Post Medieval French Imports and English Copies at Lincoln

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This note describes an ornate Saintonge chafing dish of the 16th century from south-west France together with an English copy of simpler form of similar date; also an early 16th century English lobed cup based on French prototypes. All three are in Lincoln Museum.

Lincoln Museum 9625.06. Found on site of Samuel's Shop, High Street Lincoln. (fig. 1)

Three fragments from an ornate chafing dish. Hard smooth light buff fabric with pale yellow lead glaze outside. There were four large applied medallions round the dish of which three survive. In between four low level loop strap handles terminated in further medallions of which only one survives. Round the top there were eight medallions applied horizontally to provide the supports for whatever was being kept warm or heated. These have a simple stamp of crosses and pellets. The various medallions are painted in pale green and purple. The medallions form no obvious iconography, are very crudely made and not even applied straight.

This chafing dish is an ornate example of a well known type which was made in south-west France in the Saintonge. Waster heaps are known at La Chapelle-Des-Pots, near Saintes, but the kilns have not yet been located. Examples of the simpler chafing dishes with the same characteristic form typified by the low level handles and simple medallion knobs with human faces are known from many sites in England especially round the East, South and West coasts. Many fragments are known but there are complete examples from London (Guildhall Museum 23725), Southampton (In God's House Museum) and from Glenluce Abbey, Kirkcudbright. This latter example is the only other one so far adequately published. The largest group come from the great rubbish deposits in the Castle Street area of Plymouth where a whole range of types is represented showing development from simple four handled dishes to complex multiple forms with up to eight knobs. None of the examples are closely dated but they generally fall into the period of the 16th and 17th century and represent the continuation of the trade with the Saintonge which included the polychrome jugs of the later 13th and 14th centuries. The Lincoln chafing dish with its polychrome yellow, green and purple decoration falls into the same class of wares of Mediterranean origin which were a feature of the Saintonge in a lead glaze as opposed to the original tinglazed prototypes.

There are only two other ornate chafing dishes so far known from England, (i) a single medallion from Bishopsgate Street, London (Guildhall Museum, M.IX.112) which is almost identical to the large Lincoln face medallion. The decoration is exactly the same but it is
not the same stamp since both the beard and the forehead have slightly different treatment. (ii) A single medallion from Godstall Lane, Eastgate, Chester (in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester), with a similar stamp to that from Lincoln with the two opposed figures. All three were clearly made at the same kiln and have the same ware and colouring. The medallions on the top are a common pattern found on other Saintonge chafing dishes but the grouping of the pellets and the running together of the two pellets on the left-hand cross of the Lincoln example, is exactly repeated on a much simpler chafing dish from London (Guildhall Museum M.IX.113) so that both these were the same stamp. It is difficult to put a close date on the Lincoln chafing dish but as the simpler examples appear to be late 15th or early 16th century, and the 17th century examples tend to be much more flamboyant with the decoration becoming more formalised and losing its naturalism, a date in the middle or end of the 16th century might be suggested.

Lincoln Museum 9624.06. Found on site of School of Art, Monks Road, Lincoln. (fig. 2, 1). Four fragments from another chafing dish. Hard smooth orange-pink fabric glazed outside yellow-orange on the body and dark green in the decoration and glazed part of the way inside dark green. The shape of the upper part, with its pushed up knob supports and the medallions applied to the outside, is the typical form of the usual Saintonge chafing dishes as opposed to the ornate horizontal medallions of the dish described above. Only one handle and one support survive. There are usually four handles but in view of the distance between the surviving handle and the first medallion there would only be room for two handles and four medallions unless it was not symmetrical and only had three handles. A further complication is the form of the base. Usually this is hollow at the base with a piece across the bottom of the bowl as reconstructed for the chafing dish above. In this case there is sufficient of the side to show that there never was a piece going across so it must have been open to the bottom with a closed base.

Besides these two anomalies there is the colour of the fabric which is orange-pink while most of the Saintonge wares are white or buff fired from almost iron-free clays. There are some pink Saintonge wares but this Lincoln example is coarser with more tempering. Finally there is the question of the decoration which is quite unlike any of the other Saintonge chafing dishes. The main feature is the medallion with the crowned Tudor rose with the initials E.R. In between the decoration is incised with small cross stamps, again a feature which is not found on French chafing dishes. The English Royal coat of arms does not preclude foreign manufacture as this is commonly found on imported French Beauvais jugs of the early 16th century and on later Rhenish Bellarmines, but taken with the unfamiliar decor and technique and the unusual fabric and variation on the shape, it may be suggested that this was an English copy. We know that French chafing dishes with their characteristic low level handles (a feature only found in south-west France never in north France) were copied in England. In Lincolnshire itself there is a rough undecorated example from a late 15th century kiln site at Tofton found by Mrs. E. H. Rudkin (with other examples at Boston and Tattershall Castle) and in Yorkshire the decorated examples were copied and examples have been found at Caistor, (Lincolnshire), Hull, Scarborough and York.

A local origin may, therefore, be suggested for the Lincoln chafing dish. Clearly the potter based his dish on Saintonge imports but he slightly changed the form and type of decoration. The question of date is a difficult one. The problem is the same as that of the dating of the green glazed stove tiles, plaques and cisterns7 which have been variously attributed to the reigns of either Edward VI (1547-1553) or Elizabeth (1558-1603). The crowned rose was used throughout the Tudor period but was more favoured by Henry VIII than Elizabeth who preferred the portcullis symbol. It was for example used by Henry VIII on his shilling coins. A date in the middle of the 16th century, rather than later, might therefore be suggested. This is supported by the shape of the chafing dish and the well executed pattern which is much closer to early than late Saintonge chafing dishes.
POST MEDIEVAL FRENCH IMPORTS AND ENGLISH COPIES AT LINCOLN

Lincoln Museum, 60.619. Found in Minster Yard, Lincoln. (fig. 2, 2).

Base of a bowl or cup in hard grey-buff fabric with a reddish tinge. Speckly apple-green glaze inside and out. Rough finger pressing on the outside of the footed base. Inside a stamped circular medallion with the sacred IHS monogram in the centre surrounded by an inscription AVE MARIA GRACI A PLEN. The precise form of the IHS is very like that on some late 15th century Tournai Jettons. In the inscription the Rs are very odd and look like Ns or Roman Rs. The C is also rather un-gothic. The medallion would suggest a date in the late 15th or early 16th century.8

The only parallel to this medallion is another find from Lincoln which came from the Trollope collection and is now at the British Museum.10 This is a medallion in a similar grey ware with the same inscription. This looks as though it was applied to the outside of a vessel, such as a chafing dish, rather than the inside since it is partly free-standing at the back while this example is firmly pressed into the base of the cup.

It is difficult to be sure of the reconstruction of this vessel but it was clearly open and it is most likely to be a lobed cup.11 These often have decoration inside such as the ornate free-standing animals inside the large lobed cups at York and London (Guildhall Museum).12 In France the only parallel is from the area of the Loire where bowls are found with internal medallions.13 There is no reason why the Lincoln example could not be made in England and the grey ware, as opposed to the usual white French wares confirm this. Lobed cups are known to have a wide date range from the early 15th century14 until the 17th century so a date of the early 16th century as suggested by Mr. Rigold for the inscription would fit very well.

Notes

1 Chafing dishes were used as food warmers in the late medieval and post-medieval period. Charcoal was burnt in the dish and the container holding the food, etc., to be heated or kept warm was placed on the knob supports. There are many different forms and no typology has yet been published. For preliminary note and bibliography see:—Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc., LVIII (1965), 122-4, fig. 19, no. 8,28/5.
2 Trans. Dumfries & Galloway Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Soc. XXIX (1950-1), 185, fig. 6 and Plate 7.
3 Archaeologia, LXXXIII (1933), 114-132.
5 All three drawings with this note are by Mr. D. S. Neal. I am grateful for his help with the reconstructions and for his comments on the shapes.
6 Miss K. I. Richardson, 'Excavations in Hungate, York' Arch. J. CXVI (1959), 99, fig. 26, nos. 18-22.
8 G. C. Brooke, English Cédis, (1932), plate XL, no. 1.
9 I am greatly indebted to Mr. S. E. Rigold for his reading of this inscription and his comments on the dating.
11 Rackham, op. cit. plate 44.
13 P. Cordonnier-Detrie—Le Faience Lyron, plate 84.

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