

A New Elegance: Ofuke Ware (Early to Mid-17th Century)

After the death of tea master Furuta Oribe in 1615, his disciple Kobori Enshū (1579–1647) rose to prominence as an official instructor to the shogunate. Oribe, like Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) before him, had championed the aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*, which celebrates natural, imperfect forms. In contrast, the aristocrat Enshū preferred *kirei-sabi*, a refined style that was more reflective of courtly sensibilities. Under his influence, tea implements with clean lines and uniform ornamentation came back into fashion.

One such style, called Ofuke ware, is distinguished by a translucent ash-and-feldspar glaze ranging from yellowish green to deep blue in color. Ofuke ware is sometimes also called “Mino celadon” due to this coloration. Potters often used molds or casts to create perfectly uniform dishware sets of Ofuke ware, such as the five bowls displayed here. This is opposite to Oribe ware, which was rarely identical even when pieces were produced as a set. Potters making Ofuke ware also tended to use stencils and sprigging techniques for ornamentation rather than painting their designs freehand.

The name “Ofuke” is believed to come from Nagoya Castle. The lord of the castle built a kiln on a section of the castle grounds called the Ofuke Bailey. Under the patronage of the Tokugawa family, who controlled the castle, many tea implements were produced in this kiln. Many of those tea implements were given as gifts, and the style came to be known by the name of the bailey.