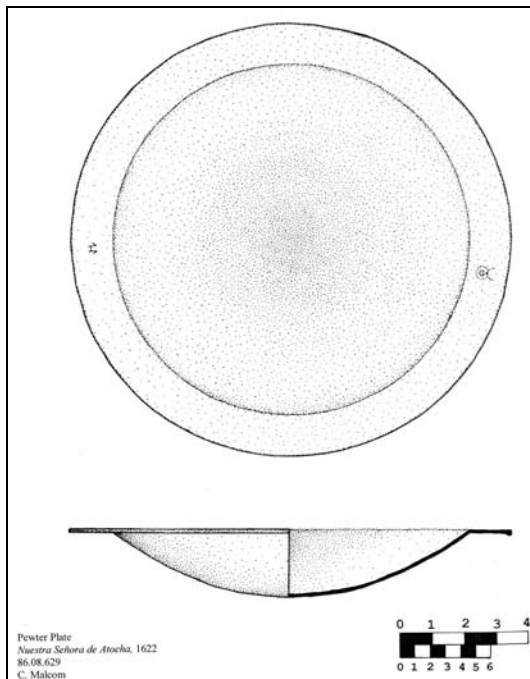


## Pewter from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*

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Two recent discoveries have opened a new subject of study concerning artifacts recovered from *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*. Recent work in the MFMHS laboratory has revealed a plate, which was labeled as being silver, to actually be of pewter. At nearly the same time, the field crew for Salvor's Inc. discovered three pewter spoons at the wreck, very close to lower hull structure or "motherlode" site. Pewter is one material type that had not been previously recorded from the *Atocha* or *Santa Margarita*.



*Atocha* Pewter Plate.

The plate is 13.7 inches (34.7 cm) in diameter with a brim 1.3 inches (3.4 cm) wide. It is round bottomed and deep dished - 2.1 inches (5.3 cm) at the center. A single bead runs around the underside of the brim. Two badly corroded marks can be discerned on the topside of the brim. One is a crowned Tudor rose - a common device used to denote English export wares, and goods of a higher quality. In 1564 it was expressly forbidden to use the crowned rose as a maker's touch mark, but it was sometimes utilized outside London and on continental Europe for such a purpose. Most commonly it is

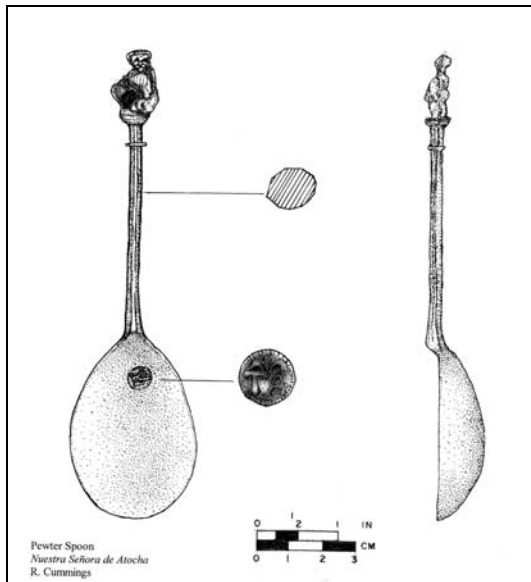
found as a secondary mark to complement the touch. The other mark appears to be an engraved owner's mark in which the capital letter "H" has been altered to a personal device.

This is a common phenomenon seen on other items found on the *Atocha*, most notably silver bars, where a person's initials were used to construct a monogram and served as a shipping mark. Unfortunately, this mark can not be tied to a particular passenger. No proper touch mark is apparent on this plate, and determining a specific date for its manufacture is impossible.

The pewter spoons are of an early design, having "round" stems (actually twelve-faceted) and slightly irregular, pear-shaped bowls. The bowls are relatively flat when compared to the plane of the stem. All other spoons recovered from the *Atocha* are made of silver or gold and have narrow stems of various cross-section with oval bowls. It was not until the middle of the 17th century, or nearly 20 years later, that "modern" flat-stemmed spoons with oval bowls began to appear.

The stems of these spoons are topped with crudely cast lion *séjant* (seated) knops. Knopped spoons were typical of the period and other characters such as balls, acorns, apostles, hooves, and maidenheads were commonly used. Narrow stemmed spoons with no finial device are referred to as "slip topped." Though these are the first such spoons found from the 1622 fleet, they would not have been particularly uncommon for the time. Beginning in the late 1500's metal spoons, especially of pewter, began to replace wooden ones as the common form.

The spoons are 5.82 inches (14.55cm) long with bowls of 2.25 inches (5.7cm) long. The stems are 0.19 inches (0.48cm) in diameter. All appear to be cast from the same mold, and are exceptionally well preserved. The interior of each bowl is marked with a circular touch, beaded on the interior, and encompassing a "TA" which is topped by a small *fleur-de-lis*. This mark has been previously recorded and is known from "early 16th century slip-top and hexagonal, knopped spoons" (Cotterel, #5396). The maker's identity is not known.



Atocha Pewter Spoon.

Early-modern Spain was not well regarded for its pewter production, though a small industry did exist there. More typically, as is

Sources Consulted:

Cotterel, Howard H.

1963 *Old Pewter: Its Makers and Marks in England, Scotland and Ireland*. Chas. Tuttle and Co. Rutland, Vermont.

Houart, Victor

1982 *Antique Spoons*. Souvenir Press, London.

Snodin, Michael]

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reflected from these pieces, the Spanish imported their pewter goods from other European countries, especially England. Pewter is consistently found on Spanish shipwrecks from throughout the colonial period, though there has never been a large number of pieces from any particular one. From such evidence, it is difficult to discern exactly how pewter was valued by the Spanish. It has obvious shipboard advantages over ceramic dishes in that it is unbreakable, but how did it compare to the tremendous volume of fine silverware found aboard the *Atocha*? Was it considered an imported luxury, or simply a minor alternative favored by only a quirky few? Did it serve as a “middle-class” ware for those above dishes of ceramic and wood, but unable to afford silver? One thing is certain from these particular examples, after decades of examining artifacts from the galleons of 1622, completely new avenues of research should not be unexpected.