



# THE LEOPARD CHANGES ITS SPOTS?

BY GARRETH CRUIKSHANK

Somewhere, someone was playing the Mission Impossible theme on a clapped-out Hammond organ. I wished they would stop. As I roused myself to full wakefulness the true source of the noise became clear - my cell phone. "Yes, hello." Too late. I had missed them. They'd call back. I looked around, bewildered. Where was I? Not Forli. Slowly it dawned on me - somehow I had managed to make my way home from the Opera House and put myself to bed. The clock said 10.20 a.m. I yawned and went back to bed. Ohh, I felt terrible.

This was going to be a critical visit, a do-or-die meeting. I was determined that we should get to the bottom of this mystery. I was sure Signora Poletta knew more than she was letting on. I needed some answers.

The phone rang. "Pronto."

"Ciao bello. It's me. What time will I pick you up?"

"When are we meeting her?"

"4.30 p.m."

"4 o'clock in the lobby then. I'll be carrying a book and a pained expression."

"So what's new. O.K. Ciao," and with that Patrizia hung up. I had just over an hour.

'Volume seven of Bodkin's research' was a small red leather tome. While the handwriting was still recognisably his, it was more scrawled. It had acquired an urgent, edgy quality. Gone was the precise, self-controlled hand.

'With the exceptions of Lazio and Venice, Italy was unified in March 1861, an event brought about by a number of factors: a fortunate diplomatic situation combined with Cavour's masterly ability to exploit it, and Garibaldi's spirit of adventure to name but a few. But unification came at a price, both economic and political. It had been achieved by a series of annexations of Piedmont of the various pre-existing Italian states, so the new nation, from the start, developed more as an expansion of

the old Piedmont rather than a new, original political organism. Until 1864 Turin was the nation's capital; projects for an administrative system based on the autonomy of the regions were abandoned, to be replaced by a rigidly centralised system. Also the electoral law favoured the economically developed regions, to the extent that in more than one region of Italy the vote became the privilege of a few notabilities. This heavy bureaucratic, censorial character was at the heart of the new state's premature unpopularity, brought into being by the gap between the government and the governed. It was this unpopularity which was the heaviest price Italy had to pay for the way unification had been achieved.

In June 1861, a few short months after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, Cavour unexpectedly died, and Italy was deprived of her great leader. The men who inherited his heavy responsibilities were at pains not to wander too far from the path he had indicated.

These men, who belonged to the government of the 'historical Right', from 1861-1876, were obsessed with the task of making up the state's awesome deficit and balancing the budget. From 1869, due to draconian fiscal measures, the condition of the treasury improved and a balanced budget was achieved in 1876.

In the meantime the Cavour - inspired policies of construction of public works and infrastructure continued to gather momentum. Italy's effort in the area of railway building was the most impressive, with the network expanding from 2,175 km in 1870 to 8,713 km in 1880.

A policy of public works and budget adjustment could only be achieved in a country of limited economic resources, by means of extremely severe taxation. In fact, Italians were soon the most heavily taxed people in Europe. The effects were felt on the level of consumption, was kept virtually stationary - hence production too was affected. The very low buying power of the great mass of consumers certainly did not favour the

development of such manufacturing industries as existed, which were, in any case, quite unable to compete with the cheaper foreign products that the liberal policies of the Right allowed free entry to the country. In the south in particular, this combination of free trade and taxation practically extinguished the scattered local industry.

Some scholars have maintained that the type of economic policy described here corresponds to the initial phase of capitalism preceding its true 'take-off', in which the initial problems are an 'original' accumulation of capital and the construction of the necessary infrastructures; in short, a pre-industrial phase. And that is precisely what the government did. The problem was not to encourage the development of industrial production, which would have been premature, but to encourage, rather, this accumulation and prepare the conditions in which the 'take-off' could occur.

For men like Cavour and Francesco Ferrera, who had grown up in the age of triumphant capitalism and free trade, Italy's development into an independent bourgeois country presupposed her unreserved entry into the great circuit of European trade. Once exposed to the biting wind of competition, Italian agriculturalists and businessmen would have to make a virtue of necessity and transform their concerns into modern organisations able to compete on the international market. Economic and social regeneration would, of necessity, advance from below, from the free initiative and individual producers, as had happened in the great bourgeois countries of Europe. This would be a slow process, but its gradualness would guarantee its success, theoretically.

However, the unimaginative successors of Cavour's legacy did almost nothing to remove the obstacles that, in the new Italy, obstructed the free development of bourgeois energies from below.

As the years passed and stagnation continued, the more perspicacious sectors of public opinion began to



suspect that the prospect of along development from below might not be best suited to Italy, which had to make up for a great deal of lost time and was pressed by urgent problems demanding immediate attention. The question was asked whether Italy too could not take those short-cuts that had allowed Germany, a few years after its constitution as a nation, to become a great independent power whose products now reached the markets of the world, and whose technical ability aroused the envy of all its competitors. So, somewhat confusedly, there took shape the prospect of a Prussian line of capitalist development: an economic transformation brought about from above, and with the state's contribution as a determining factor, under the banner of protectionism and the reinforcement of the country's international prestige.

In about 1874 'economic Germanism' began to be discussed in Italy. This concept propounded the need to reconsider the free-trade bias traditionally part of Italian economic policy. That the state should act as an accelerating force to the economy was something both admitted in theory and practised by all the governments what had ruled Italy. The economy's 'modus vivendi', the bond between the bourgeois manufacturers and businessmen of the north and the southern landowners was also modelled on Bismarck's Germany. In 1878 pressure from the textile and machine industries in the north succeeded in winning a protective customs tariff from the government. From that moment Italy's economic life became more sustained and the money market more animated. This development was assisted also by the introduction of new forms of credit specifically designed to finance investments on the French example. The new banks also moved in this direction. Some of the capital was invested speculatively: the 1880s saw the first rush towards speculative building. Rome was subject to indiscriminate demolitions, and the centre of the capital emerged with a pretentious new face, forever marred by a number of eyesores - of which the most monumental is without a doubt the so-called 'Altar of the Nation'. In Florence and Naples the demolition squads were also active.

But a considerable part of the capital on the market was employed in more productive, long-term investments, in industry. The advance of the

metal industry was spectacular; the chemical, machine and mineral industries all made steady progress, and the electrical industry also took its first steps. All these areas were essential to the ultimate transformation of the tile sector into a modern industrial enterprise.

On the whole the production of Italian industry made a general increase of 37 per cent from 1881 to 1887, with an annual growth rate of 4.6 per cent.

Italy's first modest industrial boom coincided with the beginning of the great agricultural crisis. The rise in prices of industrial products that were protected by customs barriers tallied with the fall of agricultural prices, and the draining of capital from the countryside of the town, from the south to the north steadily increased. The arrival of American corn, made possible by a drastic reduction in sea freight charges created a crisis throughout Europe, though in Italy it was the more serious in that an agricultural system as poor in capital as her's was weak and unprepared to face it.



FIGURE A  
A FOUR TILE FORERUNNER (12.5CM X 12.5CM) OF THE 20CM PRODUCT THAT SWEEP EUROPE IN THE 70'S, PRODUCED IN 1903.

Once again it was the poorest country people who had to pay the price. Many were seized by the desperate desire to escape from the downward spiral of poverty and degradation in which they were trapped. At first unobtrusively, then with mounting speed, there took shape the phenomenon of mass emigration. Swarms of emigrants crammed onto transatlantic ships bound for the vast melting-pot of North America, or else tried their chances as farmers in Latin America. In the five year period 1886-90 the average annual number of emigrants was approximately 222,000.

In 1887 a new tariff was drawn up, marking a very important step in the

history of Italian capitalism, and may be considered the birth certificate of what Gramsci called the 'agricultural-industrial bloc of the Italian dominant classes', for the new tariff raised substantially the customs barriers protecting the infant Italian industry. However, far from involving a process of levelling and of regeneration from below, the development of capitalism in Italy represented a widening of the already immense social and regional gaps existing in the country. The result was a social fabric in which new and old were juxtaposed and interwoven, in which a capitalism with a high degree of monopolistic concentration, a close interrelationship of banks and industry and state protection co-existed with an agriculture that in some regions was still at a semi-feudal stage, and with omnipresent handicrafts at a cottage level.

The five years from March 1896 to December 1900 are among the most turbulent and spectacular of all the history of united Italy. Street uprisings were bloodily repressed (with cannon fire), parliamentarians overturned the voting-urns, there were anarchist acts of violence, duels between political leaders, and, finally, the assassination of a king. The picture of a century's end, pregnant with apocalyptic fears and hopes, is complete.

Nevertheless, the economic picture during this period was healthy. From 1896-1908 the annual growth rate of Italian industry on the whole was noticeably high, at 6.7 per cent. Some experimental industries such as metallurgy, chemicals and machinery, all vital to the tile industry, showed a growth rate of more than 12 per cent. The automobile industry made a dramatic surge forward. Motor car production companies multiplied rapidly, from seven in 1900 to seventy in 1907.

But the protection enjoyed by Italy's industrial majors does not adequately explain their rapid development. There is another factor to be taken into account - the low cost of labour.

At the beginning of the century the Italian worker was not only one of the worst paid in Europe, but also worked the longest hours, for there was no law limiting the working day. As for wages, in spite of the increases that had followed the agitations and strikes of the first years of the new century, the wide use of female and juvenile labour did much to keep them low.



On the other hand a considerable part of the population experienced a rise in their standard of living during the early years of the 20th century. The entrepreneurial middle class had taken advantage of the good economic circumstances, skilled workers had won wage increases and a shorter working day, the salaries of low grade civil servants had risen, the agricultural labourers of the more highly developed areas of the Po valley had seen their cooperatives develop and prosper. So many Italians enjoyed, if not prosperity, at least a thrifty middle class decorum, and with it the possibility of a life in which there was room for the simple luxuries and amusements that BELLE EPOQUE Italy provided: Puccini's operas, D'Annunzio's novels, the cinema. Sport was another fashionable pastime, and in particular motor-racing: Italian cars - Fiats, Maseratis, Alfa Romeos dominated the racing scene. For the masses there was football and cycling.

I stood up, stretched and lit a cigarette. 3.45 p.m. Patrizia would be here in 15 minutes. I puffed on my cigarette and reflected on what I had just read. All this attention paid by Bodkin to the economic development, the slow but steady march of the nation towards industrialisation was by way of prelude to his attempt to depict the emergence of the Italian ceramic tile industry in the 50 years or so prior to his undertaking his research, it seemed to me.

The specific political policies and ideologies of leaders such as Crispi, Depretis, Di Rudini and Giolitti are of secondary importance, if that, and then only insofar as they throw light on the particular details of the socio-economic realities that he saw as pertinent to his observations. Hence Bodkin's references to the metallurgy, steel, chemical, electrical and automotive

industries, all essential infrastructural elements for the tile industry's renaissance; or so it seemed to me.

But as with so much that Bodkin refers to, or chooses to overlook, it is not always clear what his true meaning is. Indeed I am constantly left with the disquieting impression that he is saying much more, and at the same time less, than I suppose.

In consequence of the above observations it should surprise no-one, least of all me, that, having made his point, Bodkin should launch, with cavalier abandon, into an analysis of the dominant artistic style of the day - Art Nouveau.

'Art Nouveau was a complex turn of the century stylistic phenomenon that manifested itself in many aspects of art, architecture and design including tiles and architectural ceramics. Its heyday was between the years 1890 and 1914.

It was characterised by the dominant use of 'line'; sinuous, whiplash curving lines. Its second characteristic was an emphasis on flat areas of colour, which added vitality to the linear design. Thirdly, these lines and flat colours were applied to organic design motifs such as plants and flowers with slender, sinuous stems and tendrils, different varieties of insects, water birds and young women with long, flowing hair. Drawing on these themes, designers created voluptuous images expressed in wrought iron, glass, stone and terracotta cladding, timber and tiles.

Though certain general design characteristics are identifiable whatever the medium or the country of origin, Art Nouveau lacked stylistic homogeneity. It was an artistic movement that took different directions in each country and was also intertwined with the industrial, social, scientific and political developments of its time. New forms of industrial production, increasing urbanisation, breakthroughs in science and technology, worldwide trade and the rise of nationalism as a political force, all contributed to a new world view marked by a sense of ever accelerating progress and change. The very name, 'Art Nouveau' highlights the sense of renewal. In Italy the phenomenon was known as 'Stile Liberty', suggesting 'newness', 'youth', 'modernity', and indicating a period poised on the threshold of a new era.

Art Nouveau's strength proceeded from its diversity, complexity, ambiguity and its pan-European manifestations. The struggle of forms it represented was a struggle of world views: chauvanism mixed with universalism, art mingling with science, the pagan with Christian. It can be decadent and progressive, national and liberal, eastern and western, vernacular and international, urban and rural, imperial and social, natural and artificial, material and spiritual.

Art Nouveau was an attempt to give a new direction to 19th century art, architecture and design and a rejection of the stultifying historicism of existing academic art replaced with a radical new idiom based on nature and non-classical European design sources, in particular Japanese. Japan's porcelain and woodcuts opened the eyes of European artists to the purely formalistic qualities of strong line and equally strong colour. Art Nouveau aspired to be 'new' in a world full of progressive developments.

The spread of ideas and international contacts was accelerated by the numerous World Fairs convened in Europe and America since the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. Here, manufacturers were able to exhibit their wares as part of national stands. These became important industrial showcases for a multitude of products including tiles and architectural ceramics. For the participating countries it was also an opportunity to see the efforts of rival manufacturers. International juries bestowed highly coveted prizes and medals, and tile manufacturers' catalogues of the period often boasted these awards.

The Rubbiani family were the first in Italy to modernise manufacturing techniques by introducing dry pressing from England, a technique discovered by Prosser in 1861 and immediately employed by the entrepreneurial Herbert Minton, with spectacular success. In 1889, at the Exhibition of the Artistic and Industrial Museum in Rome, Carlo Rubbiani did not exhibit the usual ornamental vases but a range of maiolica tiles. In 1890, at the Modena Exhibition, he presented ceramic miniatures, i.e. tiles with mechanically reproduced decorations. In 1895, Carlo's company manufactured and earthenware for everyday use and painted tiles for floors that were sold mainly in Rome and Naples. Records reveal that by 1907 their products were being sold throughout Italy and were even being exported to South America.

FIGURE B

THIS VASE, MADE IN EARLY 1900'S BY FABBRICA FRATELLI MINARDI DISPLAYS MANY OF THE HALLMARKS OF "STILE LIBERTY": SINUOUS CURVING LINES, FLAT AREAS OF COLOUR, FLORAL MOTIFS AND A YOUNG WOMAN WITH LONG FLOWING "PATRIZIA-LIKE" HAIR.





The growth in the market for ceramic tiles was, in part, a manifestation of the increasing awareness of the importance of durable and hygienic surfaces in public, commercial and domestic buildings. Tiles and architectural ceramics were recognised as being durable and easily cleaned, while at the same time highly decorative, hence their (increasingly) popular use in hospitals, railway stations, schools, libraries and hotels, and in commercial buildings such as offices, warehouses and shops; while in the domestic sphere they were ideal for cladding walls in entrance porches, vestibules, kitchens and bathrooms.

Another aspect was the interest in the use of colour on the exterior of buildings for aesthetic effects as expressed in the writings of such architects as Viollet-le-Duc and Paul Sedille, who favoured ceramic surfaces like glazed bricks and tiles rather than painted plaster and stucco which had been the norm until then.

The Art Nouveau style, essentially decorative in principle, was readily adapted to tile design. Factories copied each others' products, as there was little design protection at this period, and this also led to the rapid proliferation of the style.

In Italy Art Nouveau manifested itself quite late because the country had started on the road to modernisation well after the rest of developed Europe, and it had felt the weight of its classical past more than its neighbours. Even at the turn of the century Italy was still better known for its Roman antiquities and Rinascimento art treasures than for its contemporary architecture or industrial design - a fact that was bemoaned by the radical poet Marinetti in his famous manifesto of Futurism in 1909. The

A BUILDING IN FAENZA DECORATED WITH A WIDE CERAMIC TILE FRIEZE IN THE "STILE LIBERTY". IT IS ONE OF MANY WHICH REVEAL THE INFLUENCE OF VIOLLET-LE-DUC, WHO FAVOURED CERAMIC SURFACES OVER TRADITIONAL PAINTED PLASTER AND STUCCO.



FIGURE C

emergence of Art Nouveau in Italy was therefore an important attempt to break with past aesthetics.

The Italians referred to Art Nouveau as 'Stile Floreale' or 'Stile Liberty'. The latter name signifies the strong influence of English design which had been introduced into Italy via Liberty's of London, whose progressive looking products were very much in vogue at that time. Though Italy lagged behind in the field of contemporary design it was provided with a significant stimulus by the first International Exposition of Modern Decorative Art held in Turin in 1902. This exhibition was to prove the last great showcase for European Art Nouveau. France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Hungary, England and Scotland were all represented, as countries that had already made important contributions to the movement.

One of the Italian buildings at the exhibition was Palazzina Lauro, financed by the businessman Agostino Lauro and designed by the architect Giuseppe Velati-Bellini. Their aim was to create a unified architectural statement in the equivalent of Art Nouveau. Ceramic tiles were part of the scheme, employed to add colour to the exterior. Tiles with floral decorations were used around the windows and a tile panel at the top of the façade showed two cockerels surrounded by poppies and ears of corn. The house attracted considerable critical comment, but the efforts made by Lauro and Velati-Bellini were sufficient for them to be awarded a gold medal.

The ceramic artist Galileo Chini (1873 - ?) became one of the principal exponents of Italian Art Nouveau tiles and pottery. In 1896 he was co-founder of Arte della Ceramica in Florence where he became artistic director. In 1907 his firm amalgamated with the ceramics factory of Chini & Co. in Florence, which was owned by a member of his family, and moved to Borgo San Lorenzo. Tile designs by Chini vary from naturalistic floral relief tiles and semi-abstract stencilled floral patterns to exuberantly hand painted figurative Art Nouveau panels.

Some fine examples of Art Nouveau tiling can still be seen on buildings in Milan, Florence, Ferrara, Viareggio and Faenza. In Milan striking panels in the style depicting men and women decorate a large apartment block by the architect Giovan Battista Bossi on Via Malpighi, built between 1902

and 1905. In Florence, Galileo Chini made the tiles for a large villa in Viale Michelangelo designed by the architect Giovanni Michelazzi in 1904. Late Art Nouveau tile work of a more restrained kind can be found in the seaside resort of Viareggio.

'This town was developed at the beginning of the 29th century, a grand civic expression of 'Italietta'. It was a leisure and spa resort for the nouveaux riches from the growing industrial towns of northern Italy. Cafes, hotels, cinemas and seaside villas were built to accommodate the burgeoning tourist trade. Villa Argentina, built approximately 1910, is an outstanding building. Tile panels decorate the entire length of the upper façade. They depict cupids carrying baskets of fruit on their heads. The areas in between the cupid panels are filled with checkerboard patterns of dark and light tiles, strictly geometric layouts that anticipate the early phase of Art Deco.'

I raced downstairs. Patrizia sat perched on a crimson damask ottoman smoking a cigarette. With a vivid multi-coloured shawl draped over her shoulders and the tangle of long black hair she resembled the subject of a painting by Gustave Klimt or a tile panel by Battista Bossi. She stubbed out her cigarette and inspected me critically for a moment or two "Bravo. Let's go." Before I could reply she was out the door. Without planning anything we had both intuitively understood what the other had been thinking. We needed to make an impression that would break down the signora's defences. Our chance would not come again.

"How many books did you say there were?"

"Eight."

"How long did it take him to write them?"

"I don't know. Months. The signora will know."

"Why would he spend months running all over the country, meeting people, visiting galleries, museums and libraries, and then leave it all behind?"

"I was thinking the same thing. He took photos as well, and made sketches."

Where are they, I'd like to know? There's just that one photo from 'L.'"



We went on in this vein until we reached our destination. I knocked on the bright red door flanked by potted geraniums. The signora looked pleased to see us and beckoned us in. We both noticed the large vase of flowers on the table. Just then a young lady in her twenties emerged from the kitchen with the coffee paraphernalia. Signora Poletta performed the introductions. The young woman was her granddaughter, Wanda (pronounced 'Vernda'). She was staying for a few days.

"Wanda lives in Ferrara with her parents but is studying Fine Arts at the University of Bologna." Patrizia and I sat there slack-jawed in amazement, staring at the old lady, for she had imparted this piece of information in perfect English. She went on, as if oblivious of our reaction.

"Alessandro, her father, thinks she should get involved in his business but the idea doesn't appeal to her."

"What is his line of business?"

"Oh, did I not mention it before ... ceramic tiles of course. As you can see Professore Bodkin had a great impact on me. It was he who taught me English and instilled in me a love and appreciation of art and tiles. Don't think because we are surrounded by such things that all Italian appreciate art. He taught me how to look. 'Past things throw light on future ones; the world was always of a kind; what is and will be was at some other time; the same things come back, but under different names and colours; not everybody recognises them, but only he who is wise and considers them diligently'. Signor Bodkin was such a man, although he was not always wise. He could be foolish and take risks, but he was always clever."

THIS CERAMIC TILE SIGN FROM THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY IS STILL IN EXCELLENT CONDITION NEARLY 100 YEARS ON. FAENZA IS GENEROUSLY DECORATED WITH CERAMIC TESTIMONIES TO ITS ILLUSTRIOUS TILE MAKING HISTORY.



FIGURE D

I broke in to her incredible monologue, unable to restrain myself any longer. "Signora, I have many questions that I need you to answer. I have read the journals constantly since that first day Patrizia and I met you, but I am confused. Why did he leave them behind; why were they amongst the rubbish outside that house; why was he in Forli for so long; why did he leave; where did he go; did he ever contact you again? Why were there pages cut from the journals?"

"I see you have given this much thought. You are genuinely interested, otherwise we would be having this discussion with Wanda present. They are all good questions. The Professore had been in Italy for sometime before he arrived in Forli. He stayed because it was quiet, small but not too small and relatively convenient to everything. After a while nobody paid the eccentric Englishman any attention. Then things began to change. He fell under suspicion. His conversations became indiscreet and his journals became more political and less about art."

"Is that why the authorities cut pages out of them? As evidence?"

She smiled. "No, I did that. To protect him. As I said before, I was in love with him, and even though my feelings could never be returned, I had to save him."

"From whom?"

"From the authorities, and from himself. He was playing a dangerous game. His drawings and photographs could not disguise his true motives, and if I could see it they would see it too. His words were more ambiguous. He used history and art as a metaphor for the present."

"Ah! The quote from Guicciardini. And can you tell us who 'L' was?"

"Not with certainty. The Professore would not reveal his name. He said it was best for everyone if he did not say. We kept his secrets, and there were many. I always felt there was a mask hiding his true identity. It's there in his writing too. But it was a beautiful mask."

This time it was Patrizia who interrupted. "Signora, you said he took risks. What did you mean?"

"The people he met, the places he went. Asking questions, taking notes,

photographs, sketches. It was very easy to see why his actions provoked suspicion and were misunderstood."

"But were they misunderstood. You have implied that he was what they thought he was," Patrizia responded.

"Professore Bodkin was an observer and a critic. That is all."

"And the people he met? 'L'?"

"The same. But Bodkin was a sharp critic. When I heard they were about to arrest him I warned the Professore to leave immediately, and then I hid the journals ... in the school library at first. No one would look for them there. Now you are wondering, maybe, why Wanda is here. Signor Cruikshank, tomorrow you are leaving Forli, yes? If you like, instead of catching the train, Wanda can drive you to Bologna. On the other hand you may wish to visit beautiful Ferrera. My son would be pleased to have you as his guest, and the two of you could talk about ceramic tiles. Wanda will pick you up tomorrow afternoon. Now if you don't mind, I am tired."

We thanked her and walked to the door. Patrizia stopped abruptly, turned and asked, "Signora, was Bodkin his real name?"

"It is good question. Signor Cruikshank, you are from Australia, yes?"

I nodded.

"But your name, it is not Australian?"

"No. Scottish."

"Ah. Names. They can tell us so much. But they are more like signposts than definitions, don't you think? Goodbye," and with that she closed the door, leaving Patrizia and me staring at each other, somewhat dumbstruck. We parted at the hotel promising to meet for dinner at nine.

Back in my room I snatched up the journal instantly and began to read with a passionate intensity.

"I have been reading Croce's HISTORY OF ITALY. No one has evoked the glory and the modesty of the 'Italietta' before the floor-war, depression and what is to come - better than him, and no one has done more to make Italian culture aware of its own roots and continuity and to confer on it some self-sufficiency.

During the latter part of the 19th century the painted maiolica of the Rinascimento was naturally the main source for much of the decorative earthenware in Italy. Examples dating from the 1870s have been noted, for instance, from the Ginori pottery at Doccia, from the Torquato Castellani pottery at Rome and the Torelli pottery at Florence; and in 1878 the most famous of the potteries devoted to the initiation of early maiolica was opened in Florence by Ulysse Cantagalli.

The latter half of the century, however, was a period in which many potters and manufacturers were consciously exploring the possibilities of historic and exotic styles. Some followed peasant art styles. In a number of porcelain factories a further revival of the rococo, known as the Third Rococo, was developed in the last decade or so of the century. Among the exotic influences the Persian and Turkish styles were prominent in the work of the Cantagalli pottery.

In Deruta, throughout the 18th and into the 19th century production levels had been in decline. Umbria's brief period under Napoleonic rule, and eventual unification into the new Italy in 1861, did little to alleviate the general economic crisis in the region. The manufacture of ceramics in Deruta was particularly hard hit, because the market, already limited to local consumption, became smaller. The situation was exacerbated by competition from other ceramic centres such as Castelli d'Abruzzo in the south. Still more competition came from the north, where several centres (Sassuolo amongst others) gained prominence with ceramic imitations of the increasingly popular porcelain.

However these centres were not immune to the advent of industrialisation throughout Europe and the fierce competition of English tiles and earthenware. The ceramic industry up and down the peninsula was faltering, and Deruta, already suffering reached its lowest ebb.

The few remaining factories continued churning out a substantial quantity of material, but it was for everyday use and of poor quality.

The second half of the 19th century was a growing interest in Rinascimento maiolica throughout Europe, especially in France and England. Some of the great maiolica collections in Paris and London were established at this time.

The resulting commercial interest in antique maiolica was accompanied by numerous studies by scholars and archaeologists.

Derutans were beginning to realise that their nearly forgotten heritage was a precious commodity, not something to let slip away. In 1872 the city council announced it would sponsor an Industrial Exhibition "for the encouragement and betterment of the making of maiolica in the town." The town fathers acknowledged that the state of affairs in Deruta had sunk so low that it was impossible to place a student in a nearby factory for the purpose of perfecting the art of pottery for there was no one left to pass on the traditional techniques of this age-old craft. The desperate need for some sort of qualification and teaching was clearly recognised but it was not until the first decade of this century that the initial steps towards a new Rinascimento were taken.

Despite a 500 year tradition of ceramic manufacture in Deruta, skills and techniques were not always handed down to the next generation. Economic crisis combined with changing taste left a great deal of valuable knowledge by the wayside. It was quite recently that much of this knowledge was revived. The event that most clearly illustrates this revival was the rediscovery of the tiles of the Pavement of San Francesco, which

had lain buried for centuries. They were 'discovered' in 1902 during the restoration of the church and although damaged they inspired the community and set a train of actions in motion.

Angelo Micheletti, a doctor and self-taught painter, and Francesco Briganti, a scholar were instrumental in this process. In 1901 the pair joined forces to form a museum, Il Museo Artistico per i Lavoranti. From the beginning they viewed Deruta's cultural heritage as a learning tool to inspire artisans. The original core of their collection included precious, locally found fragments, donated pieces, modern reproductions and, of course, the Pavement.

Subsequently the Istituto de'Disegno was founded.

Another key figure during the period was Alpinolo Magnini. He had studied drawing and design at the Fine Art Academie in Perugia and on his return to Deruta in 1907 became curator of the recently formed museum and head of the design school. In these positions he was to influence and train an entire generation of artisans.

To be continued...

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