

«A mari usque ad mare»

Cultura visuale e materiale dall'Adriatico all'India

a cura di Mattia Guidetti e Sara Mondini

## **Adoption and Diffusion of the Ottoman(ized) Style Majolica Outside the Boundaries of the Ottoman Empire Italy and Central Europe (Seventeenth-eighteenth Centuries)**

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**Abstract** As the market demand for Ottoman pottery grew up by the end of the sixteenth century in Venice and its surrounding, it was compelling to provide the general public with more affordable imitations. On the other hand those imitations and their decoration, often neglected by the literature on Italian faience in favour of more refined productions, found their way from Italy to Central Europe and must therefore be taken in consideration once more for their importance in highlighting the contribution of Ottoman art into shaping European taste and technology.

**Keywords** Ottoman ceramics. Italian-Ottoman relations. Candiana pottery. Haban faience.

The adoption and diffusion of Ottoman(ized) art in Europe is a global phenomenon that interested a very specific European macro region between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. How this fashion came from Iznik to Italy and to Central Europe to become an example of 'glocalized' Ottoman style, demands a lot in term of new considerations on the topic. The historical and geographical factors that determined the change of style, or better, the adoption of a certain style and its diffusion in two regions, are key factors to a better understanding of the European history of taste and technology.

After the battle of Lepanto in 1571, the interest of the Italian market towards Iznik faience grew very quickly. Undoubtedly imported artworks bestow a special social status on their owner, thus partially explaining the mechanism of diffusion of the European taste for oriental style pottery. But imported Iznik faience was rare and high priced. Because of the very peculiar geographical nature of Venice, other nearby centres in the region were characterized by a great number of specialized workshops. Back in the sixteenth century an artificial channel was built and directed into the lagoon of Venice. Nowadays known as Riviera del Brenta the channel and

the idyllic green surroundings enticed many Venetian noblemen to build their villas there. Villa Nani Mocenigo at Monselice, for instance had a prayer room entirely covered with imported Ottoman tiles from Iznik dating back to the second half of the sixteenth century. Beside Venice, other cities such as Padua and Bassano became centres for the production, sale and sometimes falsification of artworks. In fact a mean of distributing form and styles in ceramic art is by reproduction. This phenomenon is not an uncommon one. In fact it is well known how Chinese blue and white porcelain dishes were one of the source of inspiration for the early Ottoman tile makers at Edirne and Iznik (Carswell 1998, p. 24).

But what exactly can be replicated when it comes to ceramic artistry? If the ceramist has knowledge of the use of the potter's wheel, then what can be replicated easily is the shape of a certain model. The same can be said for the decoration: if the painter is particularly gifted, the décor can be easily reproduced. What cannot be imitated is the knowledge of the necessary technology required to achieve the perfect copy of a ceramic body. For instance the right percentage of sand, wine lees, lead compounds and tin compounds that blended together form the white glazed mixture that when fired in the kilns would give the majolica its characteristic smooth and glossy appearance. If the artisan doesn't know the exact quantity, then it is impossible to replicate the original gloss. The same goes for the oxides used for the decorations and for the second clear glaze, called 'coperta' which adds the sparkling finish to the colour beneath. The technological knowledge can be taught by someone who already possess it or else, can be learnt in the place of origin where the technique has originated.

It is in this scenario that the production of Candiana pottery inserts itself in the tradition of Italian majolica. Candiana is the conventional name attributed to a majolica produced in the North-East Italian region of Veneto between the end of the sixteenth and the first decades of the eighteenth century. As the market demand for Ottoman pottery grew by the end of the sixteenth century, the necessity to provide the general public with more affordable imitation also increased. Candiana or pottery 'a la turchesca', as it is recorded in the archival sources, is the answer to the market demand. Assuming that the adoption of Ottoman(ized) décor followed the demand of fashion, there are still many unanswered questions related to both its production and diffusion. It is a curious fact that many of the wares bear the names of nuns, for whom presumably they were made, maybe to celebrate a particular occasion. Moreover the biggest collection of Candiana majolica, the Albrizzi Collection, originally belonged to a monastery that coincidentally was located in the homonymous town of Candiana, nearby Padua.

One must take in consideration one important detail when trying to answer any question related to this peculiar Italian production. If early blue and white Ottoman pieces could have easily passed for original Yuan or

Ming examples, at least in term of shapes and decoration, our Candiana pieces wouldn't have fooled anybody in believing they were true Ottoman pottery. And this because most pieces show imperfections brought about during the firing, like pin holes and under-glaze washed colours showing a lack in term of technological knowledge. Not only that. In fact also the decorative repertoire is pretty limited and never too close to the original. What appear on most pieces is a floral decoration reminiscent of the 'saz leaf' style and flowers bunched in a vase, usually in a number of three. The colours are very poorly rendered with washed out green and burnt orange instead of the brilliant bright red that is so characteristic of the Iznik production of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that supposedly were the source of inspiration for the Italian examples. One has to wait the second half of the nineteenth century to see a proper falsification of Ottoman pieces on the Italian ground and specifically in Florence with the Cantagalli factory. Shapes also can determine very much the success between the original piece and its copies. Said that, most Candiana decoration is applied to ceramic bodies in the shape of more typical Italian productions, such as *crespine* and *tondini*. On the other hand Italian pottery makers tried hard to copy some of the characteristic spirals on the back of the Ottoman pieces, making us wondering once more about the degree of direct knowledge of the original samples by those artisans. The discrepancy between the shapes and the ceramic bodies might be explained through the fact that the workshops that were producing Candiana pieces were also producing other styles and the difference between them was given just by the decor that was applied rather than the whole process of creating specific shapes for the ones with the oriental looking decoration. This would easily explain the presence of *crespine* and *tondini* among the pieces. We also know that there were artisans specialized in that specific style: it is known in fact that in 1669 the Manardi family from Bassano, which had been producing pottery in Bassano since 1645, had hired a painter from Padua, a certain Giò Batta Salmazzo, to specifically paint 'piati a la Turchesca' (Stringa 1987, p. 72). And those 'piati a la Turchesca' must have been our Candiane. In some cases, such in the majolica dish in the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst at Vienna we assist at a case of hybridization of the tradition of Italian Renaissance painting combined with the Ottoman(ized) décor. This majolica dish in fact has in the centre of the composition a small view of an unidentified European town enclosed by two rows of flowers in the Candiana style. On their majolica, the painters included architectural themes or little animals such as rabbits, birds and bees, such interpretations compatible with the Italian paintings of the period.

To the best of my knowledge Bassano is the only place in Veneto where kiln wasters of Candiana wares have actually been found. In 1992 an archaeological survey in the centre of Bassano revealed two kilns and



Figure 1. Dish.  
Polychrome glazed  
pottery with three  
roses in a small pot.  
Iznik, 1601-1625  
(ca) (source: British  
Museum, London)

a large number of kiln wasters belonging to the Manardi manufactory (Stringa 1987, pp. 61-64). Among the kiln wasters were also pieces decorated with *saz* leaves and carnations in the style of Candiana faience. These archaeological findings read together with the archival sources suggests a different way to track the chronology and the place or places of production of those pieces rather than the early hypothesis proposed by Ballardini (1940), Callegari (1934), Moschetti (1931) and Rackham (1936), in association with the symbols or the initials painted on the back of the ceramic bodies. It is pretty reasonable to assume then that artisan painters specialized in this Ottoman(ized) style travelled from Padua to Bassano del Grappa and then from here probably to Trento. It is certainly not impossible that Trentino and the Alto Adige region had a role in the transmission of forms and decorations in Central and South Europe. The city of Bolzano was a very active commercial centre since the early medieval period, with annual fairs that functioned as mediators of goods between Venice and the German lands (Rusconi 1942, p. 94). Venice mainly brought silk and glass to these fairs, but it is likely that pottery also entered the market - for example ceramics produced in Bassano, which is located midway between Padua and Trento (Broilo 2013, p. 49).

In my previous study *New Directions in the Study of the Italian Majolica Pottery a la turchesca known as 'Candiana'* (2013a) I have already hinted to a possible relation between the 'Candiana' ceramics and the Anabaptist majolica known as Haban faience or Haban pottery. In 1622 all the Anabaptists had to leave Moravia and relocated in the Hungarian Kingdom (Slovakia, Northern Hungary and Transylvania). Many scholars have tried to solve the question of what was the mechanism of the diffusion of the majolica technological knowledge from Italy to Moravia. Scholars agree on the fact that Haban faience bears influences from both German faience and Italian white wares called *bianchi faentini* (Kalešny 1985; Marsilli 1985). They were made locally and show basic stylistic and technical analogies with the Italian white wares (Rusconi 1942, p. 90). Unlike the majority of the 'Candiana' pieces, the Haban faience doesn't display any mark on the back of the ceramic body. If we can determine with some degree of certainty that the source of inspiration for the 'Candiana' ceramics was the dishes and other objects from Iznik that came to Veneto after the battle of Lepanto in 1571, the Haban ceramics with the floral decor in blue, yellow or burnt orange, green, and purple look much more like a variation on the latter than imitations from an original Ottoman piece. If truth has to be told, the Ottoman(ized) stylistic elements of the Haban faience is not immediately recognizable. Generally speaking Haban faience shares with Candiana the colouring and a penchant for a decoration mostly based on floral patterns. Among those patterns, I want to take in consideration the so called 'three flowers bunched in a vase' and for this purpose I selected three pieces coming from those different geographical areas: Iznik, Padua or Bassano and Slovakia. The first piece is an original polychrome glazed dish from Iznik dated to the first quarter of the seventeenth century and nowadays at the British Museum in London (cat. no. 1878,1230.494) (fig. 1). It is probably one of the best examples of 'three flowers bunched in a vase' and in fact is painted with three red roses sprouting out from a little fluted pot reminiscent of a flower bud, so typical of the central spout of Ottoman ablution fountains. The roses are not regular roses but wild roses and their core is painted in indigo blue. A pretty identical rendition of this pattern appears on two large bowled dishes, one belonging to the Albrizzi Collection and the other to the Musei Civici of Padua (cat. n. 122) (Broilo 2013b, pp. 205-6) (fig. 2).

The main difference is to be found in the colouring because the roses on the Ottoman piece are painted with the brilliant red characteristic of the peak of the Iznik production, meanwhile flowers on the Italian bowled dishes, though keeping the blue centre as the original, are rendered in burnt orange. Now let's move to Slovakia with a Haban piece that is today part of the permanent collection of the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Canada (cat. no. Ch132) (fig. 3). This large dish is also decorated with the 'three flowers' pattern even if the chosen flower is in this

Figure 2. Large dish.  
Majolica painted  
with the 'three roses'  
pattern. Veneto, 1600-  
1630 (ca). Trento,  
Albrizzi Collection  
(source: Arch.  
S. Longhin)



Figure 3. Large  
dish. Haban  
majolica decorated  
with multiple  
'three flowers'  
pattern. Slovakia,  
1690. Vancouver,  
UBC Museum of  
Anthropology



case a blue tulip and not a rose, as in the previous examples. What is interesting to notice is that even though there is a different flower employed in this latter example the symmetrical composition of the decoration is kept almost the same. While the central tulip sprouts straight in between the other flowers, the external ones slightly bend toward the outside. This happens in all three examples but it is even more evident in the Candiana and Haban pieces.

Now when we consider the Haban faience as a whole, its decoration looks more precise than the Candiana counterpart. For instance the green under glaze is never washed out, showing much more finesse in the realization and a better knowledge of the necessary technology for faience making. The first thing that stands out is the palette of colours employed in both Candiana and Haban wares, where the motifs were traced with thin blackish manganese lines. In neither production were the artisans able to match the brilliant red typical of the Ottoman prototypes from Iznik, painting the flowers instead with yellow or burnt-orange colour (Broilo 2013a, p. 46). So far scholars have had the tendency to dismiss any Turkish-Ottoman influence on the Habanite decorative repertoire with the exception of the 'fish scale' pattern that is to be found on few pieces from Transylvania. But of course this region, because of its peculiar history, might have had a different medium of transmission of oriental decorative patterns than Slovakia and Hungary. In the majority of the pieces the oriental influence is very subtle, but still recognizable in the form of the 'three flowers pattern' with the predomination of carnations and tulips, which are also characteristic of both Candiana and Iznik.

Now, to sum it up, Iznik Ottoman(ized) style influenced both directly, and probably indirectly, the taste and the fashion of decorating wares outside the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire and much before than the better studied phenomena of European Orientalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The latter would see several ateliers in Italy, France and the Netherlands achieving almost perfect copies of the Ottoman originals. But I believe that those earlier attempts are far more interesting and still deserve more attentions from the scholars, for their importance in highlighting the contribution of Iznik and its style into shaping European taste and technology at an earlier stage than generally believed.

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