**Ligurian Glazed Earthenware of Albisola-Savona**

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**Other names**

North Italian Style; Common Ligurian Earthenware; Common Earthenware from Albisola

**Technical Definition:**

Glazed Ligurian earthenware is a ceramic made from a ferruginous alluvial clay, fine, well-fired and refractory, making a resonant sound when dropped or tapped. It is coated on the interior and exterior with a shiny brown to chestnut glaze, the color of which is enhanced by the contact of the glaze with the earthenware surface. These products are most often decorated with wavy black lines painted under the glaze (Fig 65).

**Paste**

The earthenware, red to orange in color, is hard (5 on the Mohs scale), with a homogenous texture containing small, abundant, fine and clear inclusions (0.1-0.2 mm), primarily quartz, mica, angular feldspars and limestone, and more rarely siliceous microfossils (Fig. 66).

**Glaze**

The transparent lead glaze, yellow or colored brown using iron oxide or manganese oxide, is applied by dipping and covers the entire piece. It is fine and of good quality, but less shiny under the bases and parts of the body which were scraped during throwing.

**Decoration**

The products, commonly known as “à taches noires” (i.e., “ black spotted”) are characterized by a random decoration in bands and waves, painted black with manganese oxide on the bisqued vessel object after bisque firing (Fig. 67). Some molded dishes have guilloche, lobed, or scalloped borders, and other shapes are decorated with lugs with molded applique motifs. The presence of engraved decoration is uncommon.

**Forms**

The repertoire consists mainly of table and serving dishes: bowls with ears, handled cups, coffee pots, teapots, flat and deep plates, round, octagonal, and oval serving dishes of various sizes, lidded casseroles, salt shakers. More rare and decorative forms such as canteen, candlestick, teapot, stationery box, tobacco jar, and vase were also made.

**Manufacturing Methods**

The tableware is primarily formed on a potter’s wheel and in some cases press molded on wooden or plaster forms. After initial drying the shape was refined and the walls scraped and thinned using a tool: a slate rib or a knife. After the bisque firing in the upper part of the kiln, the decoration was painted and the the vessels dipped in glaze. This glaze (“vernis,” an old word from the southern Mediterranean designating lead sulfide) was made from a mixture of sand from Gourjean, a town located near Antibes or Noli on the Ligurian coast, and lead ore imported from Almeria in Spain. After grinding in a mill, the mixture was dissolved in water.

The loading into the lower, hotter part of the kiln was done by stacking in saggars, with triangular kiln supports leaving traces in the glaze. The temperature of the oxidizing firing, medium to high, should have been around 850-900 Celsius.

**Origin**

This large group of table and serving ware was produced in Liguria, in the two neighboring towns of Savona and Albisola (Fig. 68). According to written sources, there were fifty workshops in the area at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, when two types of products were made: one in white clay for faience, and the other in red clay for common pottery. However, it is impossible to distinguish the different workshops in the absence of reference groups with known locations and the homogeneity of the local geology. However, brown or black faience from Genoa, or “coffee faience” is differentiated in texts in relation to white-bodied wares, for example in Marseille in the shop of François Truella in 1760 (Amouric, Richez and Vallauri 1999, 121, note 15). The Prefects' Survey, initiated by Alexandre Brongniart (1770-1847), administrator of the Sèvres Manufacture, and conducted in 1809 in the department of Montenotte then occupied by France, provides valuable workshop references, in addition to descriptions of the chaîne opératoire, manufacturing recipes, and data on the marketing of products by boat. For this date, it provides a precise directory of forms produced in the two cities. Faced with this commercial invasion, the French authorities continued to limit and tax the arrival of Ligurian products and the establishment of networks in southern France, which nevertheless continued until the beginning of the 19th century. Imitations were made by Provençal potter in competition, but these coarser copies are clearly distinguishable to the eye and in thin section under a polarizing microscope (petrographic analyses) (Capelli et al. in press).

**Dating**

Written sources, as well as terrestrial and underwater discoveries, verify production by the early 18th century. From this period on, these common and attractive, inexpensive earthenwares invaded the market both in Europe and in the American colonies. The cargo of the Grand Congloué, a tartane (coastal trading ship) washed up very close to Marseille in the middle of the 18th century, as well as the assemblages dumped into the Quarantine port in Pomègues, illustrate this marketing towards the large ports for redistribution. The sinking of the San Giuseppe in 1759, near Varazze, also provides us with detailed information on the vessel forms in a document from the Savona archives. All the Provençal, Languedoc, Spanish, Sardinian and Corsican excavations bear witness to this market conquest. Their well-identified presence in Canada, Guyana and the French Islands of the Americas is not surprising although this category of earthenware was not differentiated from common Provençal earthenware in the inventories of ship cargo. This production continued until the 1840s but it no longer spread via international trade.

**Reference collections**

Louisbourg (Nova Scotia); Fort Gaspereau and Fort Beauséjour (New Bruswick); épave du Machault à Restigouche, Parc de l’Artillerie, Place-Royale, Forges du Saint-Maurice, Premier hôpital général de Montréal et Palais de l’intendant (Québec); Fort Michillimackinac (Michigan); Degrat Island et Seal Islands (Labrador)