

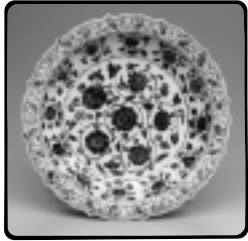


**DISH WITH VARIED SCROLLING FLOWERS**

China • Porcelain with underglaze cobalt decoration

1419–24, Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) • 47.370

# DISH WITH VARIED SCROLLING FLOWERS



CHINA

PORCELAIN WITH UNDERGLAZE COBALT DECORATION

1419–24, MING DYNASTY (1368–1644)

47.370

This Chinese porcelain dish was made at the imperial **kiln\*** in Jingdezhen (Jiangxi Province, eastern China) during the latter part of the reign of the Yongle (Perpetual Happiness) emperor. For about one thousand years Jingdezhen has produced China's finest **porcelain**, one of the nation's most prized products.

Porcelain is made of **kaolin** and **petuntse**. Kaolin is a malleable, bright white clay that hardens to a strong ceramic body when fired at high temperatures. Both materials are derivatives of feldspar, and petuntse is found only in China. When fired together, they **vitrify** to create porcelain. Potters would paint designs on the porcelain using cobalt ore before glazing and firing. This technique is called underglaze blue decoration. The cobalt used on this dish was the finest ore of the day, imported from Iran and more precious than gold in the 1400s. The dish was likely a lavish gift from the Chinese emperor to an Islamic head of state. The Yongle emperor sent the Muslim navigator Zheng He, known as the Chinese Christopher Columbus, as an envoy carrying porcelains to countries in the west, and a dish such as this could well have been part of the treasures sent.

This dish imitates earlier Islamic ceramics and metal dishes decorated with intertwining scrolls of vines and flowers. The center flower is surrounded by blossoms, among them the lotus, chrysanthemum, and peony. In China, each flower has a symbolic meaning conveying good wishes or instruction. For example, the chrysanthemum is a symbol of long life.

Certain flowers also represent the twelve months. This dish may have been one of a pair, each dish center containing six flowers with the entire calendar being represented when the two were placed together.

**Notes:**

A similar plate can be found in Ming export ware from the Ardebil Collection in Tehran, Iran, see *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, John Alexander Pope, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1956, plate 36, fig. 29.117.

\* All words in bold can be found in the glossary

