**“French Green” Glazed Earthenware**

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**Other Names**

Common green-glazed French earthenware, buff fabric green glazed ware

**Technical Definition**

This ceramic is characterized by a light chalk white to buff-colored paste covered with a clear green lead glaze ranging from shades of dark green to brownish green to yellow (Fig. 69).

**Paste**

The fine-textured earthenware contains some inclusions visible to the naked eye with a homogeneous distribution: rounded and sub-rounded grains of quartz and black micas (biotite) in addition to scattered ferruginous nodules. Depending on the clay raw material used, their preparation and the firing conditions, several textures of earthenware may be recovered: while those with a glittering white paste often have a chalky texture reminiscent of gypsum, those that are grayish white, pinkish white and buff, associated with a higher firing temperature, have greater strength and sharper fractures.

**Glaze**

Though highly variable, the transparent green glaze is one the defining characteristics of this ware, which should not be confused with Saintonge products, whose earthenware body is rather pink, coated with a transparent apple green glaze over a white slip.

The glaze coats the interior of flat vessels, spilling over onto the rim, while hollow forms such as pitchers and chamber pots are often entirely glazed except for the base. The glaze was not always applied evenly to the surfaces, especially on less carefully crafted open forms such as bowls and terrines (casserole dishes).

The lead glaze used is colored green by the addition of copper oxide fired in an oxidizing atmosphere, since firing in a reducing atmosphere would cause a red color. Between these two extremes, and depending on the firing conditions, glazes of different shades ranging from very dark green to brownish green can be produced. Note, inclusions contained in the underlying ceramic substrate sometimes cause brown stains.

**Decoration**

These ceramics are not decorated. Rare examples have impressed rosettes added to handles of some porringers (Fig. 70).

**Forms**

The range of forms produced is quite extensive: it covers the functions of preparation, cooking, serving, consumption of food and drink, as well as hygiene, to which architectural ceramics such as floor tiles can be added.

Containers such as bowls and terrines are the most common in Quebec collections, but pitchers, chamber pots, bowls, porringers, frying pans, drip pans, cream pots, ointment pots, drainers, stoves and large laundry cauldrons are also found. It is important to note that containers intended for the colonial market are not always the finest creations of metropolitan artisan potters. So it is not uncommon to find lower quality products, such as partially glazed terrines, deformed containers or others with fragments of other objects that exploded during firing adhered to them by the then viscous glaze.

**Production Methods**

Most vessels were made by potter’s wheel but some forms, such as drip pans were often molded. The glaze mixture could be applied on a dry object (single firing) or fired again (double firing). Two firings were probably preferred to reduce the consumption of lead and copper, since these metals, used to make the glazes, constituted an important expense for the potter. The first firing would eliminate some defective products and limit manufacturing rejects. The glaze would only be applied to the bisqueware passing the quality test, even if this technical choice resulted in a higher consumption of fuel.

**Provenance**

Determining the origin of these wares has always posed a problem. Found only during the French colonial period (1603-1759), they were spread from French ports to the Atlantic world. Brassard and Leclerc (2001) hypothesized that these products were coming from several centers in the Bordeaux region, Rhône-Alpes and Normandy. If the hypothesis of multiple production centers is maintained, the Rhône-Alpes region is no longer considered a likely source.

In the area surrounding Bordeaux, the potting center of Sadirac (Gironde) was the subject of archaeometric investigations looking to compare the chemical composition of earthenwares from kiln wasters with vessels found in consumption contexts during excavations of the Palais de l’Intendant in Quebec (Monette et al. 2010). While these preliminary results do not make it possible to establish a connection with this production center, they nevertheless made it possible to identify three groups of similar chemical compositions, i.e., three potential products, perhaps of different origins, solely for the Palais de l’Intendent collection. The analysis of objects found on other colonial sites of the French Atlantic, like Fort La Tour (New Brunswick), Louisbourg fortress (Nova Scotia), Fort Michilimackinac (Michigan), sites in Louisiana and Alabama, could reveal other chemical compositional groups, and consequently other products that remain to be identified.

During the modern period, light-colored earthenwares with green glaze were certainly produced in many French regions, but also in other countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and notably Germany. Colonial provisions of this ceramic type were regular throughout the period. Also, it does not matter that port activities were sometimes concentrated in the ports of Rouen, La Rochelle, or Bordeaux, given that this product seems to have been intended for export. Among the forms exported to the colony, it must be noted that terrines and bowls predominate, i.e., forms associated with dairying. However, excavations in the Sadirac workshops did not yield such objects but instead pitchers, bowls, and large laundry cauldrons similar to what is found on Quebec archaeological sites dating to the French colonial period (Régaldo Saint-Blancard 1979). According to the geographical distribution of French dairy production, bowls and terrines could be associated with the regions of the North, Normandy or Seine-Maritime for example. Additional research on the production sites will need to be continued to clarify the manufacturing origins of this ceramic.

**Dating**

These products were widely distributed in the former French colonies of America in the 17th and 18th centuries, both in North America and the Caribbean. In North America, this spread suddenly stopped following the conquest in 1760 as the supply networks then turned towards England.

**Références**

Barton 1977; Barton 1978; Brassard et Leclerc 2001; Chapelot 1978; Dagneau 2009; Gusset 1990; Lapointe et Lueger 1982; Loewen 2004; Monette *et al*. 2010; Moussette 1981; Moussette 2007; Moussette et Waselkov 2013; Niellon et Moussette 1985; Régaldo Saint-Blancard 1979; Toupin 2003