NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE ITALIAN MAJOLICA POTTERY *A LA TURCHESCA* KNOWN AS 'CANDIANA'

Federica A. Broilo (Mardin)

Abstract: *'Candiana' is the conventional name used among the scholars to indicate a majolica from the northeast Italian region of Veneto. Produced between the end of the sixteenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries, it is considered atypical of the various Italian productions from that period: the only example of majolica reminiscent of the Ottoman Iznik production. The only place in Veneto where kiln wasters of 'Candiana ware' have actually been found is the town of Bassano del Grappa at the foothills of the Venetian Prealps, north of Padua – although we know that pieces of 'Candiana' had to have been manufactured in Padua and probably also in Venice. A large number of these pieces were dedicated to nuns, something quite unexpected considering their orientalized decoration. There are still many unsettled questions related to 'Candiana ware'. In this contribution we will try to give the present state of scholarship on that subject and address some of the questions about the location of the kilns and the different extant typologies. To understand more about this little known majolica, we will also examine a phenomenon outside Veneto but similar to that of 'Candiana ware': 'Haban ware', tin-glazed ceramics painted with various coloured oxides, which were produced in Habsburg Hungary after the sixteenth century. It is certainly not impossible that Trentino and the Alto Adige region had a role in the transmission of forms and decorations in Central and South Europe. The city of Bolzano was a very active commercial centre since the early medieval period, with annual fairs that functioned as mediators of goods between Venice and the German lands. Venice mainly brought silk and glass to these fairs, but it is likely that pottery also entered the market – for example ceramics produced in Bassano, which is conveniently located midway between Padua and Trento.*

There is a peculiar type of majolica (tin-glazed pottery) from the northeast Italian region of Veneto, which remains an unsettled question among scholars. Produced between the end of the sixteenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries, it is considered atypical of the various Italian productions: the only example of majolica with an orientalizing decorative vocabulary using the so-called *saz* leaves, carnations, roses, tulips, and hyacinths painted in four colours (Ill. 1).

For the past fifty years, most scholars have agreed that it must be considered an interpretation of the décor of Ottoman tiles produced at Iznik (Ill. 2).

Ill. 1. Dish. Padua (?), Veneto. Majolica painted with central *saz* leaf. 1600–1650. Image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Ill. 2. Dish. Iznik. Fritware, with polychrome underglaze painting of flowers and *saz* leaves. 1575 (circa). Image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The very first publication entirely dedicated to this Veneto-produced majolica was a concise pamphlet written in Greek in 1924.[1] It endowed this group of objects with a name, 'Candiana ware', which was due to an older misreading of the writing 'Chandiana' on the reverse side of a fruit stand from the Sèvres Museum.[2] 'Chandiana' was then wrongly identified with the production place of the piece: first with the island of Crete, known in Italian as Candia, and eventually with the village of Candiana near Padua. It was later pointed out that the inscription actually reads 'S. Chandiana' and must refer to the name of a nun – the 's' standing for *suora* – whose first name was Chandiana.[3]

The presumed existence of a manufacture at Candiana was subsequently contested by a series of scholars.[4] This response has not completely arrested further speculations about its existence in more recent times, however. In 2009 one scholar pointed out that the Abbey of San Michele at Candiana actually possessed a kiln that is clearly identifiable on a plan of the complex dating to 1783.[5] Yet the fact that a large amount of majolica was indeed in the possession of this abbey proves only the popularity of this type of pottery among the fathers of the abbey, not that the orientalizing 'Candiana ware' was produced there as well. Besides the first (and mistaken) reading of the writing on the mentioned object as referring to a place, the only other link that these wares have with

1 Ch. A. Nomikos: *Tà keramourgèmata tes Kandiànas*. Alexandreia: Grammata, 1924.

2 Charles Drury Edward Fortnum: A descriptive catalogue of the majolica, Hispano-Moresco, Persian, Damascus, and Rhodian wares in the South Kensington Museum: with historical notes, marks, & monograms. London: G.E. Eyre & Wm. Spottiswoode, 1873, p. 616.

3 Edouard Garnier: *Manifacture national de Sèvres: Catalogue du Musée céramique*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897, p. 99, ill. 295.

4 Andrea Moschetti: "Delle maioliche dette 'Candiane'", in: *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova* 24 (1931) 7, pp. 1–58; Bernard Rackham: "Paduan Majolica of the so-called 'Candiana' type", in: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 68 (1936) 396, pp. 112–114; Adolfo Callegari: "Sulle maioliche dette *candiane*", in: *Faenza* 22 (1934), pp. 74–87; Gaerano Ballardini: "'Candiana' ma non tutto 'Candiana'", in: *Faenza*, 28 (1940), p. 39; Giuliana Erincani: "Le maioliche alla 'turchesca'. La ceramica tenera", in: *La ceramica nel Veneto. La terraferma dal XIII al XVIII secolo*, ed. Giuliana Erincani, Paola Marini. Milano: Mondadori, 1990, pp. 233–243; Michelangelo Munarini: "Le ceramiche del Seicento e del Settecento dei musei civici di Padova", in: *Le ceramiche del '600 e del '700 dei Musei Civici di Padova*. Venezia: Marsilio, 1995, p. 52.

5 Paolo Benozzi: "La collezione inedita di ceramiche 'candiane' provenienti da Candiana del Barone Ernesto da Rubin De Cervin Albrizzi", in: *Quaderni di Storia Candianese* 5 (2009), pp. 36–75. In a plan of the abbey of San Michele dated 1611 and belonging to the *Constitutio circa statum Reagularium* of 1664, there is represented a small circle that has been identified by Paolo Benozzi as the kiln for the production of the pottery for the abbey. While this identification is a little bit unclear, it is undeniable that in the plan dating 1783 there was a kiln represented as a tall but slender little house on the same spot as the one in the plan from 1611. In a document from 1879 stating the assets belonging to the Abbey of San Michele, the existence of a small kiln, or *picciola furnace*, is mentioned again. There was indeed a kiln in the abbey; however, if this kiln had ever been used to produce majolica *a la Turchesca*, that is far from being proved. Benozzi: "La collezione inedita di ceramiche 'candiane'", pp. 49–50.

Candiana is an enigmatic letter supposedly dating to 1604. It was published in 1889 by one scholar infamous for forging the historical documentation used in his work.[6] This letter addresses the "miserable conditions of the manufactures of Candiana" (*lo stato misero in cui sono pervenute le fabbriche di Candiana*). The original of this letter has never surfaced. The timing and the content of its publication may suggest that it was forged so as to support the newly formed theory, based on the object in the Sèvres Museum, that the provenience of these objects is Candiana. The fact that all of the surely datable 'Candiana' objects were produced only after the letter's supposed date of 1604, too, makes it unlikely that the manufacture already suffered a period of decline already then, and not later.[7]

Moreover, the material from the Abbey of San Michele is not homogeneous, as some examples will illustrate. Among its forty pieces that entered the Albrizzi Collection, there is a large bowled dish with a quadripartite décor with roses. (Ill. 3, Ill. 4) An identical dish is to be found in the collection of the Musei Civici of Padua: it has a reddish ceramic fabric and the back is painted with spirals and elaborated *roncigli*.[8] (Ill. 5) Another piece from the Albrizzi Collection worth mentioning is one large dish – again, identical objects can be found in other collections, namely the Musei Civici of Padua and the Museum of Toledo in Spain – with a peculiar décor distinguished by alternating roses and *saz* leaves around the rim. Such dishes seem to be characterized by a pinkish-yellowish ceramic fabric, which is quite different from the reddish paste of the former example. A third example is a fruit stand, or *alzata*, with a similar but not identical décor. Its kind can also be found in both the Albrizzi Collection and the Musei Civici of Padua. Its ceramic fabric looks orange; the back is decorated with similarly elaborated *roncigli*, which, to the best of my knowledge, appear only here and on the Albrizzi dish.[9]

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6 G. M. Urbani De Gheltof: *Notizie istoriche ed artistiche sulla ceramica italiana*, Roma: Stabilimento tipografico G. Civelli, 1889, pp. 24, 144.

7 Nowadays, the biggest collection of Candiana wares belongs to Baron Ernesto Rubin de Cervin Albrizzi. The collection includes almost forty pieces, mostly dishes that have been summarily identified as Candiana because of their oriental(ized) decor of *saz* leaves and flowers. Undoubtedly, some of the pieces truly do belong to the family of Candiana wares; some others, however, such as the two tankards, are completely different and look like they belong to a nineteenth-century production very reminiscent of the Cantagalli manufacture from Naples, even though they are unmarked. Benozzi: "La collezione inedita di ceramiche 'candiane'", p. 38, Ill. 2. Unfortunately, it is not known when the two tankards entered the collection and if they were part of the original assets from the Abbey of San Michele bought by the Albrizzi family in 1783 or if they were a later acquisition from the auction market. Either way, their identification with the Candiana majolica as stated in Benozzi's article is definitely incorrect. Sadly, on 29 March 2013 Baron Ernesto Rubin de Cervin Albrizzi passed away, and the fate of the collection, once kept in the Castle of Enn near Bolzano, is currently undisclosed. As a result, further research on the subject is momentarily suspended.

8 Munarini: "Le ceramiche del Seicento e del Settecento dei musei civici di Padova", p. 179, ill. 269.

9 Ibidem, p. 181, ill. 272.

Ill. 3. Large dish. Veneto. Majolica painted with the "three roses" pattern. 1600–1630 (circa). Albrizzi Collection, Trento. Image courtesy of Arch. Sergio Longhin.

Ill. 4. Dish. Iznik. Made of polychrome glazed pottery with three roses in a small pot. 1601–1625 (circa). Image courtesy of the British Museum, London.

Ill. 5. Large dish. Reverse. Veneto. Majolica painted with spirals and *roncigli*. 1600–1630 (circa). Albrizzi Collection, Trento. Image courtesy of Arch. Sergio Longhin.

Their three different typologies and three different ceramic fabrics make it highly unlikely that they were all produced in the same place. Other similar observations could easily be made about the décor or the oxides and glazes used to cover the ceramic fabric. Unless new archival documentation or archaeological findings come to light in the future,[10] it is therefore safe to assume that Candiana never produced 'Candiana' majolica, and especially not the one originally belonging to the Abbey of San Michele.

10 A number of ceramic fragments and possible kiln wasters have been found around Candiana during occasional excavations, but they mostly belong to the family of the Paduan majolica *graffita*. Cf. Benozzi, "La collezione inedita di ceramiche 'candiane'", p. 56, ill. 13a, ill. 13b, ill. 13c.

A certain inclination among scholars to 'candianize' unrelated ceramic material because of some features that were incorrectly considered to be typical of 'Candiana ware' – such as the name of a nun painted or etched on the front or the reverse of the fabric or the decoration of the back with basket pattern, spirals, *roncigli* and crosses – was already noted more than seventy years ago.[11] It was subsequently suggested that the only pieces which should be considered as 'Candiana ware' were those decorated *a la Turchesca*, featuring *saz* leaves and flowers (mostly roses, carnations, tulips, hyacinths, and honeysuckles) painted in blue, green, yellow, and orange with manganese-brownish outlines. There are some exceptions to the rule, first and foremost the so-called 'three flowers group' which is considered part of this family, too.[12] However, among the 'Candiana' majolica decorated with Iznik-inspired patterns, it is still possible to identify different styles and techniques. It follows that that there must have been more than just one production centre.

The only place in Veneto where kiln wasters of 'Candiana ware' have actually been found is the town of Bassano del Grappa at the foothills of the Venetian Prealps, north of Padua.[13] In 1992 an archaeological survey in Via Campo Marzio revealed two kilns and a large number of kiln wasters belonging to the Manardi manufactory, which started producing pottery in Bassano in 1645. It is known that in 1669 the Manardi family hired a painter from Padua, a certain Giò Batta Salmazzo, to paint *piati a la Turchesca*.[14] This would support the idea that Padua, or even Venice itself, figured as early production centres of 'Candiana pottery'. Their style was then replicated in the second half of the seventeenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries in Bassano del Grappa.[15]

It may also be worthwhile to look at a phenomenon similar to that of the 'Candiana ware' outside Veneto: the ceramic art known as 'Haban ware' in Habsburg Hungary after the sixteenth century, where tin-glazed ceramics painted with various coloured oxides were produced.[16] The decoration is predominantly floral and is applied in blue, green, purple, brown, or black on a white background, less often on a blue-, green- and yellow-tinted glaze. Habanite décor has been mostly linked with the influence of Italian Renaissance culture in Swiss Winterthur and

11 Ballardini: "'Candiana' ma non tutto 'Candiana'", pp. 41–42.

12 Ibidem, p. 46; Munarini: "Le ceramiche del Seicento e del Settecento dei musei civici di Padova", p. 57.

13 Cf. Nadir Stringa: *La famiglia Manardi e la ceramica a Bassano nel '600 e '700*. Bassano: G.B. Verci Editore, 1987, pp. 61–66; Erincani: "Le maioliche alla 'turchesca'. La ceramica tenera", p. 233.

14 Stringa*: La famiglia Manardi e la ceramica a Bassano nel '600 e '700*, p. 72.

15 Michelangelo Munarini: "Le ceramiche del Seicento e del Settecento dei musei civici di Padova", p. 57.

16 László Réti: *Haban myth 1593–1738: Treasures from the Hungarian private collections*. Museum of Applied Arts: Budapest, 2007.

Tyrol, but it also bears a strong resemblance to the 'Candiana' production – mainly because of the shapes (jugs with globular bodies, *crespine* or *tazze* with radial ribs on the rim and large bowled dishes) and because of some aspects of the floral décor, which indirectly remind one of the Italian *piati a la Turchesca*. The first thing that stands out is the palette of colours employed in both 'Candiana' and Haban wares, where the motifs were traced with thin blackish manganese lines. In neither production were the artisans able to match the brilliant red typical of the Ottoman prototypes from Iznik, painting the flowers instead with yellow or burnt-orange colour. Narrow blue double bands round the rim or around the *tondino* also characterized the dishes and the jugs of both Candiana and Haban wares. The floral decoration generally looks quite different, however; the characteristic *saz* leaf is not part of the decor of the Haban products. On the other hand, some Habanite examples from the mid-seventeenth century present a white fish-scale pattern on blue ground. This motif, the only one that seems to be genuinely derived from an Ottoman model, never appears in 'Candiana' ware.[17] However, the 'three-flowers' composition and the abundance of tulips and carnations as well as the 'vase and flower' pattern[18] suggest at least a similar but indirect source of inspiration, particularly for the Haban examples. (Ill. 6) If we can determine with some degree of certainty that the inspiration for the 'Candiana' ceramics had its source in the dishes and other objects from Iznik, which came to Veneto after the battle of Lepanto in 1571 as booty, the Haban ceramics with the floral decor in blue, yellow, green, and purple look much more like a variation on the latter than imitations of an original Ottoman piece. That said, the Habanite decoration looks more precise and the green under glaze is never washed out, as in most of the 'Candiana' examples, which shows much more finesse in the realization. Several scholars have tried to find a link between the Haban and the Italian majolica, but none of the hypotheses formulated until now have been widely accepted.[19]

A potentially fruitful starting point for further considerations is a tiled panel from the Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento.[20] (Ill. 7) This panel consists of nine

17 Ibidem, p. 32–33, ill. 16, ill. 17, ill. 18, ill. 19.

18 Ibidem, p. 30, Fig. 12; Munarini: "Le ceramiche del Seicento e del Settecento dei musei civici di Padova", p. 180, ill. 271; Erincani: "Le maioliche alla 'turchesca'. La ceramica tenera", p. 235.

19 Cf. Paolo Marsilli: "Da Faenza in Moravia: ceramiche e ceramisti fra storia dell'arte e storia della riforma popolare", Frantisec Kalešny: "La céramique des Habans-anabaptistes en Moravie et en Slovaquie aux 16e et 18e siècle et ses rapports à la céramique italienne" in: *Atti del Convegni Internazionali della Ceramica*, XVIII, "Influenze e rapporti della ceramica italiana con i Paesi dell'Europa centrale". Albisola: Centro ligure per la storia della ceramica, 1985, pp. 7–26, and pp. 27–40.

20 Carmen Ravanelli Guidotti: "Per un catalogo delle ceramiche: considerazioni generali", in: *Un museo nel Casello del Buonconsiglio. Acquisizioni, contributi e restauri,* ed. Laura del Prà. Trento, 1995, pp. 365–391.

Ill. 6. Dish. Hungary. Majolica painted with floral decoration. 1707. Image courtesy of the V&A, London.

squared tiles of the 'Candiana' type, decorated with both flora. The tiles, which originally formed part of the tiled floor of the Stanze della Giunta Albertina in the aforementioned castle, are likely to have been produced in Bassano in 1688. Four of these tin-glazed tiles are decorated with various birds rendered in the typical burnt-orange and blue mode. The central tile has a spotted animal in the centre, possibly a wild rabbit.[21] Then there is a tile with a rose, one with a carnation, a

21 Katia Brugnolo and Giuliana Erincani: *La ceramica a Bassano e Nove dal XIII al XXI secolo*. Nove: Bassano del Grappa, 1984, p.10, ill. 8.

Ill. 7. Tiled panel. Polychrome glazed tiles with flowers and animals. Palazzo del Buonconsiglio, Trento. Image courtesy of Arch. Sergio Longhin.

pomegranate, and a last one with the very same pointed bi-colored flower (possibly a tulip) that appears in large bowl dishes from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Interestingly, they are attributed to the Manardi factory at Bassano del Grappa.[22]

22 This beautifully decorated dish is also characterized on its upper rim by a scroll containing the initials "G:D:/B:". I have already suggested that the reading 'Bassano Del Grappa' would confirm the provenience of the dish. Scrolls or cameos with initials and dates are also found in many Haban pieces. Bernard Rackham: *Catalogue of the glaisher collection of pottery and porcelain in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1935, p. 288, ill. 2212; Julia Poole: *Italian maiolica and incised slipware in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge

Other flowers sprouting from each corner of the tiles and double-colored leaves in green and orange fill the white background together with little insects such as bees or flies. The latter usually do not appear on 'Candiana' wares, but they are characteristic of other types of tin-glazed pottery manufactured in Bassano.

The general impression of the composition is also not far from what was produced in Hungary by the Anabaptists at the very same time. It is certainly not impossible that Trentino and the Alto Adige (South Tyrol) region have had a role in the transmission of forms and decorations in Central and South Europe. The city of Bolzano for example was a very active commercial centre since the early medieval period, its annual fairs functioning as mediators of goods between Venice and the German lands.[23] Venice mainly brought silk and glass to these fairs, but it is likely that pottery also entered the market – for instance that produced in Bassano, which is conveniently located midway between Padua and Trento. Just across the Alps were the southern German lands that expelled the Anabaptists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of whom moved on to relatively freer West Hungary. There they became known as Habans, and so did the pottery associated with them. Whether they brought this art along from their old homeland, where it may have been introduced as a spillover from nearby Italy, remains a speculation. But regardless of whether the décor and shapes of Candiana and Haban majolica are directly related or not, both productions are indeed very interesting parallel phenomena that demand further investigations. Such research is unfortunately complicated by the fact that most of the pieces belong to private collections or are scattered in museums throughout Europe.

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University Press, 1995, pp. 424–426, ill. 459 and color pl. 49; Julia Poole: *Fitzwilliam Museum handbooks, Italian maiolica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 108–109, ill. 49.

23 Antonino Rusconi: "A proposito della diffusione dei 'bianchi' faentini in Alto Adige", in: *Faenza* 30 (1942), p. 94.

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