



CATALOGUE DETAILS

Author	--
Place of production	Valencia
Place of origin	--
Title/object name	Kitchen panel
Date	1789
Measurements	143.5 x 348.5 cm
Materials/technique	Polychrome ceramic
Inventory no.	CE1/00525
Location in the museum	First floor/courtyard

DESCRIPTION

Valencian tile production, which reached its pinnacle in the 18th Century, included a rich typology within which we find these kitchen tile panels. Kitchen tile veneers were fitted exactly into the spaces for which they were designed. The tiles were decorated with scenes of everyday life in the home, in which household utensils, furniture, crockery and clothing of the characters were represented in rich detail.

This panel, with polychromatic decoration on a glazed white background, represents a family scene inside a kitchen of its time, giving an idea of what could have been happening in the very same kitchen in which these scenes were originally located. Appearing around a table are the master of the house, sitting and reading, three women carrying out various tasks such as sewing, childminding and washing the dishes, together with another male servant in hunter's clothing and a child playing with a ball. Their names and actions are commented on in an inscription at the top of the panel, dated 1789: "Whoever looks at this scene / observes carefully and Sensibly / that Sir Joseph is reading / his wife is sewing / Sebastian is watching / Mariquita

working / Eleuterio like a child / with the ball is playing / and Anica with her scourer / the dishes is scrubbing.
Year 1789 // Almivar // MEDITA / TIONS. // COMPO / SED BY / F. LUIS / OF GRA / NADA.”

REREADING

<p>Related them</p>	<p>Gender division of labour Public/domestic dichotomies</p>
<p>Rereading</p>	<p>The 18th Century was one of contrast between tradition and modernity, which was also reflected in the question of the female condition.</p> <p>The ideas of enlightened despotism encouraged a reformist movement which affected multiple spheres of social life. Reform projects in the fields of education, customs, economy, literature, and culture were brought about thanks to the work of the new Intendants (government officials), the Sociedad Económica (a private association established in various cities throughout Enlightenment Spain to stimulate the country's economic and intellectual development), and the illustrated press. Changes were also seen in sociability which found expression at private gatherings, in colosseums, at social gatherings in the gardens of palaces and in other public spaces.</p> <p>The reform movement equally affected women and the role that they played in society. The traditional situation of a woman saw her shut away in the house, limiting her role to the domestic sphere: looking after her husband, bringing up the children, looking after the household finances, spinning and managing the servants. In the majority of cases, a woman's social life was limited to religious acts, and she did not participate in cultural and literary events. The 18th Century began with a panorama similar to that of the previous century, and in some aspects the Enlightenment failed to achieve radical transformations.</p> <p>In the economic sphere, recent studies have confirmed the role that women played in this pre-industrial phase – working in agriculture, in the previously rural textile industry that then became industrialised, in the trade workshops as the wives, daughters or widows of the workmen, in new centralised manufacturers, in shops and in domestic service. It is therefore evident that, contrary to the belief that women were idle, they played an important role both in family life and in the economy of the country at that time. This reality was reinforced at a legal level by the Royal Decrees (Reales Cédulas) in 1779 that permitted women to work in occupations deemed “compatible with the decorum and strength of their sex”. These decrees limited, in part, the range of jobs that a woman could undertake, citing reasons of morality and modesty as well as compatibility with family and maternal obligations.</p> <p>The arrival of the Bourbon royal family and the country's opening up to France explains why some women of high social class embraced Parisian fashion and customs and adopted them as their own. Breaking away from tradition, women started to leave the house more and participate more actively in social life through social gatherings, literary meetings, or public performances such as bull fights, theatre and dances. Equally, the relationship between the sexes and the attitude towards love changed, becoming freer. The rate of marriage declined and the rise in separations led Cabarrús, King Carlos III's minister of finance, to put forward the possibility of establishing a divorce law.</p> <p>However, all of these aspects must be given some context, since they did not occur equally in all layers of society. They were found principally among the nobility and the upper middle-class, remaining unknown to the masses of working-class women, as well as a</p>

section of nobility which, either continuing to embrace tradition or being in favour of the ideas of the Enlightenment, called into question these new social customs. Furthermore, followers of the Enlightenment continued to regard a woman's work as being limited to the domestic sphere.

Despite the limitations and the nuances regarding the change in the female condition in the 18th Century, a favourable change was emerging in her social integration. This was fundamentally brought about by interventions and projects that were still very few and far between. This progress is linked to the establishment of Enlightenment ideology, which reached maximum expression between 1760 and 1780, coinciding with the reign of Carlos III (1759-1788). The events that occurred in France with the Revolution in 1789 affected the Spanish government significantly, and in the effort to contain the influence of the revolutionary thinking, there was a more conservative reaction that undermined this reform movement.

In relation to the above, it must be pointed out that the family depicted in this tile panel, although showing signs of being relatively comfortable, belonged to the lower classes of society. The image of the woman that the scene offers is the most rooted in tradition and an indicator of the enormous inequalities between both sexes. The clear opposition between the tasks being carried out by each is evidence that women remained at the edge of intellectual activities (reading of Fray Luis of Granada), as well as of leisure activities or activities linked to the outside world. These activities, and especially hunting, remind us of the role of the man as the family's provider of food and sustenance.

Text translated in the context of a Translation Work Experience module by students in the School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies at the University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ UK. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/ppl>; <http://www.uea.ac.uk>