

## A maiolica service for Giuseppe Baviera of Senigallia

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*[Riassunto da rimanere in inglese]*

*Abstract: The present article presents, in grateful homage to the memory of Monsignor Franco Negroni, four istoriato maiolica plates, now in Mdina (Malta), Munich, Naples, and a private collection, which bear arms here identified as those of Giuseppe Baviera (1530-1591) of Senigallia. Giuseppe, the man who commissioned the remarkable series of stucco ceilings from Federico Brandani in his Palazzetto Baviera in Senigallia, was a leading citizen of that town and also a close associate of Duke Guidubaldo II of Urbino. The service to which these four plates belonged is tentatively attributed to the Fontana workshop in Urbino.]*

As a foreigner studying Italian Renaissance ceramics, and especially the maiolica of the Duchy of Urbino, I had frequent reason over nearly twenty years to thank Monsignor Franco Negroni for the tranquil courtesy of his welcome to and guidance through the Urbino archives, for his generosity with his vast accumulation of notes from those archives, and for the model he has always provided of rigorous scholarship in adding to our knowledge of the history and visual culture of Renaissance Urbino. It is a source of pleasure to all those who care about the history of this inspirational city that his precious notebooks are safely secured for future generations of scholars to draw on. The present modest contribution is on a subject on which he could, were he still among us, perhaps have shed more light. It is offered in grateful and affectionate tribute to his memory.

The subject of this article is a series of four maiolica plates, now widely scattered, which all bear the same coat of arms.

1. A large plate (figs 1, 2)<sup>1</sup>, in the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta, to which it came with the bequest of Conte Saverio Marchese of Malta (1757-1833). It is carefully painted with an equestrian battle scene from the Old Testament. On the reverse is the inscription:

*ESOD. XVII.*

*Muove Amalech esercito gagliardo.*

*Contr'a'l popol di Dio, dett Israele:*

*Giosuè spiega con... lo stendardo,*

*Con huommin'atti del popo fedele*

In the Biblical story referred to, the defeat of the army of Amelek by the Israelites (Exodus, chapter 17), the people of Israel defeated the army of Amelek while Moses held up his arms. If this is the subject, the figure kneeling and holding up his arms would represent Moses, but he is dressed as a soldier, and looks more like the general, Joshua. Despite the inscription, the subject looks more likely to represent the later story (Joshua, chapter 10), where Joshua prayed to God for the sun to stand still so that the Israelites could complete a victory over the Amorites before nightfall. No precise graphic source has been traced, but the battle scene recalls a number of engravings from the school of Raphael and Giulio Romano<sup>2</sup>.

2. A shallow *coppa* (figs 3, 4)<sup>3</sup> in the De Ciccio collection at the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. It is painted with a scene representing Esther before King Ahasuerus and the inscription:

*Lo scettro Asuer à ester smarita porge.*

The story is from The Book of Esther, chapter 5. King Ahasuerus held out his sceptre to summon his Queen, the Jewess Esther, to him; she then persuaded him to repeal the persecution he had decreed against the captive Jews.

The composition is taken from a woodcut (fig. 5) in the *Biblische Historien (Biblicae Historiae)*, a book of Bible illustrations by Sebald Beham with short texts in German and Latin, first published in Frankfurt in 1533, and with numerous subsequent editions<sup>4</sup>. This was one of the first of the small books of convenient Bible illustrations published in Europe and was widely used by maiolica painters into the 1550s<sup>5</sup>. Curiously, the painter here has taken Beham's woodcut representing David and Abishag (I Kings, chapter 1; III Kings, chapter 1 in the Vulgate) and pressed it into use for a different Biblical subject.

3. A *coppa* (figs 6, 7)<sup>6</sup> of similar shape and size in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. It is painted with another Biblical scene, the sack of the treasures of the Temple at Jerusalem by Shishak [*il nome è "Sisach" nella Bibbia italiana*], King of Egypt (I Kings, chapter 14; or III Kings, chapter 14 in the Latin Vulgate text; also II Chronicles, chapter 27). This is again taken from a Beham woodcut (fig. 8), of the same subject, from the *Biblische Historien*<sup>7</sup>. The inscription on the reverse reads: *Il Rè d'Egitto spoglia il tēpio santo:*

4. A plate (figs 9, 10)<sup>8</sup>, in a private collection, Gubbio. It is painted with Jupiter, who has changed himself into a satyr to make love to Antiope (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, lines 110-111); left and right appears winged Cupid. The inscription is: *Giove in satiro*<sup>9</sup>.

Each of these four plates is meticulously painted with a coat of arms (fig. 10), within scrollwork: Quarterly: 1. azure a lion rampant or, impaling argent a fess chequy with an unidentified charge below the fess; 2: argent a lion rampant or; 3: lozengy argent and azure; 4. the same as 1, except that the charge below the fess chequy is missing. On the three smaller pieces, but not on the big one, the shield is flanked by the initials *I* and *B*.

The four pieces seem likely to have been painted for the same recipient, and it seems probable that all four formed part of the same service. It is just possible that the *Jupiter and Antiope*, which is apparently by a different painter from the other three and has different handwriting on the back<sup>10</sup>, as well as being distinct in subject matter, is from a different service, which had Ovidian subjects. However, it was not unusual in mid sixteenth-century maiolica workshops for several painters to work on single commissions; and also for the subject matter to be divided between religious and secular<sup>11</sup>. The similarity of the painting of the intricate shield of arms is striking.

The closest comparison to the service of which these four plates formed part is one which bears the arms of Guidubaldo II, duke of Urbino, and inscriptions indicating that it was made as a gift to the Augustinian friar Andrea Ghetti da Volterra<sup>12</sup>. Of this service, which must date from after 1559, sixteen plates (but no jugs, salts, or candlesticks) are recorded,

including two large plates around 46 cm. in diameter, about the same size as the large plate from the present set. The Volterra set also contains a mixture of subjects, in that case Old Testament stories and episodes from ancient Roman history and legend. The inscriptions on the Volterra service appear to be in the same handwriting as those on the three Old Testament plates from the service here presented.

A further comparison may be made with another substantial *istoriato* service of about the same date. The large plate of the present set, with the Old Testament battle scene, resembles a series of plates painted with subjects from the Second Punic War between Rome and the Carthaginian general Hannibal<sup>13</sup>. The rhyming couplets on our battle scene plate are similar to, and inscribed by the same hand as, the rhyming couplets inscribed on the backs of the plates of the Hannibal set. Both the Volterra and the Hannibal sets are generally attributed to the workshop of Guido Durantino and his son Orazio Fontana. This seems the most likely origin, too, for our service; on stylistic grounds a dating around 1550-1560 seems likely<sup>14</sup>.

In cataloguing the *Jupiter and Antiope* recently, Riccardo Gresta suggested it might have been made in Pesaro rather than Urbino, comparing certain fragments found in that city<sup>15</sup>. Gresta is correct to point out the likelihood that some of the *istoriato* maiolica from the 1540s onwards which is often attributed to Urbino may actually have been made in Pesaro and he rightly stresses the need for rigorous criteria for attribution of mid-sixteenth-century *istoriato*. However, if the four plates presented here were indeed part of a single service, this seems most likely to have been made in the Fontana workshop, which evidently enjoyed the particular patronage of Guidubaldo II, Duke of Urbino<sup>16</sup>.

The blue and white lozenges are the armorial bearings of the Wittelsbach Dukes of Bavaria. For that reason, and because the *coppa* now in Munich is believed to have come from the collections of the Wittelsbach family, it has previously been supposed that the arms are those of a German noble house. It is the purpose of this article to suggest instead that these are the arms of Giuseppe Baviera of Senigallia (1530-1591).

Giuseppe was a descendant of a branch of the ruling house of Bavaria which had emigrated to Italy and taken the name Baviera. They settled first in the Veneto and then, in 1471, in Savona, where Giovanni Giacomo Baviera married a lady of the Manerola family, whose sister was the mother of Giovanni Della Rovere. In 1474, after the first Della Rovere Pope, Sixtus IV, had appointed Giovanni Della Rovere Signore of Senigallia, it was Giovanni Giacomo Baviera, who rode into Senigallia to take possession of the city on behalf of its new lord. His son Giovanni Francesco, who died about 1549, was Treasurer to Giovanni Maria Della Rovere, Lord of Senigallia, and to his son Francesco Maria I, Duke of Urbino. Giuseppe was Giovanni Francesco's eldest son and became one of the leading citizens of the town of Senigallia. He was closely associated with his cousin Guidubaldo Della Rovere, who succeeded as Duke of Urbino in 1538, and died in 1574. The biographical sources note that Giuseppe was responsible for draining the malarial marshes outside Senigallia known as "Le Saline"<sup>17</sup>.

Giuseppe Baviera's great legacy to posterity is the series of glorious stuccoed ceilings he commissioned about 1560 from Federico Brandani for the Palazzetto Baviera, next to the Ducal Palace of the Della Roveres<sup>18</sup>. The Palazzetto Baviera project has interesting links with maiolica. Brandani (c.1524/5-1575) had been apprenticed in 1538 to the maiolica painter, Giovanni Maria di Mariano of Urbino<sup>19</sup>. In one of the most ambitious rooms of the Palazzetto Baviera, the Sala di Ilio<sup>20</sup>, he made use of some of the drawings which had been made for maiolica for Duke Guidubaldo about 1548-50 by Battista Franco<sup>21</sup>. However, it would go beyond the evidence to say this fact proves that Giuseppe Baviera was definitely himself interested in maiolica, since it is not clear how much input the patron had into the iconographical programme of the Palazzetto. The Greek inscriptions accompanying the scenes in the Sala di Ilio suggest that a programme was prepared by a humanist<sup>22</sup>. A detail of one of the Trojan War scenes is reproduced in fig. 12.

I had some difficulty ascertaining as to the exact arrangement of the family arms adopted by Giuseppe. The Palazzetto Baviera has been heavily restored and the armorials on the *portone*<sup>23</sup> have apparently been recarved with a different and simpler form of the arms which became the standard arrangement at a later date than Giuseppe's lifetime; there is no sign in this later version of the chequer motif which is included in the maiolica version of the arms<sup>24</sup>. Closer to the maiolica is a well-head (fig. 13) in the courtyard of the Palazzetto which has the arms in the form: Quarterly: 1 and 4, a lion rampant crowned; a canton chequy; 2 and 3 lozengy. This corresponds to the drawing in the local armorial prepared by Giuseppe Tiraboschi in 1708<sup>25</sup>. The case for thinking the service was made for Giacomo was strengthened by the fact that the same initials as appear on the maiolica, *IB*, are carved into the door lintels in the Palazzetto Baviera, where they stand for *Josephus Baviera*<sup>26</sup>. The family tree does not record any other member of the family, male or female, with the initial *I* in the years around 1550-70.

The definitive proof, however, that the arms on the maiolica correspond to those used by Giacomo has been provided by Dr Gilberto Zacchè of the Archivio di Stato di Modena, who kindly examined four letters written by Giuseppe and his son Francesco Maria to Cardinal Luigi d'Este in 1584-1586<sup>27</sup>. Dr Zacchè writes: "Le lettere citate sono conservate nel fondo "Particolari", b. 99. Dei tre timbri a secco oggi uno solo è leggibile (con l'aiuto della lente d'ingrandimento) e precisamente quello apposto alla lettera inviata da Francesco Maria Baviera, da 'Sinigaglia', al card. d'Este (a Roma) il 9 settembre 1584. Lo stemma che appare sul timbro a secco è perfettamente identico a quello riferibile alla maiolica istoriata". Although the letter in question was written by the son, the seal in question belonged to the father and bears the name JOSEPH BAVIERA.

We have, unless new documentation is found, no way of knowing if the maiolica service was commissioned by Giuseppe himself, or by a member of his family; it is equally likely that it was a gift to him, perhaps, like the Andrea da Volterra set, from Duke Guidubaldo. Nor is there any way of knowing how extensive the service originally was. It is, in any case, evidence of the interest in and deliberate encouragement of the Urbino maiolica industry by Duke Guidubaldo and his family and political circle<sup>28</sup>.

## Illustration captions

1. Plate, an Old Testament Battle. Cathedral Museum, Malta. Diam: 46 cm.
2. Reverse of fig. 1.
3. Shallow *coppa*, *Esther and Ahasuerus*, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples, De Ciccio collection. Diam: 26 cm.
4. Reverse of fig. 3.
5. Woodcut, *David and Abishag*, by Sebald Beham; reproduced from the Frankfurt 1537 edition of the *Biblische Historien*.
6. Shallow *coppa*, *Shishak despoils the Temple*, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Diam: 26 cm.
7. Reverse of fig. 6.
8. Woodcut, *Shishak despoils the Temple*, by Sebald Beham; reproduced from the Frankfurt 1537 edition of the *Biblische Historien*.
9. Plate, *Jupiter and Antiope*. Private collection. Diam: 27.6 cm.
10. Reverse of fig. 9.
11. Detail of the armorial shield on fig. 3, with the initials *IB*.
12. Federico Brandani, *Aeneas, with Anchises and Ascanius, leaving Troy*; part of the stucco ceiling in the Sala di Ilio, Palazzetto Baviera,
13. Marble well head in the Palazzetto Baviera, with a version of the Baviera arms.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Azzopardi 1990, p. 7. I thank Joseph Mizzi for the photographs.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Bartsch XIV, p. 172, no. 212 (Agostino Veneziano after Giulio Romano); Bartsch XIV, p. 316, no. 420 (Marco da Ravenna after Giulio Romano); Bartsch XV, p. 93, no. 59 (Caraglio after Raphael); Bartsch XV, p. 134, no. 84 (Bonasone after Raphael).

<sup>3</sup> Inventory no. 170. I thank Paola Giusti for the photographs.

<sup>4</sup> Bartsch VIII, pp. 230-232; *The Illustrated Bartsch* 15 (New York, 1978), pp. 135-161.

<sup>5</sup> For the use of Beham woodcuts on maiolica, see Rasmussen 1984, pp. 192-193; Drey 1990.

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<sup>6</sup> Inventory no. Ke2371; Drey 1990; Hantschmann 2004, p. 34, no. 27. I thank Katharina Hantschmann for the photographs.

<sup>7</sup> The woodcut is reproduced by Drey 1990, fig. 58.

<sup>8</sup> R. Gresta in Sannipoli 2010, no. 3.32.

<sup>9</sup> The same words appear on a plate in the Ford collection, with a different version of the same subject, from a set with the arms of Lancierini, Rackham 1958, p. 151, fig. 9.

<sup>10</sup> The unusual way of writing a capital *G*, so that it resembles a figure 6, is also a feature of the handwriting of Gironimo di Tomaso of Urbino, for whom see Wilson 2003; but it seems far-fetched to suppose the plate an early work by Gironimo.

<sup>11</sup> For example the service made for Cardinal Antonio Pucci, Thornton and Wilson 2009, no. 179; and the service with the arms of Lancierini, Thornton and Wilson 2009, nos 182-183.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson 2002, pp. 125-131; 150-153; Reissinger 2000, nos 23-28. It should be noted, as a point of difference between the two services, that the Old Testament scenes from the Volterra service are from book illustrations by Georg Pencz and Bernard Salomon, rather than Beham.

<sup>13</sup> Drey 1991; Thornton and Wilson 2009, pp. 326-328.

<sup>14</sup> Mallet 1987 proposes a grouping of works marked as made in the workshop of Guido Durantino/Fontana and their attribution to six hands; the three pieces with Old Testament subjects may be by the painter Mallet classifies as no. 6, to whom he attributes the large landscape service with the arms of Salviati, as well as the Hannibal series. But there were certainly more than six *istoriato* painters who worked for the workshop at various times.

<sup>15</sup> Gresta in Sannipoli 2010, no. 3.32; Gresta 2009, esp. fig. 13. Gresta was unaware of the other pieces with the arms.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson 2004, pp. 204-207.

<sup>17</sup> Baviera 1937, p. 5; Ruggeri 2007, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> A serious fully-illustrated monograph on the Palazzetto Baviera is much to be desired. Until then, see Antonietti and Nardini 1995; there are some photographs in Bonvini Mazzanti 2008, pp. 93-109.

<sup>19</sup> Scatassa 1908.

<sup>20</sup> Clifford and Mallet 1976; Lauder 2009, pp. 29-30; 198-213.

<sup>21</sup> D. Sikorski in *Grove Dictionary of Art*, sv Brandani, suggests that the Sala di Ercole stuccoes are also after Franco designs; but there is no close correspondence between the Hercules stuccoes and the Hercules maiolica designs known to me (Clifford and Mallet 1976, figs 40, 41 [Walters Art Museum]; and a plate in the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, inv. Ke3338, which has the same *CD* mark as the Walters plate).

<sup>22</sup> Saccomani 2000, p. 220, notes that the programme for Battista Franco's maiolica designs had been prepared by the Urbino writer Antonio Galli.

<sup>23</sup> The present *portone*, with the carved armorial shield, is entirely twentieth-century; see Ruggeri 2007, p. 87, for a photo of the façade before the *portone* was constructed.

<sup>24</sup> I have not succeeded in finding the origin of the chequer motif in this version of the arms, which does not seem to relate to either of Giuseppe's wives, Giulia Passeri or Paola Bonarelli; or to his mother, Livia Floridi; or to his Manerola grandmother. Nor can I interpret the charge that is painted on each of the plates below the fess chequy in the first but not the fourth quarter of each shield on the maiolica plates.

<sup>25</sup> From a copy made by G.M. Mastai Ferretti in the Archivio Storico Comunale of Senigallia. For the same arms in a pen and ink *stemmario* by Tiraboschi, see Squarti Perla 2009, I, p. 221.

<sup>26</sup> The painted armorials between the carved letters on these door lintels have probably been repainted with a more modern form of the arms.

<sup>27</sup> The letters are described and transcribed by Baviera 1941, pp. 10-14.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson 2004 discusses this and stresses the evidence that women of the Della Rovere family often played an active role in maiolica commissions.