



Arita Dish with Pheasant "With Kibako"

Porcelain | Height: 2.5 cm | Diameter: 22.2 cm | Japan, Arita, Edo Period, circa 1650-1660 |

Provenance: - Private Collection, Japan 2012 - Private Collection, The Netherlands 2015 |

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A robustly potted early Japanese porcelain sometsuke dish, decorated in underglaze blue on a white ground. The dish has a large boldly executed central scene in the Japanese style, painted in strong washes of blue and edged in a double blue line. It depicts a large pheasant with its head turned back, holding a branch in its beak; it sits on a rock by a single large reed flower and its elongated leaf. The flattened rim has a narrow blue line around the edge. The back of the rim has sprays of reeds and a bird in flight above a single blue line; with a double blue line around the foot-rim. The base has three spur-marks and a circular felicitation mark, in a stylized seal-form, of the character *ju* (long life) within a blue line. The dish comes with a later black lacquered wooden kibako.

Dishes of this early type of Arita wares, were probably made for the domestic market; however some pieces also arrived in Europe in the late 17th century. This type of underglaze blue dish is referred to as a Sometsuke (染付), which literally means "to dye" in Japanese. It is said that the name

derived from its similarity to the deep blue colour of indigo dye from Japan.

In Japan the pheasant (kigisu), is often substituted for the phoenix in imagery – but it is distinguishable due to its more natural appearance. The green pheasant is the naturally occurring Japanese variety and it is considered the national bird of Japan. This bird is predominantly connected with spring; as well as being associated with maternal love, as female pheasants protect their young - remaining on their nest even when a wildfire threatens to destroy it. They are also fierce birds, with the male birds pecking enemies to death.

When Japanese potters started to make porcelain, it was inspired by underglaze blue porcelain from China. By the mid-17th century, Chinese porcelain production went into decline due to social unrest and dynastic change. Responding to European demand, the Dutch merchants - trading from Deshima - encouraged the fledgling Japanese porcelain industry to fill the gap left by China. Initially the designs followed Chinese examples, but towards the middle of the 17th century uniquely Japanese styles and motifs evolved – such as this dish.