

THE MARIE THERESA L.
VIRATA COLLECTION

OF ASIAN ART: A FAMILY LEGACY

家族遺珍：瑪麗·泰瑞莎·L·維勒泰亞洲藝術珍藏



CHRISTIE'S

維勒泰珍藏珍罕明式紫檀家具

柯惕思

許多世紀以來，紫檀的神秘魅力一直使中國人著迷不已。由於紫檀起源於遙遠的異國，歷來在人們心中一直蘊結著濃厚的珍奇情懷。它色澤深紫紅，磨光後表面晶瑩飽滿如玉，再加上味道清香與份量極沉等出眾的特性，反映出達官貴人的權勢和身份。作為製作家具的材料而言，紫檀則深受清宮的青睞與珍愛，事實上，大多數存世的紫檀家具實例就反映出“清式”的形體和裝飾。但維勒泰珍藏拍賣的拍品中出現了幾件“明式”的紫檀家具這一稀有流派，更顯鳳毛麟角了。

早期文獻記載紫檀從南亞進口。唐朝時，中國與邊界的貿易頻繁，往來無阻，因此紫檀之類的異國珍奇在王公貴族之間頗為盛行。然而，從最早的的文獻，甚至一直到明代多數的史料，涉及紫檀的都是相對較小的物件，如棋盤、圍棋子、畫軸頭套、小盒及樂器等。到了晚明，簡樸風貌的硬木家具在蘇州地區日益風行。萬曆丁酉年間（1597年）王士性紀實蘇州的審美世故，就說到：“……又如齋頭清玩、几案、床榻，近皆以紫檀、花梨為尚，尚古樸不尚雕鏤”。雖然黃花梨家具具有準確斷代至明晚期的實例存世，紫檀卻一個也沒發掘到；還有就是，現存極簡約主義的“明式”紫檀家具實例又比那些黃花梨的少之又少，故而彰顯出它的無比珍貴性。

清初的幾位皇帝極受江南文化的影響，而江南的核心在蘇州。十八世紀初期，帝王們重振宮廷的家具作坊而延攬廣州和蘇州的能工巧匠。雍正和乾隆兩代的大內檔案顯示皇宮家俬制作常用紫檀、花梨、楠木和雕漆。而清宮造辦處檔案中反覆出現的一個操作慣例，就是用紫檀料來複製宮廷裡的祖傳老家具。拿雍正六年的記錄來說，依旨要根據一張古老朱漆桌的尺寸及另外一張陳年黑漆桌的造型，加以紫檀料做一張新的條桌；還有用紫檀料複製一張老的朱漆燈挂椅。就像這樣，大內宮中融合新舊元素於一爐的家具，成為後來令人耳目一新的宮廷時尚，並且也蔚然成風，遍及國內。

維勒泰收藏的六件“明式”紫檀家具實例也反映了蘇州硬木家具興起於晚明而後風行整個清代的事實。四出頭官帽椅（拍品編號640）是經典樣式，並且表露出這款椅子完美又純正的表現形式。羅漢床（拍品編號643）是很少看到的紫檀大作，然而卻有優美的比例和細膩的細節，可謂拿捏得宜恰到好處的傑作。紫檀小几（拍品編號642）則反映出清早期皇家的審美品味，頤和園的藏品中就有一張不相上下的紫檀几著錄在王世襄的書裡；而紫禁城裡的故宮收藏也有類似的小几。四面平紫檀凳（拍品編號641）展示出紫檀作品中罕見的極簡約風格；形體上則是典型“明式”概念的體現。一對紫檀小凳（拍品編號644）則反映了精緻細膩的蘇州工藝，這可由座面底側利用編織細密的藤席覆蓋邊框結構例舉說明。紫檀天平架（拍品編號645）也代表江南地區一項經典的“明式”物種，它簡樸的細節設計呼應了王士性對明晚期蘇人好簡樸的風格勝於雕刻裝飾的評論。是次拍賣呈獻之明式家具實為難得可貴之珍罕傑作。

















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CHRISTIE'S

RARE “MING-STYLE” ZITAN FURNITURE FROM THE VIRATA COLLECTION

Curtis Evarts

The mystique of *zitan* has captivated the Chinese for centuries. With origins from faraway foreign lands, *zitan* has historically been associated with the exotic. With quintessential qualities of perfumed fragrance, massive weight, deep-red pigmentation, and a surface that polishes to a rich, jade-like luster, it reflects the virtuous characteristics associated with those of nobility and rank. As a material for furniture-making, it was highly esteemed at the Qing Imperial Court, and indeed, the majority of surviving examples of *zitan* furniture reflect “Qing-style” forms and decoration. But even more unique is the rarified genre of “Ming-style” *zitan* furniture, of which several examples appear in the Virata Collection sale.

Early texts note that *zitan* was imported from south Asia. During the Tang dynasty, when Chinese trade flourished freely across foreign borders, exotic goods of *zitan* were highly popular amongst the aristocracy; however, most early references—even throughout most of the Ming period—relate to relatively small objects such as game boards, *weiqi* counters, scroll ends, boxes, musical instruments, etc. During the late Ming, the popularity of plain-styled hardwood furniture swelled in the Suzhou region. In the year 1597 Wang Shixing wrote of the sophistication in Suzhou and noted, “... objects for the studio, including stands, tables, couches and beds, of recent are all made of *zitan* or *huali*. Plain styles are valued over those with carved decoration.” While examples of *huanghuali* furniture have survived that can be securely dated to the late Ming period, not one of *zitan* has yet been discovered; and that extant examples of minimalistic, “Ming-style” *zitan* furniture are considerably fewer than those of *huanghuali* marks its unique rarity.

The early Qing emperors were highly influenced by the southern Jiangnan culture, where Suzhou was centrally located. In the early 18th century, they revitalized the Imperial furniture-making workshops with highly skilled craftsman recruited from Guangzhou and Suzhou. Records from the Yongzheng and Qianlong period Imperial archives reveal that *zitan*, *huali*, *nanmu*, and decorative lacquer were commonly used to produce furnishings for the Court Palaces. That *zitan* was sometimes used to reproduce designs from older pieces is a practice that appears recurrently in the Imperial workshop archives. For example, during the 6th year of the Yongzheng reign (1728), a new table of *zitan* was ordered to be made according to the size of an old red lacquer table and the style of another old black lacquer table; and *zitan* chairs were also reproduced after an old, red-lacquer lamphanger chair. Thus, new and old were melded at the Palace, and subsequently, a refreshed Imperial fashion also trickled out throughout the kingdom.

Six examples of “Ming-style” *zitan* furniture from Virata collection reflect the rise of popularity of hardwood furniture in Suzhou during the late Ming period and its popularization throughout the Qing dynasty. The yoke back armchairs are of classic pattern and reveal a perfected and pure expression of the type (lot 640). The *luohan chuang* is a massive work in *zitan* as rarely seen; yet with exquisite proportions and detailing, it is a masterwork without excess (lot 643). The small *zitan* table reflects Imperial taste during the early Qing period (lot 642); a matching piece in the Summer Palace collection was catalogued by Wang Shixiang, and tables of similar style are found in the Palace collection at the Forbidden City. The flush-sided *zitan* stands exhibit an extreme in minimalistic style that is rarely seen in works of *zitan*; the form epitomizes the concept of “Ming style” (lot 641). The pair of smaller *zitan* stools reflect the refinement of Suzhou craftsmanship exemplified by the use of finely woven cane mat on the underside to conceal the structure of the seat frame (lot 644). The *zitan* balance stand also typifies a Ming-style pattern from the Jiangnan region, and its simple detailing echoes Wang Shixing’s comments of the late Ming period preference in Suzhou for plain styling over carved decoration (lot 645). These “Ming-style” objects are truly a rare offering.















