



Ocean-Liner Ceramics: A Red Star Line Assemblage in Antwerp, Belgium

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Abstract In contrast to what films such as *Titanic* would have people believe, scientific knowledge about ocean liners is fairly limited. These boats and their material culture, however, functioned as symbols of modernity par excellence and thus allow a better understanding of the advent of a new world at the turn of the 20th century. The focus of this article is a ceramic assemblage from the Red Star Line, the shipping company that transported some two million migrants from Antwerp (Belgium) to the United States between 1873 and 1934. The analysis of this material provides new insights into the furnishings and daily life aboard these ships. Moreover, the possible reuse of these maritime objects ashore forms a basis for a discussion of the ways in which ordinary people entered into the modern world using material culture and to what extent they might have embraced the values associated with these mass-produced goods.

Resumen En contraste con lo que películas como *Titanic* harían creer a la gente, el conocimiento científico sobre los transatlánticos es bastante limitado. Estos barcos y su cultura material, sin embargo, funcionaron como símbolos de la modernidad por excelencia y, por lo tanto, permiten comprender mejor el advenimiento de un nuevo mundo a principios del siglo XX. El tema central de este artículo es un ensamblaje cerámico de

Red Star Line, la compañía naviera que transportó a unos dos millones de migrantes desde Amberes (Bélgica) a los Estados Unidos entre 1873 y 1934. El análisis de este material proporciona nuevos conocimientos sobre el mobiliario y la vida diaria a bordo de estos barcos. Además, la posible reutilización de estos objetos marítimos en tierra constituye una base para una discusión sobre las formas en que la gente común ingresó al mundo moderno utilizando la cultura material y hasta qué punto podrían haber abrazado los valores asociados con estos bienes producidos en masa.

Résumé Contrairement aux films qui comme *Titanic*, voudraient le donner à penser, le savoir scientifique sur les paquebots est relativement limité. Ces navires et leur culture matérielle fonctionnaient cependant comme des symboles par excellence de la modernité et permettent donc de mieux comprendre l'avènement d'un monde nouveau au début du XXe siècle. Cet article s'intéresse en particulier à un assemblage céramique provenant de la Red Star Line, la compagnie maritime ayant transporté quelque deux millions de migrants au départ d'Anvers (Belgique) vers les États-Unis entre 1873 et 1934. L'analyse de ce matériau fournit des éclairages nouveaux sur le mobilier et la vie quotidienne à bord de ces navires. De plus, la réutilisation potentielle de ces objets maritimes sur la terre ferme fournit la base d'une discussion sur les manières dont les personnes ordinaires ont fait leur entrée dans le monde moderne en s'appuyant sur la culture matérielle, et la mesure suivant laquelle elles ont adopté les valeurs associées à ces biens issus d'une production de masse.

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An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Archaeology in Belgium and Ocean-Liner Ceramics

Except for some commercial and academic work on sites of the First and Second World Wars, the archaeology of the late 19th and 20th centuries in Belgium has not yet begun (Tourigny et al. 2019:424). Often dismissed as irrelevant, ceramic assemblages do have potential for writing new narratives of ordinary people and households, in addition to existing documentary ones. This article presents the fill of a feature excavated in the city of Antwerp, Belgium, as an example of how material culture can be used to give a complementary perspective. This fill is unusual, as it combines common household waste with vessels belonging to the Red Star Line (RSL), an Antwerp-based shipping company involved in passenger transport to the United States between 1873 and 1934. This analysis not only allows the study of large-scale systems and processes, such as capitalism and globalization, but also makes it possible to formulate some hypotheses about how their effects can be seen on a local level. These two research goals are reflected in the structure of this article. The first part discusses the RSL ceramics in detail in an attempt to get a better understanding of the furnishings and life in first, second, and third class aboard these ships. Particular attention is paid to how these ceramics might have served as active tools to attract customers in a very competitive business. The second part speculates about how those RSL items ended up in the backyard of an Antwerp house. Based on archival work about the proprietor and the tenant of the lot in which the feature was located, hypotheses about the recontextualization of these maritime objects in an urban context highlight the diversity and complexity of lower- and (lower-)middle-class households in a fast-changing world and sketch a possible road ahead for an archaeology of the recent period in Belgium.

Although the importance of trying to advance historical archaeology in Belgium is clear for this readership, one might question the need for an article on some broken ocean-liner ceramics given the ca. 5,500 artifacts that have been salvaged from the RMS *Titanic* since 1987. Moreover, as the *Titanic* was operated by the White Star Line, a sister company of the RSL, there is

a considerable overlap in the material culture used aboard both shipping lines. Despite being one of the most famous wreck sites of all time, the fact that the artifacts are held in the private hands of the now-bankrupt company RMS Titanic, Inc., and its owner Premier Exhibitions (Greshko 2018) has resulted in relatively few publications about this iconic ocean liner. The lion's share of these works is written for the general public (Wels 1997; Geller 2001) and displays an altogether limited interest in material culture. Scientific studies that do touch upon the onboard artifacts are either rather descriptive (Beveridge et al. 2008) or focus on the technicalities of the restoration of objects (Montluçon and Lacoudre 1989). All in all, knowledge is surprisingly limited. The exhibition “Ocean Liners: Speed and Style” (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 3 February–17 June 2018) and its related publication (Finamore and Wood 2018b), have shown the potential of studying ocean liners and their material culture because they are situated at the crossing of the nascent fields of advertising and design, technological progress, and ideas of modernity. Modernity, as defined here, is a qualitative category, not so much a chronological indicator (Osborne 1992). It is understood as the conscious contemporaneous experience of living in a present that is strongly different from a past (Sherry 2017:83) and characterized by a positivist belief in the future. In view of the unprecedented technological progress and the myriad economic, political, and social changes of the time (Sherry 2017:84), the later 19th and early 20th centuries is a preeminent period for the study of the cultural construct of modernity through various vehicles: from new ways of thinking about time and politics (Vieira 2015) to bicycles (Norcliffe 2001). Building on the foundations of Finamore and Wood (2018b), the present study tries to take present insight into these issues a step further, exploring the particular role played by the ceramics of the RSL.

The Red Star Line

Rise and Fall of a Global Brand

The Société Anonyme de Navigation Belge-Américaine (Belgian American shipping company), better known as the Red Star Line (referring to its pennant, white with a red star), came into existence in 1873. This shipping line

was founded by an American, Clement Acton Griscom, who already managed the Philadelphia-based International Navigation Company (INC, founded 1871). The founding of the RSL should be seen as an attempt by the INC, which had been dealing mainly with petroleum transport, to get a share of the migrant traffic between Europe and the United States. Moreover, New York City was the main port of entry for goods and people into the United States at that time, and the INC wanted to detour part of this flow to Philadelphia (Feys 2008:40). In spite of its Philadelphia-based origin, the RSL sailed under the Belgian flag, which offered several advantages, as Belgian ship's crews were lower paid than American ones, and ships could be constructed more cost effectively in England. The Belgian government and the City of Antwerp gave further financial incentives to the RSL through a postal-traffic monopoly, subsidies, and an exemption from quay and pilotage dues. In doing so, the government hoped to boost migrant traffic through the port of Antwerp (Nauwelaerts 2008:10). The peak year was 1913, when the RSL transported some 70,000 migrants across the Atlantic (Nauwelaerts 2008:14).

The success of shipping lines sparked the interest of banker John Pierpont Morgan. In 1902, in an effort to monopolize the North Atlantic migrant trade, he financed a trust, called the International Marine Mercantile Company (IMM), grouping the INC, which controlled the RSL, with various other subsidiary corporations and their respective subsidiaries. The RSL, as a subsidiary company of the INC, was thus amalgamated with the White Star Line (WSL), Atlantic Line, Dominion Line, and Leyland Line in 1902, but continued to exist under its own name (Feys 2008:42, 2013:164; Nauwelaerts 2008:10). The RSL from this time was associated with New York City as the port of entry instead of Philadelphia (Laister 2006:76). The IMM eventually proved to be unsuccessful. Immigration restrictions imposed by the United States from 1921 onward can be considered as the start of the RSL's downfall. In 1923, as the IMM sold off its foreign-flagged subsidiaries, the INC, the parent company of the RSL, was dissolved, and the Leyland Line took over the management of the RSL, but to no avail. On 27 February 1934, the Société Anonyme de Navigation Belge-Américaine was liquidated and the RSL ceased to exist (Nauwelaerts 2008:15). By that time, over two million migrants had traveled between Antwerp and the United States with the RSL. Knowledge about these myriad

voyages is, however, fairly limited. While plenty of information can be found about the migrants themselves in reports of government officials and lists of ships' passengers (e.g., Kurgan and Spelkens [1976] and the records of the Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation), scholars are less informed about the physical aspects of their journey. The whereabouts of the RSL's archives are unknown, and their fate remains a mystery. Most likely they are no longer preserved (Feys 2013:4).

Life Aboard: Competition for the Migrant Trade

Despite the loss of the RSL archive, recent historical research by Feys (2013) has generated new insights, debunking, for example, the persistent stereotypical representation of harsh traveling conditions for third-class (steerage) passengers at the turn of the 20th century. Belgian and American laws and control by a commission of experts guaranteed the quality of accommodation, hygiene, and food on the ships. Migrants themselves were also a driving factor behind the constant improvement of comfort during the crossing (Feys 2017:117–120). The mode of travel was largely determined by chain-migration patterns and word-of-mouth sharing of information between relatives on either side of the Atlantic (Feys 2013:155, 2016:261, 2017:122). The heavy investments of ocean liners in passenger comfort can be reduced to business logic, as “a happy customer recommends the company to family and friends and books again with eventual definitive return or visit to the homeland” (Feys 2017:122). In a cartel-type organization with fixed prices and quotas, such as the IMM, quality of service was therefore deemed necessary to strengthen customer relations and, as such, assure long-term profits (Feys 2013:155, 2016:272, 2017:132). As a result, third-class passengers around the turn of the 20th century experienced a considerable increase in privacy and hygiene, while the “quality and quantity of the menu on board exceeded the rations they had at home” (Feys 2013:155). The fierce competition for migrants marked the ocean liners’ “evolution towards floating luxury hotels” (Nauwelaerts 2008:9).

Rather than seeing them as steel cages, passengers perceived these ocean liners as “monuments of modernity” (Flood 2018:34). The transformation of steamship travel into a symbol of progress flowed from the ships' progressive and luxurious designs, their comfortable accommodations, hygiene, and food, and the many technological innovations leading to ever larger, safer,

and more reliable vessels (Finamore and Wood 2018a:12,15). Passengers therefore not only bought a ticket across the Atlantic, but entered into “a fantasy environment that fulfilled the desires and aspirations of millions” (Finamore and Wood 2018a:12). The experience of such an idealized society offered by ocean liners did not come from a philanthropic notion, but was linked to mechanisms of chain and return migration, and to the boosting of long-term profits.

Historical research has thus added to and opened up the debate on ocean liners and the industry of passenger transport during this period. Much remains to be studied, including the everyday practices of the many lives making the crossing without a paper trail and the effects of these ships, as symbols of modernity, on life ashore. The finding of an RSL assemblage in the city of Antwerp provides a unique opportunity to explore these two lines of study.

A Maritime Assemblage in an Urban Context

In March and April 2008, excavations were carried out by the City of Antwerp Archaeological Service on the

Lange Nieuwstraat (site No. A277 Jezusstraat), situated in the historical heart of the city (Fig. 1), following plans for new construction on the site (Bellens 2019). Some 70 features were detected, dating from the Middle Ages into the 20th century. One of those 20th-century features, in the backyard of a house, consisted of a keyhole-shaped brick structure (Feature S8) of unknown function ($3.4 \times 2.3 \times 1.1$ m [length \times width \times depth]) (Fig. 2). Its fill was mainly building material. Remarkably enough in this urban environment, the context was also composed of an assemblage of material dating between 1894 and 1911 (based on the presence of registration numbers and manufacturing dates printed on ceramic vessels), and associated with the RSL, the shipping company inextricably connected to Antwerp and the metropolitan character of its population at the turn of the 20th century. The RSL material was found throughout the fill, mixed together with ordinary household goods (Fig. 3). The dating of these household objects can be situated in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and therefore suggests that the most recent manufacturing date of 1911 can be used as the *terminus post quem* (TPQ) for the fill. It seems that the feature was filled

Fig. 1 Location of Antwerp, Belgium. (Maps by author, 2019.)



Fig. 2 View of Feature S8, the fill of which contained the Red Star Line material, 2008. (Photo courtesy of Tim Bellens, City of Antwerp Archaeological Service.)



quite quickly after this TPQ, as the outbreak of the First World War (1914–1918) presumably halted most construction activities in Belgium and no diagnostic material from the 1920s is present. I therefore assume that Feature S8 must have been filled somewhere between 1911 and 1920.

The following paragraphs will address the artifacts in Feature S8 in depth and will form the basis for a discussion of the broader implications of this material for the study of ocean liners and the perception of modernity at the turn of the 20th century. The choice was made to include only the RSL ceramics in this analysis and omit the glass, bone, metal, and celluloid plastic artifacts for concerns of brevity, as they contribute little to the main arguments made in this article.

Artifacts in Focus

Ocean liners offered first-class, second-class, and third-class tickets to make the Atlantic crossing. This distinction in classes was reflected in the material culture aboard. There is quite a broad consensus about which ceramic items belonged to first or second class based on their decorative motifs. There is more debate about material for third class, and I will expand on this matter further on. The consensus for this class division of objects is based on a variety of sources, such as photographic evidence of first-, second-, and third-class ship interiors, oral history, and the vessels recovered and put on display from the WSL's RMS *Titanic* wreck

(launched in 1912) and its more fortunate sister ship, the RMS *Olympic* (launched in 1911) (Wels 1997; Geller 2001; Laister 2006; Beveridge et al. 2008). Given the close business relations between the White and Red Star lines in the IMM trust, and the physical resemblance of the ceramics used on ships of both ocean liners (in part because they worked with the same manufacturers and suppliers [Laister 2006:8–9,76]), the same distinction of pottery into classes can be extrapolated from the WSL to the RSL. The present discussion of ceramic vessels is therefore structured according to the respective class to which they belonged, beginning, however, with quantification of the assemblage as a whole.

Quantification

Quantification of the ceramic assemblage was made using a sherd count and a rim-based calculation of the minimum number of vessels (MNV) (Poulain 2013). These quantification methods resulted in a total count of 748 ceramic fragments or a minimum of 286 vessels, of which 251 (88%) can certainly be associated with the RSL on the basis of decoration or marks referring to the shipping line.

Three ceramic categories were distinguished: porcelain, refined white earthenware, and redware (Table 1). Refined white earthenware is predominant, accounting for over 96% of vessels within the assemblage. Porcelain and redware follow as second and third, respectively. There was a close connection between ceramic-ware



Fig. 3 A selection of household objects associated with the Red Star Line artifacts. Whiteware: plate (*a*), jug? (*b*), (tea?)pot (*c*), Boch Frères Keramis bowl (*d*), and miniature cup (*h*). Porcelain: stopper of a swing-top beer bottle (*e*) and a doll’s head (*g*). Glass:

marbles (*f*) and a Néol medicine bottle (*j*). Bone: domino (*i*), toothbrush (*l*), and buttons (*p*). Mother-of-pearl: buttons (*o*). Metal: spoon (*m*). Plastic: comb (*k*), buttons (*n*), beads (*q*, *r*), and jewels (*s*). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

types and passenger classes aboard the ships. As can be observed in the study of these finds, first-class material is exclusively made of highly vitrified whitewares or porcelain, whereas second- and third-class services are produced solely in refined white earthenware (Laister 2006; Beveridge et al. 2008). Figures in Table 1 for the vessels (certainly) not belonging to the RSL in Feature S8 are skewed, as many unidentified body sherds, possibly of first-, second-, or third-class service, or those not associated with the RSL at all, were registered under this category.

First Class

First-class material represents 24% of the ceramic vessels in the assemblage. Transfer-printed makers’ marks and other manufacturing dates place the majority of the whiteware vessels between 1909 and 1911 (Figs. 4a–c, 5a). The occurrence of the 1911 date determined the TPQ for the fill. A transfer-printed, underglaze RSL logo with a stamped or stenciled star is characteristic of the lot. In general, their borders are decorated with a slightly varying transfer-print design in brown, with

Table 1 Ceramic categories and counts

	MNV ^a	MNV ^a %	Sherds	Sherds %
Whiteware	276	96.5%	723	96.7%
Redware	1	0.3%	16	2.1%
Porcelain	9	3.1%	9	1.2%
Total	286		748	
First Class	69	24.1%	142	19%
Second Class	98	34.3%	223	29.8%
Third Class	84	29.4%	159	21.3%
Unclear or No RSL	35	12.2%	224	30%
Total	286	—	748	—

^a Minimum number of vessels.

overglaze turquoise highlights that have now mainly worn off (remnant on Figure 4j, right) and gilding on the rim. The exact name of this pattern remains undetermined, although some collectors have incorrectly termed it “Wisteria” because of the climbing vine present in the transfer print (Beveridge et al. 2008:170). Wisteria, however, is the name of another pattern that was never used on White or Red Star Line ships (Beveridge et al. 2008:169). A variation of this pattern, named “Crown” (Fig. 4k), also referred to as “Celtic” or “Gothic Arch,” is also present (Upholster 2007; Beveridge et al. 2008:170–171). Two British registration numbers, 117214 and 324028, are found together on a variety of forms, but provide no further clarity on the possible potter or name for both patterns. No. 117214 was registered by the British company William Brownfield and Sons on 11 January 1889 for the design of a cup (Fig. 6), but was obviously used for a wide range of forms. No. 324028, on the other hand, was registered on 22 August 1898 and consists of a “Pattern for Tea & Dessert Ware” (Fig. 7). The latter patent is accompanied by the following information: “Thomas Wood and C. E. Bullock, joint liquidators of Brownfield’s Guild Pottery Society, Limited, Cobridge, Stoke-on-Trent” (National Archives 1898).

The Brownfield company produced pottery for the White Star Line and even provided the entire outfitting of the SS *Oceanic* in 1899 (Peake 1995:80). Brownfield could also have produced vessels for the RSL between 1898 (the most recent registration number) and its permanent closure in 1900 (Peake 1995:80). However, as some of the vessels with this pattern in the assemblage are dated between 1909 and 1911, Brownfield cannot be

seen as the sole producer of the first-class vessels for the RSL. The presence of minor differences between the patent and the 1901–1911 transfer prints confirms that several manufacturers seem to have been involved in the production of these goods (Beveridge et al. 2008:169–171).

Nine highly vitrified whiteware tableware forms are represented: butter dishes, plates, bowls, condiment dishes, saucers, serving dishes, cups, an eggcup, and a jug (Table 2). They all share the same printed motif, with exception of nine plates decorated with the Crown pattern (Fig. 4k). The presence of butter dishes (Fig. 4a–c), condiment dishes (Fig. 4d–f), and different types and sizes of serving dishes (Fig. 4h, i) and plates (Fig. 4j, k) testifies to the large variety of tableware and the elaborate tablesetting in first class (Fig. 8).

The first-class material also includes some porcelain forms, namely plates (Fig. 5f), cups (Fig. 5d, e), and one unidentified vessel (Fig. 5g). These porcelain vessels are decorated with painted floral motifs and gilding on the rims. The vessels all originate from Limoges, France. They were produced in the former factory of Charles Field Haviland, led by the partnership Gerard, Dufraisseix, and Abbot (GDA) from 1900 onward (mark on Figure 5e) (Haviland Online 2000–2015; POP: La plateforme ouverte du patrimoine 2003). The same GDA mark includes the words: INTERNATIONAL MERCANTILE MARINE Co, which refines the dating of the Limoges pottery to after the foundation of J. P. Morgan’s IMM trust in 1902. It shows that the IMM placed bulk orders for ceramics, and that similar vessels were likely used on several of the holding company’s shipping lines.

It is unclear as of yet how the whiteware vessels relate to the porcelain ones. Were they used for different kinds of service (lunch vs. dinner), or were they used in different parts of the ship? The latter hypothesis is most likely the case. For example, Royal Crown Derby provided ceramics specifically for the first-class à la carte restaurant of the RMS *Olympic* (Beveridge et al. 2008:169). The *Olympic* was further equipped with a first-class bar, lounge, smoke room, and several other cafés (Beveridge et al. 2008:163–164), which could suggest the use of a wide variety of ceramic bodies and decorative patterns, each adapted to the particular space in which they functioned.

A final form discussed for first class is the washbasin (Fig. 5c). Although frequently found in first-class cabins, photographs also show its presence in

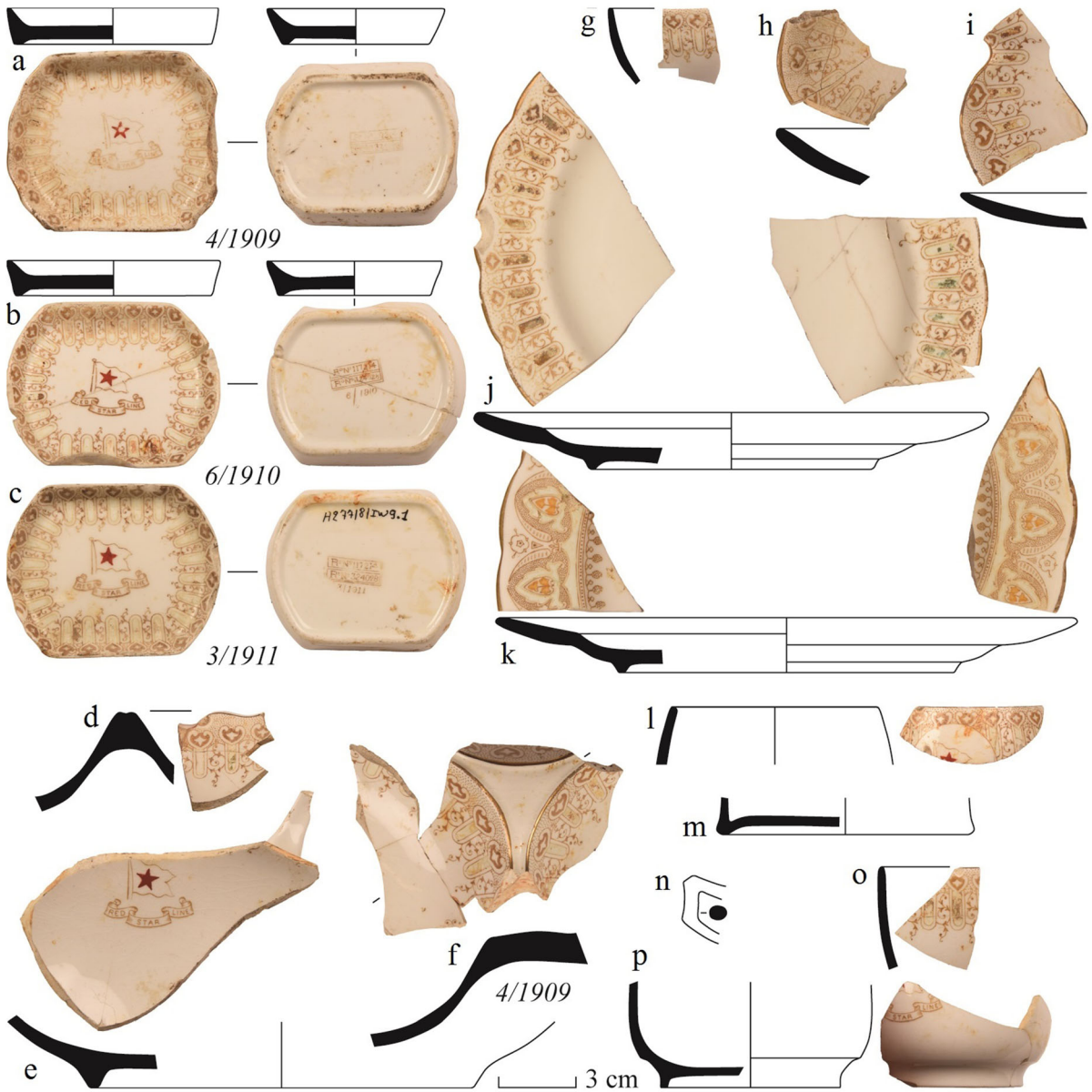


Fig. 4 First class, whiteware: butter dishes (a–c), condiment dishes (d–f), an eggcup (g), serving dishes (h, i), plates (j, k), cups (l, n–p), and unidentified (m). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

staterooms for second and third class (as, e.g., in a photo of the RSL ship *Belgenland* [Museum aan de Stroom 1925–1927]). The washbasin is easily recognizable by its spout and inwardly bent rim, shaped to keep water in the basin in rough seas. The washbasin was fitted into a wooden, fold-up cabinet, called a “compactom,” specifically designed to save space in small passengers’ cabins. Once the hinged flap on which the washbasin was fixed was tipped up, the contents were emptied into

a tank fitted into the lower part of the compactom. A supply of fresh water, hidden behind a mirror, was connected to the basin via a pipe and tap. Both fresh and waste water were brought in and removed by a steward (Beveridge et al. 2008:140). Compactoms were not exclusively used at sea, but were also much desired on land, as modern ideas about space saving and organization found their way into ordinary households and small living spaces at the beginning of the 20th century

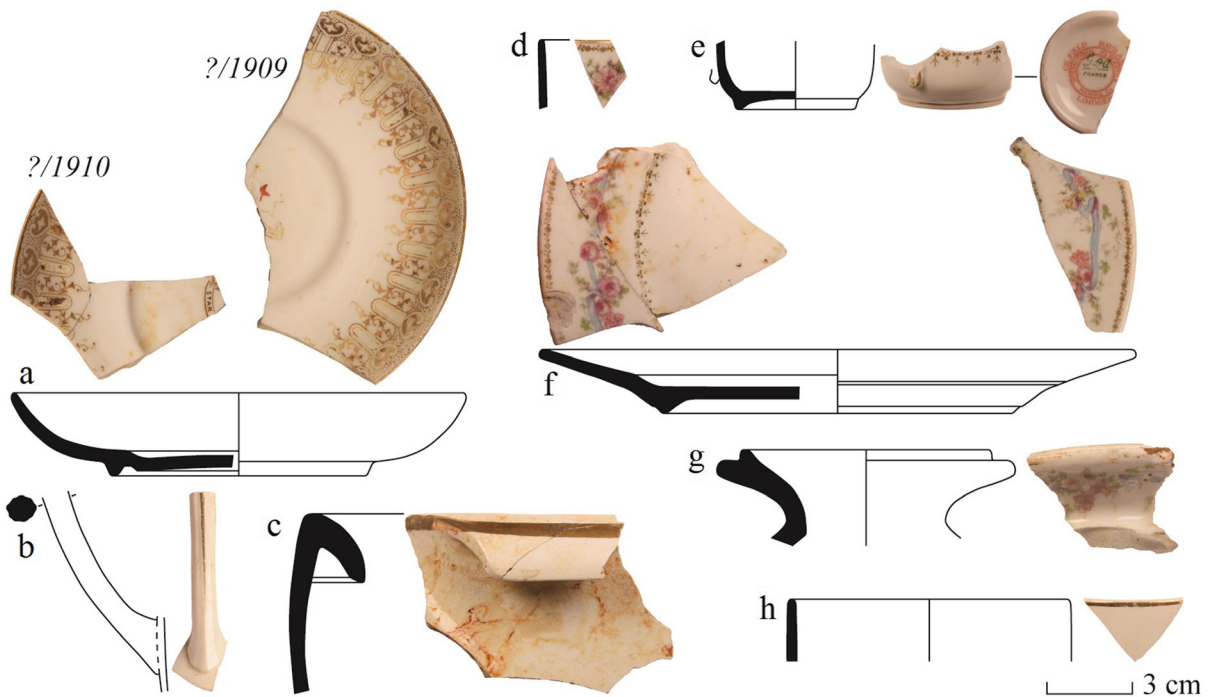


Fig. 5 First class, whiteware: saucers (a) and a jug (b). Unidentified class, refined whiteware: washbasin (c) and unidentified (h). First class, porcelain: cups (d, e), plates (f), and unidentified (g). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

(Edwards 2013). Moreover, the supply of fresh water built into these cabinets was an ingenious solution for sanitary facilities in rooms that did not have ready access to water.

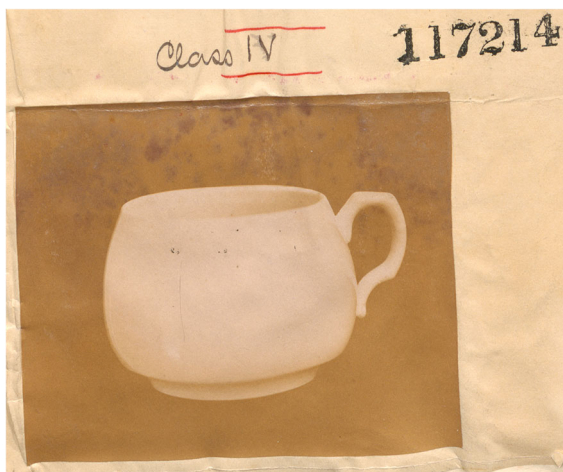


Fig. 6 Cup associated with registration No. 117214, 1889. (Image courtesy of the National Archives, BT 50/112, Kew, UK.)

Second Class

Second-class material is the dominant category in this assemblage (over 34% of ceramic vessels). These vessels are consistently made of a white refined earthenware (Figs. 9, 10). The 98 whiteware vessels can be divided into seven forms (Table 2). Remarkably enough, lids for tureens are the most common vessel form. Also noteworthy is that, for these 38 lids, only a single tureen was counted. Plates and saucers constitute two other important form categories and are complemented by cups, eggcups, and a jug. The unusually high number of extraneous lids might be due to their considerable size and relatively large degree of fragmentation. They may therefore be overrepresented as compared to smaller and less fragmented forms, such as plates or saucers, but even in this case their number remains remarkable. At the same time, as is clear from the fragmentary nature of some of the household goods (Fig. 3), this assemblage is only part of an unknown whole. The possibility that tureens were deposited selectively in another feature beyond the excavation limits is unlikely, however.

What is clear is that complementary decoration schemes coexisted together in second class, with floral



Fig. 7 Pattern for tea and dessert ware associated with registration No. 324028, 1898. (Image courtesy of the National Archives, BT 50/328, Kew, UK.)

Table 2 Quantification of ceramic forms (minimum number of vessels)

Form	First Class	First Class %	Second Class	Second Class %	Third Class	Third Class %	Unclear or No RSL	Unclear or No RSL %	Total	Total %
Butter dish	7	10.1%	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	2.5%
Plate	22	31.9%	24	24.5%	21	25.0%	11	31.4%	78	27.3%
Condiment dish	3	4.4%	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	1.0%
Saucer	14	20.3%	27	27.6%	13	15.5%	—	—	54	18.9%
Serving dish	11	15.9%	—	—	3	3.6%	—	—	14	4.9%
Cup	2	2.9%	5	5.1%	5	6.0%	2	5.7%	14	4.9%
Bowl	6	8.7%	—	—	8	9.5%	1	2.9%	15	5.2%
Eggcup	1	1.5%	2	2.0%	9	10.7%	—	—	12	4.2%
Lid	—	—	38	38.8%	22	26.2%	2	5.7%	62	21.7%
Ewer	—	—	—	—	1	1.2%	—	—	1	0.4%
Jug	1	1.5%	1	1.0%	2	2.4%	1	2.9%	5	1.8%
Unknown	2	2.9%	—	—	—	—	3	8.6%	5	1.8%
Terrine	—	—	1	1.0%	—	—	—	—	1	0.4%
(Tea?) pot	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.9%	1	0.4%
Chamber pot	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	8.6%	3	1.0%
Washbasin	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.9%	1	0.4%
Miniature	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.9%	1	0.4%
Stopper of swing-top bottle	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.9%	1	0.4%
Buttons	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	20.0%	7	2.5%
Doll	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2.9%	1	0.4%
Total	69		98		84		35		286	
Percent of total	24.1%		34.3%		29.4%		12.2%			

Fig. 8 First-class dining room of the Red Star Line ship *Belgenland*, 1925–1927. (Image courtesy of the Museum aan de Stroom archives, AS.2002.892.070, Antwerp, Belgium.)



motifs present in blue or flow-blue transfer prints. The flow-blue vessels (Figs. 9a–c, g, 10a–c, e–g) generally have a plain form, but are sometimes embellished with a scalloped rim (Fig. 10c), a molded floral motif (Fig. 9c), or a combination of both (Fig. 9g). Two different marks are found together on the vessels (Fig. 10c, back of saucer). One has the pattern and manufacturer name. The pattern is named “Progress” and was produced by W. H. Grindley & Co. A second mark relates to the shipping line for which the vessels were produced. A medallion shows the INC name circling an albatross(?). The added registration number, 233435, and corresponding patent for the Progress design date these vessels from 4 June 1894 onward (Fig. 11). For the non-flow-blue patterns, no makers’ marks have been preserved. The White Star Line had several companies producing similar wares for their ships, such as Foley (E. Brain & Co.) and Minton, both in Staffordshire, England (Beveridge et al. 2008:170). In the case of the RSL, only Minton can be confirmed as a possible manufacturer, based on Laister (2006:77) or the vessels kept in the stores of Antwerp’s Red Star Line Museum. Indeed, Minton actively advertised as suppliers of pottery to foreign shipping lines: “Mintons still supply ... most of the principal lines belonging both to this country

and abroad” (*Fancy Trades Supplement to the Pottery Gazette* 1894b). Online auctions show that the German Porzellanfabriken Lorenz Hutschenreuther AG Selb also produced a similar pattern for the RSL (Catawiki 2019). Marks date this German production from 1925 until the RSL’s bankruptcy in 1934.

Based on the analysis of this single deposit, it seems as if the observed specialization of ceramics in first class in terms of use aboard (whiteware vs. porcelain, dining room vs. restaurant or cafés) does not appear to be present in second class. I would argue that the difference between the non-flow-blue and flow-blue vessels is not so distinctive as to mark a functional divide between separate spaces. The choice for flow-blue or non-flow-blue decorations for second class is more probably due to a chronological difference or results from the fact that different contemporary manufacturers produced for the ocean liner at the same time. Moreover, in comparison to first class and its elaborate table settings (e.g., different types and sizes of serving and condiment dishes), the variety of forms in second class seems more limited. The numbers in Table 2 might suggest that most of the food was served from tureens, but this is speculative.

Finally, very much like the compactom, the redware featured on Figure 10h–l cannot be ascribed to a single

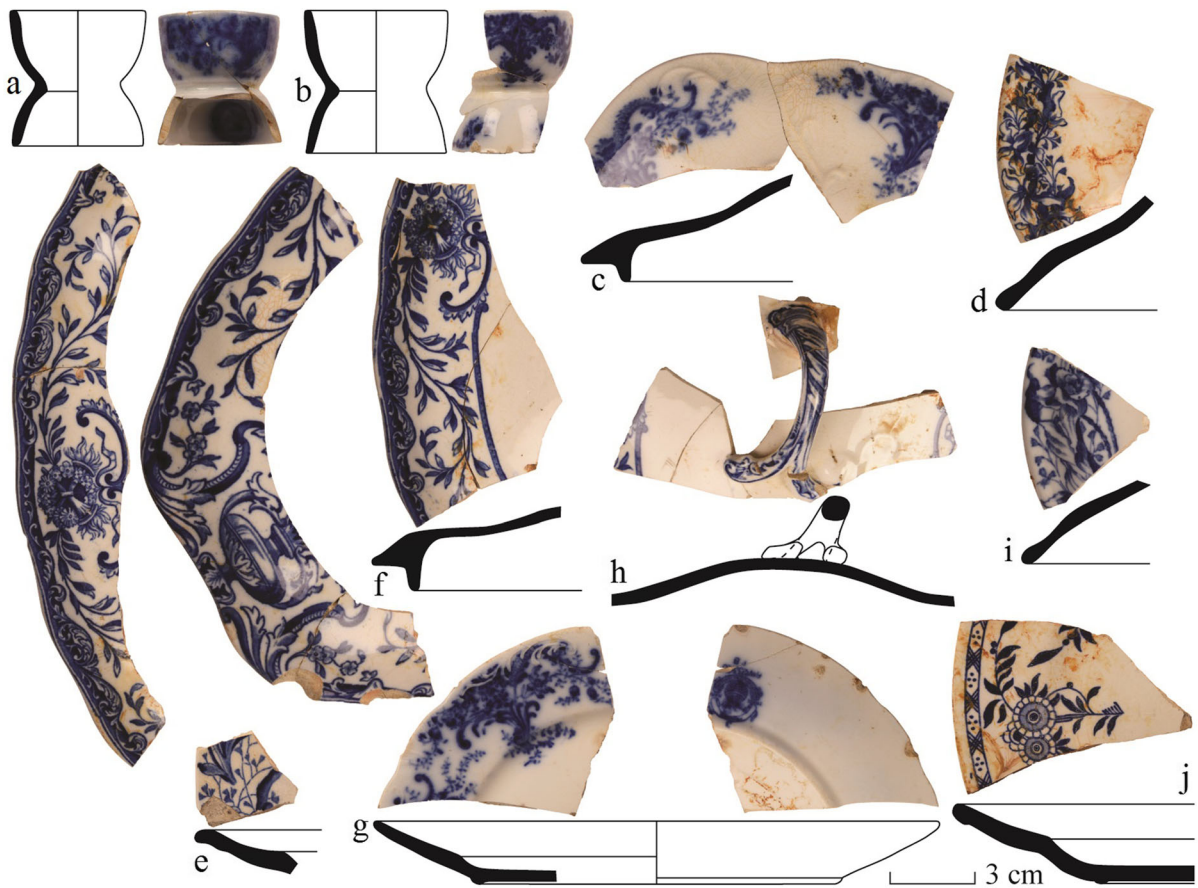


Fig. 9 Second class, refined whiteware: eggcups (a, b), lids (c, d, f, h, i), and plates (e, g, j). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

class. The interpretation of these brown-glazed, gilded vessels is not always clear, but they likely functioned for serving milk, coffee, or tea (Fig. 10j); for a parallel, see Wels (1997:129).

Third Class

While the identification of first- and second-class material is rather straightforward, it is less so for third-class vessels. In their work on the RMS *Titanic*, Beveridge et al. (2008:170) wrote that third-class tableware is “white in color and bearing only the White Star Line logo in red,” and that it “was manufactured with no special designs and no intricate details.” However, it seems that—at least for the RSL—these statements are not entirely true. An early 20th-century photograph of a third-class dining room on the RSL ship SS *Zeeland* clearly shows the use of plates with a transfer print (Fig. 12).

That exact same floral transfer print seen in Figure 12 could be identified in the Antwerp assemblage. It is a dark teal pattern named “Priscilla,” produced by a single manufacturer, John Maddock & Sons (Burslem, Staffordshire). Intricate RSL and INC monograms complement the transfer decor (Fig. 13). In total, 11 plates, 8 (sugar?) bowls, 5 cups, 7 eggcups, 2 jugs, 2 saucers, and 1 (butter?) dish were identified with the Priscilla pattern. Two types of marks occur on these vessels (Fig. 13b, f), but both date to ca. 1896 and after (Godden 1970:406). As with the Grindley mark on second-class pottery, the absence of any supplementary IMM marks or monograms suggests that these vessels date before 1902.

Shipping lines did not deal directly with pottery manufacturers, such as Grindley or Maddock. Rather, supply was outsourced to agents or distributors. Although constituting an extra cost, working with a supplier provided several advantages, eventually making up for the additional charges. A distributor not only secured the best price and reduced transport rates, but also

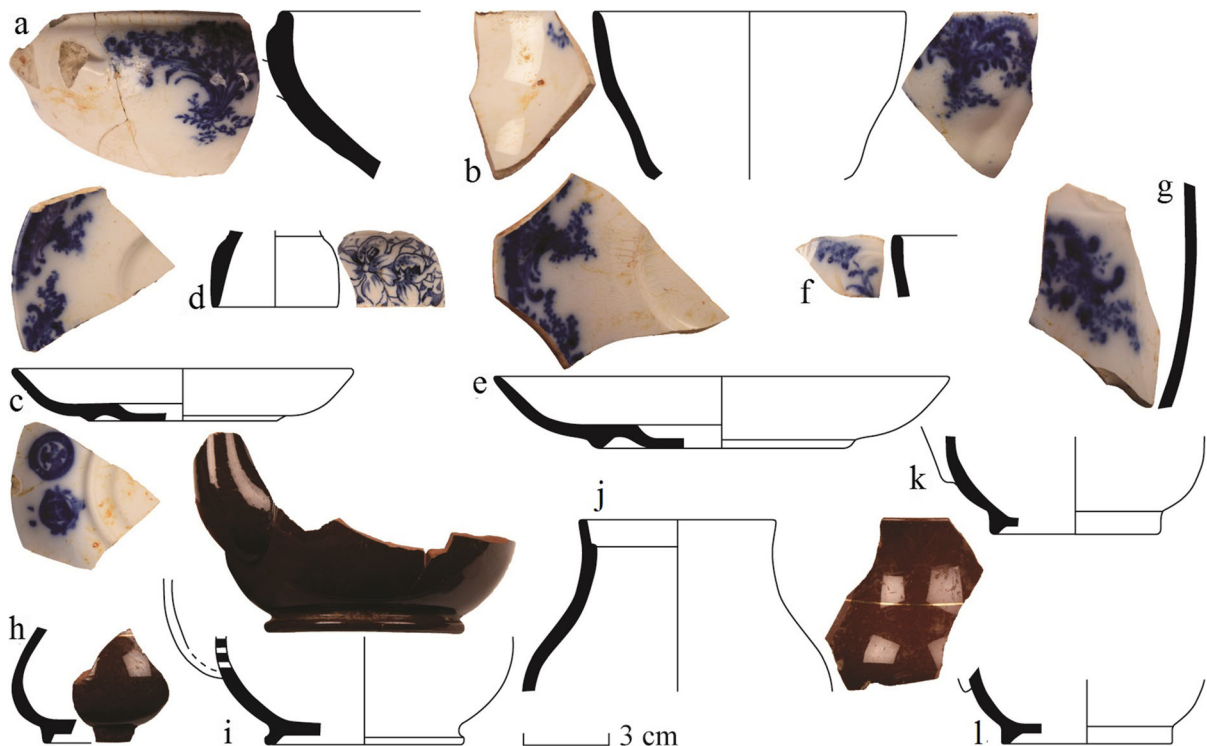


Fig. 10 Second class, refined whiteware: a tureen (a), a cup (b), saucers (c, e), an eggcup (d), and jugs (f, g). Unidentified class, refined redware: unidentified (h), a (tea?)pot (i, j), and cups (k, l). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

handled the administration involved in the purchase of ceramics, advised the shipping lines on market strategies, and guaranteed that broken pottery could immediately be replaced with an identical copy stocked in their warehouses (Bowden 1977:49; Laister 2006:9; Beveridge et al. 2008:169).

Shipping lines were a major source of income for these agents. Contemporary documents testify to suppliers' efforts toward strengthening customer relations. For example, in the correspondence section of the *Pottery Gazette* (1893d), Thomas F. Bennett & Co. demands a correction of the statement that the pottery for Cunard's steamer *Campania* was supplied by the Liverpool-based agent Robert Reynolds (*Pottery Gazette* 1893c). Bennett not only states that they had "the honour of supplying the tea and dessert ware, the former of our registered shape, and from special designs," but also writes that the tea and dessert ware for the sister steamer *Luciana* was similarly supplied by them (*Pottery Gazette* 1893d).

Stonier & Co. of Liverpool is one of the suppliers known to have worked in the service of the RSL (Laister 2006:76). The mark: ...AMAKER\NEW YORK on one

of the pieces (Fig. 13b) makes it possible to add a second supplier: John Wanamaker. The origins of this company lie in Philadelphia, where John Wanamaker (1838–1922) opened the city's first department store in 1876. The success of his business led Wanamaker to expand to New York City in November 1896 (John Wanamaker 1916:41). This TPQ of 1896 is in line with the dating of the John Maddock mark (1896+) appearing on the same Wanamaker-marked vessel. In a booklet published by John Wanamaker in 1916, the company presented itself as "New York's largest general store, not only in area of store buildings, in volume of sales, in variety and volume of merchandise, but in service and hospitality" (John Wanamaker 1916:40). Concerning the sale of pottery, the booklet states that "large and unusual stocks of the more needed and practical China and Glassware complete this most notable store" (John Wanamaker 1916:55). Furthermore, it is written that "the principal foreign steamship lines, have for their objective point lower Manhattan, and are closely linked with the Wanamaker store locality" (John Wanamaker 1916:60–61). This combination of a large stock of ceramics, proximity to the steamship piers, and the same Philadelphia roots



Fig. 11 Pattern by William Harry Grindley & Co. associated with registration No. 233435, “applicable to a dinner, tea, breakfast and toilet set,” 1894. (Image courtesy of the National Archives, BT 50/209, Kew, UK.)

Fig. 12 Third-class dining room on the SS *Zeeland*, 1900–1926. The transfer print can be identified as Priscilla and was produced by John Maddock & Sons. (Image courtesy of the Museum aan de Stroom, AS.1962.049.123, Antwerp, Belgium.)



as the INC likely explains how John Wanamaker became a supplier of ceramics for the RSL in New York and illustrates the importance of preexisting networks within markets and firms.

In a capitalist context of profit maximization, the choice by the RSL and one of its agents to use transfer-printed wares for steerage passengers might be unexpected. The close correlation between decoration and price (Majewski and O'Brien 1987:133) made transfer-printed wares more expensive than wares that were deliberately left undecorated. That the RSL nevertheless opted to invest in decorated pottery for third class can undoubtedly be linked to investments in customer comfort by shipping lines as a strategy to ensure long-term gains.

This discussion leads to another category of vessels, produced by Edward F. Bodley & Sons, active from 1881 to 1898 (Godden 1970:83). They have a transfer-printed RSL logo and red-line banding on the rim that matches the red color of the pennant (Fig. 14). Of the 48 vessels with this decoration, 18 (or 37.5%) are further highlighted with a gilded line on the rim (Fig. 14d, e, h, m). Various authors have claimed that such gilding was absent on third-class ceramics and that those vessels with a gilded rim should therefore more likely be seen as deck service, used for serving first- and second-class

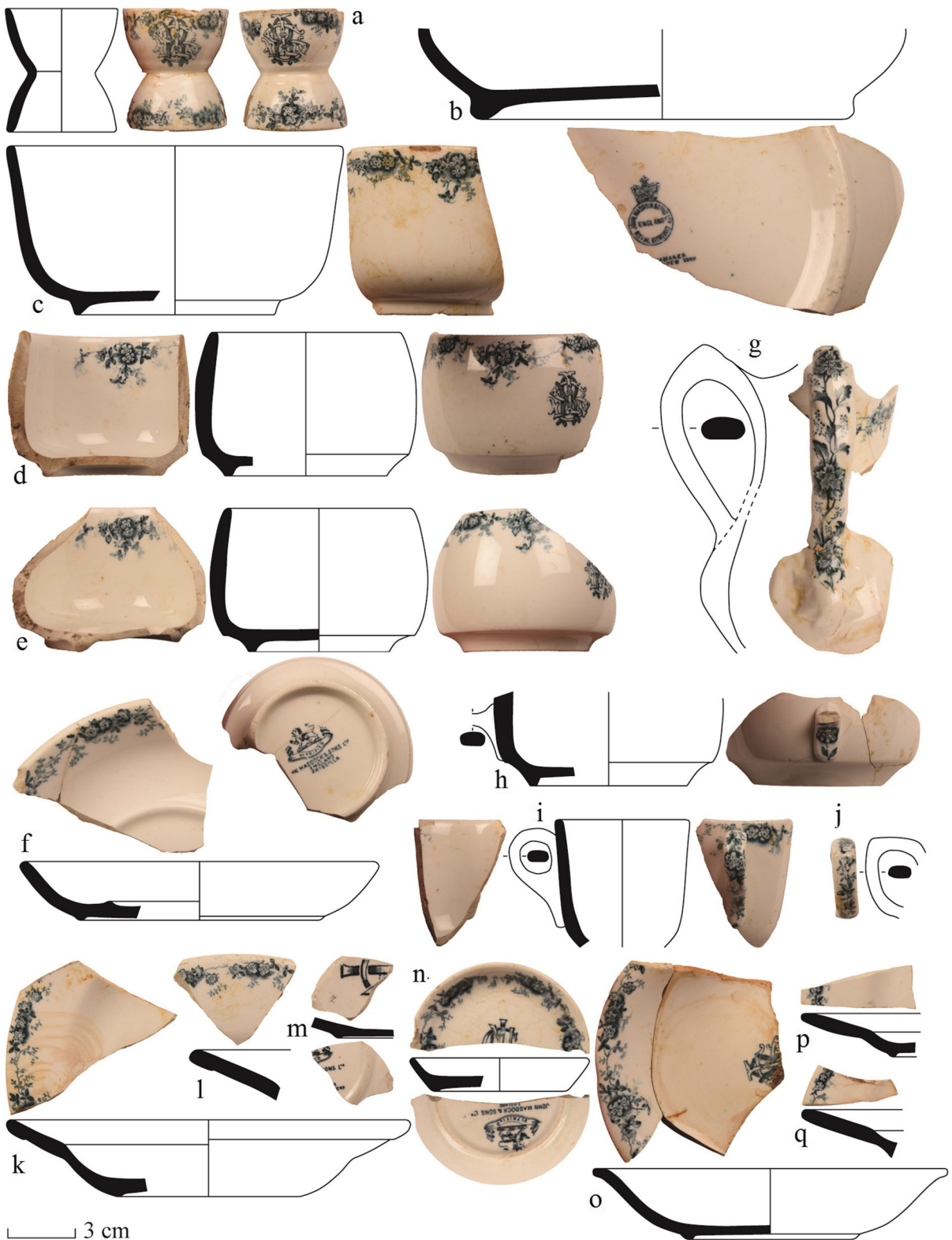


Fig. 13 Third class, refined whiteware: eggcups (a), unidentified (b), (sugar?) bowls (c–e), a saucer (f), a jug (g), cups (h–j), plates (k–m, o–q), and a (butter?) dish (n). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

passengers in outdoor spaces (Beveridge et al. 2008:174, figure 4–27). I would argue against this interpretation: ocean-liner companies had made considerable investments in very distinctive sets of ceramic vessels, each decorated according to class and use aboard. In this light, it seems illogical that ocean liners would resort to a basic pattern such as this for the luxurious first class, where everything else was top-flight. Especially in the context of outdoor use, where visual contact could be established with steerage passengers on below decks, one might expect class differences to be emphasized. Moreover, in their study of the 1906 Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog, Majewski and O'Brien (1987:133) observed that a set with underglaze transfer-printed designs (such as the third-class Priscilla print) cost a dollar more than a gold-trimmed set with a similar stencil or decal design. The presence of gilding therefore constitutes only a part of the vessel's price. The combination of gilding together with simple painted lines as decoration, instead of elaborate transfer-printed motifs, could therefore result in a total lower cost than those of the transfer-printed wares in first, second, and third class. Again, the same argument as for the Maddock pottery could be made: the small extra price paid for gilding was outweighed by the effect of building relationships with passengers. Although the possibility of deck service or the use of less-decorated ceramic sets for breakfast or lunch in first and second class cannot be excluded, I would like to put forward the hypothesis that these gilded wares could also have functioned in third class. The presence or absence of gilding could be a chronological feature or be related to certain types of tableware. As this issue will remain unresolved for now, both gilded and unglazed wares were combined in the quantification of third-class ceramics because of the inability to differentiate between them when lacking the diagnostic rim.

As with the second-class ceramics, lids for tureens or other serving vessels are the predominant form (22 vessels). Ten plates, eleven saucers, two serving dishes, one ewer, and two eggcups complete the list of forms identified as probably used in third class. A highly diversified dinner service—as observed for first but not second class—seems to be absent. The plates indicate the general dating of this batch of red-line-banded wares, with the manufacturing dates 1891 and 1895 printed on the backs of two of them (Fig. 14*d, h*). Comparison of the design variations in the style and coloring of the RSL pennant on these two plates with

secured dates in 1891 and 1895 (one is rectangular and more red in color, while the other is whiter, with two pointy edges and a different flagpole) makes it possible to situate the other vessels around the beginning (Fig. 14*e*) or middle of the 1890s (Fig. 14*a*). As such, these wares are possibly contemporary with the second-class pottery by Grindley (1894+), and slightly older than the third-class Priscilla vessels (1896+) or the first-class items (1898+, most likely 1909–1911).

Discussion

Advertising for a Global Market

Now that the objects of first, second, and third class have been analyzed separately, it is time to look at the effects they produce as a whole. Firstly, ocean-liner ceramics will be discussed as instruments “to attract and keep customers in an evermore competitive marketplace” (Bowden 1977:41). Three features (decorative motifs, quality, and logo) will be evaluated as promotional tools for the RSL.

The function of decor in an ever-increasing consciousness of design at the turn of the 20th century cannot be underestimated. Ocean-liner ticket prices were relatively fixed through the cartel organization of shipping lines, so consumers' choices were in part determined by the design of the purchased product or service (Franzen and Holzhauser 1987:157). Following rules for effective marketing, decoration was targeted toward a particular segment of the population through the selection of motifs, patterns, and colors (scalloping, gilding, red star, monograms, etc.) offered by the potteries (Bowden 1977:44,47). The cost and high quality of first-class wares, combining bright colors through multiple firings with skillfully painted motifs, is hardly a surprise. A considerable investment in pottery and material comfort for steerage passengers has also been observed. As such, I put forward the hypothesis that the material culture at disposal aboard might have differed from the household goods available at home for all passengers, and not in the least for those of third class.

Due to the poor state of archaeology of the modern periods on the European continent, and in Belgium in particular (Herremans and De Clercq 2013; Poulain and De Clercq 2015; Tourigny et al. 2019), contemporary ceramic evidence for comparison is lacking. It must thus be stressed that the conclusions below are drawn from a

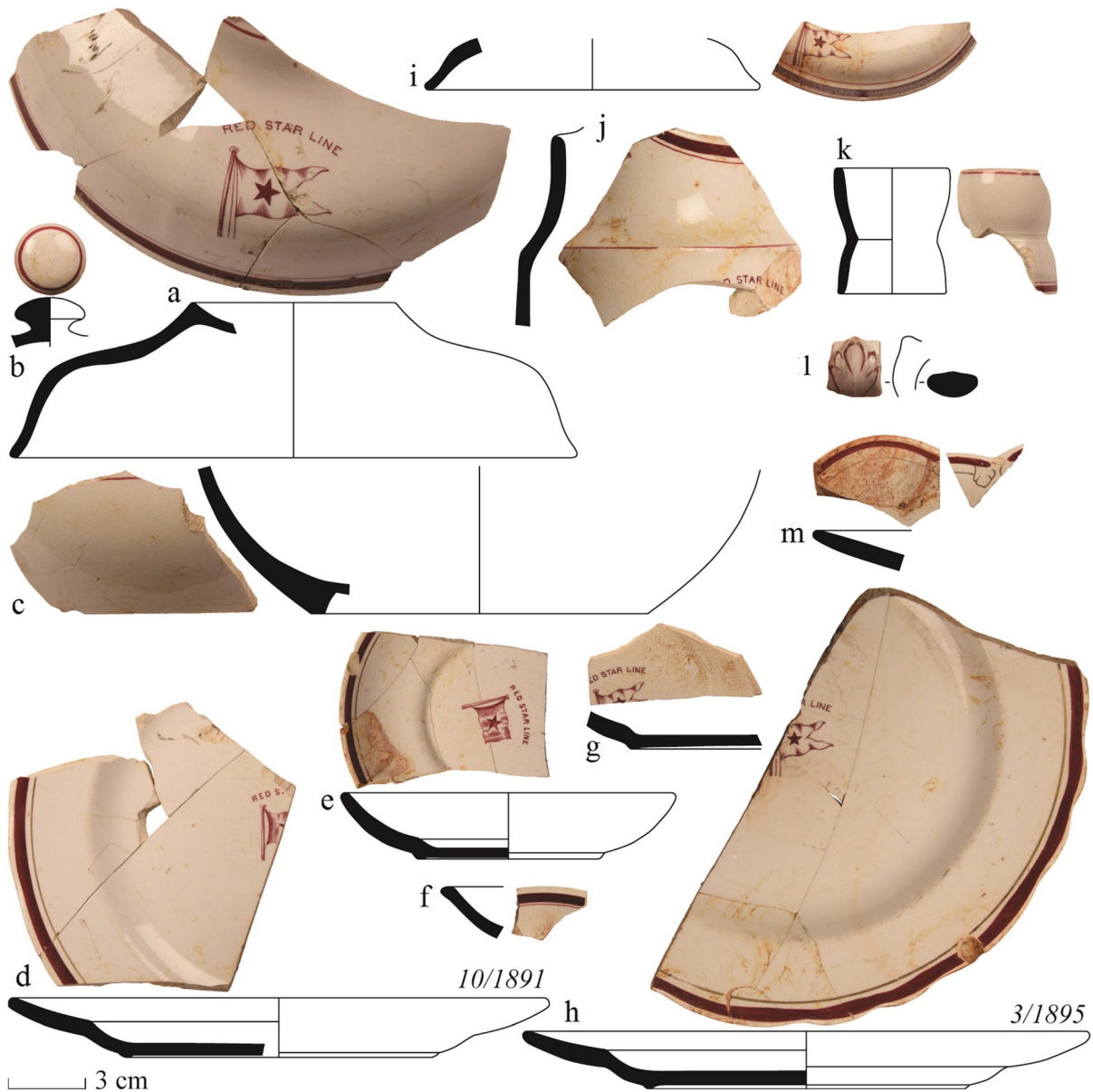


Fig. 14 Third class, refined whiteware: lids (*a, b, i*), unidentified (*c*), plates (*d, g, h*), saucers (*e, f*), ewer (*j*), eggcup (*k*), cup (*l*), and serving dishes (*m*). (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

single sample, a late 19th-century assemblage found in Aalter (Belgium), which suggests what lower-class ceramics might have looked like (Fig. 15). Although some fashionable items are present in the assemblage (Figure 15*b* in particular), the deposit is mainly characterized by a large number of undecorated refined whitewares (not illustrated) and coarse redwares (Fig. 15*c*), together with a few vessels decorated with sheet prints (Fig. 15*a*). By then, such sheet patterns were largely outmoded, with decorative, brightly colored

borders replacing all-over, monochrome printed designs (Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum: State Museum of Archaeology 2002). The vessels were produced in Maastricht (the Netherlands), Longwy and Sarreguemines (France), and in the Belgian towns of La Louvière, Tournai, Jemappes, and Nimy. According to the permanent exhibition of Keramis—Centre de la céramique in La Louvière, Belgium, Belgian potteries were slow to adopt stylistic innovations, with Art Nouveau and functionalism having a very limited impact on

their industrial production of ceramics. The occurrence of sheet prints on Sarreguemines vessels could suggest that the same is true for (some of) the non-Belgian manufacturers. It seems that, in contrast to at least some European potteries, the RSL—certainly for first and second class—opted for more modern aesthetics and adopted the most current trends in ceramic decoration, as exemplified by the brightly colored rims on porcelain vessels or the flow-blue designs (Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum: State Museum of Archaeology 2002). That same commitment to modern aesthetics can be seen with the iconic RSL posters commissioned by the line from Belgium’s most avant-garde artists (Flood 2018:28–29). Through the use of the latest designs and a uniform graphic language, the RSL maximized its visual impact. As such, the company promoted and positioned itself at the forefront of modernity (Lafleur 1999:67; Finamore and Wood 2018a:16), of which the migrants hoped to form a part.

In addition to these decorative motifs, the body of the ceramics also seems to have been a weapon in the battle for the emigrant trade. Although most English potteries produced vessels in an ordinary white refined earthenware, manufacturers did not hesitate to thrust the quality and properties of this fabric into the spotlight, as well as to highlight the economic advantage of buying durable vessels. For example, advertisements from John Maddock & Sons in *Pottery Gazette* (1898) promoted its “royal vitreous and vitrified semi-porcelain—high grade goods for hotel, restaurant, and ship use. Non-crazing, non-absorbent,” also emphasizing that the fabric is “really ‘fireproof’ and that [it] will not craze, or stain if chipped” (*Pottery Gazette* 1893b). Manufacturers elaborated on chipping in another advertisement for the so-called rolled-edge plates (Newcomb 1947:228): “The edges of the dinner and soup plates are strengthened by the addition of a welt of clay, to prevent chipping, which has been so arranged in the modelling that it does not detract from the appearance of the pieces” (*Fancy Trades Supplement to the Pottery Gazette* 1894a). E. F. Bodley & Sons also regularly advertised their “genuine ironstone china” for use in “steamships, hotel, coffee house, and mess purposes generally” (*Pottery Gazette* 1893a).

These publicized qualities were communicated also through the use of marks. Marks of John Maddock & Sons describe the vessels as “vitrified” or “royal vitreous,” while E. F. Bodley & Sons repeats in both printed and embossed marks the “genuine ironstone china”

found in their paper advertisements. The terms “vitrified,” “vitreous,” or “ironstone” were all associated with the “virtue of being less absorptive of moisture, odors, or bacterial contamination” and, consequently, with cleanliness, “as the vitrified ware was seen as more safe and sanitary than other ceramics” (Myers 2016:112). Cleanliness was similarly promoted for washbasins and compactoms. While their presence was required in order to comply with imposed sanitation regulations aboard, at the same time they symbolized the “ingenuity, the refinements, and the luxury of the modern sanitary arrangements,” and were therefore actively employed as a marketing tool (Beveridge et al. 2008:137).

Considerations of cleanliness and health safety were not expressed in the makers’ marks used by the regional potteries from La Louvière, Tournai, Jemappes, Nimy, Longwy, Maastricht, and Sarreguemines found on vessels in the late 19th-century Aalter assemblage (Maastricht marks do mention “ironstone” or “whitestone,” but only on ceramics made for export [InfoFaience 2020]). The technological qualities of vessel bodies as expressed through the markers’ marks and a strong focus on their cleanliness are therefore part of a broader branding strategy, allowing the RSL to position itself as a symbol of progress. Nonetheless, several of the RSL vessels in this assemblage are chipped, despite highly vitrified bodies or rolled edges. If it is assumed that damage occurred because of rough conditions at sea or the intensive use of these vessels aboard (and not during their possible reuse on land in domestic households, as argued below), it might explain why the ceramics were taken ashore: they no longer conformed to the image the RSL wanted to present.

The various RSL and INC monograms and crests featured prominently on many of the vessels are the final element of the RSL’s promotional tools. The application of such a logo brings corporate individual identities to otherwise nonspecific pottery and, as such, becomes another effective marketing instrument (Bowden 1977:47; Lafleur 2003:266). Aboard, this identity adds an extra layer of luxury, creating the perception of added value in the mind of the traveler and serves as “a friendly reminder” to the passengers that the ocean liner was ensuring a safe and comfortable crossing (McIntyre 1990:4). When taken ashore, the pottery continued to function as an “advertising vehicle,” e.g., as a collectable or walkaway souvenir (Lafleur 1999:66).

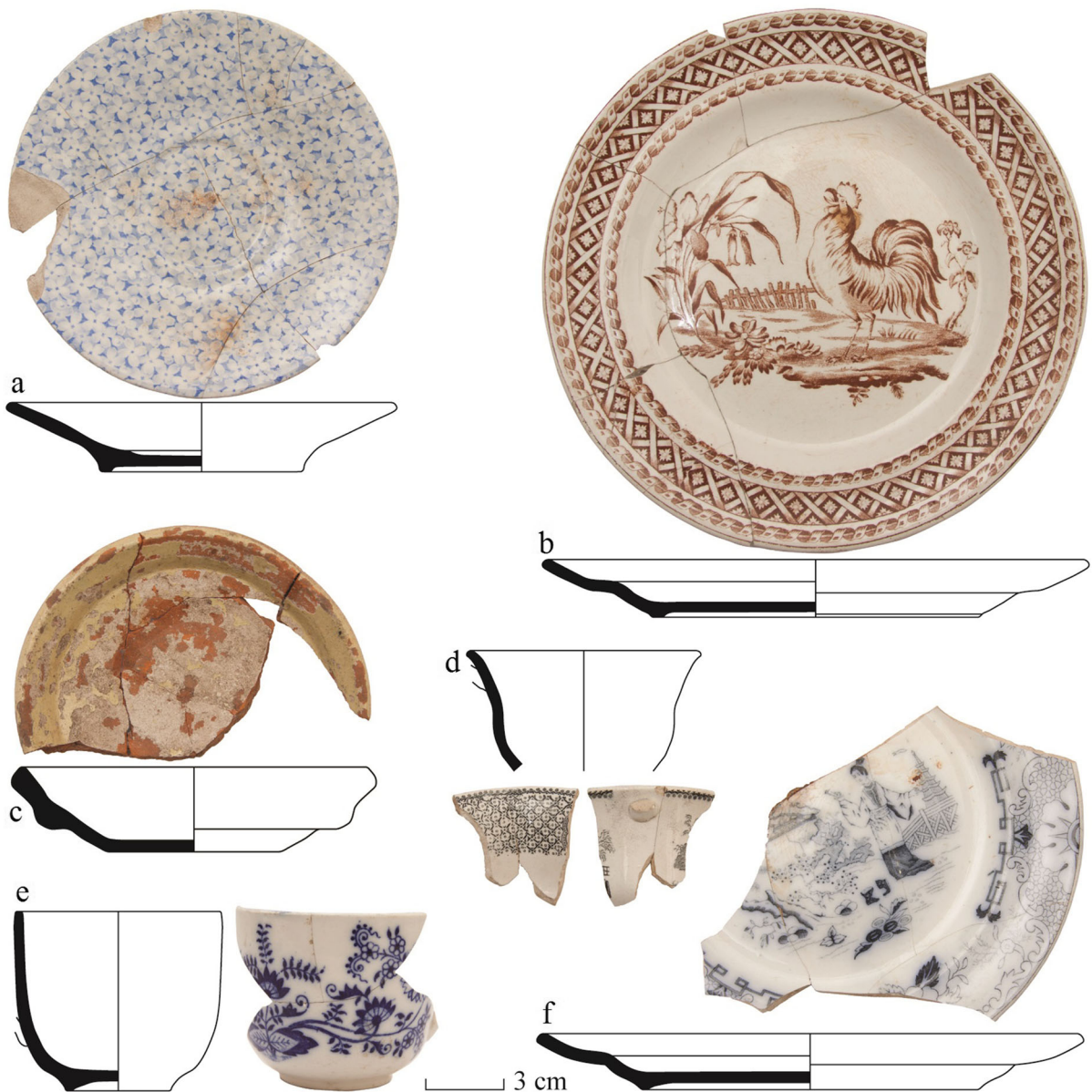


Fig. 15 Selection of decorated white- and redwares from Aalter. (Photos and drawings by author, 2019.)

The use of such printed monograms can be placed within the rise of advertising agencies and corporate advertising as a managerial ideology at the end of the 19th century, in part due to the mass production of goods exceeding demand and thus requiring manufacturers to distinguish their products from those of others (Lears 1994:110,113; Lafleur 2003:266). Brand images were needed to identify and encourage repeated purchases of the products and services of companies, while at the same time guaranteeing the quality of the purchase made (Franzen and Bouwman 1999:202–203; Barnes

2017:25–26). For a brand to be easily identifiable, it is important that it uses the same logo consistently, and any changes to this logo should be introduced step by step (Franzen and Bouwman 1999:255,256). The RSL logo is a good example of a successful brand image, with the red star immediately catching the eye of the beholder and only minor changes applied to the design of the pennant throughout the 1890s. It is perhaps unexpected that the RSL and INC monograms remained in use at the same time, somewhat to the detriment of the effects produced by the flag design. On the verge of the

new world of advertising, was the RSL still looking for a single corporate identity?

Ceramics and Capitalism

A clear distinction between first-, second-, and third-class material culture aided the shipping line in shaping everyday routines aboard. The pottery and its different decorative schemes extended the segregation of society at sea, reinforcing the limitation of interaction between classes, which consisted merely of visual contact on the deck of the ship (Feys 2017:130–131). Within classes, however, and especially within first class, information was distributed and interaction between passengers was promoted through the presence of smoking saloons, a library, bars and sports rooms, Turkish baths, an internal telephone system, and booklets with the names of fellow passengers (Feys 2017:123,131). The assemblage in Feature S8 does not have direct information about whether and how ceramics were part of this intraclass contact-enhancing system, although the large variety of forms and the specialization of tableware does reflect elaborate dining in first class. The glass finds, mainly decanters and tumblers, could perhaps refer to less-formal socializing events, such as casual drinks in a bar or smoking saloon.

The concern of the RSL with the structuration of power relations, cleanliness, and standardization aboard, and the rationalization of provisioning and reduction of associated costs via agents can be framed within a capitalist ideology. Capitalist ideology is defined here as the set of beliefs and presuppositions by which the exploitative and inequitable relations of a system, in which many work for the few, are obscured and the maximization of profit and accumulation of wealth are its main objective (Burke 1999:15; Leone 1999b:6; Leone and Potter 1999:vii). Ideology makes it possible to perpetuate the unequal distribution of resources between classes. Steerage passengers were prevented from seeing their position within this exploitative system by making them believe they were part of the modern world and on their way to a better future. For a two-week period (the time to make the crossing), the third-class passengers enjoyed luxuries that were finer than those at home through the use of the latest designs, quality wares, matching sets, refined dining, and other investments in comfort.

Ideas of freedom and progress are closely connected to individualization, which lies at the basis of capitalist

ideology (Johnson 1996:203; Leone 1999a:211). The ethos of self-improvement, the possibility to climb up the social ladder if only one tries hard enough, conceals the many inequalities within the system (Horning and Schweickart 2016:36). The materialized segregation into classes reinforces the social position of those aboard, but it simultaneously reflects the promise of a better life through hard work. Leone (1999a:211) highlighted the paradox present within the material culture of this individualism: “[E]veryone has a plate, but all the plates are the same.” Indeed, with the development of capitalism came the standardization of material culture as mass-produced goods (Johnson 1996:203). The use of standardized, matching vessels aboard the RSL meant that each third-class passenger was served equal portions and, although seated communally on benches (Fig. 12), was entitled to his or her personal space at the table as demarcated by ceramics, glass, and cutlery (Holschuh 2013:36). In turn, this is closely connected to the rise of self-discipline, pertaining to hygiene amongst other things. The compactom serves as the perfect illustration of how discipline, classification, arrangement, and standardization pervaded the most intimate spaces at the turn of the 20th century (Edwards 2013:18). If orderliness serves as an indicator of individualism (Leone 1999a:212), the RSL ships appear to have been very particular capitalist hubs sailing across the ocean.

Recontextualization of a Marine Assemblage

In his study of a hotel-ware distributor, Lafleur (2003:271) noted that excess stock was often sold or given away, thereby spreading out and promoting the standardized, individualized life of the modern world. In an attempt to study the global phenomenon of capitalism on a local, household scale (Johnson 1996:210; Leone 1999b:19; Purser 1999:117; Holschuh 2013:109; Gregory and Licence 2017:171), the following paragraphs explore the implications of the RSL material’s reuse on land within a household(s) and not simply as fill for Feature S8. The latest manufacturing year for the RSL ceramics is 1911, based on makers’ marks. There are no household goods with clear 1920s dates, thus filling of the feature likely occurred in the years immediately following 1911, possibly prior to the outbreak of WWI or immediately afterwards.

Archival research in the land register showed that the property (No. 142) on which Feature S8 was situated belonged, from the late 19th century until 1942, to a

certain Lodewijk Jan Bruynseels (born Borgerhout, 1850), who resided on the Lange Nieuwstraat, on a nearby lot (No. 154) (Administratie Opmetingen en Waarderingen 1892–1942). Bruynseels was a butcher at first and later a trader in coal. The date of this switch in occupations unfortunately remains undetermined, but there may have been an overlap between both businesses. The *Gazet van Antwerpen* (1930) journal has many advertisements by Bruynseels looking for personnel to assist in his shop, indicating that his butchery was active until at least 1939. However, sometime between 1930 and 1933, house numbers for his butcher's shop changed from 154 to 146 in the advertisements (Streven 1933), possibly indicating that the shop was relocated, perhaps in response to the new coal-trading business. In his house, Bruynseels lived together with his wife, Catharina Carolina Soetewey (born Antwerp, 1845), their daughter and sons, and several resident maids, butcher's assistants, and apprentices. Plans dating to 1904 for the renovation of his own house show a large-scale four-story facade. Together with the number of employees, and the multiple other properties he owned, they reflect the scale and success of Bruynseels's business (FelixArchief 1904).

Between 1906 and 1918, the period when the RSL material was most likely dumped, the tenant of the plot where Feature S8 was found was (except for a short stay in Paris in 1909) Jan Van der Stuyf and his family (FelixArchief 1900–1910a, 1900–1910b, 1910–1920). In 1919 several other people lived on the premises for relatively short timespans. It seems unlikely that they were responsible for filling the feature, considering the amount of household waste needed to do so. The focus in the following discussion therefore lies with the Van der Stuyf family. The family consisted of father Jan Baptist Frans Van der Stuyf (born Antwerp, 1870), mother Theresia Paulina Van Ranst (born Schoten, 1874), and their five daughters and seven sons (all born Antwerp, between 1894 and 1912).

Jan Baptist Frans worked as a shopkeeper and kept his shop in the house they rented, but also had three other branch stores in the wider Antwerp area (Dierentuin Cinema 1918). His house on the Lange Nieuwstraat had four floors, shop windows, and a French roof (FelixArchief 1891, 1901). His mother was an *oudeklerenkoopster*, a trader in old clothes (FelixArchief 1890–1900), and Jan Baptist continued a business in bargain sales. Documents describe him as seller of old furniture (FelixArchief 1900–1910a) or of

secondhand goods in general (Ratinckx 1911:138). Although active in bargain sales, in 1918 and 1919 Van der Stuyf advertised his shops in the program of the cinema in the Antwerp zoo as “the best-known houses for all kinds of soap” (Dierentuin Cinema 1918, 1919). Textiles were also likely part of Jan Baptist's shop, as one of his daughters worked as a tailor. Two other daughters were saleswomen, and one son worked as a driver. For the other family members, no profession is stated in the register of 1910–1920 (FelixArchief 1910–1920). Secondhand dealers are generally characterized by a low social standing (Van Damme 2010:79–80). Although no direct information is available on the financial situation of the Van der Stuyfs, the fact that they advertised one main shop and three branch stores from 1918 onwards shows that they had climbed the social ladder, but perhaps not to the extent that they were homeowners.

The main question remains: how does an RSL assemblage end up in the backyard of a property owned by Bruynseels and occupied by the Van der Stuyfs? Even though the RSL ceramics were made in England and France, at least some of these ceramics were distributed by an American agent, evidenced by the mark of the Wanamaker store printed on the back of one of the vessels. It therefore seems likely that the artifacts had been used at sea, rather than sold directly to land-based consumers. From an economic point of view, it would be highly illogical to decorate the ceramics with the logo of the ocean liner, transport the pottery from its place of production in Europe (Staffordshire, England, or Limoges, France) to the warehouse of a New York-based distributor, only to ship it back again to be sold off as overstock in Antwerp.

Nevertheless, at an undetermined moment in time, the RSL artifacts were brought ashore. As some of the RSL vessels were still complete and usable, it is rather unlikely that these RSL objects went straight from the ship to the fill in Feature S8. It is possible they may have undergone a process of reuse, perhaps functioning as common household goods, and were not immediately dumped. The fill of Feature S8 is therefore considered a domestic refuse deposit rather than the result of a dumping event using offsite material. The traditional explanatory model for the presence of RSL objects in ordinary families, namely that many Antwerp couples bought RSL material when they set up their households upon marrying after the liquidation of the shipping line in 1934 and auction of its movables (Bram Beelaert

2017, elec. comm.), seems highly unlikely for the particular ceramic vessels in this assemblage. Acquisition of these vessels after 1934 would mean that some of them would have been intensively used onboard ships for perhaps over 40 years and conflicts with the dating of the other household goods mixed together with the RSL material. Theft or walkaway souvenirs—a very common practice (Beveridge et al. 2008:184)—can similarly be excluded because of the number of vessels and the large size of some of them (e.g., washbasin). Rather, it seems more likely that the material was gifted as a promotional tool in the context of business relations or was sold following minor damage during the 1910s or over a longer period of time beginning in the 1890s. Many objects are indeed chipped or have faded gilding. Assuming that this damage occurred at sea, they were therefore no longer visually attractive and in conformity with expected quality aboard. The demand for second-hand goods was relatively low at the turn of the 20th century, compared to older periods, because of the presence of new and cheap mass-produced objects. Nevertheless, the market for secondhand clothing, furniture, and household goods remained important (Stobart and Van Damme 2010:4–5), and the flourishing of the Van der Stuyf business serves as an excellent example.

Can the assemblage then be connected to the owners or tenants of the plot on the Lange Nieuwstraat? There is no direct historical evidence linking the assemblage to any of the households. However, some interpretive leaps suggest that both families could be responsible for the use and eventual deposit of the RSL material on site. For example, a direct connection could be postulated between the RSL and the Bruynseels family, with the latter being a supplier of the former. The scale and success of Bruynseels's business, derived from his large house and many employees, exceeds the production of a local butcher's shop; in addition, the switch to dealing in coal, the fuel of shipping lines, might be pertinent.

As a possible meat supplier to the RSL, the Bruynseels family may have had privileged access to this material. If these RSL ceramics were part of their everyday service, should the Bruynseels family then be considered as an individualized household in which the dominant ideology was instilled through its contacts with a capitalist agent? If so, the intermingling of different classes and ceramic sets could indicate that modern values were not yet fully internalized or that the family was simply unaware of the social stratification

present in these ceramics (compare the still ongoing discussion about which patterns served in third class). Or were the vessels recontextualized for use in their butcher's shop (as display items on walls and shelves, or with the many lids covering meat in the display case or counter), creatively manipulating the symbolism of luxury and cleanliness associated with these mass-produced goods as extra value for its customers (Mullins 2008:207)? For the eventual discard of the material, the Bruynseels family may have opted for one (or several) of their rented properties, which were frequently refurbished, as the historical records testify.

On the other hand, the household objects associated with the RSL artifacts (Fig. 3) suggest a possible connection to the Van der Stuyf family. Besides objects relating to the consumption of food and drink (Fig. 3a–e, m), hygiene (Fig. 3k, l), and health (Fig. 3j), the assemblage includes a remarkable number of buttons, faux jewels, and beads, possibly linked to Van der Stuyf's profession as a shopkeeper or to the work of one of his daughters as a tailor. Moreover, the toys could be indicative of the many children in the Van der Stuyf household. Although it is unlikely that the RSL worked directly with a relatively small secondhand shop or tailor's business, the Van der Stuyfs may have bought the vessels for their own use or sold a selection of secondhand ocean-liner material in their store. This could possibly explain the presence of so many extraneous lids in this assemblage. Did they acquire the vessels as a job lot sight unseen, not aware of the lack of tureens, or did they still consider those lids to be marketable, e.g., as decorative items with various types of prints and shapes to be hung on a wall to brighten up a room? The material that did not sell may eventually have been dumped in the backyard of the lot by the family itself at the end of the Van der Stuyf's tenancy in 1918 or by one of the successive residents. Many criteria of a clearance group do indeed seem to be met (Pearce 2000:144–145).

Whichever family was responsible for discarding the RSL material, the Bruynseels, Van der Stuyfs, or someone else, it is at least remarkable that they do not appear to have taken an interest in recovering any of the complete vessels, such as the eggcups or butter dishes. It was most likely just easier to throw these things away than to move them. On a more speculative level, it is tempting to interpret this deposit as a resistance to an individualist ideology, reflected in this type of highly segmented tableware. Based on their thriving businesses, the

Bruynseels and Van der Stuyf families seem to have had the economic means to afford this luxury of choice. The non-RSL ceramics in the assemblage are indeed more in line with the conservative attitude of Belgian potteries at the time, with almost naïve decorations, e.g., Figure 3c, and the absence of ceramic sets, as noted in the Aalter assemblage. While “imported commodities increasingly defined people’s material world” (Lucas and Hreiðarsdóttir 2012:616), local or regional wares seem to have been preferred, both in Antwerp and Aalter, over English ones, although this might simply be due to price differences (e.g., in 1911, German ceramics were sold more cheaply in Britain than English ones [Barker 2017:216–217]). The hypothesis that Victorian and Edwardian ideals had not yet strongly penetrated Belgian lower and (lower-)middle classes at the turn of the 20th century should of course be tested with more assemblages, but is in each case a promising research question for a future archaeology of the 19th and 20th centuries in Belgium.

Conclusion

The site considered here can be defined as a contingent one, namely a site that demonstrably possesses no direct connection to the RSL (Cessford 2018:1078, table 1). Whereas most shipping-line ceramics have been found on ship-associated sites (wrecks, docks, etc.), it is these “counter-intuitive discoveries that are the most informative” (Cessford 2018:1080,1091). Contingent sites relate to a series of “serendipitous coincidences”; thus interpretation is often difficult, but nevertheless worthwhile as it puts the focus on the complex interaction between objects and those people who archaeologically and historically have remained rather invisible (Cessford 2018:1091).

A category of people who have remained largely neglected in the study of ocean liners are the millions of migrants crossing the Atlantic on these boats. This article has highlighted investments by shipping companies and their agents in the marketing and development of a uniform visual culture, seducing passengers with the experience of an idealized society, but it was this voiceless group that was the actual driving factor behind many of the innovations outlined here. More than mere victims of capitalism, they should be seen as conscious agents, making informed choices for a particular company. Antwerp was not only home to the RSL, but also

to several other shipping lines, such as the Cunard Line, Holland-America Line, and the Dominion Line. While much remains to be done, the objects described here offered a better understanding of everyday life aboard for these passengers. For example, especially for steerage passengers, the pottery might suggest a more luxurious lifestyle than was generally enjoyed at home through the use of matching sets, progressive transfer prints, gilded rims, vitrified bodies, and sanitary arrangements.

The ceramics not only reflect the migrant trade, but were also part of large-scale transport networks themselves, from the Staffordshire potteries in England to New York and back to the European continent. While the ceramic vessels passed the main part of their lives at sea, they were perhaps not brought ashore to die. Once debarked in Antwerp, the vessels might have started a second life in which they moved on a much smaller scale, within a city and possibly within a single street. This turns the discussion to the second group of people that merits further study: lower- and (lower-)middle-class city dwellers. The transfer of RSL objects from a marine to an urban context might have facilitated the identification of one of the line’s meat suppliers, of which little is historically known, and—through the ultimate discard of the material—allowed a better understanding of the connections within a city quarter between proprietor and tenants. Questions were asked about how these people entered into the modern world and to what extent they embraced these nonregional, faraway vessels and associated values.

In conclusion, this article is a plea for a renewed, archaeological look at ocean-liner ceramics, which, thus far, have mainly been the terrain of collectors and *Titanic* enthusiasts. I hope to have illustrated their research potential for the study of nascent modern society at the turn of the 20th century and their ability to give a voice to those groups that have largely remained absent in archaeological analyses. Concerning the historical archaeology of Belgium in particular, this case has generated new narratives of the diversity and complexity of urban life in Antwerp. I wish it may form the start of a fully fledged archaeology of the 20th century, in which the focus is not only directed toward features of the First and Second World Wars, but one in which the study of artifacts of ordinary households receives an equal share of attention.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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