

**Berliner Schlachtenkupfer: 34  
Druckplatten der Kaiser von China  
/ Berlin Battle Engravings: 34  
Copperplates for the Emperors of China**

By *Henriette Lavaulx-Vrécourt and Niklas Leverenz*. 248 pp. incl. 175 col. ill. (*Deutscher Kunstverlag, Berlin and Munich, 2021*), €42. ISBN 978-3-422-98768-5.

by LIANMING WANG

The Qianlong Emperor (reg.1736–95) commissioned several series of copper printing plates to produce engravings that commemorated the military campaigns he was to lead between 1755 and 1792 on the empire’s western border in East Turkestan (Xinjiang, or the ‘New Territory’), Jinchuan, Taiwan, Vietnam and Nepal. Altogether fifty-eight plates were produced and another thirty until 1828, under Qianlong’s successors. High-quality plates of the first series of sixteen engravings were made in Paris between 1767 and 1774 (Fig.5), based on what the contemporary French press called, the ‘pitiful designs sent from China’ (p.97). These consisted of reduced designs of sixteen large-scale battle paintings prepared by the Jesuit court artists, which were derived

from various representations of the battles such as on-site sketches and oil portraits of officers. Today thirty-seven plates survive, thirty-four of which are in the Ethnological Museum, Berlin; the remaining three are in the British Museum, London, in the Academy of Sciences, Beijing, and in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. They are published for the first time in this volume, accompanied by a systematic analysis. Just as the making of the copperplates required a collaborative approach, so too the volume has been produced by an international and interdisciplinary group of four scholars.

The core of the book comprises three in-depth studies of the production and provenance of the engravings, their place in the history of the exchange of art and technologies between East and West and their value as historical objects. In the introduction, Henriette Lavaulx-Vrécourt, the Curator of the East and North Asia Department of the Ethnological Museum, investigates the copper plates’ provenance. Drawing on the museum’s archives and records, she suggests that Friedrich W.K. Müller (1863–1930), a directorial assistant at the museum in the early twentieth century, played a significant role in their

acquisition. The majority of the Berlin copper plates were taken from Beijing at the time of the Boxer Uprising and subsequent occupation of Beijing by allied troops in 1900–01. Thirty of them probably came into the possession of Anton Goebel, a valet of the German ambassador to Beijing Alfons Mumm von Schwarzenstein (1859–1924). Lavaulx-Vrécourt’s findings are a crucial contribution to the research currently led by seven German museums that have recently begun research on the provenance of the works looted during or after the Boxer Uprising.<sup>1</sup> She examines the Berlin copperplates, including their size and weight, the composition of the scenes (including inscriptions and seals), their subject-matter and their current condition.

In Chapter 1, ‘The creation of the Berlin battle copperplates’, Niklas Leverenz, who has published extensively on Qing battle engravings, explores the question as to why the emperor commissioned the first series of the copperplates to be made in Paris, despite the fact that China possessed a thriving domestic printmaking culture. He argues

**5. *Battle of Oroi-jalatu*, by Jacques Philippe Le Bas. 1770. Copperplate, 57.7 by 94.1 cm. (Ethnological Museum, Berlin).**



that Chinese woodblock prints appeared 'less detailed' and more 'like a preparatory drawing' (p.37) when compared to the precision of European copperplates. Leverenz also suggests that the emperor's 'viewing of large-format battle engravings by the French engraver [Gérard] Audran tipped the scales in France's favor' (p.53). Leverenz's account, which is deeply grounded in archival and primary sources, includes translated excerpts from French correspondence, such as letters by the Marquis de Marigny (1727–81), the Director General of the Bâtiments du Roi, and discusses the material evidence of the plates, paper type and roller press, as well as the printing process and shipment. According to Leverenz, the Berlin copperplates – and particularly their use of advanced European technologies – exemplify Qianlong's efforts to extend his empire's universal reach.

In the second chapter, Alexey Pastukhov, a military historian, uses the copperplate prints as a lens through which to study Qing expansion from a Chinese perspective. Pastukhov's main sources are imperial texts and the inscriptions on the prints. He examines the way the copperplates and resulting prints related to Qianlong's eight consecutive campaigns, also setting the copperplates in the context of two seldom-studied series for the Miao and Zhongmiao campaigns and the second Turkestan campaigns from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The author connects the representations of major battle scenes, significant individuals and the topography to historical records and sources. Pastukhov notes that battles are not always the only subject found in the engravings; they often depict topographic details, the precision of which showcases Qing control over unknown territories.

This important volume not only unites the prints with the copperplates, but also situates these unique works in their historical, martial, technological and aesthetic

contexts. It highlights the significance of the Qianlong Emperor's battle engravings by examining their status as museum objects, technological marvels, works of aesthetic value and historical sources for Qing colonial expansion. With the support of John Finlay, a well-known art historian of the Qing dynasty, this meticulous volume has been prepared in a bilingual format (German and English) with great attention to linguistic accuracy. A vital contribution to the scholarly literature on Chinese art, global technological and aesthetic exchange, it will interest scholars in fields including Qing imperial history, Chinese and global art history, histories of technology, and military history.

<sup>1</sup> See the website of the project 'Traces of the "Boxer War" in German Museum Collections – a joint approach', Museum für Asiatische Kunst, available at [www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-asiatische-kunst/collection-research/research/traces-of-the-boxer-war](http://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-asiatische-kunst/collection-research/research/traces-of-the-boxer-war), accessed 2nd May 2024.

### Sir Thomas Lawrence: Le génie du portrait anglais

By Frédéric Ogée. 420 pp. incl. 400 col. ill. (Cohen & Cohen, Paris, 2022), €120. ISBN 978-2-36749-095-3.

by AMINA WRIGHT

Biographies of Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) often begin by observing that the artist and his most famous subject, the Duke of Wellington, were born weeks apart in spring 1769, followed later that summer by Napoleon Bonaparte. In this monograph, Frédéric Ogée notes that the three men were born on three islands – Ireland, Britain and Corsica – in the year that James Watt patented his steam engine, Josiah Wedgwood opened his Ivy Works factory and James Cook observed the transit of Venus from Tahiti. He thus sets Lawrence's life and work on a broad cultural and political stage. The 250th anniversary of that extraordinary year fell in 2019, yet Lawrence's place in it passed without commemoration. There were no publications, exhibitions or other events in Britain to celebrate that 'genius of English portraiture' – as the book's subtitle dubs him – who in 1792 was appointed Painter in Ordinary to George III at the age of twenty-two, but Ogée's book is a worthy and very welcome introduction to the artist and his work for French-speaking audiences.

The publication is the first in a series on British artists to be published by Cohen & Cohen. It is a lavish, large-format volume

generously loaded with full-page colour reproductions of paintings and drawings by not only Lawrence but also his British and continental contemporaries. The text is divided into three sections, the most substantial being a thoughtful biography considering the artist's enigmatic, somewhat complex inner life and the fragile workaholic behind the brilliant public performances, placing Lawrence in the context of late Georgian and Regency Britain and Napoleonic Europe.

This is followed by four short essays on the artist's portraiture from the perspective of social history. At a time when traditional social classes and ranks were fading, a clear expression of character and individuality were essential to the success of a likeness. Lawrence's male portraits chronicle the growing influence of the sober, black-suited man of commerce, who was beginning to replace the dazzling scarlet and gold of the military aristocracy in public life, while his images of women and children often possess an intense beauty, enhanced by a sense of being a glimpse into a private sphere. A final chapter introduces the artist's professional life and techniques, his love of drawing and his exceptional art collection.

British art is celebrated here at one of the peaks of its achievement, and the author presents Lawrence's successes in portraiture as equivalent to J.M.W. Turner's in landscape, often citing the similarities and friendship between the two Royal Academicians. Much is made of the background to the artist's life and times: the industrial revolution, the evolution of London as an international centre of commerce and culture, from Canaletto's city of gleaming spires to the Dickensian gloom of Lawrence's funeral in St Paul's Cathedral in 1830, and the long struggle against Napoleon that culminated in Britain's arrival as a leader on the modern European stage. This last event was marked by Lawrence's series of full-length portraits of the commanders of the alliance against France, commissioned by George IV for the Waterloo Chamber at Windsor Castle. Ogée, a professor of English literature, also considers the artist alongside his literary contemporaries: he sees Jane Austen's characters and Lord Byron's heroes brought to life on Lawrence's canvases, hears echoes of William Wordsworth and William Blake in his portraits of childhood and notes the publication of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* while Lawrence was in Rome painting his portrait

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