

## SU SHI 蘇軾 (1037–1101 AD) AS AN AMATEUR OF ART COLLECTING

Creating collections of painting and calligraphy was an activity already practiced in the Han 漢 dynasty period (206 BC–220 AD). Nevertheless, neither then nor during the next centuries preceding Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽脩 (1007–1072 AD) collecting pursuits was a tradition of writing on art hadn't been developed on such a scale as it was the case in the second half of the 11th century. Although, Ouyang Xiu himself showed rather little interest in painting, his writings might have been a trigger for future generations of collectors who started making records about their art collections or writing critique papers on an unprecedented scale. With the advent of a new generation we can observe not only an increasing number of texts but also new ways of perceiving art. "Interest in calligraphy became part of *hao gu* 好古, loving antiquity",<sup>1)</sup> as Ronald Egan remarked. The same author also noticed that Ouyang Xiu was somewhat torn between aesthetic and didactical principals, whereas collectors from the new generation such as Mi Fu 米黻 (1051–1107 AD) and Wang Shen 王誥 (c. 1037–1093 AD) did not have such perplexities at all; on the contrary – they valued art for itself and focused on its meaning in their lives.<sup>2)</sup>

Increased interest in collecting paintings coincided with a general flowering of painting during the tenth and eleventh century, which in turn was connected with some historical situation.<sup>3)</sup> After a period of political disunion the Five Dynasties (907–960 AD) and foundation of the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279

---

<sup>1)</sup> Egan (1989: 384).

<sup>2)</sup> Egan (2006: 165).

<sup>3)</sup> Harrist (1998: 14).

AD) a lot of painters who had previously served their rulers in Jiangnan 江南 area or Sichuan 四川 moved to a new capital in Bianjing 汴京 (nowadays Kaifeng 開封) to offer their services.<sup>4)</sup> Bianjing, therefore during the Northern Song Dynasty became the most important centre for artists as well as collectors. A variety of paintings, calligraphy, rubbings and curiosities could have been obtained especially at markets around the Grand Xiangguo Temple 相國寺, though also wine shops offered calligraphy and paintings for sale.<sup>5)</sup>

Many of the collectors were artists themselves, thus their paintings or calligraphy also became an element of exchange between connoisseurs. This was, among others the case of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) – an excellent writer, poet, artist and statesman whose pieces were often snapped up by others, particularly shortly after being done in a company where the author “had something to drink”.<sup>6)</sup>

Su Shi was born in Meishan 眉山 in the Sichuan Province. After splendidly passing examinations in 1061 AD he became a notary in Fengxiang county 鳳翔 (western Shaanxi 陝西 Province). Nonetheless, his writing talent attracted attention and soon Su Shi was recalled to a capital. It was time when Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086 AD) – a controversial Chancellor – attempted socio-economic reforms, with which Su Shi disagreed and openly criticised in his poetry. This critique, however, brought on Su Shi not only Wang Anshi’s dissatisfaction but also the accusation of using a government boat to transport and trade in salt.<sup>7)</sup> Even though the charges were unfounded, Su Shi requested relocation to avoid unpleasant consequences, and until 1079 AD he served as a prefect or vice prefect in southern posts where, in spite of himself, he had to implement the New Policies. Frustrations arising from this can be seen in many of the poet’s texts (distributed widely thanks to a new printed technology), which would eventually in turn meet with repercussions. In 1079 Su Shi was accused of the Emperor Shenzong’s 神宗 (1067–1085 AD) defamation and thrown into prison. The emperor, however spared the fractious poet and only sentenced him to four years’ exile to the rather unremarkable by that time city called Huangzhou 黃州 in Hubei 湖北 Province. Nonetheless, it is considered it was there that Su Shi created his best poems. After Shenzong’s death Shu

<sup>4)</sup> Harrist (1998: 14).

<sup>5)</sup> Harrist (1995: 240).

<sup>6)</sup> Egan (2006: 172). Su Shi’s life and activity is deeply described in: (Egan 1994).

<sup>7)</sup> Egan (1994: 33).

Shi was again recalled to the capital and appointed as a scholar at the Hanlin Academy 翰林院, albeit not for long. Su actually spent the last years of his life on continuous transfers between different prefectures; he was even banished a second time from the capital in 1094 AD and went for three years to Huizhou 惠州. Although in 1100 AD he received pardon, one year later he died en route to his new assignment.

Apart from poetry, Su Shi's prolific oeuvre also included essays on art, connoisseurship and collections. Hardly ever though did they concern the author's own accumulating pursuits.<sup>8)</sup> Su Shi avoided mentioning in his writings that he possessed some works of art and curiosities because he actually criticised permanent attachment to things. He rather warned his friends-collectors, than praised their expert abilities.<sup>9)</sup> Su Shi perceived calamity in the fact that people were unable to release themselves from the materiality of things, but his own attitude towards owning art was rather ambiguous. For sure the poet collected paintings and calligraphy through all his life, though most actively in his youth.<sup>10)</sup> In the inscription entitled *Baohui tang* 寶繪堂 (The Hall of Treasured Paintings) for Wang Shen, he even wrote that: "Among all things that bring pleasure, nothing compares with calligraphy and painting in their ability to delight men without leading them astray."<sup>11)</sup> Nonetheless, deriving pleasure from art became at some point in Su Shi's life an amusement not necessarily related to the necessity to own art work. This does not mean however, that Su completely abandoned art collection. Even in his old years he would occasionally keep some works of art if they gave him pleasure, although he would not regret if someone carried them off.<sup>12)</sup>

<sup>8)</sup> Collection of Su Shi's poems and essays is available in: SSWJ (1986), SSSJ (1982).

<sup>9)</sup> Su Shi wrote a few dedications, such as *Hua yuan ji* 畫苑記 (Garden of Painting inscription) for Shi Kangbo 石康伯, *Mobao tang ji* 墨寶堂記 (Ink Treasure Hall inscription) for Zhang Xiyuan 張希元, *Mojun tang ji* 墨君堂記 (Ink Gentleman Hall inscription) for Wen Tong 文同 (1019–1079 AD), *Momiao tang ji* 墨妙堂記 (Ink Marvels Pavilion inscription) for Sun Xinlao 孫辛老, and colophons such as *Shu Mi Yuanzhang cang tie* 書米元章藏帖 (Mi Yuanzhang's [Mi Fu's] a calligraphy collection in locked case) and *Ciyun Mi Fu Er Wang shu bawei ershou* 次韻米黻二王書跋尾二首 (Following the Rhymes of Mi Fu's Verses Inscribed after the Two Wang's Calligraphy) inscribed on Mi Fu's calligraphy. Some of those texts were written in the tone of warning, nonetheless, the most blunt in its comments about potential problems of collecting as Ronald Egan noticed was a composition for Wang Shen titled *Baohui tang ji* 寶繪堂記 (The Hall of Treasured Paintings inscription). See: Egan (2006: 168–169, 202–203), Struman (1997: 71).

<sup>10)</sup> Su Shi wrote about it in his essay titled *Baohui tang ji*. Translation in: Egan (2006: 166), based on: SSWJ (1986: 11. 356–357). Compare with Owen (1996: 664).

<sup>11)</sup> Translation after: Egan (2006: 165). Compare with Owen (1996: 664).

<sup>12)</sup> Egan (2006: 166), Owen (1996: 664).

Su Shi's colophons on calligraphy were rather singular comments on particular works than a comprehensive treatise.<sup>13)</sup> The author's thoughts (sometimes characterised by inconsistency, though), in connection with his spectacular calligraphic accomplishment illuminated a new way to the understanding and appreciation of calligraphy as art. Su Shi used to write colophons on calligraphy drawn from various earlier sources. He opined that to be a real master in calligraphy one must experience all the script types, and not specialise in just one category from the very beginning. Moreover, he defined a goal for calligraphy, which was to establish ties between the past, present and future. In calligraphy, Su Shi wanted to see a man's character if not the man in his entirety, and he would often affirm the compatibility of the calligrapher's moral nature with his excellent brushwork. Nonetheless, it happened that sometimes the quality of the brushwork was poor, in contrast to the author's impeccable character. Su Shi would value such a piece anyway, although not without raising some questions since, he was not sure whether the prior information on reputation of the calligrapher affects the perception of the brushwork, or may be brushwork itself expressed the author's character. Nevertheless, he concludes: "each person's calligraphy conveys quite apart from its skill or clumsiness, a certain drift" that "shows whether the calligrapher was wicked or upright".<sup>14)</sup> We may assume that a proper recognition of this "drift" required not only knowledge but also uncommon sensitivity, which Su Shi undoubtedly possessed. Moreover, he was not only capable of recognising the strong and weak points of different brushwork, but also valued a "new meaning" for his own calligraphy expressed without following the ancient models. In Su Shi's view each epoch had the right to develop its own standards.

#### OBJECTS OF ART AND CURIOSITIES IN SU SHI'S COLLECTION

Although, Su Shi reluctantly wrote about his own collection, nevertheless, even on the basis of some selective accounts elaborated by Ronald Egan we may assume that the poet was quite an avid collector.<sup>15)</sup> Beside, how could it be otherwise, since Su Shi came from a family of strong connoisseurs; his own

<sup>13)</sup> This outline of Su Shi's views on calligraphy is based on: Egan (1989: 392–419); (1994: 261–281).

<sup>14)</sup> Egan (1989: 401; 1994: 268).

<sup>15)</sup> This draft of Su Shi's penchants for collecting painting is based mostly on Egan (2006: 170–174 (*Su Shi as collector*)).

father, Su Xun 蘇洵 (d. 1066 AD), was a prominent collector whose interests inclined towards paintings with Buddhist themes. Su Shi himself would buy some for his father, even if they cost a fortune, as was the case with a set of four bodhisattva works by the Tang master Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680–740 AD). Nonetheless, Su's personal attitude towards such pieces might have been more emotional than aesthetical, and so he preferred to donate bodhisattvas or Luohan paintings to temples rather than keeping them in his own collection. However, we may expect that among Su Shi's collected works were pieces with religious meaning, and yet the owner did not want to give them away. To such examples belonged a painting by a famous artist Huang Quan 黃筌 (903–965 AD) showing a dragon, in front of which Su Shi would light a candle in days of drought and pray for a rain.

More because of aesthetic than religious premises, Su Shi requested Pu Yongsheng 蒲永昇, an artist of Chengdu 成都, to make twenty-four copies of waterscapes by Sun Zhiwei 孫知微 (tenth century AD) painted on the walls of the Shouning Monastery 壽寧寺 in Hangzhou 杭州. In spite of Pu Yongsheng's realistic manner, criticised by Su Shi at some point,<sup>16</sup> the reason as to why the poet wanted to possess the waterscapes painted by Pu laid probably in Su Shi's fascination with the lively painting style, which was consonant with the bohemian behaviour of the artist.<sup>17</sup> We may assume that Su Shi must have been quite satisfied with the copies as they not only provided a reflection of the original paintings' beauty but also the opportunity to admire Pu Yongsheng's artistic manner that appealed to Su's own taste. It seems that the owner kept the paintings, if not all of them then at least few for number of years in his own collection; in 1092–93 AD four waterscapes by Pu Yongzheng were sent as a gift by Su Shi to a certain Ju Chizheng 鞠稔正, with a note that the paintings would bring relief from the summer heat if only Ju were to hang them on the walls.

Sometimes, making copies was the only possibility to satisfy a collector's desire to enjoy the resemblance of the original. Su Shi made copies himself; furthermore, he even ordered some to be made by others not, however, to deceive viewers, but for his own pleasure to enjoy new results, yet obtained in compliance with the original beauty of the copied images. A good copy might have even had the hallmarks of excellent art therefore including such items into a collection was not anything shameful. Nonetheless, possessing counterfeits was seen as an expression of ignorance resulting in incompetent recognition

---

<sup>16</sup> Bush (1978: 34–34).

<sup>17</sup> Watson (2007: 22).

of artwork and an inability to appreciate the merits of past scholars, which in fact were the main reasons for which the collectors were praised.<sup>18)</sup> Most likely it was this desire to enjoy the resemblance of the original pieces of art that motivated Su Shi to make copies of a ten-panelled set of paintings by Li Cheng 李成 (919–967 AD) lent to him by a scholar-friend and collector Teng Yuanfa 滕元發 (1020–1090 AD). Li Cheng's paintings were highly appreciated by twelfth-century connoisseurs, especially because of the mystical atmosphere emanating from the artist's landscapes.<sup>19)</sup> Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that shortly after Li Cheng's death, there were plenty of copies and forgeries from originals in circulation, in dramatically decreasing quantities.<sup>20)</sup> A set of ten paintings copied by Su Shi might have been previously a group of panels from screens.

For sure, Su Shi also collected art pieces by his contemporaries. Without a doubt, amongst the paintings assembled in his collection were some by Wen Tong 文同 (1019–1079 AD), whose style Su Shi truly admired. His esteem for Yuke's 與可 (Wen Tong's style name) art, Su expressed in a dedicatory inscription: *Mojun tang ji* 墨君堂記 (Ink Gentleman Hall), calling Wen Tong's bamboos "ink gentlemen" (*mojun* 墨君), which was an absolute novelty in relation to painting.<sup>21)</sup> Bamboo as a plant was had already been called "gentleman" in the fifth century by Wang Huizhi 王徽之 [style name Wang Ziyou 王子猷] (344–388 AD) – a son of Wang Xizhi – in order to accentuate the plant's virtues. Nonetheless, it was Su Shi who for the first time used this term in connection with painting by which he gave to understand that painted bamboos may speak with equal strength to the sensitivity of the viewer as real ones.<sup>22)</sup> Su's concept was based on a poetic illusion permeating the picture and providing both verbal signals and visual representation.<sup>23)</sup> This illusion as well as the admirable artistic

<sup>18)</sup> Egan (1989: 384); Ebrey (2008: 209).

<sup>19)</sup> Elkins (2010: 75).

<sup>20)</sup> The famous *Xuanhe hua pu* 宣和畫譜 (Xuanhe Painting Catalogue or Catalogue of Paintings of the Xuanhe Emperor) sponsored by the Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1100–1126 AD) records 159 of Li Cheng's paintings [see: Ebrey (2008: 263, 286)], but most of them were merely facsimiles [see: Zhang (2006: 105); Elkins (2010: 72)]. Probably of the above mentioned 159 pieces 90 scrolls belonged previously to a collection of Ding Wei 丁謂 (966–1037 AD) a favourite official of the Emperor Taizong 太宗 (976–997 AD), who also served to the Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (997–1022 AD). After Zhenzong's death Ding Wei was found guilty of corruption and all his property, including large collection of paintings and calligraphy was confiscated. See: Ebrey (2008: 34).

<sup>21)</sup> Translation of *Mojun tang ji* in: Egan (1994: 287). Based on: SSWJ (11. 355–356).

<sup>22)</sup> Egan (1994: 288). Compare with: Lesbre, Liu (2004: 370).

<sup>23)</sup> Elkins (2010: 47).

qualities the poet sensed in paintings by Wen Tong,<sup>24)</sup> whom he personally knew and kept in touch with for years by exchanging letters and gifts. On the basis of this correspondence we know that Su Shi asked Wen Tong for pieces of art to hang in specially built halls;<sup>25)</sup> for example, he wished to have “the portrait of one of his [Wen Tong’s] brothers, descendants, or friends to keep in [his] own study, so it might be a place this gentleman visits occasionally.”<sup>26)</sup> Su had in mind the portrait of bamboo, in which he perceived his friend’s character full of “the severity of simple virtues that defies the frosty autumn.”<sup>27)</sup>

Considering that Su Shi liked painting bamboos himself,<sup>28)</sup> we may presume that this subject, repeatedly scrolled in his collection of paintings. Nevertheless, it might have appeared in different varieties, it means as a main topic or as a part of an extended composition, for example in the company of mandarin ducks and rocks as it was the case with the painting by the early Song Daoist artist Niu Jian 牛戩.<sup>29)</sup> Su Shi possessed this piece until 1094 AD, i.e. the time he decided to relieve himself of all his works of art; therefore, he sent the painting by Niu Jian he sent to the poet and prose writer, Li Zhiyi 李之儀 (1038–1117 AD). With Li Zhiyi Su Shi had already exchanged artwork, while serving as a Hanlin Academician (1086–88 AD); Li Zhiyi then presented to him a painting of a Buddhist hell scene by Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049–1106 AD), and Su in turn sent him his written critique of Wu Daozi plus a Wu Daozi painting (or copy) he owned.<sup>30)</sup> Li Gonglin, befriended with Su in 1086 AD; since then, quite frequently requested by Su, he made for him portraits, horses and Buddhist icons.<sup>31)</sup>

Besides Buddhist themes, dragons, horses, portraits, bamboos and water-scapes, in all likelihood Su Shi must also have possessed in his collection some horizontal landscapes. This is exemplified by an unspecified horizontal

---

<sup>24)</sup> In one of Su Shi’s poems on Wen Tong’s painting, the author wrote that when the artist painted bamboo he fell into a trance and all his body was then transformed into bamboo. See: Bush (1978: 41).

<sup>25)</sup> Egan (1994: 286). Based on: SSWJ (51.1511–1512); SSWJ (*Yiwen huaibian* 佚文彙編: 2.2440–2.2446).

<sup>26)</sup> Translation after Egan (1994: 287).

<sup>27)</sup> Bush (1978: 35).

<sup>28)</sup> Similarly as it was a case of Li Cheng’s paintings also those genuine works by Su were already scarcely available in fourteenth century. One of the greatest bamboo painter of the late Yuan Dynasty – Wu Zhen 烏鎮, wrote of having seen many works purport by Wen Tong and Su Shi, but in fact genuine items were rare among them. See: YNLBCH (1997: 191).

<sup>29)</sup> Egan (2006: 173).

<sup>30)</sup> Egan (2006: 172–173).

<sup>31)</sup> Harrist (1998: 21–22).

landscape by Li Ming 李明, a lesser known artist whom Su Shi befriended probably during his exile in Hangzhou, and whose painting he owned, though subsequently sent to his friend Wu Fugu 吳復古 with a suggestion that Wu should mount it on a screen enclosing his bed.<sup>32)</sup> Screen paintings or some kinds of folding screens, as Michael Sullivan noticed were already in use long before the Tang Dynasty, though their importance as an art form reached a peak under the Northern Song Dynasty.<sup>33)</sup> Usually screen paintings were taken down and mounted as scrolls, or less frequently on screens or other types of painting.<sup>34)</sup> The practice of mounting on screens, especially flower paintings was common in Japan and probably as a result of mutual influences this also occurred in China. Nonetheless, the reason as to why this custom has found its amateurs might be explained by the fact that screens provided frames and could have been treated as an intimate movable exhibition space composed for the pure pleasure of observing artwork. We may assume that this is exactly how it worked in the collection of Mi Fu who mounted on screen some flower paintings by Liu Chang, on a screen, as well as in collection of the Empress Cisheng Guanxian 慈聖光獻 (1016–1079 AD) – wife of the Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (1022–1063 AD), who fitted into wind-screens all the pictures by Li Cheng that she could find.<sup>35)</sup> Moreover, deducing from the Su Shi's words addressed to Wu Fugu, in which he did not fail to suggest how to make the best use of the landscape by Li Ming independently from the owner's wish to get rid of it, we may guess that this method of displaying pictures in the new screen-furniture arrangement was not only known to the poet but also quite possibly used by him personally.

Apart from painting and calligraphy, Su Shi was also an amateur of unusual rocks and inkstones.<sup>36)</sup> A common fascination with rocks and its collecting

---

<sup>32)</sup> Egan (2006: 172).

<sup>33)</sup> Sullivan (1965: 242, 248). Furthermore, Sullivan pays attention to one of the most satisfying study materials in terms of early screen painting that is a first 12<sup>th</sup> century copy from a painting titled *Hanxizai yeyan tu* 韓熙載夜宴圖 (Night Revels of Han Xizan) by Gu Hongzhong 顧闳中 (937–975 AD), now in the collection of Palace Museum in Beijing. Sullivan (1965: 245–46). See also *Kan shu tu* 勘書圖 (Scene of Collating Books) by Wang Qihan 王齊翰 (937–975 AD), where there is a big screen with landscapes painted on it; now in the collection of Nanjing University.

<sup>34)</sup> Sullivan (1965: 247).

<sup>35)</sup> Sullivan (1965: 247); Sirén (1956–58.1: 197).

<sup>36)</sup> This outline devoted to Su Shi's collecting of rocks and inkstones is mostly based on texts: *Spontaneous Artistry and Calculated Exchanges*, as well as *Three Poems, Two Rocks, One Painting*, Yang (2003: 167–196), and *Su Shi yu yan wenhua*, Lo (2002: 471–493).



dates back the early decades of the ninth century.<sup>37)</sup> Two very important political figures: Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (780–849 AD) and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850 AD) built at this time their exquisite collections based on the rarest specimens of rocks. Nonetheless, both collections were perceived rather negatively, especially in the eyes of the Song dynasty critics. The reason was an excessive attachment to the possession of objects bordering on insanity. The Song dynasty rock amateurs such as Ouyang Xiu, Guo Xiangzhang 郭祥正 (1035–1135 AD), or Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086 AD) emphasised moderation in the pursuit of curiosities since obsessive desires, greediness, and lack of rationality would be the downfall of every collector, who would additionally forget about the transience of all collectible objects, i.e. their transferability and exchangeability.

Each of these three amateurs mentioned above had their own idea how to properly admire and collect rocks. Ouyang Xiu, for example, organised a public display of rocks from the Ling Stream *Ling shi xi* 菱溪石 belonging once to Liu Jin 劉金 a 9th century warrior living in the Jing 荊 province (southern regions), providing widely available access to the rocks during festivals without limiting the objects to private possession.<sup>38)</sup> Guo Xiangzhang, in turn, recognising quality over quantity preferred to concentrate only on a single, yet spectacular rock from the Yangzi River.<sup>39)</sup> Sima Guang also found pleasure in a one rock, from the Kuocang Mountain 括蒼; however, in contrast to Ouyang Xiu's idea of an open rock "exhibition", he preferred to limit the number of rock admirers, and avoid showing it to "the very important persons" who might have simply taken it.<sup>40)</sup>

Su Shi as an amateur of rocks also had some thoughts on the subject of their proper appreciation. He definitely forewarned others of following in the footsteps of Li and Niu, expressing admonitions in different poems. Once he reminded Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068 AD) – a Song dynasty collector of rocks from ancient gardens – about the decline of the Li and Niu's families, writing that "one man's loss is another man's gain".<sup>41)</sup> Another time Su Shi admonished

<sup>37)</sup> Yang (2004: 83).

<sup>38)</sup> *Ling shi xiji* 菱溪石記 [Account of the Ling Stream Rocks] by Ouyang Xiu, for English translation see: Yang (2003: 139–141).

<sup>39)</sup> *Pingshiyao Zeng Guo Gongfu* 屏石謠贈郭功父 [A Ballad on a Rock Screen, Presented to Guo Gongfu] by Yang Jie 楊傑 (c. 1059 AD), for English translation see: Yang (2003: 141–142).

<sup>40)</sup> *Kuocang shiping* 括蒼石屏 [Rock Screen from Kuocang Mountain] by Sima Guang, for English translation see: Yang (2003: 142–143).

<sup>41)</sup> Yang (2003: 125).

himself in one of his two poems about the Snow Waves Rock *Xuelangshan* 雪浪山.<sup>42)</sup> The rock, so called because of its natural resemblance to snow waves, in fact had belonged to Su Shi since 1093 AD. The owner was charmed by the rock's unique shape, because it induced in him associations with the topography of his native land, and therefore provided the poet with relief from homesickness. Nevertheless, in his second poem Su Shi already recalled the names of the Tang petrophiles just to signal his awareness of a danger.

Although Su Shi tried to distance himself from material things, and appreciate them without possessing, in fact he could not resist the temptation to keep some particular specimens more than just temporarily. Moreover, in some cases Su Shi used his artistic talent with premeditation to obtain what he wanted. So it was with one rock from the Lingbi 靈璧 region (Anhui 安徽), which Su Shi perceived under the terrace in the garden of some Mr. Liu in 1085 AD.<sup>43)</sup> The rock had the shape of “a deer bending its neck” and Su Shi wished to have it. Therefore, he decided to paint on the wall of the pavilion “ugly rocks and bamboo blown by the wind” in order to make an exchange transaction with the host. In fact, the last one was truly attracted to the painting and Su finally obtained the desired object. A

Another time, after arriving in Yangzhou 揚州 in 1092 AD, Su Shi received two rocks as a gift;<sup>44)</sup> one was green with “a long range of mountain peaks”, the other was purely white. The poet named them both the Qiu Lake Rocks *Qiu-chishi* 仇池石 because of the dream he had, in which some man with a plaque saying “Qiu Lake” asked Su Shi to reside at a government office. The dream spurred Su Shi upon waking to recite a poem by Du Fu, who also mentioned Qiu Lake in his poetry, and afterwards to write down an imagined vision in which he appeared at the Qiu Lake in the Gansu 甘肅 Province, a place where Su Shi apparently wished to live.

The poet was very attached to the Qiu Lake Rocks and did not want to part with them, even when travelling in 1093 AD to the capital.<sup>45)</sup> It was risky though, for, Su Shi's friend – Wang Shen, a connoisseur as well, asked him in the form of a poem to borrow the rocks. Su Shi correctly predicted, that in this case it was not about a simple borrowing but rather a seizing of his precious

<sup>42)</sup> Yang (2003: 123–124).

<sup>43)</sup> *Hua hua dan yi* 畫畫單易 [On the Exchange of My Painting] by Su Shi, for English translation see: Yang (2003: 172).

<sup>44)</sup> *Shuangshi* 雙石 [Twin Rocks] by Su Shi, for English translation see: Yang (2003: 180).

<sup>45)</sup> Yang (2003: 180).

rocks by the friend, who was already known for his unreliability. However, the owner of the Qiu Lake Rocks did not dare to refuse. The reason was, as Xiaoshan Yang suggests, Wang Shen's high position gained by his marriage with the second daughter of the Emperor Yingzong 英宗 (1063–1067 AD).<sup>46)</sup> Su Shi found himself in quite an uncomfortable situation, for, how could he reject a request from a person so closely connected to the emperor's family? Nonetheless, he did not want to give up so therefore created a poetic response to Wang Shen in which he clearly offered a deal: Qiu Lake Rocks in exchange for a painting of "Two Loose Horses by Han Gan".<sup>47)</sup> The proposal was tough but honest – Wang Shen himself once exchanged a rock for the Han Gan's painting, this time however, the emperor's son-in-law did not want to get rid off his treasure even for the Qiu Lake Rocks.<sup>48)</sup> Perhaps, Wang Shen felt a grudge against Su Shi, and the case might not have been definitely resolved at this time. This assumption arises from the fact that some other colleagues became involved in this litigation suggesting, for example, taking painting and rocks from both collectors or burning the painting and breaking the rocks in order to deal with the problem.

In fact, Su Shi kept the rocks and moreover, even planned to enlarge his collection with a new item, i.e. the "Nine Peaks (or Glories) Mountain in a Jug" (*Huzhong Jiuhua* 壺中九華),<sup>49)</sup> – the rock so named by Su Shi when he saw it for the first time in Hukou 湖口, being on his way to Huizhou. The rock belonged to some Li Zhengchen 李正臣, and Su Shi was willing to pay for it a significant sum of a hundred gold in pieces. Nevertheless, for some unclear reasons, the deal failed. After eight years the poet was passing Hukou again on his way back from his exile and asked Li Zhengchen for the rock. However, it had been already sold to Guo Xiangzheng, for eighty gold in pieces. In the end, the object entered the collection of the Emperor Huizong, and became a priceless treasure.<sup>50)</sup> Its shape, reminding a mountain range with nine peaks, ravines and valleys must have been very appealing, though some critics such as Fang Shao 方勺 (1066–? AD) – the author of anecdotes *Pozhai bian* 泊宅編, claimed that the opinion about the item was exaggerated. In his view, (although he had never seen the original but only a rubbing made by Zhengchen) the

---

<sup>46)</sup> Yang (2003: 184).

<sup>47)</sup> Yang (2003: 186).

<sup>48)</sup> Yang (2003: 189–190).

<sup>49)</sup> Yang (2003: 195), Tian (2005: 234. n. 59).

<sup>50)</sup> Tian (2005: 234. n. 59).

peaks weren't very craggy and the rock itself had some disease.<sup>51)</sup> Fang Shao wondered, therefore, why Dongpo (Su Shi) loved this rock so much. Finally he came to conclusion that it was because of the artistic soul of Su Shi, for whom some phenomena served as means to realise his literary imagination, and the same gave him the possibility to leave his vision for posterity.

Besides rocks, Su Shi also had some inclinations to collect inkstones; they were already in use during the Han dynasty, however the demand for them increased during the Tang, reaching its climax in the Song. The main reason as to why collectors accumulated inkstones resulted, as we may assume, from the fact that they were essential for the tradition of the scholar's studio. Moreover, materials from which they were made were also very appreciated, as well as their artistic treatment.

One of the first who wrote some notes on the connoisseurship of inkstones was Ouyang Xiu.<sup>52)</sup> According to him there were several types of the most precious inkstones. Firstly, *Duanyan* 端硯 produced in Zhaoqing 肇慶 (Guandong), characterised by their resistance to water, clearness and smoothness, as well as in some cases by inclusions called "stone eyes", which were very valued. Another type of inkstones was *Sheyan Jinxing* 歙硯金星 (Gold Star) from the She County 歙縣 (Anhui) characterising by its hardness and gold-like markings shining in a black colour of the stone. The next was *Jiangzhou Jiaoshi* 江州角石 (Jiangzhou Horn Inkstone), white as ox horns, very smooth and slippery, (therefore not good for making ink). Another type represented stones from *Tuo* 沱 River in Guizhou 貴州, with blue and black spots and coarse texture (Ouyang Xiu possessed a slab of such stone in his own collection). The next were inkstones called *Qingzhou Cujin* 青州粗金 (Coarse Gold from Qingzhou [Shandong]), not very convenient to yield ink. Another was *Hongsi* 紅色 (Red Colour) stone, apparently the same quality as the *Duanyan*. Different type of inkstones were those made of ceramic tiles, especially *Shimo* 石墨 from Qingzhou and Weizhou 濰州 (Shandong), or those made of ancient roof tiles from Xiangzhou 相洲 kilns (near Anyang 安陽 in Henan) produced since the Tang dynasty and *Chengni* 澄泥 slabs.

On the basis of the Ouyang Xiu's "Catalogue" we may distinguish a few factors, which determined how an inkstone was evaluated. Firstly, the type of

<sup>51)</sup> Tian (2005: 234. n. 59).

<sup>52)</sup> *A Catalogue of Ink Stones* by Ouyang Xiu [Ouyang Wenzhongong 歐陽文忠公 (Ouyang, Duke Wenzhong)] and placed in *Ge Gu Yao Lun* 格古要論, for English translation see: David (1971: 116–117).

stone: its hardness, colour, texture and unusual marks on it, as well as its ability to yield ink. Secondly, the type of ceramic and its treatment. Ouyang Xiu made a general division into groups, without referring to a detailed description of some particular examples, (however, he did mention owning some of them).<sup>53)</sup> It was differently for Su Shi, who, also as an amateur and owner of inkstones, preferred to express his admiration for single pieces in poetry, revealing in this way also his deep attachment to the materiality of inkstones.<sup>54)</sup>

With Su Shi is connected an existing inkstone with a moon and star theme and an inscription attributed to the poet; currently the object is located in the National Palace Museum in Taipei.<sup>55)</sup> The inscription was written for a inkstone belonging to a collection of Wang Dingguo 王定國 – a painter and poet who was a contemporary of Su Shi.<sup>56)</sup> The brown stone with some yellowish dots is of the *duan* type. Its form called *chaoshou* 抄手 (inserting the hand) with a hole underneath began to be popular during the Song dynasty though already present in the Five Dynasties. The symbol of a full moon in a form of a slightly protruding pillar is visible in the middle of the inkwell; around the post on the surface there are drifting clouds. The unusual decoration appears on the back of the inkstone, where some sixty pillars of different lengths ending in an eye pattern symbolising a star scattering in the sky jut out randomly. All this astronomical composition supplements the poem enched in the running style characters on one of the sides of the inkstone. The poem attributed to Su Shi is as follows:

<i>Tianchi yi mao yin kong</i>	天池一朙印空	At the sky there was a Moon print,
<i>Yu quan xing zan jue huo</i>	宇眾星瓊燭火	Stars were crowding around it.
<i>Ning xiang bo taohongyong</i>	寧相比陶泓永	Candle lights competed with them,
<i>De wan yi ran beichao</i>	得完依狀北朝	Inkstone has more then it needs

<sup>53)</sup> Ouyang Xiu confessed that he had possessed as a young man a slab of *jinxing* inkstone, and two slabs of *chengni*, however one ceramic tile he gave to a friend, whereas the other treasured dearly in his studio. David (1971: 116–117).

<sup>54)</sup> Lo (2002: 471–493).

<sup>55)</sup> Zheng (200(1999): 124); He (2000: (IV-69) 446); Chen (2011: 92 (cat. no. 23)).

<sup>56)</sup> SDOCQ (1988: 5).

*Song zhen chi lao fang duan* 宋真齒老坊端 It is *duan* stone and comes  
from the Northern Song  
Dynasty from the old mines  
*Qing ban wen fang xia li* 清伴文房暇璃 (Written) During the leisure  
time with a company,  
in a Study Room.

Finally, one can see two imperial seals of the Qianlong Emperor who signalled his presence and the same gave the improvement to the object:

*Qianlong dingyou xin Chun you ti* 乾隆丁酉新春御題 The Emperor  
Qianlong, 1777, Spring of New Year.

#### SUMMARY

At different stages of his life, Su Shi surrounded himself with art, though he tried to prove that with age he had become more distanced in relation to the need of possessing art pieces. The concept of releasing from the materiality of art was already defined when he was forty years old and composed in 1077 AD *The Hall of Treasured Paintings Inscription* for Wang Shen, where he announced that: "...if man allows his mind to dwell permanently on these things [i.e. painting and calligraphy], never setting it free, then the calamity that painting and calligraphy may bring is of a kind that defies description".<sup>57)</sup> In extreme cases may even lead to a complete destruction what Su Shi precisely illustrated by giving a few examples of wretches. Nonetheless, there was a discrepancy between Su Shi's warnings or ideology and his own acting. Despite the poet's advices given to friends or confessions in which he affirmed that he had looked upon calligraphy, paintings and precious objects as dung,<sup>58)</sup> he was absolutely not able to resist from possessing some objects, such as the Purple-Gold Inkstone in a shape of mountain, which according to Mi Fu – Su Shi carried off from him, and subsequently ordered his son – Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112 AD) to put it down in his coffin.<sup>59)</sup> In fine Su Shi's request was not fulfilled, because Mi Fu

<sup>57)</sup> Translation after: Egan (2006: 165).

<sup>58)</sup> Egan (2006: 178).

<sup>59)</sup> Struman (1997: 196–197n.50).

recovered the valuable inkstone and refused to give it to his friend.<sup>60</sup> Whatever the problem was between those two, one might reach the conclusion that Su Shi regardless of his lofty ideas, was simply unable to prove equal to them and fell into hypocrisy.

Su Shi not only collected but also expressed his views on collecting, particularly ridiculing rich people whose collections were full of inferior works mistakenly taken as genuine by their owners.<sup>61</sup> For Su Shi it was undignified to build a collection on such base attitudes as snobbism. The real collector or connoisseur, even with modest means should emphasise above all quality not quantity. Su Shi was not alone in this issue; his statement seems to fit with the main stream of other literati critics. It was shared by Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105 AD), a great calligrapher, who would criticised collectors both for their lack of ability to improve their own calligraphic skills despite having owned a great collection of artwork, as well as for their inability to look into calligraphy and paintings for *yun* 韻 i.e. “resonance”, “rhyme” or “overtone”, which Susan Bush defined as “the lingering trace of a work that remains in the viewer’s mind”.<sup>62</sup> The first critique concerned people such as the poet Rong Zidao 榮諳道, who used to spend a fortune gathering works of art and yet could not even enter the middle rank of artists.<sup>63</sup> The second critique related to a collection of Huang Tingjian’s close friend, and what’s more one of the leading painters of this time – Wang Shen who, according to Huang, lacked the ability to distinguish genuine pieces from fakes and could not properly estimate the value of his own collection.<sup>64</sup> Su Shi himself honestly confessed that he might have not necessarily been able to attribute every painting without signature, but at least could absolutely tell a genuine Wu Daozi oeuvre from a fake.<sup>65</sup> For Su Shi were two things in particular that distinguished great art:

---

<sup>60</sup> At some point Su’s friend and ward — Liu Jisun 劉季孫 wanted to make a gift for Su Shi and tried to exchange the inkstone with Mi Fu offering him some calligraphy by Wang Xianzhi, but it seems that the deal failed. Peter Charles Sturman suspects that Mi Fu’s lack of generosity towards his elder companion resulted not only from the fact that the object was too precious, but also because of Su Shi’s public criticism of Mi Fu’s excessive collecting. Sturman (1997: 197).

<sup>61</sup> Egan (2006: 174–178 (*Collection as ostentation*)).

<sup>62</sup> Bush (1978: 43–44); Egan (2006: 177).

<sup>63</sup> Huang Tingjian was the author of *Shu mota Dongpo shu hou* 書摹拓東坡書後 (Colophon on a Rubbing of Dongpo’s Calligraphy) where he expressed his disappointment with Rong Zidao’s calligraphic style. Egan (2006: 176).

<sup>64</sup> His harsh critique on Wang Shen’s collection Huang Tingjian expressed in *Ti Bei Qi jiaoshu tu hou* 題北齊校書圖後. Translation in: Egan (2006: 176–177).

<sup>65</sup> Owen (1996: 618 (“Written After Seeing the Paintings of Wu Daozi”).

the manifestation of *Dao* 道 in works of art and *yi* 藝 – Artistry.<sup>66)</sup> By *Dao* Su meant instinct or an appropriate relationship with the world that enabled the artist to grasp shapes in his mind, whereas *yi* meant the ability to materialise these shapes in the form of painting.<sup>67)</sup> Wu Daozi's original art was for Su Shi a sign of Dao existence, however it is difficult to define on what grounds the connoisseur distinguished the presence of this manifestation. It might have been based on his very personal approach to particular pieces of art, their style or subjects. One is obvious, however – that collecting in Su Shi's life was not just an occasional expression of interest. It was very deliberate action aimed at the realisation of his aesthetic and connoisseur ambitions additionally supported by the will of self-cultivation relying on improvement of skills in using brush and ink by studying earlier works.<sup>68)</sup>

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bush (1978) = Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting. Si Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 27. Second printing with corrections. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Chen (2011) = Hui-huihsia Chen 陳慧霞, “Song Sushi Duanshi Congxingyan 宋蘇軾端石從星硯.” In: *Jingcai yibai: Guobao zongdongyun* 精彩一百：國寶總動員 (Splendid treasures: a hundred masterpieces of the National Palace Museum on parade). Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan 國立故宮博物院, 2011.
- David (1971) = Sir Percival David, *Chinese Connoisseurship. The Ko Ku Yao Lun The Essencial Criteria of Antiquities a translation made and edited by Sir Percival David*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1971.
- Ebrey (2008) = Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture. The Collections of Emperor Huizong*. Washington, Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2008.
- Egan (1989) = Ronald C. Egan, “Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy”. In: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Vol. 49. No. 2. Dec. 1989: 365–419.

---

<sup>66)</sup> Su Shi mentions these two criteria in his colophon on Li Gonglin's mountain painting [*Shu Li Boshi shanzhuang tu hou* 書李伯時山莊圖後, SSWJ (1986: 70.2211), translation in: Bush (1978: 36–37)], as well in *Wen Yuke hua Yundang guyan zhuji* 文與可畫筧簞谷偃竹記 (An Account of Wen Yuke's Painting of Yundang Valley Slanted Bamboos) [in *Jing jin Dongpo wenji shilüe* 經進東坡文集事略 (Collected Prose of Dongpo), SSWJ (1986:11.365), translation in Bush (1978: 37)]. Sometimes, however, the poet would contradict himself claiming optimistically that men of great personality actually do not need to practice because they know how to handle a brush in a natural way.

<sup>67)</sup> Bush (1978: 36).

<sup>68)</sup> Egan (2006: 176).



- Egan (1994): Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Egan 2006: Ronald C. Egan, *The Problem of Beauty. Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Elkins (2010) = James Elkins, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*. With a Foreword by Jennifer Purtle. Singapore: NUS Press National University of Singapore, 2010.
- Harrist (1998) = Robert E., Jr. Harrist, *Painting and private life in 11th century China: Mountain Villa by Li Gonglin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- He (2000) = Chuan Xin He 何傳馨, Pu Sitang 蒲思棠 (ed.), *Qian Xi Nian Songdai Wenwu Da Zhan 千禧年宋代文物大展* (China at the inception of the second millennium A.D. Art and culture of the Sung Dynasty, 960–1279), National Palace Museum: Taipei, 2000.
- Lesbre, Liu (2004) = Emmanuelle Lesbre, Liu Jianlong, *La peinture chinoise*. Paris: Hazan, 2004.
- Lo (2002) = Andrew Lo, “Su Shi yu yan wenhua”. [Su Shi and the Culture of Inkstones]. In: *Songdai wenxue yanjiu congkan (Studies on Song Dynasty Literature)*, Vol. 8, 2002: 471–493.
- Owen (1996) = Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature. Beginnings to 1911*. Edited and translated by Stephen Owen. New York • London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- SDOCQ (1988): SDOCQ *Su Dongpo chuan qi 蘇東坡傳奇*, Collective work. Taipei: Shinchosha 新潮社, 1988.
- Sirén (1956–58.1) = Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting, Leading Masters and Principles*. 7 vols. New York: Ronald Press, 1956–58.
- SSSJ (1982) = *Su Shi shiji 蘇軾詩集*, 50 *juan*, by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101). Edited by Kong Fanli 孔凡禮, 8 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1982.
- SSWJ (1986) = *Su Shi wenji 蘇軾文集*, 73 *juan*, by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101). Edited by Kong Fanli 孔凡禮, 6 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1982.
- Struman (1997) = Peter C. Struman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Sullivan (1965) = Michael Sullivan, “Notes on Early Chinese Screen Painting”. *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1965: 239–264.
- Tian (2005) = Tian Xiaofei, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture. Record of a Dusty Table*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 2005.
- Watson (2007) = Philip Watson, *Grand Canal, Great River: The Travel Diary of a Twelfth-Century Chinese Poet*. Translated with a commentary by Philip Watson. London: Frances Lincoln, 2007.
- Yang (2003) = Yang Xiaoshan, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere. Gardens and Objects in the Tang-Song Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center. Harvard East Asian Monographs 225, 2003.
- Yang (2004) = Yang Xiaoshan, “Li Deyu’s Mountain Villa at Pingquan: Forming an Emblem from the Tang to the Song,” *Asia Major* 3rd series, 17, pt. 2, 2004: 45–88.

- YNLBCH (1997) = Yang Xin, Nie Chongzheng, Lang Shaojun, Richard M. Barnhart, James Cahill, Wu Hung, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1997.
- Zhang (2006): Zhang Anzhi, *A History of Chinese Painting*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2006.
- Zheng (200(1999)): Zheng Jiahua 鄭家瑋, "Song Sushi Congxingyan 宋蘇軾從星硯". In: *National Palace Museum monthly* 故宮文物月刊, 200(1999): 124.