

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: IMITATION AND ADAPTATION IN  
*ISTORIATO* MAIOLICA: A CASE-STUDY OF  
THE ANNE DE MONTMORENCY SERVICE,  
1535

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This thesis examines the production of narrative (*istoriato*) maiolica ceramics in sixteenth-century Urbino, particularly the practice of adapting pre-existing woodcuts and engravings to the painted scenes on the surfaces of these objects. I perform this analysis through a case-study of the Anne de Montmorency tableware service, manufactured in the workshop of Guido Durantino in 1535. *Istoriato* maiolica studies have often included the art-historical convention of the early modern artist as a solitary individual or genius. I will destabilize this trope by focusing on a prominent service for a powerful aristocrat that was nonetheless designed by anonymous artisans. I assert that the unique circumstances of the duchy of Urbino enabled artisans to compose narrative paintings of classical stories within the confines of their own workshop. With this in mind, I analyze the processes and design practices of these artisans through their products, and offer new conclusions about their compositional choices.



IMITATION AND ADAPTION IN *ISTORIATO* MAIOLICA:  
A CASE-STUDY OF THE ANNE DE MONTMORENCY SERVICE, 1535

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Advisory Committee:  
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## Introduction

Maiolica, a type of tin-glazed pottery, first appeared in the Italian peninsula in the thirteenth century, growing in both popularity and diversity of style over the following three centuries. Italian potters initially mimicked Spanish and Islamic modes of decoration on these objects, producing works painted with non-figurative geometric and floral patterns. Over time, Italian maiolica workshops began to include more figurative decoration on their products, resulting in “*istoriato*” wares that were characterized by detailed narrative images.<sup>1</sup> These compositions could be religious or secular in nature, depending on the use of the ceramic object in question. *Istoriato* objects meant for banqueting were usually painted with scenes from Greco-Roman myth and history—literary subjects that were also depicted by more well-known painters and sculptors across the peninsula.

Maiolica was a popular medium for tableware in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because the brightly-painted ceramics could provide great

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<sup>1</sup> *Istoriato*, an adjective, comes from the Italian word *istoria* (also *storia* or *historia*), which can be used to mean either “history” or “story,” more generally. Architect and art theorist Leon Battista Alberti used the word *istoria* to describe artistic compositions that told stories—i.e., were narrative in nature. His treatise *On Painting* described a set of guidelines for composing pleasing *istorie*, based on classical rhetorical structures.

Anthony Grafton notes that while Cicero distinguishes between *historia* and *fabula*, history versus fable, Alberti does not make “an absolute distinction” between the two. See *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 127-128. It is uncertain whether or not maiolica painters engaged with such art-theoretical concepts, although there is no reason to suppose that they did not. See Leon Battista Alberti and Luigi Mallé, *Della Pittura* (Florence: Sansoni, 1950).



visual enjoyment at a lower cost than silver tableware.<sup>2</sup> Evidence suggests that *istoriato* tableware services were usually purchased by noble families in court cities.<sup>3</sup> Since aristocrats owned and used these objects, it is tempting to think of the concurrent images as within their sole purview as well.<sup>4</sup> However, we cannot forget that the artisans who made *istoriato* wares were important actors in this visual culture. As I will show, the unique circumstances of the duchy of Urbino meant that its artisans possessed enough erudition and independence to compose some visual narratives within the confines of their workshop. Urbino was home to a well-established ceramics industry, alongside a ducal court that favored secular narratives, and housed an influential collection of books, engravings, and woodcuts. These informed the pictorial compositions of the city's maiolica production.<sup>5</sup> In this study, I propose that even though *istoriato* wares are artifacts

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<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo de' Medici famously said of his non-*istoriato* maiolica service: "...I value these as if they were made of silver, on account of their excellence and rarity, as I say, and the fact that they are a novelty to us here." Luke Syson and Dora Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: British Museum Press, 2001), 215.

<sup>3</sup> Most *istoriato* maiolica came from court centers and was bought by aristocrats. Maiolica produced near larger, more mercantile cities tended to have floral and geometric patterns or simpler figural decoration, such as busts in profile. Wealthy businessmen in Florence and other large Italian cities certainly appreciated secular stories in painted form—but not on their dishes. As I will discuss in the first chapter, republican and oligarchic cities were wary of certain kinds of conspicuous consumption.

<sup>4</sup> As I begin to discuss court culture, it is important to distinguish between aristocrats and wealthy merchants or bankers. While Lorenzo de' Medici, for example, was powerful and influential in Florence, he did not hold a hereditary title that legitimized his political power. Urbino, like other aristocratic court centers, was a feudal territory. The rulers of Urbino—the Montefeltro and Della Rovere families—inherited their titles and cultivated their military power as a way to gain wealth and make political alliances with neighboring courts and republics. Ultimately, they owed fealty to the pope. Otherwise, they had ultimate control over their territory and their subjects. For further discussion of aristocratic courts and their art patronage, see Bram Kempers, *Painting, Power and Patronage* (New York: Penguin Press, 1987) and Ian Verstegen, ed., *Patronage and Dynasty: The Rise of the Della Rovere in Renaissance Italy* (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> For general reading about the printed book, authors, and audiences in Italy, see Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers, and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For more information on the printed image, see Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004) and Evelyn Lincoln, *The Invention of the Italian Renaissance Printmaker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).



integral to the splendor and magnificence of aristocratic households, they also reveal how maiolica artisans approached myth and history, as well as their own awareness of artistic developments in the world around them.<sup>6</sup>

I will demonstrate this through the case-study of the Anne de Montmorency tableware service manufactured by the ceramics workshop of Guido Durantino in 1535. This was likely a diplomatic gift from Francesco Maria I della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, to Montmorency, who was a Marshal and future Constable of France, and who joined Francesco Maria as a key leader during the War of the League of Cognac.<sup>7</sup> Though nineteen pieces have been identified by Timothy Wilson and J.V.G. Mallet, mine is the first comprehensive study of this service. The full list of known objects, which includes twelve extant pieces scattered across nine museums, can be found in my appendix. In order to illustrate the compositional process of the workshop, I have brought together photographs of the ceramic objects, as well as their reference images and comparative artworks. Despite the prestige of the commission, this service shows little evidence of direct engagement from the patron in terms of reference images, subjects, and the appearance of the finished products. Visual analysis reveals that the anonymous artisans exercised a surprising amount of creative autonomy.

More broadly, the goal of this study is to explore new ways of thinking about maiolica. The field of decorative arts has not escaped the art-historical

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Wilson, Patricia Collins, and Hugo Blake, *Ceramic Art of the Italian Renaissance* (London: British Museum Publications, 1987), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Brigitte Bedos Rezak, *Anne de Montmorency: seigneur de la Renaissance* (Paris: Editions Publisud, 1990), 359-363. Montmorency was appointed Marshal of France in 1522 and Constable of France in 1538. These were important positions in Francis I's council. The King counted on him as a general as well as an advisor.



convention of the early modern artist as a solitary individual or genius. Scholars still seek to identify maiolica painters by name and to catalogue their *oeuvres*. However, most of these painters, including those employed by Guido Durantino, were never identified on their artworks. As the artist's identity was rarely privileged by maiolica consumers, we may find it worthwhile to investigate other ways of understanding this body of work. For example, these objects can serve as a fascinating record of print reception among a working-class population, as well as a record of maiolica artisans' methods. The process of developing these *istoriato* paintings was much more collaborative than solitary.

The bulk of the information on individual maiolica objects exists within museum catalogues. Given the broad and disparate nature of most maiolica collections, these publications often focus on the general styles of periods and regions. While there is great value in fully cataloguing these objects, writing from within the confines of a single collection can be limiting when we consider that most services are scattered across many locations.<sup>8</sup> The fragmentary survival of maiolica services is a great challenge for scholars. Few services have as many extant pieces as the Montmorency commission. Some items have been lost due to breakage, while others may have ended up unidentified in collections where they are lost to the record. Tracking down lost pieces is a matter of ongoing research for contemporary maiolica scholars. Painted coats-of-arms are invaluable for reconstructing services, as are a patron's personal emblems

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<sup>8</sup> The so-called "Correr Service," executed by Nicola da Urbino and held by the Museo Correr in Venice, is perhaps the only maiolica service united in one museum collection. For the most part, past collecting practices have disseminated individual objects across the globe.



(*imprese*).<sup>9</sup> In many cases, personal inventories, workshop records, and patrons' letters are also used to identify lost pieces or confirm the size of the original set.

There are a few well-known services that are often referenced by scholars. One such is the service given to Lorenzo the Magnificent by Roberto Malatesta in the late fifteenth century, though this set did not include narrative images.<sup>10</sup> There is also some documentary evidence surrounding the commissions of the Della Rovere family in Urbino, particularly the duchess Eleanora Gonzaga, wife of Francesco Maria I. In 1524 she gave a set to her mother Isabella d'Este and later acted as a liaison for her brother and sister-in-law, Federico Gonzaga and Margherita Paleologa, in Mantua. Eleanora and Isabella's correspondence about this service has illuminated our understanding of *istoriato* maiolica use.<sup>11</sup> We also know that Eleanora's son, Duke Guidobaldo II, was a maiolica patron: in the second edition of his *Lives of the Artists* (1568), Vasari mentions an episode in which the young duke commissioned maiolica designs from the Venetian painter, Battista Franco, for a set intended for the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> *Imprese* (singular: *impresa*) are meaningful emblems with symbolic significance for an individual. They are not usually composite images like coats-of-arms, but rather single animals, plants, or other objects. Examples include lilies, ermines, and sailing ships. They often appear in domestic contexts—on small, personal objects and inlaid into furniture, carved into molding, and painted on walls. There are no *imprese* on the Montmorency service, though many are found on Isabella d'Este's famous service. The d'Este service was a gift from mother to daughter, so a greater level of personalization is not surprising.

<sup>10</sup> Referenced both in Richard Goldthwaite, "The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica," *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, no.1 (1989): 11, and Syson and Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 215-16. Roberto Malatesta was the lord of Rimini, a city north of the duchy of Urbino, on the Adriatic.

<sup>11</sup> These services were the topic of Lisa Boutin's dissertation titled "Displaying Identity in the Mantuan Court : The Maiolica of Isabella d'Este, Federico II Gonzaga, and Margherita Paleologa" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011). Nicola da Urbino was an occasional business partner of Guido Durantino, whose workshop was chosen instead of his for the services sent to Anne de Montmorency and the French cardinal Antoine Duprat.

<sup>12</sup> Syson and Thornton reference this passage in *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 214. The full quotation from Vasari's life of Battista Franco reads:



direct participation of a panel or fresco painter in maiolica designs was quite unusual, but it speaks to the political importance of the proposed gift. Sadly, these drawings have not been recovered.

Though attribution has been a common pursuit among maiolica scholars, only a handful of painters have been identified by name. Most surviving *istoriato* works are unsigned, implying that the cachet of a particular painter's name was not usually a factor for maiolica consumers. Two of these painters have now been written about extensively: Nicola di Gabriele Sbraghe ("da Urbino") and Francesco Xanto Avelli.<sup>13</sup> They were both active in Urbino by the 1520s. Much work has been done to attribute unsigned pieces to either of these artists. Nicola da Urbino has been identified as the main painter of the d'Este and Gonzaga services. In other cases, historians have created pseudonyms, such as the "Milan Marsyas Painter," to track works that seem to have been painted by the same anonymous hand.<sup>14</sup> When even that is not possible, variations in palette and style

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Laonde finita del tutto, rimasero poco sodisfatti il duca Guidobaldo, il Genga e tutti gl'altri che da costui aspettavano gran cose e simili al bel disegno che egli mostrò loro da principio. E nel vero, per fare un bel disegno Battista non avea pari e si potea dir valente uomo. La qual cosa conoscendo quel Duca, e pensando che i suoi disegni, messi in opera da coloro che lavoravano eccellentemente vasi di terra a Castel Durante, i quali si erano molto serviti delle stampe di Raffaello da Urbino e di quelle d'altri valentuomini, riuscirebbono benissimo, fece fare a Battista infiniti disegni, che, messi in opera in quella sorte di terra gentilissima sopra tutte l'altre d'Italia, riuscirono cosa rara. Onde ne furono fatti tanti e di tante sorte vasi, quanti sarebbero bastati e stati orrevoli in una credenza reale: e le pitture che in essi furono fatte non sarebbero state migliori quando fussero state fatte a olio da eccellentissimi maestri. Di questi vasi adunque, che molto rassomigliano, quanto alla qualità della terra, quell'antica che in Arezzo si lavorava anticamente al tempo di Porsena re di Toscana, mandò il detto duca Guidobaldo una credenza doppia a Carlo Quinto imperadore, et una al cardinal Farnese, fratello della signora Vittoria sua consorte.

Giorgio Vasari, Rosanna Bettarini, and Paola Barocchi, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568* (Florence: Sansoni, 1966), 5:465.

<sup>13</sup> See J.V.G. Mallet, et al., *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance* (London: The Wallace Collection, 2007). J.V.G. Mallet's catalogue of the works of Francesco Xanto Avelli is essential reading. Xanto is a fascinating figure, but quite exceptional among maiolica painters.

<sup>14</sup> This artist was active in Urbino; the appellation "Milan Marsyas Painter" comes from a plate depicting Marsyas in Milan's Castello Sforzesco collection. See "Plate with Perseus and Andromeda,"



allow scholars to attribute a work to a certain city or decade. These systems are invaluable, allowing us to discuss these objects with greater precision.

It is important to note that when names do appear on dishes, the individual's role in production is not always clear. For all the objects marked with the name of painters like Nicola da Urbino or Francesco Xanto Avelli, there are many more marked with the name of a workshop owner.<sup>15</sup> These owners could be potters or painters by trade, but sometimes they were simply businessmen. The owner would oversee a larger staff of artisans that included established professionals as well as apprentices.

This business model seems to have been necessary for a high-profile maiolica workshop.<sup>16</sup> Though the *bottega* model was standard for most Renaissance artisans, ceramic workshops were more inclined towards mass production than painting or sculpture workshops, requiring a large and differentiated staff. Records show that maiolica wares were produced quickly, efficiently, and in bulk.<sup>17</sup> While a fresco painter or sculptor might spend years on one commission, a maiolica workshop could complete an *istoriato* tableware service with dozens of pieces within a matter of months.

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Walters Art Museum, accessed Sept. 16, 2014, <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/10133/plate-with-perseus-and-andromeda/>.

<sup>15</sup> There are only five extant pieces that credit Nicola da Urbino in their production, and not all of these explicitly reference him as a painter. Other works have been attributed to him based on similarities in style.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Wilson comments:

There is little direct information on the size and organization of maiolica workshops. Potteries varied from tiny 'one-man-and-a-dog' operations to complex businesses with several premises and a high degree of specialization between painters, kiln-stackers, turners, and so on. Most of the 'artistic' maiolica in this book was probably made in relatively large workshops and painted by specialist painters, some of whom were independent journeymen working on a piece-work basis. Sometimes the head of the workshop was its best painter; sometimes, on the other hand, he may have been an entrepreneur with only managerial control of the actual production." *Ceramic Art of the Italian Renaissance*. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Richard A. Goldthwaite, "The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica," 8-9.



The workshop of Guido Durantino functioned in such a manner. Except for a single plate that names both Nicola da Urbino and Guido Durantino on the reverse, the works produced by Guido's *bottega* have not been attributed to one artist or another; rather, they contain evidence of multiple hands. J.V.G. Mallet has argued quite convincingly that Guido was likely not a painter in his own workshop, but, rather, served as a supervisor.<sup>18</sup> He supports his argument with the records of a fascinating civil suit. In 1530, several of Urbino's ceramics workshop owners were sued by a bloc of their employees seeking higher wages.<sup>19</sup> Guido is named as one of the workshop owners, alongside Nicola da Urbino. Only one of the nine plaintiff employees (Francesco da Rovigo, believed to be the painter Francesco Xanto Avelli) has been credited on known maiolica works. This once again emphasizes that maiolica services were produced collectively by artisans working in groups under the brand name of the workshop owner.

With this large workshop structure in mind, let us take a moment to consider the roles involved in producing a commissioned set of *istoriato* maiolica. First, a go-between (a friend or business agent of the patron) must contact the workshop owner about the prospective commission. These two would likely establish some sort of contract before the project went forward. This would include the number and type of pieces, as well as pricing and a prospective delivery date. The patron and the workshop staff decided what would appear on each piece. The patron would indicate if they wanted coats-of-arms or *imprese* to

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<sup>18</sup> J.V.G. Mallet, "In Bottega di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," *The Burlington Magazine* 129, no. 1010 (1987): 284-298.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.



appear on the dishes. The subject matter was another question. It is unclear whether the patron or the workshop decided which scenes would be portrayed—no doubt this varied based on the commission and the participants. Lisa Boutin has argued that the stories depicted on the known pieces of the d'Este service characterize Isabella as a learned woman with a humanist background; but no surviving documentation indicates who made these choices.<sup>20</sup> This is an important question to keep in mind as we consider workshop practices. A patron could mandate general themes without specifying every single scene, leaving room for the workshop to exercise its own powers of invention.

Once the details of commission were settled, the production of the service could begin. While painters are often fore-fronted in the study of maiolica, we should not make the mistake of crediting only them for the creation of these pieces. Many other workshop employees played important roles in maiolica production. The potter produced the forms themselves, which could often be quite complex. Plates and dishes sometimes featured textured patterns that complimented the painted decoration, and other types of objects, like flasks or ewers, could be even more sculptural. After the potter molded a particular form, the clay would be glazed with tin, and either the potter or a kiln assistant would take charge of the firing process, which was a highly technical task in itself. Before a fired piece was painted, the painter or an assistant would mix the pigments into paint and construct brushes, which needed to be quite fine given the small scale of the paintings.

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<sup>20</sup> Boutin, "Displaying Identity in the Mantuan Court: The Maiolica of Isabella d'Este, Federico II Gonzaga, and Margherita Paleologa," 100-138.



Designing compositions for each maiolica painting was a complex process which I will discuss in depth through my case-study of the Montmorency service. *Istoriato* maiolica workshops illustrated a plethora of mythological and historical scenes on their products. Rather than construct entirely original compositions for each *istoriato* scene, workshops would often adapt woodcuts or engravings that illustrated the same scene. This practice suited the fast-paced production timeline for services. This also complicates the idea of authorship. Ultimately, there were multiple minds involved in the creation of these scenes. Maiolica workshops in Urbino often adapted prints by the prolific engraver Marcantonio Raimondi that were in turn inspired by paintings or drawings by artists such as Raphael.

This was more than simple copying. The designer of such compositions had to accommodate each scene on the specific form of the pottery, whether it was a small plate, a large platter, a segmented ewer, a candlestick, or another form. Objects like candlesticks that allowed for simultaneous viewing of adjacent surfaces and scenes were the most complicated. Also, in the case of later *istoriato* pieces, the narrative scene might be accompanied by a border of *groteschi* or interwoven objects that was also designed and adapted for a specific surface.<sup>21</sup> These could have been designed by the same person as the narrative scenes, or by a different person in the workshop who specialized in *groteschi*.

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<sup>21</sup>*Groteschi* and figurative border patterns could be the topic of another study in their own right. *Groteschi* were whimsical, anthropomorphic figures that were painted on the walls of some ancient Roman homes, and became quite widespread in domestic painting during the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. Humans, animals, and scrolling plant forms would be combined in bizarre, highly elaborate, ornamental, non-narrative compositions. It would be useful to track recurring *grotesche* patterns across maiolica objects; this method could help unite objects from the same workshop or even the same service.



It is unclear if composition design was left to the painters or if there was a separate employee charged with this task. In small workshops, it is most likely that a maiolica painter would also design his own compositions. In a large workshop, assigning one talented individual to the task of designing and drawing each composition may have helped create uniformity among products painted by different hands. It would also accelerate the assembly-line process. The painters could then transform the monochrome drawings into lively, colorful paintings we see on the final products.

When this process was repeated for the dozens of objects that make up one maiolica service, the result was one very complex collaborative work—or, perhaps, many individual works meant to exist in dialogue with each other. Given the importance of prints to maiolica production, we should look to scholars of print culture to help us parse out these issues of mass production and originality, engaging with Renaissance art-theoretical concepts such as *invenzione*.

Who has ownership over an image? When is imitating an artwork simply copying? And how do we read compositional changes as image reception? Prints were often based on the drawings of artists other than the engraver—and these drawings could easily be based on a painting or sculpture by yet another hand. *Istoriato* maiolica complicates the process by adding another level of engagement in the production of a single work. Though scholars have long acknowledged that *istoriato* compositions are based on prints, the intellectual processes of the workshop deserve closer examination. I hope to re-orient the



discussion of these objects in such a way as to give these anonymous workshop artists greater credit for their creativity and agency. Their compositional choices—and the sources they drew from—reveal a great deal about their education and cultural sophistication, and beyond that, of their extremely wealthy customers.



## Chapter 1: The Market for *Istoriato* Maiolica in Urbino

Located near the Adriatic coast in the region of Italy called Le Marche, the duchy of Urbino was governed by two powerful noble families during the Renaissance: the Montefeltro, followed by the Della Rovere.<sup>22</sup> The Montefeltro and Della Rovere were *condottieri*, wealthy warlords, who led armies in times of war and presided over a refined court during times of peace. As Urbino was one of the Papal States, these families owed allegiance to the Pope and ruled at his pleasure. Although the ducal seat—the walled medieval city of Urbino—is small compared to Rome, Venice, and Florence, the wealthy and erudite court fostered its own artistic sphere.<sup>23</sup>

By 1535, the year that Guido Durantino's workshop produced the Anne de Montmorency tableware service, the duchy of Urbino was the leading producer of *istoriato* maiolica. Several factors led to this development. The ready availability of natural resources such as clay, water, and firewood in this relatively rural area made it an excellent site for ceramics manufacture.<sup>24</sup> In the first decades of the sixteenth century, Urbino's strong ceramics industry began creating *istoriato* wares in response to courtly patrons' demands for sumptuous domestic objects. Though local artisans were not educated at the level of these courtiers, the new

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<sup>22</sup> Francesco Maria I Della Rovere was the first Delle Rovere duke of Urbino. He was a blood relation of the Montefeltro family and inherited the ducal title when there was no Montefeltro son to continue the line.

<sup>23</sup> As Alison Cole notes, "the regional courts, with their hunger for novelty, love of magnificence, and thirst for recognition, played a key role in the dissemination and development of Renaissance ideas. The way they seized on the latest trends and innovations, or adapted them to suit local traditions and political agendas, helps to account for the richness and diversity of Italian art during this period." *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Goldthwaite, "The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica," 5-6.



proliferation of printed artworks and books in Italy helped them develop narrative compositions that appealed to their learned audience.<sup>25</sup> In this chapter, I will examine each of these factors in turn.

### *The ceramics industry in Urbino*

The ready availability of clay, wood, and water had encouraged the production of slipware pottery in Le Marche long before the technology of tin-glazed ceramics reached the Italian peninsula. By the fifteenth century, potters in the duchy of Urbino had begun to produce maiolica. Inspired by Spanish imports, the earliest Italian maiolica works featured elaborate geometric and floral patterns. These ornamental patterns were sometimes joined by coats-of-arms and simple heraldic emblems. In the following decades, Italian artists experimented with the addition of multiple registers with contrasting patterns, Latin text, and animal and human figures.

Much of our technical knowledge of Italian maiolica production comes from Cipriano Piccolpasso, who wrote the 1548 treatise *The Three Books of the Potter's Art* [Pl. 1.1]. Piccolpasso was not an artisan himself, but rather the son of an impoverished but noble family from Castel Durante, a maiolica production center located outside of the city of Urbino.<sup>26</sup> From Piccolpasso, we learn that the ceramics industry of the duchy of Urbino was made possible by the fine clay of

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<sup>25</sup> “While hundreds of laborers and artisans were sucked into the great artistic projects of the courts, it was the nobility who dictated the form of most of their endeavors.” Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Cipriano Piccolpasso, R. W. Lightbown, and Alan Caiger-Smith, *The Three Books of the Potter's Art: A Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London*, (London: Scholar Press, 1980), 1: xi-xii.



the Metauro River, which runs northwest to southeast from the Apennine Mountains near the province of Arezzo to the sea near the city of Fano.

In an evocative passage, Piccolpasso writes about the seasonal nature of harvesting clay from the Metauro:

When the rains fall in the Apennines, at the foot of which the said river rises, its waters swell and become turbid, and coursing thus turbid along their bed they leave behind the finer particles of the soil which in their downward flow they carry off from both banks. These particles accumulate above the sands of this river to the depth of a foot or two. They are then collected and heaps are made of them alongside the river bed.

He compares this to similar methods in cities like Ravenna and Rimini, and contrasts it to the digging method found in other cities like Ancona. Whatever the method of harvest, he emphasizes that “wherever the earth is white, or contains *genga*, in all these places clay for making pottery can be got.”<sup>27</sup>

The paleness of Metauro clay was an important quality for maiolica. It would fire to a fine buff color that did not show through the white tin-glaze layer which was the ground for painted designs.<sup>28</sup> Piccolpasso also tells us that kilns in the Metauro region were built from an abundant volcanic rock called tufa, which is light, porous, and easily cut.<sup>29</sup> Wood for the constant kiln fires was also easily obtained locally, as the region was partially forested. The tin that produced the distinctive white glaze of maiolica had to be imported—England was the best-known source.<sup>30</sup> Metals used for pigments were also imported from other areas of Europe. When heated, these metal-based pigments would chemically bond with

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2: 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2: xvi.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2:57.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, Collins, and Blake, *Ceramic Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 24.



the tin glaze, resulting in the vivid blues, greens, yellows, and reds that characterize Italian maiolica.

The traditional “potter’s quarter” in the city of Urbino, called the Borgo di San Paolo, housed many well-known maiolica workshops.<sup>31</sup> Other workshops were located in Piccolpasso’s hometown of Castel Durante and the seaside city of Pesaro, both within the greater realm of Urbino.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, little is known about the earliest *botteghe* in this area. Fifteenth century works from Le Marche tend to feature busts in profile and other small figural vignettes set into fields of Gothic foliate patterns. Inspired by maiolica wares from Spain, these painters emphasized intricate surface patterns.

However, the inclusion of increasingly naturalistic figures amidst ornamental patterns led to the development of *istoriato* painting.<sup>33</sup>

Such a style can be seen in a small jar with hunting scenes, now in the British Museum collection, which Timothy Wilson has identified as a product of Pesaro ca. 1480-1500 [Pl. 1.2].<sup>34</sup> The surface is divided into four horizontal registers with varied foliate patterns, all executed in shades of blue, green, terracotta, and yellow over the classic white ground. The widest register contains four separate figural scenes in roundels amidst a foliate pattern. In each scene, human figures perform hunting activities—for example, blowing a horn or striding through a landscape with a hawk and hound. Each scene is

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<sup>31</sup> Boutin, "Displaying Identity in the Mantuan Court : The Maiolica of Isabella d'Este, Federico II Gonzaga, and Margherita Paleologa," 73.

<sup>32</sup> Castel Durante (now known as Urbania) is located about 17 km from the city of Urbino. Pesaro is located about 23 km, along the coast.

<sup>33</sup> Dora Thornton and Timothy Wilson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* (London: British Museum, 2009), 58-68 .

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.



deliberately oriented in a landscape, with green grass and small trees made distant through atmospheric perspective. Though stiff and simple, these pastoral scenes show a deliberate move away from Hispano-Moresque abstraction.

Other maiolica production centers in Italy—Gubbio, Deruta, Faenza, and Cafaggiolo, among others—produced similar works during the fifteenth century. Indeed, non-narrative figurative works dominated maiolica production across the peninsula. But by the early sixteenth century, the workshops around Urbino began to specialize in the new genre of *istoriato* pottery, painting figurative scenes from classical and Biblical stories. The successful production of this genre in Urbino depended on two other factors: the courtly demand for narrative art objects and the availability of print sources for these narratives.

#### *Aristocratic patrons in Urbino and beyond*

Making up only a fraction of overall maiolica production, *istoriato* wares were specialized products mainly bought by noble patrons. We can determine the original ownership of some of these works from archival evidence and identifying marks on the objects themselves.<sup>35</sup> As we will see below, these patrons included some of the most prominent individuals in sixteenth-century Italy.

The specific appeal of *istoriato* maiolica to aristocrats stemmed from several related cultural factors: the courtly virtues of splendor and magnificence,

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<sup>35</sup> Documents such as personal correspondence and inventories sometimes indicate that a particular person owned maiolica, though they rarely contain extensive descriptions of the works. It is difficult to match extant maiolica objects to original owners unless they bear painted arms or *imprese*.



the humanistic fervor for classical antiquity, and the growing desire to surpass the greatness of Greece and Rome. The courts of Italy—not just Urbino, but also those of Ferrara, Mantua, and Milan, among others—were famed for their impressive sumptuousness.<sup>36</sup> This manifested itself in a profusion of personal possessions: rich clothing and accessories, illustrated manuscripts and printed books, elaborate tableware and other handheld objects, intimate panel paintings and personal altarpieces, marble and bronze sculpture, painted and inlaid furniture, and large-format images like frescoes and tapestries.<sup>37</sup>

This type of rich adornment was justified by the virtues of “magnificence” and “splendor,” which were delineated by the humanist writer Giovanni Pontano in his works *De Magnificentia* of 1486 and *De Splendore* of 1498.<sup>38</sup> Drawing on fourteenth-century articulations of Aristotelian philosophy, Pontano stressed the importance of entertaining one’s peers in a refined and urbane environment, honoring visitors with a reception appropriate to their social status. In this mode, material consumption was permissible and even moral as long as it was tempered with “decorum and dignity.”<sup>39</sup> Splendor and magnificence helped express social order in a highly visible way, reinforcing important hierarchies.

With their pleasing colors and varied shapes and scenes, *istoriato* maiolica objects were well-suited to the splendid entertaining practices of aristocrats. When used in banquets, they would please diners with their opulence, and when stored in open-front *credenze*, they could still delight guests who observed them

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<sup>36</sup> Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-23. Of particular interest to us is Pontano’s remark that “the French eat merely to satisfy their greed, while the Italians eat with *splendore*.”

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-26.



in passing. Though gold and silver tableware were also highly valued, the novelty and variety of narrative images on maiolica dishes were uniquely pleasing.<sup>40</sup> The types of scenes that these dishes portrayed added to their splendor. Episodes from Greek and Roman myth and history suggested that both the owner and the viewer were educated in the humanities and sophisticated enough to recall a certain passage of Ovid or Virgil from the static images painted on an object.<sup>41</sup> They added a level of visual and intellectual enjoyment to the highly sensory experience of dining, complementing taste, scent, and touch.

Importantly, many believed that *istoriato* maiolica had surpassed the artistry of the Greeks and Romans, who were not known to have made such elaborately painted ceramics.<sup>42</sup> This echoes similar desires to exceed Roman grandeur within the modern-day city of Rome, though on a smaller scale.<sup>43</sup> Given Urbino's close ties to the papacy, it makes sense that the ducal court would share this aspiration.

The number of maiolica patrons within Urbino itself was relatively small, reflecting the small size of the city. To the best of our knowledge, *istoriato* maiolica was either bought by the ducal family in Urbino and the members of their court, or exported to other areas of the Italian peninsula and beyond. The safe transportation of fragile ceramics across long distances was a delicate

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<sup>40</sup> Syson and Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 212-214.

<sup>41</sup> While both classical and Biblical narratives might be portrayed on *istoriato* wares, classical themes were better suited to secular banquets hosted by lay-persons. It seems that clergymen were more likely to own Biblical *istoriato* services; for example, while the known pieces of the Anne de Montmorency service are all secular in nature, the two known pieces of the service made in 1535 for Cardinal Antoine Duprat had biblical subjects. See Mallet's "In Bottega di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," 297.

<sup>42</sup> Syson and Thornton. *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 200-01.

<sup>43</sup> For more information, see Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).



process, but a necessary task; Piccolpasso even dedicated a section of his maiolica treatise to the stacking and packing of dishes for transit.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, Piccolpasso is silent on more explicit aspects of patronage or the origins of *istoriato* wares, so we must turn to other sources. The earliest known *istoriato* maiolica service was produced for Cardinal Ludovico Podocataro in 1501 in the Urbino workshop of Francesco Garducci.<sup>45</sup> Podocataro was a learned man from a noble Greek family whose ecclesiastical career thrived under the Borgia pontificate—for a time he served as Pope Alexander VI's secretary.<sup>46</sup> Though the pieces of his service have been lost, we have a detailed account of the order from the original contract. The service consisted of ninety-one items with a combination of narrative and non-narrative painting. Some pieces also had fanciful forms, such as dishes with “feet shaped like columns and *all'antica* horses.”<sup>47</sup> These objects were extremely ornate and no doubt impressive, reflecting well on Ludovico as a patron. He was made a cardinal just one year before he purchased this *istoriato* service, and the magnificence of these art objects would have reflected the prestige of his new position.

Curiously, Ludovico never lived in Urbino or even in Le Marche. This suggests that the workshops of Urbino had enough sway to draw patrons from other provinces. It is perplexing that the first maiolica service with *istoriato* pieces would come from a patron so far removed from the workshop that produced them. There are a few possible explanations. It is possible that *istoriato*

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<sup>44</sup> This is actually a rather fascinating matter on its own; sizes of dishes became standardized in order to facilitate easy packing and travel.

<sup>45</sup> Syson and Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 216.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



wares had been produced on a small scale before 1501, either by the workshop of Francesco Garducci or by others, and that Ludovico had seen examples of this work elsewhere already. As papal secretary, he interacted with the highest echelons of society. It is also possible that Ludovico conceived of these art objects himself, and chose the Garducci workshop as the producer because he had already been exposed to their fine non-*istoriato* products. The contract would be a rich topic for further research, and locating extant pieces of this early *istoriato* service would be helpful in exploring the development of the genre.

While the origin of this early service in Urbino is significant, there is no guarantee that the first *istoriato* wares were created in Urbino or the nearby cities in Le Marche. Other maiolica centers also produced narrative objects for a short time: a Cafaggiolo painter named Jacopo worked in this genre around 1510, though the trend did not take hold there.<sup>48</sup> Neither did it become a predominant style in Faenza, though the city was otherwise a leading producer of figurative decoration. Even if Urbino was not the birthplace of this style, it is clear that at the height of the *istoriato* trend in the 1520s and 1530s, the most prominent workshops producing narrative ceramics were within the duchy of Urbino. The market and production conditions were just right for sustaining the trend.

Perhaps the best-known service from Urbino is the service of Isabella d'Este, commissioned in 1524 as a gift from her daughter Eleanora Gonzaga, wife of Duke Francesco Maria I. The first few decades of the sixteenth century were tumultuous for the Della Rovere, as Francesco Maria served as commander of the

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<sup>48</sup> Mallet, et. al., *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*, 11.



armies of the Papal States and clashed with Pope Leo X de' Medici.<sup>49</sup> While her husband was preoccupied with politics, Eleanora was quite active in promoting the arts of Urbino.

Twenty-two pieces of the d'Este service have been identified.<sup>50</sup> They were painted by Nicola da Urbino, an artist who also owned his own workshop. All are painted with narrative scenes that incorporate the d'Este coat-of-arms as well as a variety of Isabella's personal *imprese*. In her close iconographical study of the service, Lisa Boutin determined that the uniting factor of the narrative episodes is humanist erudition, with no obvious iconographical program beyond this.<sup>51</sup> The majority are pastoral scenes, which corresponds with Eleanora's written advice to her mother: "you might make use of it at Porto, since it is a villa thing."<sup>52</sup>

Around 1533, Eleanora commissioned three more *istoriato* services from Nicola da Urbino for her brother Federico II Gonzaga and Federico's wife, Margherita Paleologa. One was meant for Federico's use, one for Margherita's, and one to commemorate their wedding. Only a handful of plates survive from

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<sup>49</sup> Eleanora had married the young duke in 1509 and by 1524, Urbino had seen its fair share of political turmoil. True to his family's *condottieri* roots, Francesco Maria had served as the commander of the army of the Papal States since the year of their marriage, and his fortunes waxed and waned with that of his uncle, Pope Julius II. Julius's successor, Leo X de' Medici, excommunicated the duke in order to hand Urbino over to his nephew, Lorenzo II de' Medici, for a few short years, before both Lorenzo and Leo passed away. The Della Rovere regained control of Urbino in 1521, just three years before Eleanora ordered the refined *istoriato* maiolica service for her learned mother at Mantua's court. See Bertrand Jestaz, "Montmorency, Anne, Duc de," Oxford Art Online.

<sup>50</sup> Wendy M. Watson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: From the Howard I. and Janet H. Stein Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 75.

<sup>51</sup> See Boutin, "Displaying Identity in the Mantuan Court: The Maiolica of Isabella d'Este, Federico II Gonzaga, and Margherita Paleologa." Syson and Thornton had previously concluded that "the twenty-two surviving components of the *credenza*, far from being carefully tailored to Isabella's requirements, seems to have been decided by the somewhat random workshop process by which services were typically assembled." *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 224.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104. Porto was the seaside country villa of the Gonzaga family, a dwelling favored by Isabella when she was not required in Mantua. Unfortunately the villa itself does not survive to this day.



these commissions, but as with Isabella's service, the known pieces depict stories from classical mythology and history. By sending these services to her noble kinsmen, Eleanora honored her family's humanist education while also advertising the craftsmanship of Urbino's artisans to a broader courtly audience.

The duchess's promotion of Urbino's ceramics did not stop with her family. A well-known 1528 letter from the duke's representative at the temporary papal court in Viterbo was written to Eleanora herself, not Francesco Maria; he tells her of the Pope's specific preferences in maiolica and the possibility of a commission.

Of larger dishes not more than two, two basins and ewers, salt-cellars and other vessels as seems best to our Genga, but above all quickly, quickly, because the time is ripe, and to speed things more one could entrust the commission to two masters who would work concurrently.<sup>53</sup>

The "Genga" that he mentions was the court artist Girolamo Genga, who was available to advise the duchess on all manner of artistic commissions.<sup>54</sup>

Genga is also mentioned in regards to ceramics in an earlier letter from 1523, in which he serves as a liaison between Francesco Maria and three local ceramics workshops in the commission of 5,000 blue and white glazed tiles for the pavement of a floor within a ducal residence.<sup>55</sup> Even for more prestigious orders, the duke and duchess would not have dealt directly with maiolica

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<sup>53</sup> Mallet, et al., *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Note that the letter writer suggests that two masters work on this project concurrently; this suggests that he is not concerned with employing a particular "hand."

<sup>55</sup> One of these three workshops was that of Guido Durantino, called "Guido di Nicolo Pellipario" within the document. This is a great example of the breadth of work accomplished in his workshop; more than just *istoriato* wares, or even non-*istoriato* figurative products. J.V.G. Mallet, "In Botega di Maestro Guido Durantino," 287.



workshops; and when commissioning services for consumption outside of Urbino, several layers of liaison seem to have been necessary.

There is no definitive proof that Anne de Montmorency acquired his 1535 *istoriato* service through the duke and duchess of Urbino. However, this must have been the case. Montmorency fought battles in the Italian peninsula at the side of Francis I, both in the Italian War of 1521-26 and the War of the League of Cognac of 1526-30.<sup>56</sup> His role in the War of the League of Cognac is the lynchpin in this commission: during this conflict, France was allied with the Papal States, as well as Venice, Florence, and the Duchy of Milan, against the forces of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. The chief commander of the army of the Papal States was not the reigning Pope Clement VII, but rather the seasoned *condottiere* Francesco Maria. Given Montmorency's involvement with Italy during the 1520s and 1530s, it is certainly no accident that he ended up with an *istoriato* service made in Guido Durantino's workshop.

We know, then, that the courtly city of Urbino produced the most exalted of ceramics—*istoriato* maiolica—for the highest patrons: popes, cardinals, noble rulers, and courtiers. What about other types of art patrons, such as wealthy merchants or tradesmen? It seems likely that the prosperous ceramics manufacturers in Cafaggiolo and Montelupo, near Florence, would have produced *istoriato* paintings if the bourgeois population of the city had expressed strong interest in purchasing them. However, splendor and magnificence did not take hold in republican or oligarchic cities as they did in courts—likely due to political

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<sup>56</sup> Bedos Rezak, *Anne De Montmorency: seigneur de la Renaissance*, 357-63.



and religious anxieties about conspicuous consumption.<sup>57</sup> The products made in this area, as well as Faenza, Gubbio, and Deruta, demonstrate that these citizens were more likely to buy non-narrative tableware.

### *Maiolica Artisans and their Work Methods*

Having considered the first two factors in *istoriato* maiolica production in Urbino, we must turn to the third: the availability of printed images and texts. This was tremendously important for the large-scale production of narrative paintings on ceramic objects. One maiolica tableware service would include dozens of pieces, each requiring its own composition. While non-figurative and non-narrative paintings were relatively straightforward commissions for a skillful ceramics painter, narrative images were far more complicated on an intellectual level. Renaissance art theory puts a great deal of emphasis on this process: an original composition was lauded as an *invenzione*, and the finest *invenzioni* required both *disegno* (a word that connotes both fine draftsmanship and intellectual design) and *ingegno* (creative intellect).<sup>58</sup> Moreover, creating the most basic visual narrative from a text requires a comprehensive knowledge of the original story. The artist must pare down the plot to its most essential and iconic points in order to make the visual interpretation recognizable and legible. Even

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<sup>57</sup> Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, 17-19.

<sup>58</sup> These terms are drawn from classical rhetoric and philosophy, and have been applied to literary constructs as well. The literature on this topic is manifold. Vasari uses such criteria in his evaluation of artists in *Lives of the Artists*. For example in praising Giulio Romano, he writes: “Fra i molti, anzi infiniti discepoli di Raffaello da Urbino, dei quali la maggior parte riuscirono valenti, niuno ve n’ebbe che più lo immitasse nella maniera, invenzione, disegno e colorito di Giulio Romano...” Giorgio Vasari, Rosanna Bettarini, and Paola Barocchi. *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1966), 5:55.



for an artist well-versed in ancient literature, repeating this complex process for each *istoriato* object in a tableware service would be a painstaking task.

Prints helped alleviate this problem for maiolica painters. By the early sixteenth century, woodcuts and engravings were printed by the thousands in the publishing centers of Venice and Florence. Talented draftsmen would work in collaboration with expert block-cutters and engravers, producing unprecedented visual narratives as book illustrations or individual images with inscriptions.<sup>59</sup> The value of these artworks varied widely, based on size, complexity, and the cachet of the artists associated with the print.<sup>60</sup> Wealthy connoisseurs valued prints that demonstrated fine *disegno* and *ingegno*, paying large sums of money for the most impressive engravings.<sup>61</sup> But these images were also marketed towards other craftsmen, like painters and metalworkers, who could add them to their workshop's image banks.<sup>62</sup>

It is still unclear whether all these draftsmen were sufficiently literate to design these illustrations on their own, or if many were advised on content by

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<sup>59</sup> An estimated one-third of books printed before 1500 were illustrated, requiring the development of many unprecedented visual narratives. David Landau and Peter W. Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 34.

<sup>60</sup> As Lisa Pon discusses in *Raphael, Durer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print*, even though many prints were "reproductive" in nature, printing privileges and the inclusion of certain artist emblems on these prints became an important legal matter.

<sup>61</sup> Landau presents us with a useful sales document from one bookseller's shop that delineates prices for certain prints. He writes: "If, for ease of understanding the relationship among their respective values, we turn all such sums into *denari*, the result is that an ordinary woodcut cost 2, an ordinary engraving 20, a small print by Marcantonio 52, a larger one by Marcantonio 66, and the very large print by Marco Dente after Bandinelli, printed from two plates, 240." *The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550*, 295-96.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 294: "The influence of prints on other art forms, from goldsmith work to majolica dish painting, is so well documented and affected so many centers that it is likely that every major workshop possessed at least some prints, probably a substantial collection. Unfortunately only a few records from the period survive to confirm this."



their publishers.<sup>63</sup> The most elite engravers, however, developed highly intellectual works.<sup>64</sup> These men were well-respected and well-known, viewed as gentlemen rather than mere artisans.<sup>65</sup> The engraver Marcantonio Raimondi, who famously worked with Raphael, merited a biography in the second edition of Vasari's *Lives*. Largely relying on the *invenzioni* of others, maiolica painters never reached this level of renown.

Vasari does mention *istoriato* maiolica in *Lives of the Artists*, but was only interested in elite artists who occasionally designed compositions for maiolica plates.<sup>66</sup> Given this scarcity of textual references, modern scholars have pieced together names of maiolica artisans and lists of their works from careful study and attribution. While three men have emerged as leading *istoriato* maiolica producers in sixteenth-century Urbino, each played a slightly different role in the industry.

Once believed to be a ceramics-painter, Guido Durantino, also known as Guido di Nicolò Pellipario or Guido Fontana, has since been identified as a potter and a workshop owner. He has long been known from the inscriptions on the bottom of his workshop's products, which read, with some variation: "*Nel Bottega di Maestro Guido durantino.*"<sup>67</sup> Privileging the role of the painter, nineteenth-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>64</sup> Raphael and Marcantonio Raimondi's *Quos Ego*, which will be discussed in the second chapter, is one of the most complex and intellectual prints of the first half of the sixteenth century.

<sup>65</sup> This is an important distinction, and only the most admired artists managed to breach this line. As Alison Cole writes: "Renaissance society was extremely conscious of social divisions: noble birth was of primary importance, although an opportunist *condottiere* like Francesco Sforza could rise to the rank of duke through his connections and abilities. Profession was very much the key to social mobility, with arms, the law, and letters conferring a degree of nobility. At its simplest, life divided itself into the serviceable categories defined in Niccolò Machiavelli's play *The Mandrake Root* (*Mandragola*, published 1524): gentleman/tradesman; rich/poor; natives/foreigners." *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Syson and Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, 214.

<sup>67</sup> The surname "Durantino" simply meant "from Castel Durante." This is probably why he later changed his family name to "Fontana" after many years of living in Urbino.



century connoisseurs assumed that Guido was responsible for the narrative scenes on these objects rather than their overall production. In the 1930s, the early maiolica scholar Bernard Rackham was the first to question the plethora of unmarked dishes attributed to Guido's hand based on the example of his signed works.<sup>68</sup> About fifty years later, careful research led Monsignor Franco Negroni and J.V.G. Mallet to doubt that any of these pieces were actually painted by Guido. Part of this misattribution of Guido as a painter came from the mistaken notion that Guido's documented father, Nicolò Pellipario of Castel Durante, was the same person as the notable maiolica painter Nicola da Urbino.<sup>69</sup> Nicola da Urbino has since been verified as Nicola di Gabriele Sbraghe, a different person altogether.<sup>70</sup>

Marriage records from 1516 in Urbino refer to Guido as a potter, and he is mentioned again in several business transactions in Urbino in the early 1520s.<sup>71</sup> He seems to have slowly accrued properties, a sign of his growing prosperity, and after 1527 he is definitively identified as a "maestro" in legal documents, indicating that he was running a ceramics workshop of his own.<sup>72</sup> A fascinating document from 1530 describes Guido and several other workshop owners involved in a legal battle with a group of their artisan employees: painters and potters had banded together to request higher wages from their employers.<sup>73</sup> It is

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<sup>68</sup> See Bernard Rackham, "The Maiolica-Painter Guido Durantino," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 77, Vol. 453 (Dec., 1940): 182, 186-88.

<sup>69</sup> Mallet, "In Botega Di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," 284.

<sup>70</sup> Nicolò's appellation "Pellipario" identifies him as a skinner; he certainly would not have trained his son to paint ceramics.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*



clear that Guido employed a number of workers within his workshop, particularly skilled painters. Among the objects signed as products of this workshop, Mallet has found evidence of at least six individual hands.<sup>74</sup> Importantly, they conformed to a standard workshop style that permitted visual coherence and unity among their products. This was vital when more than one painter was working on the same tableware service.

At least one of these painters was probably Guido's son Orazio Fontana, who worked in the *bottega* for years before setting up his own business in 1565. At that point, Guido and Orazio split their production so that they would not be competitors; Guido kept the white wares, the "Venetian-style" wares, and the common pottery, while Orazio continued with *istoriato* production.<sup>75</sup> Until Orazio started a business of his own, he remained uncredited on the objects he painted. At that point, his signature held the authority of a workshop owner as well as an artist. Like his father Guido, the overall reputation of his workshop trumped that of his personal artistic skill, or that of the other painters he employed.

There is only one known instance of an artist's name appearing alongside Guido's on a maiolica object: Nicola da Urbino, perhaps the best-known of all maiolica painters. An *istoriato* dish depicting the martyrdom of St. Cecilia, now in the Bargello in Florence, bears both of their inscriptions [Pl. 1.3]. The back side reads "*Fata in bottega di guido da castello durante/ in Urbino 1528*" and is accompanied by Nicola's monogram. At this point in time, Nicola was already established as a skilled painter of *istoriato* scenes; he had executed the so-called

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 287. Mallet notes that the meaning of "Venetian-style" is ambiguous, but suggests that this may be a kind of foliate pattern mentioned by Piccolpasso.



Correr service in the early 1520s, painting in a Raphaelesque style.<sup>76</sup> Then, in 1524, he was entrusted with the tableware service for Isabella d'Este, Marchesa of Mantua—a very prestigious commission.

Given his already successful career, it is unclear why Nicola would have collaborated with Guido's workshop on this plate. Nicola is listed alongside Guido in the 1530 wage dispute between workshop owners and employees, showing that he owned his own business. Other documents from Urbino demonstrate that Nicola and Guido had numerous legal interactions, mostly regarding property transactions—the earliest is dated 1522.<sup>77</sup> All evidence suggests that they were friendly colleagues and that Nicola had no need for a business manager. The inclusion of Nicola's monogram alongside Guido's inscription is unique; few of Nicola's products bear any identifying marks at all, and the few dishes that do bear his monogram do not contain any other workshop identifiers. It is possible that the inclusion of both their names increased the object's appeal to a knowledgeable buyer. It is also possible that Guido employed this talented painter in the absence of one of his employees; or, alternatively, that Nicola suddenly needed Guido's workshop resources. Whatever the reason, this double inscription illustrates the collaborative nature of maiolica production—

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<sup>76</sup>The Correr service is thus named after its current home, the Museo Correr in Venice. It was a non-armorial set, so the original owner of these dishes is unknown. They are united by a distinctive color palette: white with muted greens and blues. Watson, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: From the Howard I. and Janet H. Stein Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 72.

<sup>77</sup>In 1522, according to Mallet, Nicola served as a witness to Guido's purchase of a house in the potter's quarter of Urbino. He later leased property from Guido twice, though in 1527 they had some sort of lease dispute and Guido reclaimed control of the property. "In Botega di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," 285-6.



even if Nicola was responsible for the beautiful painting, Guido expected that his workshop would be equally credited for the rest of the labor.

This particular plate also demonstrates the most common approach to *istoriato* maiolica compositions. Nicola's *Martyrdom of St. Cecilia* plate is largely drawn after Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of Raphael's lost fresco of the same scene from the Villa Magliana in Rome [Pl. 1.4]. Commissioned by Leo X, the fresco was executed ca. 1517-20 and the engraving was made ca. 1520-1525, a handful of years before Nicola painted the scene onto maiolica.<sup>78</sup> Scholars generally agree that the fresco was only designed by Raphael; he left the execution to the members of his workshop. Raimondi's print is probably based on the completed *modello* for the fresco.<sup>79</sup> Innis Shoemaker describes the engraving's composition as "compact" and "frieze-like", with the figures, architecture, and horizon forming a series of horizontal parallel lines that suits the long, rectangular format of the print.

In both the engraving and the painting, we find St. Cecilia front and center, waist-deep in a vat of boiling water with a raging fire below. She is naked, but her long hair and her arms raised in prayer preserve her modesty. Above her, an angel descends with her crown of martyrdom in hand. On either side, she is framed by classicizing architecture and a watching crowd. Many of the figures point at her, drawing the eye of the viewer back towards her suffering; mirroring their poses are a prostrate man stoking the fire and the lifeless bodies of other

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<sup>78</sup> Catherine Hess, *Italian Ceramics: Catalogue of the J. Paul Getty Museum Collection* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 97. See also Innis Shoemaker and Elizabeth Broun, *The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi* (Chapel Hill: Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina, 1981), cat. 55.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



martyrs, beheaded. Closest to the picture plane are two long pieces of firewood also pointing towards the saint, as well as a tuft of grass at the crest of a riverbank.

The connection between the two images is unmistakable: much of the composition is a direct quotation of the print. However, Nicola da Urbino had to deal with a serious problem in adapting the scene: his source material was a long rectangle, but his painting surface was round. He could not simply superimpose the pre-existing scene onto the plate, leaving two-thirds of the surface blank. Instead, he attenuates the space towards the top of the scene, increasing the distance between the saint and the descending angel, as well as the size of the columns supporting the entablature on the left side of the image. He also raises the two stylized clouds higher into the air, where they float above the entablature rather than next to it. Nicola uses luminous streaks of blue and buff pigments in the sky to suggest dawn or dusk, a skillful use of color that is his own invention, absent from Raimondi's black-and-white engraving.

At the bottom of the scene, Nicola keeps the two planks of wood but eliminates the grassy riverbank; instead, he inserts a geometric, black-and-white marble floor that fills the bottom-most curve of the plate. The floor echoes the strong lines of the other architectural structures, but the sudden and sharp change in coloration is jarring. Oriented closest to the viewer in the picture plane, the floor seems to bridge the gap between the viewer and the historical-religious scene in the middle-distance. Though Nicola did not conceive the composition



himself, he made careful alterations to accommodate his format and embellished the scene with luxurious color.

Another notable maiolica painter in Urbino, Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo, approached his *istoriato* designs in a significantly different way.<sup>80</sup> Rather than adapt entire print compositions for *istoriato* paintings, he would copy individual figures from woodcuts and engravings and then incorporate them into his narratives as needed. A mediocre draftsman himself, this practice helped Francesco work through difficult anatomical features and poses. However, unlike Nicola da Urbino or the artists of Guido Durantino's *bottega*, Francesco designed the narrative content of his *istoriato* works all on his own. This level of invention is absent from many other *istoriato* works.

Francesco's biographical details help illuminate his atypical work practices. Though he was born in northern Italy near Venice, he lived and worked in courtly Urbino for the bulk of his adult life. He was living there by 1522, spent two years (1524-25) painting in the workshop of Maestro Giorgio Andreoli in Gubbio, and then returned to Urbino for the rest of his known career.<sup>81</sup> Though the details of his early life are unknown, including his birth year and the circumstances of his training, we know far more about Francesco Xanto Avelli than any other maiolica artisan because he was quite literate. He prided himself on

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<sup>80</sup> Xanto Avelli is also mentioned in the 1530 legal dispute between maiolica workshop owners and employees in Urbino; unlike Nicola and Guido, though, he was listed with the employees in the suit. Any specific dealings with Guido Durantino are unknown, but the small size of Urbino and the existence of the 1530 lawsuit suggest that they were acquainted. He is believed to have worked on a maiolica service with Nicola da Urbino in at least once instance. See Mallet, et al., *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 20. Maestro Giorgio's workshop was well-known for its lustered works, and Francesco produced some lustered *istoriato* dishes in this setting. This is interesting as we know that Guido sometimes sent finished pieces from his workshop to Maestro Giorgio to be lustered.



his education and gentility, presenting himself as a gentleman rather than a mere artisan. Not only did he start writing poetic descriptions on the back of his dishes, he wrote forty-four sonnets dedicated to Duke Francesco Maria I as a noble patron.<sup>82</sup> Francesco's familiarity with poetic forms suggests that he was actively reading the literary sources that inspired his compositions, allowing him to develop visual narrative content from the written text.

Francesco's approach is illustrated quite well in a 1535 plate painted with a scene of Glaucus and Scylla from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* [Pl. 1.5].<sup>83</sup> On the rear, he added the year, his signature, and the explanation "Scylla languishes in the evil spring, and Glaucus [turned into] fish."<sup>84</sup> Of the four figures within the composition, scholars have identified three of them as copies from three different sources: Scylla from one of Raimondi's sexually-explicit *I Modi* prints, the far-left figure of Glaucus from a Raimondi print of a man pursuing a naiad, and the background figure of Circe from a Caraglio print after Parmigianino.<sup>85</sup> The figures are re-drawn in reverse, suggesting that Francesco used a transfer process to copy the figures onto a preliminary drawing or the plate surface. He exercised his own powers of invention to create this unified scene out of multiple artworks. They form a well-balanced pyramidal composition of architecture and landscape that gracefully fills the round surface of the plate. Though the resulting work is not as harmonious or skillfully rendered as those of Nicola da Urbino, the original

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<sup>82</sup> See appendix of Mallet, et al., *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., cat. 49. This plate has no coat-of-arms, so we do not know the intended patron.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. For more information, see Bette Talvacchia's "Professional Advancement and the Use of the Erotic in the Art of Francesco Xanto Avelli," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, No.1 (1994): 121-153.



composition demonstrates that he had a firm grasp of the textual references. As will we see in the case-study of Guido Durantino's Anne de Montmorency *istoriato* service, it was rare for a ceramics painter to display this level of learnedness.

### Conclusion

In the pages above, I have briefly examined many facets of the maiolica trade in sixteenth-century Urbino, providing necessary information to ground the case-study that follows. We have seen how the duchy of Urbino accommodated a thriving maiolica industry, combining important natural resources with a wealthy pool of patrons. Skilled artisans and shrewd businessmen used printed books and artworks to develop elaborate *istoriato* services, which were consumed by noble patrons both in the city of Urbino and beyond. In the case of the Anne de Montmorency, we see that the market for Urbino's maiolica transcended national borders.

Though the painters Nicola da Urbino and Francesco Xanto Avelli marked some of their painted products with their names, just as many *istoriato* works survive with only the name of a workshop owner, like Guido Durantino. Even more *istoriato* works survive with no workshop or artist designation at all. The desirability of these objects did not always lie in their "name brand." Individual personalities were de-emphasized in favor of uniform workshop styles and the complicated series of references that their products embodied. Some of these references were visual—such as the figures and compositions taken from



Raphael, Parmigianino, and others—and some were literary, taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other classical tales.

Ideally, when handled by a viewer with an extensive humanist education, the *istoriato* wares would trigger memories of works in other media. In reality, however, how effective were these compositions? Did maiolica painters always succeed at adapting prints into legible narrative paintings? To what extent did they copy their reference images, and how did they exercise their own powers of invention?

In the next chapter, I will focus on the known pieces of a single commission: the Anne de Montmorency service. Relatively intact and produced by the anonymous artists of Guido Durantino's workshop, this service provides an excellent case-study of how *istoriato* compositions were produced. By fully examining the literary and visual sources for these paintings, we can better understand how maiolica artisans adapted these other works. Through this lens, we will consider the artisans themselves as receptors and interpreters of humanist visual culture.



## Chapter 2: The Anne de Montmorency Service

There is no known documentation surrounding Anne de Montmorency's 1535 maiolica service, executed in the workshop of Guido Durantino. Our information on this commission comes entirely from the objects themselves: the arms of the Montmorency family that appear within the painted scenes and Guido's inscription with the date 1535 on the reverse-side of the objects. Most of the pieces are also labeled on the reverse with a short description of the subject matter, helpful for identifying the narratives that may be ambiguous or unfamiliar. The appearance of the Montmorency arms and the written inscriptions on the dishes provide an unusually generous amount of information on the origin of these works.

Some catalogue entries on the individual pieces have asserted that the service was a diplomatic gift.<sup>86</sup> This is a likely hypothesis, as the influential French cardinal Antoine Duprat also received an *istoriato* maiolica service from Guido Durantino's workshop in 1535.<sup>87</sup> It seems too coincidental that two French noblemen would commission services from the same distant workshop in the same year, especially since the family of Duke Francesco Maria I was already known to favor maiolica services as gifts. The political conditions of the time support the idea that the service was a Della Rovere gift. By 1535, Francesco Maria was an unpopular figure; as the general of the Papal States' army, many

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<sup>86</sup> The V&A catalogue entry on one of these objects notes that this commission was likely a diplomatic gift. "Candlestick." Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O69155/candlestick-durantino-guido/>

<sup>87</sup> J.V.G. Mallet, "In Botega di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," 297.



Italians blamed him for the disastrous sack of Rome in 1527 and heavy losses in the War of the League of Cognac against Charles V.<sup>88</sup> If Francesco Maria were seeking allies outside of Italy, sending gifts to influential French courtiers would have been a shrewd political decision.<sup>89</sup>

Anne de Montmorency was one of the most wealthy and powerful men in France. Not unlike Francesco Maria I, he was prominent both as a soldier and as a statesman, though not necessarily known for his skill at either. Biographies describe him as “rough” in character and inept when it came to war and politics.<sup>90</sup> Though perhaps not a refined scholar himself, he was very much a participant in the aristocratic culture of magnificence. He embarked on a number of architectural projects in his lifetime, filling his new estates with prized art objects. These would eventually include two of Michelangelo’s *prigioni*, Rosso Fiorentino’s *Pietà*, tapestry sets, antique busts, painted enamels, and more. His collection included local Palissy ware pottery as well as this maiolica service.<sup>91</sup> Francesco Maria’s gift must have pleased someone so interested in fostering a sumptuous environment.

Since there is no documentation available for this service, we do not know who was responsible for negotiating the commission, or what may have been included in the contract. Was Urbino’s court artist, Girolamo Genga, the

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<sup>88</sup> J.V.G. Mallet, et al., *Xanto Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*, 18-19.

<sup>89</sup> See C.H. Clough, “Francis I and the Courtiers of Castiglione’s *Courtier*” in *The Duchy of Urbino in the Renaissance* (London: Vaorum Reprints, 1981).

<sup>90</sup> Bertrand Jestaz, “Montmorency, Anne, Duc de,” *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T059361>.

<sup>91</sup> Timothy Wilson, *Maiolica: Italian Renaissance Ceramics from the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2003), cat. 15. For more on the *Pietà* commission, see its catalogue entry at the Louvre, “*Pietà*,” Musée du Louvre, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/pieta>



middleman between Francesco Maria and Guido Durantino?<sup>92</sup> Were any of the pictorial subjects requested by the patron, or were broad parameters given to the workshop? As workshop owner, did Guido Durantino make any of the design decisions, or were these left up to his painters? The lack of paperwork is frustrating, but we can learn a lot about how this service was conceptualized by analyzing the narrative scenes themselves.

Other scholars have noted that Isabella d'Este's maiolica service has no sophisticated iconographical plan, suggesting that the workshop was entirely responsible for choosing the narratives that they painted. After surveying the objects in the Montmorency service, this seems to be true in this case as well. Such a practice differentiates maiolica services from the larger mythological image cycles that we find in aristocratic sixteenth-century homes, which were usually executed as tapestries or frescoes. These complex artworks required the artists and patrons to work in tandem with scholarly advisors who developed the intellectual content.<sup>93</sup> In contrast, maiolica artisans developed their own designs by referencing the prints and books at their disposal. Though the resulting

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<sup>92</sup> Though he may have facilitated business transactions between the duke and the maiolica workshop, it does not seem that Genga was involved in maiolica production in any way. Though Vasari writes that the duke Guidobaldo Della Rovere employed Battista Franco to make *istoriato* designs for dishes, Vasari makes no mention of maiolica in his biography of Genga. Since he does include the "triumphal arches and scenery for comedies" that Genga designed for Francesco Maria and Eleanor's marriage, it seems unlikely that he would omit other types of furnishings or functional works. See *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architect*, vol. 3 (London: Dent, 1963), 262, and Giorgio Vasari, Rosanna Bettarini, and Paola Barocchi. *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1966), 5:349.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on mythological painting and intellectual advisors in art commissions, see Anthony Colantuono, *Titian, Colonna, and the Renaissance Science of Procreation: Equicola's Seasons of Desire* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) or Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).



artworks are less cerebral, they reveal several things about the artisans themselves: firstly, the types of printed works that they knew; secondly, the types of scenes that they thought aristocratic patrons might want; and thirdly, the workshop's capacity for invention and adaption.

As I will discuss in the following pages, the pictorial compositions in the Montmorency service can be read as working-class interpretations of aristocratic visual culture. These lively, pleasant paintings refer to printed artworks and classical tales that were widely known in the sixteenth century, displaying a popular understanding of classical literature rather than an intellectual one. While the artisans were skillful at adapting printed images to ceramic paintings, they often took a very literal approach to their adaptations, resulting in compositions that are occasionally ambiguous or mistaken. They were most successful when they had access to printed, vernacular translations of their chosen narratives.

It is interesting to consider how aristocratic owners perceived their *istoriato* services. By and large, patrons seem to have been satisfied with these artworks, and they were evidently well-received as gifts. Even if *istoriato* services did not include highly detailed or scholarly representations of classical literature, the mere reference to these subjects seems to have been sufficient to please their consumers. We might also consider that even among the wealthy, not all were conversant in Latin, or inclined towards learning. Though men like Francesco Maria I Della Rovere and Anne de Montmorency cultivated splendor and magnificence, their appreciation of Ovid or Virgil was not necessarily much more nuanced than that of the artisans who painted *istoriato* wares.



To further examine these questions, I will analyze the formal and iconographical characteristics of each known work in the Montmorency service, identifying reference images and texts when possible, and discussing the legibility of the pictorial narratives. By studying these individual objects as part of a larger whole, we will see how Guido Durantino's workshop approached such a commission.

### The service

Though originally numbering in at least the dozens, only nineteen pieces of the Montmorency service are known in any detail.<sup>94</sup> Fortunately, there is some diversity among the forms of the known objects: one flask with a stopper, three candlesticks, two shallow dishes with feet, and thirteen plates of varying sizes. It is impossible to know for certain how many or what kind of pieces made up the whole service, but we can hypothesize, based on documented commissions and information in Piccolpasso's treatise, that there would have been at least six and as many as forty of each plate type.<sup>95</sup>

Piccolpasso lists a number of highly-specialized plates in his maiolica treatise: plates for meat, plates for salads, plates for napkins, plates for condiments, and more.<sup>96</sup> By and large, the extant plates from the Montmorency service are a form that Piccolpasso calls a *tagliere*, featuring a central, circular

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<sup>94</sup> See my appendix for a detailed list of these nineteen works.

<sup>95</sup> Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis, *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: V & A, 2006), 257-8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.



depression called a “well” surrounded by a broad, flat rim.<sup>97</sup> The Montmorency *taglieri* feature a narrow border of solid yellow around the rim, accentuating the very edge of the plate and fully enclosing the scene within. The undecorated rim also serves as a buffer for chips in the glaze caused by day-to-day usage, protecting the *istoriato* scenes on the surface from wear-and-tear. Large *taglieri* could be used for serving food; they were also easily admired when stored in *credenze* for display. The two “shallow dishes,” raised on low feet, have a smooth surface uninterrupted by a well. Piccolpasso calls this form a *piatto* (plural: *piatti*) and they could be used for holding napkins or condiments.<sup>98</sup>

The three candlesticks are painted with the Roman numerals for “11”, “16”, and “23,” implying that there were at least 23 candlesticks in the full service and likely more, as 23 is an odd number with no known precedent in other sets. The sculptural forms of the candlesticks provide many contrasting, non-contiguous surfaces for painting, but as we will see, the painters met this challenge quite admirably without resorting to purely ornamental registers of design.

Finally, there is one surviving flask and stopper. As with the other pieces, there is no doubt that there were multiples of this form, which is not discussed by name in Piccolpasso’s treatise. It would certainly have been used to hold a liquid, likely water or wine.

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<sup>97</sup> David Harris Cohen and Catherine Hess, *Looking at European Ceramics: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1993), 65-67.

<sup>98</sup> Piccolpasso, Lightbown, and Caiger-Smith, *The Three Books of the Potter's Art: A Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London*, 2: 32-33.



Seven of these known pieces have been lost since they last appeared in sales catalogues, some missing since the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>99</sup> Of the twelve pieces that exist in present-day collections, eleven have published images. I will focus my detailed discussion on these eleven published objects, but it is important to consider the narratives, or *fabule*, of the other pieces as well. Of the nineteen *fabule* depicted, fourteen are stories from the *Metamorphoses* and five are other mythological subjects. Of the fourteen *Metamorphoses* compositions, at least three were taken directly from the 1497 and 1522 Venetian editions of the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, a fourteenth-century adaption of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Giovanni Bonsignori of Città di Castello.<sup>100</sup> This is the most direct connection between the service and a specific literary text.

### The Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the beloved compilation of classical myths told in verse, had long been available in manuscript form, both in Latin and in vernacular Italian. Giovanni Bonsignori's vernacular, prose adaptation of the text, called the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* (hereafter *OMV*), was completed ca.1375 and circulated in manuscript form for more than a century before its first printing in 1497.<sup>101</sup> This adaptation was more than just a translation: Bonsignori paraphrased

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<sup>99</sup> More detail is available in my appendix.

<sup>100</sup> In Mallet's "In Botega di Guido Durantino," he and Wilson identified the *Hippolytus and Phaedra* plate as sourced from the *OMV*. By reading through the 1497 and 1522 editions of the *OMV*, I identified two other woodcuts that corresponded to Montmorency service objects: *The Augury of Calcas* and *Ceyx and Alcyone*.

<sup>101</sup> Ovid, Giovanni Bonsignori, and Erminia Ardisino, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* (Bologna, Italy: Casa Carducci, 2001), ix-x.



the original text using his own *ingegno* and also added explanatory *allegorie* at the conclusion of many of the tales. While the *OMV* itself is an important work by a humanist scholar, its readers were not necessarily as learned as Bonsignori himself. These addendums included helpful facts as well as moral interpretations of each episode, geared towards readers who wished to enjoy and learn from Ovid's tales without learning Latin or making their own exegesis of the text. The printed edition also included illustrative woodcuts, which heightened its appeal to readers. Inventory records show that artists such as Filippino Lippi and Leonardo da Vinci owned copies of the *OMV*.<sup>102</sup>

A Latin edition of the *Metamorphoses* was printed by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1502, only a few years later.<sup>103</sup> Compare the Latin below to Bonsignori's vernacular version in this passage from the story of Apollo and Daphne. While the story is the same, Bonsignori adds his own poetic touch instead of translating it literally.

Wait nymph, daughter of Peneus, I beg you! I who am chasing you am not your enemy. Nymph, Wait! This is the way a sheep runs from the wolf, a deer from the mountain lion, and a dove with fluttering wings flies from the eagle: everything flies from its foes, but it is love that is driving me to follow you! Pity me! I am afraid you might fall headlong or thorns undeservedly scar your legs and I be a cause of grief to you! These are rough places you run through. Slow down, I ask you, check your flight, and I too will slow.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> The book is listed in postmortem inventories of their libraries. See Luba Freedman, *Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>104</sup> "Book 1: lines 504-511," Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.S. Kline, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph11.htm>. For all future references to the Latin of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, please reference the given line numbers in A.S. Kline's online translation. Unfortunately, there has been no modern day transcription of Aldus Manutius's 1502 *Metamorphoses* Latin edition. For a critical Latin text that incorporates medieval manuscripts, I recommend R.J. Tarrant's *Metamorphoses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Book 1: lines 504-511 from this translation appear below.

'Nympha, precor, Penei, mane! non insequor hostis;



I pray that you wait for me, for I do not follow you as the wolf after the lamb, or as the eagle after the dove, or as the lion after the deer, or as an enemy, and certainly you must not flee thus, because I follow you out of love. Oh, leave me, misery! I pray that you go carefully so that you do not fall and do yourself harm; watch that no thorn pricks your skin, so that by hunting you I am not the cause of any harm to you. I pray that you wait for me a little, or at least I pray that you run more temperately, and I will more temperately follow you.<sup>105</sup>

The 1497 edition was an edited version of Bonsignori's adaptation. For practical reasons, an introductory section call the *Essordio* was cut, while the shorter *Proemio*, which praised God and introduced the author, was left intact. The printers also shortened some of the stories and eliminated some of the *allegorie*; for example, the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, discussed below, was edited considerably in this edition.

### The compositions after Ovid

Timothy Wilson and J.V.G. Mallet have identified a woodcut illustration from the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* as the source material for one of the Montmorency *taglieri*. This composition depicts Theseus's son Hippolytus

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nympha, mane! sic agna lupum, sic cerua leonem,  
 sic aquilam penna fugiunt trepidante columbae,  
 hostes quaeque suos: amor est mihi causa sequendi!  
 me miserum! ne prona cadas indignaue laedi  
 crura notent sentes et sim tibi causa doloris!  
 aspera qua properas loca sunt: moderatius, oro,  
 curre fugamque inhibe; moderatius insequar ipse.'

<sup>105</sup> This English translation is my own. In Bonsignori's Italian:

Io ti priego che tu m'aspetti, perciò ch'io non te seguito sì come l'agnello dal lupo, e come la colomba da l'aquila, e come cervio al liono, e come fugge ciascuno dal suo nemico, e certamente tu non deveresti ciò fare, perciò ch'io te seguito per amore. Oh, lasso me misero! Io ti priego che nel fugir tu vadi tanto attenta che tu non cagge e che tu non te faccie male; guarda che alcuna spina non t'entrasse nello pé, acciò che io cacciandote non sia cagione de nullo tuo male. Pregote che tu m'aspetti alquanto, o almeno te prego che tu corri più temperatamente ed io più temperatamente te seguirò.

Bonsignori, Giovanni. *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 123. Please note that I have not given line numbers for the Bonsignori, as there is only one modern edition available for consultation.



fleeing the advances of his stepmother Phaedra [Pl. 2.1 and 2.2].<sup>106</sup> The rear of the plate bears the inscription “*fabula di Ipolito / e Phedra*,” identifying the story for those who may not immediately recognize it; however, the compositional reference to the *Vulgare* illustration could serve as a strong visual cue for those who had read that printed form of the work. The painted composition refers heavily to the woodcut without copying it in its entirety. The action is more dynamic on the Montmorency plate, the architecture far more elaborate, and the color gives the plate a richness and depth lacking in the simple woodcut.

Three separate episodes are included in the painted narrative. On the left, standing under the portico of a classicizing building, Theseus’s wife Phaedra flees into a door, her mouth open in calumny after her stepson Hippolytus spurns her amorous advances. Hippolytus lunges in the opposite direction, divided from her by an interposing column. He glances back at her as he runs, one hand held high to ward her off. This is a strong figural grouping, evocative in its rendering of Hippolytus’s horror and Phaedra’s chagrin. The artist’s exaggeration of the scene’s emotion suggests that he was familiar with the tale he was illustrating.

On the far right, we see the distant figure of Hippolytus repeated as he flees even farther in his chariot, driving his horses clear over the water. Behind him, his enraged father Theseus raises his sword high, threatening him with violence; Theseus believes Phaedra’s explanation that Hippolytus had tried to seduce *her*. The dark, roiling clouds that begin to gather above his head suggest

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<sup>106</sup> In the Latin, this story is told in the Book 15, lines 479-546. For Bonsignori’s rendition, see Ovid, Giovanni Bonsignori, and Erminia Ardisino. *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 167-168.



coming disaster: the monstrous, supernatural bull that later appears out of the water and frightens Hippolytus's horses into madness.

In the center of the plate, towards the bottom and closest to the picture plane, is the third episode from the story, and the most visually confusing one. A prostrate figure, wearing the same knee-length robe as Hippolytus, lies against a rock. Two other figures lean over this one in concern: a yellow-gowned woman with an elaborate hairstyle and an androgynous person in contrasting pink and blue robes. If the prostrate figure is indeed Hippolytus, then these two must be the deities Asclepius and Cynthia who heal him and hide him after his chariot crashes disastrously. Though copied faithfully from the original woodcut, the figure group would not successfully convey this part of the story to a viewer unfamiliar with the myth.

In designing this composition, the painter faced a particular formal problem: the existence of the depressed well in the center of the plate, which disrupted the otherwise flat painting surface. He did not interrupt the full composition of the plate to accommodate the well, but there seem to be a few design choices based on the well. He acknowledged the radial shape by placing a pillowy green hillock in the very center of the plate, with a sturdy tree shooting straight upwards out of it, practically bisecting the plate and moving the eye from the well outwards to the rim. Similarly, the standing figure of Cynthia leads the eye from the well downward, to the prostrate form of Hippolytus that just barely skims the inner rim. Strong diagonals from the classicizing building on the left almost radiate out from a central vanishing point, as does the distant figure of



Hippolytus fleeing in his chariot. Overall, the design is quite complementary to the circular shape of the plate.

Above the chariot of Hippolytus hangs the coat-of-arms of Anne de Montmorency, an imperative inclusion in the composition—a golden shield with a red cross and rows of blue alerions, topped with a golden coronet.<sup>107</sup> The shield is festooned with red ribbons that billow in stylized curls and waves, adding visual emphasis. Rather than simply superimposing the arms on the narrative scene, the painter has cleverly hung the shield and coronet from a long branch of the central tree.

The composition, then, does not falter over the central well; but if that well were full of food, the viewer would still be left with the most central parts of the story along the wide rim of the plate. On the far left, nestled in an elaborate fantasy of a building, is Phaedra; and on the far right is Hippolytus, fleeing as far as he can. The interpretation of this tale seems straightforward, and perhaps this is why the *allegoria* for this passage was cut from the 1497 printed edition. The Montmorency arms float directly above Hippolytus's chariot, identifying the family with the virtues of male chastity and continence.

Another *tagliere* adapts a woodcut from the *OMV* for its narrative scene: the augury of Calcas, identified on the back of the plate with the words “*Sachrifitio di Gre/ ci & de lo augurio/ d Calcanti*” [Pl. 2.3 and 2.4].<sup>108</sup> In this episode, the Greeks make a burnt offering to the god Jupiter while traveling to

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<sup>107</sup> An alerion is a heraldic emblem shaped like a small, stylized bird, sometimes called an “eaglet.” See Henry Gough, *A Glossary of Terms Used in Heraldry* (London: J. Parker, 1894 ), 218.

<sup>108</sup> In the Latin, the story is told in Book 12, lines 1-38. For Bonsignori's rendition, see Ovid, Giovanni Bonsignori, and Erminia Ardissino. *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 542.



Troy. As the flames engulf the altar, they see a large snake slither up a nearby tree and eat eight fledgling birds, as well as their mother. Calcas interprets this as a sign of Greek victory over the Trojans, but warns his countrymen that this will take nine years, one for each bird that the snake devoured. The snake is then turned to stone in the tree, the central metamorphosis of the tale.

The resemblance between the two images is undeniable. In both, the burnt offering and the altar are central, with a group of kneeling Greeks in armor on the left and a standing group of robed men on the right, which includes the seer Calcas. In the background there are ships afloat on a wide sea, indicating that the Greeks have been interrupted in the middle of their journey. Between the altar and Calcas, we find the tree and the ominous snake, devouring the birds.

The painter elaborated on the woodcut, adding more trees and rocks as well as a distant city across the sea. To accommodate the rounded surface, he compressed and extended certain spaces, and removed one of the two ships from the woodcut. The woodcut's altar includes a burning sacrificial calf, with a bonfire blazing in a hearth underneath. The altar in the painting also includes the calf, but the bonfire is placed directly on top of a marble altar. The area underneath is decorated with a frieze of fighting men, astonishing in its minute details. The frieze is reminiscent of Roman sarcophagus reliefs, like this Hercules sarcophagus from c. 3rd century CE [Pl. 2.5].

The snake is painted very much as it appears in the woodcut, twining itself up the tree with its mouth open to grab a fledgling. The woodcut's serpent has a pointed snout and two ears, more like a dragon than a snake. The maiolica



painter has turned the serpent into a more avian creature, with a beak rather than a snout and feathered crests rather than ears. This may have been a deliberate iconographical decision rather than merely an aesthetic one, as some of the details of this scene are visually problematic. Anne de Montmorency's arms feature eight bird-like heraldic symbols called alerions. Since part of this narrative includes eight young birds being devoured, the image becomes symbolic in an uncomfortable way. Perhaps the painter chose to portray the serpent as birdlike to offset any offense that this scene could have given to the French duke.

One is tempted to read more into this composition by referring to other heraldic emblems. The Papal States and France had recently fought together against Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire in the War of the League of Cognac. Charles V's arms also contain avian imagery: a large, threatening double-headed eagle [Pl. 2.6]. Could the large, bird-like serpent devouring the fledglings refer to the threat that the Holy Roman Emperor posed to the interests of France and the Italian lords? A threatening reading is bolstered by the Montmorency arms dangling precariously into the fire, enveloped in the smoke wafting upwards. The images here seem almost too on-point to be accidental. And yet this composition is borrowed almost entirely from a pre-existing image with no political connotations. It is possible that this was a mere coincidence, conceived by a painter or businessman uninterested in politics, but aware that the *Metamorphoses* were universally popular subjects. The other errors in the service lead one to doubt any complex allegorical readings.



The third composition inspired by an *OMV* woodcut is inscribed with “*Guerre et tribulanti/ de Troiani Terreste e/ Maritime: Ovi:/ Meta.*” [Pl. 2.7 and 2.8]. It is unique among the surviving pieces of the Montmorency service in that it specifies its reference material (*Ovi: Meta.*) explicitly in the rear inscription. However, the juxtaposition of this title with this composition is puzzling. The related woodcut from the *OMV* illustrates the tragic tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, who defied the gods and were struck down for impiety before being transformed into kingfishers.<sup>109</sup>

In the plate’s painted scene, a seafaring ship with several passengers sails through the well of the plate, while a sinking ship of similar construction is visible on the horizon, on the upper left rim. At the bottom of the well, the body of a man floats in the waves; below him on the bottom left rim, standing on the land in the foreground, are several mourning women with outstretched arms. On the bottom right side of the rim, a man stands in front of a similar group of women and clasps one’s hand in a gesture of affection and perhaps farewell. The Montmorency arms dangle above the central ship, hanging from an indeterminate point in the sky.

Unlike the two plates above, this composition may be from the 1522 printed edition of the *OMV* rather than the 1497 edition [Pl. 2.9]. The two are very similar, but the 1522 print is a mirror image of the 1497 print, with some added details: a mast on the sinking ship, elaborated terrain, and darkly-shaded areas.

Though the artist of the 1522 woodcut may have used the 1497 as a guide,

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<sup>109</sup> In the Latin, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone is told in Book 10, lines 410-748. For Bonsignori’s rendition, see Ovid, Giovanni Bonsignori, and Erminia Ardissino. *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 526-532. The adjacent chapter on the generations of the Trojan kings can be found on pp. 533 of this edition.



transferring the image from the print to his work surface, the painter of the maiolica scene redrew every figure himself—there is too much variation in figure style for a direct transfer, and the painted ship is seen from a different angle.

There are three significant alterations in content between the woodcut illustrations and the maiolica scene. Firstly, the maiolica painter chose to omit the man in a small boat traveling between the mainland and the seafaring ship. This was likely a choice made for spatial reasons—the plate’s composition is quite crowded as it is. The other changes involve the group of figures on the right: the man carries a sword, which Ceyx did not, and the woman is in a striking one-shouldered gown, her hair braided and crowned with a diadem. She does not seem to correspond to the mourning figure on the left, who wears a long-sleeved yellow gown and covers her hair.

The maiolica rendition is confusing. The simplest explanation is that the worker responsible for inscribing the plate did so mistakenly, labeling it as a scene of the Trojans instead of the *fabula* of Ceyx and Alcyone. However, there is no distinct tale in the *Metamorphoses* that describes the travails of the Trojans—rather, they are scattered throughout the final books of the *Metamorphoses*, interspersed with unrelated myths. One of the adjacent sections in the *OMV* is called “*Della generazione del re de Troia*,” so it is possible that the painter mistook the woodcut for an illustration of the Trojan War. It is also possible that the painter tried to construct a summary of the Trojan chapters, fully aware that they were using an unrelated reference image. Given the prompting inscription on the back of the plate, a viewer might imagine the ships and the figural groups as



episodes from the Trojan War, but the specific subjects of the vignettes would be left to imagination. Ultimately, this visual narrative is too ambiguous, and therefore unsuccessful.

The narratives on these three *istoriato* plates prove that Guido Durantino's workshop had access to at least one printed copy of the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, and possibly two, if they drew from both the 1497 and the 1522 editions. Written in vernacular, this was a text that at least some of the members of Guido's workshop could have read themselves. The enhanced drama in the Hippolytus episode implies that someone in the workshop was familiar with the story and was enhancing the illustration rather than just copying it. Overall, the painters exercise their *ingegno* not by altering the narrative content, but by formally adapting and embellishing the compositions. The artists transform these woodcuts into "splendid" images by adding luminous color and visually appealing details, like the lavish attire of the woman in the Trojan War composition, or the antique altar in the Calcas composition. They do not change the orientation of the narrative vignettes, or add new ones.

Eleven other known objects from the Montmorency service were inspired by episodes in the *Metamorphoses*, but their compositions were not adapted from the *OMV*'s woodcuts. This may have been purely a matter of necessity, since the stories below were not illustrated in the printed *OMV* editions, and there were not enough illustrations in the *OMV* to provide compositions for an entire tableware service.<sup>110</sup> Guido and his employees had to look elsewhere for models. Like other

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<sup>110</sup> It seems very likely that the remaining *OMV* woodcuts were used in the creation of other, lost pieces of the Montmorency service.



maiolica workshops, they went to popular circulating prints for assistance in this matter. Two of the plates, each depicting a labor of Hercules, were after Gian Jacopo Caraglio's *Labors and Adventures of Hercules* engravings, which were based on Rosso Fiorentino's drawings, ca. 1524.<sup>111</sup> The reference materials for the other compositions have not been identified.

Only one of these two plates, inscribed "*Hercole amazza/ Lydra*," is extant [Pl. 2.10 and 2.11].<sup>112</sup> Its reference image illustrates the same subject—Hercules fighting the Hydra—but the alterations to the scene are quite striking. The figures of Hercules, the Hydra, and his accompanying nephew Iolaus are straightforward copies, but the painter has imagined a strange, new background for this scene. The three main figures are posed in front of a rocky cliff, scrubby trees and a domed tower, without any clear delineation of where one feature begins and the other ends. The painter also added a new figure: a white-bearded man located above the Hydra, perched on either the cliff or a tree. He has one hand raised with a pointed finger, suggesting that he is speaking to the men in the foreground or possibly the viewer. Behind this amalgamation of land and architecture is a gentle landscape, fading into atmospheric blues. The Montmorency arms are suspended from a tree on the rim of the plate, as is standard throughout the service.

The strange, moody backdrop and the additional figure are interesting visual elaborations on Caraglio's print, highlighting the maiolica artist's creativity. However, this unknown figure complicates the narrative in a confusing

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<sup>111</sup> Carroll, Eugene A., et al., *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 75.

<sup>112</sup> Currently in the Ashmolean Museum. See Timothy Wilson, *Maiolica: Italian Renaissance Ceramics from the Ashmolean Museum*, 38.



way. The painter may be referencing another textual or visual source, but I have not been able to identify any obvious possibilities.<sup>113</sup> The other known Hercules *tagliere*, sadly no longer extant, also raises confusion. The inscription on the back of the lost Hercules plate read “*Hercole occise/ Caccho et il Cane/ Cebero.*”<sup>114</sup> This references two separate incidents, for which two separate Caraglio engravings exist [Pl. 2.12 and 2.13]. In Caraglio’s engraved rendition, Hercules slays the shepherd Cacus while recovering the cattle of Geryon, a task that does not include Cerberus. And in the *OMV*, the death of Cacus merits its own, albeit short, chapter.<sup>115</sup> There is no narrative precedent for conflating these episodes.

However, the Caraglio engraving of *Hercules Fighting Cerberus* does include a slain figure lying beneath the hero as he fights Cerberus. Could the maiolica painter have mistaken the slain man for Cacus? This may well be the case, if the composition’s designer had an incomplete knowledge of Hercules’s labors. In the *OMV*, Bonsignori describes Cacus as an infernal creature, and Cerberus was known to dwell in hell.

If Guido’s workshop used two works out of the series of six Hercules engravings, they likely used the others, too. We must consider *why* the maiolica artist would choose to stray from the composition of the engravings. On the other

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<sup>113</sup> The *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* identifies Iolaus as Hercules’s son, not his nephew, as Ovid does. However, neither Ovid nor Bonsignori included Iolaus in the Hydra episode at all. The most detailed story of Iolaus helping Hercules defeat the Hydra comes from Pseudo-Apollodorus, which was not available in print until 1555, compiled by Benedictus Aegius in Rome. Rosso Fiorentino or his patron may have had access to a manuscript copy, but it seems less likely that Guido Durantino’s workshop would be directly familiar with this text.

<sup>114</sup> In English, “Hercules kills Cacus and the dog Cerberus.”

<sup>115</sup> Bonsignori describes Cacus as “figliuolo de Vulcano e de Venere, el quale faceva molta nogia allo re Evandro in monte Palatino, dove è oggi Roma” and states that Cacus would drag virtuous men to “el qual demonio abita nel centro della terra” (*Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 436).



objects we've discussed, alterations were made to accommodate the form of the object or to increase the painting's splendor. It is possible that the old man that appears in the extant plate was included as a unifying, storytelling factor—perhaps he is the character who assigned all of Hercules's tasks, watching him complete them. Exhibition catalogues that include this plate have not included any explanation, and we cannot do more than speculate.<sup>116</sup>

Nine more objects in the Montmorency service feature scenes from the *Metamorphoses*, but their reference material has not yet been definitively identified. Of these nine, five have been lost to time and only short written descriptions remain. Without images, it is impossible to determine the inspiration for these compositions. The remaining four, however, are ripe for further study. Below, I have included my best hypotheses regarding their sources. In some cases, it seems that the painter may have drawn figures from prints that do not share the same subject as the maiolica plate. In such a case, we can surmise that at least one or more workshop members were familiar enough with the *fabule* to find analogous figures and put together their own illustrations. If the workshop did indeed possess a copy of the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, this would have been an excellent reference text for composing these visual narratives.

The story of Jupiter and Semele is painted onto a smooth, footed dish with no well to disrupt the pictorial space [Pl. 2.14]. The painter divided the surface into two figural groups: two women conversing in a bedchamber on the left, and Jupiter appearing to Semele on the right. The groups are divided by a sliver of

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<sup>116</sup> Eugene A. Carroll, et al., *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts*, cat 15: "A large landscape with architecture has been added, which includes another figure of a bearded man seated on a mound at the center."



landscape, revealing a smooth wooden floor, several trees, and the distant blue cityscape that appears on several other objects in the collection. Jupiter and Semele are framed by classicizing architecture—a post-and-lintel construction with a shadowed doorway—while the women on the left are delineated by the undulating confines of the bed-curtains, which are echoed by their draped mantles.

The four figures succinctly retell a tragic story. Jealous Juno, wife of Jupiter, disguises herself as a human woman and appears to Semele, who has already been impregnated by the god. Juno tells her that Jupiter must make love to her in his true, godly form, in order to demonstrate his regard for the young princess. Semele naively believes her and later asks Jupiter for this favor. Jupiter agrees and appears in his storm-god form, but it is too much for her human body; she is incinerated by his power. Jupiter rescues her unborn child, the infant Bacchus, who is then raised in secret by mountain nymphs to protect him from Juno's malice.<sup>117</sup> The story as told on the dish is completely in line with the one told in the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*.<sup>118</sup>

Of the two women on the left, one holds a hand to her mouth as if whispering, while pointing with her other hand: this is Juno, confiding to Semele, who holds her hand over her heart in a gesture of sincere attentiveness. On the right, Jupiter is clearly identified by his long beard, the roiling storm clouds beneath him, and the lightning bolt he holds in his hand. His other hand holds aloft the Montmorency arms, cleverly calling to mind Jupiter's other signifier, the

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<sup>117</sup> In the Latin, this story occurs in Book 3, lines 253-315.

<sup>118</sup> For Bonsignori's adaption, see *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 191-193.



eagle, through its alerions. Semele is prostrate on a couch below him, her pink gown sliding down to reveal her breasts.

The depiction of Jupiter on this dish is reminiscent of Michelangelo's paintings of God on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, perhaps most evident in his forked white beard, the animate quality of his hair blowing backwards, and the curving sweep of his cloak behind him. A similar character exists in Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving *God Appearing to Noah*, dated ca. 1513-1515 and tentatively connected with Michelangelesque drawings by Raphael for the Stanza d'Eliodoro in the Vatican [Pl. 2.15].<sup>119</sup> The resemblance is strongest in the handling of God and Jupiter's heads and outstretched arms, but the maiolica painter has bared Jupiter's legs, showing him striding forward on his storm cloud, rather than covering them with a long robe and supporting figures as Raimondi does in his engraving. There are also a couple parallels from Caraglio's 1526 print of Jupiter after Rosso [Pl. 2.16]. His cloak billows in a perfect circle up and behind him, while the thunderbolts he grasps in his hand share the same wavy quality as those of the maiolica Jupiter. The maiolica composition could very well be a composite.

However, an engraving from a Dutch print edition of the *Metamorphoses*, dating to 1703, suggests an alternate source [Pl. 2.17]. Now in the Warburg Library, this print shows Jupiter hovering above Semele upon his storm cloud in a composition strikingly similar to the maiolica version. The Warburg library describes this illustration as "an engraving by an unknown printer after a drawing

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<sup>119</sup> Shoemaker, *The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi*, 104-105.



by an unknown artist.”<sup>120</sup> It seems likely that the maiolica composition and this illustration 150 years later had a common origin, possibly in a previous illustration of this tale. This does not preclude a connection to Raimondi or Caraglio; the artists above may have been referring to a general style that proliferated through these prints or others like them.

Though the use of perspective in this plate is rather awkward, this seems to be one of the more successful visual narratives among the extant objects of the Montmorency service. The story is told succinctly, and with a certain sense of dramatic irony. Though Semele’s destruction is not portrayed explicitly, a viewer familiar with the story would anticipate her disastrous end. This clarity suggests that the painter was personally familiar with the story, likely the *OMV* version.

Another *tagliere* in the service depicts another disastrous love affair: that of Apollo and Daphne [Pl. 2.18].<sup>121</sup> This plate is visually united with the others by the repeated motifs of the distant blue landscape and the Montmorency arms, hanging high from the branch of a tree and surrounding by eye-catching red ribbons. As in the Jupiter and Semele painting, the coat of arms is elevated into the realm of the gods; it hangs amidst dark, swirling clouds that contain the figures of Cupid and the newly-smitten Apollo, who gazes down at Daphne from the heavens. The rest of the scene takes place in a pastoral land, where the gesturing figure of Apollo chases Daphne through a dark forest and across the river-bed of her father Peneus. On the opposite side of the river, Daphne glances

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<sup>120</sup> “Jupiter and Semele,” Artstor Collections, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8CdWZyUxLSE9IjZUEj54RngvU3Iofw%3D%3D&userId=hTZDdz8t&zoomparams=>

<sup>121</sup> See note 102 for the page reference of this story in Latin as well as the *OMV*.



back at Apollo as she begins her transformation into a laurel tree. As in the Jupiter and Semele plate, the story is conveyed very well by the body language and arrangement of the figures.

Once again, the painter has designed the scene to accommodate the presence of the well. The figure of Peneus seems to recline against the curve of the well, his legs bending around it toward the rim as if he were sitting in a chair, and the river itself spills over the edge of the well to widen along the broad bottom rim of the plate. If the well were in use during a dinner service, the story would still be apparent—Cupid, Apollo, and Daphne, as well as the Montmorency arms, are all arranged along the rim of the plate. This once again demonstrates how the maiolica artisans used their creative intellect to overcome difficulties of form.

Apollo and Daphne were commonly depicted as they are here, with Apollo in pursuit as Daphne's arms begin to sprout into laurel branches. Sometimes he is far behind her as the transformation begins, and in other instances he grasps her around the waist.<sup>122</sup> This painting is notable for portraying both of these main characters in the nude, unlike maiolica versions of this story by Francesco Xanto Avelli and the Milan Marsyas Painter, also executed in the early 1530s [Pl. 2.19 and 2.20]. The nudity of these figures is a visual reference to classical sculpture, recalling works like the Apollo Belvedere [Pl. 2.21]. Though I have not found a matching print, the inspiration was likely an engraving by a classicizing artist such as Marcantonio Raimondi, Agostino Veneziano, or Gian Jacopo Caraglio.

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<sup>122</sup> Antonio del Pollaiuolo's ca. 1470-80 painting of the subject is one such example of the time.



Another *tagliere*, this one featuring a much wider well and a narrow rim, depicts an episode from the tale of the daughters of Minyas [Pl. 2.22].<sup>123</sup> In the *Metamorphoses*, this episode acts as a frame story. The women are introduced as three sisters who choose to worship Minerva instead of Bacchus. Rather than participate in a Bacchanalian festival, they remain indoors and work on their spinning. To pass the time, they tell the tales of Pyramus and Thisbe, Mars and Venus, and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. However, Bacchus is angered by their impiety, and upon completion of these tales, he turns the daughters of Minyas into bats.

This plate only depicts the beginning of this frame story: the three daughters of Minyas sitting indoors and spinning. The three women are flanked by colonnades on either side, receding into a central arch that frames the middle sister. The viewer is drawn into the composition by a set of stairs leading into the scene from the very bottom edge of the plate, curved in a way that suggests the distortion of a convex mirror.<sup>124</sup> The curve follows the edge of the well where it meets the rim of the plate, using the three-dimensional form of the plate to enhance the surface painting. Indeed, most of the recession into space occurs within the large well; the rim is occupied by curtains that are parallel to the picture plane, drawing back to reveal the scene within. The Montmorency arms hang from the very apex of the plate, overlapping with the central arch.

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<sup>123</sup> In the Latin, this story can be found in Book 4, lines 31-54 and 389-415. For Bonsignori's adaption, see *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 214 and 230-231.

<sup>124</sup> Consider Parmigianino's 1524 *Self-Portrait in a convex mirror*, painted on a round panel. The effect is not as dramatic, but the artist seems aware of the effect of his round surface.



The arms are much more prominent in this simple and symmetrical composition than they are in any of the other plates, suggesting identification with the daughters of Minyas. This contrasts with the Ovidian text, which describes their eventual punishment for not worshipping Bacchus. Their behavior in this scene—chaste, demure, and domestic—is much more in line with Renaissance morals and proscribed female roles than Bacchanalian celebrations would be. It is a willful misunderstanding of the story, as these women were later punished for impiety, but one that is perhaps didactically necessary. I have found no parallel print for this plate; the daughters of Minyas are usually portrayed during the scene of their metamorphosis, which is much more dramatic [Pl. 2.23]. Indeed, the image hardly functions as a narrative on its own. Without the inscription on the backside, these three figures would appear very ambiguous. It is possible that the reference image depicted a different story altogether.

Finally, we have the candlestick that depicts the *fabula* of Alpheus and Arethusa [Pl. 2.24, 2.25, 2.26]. The candlesticks—three of which are extant—are the most complex forms among the known pieces of the service. There are three separate bands of ornamentation: the strip that runs horizontally around the base of the candlestick, the disc-shaped top surface of the base, and vertically-oriented shaft of the candlestick, which bells outward and narrows inward at several points. The figures of Alpheus and Arethusa, as well as the Montmorency arms, were placed on the top of the base, the most legible of the painting surfaces. The horizontal band bears a gentle landscape of distant buildings, trees, and sea, while the shaft of the candlestick holds a seated *putto* on one side and a swooping *putto*



on the other. They are carrying green garlands in their hands and the area above them is painted with citrus tree branches.

This *fabula* is similar to that of Apollo and Daphne.<sup>125</sup> Arethusa was a young and beautiful nymph dedicated to the worship of Diana. One hot day, she stripped off her clothes and went swimming in a cool river— not realizing that it was occupied by the river god Alpheus. He startled Arethusa and then pursued her as she fled, still naked. While he chased her, she prayed to Diana for intervention and the virgin goddess hid her within a cloud; but she soon melted into a pool of water, which mingled with the waters of Alpheus and later became a fountain sacred to Diana.

In the maiolica painting, Arethusa flees on the left while Alpheus pursues her on the right, separated by the shaft of the candlestick in the center, the Montmorency arms right above, and a pool of water just below. Like Daphne, Arethusa raises her arms and looks behind her as she runs, but this is not simply the figure of Daphne reversed. Arethusa's hair billows upwards into swirls of mist, which also begin to obscure her hands, one foot, and almost the entirety of one leg. These brushstrokes mirror the stylized curves of Alpheus's drapery, visually linking the flowing water and the misty cloud.

This is an unusual rendition of the story. Surviving prints of this subject often include the goddess Diana, and place a cloud in between Alpheus and Arethusa rather than showing her transformation [Pl. 2.27]. The painter may have instead adapted this composition from images of Apollo pursuing Daphne. He

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<sup>125</sup> In the Latin, this story is found in Book 5, lines 572-641. For Bonsignori's adaption, see *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, 282-284.



certainly exercised a measure of *ingegno* in the decoration of the other candlestick surfaces. The landscape and *putti* add visual interest and contextualize this narrative within a larger pastoral world. There is something to delight the eye from every angle of view, essential for a light source that would protrude over the surface of the table and draw the attention of multiple diners.

We lack images for five other objects that depict stories from the *Metamorphoses*. Based on records organized by Timothy Wilson in the 1980s, we know that the other Ovidian subjects were the stories of Pelias, Cadmus killing the serpent, the triumph of Galatea, Hermaphroditus, and Atalanta racing Hippomenes. The *OMV* contained a woodcut illustration of Atalanta and Hippomenes, so it may well have served as a reference image. It is also very likely that the Galatea plate was adapted from Raphael's famous fresco in the Villa Farnesina, which was engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi ca. 1515-16 [Pl. 2.28].<sup>126</sup> We cannot speculate on the others.

#### *Beyond Ovid: the other fabule*

All of the stories discussed above were mentioned in the *Metamorphoses*, and it is likely that many other lost objects in the Montmorency service were also inspired by it. However, five of the extant pieces of the Montmorency service depict mythological subjects that are not included in the *Metamorphoses*. While these paintings may illustrate episodes from texts such as Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, or Livy's *History of Rome*, it seems unlikely that the

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<sup>126</sup> Shoemaker, *The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi*, cat. 33.



members of Guido Durantino's workshop read the literary versions of these myths in order to design their *istoriato* products. This was a matter of access as well as literacy. While the *Biblioteca* was a major compilation of mythology, it was not printed until 1555, twenty years after this service was painted; moreover, this printed edition was in Latin, not the vernacular. Instead of using a printed book like the *OMV* as a guide, Guido's workshop probably used popular, stand-alone prints to develop the compositions of these five objects.<sup>127</sup>

The candlestick that portrays Vulcan forging the arrows of Cupid has the same sculptural form as the other two extant candlesticks in the service [Pl. 2.29, 2.30, 2.31]. Like the others, the story is painted on the top side of the base, while a gentle landscape ornaments the circumference of the base. The shaft is painted with a *putto* diving downwards on one side, and a seated *putto* on the other—the same figures as on the shaft of the Arethusa candlestick. Instead of green garlands, they hold some a golden substance that could be grain or even fire, a reference to Vulcan's forge.

Vulcan is seated at his forge on the left side of the base, while Venus and Cupid standing on the edge of a forest on the right side. The figures are mostly nude, but the adults are draped with billowing robes. Cupid is portrayed as a young child, identical to the *putti* on the shaft. He faces away from the forge, hugging his mother's legs and glancing upwards towards her. She calmly oversees Vulcan's work while holding on to her son with one hand.

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<sup>127</sup> The artists who designed the engravings would have access to intellectual advisors, either a friend or a scholar employed by their printer.



This domestic scene was a popular one in the sixteenth century, especially in prints. Italian versions exist by Marcantonio Raimondi, Marco Dente da Ravenna, Agostino Veneziano, and Giorgio Ghisi. The painting on the Montmorency plate does not match any of these versions in its entirety, but the figure of Vulcan is a close match to the one in Marco Dente's rendition of the story [Pl. 2.32]. Vulcan is seated at his anvil while Venus and Cupid are standing; he faces towards the right and has his right arm lifted over his head, holding a hammer that is ready to strike down on the anvil. In his left hand, he holds a long arrow against the anvil. In both, curiously, the anvil is simply sitting upon a tree stump—Vulcan has no need for a heated forge. However, one can imagine that a lit candle placed in this candlestick would add a warm, flickering ambience to this scene. This is another example of maiolica artists using images to complement the forms of their products.

The painted Cupid and Venus are not a match with this print. Venus is more attentive on the candlestick painting, acknowledging her son but clearly watching Vulcan at work. It is a kinder take on Vulcan and Venus's relationship than another commonly-portrayed episode: Vulcan catching Venus and Mars in bed together while the other gods laugh at their mutual humiliation. More often than not, Vulcan is characterized as a dull, older husband who is ignored by his imperious young wife. Here, we see a family living together harmoniously.

One of the lost plates also bore an image of Vulcan at work, this time making the weapons of Mars. The accompanying inscription read "*Vulcano fabrica le Arme al foribundo/ Marte.*" The description does not mention the



presence of Venus in the scene, but this was a common occurrence. If two of these scenes of Venus and Vulcan were included in the service, it is possible that the full service included plates that told the full story of their marriage, including Vulcan catching them in the act of adultery.

Also lost is a plate depicting the fall of the Titans, described in a French auction catalogue from 1837: “*Decoré en couleurs, représentat les géants foudroyés par Jupiter et portant les armes de la famille de Montmorency. Au revers, la légende.*” This subject was perhaps most famously conceived by the Dutch painter Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem in the late sixteenth century, long after the creation of this service. Earlier iterations were not common.

The final extant pieces in the service contain a minimal amount of narrative, though they refer to classical myth. The third candlestick in this group shows the birth of Castor and Pollux [Pl. 2.33, 2.34, 2.35]. The base is painted with another horizontally-oriented landscape, and the shaft features the repeated figures of the seated *putto* and the diving *putto*. In this instance, the *putti* are carrying bundles of flowers with long green stems and tiny reddish flowers. The combination of buildings, trees, and hills along the base are also subtly different. The artist has added pleasing variety to these unifying conventions.

The mythological painting on the top of the base shows Leda with her twin sons hatching out of their eggs. A famous lover of Jupiter, Leda was a very popular subject for mythological painting in the sixteenth century; we know of versions painted by Sodoma, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Leonardo, Bacchiacca, and many more [Pl. 2.36 and 2.37]. Artworks based on her myth can be divided



into two basic categories. Some are overtly erotic, showing her copulating with Jupiter in swan form, while other works are more discreet, depicting her nude and accompanied by her children and a swan. In this maiolica painting, she is seated on the left while Castor and Pollux emerge from their eggshells at the bottom of the scene. Curiously, there is no swan in sight and she is fully clothed in a blue robe.<sup>128</sup> The Montmorency arms hang from a tree on the right side of the base, balancing the composition.

If this candlestick composition was based on a print of Leda, then it was an unusual one. The extant prints of Leda tend towards the erotic. Many of them are visual descendants of Michelangelo's lost painting of Leda [Pl. 2.38]. But in this maiolica painting, Leda appears more matronly than sensual. Her unusual pose may provide a clue to the reference image. It is analogous to an anonymous sixteenth-century panel painting of Leda, Castor, and Pollux that was sold in Pesaro in 1993; both female figures are seated in the wilderness, looking to the side and supported by one bent arm, their legs crossed at their ankles [Pl. 2.39].<sup>129</sup> This similarity is striking, though the children are in very different positions and lack eggshells.<sup>130</sup> If the maiolica artist was at all familiar with this painting, then he made significant alterations in composition. It is perhaps more likely that these two painters were inspired by a common source, perhaps a drawing or a book illustration. The workshop may have decided to produce a modest version of this

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<sup>128</sup> As the myth goes, Castor was the son of Zeus, while Pollux (Gr: Polydeuces) was the son of Leda's husband, Tyndareus. Classical sources for this myth include Isocrates's *Archidamus* and Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca*.

<sup>129</sup> "Anonimo fiorentino sec. XVI, Leda e il cigno," Photo archive of Fondazione Federico Zeri, University of Bologna.

<sup>130</sup> The inclusion of the egg shells may ultimately derive from Leonardo da Vinci's lost painting, which was widely reproduced by contemporary painters.



common story, in line with several other paintings in this service that seem to promote chastity.<sup>131</sup>

The final object in this service is the stoppered flask painted with the sea god Neptune and two horses [Pl. 2.40]. This is by far the most sculptural piece of the nineteen known objects in the service. The body of the flask is a smooth gourd shape that curves outward at the bottom and narrows at the neck. It is set on a narrow, bell-shaped foot, and the stopper is decorated with a painted finial. Most impressively, the flask has two handles in the shape of dragons, wings spread against the body of the vessel and tails curling downwards toward the base.

Perhaps the complexity of the form itself required a relatively simple painting. There is no obvious narrative. The god poses with his trident, looking upwards at the sky, and his horses stand at attention close by. Neptune and the horses are juxtaposed against bright blue water, and the sky on the horizon is golden, signaling sunrise or sunset. Ominous, dark gray clouds hang above the figures, becoming quite thick and dark on the neck of the bottle and offsetting the bright colors of the Montmorency arms.

The dramatic lighting and heavy clouds hint at a narrative and a likely visual source: Marcantonio Raimondi's ca. 1515-16 engraving after Raphael, called *Quos Ego* [Pl. 2.41]. This large, multi-panel print referenced a type of Roman relief sculpture from the early Imperial period, which illustrated epic works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>132</sup> The central panel of the large engraving

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<sup>131</sup> Particularly *Hippolytus and Phaedra*, *Apollo and Daphne*, *Arethusa and Alpheus*, *the Daughters of Minyas*, and perhaps *Venus and Cupid with Vulcan*.

<sup>132</sup> Shoemaker, *The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi*, cat. 120. See study by Lawrence Nees for discussion of Raimondi and Raphael's source material. The catalogue quotes Nees: "The *Quos Ego*



was inspired by “Neptune calming the tempest,” a passage in the *Aeneid*.<sup>133</sup> In the print, Neptune braces himself in his chariot, legs spread wide and hands grasping the reins, and looks upwards at the personified faces of the winds as he clutches his trident in his other hand. The waves are tumultuous around him and the sky is dark and troubled. Below him, two figures emerge from the water to aid him.

The print and the painting are by no means identical, but the poses of Neptune and the horses seem too similar to be coincidental. The painter made his own alterations: the chariot is gone and Neptune faces away from the horses, no longer even suggesting the presence of a chariot. He also holds the trident awkwardly, grasping it with both hands and pointing the tines behind him. However, his legs are stretched wide in the same manner as Raimondi’s Neptune, his hair blows backwards in the face of the storm, and his glance upwards echoes the important narrative gesture of Neptune interacting with the winds.

This painted flask helps us understand the relationship that Guido and his workshop had with their source materials. We have now seen a full spectrum of reference images, from simple woodcuts to this erudite engraving. The adaptations of these works reveal an uneven understanding of their content. *Quos Ego* presents the greatest challenge in this regard. As we have seen throughout the Montmorency service, simply copying images from one medium to another does not ensure that the narrative will remain intact. The workshop must have used *Quos Ego* as a model because it was highly regarded, but the designer adapted the engraving in a way that disregarded the original’s sophisticated design and

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represents a scholarly Humanist undertaking, a free ‘imitation’ of an ancient monument, substituting that national (and Roman) epic of the *Aeneid* for the Greek epic poems.”

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



historical-literary references. Though the figures of Neptune and his hippogriffs fit neatly onto the body of the flask, the image has lost important context and dramatic flair. This weakens the narrative's legibility.

Other paintings in this service also lack narrative coherence, but for different reasons. The *Hercules and Hydra* plate includes an extra figure that was not in the original Caraglio print—and while this is an ambitious addition, and perhaps indicative of additional narrative content, the reference is not clear. The success of an *istoriato* composition did not necessarily lie in the faithful imitation of one reference image, but a designer did need to fully understand the story he depicted. The *Apollo and Daphne* and *Jupiter and Semele* plates are quite legible, even though they may be composites of many artworks. These compositions demonstrate that the designer or designers were very familiar with the literary episodes that they were illustrating. They had access to a copy of the *OMV*, a vernacular translation of Ovid's tales—and with this textual reference at hand, they could study Ovid's stories themselves and make their visual compositions easy to read.

Paintings like *Vulcan Forging the Arrows of Cupid* and the *Birth of Castor and Pollux* also demonstrate a firm grasp of the content. There are small visual alterations to standard iconography, but these images are still effective. By changing the direction of Venus's glance, the maiolica painter has made her an attentive wife and mother rather than a self-absorbed adulteress. Similarly, the painter turns Leda into a respectable matron by clothing her in a blue gown. These additions change the inflection of these narratives without making them illegible.



In these cases, the painters have altered their reference images to convey themes of respectability and morality while preserving the identifying characteristics of their subjects.

Of the eleven compositions I have discussed, most do succeed at conveying a legible visual narrative. This was quite an achievement given the large number of *istoriato* scenes that were included in the full service. These artisans—who were working-class men, not gentlemen—were reasonably familiar with a very wide variety of mythological tales, subjects that had previously been the purview of the wealthy. This level of knowledge would not be possible without the widespread distribution of printed images and texts in sixteenth-century Italy, especially vernacular texts.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Montmorency service is its visual uniformity. Though it was executed by multiple painters working from disparate reference images, these artists worked together to uphold a general workshop style. All the objects in this service share a bright color palette of yellows, reds, greens, and blues. Several motifs run throughout the service: the golden-yellow rims of the plates, the hanging Montmorency arms, and soft blue landscapes that accompany the narrative scenes. A casual viewer would not imagine that these paintings were inspired by such formally different works as the *OMV* illustrations and Raimondi's *Quos Ego*. The painters worked in broad, rounded brushstrokes that gave their figures weight and volume. Though close examination reveals different hands at work, this would not have been obvious to the general viewer, who encountered these paintings while dining. Unlike many better-known



workshops in Renaissance Italy, this uniform workshop style emphasizes equal collaboration rather than emulation of a single master. The goal was a prosperous business, not personal renown.

In this case-study, I have reunited these images and set them within the greater visual context of early sixteenth-century Italy. These artisans may not have matched the invention and draftsmanship of the artists they emulated, but they were remarkably skillful at transforming disparate works into a uniform collection. Ultimately, we know that the consumers of these *istoriato* services were quite pleased with them. After examining the Montmorency service as a whole, it seems that this pleasure came from the effect of viewing the entire service together. When seen *en masse*, the awkward narrative structures or flawed execution in some of the compositions would be masked by the overwhelming profusion of figures and stories. This is reasonable when we consider the use and function of prints versus tableware. Prints are flat and static objects, chiefly made for study and contemplation, while maiolica dishes were best suited for the manipulation and motion of the banquet hall. We can imagine that the sight of the Montmorency service in use must have been splendid indeed.



## Conclusion

In the course of this study, I have provided an overview of *istoriato* maiolica production in the duchy of Urbino, as well as a close reading of the *istoriato* tableware service of Anne de Montmorency, Grand Master and Constable of France. I have delineated the three factors that made Urbino the center of *istoriato* maiolica manufacture in the sixteenth century: the availability of natural resources for ceramics, the presence of a magnificent ducal court, and the widespread availability of printed books and images. I briefly discussed known patrons of Urbino's maiolica workshops, including Cardinal Ludovico Podocataro, who commissioned one of the first *istoriato* services; Pope Clement VII, who owned many types of maiolica; and Eleanora Gonzaga and Francesco Maria I of Urbino, who gave *istoriato* services as gifts. I also presented three men who were key players in the business: potter and workshop owner Guido Durantino; painter and workshop owner Nicola da Urbino; and painter Francesco Xanto Avelli.

By contextualizing the circumstances of the Montmorency service, I have highlighted the ways in which these objects engaged with two spheres of sixteenth century art: aristocratic material culture and print culture. In fact, this close study of the service reveals that *istoriato* maiolica painters excelled at integrating these two aspects of Renaissance visual culture, transforming monochrome, linear works into bright, eye-catching paintings that suited the grandeur of court banquets.

I have come to the same conclusion as Lisa Boutin in her study of Isabella d'Este's *istoriato* service: the Montmorency service did not seem to have a dedicated scholarly advisor overseeing the choices of *fabule*. While all of the subjects were



drawn from classical myth and history, there is no overarching, intellectual message among these paintings. Instead, the workshop seems to have chosen narratives that were familiar and popular. I have brought together a large group of confirmed and possible reference materials for these paintings. Sometimes a composition's inspiration was based in a popular text, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and sometimes the inspiration was drawn from a renowned artwork with no textual equivalent, such as Marcantonio Raimondi's *Quos Ego*. The visual allusions to Caraglio and Rosso's *Labors and Adventures of Hercules* would have appealed to print connoisseurs.

The breadth of texts and images referred to in these nineteen objects demonstrates the cultural attunement of Urbino's ceramics manufacturers. Though they were working-class men without as much access to formalized education as their patrons, their proximity to the ducal court heightened their engagement with elite art forms. Narrative painting was considered one of the highest artistic achievements, and they rose to this challenge with aplomb. The legibility of the Ovidian *fabule* indicates that they were familiar with these classic tales. The maiolica translation of *Quos Ego* is more superficial, but still demonstrates an awareness of the most intellectual prints of the era. Though the artisans did not try to invent completely original renditions of every *fabula* they illustrated, they did use their creative intellect to embellish their compositions and make them more colorful, elaborate, and splendid than their references.

Further research could expand this study of the Montmorency service into a larger study of Guido Durantino's workshop production. As I have described, his workshop was a collaborative space where multiple painters worked together in a



uniform style. They must have had uniform access to reference images, as well. Rather than tracking the individual “hands” of these painters, we might instead track the prints that they used. Other *istoriato* objects that refer to the *OMV*, Caraglio’s *Hercules* series, or *Quos Ego*, may have also been executed in Guido’s workshop. Some of these reference images were ten, twenty, or over thirty years old by the time they were incorporated into the compositions of Guido Durantino’s workshop, so they may have been used for *istoriato* compositions before this 1535 service. And if these prints were owned by Guido himself, they may have passed on to his son, Orazio Fontana, after Orazio took over the *istoriato* ware production.

This line of research is also useful in tracking the dissemination of prints. It is difficult to know who owned prints, where they traveled, and how long they may have remained in one collection. *Istoriated* maiolica compositions are a physical record of print ownership. We can look beyond Guido Durantino’s workshop to track these relationships. Nicola da Urbino, Francesco Xanto Avelli, and other maiolica painters also used prints in the same way. By studying large numbers of *istoriated* objects, we can develop a list of the woodcuts and engravings present in Urbino during the sixteenth century.

Overall, *istoriated* maiolica objects are multivalent cultural artifacts. Their production bridges working-class and aristocratic visual culture, as artisans exercised their own agency to create artworks desirable to courtiers. They embody a series of collaborations and adaptations, originating with compositions by grand masters of *disegno*, such as Raphael and Rosso Fiorentino, and mediated through the hands of gifted engravers. Rather than imagining these ceramic paintings as purely



reproductive compositions or an isolated artistic trend, we must understand them as meaningful reverberations of broader artistic culture and taste.



## Appendix: Known objects in the Anne de Montmorency maiolica service, 1535<sup>134</sup>

### Objects in known collections

1. Plate, arms of Montmorency; Hippolytus and Phaedra. Reverse inscribed: '*fabula di Ipolito / e Phedra / In Botega de M.o. Guido duratino/ in Urbino/ 1535.*' London, Victoria and Albert Museum. [Pl. 2.1]
2. Plate, arms of Montmorency; Trojan War subject of the Sacrifice of the Greeks and the Augury of Chalcas. Reverse inscribed '*Sachrifitio di Gre/ ci & de lo augurio/ d Calcanti/ In Botega, d M.o. Guido/ durantino In Urbino.*' Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art. [Pl. 2.3]
3. Plate, arms of Montmorency; wars and troubles of the Trojans on land and sea. Reverse inscribed '*Guerre et tribulanti/ de Troiani Terreste e/ Maritime: Ovi:/ Meta:/ In Botega de Mastro Guido/ Durantino In Urbino 1535.*' London, Victoria and Albert Museum. [Pl. 2.7]
4. Plate, arms of Montmorency; Hercules and the Hydra. Reverse inscribed '*Hercole amazza/ Lydra/ in Botega de M.o. Guido/ durantino in Urbino/1535.*' Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. [Pl 2.10]
5. Dish on low foot, arms of Montmorency; Jupiter and Semele. Reverse inscribed '*fabula/ de Giove et /Semele/ nella Botega de M.o./ Guido durantino/ In Urbino/ 1535.*' London, British Museum. [Pl. 2.14]
6. Plate, arms of Montmorency; Apollo and Daphne. Reverse inscribed '*Apollo Seguita/ Daphne qual se/convertj in Lauro -/ In botega d mo Guido/ durantino/ In/ Urbino.*' Baltimore, Walters Art Museum. [Pl. 2.18]
7. Plate, arms of Montmorency; the daughters of Minyas. Reverse inscribed '*Le Piche favoleg/ giano nella festa/ di Baccho/ In Botega de M.o. Guido/ durantino in Urbino.*' London, Sir John Soane Museum. [Pl. 2.22]
8. Candlestick, arms of Montmorency; Alpheus and Arethusa on flat upper surface of pedestal; continuous landscape around the side of the pedestal; numeral 16 in blue underneath. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. [Pl. 2.24, 2.25, and 2.26]

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<sup>134</sup> All information here collected by Timothy Wilson of the Ashmolean Museum and J.V.G. Mallet, published in "In Botega di Maestro Guido Durantino in Urbino," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 129, No. 1010 (May 1987), 284-298.



**9.** Candlestick, arms of Montmorency; Vulcan forging the arrows of Cupid in the presence of Venus on upper surface of pedestal; above them on baluster-shaped column are further figures; round the side of the pedestal, a continuous landscape. Underneath, in blue, is the numeral 11. New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Pl. 2.29, 2.30, and 2.31]

**10.** Candlestick, arms of Montmorency; the Birth of Castor and Pollux on the upper surface of the pedestal; above, on the baluster-shaped column are further figures; round the side of the pedestal a continuous landscape. Underneath in blue is the numeral 23. New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Pl. 2.33, 2.34, and 2.35]

**11.** Flask and stopper with Montmorency arms on both sides; Neptune and other figures amongst hippocamps in the sea. Turin, Museo Civico. [Pl. 2.40 and 2.41]

**12.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; story of Pelias. Reverse inscribed '*Fabula de Baccho/ E Sue Notrice/ In Botega di m.o. Guido/ durantino In Urbino/ 1535.*' Rouen, Musée de Antiquités. Image unpublished.

#### Lost objects

**13.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; Vulcan and Mars. Reverse inscribed '*Vulcano fabrica le Arme al foribundo/ Marte/ In la Botega d mo Guido/ durantino in Urbino/ 1535.*' Location unknown since ca. 1900. Formerly in Spitzer collection, Paris.

**14.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; Hercules, Cacus, and Cerberus, after an engraving by Gian Jacopo Caraglio. Reverse inscribed '*Hercole occise/ Caccho et il Cane/ Cebero/ In Botega de M.o. Guido/ durantino in Urbino/ 1535.*' Location unknown since 1884. Formerly in Fountaine collection, London.

**15.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; Atalanta and Hippomenes. Reverse inscribed '*Atalante Veloce/ Et Ipomenes lavar/ ca co ingegno/ In Botega di M.o. Guido/ durantino In Urbino/ 1535.*' Location unknown since 1884. Formerly in Fountaine collection, London.

**16.** Plate (?), arms of Montmorency; Triumph of Galatea. Formerly in Paris. Location unknown since 1837.

**17.** Dish on foot, arms of Montmorency; Cadmus killing the Serpent. Reverse inscribed '*Fabula di Cadmo qual occise il serpente. Nella bottega di M.o. Guido Durantino In Urbino.*' Formerly in Bologna, location unknown since 19th century.

**18.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; Fall of the Titans. Described as '*decoré en couleurs, représentat les géants foudroyés par Jupiter et portant les armes de la famille de Montmorency. Au revers, la légende. Cadre doré. Diam, 30 cent.*' Formerly in Seillière collection, Paris. Location unknown since 1837.



**19.** Plate, arms of Montmorency; Hermaphroditus. Described as '*représentant la fable d'Hermaphrodite avec les armoiries des Montmorency. Il porte, au revers, l'indication du sujet ainsi que l'inscription*: In Botega de M. Guido Durantino in Urbino. *Cadre doré. Diam, 30 cent.*' Location unknown; last recorded in Paris in 1890.



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