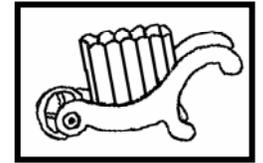


Salty Comments



Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting

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Tin Glazed Pottery - Faience

When pottery is made, the color of the piece can depend on the clay you use. If the clay is yellow, you get yellow ware; if it is red, you get redware; pure white clay is seldom available. It can be decorated with a transparent glaze so the color shows through, but usually the designer prefers an opaque background so he can make a wider range of designs on the finished piece. In the 9th century, someone in Iraq discovered how to make pottery glaze opaque by adding tin to it. This makes the clear glaze white for use as a background. The white glaze can be colored with various pigments for painting the final design. The idea spread, and by the 15th century the technique had reached Europe.

Tin glazed pottery has a variety of names, depending on where it is made. In the US it is often called Majolica, in Italy it is Maiolica, in England and Holland it is Delft Ware, and in France and other European countries it is Faience. Each of these names refers to pottery decorated with tin glaze enamels.

In the earlier pottery, the colors were limited by the temperature encountered in the firing. They knew how to get only orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. One clue that researchers use in dating an old piece is the colors. This applies to china as well as pottery. Two of our china salts have been dated by an expert as “early 1800’s” based partially on the blue, green and orange colors used in the decoration. In later years the potteries used a subsequent firing at a lower temperature to add red, pink and gold to their palette.



Pottery is a relatively fragile material, and less than half of it emerged from the kilns as top quality. The lower grades were sold at reduced prices, with the worst ones often sold to itinerant door to door peddlers. In use, pottery is easy to chip. It is not nearly as durable as the various types of china. While tin glazed pottery was used all over Europe in the 1700’s, it gave way to sturdier ceramics by the late 1800’s. It now is made in only in a few places “to provide tourists with souvenirs”, according to one author.

Faience became popular in France in the 1700’s. Because the wars in Europe drained the treasury, edicts by the French king in 1709 and again in 1759 confiscated all the precious metals, which were then melted down and used to pay debts. The custom in those days was to store your silver in the form of decorative pieces and dining utensils, made by hand and easily identifiable if stolen. With their silver gone, the French turned to pottery to replace it, so faience became popular. Many of the replacement pieces were fancy vases, figurines, or other decorative items for the nobility which were hard to make and never cheap. There also was a big demand for dinnerware, which was not always fancy and was less expensive. The books we see today about Faience (and Majolica and Delft) concentrate on the fancy, expensive things. We rarely ever see a picture of an open salt in any of them.

When the demand for Faience ware expanded, the French potteries prospered. Famous ones were located in Rouen, Nevers, Moustiers and Quimper. The higher quality items are the ones featured in the books we see today. As other better dinnerware materials became available, the demand decreased and

most of them went out of business. Today only the Quimper factories are still operating. They have a web site – <http://www.quimperfaience.com> - which shows some of their wares. We found no salts listed, and the small figurines which they offer cost from \$55 to \$368 each. Labor costs must be high over there.

Quimper is a town in Brittany in westernmost France. It is on the Odet river, only 11 miles from the sea which was important for transportation in the 1700's. It had a sufficient supply of wood for kilns, and a deposit of clay nearby, so a pottery factory was established there just before 1700. This was the Grand Maison HB, the initials coming from Hubaudiere, the name of the founder. In 1778, a rival factory was started and was subsequently purchased by Jules Henriot in 1884. The first of these factories signed their wares "HB" starting about 1880, and the Henriot firm started using HR about 14 years later. In 1904 both added "Quimper" to their mark. By 1922, the older firm decided that the marks looked too much alike, and filed a lawsuit against Henriot. They won, and the HR was changed to HenRiot. The two firms merged in 1968. By 1984 the company was nearly bankrupt, and American investors bought it. Since then both HB and HenRiot have appeared on most of the pieces they make.



One of the books we saw ("Quimper Pottery") reprinted an 1887 price list from Maison HB. There was a long list of items, but no open salts. We have the theory that pottery didn't hold up at all when used to serve salt. The glaze may have been attacked, but more likely it chipped too easily when you dug the caked salt with a spoon or the end of a table knife. A second undated catalog page had salts, condiment sets and ash trays, without saying which was which. The use was up to the buyer, especially for the ash trays. The salts were almost all doubles with simple bowls and a post or ring handle. There was one with a pair of shoes and another with two boats, but none with swans. two boats. A third catalog page had a typical double and beside it an oval salt, which they were selling as a "pot à beurre" (butter dish). It also showed a double with a dog between the bowls. We've never seen this latter salt anywhere.



When we look in our collection for tin glazed pottery salts, the most obvious one is white, but the bottom shows that the material is red clay, like bricks are made of. The glaze covers the base color completely. The decoration on this one is "cold paint" – put on over the glaze and never fired. There is no maker's mark on it.



Cold Paint on Tin Glaze

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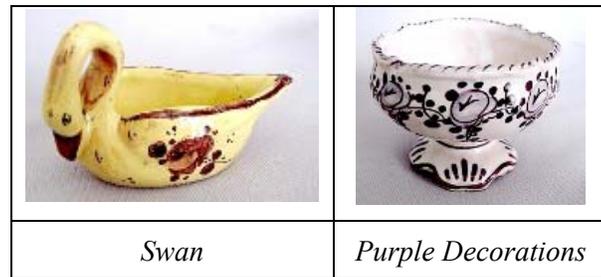
Another pottery salt, but with fired decorations, is at the right. Again the tin glaze provides a good base for the design and covers the pottery color completely. It is marked “R.Rolli Deruta” which we think is Italian. Another salt of this type which may also be Italian is beside it.. These two use a limited color palette, like the ones from the early1800’s, but we suspect that is to avoid an extra firing, not because they are old.

We have two figural tin glaze salts. The first is a lady holding a basket – a pose typical of French faience. There are no marks on the bottom, however. The most interesting thing about her is her head – it comes off and is a pepper shaker. We don’t think this one is particularly old. The other is a lady in French peasant costume holding two baskets. We bought her at an antique importer’s wholesale shop in New Orleans. She doesn’t have the “1792” mark at her feet, like the one in the Smith books (96-6-2). The mark on the bottom is a drawing of a ribbon which we have yet to track to its source. She has a number of glaze chips, showing how fragile this type of ceramic ware can be.

Two of our faience salts are marked only “Made in France” These are a swan and an old style pedestal master with purple decorations. Since the country of origin is marked, they must have been made after 1891. We also suspect that they are after 1921 because of the words, ”Made In” . Our reasoning is that Japanese markings changed from ”Nippon” to “Japan” starting in that year There are many “Made in Japan” marks, but no “Made in Nippon” ones, so “Made In” must have come after 1921. We hope someone will find an official record sometime that tells about the change in wording.

We have only two Quimper salts, both from Grand Maison HB. The first is an oval trencher with typical decorations. It has glaze chips, and the usual lady in a peasant costume. The other one is an oval one that might be a butter dish. It too uses colors that do not require an extra firing.

Beyond the Quimper faience, we have salts from several other faïenceries (French for faience factories). The most mysterious one is a double with split bowl and a very unusual shape. It is marked “Gallé Nancy”, and we never realized that Galle did anything in china or pottery. We’ve yet to track down the story on this one.



We have a faience pair – a man and a lady holding baskets – that we bought years ago while coming back from a visit to our kids in New Orleans. They are marked with only a number on the bottom, but the costumes should tell which part of France they represent. It may even lead to the name of the maker. Any idea you could give us about their origin would be deeply appreciated.

A mark that we have been unable to identify is on the bottom of a faience double with oblong bowls, shown at the right. The salt looks very French. We showed a picture of it and the mark to Adela Meadows who spoke on faience at the California National Convention, but she had no clue. She did identify several other faience marks for us. The salt with a Fleur-de Lys handle was made by George Martel of Desvres, a town in northern France. The goat double is by Keller and Guerin in St. Clement, France. This latter has much more detail in the design than our other faience ones.



Finally before we leave the subject, we have a double that is definitely not faience. We think the hen is definitely tin glaze, but she is not faience because the base material is not pottery. If you look underneath, you can see she is hollow. The salt was formed by putting ceramic slurry in a porous mold to deposit the china shape. The excess slurry was removed, leaving the hollow interior. This is a typical technique for making china figurals, but we understand that pottery is hand-shaped and solid. If any of you are potters, maybe you can inform us otherwise.



We hope this has given you a better perspective on tin glazed pottery, and that you have some salts of this type in your collection. They are not very common, but are worth hunting for to show the range of the potters' art.

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References:

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- “Mailoica, Delft and Faience”, by Guiseppe Scavizi
- “French Faience”, by Arthur Lane