

LI RUBBOLI
GUNLDO. I



The Rubboli Collection

Italian lustre pottery in Gualdo Tadino

edited by Marinella Caputo with a preface by Timothy Wilson



The Rubboli Collection. Italian Lustre Pottery in Gualdo Tadino

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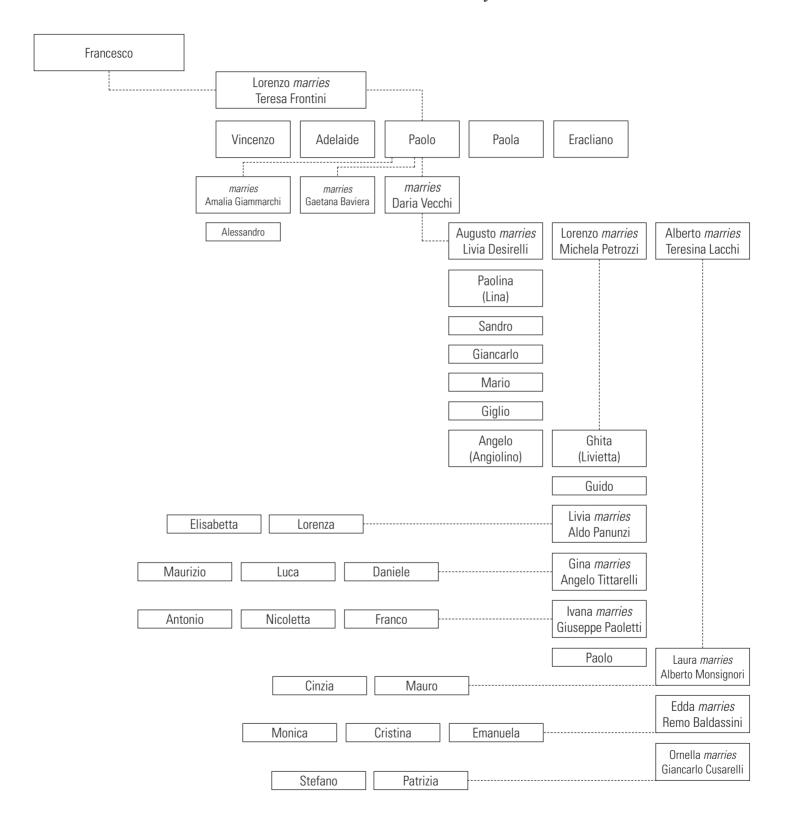




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The Rubboli Family



Preface

ince the 1870s, the international reputation of the town of Gualdo Tadino has been linked to and in good part based on its artistic ceramics and in particular on its lustred maiolica. The fact that Gualdo became so eminent in the production of lustreware is due overwhelmingly to the energy and skill of Paolo Rubboli and successive members of his family. Following the decision to reduce the scale of the factory's commercial production in 2002, it is a matter of intense congratulation that a tangible patrimony of this century and a quarter of fine and distinctive ceramic production has been secured for the town, for its visitors, for Italy and for the wider world. Furthermore, the factory will remain in operation and both traditional and experimental work continue to be made there—a happy symbiosis of *musealizzazione* and creative energy such as is often hoped-for but all too rarely achieved. This is thanks to the passionate commitment and vision of a descendant of Paolo's in our time, Maurizio Tittarelli Rubboli; and it is a privilege for me, in the name of that wider ceramic-loving world, to write, in this scholarly study and catalogue, these few words of welcome.

It is hard to explain why, in the Renaissance, Umbria, and in particular Deruta and Gubbio, became the focus of Italian production of lustred maiolica. The raw materials are not available in Umbria in greater quantity or more appropriate form than in other regions; the Umbrian merchant classes had not in the Quattrocento, as their Tuscan equivalents were, been so fascinated by the lustreware of Manises and Paterna that they commissioned lustred Spanish tablewares in great quantities; nor (despite the many persistent myths about alchemical secrets) did Umbrian potters possess a secret that was hidden from other potters: recent research has shown that successful experiments in lustreware were made in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in several places—including Faenza, Pesaro, Montelupo, Cafaggiolo, and Orvieto—but only in Deruta and Gubbio did lustre become a major sector of the ceramic industry. In Gubbio it seems to have been the technical skill and commercial acumen of one immigrant, the Lombard Maestro Giorgio Andreoli, which established the local success of the industry.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, too, several ceramic centres in Italy experimented with lustre production, but only a few persisted with the unreliable technology—arte fallace, as Cipriano Piccolpasso had called it in his Tre Libri dell'Arte del Vasaio about 1557. In general, in mid-nineteenth-century Italy, two factors provided incentives for the recreation of reduced metallic lustre in the footsteps of Maestro Giorgio: one was the Risorgimento

spirit with its ambition to recreate the lost glories and mysterious alchemical iridescences of Renaissance lustreware; the other was the fact that sixteenth-century lustrewares, especially if marked by Maestro Giorgio, were fought over in the auction rooms of London and Paris by British and French, and, later, American collectors, so that they reached prices undreamt-of by previous generations of pottery collectors.



1. Paolo Rubboli

It would have been hard before the arrival in the town of Paolo Rubboli, who was like Maestro Giorgio an immigrant bringing to his adopted town skills learnt elsewhere, to predict that Gualdo Tadino was destined to become a pre-eminent centre for the making of lustred maiolica. It may have been encouraging or relevant that the French scholar Jacquemart in the early 1860s attributed several examples of red-lustred maiolica, which the Louvre had acquired from the Campana collection, to Gualdo: this attribution was provisionally followed in 1864 by a more rigorous and prudent specialist

Alfred Darcel in his catalogue of the Louvre maiolica, but Darcel commented sceptically *nous ne savons sur quels indices* the attribution had been based. Subsequent scholars, including the English writer C.D.E. Fortnum, in his monumental and authoritative catalogue of the South Kensington Museum (1873), dismissed the attribution; although it was defended by Angelo Genolini in his derivative compilation *Maioliche Italiane* of 1881. In reality, although evidence has been presented that occasional production of lustre may have taken place in the town, Gualdo was not in the Renaissance renowned, like Deruta and Gubbio, for large-scale production of lustreware. It is all the more to the credit of Paolo and successive members of the Rubboli family—including the redoubtable matriarch Daria—to have established in an era of virtuoso historicism, and to have maintained for so long, Gualdo's pre-eminence as an internationally celebrated manufacturing centre.

Factory collections are of great importance as one of the foundations of the history of ceramics, but history has shown they are vulnerable to economic factors. Perhaps only two family workshops in Italy, that of the Cantagalli family in Florence and that of the Grazia family in Deruta, have comparably long and distinguished histories in making neo-Renaissance lustreware to Rubboli's. The Grazia factory is, happily, still working and has retained its factory museum; but in 1971, after the closure of the Cantagalli factory, the Raccolta Storica della Manifattura Cantagalli was deplorably dispersed in a sale at Sotheby's in Florence. In England, where no law corresponding to the Italian *notifica* exists,

the factory collection of one of the greatest of Stoke-on Trent's firms, Minton's, was recently, equally scandalously, dispersed at auction.

Posterity will have cause to be grateful that, thanks to Maurizio Tittarelli Rubboli and his collaborators and supporters, Gualdo Tadino has retained and even enhanced, and now put on public display in the building where it is historically most eloquent, a collection which encapsulates so important a part of the town's cultural and historic identity.

Timothy Wilson, Keeper of Western Art, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

