

Italian Pottery Exported During the 15th and 16th Centuries

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SUMMARY

This paper presents a general outline of Italian pottery exported from Liguria and Tuscany to north-west Europe and to England; the period under consideration concentrates on the late 15th and 16th centuries, but a few 17th-century wares are also presented. The main tradition is that of the 'berettino', but other types are also discussed, as is the inter-relationship of Archaic Maiolica to the later tin-glazed wares. Questions of fabric and decorative styles, typology and distribution are considered for each of the main centres in Liguria (Savona, Albisola, Genoa) and in Tuscany (Pisa, Montelupo)¹.

INTRODUCTION

The regions of Liguria and Tuscany are well known for their wide range of average quality decorated pottery, which in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods was distributed throughout the Mediterranean countries, to North-West Europe and to England (Hurst 1991).

Less well-known, outside Italy, are the problems facing Italian ceramicists, about which a few words must first be said. Unlike many European countries, where late medieval and post-medieval archaeology is an established field of research, in Italy these are still ignored subjects, both in the protection work carried out by the Archaeological *Soprintendenza* and in the Universities, where these topics do not count as research subjects (Milanese 1983a; Milanese 1989). The protection of later 15th-century deposits, therefore, often depends on how each Superintendent and each functionary interprets the law (Gelichi 1992, 215, note 17). Moreover, since a great number of Italian archaeologists dealing with this period are unable to break away from an antiquarian approach, these officers do not feel the need to publish the few contexts they have excavated, because there is no appropriate academic debate on the matter which they can relate to.

Archaeological data pertaining to questions such as kilns and pottery distribution is therefore limited owing to the lack, in the Italian archaeological scientific community, of a working methodology which accommodates autonomous and specific research programmes dealing with this period; compared to the continuity of urban sequences, late medieval/post-medieval archaeology constitutes, at best, a subject that is only partially analysed. This

explains, albeit partially, the shortage of Italian literature on these periods.

Given the above provisos, the following attempts to discuss the important questions of attribution (through the study of kiln wasters and typology), chronology and distribution area for the main production sites of Liguria (Savona, Albisola, Genoa) and Tuscany (Pisa and Montelupo).

LIGURIA

Production centres and problems of attribution

Pottery production in Liguria during the 15th century is discussed elsewhere in this volume (Benente *et al.* above). This paper considers the wares which were exported in large quantities during the 16th century; some of the main 17th-century types found in England will also be summarised.

The main 16th-century production sites in Liguria were at Savona, Albisola and Genoa; the most important product, from the point of view of this paper, is blue-on-blue tin-glazed ware (the so-called *Berettino*), which is discussed below.

In Genoa, pottery in the medieval tradition, *Archaic Maiolica*, is present in such great quantities in all 16th-century contexts, that we cannot explain it as being residual; we must accept that *Archaic Maiolica* was produced until c. 1550, when it was completely replaced by blue tin-glazed pottery (Milanese 1989; Milanese 1990). In 1978 I ascribed to Genoese production an *Archaic Maiolica* hemispherical bowl, first found in the Commenda di Prè excavations in Genoa (Milanese 1980) and a new study by Benente has confirmed this theory (Benente

et al. 1993).

During the 16th century *Archaic Maiolica* was also produced in Savona. This pottery, which has a soft orange fabric with occasional grog inclusions, is characterized by a simple brown and green decoration.

In Genoa, a new pottery industry was started during the first quarter of 16th century by Francesco da Camerino and Francesco da Pesaro, potters coming from Central Italy; their arrival represented the beginning of the break with the medieval tradition of *Archaic Maiolica*.

It is not necessary here to try to differentiate exactly the 16th-century wares from Savona, Albisola and Genoa. The distinction is not certain even for Italian archaeologists, because although kiln wasters were found long ago in each of the three centres, they have mostly never been published. Complete studies could, however, be published by Varaldo, Lavagna, Restagno and Gassa.

In the case of Genoa, some kiln wasters have been published, but in a preliminary manner only, for example in a note on some tiles made in Genoa (Milanese 1983b; Milanese 1988) (see Col. Pl. 2c). The 16th-century tin-glazed wasters found on the Via San Vincenzo site were partially published by a number of authors in 1969 (Mannoni 1969; Farris and Ferrarese 1969; Panelli 1969).

The tin-glazed pottery kiln wasters found in Savona (Cameirana 1969, 69) and Albisola (Barile 1975, 313) are also substantially unpublished. A few poor-quality photographs pose, in a quite unsatisfactory manner, some very interesting problems for European and Mediterranean archaeology.

The 'berettino' tradition: fabrics, forms and decoration

The 16th-century type of Ligurian maiolica known as *Berettino* ware was introduced by Central Italian potters; sherds of this ware figure in many English excavation reports. There are many other types of Ligurian maiolica, but I wish to emphasize here the centrality of the blue tin-glazed *berettino* during the 16th century.

This ware generally has a yellow or pink fabric; only a very few fragments have a red fabric. One of the earliest *berettino* decorations produced in Genoa comprises a vegetal design based on leaves (Fig. 2a; Col. Pl. 2d); this is described in a document of 1532, which refers to Genoese pottery decorated 'in the Venetian style' (Milanese 1980). In fact, Cipriano Piccolpasso wrote of the vegetal scheme: 'These leaves are made in Venice and in Genoa, more than elsewhere'.

A very important class of *berettino* is decorated in the so-called *calligrafico a volute* style (Farris and Ferrarese 1969, 22–24). The 'A' pattern is known in Genoa, but to date it has not been recorded at Savona and Albisola; a thin stem with small leaves and pointed circular motifs is typical (Fig. 3b). Excavated finds mainly

comprise flanged dishes, but it is also found on high quality apothecary wares (Fig. 2b), both from excavations and on vessels preserved for several centuries in collections; it is probable that this pattern was made in Genoa. The range of designs in *calligrafico a volute 'A'* has recently been extended by two dishes found at Acton Court (Vince and Bell 1992, Nos. 221, 224), which confirm Mallet's information about a similar fragment from Southampton (Mallet 1972). This fact, amongst others, underlines the shortage of Italian studies.

In Genoa, in the same archaeological contexts as *calligrafico a volute 'A'*, it is occasionally possible to find their prototypes; these are of Iznik first-style pottery, (the so-called 'Golden Horn' ware), which was imported into Genoa. It is possible to distinguish these imports quite easily, because Ligurian pottery is tin-glazed, whereas the Turkish prototypes are made with a white, very hard, quartz-rich fabric with a lead glaze. Finds include bowls and dishes such as a large dish fragment (Fig. 3a, still unpublished in Italy), from the convent of San Silvestro, Genoa.

Calligrafico a volute 'B' is a simple *berettino* decoration, comprising several buds and large divided leaves (Fig. 2c).

Calligrafico a volute 'C' has a very stylized stem of herring-bone form, but the centre of the interior may be decorated with houses, stars or Catherine wheels (Fig. 2d). The latter is the most common *berettino* found in Amsterdam (Baart 1983).

In Farris's opinion (Farris and Ferrarese 1969, 42), the so-called *calligrafico a rabesche* (Fig. 2e), frequently found on excavations in Genoa, was a local production, like *calligrafico a volute 'B'* and 'C' and the vegetal decoration: all these wares have been found as kiln wasters in Genoa.

Kiln wasters of *calligrafico 'C'* have also been found in Savona and Albisola (Barile 1975, 313). The so-called *a quartieri* decoration was produced there too: the name comes from the sectors occupied by particular decorative motifs around central designs such as houses or trophies (Figs. 3c, 4a). In archaeological contexts we also find some apothecary *berettini*, such as albarelli with vegetal decoration (Col. Pl. 2e; Milanese 1976, 303).

Jugs (Col. Pl. 2f) were also exported together with the dishes and bowls; they have been noted in Corsica (D. Istria, pers. comm.) and are probably present in Sardinia too. They are decorated in blue, pale blue, yellow and green; crosses, flowers and leaves are the more common decorative motifs.

Berettino chronology

Regarding the problem of the chronology, the only known dated *berettino* is a little dish from Savona, which is inscribed '1568' (Cameirana 1969, table III). Archaeological context analysis is more

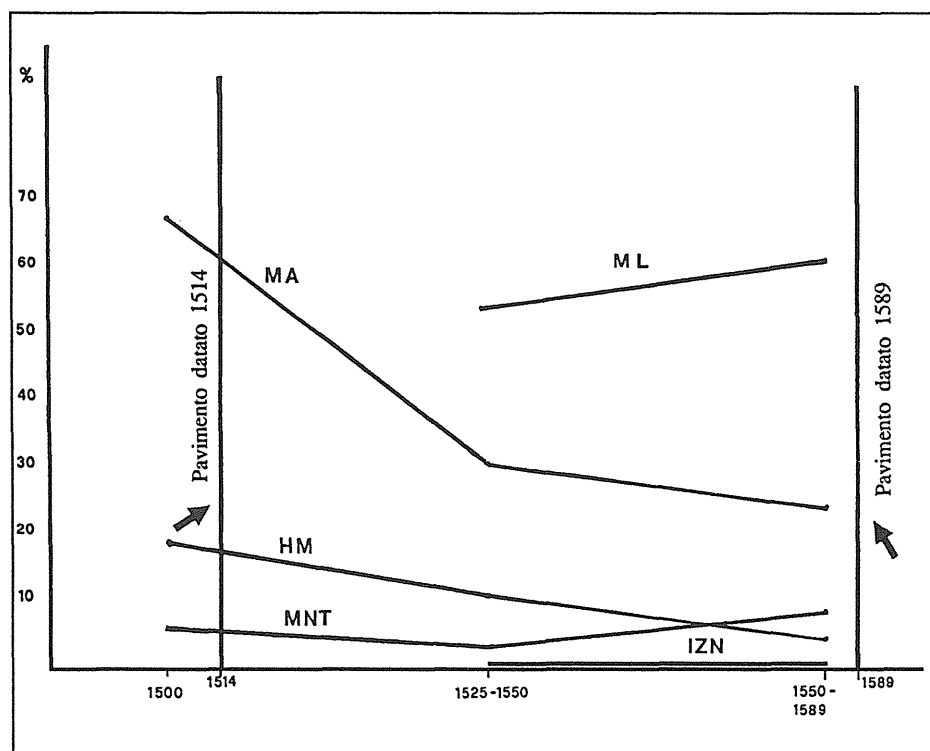


Fig. 1. The distribution of the pottery types present in dated contexts at the convent of San Silvestro, Genoa.

helpful, and Fig. 1, based on the excavation of two stratigraphically related flint pavements of the Genoese convent of San Silvestro, which are dated 1514 and 1589, demonstrates the potential of stratigraphic dating.

The excavation of the first context beneath the 1514 pavement produced some 1500 fragments of maiolica, but absolutely no Ligurian *berettini*: the pottery present comprises 75% *Archaic Maiolica* (MA), 18% *Hispano-Moresque tin-glazed ware* (HM) and 6.5% *Montelupo Maiolica* (MNT). In a context dated to the second quarter of the 16th-century, *Berettino* wares and other *Ligurian Maiolica* (ML) first appear as 54% of the total sherds; for this period we also have documents concerning the production of *Berettino* ware (Andrews and Pringle 1977).

A later context can be dated to between 1550 and 1589, the year of the second pavement; in this were discovered 2235 tin-glazed sherds, of which *Berettino* ware and other *Ligurian Maiolica* comprise 61%.

Similar dating comes from other sites: in a recent excavation in Corsica (D. Istria, pers. comm.), a large amount of *Berettino* ware was found in a context securely dated to before 1564. Excavations in Amsterdam and Delft have also provided several contexts dated to the last quarter of the 16th century (Baart 1983).

Berettino ware was widely distributed and I am working on this important geographical aspect of the evidence. In some regions, such as Sardinia, Corsica and Tuscany I know of no 16th-century contexts without *Berettino* wares, and they have also been found throughout the eastern Mediterranean area (Milanese

1992). In the Low Countries and in Southern England this distribution is also important

Blue-and-white tin-glazed ware

The stratigraphic data from Genoa (Gardini and Milanese 1978) and Rome (Ricci 1985, 418-423) suggests that blue-and-white Ligurian tin-glazed production started during the 16th century and that it continued into the 17th century; this comprises a central motif and divided leaves on bowls and dishes (Fig. 4b; Fig. 6a). John Mallet has suggested that this ware was found in contexts dated to the second quarter of the 17th century in Southampton (Mallet 1972).

Amongst the blue-and-white Ligurian tin-glazed ware, mention should be made of the so-called *ju-i* decoration (Fig. 6b), which is a tripartite Chinese motif representing the head of a Chinese sceptre (Farris 1972, 323-335). This has been found in Amsterdam (Baart 1983, 179) and I think it might be found in England too: it is dated to around the end of the 16th century.

Finally, I include a little 17th-century blue-and-white tin-glazed ware, because it has been found in Southampton (Mallet 1972, Pl. 18) and I think it may be of interest for British and North European archaeologists. The so-called *calligrafico naturalistico* decoration is found on dishes (Fig. 4c) and other forms (Fig. 4d). It dates to the first half of the 17th century, and typically comprises very long leaves; the style is still calligraphic. The so-called *calligrafico a tappezzeria* (Fig. 4e) is dated to the second half of the 17th century, but it is not very common in archaeological contexts.

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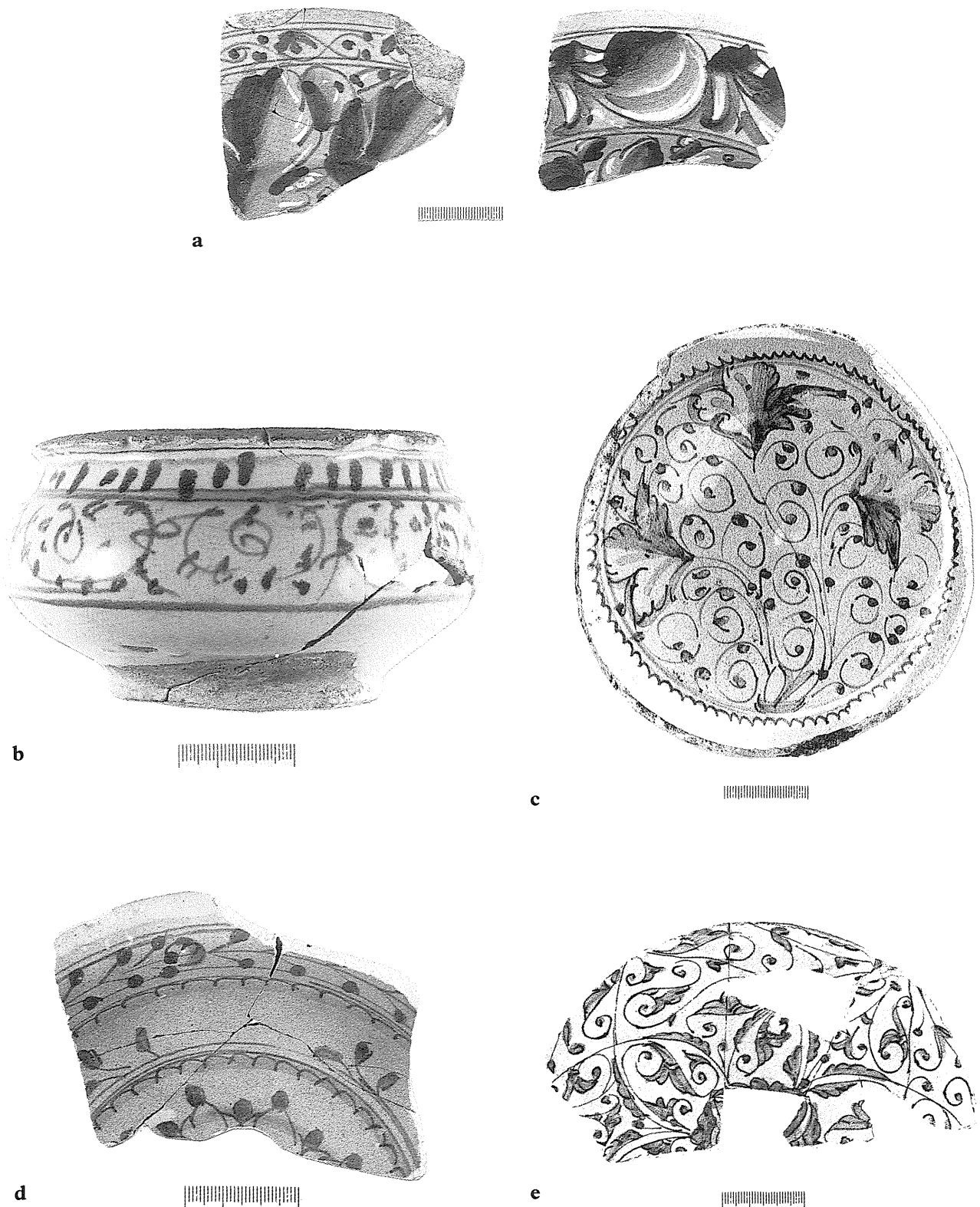


Fig. 2. 16th-century Ligurian tin-glazed wares: a, berettino dish sherds with foliate decoration; b, apothecary vessel with 'calligraphico a volute A' decoration; c, bowl sherd with 'calligraphico a volute B' decoration; d, bowl with calligraphico a volute C' decoration; e, dish with 'calligraphico a rabesche' decoration'.

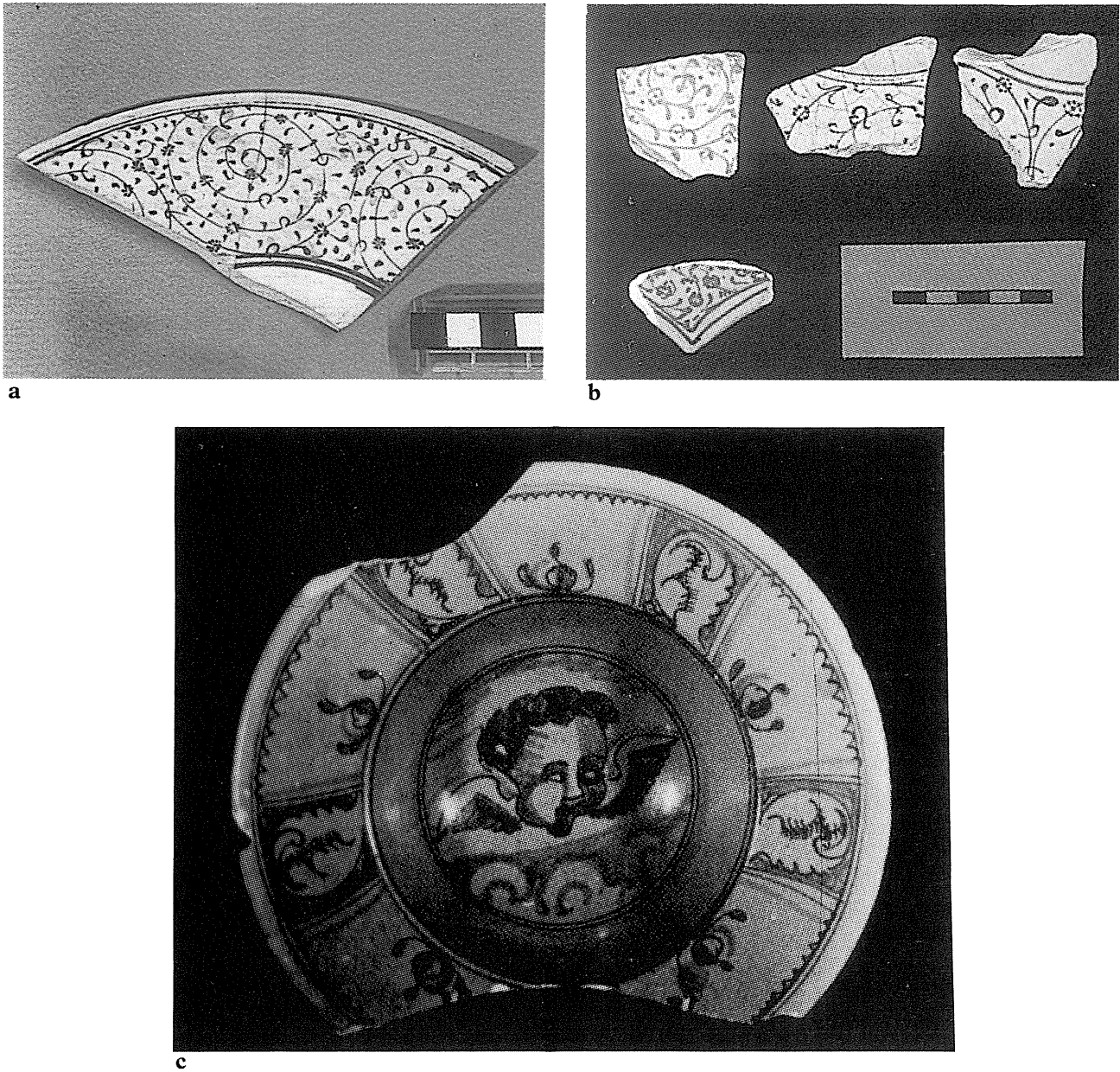


Fig. 3. a, Iznik dish rim, the inspiration for 'calligraphico a volute' decoration, found at S. Silvestro, Genoa. b, c, 16th-century Ligurian tin-glazed wares: b, berettino dish sherds with 'calligraphico a volute A' decoration; c, dish with 'a quartieri' decoration.

The last blue-and-white ware is contemporary with *calligrafico naturalistico*, but it is less common: one fragment from excavations in Pisa bears the date 1629 (Milanese and Bagnoli 1981), which is an important chronological point.

TUSCANY

There were several production sites in this region, but many of them, even in important cities such as Siena and Lucca, only had a limited distribution, due to the difficulty of reaching the sea and harbours. The wares produced at production sites such as Pisa and Monte-

lupo, however, were exported to all the Mediterranean countries and across North-West Europe thanks to the local harbour at Pisa and Montelupo's position on the River Arno.

Pisa

During the second half of 13th century and in the 14th century Pisa was a very important production site in the Mediterranean context. The *Archaic Maiolica* of Pisa has a very hard, red fabric, which is sometimes fairly thin (Berti and Tongiorgi 1977); one surface only (inside on open forms; outside on jugs) has a monochrome (white or grey) tin glaze, while the other has a

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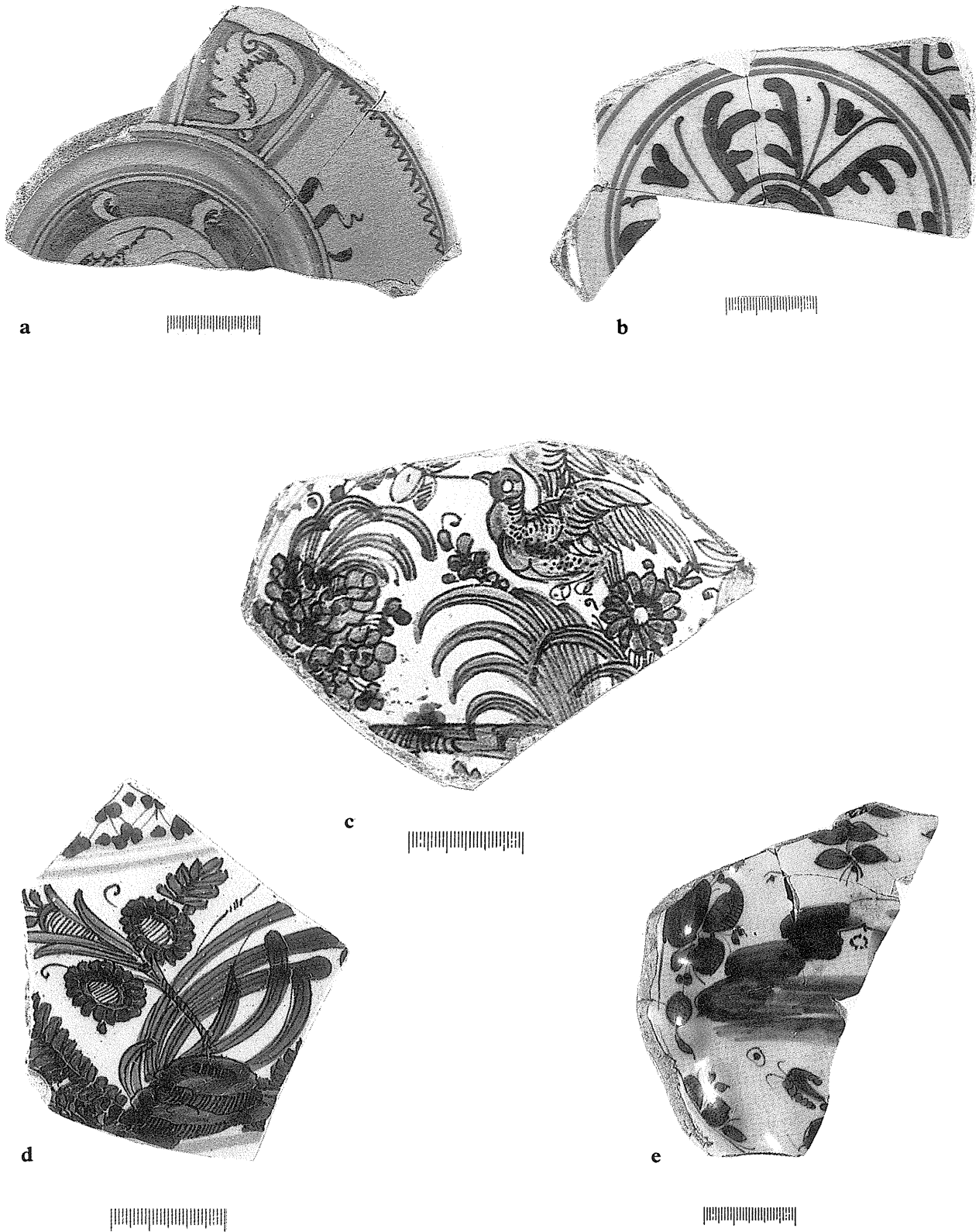


Fig. 4. a, b, 16th-century Ligurian tin-glazed wares: a, bowl with 'a quartieri' decoration; b, dish with blue-and-white decoration. c-e, 17th-century Ligurian wares: c, d, sherds with 'calligraphico naturalistico' decoration; e, bowl with 'calligraphico a tappezzeria' decoration.

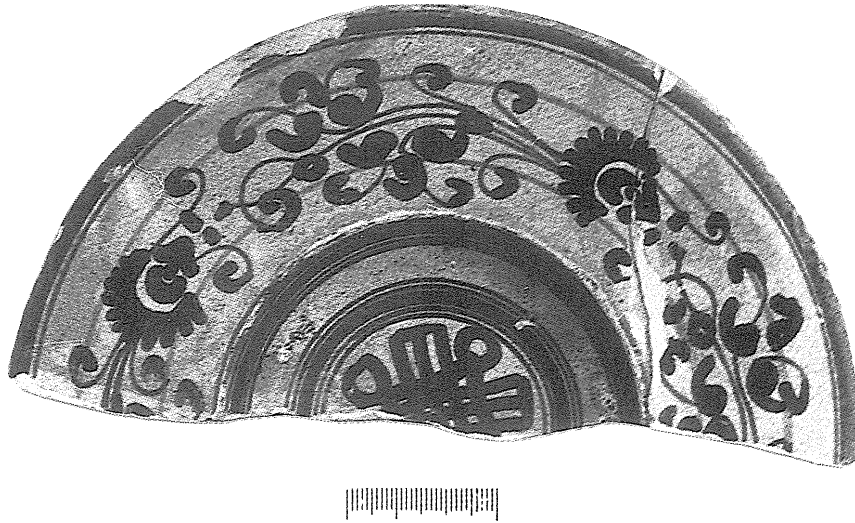


Fig. 5. Bowl decorated in the 'alla porcellana' style, 16th century. From Montelupo, Tuscany.

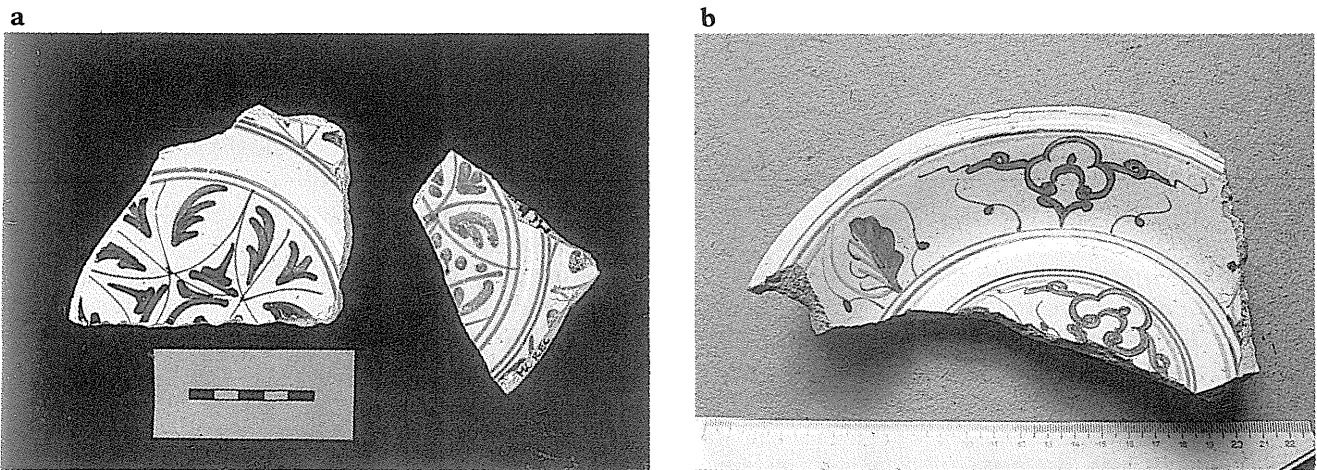


Fig. 6. 16th-/17th-century Ligurian tin-glazed wares: a, dish sherds with blue-and-white decoration; b, dish with Chinese-style 'ju-i' decoration.

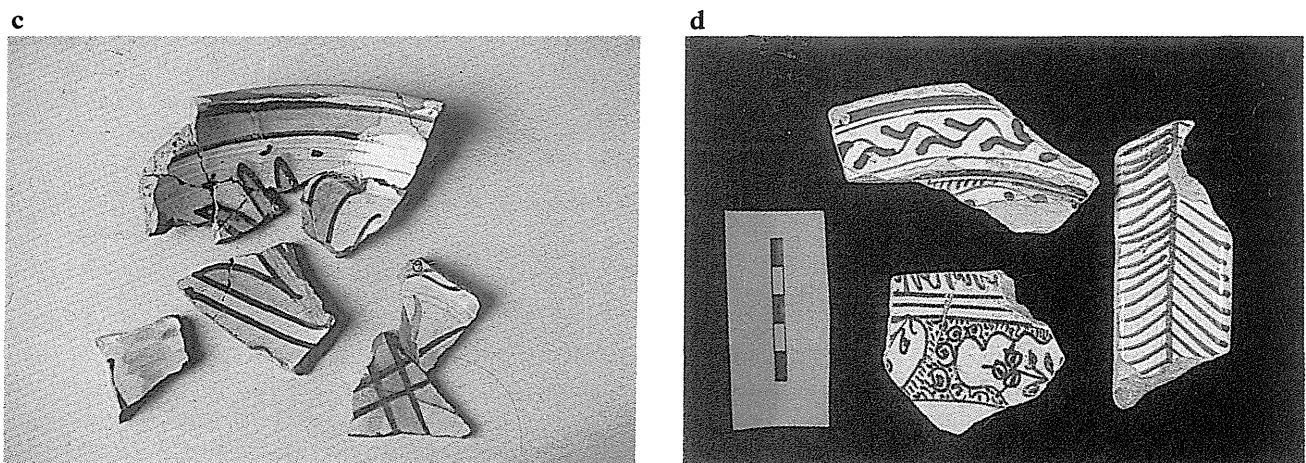


Fig. 7. 15th-century Tuscan wares from Montelupo: a, Archaic Maiolica dish sherds; b, sherds decorated in the 'Italo-Moresque' style.

lead glaze. The typical forms are jugs, bowls and other open forms.

During the 15th century, however, documentary evidence suggests that Pisan production declined (*ibid.*, 150–153), and the potters started to change their products, making bricks and different kinds of slipped and glazed wares.

From an archaeological point of view, this problem requires further study, but by observing some archaeological contexts outside Tuscany, we can suppose that *Savona Archaic Maiolica*, started in the second half of the 14th century, competed with and disturbed the traditional Pisan ware.

Montelupo

Production of *Archaic Maiolica* continued during the 15th century, at Montelupo (Berti 1986, 22–23). This ware is characterised by an orange and yellow sandwich fabric; a tin glaze of varying thickness was applied over the internal surface of the vessel only. Some mid-15th century contexts excavated in Montelupo have produced large *Archaic Maiolica* dishes (found together with a quantity of kiln wasters) whose decoration generally comprises a variety of vegetal patterns painted in green and brown; these wares were widely exported (Fig. 7a).

During the second half of the 14th century, however, *Archaic Maiolica* was superseded by the so-called *Zaffera a Rilievo*, which has a very heavy blue decoration, so that there is no evidence of *Archaic Maiolica* in Montelupo in the last quarter of the 15th century. This phenomenon is also common in other parts of Italy, such as Emilia-Romagna, but I think that the problems of Tuscan pottery are more relevant to British archaeologists.

In the early 15th century, *Italo-Moresque* ware was introduced in Montelupo (Berti 1986, 25) and at Bacchereto (Wentkowska-Verzi 1992, 57), another important production site quite near to the Arno river, only a few miles from Montelupo. An example of this distinctive ware from Southampton is published by Mallet (1972, Pl. 7). The fabric of *Italo-Moresque* pottery from both centres is very similar, usually white or clear yellow and quite soft. The tin glaze, usually white, is thin and adheres badly; the decoration is generally in blue alone, but sometimes there is a little use of brown and yellow. Distinctive forms are the small bowl with an internally bevelled rim, and the jug, which is also quite small. The most common decorative themes are vegetable and animal patterns (Fig. 7b).

From the mid 15th century, Montelupo produced the so-called *Famiglia Verde*. This can be divided into two groups, of which the earlier (Berti 1986, 24) is closely related to *Italo-Moresque* ware, both for the repertoire of forms and for the decorative motifs. The differences are in the colours used (there is no blue on the Montelupo wares, but green, brown and yellow), and in the fabric, which is pink and hard, not yellow

and soft. The reason for this is that in this period Montelupo potters were exploiting a different clay source in their countryside.

During the last quarter of the 15th century and at the beginning of the 16th century, the later group of *Famiglia Verde*, whose decorative repertoire was derived from the then defunct *Archaic Maiolica*, is quite common amongst the contemporary kiln wasters from Montelupo, but we are as yet unable to say anything about its distribution.

During this period, we can see a complete revolution in the pottery industry of Montelupo, with a considerable increase in output due to the interest of some Florentine merchants in exporting this pottery *via* the harbour of Pisa. Montelupo Maiolica is thus found all over the Mediterranean area, especially in the eastern part, and in North-West Europe (The Low Countries, England).

The late 15th- and 16th-century maiolica of Montelupo has a white fabric which is usually quite soft, while the tin glaze is thin and generally adheres poorly. Numerous kiln wasters of each of the following types have been found during investigations by Montelupo Museum.

The so-called *Palmetta Persiana* ware, with the typical floral motifs all around the plate, dates from the last twenty years of the 15th century and to the 16th century (Berti 1986, 26); these new wares have a wide range of colours (Col. Pl. 3a).

During the last quarter of the 15th century a distinctive type known as *Santa Fina* ware was produced (Col. Pl. 3b); this has been found in excavations in Southampton, while many jugs have been found in the Low Countries. An imitation lustreware can be assigned to the same period. At the beginning of the 16th century new decorative styles appeared, such as the so-called *nastri spezzati* (broken ribbons), which was widely distributed and which has been found in a London context.

The blue-and-white *Alla Porcellana* ware was produced in large amounts during the 16th century (Fig. 5); another blue-and-white Montelupo Maiolica dating to the second half of 16th century is decorated in the *losanghe* style (Col. Pl. 3b). Apart from these Italian wares, there were many North-European copies; these demonstrate the wide mobility of potters and goods and the complexity of the problems of attribution.

DISCUSSION

If we wish to advance our understanding of these problems, and to base our knowledge on more than inadequate personal impressions, it is necessary to improve our analytical approach. Fabrics, technologies, typologies and decorative styles are surely the elements that, if observed on kiln wasters, can characterise imported wares and their local imitations. It would, however, be very short-sighted, at least for Italy, if we

were to try and improve the quality of pottery studies only, while ignoring the fate of the post-medieval archaeological stratigraphies that contain these ceramics.

Footnote

1. This paper derives from that presented at the annual conference of the MPRG, on Late Medieval Imported Pottery, at Southampton, March 1993.

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Resumé

Cet exposé présente une vue générale des céramiques italiennes provenant de la Ligurie et de la Toscane et exportées dans le nord-ouest de l'Europe et en Angleterre. La période passée en revue ici concerne surtout la fin du 15^{ème} et le 16^{ème} siècle, cependant quelques céramiques datant du 17^{ème} siècle sont aussi considérées. Bien que le type de céramiques le plus important qui soit présenté ici est celui dit "berettino", d'autres catégories sont aussi examinées comme, par exemple, les rapprochements entre la céramique dite "Maiolica archaïque" et celle plus tardive à glaçure d'étain. Les pâtes et les styles décoratifs, de même que les typologies et leurs distributions sont considérés dans le contexte de chaque centre principal de production en Ligurie (Savona, Albisola, Gênes) et en Toscane (Pise, Montelupo).

Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie umreißt die italienischen Töpfereixporte aus Ligurien und der Toscana nach Nordwest-Europa und England. Der Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem späten 15. und 16. Jahrhundert mit Ausnahme einiger weniger Stücke aus dem 17. Jahrhundert. Die Haupttradition besteht in der 'berettino'-Ware, aber auch andere Arten werden behandelt wie z.B. die Beziehungen zwischen der 'Archaic Maiolica' und der späteren zinnglasierten Ware. Auch werden Fragen des Materials und dekorativen Stils sowie der Typologie und der Verteilung für die Hauptzentren in Ligurien (Savona, Albisola, Genua) und der Toscana (Pisa, Montelupo) erörtert.

