

known but I feel sure that the quantity and nature of the artefacts we have located indicate a shipwreck of sufficient importance to warrant front-page news in any local newspaper of the time. It is hoped that the publication of this report will stimulate interest in the search for this information;

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B. Oil jars

Introduction

The discovery at the Mewstone Ledge wreck site of fragments of several large pink earthenware storage vessels, known to be in use in Europe and her colonies in the 18th and 19th centuries, provides an opportunity to discuss the type. Parts of seven vessels of slightly varying sizes have been located on the seabed and the following description is based on no. 1 in Mr. Middlewood's table, which is marginally the largest in size. Elsewhere when complete jars exist they range from 24 in (0.61 m) to 36 in (0.92 m) in height. The fragments available for comment include two large body fragments and a complete top comprising rim and shoulders, which provide sufficient material to reconstruct the form of one vessel. It is also particularly fortunate that the material includes a lid and two examples of the applied plaques known to exist on the 18th century form of these jars.

Description of the Mewstone oil jar

Large lead-glazed storage jar; simple out-turned rim with lid seating internally, flattened shoulders below rim. Placed high on the body are vestigial crescent shaped handles, (such handles, while described as vestigial, allow the jar to be turned on its base with ease) enclosing an applied oval plaque. The base is presumed to be flat. The reconstruction (Fig. 6), 29 in (0.74 m) high with an average thickness of 0.020 m is based on a 19th century jar 33 in

also research on the occurrence of "fins" on cannon.

The research on the pottery was undertaken by Martin Dean of Slough SAC, and that on the cannon by Dennis Hinchcliffe of Croydon B.S.A.C. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

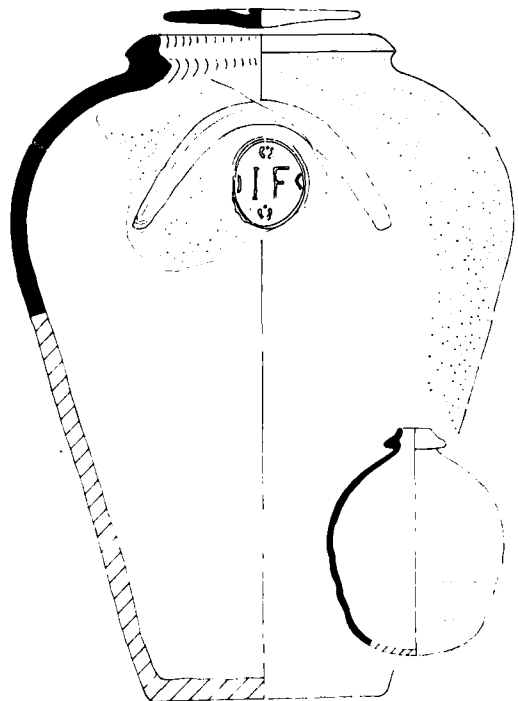


Figure 6. Mewstone Ledge oil jar. A reconstruction of an 18th century oil jar (height 29 in (0.74 m)) with IF plaque and lid, based on fragments from the Mewstone wreck, Devon, compared with a post-medieval olive jar (height 10 in (0.25 m)) (bottom right) from the Thames foreshore at Wapping, London, to the same scale (1/10). The reconstruction of the oil jar is based on a 19th century jar used as a shop sign in London. The lid is based on a drawing by R. Middlewood.

(0.84 m) high with an average thickness of 0.03 m, used as a shop sign and now in the London Museum.

Pink micaceous fabric apparently filled with small dark red and white inclusions. On the surface of the fabric (in the present eroded condition of the fragments) the dark red inclusions project but the white appear to erode out producing the pitted look common on these vessels. The exterior is unglazed, the interior has a dark brown wash, which on the upper part has a glossy lead glaze over the wash up to the level of the lid seating.

Circular lid of similar fabric with three impressed finger grips to the upper surface. The origin of such jars has usually been regarded as being Iberian, (from Spain or Portugal), but another source in central Italy cannot be ruled out. Oil jars range in date from the 1740's to the early 20th century but the existence of applied plaques indicates that the Mewstone Ledge jars should be placed in the second half of the 18th century.

Description of the Mewstone oil jar plaques

Moulded oval plaques, forming raised pads applied to a prepared oval impression on the body of the jar before kiln firing. Pink micaceous fabric as jar.

Figure 7A. This bears the raised initials IF with stylized crown above and below the letters which are flanked on either side by a simple short bent stroke. The whole contained within a single raised ring. The use of IF on oil jar plaques is known on jars from Wapping, London; Colchester, Essex; and Hoorn in the Netherlands.

Figure 7B. This incomplete plaque bears the raised initials IN with devolved crown above; the whole contained within a raised ring.

It is impossible to suggest for the present any interpretation of the meaning or origin

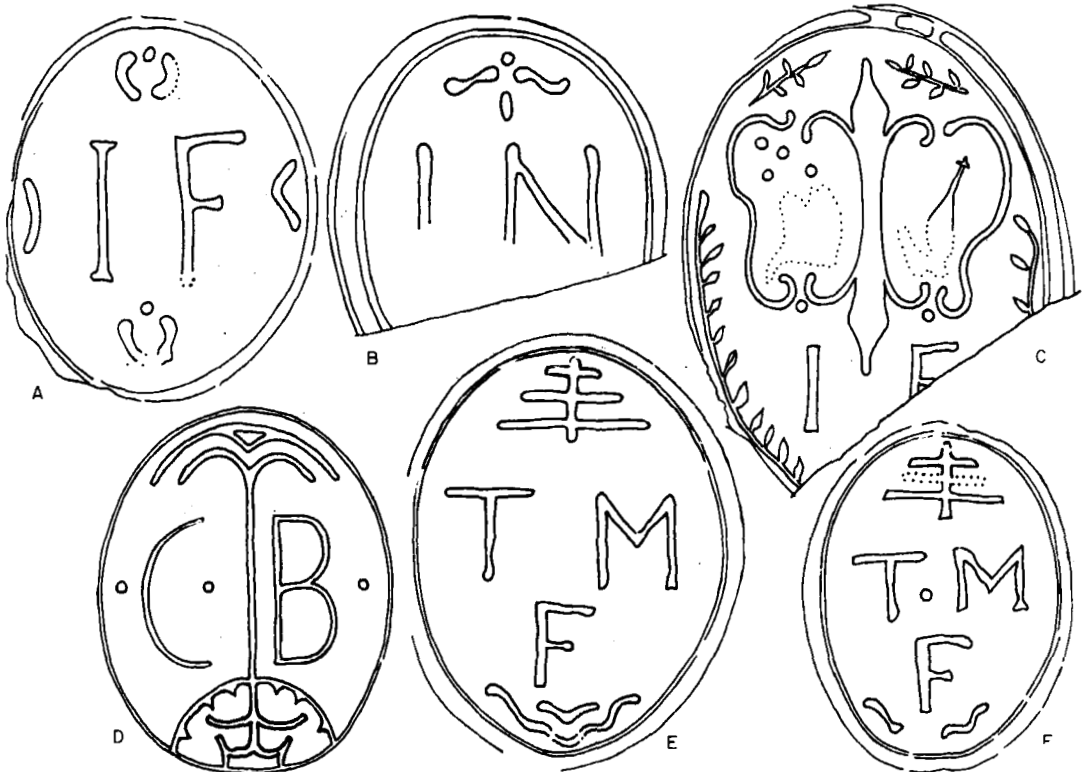


Figure 7. Oil jar plaques. A and B from Mewstone Ledge, Devon; C from the Thames foreshore at Wapping, London; D from the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, Netherlands (diagram only); E from Huntley House Museum, Edinburgh; and F from Ashbourne, Derbyshire. Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

of the initials on the Mewstone plaques except that they are merchant or marketing symbols.

The function of oil jars

The post-medieval oil jars discussed here are the more recent representatives of a long Mediterranean tradition of large earthenware containers for water, wine, oil or grain. The great *pithoi* of Greece⁽¹⁾ and the large *dolia* of the Roman world⁽²⁾ suggest an origin deep in the history of trading. A parallel can be drawn with the long history of the earthenware vessels of the amphora family, a multi-form class of container vessels, with handles and a short narrow neck. Handleless vessels made in the amphora tradition when found in medieval and post-medieval contexts are known to archaeologists as *Olive jars*⁽³⁾ (see Fig. 6) and have a wider but similar distribution to the larger *Oil jar*. Both of these containers are further linked in that they are capable of various secondary uses, for example, containing water or other liquids for domestic or industrial purposes. It might therefore be considered that the Mewstone jars should be simply described as storage jars⁽⁴⁾. However in British contexts at least they are so closely linked with the oil trade that the popular name oil jar has survived in use to the present day.

The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, quotes the following 17th and 18th century references to oil jars⁽⁵⁾.

1656 from Thomas Blount's *Glossographia*. "Jar, with us it is most usually taken for a vessel of twenty gallons of Oyl".

1706 from Philips "Jarr of oil, an earthen vessel containing from 18–26 gallons".

1732 from Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*. "Sir, Spain has sent a thousand jars of oil".

The earliest reference given to an oil shop is 1679, from Titus Oates' *Narr. Popish Plot*, "Where they found an oyl shop which the said Groves brag'd he fir'd".

Oil jars as London shop signs

Jars of the Mewstone type with crescent handles were used on the painted wooden

street signs and printed documents of the 18th century London oil men and Italian ware-housemen. Significantly these illustrations indicate straw rope containers or cases to protect the jars in transit. Ambrose Heal, in his catalogue of 17th and 18th century London shop signs, includes eight examples of oilmen using the oil jar in their shop names, and illustrates two examples from trade cards⁽⁶⁾. The actual jars themselves became street shop signs in the 19th century, if not before. These are either whole jars mounted on a ledge projecting out over the shop front, or jars sawn in half and fixed to the wall face above the shop. They were painted red and the significant surviving examples do not have applied plaques. There are upward of some 15 shops in London with jars still in position and many more have been removed in recent years. They are usually found on buildings of a mid- to late 19th century date, but one set was certainly put up in the first decade of the 20th century⁽⁷⁾. To-day these shops are domestic stores or ironmongers, the lineal descendants of the more specialized oilmen of the last century. That the symbolic link with the oil trade is *almost* broken is apparent in that the jars are no longer always painted red, and by their removal as an anachronism.

Discussion and summary of oil jar types

Oil jars are found in Britain and north-west Europe in archaeological site collections, in museums, in gardens, and in London used as shop signs. They also occur, perhaps in greater numbers, on Spanish and British colonial sites in north and central America. They are unlikely, however, to have been made, or to have originated, in these areas and a western Mediterranean source seems indisputable⁽⁸⁾. Summarizing the examples known to me we consider first the evidence of contemporary painters.

The two oil paintings by Samuel Scott (c. 1710–72), known as the *Old Custom House Quay* or, alternatively, as the *East India Company Quay*, in the Pool of London, dated 1757 (now respectively in the Victoria and Albert Museum (FA 249) and Fishmongers' Hall, London), are the most precise evidence

for dating the appearance of oil jars. The painting might also suggest that oil jars are of English manufacture but they are so unlike any British ceramics in form or fabric as to make this very improbable. While Scott's paintings are not quite identical, both show two large oil jars and a smaller relative^[9]. The paintings are important for another reason, because while the most prominent jar on the right hand side (Fig. 8) of the painting is shown resting on the quay open lidded, a second jar, less prominent on the left hand side, is still closed and bound in its straw rope travelling case (rather like a thick string bag) with a looped knot above the lid^[10]. This is the same form of travelling container shown on the oilmen's trade cards illustrated in Ambrose Heal's catalogue (1947: 140-1). It is not clear from Scott's paintings whether his jars have plaques but in view of the care taken to mark other merchandise it is unlikely that the numerals 136 shown below the handles on the Fishmongers' Hall painting occur by chance.

I have not been able to trace another example of an oil jar in a painting. C. J. Vernet (1714-89), a French contemporary of Scott's, who painted fine harbour views, shows very large yellow-glazed storage vessels of barrel shape with thumb-pressed body cordons in his *Port de Marseille* of 1753-4 (Musée de

Louvre)^[11]. The four jars depicted by Frans Post (1612-80) in his *View of a village in Brazil* are too small to be dogmatic about^[12]. The fine painting of an *Italian Port* by Thomas Wych (c. 1616-77) is also a century before Scott. This depicts two brown jars, rather smaller than oil jars which appear to have less vestigial lug handles and are cased in quite another form of travelling case^[13]. These may, of course, be a Dutch variety or even the 17th century form of the oil jar.

The evidence of the jars themselves must now be considered, first from Britain then from Europe and America. In fact the jars from the Mewstone wreck can be regarded as the most interesting of those found in Britain but as I have not made a systematic study of museum collections, the following random sample must serve to illustrate the range. It does, however, suggest that oil jar fragments are common on British archaeological sites.

Oil jars found in Britain

a. London. Considerable fragments of a jar found on the foreshore of the Thames off Wapping^[14]. This has a similar micaceous fabric and rim form to Mewstone but of greater interest is its applied plaque with the initials IF. (Fig. 7C.) This nearly complete plaque has IF



Figure 8. A detail from Samuel Scott's *Old Custom House Quay or Old East India Quay* of 1757. An open oil jar on the quay to the right contrasts with the closed jar to the left, which is still in its straw rope case.

below a heraldic device in the form of a fleur-de-lis or lily. I would suggest this is the Florentine lily^[15] enclosing to the left an unreadable panel with four dots or roundels above, and to the right a calvary; below, two long leaved branches enclose the device and two smaller branches complete the top. The coat of arms of Florence, a stylized lily, is not uncommon on the tin-glazed or maiolica earthenwares of central Italy in the post-medieval period^[16]. If this interpretation is correct it suggests a Tuscan origin for the jars with the IF initials. The former Duchy of Tuscany was, and the region remains, a major source of olive oil. One of the 18th century London oilmen was using the Grand Duke of Tuscany's arms as a sign for his shop (Richard Hockett against Cecil Street, Strand) in 1720 (Heal, 1947: 140-1).

b. Portsmouth. A rim fragment from the Portsmouth Museum Society's excavations in Penny Street (91/53-40). This has the micaceous fabric and internal lead glaze but also has a white slip band externally below the rim. This slip is a feature noted in Virginia.

c. Brentford, Middlesex. A large part of a jar from the London Museum's excavations in the High Street, found set upright within a building, in a late 18th or early 19th century context. It does not have plaques.

d. Ashbourne, Derbyshire. A complete jar in the possession of one family for many years and

a rim similar to Mewstone and bears plaques marked TMF with a papal cross above as the Ashbourne example (Fig. 7E). It has been suggested to me that the oil jar as an oilman's shop sign does not occur in Scotland but is used as a snuff jar.

g. Shop sign jars. These vessels are similar to that shown in Fig. 6, but without the flattened shoulders. The rim section and crescent handles are also thicker and heavier. Significantly those examined so far do not have plaques. It is likely that actual jars were adopted as signs when they were becoming less common in general use as most are fixed to mid- and late-19th century buildings.

h. Garden jars. The oil jar is found in one other context in Britain and elsewhere used as a decorative feature in a garden. There is also a tendency to collect them in museum gardens; for example Colchester (noted above) Lewes Castle (two sizes, no plaques) Lincoln Castle and the Yorkshire Museum gardens, York^[17]. Where these have rims like the Mewstone jars they would appear to be genuine survivals of the oil trade. A further class of jar perhaps made to satisfy a need for garden jars is of comparatively modern date. These are of oil jar shape but have a high rounded rim and bear impressed makers' marks either on the rim or upper part of the body. In all the cases noted these makers are Italian from the Tuscany region^[18].

Impressed mark

Situation

CARLO BITOSSO MONTELUPO TOSCANA
CARLO BITOSSO MONTELUPO
VINCENZO BITOSSO MONTELUPO
PASQUALE DI NARCISO CORRAGINI
S. MINIATELLO

182, Gloucester Place, London W1
Winchelsea, Sussex
High Tor Hotel, Matlock, Derbyshire
Myddelton House, Bulls Cross, Enfield

now kept in the garden of the Old House, Ashbourne. This example 24 in (0.61 m) high has similar rim to Mewstone and bears the plaque TMF with a cross symbol above, all enclosed within a ring (Fig. 7F). The cross is the three-armed papal type.

e. Colchester, Essex. Two complete jars kept in the garden of the Holly Trees Museum at Colchester Castle. These have rims similar to Mewstone and plaques marked TM and IF.

f. Edinburgh. A complete jar from the shop of James Gillespie, a tobacconist, at 231 High Street. Now no. 11 in the shop signs room at the Huntley House Museum, Edinburgh. It has

Oil jars found in Netherlands and North America

i. Arnhem. A complete jar now in the Gemeentemuseum but found used in connection with a leather tanning industry. It has a rim similar to Mewstone and plaques with the initials CB flanking a stylized tree (with roots and branches). There can be little doubt that this device represents the olive tree used by both Italian warehousemen and oilmen in the 18th century (Heal, 1947: 9, 10, 106-7).

j. Hoorn. A complete jar in the Westfries Museum found at Venhuizen used as an ash

container (about 32 in (0.81 m) high). It has the Mewstone type rim and bears plaques with IF and the lily very similar to the plaque found in London at Wapping.

k. Oil jars in North America have been described by Ivor Noel Hume on several occasions (Noel Hume, 1963–8: 306, pls. 66, 70; 1969: 37–8, fig. 38; 1970: 144, pl. 54). He has been very careful to describe them as storage jars of Iberian origin, and notes that below the handles initials are painted in white slip or placed on oval plaques with coats of arms. He suggests their popularity in Virginia was in the period 1745–80 and indicates that over 120 jars have been found on archaeological sites in Williamsburg alone. At Rosewall in Virginia fragments occur in the trash pit probably deposited by 1771–2 (Noel Hume, 1962: 208–10). Two complete examples from Virginia with a lid were salvaged in pre-aqualung days from the wrecks of the British warships sunk in the York River in 1781 and are now displayed at the National Parks Service Visitor Centre at Yorktown (Noel Hume, 1963–8: 180–5, pl. 66, 70). One of these has plaques (initials not known) and the bands of white slip noted on the Portsmouth example. Noel Hume also notes that oil jars occur in large numbers in Jamaica and the West Indies and are still used as water containers. Certainly the two jars standing at the steps to “the Counting House” in the garden of Good Hope at Trelawny in Jamaica^[19] are similar to those found in England but do not bear plaques. As a further contribution to the debate on origins Noel Hume refers to a modern jar brought back to England from Portugal in the early 20th century.

Conclusion

The Mewstone Ledge jars are a valuable addition to our current knowledge of a little discussed post-medieval ceramic type with a date range from 1740 until at least 1900. That over seven jars have been located from the wreck suggests they may be cargo in transit rather than in use as ship’s water jars. The ceramic dating suggested for the Mewstone examples by the Virginian evidence and by the existence of plaques that can usually be placed in the second half of the 18th century accords with the dating of other artefacts from the wreck. The question of the origin of oil jars is still complex but it is likely that such

ubiquitous containers were produced in several centres in Portugal, Spain and Italy. While the general shape is standard, various sizes can be detected which might relate to volume or source. Several of the examples discussed above suggest that one possible centre would be the former Duchy of Tuscany. The use of the Florentine lily on the example from Wapping and Hoorn^[20], the 18th century London oilman using the arms of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the origin of the modern garden jar at Montelupo are pointers. However, it is likely that other modern jars come from Portugal and the early references show that Spain supplied oil in jars. Once empty such jars had many domestic or industrial uses. Three main types are distinguished.

1. Jars with a low rim and bearing applied plaques (18th century).
2. Jars with a low rim without plaques, in the London area used as oilmen’s shop signs (19th century).
3. Garden jars with high rounded rims often with impressed makers’ marks (late 19th and 20th century).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Martin Dean and Richard Middlewood for discussing their work at Mewstone ledge; to Alan Bax for introducing me to divers at Plymouth and providing facilities and ideas. I have had the benefit of discussions with John Hurst who contributed several of the examples and put his notes of these at my disposal. Michael Curtis visited and examined the jar in Huntley Museum, Edinburgh and supplied details of it; the Gemeentemuseum Arnhem supplied details of their jar, as did Mr K. J. Barton at Portsmouth, Mr R. Canham at Brentford, Mr D. T. D. Clarke at Colchester, Miss K. Hollick at Ashbourne. I am particularly grateful to Mrs Olive Talbot for allowing me to examine the fragments of the Wapping jar and for supplying the original drawing of the olive jar used in Fig. 6. Mrs. P. Glanville made it possible to examine the sawn jar in the London Museum. It will be clear that I have benefited from the writings of Ivor Noel Hume, Director of Archaeology at Williamsburg, Virginia, who first drew my attention to an excavated oil jar in his Rosewell report of 1962.

References

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Notes

- [1] For example see pl. vii. Pendlebury, J. D. S., 1954, *A handbook to the Palace of Minos, Knossos*. London.
- [2] Noted in Frost, H., 1963, *Under the Mediterranean*: 213–4, London, and illustrated in Taylor, J. du P., 1955, *Marine archaeology*, pl. 32, London; Calza, G. & Becatti, G., 1955, *Ostia, M.D.P.I. guide*, pl. 29, Rome; and Phaidon *Rome of the Caesars*, pl. 43, London n.d.
- [3] Coggin (1960). Examples excavated in England will be found in *Medieval archaeology*, VIII: 1964, 211, No. 95 from Bristol in context 1652–6; and *Post-medieval archaeology*, 4: 1970, 23. No. 29 from Tresco, Scilly.
- [4] As used by Noel Hume. Care does have to be used of course as oil jar and olive jar are such similar terms.
- [5] Murray, J. A. H., 1901–28, *A new English dictionary on historical principles*, Oxford, see under Jar and Oil.
- [6] Heal (1947: 140–41 e.g.). B. Valle and Bros. at the Orange Tree and Two Oil Jars, St. James's 1751; F. Humphreys at the Jar and Three Pidgeons, Newgate; Jones at the Oil Jar, Charing Cross 1740; J. Cam at the Oyl Jar, Westminster, 1760.
- [7] A short paper recording the surviving shops will appear in the *London Archaeologist*.
- [8] So little has been published on coarse pottery in Mediterranean countries that it is impossible to be precise.
- [9] Both paintings are accessible in colour reproduction. For the V. and A. picture with dog see Cobbam, A., 1970, *The Eighteenth Century*: 161. London: Thames & Hudson. For the Fishmongers' picture without dog see Hart, R., 1970, *English life in the eighteenth century*. London: Wayland.
- [10] I have a modern linen basket of oil jar shape made of just such straw rope.
- [11] An excellent colour reproduction formed the cover of the Autumn 1970 number of the French marine magazine *Neptunia*, No. 100.
- [12] See *Dutch pictures from the Royal Collection (1971–72)*, No. 51. Queen's Gallery Cat. London.
- [13] Illustrated in colour in Mojzer, M., 1967, *Dutch genre paintings*, pls. 44–45. Budapest.
- [14] Found by Mrs O. Talbot of Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society who has let me examine the fragments.
- [15] For example see Hay, D., 1968, *The age of the Renaissance*: 13 and 23. London: Thames & Hudson.
- [16] See Rackham B., 1952, *Italian Maiolica*, pl. 5, 90B. London.
- [17] There are further jars at Forest Row, Sussex (blank plaques); in the garden of Stoneacre, Otham, Kent (rather crude examples); in the garden of Lullingstone Castle, Kent; on the Aylesbury–Wendover Road near Stoke Mandeville, Bucks. (unmarked) and in the garden of 56, Freeman Street, Wells-Next-the-Sea, Norfolk. There must be many more.
- [18] Which can be compared to the Spanish 19th century marks given in Coggin (1960: 30).
- [19] Shown on the cover of *Jamaica Journal*, June 1970.
- [20] A further jar with the lily and IF plaque has been located by Mrs Talbot in an antique shop in Salisbury, Wiltshire. This example is 34 in (0.86 m) high, and its price £50.

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A Portuguese wreck off Mombasa, Kenya

For some years the existence of a wreck lying off Fort Jesus, a Portuguese fortress at the entrance of the old harbour of Mombasa in Kenya, has been known to skin divers. The length of the ship was measured by P. Phillips

and C. Plough and found to be approximately 130 ft (39 m). The width of the surviving hull was 15 ft (4.5 m). A number of interesting objects were brought up and presented to the Fort Jesus Museum. These included Chinese