

JAIME EGUIGUREN ART & ANTIQUES



Tabor with Two-Headed Eagle

Mexico, Tonalá, 1710
Earthenware
Molded, shaped and burnished with slip (*engobe*); single firing. Polychrome wooden lid
88 x 66 cm
Provenance: Private collection, Spain

A tabor is a container shaped like an amphora, originating from Asia, which was widespread in Europe from the Greco-Roman period onwards. It could have either a decorative or utilitarian function. In the Mediterranean world, it was used for carrying food and liquids. These simple, undecorated vessels, with their rounded bottoms making it easy to stand them on dirt floors, were widely used for transporting oils and other foodstuffs from Spain to the Americas. Furthermore, this type of amphora, with its more sophisticated decoration and glaze, was introduced into the Viceroyalty of New Spain as a result of the trade routes between the Spanish colonies in the Orient, from the port of Manila to Acapulco in Mexico, carried by the Manila Galleons. It was as such that ceramics from Tonalá and Talavera de Puebla started to include these sorts of models in their repertoires. Taboros from Tonalá usually include a lid, and were displayed as highly-valued possessions, on lacquered or gilt wooden bases. They were egg-shaped with rounded bottoms, so these pedestals were necessary to support them. Their function in the homes of the wealthy classes was to hold water, this being a way of keeping the air fresh in hot seasons and environments, while the famous Tonalá clay impregnated the liquid with an exquisite aroma. Pieces of Tonalá ceramics were exported to Europe, with taboros preserved in the Royal Palace of Turin, Rome's Quirinal, Cosimo III's collection in Florence, and in the famous collection belonging to the Count of Oñate in Spain,¹ which is currently housed at Madrid's Museo de América (Figs. 1 and 2). The Europeans were highly attracted to these ornamental vessels, which they called "*archibúcaros*".²

The tabor we are presenting here is characterized by its oval shape with its neck and handles, and is exceptional in that it possesses its original lid, in carved, polychromed wood, which repeats the floral decorative motifs of the body of the vessel. Its two faces present different iconographic designs. The front features three rounded arches supported by columns, in the middle of which the crowned two-headed eagle of the Habsburgs. Said dynasty reigned as Spanish monarchs until the end of the 17th century. A lamb rests at the feet of this majestic bird, symbolizing the union of the Habsburgs with the Catholic religion. The side arches are taken up by rampant lions and hummingbirds, sipping from exuberant bell-shaped flowers. The columns are decorated with pomegranate flowers and little winged cherubim in relief, with stylized features. The lower section of the tabor features a wide floral border around the entire circumference.

On the back, we observe a heart inside of which there is a coat of arms and, above this, the date 1710. The heart suggests the joining of two families, by marriage, represented in the aforementioned heraldic shield. The front is profusely decorated with plant and flower motifs, particularly roses, poppies, wisteria and bell-shaped forms. Two lions with half-open mouths rest their paws on the surface of the body of

the vessel where it joins the neck, and at the shoulders there are two cylindrical handles.

The body and the neck were executed using vertical molds in two parts that joined together. The handles, as well as the relief decoration, the lions, cherub heads and flowers, were made separately using molds and then stuck to the body while the clay was still fresh. The eagle, the coat of arms, the plants, flowers and rest of the motifs were painted using manganese, cobalt and iron oxides. The cream-colored background was executed using slip, or "*engobe*", and the surface was burnished in its entirety, lending it that characteristic shiny finish. It is worth highlighting the beautiful decorative fillet work, made up of geometric motifs such as spirals, dots and dashes.³

V.V.I.



Fig. 1 Tabor, Tonalá (Mexico), 17th century. Museo de América, Madrid



Fig. 2 Tabor with Two-Headed Eagle and Relief Figures, Tonalá (Mexico), first third of the 17th century. Museo de América, Madrid