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ART & ANTIQUES

**Pava-hornillo
(Stove-kettle)**

Peruvian Viceroyalty, Altiplano (Bolivia)
ca. 1725-1750



Pava-hornillo (Stove-kettle)

Peruvian Viceroyalty, Potosí (Bolivia), ca.1725-1750

Cast, burnished and engraved silver with “picado de lustre” punchmarks

35x29.3 cm; weight 2,319g

Provenance: Private collection

Cristina Esteras Martín

This water heater presents a spheroid body, bulging out in the middle, above which there is a flat platform followed by a square plinth with bevelled corners featuring double ogee arches. At the top, we find a cylindrical opening covered by a lid adorned with wedge-shaped openwork to facilitate ventilation, as the opening is used to introduce hot coal that is then arranged in a circular recipient inside the body of the piece. In the middle of the latter we find two circular orifices on opposing sides (with leaf motifs around them), which serve as air vents. With regard to decoration, the upper and lower sections of the main body feature bands populated by intertwining flowers and leaves engraved on top of a *picado de lustre* punchwork background, something we can also observe on the convex area of the lid. The spout is long and curved, with a palmette superimposed on the end. On the other side of the piece, we find a protuberance shaped like a truncated cone, with a hinge that operates a little lid adorned with gadroons through which water is poured. Sticking out from the top

of opposing sides of the main body are two cast metal floral motifs with two figures, their backs turned to each other, depicting “vegetal men” (Fig. 1). The water heater’s curvilinear handle goes from one “vegetal man” to the other, and at the bottom of the handle itself we find two opposing “foliage angel” (Fig. 2) figures, while the top of the handle features a floral finial. The water heater rests on an elevated support, made up of a long shaft shaped like a truncated cone on top of a round base, the latter featuring a smooth flange and a convex plinth, which once again presents the decorative device of four moulded double ogee arches.

Given this piece has a spout, conduit for pouring water into it, an inner recipient for holding hot coal and two side openings to act as vents, we can be certain that its function was none other than that of a water heater (or combination of kettle and thermos). In other words, like a jug, but arranged in such a way as to keep the liquid extremely hot. This is therefore conceived of as a particularly ingenious device,



Fig. 1 *Pava Hornillo* (detail of the “vegetal man”)



Fig. 2 *Pava Hornillo* (detail of the “foliage angel”)

part of the extremely widespread social ritual throughout the Peruvian Viceroyalty of preparing and drinking the extremely hot herbal maté infusion in living rooms or other places that are not near the stove. This sort of piece was given a range of names, from herbal infusion “water heater”, simply “heater”, *pava* or *tacho*, though it is now most commonly referred to as a *pava-hornillo*, probably because *hornillo* means little oven, while *horno pava* refers to the large bellows found on certain metallurgical ovens.

It is not meant to be heated directly on the stove, as we can clearly see by its raised base, instead serving as an independent object. The pot (*pava*) is also a brazier (*hornillo*), thereby combining the two essential functions of this sort of water heater, facilitated by the insertion of a circular recipient to hold the hot coal, linked to an upper opening with a lid, plus an orifice on each side for ventilation and to keep the coal burning. It was thus that the water, in contact with the coal, would come out of the spout at near boiling point. This piece would have formed part of a set made up of a “*mate*”, into which the water was poured, mixing with the herbal infusion, and the “*bombilla*”, a sort of straw used to drink the infusion.

These pieces could adopt varying models: with a rectangular/ eight-sided body, imitating animal figures (turkeys, lions, bulls, etc.), or a more globe-like form,⁴⁴⁵ as seen in the piece we are analysing here. There are various known examples of the latter model, once part of prominent Buenos Aires collections, since decontextualised, such as those of the Muñiz Barreto collection,⁴⁴⁶ the one belonging to Alfredo Hirsch, the one belonging to Celina González Garaño (Fig. 3) (now in the Isaac Fernández Blanco Museum), that of the Díez Andino family⁴⁴⁷ or the one belonging to Nelly Arrieta de Blaquier and Carlos Pedro Blaquier.⁴⁴⁸ Further pieces may also be found in monasteries, such as the Dominican monastery of Santa Catalina in Cuzco (Peru). But this globe-shaped model was immortalised in *A voyage to the South-*



Fig. 3 *Pava Hornillo*, Peru, second half of the 18th century. Formerly Celina González Garaño collection. Museo Isaac Fernández Blanco, Buenos Aires



Fig. 4 Amédée Françoise Frézier, *Peruvian ladies drinking maté*, *A voyage to the South-Sea, and along the coasts of Chili and Peru*, 1717

Sea and along the coasts of Chili and Peru in the years 1712, 1713 and 1714, by Amédée Françoise Frézier (1682-1773), 1717 (Fig. 4), where we observe three Spanish ladies in Peru engaged in the ceremony of drinking maté herbal infusion from Paraguay (plate 36) and, on the floor in the foreground we can clearly see a round-bodied “*pava*”.⁴⁴⁹ Saying that, whatever shape they may be, these “*pavas*” are exclusively from Peru and Bolivia, being linked to a social custom that did not exist anywhere else in the Americas.

The originality of our *pava*, compared to other examples that are box- or animal-shaped is that it has not one, but two, lateral vents providing the *hornillo* with ventilation. And, in contrast to the pieces listed above, instead of insulating legs, ours has a single base also preventing the heat from damaging surfaces. And these singular characteristics are what lead us to describe this “*pava*” as extraordinarily unique, as we only know of one other unpublished piece from a private collection presenting the same characteristics.⁴⁵⁰

The provenance of these water heaters has not been precisely catalogued, being pieces that have been taken out of context, and often widely dispersed. They are generally attributed to the silver workshops of Lima, the Peruvian Sierra, the Altiplano (modern-day Bolivia) and even Chile, but without identifying any specific centre. The widespread lack of any standardised silverwork markings in the Peruvian Viceroyalty adds enormously to the challenges of pinpointing a particular workshop. However, on this occasion we are certain that the “*pava*” was executed in the city of Potosí, and we reached this conclusion having discovered not only the structural parallels with the aforementioned unpublished piece, but also based on the fact that the decoration at the base of the spout is clearly “*butterfly rocaille*”,⁴⁵¹ as used by the silversmiths in the Cerro Rico (Potosí) area. A further aspect pointing to said city lies halfway between the decorative and the structural, namely the moulded double ogee arches on the plinth and lid, which match those from the base of a pelican-shaped eucharist container we also believe came out of Potosí.

The work’s dating, to about 1725-1750, is borne out by the intertwining leaves on the main body and lid, and the anthropomorphic figures on the handle and just below it.

If these *pavas* are among the most unique and attractive pieces of Peruvian silverwork, the one we are unveiling here is all the more so, breaking as it does with known models, and offering a new design, which we have been able to attribute to Potosí, confirming that in this city of abundance and luxury new and original pieces were created, enriching the brilliant art of viceregal silverwork.

