

PART 3

The Materiality of Devotion



Religious Subjects on Sixteenth-Century Deruta *Piatti da Pompa*

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The small Umbrian hill town of Deruta, about 19 km south of Perugia, is one of Italy's most important centres for the production of sixteenth-century maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware). Among the wares for which Deruta is most famous are large, concave dishes with flat rims, painted at the centre with a wide variety of sacred and profane subjects. On most examples, the rim, which neatly frames the central image, is treated independently from the centre, and its decoration either circles the rim [Fig. 8.1] or consists of repeating radial segments of varying width and design [Fig. 8.2]. These works of art range from about 38 to 44 cm in diameter, and are commonly referred to in the specialist literature as *piatti da pompa* – 'show' or 'display' dishes.¹ The majority of them were made between 1500 and 1560, and because they remained in fashion for such a long time, and changed little stylistically, they are particularly difficult to date with any precision.

Of the two largest categories of decoration on these works, the first comprises the so-called *belle donne* dishes that typically feature bust or waist-length images of graceful and idealised women in contemporary dress, often accompanied by fluttering banderoles containing pithy aphorisms or moralising statements, or epithets extolling their virtue or beauty. The second category is religious images, most notably saints – like St Francis, the commonest saint depicted [Figs 8.1 and 8.2] – the Virgin, angels, and the sacred trigram. The present essay focuses on this latter category, and it includes suggestions pertaining to the decorative and devotional use of these objects for a variety of clients.

Two technical aspects regarding the dishes' manufacture shed light on their intended use, as well as help identify who the potential consumers were for these attractive objects. All maiolica is kiln-fired twice – once to become *terracotta* (the biscuit firing), and a second time, after being glazed and decorated, to fuse the painting and glazes to the object – but a good proportion of Deruta

1 This term is not a Renaissance one. One of the earliest instances of the use of *piatto da pompa* is the catalogue of the Campana maiolica (now mostly at the Louvre): *Cataloghi del Museo Campana. Classe X. Dipinture in majolica [...]* (Rome, n.d., but ca. 1858).



FIGURE 8.1 Deruta, "St Francis Receiving the Stigmata", 1531. Maiolica, diam. 41.3 cm.
Cleveland Museum of Art
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piatti da pompa – I would estimate 65–75% of surviving examples – are decorated in golden lustre [Fig. 8.2] rather than in polychrome [Fig. 8.1]. Lustring, or the application of metallic oxides, requires a third firing in a kiln within a reducing atmosphere; once removed from the kiln, the dishes are burnished to reveal an iridescent lustre with a tone ranging from bright yellow to light brown.²

Lustrated pottery was Deruta's speciality, and only a few workshops in a few towns in Italy are known to have possessed the highly guarded secret of its production; consequently, this ware was in large part responsible for Deruta's

² Red lustre sometimes also appears on Deruta wares, but for reasons unknown potters abandoned its use by the early 1520s.



FIGURE 8.2
Deruta, “St Francis
Receiving the Stigmata”,
ca. 1500–1530. Lustrated
maiolica, diam. 40.8.
Pesaro, Museo delle
Ceramiche
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fame as a pottery centre. The additional time and labour (not to mention the risk) involved in producing lustrated maiolica meant that it could fetch more – perhaps six times more – than the price of its polychromatic counterpart; and such a price disparity, if credible, would indicate different consumers for these products.³ Cipriano Piccolpasso, in his treatise of ca. 1557 on maiolica-making, estimated – perhaps with some exaggeration – that only 6% of lustrated objects emerged from the third firing intact: ‘è arte fallace che, spesse volte, di 100 pezzi di lavori, a ffatiga ve ne sono 6 buoni. Vero è che l’arte in sé è bella e ingegniosa, e quando gli lavori son buoni paiono di oro’.⁴

The high esteem afforded to Deruta lustrewares was also expressed by the Bolognese friar Leandro Alberti, who wrote in his *Descrittione di tutta Italia* (1550):

3 Biganti T., “Documenti: La produzione di ceramica a lustro a Gubbio e a Deruta tra la fine del secolo XV e l’inizio del secolo XVI. Primi risultati di una ricerca documentaria”, *Faenza* 73 (1987) 214, 218. One hopes for documentary evidence of this presumed price disparity. Given the posited price difference, one might expect higher quality painting on lustreware, but that is not the case; Wilson T., *Italian Maiolica of the Renaissance* (Milan: 1996) 37, n. 8.

4 ‘The art [of lustring] is treacherous, for often of 100 pieces of ware tried in the fire, scarce six are good. True it is that the art itself is beautiful and ingenious, and when the wares are good they seem like gold’; Piccolpasso Cipriano, *I tre libri dell’arte del vasaio: The Three Books of the Potter’s Art, a Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London* (ca. 1557), ed. R. Lightbown – A. Caiger-Smith, 2 vols. (London: 1980) vol. I, folio 49 and vol. II, 90.

Sono molto nomati li Vasi di terra cotta quivi fatti, per esser talmente lavorati, che paiono dorati. Et anche tanto sottilmente sono condutti, che infino ad hora non si ritrova alcun artifice nell'Italia, che se li possa agguagliare, benché assai sovente habbiano isprimentato & tentato di far simili lavori.⁵

For these reasons lustreware might have been regarded a semi-luxurious product, and much of its appeal had to do with its iridescent glazes that mimic expensive metalware.⁶

A second technical aspect of the *piatti da pompa* germane to our discussion is the uniform presence of suspension holes through the footring on the underside [Fig. 8.3].⁷ Most dishes are pierced with two holes about three cm apart, but a minority of dishes have three piercings spread further apart. Because on most surviving examples the glaze coats the insides of the holes, these holes were created when the clay was still pliable, i.e. before the first kiln firing. Since this convenient hanging feature is built-in to the objects, historians have concluded that the dishes' primary function was as domestic, wall-hung devotional art.

It is curious, and surprising, that in some cases – a significant but low minority – when the *piatti da pompa* are suspended by these holes, they do not hang in the proper orientation with respect to the painting on the front; possibly this is due to oversight by the painter, or the worker engaged in transferring a design. But it is also possible that the holes had a second purpose: to suspend, perhaps from a horizontal rod, the painted dishes inside the kiln during their second firing. Support for this derives from the observation that the fronts of the dishes lack scars from spurs or spacers – the devices that typically separate

5 “The earthenwares made here are renowned for being made to look as if they were gilded. And the technique is so subtle that up to now no other craftsman in Italy has been found to equal them, although experiments and attempts have often been made”; Alberti Leandro, *Descrittione di tutta Italia; nella quale si contiene il sito di essa, l'origine, & le signorie delle città, & delle castella [...]* (Bologna, Anselmo Giaccarelli: 1550) folio 85v.

6 It is worth recalling that tin, the essential ingredient of the white glaze that coats the surface of maiolica objects before painting, was an imported ingredient, and the majority of the tin used by Italian potters was mined in Cornwall, England. With respect to the hierarchy of materials during the Renaissance, it is probably the case that most Italians ranked even high-quality maiolica below pewter (‘poor man’s silver’) in spite of the widespread encomia it received from patrician consumers. For the phenomenon of maiolica imitating metalware see Brody M.J., *The Evolution, Function, and Social Significance of Italian Renaissance Maiolica Services, c. 1480 to c. 1600*, DPhil thesis (University of Oxford: 2017) 39–43.

7 See also Wilson T., *Italian Maiolica in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne: 2015) 56, where this detail is illustrated.



FIGURE 8.3 Deruta, ca. 1540–1560. Lustrated maiolica. Philadelphia, private collection. Detail of footring, underside of dish
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

stacked plates and dishes in the kiln. That *piatti da pompa* footrings are often fully covered by glaze also suggests they were not laid flat in the kiln.⁸

Although it is plausible, and likely probable, that the dishes were regularly hung on a wall or from a shelf, there is nothing that would preclude their owners from placing them flat atop furniture or shelves, or even propping them up in the Renaissance equivalent of a plate stand. Given the popularity of these dishes (based on their survival rate), it is somewhat puzzling that they never appear in secular or religious Renaissance paintings.

It is well established that houses were the locus for a wide assortment of pious objects and that the borders between domestic and public devotional spaces were consciously blurred in Renaissance Italy.⁹ Objects could take the form of small religious paintings, tabernacles, relief sculptures, statuettes, maiolica, or inexpensive prints, according to the economic means of their owners. A detail of a bedchamber from Carpaccio's *St Ursula* cycle from the late 1490s shows, on the wall above the bed, a small devotional painting of

8 Piccolpasso states that large dishes were placed on their side, in a row, but his knowledge of techniques came primarily from observation and discussion with potters from and in Casteldurante (present day Urbania). Regarding lustre, he reveals that he was only able to observe the process in Gubbio (then part of the Duchy of Urbino) so it is almost certain that he had no direct knowledge of the methods used by Deruta potters for their specialty products.

9 E.g. Lydecker J.K., *The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence*, Ph.D. dissertation (The Johns Hopkins University: 1987), particularly “Religious art in Florentine homes” (114–119), citing the domestic functions of images of saints, the Crucifix, Madonna and Child, and Jesus; and Cooper D., “Devotion”, in Ajmar-Wollheim M. – Dennis F. (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: 2006) 190–203.

the *Madonna and Child* framed like a tabernacle, a common item in wealthy and patrician households [Fig. 8.4]. A seated Madonna with the Christ Child was among the most ubiquitous domestic Marian images in any medium, and numerous surviving Deruta *piatti da pompa* featuring this iconography attest to its popularity on ceramics [Fig. 8.5].¹⁰ In several lusted versions of these dishes the figures are accompanied by banderoles with Latin inscriptions – perhaps prompts for the recitation of the rosary – such as ‘SANTA MARIA ORA PRO NOBIS’ (Holy Mary, pray for us) and ‘AVE SANTISSIMA MARIA MATER DEI REGINA CELI’ (Hail most holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven).¹¹ The Holy Virgin was the primary protector of all Catholics, and regardless of medium, these works served the same devotional, protective, and decorative functions.

Designs on many Deruta *piatti da pompa* reflect the influence of local artists such as Pinturicchio (d. 1513) and Perugino (d. 1523). They and their workshops executed a host of commissions throughout Umbria and beyond, and many *bella donna* profiles derive from the graceful female types pervasive in Pinturicchio’s frescos. Although it has been suggested, though never proven, that Pinturicchio was married to a Deruta potter’s daughter, it seems likely that he, Perugino, and their respective workshops collaborated with local potters. Drawings, or drawings of drawings, must have existed for works beyond the potters’ reach, or for works located in what were then inaccessible places, such as the Vatican. The near identical pose and appearance of secular and religious figures on multiple Deruta dishes suggests that certain designs were serially produced from a workshop’s stock repertory of cartoons, and typically transferred to the dishes through a pounce technique that involved pricking a cartoon and tapping the holes with a porous bag filled with dark chalk or charcoal.

A notable number of inscribed dishes are hybrids of a sort, since they pair religious subjects with secular mottos, or the opposite, secular images (usually

10 Fiocco C. – Gherardi G. – Sfeir-Fakhri L., *Majoliques italiennes du Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Lyon. Collection Gillet* (Dijon: 2001) cat. 85. The source for this and most of the Deruta *Madonna and Child* dishes is likely Perugino’s *Madonna in Glory with Child and Saints* (ca. 1496, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna) or *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints* (1521, Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Spello). At least six other *Madonna and Child* dishes that differ only in small details are known to me.

11 Respectively, Curnow C., *Italian Maiolica in the National Museums of Scotland*, National Museums of Scotland Information Series, no. 5. (Edinburgh: 1992) cat. 29 and Wilson T., “Renaissance ceramics”, in *The Collections of the National Gallery of Art, Systematic Catalogue. Western Decorative Arts, Part I: Medieval, Renaissance, and Historicizing Styles Including Metalwork, Enamels, and Ceramics* (Washington, DC and Cambridge, UK: 1993) 156–158.



FIGURE 8.4 Vittore Carpaccio, Legend of St Ursula polyptych, "Arrival of the Ambassadors", ca. 1498. Oil on canvas, 378 cm × 589 cm. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. Detail
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FIGURE 8.5 Deruta, "Madonna and Child", ca. 1520–1530. Maiolica, diam. 40 cm. Musée des arts décoratifs de Lyon

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belle donne) with pious inscriptions. The union of image and text that do not explicitly relate to one another could mean that potters were executing custom orders, but more likely it speaks to workshop practices – what sources were available, what was deemed attractive or saleable, what afforded variety. The dish with a standard *bella donna* accompanied by the inscription 'ORARE SEGRETO E MOLTO ACETTO A DIO' (To pray in secret is most acceptable to God) reminds its owner, presumably a woman, to pray alone or in the private spaces of the home, such as the bedchamber [Fig. 8.6].¹² In a similar

¹² Wilson, *Italian Maiolica of the Renaissance* cat. 26. The same inscription appears on at least four dishes with a composition (based on a Raphael-school engraving) of a



FIGURE 8.6 Deruta, *Bella donna* dish inscribed *ORARE SEGRETO E MOLTO ACETTO A DIO* (To pray in secret is most acceptable to God), ca. 1505–1520. Lustrated maiolica, diam. 42.6 cm. Private collection
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

mother reading to a child, sometimes referred to as the *Virgin reading, with the infant Jesus*: *Catalogue d'une précieuse collection de faïences italiennes, Hispano-Moresques d'Alcora et de Nîmes* [Duc de Dino], sale catalogue, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 8 May 1894, lot 21; Rackham B., *Islamic Pottery and Italian Maiolica. Illustrated Catalogue of a Private Collection* (London: 1959) cat. 350; Busti G. – Cocchi F., "Umbria" maiolica entries in Ausenda R. (ed.), *Musei e Gallerie di Milano. Museo d'Arti Applicate [del Castello Sforzesco]. Le ceramiche. Tomo primo* (Milan: 2000) cat. 69; and Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, inv. 65.6.13. For the same inscription (highly abbreviated at its ending) with a Roman emperor in profile and the arms of Baglioni, lords of Perugia, see Chompert J., *Répertoire de la majolique italienne*, 2 vols. (Paris: 1949) vol. 11, fig. 183. See Watson W.M., *Italian Renaissance Maiolica from the William A. Clark Collection* (London: 1986) cat. 32 for a dish in which a standard *bella donna* is transformed (through a halo and small prayer book in

way, prayer is encouraged through another popular image repeated on *piatti da pompa*: an angel with clasped hands, which is a direct quote from interchangeable angel details in Perugino and Pinturicchio frescos.¹³ It is conceivable that the small building that almost always flanks the angel on these dishes, and which is found on a host of other religious-themed Deruta pottery, is a simplified rendering of the St Francis or St Clare basilicas in Assisi; if so, its presence suggests these objects were souvenirs of a visit to a pilgrim centre.

Prayer is again the obvious theme in an early Deruta narrative painting, *Jesus praying in Gethsemane*, made ca. 1500–10 [Fig. 8.7].¹⁴ The scene is adapted from a woodcut that appeared in the 1492 (or later) edition of Savonarola's pious *Tractato overo sermone della oratione*, and the dish provides evidence of the *invenzione* of a skilled painter in adapting a simpler print source – the increased perspective, delicate colouring, and the addition of buildings and narrative details such as a string of minute soldiers carrying torches in the background, on their way to arrest Jesus [Fig. 8.8].¹⁵ While the religious subjects on *piatti da pompa* never reached the variety found in panel, canvas, and fresco painting – there is, for example, a dearth of Old Testament subjects – Christological and Marian subjects are particularly well represented: for example *The Resurrection*, *Agnus Dei*, *The Lamentation*, *The Assumption of Mary*, and *The Annunciation* [Fig. 8.9].¹⁶ Marian images in particular, ubiquitous in household inventories, were the most popular subject for domestic devotional

her hand) into the Virgin; in what may be a unique subject on extant Deruta pottery, the *Incarnation of Christ*; see Glaser S., *Majolika. Die Italienischen Fayencen im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg. Bestandskatalog* (Nuremberg: 2000) cat. 176 for a dish with the inscription 'IN TE DOMINE SPERAVI' (In you, Lord, I have placed my trust) and a female bust that may be an attempt at a portrait of an actual woman.

- 13 For the dishes, see Thornton D. – Wilson T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics. A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 2 vols. (London: 2009) cat. 280 (with references to nine others). The frescos are: Perugino, *The Eternal Father above Prophets and Sibyls* (ca. 1500, Collegio del Cambio, Sala delle Udienze, Perugia) and Pinturicchio, *Enthroned Virgin and Child with Saints* (ca. 1508, Church of Sant'Andrea, Spello).
- 14 Ravanelli Guidotti C., *Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza. La donazione Angiolo Fanfani. Ceramiche dal Medioevo al XX secolo* (Faenza: 1990) cat. 94.
- 15 For an equally impressive dish with *Jesus Processing with the Cross amongst Soldiers*, based on a late-Quattrocento engraving, see Klesse B., *Majolika. Kataloge des Kunstgewerbemuseums Köln, II* (Cologne: 1996) cat. 293.
- 16 Respectively: Poole J.E., *Italian maiolica and Incised Slipware in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (Cambridge, UK: 1995) cat. 254; Rackham B., *Victoria and Albert Museum. Catalogue of Italian Maiolica*, 2 vols. (London: 1940) cat. 468 and 495 (also called a *Pietà*); Giacomotti J., *Catalogue des majoliques des musées nationaux. Musées du Louvre et de Cluny, Musée National de Céramique à Sèvres, Musée Adrien-Dubouché à Limoges* (Paris: 1974) cat. 479; and Cole B., *Italian Maiolica from Midwestern Collections*, exh. cat., Indiana University Art Museum (Bloomington: 1977) cat. 36.



FIGURE 8.7 Deruta, "Jesus praying in Gethsemane", ca. 1500–1510. Maiolica, diam. 43 cm.
Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche
© MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE DELLE CERAMICHE, FAENZA

art, and Mary receiving news that she was to bear a son would seem to be a suitable bedchamber image for a wife hoping to become pregnant.¹⁷

17 For Marian images see Musacchio J.M., *Art, Marriage, & Family in the Florentine Renaissance Palace* (New Haven and London: 2008) 211. A striking example invoking for the conception of a son is a maiolica plate (part of a childbirth set) prominently inscribed with the word 'MASCIO' (male), ill. Musacchio, J.M., *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: 1999) 143, fig. 141. Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (ca. 1453) for the Palazzo Medici in Florence is thought to have hung over a door or bed, or to have been set into a bedhead, and its pendant panel, *Seven Saints*, depicts the protector-saints of male members of the Medici family, both National Gallery, London, ill. Motture P. – Syson, L., "Art in the casa", in Ajmar-Wollheim – Dennis (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* 272–273, figs 19.4–19.5.



FIGURE 8.8 Anonymous, Florence, "Jesus praying in Gethsemane", ca. 1492. Woodcut from Girolamo Savonarola, *Tractato overo sermone della oratione* (Florence, Lorenzo Morgiani: 1492)

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

An exceptionally ambitious Deruta dish is painted at the centre with the *Crucifixion* and on the rim with sixteen roundels containing scenes from the *Passion*, the short final period in the life of Jesus beginning with his entry into Jerusalem and culminating with his Resurrection [Fig. 8.10].¹⁸ The centre

18 Ballardini G., "Eine Deruta-Schüssel mit der Passion Christi", *Pantheon* 6 (1930) 464–468 (where the subjects of all sixteen roundels are identified), Liverani F. – Reggi G.L., *Le maioliche del Museo Nazionale di Ravenna* (Modena: 1976) cat. 54 (where the likely design source, a Florentine print of the 1460s, is illustrated), and Fiocco C. – Gherardi G.,



FIGURE 8.9 Deruta, "The Annunciation", ca. 1500–1520. Maiolica, diam. 40.1 cm. Kansas City, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
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consists of various vignettes disposed across a hilly landscape (such as soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothing), and contains over forty-five figures in a variety of attitudes – on horseback, standing, sitting, or flying. The Virgin appears twice: at the foot of the cross and, lower down, collapsed in grief. The scenes on this dish (as well as less grand renderings of the subject on maiolica) allowed viewers to make a spiritual pilgrimage through meditation of the *Passion*, while contemplating their own end. This type of object, which offers an abundance of images in a compact space, seems particularly well-suited for display on the wall of a small chapel in a private home or confraternity hall,

La ceramica di Deruta dal XIII al XVIII secolo / Deruta Pottery from the 13th to the 18th Century (Perugia: 1994) cat. 30.



FIGURE 8.10 Deruta, “The Passion of Jesus”, ca. 1500. Maiolica, diam. 47.5 cm.
Ravenna, Museo Nazionale
© MUSEO NAZIONALE DI RAVENNA

or in front of a prie-dieu, or as an alternative to a tabernacle set on a portable household altar.¹⁹

Why did Deruta potters choose to paint religious and secular subjects on the curved surface of *piatti da pompa* so prodigiously when they also produced – in far lower quantities to gauge from the number of surviving examples – flat, rectangular plaques that were presumably easier to paint?²⁰ Perhaps they

19 Compare with a plate, probably Tuscan, formerly in the Beit collection, decorated with the *Crucifixion* and, on the rim, only four scenes from the *Passion*; Rackham B. – Van de Put A., *Catalogue of the Collection of Pottery and Porcelain in the Possession of Mr. Otto Beit* (London: 1916) cat. 751, now Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1943.55. For the use of the *Passion* as an aid to prayer in lay confraternities see the sources cited in Cooper, “Devotion” 195, note 30; for domestic altars see Cooper, “Devotion” 198–201.

20 The broader question of why so few maiolica plaques in general, with sacred or profane subjects, were produced in sixteenth-century Italy is also puzzling. The relatively small

felt a professional impetus to fabricate three-dimensional objects that were primarily utilitarian, knowing full well that for some classes of objects their serviceability would be eclipsed by their decorative and/or devotional functions. To be sure, *piatti da pompa* were a Deruta trademark, and among the town's most recognisable products, so perhaps it was with a sense of both pride and tradition that potters persisted in utilising the form. Occasionally, however, a painter disregarded the dish's morphology in order to position a design over the entire dish, effectively treating it as a flat, uninterrupted surface. A complex and accomplished example of this is a dish with the *Crucifixion, IHS Christogram* (or *Sacred Trigram*), and *St Jerome and St Francis*, all set against a characteristically Umbrian landscape [Fig. 8.11].²¹ The main portion of the composition was adapted, in reverse, from a late-fifteenth century Northern Italian print of the *Crucifixion with St Jerome and St Francis*, and the placement of the monogram below the crucifix may have been inspired by an illustration from a sacred text, such as the *Plenarium* (Augsburg, 1478) – although the maiolica painter has artfully made the cross an extension of the beribboned central letter 'h'.²²

Saints had a special relationship with the divine and were seen as intercessors between humans and God, as protectors for the living.²³ In accordance with the dictates established at the Council of Nicaea in 787, saints were exemplars to be represented, venerated, and emulated. Maiolica display dishes depicting saints thus served as significant devotional tools in the service of such role models. The popularity of *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata* is easy to understand: not only was it the climactic event in the life of one of Italy's most beloved saints, but Deruta is only 25 km from Assisi, the saint's final resting place [Figs. 8.1 and 8.2]. Deruta potters were supplying wares to the Convent

number of religious-themed plaques made in Deruta include lusted examples with St Jerome in relief (1520s–30s), for which see Busti – Cocchi, "Umbria", cat. 78, and unlusted plaques made in the Mancini workshop (1550s–60s), e.g. *The Crucifixion* and the *Madonna and Child Enthroned, with St Anthony Abbot and St Sebastian*, for which see, respectively, Poole, *Italian Maiolica* cat. 275, and Bojani G.C. – Ravanelli Guidotti C. – Fanfani A., *Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza. La donazione Galeazzo Cora. Ceramiche dal Medioevo al XIX secolo* (Milan: 1985) cat. 747.

21 Fiocco – Gherardi – Sfeir-Fakhri, *Majoliques italiennes* cat. 83, with illustrations of the probable print sources.

22 The monogram was popularised in the fifteenth-century by St Bernardino of Siena. To avoid suspicion of idolatry, Bernardino created a cross from the ascender of the 'h', although on the dish it appears as a full Crucifixion; see Thornton – Wilson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics* cat. 282 for further remarks about the monogram.

23 See Goldthwaite R., *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300–1600* (Baltimore and London: 1993) 109–114 for the cult of saints, including their politicization and the demand for, and ascendancy of, saint images.



FIGURE 8.11 Deruta, “The Crucifixion, with St Jerome and St Francis”, ca. 1540–1550. Lustrated maiolica, diam. 42.2 cm. Musée des arts décoratifs de Lyon
© LYON, MTMAD – SYLVAIN PRETTO (1947)

of San Francesco as early as 1358.²⁴ Most renditions of this scene are faithful to its design source, a late fifteenth-century engraving, with the exception that Brother Leo, Francis’s favourite disciple, is usually omitted.²⁵ That when Francis received the stigmata he himself was gazing raptly at an image of the Saviour must have resonated with the pious owners of these dishes, whether lay or religious.

24 De Mauri L., *Le maioliche di Deruta*, Monografie di arti decorative, 6 (Milan: 1924) 21.

25 For the print, see Hind A.F., *Early Italian Engraving* (London: 1938–48) vol. VII, plate 886. Wilson, *Italian Maiolica of the Renaissance* cat. 31, note 1, lists 32 recorded dishes with the subject; the ratio of unlustrated (9, or 28.1%) to lustrated (23, or 71.9%) versions nicely accords with the estimate I cite at the beginning of the present essay.

St Jerome was one of the four doctors of the early Church, and his Latin translation of the Bible was among his greatest works. On *piatti da pompa* he is depicted either kneeling in the wilderness (with or without his lion), or seen in close-up, gazing at the crucified Jesus.²⁶ In both versions Jerome holds a stone with which he penitentially beats his bare chest in order to tame his sinful heart. In a unique rendering of the scene, a woman in contemporary dress, identified by name (*VICENTIA*), kneels in prayer in front of Jerome in the wilderness [Fig. 8.12]; as a sign of her humility she is depicted markedly smaller than the saint, a convention typical of some early Renaissance religious paintings.²⁷ This work is an unusual document, as it inserts the client into the work (via image and text), alludes to the devotional relationship between the holy image and the viewer, and demonstrates that Deruta *piatti da pompa* could be personalised.

The establishment of Hieronymite congregations in Tuscany and Umbria undoubtedly contributed to the saint's popularity on Deruta wares, and the contrite Jerome must have struck a chord with those seized with a desire for a life of ascetic penance. His very image was thought to be apotropaic, and it was said that demons feared to enter the cells of nuns who kept his image on the wall.²⁸ The notable prevalence in Deruta of St Jerome (d. 420) and St Francis (d. 1226) above other saints may stem from their shared devotion to prayer, asceticism, repentance, and virtuous obedience – their imitation of the life of Jesus himself. Through them, laypeople were able to participate more directly in religious life, an aspiration that was one of the most profound spiritual demands of the age.

In the hagiography of Catherine of Alexandria, the princess-scholar with unyielding Christian faith was condemned to death on a spiked breaking wheel, but miraculously, at her touch, the wheel shattered [Fig. 8.13].²⁹ If her virginity made her an appropriate model for unwed girls, her mystical marriage to the

26 See Wilson T. – Sani E.P., *Le maioliche rinascimentali nelle collezioni della Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia*, 2 vols. (Città di Castello: 2006–7) vol. 1, cat. 14 (wilderness version) and Hausmann T., *Fioritura. Blütezeiten der Majolika einer Berliner Sammlung* (Berlin: 2002) cat. 33 (close-up version).

27 Sannipoli E. (ed.), *La via della ceramica tra Umbria e Marche. Maioliche rinascimentali da collezioni private*, exh. cat., Palazzo Ducale, Gubbio (Città di Castello: 2010) cat. 1–20 (entry by G. Busti and F. Cocchi).

28 Kalinke M.E., *The Book of Reykjahólar: The Last of the Great Medieval Legendaries* (Toronto: 1996) 161.

29 Rackham, *Victoria and Albert Museum*, cat. 484; for another example see Sotheby's, London, 21 November 1978, lot 37.



FIGURE 8.12 Deruta, “St Jerome in the Wilderness”, ca. 1550–1560. Maiolica, diam. 41.5 cm.
Private collection
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

infant Christ made her an exemplar for wives and nuns.³⁰ The popularity of Catherine on Deruta wares surely also relates to the fact that she is the protector of potters – her attribute of martyrdom parallels the potter’s wheel – and, because pottery was Deruta’s main industry, she was also the town’s patron saint.

Although the cult of St Roch as a protector against plague and pestilence developed slowly after his death around 1380, by the sixteenth century he had

30 Ajmar M. – Thornton D., “When Is a Portrait Not a Portrait? Belle Donne on Maiolica and the Renaissance Praise of Local Beauties”, in Mann N. – Syson L. (eds.), *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance* (London: 1998) 142, with reference to the *Sermones* (1487) of preacher Vincent Ferrer.



FIGURE 8.13 Deruta, "St Catherine" ca. 1510–1530. Lustrated maiolica, diam. 40.5 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

become a popular saint. Following the standard iconography, Roch is dressed as a pilgrim leaning on a staff and pointing to the plague sore on his thigh [Fig. 8.14].³¹ Despite the prevalence of plague, including local outbreaks in the 1520s, extant Deruta *piatti da pompa* decorated with St Roch are surprisingly uncommon.³² The three examples known to me appear to be based on the image of St Roch in a Perugino fresco made for the Church of S. Francesco

31 Poole, *Italian Maiolica* cat. 245.

32 Busti G – Cocchi F., *Museo Regionale della Ceramica di Deruta. Ceramiche policrome, a lustro e terrecotte di Deruta dei secoli XV e XVI* (Milan and Città di Castello: 1999) 37 refers to a plague outbreak in 1522, on the outskirts of Perugia; and Poole, *Italian maiolica* 174 refers to a particularly virulent outbreak in 1527.



FIGURE 8.14 Deruta, “St Roch”, ca. 1500–1550. Lustrated maiolica, diam. 41.8 cm. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

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in Deruta, a convenient design source for the town’s potters.³³ St Roch’s curative and protective image is found on other Deruta pottery, such as a drug jar (*albarello*), whose contents label reads ‘ELLE. CONTRA. PESTA’ (electuary against the plague), and a large (h. 75 cm) lustrated figure of the saint.³⁴

A popular subject on *piatti da pompa* is *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, the gospel account in which Christ shows the wound in his side to Thomas, who

33 In addition to Fig. 14 here, there is one in the Hermitage and one illustrated in Guaitini G. (ed.), *Maioliche ombre decorate a lustro. Il Rinascimento e la ripresa ottocentesca: Deruta, Gualdo Tadino, Gubbio*, exh. cat., Spoleto (Florence: 1982) 116, fig. 37. The Perugino fresco is now in Deruta’s Pinacoteca Comunale.

34 Respectively, Fiocco – Gherardi – Sfeir-Fakhri, *Majoliques italiennes*, cat. 59 and Thornton – Wilson, *Italian Renaissance ceramics* cat. 294.

is thereby convinced of his resurrection. This evocative image surely helped quell the doubts of those whose faith was weak or being called into question. Although the figures of Thomas and Jesus are nearly identical from dish to dish, there is considerable variation among the accompanying inscriptions, e.g.: 'MITTE MANUM TUA IN LOCHO CLA[V]ORUM' (Place your hand in the spot of the nails) [Fig. 8.15];³⁵ 'IESUS NAZERENUS REX IUDEORUM X' (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Christ);³⁶ 'TOMA QVI ME VEDISTI ET CREDISTI' (Thomas, that he saw me and believed);³⁷ and 'BEATU CHI NON VIDERONT E CREDIDERONT IM ME' (Blessed be those who do not see yet believe in me).³⁸

The variety of identifiable saints on Deruta *piatti da pompa* is impressive, and most exist in lustred and unlustred versions; examples include: St Barbara;³⁹ St Lucy;⁴⁰ St Peter;⁴¹ St Paul;⁴² St Augustine;⁴³ St John the Baptist;⁴⁴ St Anthony of Padua;⁴⁵ St Michael and St George (potent emblems of good over evil);⁴⁶ St Anthony Abbot (for whom a Deruta potters' confraternity was named);⁴⁷ St Secundus (patron saint of Asti);⁴⁸ St Ubaldo (patron saint of Gubbio);⁴⁹

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- 35 Gardiner Museum, Toronto, inv. G83.1.335; for another version with the same inscription (except that *CLAORUM* is written as *CRAORUM*), see Busti – Cocchi, *Museo Regionale della Ceramica* cat. 154.
- 36 Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 29.100.93 and (with minor letter changes) Giacomotti, *Catalogue des majoliques* cat. 567.
- 37 Rackham, *Victoria and Albert Museum* cat. 483.
- 38 Mancini Della Chiara M., *Maioliche del Museo Civico di Pesaro. Catalogo* (Bologna: 1979) cat. 115.
- 39 Giacomotti, *Catalogue des majoliques* cat. 503, 519, and 595; and Cole, *Italian Maiolica* cat. 38.
- 40 Giacomotti, *Catalogue des majoliques* cat. 521; Fuchs C.D., *Maioliche istoriate rinascimentali del Museo Statale d'Arte Medioevale e Moderna di Arezzo* (Arezzo: 1993) cat. 297; and Hausmann T., *Majolika und Fayence. Vermächtnis Rolf Lahr. Kataloge des Kunstgewerbemuseums Berlin, Band XI* (Berlin: 1986) cat. 10.
- 41 Busti – Cocchi, *Museo Regionale della Ceramica* cat. 68.
- 42 Fiocco – Gherardi – Sfeir-Fakhri, *Majoliques italiennes* cat. 73.
- 43 Chompert, *Répertoire*, vol. II, fig. 177.
- 44 Rackham, *Islamic Pottery and Italian Maiolica* cat. 355; Béalu C., *50 majoliques. Faiences italiennes de la Renaissance*, dealer's cat., JM Béalu & Fils (Paris: 2010) 28–29.
- 45 Béalu, *50 majoliques* 22–23.
- 46 Respectively, Fiocco – Gherardi, *La ceramic di Deruta* cat. 180 and Rackham, *Victoria and Albert Museum* cat. 760 and 762.
- 47 Busti – Cocchi, *Museo Regionale della Ceramica* cat. 153, with the inscription 'SANCTE ANTONIO ORA PRO NOBIS' (St Anthony, pray for us).
- 48 Sold Christie's, London, 23 November 1981, lot 212 (recorded as being a remarkable 63.5 cm in diameter); with respect to attribution, I cannot rule out Siena or another Tuscan centre.
- 49 Ravanelli Guidotti, *Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche* cat. 100.



FIGURE 8.15 Deruta, “The Incredulity of St Thomas”, ca. 1500–1530. Lustrated maiolica, diam. 40.5 cm. Toronto, Gardiner Museum
© GARDINER MUSEUM, TORONTO

St Geminianus (patron saint of San Gimignano);⁵⁰ St Constance (first bishop of Perugia and one of that city’s saint-protectors);⁵¹ St John the Evangelist and St James;⁵² St Benedict with four saints from his order: Scholastica, Justina, Maurus, and Placidus;⁵³ and Sts Cecilia, Magdalene, Augustine, John the Baptist, and Paul.⁵⁴ Surprisingly, Clare of Assisi (d. 1253), best known for

50 Sold Christie’s, London, 26–27 November 2013, lot 14.

51 Thornton – Wilson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics* cat. 279.

52 Giacomotti, *Catalogue des majoliques* cat. 480.

53 Thornton – Wilson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics*, cat. 253; the footring is pierced four times. The figures closely follow their source, a ca. 1500 engraving, but the maiolica painter omits the names of the saints and the background landscape.

54 Fiocco – Gherardi, *La ceramica di Deruta* cat. 165; this object is actually a ewer stand/basin, but as it closely reproduces a Marcantonio Raimondi engraving, it stands to reason the subject was painted on *piatti da pompa* as well.

founding the Order of the Poor Clares, a monastic religious order for women in the Franciscan tradition, appears on only one dish that I am aware of.⁵⁵ In general, even given this variety of saints, most likenesses are to be expected given Deruta's location and its proximity or connection to particular religious sites or orders. This largely identifiable pool of saints also suggests that, contrary to what one might expect, consumers did not regularly personalise them with images of their own saint's name.

Historical religious figures make very rare appearances on *piatti da pompa*, and only two examples, both lustred, are known to me. One shows Judas Maccabeus, the Jewish priest who led the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucids in the second century BCE, after their ruler issued decrees forbidding Jewish religious practices.⁵⁶ The other depicts Constantine the Great, whose dramatic conversion and military victories made him the first Christian Emperor of Rome; he is shown on horseback, with hands clasped in prayer, an attitude echoed in the rim inscription 'IO MA RE CHOMA[N]DO A DIIO' (I commend myself to God).⁵⁷

Identifying precisely who purchased or commissioned Deruta display dishes is difficult at the current state of scholarship. I know of no documents (potters' records, commission contracts, or household inventories) in which these works can be definitively identified.⁵⁸ Given the dishes' size, cost, and – in the case of secular subjects – inclusion of moralising inscriptions (often in Latin), it seems likely that as souvenirs they were beyond the means of poor pilgrims and those of modest means.⁵⁹ More likely, consumers included the fairly well off, what we call the 'middle class' today, or the reasonably wealthy – in particular those who could display these works in houses that contained bedchambers, spaces designated for prayer, or even private chapels.⁶⁰

55 Museo regionale della ceramica di Deruta, inv. 1100; I thank Dott.ssa Iolanda Cunto for confirming its location for me.

56 Fiocco – Gherardi, *La ceramica di Deruta* cat. 136.

57 Prentice von Erdberg J. – Ross M.C., *Catalogue of the Italian Majolica in the Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore: 1952) cat. 21.

58 Maiolica references in the archives of pilgrim centres such as Assisi could add significant understanding to the dishes' likely role as souvenirs.

59 Prints would have been among the cheapest available effigies of saints and pious subjects.

60 On an empirical note, in three decades of extensive travel throughout Italy I have never encountered sixteenth-century *piatti da pompa* inside churches. The medieval tradition of inserting large dishes (*bacini*) into the church facades, still visible in various cities in Lazio, Umbria, and Tuscany, had largely died out by 1500. With respect to devotional maiolica in the domestic sphere, the 1609 inventory of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino lists several elaborate maiolica sculptures, all almost surely made in Urbino, including: 'un eramo grando con un San Girolomo un Christo et un angelo et la Chiesa accima, di rilievo et dipinto' (a large painted hermitage in relief with St Jerome, a crucifix, an angel, and a church above), for which see Sangiorgi F., *Documenti urbinati. Inventari del Palazzo Ducale (1582–1631)*, Accademia Raffaello, Collana di Studi e Testi, n. 4 (Urbino: 1976) 189;

Lay members of confraternities were likely key consumers of religious-themed Deruta maiolica. Present in every city and town, confraternities were the vehicles through which the laity could, in varying degrees, engage with the Church and act out their faith; for some, membership was a viable alternative to committing to the strict behaviours of monastic or convent life.⁶¹ Confraternities had a critical role as custodians of civic cult images – including the supervision of shrines and organisation of processions – and it is likely their members owned, for private use, versions of those images in various media.⁶² Because the social and economic status of confraternities differed so widely, one might posit that polychrome *piatti da pompa* appealed to members of moderate means, while lusted *piatti da pompa* (which appeared gilded and were at least marginally more expensive) were suitable objects for more prosperous confrères.

As we saw above with the example of the St Jerome dish inscribed ‘VICENTIA’, in spite of an array of consistently repeated images, religious-themed Deruta dishes could be customised. This is likely the case with a dish depicting a woman in a Franciscan robe (presumably a nun) in a landscape holding a book, with ‘FRANCESCO SCRIVE / FAUSTINA LEGIE’ (Francis writes, Faustina reads) inscribed behind her, presumably a personal declaration of esteem for the writings of St Francis.⁶³ The unique subject on a naïvely-painted dish of a tonsured Franciscan monk preaching from a pulpit to a segregated congregation, with a fervour reminiscent of the Dominican reformer Savonarola (d. 1498), also suggests customisation [Fig. 8.16].⁶⁴ No printed design source has been identified for this dish, and it would not surprise me if it had been commissioned by a monastic, as a reminder of his sacred calling.⁶⁵

an extant object approximating this is the Urbino model of a wayside altar in the V&A, for which see Sani E.P., *Italian Renaissance Maiolica* (London: 2012) 184, fig. 213.

61 See Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art* 114–121 for confraternities and guilds as important consumers of religious artwork. Goldthwaite notes a revival of confraternities in the sixteenth century as an instrument by which the secular laity could participate in Church reform, and observes that even the small town of Spello, about 20 km from Deruta, had about a dozen confraternities. For confraternities as patrons of art and architecture, see Wisch B. – Cohl Ahl D. (eds.), *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image* (Cambridge, UK: 2000); sixteenth-century Rome had approximately 112 confraternities, many with more than 500 members.

62 Wisch – Cole Ahl, *Confraternities* 11–12.

63 Rackham, *Islamic Pottery and Italian Maiolica* no. 360.

64 Gardelli G., *Italika. Maiolica italiana del Rinascimento. Saggi e studi* (Faenza: 1999) cat. 183.

65 The scene on the dish echoes (though was not based on) a woodcut of Savonarola preaching in his *Compendio di rivelatione* [...] (Florence, Francesco Bonaccorsi per Piero Pacini: 1496).



FIGURE 8.16 Deruta, "A Franciscan Monk Preaching from a Pulpit", ca. 1540–1560. Maiolica, diam. 46.5 cm. Private collection
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

The message of yet another bespoke dish is not easily decipherable: at the centre is a female pilgrim saint with the flowing Latin inscription 'IBIT AD GIEMINOS LUCIDA FAMA POLLOS FIAT' (roughly translated, He [or She] will go to the twins; the fame will be bright).⁶⁶ It seems possible that this dish commemorates the safe birth of twins, accomplished through the intercession of the particular saint portrayed.

The presence on Deruta maiolica of prelates' coats-of-arms or symbols or insignia associated with religious orders or communities demonstrates that

66 Gardelli, *Italika* cat. 186 and Béalu, *50 majoliques* 30–31. An alternative reading of the inscription is 'He (or She) will go with bright fame to the twins; let it be done.'

clerics at every level were enthusiastic consumers of the wares. A lusted *piatto da pompa* with the arms of the Della Rovere pope Julius II (r. 1503–13) is one of many with papal armorials.⁶⁷ While it cannot be ruled out that such dishes were made for direct use by pontiffs, it seems more likely that they were made for papal supporters. Rome was an important market for Deruta potters, and if armorial products were fashionable among clerics there and elsewhere in the Papal States, it stands to reason that religious-themed dishes were as well.

At least a dozen pieces of extant Deruta maiolica are decorated with the arms of the Baglioni family, who ruled Deruta in the early sixteenth century.⁶⁸ A *piatto da pompa* with the arms of a Baglioni bishop indicates ownership by a high-ranking prelate, probably Troilo Baglioni, Bishop of Perugia from 1501.⁶⁹ Troilo commissioned frescos from Pinturicchio and perhaps even Raphael, and his death in 1506 is presumably the *terminus ante quem* for the dating of the dish. The griffon, a symbol of Perugia, flanks the arms, and in this context it probably alludes to the bishop's civic and institutional duties. Patronage of Deruta display dishes thus extended to the uppermost echelons of secular and religious society, which included educated and cultured consumers capable of appreciating the allegorical or symbolic meanings behind some of its paintings and inscriptions. The Baglioni family's dominance ended in 1540 when the Papal forces of Paul III ousted them from Perugia in the brief war over salt taxes. Deruta sided with the papacy against Perugia, and the region settled down to an uneventful history as part of the Papal States. These political events likely resulted in an increased market for religious-themed Deruta maiolica after 1540; but whatever the tangible effect, they surely created an expanded market for its wares in Rome.

Turning to secular patronage, it is well recognised that women (and wives in particular) played a central role in maintaining the Renaissance household, including the choice and placement of decorative and devotional items such as *piatti da pompa*. The dishes can be seen in the context of the attention paid to the comportment and household obligations of women, for example as reflected in contemporary manuals and dialogues regarding the ideal conduct of wives and daughters.⁷⁰ The female saints and martyrs on these dishes (such as St Barbara, St Catherine of Alexandria, St Lucy) could be viewed as moral

67 Thornton – Wilson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics* cat. 277.

68 Busti G. – Cocchi F. (eds.), *La ceramica umbra al tempo di Perugia* (Milan: 2004) 23–24 and cat. 7–12.

69 Busti – Cocchi, *La ceramica umbra* cat. 10.

70 For references to such manuals, the most well-known of which is probably Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* (1528), see Clarke A.J., *Prestige, Piety and Moral Perfection: Deruta Maiolica and the Social and Cultural Value of a Decorative Object*, Ph.D. thesis (The University of

exemplars, with prayer to their images – it was hoped – having a salutary effect or facilitating spiritual goals; one of these goals could be assisting a husband's work toward his own pious refinement. A wife was considered an 'ornament of the family': she contributed to her family's reputation and was emblematic of its capacity for virtue.⁷¹ But more broadly, all family members were expected to demonstrate piety, a requisite element of social respectability and of public prestige.⁷² To the extent that Deruta display dishes with secular *belle donne* were suitable gifts from fiancés or husbands to women at any point during their courtship or marriage, more pious couples would have preferred the exchange of dishes with saintly and religious subjects, and the spiritual and protective values associated with those images.⁷³ One suspects too that some individuals gave sacred-themed dishes as dowry or wedding gifts, but no archival evidence for this practice has yet come to light.

The difficulties in assessing how far the movement towards reform leading up to and including the Council of Trent (1545–63) influenced religious art displayed in sacred spaces is amplified when it comes to Deruta wares. What effects, if any, were there to the market for religious-themed *piatti da pompa*, or on the popularity of specific subjects? Given the dishes' generally sombre and standard depictions of saints, Jesus, and Mary, it is easy to see how there would be a long-standing and robust market for them. A significant figure at the Council, Cardinal-Bishop Gabriele Paleotti is best remembered for his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), which codified the Church's views on the content and proper role of art.⁷⁴ Although his text slightly post-dates the period of *piatti da pompa* under consideration here, his commentary on the value of sacred images in domestic and public spaces surely reflects lay and ecclesiastical attitudes prevalent throughout in the century.

Paleotti wrote that the noblest Christian images serve the glory of God, and are testaments of our obligation, subjection, obedience and hope; they delight (sensually, rationally, and spiritually), 'instruct the intellect, move the will, and refresh the memory of divine things' and 'in an instant [...] cause in us a desire for virtue and horror of vice'.⁷⁵ He further points out that pious images are

British Columbia: 2006) 2, 283–285 and Ajmar – Thornton, "When Is a Portrait" 141–142, incl. note 11.

71 Clarke, *Prestige, Piety and Moral Perfection* 162.

72 Cooper, "Devotion" 190.

73 For a study, including taxonomy, of the broad class of *belle donne* maiolica, see Ajmar – Thornton, "When Is a Portrait".

74 Paleotti Gabriele, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. W. McCuaig (Bologna, Alessandro Benacci: 1582; reprint, Los Angeles: 2012).

75 *Ibid.*, 110 (Book I, ch. 20).

easily understood by everyone, and we obtain from them not only 'the theory of all that we need for salvation' but 'the practice of all the virtues and the true institution of our lives, represented before us with the examples of holy persons who, to serve God, drove out their own vices, held iniquity in abhorrence, and overcame the difficulties of the world, embracing piety, charity, modesty, justice, and true obedience to the law of God'.⁷⁶

In underlining the clear preference for viewing religious stories over hearing them, Paleotti states: 'To hear the story told of the martyrdom of a saint, or the zeal and constancy of a virgin, or the Passion of Christ himself – those are things that really hit one inside. But when the saintly martyr practically materializes in front of your eyes in vivid color, with the oppressed Virgin on one side and Christ pierced by nails on the other – one would have to be made of wood or stone not to feel how much more it intensifies devotion and wrenches the gut.'⁷⁷ As proof of the efficacy of pious and devout images in times of need – and, by extension, proof of heavenly power itself – Paleotti points out their supernatural ability to restore health, eliminate peril, and defend cities and sites threatened by enemies.⁷⁸ In this framework, Deruta *piatti da pompa* are sacred images *par excellence*, and their placement in the home – whether in a private space, such as a *camera*, or less private one, such as a *sala* – made them accessible to owners at all times, to 'instruct the intellect, move the will, and refresh the memory of divine things'.⁷⁹ The display of the dishes in a reception space such as the *sala* communicated to invited guests (and indeed to anyone who entered the house) the religious affiliation of their owner, and, via the objects' painted decorations or scenes, which aspects of their faith were most meaningful to them.

Large maiolica dishes and plates are consistently listed in Renaissance household inventories, and while those that formed part of table or credenza sets were used in food service, consumption, or related rituals, the one-off Deruta dishes under discussion here were very likely used exclusively for display, following a tradition of hanging single large ceramic plates on walls that

76 Ibid., *Discourse* 116 (Book I, ch. 23).

77 Ibid., *Discourse* 119 (Book I, ch. 25).

78 Ibid., 120 (Book I, ch. 26).

79 The humanist Giovanni Pontano (*De splendore*, 1498) surely would have considered Deruta *piatti da pompa* among the ornamental household objects acquired 'as much for use as for embellishment and splendour' and whose sight 'is pleasant and brings prestige to the owner of the house'; see Welch E., "Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano's 'De splendore' (1498) and the Domestic Arts", *Journal of Design History* 15, 4 (2002) 211–221.

dates from at least the early Quattrocento.⁸⁰ It is reasonable to assume that both their specific location in the house and the degree of piety of their owners determined the extent to which the dishes served as actual foci for prayer, intercession, and reflection. Earthenware plates or dishes described as large (*grandi*) appear in the inventories of various rooms, including the bedchamber, *sala*, *guardaroba*, and kitchen, but these cursory references rarely contain further details (such as place of manufacture), except perhaps to note which objects are armorial (*con arme*), and I know of no contemporary descriptions of stand-alone dishes that specify subjects, pious or otherwise. Because most maiolica is readily moveable, it can shift within a house according to the owner's needs, and the locations cited in postmortem inventories may represent the consolidation of some goods in certain areas of the house for the benefit of the inventory takers; consequently any discussion of use based on inventory location can only be speculative.

In spite of such hurdles, one suspects that the placement and use of religious-themed Deruta *piatti da pompa* paralleled that of other pious images in the household, and it was a client's means that largely guided the choice of medium (metalwork, textile, painting, ceramic, print, and so on) for such images. In as much as one can speak of a general hierarchy of materials, maiolica ranked below precious metal and tempera and oil painting, and above prints.⁸¹ The relative cheapness of prints is highlighted by an episode involving Savonarola that simultaneously informs us about a suggested household use of pious images: in his sermon on the art of dying well, delivered in 1496, the friar describes three pictures that the public should display in their bedrooms and contemplate each morning, and to ensure their maximum dissemination, he urges that they be produced as woodcuts accompanying his text, which they ultimately were. Two of the scenes show bedchambers with Death approaching sick or dying men confined to a bed; in both instances large, religious works – a crucifix above an altar, and a Madonna and Child tondo, (analogues of each of which can be found in Deruta maiolica) – decorate the wall.⁸² For Savonarola

80 Syson, L., "Italian Maiolica Painting: Composing for Context," in Wilson T, *Maiolica. Italian Renaissance Ceramics in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: 2016) 19–20; there Syson illustrates a late-sixteenth-century engraving that includes two large plates flanking a kitchen doorway, though it is impossible to know the plates' medium or to discern what figures or scenes are represented on them.

81 On maiolica pricing, attitudes, and hierarchy see Brody, M.J., *The Evolution, Function, and Social Context of Italian Renaissance Maiolica Services, c. 1480 to c. 1600*, DPhil thesis (University of Oxford: 2017) 131–154.

82 *Predica del arte del bene morire*, various editions ca. 1497 to ca. 1502; see www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/356702 and www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/savonarola-giro-lamo-1452-1498-predica-dellarte-del-5662543-details.aspx; the copy in the Library of

'dying well' consisted of dying in the comfort of one's own bed, surrounded by religious images whose intercession presumably could minimise one's suffering and thwart Death until God's final calling; but for the majority of their owner's life, these works, visible from the bed, served as reminders of Christian values and morality, and as catalysts for prayer and contemplation.

To conclude, extant *piatti da pompa* number in the high hundreds, and they may even exceed 1,000 examples worldwide; the longevity of the dish's form merits calling it a phenomenon. The high repetition of the same saints (particularly Francis and Jerome) suggests there was a thriving market fuelled by the desire to adorn one or more rooms of the house with these charming works of art, which were available in polychrome and (more costly) lustred versions. The regular appearance on the dishes of Italian and Latin inscriptions (especially humanist and moralising ones) suggests that at least a portion of the production was tailored to literate consumers, and to those of some means. Display dishes were but a single category of object in an overall production of religious-themed Deruta wares so varied (plates, cups, bowls, basins, bottles, ewers, vases, plaques, ex-votos, and pharmacy vessels) it could satisfy the needs of consumers at every economic level of image-hungry Italy and beyond – from pilgrim-tourists and the religious, to labourers and merchants, to patricians and other elites, many of whom belonged to confraternities and guilds that required their own devotional images for halls and private devotional spaces.

Although *piatti da pompa* were naturally popular in and around the religious centres and pilgrim sites of Umbria and central Italy, the fame of lustred Deruta pottery was more widespread. Already by 1498 the Masci family of potters claimed in their tax return that their lustrewares were 'beautiful and unprecedented and sold throughout the whole world, and because of this the city of Perugia takes pride and increases in fame, and everyone marvels to see these maiolica works'.⁸³ By transporting these portable objects back to their home towns, pilgrims and other pious-minded visitors helped popularise the wares. Whether purchased as devotional souvenirs or domestic decoration, *piatti da pompa* were attractive, veritable art objects, available off-the-shelf in a broad array of religious subjects, or easily customisable, and they were one way by which different segments of Italian Renaissance society sacralised their domestic surroundings.

Congress is digitally available at www.loc.gov/item/48036828/. In some editions of the *Predica* the Madonna and Child in the woodcut is rectangular and smaller.

83 Wilson, "Renaissance Ceramics" 138, incl. note 3, where the original Latin is transcribed.

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