

A MATTER OF ATTRIBUTION

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FIGURE A

TILE MURALS DECORATE THE WALL OF THE CAFFÈ AT STABILIMENTO TETTuccio (MONTECATINI TERME BUILT IN 1927 IN A NEO-RENAISSANCE STYLE.

"If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change d'you understand?" THE LEOPARD, Giuseppe di Lampedusa.

"Things die, too, you know. And so, if they too have to die, well there it is, it's so much better to let them go. That has more style about it, apart from everything else, don't you agree?" THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS, Giorgio Bassani.

In 1910 Magnini assumed the additional role of technical director of the new Società Anonima Maioliche Deruta, a co-op that united the scattered artisans in hopes of conquering a broader market. Through his continued study of archaeological sites and fragments, as well as museum pieces in foreign collections, Magnini began to re-establish Deruta's historic past.

Magnini steered the artisans toward a neo-Rinascimento style that emulated and

eventually reinterpreted the masterpieces of the 16th century. He also invited the painter Davide Ziporovich to work in the town from 1923-1927, during which time Ziporovich executed a series of plates based on famous works by Michelangelo, Raphael and Botticelli.

Ubaldo Grazie, together with Magnini sought to unravel the forgotten recipe of the lustre glaze synonymous with 16th century Derutan ceramics. Eventually their reproductions became so exact that they were difficult to distinguish from the originals. Slavish reproduction of antique pieces was not an end in itself, however, nor was it a way to satisfy the growing demand for Rinascimento maiolica. Rather, it was the exploration of an artisan who was extremely proud of his past and who sought to absorb all that it had to offer him.

Born in 1887 to one of the most successful ceramic manufacturing families in Deruta, Grazie worked

during the first decades of this century as head of operations for the Società Anonima Maioliche Deruta. In 1922 he opened the Società Anonima Industria Maioliche Artistiche Giuseppe Grazie. Shortly afterwards he built a new factory incorporating all that was modern in the manufacturing of ceramics.

Another innovator was Amerigo Lunghi, an artist and a latecomer to the field of ceramic design. Lunghi was commissioned to execute a ceramic panel for the Church of San Francesco depicting St Catherine of Alexandria - the patron saint of Derutan ceramicists. Other works include 'San Francesco Preaching to the Animals' adorning the Parish House and the 'Enthroned Madonna' which decorates the small Church of Madonna delle Piagge. His fame spread throughout Umbria and many of his works are to be found in Foligno, Assisi and Perugia.

Lunghi's figurative panels are part of a

larger disposition towards historicism which involves the decoration of buildings with terracotta embellishments and maiolica tiles. Many turn of the century structures in Deruta display the brightly coloured tiles; framing windows, edging cornices or simply placed in the middle of facades for some visual interest. The train station, located in nearby San Nicol  di Celle bears a great deal of decoration executed by Grazie's factory in the 1920s. The cemetery is also a repository of architectural decoration.

In 1924, Lunghi became artistic director of the Grazie factory, incorporating new styles into the traditional repertoire. The factory's catalogue listed over 700 different items, executed in 63 patterns: everything from traditional Deruta motifs, to patterns from all over Italy from the last 600 years, to Art Deco shapes. Here was a company that was energetically pursuing a world market.

Early in the century two competing trends co-existed: the desire to maintain strong local traditions, and the desire to explore new stylistic terrain, including Art Nouveau, Modernism, Art Deco and Futurism. The market encouraged artisans to adapt traditional forms such as 16th century display plates and apothecary jars to modern purposes. Commemorative family portraits replaced the idealised feminine profiles of the Rinascimento. Gradually, the traditional designs found greater success and modern patterns were rarely produced.

Innovations which did occur were focused on the modernisation of manufacture rather than design. Electric kilns streamlined production making tasks such as the gathering of wood for fuel obsolete. Similarly, industrially produced glazes not only expanded the colour range but also made the entire glazing process easier.

The circumstances that existed in Faenza, that other great centre of ceramic manufacture, were not substantially different from those at Deruta. At the end of the last century ceramics in Faenza went through a critical phase, after approximately six centuries of activity, due to the closure of its production workshops. The activities of both: the factory of the Conti Ferniani which had operated without interruption since the 17th century, and that belonging to Achille Farina which operated in the second half of the century same to an end. There were, naturally, attempts at recovery immediately at the start of the 1900s with the Fabbriche Riunite di Ceramica, an initiative of Carlo Cavina. At the same

time the Minardi brothers started a new factory.

During this period there was a cultural, artistic and productive re-awakening in Faenza. A great exhibition promoted by the Societ  per il Risveglio Cittadino was promoted to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the birth of Evangelista Torricelli, the Favertine inventor of the barometer. Following this exhibition, under the impetus of Gaetano Ballardini, the International Museum of Ceramics was founded as a point of reference for ancient, modern and contemporary ceramics, both national and international.

The development of the local factories faced another set back with the financial crisis that involved the Fabbriche Riunite di Ceramica at the end of 1908. At the end of the first decade the factory owned by the Minardi brothers faced a similar situation and for several years was managed directly by technicians and factory workers.

One of the solutions to the problems of the ceramics craftsmen that would permit the continuation of their work in a precarious situation regarding finances and productive structures was initiated by Gaetano Ballardini. The foundation of the Museum was quickly followed by a ceramics school which offered training and a start in the profession. The objective was to address the problems of technical-scientific research, aesthetic and functional aspects as well as those related to the organisation of craftsmen and industry and placing the products into the marketplace.

The technicians employed by the school were from among those that had had first hand experience in the troubled affairs of the factories at the beginning of the century. The Faenza workshops of this period provided numerous opportunities to gain experience and were excellent training centres for those that followed. The distinctive feature of the Faenza 'product' is its reliance on the family unit for its manufacture, and its great dependence on a revival of the traditional decorative models from the Middle Ages to the 1800s.

For anyone in the first decade in search of stronger stuff, there were the Futurists, the 'enfants terribles' of their day, who exalted the beauty of the motor car in contrast to that of the 'Nike of Samothrace', or Michelangelo's 'David' or Rinascimento maiolica.

By 1909 many Italians had begun to feel irritated and unsatisfied by the culture and lifestyle of the period, the

'Italietta', finding it mean and lacking in energy. The Futurists were their spokesmen.

Had the new political course embarked on by Prime Minister Giolitti continued, further progress and change might have been achieved. It might have been possible to overcome the backwardness that still weighed heavily on most of the country. It might have been. But by now the domestic political horizon was clouding over and there were signs that the Italian economy was moving out of its prosperous phase.

The 'red week' of June 1914 was the first difficult test that the new government led by Antonio Salandra had to face. This is the name given to the improvised, spontaneous uprising that disturbed the country for a week, and had its epicentre in the Romagna and the Marche. It was a provincial revolution, or more accurately perhaps, a caricature of a revolution, led by two provincials, Pietro Nenni and a syndicalist school teacher from Forli, Benito Mussolini.

Caricature or not, 'red week' appeared as a threatening symptom of the real thing. Salandra and the King supported the use of extreme measures to suppress the perceived threat. However, within a month came the news of the assassination in Sarajevo, and Austria's response. In the world conflict that subsequently burst forth, Italy maintained its neutrality, initially. In May 1915, despite the fact that the country as a whole did not want war, Italy went to war with Austria, psychologically and militarily unprepared. The domestic effects of the war were enormous, and their importance can hardly be calculated.

The war effort demanded a corresponding effort from the industrial sector. In a war economy in which the notions of market and market prices were almost abolished, profits, naturally, could be extravagant, and there were spectacular increases of capital, e.g. Fiat increased its capital from 17 million lire in 1914 to 200 million in 1919. As a result, the typical traits of Italian capitalism - a high degree of concentration, the close interrelationship of banks and industry, dependence on state orders, agreements between different sectors as to the regulation of the market - were greatly magnified. In 1919 the economy was described as being dominated by "a small brigade of a few great financiers and a few great industrialists." They were by now powerful 'baronies', with who the state had constantly to make treaties.

Once the war was over Italy realised that she remained a poor country and heavily in debt to her allies. The peasants who returned from the trenches found the same grinding poverty that they had left behind, and the officers faced the prospect of uncertain salaries of inflated money.

A profound surge of popular feeling arose against the Italian state and its ruling class, and those who had hoped that intervention in the war would prevent a revolution were terrified to witness this growth of a revolutionary restlessness that seemed more threatening and disruptive every day.

In April 1920 the metal workers of Turin were provoked into a general strike by the actions of their bosses. Its defeat marked the first receding of the revolutionary wave that had disturbed Italian society. The forces of conservatism were already reorganising themselves and already gave hints of passing decisively to the counter-attack. Things were entering a period of uncertainty and precarious balance, a period which as Gramsci was one of the few to realise, would only be ended by a final solution: either with a revolution or with an equally radical and violent reaction.

The Italian economy was entering on a period of acute and general crisis. Production stagnated. In December 1921 the Banca di Sconto collapsed, involving thousands of small savers. In the meantime the unemployment figures rose continually, while at the same time the number of strikes diminished. The economic crisis weakened the Italian workers' movement, but had a galvanising effect on 'Italian reaction' (soldiers, industrialists, landowners) which had been helpless in the face of the wave of subversion of 1919.

Giolitti, who had been called back to the prime ministership in 1920, with his traditional policy of balance, now seemed out-of-date. What was wanted was a man of greater energy and bolder views, who would be able to replace a precarious and uncertain balance, providing the country with something stronger and more final.

I laid down the journal and got ready to meet Patrizia for dinner. A few minutes later I walked downstairs and waited, and reflected on all that I had read and heard. Still the truth eluded me, but I felt that I was very close. And I was unsettled by what I thought I would find. Patrizia arrived looking radiant, but also showing a degree of uncertainty. Was it the implications of Signora Poletta's words regarding Bodkin's journal?

At dinner we tried to avoid discussion of the afternoon's visit, and the journals, save to express amazement at the signora's command of English and her motives for maintaining the pretence for so long.

"It certainly give her an advantage over us."

"I think she learned more than English from Bodkin. She seems to have a natural gift for dissembling. Sorry - pretending." After that we moved on to more general subjects, reminisced and discussed my departure tomorrow. Although I was bored with Forli, I would miss Patrizia.

The next day, having slept badly, I was up early and packed. After breakfast I resumed my reading of the eighth and final volume. It was less than half full.



FIGURE B
CLOSE TO THE POLETTA HOME IN FERRARA IS THIS ELEGANT 'STILE LIBERTY' VILLA WITH CERAMIC TILES SET INTO THE FACADE; THEIR SINUOUS LINES ECHOED IN THOSE OF THE WROUGHT IRON GATE AND BALCONY.

Giolitti's moderate policies and the fact that he was the figurehead of Italy's 'Belle ...poque' made him vulnerable to charges of decadence and corruption by his radical enemies, who disapproved of his pragmatic compromises and lack of radical vision. Young intellectuals and artists became fierce opponents of Giolitti and sought political ideas and cultural forms with which to express their impatience and frustration. Ottavio Dinale, editor of *La Demolizione*, and publisher of Marinetti's *Founding Manifesto of Futurism*, believed that "Italy's stifling and humiliating cultural dependency on its 'dead' museum culture would be demolished to make way for the new art of the future."

What Marinetti, the Futurist leader, and many of his associates meant by 'Futurism' was a rejection of the past, a destruction of Italy's heritage on the one hand, and an almost idolatrous concern with the portents of the future

on the other. Violent action, whether in life or art, was seen as the antidote to political, cultural and psychological lethargy.

When Italy entered the war in 1915 many of the Futurists were quick to volunteer. When Mussolini's fascists seized power following the 'March on Rome' in 1922 their actions seemed the embodiment of the Futurists demands for political and cultural renewal.

I closed the book and proceeded together up my bags and left them down to the reception desk to check out. The man at the counter handed me two messages: one from Patrizia saying she would meet me for lunch at our usual *caffè* on Piazza Saffi, and the other from Wanda informing me that she would pick me up from the hotel at 3 p.m. Done!

In the few remaining hours before I left Forli, uncertain when I would return, I decided to shop for gifts, for Signora Poletta and something special for Patrizia. I would also visit a museum or two.

At the appointed hour we came together outside the *caffè*, electing to sit at an outdoor table in order to smoke and more freely take in the bustle of the piazza. She expressed delight with her present - a shawl by Missoni. After opening her present to me, cologne by D&G, we ordered and lit our cigarettes. But despite the surface gaiety and the sunny sky, the mood was restrained. We both knew it would be a long time before we saw each other again.

Patrizia was the first to speak. "I wonder if this was how the Signora and Bodkin felt before he left?"

"I doubt it. He was fleeing the authorities. There would have been no time for lengthy goodbyes."

"But she loved him, and he obviously felt something for her. They must have spent a lot of time together if he managed to teach her to speak English."

"Amongst other things. It seems rather implausible to me, when you consider the implications of some of her other comments. I had the faint suspicion that the professor was, how did they used to put it, ...'artistic'."

"I thought so too. It was even more explicit in the Italian. Whatever the truth of the situation, he certainly made a great impression on her. You could say he changed her life, for the better I think."

"There are still so many unanswered questions, which will probably never be answered. He is so illusive, and yet his personality, his presence is so strong throughout the journals."

"It is ironical that his research is an attempt to understand the meaning of Italian tiles better ... and much more, but as he continued to investigate the past, he became the greater mystery."

We continued on in this vein throughout the meal, constantly speculating 'what if' until our heads were spinning. To me it seemed, however, that our conversation was, subcutaneously, like an elaborate game we both wanted to play, but neither wanted to complete, to reach the conclusion.

Nevertheless, the end of the meal brought the suspension of the game/conversation. It was time to go our separate ways. We both promised to write, and probably believed that we would.

Patrizia walked across the piazza, and I sat for a while, smoking and thinking.

At 3 p.m. on the dot Wanda pulled up outside the hotel, blocking the street, and we bundled my things into the boot. For the first few minutes our talk was general, then she began to probe.

"Where are you up to with Bodkin's research?"

"Futurism and the rise of Fascism."

"Ah. Bravo. We are studying them now. What do you think of the Futurists?"

"I like their art, but not their politics."

She turned her head slightly and gave me a strange look. "Can you separate the two? Surely not."

"I don't really know much about either." This comment was taken as a cue by Wanda to enlighten me.

"To understand the Futurists you need to consider the turbulent political situation in Italy at the time. Technical innovations, including the telephone,

wireless telegraph, X-ray, cinema, the automobile and aeroplane established a foundation for this reorientation of art, thought and life.

The 'Futurist Painting Technical Manifesto' was launched in Turin in March 1910. Its central point is that the modern world, experienced by the city dwellers of the new 20th century is one of movement, dynamism, transparency and radiant coloured light."

No matter how quickly Wanda drove, I realised as I listened to this smart, young, very earnest art student that it was going to be a long journey.

"It was the impact of Cubism, that was the decisive factor in transforming the practice of the Futurists during the course of 1910-11. Gino Severini's 'Self Portrait' of 1912 shows how Cubist technique became a vehicle for a new Futurist style. He'd been working in Paris and was an important conduit between the two movements. It was Cubism's interpretation of form and space, transparency and multiple viewpoints that the Futurists adapted to their own distinct ideological and imaginative interests."

"Are we far from Ferrara?" I asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

"Another hour or so."

In 1916 Severini published two articles which indicate a profound shift in his aesthetic thinking. He was moving away from the disrupted and dynamic forms of Futurism, and towards a rationalist reworking of tradition and figuration. This 'return to order' paralleled that of many other European artists during and after the war.

Severini was drawn towards his artistic heritage - Giotto, Uccello and other early Rinascimento artists, whose work he interpreted as a peculiarly Italian expression of a sense of gravity, solidarity and mystery. His new art stemmed from a powerful sense of

national identity, but it is as if, having been part of a race towards modernisation, he was now drawn to deeper aesthetic roots at odds with the excitability and fragmentation of Marinetti's vision. The tension between dynamism and classical order was to be a key theme throughout the Fascist era of Italy."

"Severini was particularly attracted by the formal traits of Ravenna's mosaics, so modern in character and style that they resemble, according to him, certain figures by Cezanne and Van Gogh. From the 1930s on Severini devoted himself to the practice of mosaic-making, founding and running a school for mosaic in Paris. He advocated the ideal of art-craft unity ... merging the creative act and its practical execution in the figure of the 'designer-mosaicist'.

If I heard the word 'dynamism' one more time I was going to scream. Fortunately Wanda's lecture was complete, for the moment, and she took this opportunity to pull into a petrol station/caffe for all the usual reasons.

Back in the car, Wanda's monologue about the Futurists, Severini and mosaics was winding down.

"What does the English professor have to say about this period?"

"Not much about the Futurists; mainly about the economic and political conditions of the time."

"Ah, good. Read them to me please. And then she swore in Italian at another driver.

"O.K." I flicked through the pages trying to find my place. Just as fascism's way to power has been smoothed by the economic crisis, the favourable state of the European and American economy on the whole between 1922-29 has done much to aid its process of consolidation. The new government has had to do no more than assist the current tendency, allowing those forces and men who control the country's economic life to have their way.

Of necessity the regime strives to create and ideology and an aesthetics of its own. The official face of fascist Italy is martial. In architecture the monumental 'archaeological' style of Piacentini is 'celebrated' by demolition on a sickening scale and grandiose rebuilding in the historic centre of Rome.

And now the years of prosperity have rapidly passed; the euphoria of a temporary, limited and artificial wellbeing has been replaced by the return of the old Italian reality, but this time, I feel, with a more threatening urgency. That's where it ends." I closed the last of the journals, with a vague sense of

FIGURE C

MOSAICS
DECORATE THE
FACADE OF
THIS PALAZZO
OVERLOOKING
THE GRAND
CANAL, VENICE.



loss. Something significant had come to an end.

"Mmm. Bravo. I think I like this fellow, Bodkin. He is very sharp."

My god! That's where I'd heard the name before - HAMLET. "... When he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?" So where does that leave me. Was the name genuine or fake. Signora Poletta had said names are signposts not definitions. What was she getting at.

The sign indicated the turn off of Ferrara. We were nearly there. "My father is looking forward to meeting you and talking about tiles. Tomorrow might we have some guests for dinner, mostly friends of my father."

Before long we had arrived. Wanda's driving took my breath away, and her parking was a modern marvel. Before I knew what was happening the entire Ferrara branch of the Poletta family had burst upon me: Alessandro, his wife Marilena, their son Luca, and the dog. Wanda's boyfriend was there as well, adding to the sense of occasion.

Once inside I was shown my room and given an opportunity of freshen up. Dinner would be ready soon. I emerged, several minutes later, changed and suitably refreshed, into a warm and elegant room full of smiling faces. The hospitality and generosity of spirit was so overwhelming I had to remind myself that I hadn't the faintest idea who these people were.

I sat down, was offered a glass of wine and instantly bombarded with questions about myself, Australia and my trip to Italy. After a while we progressed to the dinner table where the questions continued. But I had questions of my own.

"Signore..."

"Call me Alessandro, please?"

Alessandro, what can you tell me of Bodkin's journals? Have you read them?"

"Yes, from cover to cover, several times. It was because of them, and my mother that I became involved in the ceramic industry. I was studying mosaic craft in Ravenna, where I met Marilena. At one point I was even inspired to continue his research, from the 'inside' you might say, as I was Italian and working in the ceramic industry."

"Did you ever publish?"

A few short pieces, but the demands of work and family increasingly got in the way. I don't mind. Would you like to read them? Don't worry, I made translations."

"Yes, that would be wonderful. Thank you. For an 'invisible man', Bodkin has had a profound effect on your family."

"More than you think."

After dinner, which was excellent, we drank and smoked, and talked of subjects unrelated to tiles. On preparing to retire Alessandro handed me his 'few short pieces' of research. So once again I went to bed with nothing more than a thesis ... on Italian ceramic tiles. Very sad.

From 1911 on the Rubbiani family ceased operations and were no longer a part of the Sassuolo tile industry but they had emphatically established its future direction.

Apart from death and destruction the First World War had a detrimental effect upon trade. Industries had to streamline and rationalise to sustain the war effort, and since little was built between 1914-18, the demand for tiles fell sharply. When production resumed, a leaner, more cost effective industry made greater use of automation and prefabrication to increase output with lower labour costs.

There were still only a few factories in 1919 and these employed no more than 500 people, with modest turnovers. But an industrial culture was created and developed in Sassuolo that stimulated entrepreneurs like Eugenio Carani and Filippo Marazzi. Alongside the industrialists who were prepared to take risks, there were the experimenters, the inventors and the innovators.

Between 1920 and 1940, when Italy entered the war, the Sassuolo tile industry underwent something of a boom. While small by comparison with the post-war boom it was nonetheless significant in the economic climate of the period. The reports of the provincial Council for Corporate Economics for the years 1930-39 become almost monotonous when they talk about the development of the tile industry: after noting that brickworks and tile factories are condemned to stand idle or close, they add that "the only exception is the glazed wall tile industry." The number of people employed by it was ever increasing, and it was selling throughout Italy and to an increasing extent abroad. In 1938 the industry employed 1,600 people. Between 1940-45, due to the war, there was a fuel shortage. After 8th September 1943 and the Nazi occupation of Italy all the previous difficulties were exacerbated. In the last months of the war leading up to April 1945 allied bombing became

extremely heavy and, amongst other things, seriously impaired manufacturing capacity. Consequently, at the end of the war, Sassuolo tile manufacturers, indeed all tile manufacturers were faced with the problems of reconstruction combined with those of finding fuel and sources of energy.

The allied bombing together with the looting and sabotage inflicted by the retreating Nazi forces caused immense damage, especially to the companies of Saime and Marca Corona. They nevertheless recovered immediately as peace came and together the Marazzi, Saces and Veggia became a vanguard that in just a few years was to become an army.

While the 1930s was a good decade for the Sassuolo tile industry, the majority of Italy was not so fortunate. As was noted in a report to the C.C.E. many brickworks and tile factories were idle or closed down.

From 1930 the impact of the Wall Street collapse and the ensuing world recession were clearly felt in Italy: falling prices and the subsequent collapse of shares provoked drastic falls in production. Between 1929-32 automobile production was halved. The average national income fell from 3,079 lira in 1929 to 2,868 lira in 1933, while unemployment rose from 300,000 in 1929 to 1,019,000 in 1933. Naturally, consumption of all things declined.

In the beginning, the government reacted by intensifying the policy of public works. But far more was necessary to overcome the crises and restore energy and future prospects to the economy. Those same industrialists who at a time of prosperity had requested the government not concern itself with their affairs now demanded support, which they received. There began a policy of increased public spending and restriction of private consumption. State financing and industrial commissions increased also. It became a patriotic duty, which the state was the first to perform, to prefer the national product, even when the price was much higher than that of a similar product from overseas. So a new edition of protectionism emerged, under whose aegis Italian capitalism had been born and had developed.

The price overcoming the crisis ... of the ... early 1930s ... was ... zzzzzzz.

Aarr, whaa, oh that damned phone!