

# Study on the Innovative Victorian Style Decanters

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**Abstract:** *This essay focuses on the Victorian Orientalist perspective. And cross-culture is shown by Victorian decanters. Victoria Orientalism shows the influence of Orientalist tropes and ideas. Firstly, this article expands the interaction between Chinese Export Ceramics in traditional function and the cultural connotation of Chinese ceramics. And then it overviews the designer William Burges and his ceramics (Chinoiserie) as a representation of his collection aesthetic. An alternative way of looking at the objects that values usual hybrid forms and that focuses on fused cultures is proposed.*

**Keywords:** *Orientalism, Victoria, Decanter, Cross-cultural*

## 1. Introduction

Chinoiserie continually decreased during the nineteenth-century when the appeal of China was challenged with other exotic tastes, such as the Egyptian, the Gothic, and the Greek. The article explores the Orientalism in the Victorian time period, which appear in British culture. At that time, Victorian customers are not only accept the existing decorative ceramic patterns. The collector Burges has also built up his taste and aesthetic stance on ceramic. In Burges design, gems have also provided decorations on the surface on the ceramic. The object is focus on different countries with cultural traditions, it also encourages reader to think about the globalization for an object. The innovative way of using the object as social and cultural, the object helps us to understand the global visual and material language on a global scale.

## 2. Globalisation perspective

The object (See Figure 1) designed by William Burges in 1867 for his collection. Regarding the complicated matter of Victorian style, it makes sense to see how the designer Burges picked pieces of things and developed them at the expense of creativity in his taste. The object consisted of an eighteenth-century Chinese "Sang de boeuf" ceramic mounted with semi-precious stones. The decanter was caged with silver straps in geometrical pattern, studded at each intersection with lumps of Chinese jade and amethyst. Around the neck runs a band of openwork tracery, filigree, and coral. In addition, the hinged cover, enamelled inside, is topped with a coral carving on a sphinx form.



*Figure 1: Decanter, Chinese Sang de boeuf, mounted in silver gilt and precious stones, 1870.*

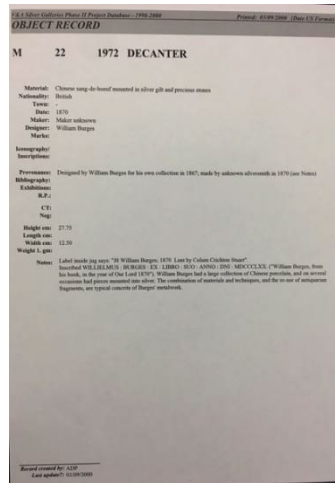


Figure 2: Decanter object record, Department of Silver & Metalwork, London, 1972.

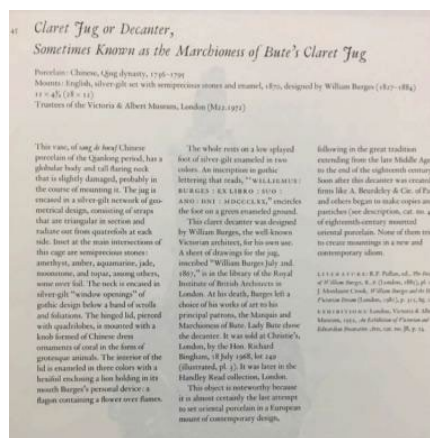


Figure 3: Claret Jug or Decanter, Trustees of Victoria & Albert Museum, Department of Silver & Metalwork, Decanter object record, London, 1972.

The decanter dimensions: Height 27.75cm; Width 12.50cm; Weight 121.65g.

The decanter have a globular body and a tall flaring neck, which is encased in silver gilt, and triangular insections and radiating from stones (See Figure 2). The object in many respects is typical of the eclecticism of Victorian taste.

The manuscript documents (See Figure 3) are from the Victoria & Albert Museum, Department of Silver and Metalwork, the gemstones decorating the William Burges decanter are on loan from Martin Chapman for precious stones identification.

The object shows Burges preferred naturalistic details and form of geometric patterning. For example, the champeve technique, where the metal cavities were scooped out and filled with enamels, was only gradually revived in England in mid- nineteenth century. The Gothic Revival at that time had almost become as national style. The scholar Jeremy Cooper suggests that leading designers and painters were wealthy and sociable in the second half of the nineteenth century. [1] William Burges was a renowned antiquarian and keen collector of rare and precious things. Burges, as the well- known Victorian architect, and designer for his own use, designed the decanter. In Burges' own words, he explained, "I was brought up in the thirteenth-century belief, and in that belief, I intend to die." [2] Burges not only appreciated old and beautiful things but also successfully incorporated them into his work. Burges bequeathed a selection of his works of art to his principal patrons, the marquis, and marchioness of Bute. However, William Burges was just a part of the second wave Victorian Medievalist. The nineteenth-century Gothic style had begun in church architecture and furnishings. In 1860, Burges design had spread into the domestic field, much of Burges's work was on domestic projects, either for himself or for wealthy patrons. The most important of his patrons was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Bute, John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, reputedly the richest man at that time.

### 3. Chinese Porcelain, "Sang de boeuf"

Chinese porcelain was a significant factor in the development of global economic activity in what is known as the early modern world. William Burges had broadly collected Chinese porcelain, and Burges had used his antiquarian fragments, are typical conceits of Burges's decanter metalwork. This can especially be seen with the consumption and conceptualisation of Chinese porcelain in England at that time. Therefore, after commercial trade in porcelains became possible and exposure increased, attitudes towards the material changed quite dramatically in Britain.

In the late sixteenth to early eighteenth century was a particularly important period in the history of porcelains as a media, not just because of their long tradition as objects that circulated transculturally, but also because as global fashions they began to mediate or gather together a large number of other media techniques and exchange processes.

Porcelain was consumed, could be personalised, and was not inherently as valuable as silver was. The personalised object, transformed at source, with metal mounts, creates a new visual language. The Chinese porcelain "Sang de boeuf" has been attributed to the Qing Dynasty. Potters of the Qing Dynasty, with the greater range of techniques at their disposal, introduced a series of new varieties of red glaze. The most notable one is the Qing "Sang de boeuf", a rich, glossy, blooded glaze often slashed with streaks of turquoise used to decorate particularly porcelain, which is produced by a method of firing, a method first discovered by the Chinese of Ming dynasty. High-fired glazed, with a wide variation of tints.

"Sang de boeuf" was in use by the Chinese from the eighteenth century, and the effect was achieved by using copper oxide as a colouring agent and firing the object in a reducing atmosphere. "Sang de boeuf" red glaze as a colouring agent and fired at a high temperature, the glazing techniques of the potters in the mastery of the widest range of glazing techniques seen in the coloured wares of the Ming and Qing dynasties are seen to have had a significant impact on world cultures as global consumption. The personalised object, transformed at source, with metal mounts are creates a new visual language.

Chinese porcelain also became a new kind of luxury good pursued by the middle and upper class at that time. As can be seen in Figure 1, this impact is often transformative, both physically and conceptually.

On the other hand, China had once led Europe in science, technology and material growth, as late as the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Yet, in the 1840s, China could hardly manage to attempt a defence against the European invasion. There is evidence to suggest that materials and techniques were combined in the decanter object can be understood as the West's leading contender for technological leadership. Here, Orientalism was used as part of critical perspective on the Victorian decanter, related to the British Empire. In the argument of Burges 'Aesthetic Colonialism' on the decanter object, indicated the sense of western to Oriental cultures that defend the Western conceptualizations to the East in the eighteenth century.

In the argument of Burges 'Aesthetic Colonialism' the imperial project, indicated the sense of western to oriental cultures that already defined the eighteenth century Western conceptualization of the East. Neo Classicism can be found in the object, in which the traditional Chinese porcelain with new materials and techniques has been used.

Nonetheless, according to Allison Kroll, 'The Gothic is a style associated with late medieval English art and architecture; its many revivals are attempts to style literature, architecture, visual and decorative art, landscape design, and music after its features.' [3] The fashion for more 'Gothic' style in architecture and decorative arts beginning to take hold is reflected in Burges's design.

However, the elegant and dignified elegance of classicism has been preserved. By the end of the eighteenth century, pure neo-classicism was becoming overlaid with designs inspired by other parts of ancient and oriental world. William Burges was a Gothic revivalist, but he was not a religious man- his religion was the art of the Middle Ages, embedded in his vision of the observations from his extensive travels, and his own personality, creating the eclectic style in his work. Burges's training came from not only his upbringing and schooling, but also from his travels experience. In addition, his family background had a great influence on his subsequent design, as his father was a civil engineer, this grown up background was also influence Burges.

The description (See Figure 4) of gemstones decorating a William Burges decanter from Martin Chapman (V&A Metalwork) was used for the purpose of precious stone identification. The sphinx with

a lion's body and a human head was very popular in ancient art. The hinged cover has a grotesque enamelled image on the inside, and this is surmounted by a coral, carved in the form of a sphinx, and a female face. The sphinx seems to offer a textbook case of the fear and fascination identified by Edward Said as typical of Orientalism.[4]

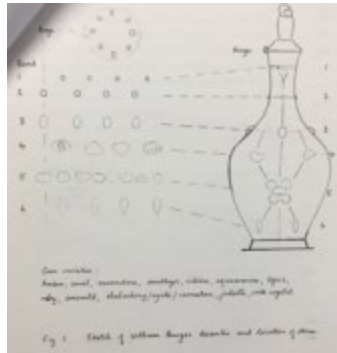


Figure 4: Victoria & Albert Museum, Department of Silver & Metalwork, Martin Chapman stone identification, 1986.

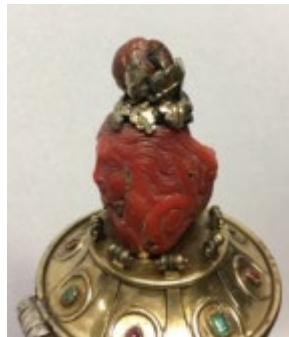


Figure 5: Victoria & Albert Museum, Department of Silver & Metalwork, Photography of Coral Female Face, 2018.

The image (See Figure 5) shows coral decorating a form of grape leaves. Using the methodologies of visual language, physically this serves to understand the sign of a grape, and mentally explore the ancient Greek mythological imagination.

Imagination relates to socialisation as human nature; for example, Dionysus in ancient Greek mythology probably is the figuration of the desire of the ancient Greeks. The Dionysian taught people to plant wine but did not warn people of consequences of binge drinking. This is the pursuit of human nature. Thus, it can be imagined that Dionysus is the representation of human beings' instincts. In addition, in ancient Greek mythology, there are many artworks portraying him as womanish.

#### 4. Society & Class

Drinking habits reflected the social and cultural context in eighteenth century, at that time, alcohol consumption of middle and upper classes was driven by social status. In general, alcohol consumption can be understood as a factor that draws upon sociological theories of consumption.

Leading designers were rich and sociable in the nineteenth century. By the 1870s, Holland Park was established as an 'artistic' area. For example, President of Royal Academy Frederick, Lord Leighton had his art studio and home, named Leighton House, built in the heart of Holland Park in 1867. During this period, Leighton lived in Holland Park, and the 'Holland Park Circle' of artists developed around him. He travelled broadly but the house gave him the chance to develop his interests as a serious collector of art works, which he displays in the Tower House. Burges as a designer was the same; he built his 'palace of art' and named it Tower House. Burges planned his new Tower house, a homage to the spirit of the gothic in an area known for its 'Queen Anne' revived form, which was popular in nineteenth century. Tower House was designed to delight, display of luxury, and culture references drawn from Western and Eastern sources. Thus, the middle classes can be understood as the social context in William Burges design.



Figure 6: C. Handely-Read, 'Notes on William Burges's Painted Furniture', Burlington Magazine, 1963, Victoria & Albert Museum, Archive department, AAD/2014/14/4/4/17

There is evidence (See Figure 6) shown in the Victoria & Albert Museum, Handely-Read, 'Notes on William Burges's Painted Furniture', Burlington Magazine (1963), which confirms that, 'a large proportion was made for his own use at 15 Buckingham Street, stand, or for Tower House in Melbury Road, Kensington.' And the footnote in this archive page '1856 moved from York Bldgs to 15 Buckingham St. June 25.' From 1789 onwards, Burges was living at Tower house. In Tower house, Burges created a multi-coloured fantasy, exotic metalwork in his own High Gothic dream world, as known as Burges's Private Palace of Art. In the archive note on William Burges's Painted Furniture (See Figure 6), there is evidence in Burges his own words in 'Art Applied to industry of 1865', where he says that 'we may learn nearly all we want to learn if we go to the Middle-Ages.' Even Burges's rich clients earned and spent their money not on the fringes of fashionable society but at its centre. According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu theory, context of "theory of society" and the idea of "fields" which refers to the numerous social and institutional field in which people express and reproduce their personality, and the content for the different of capital. A field represented in this object is the High Victorian Gothic network, a set of relationships that is intellectual, education and cultural. In a social life in the middle class, all culture symbols and practices were derived from artistic tastes. In order to demonstrate Burges design and his social class, he denotes real social groups based on common lifestyles, such as those shaped by economic power. In Burges High Victorian social class, he offers economic interpretations of his social world for the class of Burges' clients can be analysed in terms of lifestyle indicators, taste, educational credential, gender and ages.



Figure 7: Victoria & Albert Museum, Department of Silver & Metalwork, Photography of gothic lettering, 2018.

The whole work rests on a low splayed foot of silver gilt enameled in two colours. An inscription in gothic lettering reading (See Figure 7) reads:

'WILLIELMUS:BVRGES: EX: LIBRO: SUO: ANO: DNI: MDCCCLXX' ((William Burges from his book in the year of Our Lord 1870), encircles the foot on a green enameled background, which translate as 'What is the object of having pretty things, unless one makes use of them? '.

This was attributed to William Burges by R.P.Pullan (1885). He was one of the initial designers of the Gothic Revival, which was one of the most influential styles during the nineteenth century. Gothic Revival developed from the Medieval Revivals style. Design were based on forms and patterns. Gothic taste was reflected in design objects, and the gothic always stood for ideas larger than itself. The

general studies of structural symbolism emerged from the arts and crafts movement, an English movement set on improving the ill effects of the industrial revolution. Highly personal and originally derived styles became the basis for a popular fashion, reflected in Burges design with the High Victorian Dream.

On the other hand, "Art Nouveau" as an international style in decoration, took hold as a powerful and dramatic style in the visual arts from the early 1890s, at the time the inspiration from the natural world, the object characteristic motifs include swirling lines, swirling lines, and exotic bodies, are which can be seen in Burges's design.

## 5. Decanters by William Burges



*Figure 8: V&A Collection, Decanter, Glass Bottle, mounted in silver gilt and precious stones, 1865-1866.*

William Burges designed several decanters (See Figure 8) similar to the former decanter object. He had conceived this decanters' design in 1858. This decanter was one of two forming a set with a cup made by George Hart in 1862. The decanter with green blown glass body, mounted in silver and engraved ornament, set with semi-precious stone, cloisonne enamels.

Dimension (s): Height, overall, 27.3cm; Width, overall, 19cm; Diameter, foot, 10.7cm.

The decanter (See Figure 8) with Chinese rock crystal lion rest on the top of lid. The glass body and neck are covered in silver, the object itself mottled with Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins. The Roman and ancient Persian are carved with gems and coral cameos. Burges' design boldness showed in every detail not only in architecture, but also in metalwork. The maker was the silversmith Josiah Mendelson. There is evidence to suggest Josiah made the former object, which is mounted in the same way in which silver and engraved ornamentation and set with some of semi-precious stones. Nonetheless, the difference is that the body is glass rather than porcelain. An inscription read: 'WILLIELMUS BURGES ME FIERI FECIT ANNO DI MDCCLXV EX HONS ECCL [ESI]AE CONSTANTINOPOLITANAE', which can be seen that Burges paid for the decanter from the fees which he had received for his prize-winning design in 1856, and for Crimea Memorial Church in Constantinople.

In general, the two decanters are remarkable from different cultures and period of time of typical eclecticism of Victorian taste. The two decanters that Lord and Lady Bute chose as mementoes from Burges's collection, as pieces of domestic metalwork, are surely unique. The decanter celebrated the publication of Burges's Architectural Drawings for Gothic Revival Exhibition and the two decanters can be understood as cultural forms that cross great expanses of geography and time.

## 6. Conclusion

Among the English architects of the High Victorian Gothic Revival, William Burges showed his "Aesthetic Colonialism" in his way of design. The author proposes an alternative way of looking at the object. It's a way that prizes diversity and contradiction, values usual hybrid forms, and focuses on fused cultures. The paper presents highlights of cross-cultural expression in Burges design. Burges design ideas and theories were drawn from different time periods. And origins are all combined on his decanter project. Although Burges was foremost an architect, his role as a playful and innovative designer is expressed to perfection in his metalwork. From the decanter object, William Burges' design across classical and medieval history can be seen.

**References**

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