philippe Lambert factory, Sèvres, France,
1801-1815
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"The Wolf, The Goat and the Kid"



Choisy-le-Roi factory, France, 1836-1863
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"It's not difficult to trick a trickster"

Switzerland was a favourite theme, partly due to its geographical proximity and the popularity of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Nevertheless, the picturesque romanticism of its landscapes took precedence over geographical accuracy; on a plate by the Bordeaux factory, the city of Murten (Canton of Fribourg) is depicted on the shores of Lake Geneva!

Fables

With their fun and moralizing dimensions, the *Fables* of Jean de la Fontaine (1668-1694) featuring animal characters, were a fashionable subject. These plates are proof that the potteries used the same designs or drew inspiration from the same engravings. This was the case for the Charles-Philippe Lambert factory (Sèvres, 1801-1815) and for Niedermeyer & Mülhauser (Nyon, 1814-1829). Apart from the decorative border, there are few differences between their respective versions of "*Le loup, la chèvre et le chevreau*" (The Wolf, the Goat and the Kid) or "*La cigogne et le renard*" (The Stork and the Fox).

Proverbs and Rebuses

Didactic and entertaining, plates featuring rebuses were made by several of the potteries and were highly popular. Guessing the hidden meaning of the motifs was a game that took place over dessert, requiring good observation and perspicacity on the part of guests. The solutions to the rebuses were given on the underside of the plates.

At the Rue Caroline pottery in Carouge, the sobriety of the plates (whiteness, absence of decoration) contrasts with the occasionally unrefined language of the inscriptions in the well: "*à toute heure / Chien pisse & femme pleure*" (At any hour of day / dogs piss and women weep)! (1890-1897)

In the series "Proverbs and Peasants" by Creil et Montereau, country people are the focus of the central composition. The clientele was also rural and this was a means for the pottery manufacturers to reach a very diverse public.

Religious Plates

French potteries produced numerous series on the life of Jesus (at Lunéville, for example) and on other biblical subjects. Yet religion is not a subject often found on the speaking plates in the Musée Ariana's collections. The pious scene printed on this plate by Baylon (1803-1829) shows an old man blessing his sons in front of the ossuary in Morat. Churches, cathedrals or religious monuments also feature on the wells of plates. Examples include images of the cathedrals of Bern (Nyon factory, 1832-1845) and of Solothurn (Baylon factory, Carouge, 1803-1829).

Society and Daily Life



Baylon pottery, Carouge, Switzerland,
1803-1829
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"The Old Swiss Man Blessing his Sons in
Front of the Morat Ossuary"

All layers of society find themselves on the centres of printed plates: foreigners (especially the English, Germans, blacks and colonized peoples), servants, masters, peasants, soldiers, men, women and children. No-one is spared! This is partly explained by the democratization of creamware plates; the potteries wished to reach customers from different spheres, and from both town and country. Humour is ever-present in the form of social satire or caricatures. On the plates, there are many jokes, clichés, puns, allusions and innuendoes to be found, sometimes in codified language: "*Chasse à la biche*" ("Hunting the doe", with *biche* meaning both "doe" and an affectionate term for a woman), "*Misérable! Fallait donc l'dire que vos brouettes n'étaient faites que pour les femmes légères!*" (Rascal! Should've said your barrows were only for light women!). Here, *légères* implies both "light" in terms of weight and "promiscuous". The satirical plates range from "*Duel de marquises*" (Duel between Marquises) to servants who take power and deride their masters.

In "*Signes des temps*" (a French pun meaning both "Signs of the Times" and "Weather Signs") by Sarreguemines, monochrome plates printed in manganese purple depict couples whose moods are linked to weather conditions. In "*Temps incertain*" (Unsettled Weather), a man with a woman on each arm is seen to hesitate. Domestic rows and conjugal violence are also shown, as in "*Tempête*" (Storm) and "*Dégel*" [*sic*] (Thaw). There's even a version of the same designs with inscriptions in German - "*Stürmish*", "*Unbeständig*" - whose series title is *Wetterstand*.



Utzschneider & Cie factory, Sarreguemines, France, 1860-1925
Collection of the Musée Ariana
"French pun meaning "Signs of the Times" and "Weather Signs"
/ Thaw"

Conclusion

The thematic range of the collection of speaking plates at the Musée Ariana is highly diverse. During the “century of the image”, the industrialization of decorative processes marked a turning point in the history of ceramics, making it possible to manufacture series and enabling mass production and distribution. From that time onwards, images featured on day-to-day objects found in every home. Products of the industrial culture, these plates were a powerful media tool that conveyed political, moral or religious messages. These objects tell us stories and speak to us through their decoration and inscriptions. Inexpensive items, they adapted to reflect public taste and contemporary events, hence their popularity and their importance as a 19th century fashion phenomenon.

The potteries manufactured series like these until around 1920. After the First World War, the factories fell into decline and people lost interest in these once highly coveted objects. Nowadays, it's not unusual to find them for sale in second-hand shops and galleries, at flea markets or on online, though the sets are usually incomplete.

These 19th century “comics” are rich historical and artistic testimonies of the society of the time. Still today, these speaking plates are not about to keep quiet!

Ana Quintero Pérez



Creil et Montereau factory, France, 1884-1920

Collection of the Musée Ariana

“Our servants (n°7) / 7f.50 for this chicken! What price do you want me to tell my minx of a mistress?”

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Contemporary set of Gien creamware speaking plates "Monuments of Paris" sold at a Parisian department store, 2017

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