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Trading Earth: Ceramics, Commodities, and Commerce, April 9, 2022-January 28, 2024

A pinch of salt, a stein of beer, a cup of coffee with sugar—around the world, these commodities are traded and consumed. So familiar are these foodstuffs that how they made their way onto our tables is seldom pondered. Drawn from more than 25 nations across the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Africa, the objects in this exhibition focus on the global trade of consumable commodities and the works made to store, serve, and ingest them. Like many of the goods they contained, these ceramic vessels were marketed via vast international trade routes, resulting in the exchange, imitation, and appropriation of decoration, design, and technology.

These functional objects are presented here side by side, transcending geographical, cultural, and chronological boundaries, underscoring the near universality of experiences such as drinking tea from a ceramic vessel. The majority of the objects are made from clay, but also included are related forms in materials such as glass, metal, and ivory. Many of them bear expected signs of use and wear from generations of owners.

Enjoyed worldwide, coffee, tea, alcohol, sugar, chocolate, and spices allow us to share a favorite drink or meal with family and friends. While the monetary price of these commodities is realized, other costs are often concealed. Their cycles of cultivation, production, and trade are an inextricable part of global systems of oppression and privilege, including reliance on enslaved and exploitative labor and lasting damage to communities, human health, and the natural world.

Elizabeth A. Williams
David and Peggy Rockefeller Curator of Decorative Arts and Design

With special thanks to
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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Heat, Light, and Smoke

Ceramics play a central role in fulfilling basic human needs for heat and light, as well as myriad ways to enjoy tobacco, whether it is smoked, inhaled, or chewed. Up until around 1800, oil extracted from plants and animals fueled lamps, providing illumination beyond daylight hours. Earthenware cooking vessels and stoves made of ceramic tiles made hot meals possible. Tobacco's many forms—including snuff, chewing tobacco, and leaves shredded for pipes and fashioned into cigars and cigarettes—prompted many smoking devices and containers. Aromatic smoke of a different sort is produced by incense,

typically a mixture of plant-based materials. First produced in China, incense has inspired many ceramic and metal vessel designs.

Rhode Island Connection

Tobacco gifts, offerings, and pipe smoking have long been part of the spiritual and diplomatic ceremonies among Indigenous people of the Americas. Governor John Carver and Massasoit Ousamequin are believed to have shared a pipe in 1621 to mark the alliance between colonists and the Wampanoag Nation. The colonists broke this alliance in 1675 in King Philip's War, when they attempted to annihilate the Wampanoag Nation and their Narragansett neighbors, whose ancestral lands lay in what is now Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

First enjoyed in Egypt and Asia more than 5,000 years ago, the scented fumes of burning incense are an integral part of religious ceremonies, meditation practice, and aromatherapy. Wafting from open or pierced vessels, the smoke can infuse a room, freshen a garment, or even repel insects.

Chinese
Incense Burner, 1368-1644
Stoneware with iron underglaze and turquoise glaze
15.2 cm (6 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 13.009

Japanese
Censer, late 1800s
Hirado Mikawachi ware porcelain with iron and glaze
30.5 x 18 x 18 cm (12 x 7 1/16 x 7 1/16 inches)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.428ab

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Pakistani
Incense Burner, late 1800s
Brass
Height: 22.9 cm (9 inches)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.372ab

Placed on the back of the hand and inhaled through the nose, finely ground tobacco, or snuff, offers a smokeless way of ingesting nicotine. The practice began in Brazil, spreading through the Americas and to Europe by the 1700s, where the custom became one of social performance, accompanied by innovatively designed snuff boxes.

American
Snuff-Taker Toby Teapot, mid 1800s
Ceramic with glaze
Height: 26.4 cm (10 3/8 inches)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.189

John Wakefield, English, active 1798 - 1818
Snuffbox, ca. 1800
Shell and silver
5.1 x 8.9 x 7 cm (2 x 3 1/2 x 2 3/4 inches)
Gift of Richard and Inge Chafee 2013.73.5

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Andreas Blytt, Norwegian, 1754-1825
Incense Burner, ca. 1795
Silver
Height: 27.3 cm (10 3/4 inches)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.719

Johann Friedrich Eberlein, German, 1696-1749
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Incense Burner in the Form of a Chinese Man, ca. 1735
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
15.7 cm (6 3/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.173

German
Incense Burner, ca. 1525
Copper with gilding, silver, and bronze
28.3 cm (11 1/8 inches) (height)
Museum Works of Art Fund 48.330

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German
"Wildman" Stove Tile, ca. 1480
Earthenware with lead glaze
22.2 x 10.8 x 3.5 cm (8 3/4 x 4 1/4 x 1 3/8 inches)
Gift of Mr. Leopold Blumka 48.445

Used to smoke tobacco or opium, water pipes and hookahs cool the smoke without diluting its strength or flavor, thus providing a smoother inhalation.

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Snuff Taker, 1737
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
19 x 9 x 5 cm (7 1/2 x 3 9/16 x 1 15/16 inches)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund J. Katz 53.200

English
Pastile Burner in the Form of a Cottage, early 1800s
Porcelain
12.1 cm (4 11/16 inches) (height)
Gift of the Estate of Abby Rockefeller Mauzé 78.046.37

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Persian; Iranian
Hookah Base, late 1400s - early 1500s
Fritware with glaze
Height: 21.6 cm (8 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.671

Chinese
Snuff Bottle, 1800s
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glass, and ivory
6.3 cm (2 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.211.4

Chinese
Water Pipe, 1800s
Silver with enamels
Height: 26 cm (10 1/4 inches) of box (?)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.423ad

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Syrian
Lamp, 1200s
Earthenware with black pigments and glaze
4.1 x 9.8 cm (1 5/8 x 3 7/8 inches)
Gift of K. O. Aharonian 13.1510

Italian
Youth Holding a Pipe, ca. 1770
Porcelain with glaze and enamels
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.202.2

Tobacco has been an important commodity for thousands of years, its uses ranging from medicinal and mood-altering to recreational and ceremonial. Containers for storing tobacco include silver boxes, ceramic cigar humidors, and Native American leather pouches adorned with European trade beads and jingle cones cut from tin snuff cans.

Apache; Native North American
Tobacco Pouch, ca. 1900
Leather, beads, and metal
14 cm (5 1/2 inches) (length)
Gift of Mrs. Thomas Hunt 43.421

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Malaysian; or; Sumatran
Tobacco Box, 1800s - 1900s
Silver
3.8 x 5.4 x 11.4 cm (1 1/2 x 2 1/8 x 4 1/2 inches)
Gift of Miss Elizabeth T. Casey 1988.102.2

Haida; Northwest Coast Native American
Panel Pipe, ca. 1820-1830
Argillite
19.1 cm (7 1/2 inches) (length)
Collection of Reverend Robert Casey EL256.45

Gien Faience Factory, French, 1821-
Humidor, ca. 1865 -1870
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
18.4 x 18.4 x 12.7 cm (7 3/16 x 7 3/16 x 5 inches)
Gift of the estate of Shirley A. Goldberg 1992.122.1

Greco-Roman; Roman
Lamp, 100 BCE-100 CE
Ceramic with black slip
13 cm (5 1/8 inches) (length) including handle
Museum Works of Art Fund 60.054

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Pan Painter, Greek, 480 - 460 BCE
Oil Flask (Lekythos), ca. 480 BCE
Red-figure terra cotta
Height: 38.7 cm (15 1/4 inches)
Museum Appropriation Fund and Special Gift Fund 25.110

Silver

Minted into coins and made into wares, silver shares space on the dining table with ceramic forms, some of which may be fashioned after silver examples or enhanced with silver mounts. Used as legal tender for thousands of years, silver coins often were melted down to make silver wares, then melted down again later to produce new coins. A global trade economy emerged in the 1500s with silver mined in Spanish colonial South American countries by forced Indigenous laborers and enslaved Africans.

Rhode Island Connection

Rhode Island's long and important history of silversmithing began around 1700 in Newport, then transitioned to Providence. Objects by these early silversmiths—including Samuel Vernon, Samuel Casey, Ezekiel Burr, Nehemiah Dodge, John Tanner, and Henry L. Webster—are shown throughout this exhibition. The globe-shaped teapot in this case was made by Jonathan Clarke, who was born in Newport in 1705. Clarke worked in Newport until 1755, when he became active in Providence.

Metal rims, bases, and lids, as well as chains to secure lids, were often mounted onto ceramics for decorative and functional reasons, including hiding a chipped edge. Pewter provided durability and was less costly, while silver and gilded silver added value and ornament to ceramic vessels.

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Chinese
Double-Necked Vessel, 1600s
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze and silver
Height: 22.2 cm (8 3/4 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.665

German
Mug, ca. 1520-1550
Stoneware with gilded silver
12.1 cm (4 11/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 49.075

English
Coffeepot, 1760-1765
Earthenware with glaze and silver mounts
35.6 cm (14 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.257

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English
Mug, 1708
Stoneware with salt glaze and silver mount
10.2 x 11.4 cm (4 x 4 1/2 inches)
Gift of the Wunsch Americana Foundation, Inc. 1991.185

German
Tankard, 1650-1700
Stoneware with glaze
14.6 cm (5 13/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 48.374

Costly silver objects, like the teapot in the center, were often copied in form and finish in the less expensive medium of ceramics, as seen in the teapot on the left. The ceramic three-piece tea service on the left fools the eye, gaining its shine not from metal but from a luster glaze containing metallic oxides.

English
Creamer, ca. 1830
Earthenware with silver-luster glaze
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Sarah Osborn 63.005.16

English
Teapot, ca. 1830
Earthenware with silver-luster glaze
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Sarah Osborn 63.005.14

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English
Sugar Bowl, ca. 1830
Earthenware with silver-luster glaze
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Sarah Osborn 63.005.15

Simon Harris, English, active beginning ca. 1795
Teapot, 1810-1811
Silver
Height: 18.1 cm (7 1/8 inches)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.197

English
Jug, ca. 1780
Earthenware with copper-luster glaze
10.8 cm (4 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of the estate of Amey A. Lillibridge 45.002.83

English
Jug, ca. 1780
Earthenware with silver-luster glaze
12.1 cm (4 11/16 inches) (height)
Gift of the estate of Amey A. Lillibridge 45.002.28

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Tablewares are often made of silver, ceramics, and glass. From shapes and sizes to handles and feet, striking similarities abound in these silver teapots, creamers, and sauce boats and their less-expensive ceramic counterparts.

Jonathan Clarke, American, 1705 - 1770
Teapot, ca. 1760
Silver with wood
Height: 14.9 cm (5 7/8 inches)
Bequest of Peyton Randolph Hazard 62.088

English
Teapot, ca. 1760
Earthenware with glaze
13.3 cm (5 5/16 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.217

Samuel Casey, American, ca.1724-ca. 1780
Silver Creamer, ca. 1750
Silver
Height: 8.4 cm (3 5/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. M. E. Sawin 57.202

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English
Agateware Creamer, 1745-1755
Varicolored earthenware with glaze
9.5 cm (3 13/16 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.246

English
Sauceboat, ca. 1760
Earthenware with glaze
9.5 cm (3 13/16 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.245

Matthew West, Irish, 1747 - 1806
Sauceboat, 1787-1793
Silver
height: 13 cm (5 1/8 inches)
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 74.017

Ceramic wares have long been popular for dining and drinking, but for some implements, silver is the medium of choice for its shine, durability, and intricate detail. Wealthy European travelers might have carried their own silver utensils in the 1700s, a time when tea was an expensive commodity often stored in locked caddies.

Hester Bateman, English, 1708-1794
Tea Caddy, 1708-1794
Silver
Height: 14.8 cm (5 13/16 inches)
Gift of Jesse H. and Stephen O. Metcalf 32.260

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Dutch
Caddy Spoon, 1820
Silver
Length: 11.4 cm (4 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.735

Johann Martin Satzger, German, 1707 - 1785
Johann Jakob Bruglocher, German, 1710-1752
Traveling Set with Silverware, 1747-1749
Steel with gilding and steel
7.8 x 18.4 x 25.2 cm (3 1/16 x 7 1/4 x 9 15/16 inches)
Gift of Cornelius R. Love, Jr. 53.106

Hester Bateman, English, 1708-1794
Caster Set, 1782-1783
Silver, mahogany, and glass
22.9 cm (9 inches) (height)
Given in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 78.067

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Clay and Ceramics

Formed from clays unique to their geographical origins, most ceramic objects were made to serve basic functions. Yet they also contain important histories about global maritime and overland trade, slavery, and the exploitations of colonialism.

Enslaved on a sugar plantation or as a domestic servant, the Black figure bending over a sugar basket was originally intended as a functional novelty, but it now registers its true meaning of undeniable racism and subjugation. It was made in Europe in the 1700s, when many African people were forcibly taken from their lands as slaves. Most of Africa was eventually seized as Western empires claimed vast amounts of the world as their own, violently displacing communities with Western colonists and systems that exploited people and natural resources and economies.

Rhode Island Connection
In 1635, Puritan minister Roger Williams headed to what is now Rhode Island after being banished from Massachusetts for his beliefs. Depicted more than 250 years later on a ceramic jug, Williams's arrival in what is now known as Providence set in motion the displacement of the Narragansett Nation and the colonization of the land that RISD now occupies.

The large blue and white platter depicts a large three-masted ship and smaller ships before a castle-like structure. The activity of loading the large merchant vessel with goods is seemingly taking place, but here the cargo is that of human beings. Originally built as trade post for commodities, Cape Coast Castle in West Africa (now Ghana) became a center of the transatlantic slave trade in the 1700s.

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, English, 1759-present
Roger Williams Jug, 1886
Earthenware with transfer print and glaze
18.6 x 21.6 cm (7 5/16 x 8 1/2 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John L. Stiness 16.127

Chinese export
Sugar Bowl, ca. 1785-1790
Porcelain with underglaze blue, enamels, glaze, and gilding
Height: 6.5 cm (2 9/16 inches)
Gift of William A. Viall III in memory of Gretchen Viall 2016.102.18

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Enoch Wood and Sons, English, 1818-1846
Cape Coast Castle Platter, ca. 1840
Earthenware with transfer print and glaze
42.2 x 32.7 cm (16 5/8 x 12 7/8 inches)
Gift of Edward B. Aldrich in memory of Lora E. Aldrich 35.195

In the 1700s, as European ceramic makers were discovering how to produce porcelain, European ships were sailing in all directions in search of profitable commodities and mapmakers were plotting the locations of their travels. Symbolized by the ceramic bank, countries and private citizens grew wealthy through the trade of foreign resources.

Johann Peter Melchior, German, 1742-1825
Höchst Manufactory, German, 1746-present
Map Seller and Two Children, ca. 1775
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
18.2 x 17.7 x 16 cm (7 3/16 x 6 15/16 x 6 5/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.167

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Putto Holding Globe, 1745 - 1750
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
12.6 cm (4 15/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.183

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William Greatbach, English, 1735-1813
Creamware Teapot, 1770-1782
Earthenware with transfer print and glaze
12.4 cm (4 7/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.174

English
Pratt Ware Money Box, ca. 1800 - 1820
Earthenware with polychrome underglaze and glaze
20.3 cm (8 inches) (height)
Gift of the Estate of Abby Rockefeller Mauzé 78.046.50

Revered by Europeans as white gold, porcelain made in China was a highly prized commodity. These wares eventually met with competition in the 1700s, as European countries discovered how to create translucent porcelain ceramics. Figural pieces representing anthropomorphized versions of the earth's continents were popular, as well as telling of the producers' belief of their standing in the world. Made in Germany, the Black figure personifying Africa serves the commodity of sugar, while Europa rides high on a white horse, wearing a crown and holding a scepter, the globe at her feet.

German
Sugar Basket, 1700s
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
18.4 cm (7 3/16 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.462

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Chinese
Coffeepot, 1800
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
20 cm (7 7/8 inches) (height) with cover
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.156

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Europa on a Horse, 1745 - 1747
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
20.8 cm (8 3/16 inches)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.165

Like other commodities, ceramics traversed great distances along trade routes. While spices and silks traveled on camelback via the Silk Road, ships carried Chinese blue and white porcelains west to Europe and North America and east to Mexico and Europe. Trade spread ceramic processes, decorations, and related adaptations along the way.

Mexican
Jar, 1700s
Earthenware with tin glaze, cobalt oxide, and glaze
Height: 34.9 cm (13 3/4 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Davenport West 63.001.37

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English
Teapot, ca. 1760
Stoneware with salt glaze
14.9 cm (5 7/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.180

Jan Van Duijn, Dutch, active ca. 1760
De Porceleyne Schotel (The Porcelain Dish), Dutch, 1598 - 1791
Tea Caddy, ca. 1760
Earthenware with tin glaze, cobalt oxide, and glaze
14.3 x 7 cm (5 5/8 x 2 13/16 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.649

Chinese
Tea Caddy, ca. 1820
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
14 x 7.6 x 3.8 cm (5 1/2 x 3 x 1 1/2 inches)
Gift of William H. Claflin 1991.179.10

Coffee

Originating in Ethiopia in the 1600s, coffee is now one of the most heavily traded agricultural products in the world. Historically, coffee's energizing powers have been both feared and embraced. Its consumption has been prohibited for religious reasons and its sale banned for economic reasons. As a statement against British tea, coffee became the beverage of choice for American colonists, and coffeehouses developed as sites of social and political activity.

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Less savory aspects of coffee relate to its production. Today's fair-trade regulations do important work in prohibiting the forced labor of adults and children and promoting sustainable cultivation practices and equitable trading standards.

Rhode Island Connection

Born in Bristol in 1764 and elected a Rhode Island state senator in 1821, James DeWolf became one of the wealthiest men in the US by participating in the slave trade and investing in Cuban coffee and sugar plantations. From the late 1700s to the early 1800s, members of the DeWolf family funded nearly 90 sea voyages that brought more than 10,000 enslaved Africans to the US and the Caribbean. More than a hundred of these people were forced to cultivate and harvest coffee on DeWolf's plantation in Cuba.

Coffeepots from England and America face each other, representing volatile trade relations between the two. Just before the Revolutionary War, America's coffee consumption was soaring. At that time, the commodity was mainly imported from British-colonized Jamaica. When America gained independence, Britain prohibited the exportation of coffee on American vessels, which prompted savvy import merchants to quickly pivot to non-British suppliers including the French, successfully navigating an unpredictable Atlantic trade system.

American
Toleware Coffeepot, ca. 1825
Tin with paint
21 x 12.4 cm (8 5/16 x 4 7/8 inches) (height x depth) base
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.013

American
Creamer, ca. 1850
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1013

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John Shorthose, English, 1768-1828
Mochaware coffeepot, ca. 1820
Earthenware with slip decoration and glaze
26.4 x 22.2 x 14 cm (10 3/8 x 8 3/4 x 5 1/2 inches) (handle to spout; diameter)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.188

American
Toleware Coffeepot, ca. 1840
Tin with paint
27.3 x 16 cm (10 11/16 x 6 5/16 inches) (height x depth) base
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.014

Meissen, the first European company to unlock the secrets of producing porcelain, excelled in creating elaborate services intricately decorated with imagery of flora and fauna painted in polychrome enamels that often were accented with gilding. Each piece in this coffee service features different types of birds rendered so accurately that they can be identified by species.

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Saucer, ca. 1760
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
13.5 cm (5 5/16 inches) (diameter) saucer
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.624A

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Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Sugar Bowl and Cover, ca. 1760
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
Height: 10.2 cm (4 inches) (with cover)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.612

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Cup, ca. 1760
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
9.7 cm (3 13/16 inches) (width) cup
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.624B

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Saucer, ca. 1760
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
13.5 cm (5 5/16 inches) (diameter) saucer
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.620A

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Cup, early 1800s
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
9.7 cm (3 13/16 inches) (width) cup
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.622B

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Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Coffeepot with cover, ca. 1760
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
24.1 x 16.5 cm (9 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.611ab

Some locations are synonymous with commodities traded there. Mocha—the name of a coffee bean and a coffee beverage—is a port city that for centuries led coffee trade in Yemen, the first export destination for coffee from its origin in Ethiopia. Batavia ware is porcelain with a deep coffee-colored iron glaze, made in China for Western export. These wares were named for Batavia (now Jakarta), a city on the island of Java, which was the Dutch East India Company trading center for coffee.

Chinese export
Batavia Ware Vase, ca. 1740
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
23.5 x 11.4 x 21.6 cm (9 5/16 x 4 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.364

Chinese export
Batavia Ware Bowl with Cover, ca. 1740
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
9.2 cm (3 5/8 inches) (height) without cover
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.227

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Indian
Coffeepot, 1800s
Silver and ivory
17.1 x 13.3 x 7.6 cm (6 11/16 x 5 5/16 x 3 inches)
Gift of Miss Elizabeth T. Casey 1988.102.8

Chinese export
Batavia Ware Saucer, ca. 1720
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
2.2 cm (7/8 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.1613

Chinese export
Batavia Ware Teacup, ca. 1720
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
4 cm (1 5/8 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.1609

Chinese export
Batavia Ware Bowl, ca. 1740
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
8.9 cm (3 1/2 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.237

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As aromatic coffee is poured every day from various styles of coffeepots around the world, the laborious production process behind this beverage is often forgotten. This work, which includes separating the coffee berries from the seeds, which are then roasted and ground, was originally performed by enslaved people on coffee plantations. Forced labor remains a problem today in the three countries leading coffee production—Brazil, Vietnam, and Colombia—fueling a more than $100-billion global market.

English
Coffeepot, mid-1700s
Stoneware with glaze
18.4 cm (7 3/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.281

Chinese export
Coffeepot, ca. 1750
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.209

Chinese export
Coffeepot, ca. 1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze, and gilding
Height: 21 cm (8 1/4 inches)
Bequest of Oliver Kendall 17.527

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Sugar and Chocolate

Originating about 10,000 years ago in New Guinea, sugar cane is now produced in more than 110 countries, with an annual crop totaling 180 million metric tons. In 1700s Europe, the popularity of coffee, tea, and chocolate rapidly escalated sugar consumption, simultaneously increasing the amount of land cleared for its cultivation and the number of humans enslaved for its production. Made from cocoa beans, chocolate first developed in the Americas as a savory, spicy beverage. Cocoa was unpopular when Spanish colonists first brought it to Europe, but with the addition of sugar, demand soared for sweet creations made with chocolate.

Rhode Island Connection

Art collectors and sisters Lucy Truman Aldrich (1869–1955) and Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948) established some of the most important collections at the RISD Museum, including Aldrich's assemblage of nearly 150 18th-century European porcelain figures. Throughout this gallery are examples from this collection depicting people engaged in everyday activities such as breaking eggs and picking apples—possibly preparing ingredients for a sweet dessert.

Cultivated in South America and shipped to Europe and America, where it was sweetened with sugar likely from the Caribbean and served in Chinese porcelain vessels, chocolate was a global commodity, trade, and craze that prompted the creation of specific ceramic forms. The staples used to repair the chocolate pot on the far left attest to the value held for Asian porcelain.

Chinese export
Chocolate Pot, ca. 1750
Porcelain with underglaze blue enamel and glaze and metal staples
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.208

Chinese export
Chocolate Cup, 1770-1785
Porcelain with underglaze blue, enamels, glaze, and gilding
6.3 cm (2 1/2 inches) (height)
The Helena Woolworth McCann Collection. Gift of the Winfield Foundation 55.023.2C

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Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Turkish Woman with Sugar Basket, ca. 1745
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
Height: 16.2 cm (6 3/8 inches)
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.084

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Turkish Man with Sugar Basket, ca. 1745
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
16.8 cm (6 5/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.085

Candies, pieces of fruit crystalized with sugar, and other confectionaries, known as sweetmeats, were served on special dishes, some with multiple shell-shaped tiers. The dessert course of a formal dinner called for its own set of serving dishes, bowls, and plates, such as the leaf-shaped example crawling with an assortment of insects.

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English
Creamware Sweetmeat Dish, ca. 1765-1770
Earthenware with glaze
40.6 x 24.8 cm (16 x 9 13/16 inches)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.355X

English
Creamware Sweetmeat Dish, ca. 1770 - 1780
Earthenware with glaze
4.5 x 13.3 x 10.2 cm (1 13/16 x 5 5/16 x 4 inches) sweetmeat dish
Gift of Alfred Morris, Jr. 1992.140.1A

English
Creamware Tray, ca. 1770 - 1780
Earthenware with glaze
0.6 x 11.8 cm (5/16 x 4 5/8 inches)
Gift of Alfred Morris, Jr. 1992.140.1B

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, English, ca. 1745-1784
Dessert Dish, ca. 1755
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
Length: 28.6 cm (11 1/4 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Sigmund J. Katz 74.124.4

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Sugar found its way into many desserts, including pies, rich custards and puddings made with cream and eggs, and ice cream, which was quite a novelty in the 1700s. Used to cut and seal the dough of pie crusts, pie crimpers were carved from marine ivory by sailors on whaling ships. The names of the makers of these wares, especially the men of color, are, unfortunately, often unknown. However, the example on the left is believed to have been made by Shubael Lewis of Tisbury, Massachusetts, whose skin was identified as “dark” on whaling crewmen lists, which noted each sailor’s age, height, and eye, hair, and skin color.

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck, German, 1714 - 1754
Ice Cream Pail, 1727-1736
Porcelain with glaze, enamel and gilding
Assembled: 30 x 28.2 x 18.8 cm (11 13/16 x 11 1/8 x 7 3/8 inches)
Anonymous gift in honor of Houghton P. Metcalf, Jr. 2020.9

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, English, 1759-present
Pudding or Jelly Mold, early 1800s
Earthenware with glaze
4.5 x 12.4 x 11.6 cm (1 13/16 x 4 7/8 x 4 5/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Georgie Elms 22.217

Johann Wilhelm Lanz, German, active 1755 - 1761
Man Breaking Eggs, ca. 1757-1759
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.181.2

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Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, English, 1759-present
Jasperware Custard Cup with Cover, ca. 1800
Stoneware
7.9 x 5.4 x 6.5 cm (3 1/8 x 2 1/8 x 2 5/8 inches) cup and cover; across handle
Gift of Rose and Seymour Cohen 2002.59.9

English
Creamware Custard Cup with Cover, ca. 1780
Earthenware with glaze
8.9 cm (3 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 24.512

Chinese export
Cup with Cover, ca. 1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
5.4 x 8.9 x 6.4 cm (2 1/8 x 3 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches) (cup)
Museum Collection INV2014.4

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American
Pie Crimper or Jagging Wheel, 1773
Marine ivory and metal
13 cm (5 1/8 inches) (length)
Gift of Miss Eliza A. Peckham 14.436

Shubael Lewis, American, active early 1800s
Pie Crimper or Jagging Wheel, early 1800s
Marine ivory and metal
17.1 cm (6 11/16 inches) (length)
Gift of Miss Edith H. Williston 21.268

The sweet Western beverage now called hot chocolate was first a South and Central American frothy brew of roasted cocoa-bean paste, chili peppers, vanilla, spices, and water. Chocolate played a central role in Mayan and Aztec spiritual, political, and economic matters, with cocoa beans sometimes traded as currency. As chocolate made its way to Europe, sugar and cream were added, creating a drink that was enjoyed socially from specialized ceramic services.

French
Travelling Chocolate Set, ca. 1870
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
14.3 x 40 cm (5 5/8 x 15 13/16 inches)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richmond Viall, Jr. 81.224

Over centuries, as demand for sugar increased, the locations where sugar cane was grown expanded, as did the number of enslaved humans forced to cultivate this labor-intensive crop. Originating in New Guinea, sugar cane was brought to India and then the Caribbean, where the Dominican Republic led production in the early 1500s. A century later, sugar cane became the base of the economy in Dutch-colonized Brazil, where more than 500,000 Africans had been shipped through the Atlantic slave trade to plant, tend, harvest, and process the crop.

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Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Sugar Bowl, ca. 1770
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze, overglaze enamel, and gilding
Height: 10.2 cm (4 inches)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund J. Katz 57.198.9

Nehemiah Dodge, American, 1774 - 1856
Sugar Tongs, ca. 1824
Silver
Length: 17.8 cm (7 inches)
Walter H. Kimball Fund 78.047

Chinese export
Sugar Bowl, ca. 1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze, and overglaze enamels
14.5 x 14.8 x 11.4 cm (5 11/16 x 5 13/16 x 4 1/2 inches) (assembled)
Gift of William H. G. Temple 26.064

Chinese export
Sugar Bowl, ca. 1750
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
Gift of William H. Claflin 1991.179.11

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German
Chocolate Pot, ca. 1780
Porcelain with underglaze blue and glaze
16.5 cm (6 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Arnold B. Chace, Jr. 44.751

Chinese export
Chocolate Pot, 1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze and gilding
Height: 19.7 cm (7 3/4 inches) (without cover)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.215

Fruits shipped from tropical ports and grown in hothouses were prized—especially the pineapple, which inspired bright yellow and green ceramics that emulated its shape and texture. Citrus fruits were displayed in ceramic baskets with pierced lids to show off their vibrant colors, while local fruits, such as apples, remained popular dessert ingredients.

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, English, 1759-present
Creamware Chestnut Basket, 1770-1780
Earthenware with glaze
20.5 x 26.7 cm (8 1/8 x 10 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Louise Tifft Brown 33.075

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English
Teapot, ca. 1760
Earthenware with glaze
10.6 x 10.2 cm (4 3/16 x 4 inches) (height x depth)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.200

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Friedrich Elias Meyer I, German, 1723-1785
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
The Cherry Pickers, 1753 - 1765
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
28.3 cm (11 1/8 inches)
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.166

Decorated with Chinese motifs of enameled dragons, flowers, vases and quilins—mythical hooved creatures known in East Asian cultures—this tea service belonged to the collector Lucy Truman Aldrich, for whom this gallery is named. Her nephew, David Rockefeller Sr., fondly remembered enjoying tea with his aunt from this service, which she bequeathed to him. He later donated it to the museum.

Ezekiel Burr, American, 1765-1846
Sugar Tongs, ca. 1780
Silver
Length: 15.9 cm (6 1/4 inches)
Gift of John W. Richmond in memory of Charles Talbot Richmond
42.098

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Sugar Bowl with Lid, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
11.8 x 12 x 12 cm (4 5/8 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.19ab

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Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Tea Caddy, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
15.2 x 7.5 cm (6 x 2 15/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.23ab

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Tea Bowl, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
4.3 x 7.8 x 7.8 cm (1 11/16 x 3 1/16 x 3 1/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.5

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Saucer, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
2.5 x 11.9 x 11.9 cm (1 x 4 11/16 x 4 11/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.16

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Teapot, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
13.6 x 19 x 10.5 cm (5 3/8 x 7 1/2 x 4 1/8 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.17ab

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Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Cup, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
5.6 x 8.7 x 6.7 cm (2 3/16 x 3 7/16 x 2 5/8 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.1

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Saucer, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
2.5 x 11.9 x 11.9 cm (1 x 4 11/16 x 4 11/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.9

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Hot Milk Jug, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
13.6 x 9.5 x 7.5 cm (5 3/8 x 3 3/4 x 2 15/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.18ab

Worcester Porcelain Company, English, 1751- present
Dragon in Compartments Chocolate Cup, ca. 1770
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
8 x 12.5 x 10 cm (3 1/8 x 4 15/16 x 3 15/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.40.22

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In addition to sugar bowls and chocolate pots made from ceramic, versions were also fashioned from silver, along with a whole new array of implements that were devised to sprinkle, shake, and deliver sugar onto and into foods and beverages. Pierced casters held sugar, as well as dried mustard and other spices, while sugar sifters and tongs were designed in a variety of styles.

Joseph Smith, English, 1707-1739
Chocolate Pot, 1736-1737
Silver and fruitwood
Height: 21.3 cm (8 3/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.29

American
Sugar Tongs, 1751
Silver
Gift of the estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.308

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Samuel Wood, English, 1704 - 1794
Caster, 1748-1749
Silver
height: 18.7 cm (7 3/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.35

Samuel Wood, English, 1704 - 1794
Caster, 1748-1749
Silver
height: 15.2 cm (6 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.36

Samuel Wood, English, 1704 - 1794
Caster, 1748-1749
Silver
15.5 cm (6 1/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.37

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John Tanner, American, 1713-1785
Caster, 1700s
Silver
10.2 x 5.1 cm (4 x 2 inches)
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.347

English
Sugar Sifter, mid-1800s
Silver and ivory
Gift of the estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.31

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F. Ducot, French, active beginning 1830s
Chocolate Pot, 1830-1840
Silver and fruitwood
19.1 x 20.3 x 8.3 cm (7 1/2 x 8 x 3 5/16 inches) base
Gift of Miss Elizabeth T. Casey 1988.102.7

Salt and Spices

When we ingest salt, we are literally consuming our planet, as sodium—one of the two elements in table salt—is the most abundant element in the earth's crust. An inexpensive commodity today, salt was historically very costly. Open ceramic dishes, simply called salts, were set on tables, allowing diners to take a small pinch. Savory stews, soups, and sauces prompted the production of many ceramic forms for serving.

Beyond salt, spices have flavored foods for thousands of years. Cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg, and other popular spices were cultivated in Asia and Africa, traveling land and sea over the spice routes. Trade with the Americas introduced vanilla, allspice, and chiles to Europe and Asia.

Rhode Island Connection

The first mercantile shipping expedition from Providence to China, the General Washington left the shores of Rhode Island on December 27, 1787. Providence merchant John Brown and his son-in-law John Francis supplied much of the money for this risky venture. Brown was already heavily involved in the triangle slave trade between New England, Africa, and the Caribbean, and this was the first of many voyages that also placed Providence at the center of what is called the China Trade. Ships returned to the city with highly sought-after Asian goods. These included countless pieces of Chinese export porcelain, such as the pair of blue and white oval salt cellars on the bottom shelf, which bear the monogram of Hope Brown Ives, the niece of John Brown.

Large tureens were the centerpieces of the dining table, serving savory stews and soups flavored with salts and spices from around the world. Animal-shaped examples were popular in the 1700s, and this goose-shaped tureen, made in China from porcelain and decorated with enamels and gilding, is among the rarest and most extravagant of these forms, which also included boar and ox heads, fish and crabs, and roosters and quails.

RISD
MUSEUM

Chinese export
Goose Tureen and Cover, ca. 1760-1780
Porcelain with enamels, glaze and gilding
35.5 x 36.5 x 25.5 cm (14 x 14 3/8 x 10 1/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.30ab

Savory sauces, soups, and broths were served from ceramic sauceboats, tureens, and two-handled covered dishes, which were often accompanied by an underplate, or stand, and sometimes a matching ladle.

Enoch Wood and Sons, English, 1818-1846
Sauceboat, ca. 1840
Earthenware with transfer print and glaze
Gift of Edward B. Aldrich in memory of Lora E. Aldrich 35.250

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, English, 1759-present
Tureen with Cover and Stand, 1805-1815
Earthenware with luster glaze
16 x 23.3 x 16.5 cm (6 5/16 x 9 3/16 x 6 1/2 inches) assembled; tray
Gift of Miss Ellen D. Sharpe 40.187

Jacob Petit, French, 1796-1865
Two-Handled Covered Bowl and Fitted Saucer, ca. 1850
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
19.1 cm (7 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Harold Leavitt 1989.099.3

Beyond flavoring foods on the table, salt was crucial to preserving perishable foods before refrigeration was available. Pork, beef, and fish were rubbed with salt and packed in barrels dry or covered in water to create a brine. Crews on merchant ships ate salted meat and fish during the many months they were at sea procuring commodities for trade.

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English
Creamware Sauceboat, ca. 1800
Earthenware with slip and glaze
13.3 cm (5 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 24.511

English
Mochaware Mustard Pot, ca. 1770-1780
Earthenware with slip and glaze
6 cm (2 3/8 inches) (height)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.248

Chinese export
Tureen Stand, late 1800s
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
4.4 x 35.6 x 27.9 cm (1 3/4 x 14 x 11 inches)
Bequest of Amey Willson Hart 58.103.1

Chinese export
Tureen with Cover, late 1800s
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
Width: 17.8 x 16.5 cm (7 x 6 1/2 inches) base
Bequest of Amey Willson Hart 58.103.11

Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, American, 1826-1888
Salt, 1830-1845
Pressed glass
4.5 x 5.2 cm (1 3/4 x 2 1/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. H. Martin Brown 33.141

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Canon August Ernst Otto von dem Busch of Hildesheim, German, 1704 - 1779
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Bouillon Cup with Lid, ca. 1760
Porcelain with glaze and pigment
13 cm (5 1/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund J. Katz 53.188

Typically made from a plant's root, bark, fruit, or seeds, spices can be used fresh or dried. They can be crushed or combined with other ingredients using a weighty pestle in a mortar, ground into a powder, or in the case of nutmeg's hard seed, grated with a specialized tool. Containers for storing spices were designed to be airtight and secure, like the multi-compartment silver box from India, the world's largest producer, exporter, and consumer of spices.

American
Nutmeg Grater, 1800s
Tin with silver
2.5 x 2.7 x 5.1 cm (1 x 1 1/16 x 2 inches)
Bequest of Miss Sarah C. Durfee 15.917

English
Nutmeg Grater, 1800-1850
Silver
3.8 cm (1 1/2 inches) (length) approximate
Gift of Mrs. Gerard P. Herrick 59.141.17

RISD
MUSEUM

French
Mortar, 1500s
Bronze
height: 10.8 cm (4 1/4 inches)
Bequest of Miss Ellen D. Sharpe 54.147.6

Italian
Pestle, 1500s
Bronze
19.1 cm (7 1/2 inches) (length)
Bequest of Miss Ellen D. Sharpe 54.147.21

English
Creamware Ladle, ca. 1775
Earthenware with glaze
31.8 cm (12 1/2 inches) (length)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 24.510

RISD
MUSEUM

Chinese export
Punch Bowl with Arms of Rhode Island, ca. 1800
Porcelain with glaze, enamels, and gilding
Height: 11.6 cm (4 9/16 inches)
Gift of William A. Viall III in memory of Gretchen Viall 2016.102.22

Indian
Spice Box, mid- to late-1800s
Silver
6.3 cm (2 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.157

Served from various ceramic and metal containers, salt is one of the five basic tastes, and essential for normal function of the human body—although too much salt can also cause health issues. Underscoring salt's role in the history of world commerce, the word salary comes from the Latin sal, meaning salt, as Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt.

William Aitken, English (Birmingham), active ca. 1894–1921
Mustard Pot with Spoon, 1908
Silver with gilding and glass
Gift of Miss Elizabeth E. Holland 37.413

Italian
Salt Dish, 1600s - 1700s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
2.9 cm (1 1/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 51.112

RISD
MUSEUM

Chinese export
Trencher Salt, 1790-1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze, and gilding
Length: 9.5 cm (3 3/4 inches)
Gift of Mrs. C. Oliver Iselin 58.024.19

German
Figural Standing Salt, 1740-1760
Stoneware with salt glaze
20.3 x 10.2 x 10.2 cm (8 x 4 x 4 inches)
Walter H. Kimball Fund 1996.17

Chinese export
Trencher Salt, 1790-1800
Porcelain with underglaze blue, glaze, and gilding
Length: 9.5 cm (3 3/4 inches)
Gift of Mrs. C. Oliver Iselin 58.024.20

William S. Morgan, American, Active 1832 - 1881
Salt Spoon, mid-1800s
Silver
Length: 10.3 cm (4 1/16 inches)
Gift of the estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.166.1

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William S. Morgan, American, Active 1832 - 1881
Salt Spoon, mid-1800s
Silver
Length: 10.3 cm (4 1/16 inches)
Gift of the estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.166.2

Thomas Wallis I, English, 1758 - 1822
Caster, 1809-1810
Silver
height: 15.8 cm (6 1/4 inches)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.192ab

Italian
Plate with Egg Cups and Salt Dish, ca. 1600
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
21 cm (8 5/16 inches) (diameter)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.515

Samuel Vernon, American, 1683-1737
Pepperbox, ca. 1720
Silver
8.9 x 7.6 cm (3 1/2 x 3 inches) (overall)
Bequest of Daniel Howland 2003.135.2

RISD
MUSEUM

French
Salt Cellar, early 1700s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
5.1 cm (2 inches) (height)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.250

Henry L. Webster, American, active 1831 - 1864
Salt Spoon, ca. 1831-1841
Silver
5.2 cm (2 1/8 inches) (length)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 43.179.1

Henry L. Webster, American, active 1831 - 1864
Salt Spoon, ca. 1831-1841
Silver
5.2 cm (2 1/8 inches) (length)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 43.179.2

John Tuite, Irish, active 1710 - 1740
Salt, 1727
Silver
3.1 x 7 x 5.5 cm (1 1/4 x 2 3/4 x 2 3/16 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.35.1

John Tuite, Irish, active 1710 - 1740
Salt, 1727
Silver
7.6 x 5.7 cm (3 x 2 1/4 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.35.2

RISD
MUSEUM

Alcohol

Fruits and grains have been used to make alcoholic beverages nearly since the beginning of human existence, and ceramic vessels for making, storing, serving, and consuming alcohol soon followed. Beer and wine—the first alcoholic beverages—were created as early as the Neolithic period, around 12,000 years ago. In the 1700s, distilled spirits, including rum, became mainstay products in New England.

Rum made good use of molasses, a byproduct in refining sugar, and it served as a key commodity in what is known as the triangle trade. Rum was shipped to Africa and exchanged for slaves that were sold to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean, where sugar and molasses was purchased and brought to New England to be made into rum.

Rhode Island Connection

By the late 1700s, Rhode Island had become the leading American colony in the transatlantic slave trade, with nearly 60 percent of North American slaving ships originating from the state. The Brown family of Providence was prominently involved in the triangle trade of rum, enslaved people, and sugar. The account books of the Browns' ill-fated 1764 slaving voyage on the Sally lists more than 17,000 gallons of rum aboard the ship. The rum was traded in Africa for 196 enslaved people, more than half of whom died at sea due to starvation, disease, suicide, and maltreatment.

Reflecting Rhode Island's maritime commerce, the flagon on the left bears the arms of the state, and the glass, ready to travel in its basketry carrying case, was owned by Martin Page, a sea captain for the Providence mercantile firm Brown & Ives. On the right is a jug meant to trick the drinker with its pierced sides: to take a sip without spilling, you must first use your fingers to plug the strategically placed holes, some of which are hidden.

Chinese export
Flagon with Arms of Rhode Island, ca. 1800
Porcelain with glaze, enamels, and gilding
25 x 21.5 x 14 cm (9 13/16 x 8 7/16 x 5 1/2 inches) (with lid)
Gift of William A. Viall III in memory of Gretchen Viall 2016.102.20.1

RISD
MUSEUM

American
Bottle, late 1700s-early 1800s
Flint glass
Height: 29.2 cm (11 1/2 inches)
Gift of Miss Mary Anne Greene 25.070.14

English
Tumbler with Carrying Case and Stamp, ca. 1800-1810
Lead glass, rattan case, and ivory
Height: 12.1 cm (4 3/4 inches) (wicker case)
Walter H. Kimball Fund 1993.038

French
Puzzle Jug, 1800s
Earthenware with enamels and tin glaze
Height: 20.6 cm (8 1/8 inches)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.436

Demonstrating the commonality of certain forms, tall mugs for drinking beer or ale can be found in numerous cultures, as seen here in examples from China, the US, Turkey, Germany, and England. Sometimes called steins or tankards, most of these drinking vessels are ceramic, but some were made of or include other materials, such as silver and leather.

RISD
MUSEUM

German
Stein, 1716
Stoneware with glaze and pewter
Height: 25.1 cm (9 7/8 inches)
Museum Works of Art Fund 49.074

English
Tankard, 1700s
Earthenware with glaze
Bequest of Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Fund, by exchange and gift of William C. Talen in memory of June S. Talen 79.121.4

German
Screw-Top Bottle, ca. 1650-1700
Stoneware with salt glaze, enamels, and pewter
18.6 cm (7 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 48.387

RISD
MUSEUM

Turkish
Tankard, 1500s-1600s
Fritware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
20.2 x 14 cm (7 7/8 x 5 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.753

German
Bottle, ca. 1570
Stoneware with salt glaze and pewter
26 cm (10 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 48.381

Two handles on a vessel can help the drinker steady the contents during use or more easily hand it off to a fellow imbiber. Caudle was a warm beverage of wine or ale, eggs, bread, milk, and spices that was popular in the 1600s and 1700s in England and its colonies. Flanking depictions of followers of the wine god Dionysus, the large painted eyes on the ancient Greek kylix turn the cup into a mask when brought to the drinker's mouth.

William Gamble, English, active ca. 1688-1732
Caudle Cup, 1715-1716
Silver
11.6 x 19.5 cm (4 9/16 x 7 11/16 inches) at handles
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.28

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Greek
Drinking Cup (Kylix), 525-500 BCE
Black-figure terra cotta
Height: 8.9 cm (3 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Susan Martin Allien 35.709

Greek
Wine Jug (Oinochoe), 500s BCE
Black-figure terra cotta
Height: 16.3 cm (6 7/16 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.007

An English form designed to cool and rinse wine glasses, the monteith is a vessel with a notched rim to hold glasses as they are immersed in the basin of ice water. Wine funnels prevented spills while decanting a bottle, and shiny metal wine tasters with convex dimples reflected light, aiding the evaluation of quality and color even in a dimly lit wine cellar.

Pierre Stephan, French, active 1770-1819
Derby Porcelain Manufactory, English, ca. 1748 - 1848
Autumn, 1795 - 1810
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
26.7 cm (10 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.098.3

Sächsische Porzellanmanufaktur Dresden, German, 1872 - present
Monteith, ca. 1875
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Buchanan
Gift of Florence W. Patrick 1991.055

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German; Silesian
Wine glass, 1750-1760
Glass with gilding
Height: 15.3 cm (6 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Davenport West 64.001.24

French
Wine Taster, 1838-1919
Silver
diameter: 8.3 cm (3 1/4 inches)
Gift of Mrs. John Nightingale in memory of John Trowbridge Nightingale 75.117.8

George Brasier, English, after 1793
Wine Funnel, 1785-1786
Silver
height: 12.4 cm (4 7/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Henry D. Sharpe 73.014.8

Produced and consumed worldwide for millennia, wine is often poured from a ceramic vessel into shallow cups or bowls made of various materials. The decorations of the Korean wine cup on its stand appear to be painted, but they were carved into the clay while it was still moist. The cavities were then filled with colored slips (thinned clay) and the entire vessel was covered with celadon glaze and fired. The combination of celadon glaze and inlaid slip decoration is unique to the ceramics of Korea.

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Chinese export
Rockefeller Service Tankard, ca. 1790
Porcelain with enamels and gilding
17.6 x 14.9 x 12 cm (6 15/16 x 5 7/8 x 4 3/4 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.38.6

Indian
Wine Cup of Emperor Jahangir, 1612-1613
Quartz and chromium muscovite
Height: 7.1 cm (2 13/16 inches)
Helen M. Danforth Fund 84.163

Japanese
Wine Cup (Sakazuki), ca. 1710
Wood with lacquer and gold
9.5 cm (3 3/4 inches) (diameter)
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 45.213.6

Korean
Wine Cup on Pedestal, 936-1392
Stoneware with glaze
11 x 15.2 x 15 cm (4 5/16 x 6 x 5 7/8 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 17.105

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Korean
Ewer, 936-1392
Stoneware with glaze
13.7 cm (5 3/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Charles B. Hoyt 27.045

In Europe and the US, large silver tankards were often used and given at celebratory events, such as marriages, or to recognize an achievement. Made by Newport silversmith Samuel Vernon, this tankard's many lengthy inscriptions indicate its significance as an heirloom of the Ellery family of Newport beginning in the 18th century and continuing through the 20th century.

Samuel Vernon, American, 1683-1737
Tankard, ca. 1720
Silver
22.2 x 24.8 x 15.2 cm (8 3/4 x 9 3/4 x 6 inches) (maximum)
Bequest of Mr. Henry Renwick Sedgwick 46.557

Edward Medlycott, English, active 1740-1770
Blackjack Tankard, ca. 1740
Leather with silver and pewter
Height: 19.1 cm (7 1/2 inches)
Gift of Miss Elizabeth T. Casey 1988.102.10

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German
Tankard, 1600s
Stoneware with salt glaze and pewter
26.7 cm (10 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 49.196

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Harlequin with Goat As Bagpipes, 1736 - 1740
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
14.6 cm (5 13/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund J. Katz 53.194

English
Pearlware Mug, late 1700s
Earthenware with transfer print, glaze, and silver luster
8.6 cm (3 3/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Elizabeth Hazard 76.188

Much of the rum produced in colonial New England was consumed domestically, sometimes in punch, a popular celebratory, and often communal, drink. Believed to derive from the Sanskrit word pañca, meaning five, punch was made from water mixed with ingredients central to the era's commercial shipping expeditions—citrus fruit, rum, sugar, and spices. Many Chinese porcelain punch bowls made for export to the West found their way to Providence through maritime activities known as the China Trade, which brought prosperity to many residents of the city.

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English
Punch Pot, ca. 1760-1770
Earthenware with glaze
23.2 cm (9 1/8 inches) (height) over all
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.307

Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Lemon-Shaped Box, 1740 - 1750
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
8.3 cm (3 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of the Estate of Abby Rockefeller Mauzé 78.046.35

English
Coin ladle, 1787
Silver and baleen
33 x 8.9 x 5.1 cm (13 x 3 1/2 x 2 inches)
Gift of Richard and Inge Chafee 2013.73.3

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Chinese export
Punch Bowl, ca. 1800
Porcelain with enamels and glaze
25.4 cm (10 inches) (diameter) top
Museum Collection 09.311

William Swan, American, 1715-1774
Strainer, ca. 1745
Silver
27.3 cm (10 11/16 inches) (width) across handles
Museum Appropriation Fund 24.503

Made from malted or germinated grains—especially barley—and flavored with the flowers of hop plants, beer is consumed around the world, with specific ingredients varying by geography. South African beer traditionally is made with maize and sorghum and fermented in large earthenware vessels, where the sugars convert to alcohol. In the US in the 1800s, stoneware bottles—often stamped with the name of the maker or bottler—were commonly used to store and transport beer.

Zulu; South African
Beer Fermentation Vessel, 1900s
Earthenware
Height: 31.8 cm (12 1/2 inches)
Museum purchase: anonymous gift 1999.52

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German
Mug, 1600s
Wood and pewter
19.7 cm (7 11/16 inches) (height)
Gift of Mr. Eugene L. Garbaty 49.412

American
Hiram Wheaton & Sons Beer Bottle, 1875
Stoneware with salt glaze and cobalt
25.4 cm (10 inches) (height)
Museum Works of Art Fund 44.378.2

American
Kenyon Smith & Co. Jug, ca. 1890
Stoneware with salt glaze and cobalt
17.8 cm (7 inches) (height)
Gift of the RISD Nature Lab 1998.12

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Tea

After water, tea is the world's most consumed beverage, and one of the oldest known to humankind. Most simply, tea leaves are added to boiling water, but there are many varieties and preparations. Native to East and Southeast Asia, tea plants were cultivated by the Chinese as a crop by the time of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Teahouses first appeared in China in the 700s, offering a place to meet and socialize. Introduced to Europe through trade in the 1500s, tea grew in popularity through the 1700s. Today's preparation processes offer an abundance of choices, from loose tea and tea bags to instant and bottled tea.

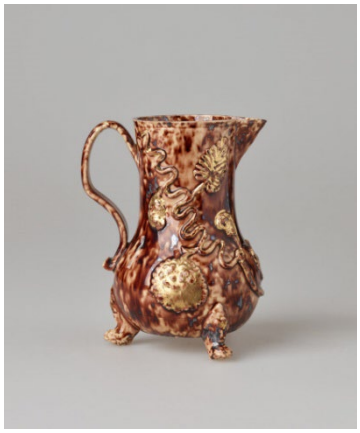
Rhode Island Connection

Following the Boston Tea Party and other political protests against British rule and taxation, colonists in Providence were called to defend their liberty on March 2, 1775. Chronicled in the Providence Gazette newspaper, the town crier announced that "all true friends of the country, lovers of freedom, and haters of shackles and handcuffs, are hereby invited to testify . . . by casting into the fire a needless herb, which for a long time hath been highly detrimental to our liberty, interest and health." That afternoon 300 pounds of tea were burned in the middle of Market Square, and the word tea was covered over on shop signs with lampblack.

Invented in Russia in the mid-1700s, samovars are large urns typically made of brass. A vertical chamber filled with burning charcoal runs through the middle of the urn, heating the water. The heat rises up the chimney, on which a pot of very strong tea is set to steep. Once poured into cups, the tea can be diluted with water from the spout at the bottom of the urn.

English
Tortoiseshell Ware Teapot, ca. 1750 - 1765
Earthenware with glaze and gilding
12.4 cm (4 7/8 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.337

English
Tortoiseshell Ware Cream Pitcher, ca. 1750 - 1765
Earthenware with glaze and gilding
12.9 x 8.3 cm (5 1/8 x 3 5/16 inches)
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.202



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Chinese
Teapot, 1800s
Porcelain with glaze, enamels, and gilding
21 x 15.4 x 11.4 cm (8 1/4 x 6 1/16 x 4 1/2 inches) (maximum)
Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.15

Persian
Samovar, 1800s
Brass and wood
Height: 11.4 cm (4 1/2 inches)
Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.397ac

Tea is served and consumed in many ways. Teapots may have small holes in the body by the spout to strain out loose tea leaves. In South America, straws with perforated filters are used for drinking mate, a caffeine-rich infusion similar to tea. A double-spouted teapot ensures that no one needs to wait when sharing tea for two.

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American; South American
Drinking Straw with Filter (Bombilla), 1800s
Silver
22.9 cm (9 inches) (length)
Bequest of John F. Street 40.017.326

South American; Possibly; Peruvian; or; Argentine
Drinking Straw with Filter (Bombilla), 1800s
Silver
Length: 21.3 cm (8 3/8 inches)
Gift of the Estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.502

South American; Possibly; Peruvian
Drinking Straw with Filter (Bombilla), 1800s
Silver
Length: 22.9 cm (9 inches)
Gift of the Estate of Elizabeth T. Casey 1989.045.12.30

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South American
Mate Cup with Bombilla, 1800s
Silver
16.8 cm (6 5/8 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Ellen D. Sharpe 13.1504

English
Double-spouted Teapot, ca. 1840
Earthenware with manganese-oxide glaze
Height: 19.1 cm (7 1/2 inches)
Gift of Mrs. S. James Foster 56.007

English
Mochaware Teapot, late 1700s-early 1800s
Earthenware with glaze
Height: 16.5 cm (6 1/2 inches)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.187

Chanoyu, a practice focused on the artful preparation and consumption of tea, developed in Japan in the 1500s. It employs a carefully curated array of tea utensils. Tea bowls are central to chanoyu and highly valued by tea practitioners. *Tomobako*, special wooden or lacquer boxes made for storing tea bowls, play a vital role in protecting the utensils and recording their history. *Tomobako* can feature the potter's signature and the practitioner's appraisals and appreciations, enriching the experience of chanoyu.

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Ōtagaki Rengetsu, Japanese, 1791-1875
Tea Bowl, 1800s
Stoneware with glaze
10.8 cm (4 5/16 inches) (height)
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 1987.060

Japanese
Teapot, late 1800s - 1900s
Stoneware with glaze and overglaze enamels
15.2 cm (6 inches) (height)
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.143

Japanese
Bizen Ware Tea Caddy, 1800s
Stoneware with glaze and ivory lid
8.9 cm (3 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift of Isaac C. Bates 09.031

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Japanese
Water Jar, 1600s
Earthenware with glaze and lacquer lid
15.2 cm (6 inches) (height)
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.247ab

Tea plants are expensive to produce: they must grow for three years before they are ready for harvest, and even then only the top inch or two of the plant is picked. The costly nature of this commodity is seen in the especially small scale of teapots made in the 1700s (the size of which increased in the 1800s) and the use of tea caddies designed for secure and proper storage.

Chinese
Tea Caddy, 1800s
Pewter
22.9 x 13.3 x 12.1 cm (9 x 5 1/4 x 4 3/4 inches)
Bequest of John F. Street 40.017.16

English
Agateware Teapot, ca. 1745
Varicolored earthenware with glaze
13.3 x 45.7 cm (5 1/4 x 18 inches)
Gift and Bequest from the Collection of David and Peggy Rockefeller
2017.74.24ab

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English
Teapot, 1800s
Earthenware with transfer print and glaze
15.2 cm (6 inches) (height)
Gift of Miss Alice Brownell, Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend and Alfred S. Brownell 29.232

English
Tortoiseshell Ware Tea Bowl and Saucer, ca. 1750 - 1765
Earthenware with glaze
4.9 cm (1 7/8 inches) (height) cup
Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.227

Johann Joachim Kändler, German, 1706-1775
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, German, 1710-present
Teapot, 1735 - 1737
Porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding
Height: 15.2 cm (6 inches)
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.090.2

Store and Serve

Ceramic vessels were one of humankind's first inventions, as safely storing commodities was and is essential to life—especially foodstuffs needed to survive the winter months in cold climates. Ceramics provide good protection from moisture, air, spoilage, and infestation.

Archaeologists learn a great deal through the study of ceramic sherds and what remains on them. Traces of fat may indicate a dish used for fish or animal products, carbon or nitrogen particles are evidence of contact with fire, and proteins might suggest that grains or legumes were once stored in the pottery.

Rhode Island Connection

Sometime before 1907, Eliza Radeke purchased a collection of approximately 1,750 ceramic works from more than 30 countries, all of which were delivered in 92 barrels to her home on Prospect Street in

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Providence. The president of RISD from 1913 to 1931 and the daughter of Helen Adelia Rowe Metcalf, the co-founder of RISD, Radeke donated part of her ceramics collection to the museum, including works from Morocco, Mexico, and Spain displayed in this case.

Earthenware, the first clay body humans fired, can be left unglazed for dry goods, although glaze is required for wares containing liquids and serving foods. Harder and more durable than earthenware, stoneware vessels can hold liquid even when unglazed, but they become more resistant when glaze is added. Stoneware was often the preferred clay body for storage vessels—especially for commodities shipped across the seas or transported on overland journeys.

Persian; Iranian
Ewer, 1200s
Earthenware with glaze
28.6 cm (11 3/16 inches) (height)
Museum Appropriation Fund 27.114

German
Pitcher, ca. 1575
Earthenware with lead glaze
19.7 cm (7 11/16 inches) (height)
Anonymous gift 49.069

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American
Jug, early 1800s
Stoneware with glaze
23.5 cm (9 5/16 inches) (height)
Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 31.523

Ceramic vessels used for storing and serving were not only made to be functional, but also often designed to be attractive. Intricately decorated Moroccan *jobbanas* were traditionally used to store a type of soft cheese, but the form is now used to serve *harira*, a type of soup. The Italian *albarello* stored medicine, while the Mexican *botijo* used evaporation to keep water cool.

Moroccan
Jobbana (Lidded Bowl), 1800s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke RadekeE_130a

Italian
Drug Jar (Albarello), 1500 - 1550
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
18.4 cm (7 3/16 inches) (height)
Museum Works of Art Fund 51.078

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Mexican
Botijo (Water Jug), 1800s
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke RadekeN-1_117a

A ceramic form found worldwide, pilgrim flasks were modeled after dried gourds used by travelers to carry water on long journeys. Examples in metal, glass, and ceramics followed; some versions remained functional, while others became purely decorative.

Moroccan
Pilgrim Flask, 1800s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke RadekeE_105

Italian
Jug, 1500s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
21.6 cm (8 1/2 inches) (height)
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.347

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American
Jug, 1800s
Stoneware with glaze
13.3 x 7.6 cm (5 5/16 x 3 inches) base
Museum Works of Art Fund 43.493

The large lidded storage jar was probably fashioned by a maker from Tetsuge Owingeh or Tesuque Pueblo, located for centuries in what is now New Mexico. The vessel was meticulously hand-built one coil at a time, then carefully smoothed. The painted abstracted designs represent natural elements including plants, animals and birds, and clouds and rain.

Probably; Tetsuge Owingeh (Tesuque Pueblo); or; P'ohwhóge Owingeh (San Ildefonso Pueblo); Native North American
Covered Jar, before 1916
Ceramic with pigment
29.2 cm (11 1/2 inches) (height)
Gift in memory of Mrs. Henry W. Wilkinson 16.145

Spanish
Dish, 1800s
Earthenware with tin glaze, polychrome metal oxides, and glaze
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke RadekeQ-a_25-a

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Ann Agee, American, b.1959
Red Stripe Madonna with Drawer, 2021
Earthenware with glaze and underglaze
94 x 21.6 x 19.1 cm (37 x 8 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches) (installed)
Mary Ann Lippitt Acquisition Fund 2021.97

Championing the status of utilitarian and decorative works as equal to those in any other media in the historical canon of Western art, Ann Agee's works elevate everyday domestic objects, such as ceramics, and the people—especially women—who create them. Holding a female infant, the artist's Madonna sits on a pedestal with a drawer, referencing reliquaries made to hold precious objects. This work draws on Agee's interest in Italian Renaissance ceramics, including cellars made for salt, a very costly commodity at that time.

Agee's Madonna is branded with the mark of a fictitious enterprise—Agee Manufacturing Company—alluding to machine-made mass-produced wares that erase human presence in the act of making. Similarly, the people who labor to produce salt and other commodities are often rendered invisible to consumers.