

Imports of Spanish Pottery to England in the Later Middle Ages

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SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of the documentary evidence for the mechanisms whereby the different types of Spanish pottery imported from the 13th to the 15th century reached England¹. Much Iberian pottery arrived through trade with Valencia, Granada and Andalusia, but nearly all commercial imports to Southampton, Sandwich and London came in on Catalan and Italian vessels, often as containers for oil, ginger, and sugar. In London, however, the situation is complicated by Flemish interests. The problems of identifying the different forms, their provenance, function and destination are discussed with reference to entries in the records for London and Southampton, which include details of merchant, date, vessel, cost and associated cargo, and the potential of the Customs Records to contribute to pottery studies is demonstrated.

The presence of Spanish wares in English ports and elsewhere is well known through excavations, but the scale of its availability and the circumstances of its arrival are less easy to determine.

Geographical proximity, complementary goods, and reasonably good political relationships (except for certain periods during the Hundred Years War) promoted Anglo-Spanish trade in the 13th to 15th centuries. England's main trading partner was Castile, and the Anglo-Castilian treaties of 1466 and 1489 repaired the damage of the Hundred Years War, and provided stable political conditions in the later 15th century. Then, eight to ten ships a year of Bristol, Dartmouth and London would regularly sail to Andalusia, where English merchants kept factors in Seville and Sanlucar; tens and sometimes scores of Basque ships carried northern and some southern goods into English ports, and Castilians kept agents in London. From Castile, the English sought iron and wines from the north, and almonds, fruit, wines, olive oil, dyes, mercury, silk, carpets and fine pottery from the reconquered south. In return they sent cargoes of dyed cloth suitable for a range of buyers, including the royal household. Full details of recorded pottery imports, as well as further information on the background of this branch of Anglo-Spanish trade, are to be published shortly (Childs forthcoming a, b; for a full discussion of Castilian trade with England see Childs 1978).

Trade also took place with Navarre, Portugal, Valencia, Catalonia, and Granada, and it is the last three which were particularly important for the supply of Iberian pottery to England. Trade from Medi-

terranean Iberia was carried by Catalan, Genoese and Venetian vessels, since English ships rarely ventured into the Mediterranean before the end of the 15th century. The Italian activity was clearly important in bringing Spanish goods to England, but the precise extent of this is unclear. Many Italian and Iberian trading goods were similar and it is often impossible to know whether the olive oil, fruit, and sugar, and their containers have come from Italy, Valencia, or Andalusia.

Pottery may have come to England as personal souvenirs, or as gifts. English merchants who spent time in Spain might well have brought home pottery they had liked; Spaniards resident in London might have used it, as might the colonies of Italians in Southampton and London, whose ships regularly called at Valencian, Granadan, and Andalusian ports. Some, however, was traded from an early date. The purchase of pottery for the court, apparently from a speculative trading voyage, is attested by the well-known example of the pottery bought for Edward I's Spanish queen in 1289². Then Gundisalvus Martini bought for her at Southampton off a ship of Spain figs from Seville, raisins, dates, pomegranates, oranges, four jars of olive oil (*jar' cum oleo olive*), forty-two dishes or bowls (*scutelli*), ten 'saucers' (*salsarii*), and four pottery jars of foreign colour (*olle terrene extranei coloris*).

The English customs records of imported goods are an obvious source to explore for more consistent information. They must be used with some caution as some goods (personal or royal) are exempt, pottery containers may not be mentioned, and smuggling could

occur. Nonetheless they provide us with interesting evidence of importers, types and prices. Only Sandwich, Southampton and London show clear documentary evidence of direct pottery imports from south Europe, but coastal and land transport would distribute the goods further. The recorded commercial imports were nearly all on Italian and Catalan shipping coming from the Mediterranean. This explains why these three ports are the main importers, and why rather more references are found in Southampton documents than in those of London, as Southampton welcomed more of the Genoese carracks than did London. With the heavy involvement of Italian shipping in the carriage of pottery, caution must be exercised. Pottery on Catalan ships may well be Iberian, but that on Genoese and Venetian ships may include a mixture of Italian pots with others picked up in Granada, Valencia, or Andalusia, their landfalls on the routes from the Mediterranean to England and Flanders. Even that described as '*malik*', may be in Malagan style rather than of Malagan provenance. The information of the customs accounts must always be used with caution, but they do offer interesting information on importers, types and prices.

In England, coastal vessels and land transport distributed goods further afield. For instance in 1481 the *Katherine* of Topsham arrived in Exeter on 7 June with 100 *paynted pottis* for Nicholas a Burne, and ten days earlier (on 28 May) the ship had been in Southampton where the Italian trading fleet had just arrived. Probably Nicholas bought his pots from the newly arrived Italians³ (Quinn and Ruddock 1938, II, 162).

Pottery imports were recorded infrequently in the early 14th century but included a shipment in 1303 of earthenware dishes and jugs of *malyk*' (*discorum et picherorum terre de malyk*') valued at 30 shillings brought to Sandwich (Gras 1918, 269), and in 1342 five crates of potter's vessels (*cannes plen de vasis figuli*) were carried on the *Santa Maria* of Barcelona⁴. References multiply from the late 14th century. Most pottery came on Genoese ships, but some was unloaded from Catalan or Venetian vessels. Some was specifically said to be of Malaga (*malik*'), although this is as likely to indicate a particular type to the English customs collectors as to indicate exact provenance. Sometimes this is described as painted. Much is unidentified, but of it some at least is likely to be Spanish. Some was described as Genoese (*jeen* or *jene* pots), possibly from Liguria or from other Italian centres sent through Genoa, or possibly re-exports of southern Spanish pottery, which was sent in considerable amounts to northern Italy.

Typical of cargoes unloaded at Southampton are the following. In 1391 Antonio Calfate unloaded from the *George and Katherine* of Genoa five dozen painted pots (*pottes de malec' depict'*) valued at 3s 4d, among a large cargo of dates, spices, nuts, sugar, and cotton⁵. In January 1432 the Catalan carrack of Ramon Amat

brought 100 cups (*coppes*) valued at 5s for Bernard Bonat in a cargo which included *jarres* of green ginger and *pottes* of sugar⁶. In 1438–9 the Genoese carracks of Niccolo Doria and of Marco Giustiniano unloaded jars (*olle*) of *malik*'⁷. In 1442 the Genoese carrack of Illario Squarzafico unloaded two 'coffins' of Malaga jars (*olle*) valued at 5s and twelve dozens of them valued at 15s, and in the same year the carrack of Sebastiano Lomellini unloaded nine dozen Malaga jars (*olle*) valued at 5s⁸. In 1448 the carrack of Morizio Cattaneo again highlights the difficulty of precise identification. It arrived for the first time in January and unloaded a Mediterranean cargo which included Malaga and Spanish raisins, alum which would have come from Asia Minor, woad from Lombardy, and three baskets of unspecified earthenware jars (*iiij sport' ollarum terrenarum*). Six months later it was back again with a similar cargo, this time including forty dozens of pottery jars said to be from Genoa (*ollarum terrenarum de jeen*) valued at 40s. In the first case there is no further clue to provenance, and from these documents alone it is difficult to be sure of the exact provenance of all the pottery it carried⁹.

The records of London show fewer Mediterranean pottery imports for the 14th century than do those of Southampton, since fewer Italian and Catalan ships arrived there, but some southern goods, such as oil and treacle were brought in jars, and in early 15th century London imports increased, as they did at Southampton. Here they indicate more clearly the complexity of trade with imports from the Low Countries as well as from the Mediterranean. In 1429 the ship of John Cockesson, almost certainly in from Flanders, unloaded four butts containing sixty dozens of empty Malaga jars (*ollarum de malik' vacuarum*) valued at 30s. At a halfpenny each this is a low valuation. They were perhaps not of the same quality as those brought for themselves, yet they were still attractive or useful enough to sell. On the Venetian galley of Giacomo Barbarigo that year merchants imported eleven dozens of Malaga jars (*ollarum*) valued at 1d each, and in another galley twenty jars were valued at 3s 4d. The valuations at 1d or 2d each seem to reflect the usual prices of Malaga jars. Altogether that year over 920 Malaga pottery vessels of some shape or other arrived by sea in London¹⁰. Further imports of Malaga dishes and jars came on Venetian galleys in 1442, and 1445, when forty jars described as from Damascus (*olle damask'*) were also imported¹¹. This may indicate pottery in the damascene style, but since the Venetians regularly traded with Beirut, they were well placed to pick up and re-export Syrian and other Levant pottery.

There are few indications of pottery being imported from other areas of Spain, or on ships other than those of Italians or occasionally Catalans, until the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, when some imports appeared on English and Iberian ships, sailing on the Andalusian

route but with no indication of Mediterranean sailing. Whether these pots came from Andalusia, or were still of Malagan provenance or type, or from Valencia is quite unclear. In 1495 John Gibson's ship unloaded oil, Spanish lambskins, orchell dye, soap, and (for Gabriel de Ariga) 130 *erthen pottez* valued at 23s 4d¹². Pottery containers pose problems since provenance is never given, but again some must be from Iberia. The *jarres* which contained green ginger on Italian ships such as the *S. Gieronimo* of Genoa at Southampton in 1387 may have been Italian¹³, but containers of oil, the commodity most frequently recorded in jars, which came on Portuguese, Catalan, Basque and Italian ships, must include a substantial number of Iberian ones. For example in 1308 three Portuguese ships at Bristol unloaded 47 jars of oil valued at 12d the *jarda*¹⁴ (Gras 1918, 354–6, 358). In 1342 the *Santa Maria* of Barcelona carried no fewer than 407 *jarres* of oil¹⁵. On the *Nuestra Senora* of 'Alkayte' (probably Lequeitio), blown to Devon in 1418, there were 600 *jarres* of olive oil valued at 4d the jar¹⁶. Catalans in 1433 imported fifty-one small jars (*parvo' jarr'*) of oil worth £1 6s 8d (just over 6d each), fifty-two valued at £1 (something over four and a half pence each) and two more valued at 1s 8d (10d each)¹⁷. The oil jars imported on Italian ships seem to have been much larger than this. In 1447 Italian imports to Southampton included, besides 115 tuns of oil, one *jarr'* valued at 10s, two *jarres* at 13s 4d (6s 8d each), forty-one *jarres* at £10 5s (5s each) and eleven small jars (*jarr' parvo'*) at 13s 4d (about fourteen and a half pence each)¹⁸.

Sugar came mostly in barrels or boxes, but sometimes in pots, and presumably from the area where the sugar was refined, which could be Valencia, Granada, or Andalusia. In 1387 the *Santa Caterina San Antonio* of Genoa brought 186 boxes of *sugar en potz* for Cipriano de Mare. The collectors' account for this year, which records the consignment as *pottsugre in pottes*, seems to make clear that the sugar was in pottery containers, and that this was not simply a description of a type of sugar¹⁹. Perhaps the pots were frequently wrapped, and packed in baskets. In 1396 the *Maria* of Genoa, which bore a typical Mediterranean cargo of woad, sugar, ginger, rice, dates, cotton, alum and painted jars as mentioned earlier, brought for Simone Negre five baskets of sugar in *ollis* valued at 70s, and Domenico Spinola brought 101 and a half baskets of the same valued at £72 7s 6d²⁰. At Sandwich in 1465 Gherardo Canigiani unloaded thirteen baskets with thirty-nine jars of sugar, each pot weighing 20 lb (*xiiij sport' cum xxxviii ollis sugur pond' le pott xx li*)²¹. Jars and pots were occasionally used for many other commodities, which normally came in baskets, boxes, or bales: raisins, treacle, marmalade, mercury, black soap, tunny, and fish oil.

The customs accounts thus provide interesting details about the southern pottery trade, but also leave problems of provenance, type, and scale. Provenance is

often not given, and descriptions of jars and dishes as of Malaga or of Genoa or of Damascus must be viewed with an open mind. They may describe a generic type, rather than a precise provenance, but there is no reason to doubt that many shippers knew just what they were importing and gave the customs collectors accurate information. The shape and style of the pots is similarly imprecise in the customs accounts. The words themselves, *olla*, *potte*, *discus*, *disshe*, *vasus*, *picher*, *jarre*, *coppe*, *scutellus*, *salsarius*, *tassa* are all difficult to interpret since the language used (and the image thus conjured up by the word) might come from an English, Iberian, or Italian context, or be deliberately but not necessarily accurately Latinised. An extensive discussion by Alejandra Gutiérrez on terms used in the Spanish pottery trade will appear in Gerrard, Gutiérrez and Vince (forthcoming). The customs accounts do, however, clearly describe some pottery as coloured or painted, and they also indicate a variety of sizes. Jars used as containers are sometimes specifically referred to as small, as when in 1395–6 at Southampton four *jarr' parvo' de zinziberis viridis* worth £12 were unloaded from the *Maria* of Genoa for Simone Negre²². Size may also sometimes be indicated by the weight of goods within pots, as when the Venetian galley in London in 1389 unloaded a *jarre* containing 30 lb of manna, and another containing 20 lb of treacle²³. Despite the apparent imprecision, there is a wealth of material here for pottery experts to examine.

Overall, recorded Mediterranean pottery could amount to several hundred vessels a year. The quantity of Spanish pottery vessels entering England in any year was of course smaller, even if all the containers of southern goods (some of which may not be Iberian) are added to those jars specifically said to be of *malik*, but imports were regular from the late 14th century. In London in 1429 the 720 empty 'Malaga' jars (*olle de malik' vacue*) brought from Flanders were added to by 192 'Malaga' jars brought on Italian vessels²⁴; at Southampton in 1442–3 at least 252 'Malaga' jars (*olle*) were imported²⁵; and in 1491–2 the Portuguese brought to the port 398 jars (*jarres*, *yerras*, *yeris*) of oil²⁶. Despite all the uncertainties of the records, and with the *caveat* that not all the southern pottery in them was from Spain, Spanish pottery would not be unusual on the markets of Southampton and London, nor unavailable to those who could afford a touch of foreign luxury.

Footnotes

1. This paper is derived from that delivered at the annual conference of the Medieval Pottery Research Group at Southampton in March 1993.
2. Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO) C47/4/5, fo.2.
3. Devon Record Office, Local Customs Roll 20–21 Edward IV.
4. *Calendar of Miscellaneous Inquisitions 1307–1349* (HMSO London 1916), No. 1819.

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5. PRO E122/138/20.
6. PRO E122/141/21.
7. PRO E122/141/23.
8. PRO E122/141/25.
9. PRO E122/141/29.
10. PRO E122/74/11.
11. PRO E122/77/4, 203/3.
12. PRO E122/79/5.
13. PRO E122/138/16.
14. PRO E122/5/1.
15. *Calendar of Miscellaneous Inquisitions 1307–1349* (HMSO London 1916), No. 1819.
16. *Calendar of Miscellaneous Inquisitions 1399–1422* (HMSO London 1969), No. 552.
17. PRO E122/141/21.
18. PRO E122/141/29.
19. PRO E122/138/16.
20. PRO E122/138/22.
21. PRO E122/128/6.
22. PRO E122/138/22.
23. PRO E122/71/13.
24. PRO E122/74/11.
25. PRO E122/141/25.
26. PRO E122/142/11.

Resumé

Cet exposé présente une vue d'ensemble des données documentaires concernant les voies empruntées par les différents types de céramiques importées d'Espagne, du 13^{ème} au 15^{ème} siècle pour s'acheminer jusqu'en Angleterre. Un grand nombre de céramiques ibériques arrivèrent en Angleterre grâce au commerce avec l'Andalousie, Valence et Grenade, mais pratiquement toutes les importations faites à Southampton, Sandwich et Londres arrivèrent par bateaux catalans et italiens sous forme de containers d'huile, de gingembre et de sucre. Toutefois, la situation est rendue plus complexe à Londres à cause de intérêts commerciaux flamands. Les problèmes d'identification des différentes formes de céramique, leur provenance, fonction et destination sont passés en revue dans cet exposé en se référant aux écritures tenues dans les dossiers d'enregistrement de l'époque à Londres et à Southampton. Ceux-ci contiennent des renseignements sur les marchands, les dates, les bateaux, les coûts et les autres cargaisons. On démontre ainsi le potentiel que peut offrir cette documentation douanière à la connaissance des céramiques.

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie gibt einen Überblick über die schriftlichen Zeugnisse, auf welche Weise die verschiedenen Arten spanischer Töpferware vom 13. – 15. Jahrhundert England erreichten. Ein großer Teil der Ware hat seinen Ursprung im Handel mit Andalusien, Valencia und Granada. Fast alle kommerziellen Importe nach Southampton, Sandwich und London wurden jedoch auf catalanischen oder italienischen Schiffen transportiert. Oft dienten die Tonwaren als Transportbehälter für Öl, Ingwer und Zucker. Die Schwierigkeiten, die verschiedenen Formen, Herkunft, Funktion und Bestimmung zu identifizieren, werden im Falle Londons und Southamptons anhand von Urkunden dargelegt, die Einzelheiten über Händler, Schiff, Datum, Preis und Schiffsladung enthalten. In London wird die Lage noch durch flämische Interessen kompliziert. Es wird auch gezeigt, welchen Beitrag Zolldokumente leisten können.