**Saintonge Glazed Earthenware**

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**Other Names**

Saintonge Style; Saintonge green-glazed earthenware; Common coarse earthenware with slip and glaze from Saintonge (Brassard and Leclerc 2001)

**Technical Definition:**

The ceramic produced in Saintonge from the middle of the 13th C. on is an earthenware with lead glaze, of good quality from the 16th to the 17th century, and utilitarian from the 18th to the 19th century (Chapelot 1975; Hugoniot 2002).

The 16th and 17th century production is characterized by thin walls, often has applied molded decoration, and certain forms such as boat-shaped bowls (navettes), molded in earthenware molds. Most of the pottery was double fired. It is coated in a clear, colorless glaze, highlighted with green and brown colors, especially on the molded decorations.

The products of the 18th and 19th centuries are very different. The forms are heavy, with regular throwing marks on the outside and at the base of the open forms. Potters used clear, colorless glazes, or green glazes applied over a white slip on the inside of flat forms and on the interior and part of the exterior of hollow forms.

**Paste**

The coarse earthenware very often contains small, readily visible ferruginous nodules that are brown in color. Products from the 16th and 17th centuries use a clay which, after firing, is pale, ivory to light pink in color. Those from the 18th and 19th centuries are, after firing, a deep orange color and have thick walls.

**Surfaces**

*Slip*

A white slip may cover the interior of flat forms and the interior and part of the exterior of hollow forms in 18th and 19th century products.

*Glaze*

The pieces may be partially or wholly coated in a colorless or colored glaze, most often green. Refer to the *Technical Definition* and *Decoration* sections.

*Decoration*

The 16th and 17th c. products typically have relief decoration, molded and applied, more rarely stamped, and are covered with a polychrome glaze. These decorations and these glazes are in the tradition which was defined shortly after the middle of the 16th century and commonly referred to by the term “suite de Bernard Palissy” (i.e., after Bernard Palissy), named for the famous potter who, before leaving for Paris in 1565, worked for years in Saintes, a few kilometers from the rural workshops producing Saintonge ceramics.

The 17th, 18th, and 19th c. products are typically flat forms, often with an engobe and decorated with spots of slip arranged in a band, or more rarely in wavy lines. Some hollow forms may have marbled slip decoration with combing that resembles fern leaves. These decorations are most often done with a brown slip over a white engobe, but the reverse is also found: decoration with white slip over a brown engobe. The hollow forms may have the same kinds of decoration as the flat forms, but most often they are totally coated on the interior and part of the exterior with a green glaze over a white engobe.

**Forms**

The 16th and 17th c. products were of good quality, made for decoration of the table or the home, but rarely for regular use and never for cooking. The hollow forms are ewers, jugs, chafing dishes, and navettes for holy water as an example; flat forms were often dishes or plates, all of which usually had applied molded decoration covered with polychrome glazes.

In the 18th and 19th c., flat forms dominated, such as dishes, two-eared porringers, and plates. All of them, as well as hollow forms such as jugs and pitchers, are undecorated other than the glaze and dots or lines drawn in slip.

**Manufacturing Method**

The techniques used in the 16th and 17th c. for throwing, glazing, and decorating, are limited to a few workshops such as in Normandy at Pré d'Auge, near Lisieux. Though a few shapes are molded, such as the navettes, most vessels are wheel-thrown, the molded decorations being added after drying and before the bisque firing. The resulting bisqueware is covered with a glaze and then fired a second time.

The techniques used in the 18th century are very common in many other rural workshops. After drying, vessels were dipped in slip, then bisque fired, glazed, and fired again.

**Provenance**

The Saintonge ceramic workshops have been studied for more than forty years, through the analysis of archives, surveys and excavations (Chapelot and Henriet 2011). Those dating to the Middle Ages have been observed in the village of La Chapelle-des-Pots and to the north and west of it (FIG. 75), while those dating from the 16th-18th c. are not known in the village. Production in nearby communities such as Vénérand or Écoyeux, is certain given 17th and 18th c. written records, but it has not yet been found via excavations. Jean Aumier, son of a potter from Écoyeux, worked as a potter in Quebec from 1676 and again in 1704 (Chapelot 1978, 112).

All the characteristic Saintonge products have been recovered in workshops excavated in the village of La Chapelle-des-Pots: such as those of the 16th and 17th centuries in 2005 in parcel AL 116 (FIG. 72, FIG. 73 and FIG. 74), and those from the 18th century in 1972 at a place called La Tournerie in parcel AL 102 and 106.

At the same time, it has been studied in the Charente River in Port-Berteau, Bussac district, a few kilometers downstream from Saintes and 10 km west of Chapelle-des-Pots. There, there was a shipping port for these ceramics, active from the end of the Middle Ages to the 19th century (Orssaud 1975; Rieth 1975; Chapelot and Rieth 2007). An underwater excavation produced hundreds of pottery sherds which bear witness to these shipments to La Rochelle, then Northwest Europe in the 13th and 17th centuries, and North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Dating**

The presence of potters is known from the texts and excavations at La Chapelle-des-Pots from the middle of the 13th century on (Chapelot 2005; Chapelot and Henriet 2011). They were active in this district and several neighboring ones until the beginning of the 20th century, but the dates of operation remain unclear, the excavations of workshops not providing precise dates. The excavations of pottery consumption sites carried out over the last twenty-five years in Charente-Maritime, in particular the numerous urban excavations in La Rochelle, are unpublished. For the Middle Ages as for the 16th to 18th centuries, the best options for dating come from discoveries made on consumption sites excavated outside of France. North American sites show that Saintonge earthenware was, in the 18th century, the most common ceramic from the metropole in New France, probably also in the Antilles (Chapelot 1978; Chapelot 2004). The presence of this ceramic in New France was established in 1972 thanks to the excavation, between 1968 and 1970, of more than a hundred burials in a Tunica Indian cemetery (Mississippi) (Brain 1988; Brain 1990). It has been verified many times since, notably in Louisbourg (FIG. 74). Some sites, such as Champlain's dwelling in Quebec (Niellon and Moussette 1985, 227-229, fig. 34 pages 464) or the Place d'Armes in Trois-Rivières (FIG. 71), have produced very valuable examples of the 17th c. production, but the most abundant discoveries relate to the common wares of the 18th century.

An inventory of Saintonge ceramics discovered in North America would be of great importance because it would make it possible to establish a detailed chronology of this ceramic production.

**References**

Brain 1988; Brain 1990; Chapelot 1975; Chapelot 1978; Chapelot 2004; Chapelot 2005; Chapelot forthcoming; Chapelot and Rieth 2007; Hugoniot 2002; Niellon and Moussette 1985; Orssaud 1975; Rieth 1975