

# An unusual kitchen gadget from Roman London

Over the last 40 years pottery reports on Roman London have arrived at the point where much of the excavated material can be referenced to standard classifications of both fabric and form, and recent analyses concentrate on the chronological, economic or functional patterns that the assemblages represent. Nevertheless, London was capable of attracting unusual vessels from all parts of the empire which fall outside the existing type series.

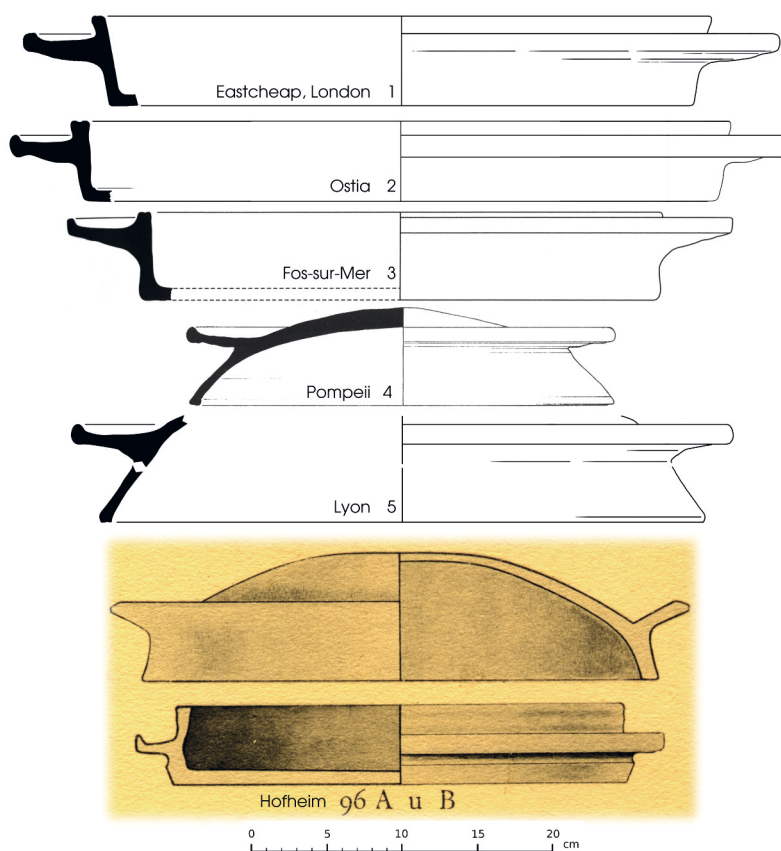
Paul Tyers investigates where a flanged dish from excavations at Eastcheap fits in.

The vessel under scrutiny here is from the MOLA excavations at 41 Eastcheap in the City of London, and was illustrated in the latest volume of the LAMAS transactions.<sup>1</sup> It is a large shallow dish with a wide flange projecting from the wall, which terminates in an upturned rounded bead (see right, 1). The diameter of the vessel alone – 49 cm – marks it out from the general run of Roman ceramics but there are close parallels for both the form and dimensions from a number of sites in Italy, including Ostia – the port of Rome – and from southern France (right, 2–3).

Visitors to the *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* exhibition at the British Museum in 2013 will have seen an almost identical vessel from Herculaneum, paired in the display with a domed lid of similar proportions also featuring a prominent broad flange.<sup>2</sup>

This upper domed part of the Herculaneum pair is an example of a rare Roman pottery form known as a *clibanus* (see right, 4–5 for examples from Pompeii and Lyon).<sup>3</sup> It was probably used in a particular cooking technique where a fire was set on a flat surface, the ashes scraped aside and the items to be cooked then placed under the cover on this pre-heated surface. The purpose of the flange on the cover was to hold the hot ashes and charcoal which were heaped over the lid, thus providing additional heat from above.

There is a pair of very similar vessels from the Roman fort at Hofheim, published by Emil Ritterling in 1913.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the classic reports on Roman pottery from the early 20th century, and his samian forms are still in daily use. Ritterling's coarse ware type 96A is a shallow dish with a flange, and his type 96B is a domed flanged lid (right). In his text, Ritterling argues



ABOVE Examples of Roman vessels from around the empire compared to the Eastcheap find

strongly that the pair belong together. They are from the same area of the fort and have the same unusual fabric, unique on the site, and the lip of the lid sits within the flange on the dish, with the bead on the end of the flange preventing the lid from slipping. Ritterling also notes that the vessels show traces of sooting on the surface, which may be linked with their use in the cooking technique described above. While somewhat smaller than the Herculaneum or London examples, at 34 cm diameter, Ritterling's type 96 nevertheless indicates the function of the large flanged dishes of the Eastcheap type.

Turning to modern parallels, the pairing of the flanged dish and lid

slightly resembles the *tajine* of North Africa, though this lacks the elaborate flanges of the Roman vessels. A rather closer parallel, the *peka*, is a traditional cooking vessel of the Balkans. This is now generally made in light steel rather than ceramic, but is strikingly similar to the Roman *clibanus*. It too has a flange to hold the hot coals that cover the domed lid, and was shown on a recent BBC series, *From Venice to Istanbul*, featuring Rick Stein travelling through Croatia.<sup>4</sup>

Finally we come to the usual ceramicist's questions of date and source. The Eastcheap dish is from 'Period 2 phase 3' of the activity on the site, described as Boudiccan fire debris

and the construction of a fort or military camp, and dated *c.* AD 60/61–85.<sup>6</sup> The Hofheim pair was from the latest phase of activity in the vicinity of the headquarters building of the fort, dating to the early AD 70s, while the examples from the Vesuvian cities were – presumably – in use in AD 79. These examples all provide good dated parallels for the Eastcheap dish, and in the case of Hofheim, a similar military context in the northern provinces.

The fabrics of the flanged dishes and *clibani* from France and Italy vary somewhat, but they are generally dark grey-brown or red-brown in colour, with a rough texture, and mica, volcanic and large feldspar and quartz inclusions are noted. They are invariably assigned to an Italian source, though more than one workshop is responsible, judging by the diversity of wares and typological details. Once sufficient examples have been assembled a programme of detailed fabric analysis could no doubt unravel the full story.

Unfortunately the Eastcheap dish can contribute little more to this picture at present. In the publication the dish is

described only as *miscellaneous tempered ware* – surely intended as a temporary holding label rather than a description of a fabric – and reference is made to Central Gaulish coarse micaceous wares dated *c.* 90 BC to AD 40 as a possible parallel. My attempts to examine the sherds to confirm (amongst other things) the Italian source suggested here, or the Central Gaulish source suggested in the report, have been unsuccessful as the material has not been lodged in an accessible archive, and no date can be given for its deposition. Pending that, the suggestions made above have been largely on the basis of the published illustration.

This, then, is the background of the Eastcheap dish. There is as yet no example of an imported *clibanus* domed lid from London, though of course one may lurk unpublished, or unrecognised, and they should certainly be looked for in future analyses. Nevertheless it seems that someone felt the need to duplicate the cooking techniques of their homeland in early Roman London, and was prepared to obtain the correct kitchen gadget to do so.

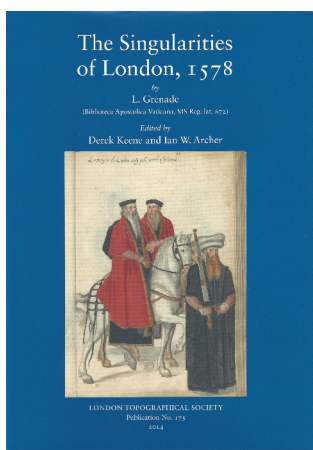
## Acknowledgements

The Eastcheap dish was drawn to my attention by Dr Jane Timby. Rupert Featherby and Vince Gardiner of MOLA provided additional information on the pottery from 41 Eastcheap (site code EAE01) and its availability. Colleagues at the *SFECAG* meeting in Autun in May 2016 commented on a poster I presented there, and a fuller report on *clibani* and flanged dishes will be published in the *Actes* of the congress.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. K. Pitt 'Excavations at 41 Eastcheap, London EC3' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **65** (2014) 158, Fig. 6 <P5>.
2. P.C. Roberts *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (2013) 253, Fig. 305.
3. A.L. Cubberley, J.A. Lloyd and P.C. Roberts 'Testa and Clibani: The Baking Covers of Classical Italy' *Papers of the British School at Rome* **56** (1988) 98–119.
4. E. Ritterling *Das Frühromische Lager bei Hofheim in Taunus* *Annalen des Vereins für Nassauische Altertumskunde und Geschichtsforschung* **40** (1913).
5. R. Stein *From Venice to Istanbul: Episode 2, Croatia* (transmitted August 2015) BBC.
6. *Op cit* fn 1, 154–8.
7. P.A. Tyers 'Un bref aperçu des cloches de cuisson dans les provinces septentrionales' *SFECAG: Actes du Congrès d'Autun, 2016* (in prep).

## The Singularities of London, 1578



L. Grenade (editors Derek Keene and Ian W. Archer)

London Topographical Society  
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288 pp, 61 col and b/w figs

Hardback, £25

Reviewed by Peter S Clayton  
FSA

Emanating from Vatican Ms Reg. lat. 672, this is a remarkable account of Elizabethan London, even more so in that it was written in French in praise of the City's welcoming reception of religious refugees, and with a distinctly Protestant outlook; in 1581 4,141 aliens were listed as resident in London. Grenade dedicates his account of the City and its immediate suburbs, its ceremonies, major buildings, markets and people to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City which 'has on many occasions opened her breast to harbour close to her most noble bowels of the Church of the Lord Jesus, at those times when rope, sword and fire were pursuing it on all sides'.

It is not known exactly who Grenade was but there are clues in the text that associate him with the complex family of the Granados who had fingers in many London pies in the 1570s, and family connections spread through Europe. Grenade appears to have visited London in 1577–78 and possibly stayed with the remarried widow of Sir James Granado, as he shows a distinct interest in the areas close to her house in Mincing Lane.

Thirteen chapters, describing perambulations through the City and 'the singularities that are in it', are largely concerned with the areas around the City gates, Southwark, St Katherine's, the Tower and Thames Street, but also dwell on the privileges, laws, policies and governing bodies that make the City what it is. Grenade has a sense of the highlights but a greater interest in the history and customs of the City, and also civic philanthropy. He particularly notes in this regard how if a man belongs to one the 'Halls', ie a livery company, and is poor he is given a house, a reasonable pension and money to set him back on his feet, and he is buried with honour and an excellent sermon. The text, as may be expected from an overwhelmed foreigner, is a panegyric to a 'noble and triumphant city... so ordered that nothing better is possible'. Although perhaps erroneous at times, this is no bad thing as he gives us such a lively picture.

The copious, informative notes are backed by a fine selection of pertinent illustrations particularly strong in details from contemporary maps and engravings of buildings and officials.

This is one of the most important descriptions of 16th-century London and is presented here in a very readable translation, with the original French text also reproduced. It is remarkably good value for an interesting and well produced book.