

Silver Ewer Spout from the Nuestra Senora de Atocha, Tag #85556

By James Sinclair, MA

Senior Archaeologist for Motivation, Inc

What is a Ewer?

Recently, the crew of the *Dare* recovered the spout of a silver ewer. So, the basic question these days would be, just what is a “ewer” and why does it have a spout? Simply put, a ewer is a pitcher of a relatively small size. The word “ewer” itself is derived from French and Middle English out of the Greek word for water bearing, or “Aquarius.” Ewer is not a word that is used much anymore. In fact, the Spanish had their own term for this sort of vessel “jarro de pico.” In English that literally translates to “beaked jug” though the term ewer is used by many of the English-speaking silver experts. Ewers were used for serving water. However, in at least one context it was not for drinking.



Figure 1: Silver ewer spout #85556 found by the *Dare* on August 7, 2019

Table manners in 1622

The *Atocha* sailed in a time period before the widespread use of forks. Spoons were common, as were knives and most of the wealthy class would carry their own knives for dining, (in fact, a class of folding knife first termed a “personal razor”, featuring an ebony handle and decorative brass tip found on the *Atocha* is likely just this sort of knife). Forks were a style of utensil that was first used as a large cooking tool, the use at a table for dining spread slowly across Europe, allegedly originating in France and then onward to the Colonies in the Americas. Many more forks are found on the *1715 Fleet* than are found on the *Atocha*.

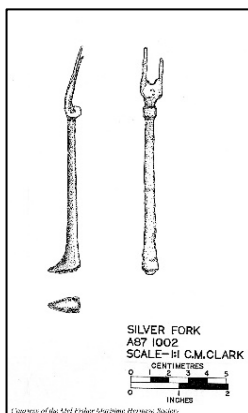


Figure 2: Silver Fork two tine *Atocha* 1622

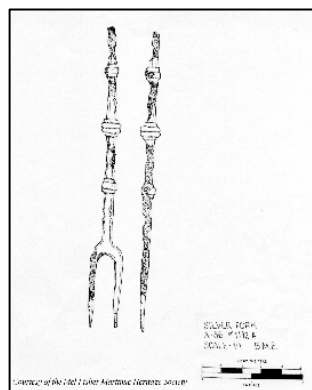


Figure 3: *Atocha* two tine fork



Figure 4: Four tine fork 1715 Fleet

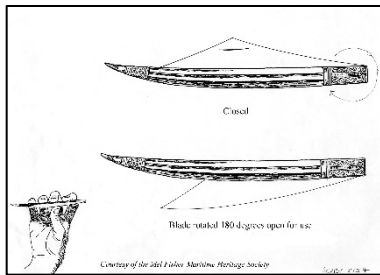


Figure 5: Personal folding knife Atocha, 1622

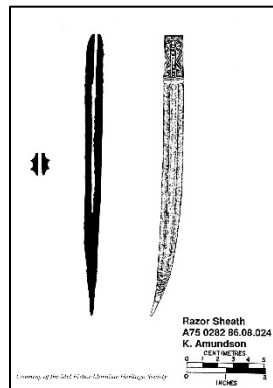


Figure 6: Personal folding knife Atocha, 1622

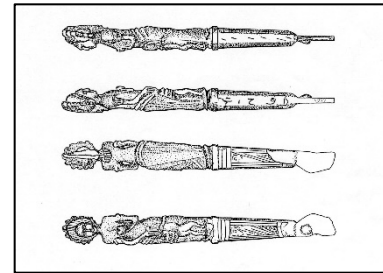


Figure 7: Ivory knife handle, Atocha, 1622

Eating was done with knives and spoons and hands. As you can guess, it could be and was often a messy affair. Meat was cut with a knife, and either speared and brought to the mouth, or picked up with the hands. Tablecloths were used as napkins that guests could wipe their hands on. Before and after dinner, guests would often wash their hands in water from these pitchers over a basin that servants would then carry away. In fact, the *Atocha* produced several large silver basins that have been classified as “rosewater dishes” that were for that purpose.

Ewers from the *Atocha*

Several “ewers” were recovered from the *Atocha* through the years. Many during the recovery of the “Main Pile”, or the primary cultural deposit of this great, lost ship. A few examples have been featured at the exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2004 “The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830. They can also be seen in the wonderful volume of studies produced in conjunction with that exhibit.

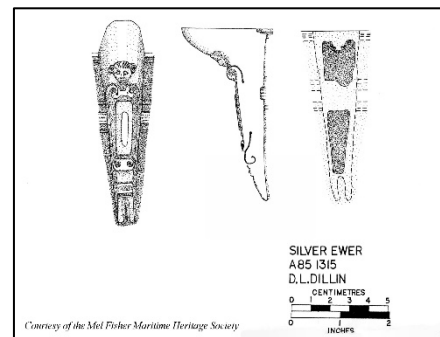


Figure 9: Ewer Spout, Atocha, 1622

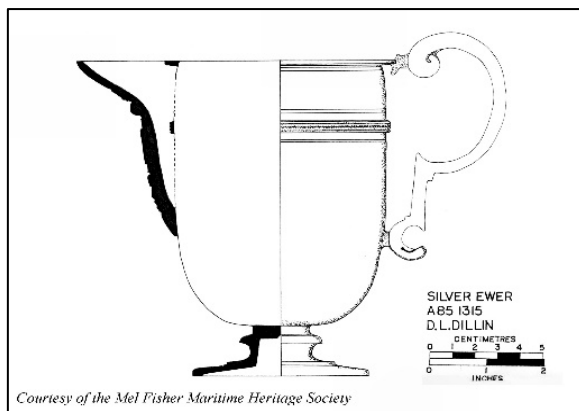


Figure 8: Ewer Atocha, 1622

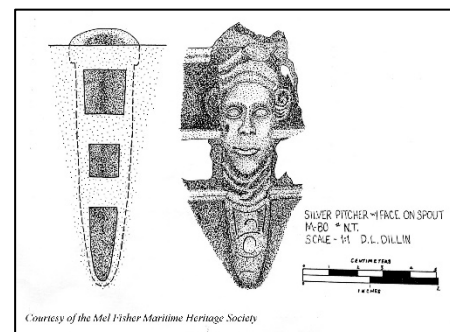


Figure 10: Ewer Spout with face Atocha, 1622

Others can be seen in the Christies Auction Catalog of *Atocha* Materials published in 1988 in conjunction with the first auction of *Atocha* treasures after the Main Pile was found.



Figure 11: *Atocha* Ewer, Christies 1988



Figure 12: Two *Atocha* Ewers, Christies 1988

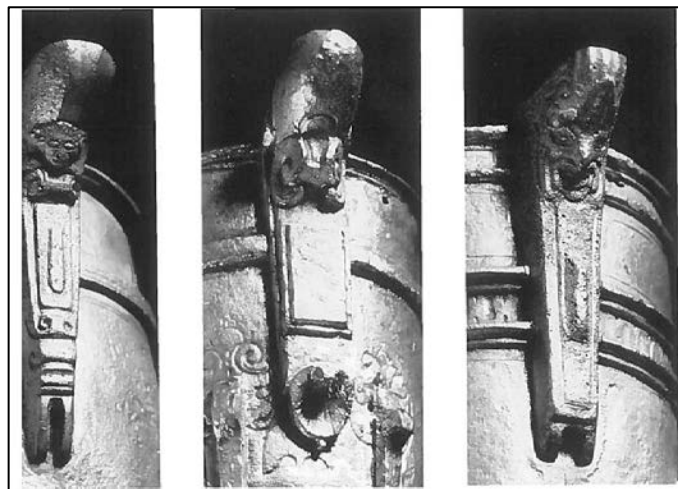


Figure 13: Spouts from *Atocha* Ewers, Christie 1988

The current silver spout #85556 from the *Atocha*, a find made by the *Dare*, is of course only one part of the ewer. Many of the ewers that were found showed decorative elements that were popular in the early part of the 17th century. Faces or masks of the “grotesque” sort” were often added. These sorts of faces had been popular in Europe for a long time and perhaps most familiarly they can be seen on the faces of gargoyles that adorn churches and cathedrals.

We are, sadly, missing the body of the ewer from which it came and though a fragment of the whole, it is associated with not only the *Atocha*, but also an ancient tradition. Used for both serving water to drink, but perhaps more importantly for and integral part of a dinner for the wealthy in both Spain and its New World Colonies.

While the artifact recovered by the Dare is certainly a part of a silver ewer, the *Atocha* also carried a less valuable type that is modeled on the silver styles but is actually made of ceramic and decorated with simple scrolling motifs and glazed with what is known a “Santiago Blue on White.”

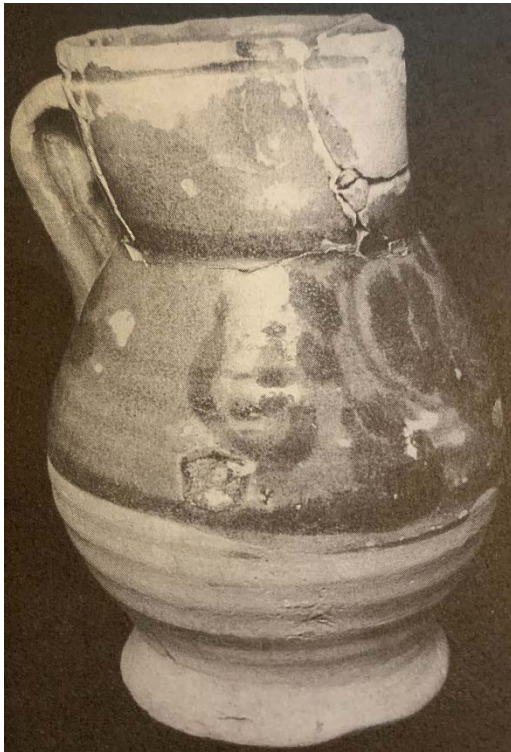


Figure 14: Ceramic Jarro de Pico, Atocha 1622 1

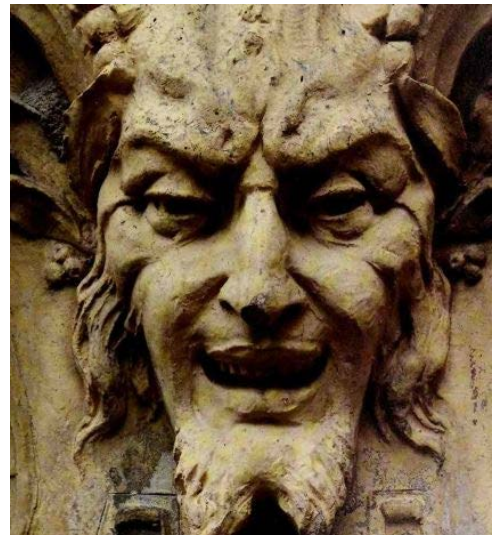


Figure 15: Face of Gargoyle from church

Spanish Colonial Silver Ewer's



Figure 16



Figure 17

This ewer (figure 15 and 16) was found in an online search and shows some of the characteristics that are also found on the ewers from the *Nuestra Senora de Atocha*, 1622.

<https://www.the-saleroom.com/fr-fr/auction-catalogues/crn/catalogue-id-crn-au10002/lot-94b804e6-68e4-4323-a499-a5bf00be69f9>



Figure 18: jarro de pico, late 16th Century Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Likewise, a bit of searching in some art books revealed this lovely still life done by Francisco de Palacios in 1649.



Figure 19: Still Life with Braided Bread, Palacios, 1648

In all, this small piece of an ewer is connected in a fundamental way with the wreck of the *Atocha*, but also with a long history of the use of these objects. The tradition of use transferred to the New World where artisans of Amerindian or mixed origin (Mestizo) crafted some of these objects. While their use has faded in modern times as has the name “Ewer,” they speak to us of wealth. Of individuals, families or groups sitting down at a table and sharing a meal, that is a tradition that goes much further back than the use of this object, the ewer.

It is not so much of a stretch, when dining at a fine restaurant to see this tradition continue, with a pitcher of water carried by a server or for the cleansing, in warm moist towels brought after dinner, or even the prepackaged towelettes that are often found in some restaurants today.

Sources

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