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Provenance report regarding Zalfpot van aardewerk [Chinese ointment jar]

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Provenance report regarding Zalfpot van aardewerk [Chinese ointment jar]

Caroline Drieënhuizen

 <p><i>Photos: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. TM-H-2285</i></p>	Title	Zalfpot van aardewerk / a pottery ointment jar
	Custodian	NMVW Tropenmuseum
	Current possessor	Dutch state
	Inventory number	TM-H-2285
	Material/technique	Pottery
	Measurements	5.5 x 4.5 cm

Summary of findings

Although there is no conclusive evidence, based on her collecting practices in later life, Martine Tonnet (1866-1919) probably bought this jar in Yogyakarta between 1893 and 1903-1904. She donated it, together with other objects like the model of a *saron* (see Provenance report: Model of a *saron* and striking mallet — children's toys), to the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem 10 October 1907 after she came back on furlough to the Netherlands in 1903-1904. As the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam was the successor of the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem, the jar is part of the collections of what now is called the Tropenmuseum, part of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

Reconstruction provenance

[no date]

Probably made in South China, near Guangzhou / Guangdong province

[Information provided by Ching-Ling Wang, curator Chinese Art, Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands].

Between 1893/1903-1904 - 10 October 1907

Martine Tonnet (1866-1919) in Yogyakarta

[Museum card Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, TM-H-350a and TM-h-350b].

10 October 1907 - 1926

Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem

[Letter M. Greshoff to Tine Tonnet, d.d. Haarlem, 14 October 1907, Family archive Eindhoven, the Netherlands].

1926-present

Koloniaal Instituut (today NMVW Tropenmuseum)

Introduction and context

Object information

This is a dark brown, mat-finished, cylinder-shaped jar from Yogyakarta, Java. According to the museum inventory card, this is a pottery ointment jar, imported ‘colli-wise’ either from China or Thailand, meaning that they were sent in bulk. One could find these kinds of jars “in every household,” according to the inventory card, and they could have been found in green or brown colours, and the green ones were considered “the best.”¹ The jar is not dated by the museum. The source of its precise information is unknown. The inventory cards were made after the Second World War. The original inventory book of the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem only mentions the donation as a whole (and the accompanying more detailed list has not been found yet).

Trade relations have existed for centuries between China and Indonesia, and Chinese ceramics represent some of the most tangible evidence of these trade links. Since at least the tenth century CE in Asia, jars have been used to transport goods. Most jars were produced in the south of China, in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Burma. Many of the large jars (“martaban” jars) became heirloom objects in the Indonesian archipelago, some were even attributed to having mystical qualities, and were cherished over generations.

The jar discussed here is probably not such an heirloom, but a utensil for daily use as it was qualified by the museum as being part of every household — whose household (those of Europeans, Indonesian nobility, Chinese-Indonesian working class or another social group) was not specified.

Interestingly, this specific type of jar (in this dark-brown colour and cylindrical-form) is hard to trace in museum collections. One Belgium decoration website that also sells “Asian antiques” sells a rather similar jar, but with a figure of a lion on top of the lid. The website traces the provenance of the jar back to the Henan province in China around the 1880’s.² This provenance is also conceivable because

¹ Museum object card, inv.nr. TM-H-2285.

² The Silk road Collection. “Storage jar with Chinese Lion lid.” <https://www.tradingpartners-silkroad.com/prod/pots/antique-pots/storage-jar-with-chinese-lion-lid/> .

according to the museum object card, it originated in China and was a household utensil (and thus not treasured for generations).

The donator's biography

The jar was donated on 10 October 1907 to the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem by Martine ('Tine') Tonnet (1866-1919).³

Tine Tonnet was educated as a school teacher, but developed herself as a specialist of Indian and Indonesian archaeology and of arts and crafts and became a renowned art and antiquities dealer in Calcutta, India. In Batavia in 1908 she was appointed as probably the first Dutch female museum curator. Tonnet's career in Asia started in 1893 when she decided to travel to the Dutch colony of Indonesia to work as a governess with a Dutch coffee planters family in the vicinity of Klaten. She did not stay very long at the plantation,⁴ but remained in Indonesia until 1903 or early 1904, where she taught in schools and acquired an interest in Javanese culture and history.

Although it is not completely possible to trace Tine Tonnet's whereabouts in Indonesia at this stage of her life, she was invited for dinner and a ball at the palace (*keraton*) in Yogyakarta in January 1899,⁵ and later lived there to "study the customs and manners of the Javanese and their industry" probably toward the end of 1902 and first months of 1903.⁶

In this latter period she stimulated the production of artefacts by Javanese craftsmen for the European market ensuring these craftsmen could profit financially.⁷ In this she joined other European ladies in Yogyakarta, like Catharina 'Trijntje' ter Horst-de Boer (1861-1938) who, inspired by the Ethical Policy, shared the same outlook on the "uplifting" of local art and culture.⁸ It is a fact that they knew each other in 1916, but perhaps their relationship was already much older.⁹

In the spring of 1903, Tonnet traveled back to Holland and lived in both Haarlem and The Hague. In Leiden she started to study Sanskrit continued studying Javanese. Between 1904 and 1907 she maintained a lively though sometimes cumbersome correspondence with several scholars on colonial Indonesia, such as the ethnographic museum directors in Leiden, J. Schmeltz and H.H. Juynboll, the director of the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem, E.A. von Saher, the archaeologist and man of letters, J.L.A. Brandes, and J.E. Jasper, a specialist on Indonesian arts and crafts.¹⁰ She also exchanged letters with the founding father of the Ethical Policy, C. Th. van Deventer.

³ Letter from M. Greshoff, director of the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem, to M. Tonnet, d.d. Haarlem, 14 October 1907. Personal archive, Eindhoven.

⁴ Letter from A.M. Tonnet-Thiel to M. Tonnet, d.d. The Hague, 20 March 1894, Personal archive, Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

⁵ Invitation from the resident on behalf of the sultan of Yogyakarta, Personal archive, Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

⁶ "Kantwerk van leer," *De Locomotief*, 6 April 1903. "Het bestudeeren van de zeden en gewoonten der Javanen en van hun industrie."

⁷ *De Locomotief*, 2 April 1903.

⁸ "Mw Ter Horst-de Boer," *Het Vaderland*, 5 June 1938.

⁹ Letter Martine Tonnet to H.J. Boelen, d.d. Yogyakarta, 8 March 1916, Personal archive, Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

¹⁰ See the correspondence archives of the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden and Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (both part of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen), 302, inv.nr. 2, KITLV-archive, University Library Leiden, Leiden, the Netherlands; Personal archives, Heemstede and Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

In these years, Tonnet researched *wayang* and the decoration programs of temples like Candi Panataran and wrote on leather processing. Furthermore, she reviewed local Dutch colonial exhibitions.¹¹ To the exhibition of the “arts, crafts, and home manufacturing” of colonial Indonesia in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1906, she donated a *bokor*, a copper bowl.¹² Other artefacts from colonial Indonesia she donated to the museum of antiquities in Leiden and to the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem.¹³ In the same year, Tine Tonnet was also involved in the exhibition on colonial Indonesia in Krefeld, Germany, which also set the objective of promoting the Indonesian arts and crafts for the financial benefit of the Indonesian people.¹⁴

Provenance report

The jar made part of a larger collection of objects Tonnet donated on 10 October 1907. At least 34 other “very diverse objects” were donated, amongst which were sewing tools, a pipe, jewelry, musical instruments, a model of a *saron* with mallet (discussed in its own provenance report), and two antique spear-points unearthed in East-Java.¹⁵

The still existing inventory card of the museum, made just after the Second World War, mentions Yogyakarta as place of manufacturing of the *saron*. Although the original inventory book only mentions the donation as a whole (and the accompanying more detailed list has not been found yet), the credibility of the origin of Yogyakarta as place of origin is strengthened as a newspaper mention the sewing tool’s origin as Pasar Gedeh, near Yogyakarta.¹⁶ Furthermore, Tine Tonnet lived in Yogyakarta in 1902-1903, and her activities and interests at that time (studying the “customs and manners of the Javanese”) also make it likely she collected the jar in Yogyakarta at the end of 1902 or the first months of 1903 and took it with her when she sailed to Holland in April 1903. As the jar was a pretty conventional object, she could have bought it in a store.

Her collecting practices in later life when she settled in India, which are documented, might shed some light on her manner of acquiring objects. When she ran antique stores in Calcutta, India (sometimes working on commission), she made use of middlemen, “merchants,” and “hawkers,” who could visit her there and offer her their goods.¹⁷ Poor people visited her, too, selling her their valuables, such as the widow in Calcutta who sold Tonnet her napkin ring.¹⁸ Occasionally Tonnet had personal assistants working on her behalf.¹⁹ She also traveled, for instance, to Darjeeling to collect objects in order to sell

¹¹ *Apeldoornsche Courant*, 27 July 1907.

¹² *Catalogus van de tentoonstelling van Ned. Indische kunst, kunstnijverheid en huisvuilij in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam*, 8 Aug.-8 Sept. 1906 ([?]: Amsterdam 1906) 53.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Soerabaijisch Handelsblad*, 7 November 1906. This was the “Niederländisch-Indische Kunstausstellung” in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Museum in Krefeld. The exhibition took place from 5 October until 4 November 1906.

¹⁵ This is the amount of objects listed in the current museum database TMS. This, however, does not mean the original donation of 1907 was larger; *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 17 August 1908; “Een aantal zeer verschillende voorwerpen (volgens lijst).” Inventory book Koloniaal Museum Haarlem, Tropenmuseum (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen), Amsterdam.

¹⁶ *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 17 August 1908.

¹⁷ Letter Martine Tonnet to her sister Anna Maria Klinkenberg-Tonnet, Calcutta, 15 July 1918, Personal archive Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

¹⁸ Incomplete letter from Martine Tonnet to an unknown recipient, Personal archive Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

¹⁹ Letter Martine Tonnet to her mother Anna Maria Thiel, Calcutta, 10 March 1917, Personal archive Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

them elsewhere: some of these objects from her trip to Darjeeling in the first two months of 1913 were donated to the ethnographic museum in Leiden.²⁰ Tine also bought modern Indian miniature paintings of her friend Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), the founding father of modern Indian art, and exhibited them and sold his paintings to the public.

Furthermore, Tonnet imported artefacts from Indonesia, mainly Java, to show to the Indian Art Circle in Calcutta and to sell them.²¹ She also collected on request. Sometimes she even wrote the director of the ethnographic museum in Leiden asking if he already had a specific object, indicating that if he would like to have the object, she was able to buy the object in certain districts in Calcutta.²² One of the venues where she was able to sell her artefacts was at the exhibitions she organised or helped to organise: the British India Art-exhibition in Medan in 1914 and the Colonial Exhibition in Semarang in 1914, among others.

But this was ten years *after* her donation of the jar and after she had made a name for herself as a former (and first female) curator of the Bataviaasch Genootschap (from 1908 until 1910), collector and expert of Indian and Indonesian objects. Just before her untimely death in 1919 she wrote to her sister about her reputation: “as you can see I am considered here a seasoned art dealer, which is not that bad and I have, if I say so myself, a lot of experience of goods gained by the fact that a lot passed through my hands.”²³ Perhaps Tonnet’s donation twelve years earlier was intended to introduce herself and her knowledge to the Dutch museums.



Martine Tonnet in later life. *Family archive.*

²⁰ This is inventory number RV-1850-* (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, the Netherlands).

²¹ Letter Martine Tonnet to H.J. Boelen, d.d. Semarang, 6 March 1917, Personal archive Aerdenhout, the Netherlands.

²² Letter Martine Tonnet to museum director Hendrik H. Juynboll, d.d. Calcutta, 24 April 1913, Folder 84, Correspondence archive, Archives of the Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, the Netherlands.

²³ “Je ziet ik word hier als een geroutineerde handelaarster beschouwd, wat zo kwaad nog niet is en ik heb, al zeg ik het zelf, veel ervaring opgedaan van goederen daar er ontzettend veel door mijn handen is gegaan.” Letter from Tine Tonnet to Stans Berends-Tonnet, 9 January 1919. Private archive Aerdenhout.