

## Considerations on attributing and dating Renaissance *istoriato* maiolica

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The class of Italian maiolica known as *istoriato* (though the more usual sixteenth-century term was *figurato*) developed in the years before 1500 in various ceramic centres in north-central Italy. It became the most prestigious type of Renaissance maiolica production for over seventy years and its patrons included some of the most artistically sophisticated men and women of the time. When covered with painted figure subjects, maiolica plates, bowls, or jugs are a genre of Renaissance pictorial art, part of a spectrum of image-making that extends from fresco- and easel-painting to the decoration of furniture, textiles, or glass, and including prints. A fifteenth-century *cassone* panel is both a piece of furniture with a social and domestic function and an example of the art of the painter; so is an *istoriato* plate.

Maiolica has many claims on the attention of those interested in the Italian Renaissance. It is one of the few forms of Renaissance art which has survived in colouring exactly as it left the maker's workshop, without fading. Much maiolica depicts a vision of the Classical world or shows scenes from contemporary life or literature, providing us with one of the largest groups of non-religious subject matter in all sixteenth-century art. As a domestic art, in which women were often involved as patrons, purchasers, or recipients of gifts<sup>2</sup>, maiolica provides a "finger on the pulse" of Renaissance life more intimate and domestic than most other art forms. Furthermore, artistic ceramics have survived, despite their fragility, in large numbers: I estimate that over ten thousand specimens of sixteenth-century *istoriato* survive more or less intact.

There are two caveats to be remembered in looking at *istoriato*. Firstly, it never formed more than a tiny proportion of the production of any Renaissance maiolica centre. Even in towns now celebrated for *istoriato*, such as Faenza, Urbino, or Pesaro, excavations and casual finds include hundreds of fragments painted with simpler types of ornament for every fragment of *istoriato*. Cipriano Piccolpasso of Castel Durante, in his *Tre libri dell'arte del vasajo*, written around 1557, towards the end of the "glory days" of *istoriato*-painting, hardly thought it worth discussing. In this respect the world's great museum collections of maiolica, from London to New York, from Florence to Paris, from Braunschweig to Saint Petersburg, loaded with *istoriato* which has been treasured in collections over the centuries, give a misleading impression.

Secondly, the fact that ceramics have survived in larger quantities than more perishable works of art, or than media (like silver) that have recycling value, can tempt us to over-rate their importance and value to people of the past. The clearest case of this is ancient Greek pottery. Ancient "vases" have long been, and still are, energetically collected all over Europe and beyond. However, in an eloquently polemical book published in 1994, *Artful Crafts*, Michael Vickers and David Gill argued that pottery in the ancient Greek world was of trivial financial value, often serving as hardly more than a substitute for and imitation of objects in precious metal. They suggested that to treat Greek pots seriously as works of art, or to spend time and intellectual energy classifying them, as for instance the Oxford scholar Sir John

Beazley did over many decades, is a misunderstanding of the status of pottery in the ancient world<sup>3</sup>.

In sixteenth-century Italy, too, precious metal objects were far more valuable than maiolica. In 1530 the agent of Federico, Duke of Mantua, could buy nearly 100 pieces of Urbino *istoriato* maiolica for 25 scudi<sup>4</sup>. In 1525-6 a silver-gilt salt designed by Giulio Romano for Federico cost 31 ducats for materials and 20 ducats for the goldsmith's labour (not counting payment to Giulio)<sup>5</sup>. Since a ducat and a scudo were similar in value, one silver-gilt salt – albeit unusually elaborate and designed by a prestigious artist – was approximately equivalent in value to 200 good-quality pieces of *istoriato* maiolica.

Shortly before, in the autumn of 1524, Federico's mother Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, received from her daughter, Eleonora, Duchess of Urbino, a maiolica service which Eleonora had commissioned in Urbino. Eleonora wrote:

*Ho facto fare una credenza di vasi di terra... per havere li maestri de questo nostro paese qualche nome di lavorar bene, et se piacerà alla ex.tia v. mi sera di contento, et lei se ne fara servire a Porto per essere cosa da villa...*<sup>6</sup>

We have no reliable documentary evidence of how extensive this service was, but the 24 pieces that have survived (fig. 1) make up the most celebrated of all maiolica services.

Eleonora expected her mother to use the service at her country villa at Porto Mantovano outside Mantua. At court in Mantua, as wife of the head of state, Isabella would have been required by decorum to eat off silver or gold. In her country villa, off duty, and in the company of female friends, musicians, and men of letters, the plates could be taken down from the *credenza* (the word denoted both the pottery service and the piece of furniture on which it could be shown) where one may imagine them displayed and be used at table, and the Ovidian and other literary subjects could provide an impetus for cultured conversation. The fact that it cost less than silver did not make this *cosa da villa* unworthy of serious consideration by Isabella, in the context of Porto.

The point I want to stress here, in citing what is now a well-known document, is that Eleonora did not feel the need to mention the name of the maiolica-painter; he would have had, in her mind, the status of a talented artisan, rather than an artist "of name". I know of no sixteenth-century document which insists, as contracts for large-scale paintings routinely do, that the work be carried out by the master-painter *propria manu*, with his own hand. Nonetheless, as *istoriato* developed in the years after 1500, maiolica painters started to sign and to date their works with increasing frequency. Whatever the marketing advantages of this may have been, it suggests a growing degree of self-conscious artistic pride and aspiration among maiolica-painters, a wish to enjoy some echo of the glamorous new status that famous painters of the time, such as Raphael, the artistic pride of Urbino, enjoyed<sup>7</sup>.

Even if one fully accepted Vickers and Gill's arguments about the low value and status of pottery in the ancient Greek world (which many scholars do not entirely do), and even if the same were true for sixteenth-century Italy (which it is not), I do not think it would follow that scholars like Beazley, or my friend and mentor John Mallet<sup>8</sup>, or eminent Italian scholars such as Carmen Ravanelli Guidotti, who have devoted good parts of scholarly lifetimes to attributing groups of pots to individual painters or workshops, have been wasting their time. Museums show to the public rich *istoriato* maiolica collections and many people derive pleasure and instruction from this branch of Renaissance art. A

fortunate few are even able to make collections of it. Museum curators like me have to write labels. I do not apologize for the view that the attempt to put accurate attributional labels on maiolica is a scholarly endeavour worth pursuing<sup>9</sup>.

That is not to say that I suppose that taxonomic approaches to Renaissance maiolica by style or artist are the only, or even always the most illuminating ones. Anyone dealing with Renaissance pottery has to follow much official and unofficial archaeological work in Italy. The history of the development of cooking and of table rituals at various social levels provides contexts for maiolica services and the shapes of their components. The archives of Italian towns, especially the vast notarial archives, offer material for studying the economics of the industry: matters like prices, labour organization, the role of guilds, protectionist legislation, and the emergence of “proto-capitalist” systems of financing production can be fruitfully studied from this archival material. Scientific studies of clays and glazes can be revealing, though the results have not always been as definitive as might have been hoped, partly because specialist clays were sometimes – as was noted by Cipriano Piccolpasso about 1557<sup>10</sup> - transported over long distances from where they were dug to the potteries where they were used.

There is, inevitably, a degree of subjectivity in making attributions of *istoriato* to a particular painter, whether we can name him (almost always “him” rather than “her” in the sixteenth century, it seems) thanks to a signature or to archival documents, or whether he goes under a “name of convenience” assigned by modern scholars. At various times in the past, attempts have been made to create a “science” of art attribution. This approach, often associated with the name of Giovanni Morelli, can be caricatured as the intensive study of the way artists paint fingernails. How different painters paint fingernails can be a useful pointer to attribution, but there is no substitute for the experienced eye which has seen – and handled – a lot of maiolica and supplements specific and explainable observations with the instinct thus developed. Furthermore, excellent though modern photography is, the direct confrontation with an object can lead to conclusions different from those formed from photographs; it has always been my practice, in commenting on an attribution, to say whether I have seen (and if at all possible handled) the object myself. Whether, in the future, analysis of images by Artificial Intelligence technology will be able to supersede the eye of the art-historian remains to be seen.

Three complications in the process of attributing *istoriato* to particular painters and particular workshops are collaboration, mobility, and the use of graphic sources.

Fig. 2 shows a plate dated 1518 made in the workshop of Maestro Giorgio in Gubbio. On the border, on the right near the centre, is the word *Azuro* (fig. 3). The main painter, it would seem, drew the design and passed the plate to an assistant to paint in the blue background. The assistant used too pale a blue, leaving the instructional word visible<sup>11</sup>.

Such collaboration between the principal artist and a less skilled assistant is one kind of collaboration in maiolica-painting. But one can imagine others, especially in a large and busy workshop. The workshop-owner was sometimes a maiolica-painter himself, but he might have left the painting to employees or to freelance painters brought in to do specific pieces of work. A Castel Durante legal document of 1606 reveals a typical mixed situation: a witness who worked in the workshop of Cesare Compagni mentioned the painter Giovan Paolo Savini, who “*alle volte viene a lavorare nella medesima*

*bottega di Cesare*”; Savini complained that someone else had been using his brushes, which he had left in the workshop<sup>12</sup>. One painter might have been a specialist in ornamental borders, another in *istoriato*; one painter might be a specialist in landscapes, another in figures, and a third in painting shields of arms. Some painters may have been illiterate, so words on the back of plates were sometimes written by the painter of the front but sometimes added by the head of the workshop or a specialist in writing inscriptions; there are cases where more than one handwriting is found on the back of a single plate<sup>13</sup>. Contents inscriptions on pharmacy jars may have been written by specialists. Sometimes, perhaps, a junior painter in the workshop could have been given the task of replicating a drawing or a finished maiolica piece by the owner or principal painter.

The quality of painting on the surviving pieces of Isabella’s service is uniformly high and the painting style is consistent. After many decades of confused attribution to a non-existent painter, “Niccolò Pellipario”, the artist has now been conclusively identified<sup>14</sup> as painter and workshop-owner Nicola di Gabriele Sbraghe, who is first recorded in 1520 and died in the winter of 1537/8 and who signed or monogrammed five works *Nicola da Urbino*. The lyrical, pastoral atmosphere in which he sets the stories from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that make up most of the service, as well as an earlier service, of which seventeen pieces survive in the Museo Correr, Venice, is unequalled<sup>15</sup>.

We can be sure that Nicola’s monogram appears on the marked pieces as painter, and not just as workshop-owner; a plate (figs 4, 5), painted with an Old Testament subject, *The Discovery of the Cup in Benjamin’s Sack*, bears the words *Io niChola pinsitt*, “I, Nicola, painted this”. This plate was surely painted by the same hand as the Isabella set, Nicola’s.

Isabella’s service was for most of the twentieth century dated, for no very good reason, c1519. In 1981, John Mallet re-examined the evidence for sequencing Nicola’s work and, on purely stylistic grounds, based on the dated works, suggested a date “around 1525” for the service<sup>16</sup>. Soon afterwards was published for the first time, from the Mantuan archives, the letter from Eleonora proving that the service was delivered in November 1524. An excellent example of a hypothesis formulated by stylistic analysis being verified by archival discoveries!

A plate in the British Museum, 6, 7<sup>17</sup>, bearing the same handwriting on the back, is signed *Nicola da .V.* While it lacks the grace of the painting of the Isabella service and is certainly later, the stylistic language is recognizably the same. Mallet has for many years argued that this plate lacks Nicola’s fluency and sense of space and believes, despite what seems to be a signature on the back, that the plate was largely or wholly painted by an assistant. But how does one distinguish, in this sort of case, the work of a studio follower from the work of the *maestro* on a bad day, perhaps when he was old, ill, or had had a glass too much wine for lunch? This is not in essence different from trying to determine what parts of a painting from Rubens’s studio are by him and what by assistants. In both cases, experienced eyes can and do come to different conclusions. I believe this plate to be wholly or mainly painted by Nicola, though I do not exclude the collaboration of an assistant. Mallet and I have been in friendly disagreement on this point for over thirty-five years.

Fig. 8 is another plate on which Mallet and I disagree. I have published this as a collaboration between Nicola and an assistant, and I believe that the Cupid in clouds is by Nicola<sup>18</sup>. Mallet tells me he declines to accept any part of the plate into Nicola's *oeuvre*<sup>19</sup>.

A plate in the collection of the Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse, figs 9, 10, with *Caesar travelling to Egypt* and a splendid fortified town in the background is, in my opinion, an autograph work by Nicola, inscribed by him. The composition takes its origin from a primitive little woodcut in an Italian-language edition of the ancient historian Dio Cassius, published in Venice in 1533 (fig. 11)<sup>20</sup>. The plate cannot therefore be earlier than that date.

Another version of the subject, similar in composition, with the same inscription on the back in the same handwriting (surely Nicola's), is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (figs 12, 13)<sup>21</sup>. Bernard Rackham, in the 1940 catalogue of that Museum, attributed it tentatively to Nicola. In my opinion it is a studio replica, made by an assistant with either a detailed drawing or the actual Bemberg plate in front of him; the piece then being inscribed by Nicola as workshop boss<sup>22</sup>.

A similar group of equestrian figures occurs on a plate in the Museo Correr from a service painted, perhaps by Nicola unaided, for Federico Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, and/or his wife Margherita Paleologo (figs 14, 15)<sup>23</sup>; they were married in 1531, but if, as seems to be the case, the figures depend on the 1533 woodcut, then some, perhaps all, the armorial maiolica supplied to them by Nicola can be no earlier than 1533.

The more archival research is done on Italian Renaissance maiolica, the clearer it is that potters and pottery-painters, men with a specific skill to sell, travelled widely for work, both for short periods and to establish themselves in new places.

Francesco di Berardino, known as Francesco Durantino because he was from and probably trained in Castel Durante, is an exceptionally well-documented case of such mobility<sup>24</sup>. Figs 16, 17 show a large plate in Vienna painted with an ambitious scene of *Jupiter defeats the Giants*<sup>25</sup>. It is inscribed and signed by Francesco as made in 1543 in the workshop of the Urbino workshop-owner Guido di Merlino. There is reason to believe Francesco had previously worked for a rival Urbino business, the workshop of Guido Durantino<sup>26</sup>.

The subject of this plate was taken from an engraving (fig. 18) after Perino del Vaga's ceiling fresco in the Palazzo del Principe, Genoa<sup>27</sup>. The composition of an *istoriato* piece can be original, or based on a simple book illustration like the Dio Cassius one illustrated here, or based more or less closely on the whole or a part of a sophisticated drawing or print. The more closely the painter follows a detailed graphic source, the more his own artistic identity may tend to be obscured. In this case, despite the dependence on a print, the forceful figure drawing is immediately and evidently characteristic of Francesco as we know it from other signed works.

Fig. 19, 20 show a plate recently acquired by the Musée national de la renaissance at Écouen. The monogram can be read as for *Francesco*, and the attribution to him on stylistic grounds is convincing. Since it is dated 1543, and we know both from documents and from marked pieces that Francesco was working in Guido di Merlino's

workshop that year, it is likely that this plate was painted in Guido's workshop, though it is possible that talented painters like Francesco would work on a short-term or piecework basis for more than one workshop-owner.

Figs 21 and 22 show a plate with *Jupiter and Semele* in the collection of Sinclair Hood, which I have some confidence in attributing to Francesco<sup>28</sup>. Figs 23 and 24 show a plate in the Goethe National Museum in Weimar, once in the collection of the great German poet, dated 1542, with the identical composition similarly treated, but surely not by Francesco<sup>29</sup>. Dr Johanna Lessmann, whose eye for style is among the acutest of all maiolica-scholars of our time, in her recent catalogue of Goethe's maiolica, points to an affinity with Francesco's work but concludes (partly on grounds of the resemblance of the handwriting on the back to pieces marked as made in Pesaro) that the Weimar plate is more likely to have been made in the workshop of Girolamo di Lanfranco; it seems possible indeed that it is by the painter Nicolo da Fano<sup>30</sup>. It is plausible to suppose that the Weimar plate is a replica of Mr Hood's plate, made in close contact with Francesco and perhaps directly copying it (it seems to me less likely, from what we know of him, that Francesco was the copyist). If the Weimar plate was indeed made in Pesaro, this is striking, if not fully explained, evidence of a link between Francesco and *istoriato*-painting in Girolamo's workshop in Pesaro. I have elsewhere hypothesized that at least one painter, and perhaps more, who had worked for Guido di Merlino in Urbino, subsequently went to work in Pesaro<sup>31</sup>. In the absence of evidence from form or glaze to distinguish consistently Urbino products from Pesaro ones, this may lead us to be cautious in attributing maiolica from this period between the two cities, even in cases where we can attribute a work to a particular hand. I remain uncertain as to whether the Weimar plate was painted in Urbino or in Pesaro.

The shallow bowl in figs 25, 26 is dated 1547 and is marked as made at Monte Bagnolo, a small settlement outside Perugia<sup>32</sup>. We know from archival documents that Francesco moved in 1547 from Urbino to take over a pottery at Monte Bagnolo, and this bowl must have been one of the first things made there<sup>33</sup>. While his stylistic mannerisms are recognizable, both the painting and inscription seem to show signs of haste. Perhaps Francesco, having his own business to run for the first time, found there was never quite enough time. But, were it not marked, we would have no way of knowing if it was made in Urbino or at Monte Bagnolo.

Recent documentary research enables us to follow Francesco in subsequent restless movements across Italy, sometimes to escape debts<sup>34</sup>. He is recorded in Nazzano, a little town north of Rome, then in Rome, then in Turin, then back in Nazzano. The *coppa traforata* at Palazzo Madama in Turin, marked as made in Turin and dated 1577, illustrated in this volume by Luca Pesante, is much in the manner of *bianco di Faenza* and was previously attributed to a Faenza artist<sup>35</sup>. A plate acquired not long ago by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, is not signed but inscribed as made in Nazzano on 1 August 1583<sup>36</sup>. The decoration on the front of these two pieces is at first sight quite different from Francesco's *istoriato* work, but, once it was discovered from documentary evidence that Francesco was working in Turin in 1577 and in Nazzano in 1583, it was easy to recognize his handwriting on the back of these two pieces, and then to discern that the style was, taking into account that twenty years had passed since his latest previously-known signed work, compatible with Francesco's hand<sup>37</sup>. Documents, stylistic analysis, handwriting, and other forms of evidence complement and illuminate each other.

Perhaps the most prolific workshop in Castel Durante (now Urbania) in the middle of the sixteenth century was run by Ludovico and Angelo Picchi<sup>38</sup>. In 1562 the brothers received, in partnership with two other local potters, an order for 307 pharmacy vases for a Genoese resident at Palermo, Andrea Boerio. Most of these were to be *figurati* or *istoriati* (both terms occur in the documents) and some were to be decorated *a trofei*. The brothers failed to produce all the jars in the stipulated time and were sued by Boerio. The court papers are vivid: Boerio stated to the court that Ludovico and Angelo were “*larghi al promettere et all’attendere parchi*”<sup>39</sup>. The brothers had to pay compensation and subsequently closed their Castel Durante workshop and moved to Rome.

Over fifty pharmacy jars survive, painted with the arms of Boerio, which must have formed part of this order. Two albarelli are marked as made in the workshop of Ludovico Picchi<sup>40</sup>, but otherwise it is not clear which were made by the Picchi and which by the other potters involved, Pompeo Cresce and Baldo dalla Murcia.

One of these jars (figs 27, 28)<sup>41</sup> is painted with the subject of three impious brothers shooting at their dead father’s body, a moralizing tale from the Babylonian Talmud diffused in medieval and Renaissance Europe<sup>42</sup>. The rapid and fluid style of painting is recognizable as that found on numerous *istoriato* bowls and dishes. One of these (figs 29, 30)<sup>43</sup>, in the museum at Arezzo, is inscribed on the back *andrea da negroponto*. Attention to this was drawn in 1979 by Johanna Lessmann<sup>44</sup>; she proposed that this Andrea (Negroponte is the Italian name for the Greek island of Euboea, a Venetian possession, so he may have been a Greek or Venetian immigrant) was the painter of the whole group of stylistically related works. I asked the great archival scholar of Castel Durante, the late Don Corrado Leonardi, if there was any record of “Andrea da Negroponte” in the Castel Durante archives; he said he had never come across the name. It seemed to me unlikely that a man who must have been an important painter in Castel Durante over at least a dozen years should have left no archival trace, so I was sceptical about the identification: could “Andrea da Negroponte” have been the client, not the painter, of the bowl<sup>45</sup>? Quite recently, however, has emerged on the art market a plate in this style, with the same subject, which bears the initials *AB* (figs 31, 32), seemingly the initials of the artist. It seems possible that *A* stands for Andrea and *B* for an as yet unidentified family name. This strengthens Lessmann’s case that Andrea da Negroponte was the name of the painter. It seems likely, but, given that we know of collaboration between workshops on orders like this, not certain, that he worked wholly or mainly for the Picchi brothers.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to examine the *AB* plate and the Ashmolean albarello together. They have the same subject, which aids comparison. The first impression was that they are by the same painter. However, there are details that give rise to uncertainty: for example, the mortar joints on the brickwork on the plate are rendered with double vertical strokes, but on the albarello with single brushstrokes. Here the Morellian concentration on minute detail and the overall stylistic “feel” seem to lead in opposite directions. Are we dealing with one painter, perhaps in works separated by a few years, or with two painters working closely side by side and developing a close “house style” together? Could the brickwork have been passed to an apprentice to paint in? My conclusion was that the two works are essentially by the same painter, but it remains debatable.

Figs 33, 34 show a double-spouted vessel of elaborate Mannerist form, now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid. The coat-of-arms is that of a Spanish grandee, Juan de Zuñiga, Count of Miranda del Castañar, and his wife. In 1586, Zuñiga was nominated by Philip II as Viceroy of the Kingdom of Naples (which was part of the dominions of the King of Spain) and came to live in the city. In 1593, as shown by documents published by the late Monsignor Negroni, Isabella Della Rovere, Princess of Bisignano and sister of Francesco Maria II Della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, commissioned from Francesco Patanazzi a large table service, as a gift to the wife of the Viceroy<sup>46</sup>. This vessel and three surviving plates known to me, are doubtless the remains of this armorial *credenza*. The recipient of this diplomatic gift was not, therefore, as the arms might suggest, the Viceroy, but his wife<sup>47</sup>.

Five other vessels of this form, without armorials, are known to me: two are in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne<sup>48</sup>; two are in the Bargello, Florence<sup>49</sup>; and one was in the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig, but lost or destroyed at the end of World War II<sup>50</sup>. These other examples of the form have usually been attributed to the Fontana workshop and assigned dates between 1560 and 1580. The Madrid example seems to have been made from the same mould as the others and seems to prove that when, no later than 1580, Antonio Patanazzi and his family took over the workshop of their relatives, the Fontana, they continued to use the same moulds at least into the 1590s<sup>51</sup>.

A flask in the collection of the Bemberg Foundation (figs 35, 36) bears the arms of Fernando Ruiz de Castro Andrade y Portugal, Count of Lemos, who became Viceroy of Naples in 1599, and his wife; it is one of four pieces now known from an armorial set<sup>52</sup>. Documents show that these are survivors of a service of 377 pieces, “*una credenza di vasi historiati et a grottesca*”, which was commissioned from Francesco Patanazzi by Isabella Della Rovere, as a gift to the wife of the new Viceroy and which was to be made on the model of the service she had commissioned six years previously. The Bemberg Foundation flask may be one of three “*fiaschi di bella forma con fondo historiato et il resto grottesco*” listed by Francesco Patanazzi in registering the order in 1599<sup>53</sup>.

The surviving pieces of these two sets are therefore, thanks to the identification of the heraldry which allows them to be connected with archival documents, significant fixed points in dating the products of this most important of Urbino late-sixteenth-century workshops. The grotesque-painting on pieces of the Lemos set is similar to that on pieces made twenty or so years earlier and the style of some of the grotesque-painting and of the *istoriato*-painting in the Patanazzi workshop seems to have been constant through the 1580s and 1590s (perhaps much of it by one or two painters working in the same workshop for at least twenty years). These examples, with the evidence that the same moulds remained in use over a long period, may serve as a warning against trying to date Patanazzi workshop maiolica too closely on stylistic grounds<sup>54</sup>.

“Connoisseurship” is that aspect of art history which seeks to discover by stylistic and technical examination the authorship and date of a work of art, and also to weed out fakes. The activity is nowadays sometimes criticized in academic circles for being too subjective or unscientific or too closely linked to art market values. In British universities, there are now alarmingly few art-historians for whom the determination of who made which works of art, in any medium, or the writing of *catalogues raisonnés*, is a central concern<sup>55</sup>. But if objects are misattributed or misdated, conclusions drawn from

them are likely to be unreliable. In studying *istoriato* maiolica, the assessment of style, alongside documentary, archaeological, scientific, heraldic, and other types of evidence, remains an essential tool in learning more about this wonderful branch of ceramic art.

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## Illustration captions

1. Plate, *The Justice of Trajan*, arms and *imprese* of Isabella d’Este, By Nicola da Urbino, Urbino, 1524. Diam. 27 cm. British Museum, PE1855,1201.96.
2. Lustred plate. Workshop of Maestro Giorgio, Gubbio, 1518. Diam. 29.5 cm. British Museum, PE1855,1201.69.
3. Detail of fig. 2, with instruction *Azuro*.
4. Plate, *The Discovery of the Cup in Benjamin’s Sack*. By Nicola da Urbino, Urbino, c1525-30. Diam 42 cm. Now in the Museo Diocesano, Reggio Emilia (from the church at Novellara).
5. Reverse of fig. 4.
6. Plate, *The Athenians sacrifice to Diana*. Probably wholly or partly painted by Nicola da Urbino, Urbino, c1535. Diam. 26 cm. British Museum, PE1855,0313.23.
7. Reverse of fig. 6.
8. Plate, *Hercules and Omphale*. Perhaps by Nicola da Urbino and a collaborator, Urbino, c1530-5. Diam. 25.7 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts, gift of Mr and Mrs R. Brodie.

9. Plate, *Caesar travels to Egypt*. Here attributed to Nicola da Urbino, Urbino, c1533-5. Diam. 26.7 cm. Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse, no. 4003.
10. Reverse of fig. 9.
11. Woodcut from *Dione Historico Delle Guerre & Fatti de Romani*, Venice 1533, beginning of Book 41. Photograph Warburg Institute, London.
12. Plate, *Caesar travels to Egypt*. Probably a studio replica of the plate in fig. 9, by a painter in the workshop of Nicola da Urbino (possibly Sforza di Marcantonio), Urbino, c1533-5. Diam. 25.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.2255-1910.
13. Reverse of fig. 12.
14. Plate, *Caesar leaves Rome*. Probably by Nicola da Urbino, Urbino, c1533. Diam 26 cm. Museo Correr, Venice.
15. Reverse of fig 14.
16. Large plate, *Jupiter defeats the Giants*. By Francesco Durantino in the workshop of Guido di Merlino, Urbino, 1543. Diam. 45.8 cm. MAK, Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna, Ke6699. Photo: © MAK/Katrin Wisskirchen
17. Reverse of fig. 16.
18. Engraving, *The Fall of the Giants*, after Perino del Vaga. British Museum, PE1871,0812.766.
19. *Coppa, Alpheus and Arethusa*. By Francesco Durantino, probably in the workshop of Guido di Merlino, Urbino, 1543. Diam. 28 cm. Musée national de la renaissance, Écouen, Ec.1993. Photo: Justin Raccanello.
20. Reverse of fig. 19, with Francesco's monogram.
21. Plate, *Jupiter and Semele*. By Francesco Durantino, Urbino, c1542. Diam. 25.9 cm. Collection of Sinclair Hood (promised bequest to Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Photo: Ashmolean Museum.
22. Reverse of fig. 21.
23. Plate, *Jupiter and Semele*, dated 1542. Perhaps by Nicolo da Fano, Pesaro, 1542. Diam. 27 cm. Goethe National Museum, Weimar.
24. Reverse of fig. 23.
25. *Coppa, The Flaying of Marsyas*. By Francesco Durantino, Monte Bagnolo, 1547. Diam. 25.5 cm. British Museum, PE1895,1220.2.
26. Reverse of fig. 25.
27. Albarello, *Shooting at Father's Corpse*, arms of Boerio. Castel Durante, 1562-3, perhaps by "Andrea da Negroponte", perhaps workshop of Ludovico and Angelo Picchi. H: 24.5 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, presented by the Royer family, WA2006.178.
28. Another view of fig. 27, with arms of Boerio.
29. *Crespina, Apollo and Marsyas*. Castel Durante, c1550-63, perhaps by "Andrea da Negroponte", perhaps workshop of Ludovico and Angelo Picchi. Diam. 24.8 cm. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna, Arezzo, no. 14614. Photo: Tavanti.
30. Reverse of fig. 29.
31. Plate, *Shooting at Father's Corpse*, Castel Durante, c1550-63, perhaps by "Andrea da Negroponte", perhaps workshop of Ludovico and Angelo Picchi. Diam. 28 cm. Private collection. Photo: Justin Raccanello.
32. Reverse of fig. 31, with initials *A B*.

33. Double-spouted vessel, with arms of Zuñiga. Workshop of Francesco Patanazzi, Urbino, 1593-4. Length 28 cm. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, 1981-56. Photo: Raúl Fernandez Ruiz.
34. Another view of fig. 33, with *Marcus Curtius*.
35. Flask, arms of the Count and Countess of Lemos. Workshop of Francesco Patanazzi, Urbino, 1599-1600. Height 27.2 cm. Fondation Bemberg, Toulouse, no. 4051.
36. Another view of fig. 35.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> At the Assisi conference in 2016 I presented a paper on the diffusion of Italian maiolica across Europe which was based on the introductory chapter to my book, *Italian maiolica and the Renaissance*, subsequently published by the Ashmolean Museum (Wilson 2017). This was in turn an expanded and revised version of an essay previously published in Italian (Wilson 2007). Instead of repeating this, what is published here, by permission of the editors of this volume, is a revised and augmented version of an essay published in French in 2015 (Wilson 2015); I thank Philippe Cros for his courteous permission to do this.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Vickers and Gill 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Mallet 1981, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Ferrari 1992, I, pp. 109, 112.

<sup>6</sup> The letter was discovered by Mariarosa Palvarini Gobio Casali. For recent accounts of Isabella's service and the documentation on Nicola, see Thornton and Wilson 2009, pp. 229-34; Écouen 2011, pp. 64-7; Wilson 2017, pp. 131-7. For a modern re-creation, Ferrari and Palvarini Gobio Casali 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Mallet 2007B is a personal perspective on the issues of attributing maiolica.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Rackham wrote (1943, p. 12) "It is as reasonable to paint a picture on an earthenware roundel as on a frescoed wall or square of canvas. But from the pot point of view I sometimes have a sense of guilt". This anxiety reflects the prescriptive aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts and Modernist movements in which Rackham was steeped.

<sup>10</sup> Piccolpasso 2007, Book I, fol. 1 recto, noting, for example, that: "*Vinegia lavora la terra di Ravenna, et di Rimini, e di Pesaro per la miglior*".

<sup>11</sup> Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 295.

<sup>12</sup> Mallet 2004, p. 190.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson 1996, no. 112, for plates from the workshop of Guido di Merlino with two separate handwritings on each piece.

<sup>14</sup> Negroni 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Écouen 2011, pp. 157-95.

<sup>16</sup> Mallet 1981, p. 166.

<sup>17</sup> Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Darr, Simons and Wilson 2013, no. 14. There is no handwriting on the back.

<sup>19</sup> Mallet wrote to me, 28 March 2015: "the plate looks to me through and through by a single painter, the one who painted at least most of the Montmorency Service".

<sup>20</sup> *Dione Historico Delle Guerre & Fatti de Romani*, Venice 1533, beginning of Book 41. Caesar's journey was not in fact to Egypt.

<sup>21</sup> Rackham 1940, no. 576; Mallet 2007, no. 123, as "inscribed by Nicola but wholly or partly painted by another hand".

<sup>22</sup> One possibility is that the assistant in question was the young Sforza di Marcantonio, a painter from Castel Durante, who later went to work in Pesaro; see Fiocco and Gherardi 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Liverani 1939, p. 14; see Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 147; Boutin 2011; Wilson forthcoming. The plate will be included in Caterina Marcantonio's forthcoming catalogue of the maiolica in the Museo Correr.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson 2004; Pesante 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson 2001, pp. 214-5; the engraving is discussed on p. 213.

<sup>26</sup> Pesante 2012, p. 10; Pesante in this volume.

<sup>27</sup> Bartsch XV, pp. 45-46, no. 16; variously attributed to Giulio Bonasone or the Monogrammatist *FG*.

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- <sup>28</sup> Wilson 2017, no. 65.
- <sup>29</sup> Lessmann 2015, no. 61.
- <sup>30</sup> Lessmann 2015, p. 176, notes a similarity between the handwriting on the Weimar plate and that on a plate with *Cicero and Caesar* in the British Museum, which is marked as made in Girolamo's workshop in 1544 (Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 208). Mallet has argued cogently (Mallet 2010 and 2015) that this must be the painter Nicolo da Fano, who signed a plate now in the collection of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia (C. Fiocco and G. Gherardi in Wilson and Sani 2006-7, II, no. 122).
- <sup>31</sup> Wilson 2004, p. 138, suggesting that the painter named by John Mallet "The Painter of the Orpheus Basin" after a plate at Sèvres marked as made in the workshop of Guido di Merlino in 1542 (1996, figs 12, 13), is likely to be identical with the painter named by Bonali and Gresta (1987, tav. XVIII, XIX, XX, XXIII), after a plate in Padua, "*Il pittore di Sansone e i Filistei*"; Bonali and Gresta argue that this painter worked at Pesaro. See also Wilson 2017, pp. 169, 260.
- <sup>32</sup> Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 247.
- <sup>33</sup> Wilson 2004; Balzani and Cutini 2013.
- <sup>34</sup> Pesante 2012.
- <sup>35</sup> Pesante 2012, figs 5, 6.
- <sup>36</sup> Pesante 2012, figs 1, 2.
- <sup>37</sup> Pesante 2012, p. 25, note 2, credits me with the realization of this, but I believe the credit is at least as much due to him; see also Wilson 2015, pp. 20-2. A similar *coppa traforata*, marked as made in Turin in 1578, has recently been given to the Fondazione Torino Musei for Palazzo Madama.
- <sup>38</sup> Wilson 2002, pp. 143-9; Leonardi and Moretti 2002, pp. 35-67.
- <sup>39</sup> Leonardi and Moretti 2002, p. 49.
- <sup>40</sup> Biscontini Ugolini 1997, no. 19; Wilson 2002, figs 33a, 33b; the one there published from a private collection was sold at Finarte Semenzato, Florence, 19 December 2002, lot 172. It is debatable whether these two marked examples are by "Andrea da Negroponte".
- <sup>41</sup> Wilson 2002, p. 145, figs 37, 38; Wilson 2017, no. 79.
- <sup>42</sup> Wilson 2014.
- <sup>43</sup> Fuchs 1993, no. 217; Wilson 2002, pp. 137-8.
- <sup>44</sup> Lessmann 1979, p. 148.
- <sup>45</sup> Wilson 1985, p. 908.
- <sup>46</sup> Negroni 1998, pp. 108, 114-5. Negroni was cautious about identifying the "Principessa di Bisignano" mentioned, but it seems overwhelmingly likely the reference is to Isabella Della Rovere; compare Wilson 2017, no. 94.
- <sup>47</sup> For the suggestion that a shield incorporating the arms of husband and wife impaled on a Renaissance work of art is, in general, at least as likely to have been commissioned by or for the wife as the husband, see Wilson forthcoming.
- <sup>48</sup> Wilson 2015B, pp. 116-23.
- <sup>49</sup> Conti 1971, nos 39, 44; Marini 2012, p. 21. Marco Spallanzani (1994, pp. 80, 128, 181) has suggested that one of these might be the "*vaso a due manichi della medesima terra, con due arpie*" which had belonged to Grand-Duke Francesco de' Medici and is listed in an inventory of 1587.
- <sup>50</sup> Lessmann 1979, p. 568, no. XIV.
- <sup>51</sup> Thornton and Wilson 2009, pp. 335, 400-2. Another example of moulds from the Fontana workshop remaining in use under the management of the Patanazzi is the form of trilobed basin with a back moulded as three pairs of swans, for which see most recently Wilson 2017, no. 91.
- <sup>52</sup> For pieces from the set now in the British Museum, Saint Louis, and Braunschweig, see Thornton and Wilson 2009, p. 412.
- <sup>53</sup> Negroni 1998, p. 115.
- <sup>54</sup> The set with the *impresa ARDET AETERNUM*, often in the past dated to the time of the marriage of Alfonso II d'Este and Margherita Gonzaga in 1579, is likely to have been made later than this, perhaps as late as the 1590s; see Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 240.
- <sup>55</sup> Professor David Ekserdjian of the University of Leicester, whose work includes monographs on Correggio and Parmigianino, and who has also written about maiolica, is an eminent exception.