

POTS AS MEDIA: DECORATION, TECHNOLOGY AND MESSAGE TRANSMISSION

Edited by

Vesna Bikić and Jasna Vuković



1838

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY



АРХЕОЛОШКИ ИНСТИТУТ
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
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University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy | 2024



Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade



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Belgrade 2024.

Publishers

Institute of Archaeology
Knez Mihailova 35, Beograd 11000, Serbia
www.ai.ac.rs
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy
Čika Ljubina 18–20, Belgrade 11000, Serbia
www.f.bg.ac.rs

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Proofreader

Dave Calcutt

Pre-press

Dosije studio, Belgrade

Printing

Dosije studio, Belgrade

Print run

200 copies

ISBN

Printed edition

978-86-6427-300-8 (FF)

978-86-6439-098-9 (AI)

Online edition

978-86-6427-301-5 (FF)

978-86-6439-099-6 (AI)

The book has been published with the support of
The Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation
of the Republic of Serbia and the Secretariat for Culture of the City of Belgrade

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PREFACE

Pottery decoration and styles, and their meanings are always challenging topics. The book *Pots as media: Decoration, technology and message transmission* is the second edited volume resulting from the research of a group of scholars focused on pottery studies through the series of biennial meetings of BECAP (Belgrade Conference on Archaeological Pottery).

The book brings together fifteen chapters with various approaches to the analysis of pottery designs, from various perspectives, and a wide chronological span and range of geographical areas. The introductory chapter deals with theoretical considerations on the subject (Palaguta). The first section of the volume is dedicated to archaeological approaches to the study of designs (Starkova, Korokhina, Miele), their execution (Svilar et al.), and production (De Mitri). The central part of the book is focused on decoration as a message and its meanings: the origins of zigzag motif in the prehistory of Eastern Europe (Kotova and Radchenko), the hybrids between different technological and cultural traditions (Vuković and Tripković), decoration as an expression of cultural behaviors and boundaries (Agolli), the role of painted designs in the communication systems between communities (Vita), the interconnections between decoration and the formation of politically organized societies (Eriksson), the meanings of peculiar figural representations on the vessels (Bugarski), and the interrelations between pottery decoration and group identities (Bikić). Cultural interactions reflected through decorative styles (Ljuština and Dmitrović, Ninčić) are considered in the last part of the volume.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their inspiring papers, and their patience through the reviewing process. We also wish to express our gratitude to all of the anonymous reviewers who sent us their suggestions and remarks for each paper, but also to our colleagues, the reviewers of the book as a whole. Finally, the book would not have been completed without the support of our institutions – the Institute of Archaeology and Faculty of Philosophy.

The editors

ARS ORNAMENTUM: ANALYSIS OF THE DECORATIVE REPERTOIRE PRESENT ON THE TIN-GLAZED WARES OF SOUTHERN PRODUCTION FROM CENCELLE (VT)

Flora Miele

Medieval figurative art is defined by a repertoire rooted in that figurative language, corresponding to the needs of a community and the expression of an ideological system of symbolic interpretation, which medieval society applied to most of its activities. Precise skills were required of those who manifested their art by continuously updating their knowledge and working techniques, often making use of artistic expressions that were the result of a common culture and a similar figurative sensitivity. Specifically, as far as the figurative universe of late-medieval pottery is concerned, although it seems appropriate to speak of common elements, as the geometric, naturalistic and heraldic repertoire is common, it is necessary to take into account the specificity of an urban center or a territory, as well as the artistic and cultural background of the craftsmen, where the symbolic and figurative language frequently assumes inflections connected with historical and socio-cultural events, all the more so if one is faced with a territory, such as the 'Italian' one, which appears between the 13th and 14th centuries to be more characterized by pottery production that reflects, in form, decorative stylistic features and technological processes, the signs of heterogeneous traditions that can be recognized and analyzed. Therefore, it seemed opportune to focus on the decorative repertoire visible on some tin-glazed wares found in Cencelle (VT), and produced in Southern Italy between the 13th and 14th centuries in order to highlight, as far as possible, the choice, organization and various phases of the decorative program through a traditional and scientific approach. Cencelle is a town nestled in the Tolfa mountains, in the upper Latium region, that is, in the area to

the northwest of the lower Tiber river, currently belonging to the province of Viterbo. The *Liber Pontificalis* of the Roman Church in the biography of Pope Leo IV (847–855), in which the foundation of a new civitas twelve miles from the Roman port city of *Centumcellae* (today's Civitavecchia) is attributed to a direct papal initiative in order to provide hospitality to its inhabitants who sought shelter and protection from Saracen raids (Ermini Pani 1996; Stasolla 2012; Ermini Pani et al. 2014), is a city of papal foundation. The study of the central (11th-14th century) and later (15th-17th century) phases of life in the city has made it possible both to define the city's role in the complex framework of economic-commercial relations (Miele 2023; Miele and Russo 2023; Cirelli 1998, 2002; Barone 2014, 2015), to which it necessarily had to refer, and to ascertain the transformation processes typical of an urban center changing into a large rural management center (Stasolla 2014, 2020).

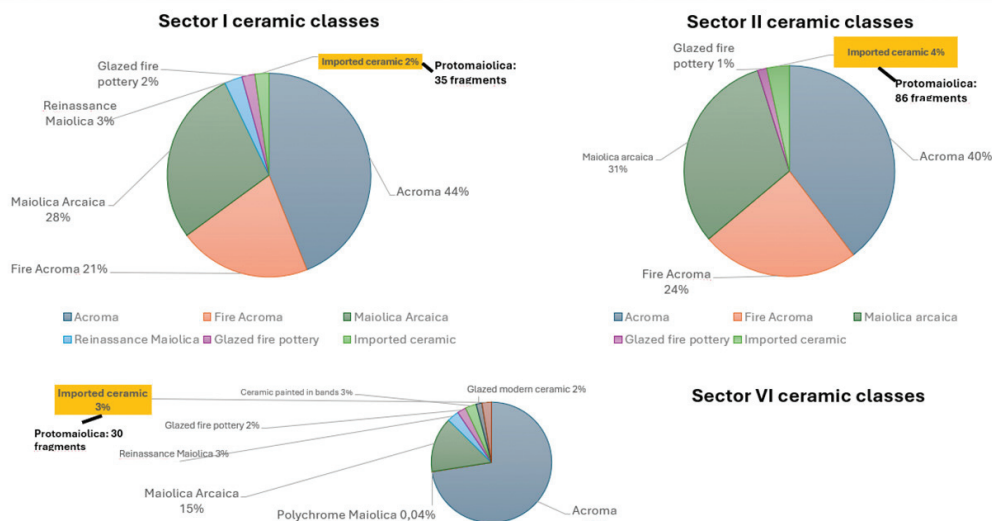
The ceramic material analyzed

The category of artefacts subject to the above-mentioned analysis is characterized by tin glaze applied only on the visible surface of both open and closed forms with decorations made essentially in brown, green and yellow, or sometimes with blue-blue instead of green. Technological, decorative and morphological aspects refer to Protomaiolica (Patitucci Uggeri 1997), a term that is now essentially obsolete but which continues to be used today to indicate a production of fine pottery for tableware active between the 13th and 14th centuries in diversified centers located mainly in Southern Italy (Apulia, Campania, Sicily)¹ and, in the light of recent studies, also in the Campania-Lazio (Mannoni 1984; Pannuzi 2010) and Abruzzo regions (Pannuzi and Staffa 1997). Here, pottery fragments from different excavation² sectors were taken into consideration, providing a picture of the different functional areas of the city, covering the residential-craft (sector I-II)³ and religious (sector VI) (Pistilli 2014) areas. The substantial difference in the contexts analyzed allowed for an initial comparison on the issues concerning the differences in associa-

1 The studies conducted on Protomaiolica are numerous, so a brief overview is offered below. For Apulia, see, for example: Patitucci Uggeri 1976, 1977; Whitehouse 1966; Valenzano 2018. For Campania, the works of: Fontana and Ventrone Vassallo 1984; De Crescenzo et al. 1992; Fiorillo 2005. For Sicily, see: Ragona 1986; D'Angelo 1977; Cuomo di Caprio and Fiorilla 1992; Molinari 1994, 1995; Fiorilla 1996.

2 Excavation conducted by the Department of Antiquities of the University of Rome La Sapienza, three-year concession of the Director General rep. no. 766 of 15-07-2021.

3 For more on sectors I and II, see: Stasolla 2012.



Graph1: Percentages of pottery classes found in Sectors I-II and VI

tions, quantities and types of finds⁴. In the living areas, rather homogeneous data is found, with a high proportion of everyday pottery (between 39% and 46%), followed by kitchen pottery (between 21% and 24%). The area of the Romanesque church logically hosts a smaller number of common use pottery, while the high percentage of kitchenware forms is related to the conversion of the area into a farm site after the mid-15th century (Stasolla 2014; Barone 2015). Among the coated pottery, the highest percentage is occupied by the Maiolica arcaica, which is, in any case, remarkable, especially when placed in relation to the purified achromatic and fire ware and the other pottery classes that occupy much lower percentages, as in the case of Protomaiolica, which does not even reach 1%⁵ (Graph 1). The sectors investigated yielded a total of 154 fragments

4 For an examination of the formation of archaeological deposits within the city of Cencelle, see Stasolla 2018.

5 For data regarding the imported pottery found at Cencelle, reference is made to the research, still in progress, by the author of this paper on the doctoral project entitled "Ceramiche d'importazione a Leopoli-Cencelle (VT): nuovi dati e moderni approcci della ricerca archeologica", which is being carried out at the doctoral school of the Sapienza University of Rome (XXXVI cycle). The quantitative data pertaining to achromatic, purified and fire pottery, and band-painted pottery were kindly provided by Giulia Previti, who analyzed these pottery classes as part of her PhD project entitled "La ceramica di Cencelle come strumento di indagine per la ricostruzione funzionale e sociale del contesto quotidiano di una città medievale", which was discussed in May 2022 at the doctoral school of the Sapienza University of Rome (cycle XXXIV). The numerical data referring to the Maiolica arcaica present in Cencelle was taken from Brancazi 2021.

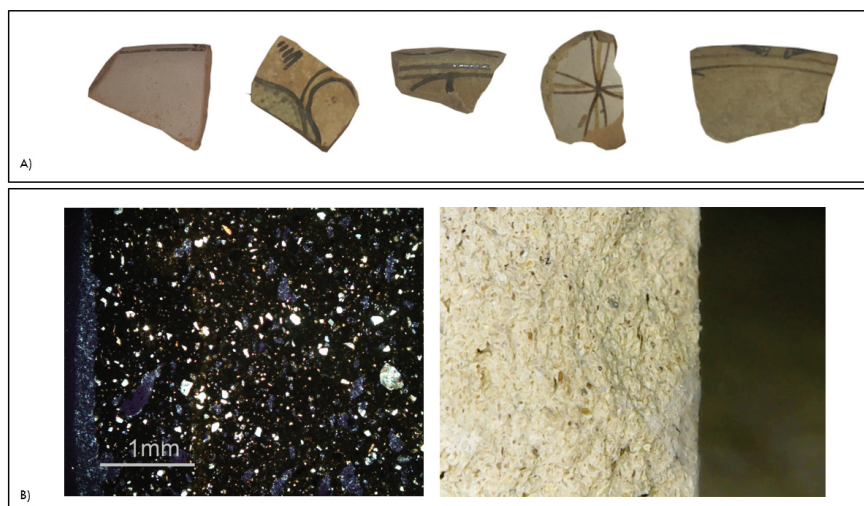


Figure 1: a) Fragments of Protomaiolica from Cencelle; b) Thin sections in crossed Nicol polarized light, 4x

referable to Protomaiolica, whose analyses of the clays made it possible to identify three mineral-petrographic associations, two of which are referable to the Campania or Campania-Lazio area and one relating to Tuscany, more precisely to the Siena-Arezzo area⁶. According to the analysis of the morphological and decorative repertoire, the artefacts referable to the Campania or Campania-Lazio area most probably refer to two different productions gravitating in the Neapolitan orbit⁷ active between the 13th and 14th centuries (Fig. 1A), but with strong references to the protomaiolica productions of the Apulian Tavoliere, which seems to have played a role of primary importance for communications between Campania and the Adriatic ports (Doufournier, Flambard and Noye 1986, pp. 276–277). Considering the abundance and degree of preservation of the fragments referable to one of the impastos attributed to Campanian production (Fig. 1B), we will focus here on these particular artefacts, proposing an analysis of the decorative motifs and, where possible, hypothetical reconstructions of the decorative programmes in which they were traced on the ceramic surface. However, the mineral-petrographic investigations

6 The archaeometric analyses were carried out by Silvano Agostini and Ilaria Pallotta from the University of Chieti Gabriele D'Annunzio (cfr. Antonelli 2007).

7 It is worth mentioning the proposed attribution of the tin-glazed ceramics (including the Protomaiolica) found at S. Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples to the Formia clay already identified by Guido Donatone (Donatone 1967 and cfr. Mannoni 1984, p. 367; Ventrone Vassallo 1984, pp. 178-179).

have ruled out any imitations of this class in Cencelle, a locality that both archaeologically and documentally testifies to a profitable ceramic production between the late 12th and mid-14th century⁸. Further confirmation comes from recent and additional mineralogical-petrographic analyses, which have shown no correlation between this type of impasto and the clay taken from both the kiln walls and the presumed clay extraction points identified in the area around Cencelle (Testolini, Thompson and Lemorini 2023). At an overall glance, it can be seen that the minimum number of specimens (MNS)⁹ found within the three analyzed contexts and referable to the aforementioned Campanian production, amount to a total of 26, among which the open forms (20 MNS) definitely stand out compared to the closed ones (6 MNS). More information comes from the open forms usually characterised by a perforated ring base (Fig. 2C). From the vascular landscape, bowls with rather thin walls and a rim diameter of between 14 and 20 cm clearly emerge. Depending on the shape of the rim, one can distinguish bowls with indistinct, slightly thinned and more or less outwardly sloping rims with flared walls (Fig. 2A, a.1-a.3), bowls with a hemispherical body (Fig. 2A, a.4') and keeled or more flared bowls with a slightly enlarged rim that slopes outwardly (Fig. 2A, a.5-a.7). The morphologies identified for the bowls are reminiscent of those found in Campanian production, in particular, bowls with curved and slightly flared walls (Fig. 2A, a.1-a.3) that find strong comparisons with those of Campania production, which emerged from the Neapolitan complex of San Lorenzo Maggiore (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Series XI-XX, Table LXXII, J1), although there are also similarities with vessels from the Tavoliere area (Valenzano 2014–2015, p. 13, Table 17, SL.MP/PROT.15). The same association occurs for the plates, which show a rather varied morphological landscape and a rim diameter of between 12 and 24 cm (Fig. 2B), while a small number of fragments refer to the morphology of the jug (Fig. 2D), which appear to have either a swollen rim and truncated cone neck or a long neck that flares at the mouth with a flat base and disc.

8 The pottery production plant, identified by the University of Chieti team under the scientific direction of Maria Carla Somma, is located within sector V, between the Romanesque basilica and the large tower, to which it partially adjoins. For more details on the pottery production and processing plant, see Antonelli 2007 and in the volumes Stasolla 2012 and Ermini Pani et al. 2014.

9 The MNS, that is the minimum number of specimens, corresponds to the number of rims and profiles reconstructible (when the artefact has both rim and bottom at the same time, its profile can be perfectly reconstructed). The figure thus obtained must certainly take into account the number of bases, which must, therefore, be observed in parallel, in order to try to obtain a plausible estimate of the number of specimens. Open-form bases: 6; closed-form bases 6.

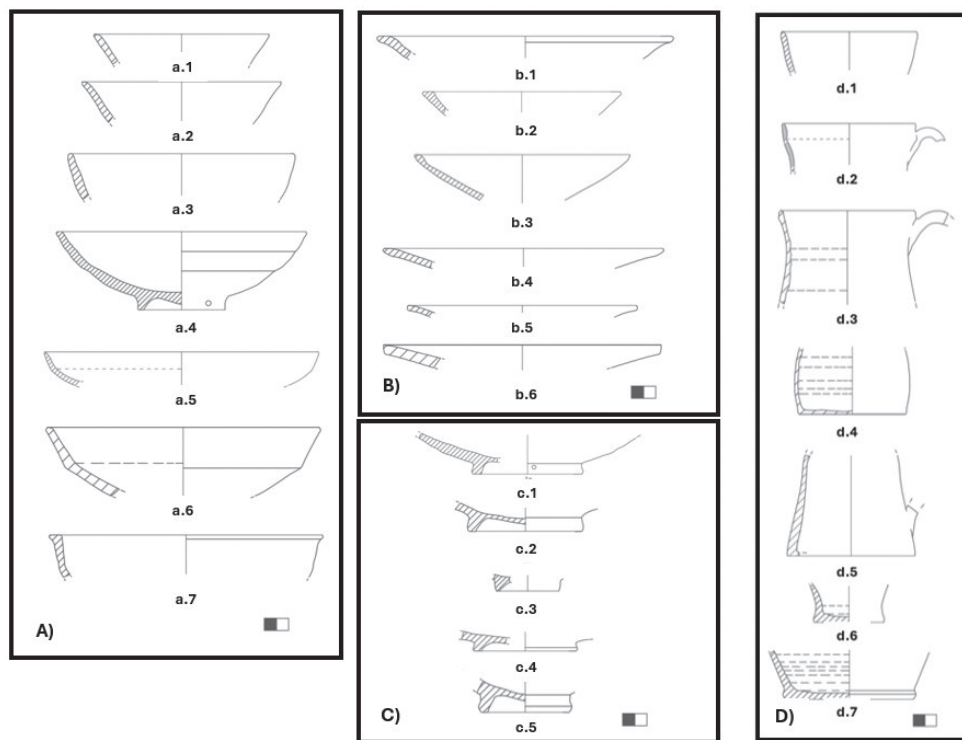


Figure 2: Morphological repertoire of a Campania production of Protomaiolica present in Cencelle

Organization, choice and phases of the decorative program

With the material in question, in line with what occurs in the field of Protomaiolica, although there are strong differences between different areas and production centers, decoration only takes place on the inside in open forms and on the outside in closed forms. Borrowing terms used in art-historical circles, the organization of the decorative program can be divided into registers (Fig. 3A). For the open forms we thus have registers I, II and III, corresponding respectively to the main decorations placed in the center, secondary decorations on the interior walls and finally, accessory decorations with a repetitive module painted on the brim. Sometimes, depending on the morphology of the container and in the absence of a brim in particular, the combination of I and II register can be found. As far as closed forms are concerned,

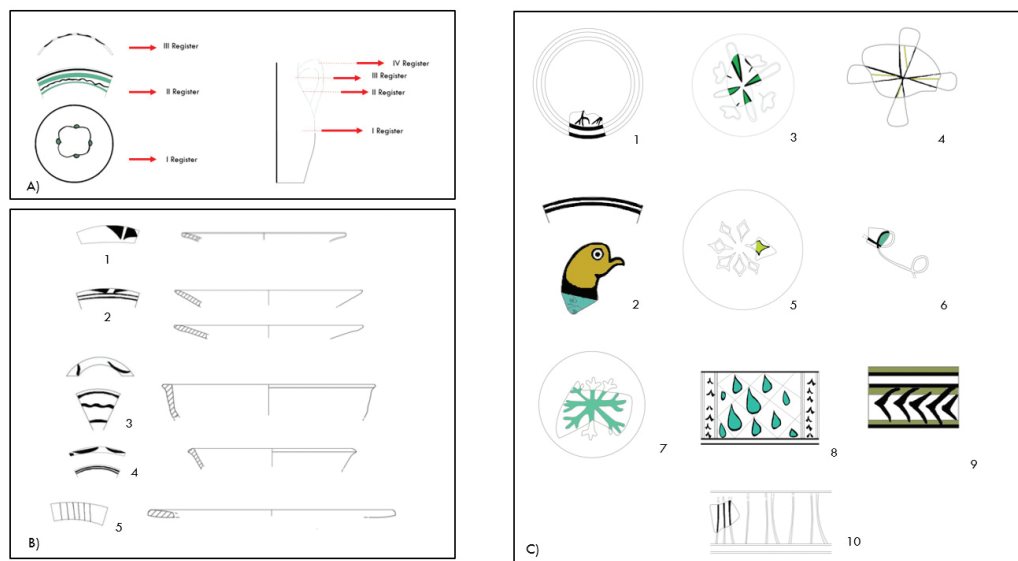


Figure 3: Hypothetical reconstruction of decorative motifs found on Cancelline fragments of Protomaionica

decoration is limited to the upper part of the body, the shoulder, the neck and the handle, thus defining the I, II, III and IV registers in order of succession. This type of organization implies the pottery decorator's tendency to eliminate any empty space with the ornamentation, implying what is known as the *horror vacui* or horror of emptiness, a tendency that characterizes the medieval age. For open forms, limited to the brim, there are various decorative motifs also attested here in the Campania and Foggia area¹⁰:

- 1: Horizontally arranged specular triangles (Fig. 3B, 1–2).
- 2: Small arches (Fig. 3B, 3).
- 3: Small half-moons, a motif probably of Islamic tradition, also attested on glazed specimens from Alifano (in the Caserta area) and on some glazed specimens from Velia (in the Salerno area) of Maghreb production (Fig. 3B, 4).
- 4: Diagonal bands (Fig. 3B, 5).

10 For the horizontally arranged specular triangle decoration cf. Cocciantelli 2019, 267, Fig. 11, b; Di Cosmo 2000, 27, n. 24; per gli archetti cfr. Scerrato 1984, Tav. CLIII, b. Per la decorazione a piccole mezzelune cfr. Valenzano 2014–2015, 183, Tav. XXX, MCV/PROT. 23; Scerrato 1984, Tav. VII, a. Per le bande diagonali cfr. Di Cosmo 1994, 169, Tav. III.

Both phytomorphic and zoomorphic motifs have been identified on the cavettos of the open forms, often circumscribed by one or a double thread running below the rim (Cocciantelli 2019, 266–267; Cataldo 2008, 103, Fig. 3, no. 2; Di Cosmo et. al 2012, 121, Fig. 3). Among the phytomorphic motifs, a decorative scheme typical of 13th-century southern Italy recurs, namely the four spindles, outlined in brown and fielded in green and yellow, alternating with geometric and/or phytomorphic motifs¹¹ (Fig. 3C, 3–4). Another motif identified on Cencelline pottery is that of the bush with rhomboid leaves, which finds comparisons in the Neapolitan area (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. XCVIII, no. 359) and the Benevento area (Di Cosmo 1996, 163, Tav. 1, 2) (Fig. 3C, 5), or characterized by small eyelets (Fontana 1984, Tav. L, no. 169) (Fig. 3C, 6). Curious is the lily rays motif (Fig. 3C, 7), which is found identical both on the base of a tin-glazed bowl with monochrome decoration in green from Cencelle and on the base of a bowl, pertaining to the same class, found at San Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. LXXVII, a). Both bowls cannot be associated with protomaiolica production as they differ in the presence of the outer covering, which in both cases appears in the form of a transparent glaze.⁹ An ansa found in Cencelle with green monochrome also seems to refer to a Neapolitan specimen from the excavations at San Lorenzo Maggiore. Among the zoomorphic motifs, only the ornithomorphic type can be recognized (Fig. 3C, 1–2). While on one specimen only the bird's legs are visible, on another the head is visible, and the upper part of the body is characterized by a neck rendered in manganese-brown plumage and a coat with dotted scales, attested in areas of southern Italy, and above all in Naples (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. XCVIII, b), in the Avellino area (Cataldo 2008, 107, Fig. 1, no. 7), in the Caserta area (Di Cosmo 2001, 149, Tav. II) and in northern Apulia (Valenzano 2014–2015, 182, Tav. 29, MCV/PROT. 18). This seems to be a realistic rendering of the plumage that is also found in other birds depicted in various works: see, for example, some miniatures from *De arte Venandi Cum Avibus* or the large eagle above the 13th-century ambo in Bitonto cathedral in the province of Bari, Apulia.

With regard to the closed forms, there are, unfortunately, few fragments that have allowed for a correct interpretation and reconstruction of the iconographic motifs. A few motifs pertaining to the first register have been identified:

11 Comparisons with productions from Campania: Cocciantelli 2019, 267, Fig. 11, d; Di Cosmo 2001, 164; comparisons with productions from Apulia: Valenzano 2014–2015, 142, Table XIX, SL. MP. /PROT. 41.

1. Geometric motif, within metopes, characterized by a chequerboard motif containing drop-shaped decorations with lateral sequences characterized by vertically arranged chevrons reminiscent of the Neapolitan area, see for example on a bowl at Santa Severa (RM) (Cocciantelli 2019, 267, Fig. 11, b), a site on the Tyrrhenian coast, motifs reminiscent of such ornamentation. On other Cancellinian fragments, again within a chequerboard motif, other elements such as small triangles or drops are also found, which are widespread in the Campania area on both open and closed forms (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. XCII, 315 and Tav. CVIII, 47) (Fig. 3C, 8).
2. Sequence of horizontally arranged chevrons contained in horizontal green and brown bands. This decoration refers to production from Brindisi (Porcella and Vigna 2014, 356, Fig. 9) and Irpinia (Pratillo 2008, 118, Fig. 10) in the late 13th and early 14th century (Fig. 3C, 9).
3. Sequence of vertical bands and lines, which seem in this case, given the features of the fragment and the decoration itself, to refer to an ornament placed on the neck/shoulder, of probably a flask, as found on a specimen from S. Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples, which differs in the presence of a vertical wavy line instead of a straight one (Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. XCV, 349; Tav. CVIII, 477) (Fig. 3C, 10).

Among the Cancelline finds, the organization of the decorative program is provided, almost entirely, by two bowls, one with a hemispherical profile (A) and the other with a keeled profile (B) (Fig. 4). At a glance, what they have in common is the iconographic scheme of the second register, consisting of a series of bands in yellow and/or green separated by a wavy line in brown, subtended by a line in brown below the rim. A very similar motif can be found in polychrome glazed bowls (Salvatore 1984, Tav. CC, nn. 14–15 (Policoro, Basilicata); Flambard and Noyé 1984, Tav. CCXXXIX, n. 1 – Scribla, Calabria) and basins from Campania (found in the Neapolitan and Caserta areas) (Neapolitan area: Ventrone Vassallo 1984, Tav. LXXXVI, 287; Caserta area: Frisetti et al. 2011, 310, Fig. 12, no. 6) and Foggia (Valenzano and Favia 2010, 255, Fig. 14 a-b; Valenzano 2014–2015, 135, Tav. 29, SL.MP. /PROT. 11) from the end of the 13th century and beginning of the following century. This particular rendering of the second register is also found with some small variations on other fragments (Fig. 4, C, D, and E, the latter with a brim decorated with small arches). What differentiates the decorative repertoire of these two bowls is the III register, present only on bowl B and consisting of small arches

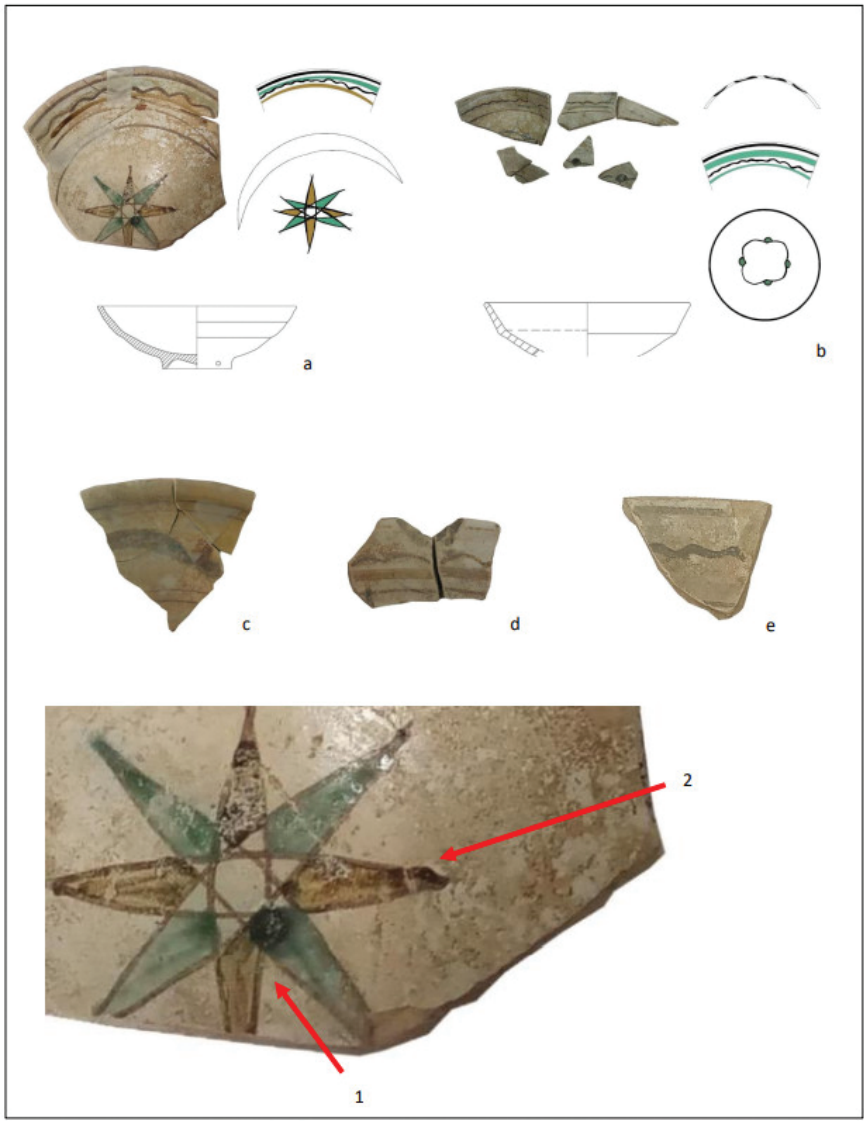


Figure 4: Organization of the decorative program visible on Protomaiolica artefacts

along the brim, and the I register. In bowl A, in the center of the cavetto, an eight-pointed star with a crescent moon at its side (a motif of Islamic ascendancy) is evident, while the main motif of bowl B is represented by a probable extreme stylization of a four-lobed phytomorphic ornament with green-painted eyelets at the junction points. Both bowls show an icono-

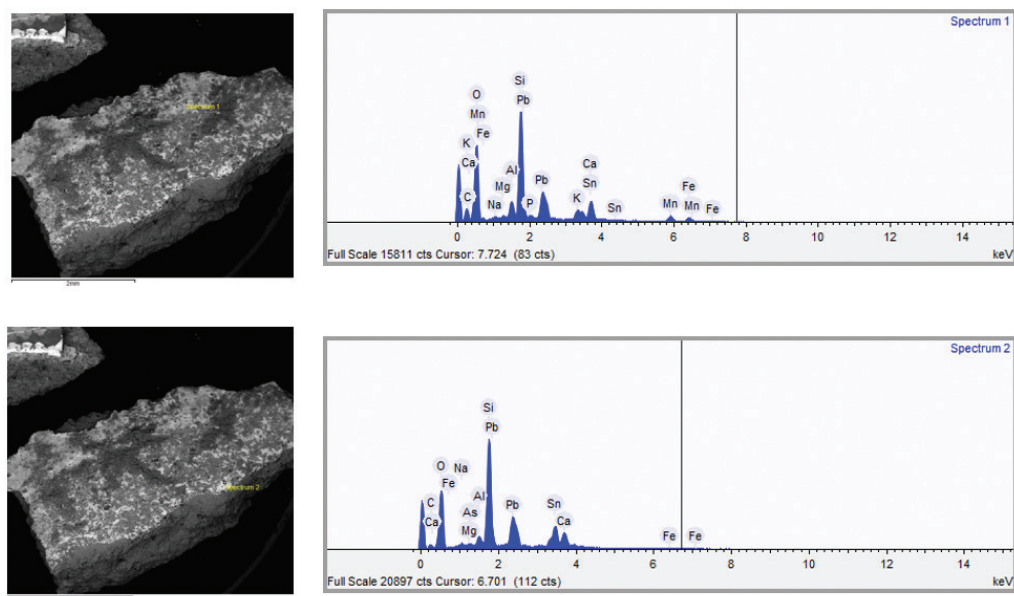


Figure 5: Identification of chemical elements in the coating of a Protomaiolica sample using SEM-EDS

graphic rendering of the ornamentation that is not too refined, probably intended for undemanding purchasers or made by relatively low-skilled labor. This can be deduced, for example, from the brush strokes (not too precise), the colors used (a brown tending towards black/purple, a yellow ochre tone and a very diluted light green) and the quantity of the same. In fact, on both bowls A and B there are thicker traces of color, especially within the backgrounds, which often overlap the borders drawn by the craftsman. In order to clarify the nature of the coating, which appeared particularly deteriorated, 2 fragments of Protomaiolica (one of which relates to bowl A) were selected. SEM-EDS¹² mapping revealed for both samples a glaze consisting of lead, silica and tin with the presence of some alkalis (Fig. 5). In particular, on bowl A, by analyzing at both an autopsy and microscopic level, the strokes rendered by the brush in brown and the distribution of the colors used in the decoration, we proposed a possible scan of the phases relating to decorative practice. Starting with the earliest phases, we identified:

12 We would like to thank Prof. Cristina Lemorini for providing the equipment of the LFTAPA laboratory of the Department of Ancient Sciences, at Sapienza University of Rome.

Phase 1: the decorator traces in brown the outlines of the figures and the straight and wavy lines pertaining to the 2nd register.

Phase 2: the decorator fields the star outlines and the line below the wavy line in yellow.

Phase 3: the decorator fields the star and the second line below the rim in green.

This is hypothesized and proposed as a possible key to interpretation since it can be seen that the line in brown is covered by both the green (point 1) and the yellow, which is, in turn, covered by the green (point 2).

In conclusion, it can be stated that this type of pottery class fits well within a cultural and social context in which, from the mid-13th century, a more articulated social order was recorded for Cencelle, attested by sources in which some individuals certainly had the opportunity to adorn their tables with crockery purchased beyond the borders of Lazio, not only in southern Italy but also in other regions of Italy and from Spain. The *forma urbis* of Cencelle, brought to light by the archaeological excavations, is the one that began to take shape from the 12th century onwards and was completed by the 14th century, probably also under the impetus of the new urban magistracies; at this time, a series of important restructuring interventions of the town began, affecting both the infrastructure and the building fabric, from the courtly to the residential and productive. The presence in Cencelle of towers, tower-houses in the town, characterized by rusticated ashlar and the two-colored facing, denotes the presence of a group of prominent people expressing their position in society through the construction of these buildings, in line with what occurred in other coeval mediaeval towns of the upper Lazio region. Singular, is the finding in Cencelle of a wax seal bearing a fish (specifically a pike) standing out in the background framed by a legend bearing the name of a certain Brichut or Bricaut de Chaudere, a personage of Ultramontane origin, given the specificity of the linguistic styling, who may have travelled to Cencelle in the 13th century. A few decades later, in a 196-strong list of castellans present in the *civitas* from 1304 to 1370, at least two names display a French origin, such as Bertrand Donec, mentioned in 1312 and from 1317 to 1321, and Guillaume de Focayrolis, from the diocese of Cahors, in 1318. This brought to mind the Angevin domination that marked the history of Rome and Latium from 1263 to 1335, and by virtue of the link between the Roman Church and the crown, even allowing oneself to be influenced by these ultramontane presences, the presence of enameled pottery produced in the Angevin kingdom is not so strange (Annoscia 2012).

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