From maiolica to delftware: tin-glazed earthenware in London and the Low Countries, 1570-1630

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SUMMARY

English tin-glazed earthenware was introduced into this country by immigrant potters from the Netherlands who settled in Norwich in 1567 and moved to London three years later. Netherlands personnel, technology and decorative styles dominated English production till the second quarter of the 17th century. Facing competition from imports of oriental porcelain, tin-glaze potters in the Netherlands introduced a number of technological changes in an attempt to imitate porcelain, bringing about a transition from the traditional maiolica to the new delftware. These changes form the basis for an understanding of developments in England, and are discussed in this article.

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INTRODUCTION

If we survey the history of ceramics in this country we cannot do better than to start with the distinguished book on English pottery by Rackham and Read (1924), published nearly 80 years ago, but still a classic. They pointed out very forcibly that before the arrival of tin-glazed earthenware in this country there was no tradition of painting on pots with ceramic pigments. They stated, quite bluntly, 'there was no tradition in the use of ceramic pigments in England' (*ibid.*, 46). This is not to deny the earlier use of clear glazes, tinted or otherwise, or of decoration with coloured slip. This is a consideration of absolutely fundamental importance in the understanding of the development of tin-glaze production in this country. Naturally, many pieces of painted ceramics had been seen here, as examples of Spanish and Italian tin-glaze maiolica had been landed for several centuries in ports along the south coast, also coming into London, whence they had penetrated the hinterland. But nothing comparable had been made in England (Hurst 1991, 220-46).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIN-GLAZING IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

The particular purpose of incorporating tin into a standard lead glaze was to provide a white, opaque surface on which the decorator could work with coloured pigments. It was a very old technique, owing its origins to attempts in 9th-century Mesopotamia to imitate the white colour of Chinese porcelain (Lane 1947, 13), which had found its way to the Middle East along the old Silk Route and over the old maritime trading network. Interestingly, this was not the only time that attempts to imitate Chinese porcelain led to developments in the technology of tin-glazed earthenware production.

The practice of tin glazing spread through Egypt to North Africa and Moorish Spain, and then Italy, and thence to the Netherlands. It reached Antwerp *c.* 1510, when three Italian potters arrived there, almost certainly from Northern Italy, (Dumortier 1991, 241; Wilson 1991, 7), and a thriving maiolica industry developed. It was not, however, allowed to develop in peace: like all economic activity in the southern Netherlands, it was disrupted later in the 16th century with the appalling religious and social oppression of the ruling Spaniards, with the consequent civil wars, insurrections and pillage. It was a time of terror and mass migrations. The northern Netherlands, shielded by the major river systems, remained more stable and the centre of economic activity moved from the largely catholic south to the more protestant north (for a full account of these times, see Israel 1995). The maiolica potters moved too, some to the north,

and some abroad. So it was that in 1567, Jasper Andries, a direct descendant of one of the original Italian potters, and Jacob Jansen left Antwerp and settled in Norwich.

There were probably two reasons for the choice of Norwich, apart from the obvious proximity of East Anglia to the Netherlands. The first was the ever-present need of the tin-glaze potters for suitable clay. It has long been said that clay from Norfolk was used in admixture with local clay in the Netherlands, and hence could be relied on as suitable, though the earliest known record of clay being shipped abroad was of twenty tons going to Rotterdam in 1597 (Britton 1987, 26). The other reason for the choice of Norwich was probably social: by this time, the 1560s, the towns of East Anglia were full of refugees from religious persecution in the Low Countries. There were more than 4,000 in Norwich alone (Parker 1985, 119), comprising some 40% of the population of that city, so that the newly arrived potters could be sure of a welcome into a community in which they would feel at home. The two potters do not seem to have flourished in Norwich, as three years later, in 1570, they petitioned Queen Elizabeth for a waterside site in London, and a twenty year monopoly of tin-glazed earthenware production. This petition was not granted, possibly because of pre-existing patents, but in the same year Jacob Jansen moved to Aldgate where, joined by a number of potters from the Netherlands (Edwards 1974, 8), he set up a pottery which was to continue in production till 1615. This was the first tin-glaze pothouse in London. His erstwhile partner, Jasper Andries, soon moved to Colchester and, it is thought, set up in business as an importer and dealer.

THE EARLIEST LONDON TIN-GLAZED WARE

It is not known how many men were employed in the Aldgate pothouse, but the names of at least nine potters from the Netherlands who worked there are known (see Edwards 1974, 27). In the absence of any local tradition of tin-glaze pottery and painting it is to be expected that the skilled men all came from abroad and passed on their experience and techniques to locally recruited staff, who were likely to be employed initially on the more routine tasks. The methods of manufacture and the styles of decoration were of necessity those of the Netherlands, where the potters had learnt their craft. Consequently pottery from the Netherlands and from London of this period is visually indistinguishable, and can only be separated with certainty by micro chemical analysis of the body (Hughes and Gaimster 1999). It was not until the second quarter of the 17th century that English tin-glaze earthenware began to take on characteristics of its own. The Aldgate pothouse ran on till 1615 or so. Archer (1997, 570-1) has published a useful compilation of the working span of British tin-glaze pothouses. A famous maiolica piece made there is now in the Museum of London. The date is probably 1600, though this is a matter of dispute, as it may be read as 1602, and it is thought to depict the Tower of London. It has often been illustrated (see, for instance, Britton 1986, Plate B). The inscription is very interesting as it illustrates a habit common among pot painters of all ages of cutting the coat according to the cloth. The original verse ran 'The Rose is red the leaves are grene God save Elizabeth our noble Queene', but not having room for it all, the painter left out 'noble' – not a treasonable omission, perhaps, but a severely practical one. Hughes and Gaimster (1999, 70) confirm the London origin of this maiolica charger and, indeed, it must have been made in Aldgate because to the best of our knowledge this was the only tin-glaze pothouse then extant. That is, of course, if the date on it reflects the date of manufacture – of that you can never be certain, but as Elizabeth was on the throne at that date it is likely to be correct. It is certainly the earliest dated piece of English tin-glazed earthenware.

THE SOUTHWARK POTHOUSES

The next two potteries to be established in London, and the only others to be founded before 1630, were both south of the river, on sites near the Thames. Nearly all tin-glaze pothouses were near the water, for sea or river borne supplies of clay and fuel coming in and finished ware going out. The first of these two was at Montague Close, where two London merchants were granted a patent in 1612 to make 'Earthenware in the manner of Fiansa', that is, in the style of Italian maiolica. It seems probable that on the demise of the Aldgate works in or around 1615, the Netherlands potter Jacob Prien moved to Montague Close, becoming manager there in 1625, thus continuing the Netherlands tradition (Edwards 1974, 10).

The other pothouse was at Pickleherring Quay, in the parish of St. Olaves, Southwark. The owner was Christian Wilhelm who had come from the Palatinate, with his wife who was from Deventer in Gelderland (Tait 1960, 36). His intention was to make smalt, the basis of cobalt blue pigment, but in this he was frustrated by existing patents. By 1615 he seems to have switched to making tin-glazed earthenware, having been joined by two other potters from the Low Countries, John Rokensor from Middelburg and Christian Loest from Dollett (Britton 1986, 35) and, no doubt, by others whose names have not come down to us.

It is not possible to over-emphasise the importance of the Netherlands contribution to the establishment of tin-glaze earthenware production in England. This is borne out by an examination of the wares produced in these early years. As Ivor Noel Hume (1997, 16) wrote 'In the first half of the 17th century, when the Netherlands potters and

painters were the backbone of the London industry, and when English clay was used by their confreres in the Netherlands, telling one product from another is a tricky and often worthless task'. This sums it up admirably. Frank Britton (1986, 97) pointed out that even during the 18th century, potters were being brought in from the Netherlands to supplement the shortages of skilled labour. This is not so much a situation where Netherlands work was influencing the development of English work, but more the continuation of one tradition in another country. The absence of a local tradition in England, the predominance of Netherlands potters and painters with their techniques and skills and the continuing close contact with the continent brought about a situation whereby the London pothouses were to all intents and purposes merely a branch of the Netherlands tin-glaze earthenware industry. The Netherlands industry had effectively extended its geographical reach to include London. Where the pottery was made is not so important: by tradition, techniques, style and personnel, pots made in this country were Netherlandish. Not till the second quarter of the 17th century did the English work begin to achieve an identity of its own.

MAIOLICA AND DELFTWARE

Having established the basis of the London scene it is appropriate to move on to the main topic of this article, the transition from maiolica to delftware. These two terms are widely misunderstood and indeed often misused, and the confusion thus created obscures the very real part that the transition from one type of ware to the other plays in the history of ceramics.

The traditional tin-glazed earthenware of the Netherlands was maiolica, a continuation of the Italian production. For a comprehensive survey of this ware, see Korf (1981). It was made of coarse earthenware, heavily potted, with wide solid footrings of smallish diameter. It was predominantly decorated in polychrome (just 30% of the 700 pieces described by Korf are painted in blue only) and, importantly, had tin-glaze only on the obverse. The reverse side was given a lead glaze, possibly to save the expense of using tin, and consequently was never decorated. It was fired on trivets and when these were removed after firing some of the glaze came away, leaving three ugly marks in the middle of the design. The base of the trivet rested on the footring of the piece underneath and that footring was wiped clean of glaze for this purpose. (See Fig. 1). All these elements applied equally to the maiolica later made in London and in the Netherlands.

As the maiolica potters moved northwards in the face of religious persecution and civil chaos they established three factories in Haarlem, two in Amsterdam and eight in Delft, in the 1570s, and others followed. (van Dam 1962, 6-10). For a time the industry flourished. By 1620 there were six pothouses in Haarlem, six in Amsterdam, six in Rotterdam and eight in Delft; at that time there were two in London. (Archer 1997, 560-3).

Fig. 1 Fragment of Netherlands dish, first quarter of 17th century, with heavy, broad footring, wiped clean of glaze to accommodate base of trivet.

However, from the middle of the 16th century examples of Chinese porcelain had been brought to Europe by the Portuguese (Pinto de Matos 1994, 13), and many pieces had reached the Netherlands. The historical event which was to change the situation was the annexation of Portugal by King Phillip II of Spain in 1580, which aligned Portugal on the Spanish side in the Spanish oppression of the Netherlands. In 1595 Phillip closed the port of Lisbon to Netherland ships and as a result, Portuguese carracks bringing cargoes from the Far East were attacked by the Dutch. Thus it was that captured cargoes of porcelain were brought in to Amsterdam and auctioned there; for instance, sixty tons of Chinese porcelain from the Catarina were sold in 1604 (Godden 1979, 19) and much more followed as the Netherlands took over from Portugal in exploiting the ceramic riches of the East with the development of the Dutch East India Company. The population of N. Europe rapidly developed a demand for oriental porcelain, so much so that by the 1620s and 30s the Netherlands ceramic industry was facing a crisis.

In Amsterdam, mergers and liquidations led to a move from maiolica to tile production; similarly in Rotterdam, encouraged by changes in building regulations which outlawed wooden buildings. (van Dam 1982, 18). The industry in Haarlem was already seriously in decline, while in Delft most maiolica pothouses went over to tiles. Faced with the competition from oriental porcelain, the potters of the Netherlands tried to make it themselves, but as they did not have the secret of making porcelain, they had to compromise by making the best imitations they could. Thus began the development of what was eventually to become known as Delftware, though it was known at the time as "Hollants porcelain". This development proceeded alongside the continuing production of old-style maiolica, which persisted, particularly in England and Friesland, well into the

18th century.

Initially, standard maiolica forms and bodies were decorated in a Chinese style, for instance with the familiar 'Bird on a Rock' motive, with a border copying that of a kraak original (1989, 106) for example see Rinaldi. Fig. 2 shows a typical example of a Chinese 'kraak' export porcelain dish, of the early 17th century, (rim diameter 274 mm.) Fig. 3 shows a Netherlands maiolica dish of the same period (rim diameter 327 mm), one of the earliest attempts to copy Chinese porcelain in tin-glazed earthenware. It became increasingly obvious, though, that an acceptable substitute for oriental porcelain was not to be achieved in this way, and a number of far reaching technical changes were therefore embarked on (Korf 1981, 75). The whole body had to be thinner and much more finely potted; the heavy footring of maiolica had to be replaced by a thin, shallow one; both obverse and reverse had to receive a tin glaze; some way had to be found of removing the ugly marks left by the trivets; and finally the predominantly polychrome decoration had to make way for monochrome cobalt blue. The end product of all these changes put together is now known as Delftware.

Fig. 2 Chinese export porcelain dish, diameter 276 mm, early 17th century, with typical 'kraak' border.

Fig. 3 Netherlands maiolica dish, diameter 327 mm, second quarter of 17th century, imitating the Chinese 'Bird on a Rock' design, with 'kraak' border.

DISCUSSION

These changes deserve to be examined in more detail. First, the body. Korf (1968, 10) pointed out that the body had to be reduced to about a third of its earlier thickness; examining wasters deposited in 1638 in a dyke at Haarlem, he noted that the body was a mixture of red and light coloured clay. It is interesting that pottery inventories from the Netherlands in the 1620s and 30s listed stocks of English clay, one of 56 tons or thereabouts (van Dam 1982, 83-4). This was presumably high calcium clay from East Anglia, but Papendrecht (1920, 9) refers also to white clay from the Isle of Wight, probably the same as the clay from Dorset which Dwight later records as being used in Delftware production in London (Weatherill and Edwards 1971, 165). The incorporation of quantities of a high calcium clay would be needed to add strength to the mixture so that thinner bodies could be made, to give a lighter coloured body more easily disguised by the tin glaze and to reduce crazing on firing. It is not suggested that this was the first use of English clay in the Netherlands – and in any case similar clays were available from Tournai (Britton, 1987, 25).

Second, the heavy footring, which was shaped with a hooked tool, one of which was found in the waste of a pottery at Deventer which closed in 1637 (de Beer 1985, 42) and which were also illustrated by Piccolpasso (1980, 38) were entirely unsuited to the new ware and were replaced by one with a maximum depth of about 5mm and of much greater diameter (Fig. 4).

The elimination of trivet marks was a more intractable problem. As long as pieces were fired on trivets, some marks were inevitable. There were at least two types of trivet mark, as shown in Figs 5 and 6. In the first, as the trivet came away after firing, some of the glaze came away with it, exposing the body. In the second, some of the points of the trivet were left adhering to the surface. Where the trivet had been made of rough red clay ('chamotte'; Korf 1968, 11), these marks show up as red deposits. The first attempt to ameliorate them came with the use of glazed trivets (*ibid.*, 11) and while these left less obvious marks, this was not enough. Eventually the whole method of firing was changed, with the use of saggars and triangular pins; to be sure, the pins left marks, but these were on the underside and were very much less obtrusive. Piccolpasso, writing in Italy in the mid16th century (1980, 39), referred to the use of saggars and pins, but their first use in the Netherlands was reported in Rotterdam in 1627 (van Dam 1982, 17). In 1647 the inventory of a pothouse in Delft listed over 2,500 saggars (*ibid.*, 28), and in an excavated pottery in Leiden, which closed in the mid 1640s (Korf 1981, 25), there were piles of trivets and saggar pins on the same bench, suggesting that the change over was even then taking place. In the van Drecht collection in Amsterdam there are two saggar-fired dishes of the early 17th century, and Korf's (1981) survey

Fig. 4 Reverse of Netherlands delftware dish, diameter 238 mm, third quarter of 17th century, showing new style of footring and marks left by saggar pins.

Fig. 5 Fragment of Netherlands dish, first or second quarter of 17th century, with three pits in glaze caused by removal of trivets after firing.

Fig. 6 Fragment of Netherlands dish, first quarter of 17th century, with three deposits of red clay left behind on removal of trivets after firing.

shows a few of the same period, for example Nos. 666, 714, 736 and 748; these are maiolica in all respects except in the manner of firing. The earliest English tin-glazed earthenware fired in saggars comes from the middle of the 17th century.

The fourth technical improvement was probably the easiest to achieve, the use of tin- glaze on both the obverse and reverse surfaces. There are isolated examples of this in earlier years, and, indeed, the use of tin-glaze on both surfaces can be traced back to the 16th century on occasional pieces, and sporadically thereafter. In his study of some 700 pieces of Netherlands maiolica, Korf (1981) listed such pieces dated 1601 and 1626; two (undated) from the last quarter of the 16th century and six from the early years of the 17th, and a number of later pieces, all recognizably maiolica, *sensu strictu*, except for the tin-glaze on the reverse. With maiolica made in England, Lipski and Archer (1984, 17) listed a dated example of 1620. Otherwise, tin-glazed backs do not appear in any number until after the 1640s.

The combination of tin-glaze on the reverse and firing on trivets did not occur at all frequently, presumably because the new style dishes had narrow, wide footrings which would not accommodate the base of the trivet. A most interesting sherd was described by Korf (1981, 190): it had the standard 'Bird on a Rock' decoration, in blue, with a delftware-type footring with a tin-glazed back, but was fired on trivets. He dated it to the second quarter of the 17th century, adding that it must have been one of the first attempts of the Haarlem potters to make an imitation porcelain. In this type of work the transition from maiolica to delftware can be seen in process.

While maiolica was traditionally decorated in polychrome, with restricted use of blue on its own, the imitation of porcelain involved decorating in monochrome blue. This is often thought of as the simplest method, with polychrome as a more 'advanced' technique; but in historical terms in Europe, this is not so, and with the need to imitate Chinese export porcelain, polychrome decoration had to give place to monochrome blue. Similarly, older decorative styles and motives had to make way for Chinese elements such as Kraak motives and border patterns and 'Bird on a Rock' type of decoration. While blue derived from cobalt had long been used in Europe, Korf (1968, 15) found that the Haarlem potters were developing a light blue similar to Ming blue in the 1640s.

An interesting commentary on these changes arises out of a quarrel between two potters, father and son Verstraeten, in Haarlem (see Korf 1981, 86-90). They had entered into a legal agreement in 1642 that father would continue to make maiolica, the old way, and that son would make 'Netherlands porcelain' using the new methods. However, father found he could not prosper with the traditional maiolica and sought to evade the agreement. In 1648 he began to make the new ware and his son took him to court. It was agreed that he could continue to make it, provided he did not decorate it in the Chinese style. This ruling confirms that the new ware was essentially associated with the imitation of Chinese

porcelain, so that the substitution of other decoration removed the commercial competition. Clearly the important criterion was stylistic rather than technological, but the stylistic differentiation could only be achieved by the co-ordinated technical advances just described.

The introduction of Chinese type decoration came, both in the Netherlands and in England, between 1625 and 1630. In England the first dated piece with the 'Bird on a Rock' design is from 1628 (Lipski and Archer 1984, 310). The introduction of Chinese decoration is attributed to Christian Wilhelm of Pickleherring Quay, though he died in 1630, and the tradition was carried on by his colleagues.

Under the impact of Chinese porcelain, many factories in the Netherlands merged, went bankrupt or went downmarket to manufacture rough kitchenware; others specialized in tile production. Only three in Haarlem, and, later, two in Delft made the transition to 'Netherlands porcelain', or Delftware. In fact, the pottery industry in Haarlem had been on the decline since 1610 or so, so that when the potter Verstraeten (the father) sought to set up there from Delft in 1625 he was made welcome, and was encouraged to make the new ware immediately (Korf 1981, 86). Similarly, the potter Dorpman founded a pottery in Deventer and in 1624 was granted the sole right of attempting the imitation of Chinese porcelain (de Beer 1985, 53). However, it should always be remembered that the origins of 'delftware' are to be found not in Delft but in Haarlem.

CONCLUSION

When, in 1647, the importation of Chinese ware came to an abrupt halt, the way was open to the Netherlands and English potters to exploit the situation, and this they proceeded to do. By 1660 there were 30 factories employing 1000 workers in Delft alone, making 'porcelain', and taking advantage of a number of empty breweries to use as factories (van Dam 1982, 40). The concentration of production in Delft led to the town giving its name to the new ware. The number of factories in London also began to increase, till in 1680 there were eight (Archer 1997 560-3). Old style maiolica production in the Netherlands had largely died out by 1675, except in Friesland, where it continued into the 18th century. In this country, tin glazed earthenware in the form of maiolica was made from 1570 till about 1720; in the form of delftware, from 1630 till about 1840.

Many ceramicists in this country fail to distinguish properly between maiolica and delftware. Clearly the groups cannot be described so exactly that problems of identification at the interface do not occur, but in general terms the transition between the heavily potted, traditionally decorated maiolica and the more delicate, Chinese porcelain inspired delftware came about in the second quarter of the 17th century. Thereafter, delftware developed under its own impetus, but that is a different though no less interesting story. The technological changes which underpinned this transition were worked out primarily in the Netherlands tin-glaze industry, of which the London factories effectively formed part.

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Since preparing the text of this article, a most important book on this subject has been published. This is:

Dumortier, C. 2002, Céramique de la Renaissance à Anvers. De Venise à Delft. Bruxelles, Racine.

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Résumé

La poterie émaillée anglaise fut introduite dans ce pays par des potiers immigrants des Pays Bas installés dans un premier temps à Norwich en 1567, avant de s'établir à Londres trois ans plus tard. Le personnel, les technologies ainsi que les styles décoratifs hollandais ont dominé la production anglaise jusqu'au deuxième quart du 17 ème siècle. Devant faire face aux importations de porcelaine orientale, les potiers néerlandais introduisirent un certain nombre d'innovations technologiques afin d'imiter la porcelaine, favorisant ainsi la transition du *maiolica* traditionnel à la faïence. Ces changements, essentiels à la compréhension des développements céramiques en Angleterre, sont discutés dans cet article.

Zusammenfassung

Zinnglasierte Tonware wurde von eingewanderten niederländischen Töpfern nach England eingeführt, die sich 1567 in Norwich niederließen und drei Jahre später nach London zogen. In der englischen Produktion herrschten Niederländische Handwerker, Technologie und dekorative Stile noch im zweiten Viertel des 17. Jahrhunderts vor. Unter dem Druck orientalischer Porzellanimporte führten die niederländischen Zinnglasurentöpfer verschiedene technische Veränderungen ein, die Porzellan imitieren sollten, was zu einem Übergang von der traditionellen Maiolica- zur neuen Delftware führte. Diese Veränderungen, die in dem Artikel behandelt werden, formen die Grundlage für das Verständnis der Entwicklung in England.