

**Figure 1**

Map showing the main production sites for marbled wares in Tuscany (1550–1650).

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## Summary

*Pottery with a surface decoration employing different colours of slip to imitate marble and other semi-precious stones was made in Tuscany from about 1570 to 1650. Marbleized pottery is in many ways a typical product of the Counterreformation. It was certainly made in Pisa and recent discoveries have revealed that it was*

*also produced in several other towns along the Arno river between Florence and the Tyrrhenian coast. This paper proposes to explore three main aspects of Tuscan marbleized pottery: why it was made, where it was made and how it was made.*

## The art-historical context

### Marbleized pottery as an expression of the art of the Counterreformation

Pottery decorated with a marbleized surface belongs to the category of ceramics called slipware. As the name suggests, the intention was to create an effect that imitated marble or other semi-precious stones. Production in Italy began in the second half of the 16th century.

This is the era in which what is defined as Baroque art begins to appear; the style evolved as the Catholic Church struggled to assert itself as it weathered the storm of the protestant reformation and the even stormier period of the Counterreformation. Italian Baroque art, in fact, was charged with the task of sustaining at a visual level the impassioned sermons of the Jesuits in order to assert the power, the magnificence and the glory of the Catholic Church. The greatest artists of the day were summoned to Rome to celebrate the triumph of the Church using this style which, in its every manifestation, was supposed to be dynamic, dramatic and powerful. One of the materials most suitable for expressing these concepts was certainly semi-precious stone, in particular marble, agate, onyx, jasper, lapis lazuli, and malachite. This taste for semi-precious stones, in fact, later becomes one of the most characteristic features of many other manifestations of Baroque art:

In 1585 a craftsman from Carpi, Guido Fassi, invented the technique known as *'scagliola'* to create objects and architectural elements using colored plaster that simulated semi-precious stones. (Zecchini 1997, 21)

In Florence, the Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici in 1588 founded the *Opificio delle Pietre Dure* for the manufacture of splendid objects made of inlaid semi-precious stones. (Giusti 2002)

Starting at the end of the 16th century, marbleized paper, made using a technique that originated in the Far East, became popular in Europe; in Italy Athanasius Kircher accurately described the technique in a treatise called *Ars Magna lucis et umbrae* published in 1646 in Rome and, in fact, starting in Rome, the new technique became popular with Italian bookbinders who considered it perfect for the endpapers of books. (Pezzati 2004, 30–31)

At Murano (Venice) they had already developed a method for the manufacture of 'chalcedony glass' around 1450 and were using it to make vessels in imitation of banded agate; however, in the early 17th century (it is cited in documents for the first time in 1626) an even more elaborate procedure was developed by the Miotti family of Venice to make aventurine glass, a sophisticated imitation of semi-precious stone which was enhanced by the addition of oxidized metallic flakes which sparkled in the glass paste of the completed vessel (Dorigato 1986, 40; Mehlman 1982, 14).

For all of the last quarter of the 16th century the most fashionable pottery in Italy was maiolica in 'stile compendiario' which was made mostly in Faenza but also at Montelupo and other towns: This maiolica featured a pure white surface with minimal pictorial decoration. The shapes were complex, dynamic and often monumental and represented another manifestation of Baroque art. At the same time, in Urbino the local potters were making a very refined and elegant maiolica with white surfaces entirely decorated with grotesques. In Florence, after the death of Cosimo I de' Medici in 1574, his son Francesco became the second Grand Duke. He continued the experiments that he had already started several years earlier and finally succeeded in making the first porcelain produced in the West, the so-called 'Medici Porcelain' (1575–87). These are the most significant types of luxury ceramics being

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produced in Italy in the second half of the century.

As far as pottery for everyday use is concerned, towards the middle of the 16th century there occurred an important phase of transition because, as is known from archaeological evidence, the quantity of slipware being produced and consumed starts to exceed that of maiolica (Moore Valeri 2004, 17–18). In fact, it is known that the number of kilns producing slipware in Tuscany must have been enormous, although at this time archaeological proof exists for only about twenty, mostly concentrated in the northern part of the region between Florence and the Tyrrhenian coast (Moore Valeri 2004, 36). In this period, they continued making huge quantities of slipware with simple incised decorations '*a punta*' and '*a stecca*' and the most refined version of slipware, the champlévé type called '*a fondo ribassato*' reached the height of its sophistication and popularity and in many cases crossed over the confines between common pottery and luxury pottery. These three types of slipware gradually replaced maiolica as the preferred type of tableware. At Pomarance, near Volterra, the local potters created a fancy polychrome slipware '*a fondo ribassato*' with grotesqueries mostly derived from Sienese maiolica (Moore Valeri 2003b; Thornton and Wilson 2009, no.448, 672–673) and in Pisa and the lower valley of the Arno, some of the workshops that were beginning to make late slipware (*graffita tarda*) also started to make plates, bowls and flasks with surface marbleizing or splashing (*schizzata* and *maculata*)<sup>1</sup> in imitation of the semiprecious stones so popular in Baroque art. Marbleized pottery joined the *fondo ribassato* as a luxury ceramic in the last decades of the 16th century and by the beginning of the 17th century had almost completely replaced it in this category (Figure 1).

## The economic context

### Export and local consumption of marbled pottery

The second half of the 16th century represented a period of great development in the Italian economy, a kind of Indian summer before the long winter of economic crisis that lasted for most of the following century. The population grew and manufacturing, agricultural production and commerce all expanded. Enormous quantities of pottery, mainly polychrome maiolica from Montelupo, incised slipware from Pisa were exported from the port of Pisa to destinations throughout the Mediterranean basin and Northern Europe. Starting in the last quarter of the 16th century, marbled pottery also became an important export. In relation to this, it is curious to observe that the first and most precisely dated finds of Tuscan marbled pottery occurred in Great Britain – more than 50 different sites – and even in the British colony of Virginia in North America, in a context dated 1620–1640 (Hurst *et al* 1986, 33) – and in Holland where



**Figure 2**

Costrel made of pale red earthenware, coated with marbled red and white slip, and spattered on one side in green under clear lead glaze. Oviform body with outward curving foot, slender tapering neck with a flanged mouth, and on either side of the body two loops for straps, each moulded in the form of a lion's head. Height c 27 cm.

Fitzwilliam Museum inv. no. 1850–1928

it has been identified in numerous contexts dated from 1575 to 1650 (*ibid* 33–37; Baart 1985, 161–186, figs.24–25). These finds consist of simple bowls and basins with a curled rim and a particular type of pilgrim's flask with four loops on the sides that British scholars call lion-headed costrels (Hurst *et al* 1986, 37, Berti 1997, 376, Tipo Cc 2 and fig. 33/4) (Figure 2). The context of the various find sites in Northern Europe and the Mediterranean sea, and in particular those of the shipwrecks, demonstrate that the marbled pottery was almost always exported along with late Tuscan slipware of the type called '*a papavero*' for the presence of a stylized, incised and painted red and green poppy in the centre (Figure 3) (Hurst *et al* 1986, 32; Amouric *et al* 1999, 83–86; Berti and Tongiorgi 1982, Tav. VI,



**Figure 3**

Polychrome slipware dish found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Casa Carrucci). Red earthenware covered with a white slip, incised filets and a stylized flower in the center, painted in green and red orange. This 'poppy' motif was the most common type of decoration used on late Pisan slipware (*graffita tarda*) from about 1575 to 1650. Dishes like these are very commonly found in contexts with marbled ware. Rim diameter 23 cm. Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli.

166; Moore Valeri 2004, fig. 3, 92), but it is interesting to note that in the second half of the 17th century when the export of late incised slipware and Montelupo maiolica had totally ceased, in archaeological contexts in Britain one continues to find this Tuscan product along with a few fragments of Ligurian maiolica (Hurst 1991, 216). In this era, when the importation of Tuscan marbled pottery in Britain finally comes to an end, they begin to make a beautiful and technically sophisticated version of marbled pottery in Staffordshire (Poole 1995, 40–41).<sup>2</sup>

Recently large quantities of Tuscan marbled ware have been found in archeological excavations in Barcelona, Spain, in contexts dated from the final decade of the 16th century to the end of the 17th century. Most of the finds are high quality polychrome types and include not only the usual dishes and bowls but also some lion-headed costrels (Beltran de Heredia Bercero – Mirò I Alaix 2010, 14–15; 86–90; plate 51, 142–143).

The production of marbled pottery in Italy was certainly not confined exclusively to Tuscany; it was also produced in all the other regions where they were making slipware, above all Emilia Romagna, but also in Liguria, Lombardy and the Veneto, however in these regions it always remained a marginal pottery type of no particular economic importance and destined only for local consumption.<sup>3</sup>

In the second half of the 16th century a very large part of the Italian population lived in monasteries and convents and there were numerous hospitals and hospices being run by the various religious orders. These institutions ordered large quantities of simple tableware, by this time more slipware than maiolica, which were often decorated with the emblem or symbol of the order (Franciscan, Dominican, and Carthusian are the most common). For example, within the walls of the castle of Empoli there were Augustinian, Benedictine and Capuchin monasteries and, starting in 1630 Dominican, as well as the hospice managed by the Carthusians and nearby, at Pontorme, the two hospices of Pietrafitta and San Martino (Siemoni and Guerrini 1987, 26). From the fragments of incised slipware found in the kiln dumps in Empoli and in Pontorme (see below) it is known that the local potters were supplying them with tableware for daily use. Moreover, from the context of the convent of the Murate in Florence it is known that in this era, besides the incised slipwares, the workshops of the lower Arno valley were sending entire sets of marbled pottery to the religious institutions in and around the city.

## The archaeological context

### Pisa, the kilns at Pontorme

### and the finds from Florence and Montelupo

The Tuscan origin of the numerous examples of marbled pottery found in Northern Europe has been convincingly demonstrated by the research of Graziella Berti, published in numerous books and articles but in particular in two important studies (Berti and Tongiorgi 1982, 172–173; Berti 1997, 373–376) which describe the finds from the historic center of Pisa. In a more recent study (2009) Berti and Marcella Giorgio note that marbled ware was exported from Pisa starting in the last quarter of the 16th century and during the first half of the 17th century. The technique was certainly employed by multiple workshops in Pisa and although abundant quantities of marbled pottery have been dug up in the city, to date no specific kiln dump has been located (Berti and Giorgio, 2009, 47). In recent years, however, very large quantities of marbled pottery wasters both from the first and second firing, have been found in Pontorme, a tiny suburb of Empoli on the river Arno (Terreni 2004, 40–43; Moore Valeri 2005; 2006), which have characteristics that are very similar to the Pisan finds and confirm the documents that demonstrate the presence of numerous potters in this town in the second half of the 16th century.<sup>4</sup>

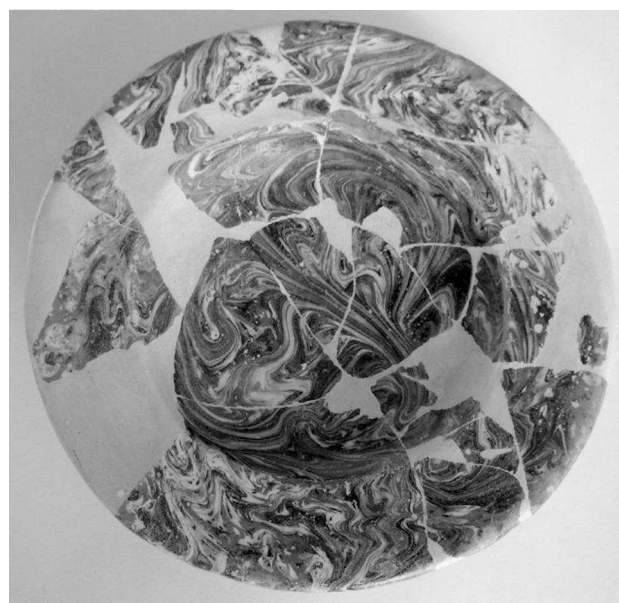
This study is based mainly on the finds from three different sites at Pontorme: Via del Fuoco, Mura Sud, and Casa Carrucci (according to tradition, the house where the painter Jacopo Carrucci, called Pontormo, was born), which are only a few hundred yards from each other and all inside the city walls of Pontorme.

In all three cases it is clear that the site is a kiln dump but several differences in the pottery types and in the kinds of kiln stilts that were found suggest that they are the dumps of three different workshops. The pottery production, which ranges from the middle of the 16th century to the middle of the following century, mostly concentrated in the fifty years between 1575 and 1625, consisted almost exclusively of two types of slipware: late incised slipware (*graffita tarda*) and marbled wares. At Casa Carrucci a small quantity of ‘*fondo ribassato*’ was also found. Documents show that three generations of potters worked at Casa Carrucci starting in 1570: Piero di Mariano del Riccio, Ottavio di Piero del Riccio, and his brother Tiberio di Piero del Riccio who, in the census of 1621, is listed as the owner of the house (Procacci 1956, 26). This date corresponds precisely to that of some of the iconographical sources (Figure 4) with plates and bowls of ‘*graffita tarda*’ identical to those found in the three kiln dumps (Moore Valeri 1999).



**Figure 4** Detail of a still life painting attributed to Jacopo da Empoli c 1600–1620. In the background there is a large kitchen bowl made of late Tuscan slipware (*graffita tarda*). Fragments of identical bowls were found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Casa Carrucci) associated with marbled ware. Another bowl, identical to this one, was found in Amsterdam in a context dated 1600–1612. This shape was commonly used for both *graffita tarda* and marbled ware. Rim diameter 21.5 cm.

In the past, finds of marbled pottery in Tuscany have usually been classified as either TRI when three colours of slip, usually red, white and black, were used (Figure 5) or BI when only red and white slips were used. However, our research has shown that there was often another two-colour combination besides the red and white (Figures 6–10), which was black (or very dark brown) and white (Figures 11–13). They are therefore called the red and white type BR (*bianco–rosso*) and the black and white type BN (*bianco–nero*).<sup>5</sup> The set of finds from Casa Carrucci consisted of 131 fragments of marbled pottery that were discarded after the first firing and 40 fragments that were discarded after the second firing (110 in type TRI, Figures 11 and 14, and 61 type BR); the finds from Via del Fuoco consisted of 180 fragments discarded after the first firing and 8 discarded after the second firing, of which 122 were BR (Figures 15 and 16) with one fragment which had the inside covered with green glaze over the marbled



**Figure 5** Dish of polychrome (red, white, black and green) marbled slipware, found during the excavations of the Medici Fortress in Grosseto. The back is glazed but not decorated. Rim diameter 19 cm. Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma, Grosseto



**Figure 6**

Deep bowl with red and white marbled decoration. Three of these bowls were found during the excavations of the Medici Fortress in Grosseto. They all have the same basic shape but the diameter varies from 28.5 cm to 29.5 cm and the height from 10.8 to 11.5 cm. Partially glazed on the outside. Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma, Grosseto



**Figure 8**

Dish with red and white marbled decoration covered with transparent glaze, diameter 25.7 cm, height 5.5 cm. The outside is undecorated but glazed even under the base. Found during excavations in the Medici Fortress at Grosseto. Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma, Grosseto.



**Figure 7**

Shallow bowl with red and white marbled decoration. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Via del Fuoco). The shape is similar to the bowl in Figure 8, but smaller. The base is slightly concave. The outside is not decorated. It was probably discarded after the first firing since there is no glaze on either side. Diameter 14.5 cm, height 4 cm.



**Figure 9**

Shallow bowl with red and white marbled decoration covered with transparent glaze. The outside is undecorated but glazed even under the base. Found during excavations in the Medici Fortress at Grosseto. Diameter 22 cm, height 3.5 cm. Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma, Grosseto

**Figure 10**

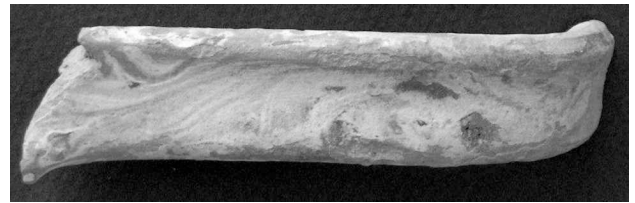
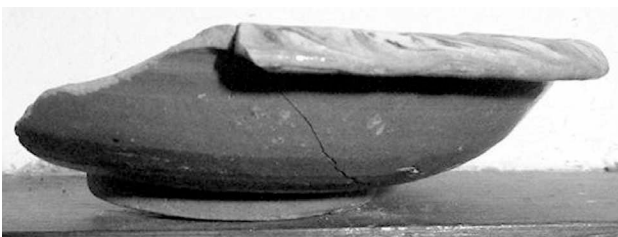
A dish with marbled decoration in red and white. Diameter 29.8 cm, height 6.2 cm. The exterior is not decorated but is covered with a transparent glaze. The base (diameter 10 cm) is slightly concave. Found in Florence.

Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico di Scandicci, Rinaldi, Florence

**Figure 11**

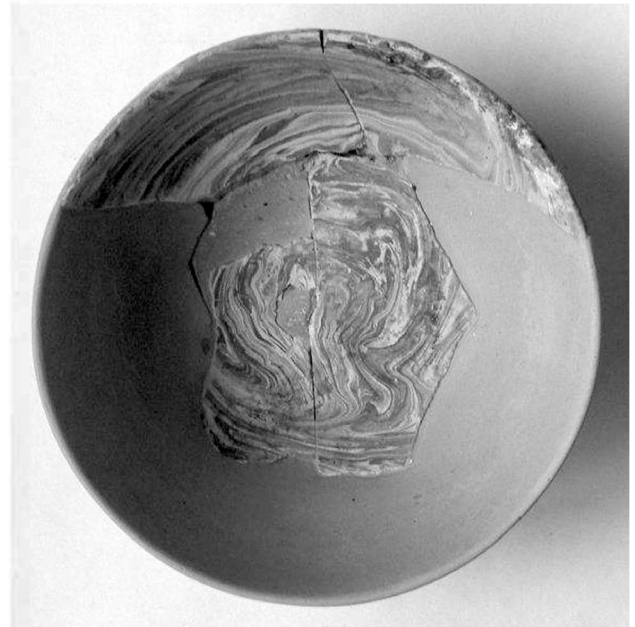
Bowl with deep vertical indentations around the outside, probably thrown and then moulded; the inside has black and white slip covered with a green glaze, the outside has a marbled decoration in black and white slip. Found during excavations in Piazza Donatello, Florence. It was almost certainly made in Montelupo, the only production center in Tuscany regularly using moulds for marbled ware.

Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico Fiorentino, Florence

**Figure 13**

Strap handle with unglazed black and white marbled decoration, about 7 cm long. It was probably part of a jug. Found during the excavations at the Mura Sud site in Pontorme.

Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli.

**Figure 14**

Small hemispherical bowl with straight, vertical rim with polychrome (red, white and black) marbled decoration on both sides; there is white slip also under the slightly concave foot so the bowl must have been dipped in slip before the marbling. There is no glaze. The bowl was found in one of the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Casa Carrucci) and was discarded after the first firing. This shape, with a diameter varying from 9.5 to 12 cm, and a height of 5 to 6 cm, was quite common. Rim diameter 12 cm.

Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli.

**Figure 12**

Shallow bowl with a rolled-over lip. Diameter of rim 21 cm, height 5 cm, diameter of base 9 cm. The inside has black and white (BN) marbled decoration. The exterior is not decorated but is covered with a transparent glaze. Found in Florence.

Private collection, S Quirico, Florence

**Figure 15**

Shallow bowl with red and white marbled decoration. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Via del Fuoco). The shape is similar to the bowl in Figure 8, but smaller. The base is slightly concave. The outside is not decorated. It was probably discarded after the first firing since there is no glaze on either side. Diameter 14.5 cm, height 4 cm.

**Figure 16**

Shallow bowl with red and white marbled decoration. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Via del Fuoco). The shape is similar to the bowl in Figure 8, but smaller. The outside is not decorated. The base is slightly concave. It was probably discarded after the first firing since there is no glaze on either side. Diameter 17.6 cm, height 4 cm. Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli

**Figure 17**

Small hemispherical bowl with straight vertical rim, only slightly slanting outwards which makes the shape slightly different from the other hemispherical bowls found here, in Pisa and Grosseto (see Figure 7). The bowl has red and white marbling on both sides (17a, above, and 17b, below) but the inside is mostly covered with a green glaze (17b). Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Via del Fuoco). Height 7 cm. Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli

decoration (Figure 17a–b), 62 type TRI, and four black and white, type BN. The finds from the site that is called Mura Sud consisted of 183 fragments discarded after the first firing, and 27 fragments discarded after the second firing of which 160 were type BR, and 42 polychrome TRI, 7 of the TRI were covered or splashed with green glaze and there was one fragment in black and white (BN). In order to acquire additional data the marbled fragments that were collected during the excavations at the site of the 18th-century Levantino maiolica factory in Empoli, less than a mile away, were



also taken into consideration. These were certainly produced at one of the kilns of Pontorme (Figure 7).

In Casa Carrucci along with the marbled wares archaeologists found 659 fragments of '*graffita tarda*' divided among the various types of monochrome '*graffita a punta*' (21 discards from the first firing and 98 discards from the second firing, Figure 3), polychrome '*graffita a punta*' (144 discards from the first firing and 100 discards from the second firing), monochrome '*graffita a stecca*' (19 discards from the first firing and 66 discards from the second firing), '*graffita a fondo ribassato*' (186 discards from the first firing and 25 from the second firing). In Via del Fuoco they found 814 fragments of polychrome '*graffita a punta*', (360 discards from the first firing and 454 discards from the second firing; of these, 77% had the poppy decoration). In the site called Mura Sud they found 194 fragments of polychrome '*graffita a punta*' (176 discards from the first firing and eighteen discards from the second firing, 24% of which had the poppy decoration) and eleven fragments of '*graffita a stecca*' (six discards from the first firing and five from the second firing) and ten fragments of '*graffita a fondo ribassato*', all of which were discards from the first firing of the late '*graffita*' type with a Catherine wheel in the center and the compact serpentine (*serpentina compatta*) around the rim.

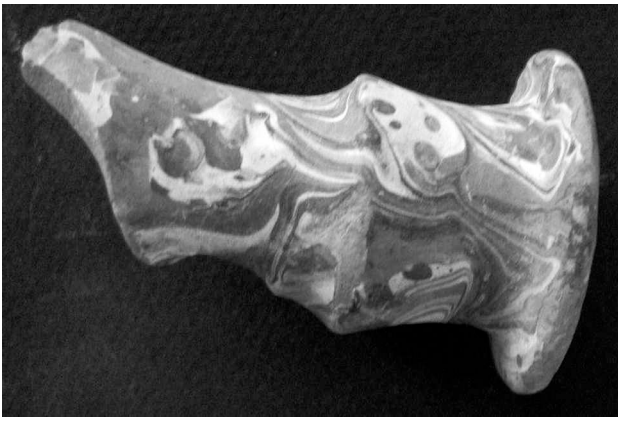
These associations of marbled pottery with the various types of '*graffita tarda*' decorated with a poppy (Figure 3) are identical to those found in Pisa, particularly in Piazza Solferino (Berti and Tongiorgi 1982, 165–166, 171–172; Berti 1997, 373–376; also those found in Piazza Dante: Alberti and Tozzi 1993, 609) and in the shipwrecks of the Rondinara, the Revellata, Calvi I and Sainte Marguerite (Amouric *et al* 1999 80–86), besides the previously mentioned sites in Holland, in Great Britain, and the English colony of Virginia in North America (Hurst *et al* 1986, 37). It is interesting to observe, however, that the large quantities of marbled ware found during the excavations under the ring-road around the historic center of Florence (*viale Giovine Italia*) in the early 1980s (Barbieri *et al* 1985, 275) which is still considered the most important find of this typology in or around the city, has characteristics similar to those of Pontorme and Pisa but was found in a context that, besides the contemporary maiolica from Montelupo, contained a large quantity of incised slipware from Borgo San Lorenzo<sup>6</sup> to the total exclusion of that from the Arno valley area. Most of this pottery was monochrome '*graffita a stecca*' which was part of a set that belonged to the nuns of the convent of the Murate, located directly in front of the excavation area, as can be deduced from the name of the convent which was incised before firing on some of the jugs (Barbieri *et al* 1985, 288), and it is probable that the marbled pottery, consisting mainly of small plates and bowls with rolled rims, belonged to the same institution. Some of the marbled wares have names, initials



**Figure 18**  
Base of a closed vessel (a jug or a costrel), decorated with polychrome (red, white and black) marbled decoration. Only the inside is glazed. Found during excavations in Florence near the convent of the Murate. A mark of ownership has been scratched into the base, probably by one of the nuns ('Sa -M' for *Suora*). Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico Fiorentino, Florence

and other marks of ownership incised in the fired clay, under the base (Figure 18). The particular context of these wares, together with the incised slipware from Borgo San Lorenzo, suggests a possible provenance from the same town for the marbled wares as well, and in fact, there was some production of this type in Borgo. However, except for a few flasks, the fragments that are known from this town in the Mugello Valley, are extremely simple plates and dishes made in a not very skillful version of the BR type. These do not have much in common with the pottery found in Florence. It should be added that, also in the Mugello Valley, there was a small production of marbled pottery at the famous kilns of the Medici villa of Cafaggiolo where, during the excavations conducted from 1998 to 2000, archeologists found biscuit sherds of marbled pottery related to the period of the second Grand Duke, Francesco I de' Medici (who ruled from 1574 to 1587), but the fragments are too small and insufficient in quantity to draw any conclusions about production at the Medici kilns (Moore Valeri 2003a).

At the three sites in Pontorme archeologists found five fragments of marbled pilgrim's flasks, two BR walls that had been discarded after the first firing, the neck of a TRI flask discarded after the first firing (Figure 19), the neck of a BR flask discarded after the second firing (Figure 20), loops decorated with a lion face from the Mura Sud site<sup>7</sup> (Figure 21) and from the site of the Levantino factory in Empoli which are identical to the *lion head costrels* found in Britain, Holland and Spain (Figure 2). Besides Pisa, fragments of similar flasks have also been found in Lucca (Ciampoltrini 2005, fig. 2, no. 7) and Castel del Bosco, a town between Empoli



**Figure 19**

Neck and mouth of a costrel with polychrome (red, white and black) marbled decoration. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Mura Sud). There is no glaze so it must have been discarded after the first firing. The shape of this neck with a horizontal rib and a flanged mouth corresponds precisely to the necks of costrels found in Pisa.

Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli.



**Figure 20**

Neck and mouth of a costrel with red and white marbled decoration covered with transparent glaze. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Mura Sud). The fragment is the same basic shape as the one in Figure 15, with a horizontal rib and flanged mouth, but it is slightly shorter and wider.

Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli

and Pisa (Ciampoltrini and Spataro 2004, fig. 3, nos. 23–26).

In relation to the production of marbled pottery in Tuscany an exceptional example, found during the same 1980–1981 excavations referred to above under the ring-road around Florence but in a different context (Piazza Donatello), is of particular interest. It is composed of two fragments belonging to an elegant mould-made bowl with gadroons in the walls, a scalloped rim, a high ring at the base and black and white marbleizing on both surfaces (even inside of the foot ring), however the inside is partially covered with a green glaze (Figure 11). Though somewhat smaller, it is similar in shape and typology to a gadrooned dish with a diameter of 29cm in the Cora collection at the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche di Faenza (Bojani *et al* 1985, 282, no. 723) (Figure 22) and to one in the British Museum (Thornton and Wilson 2009, vol.ii, no. 450, with a diameter of 36.5 cm). The gadrooned bowl or *crespina* is a shape that is typical of the maiolica of the second half of the 16th century (Berti 1998, 428, tipo 84); it is never used for ‘*graffita tarda*’. It is probable therefore, that the two bowls were made in a workshop in Montelupo where, starting around the mid 16th century, according to F Berti, slipware was rapidly replacing maiolica (*‘venne rapidamente a ridimensionare il ruolo largamente egemone che la maiolica aveva esercitato sin dal medioevo nelle botteghe ceramiche di Montelupo’*: Berti 1998, 161).

Another marbled shape that seems to be an exclusive of Montelupo is the drinking bowl (diameter 11 cm) with a single horizontal palmette



**Figure 21**

Fragment of a costrel with a lug with a lion head. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Mura Sud). The fragment has been fired but there is no trace of slip or glaze. The shape of the lion head is similar to those found in Pisa and northern Europe (lion-head costrels).



**Figure 22**

Mould made gadrooned bowl with polychrome marbled decoration in black, white, brown, green and traces of blue. Diameter 29 cm, height 6,8cm. Probably made at Montelupo. Cora collection, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza

shaped handle. In 1998 F Berti dated the cup 1550–1600 (Berti 1998, 323), in our opinion far too early for this type of object, and in fact, in 2002 the same author assigned a date of 1620–1630 to a marbled cup of the identical shape (Berti 2002, 237). In archeological layers in Tuscany these cups have been found only in 17th century contexts.<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that the marbled pottery from Montelupo, besides often being made in unusual shapes, reflects the presence of the maiolica being produced in the same workshops in the preparation of the slips; in fact, besides the usual colours of red, black and white, the polychrome marbled wares sometimes included blue, a colour which is totally absent in the other productions of this type in the Arno valley.<sup>9</sup>

For the earliest marbled ware at Montelupo, F Berti has proposed the date of 1540, however he has not produced any convincing archeological evidence to sustain this theory. In reality, such an early date seems highly unlikely in view of the fact that no marbled wares have been found in dated Tuscan contexts earlier than the 1580s.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, from the extensive investigations conducted for the last four decades at multiple sites in and around Pisa by Graziella Berti and, most recently, by her colleague Marcella Giorgio, it is clear that in the 16th century it was Pisa that was driving the production of all types of slipware in Tuscany and the other towns, even the ones like Pomarance, with unique slipware products of their own, were basically following this lead. M. Giorgio believes that marbled pottery started to be produced in Pisa around 1580. As far as the date of 1540 proposed

by F Berti for the production of marbled pottery at Montelupo is concerned, she observes: 'In my opinion such an early date is highly unlikely. If it were true that at Montelupo they had already begun making marbled ware at that time, it would have been the first and only town that was making this kind of pottery while, oddly enough, all of the others would have imitated it only about fifty years later. It would be strange, if only for the presence of Pisa which had such an enormous volume of production in that same period. And it would be even stranger when one thinks of how rapidly these techniques spread at that time'.<sup>11</sup>

## Shapes of marbled pottery

At Pontorme marbled pottery was made in dozens of different shapes; it is possible, however, to recognize six basic types, each of which has many slight variations in the form and dimensions (Figure 23).

### Shape 1

A plate with a diameter of 17 to 21 cm, h. 3–4 cm, with a small flanged rim, beveled splayed foot and concave base which corresponds to G Berti 1997, 389, fig. 27, letters b and c.

### Shape 2

A flanged dish with a diameter of 20 to 30 cm, height 4–5 cm (Figures. 4, 19 and 26: corresponds to G Berti 1997, 391, figs. 5–8) (Figures 5, 21 and 28).

### Shape 3

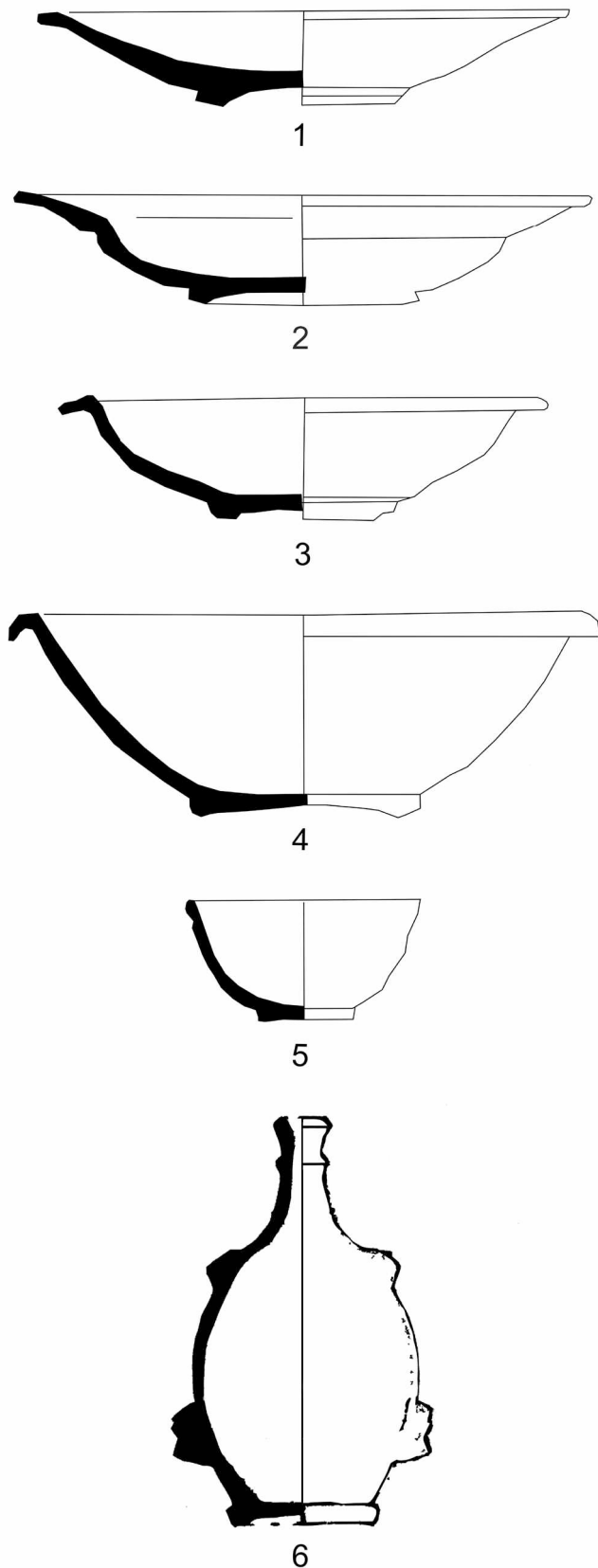
A shallow bowl with a diameter of 14 to 20 cm, height 5–6 cm, with a grooved flanged rolled over rim, curving sides hollowed above the slightly beveled foot and slightly concave base (Figures 14, 15, 17a–b, 22 and 24: corresponds to G Berti 1997, 389, 28/2-2\*-2\*\*) (Figures 7, 9, 16 and 24).

### Shape 4

A wide, deep bowl with a simple collared edge or an overhanging rim; the diameter may vary from 18 to 30 cm, height 7,5–9 cm; rounded foot and concave base corresponds to G Berti 1997, 390, fig.30, nos.1–8. (Figures 4, 6, 25a–b and 26a–b).

### Shape 5

A small hemispherical bowl with a straight vertical rim, slightly concave foot and a diameter varying from 9 to 12 cm, height 4.8–7.5 cm corresponds to G Berti 1997, 389, fig.29, no.2. (Figures 14 and 17a–b).



**Figure 23**  
Basic shapes of marbled ware in Tuscany 1550–1650.



**Figure 24**  
Shallow bowl with polychrome (red, black and white) marbled decoration. Found in the kiln dumps at Pontorme (Casa Carrucci). Probably discarded after the first firing since there is no glaze. The outside of the bowl is not decorated. The base is slightly concave. Diameter 20 cm, height 4.5 cm. Deposits of the Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno, Molin Nuovo Empoli.

### Shape 6

An ovoid flask, height 22–27 cm, diameter of the base usually about 9 cm, with a long neck and flanged mouth, two pairs of evenly spaced lugs on opposite sides, some of which have deep horizontal lines while others have mould made lion heads in relief (Figures 18–20 and 27–29). The shape corresponds to G Berti 1997, 392, fig.33 no.4 and fig.34, no.5. The elongated, bottle shaped marbled pilgrim's flask found commonly in northern European excavations has not been found here or in any other Tuscan sites.<sup>12</sup>

These same six shapes have been found in the Pisan excavations (Berti and Tongiorgi 1982, 171; Berti 1997, 389–391). At Pontorme they were almost certainly also making marbled jugs, as suggested by the presence of a BN strap handle among the finds at Mura Sud (Figure 13). An identical strap handle was found with other marbled fragments at Castel del Bosco and is displayed with some of the other finds in the museum in Montopoli. Unfortunately, there are not enough fragments to determine either the size or the shape of these jugs (Ciampoltrini and Spataro 2004, 118, fig.3, nos.23–24).

All of the dishes, without exception, have a slightly concave disk base. The marbled pottery from Pontorme, in fact, does not have the characteristics recorded for the marbled pottery from Montelupo



**Figure 25**

Fragment (9 x 10 cm) of a large deep bowl. The outside has red, white and black marbled decoration (25a, above) and the inside has the same polychrome combination to which green has also been added (25b, below). Found in Florence. Diameter c 30 cm.

Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico di Scandicci, Rinaldi, Florence



**Figure 26**

Fragment of a large deep bowl. There is a polychrome marbled decoration in red, white, black and green on both sides (26a outside, above, and 26b inside, below) under a colorless lead glaze. The marbling technique is superbly executed. Found in downtown Florence during excavations in 1980. Diameter calculated at about 30 cm. Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico Fiorentino, Florence



**Figure 27**

Costrel with four lugs in the shape of lion heads, red and white marbled decoration. Height 22,6 cm, diameter of base 7.8 cm.

Private collection, Florence, Italy



**Figure 28**

Costrel with two lugs covered with a cream colored slip with irregular blobs of brown and green, probably an unsuccessful attempt to make a marbled surface. The basic shape and dimensions are similar to those found in Florence and Pontorme but the costrel has two simple lugs instead of four, the neck is shorter and the mouth has no lip. Height 22.6 cm, diameter of base 8.1 cm.

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which, according to F Berti has a scraped out foot and shaved down walls: *'profilo assottigliato al rovescio mediante rifinitura, e con piede alleggerito dall'escavazione a ferro'* (Berti 1998, 161). The deeper bowls, Shapes 4 and 5, have the marbled decoration on the outside as well as the inside. The plates and shallow bowls, Shapes 1–3, on the outside have no decoration but are glazed.

The shapes used for the marbled pottery from Pontorme correspond precisely to those being used for the contemporary *'graffita tarda'* at Pontorme and Pisa, although in different proportions. If the biscuit wares found in Via del Fuoco are considered, for example,

according to an analysis based on the shapes, then 37% of the marbled fragments belong to large, deep bowls (Shape 4), while for the *'graffita a punta'* only 19% of the fragments belong to this shape. A bowl of this type that is identical to those made at Pontorme is represented in a Tuscan still-life painting dated c AD 1620 (Figure 4). When this kind of bowl was decorated with *'graffita tarda'*, it usually has a simple painted and incised decoration of spear shaped leaves set vertically around the exterior, as can be seen in the painting. While all of the marbled plates and shallow bowls (Shapes 1–3) that had undergone a second firing had a transparent glaze on the back, for the same shapes



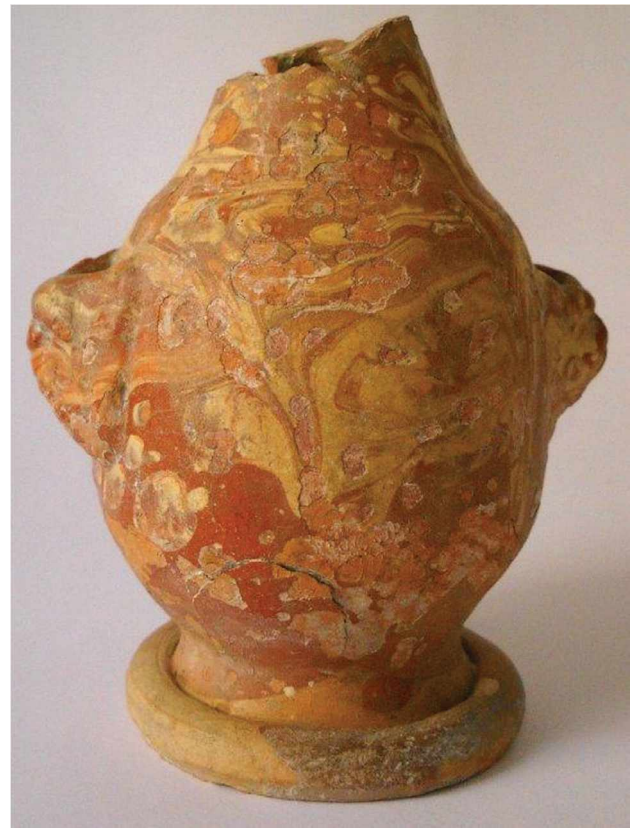
**Figure 29**

Fragment of a closed vessel, probably a costrel but possibly a jug. The inside has a colorless glaze; the outside has a well executed marbled decoration in red, black and white with splashes of green which were probably added after the first firing. Found at the Abbey of San Salvatore a Settimo, just a few miles west of Florence. Height (maximum) of fragment 14.5 cm, diameter of base 9 cm.

Deposits of the Gruppo Archeologico di Scandicci, Rinaldi, Florence.

belonging to the class of '*graffita tarda*', 60% of those examined had the back covered with transparent glaze while 40% were left completely bare on the back.

Except for the moulded dishes from Montelupo mentioned above, attempting to distinguish the various production centers of marbled wares on the basis of shape would appear to be problematic. With only one exception, (Figure 17a–b) the pottery found at Pontorme, Empoli and Florence has shapes that correspond to those in the Pisan repertory published by Graziella Berti in 1997 (Berti 1997, 389–391). A re-examination of the pottery from one of the most significant finds of marbled wares in Tuscany, that from the Medici Fortress in Grosseto published in 1980, showed that all of the plates and bowls correspond to one of the Pisan shapes (and they may actually be from Pisa). Of the various marbled vessels in the museum in Grosseto (Figures 5, 6, 8, 9, 28 and 30), only a small flask with a thick foot ring from the Abbey of San Rabano (Figure 30) has a shape that, to our knowledge, is not part of the Pisan repertoire and a gourd shaped flask (Figure 28) with two loops (rather than the usual four) which is probably a botched attempt to make a polychrome marbled surface, differs also in the shape of the neck and mouth and may be a local product. In relation to the finds from Grosseto it should be noted that the clay used for all of the



**Figure 30**

Small costrel with a thick ring around the foot and two lugs; red and white marbled decoration, transparent glaze on the inside and outside (now mostly flaked off). The mouth and most of the neck is missing. The smaller size (base diameter 6.4 cm) has also been found in Florence but the thick ring around the base is unknown among the Valdarno finds. The neck and mouth probably resembled the one shown in Figure 17. Found at the Abbey of San Rabano, just south of Grosseto. Height (maximum) 12.5 cm.

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eight marbled bowls found in the Medici Fortress, described as '*2.5 YR 5/6 marrone vivo*' in the catalogue (Francovich and Gelichi 1980, nos.126–133) is quite a dark orange and does not correspond to the light buff colored plaster used to reconstruct them which is visible in the photographs, especially in Figure 5. The same observation may be made for the reconstructions from Pontorme where the clay used for both the '*graffita tarda*' and the marbled ware was consistently a light brick-red colour, while the plaster used for restoring them varies from a deep purple brown (Figure 3) to a light tan (Figure 15).

## The technology

### Production techniques used for making marbled pottery

At Pontorme, as in Pisa, many different variations of marbled pottery have been found. The most common is the red and white type which is called BR, but there are also examples of the other two-colour type in black and white BN (*bianco e nero*). The three-colour type in black, white and red (TRI) is also quite common especially in the early years of production (1575–1625). All three of these types of marbled ware also exist in versions to which the colour green has been added in various ways: before the first firing it has been added to the slips and swirled around so as to form a four colour marbled effect (Figures 5, 25b and 26a–b); it has been applied with a brush on the marbled surface after the first firing (Figure 22); it has been splashed on the marbled surface either over or under the transparent glaze to form green drops and blobs after the first firing (Figure 2 and 29). It should be recalled that in their groundbreaking study of Pisan slipware, G. Berti and Tongiorgi were able to establish that for the *'graffita tarda'*, the colour red was applied before the first firing and the colour green after the first firing (Berti and Tongiorgi, 1982, 163, note 13), so retouching the biscuit-fired vessel with green was evidently a normal technique in the production of Tuscan slipware. A curious aspect related to the use of the green glaze is the fact that before firing it is a dull grey colour, consequently the potter really had no idea of what the completed marbled vessel was going to look like. In fact, some of the biscuit fired fragments found, like the costrel neck in Figure 19 may have been splashed with green which that cannot be distinguished without chemical analysis.

It has been stated that the red and white marbled ware was obtained by pouring a white slip directly on to the bare surface of the unfired vessel (Berti 1989, 161). This is not true and numerous experiments conducted with a professional potter have demonstrated that it is not possible to make marbled pottery this way. In order to create the marbling effect the potter must pour the slips (both red and white in this case) onto a surface that has been covered with a red slip (*barbottina*) that is still wet.<sup>13</sup> This is necessary because of a particular technical aspect which, for the creation of a marbling effect, requires that the vessel be wet and the slips quite fluid so that they can run across the surface to be decorated. If the surface is too dry, instead of flowing across the vessel, the slips will condense and be immediately absorbed by the porous surface of the earthenware, thus creating spots and blotches rather than the smooth, flowing lines characteristic of marble, agate and the other semi-precious stones. Amongst the biscuit wares found at Pontorme there were several fragments that were evidence of attempts to create the BR marbled pottery with this quicker and more economical method. There are also numerous examples

of BR in which the potter has swiped the bowl with a brush, usually in a figure eight motion, to move the slips around (Figures 6, 7 and 10). Of course, it was possible to make the BR marbled pottery using the reverse procedure, that is, pouring the red slip on to a vessel that had been dipped in white slip, as described by Mannoni (Mannoni 1975, 71) for some marbled wares found in Genoa, but this technique was rarely if ever used in Tuscany. In order to make the black and white (BN) and the polychrome (TRI) marbled decoration the vessel was always covered with a white slip and the red, white and black slips were poured on to it while it was still damp.

As mentioned earlier, the bowls (*catini* and *ciotole*, Shapes 4 and 5) are the only shapes that have the marbled decoration on both the inside and outside. The plates, dishes and shallow bowls (Shapes 1, 2 and 3) have a transparent glaze on the back side and the flasks (Shape 6) are, of course, glazed on the inside. Apart from the number of colours used, the marbling decoration on both sides of the bowls is indicative of a vessel of a certain quality and presumably also a higher price because it represented not only the use of a larger quantity of raw materials but the production also required much more time because the decoration had to be applied in two separate phases, with that on the outside being applied only when the inside was completely dry (or *vice versa*). It is not unusual to find bowls that have one kind of marbling on the inside and another kind on the outside, usually TRI or TRI with green splashes on the inside and plain red and white (BR) on the outside (Figure 17a–b and 25a–b).

Like maiolica and like most of the other types of slipware, marbled pottery required two firings. Except for a few mould made shapes from Montelupo, mentioned previously, the vessel was thrown on a wheel (some of the more complex shapes from Montelupo may have been made using both techniques). When it was dry, it was covered with slip, red or white depending on the type, and then the other coloured slips were poured on it and made to flow across the surface by means of the rapid rotating motions, back and forth, left and right, made by the potter who was holding the vessel in his hands. When the decoration was completed, the vessel was fired for the first time; after the first firing it was entirely covered with a transparent lead glaze and fired for a second time. In some cases this glaze is completely colourless, while in others it tends to be quite yellow so that the white slip underneath it appears as a creamy ivory colour. For this reason in some of the early descriptions of archeological finds marbled ware is described as being 'marbled in yellow' (Francovich and Gelichi, 1980, cat. nos.127–130).



It is obvious that the true marbleizing decoration, which required a certain agility in the manipulation by the potter, could not be applied to very large sized objects. In order to obtain an effect that imitated semi-precious stones, on the large pots (*conche*, in which they planted small trees like lemons) and oil jars (*orci*) they had to use the splashing and dribbling techniques called '*schizzata*' or '*maculata*', spraying the colours on the surface of the vessel by flipping the glazes from a brush and other techniques.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dott.ssa Francesca Colmayer and Dott.ssa M G Celuzza for showing me the marbled vessels in the Museo Archeologico in Grosseto.

## Endnotes

- 1 For a definition of all the types of slipware in use in Tuscany, see Moore Valeri, 2004, 21–30.
- 2 The technique used to make the Staffordshire marbled ware was essentially the same as that used in Tuscany, however some of the Staffordshire pieces have been marbled and then feathered by drawing a quill through the wet slips. This latter technique does not seem to have ever been used in Tuscany.
- 3 For marbled pottery in Bologna, see Librenti 1993, 65; for Lombardy, Nepoti 1993, 129–131; for the Veneto, Saccardo 1993, 150–151 and Bertacchi 1977, 17 and 41–43; for Carpi, Reggi 1981, 80–81; for Argenta, Gelichi 1992, 60e, fig.2, no.8a, 54; for San Giovanni in Persiceto, Gelichi 1986, 62–63; for Liguria, Mannoni 1975, 70–71.
- 4 For a list of potters working at Pontorme in the 16th century see Guerrini 1990, 385–386.
- 5 For the classification of marbled ware on the basis of colour, see Berti 1997, 373.
- 6 For incised slipware from Borgo San Lorenzo, see Moore Valeri 2001; 2002.
- 7 Besides the Pisan examples mentioned, there are also similar flasks from excavations at Borgo San Lorenzo, however, they are decorated with splashing (*schizzata*) rather than marbled (Moore Valeri 2002, 72, fig.5); moreover flasks with lion headed loops were produced at Carpi in incised slipware (Reggi 1981, 52–53) and at Lugo in a version with two loops rather than four (Gelichi 1991, Tav X)
- 8 See, for example Francovich *et al* 1978, 172, no.813.
- 9 A blue and white marbled ware would appear to be quite common in the Veneto in this era: see Bertacchi 1977, cat. nos.61–62, 64–70.
- 10 For Prato see Francovich *et al* 1978, 118 (Fase I-taglio 2, 18th–20th century; 172, vano delta phase II, a 17th century layer); For Grosseto see: Francovich and Gelichi 1980, 20, 131–137, in an 18th-century context; for Pistoia see: Vannini 1987, 602; for downtown Florence (Viale Giovane Italia) see Barbieri *et al*, 1985, 275, in particular the comment by F.Berti on (p. 281) suggesting a date of 1570–1580; for Vaiano see: Francovich and Vannini 1976, 74 (Strato I, final years of the 16th century). It is also very significant that not a single fragment of marbled pottery (or '*graffita tarda*' with poppies), was found among the more than 50,000 fragments of pottery excavated at the slipware kiln in Piazza Cavour at Castelfiorentino where production seems to have come to an end in the final decades of the 16th century (Moore Valeri and Marini 2012, 144.
- 11 Pers.comm. Marcella Giorgio, July 2012.
- 12 *eg* Thornton and Wilson 2009, nos.456–459, 681–683. For the bottle shape see Hurst *et al* 1986, fig.33, 37.
- 13 In ceramic terminology in Italian a distinction is made between *ingobbio* (a white slip) and *barbottina* (a coloured slip): see Berti *et al* 2002, 11.

**Résumé**

Une poterie dont la décoration de surface fait entrer en jeu différentes couleurs de barbotine pour imiter le marbre et autres pierres semi-précieuses était fabriquée en Toscane, aux alentours d'une période située entre 1570 et 1650. La poterie marbrée est, sous de nombreux aspects, un produit typique de la Contre-Réforme. Il ne fait pas de doute qu'elle était fabriquée à Pise, et de récentes découvertes ont révélé qu'elle était également produite dans différentes villes des rives du fleuve Arno, entre Florence et le littoral tyrrhénien. Cet exposé se propose d'explorer trois aspects principaux de la poterie toscane marbrée : la raison, les méthodes et le lieu de sa fabrication.

**Zusammenfassung**

Zwischen etwa 1570 und 1650 wurde in der Toskana Keramikware hergestellt, deren Oberfläche mit verschiedenfarbigem Schlicker verziert wurde, um Marmor oder andere Halbedelsteine zu imitieren. Marmorierte Keramik ist in vielerlei Hinsicht ein typisches Erzeugnis der Gegenreformation. Sie wurde sicherlich in Pisa hergestellt, und neuere Funde haben gezeigt, dass sie auch in einigen anderen Städten entlang des Arno zwischen Florenz und der tyrrhenischen Küste produziert wurde. Dieser Artikel macht den Vorschlag, drei Hauptaspekte der marmorierten Keramik zu untersuchen: warum, wo und wie sie hergestellt wurde.