

# Late medieval Iberian pottery imported into the Low Countries

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## GENERAL BACKGROUND

Late medieval Iberian pottery imported into north-west Europe falls into two main groups: fine decorated wares mainly traded as luxury items because of their appearance, and glazed or unglazed coarse wares which came as the containers of imported food and drink. The fine wares were predominantly lustre-decorated tin-glazed open dishes and bowls, with only a few closed wares, from Andalucía and Valencia. There were isolated examples of *Cuerda Seca* (Hurst, 1968, 202), Paterna (Hurst & Neal, 1982, 93 & 99); and Catalan blue (Renaud, 1957, 6, fig. 1). Single finds such as these were probably imported to N.W. Europe as souvenirs or as the personal belongings of merchants; only the finest lustrewares are found in quantities suggestive of commercial trading. In view of the fact that a large proportion of Spanish 13th and 14th century pottery is Green and Brown decorated tin-glazed ware, it is surprising that these do not seem to have been imported into north-west Europe, when similar wares imported from other countries in the western Mediterranean are fairly common. (Hurst, 1968).

The most frequently imported late medieval coarse wares were unglazed red micaceous ware costrels of Mérida type from the Alentejo in Portugal together with a few examples of large green-glazed bowls (*lebrillos*) possibly from Andalucía or the Algarve. There were also a few undecorated coloured glazed jars and black-painted wares which were originally thought to have come from the Near East (Hurst, 1968) but it is now more probable that they are all Spanish from various centres (Hurst, 1982). Finally, there is a range of unglazed amphorae, and large and small jars and bowls which presumably came from the Western Mediterranean but which are hard to parallel in Iberia, Italy or North Africa. There is thus a wide variety of Mediterranean pottery imported into north-west Europe from the Western Mediterranean, between the 13th and 15th centuries, most of it co-

ming from Iberia. In contrast, Italian wares are rare and Near Eastern vessels are found on only half a dozen sites, though they are widely distributed as far north as Bergen and Trondheim in Norway, which is also the furthest extent of the Iberian fine and coarse wares.

In the 16th century the popular Rhenish stoneware decorated jugs and tankards supplanted the imports of Mediterranean fine decorated pottery while at the same time there was a rise in the production of Low Countries Maiolica which was first made in the second half of the 15th century. Imports from Spain at this time were of quite a different character: they comprised Seville wares, which are likely to have arrived in the Low Countries with the soldiers during the period of the Spanish occupation. Types include common household wares such as Isabela Polychrome, Yayal Blue and Columbia Plain: a similar assemblage to that associated with the Spanish settlement in the Americas after 1492 (Goggin, 1968). Together with these Seville wares came an increased number of Mérida-type wares from the Alentejo with a wide variety of forms for everyday use, such as bowls and dishes. For the luxury trade Spanish lustreware was mainly replaced by Italian maiolica from Liguria and Montelupo together with lead-glazed wares from Pisa (Blake, 1981). The changes in the 16th century therefore almost completely stopped the importation of the finer Spanish wares which were replaced by locally made wares or imports from Italy. The connection of the coarse Iberian wares with the Spanish troops is confirmed by the fact that they are rarely found in Britain.

## SPANISH LUSTREWARE

Spanish lustreware may be divided into four groups (Hurst, 1977, 72) of which I and III are the major ones, with II falling as a hybrid between them: I. Early Andalusian Lustreware made at Málaga in the 13th and 14 centuries;

II. Late Andalusian or Early Valencian Lustreware which may have been made at Málaga or Manises during a long overlap period in the 14th and early 15th centuries; III. Mature Valencian Lustreware made at Manises in the second and third quarters of the 15th century; and IV. Late Valencian Lustreware in the last quarter of the 15th and the early 16th century.

I. **Early Andalusian Lustreware** first reached north-west Europe in the second half of the 13th century. It was most common in England, where about 50 examples have been found from about 20 sites (Hurst, 1977, 74). Only a few jugs and bowls were traded across the North Sea as a small part of the considerable interchange of pottery types (Dunning, 1968). There are examples from only four sites in the Low Countries but, as two of these are very recent finds, it is expected that more will be found, particularly at towns like Bruges which was probably the transshipment centre for the five Andalusian jugs the Frisian traders took to the north Frisian coast of Germany (Hartmann, 1975, 82, pl. 26, nos. 6-10 and Zick, pp.     in this volume). No Andalusian pottery penetrated the Baltic (Hurst, 1978) but there are examples at Bergen in Norway which are also likely to have been transhipped from either Bruges or London.

II. **Late Andalusian or Early Valencian Lustreware** of the late 14th or early 15th century has been found from only six sites in the Low Countries, while there are about 20 examples from 12 British sites.

III. **Mature Valencian Lustreware** by the middle of the 15th century was not much more common in Britain, comprising about 50 vessels from some 50 sites, but in the Low Countries it is found in large numbers on many sites, while the distribution pattern was extended to the Baltic, with examples in the National Museum of Copenhagen and in Lübeck (Hurst, 1978) and increased numbers are also found at Bergen. There was nothing special to north-west Europe in this increase, which was part of the considerable expansion in Mediterranean trade which is demonstrated by the large numbers of Mature Valencian Lustreware sherds found – no longer as single finds but in large groups – in southern France (D'Archimbaud, 1969), and in Italy at Genoa (Blake, 1972), Pisa (Tongiorgi, 1970 & Berti, pp.     of this volume), Tuscania (Johns, pp.     of this volume) and Adriatic Italy (Nepoti, pp.     of this volume). The trade was also eastwards to Egypt, Iraq and Russia.

In the Low Countries, the evidence for Mature Valencian Lustreware in the middle of the 15th century comes from four main sources: 1. Documentary references to the importation of Valencian pottery to Bruges by the Dukes of Burgundy, 2. Valencian lustreware with the arms of the Dukes of Burgundy, 3. Paintings by Flemish artists including examples of Valencian lustreware and 4. Sherds of Valencian lustreware found at 25 sites in the Netherlands and 6 in Belgium.

#### 1. *Documentary evidence*

The Dukes of Burgundy had increasing contact with Spain in the second quarter of the 15th century, at the time when Moorish patterns were giving way to gothic designs at the rapidly expanding Manises potteries. In 1427 and 1428 Philip the Good sent embassies to Spain to negotiate marriages for him with Isabel of Urgel and the daughter of John

II of Castile. Although their missions were unsuccessful they visited Valencia, and may at this time have first acquired Valencian lustreware. In 1441 there is documentary reference to Valencian wares imported into Bruges free of duty via the port of Sluis (Viaene, 1970); most important evidence in view of the Sluis find described in this paper.

#### 2. *Lustreware with the Burgundy Arms*

There are several Valencian dishes surviving which bear the arms of Philip the Good as they were before 1430, when the arms were impaled with the lions of Brabant and Limburg. These dishes may have been acquired during the missions of 1427 and 1428. One dish (Frothingham, 1951, 94, pl. 58) still has Andalusian type Islamic decoration, but another dish (Frothingham, 1951, 109, fig. 69) has the lustre disc rosettes and gothic foliage typical of Mature Valencian Lustreware of the middle of the 15th century.

#### 3. *Flemish paintings depicting lustreware*

It was Rackham (1926, 29, 97 & pl. 2) who first drew attention to the Valencian lustreware, together with early South Netherlands Maiolica illustrated in a Book of Hours painted for Engelbert of Naseau by the Master of Mary of Burgundy between 1477 and 1490 (Pacht, 1948, 76 & Alexander, 1970, pls. 79-80). It has been suggested that the pottery shown in these two pages represents the collection of the Dukes of Burgundy set out on shelves (Frothingham, 1951, 97) for display rather than use. The Book of Hours was later given by Engelbert to Philip the Fair, as is shown by the addition of his arms to the manuscript. In the Low Countries, Mrs Beerman-Hefting drew attention in 1939 to examples of Spanish pottery in Flemish paintings. The most notable of these is the Portinari Altarpiece, painted by Hugo van de Goes, now in the Uffizi, Florence, which must have been painted before 1482. This contains a typical blue and lustre albarello (Friedlaender, 1956, pl. XI).

#### 4. *Lustreware fragments in the Low Countries*

The first piece of Manises lustreware found was a typical albarello like that on the Portinari painting. This was part of a remarkable group of pottery collected by Nanne Ottema between 1916 and 1918 at Leeuwarden, Netherlands (Ottema, 1918). Between the wars Manises lustreware was identified from Groningen, Netherlands, but it was not until the 1940s that a steady stream of finds started with examples from Rotterdam, Middelburg & Spangen, Netherlands. After the war the increasing number of medieval excavations, together with extensive urban rebuilding, multiplied the number of finds, but most were still single examples until the larger scale work and interest of the 1970s produced larger groups, with 25 sherds from Damme, Belgium, 23 from Oud Krabbendijke, Netherlands, and 8 from Mechelin, Belgium, and Reimerswaal, Netherlands. The first survey of Spanish imports into the Netherlands was made by Renaud in 1957, followed by further articles in 1968 and 1976. In Belgium there have been surveys by Vandenberghe in 1973 and Marien-Dugardin in 1974. There are now about 140 Valencian lustreware vessels known from over 30 sites (Hurst & Neal, 1982).

## SLUIS SPORTSGROUND

The importance of these finds, however, has paled beside the remarkable find from Sluis, Netherlands, made when a field was levelled for a new sportsground in 1970. 230 imported sherds were found, including 210 Valencian lustreware and 14 coarse Mediterranean ware fragments. These sherds, now in the Van Beuningen collection at Langbroek, Netherlands, are the largest single group from any site in Europe outside the kiln sites at Manises. Although the find was not stratified the sherds all seem to be of one date in about the middle of the 15th century. The find is thus of considerable importance in showing the main types which were current, and being imported together, at the time of the documentary reference to Spanish pottery coming into Sluis, the port for Bruges.

The various forms and types of decoration include gothic foliage, floral, lettering and geometric designs, all typical of Mature Valencian Lustreware datable to the second and third quarters of the 15th century. Only a very few vessels are in the earlier Moorish tradition but these could still have been made up to the middle of the century and be in use after this. There is only one vessel with the debased leaves of Late Valencian Lustreware. There is a complete lack of Late Valencian Lustreware types of the last quarter of the 15th century and early 16th century decorated in overall lustre. Although the date range of the Sluis find might be as wide as 1425-1475, the lack of early and the absence of later types suggests a central date of about 1440-1450, the period when importation is documented. Recent finds from Trig Lane, London, of Mature Valencian Lustreware are dated by dendrochronology to 1440 (information from Alan Vince) so these central years of the 15th century seem to be the main period of the importation of Valencian lustreware to north-west Europe.

The pottery was collected from the Sluis sportsground site over a period of three years from October 1970 to September 1973. In the first years only large decorated sherds were collected but on the 15th September 1973 a thorough search was made by H.J.E. Van Beuningen, J. G. Hurst, D. S. Neal and F. Verhaeghe. All Spanish sherds, however small, were collected over the whole field, together with the total pottery assemblage from a sample area. This produced 25% Valencian lustreware, 25% Rhenish Siegburg stoneware, and 50% local wares. This is a very large percentage of Spanish wares at a time when Rhenish imports usually predominate. It clearly reflects the special nature of Sluis as the port of Bruges in the middle of the 15th century. In the full report (Hurst & Neal, 1982) 118 Valencian lustreware vessels are described and illustrated and 83 small sherds listed. They were mainly a luxury trade in objects for display rather than containers for spices and ointments, as is shown by the fact that 187 of the Sluis vessels were open bowls or dishes and only 9 closed jugs, jars or albarelli. There were 14 examples of miscellaneous Mediterranean coarse wares. Of considerable interest was the presence of 15 sherds from the Saintonge in south-west France, showing that trade between the Low Countries and France, which has its main peak in the 13th and 14th centuries, was still active in the 15th, as it was in other parts of north-west Europe as is now also increasingly becoming evident from British sites (Davey & Hodges, 1982).

Some of the main types of Valencian imports found at Sluis, together with some examples from other sites in the Low Countries, are described and illustrated below to demonstrate the wide range of decoration found. All the Mature Valencian Lustreware is in a thick sandy fabric with a core varying from red-brown to pink-buff, all with buff surfaces. All are covered with tin-glaze inside and out. The decoration on the inside (In) is described first then the outer (Out) design. In view of the colour variations in the glaze, colours are individually described as is the state of the glaze and the lustre, which has often decayed leaving a ghost glossiness on the matt tin-glazed surface which is seen by holding the sherd up to the light. Within the groups the order is from open to closed vessels and from rim to base. The illustrations are numbered according to the full publication for easy reference and to save the confusion of duplicate numbers. The VB numbers at the end of each entry denote the original numbering of the sherds as sorted and drawn by D. S. Neal before they were divided into types.

## MÉRIDA TYPE WARE FROM THE ALENTEJO AREA OF PORTUGAL

Mérida type ware has been known in Britain (Hurst, 1969-70) and North America (Cotter, 1958) for some time but was at first identified as post-medieval in date. Excavations at Southampton, however, demonstrated that the classic ovoid standing costrel was already, from the 13th and 14th centuries, imported into north-west Europe with a full range of rim forms (Platt, 1975, nos. 1279-80, 1283, 1287 & 1293). Examples have since been increasingly recognised on British Medieval sites. The only vessel imported at this time was the classic Mérida type costrel (Hurst, 1977, 96-8). By the 16th and 17th centuries many other closed vessels and bowls are found (Clark, 1979, 47-9).

It was thought in the 1960s that this pottery was made in the Mérida area of Spain, which was a centre of production of red micaceous wares from the Roman period onwards. Recent work has, however, demonstrated that this same Mérida type costrel shape is still made today in the Alentejo area of Portugal (Parvaux, 1968, 128, fig. 19). A recent visit to Spanish and Portuguese museums, arranged through the British Council, with the valuable help of Dr. J. Zozaya and Dr. J. L. De Matos, has shown that this costrel shape is not known in Spain but is common over a wide area of the Alentejo and the Algarve. Britain had very close trade links with Portugal from the 14th Century and the red micaceous ware seems to be the archaeological evidence for this. In view of the porous nature of the fabric it is not clear what was traded in these costrels, which presumably must have come as containers rather than objects for use. Preliminary fabric analysis by D. Williams suggests there are several fabrics, so it is suggested that the term Mérida type ware be retained for the present, rather than a change to Alentejo, because several centres of production may eventually be identified, as red micaceous pottery seems to have been made over a wide area of southern Portugal and western Spain.

There is no Mérida type ware from Sluis so, although this does not mean it was not imported in the 15th century to the Low Countries, it may suggest that there were not the same medieval contacts between Flanders and Portugal as there were with Spain. The recent identification, however, of

Mérida type ware from Dordrecht, Netherlands, may mean that there are others not recognised. Certainly by the 16th century Mérida type ware was coming in for general use by the Spaniards and has so far been recognised from six sites, Amsterdam, Delft, Hoorn, Leeuwarden, Middelburg and Utrecht.

## WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN COARSE WARES

Many specialised foods and drinks came in coarse pottery containers, so although not luxury items in themselves, these coarse vessels represent exotic perishable goods which have otherwise left no archaeological trace. It is probable that oil, fish sauce and wine were imported in the amphorae and costrels and possibly dried fish and fruit in the bowls. In the Medieval period these vessels have so far been recognised in the Low Countries only from Sluis, but others may be unrecognised in museum and excavation collections. They are not so easy as lustrewares to identify as imports, but at Sluis they stand out from the local red and black wares and imports of Rhenish stoneware. They certainly come from the Mediterranean, and almost certainly from the western part, but the types are hard to identify with any definite source.

## SEVILLE WARES

### Isabela Polychrome (Calatayud)

This type of pottery is known from late 15th and early 16th century sites in the Caribbean where it has been called Isabela Polychrome (Goggin, 1968) and from several sites in Britain where it has been termed Calatayud (Platt, 1975, nos. 1324, 1327 & 1329). It is the poor man's lustre, halfway between the ornate lustre wares and the simple undecorated tin-glazed Columbia Plain. The simple decoration of alternate thick and thin concentric purple circles on the insides of these dishes is the same as the lustre type of decoration used on the outsides of the finer lustreware dishes (Frothingham, 1951, 98). They were taken and traded to the Americas by the Spanish settlers as everyday ware rather than luxury traded lustrewares. Examples in the Low Countries may, therefore, be equated with the period of the Spanish domination

in the 16th century. Examples are rare in Britain and, as they are mainly found at ports, such as Plymouth, they may have been acquired from Spanish ships rather than traded.

The closest parallels to this type of ware in Iberia have been identified as coming from Calatayud in Aragon (Llubiá, 1967, 182, figs. 293-4 and Alvaro, 1976, figs. 68-72). There are certainly very similar examples in the Barcelona Museum and it was after seeing these and on the advice of L. Llubiá, that I termed these imports as Calatayud in 1964. The publication of similar material from America by Goggin in 1968 shows that this ware clearly falls into the same group as Columbia Plain and Yayal Blue which it is thought was made at Seville, the main 16th century port for both the American and the Low Countries. Unfortunately no pottery of the period has been saved in Seville but it has been found by Mr & Mrs Lister near Seville and I have seen it over a wide area of the Algarve. It is probable that this type of pottery was made at Calatayud and possibly many other centres in Spain, but it is likely that the type which was exported was that made in Seville, the main 16th century port for both the Americas the examples found in north-west Europe. In the Low Countries Isabela Polychrome has been found (up to 1979) on at least six 16th century sites, Amsterdam, Dordrecht, Oud Krabbendijke, Reimerswaal and Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Mechelen in Belgium (Hurst & Neal, 1982) but there may well be more unrecognised in museum and excavation collections.

## COLUMBIA PLAIN & YAYAL BLUE

A most important group of 16th century pottery was found in 1979 in a pit in Lange Noordstraat in Middelburg, Netherlands. Part of this is now in the Van Beuningen Collection; it includes further examples of Isabela Polychrome but also, for the first time in the Low Countries, the other contemporary Seville type wares which would be in daily use by the occupying Spanish troops, Columbia Plain and Yayal Blue. Also in the same group were a few sherds of Late Valencian Lustreware and Italian Maiolica which at this time first appears in any quantity in the Low Countries. In the opening years of the 16th century there is thus a complete change in the character of Iberian imports from the fine luxury lustrewares of the 13th to 15th centuries to the coarser household wares brought in for the use of the Spaniards.

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