



Mid-17th century

Tin-glazed earthenware

Height: 18 1/2 inches (47 cm)

**ATTRIBUTED TO DAMIÁN  
HERNÁNDEZ**

Mexican (Puebla de los Angeles)

Purchased with funds contributed by  
Mrs. John Harrison, 1907, 1907-295

**FIRST LOOKS**

What is this?

Describe the pictures and  
patterns decorating this jar.

How are they organized?

What section is not decorated?

What repeating patterns  
can you find?

What is this jar made of?  
How was it made?

Where are the handles?  
What makes them special?

**JAR WITH HANDLES**

Shaped like an upside-down pear, this jar is decorated with many bright blue pictures and patterns. It is just over 18 inches tall and almost as wide. Look for two serpentine (snakelike) handles on either side of the neck, wriggling down the shoulders. Have you noticed all the blue dots that form the flowers and fill the figures? The pictures and patterns are arranged in six bands, each separated by thin, blue lines. The neck and lip of the jar feature repeating flower designs. In the center, surrounded by hundreds of flowers, prancing ponies pull an elegant lady in a fancy carriage driven by a man with a ponytail who looks Chinese. Nearby, barely visible in this photograph, a man on horseback is fighting a bull. Below, another band of blue shapes boldly contrasts with the broad band of plain white. Two thin lines circle the foot of the jar.

Over 300 years ago, this jar was made in Puebla de los Angeles, located in central Mexico. Using earthenware (a red-brown clay), a potter formed the jar on a potter's wheel. Later, he pressed three coils together to make the curvy handles. Next, the jar was fired (baked) in a kiln (a special oven) to make the clay strong and hard. After cooling, every surface of the jar "inside and outside" was covered with a thick, white, tin-based glaze. Light and dark blue glazes were painted over the white glaze to create the decorative pictures and patterns. Finally, the jar was fired again, causing the glazes to melt. After it cooled, the surface of the jar became hard and shiny.

While the jar was made in Mexico using high-quality Mexican clay, it beautifully combines decorative elements from Spain, Italy, China, North Africa, and the Middle East. Look for the letters *h* and *e* written in script, perhaps identifying its maker as Damián Hernández (dah-mee-AHN ehr-NAHN-des) by the first two letters of his last

name. Hernández was born in Spain and learned his trade from a Spanish potter in Puebla de los Angeles. Founded in 1531 by the Spanish, this city became a center for producing European-style ceramics. Hernández was an organizer of the potters' guild there, which, like European guilds, was established to ensure quality. The potter's wheel, tin-based glazes, and kilns were all imported from Europe to Puebla. The glazes contain an expensive blue pigment called cobalt from Persia (present-day Iran).

The shape of the jar is similar to Spanish olive jars and Chinese storage jars. The painted pictures are like Italian-influenced pictures on white, tin-glazed earthenware from a city in central Spain, Talavera de la Reina. Eventually, throughout Mexico the Spanish city name *Talavera* came to mean ceramics produced in Puebla. The distinctive blue-and-white color scheme was inspired by blue-and-white Chinese porcelain. The densely decorated surface with repeated dots can be traced to Islamic motifs popular in Spain when Muslims ruled large portions of the country, from 711–1492.

## ABOUT LIFE IN COLONIAL MEXICO

Mexico became a colony of Spain in 1521, and was called "New Spain" for 300 years until gaining independence in 1821. The Emperor of Spain\* and Holy Roman emperor, Charles V (1500–1558), appointed a Spanish nobleman as the first viceroy, or ruler, of New Spain. The colony rapidly became a bridge connecting people and trade between Europe and Asia. Sailing ships brought fancy household goods across the Pacific Ocean from China to Acapulco via the Philippine Islands. Then the goods were transported over land to Veracruz, and by ship across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. In the marketplaces of New Spain, exquisite porcelain and colorful silks from China mingled with thick Spanish carpets and Venetian glass, as well as intricate featherwork and lacquerware produced locally by indigenous (native) people.

People in Mexico and Europe were especially attracted to the pure white, translucent surface, smooth texture, and strength of porcelain, which was invented by Chinese potters during the Tang dynasty (618–907). The explorer Marco Polo named it *porcellana*, which means cowrie shell in Italian, because cowrie shells have similar smooth, white



*Bowl*

Early 15th century,  
Yongle Period (1403-1424)

Porcelain with underglaze blue  
decoration of bamboo, pine,  
and plum (Jingdezhen ware)

3 5/16 x 8 11/16 x 8 3/4 inches  
(8.4 x 22 x 22.2 cm)

Chinese

Purchased with the Henry B. Keep Fund,  
the Joseph E. Temple Fund, the Bloomfield  
Moore Fund, the John T. Morris Fund, and  
with funds contributed by Mrs. Walter H.  
Annenberg, The Beneficia Foundation,  
Mr. and Mrs. J. Welles Henderson, Mrs.  
Howard H. Lewis, Mrs. William F. Machold,  
Mrs. Donald Petrie, Meyer P. Potamkin,  
Hugh Scott, and Mrs. William L. Van Alen,  
1984, 1984-116-1

surfaces. Although European and Mexican potters did not discover the secret of making porcelain for several centuries, during the 1600s they made tin-glazed, earthenware pottery like this jar, inspired by blue-and-white Chinese porcelain like the tiny bowl pictured here. Johann Friedrich Böttger of Dresden, Germany, discovered the technique of making porcelain in 1708, almost a thousand years after the Chinese.

The fancy carriage painted on this jar carries a lady dressed in European-style clothing holding an umbrella for protection from the sun. At this time in Mexico City, wealthy men and women liked to drive in their coaches to Alameda Park in the late afternoons, where they flirted and tried to impress one another. Later, in the evenings, ladies entertained in their homes, surrounded by luxury goods such as large, painted folding screens (inspired by screens from China), fine furniture, cushions, and carpets. The walls were covered with embossed and gilded leather imported from Spain. Fluttering expensive fans, the ladies served foamy hot chocolate prepared with water, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla, and, sometimes, hot chilies. People also engaged in polite conversation, or performed music on harps or guitars. Today, many of the objects used on a daily basis (like this jar) are considered to be rare and beautiful works of art.

\* Charles's titles are somewhat confusing. As King of Spain, he was known as Charles I, but as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire he was called Charles V.

## SECOND LOOKS

Can you find some letters written in script? What could they be?

Most of the decoration is blue on white. Look for a few places where the decoration is dark blue on light blue. Which combination is brighter? Why?

How do you think this jar was used? (Hint: find out its size.)

Based on what you can see, who might have owned it? Why?

## CONNECT AND COMPARE

Create a family tree for *Jar with Handles* using words and pictures that show influences and elements from a variety of cultures: Mexican, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and Islamic.

Fancy china and carriages were status symbols in colonial Mexico. What are some status symbols in your school and your neighborhood?

### RELATED ART PROJECT

Fold several squares of white construction paper (6 x 6 inches) in half. Cut out several different kinds of jar shapes. Choose one to decorate with pictures and patterns using only blue markers, crayons, oil pastels, or watercolors. Draw a picture on your jar that shows something about your life. Try using dots in parts of your design. Place the decorated vase on a large piece of light-colored construction paper. As you move your vase around on the paper, imagine that it is in colonial Mexico—in a living room or dining room, an outdoor patio, or a church altar. Then draw the scene you imagine around your vase.

*This jar is included in Mexican Art, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by generous grants from Delphi Financial Group, Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company, and The Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation.*