

## Papal Plates & Propaganda on the Deep-Sea Tortugas Shipwreck, Florida (1622)

Sean Kingsley

*Wreck Watch Int., London, UK*

The excavation in 1990 and 1991 of the 400m-deep Tortugas shipwreck in the Straits of Florida, USA, by Seahawk Deep Ocean Technology of Tampa, Florida, recovered a major collection of 1,477 tin-glazed tablewares. The Blue on White pottery produced in Seville, almost certainly within the potter's quarter of Triana, included two plates painted with the emblem of two crossed keys surmounted by a triple crown. This insignia is identifiable as the arms of the papacy and is extremely rare on 16th to 18th-century Spanish ceramics. The Tortugas plates seem to be unique within the archaeological record.

On 6 January 1622, Pope Gregory XV established the Sacra Congregatio Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith) to coordinate overseas missionary initiatives. The Congregation was empowered to execute all matters pertaining to the propagation of the faith worldwide. It is hypothesized that in early September 1622 one of its members and a companion were returning to Seville following missionary work in the Americas on the Tortugas ship, identified as the 117-ton *Buen Jesús y Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, when tragedy struck. The papal plates could have been commissioned by the Church as material expressions of the Congregation's work and authority overseas. The presence of two additional Seville Blue on White bowls on the wreck, painted with the letters 'CAR/MO', may indicate that these ecclesiastic brethren were based in a monastery in the city of Carmona, 30km east of Seville.

The establishment of the Sacra Congregatio Propaganda Fide in 1622 marks the birth of the exploitation of propaganda as a political tool through rigorous control and uniformity. By extension, the two papal plates from the Tortugas shipwreck may be the earliest archaeologically attested use of propaganda in the Early Modern world.

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### 1. Introduction

The most unusual decorative scheme encountered amongst the 1,477 tin-glazed tablewares recovered from the 400m-deep Tortugas shipwreck in the Straits of Florida were a pair of plates painted with two inter-crossing keys below a triple-tiered tiara surmounted by a cross (Fig. 1). The emblem occurs on the interior base roundels of Tortugas Type 2A Seville Blue on White plates (Rim Style G/Base Style F, inv. TOR-90-1A-000577) (Kingsley, 2014: 39-41).

Dual concentric blue lines encircle the plate's rim edge. The blue glaze is slightly blurred. On one plate a large air bubble has broken through the white glaze of the body wall at the transition between the rim and base. The fine and hard clay fabric has a slight yellow cast and no obvious inclusions. The finish displays surface crazing reminiscent of Chinese porcelain. Sherds from a second plate with a comparable design, clay fabric, glaze texture and color were also recovered from the wreck (Flow, 1999: 46).<sup>1</sup> Inductively-Coupled Plasma Spectrometry (ICPS) analysis conducted on the Tortugas wreck ceramics identified the Type 2A plates as originating in Seville (Hughes, 2014).



Fig. 1. One of two Seville Blue on White tin-glazed plates from the Tortugas shipwreck painted with the arms of the papacy: the triple crown surmounting the crossed keys of heaven (Type 2A, Rim Style G/Base Style F, inv. 90-1A-000577).



Fig. 2. King Ferdinand II receiving the keys to Seville from Axataf, the city governor of the Moors. Wall painting in Seville Cathedral, Spain, by Francisco Pacheco, 1634.

## 2. Keys & Morisco Suppression

Keys symbolized the values of safety and peaceful relations in colonial Spain. Since the medieval period these utensils designed to open and close properties were presented to Spanish sovereigns visiting towns such as Toledo or Seville, when they swore during ceremonies to uphold their privileges. The manufacture of keys was a specialty of Moors and their successors. Two keys stored in the shrine of the Cathedral of Seville, one iron and the other silver, are particularly renowned (Calvert, 1907: 83). The 6in-long iron Moorish example is traditionally identified as the city key solemnly handed to King Ferdinand II by Axataf, the Moor's governor of Seville (Fig. 2), when the Spanish king conquered the city on 23 November 1248 (Riaño, 1890; Calvert, 1906: 384).

The key is allegedly inscribed in African Kufic script, "May Allah permit that the rule (of Islam) last for ever in this city" and was donated to the cathedral in June 1698 by Dona Catalina Basilia Domonte y Pinto, niece of the former owner, Senor Lopez de Mesa (Williams, 1907).

Following Ferdinand II's successful holy war in Granada, according to legend the vanquished Moors forced to retreat to North Africa retained the keys to their mansions, treasuring them in the hope of a triumphant future return to southern Spain (Guilday, 1921; Harvey, 1992: 201). In a comparative convention of later date, the keys of Palestinian refugees passed down the generations since 1948 symbolize the right of return amongst Arab communities (Lybarger, 2007: 111).

In terms of symbolic power, Williams (1907) has argued that "the key, just like the sword, seemed, in the warm

imagination of the Spaniards, to be something almost sacred. Surely, in the whole domain of history, no object has a grander symbolism than the key... So was it that both Moors and Spaniards made their keys of fortresses and citadels almost into an object of their worship."

Given the powerful symbolism of Axataf's iron key amongst the conquered Moriscos of Seville – not least signifying liberty and enslavement – it would not be beyond the bounds of speculation to envisage Morisco potters incorporating this symbol into the decorative scheme of Triana tin-glazed pottery, re-interpreted to signify peaceful coexistence (with perhaps a more hidden ulterior message for the vanquished population).

## 3. Papal Arms

A more historically grounded interpretation of the Tortuga shipwreck plates is as an example of prominent ecclesiastical heraldry. The specific combination of the crossed keys surmounted by a crown signifies the papal coat of arms, as well as those of the Holy See and Vatican City State (Fig. 3). The artistic concept of St. Peter holding keys dates back to the 5th century AD.

The crossed keys serving as the emblem of the papacy symbolize the keys of heaven entrusted to St. Peter (Matthew 16:19). The motif developed into the choice symbol of papal authority because in biblical narratives the



Fig. 3. The classic design of the papal seal with the tied gold and silver keys of St. Peter surmounted by the triple crown tiara.



Fig. 4. A fresco in the Sistine Chapel, the Vatican, depicting Christ Handing the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter by Pietro Perugino, 1481-83.

apostle Peter “received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the power of binding and loosing is committed to him, the care of the whole Church and its government is given to him” (*Epist.*, lib. V, ep. Xx). The saint is often depicted in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox paintings and other art holding a key or a set of keys (Fig. 4). The ground plan of St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, Rome, is also generally described as being key-shaped.

The device’s earliest use as an emblem of the papacy dates to the 13th century, first appearing on a banner suspended by a figure entitled ‘ECCLESIA ROMANA’ in an apsidal mosaic of Old St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City built under Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). The configuration of the keys on the ‘Tortugas plates’ papal arms, where they are crossed in saltire, emerged as a religious scheme in 1267 on a *loggia* in the papal palace of Viterbo. Thereafter, the crossed keys of St. Peter became the best-known and most enduring emblem of the Church (Galbreath, 1930: 6-8).

The popular artistic use of the keys of heaven expanded in the second half of the 13th century onto banners, seals and coins. As the keys of St. Peter they symbolized the



Fig. 6. A coin minted in Avignon, France, under Pope Martin V (1417-31) showing him on a lion-headed throne wearing the papal tiara. On the reverse, the legend ‘SANTVS. PETRVS:ET:PAVLVS’ enclosing the keys of heaven.

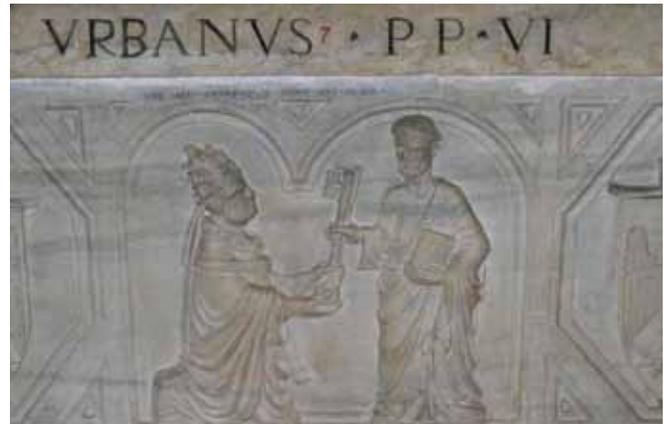


Fig. 5. The sarcophagus of Pope Urban VI (1378-89), the Vatican, Rome. The pope chose to be buried in a 3rd-century AD marble sarcophagus, at the time occupied by the remains of a married couple. On the front the kneeling Urban VI was newly depicted wearing the papal tiara and receiving the keys to heaven from St Peter.

power to administer the treasures of redemption merited by Christ and to teach his doctrine with authority. One of the keys was traditionally gold, signifying the power extending to heaven. The second key was depicted in silver, representing power over all the faithful on Earth. As on the Tortugas plate, the two keys are often linked by cordon Gules to signify the union between the two powers. The keys’ handles are turned downwards to symbolize their status as the property of the pope, Christ’s lieutenant on Earth (Heim, 1978: 54).

The second characteristic emblem of the papacy, also featured on the Tortugas plate, is the tiara, or *regnum*, the most exalted heraldic insignia associated with the Catholic Church representing the sovereign power of the papacy. This headwear is not the same as the miter worn by the pope when officiating during religious ceremonies. The *triregno*, or triple crown, is an extra-liturgical headpiece worn by the pope on occasions of great solemnity (and formerly in processions or parades). This headwear may have originated from the *camelaucum*, a white pointed cap of Eastern origin, probably Syrian, construed in Early Christian Rome as an emblem of liberty. Simultaneously, the tiara may have been believed to replicate the headwear worn by High Priests in Old Testament times (Galbreath, 1930: 17).

The third crown was added to the tiara either under Pope Benedict XI (1303-04) or Clement V (1305-1314) and is first listed in an inventory of papal treasure dated to 1315. Two ribbons hung from its back from the 13th century onwards. Since then the triple crown has always been the symbol of papal authority (Heim, 1978: 50) (Figs. 6-7). The round, rather than pointed, form emerged after

the papacy of Urban VI (1378-89) until it ultimately developed into the bulbous shape seen on the Tortugas plate in the 17th century, at which time it was topped with a cross surmounting a ball representing Earth. The first appearance of the combination of a tiara set above crossed keys occurs above the shield of Pope Clement VI on his palace gateway at Avignon, France, which was completed in 1348 (Galbreath, 1930: 20, 23).

The tiara was not a sacred headpiece and was never worn by the pope during liturgical functions. Instead, it symbolized the pope's sovereign power as Supreme Head of the Church and ruler of the Papal State. The pontifical triple crown also represented the supremacy of the pope over the three churches (militant, penitent and triumphant), and his triple ministry as priest, pastor and teacher of the faithful.

Traditionally the papal tiara is first placed on the pope's head in the course of his coronation ceremony by the Cardinal-Proto-Deacon and Sovereign Pontiff, who declare:

Accipe tiamam tribus coronis ornatam; et scias te esse Patrem Principum et Regnum, Rectorum Orbis, in terra Vicarium Salvatoris nostril Jesu Christi, Cui est honor et Gloria in saecula saeculorum.

[Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns and know that thou art father of princes and kings, the ruler of the world on earth, the vicar of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom is honour and glory through all ages.]

## 4. Conclusion: Sacred Missionary Work

Why was such highly exalted, specific imagery painted onto Blue on White plates manufactured in Seville and why did they ultimately end up on a small merchant vessel returning from the Americas to Andalusia? Given the plates' very specific religious iconography it seems reasonable to suggest that its owner did not simply buy the product over the counter in the open market, where it had been manufactured based on popular schemes found in a pattern book. These plates are more likely to have been commissioned specifically for the Church and conceivably for a very particular purpose.

When the crossed keys and triple crown are represented with a shield, the insignia is identifiable as the personal arms of the pope. When the emblem is depicted in isolation it represents the papacy as an institution (Galbreath, 1930: 23). Since the arms of Pope Gregory XV (1621-23) – gules three bends silver retraits in chief – are not associated with the Tortugas plates, its design was clearly intended to signify the broader papal authority of the Catholic Church.



Fig. 7. Pope Clement VIII wearing the papal tiara on a mosaic in Florence by Jacopo Ligozzi and Romolo di Francesco Ferrucci del Tadda, 1600-1601.

Religious imagery and ecclesiastical terms are not unusual on 16th-18th century Spanish pottery. The Hispanic Society of America collection includes 18th-century medicinal *albarello* jars once used in the Convent of the Conceptionists, painted with the letters 'AM' for Ave Maria, and in the seminary Colegio de Jesuitas, both in Seville, accompanied by the Christian symbol 'IHS' (In Hoc Signo Vincas: In this Sign you will Conquer) and a cross. Another *albarello* of comparable date from the Convent of San Francisco de Paula in Seville bears the painted letters 'CHARITAS' (Frothingham, 1944: 163-5). The abbreviation 'AM' was similarly painted on Seville plates for the Carthusian monastery of Jerez de la Frontera (Lister and Lister, 1987: 150, fig. 92).

IHS surmounted by a cross within a sunray bursts forth from a candelabra on a mid-18th century jar produced in Talavera (Pleguezuelo, 2002: 351). Additional plates and jugs from the same location, dated 1788-91 and used in the Monastery of El Escorial, are inscribed 'NRO. RMO.P.MRO.P<sup>R</sup>.F.CARLOS GARCIA', an abbreviation

of Nuestra Reverendísimo Padre Maestro Prior Fray Carlos García (Sanchez Hernandez, 1989: 62-3). Plates of the 17th to 19th-century from Toledo are inscribed 'CHARITAS', 'PROBISORIA', 'HOSPICIO P CD RL' and 'REF' for *refectorio* (Villalba and Ray, 2005: 58, 59, 60, 117, fig. 16, pl. XIV).

The keys of St. Peter and triple crown papal emblem, by contrast, is very unusual on Spanish pottery and is unknown from any other ceramic vessel produced in 16th or 17th-century Seville. The earliest example found on ceramics seems to be a tile associated with the Convent of Sant Pere de les Puelles, Barcelona, of 1500-25 (Ray, 2000: 379). The insignia features as a double crown above crossed keys, surrounded by elaborate arms, alongside the inscription 'D. FRAN DE LA FUENTE DUQUE', on a 22.5cm-diameter Serie Alcoreña de la Puntilla de Berain plate manufactured in 18th-century Talavera.<sup>2</sup> A medicinal jar also from Talavera of the same date, and used in the Convent of St. Peter the Martyr of the Dominican Order, portrays a very simple crown set above crossed keys as arms alongside the legend 'CONGREGACIÓN MEDINA DE RIOSECO' (Pleguezuelo, 2002: 348). The motif features on a blue on white jar from Talavera with two handles and the arms of Don Diego de San Pedro y de la Palma (Villalba and Ray, 2005: 118, fig. 17).

A series incorporating a triple crown covering the central part of crossed keys, probably attributable to Toledo, are contemporary with the Tortugas shipwreck. They occur on white plates of maximum 32cm diameter in contexts of 1600-1700 associated with the arms of an archbishop and in isolation as arms of the papacy, with one example inherited by a palace in the Plaza de San Vicente, Toledo (Ray, 2002: 69, 70, 72).

Under what historical circumstances may the Tortugas plate have been commissioned and used? The year when the Tortugas ship, the *Buen Jesús y Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, sank witnessed a significant re-ordering of the Church's administration of its overseas missions, a process in which it is proposed the wrecked plates may have been archaeologically intertwined. On 6 January 1622 Pope Gregory XV established the Sacra Congregatio Propaganda Fide, the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, to coordinate overseas missionary initiatives, which revived a Commission begun under Clement VIII in 1599 to meet the spiritual needs of the newly discovered heathen populations through Counter-Reformation. The doctrine was based around the fundamental charge of Christ to the Apostles to go forth, teach (Matthew 28:19), and ensure the propagation of the faith, preservation of the faith and defence of the faith (Song, 1961: 63). As Guilday (1921: 480) concluded in terms of its remit:

To reconquer by spiritual arms, by prayers and good works, by preaching and catechising, the countries that had been lost to the Church in the débâcle of the sixteenth century, and to organize into an efficient corps the numerous missionary enterprises for the diffusion of the Gospel in pagan lands, were the two distinct objects which soon ranked Propaganda Fide only a little less in dignity than the Universal Church.

The Congregation was composed of 13 cardinals, two prelates, a Secretary General and a consultor, and convened its inaugural general assembly on 14 January 1622 at the palace of Cardinal Sauli. The newly appointed members decreed that a letter should be written to all Apostolic *nuncios* (ecclesiastic envoys) enquiring about the status of religion in their territories and requesting information about methods to promote the Catholic faith. Thereafter, members of the Sacred Congregation held a monthly meeting in the presence of the pope. According to the constitutional bull of Gregory XV, 'Inscrutabili Divinae Providentiae', the Congregation had full, free and sufficient authority and power to perform, manage, treat and execute all matters pertaining to propagation of the faith worldwide (Cross and Livingstone, 2005: 1344).

The Congregation organized evangelization in non-Catholic territories and standardized Catholic practices amongst indigenous peoples. By a decree of 24 June 1623, the organization's control was such that religious supervisors were required to present their missionaries to the Congregation for scrutiny and approval before they might be dispatched overseas (Song, 1961: 17, 19, 29, 63; Parker, 2010: 203-204). The Propaganda Fide supplied missionary workers practically for the whole known world (Guilday, 1921: 489-90).

Given the Tortugas plates' specific imagery and chronological context, it is plausible that their presence on the *Buen Jesús* merchant vessel in early September 1622 archaeologically reflects the presence of administrators or missionaries of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith returning to Seville on this Tierra Firme fleet ship. In this historical hypothesis their personal belongings stowed on an Americas-bound vessel earlier in the year would have included two plates freshly thrown under papal commission. Of humble service, albeit highly appointed, one might imagine that a single plate would have sufficed per individual. The two examples recovered from the Tortugas wreck could suggest the presence of two such missionaries gracing the ship's deck.

Within this context it is relevant to recall the other select religious artifacts found on the wreck, which included rosary beads, a Virgin Mary clay figurine, a brass medallion dedicated to St. Catherine of Sienna, and two Seville Blue

on White bowls painted with ecclesiastic inscriptions, of which only the letters ‘CAR’ written above ‘MO’ are preserved on their interior roundels (Stemm *et al.*, 2013: 82-3, 96).

It is tempting to envisage the ‘CAR/MO’ bowls as also the property of the owners of the papal insignia plates. A single plate and bowl would have been an appropriate dining set for a well appointed, yet humble, missionary requiring conspicuous material culture to physically express his religious high-status during his travels. The inscriptions could be an abbreviation of CARMEL MONASTERIO, but the 11 Carmelite monasteries founded in Spain (seven in Andalusia, three in Castille and one in Valencia), including the Carmel monastery of St. Joseph in Seville, were establishments dedicated to nuns living in isolation.

A more convincing alternative is the possibility that the bowls were commissioned by a monastery in the ancient city of Carmona, located 30km east of Seville in the agriculturally fertile Guadalquivir Valley. In this hypothesis the colonial ‘CAR/MO’ wares would be an abbreviation of the city name, the ceramic equivalent of city coins stamped with the letters ‘CARMO’ in the Roman period (Fig. 8). A potential candidate for these ceramic commissions could have been the convent of Santa Clara, founded in Carmona in 1460 by a papal bull issued by Pope Pius II. The construction was initiated through papal and royal privileges granted by the city council.

Because of its famous potter’s quarter, Triana would have been the obvious choice for an ecclesiastical establishment in Carmona to commission its ceramic wares. Moreover, its farmers and merchants would have frequented Seville as Andalusia’s main regional market en route to the coast. A more sinister reason for their production at this location may be surmised. Triana’s lanes were very heavily supervised by the Church in the form of the seat of the Spanish Inquisition, which was based in the Castillo San Jorge in Triana, where it could geography dominate and control its large Morisco population.

In conclusion there is a sad irony between the *Buen Jesús*’s religious dimension and the inability of a divine presence to protect the ship from the great hurricane that sunk it in the Straits of Florida on 5 September 1622. On its outward journey Juan de Céspedes had consigned a tapestry depicting the souls of purgatory to the *Buen Jesús*, which was bound for the city of Nueva Cordoba and, ultimately, on to Captain Antón Suarez at the lagoon of Maracaibo in northwest Venezuela (Kingsley, 2013: 133). On its return voyage officials from the newly convened Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, dispatched by Pope Gregory XV, may have met their fate on the Tortugas ship.



Fig. 8. A bronze coin minted in Carmona, Spain c. 200-150 BC showing a helmeted male and the abbreviation ‘CARMO’ between two ears of wheat. Photo: courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Group.

The presence of high-ranking church officials on the *Buen Jesús* would not have been unusual: in the same fleet Friar Peter de la Madriz of the Order of S. Astin of Peru and his companion, Friar Anthony of S. Austin, plus Friar Christopher of Urtega, Father Insepe of Arriaga of the Society of Jesus and his companion, Father Claudio Colci, all died on the *Atocha* and *Santa Margarita*, according to contemporary sources.<sup>3</sup> As on these sister ships, it may be hypothesized that the papal seal plates and ‘CAR/MO’ bowls may have belonged to churchmen, in this instance a Congregation official and his companion based in the city of Carmona in Andalusia.

The establishment of the Sacra Congregatio Propaganda Fide in 1622 has been identified as marking the origins of a concerted propaganda apparatus through rigorous control and uniformity. In 1626 the Congregation established its own printing press to manipulate its message within the wider world. A year later Pope Urban VIII established the Collegium Urbanum as a propaganda seminary devoted to the training of the Congregation’s workers and missionaries.



Fig. 9. Seville Blue on White tin-glazed bowl bases from the Tortugas shipwreck painted with ‘CAR/MO’ ecclesiastical inscriptions (Type 2B, Base Style G, inv. 90-1A-0022074.0012, 90-1A-002066.0071).

The volume of this organization's accumulated information and archival sources are described as virtually unparalleled worldwide. Through these measures it is argued that "popular use of the term *propaganda* does not originate directly from certain kinds of rhetoric speech acts designed to sway audiences and manipulate opinions. Rather, it stems immediately from an organizational event, the foundation of the Congregation dedicated to doctrinal uniformity within the Roman Catholic Church's worldwide religious community" (Cunningham, 2002: 15). If the historical interpretation of the Tortugas plates as testimony to the nascent activities of the Sacred Congregation is correct, then they would represent the earliest archaeological evidence of propaganda in action within the Early Modern world.

## Notes

1. Neither plate survives within the Tortugas collection housed within the permanent archive of Odyssey Marine Exploration in Tampa, USA.
2. See, *500 Años de Cerámicas de Talavera* (Zaragoza, 2002), 236, pl. 120 and *Cerámica de Talavera de la Reina y Puente del Arzobispo* (2001), 132, fig. 144.
3. *A True Relation of that Which Lately Hapned to the Great Spanish Fleet, and Galeons of Terra Firma in America* (1623), 17, 23.

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