

# Unidentified Italian or English porcelains : the A marked group

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## Unidentified Italian or English Porcelains: The A Marked Group

By Arthur Lane, London

Fig. 1—9

At a meeting of the English Ceramic Circle held in December 1937 attention was drawn for the first time to a small group of 18th-century porcelains whose origin could not be easily explained<sup>1</sup>. A suggestion made by Mr. William King, that they were of Continental European (probably Italian) manufacture, had already been anticipated by the Victoria & Albert Museum, which acquired the cream jug shown in Figure 3 in 1934 and attributed it at that time to the Cozzi Factory, Venice<sup>2</sup>. But other voices were raised in favour of an English origin — the pieces so far known have all turned up in England — and in 1937 no general agreement could be reached. Now, twenty years later, the problem of the so-called «A marked family» still remains unsolved, in spite of recent investigation of their material by spectrographic means.

The present writer hopes that his description of these porcelains may elicit further contributions from readers of the *Mitteilungsblatt* of the *Keramik-Freunde der Schweiz*. It would be particularly interesting to know if similar or related pieces exist in collections in other European countries, since these might offer some clue to the origin of the whole group.

The pieces so far recorded are the following:

1. Teapot in the British Museum. Marks under base and inside cover, capital «A» in underglaze blue (Fig. 1, 9).
2. Teapot in the Victoria and Albert Museum No. C 207 A-1937. Marks under base and inside cover, capital «A» in underglaze blue (Fig. 2).
3. Cream-jug in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. C 68-1934. Mark, capital «A», incised (Fig. 3).
4. Low cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. C 26-1957. Mark, capital «A» in underglaze blue (Fig. 4).
5. Fluted cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. C 149-1956. Unmarked (Fig. 5).
6. Fluted cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. C 85-1957. Unmarked (Fig. 6).
7. Snuff-box in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. Incised faintly inside, the capital letter «A» or possibly «V» (Fig. 7, 8).

Common characteristics of the group are, in the first place, the mark of a capital «A», carefully painted in underglaze blue or incised (Fig. 9). It may be recalled that similar capital letters are often incised as marks on a series of octagonal hard-paste teapots attributed with good reason to the Vezzi factory in Venice, which was operating between about 1720 and 1727<sup>3</sup>. The capital «V» incorporated in the painted marks «Vena» or «Va» used by this factory is commonly painted with the same care as the capital «A» on the group we are now discussing. A capital «V», carefully incised or moulded in relief, was used by the short-lived factory at Venice run by the Hewelcke family between 1758 and 1763<sup>4</sup>. And the letters «AG», carefully painted, appear occasionally on porcelain made at the Le Nove factory in Venetian territory about the end of the 18th century<sup>5</sup>. The character of the «A» on our group thus finds some rapport with the marks used by porcelain manufacturers over several generations in a particular area of Northern Italy.

The paste of all pieces in the «A-marked» group is consistent and very peculiar. It is extremely translucent, showing a very cold, almost icy greenish-blue tinge by transmitted light (with the exception of the teapot, No. 2, which shows an olive-green tinge). By direct light the paste is cold greyish white. The close-fitting glaze varies slightly; on the cups, Nos. 5 and 6, it is rather dull, perhaps not properly fused; on the other pieces it is very glassy, and on the teapot, No. 2, it develops a slight crackle. The body is much harder than that normal among the English soft-paste porcelains, including the soapstone porcelain of the Worcester-Liverpool group, and gives a modified conchoidal fracture. But it appears much less hard than the hard-paste porcelain made in Germany or under German influence. It is possibly a «hybrid» body, containing some kaolin, of a type made in Italy, especially in factories in the Venice area and at Doccia. The material of four pieces has been submitted to spectrographic analysis by Miss Mavis Bimson of the British Museum Research Laboratory, who has very kindly allowed me to quote from her report at the end of this

article. The spectrographic method of analysis has its limitations, and Miss Bimson did not regard her tests as conclusive, but she found that the composition is not quite like that of any of the known English factories; it does, however, bear some resemblance to the paste of samples of Venice (Hewelcke) and Venice (Cozzi) porcelain analysed at the same time.

The «A-marked» pieces nevertheless differ considerably from any of the identified Italian porcelains in the fineness of the «potting». They are very carefully made. The low foot-rings are neat and slight, unlike the coarse, heavy foot-rings of Venice (Hewelcke), and Venice (Cozzi), and Le Nove pieces. Except in the case of the cream-jug, Figure 3, the walls are very thin. The bold handles are peculiar in shape and rather clumsy, and tend to split down the back along the line left by the two halves of the mould in which they were formed. They recall the baroque of early Meissen and Vienna (Du Paquier) porcelain rather than the rococo of the mid-18 century. They are quite different from the equally peculiar handles of Venice (Hewelcke and Cozzi) and Le Nove pieces. The teapot, Figure 1, has on its upper part low-relief decoration of scrolls and flowers, on a pitted ground. The knobs on the covers of this and the secits wares as «blue and white», and the elaborately enamel-painted «A-marked» porcelains clearly have nothing to do with Limehouse.

In 1755, and perhaps earlier, Nicholas Crisp and Thomas Saunders had a china-factory at Vauxhall in the parish of Lambeth (London), and this was apparently still existing in 1762, when one Richards had succeeded Crisp as Saunders' partner<sup>8</sup>. The sculptor John Bacon was apprenticed to Crisp in 1755, and is said by his later biographers to have modelled porcelain figures in the Vauxhall factory. In 1755 a third obscure London factory was started in Kentish Town, under the management of John Bolton, who had been previously employed by Crisp and Saunders at Vauxhall; some porcelain was actually made and sold<sup>9</sup>. One might assume that the Vauxhall and Kentish Town porcelains would resemble those made in the older-established London factories at Bow and Chelsea, from which any pieces that may survive have not been distinguished. There are no positive reasons whatever for associating the porcelains of the «A-marked group» with Vauxhall or Kentish Town.

It is much more profitable to speculate on their possible Italian and more specifically Venetian origin, which is suggested by their material and not definitely contradicted by their style. After the failure of the Vezzi factory in Venice, which made hard-paste porcelain between about 1720 and 1727, the first serious attempt to revive the manufacture of porcelain in Venetia was made by Pasquale Antonibon of Le Nove. His experiments from 1752 onwards had

succeeded by 1762, when he submitted samples to the Board of Trade in Venice and was granted a privilege. It would be tempting to read the «A» mark on the group we are discussing as the initial of Antonibon. But there are enough marked pieces of Le Nove porcelain, presumably made in and after 1762, to confirm their basic difference from the «A-marked group»<sup>10</sup>. The Le Nove pieces are much coarser in material, in «potting», and in painting; they also follow a rather wild and picturesque rococo style. If the «A-marked» pieces were made at Le Nove in the experimental period before 1762, it is hard to account for the lapse in refinement shown by their successors. Also, why should the «A» mark have been abandoned?

The rare surviving porcelains made by Nathaniel Friedrich Hewelcke and his wife, refugees from Saxony during the Seven Years War, have been satisfactorily identified<sup>11</sup>. In March 1758 the Venetian Board of Trade granted the Hewelckes a privilege to make porcelain for twenty years on conditions that the wares were marked with a «V». The Hewelckes operated at Udine till November 1761, and thereafter in Venice; they seem to have there entered a partnership with Geminiano Cozzi which ended in May 1763, when they probably returned to Saxony. The Hewelckes' productions, marked with a deeply incised «V» and teapot (Fig. 2) are in the shape of a fantastic lion sitting in a circle formed by its own long tail. Similar lion-knobs are found on English teapots of the late 17th century made by the brothers Elers in unglazed red stoneware and in brown salt-glazed ware<sup>6</sup>. But the «A-marked» teapots are at least fifty years later than the Elers wares, and the lion-knob is of no real value as a possible link between the two classes. It merely derives from a common original, the red-stoneware Yi-hsing teapots imported from China.

The peculiarities of the «A-marked» group are nowhere more conspicuous than in the painted decoration. On three pieces, the teapot (Fig. 2), the cream-jug (Fig. 3) and the snuffbox (Fig. 7, 8), the main designs are enclosed in panels surrounded by feathery scrolls elaborately painted in shiny iron-red; masks of children appear among the scrolls. The figure-subjects, borrowed mostly from French engravings of the school of Watteau, are painted mainly in red and warm chestnut brown, with transparent washes of very pale yellow and turquoise, and rare touches of purple. A very soft and easily abraded gilding, which may be unfired, is used for scrolls and outlines round the oriental designs on the cups (Fig. 5 and 6); there are also touches of gold on the cream-jug (Fig. 3), on arrows transfixing the mask at the top. On the low cup, Figure 4, the foreground trees near the rather helpless classical figures are painted in a dry blackish green (evidently over-fired); here, as on the teapot, Figure 2, the distant trees show as a faint, dirty smear. A harbour-scene and bunches of flowers on the snuff box (Fig. 7,

8) are painted with even more care than the figure-scenes.

In fact this lavish care in executing elaborate decoration, with smeary enamel colours whose behaviour is imperfectly mastered, creates the same kind of impression as much of the *Hausmalerei* of the German independent decorators. But the painter of the «A-marked» porcelain was no ordinary *Hausmaler*; he also knew how to make porcelain, or at any rate worked in close association with someone else who did. Neither the painting nor the porcelain are in the strict sense «primitive». They appear to be the work of men who already possessed some knowledge of the required techniques, but whose procedure, perhaps in some newly founded factory, had not yet reached standardization. We are entitled to believe that the new factory was short-lived — its productions are rare. Its approximate date, to judge by the fact that the wares do not yet show a fully developed rococo style, should be before rather than after 1760.

There is documentary evidence for the existence of a few English eighteenth-century porcelain-factories whose wares have not yet been identified. Limehouse (London) was advertising its productions from January 1747, but had evidently failed by June of the following year<sup>7</sup>. It described coloured red, have a certain family resemblance to the Le Nove porcelain produced from 1762 onwards, and to those made by Cozzi in the successful factory which he maintained in Venice from 1764 onwards. They are, however, coarser in material and «potting», and much simpler in decoration than the «A-marked» porcelains, showing even less influence of the rococo style.

The porcelain made at the Cozzi factory in Venice from 1764 onwards was from the beginning strongly rococo in style, and in material and «potting» hardly to be distinguished from the Le Nove porcelain. This is hardly surprising, for Cozzi benefited enormously through workmen who had deserted to him from the Le Nove factory during Antonibon's illness between 1763 and 1765. We know many of the names of these workmen from the records of the lawsuit which Antonibon brought against Cozzi in 1765; they included the «arcanist» Pietro Lorenzi<sup>12</sup>. In fact Antonibon's constant lawsuits and feuds with his own workers, and their consequent readiness to desert, caused Le Nove to become the unwilling parent of several minor factories elsewhere, about which very little is known.

In 1765 Giovanni Battista Brunello, a runaway from Le Nove, attempted to set up a porcelain factory at Este, with the help of three fellow deserters who had managed to steal some of the designs and of the red pigment used at the Le Nove factory<sup>13</sup>. Brunello apparently established himself as a maiolica manufacturer, but it is doubtful whether he succeeded in marking porcelain at Este.

In 1767 Antonibon of Le Nove was again in litigation

against Giovanni Battista Antonio Rossi of Treviso. It is known from the Venetian State Archives that in 1759 Rossi claimed knowledge of how to make porcelain<sup>14</sup>; his request for exemption of duties on his raw materials appears to have been granted. In 1766 Rossi was joined by various deserters from Le Nove, including Stefano Agnelli, whom he made his director<sup>15</sup>. (This formed the ground for Antonibon's lawsuit). Rossi's small factory appears to have continued making porcelain until 1777. None of it has been identified, but there is at least a possibility that pieces of the «A-marked group» may be its early productions. There seems to have been no direct connection between Le Nove and Treviso from 1759 until the arrival of the deserters in 1766, and this might help to explain why the «A-marked» pieces, if made at Treviso, stand apart in their technique and style from the inter-related wares of the Le Nove, Hewelcke, and Cozzi factories. It would no doubt be far-fetched to suggest that the mark «A» might represent the initial of the director Stefano Agnelli, who only reached Treviso in 1766.

Even more remote is the possibility that «A» might stand for Angarano, the suburb of Bassano near Le Nove. Here the widow Ippolita Meneghini obtained permission to make porcelain in 1777<sup>16</sup>. Samples submitted to the Venetian Board of Trade in 1778 were found to be indistinguishable from the wares of Le Nove, since they were unmarked. The style appropriate to this date would be different from that of the «A-marked group», which, wherever it was made, should be dated within a very few years of 1760.

*Extract from report by Miss Mavis Bimson, of the  
British Museum Research Laboratory*

(The pieces tested were those here illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 6).

*The porcelain Body*

A small sample was ground from the base of each piece with a diamond pencil and examined spectrographically. This particular technique does not claim to give quantitative results and, though it is possible to make rough estimates by comparing the spectrum of a porcelain of known composition with an unknown one, the results must be accepted with caution. Preferably, four to six pieces from each factory ought to be examined to give some idea of the variation that may occur.

In the present case, only four «A mark» pieces were available for examination. They were found to form a consistent group; the elements present in each case were silicon, aluminium, magnesium, calcium, and sodium with minor amounts of copper, tin, lead manganese and iron. The only variation observed was a slight difference in the intensity of the calcium lines in the four spectra.

The following inferences may be drawn from this examination:

1. The absence of phosphate indicates that this is not a bone ash body.
2. The trace of lead was probably due to contamination by the glaze and does not indicate that this is a lead frit porcelain.
3. The intensity of the magnesium lines was consistent in all four samples, and was found to compare closely with that of the piece of Hewelcke porcelain C 16-1929 (V. & A. Museum) also examined. The intensity was less than in a soapstone porcelain but greater than in a sample of Plymouth hard paste.
4. The intensity of the calcium lines was slightly more variable, but in general was less than that given by the Hewelcke porcelain and of about the same order as given by a piece of Cozzi porcelain C 118-1919 (V. & A. Museum) also examined.

#### The Glaze

This appears to be rather an unusual glaze. The standard lead iodide test indicates that lead is present, but the amount is considerably less than one expects for a normal lead glaze.

#### Conclusion

The «A mark» porcelain certainly appears to be more nearly related to the hard paste than the soft paste porcelains: in fact, if a little lead had been added to the feldspathic glaze of the Cozzi and Hewelcke porcelains, the similarity to the «A mark» pieces would have been fairly

close. However, since these do not contain any ingredient, such as bone ash, which is typically English, and since their composition is not quite like the product of any well known factory, the place of origin of these pieces must still remain in doubt.

<sup>1</sup> *English Ceramic Circle Transactions*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1939, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Published also as Cozzi, Venice by Giuseppe Morazzoni, *Le porcellane italiane* (Milan-Rome, 1935) Tav. CXXXVII; he accepted the identification proposed by the Museum.

<sup>3</sup> G. Morazzoni, *Le porcellane italiane*, Tav. CXXIV, b, b; Arthur Lane, *Italian Porcelain*, London 1954, Plates 8c, 11c, Colour Plate A.

<sup>4</sup> Morazzoni, *op. cit.*, Tav. CXXV; Lane, *op. cit.* Plates 14, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, *op. cit.* p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Red stoneware, W. B. Honey, «Elers ware», in *English Ceramic Circle Transaction*, No. 2, 1934, Plate IIIa; brown saltglazed ware, B. Rackham, «A dated Staffordshire mug in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff», in *E. C. C. Transactions* Vol. II, 1939-48, p. 145 and Plate L 11.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bellamy Gardner, «The earliest references to Chelsea Porcelain» in *English Porcelain Circle Transactions*, No. 1, 1928, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>8</sup> A. J. Toppin, «Contributions to the history of porcelain-making in London», in *E. C. C. Transactions* No. 1, 1933, pp. 30, 31.

<sup>9</sup> A. J. Toppin, *loc. cit.*, pp. 38-43.

<sup>10</sup> Morazzoni, *op. cit.* Tav. CXL b), CLVII a), CLIX a), Lane, *op. cit.*, Plates 28-30.

<sup>11</sup> Morazzoni, *op. cit.* pp. 150-152; Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>12</sup> C. Baroni, *Le ceramiche di Nove di Bassano*, Venice 1932, pp. 216-222, 262-282.

<sup>13</sup> Baroni, *op. cit.* pp. 279, 280. G. Urbani de Gheltof, *La manifattura di maiolica e de porcellana in Este*, Venice, 1876, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>14</sup> G. Morazzoni, *op. cit.* p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> C. Baroni, *Le ceramiche di Nove di Bassano*, Venice, 1932, pp. 222-225.

<sup>16</sup> G. Morazzoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-8.

## Neu bekanntgewordene Arbeiten von Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck

Von Ralph Wark, Hendersonville NC., USA

(Abb. 10-19)

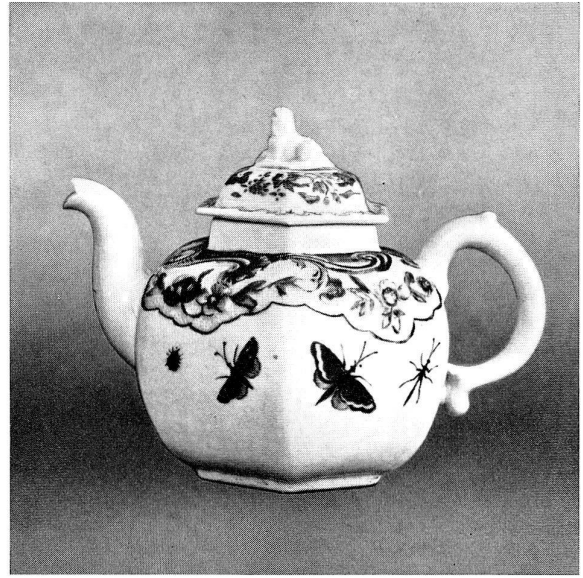
Mein Aufsatz «Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck, einer der bedeutendsten deutschen Porzellan- und Fayencemaler des 18. Jahrhunderts» im Mitteilungsblatt Nr. 34 der Keramik-Freunde der Schweiz und die Nachträge in den Heften Nr. 35, 37 und 41 erregten ein lebhaftes Interesse für diesen Künstler. Es war zu erwarten, dass neue Arbeiten bekannt wurden und dass als natürliche Folge die Preise gewaltig anzogen.

Als Ergebnis steht heute fest, dass Löwenfinck in Meissen und in den anderen Fabriken Landschaftsmalereien und figürliche Staffage, nach eigenen Entwürfen und nach Vorlagen, geliefert hat. So konnte z. B. der Kamelreiter aus der Weigelfolge 125 «figures et habillemens Chinois», die 1719 im eigenen Verlag erschien, als Vorbild für die Malerei Löwenfincks auf dem bekannten Fulder Krug, einer DuPaquier-Terrine und einer Vase aus Dorotheenthaler Fayence

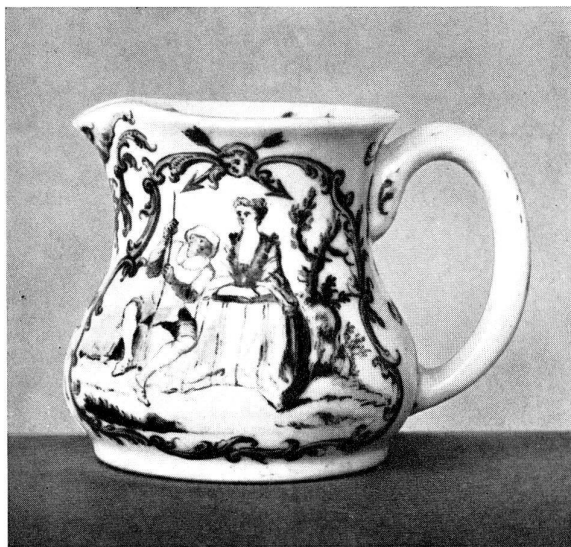
Tafel I



*Abb. 1 Teapot in the British Museum.*



*Abb. 2 Teapot in the Victoria and Albert Museum.*



*Abb. 3 Cream-jug in the Victoria and Albert Museum.*



*Abb. 4 Low cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum.*

Tafel II



Abb. 5 Fluted cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Unmarked.

Abb. 6 Fluted cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Unmarked.



Abb. 7 Snuff-box in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.



Abb. 8 Snuff-box in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

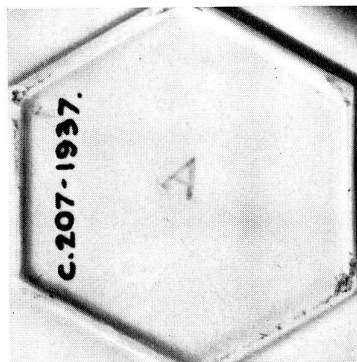


Abb. 9 Mark: Capital «A» in underglaze blue.