

Amsterdam broadsheets as sources for a painted screen in Mexico City, c.1700

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Among the *objets d'art* that were produced in the New World are feather mosaics, such as *Jesus at the age of twelve* and *The weeping Virgin* (both Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), which were made in Michoacán, Mexico, between 1590 and 1600. For Thomas Cummins, these are important examples of hybrid works that crucially shift the discussion from one of passive reception of European influences to a more fluid and dynamic conception of a visual culture common to both Europe and the New World.⁷ These works, made of brightly coloured feathers on copper supports, were based on engravings of around 1590 by Philippe Thomassin after Giulio Clovio; they were highly prized in Europe and already featured in the collection of Rudolf II in Prague by the early seventeenth century.⁸

The Tepotzotlán/Brooklyn screen also made its way to Europe, most likely with Sarmiento de Valladares upon his return to Spain in 1701.⁹ It was divided into two six-panel screens at some point in its history. The Tepotzotlán half of the screen seems to have remained in Spain while the Brooklyn half entered the collection of the Blois family of Cockfield Hall, Suffolk, almost certainly during the first half of the twentieth century, and was sold, along with the residual contents of the house, in 1996.¹⁰ This article expands the discussion of the use of European prints in Latin America – neither broadsheets nor the work of the Dutch printmaker Romeyn de Hooghe have previously been considered in the literature – and adds a significant work to the growing canon of ‘transcultural’ art.

As Richard Aste has shown, the folding screen with the *Siege of Vienna* (front) and *Hunting scene* (back) in Tepotzotlán and the *Folding screen with the Siege of Belgrade* (front) and *Hunting scene* (back) in Brooklyn, originally formed a single screen made up of twelve wooden panels,¹¹ which are joined by their original metal hinges and together measure around 460 by 550 cm. They were painted in oil and inlaid with mother of pearl on both sides by local artists working in the style of Juan and Miguel González, brothers who are best known for mother-of-pearl inlay paintings such as the series of twenty-four panels (c.1680–1700) on the theme of the *Conquest of Mexico* now in the Museo de América, Madrid. Aste has noted that the Tepotzotlán/Brooklyn screen is the only known work to unite the two Mexican genres of the *biombo*, or folding screen (whose name is derived from *byōbu*, the Japanese word for folding screen), and shell-inlay painting (a combination of Asian and Mexican lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay techniques) with the traditional European media of tempera and oil painting.¹²

Visually and thematically there can be no question that the Brooklyn and Tepotzotlán screens are halves of what was originally a single screen made for a specific patron – Sarmiento de Valladares’s coat of arms can be seen at the uppermost left panel of the Tepotzotlán half of the screen.¹³ When seen side by side, a number of compositional and decorative elements unite the two halves. The battle scenes on the front of the screen are both framed with elaborate floral borders painted in gold leaf with an array of grapes, decorative tendrils and flowers. The borders are arched at the top of each panel and the areas at the foot of the screen are decorated with a Japanese-inspired pattern of abstract leaves and trees painted in gold on a black ground. Small bouquets hang at the screen’s folds, continuing the decorative pattern of the upper border and enhancing the illusion of receding space in the painted scenes. The horizon lines of both halves of the screen are aligned and the battle scene on the left (Tepotzotlán) and that on the right (Brooklyn) are framed together by a pair of monumental Solomonic columns.

The hunting scenes on the reverse of the screen are framed by a floral border, which is interrupted at the folds of the screen along the upper edge by grotesque heads painted in gold. Here the monumental columns have been replaced by a continuous border, almost certainly derived from the tapestry designs upon which the hunting scenes were based. European prints have been identified as the source of these hunting scenes: for the Tepotzotlán half of the screen, prints after Gobelins tapestries by Louis XIV’s court artists Adam Frans van der Meulen (1632–90) and Charles Le Brun (1619–90); and, for the Brooklyn half, as identified by Aste, prints after designs for tapestries by the Medici court artist Johannes Stradanus for Cosimo I’s villa at Poggio a Caiano.¹⁴ Floral garlands tied with red ribbons decorate the tops of the panels and smaller bouquets hang at the folds of the screen, motifs that recall the kinds of decorative elements commonly appearing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tapestries.

The battle scenes on the front of the Tepotzotlán/Brooklyn screen depict two of the most important European victories in the Great Turkish War (1683–99): on the Tepotzotlán half, the siege of Vienna on 12th September 1683, when the forces of the Holy Roman Empire, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Saxony, Bavaria and Franconia relieved the city from a two-month siege by 130,000 Turkish troops;¹⁵ and, on the Brooklyn half of the screen, the siege of Belgrade on 6th September 1688, when Imperial Habsburg troops under the

the ‘4-fold screen’ included in the ‘Inventory of Furniture and Effects at Cockfield Hall . . . the property of the late Sir Ralph B.M. Blois, Bart.’, 1950, p.4 (collection of Mr Andrew Blois) is the only description that in any way relates to the Brooklyn screen. Earlier inventories housed in the Suffolk Record Office are unfortunately unavailable for consultation. Sir Ralph Blois (d.1950), who inherited Cockfield Hall in 1896, is the most likely candidate to have purchased the screen as he undertook extensive renovations on the house and travelled widely buying furniture and works of art abroad. The screen remained at Cockfield Hall until it was included in the following sale: Phillips, London, 20th February 1996, *The Residual Contents of Cockfield Hall, Yoxford, Suffolk*, p.33, lot 320: ‘An 18th Century Spanish Six-Fold Screen painted with figures hunting and heightened with mother-of-pearl within black foliate borders’.

¹¹ See Aste, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.24–33.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹³ For the Tepotzotlán half of the screen, see A. Bonet Correa: ‘Un biombo del siglo XVII’, *Boletín INAH* 6 (1965), pp.33–37; T. Castelló Yturbide and M. Martínez del

Río de Redo: *Biombos Mexicanos*, Mexico City 1970, pp.49–52; and M. Dujovne: *Las pinturas con incrustaciones de nácar*, Mexico City 1984, pp.101–07.

¹⁴ Aste, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.33. The source of the Brooklyn screen is *Chamois hunt* (Hollstein 404/I), attributed to Harmen Jansz Muller and published by Hieronymus Cock in Antwerp in 1570; see M. Leesberg and H. Leeflang: *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, 1450–1700*. Johannes Stradanus, Part III, Oudekerk aan den IJssel 2008, pp.116–17 and 119. Copies after some of Stradanus’s prints appeared in Spain as illustrations to *Libro de la Montería* of 1582 by Andrea Pescioni (who was known as Juan de León after 1587); see B. García Vega: *El Grabado del Libro Español siglos XV–XVI–XVII*, Valladolid 1984, II, pp.99–101, figs.279–96.

¹⁵ Different figures have been cited for the number of Turkish troops; see I. Parvev: *Habsburgs and Ottomans between Vienna and Belgrade (1683–1739)*, New York 1995, p.31, note 65. I have used the figure cited by Field Marshal Francis Taaffe in his letters from the Imperial camp; see F. Taaffe: *Count Taaffe’s letters from the Imperial Camp to his brother the Earl of Carlingford here in London . . .*, London 1684, p.2.