Dish

Place of origin: Port St Symeon (This dish was found at Port Saint Symeon (also known as Port St. Simeon), now al-Mina/Samandag, Turkey. Chemical analysis of a sample taken from the dish, subjected to neutron activation analysis in 2004/5 by Scott Redford and M. James Blackman, confirm that the dish is part of a group assigned to Port Saint Symeon production, made)

Date: ca. 1188-1268 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Earthenware with incised decoration (Coloured Sgraffito Ware).

Credit Line: Given on behalf of the Archaeological Expedition to North Syria, by Sir Leonard Woolley

Museum number: C.295-1937

Gallery location: Ceramics, Room 137, The Curtain Foundation Gallery, case 33, shelf 7

Public access description
The seated figure in the centre of the bowl is identified as a saqior cupbearer. They are frequently depicted on the incised or sgraffito wares of the medieval eastern Mediterranean. These figures, typically seated cross-legged, are expensively dressed in fine caftans and hold what may be a glass or metal goblet, presumably full of wine. A bottle or ewer, filled with wine, is often depicted alongside the figure. The saqi was usually a carefully chosen servant, who was handsome and well-educated. Universally, the position or office was held in high rank. They were employed at court where they gained the confidences of the nobility. The image would thus have appealed to Islamic courts (examples have been found was found in the citadel in Hama, Syria), as well as Christian markets, perhaps ordered through Italian maritime traders.

Descriptive line
Dish, earthenware, slip-covered and incised with a male figure holding a wine glass, probably a cupbearer (saqi), with splashes of green and yellow under the glaze. North Syria, Port Saint Symeon (Al-Mina), near Antioch, 1188-1268.

Physical description
Dish, buff earthenware, of shallow form with a broad flat everted rim with distinctive raised inner edge, narrow foot-ring. The front is covered with white slip, which has been incised with a seated male figure wearing a turban and holding a wine glass, probably a cupbearer (saqi), and around the rim a half moon band within concentric line bands. Details are splashed in copper-green and antimony- or lead- yellowish-brown pigment. Covered in a clear glaze. Restored.

Dimensions
Diameter: 19.2 cm taken from Register

Museum number
C.295-1937

Object history note
Given by Sir Leonard Woolley (38/43)

Historical context note
Extract from Los Angeles Medieval Ceramics catalogue:
In Arabic "al Mina" means "the harbor", and its location at the mouth of the Amuq River, the classical Orontes, in northwestern Syria (now Turkish Hatay), makes it the port for the once great city of Antioch farther up the river. Excavated in 1936-37 by Sir Leonard Woolley, it yielded significant ceramics of the ninth through the thirteenth centuries. Quantities of imported wares from Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant were found; but more significant were the kiln wasters indicating that the "al Mina Ware", the lively, white slip, clear glazed sgraffito ware with green and yellow or brown underglaze decorations, was indeed made at this site.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O171255/dish-unknown/