



Oval Basin, attributed to Bernard Palissy

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Attributed to Bernard
Palissy
French, Paris, about
1550
Lead-glazed
earthenware
18 7/8 x 14 1/2 in.
88.DE.63

A man of many interests and talents, Bernard Palissy developed his distinctive "rustic-ware," such as this basin, by casting shellfish, plants, and reptiles from life. He then attached them to traditional **ceramic** forms, such as **ewers** and plates, and painted them in blue, green, purple, and brown. Finally, he decorated the wares with runny, lead-based **glazes**, which increased their watery realism.



During his own lifetime, Palissy's works were highly popular. Such influential patrons as Catherine de Medici, Queen of France, commissioned him to decorate **grottoes** in their private gardens, settings for diversion and contemplation in the 1500s. Palissy's rustic works were so successful that they were imitated during his own lifetime. In the 1800s, such notable ceramic factories as Sèvres in France and Wedgwood in England also copied them.

About the Artist

Bernard Palissy (French, 1509–1590)

Although having no formal training, Bernard Palissy became a scientist, land-surveyor, religious reformer, garden designer, glassblower, painter, chemist, geologist, philosopher, and writer, as well as a ceramist. A devout and outspoken **Huguenot**, he was imprisoned for his religious beliefs and for his involvement in the Protestant riots of the first instances of the **Wars of Religion**. It was only with the help of his influential Catholic patron, **Anne de Montmorency**, that he obtained amnesty. Catherine de Medici later acted as his protector, commissioning Palissy to build a private grotto for her at the garden of the Tuileries palace.

Beginning in 1575, Palissy gave public lectures in Paris on natural history that, when published as *Discours Admirables* (Admirable Discourses), became extremely popular and revealed him

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as both a writer and experimental pioneer. In 1588, as the struggle against the Protestants grew, Palissy was again imprisoned. He died two years later of starvation and maltreatment.

Questions for Teaching

Name the animals you see on this object.

How are the animals arranged on the plate? Do you see any patterns?

Where might you find all these animals in nature? What do the animals have in common?

This object is known as a basin and might have held water. Imagine this basin filled with water. Can you guess what type of environment it is trying to mimic? Consider the relationships of the plants, animals, and water.

What would you use this basin for?