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Dining in the Gonzaga Suburban Palaces : The Use and Reception of *Istoriato* Maiolica

This article explores connections between istoriato (narrative-painted) maiolica dishes created for marchesa Isabella d'Este and her son duke Federico II Gonzaga and dining rituals at their suburban palaces. Due to its low intrinsic value, maiolica was especially well-suited for use at their suburban palaces, as these retreats were usually expected to be less ostentatious than the court in Mantua. These palaces outside the Mantuan city limits, such as Isabella's palazzo di Porto, were places of learned discussion, lush gardens, and outdoor dining. The decoration of the Gonzaga maiolica dishes, which included imprese of the marchesa and duke, stories and characters from classical literature, musical motifs, and verdant landscapes, would have resonated with visitors to the palaces, who would have viewed similar iconography in the palace decoration and enjoyed the suburban palace gardens. Therefore, the Gonzaga maiolica dishes served as an important part of the dining rituals that took place at these retreats by inspiring discussions and reinforcing the palaces' visual messages.

The prevalence of *istoriato* or narrative-painted maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware) in courtly collections in the sixteenth century indicates that it must have communicated status, if not material value, during dining rituals by conveying the erudition and discriminating tastes of the owner¹. For the renowned art patrons the Gonzaga of Mantua, the classical narratives and low intrinsic value of *istoriato* maiolica dishes made them especially well-suited to the Gonzaga suburban palaces². These palaces served as retreats for social interaction and intellectual reflection. They were also logical destinations for less valuable art objects, as these structures lacked extensive fortifications³. Dowager marchesa Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), her son, duke Federico II Gonzaga (1500-1540), and Federico's wife, duchess Margherita Paleologa (1510-1566), acquired services of *istoriato* dishes in the 1520s and 1530s from the preeminent maiolica painters of the time, Nicola da Urbino and Francesco Xanto Avelli⁴. In this essay, I suggest that the maiolica created for them, decorated with stories and characters of classical mythology and with musical motifs, served as an important part of dining at the family's suburban retreats, especially because this iconography could frequently be linked to the surroundings, decoration, and the activities that took place in the palaces themselves.

Isabella's maiolica service, dated approximately to 1524, may have marked the dowager marchesa's retreat from public court life in Mantua when she increasingly traveled and spent time at her suburban estate, the palazzo di Porto. Isabella's service currently survives as twenty-three individual dishes, but the original service probably consisted of a larger number of dishes⁵. The service is attributed to maiolica painter and workshop owner Nicola da Urbino, although none of the dishes is signed. The compositions of the painted narratives were inspired by contemporary prints of mythological scenes and the Old Testament. Scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* form a majority of the painted narratives for Isabella's surviving dishes, such as the *Story of King Midas* (fig. 1). Nicola integrated identifying personal symbols into the painted narratives in the form of imprese and Isabella's stemma, which combined the Gonzaga and Este coats of arms.

For duke Federico II Gonzaga and duchess Margherita Paleologa of Monferrato, their maiolica dishes created in about 1533 could have served to commemorate their recent marriage, their expanding political control, and the birth of the Gonzaga heir. The marriage of Federico and Margherita took place on 3 October 1531 in Casale, and in 1533, the marchesato of Monferrato unofficially passed to Federico's control with the death of Margherita's uncle, Gian Giorgio⁶. The Gonzaga heir, Francesco III Gonzaga, was born in 1533, a cause for celebration in light of the assured continuation of the Gonzaga dynasty.

At this time, Federico regularly hosted guests and appreciated spending time at his suburban palaces. His favorites included the palazzo di Marmiolo and the newly-constructed Palazzo del Te, where the dishes may have been displayed and used. The dishes included the combined Gonzaga and Paleologa coats of arms that exploited the Gonzaga's link to that dynasty of imperial Byzantine heritage. Five surviving dishes include these joined arms⁷. Like Isabella d'Este's service, the Gonzaga/Paleologa painted narratives were also inspired by contemporary prints, but with greater emphasis on the presence of ancient Roman gods and goddesses, as can be seen in *The Council of Apollo and Minerva* (fig. 2), which included Apollo, Minerva, Diana, Venus, and Mercury.

1. The Value of Maiolica and the Suburban Palace

The arrival of these services placed Isabella, Federico, and Margherita among the leading collectors of this medium. Nicola da Urbino's workshop was located in Urbino, and through familial connections to the duchy of Urbino, the Gonzaga enjoyed singular access to the maiolica industry there. In a letter, dated 15 November 1524, Isabella d'Este's daughter, the duchess of Urbino, Eleonora Gonzaga,

wrote to Isabella about a service that she had commissioned as a gift. Scholars now believe that this service was probably the Nicola da Urbino *istoriato* service. In the letter, Eleonora suggests that her mother might use the service at her suburban retreat known as palazzo di Porto, to which she felt the maiolica dishes were well-suited⁸. The rustic quality and economical price of the dishes, illustrated with classical iconography, may have been particularly appropriate for a suburban setting that was reminiscent of an ancient villa.

During the fifteenth century, Pope Pius II objected to the use of gold and silver dishes in the country by Borso d'Este (1413-1471), Isabella d'Este's ostentatious uncle⁹. Thus, residences outside the city walls, like Isabella's palazzo di Porto, were places where hosts were not expected to impress with traditionally luxurious materials. On the occasion of a special visit by a pope or an emperor, hosts may have been inclined to bring more valuable dining ware to the country temporarily, but there seems to have been a general preference among those in the Italian courts to avoid such displays. This preference for ceramics in country residences continued into the seventeenth century, as demonstrated by Giovanni Battista Barpo's recommendation in 1634 that villas should be supplied with some attractive maiolica plates¹⁰.

Rather than using actual silver, pewter, or gold serving vessels, dishes made of valuable plate were often frescoed on the walls of banqueting halls within suburban palaces. Sixteenth-century examples of such painted credenze (sideboards) laden with luxurious dishes include Giulio Romano's fresco on the south wall of the Sala di Psiche in the Palazzo del Te and Alessandro Allori's *Banquet of Syphax with Scipio* in the salone of Villa Medici in Poggio a Caiano¹¹. Suburban palaces, which were often well outside city limits, such as Federico II Gonzaga's palazzo di Marmirolo, lacked essential security for objects of great material value. Frescoed credenze in suburban palaces inexpensively alluded to the patron's wealth and have proven to be more permanent than actual examples of plate in courtly collections, which were frequently melted down or pawned in times of financial hardship.

Because maiolica was not inherently valuable, its display did not convey wealth as metal vessels did; maiolica could not be melted down or pawned. Tin oxide, which needed to be imported from northern Europe, was the most expensive material used in the production of Italian maiolica. According to the calculations of Dora Thornton and Luke Syson, using prices from Gonzaga records in 1525 and 1530, a vast *istoriato* service of 200 pieces was approximately equal to the cost of one silver salt¹². Richard Goldthwaite found that a maiolica service of 84 pieces commissioned in 1517 for Filippo Strozzi's wife cost 36.5 lire or about five ducats,

equivalent to three or four months of unskilled labor or two or three weeks of skilled labor¹³. A painting from a well-known, established artist could cost much more ; Isabella d'Este paid Perugino 100 ducats in the early sixteenth century for the painting *The Triumph of Chastity*¹⁴.

2. Life in the Gonzaga Suburban Palaces

Suburban palaces were intended to be enjoyable respites from the pressures of the court environment, not locations to dwell on the material value of art objects. Although the palazzo di Porto was razed during the Austrian sieges of Mantua, evidence survives regarding its usage and appearance¹⁵. Porto was referred to as a « palazzo » because it functioned as a seigniorial residence, not because it was especially luxurious or large. Tellingly, Isabella often referred to Porto as a « giardino » or « casa » rather than a palace¹⁶.

As the palace was primarily used during the summer and early autumn months, the estate gardens and outdoor spaces are often the subject of correspondence. Maintenance of the extensive gardens was a concern of Isabella's, who expressed worry about the water supply and dry conditions at Porto¹⁷. Her engagement with such logistical issues highlights her role as the manager of her residence. Isabella's improvements to the palace included paving the approach to Porto and adding a loggia and fruit trees in 1511. The substantial loggia was constructed with porphyry, serpentine, and marble, and designed with views of the gardens¹⁸. Isabella received seedlings for 68 pear trees, 390 apple trees, and 12 apricot trees in 1511 to accompany the new construction¹⁹. Such additions to the garden are in accord with Giovanni Pontano's writings on the social virtues, in which he recommended that the villa be focused on the artful arrangement of plants in a manner advantageous for banqueting and strolling²⁰.

Isabella's receptions probably took place outside to take advantage of her garden plantings. The loggia at Porto provided space to hold such outdoor events²¹. Matteo Bandello described the loggia in the dedication of one of his *novelle*, envisioning Isabella's guests traveling to Porto on a hot day and listening to stories of his *Novelle* in the fresh air of the loggia²². Baldassare Castiglione was likely extolling the beauty of Isabella's garden loggia at Porto in a letter in 1524 where he expressed his longing to dine under the lovely loggia that he claimed could not be matched by anything in Rome²³. Such a comment would have pleased Isabella, and the date of 1524, the same year that Eleonora sent the ceramic service, indicates that Porto was then considered a desirable place to visit. Castiglione's letter also proves that meals took place in the loggia, where the maiolica could have been viewed in the context of

the surrounding verdant landscape.

We know that Isabella, despite being raised in a similar castello in Ferrara, found the Palazzo Ducale to be unpleasant. She preferred her relaxing residence at Porto that was under her control, unlike the damp and dark palazzo in Mantua²⁴. When Isabella returned safely from France in a 1517 she reported to her brother, Ippolito d'Este : « Late last night, arriving here well for the grace of Our Lord God, I came to rest at my garden of Porto »²⁵. After Francesco Gonzaga's death in 1519, Isabella spent more time at Porto, as she sought to retreat from the forefront of court activities in Mantua.

Letters and literature portray the palazzo di Porto as an idyllic haven for respite and for lively discussion that probably included humanist subjects in light of Isabella's education and interests. Bandello noted in the dedication of one of his *novella* that he would go to go Porto two or three times a week to visit the marchesa and enjoy the discussions of lords and noblemen²⁶. Isabella desired her palace to be a place for educated discourse, and thus she surrounded herself with a circle of cultured individuals. In another *novella*, Bandello described the activities, including reading, discussion, listening to music, and civilized games, that took place when the « illustrious madame » was present at the villa²⁷.

Federico and Margherita's vessels cannot be reintegrated into their physical context with such certainty, but the duke's suburban palaces, such as the Palazzo Marmirolo, probably were sites for the dishes' use and display. Like Porto, Marmirolo was documented as having extensive gardens and water features, but the villa was created on a much grander scale and was farther outside the city limits. Soon after becoming marchese, Federico became interested in making improvements to the decoration of Marmirolo, but after 1526, his patronage was focused on the much larger project of the Palazzo del Te²⁸. Federico did make some changes at Marmirolo, including the expansion of the gardens in order to create spectacular water shows on the occasion of Charles V's visit to Mantua in 1530²⁹. Although Palazzo del Te was the focus of Federico's attentions as a patron of architecture, Marmirolo remained his favorite retreat and was the place where he died in 1540.

Like her mother-in-law, Margherita Paleologa also enjoyed escaping the city in order to enjoy better air. Soon after her marriage to Federico, she wrote to her mother, Anna d'Alençon, that, under the recommendation of doctors, she had retreated to the delightful Palazzo del Te for the good air while recovering from illness³⁰. Margherita would have had access to Federico's suburban palaces, but upon Isabella's death, she inherited her mother-in-law's Palazzo di Porto, and thus continued the tradition of Porto being passed to the female consort of the

succeeding generation. In her will, Isabella emphasized that the estate included much more than just the residence, mentioning that the property included the considerable gardens, the mill at Porto, and possessions in the vicinity³¹.

3. Connecting *Istoriato* Maiolica and the Decoration of Suburban Palaces

Guests of the suburban palaces could draw connections between the features of the palaces and the imagery of the *istoriato* maiolica dishes. The gardens and fountains that were a crucial feature of suburban palaces were echoed in the lush, bucolic landscapes that decorated the dishes. The painted landscapes often included verdant rolling hills and meandering streams or rivers behind the principal characters of each narrative, as exemplified in *The Story of King Midas* and *The Council of Apollo and Minerva*.

The iconography featured on Isabella's service by Nicola da Urbino seems to have been especially popular for fresco and stucco decoration of suburban palaces. Stories and characters from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that appeared in Isabella's service were frescoed on the walls of Palazzo del Te. Along the frieze of the Camera di Ovidio in the Palazzo del Te was the same story of King Midas judging Apollo and Pan's music competition that had appeared in Isabella d'Este's service³².

The Story of King Midas was well known and easily recognizable to those who frequented the Gonzaga court. The example from Isabella d'Este's maiolica service included Apollo, King Midas, Pan, and the god Tmolus (fig. 1). On the left of the maiolica dish, Apollo was shown proudly playing his *lira da braccio* while the Pan, Midas, and Tmolus listen, with the Isabella's candelabrum *impresa*, a marker of sorrow, hanging overhead³³. According to Paolo Giovio, this same *impresa* decorated the palace at Porto³⁴. On the right side of the dish, Midas judges Pan's pipe music to be preferable by gesturing approvingly towards the satyr, while Apollo covertly peers out from behind a tree trunk. In order to punish Midas for his foolish choice, Apollo will give him ass' ears to reflect his poor taste in music (*Met.* 11.172ff). The lottery tickets *impresa*, representing Isabella's unpredictable fortune, hangs above the group on the right. Isabella's stemma over the *tempi e pausi* *impresa* divides the two scenes and emphasizes the difference in opinion between the judges. The series of symmetrical *tempi e pause* (musical repeats and rests) signified silence, a virtue desirable for any Renaissance woman³⁵. Nicola da Urbino used a print from an edition of the *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* as inspiration for his composition of the narrative³⁶.

The *Story of King Midas*, as well as other dishes in the service, such as one featuring the competition of Apollo and Marsyas, reflects the importance of mu-

sic in Renaissance courts ; we know this art played a significant role in the highly sensory banquets in which elaborate serving ware was utilized³⁷. Isabella was also known to have been a significant patron of music, and, thus, the subjects spoke to her personal interests³⁸.

The maiolica dishes created in Urbino for duke Federico II Gonzaga and duchess Margherita Paleologa also possessed certain links to the decoration of their palaces. The Gonzaga and Paleologa coats of arms that were the primary identifying features incorporated into the narrative of the dishes were also included regularly in decoration that was commissioned before the marriage. In July 1531, Federico requested fifty leather wall hangings featuring these arms³⁹. A few weeks before Margherita's arrival in Mantua, the façade of the Palazzina Paleologa, a new wing added to the Castello di San Giorgio in the bride's honor, was painted with three large *arme*, consisting of Federico and Margherita's respective coats and arms and Federico's Mount Olympus impresa⁴⁰.

Nicola da Urbino emphasized Federico's preference for classical imperial imagery for the service featuring the combined Gonzaga/Paleologa coats of arms. Although each ceramic dish in Isabella's service rarely included more than one Olympian god and occasionally included none, Federico's services featured a variety of such deities, as can be seen on the dish inscribed : « *del Chonseglgio de/apollo e minerva* » (the council of Apollo and Minerva) on the reverse (fig. 3). On the obverse, Nicola depicted, from left to right, two reclining river gods, Apollo, Mercury, Minerva, Diana, and Venus (fig. 2). The combined Gonzaga/Paleologa stemma crowned with a ducal tiara was painted just above this group of Olympian gods. The scene is based on a much more complex engraving (versions were created by Enea Vico and Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio) of the singing contest between the Muses and the Pierides (*Met.* 5.254ff) after a painting by Rosso Fiorentino⁴¹. Nicola replicated only a few of the figures from the print and did not include any direct reference to the singing competition, but the subject matter of the print reaffirms the popularity of iconography related to music.

Guests would surely have engaged with the dish, attempting to identify the deities by their attributes, such as Apollo's bow, Minerva's shield, and Diana's crescent moon. As Apollo and Minerva were the most admired ancient deities during the sixteenth century for their desirable traits of wisdom and fortitude, a dish that focused on their council would have reflected well on Federico's court. Nicola da Urbino emphasized their presence by only mentioning their names in the inscription, which guests could have observed through handling the dish during meals.

The ancient Roman gods that appeared on Federico and Margherita's dishes were also incorporated into the decorative program of the Palazzo del Te. Representations

of Venus could be found throughout the palace, including the Sala di Psiche, the Sala dei Giganti, the Sala dei Cavalli, and the Camera dei Candelabri. She was often grouped with similar gods as on the Nicola da Urbino dish ; Venus, Apollo, and Mercury appeared in the decoration of the Camera dei Venti, and the vault of the Camera degli Stucchi included representations of Venus, Apollo, Mercury, and Diana⁴². Throughout Federico's palaces, such as the Palazzo del Te, visitors would confront depictions of gods, emperors, the Gonzaga coat-of-arms, and Federico's Mount Olympus impresa⁴³. In addition to his own impresa, he also used his mother's lottery tickets impresa for the interior and exterior of the palace, demonstrating the continuity of the Gonzaga dynasty between mother and son.

4. Dining with Maiolica

Although scholars disagree about the precise use of elaborately decorated maiolica in the sixteenth century, I argue that these dishes were created for dining rituals. They were probably placed on display on a sideboard or credenza, but at the owners' discretion, they could also hold food. One *istoriato* maiolica plate includes a drain proving that it was intended to provide some type of useful function⁴⁴. *Istoriated* maiolica dishes often included inscriptions on the reverses, such as the Gonzaga/Paleologa dish featuring the description of Apollo and Minerva's council, proving that the pieces would have been handled (fig. 3). Food was also judged to be more palatable when eaten from glazed ceramics, like maiolica, than from silver or pewter, as explained by seventeenth-century Bolognese scientist, Ulisse Aldovrandi⁴⁵.

Scholars who reject the idea that maiolica served a useful purpose at the table have cited the lack of scratching from utensils on surviving dishes. Jacqueline Musacchio has suggested that food served on maiolica vessels could have been easily scooped up with the hand or a soft piece of bread, thereby protecting the smooth surface⁴⁶. As it happens, the tiny forks and seemingly unused knives depicted at the elaborate banquet scene represented in Paolo Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* suggest that utensils may in any case not have been extensively or aggressively used at individual place settings in the sixteenth century. In addition, eating with one's hands would have been consistent with the simple villa atmosphere that Isabella and Federico may have hoped to foster at their suburban residences.

The painted narratives of *istoriated* maiolica would have provided interactive entertainment for guests. When utilizing the dishes during a meal, Isabella's or Federico's guests would have been able to analyze closely the individual narratives and

piece them together to create a story. Similarly, sixteenth-century knives etched with musical notes and lyrics were part of sets that required each banquet participant to sing the portion etched on his or her knife⁴⁷. Thus, the song was only complete when all participants sang as an ensemble. An example of a maiolica dish with a musical function, probably intended for Federico II Gonzaga, was decorated with the Gonzaga coat of arms above an open music book with a piece of music meant for instrumental performance (fig. 4)⁴⁸. These dishes and utensils demonstrate that in addition to their useful properties, maiolica and other banquet ware could provide amusement that commanded close attention.

Thus, the painted services of Isabella d'Este, Federico Gonzaga, and Margherita Paleologa most likely functioned as a part of the pleasurable environments of their respective suburban palaces. These dishes would have proclaimed the Gonzaga dynasty's erudition and dynastic power in a relaxed, but cultivated environment. Guests would have been able to observe the classically-inspired painted dishes during meals, and the relatively inexpensive ceramic medium was generally seen as more appropriate than silver plate in this country setting.

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- 1 J. VARRIANO, *Taste and Temptation : Food and Art in Renaissance Italy*, Berkeley 2009, p. 161.
- 2 F. HARTT, *Gonzaga Symbols in the Palazzo Te*, « Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes », 13.3/4, 1950, pp. 151-188. According to Hartt, the Gonzaga residences included : « Marmirolo, Gonzaga, Bosco Fontana, Borgoforte, Goito, Spinosa, Porto, Marengo, Poggio Reale, Sacchetta, Cavriana, Pietole and Revere, Francesco Gonzaga's Palazzo di San Sebastiano, the villa at Maderno on Lake Garda, and the Frascati villa acquired by Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga, not to speak of Gonzaga palaces in Milan and Venice. », *ibid*, p. 152.
- 3 J. V. G. MALLET, *Review : Majolique, la Faïence italienne aux temps des Humanites*, « Faenza », 98.1, 2012, pp. 92-96.
- 4 B. WALLEN, *A Majolica Service for Isabella d'Este*, M.A. Thesis, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1966 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *The Gonzaga and Ceramics*, in *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, ed. by D. Chambers and J. Martineau, London 1981, pp. 39-43 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *Mantua and Urbino : Gonzaga Patronage of Maiolica*, « Apollo », 114, 1981, pp. 162-169 ; M. PALVARINI GOBIO CASALI, *La ceramica a Mantova*, Ferrara 1987 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *Nicola da Urbino and Francesco Xanto Avelli*, « Faenza » 93.4/6, 2007, pp. 199-250 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *Xanto : Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*, London, 2007 ; D. THORNTON and T. WILSON, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics : A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, London 2009, pp. 229-236.
- 5 Timothy Wilson suggested that the surviving dishes may represent a large percentage of the original set. Cf. THORNTON / WILSON, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics*, p. 232. This claim refers to an entry from the 1626-27 Gonzaga inventory, which lists twenty-four pieces of maiolica

- « historiata » from Urbino decorated with various figures and views. Cf. R. MORSELLI, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga : l'Elenco dei Beni del 1626-1627*, Milano 2000, p. 406, item 2772.
- 6 Although the Gonzaga claimed control of Monferrato, Charles V did not grant Federico and Margherita official rule over the territory until November 3, 1536. Cf. M. S. AHRENDT, *The Cultural Legacy and Patronal Stewardship of Margherita Paleologa (1510-1566) Duchess of Mantua and Marchesa of Montferrat*, Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, Saint Louis 2002, p. 19.
 - 7 THORNTON/ WILSON, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics*, pp. 229-236.
 - 8 « Ill.(ma) et Ex.(ma) Sig.(ra) mia et Mre ob(s)er(ma) : Pensando io di volere vistare V.Ex.(tia) cum qualche cosa de quelle che Dano questi paesi, et che gli potessero piacere a questi tempi Non trovando cosa che mi paresse al proposito : Ho facto fare una credenza de vasi di terra, Quale la mando a v. Ex.(tia) per Baptista mio Credentiero pnite exhibitore, per havere li maestri de questo nostro paese qualche nome di lavorar bene, et se piacerà alla Ex.(tia) v.mi sera' dicontento, et lei se ne fara' servire a Porto per essere cosa da villa accettando il Bono animo mio in cambio de quanto vorrei chella fusse : che certo desiderarei potergliela mandare de tante Gioye rare, essendo mio(de'b)ito de non pensare ad altro piu che di potere servire et fare cosa grata a vra' Ex.(tia) alla quale basando la mano in sua bona gr'a di cont(o). Mi racoman(o) Pesaro XV. Novembre MDIV », Eleonora Gonzaga to Isabella d'Este, 15 November 1524, Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga (hereafter cited as ASMn, AG), busta 1070, c. 410r, in PALVARINI GOBIO CASALI, *La ceramica a Mantova*, pp. 211-212.
 - 9 POPE PIUS II, *Commentaries*, vol. 1, ed. by M. Meserve and M. Simonetta, Cambridge 2003, p. 362 : « Supellectilem domus ditissimam cumulavit, argenteis et aureis vasis etiam ruri usus ».
 - 10 W. WATSON, *Italian Renaissance Ceramics : The Howard I. and Janet H. Stein Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia 2001, p. 151, citing G. B. BARPO, *Le Delitie, & i frutti dell'agricoltura, e della villa, libri tre, spiegati in ricordi particolari*, Venezia 1634, pp. 12-13. Barpo does not object to the presence of silver at the villa in the form of spoons and forks, but it should be noted that silverware was much more popular in the seventeenth century than in the sixteenth.
 - 11 V. TAYLOR, *Art and the table in sixteenth-century Mantua : Feeding the demand for innovative design*, in *The Material Renaissance*, ed. by M. O'Malley and E. Welch, Manchester 2007, pp. 174-196. S. LECCHINI GIOVANNONI, *Alessandro Allori*, Torino 1991, pp. 249-250. Liberality, a virtue associated with the provision of banquets, is included among the personified virtues painted on the walls of the salone at Poggio a Caiano.
 - 12 L. SYSON and D. THORNTON, *Objects of Virtue : Art in Renaissance Italy*, Los Angeles 2001, p. 200. A silver-gilt salt cost 51 ducats in 1525, and 25 scudi could buy 100 pieces of *istoriato* maiolica in 1530 (in their calculations, one scudo = one gold ducat). For discussion of the value of the scudo and ducat, cf. R. GOLDTHWAITE, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore 2009, p. 56.
 - 13 R. GOLDTHWAITE, *The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica*, « Renaissance Quarterly », 42, 1989, pp. 1-32.
 - 14 S. J. CAMPBELL, *The Cabinet of Eros : Renaissance mythological painting and the studiolo of Isabella d'Este*, New Haven 2004, pp. 285-286.
 - 15 The foundations of Porto, which included three closely-situated buildings, were uncovered during the building of a canal, and the discovery was reported in the *Gazette de Mantova*, 20 July 1957 and 7 November 1957, cited by C. Brown with A. M. LORENZONI, 'Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto' : *Biagio Rossetti and Isabella d'Este*, « Atti e Memorie della Accademia Virgiliana di Mantova », 58, 1990, pp. 33-56.

- 16 A. BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, in *Maisons des Champs dans l'Europe de la Renaissance*, ed. by M. Chatenet, Paris 2006, pp. 105-116. It was not as impressive as the elaborately-frescoed Palazzo del Te, nor was it as expansive as Federico's favorite country dwelling, Marmirolo.
- 17 « ... che per extrema sicità tutto quello nostro loco si ruina non potendo havere aqua adaquarlo, essendo retenuta da quelli che sono di sopra da noi a' quali è stato concesso di potere adaquare » ; 27 July 1516, ASMn, AG, b. 2997, l. 22, c. 41v, cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 36.
- 18 « ...bellissima loggia, dale quale potevasi vedere lo giardino in lunghezza ma molto meglio la quadrata chorte a noi più vicina, l'eltanelle della quale rilucevono in pietra marmorina con certi occieti per entro di sasso porphiritico et serpentinesco » ; cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 37. Isabella's daughter, Eleonora, duchess of Urbino, also demonstrated an interest in creating gardens at her Villa Imperiale, cf. S. EICHE, *l'Della Rovere mercenati dell'architettura*, in *Pesaro nell'età dei Della Rovere*, ed. by G. Arbizzoni et al., Venezia 1998, pp. 245-246.
- 19 5 November 1511 and 11 December 1511, ASMn, AG, b. 1243, cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 38.
- 20 G. PONTANO, *I libri delle virtù sociali*, trans. and ed. by F. Tateo, Roma 1965, pp.136-137.
- 21 BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, p. 107.
- 22 M. BANDELLO, *Novelle*, parte I, novella XVII : On a day of « de la canicola » the guests decide to go « tutti di brigata a goderci il fresco da la loggia del giardino » ; cited in BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, p. 107.
- 23 « mangier sotto la bella loggia, che in vero tra tutti li belli lochi di Roma non ve n'è alcuno che possi star al parangone di quella ». Baldassare Castiglione to Isabella d'Este, 20 July 1524, ASMn, AG, busta 868, c. 290 ; A. LUZIO and R. RENIER, *Mantova e Urbino : Isabella d'Este ed Elisabetta Gonzaga nelle relazioni famigliari e nelle vicende politiche*, Torino 1893, p. 255, cited in BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, op. cit., p. 107.
- 24 BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, p. 105. In one letter, Isabella expresses a desire to escape the « cativo aere del castello » ; ASMn, AG, b. 2991, lib. 3, cc. 60v-61r, cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 34. Retreating to the country for better air seems to have become a trope : « Diporto, ove madam illustrissima di Mantova suole tutta la state diportarsi per l'aria ch'assai temperata gli spira » , BANDELLO, *Novelle*, parte I, novella XLII.
- 25 « Heri sera al tardi gionsi qui sana per gratia de Nostro Signore Dio ; sono venuta a stare in riposo al giardino mio di Porto » ; ASMn, AG, b. 2997, lib. 34, c. 65r, cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 34.
- 26 The full dedication reads : « Era, come sapete, mio costume, quando in Mantova dimorava, mentre che madama Isabella da Este marchesa al suo amenissimo palazzo di Diporto si teneva, andar due e tre volte la settimana a farle riverenza, e quivi tutto il giorno me ne stava, ove sempre erano signori e gentiluomini che di varie cose ragionavano, ora a la presenza di quella ed ora tra loro. » ; BANDELLO, *Novelle*, parte I, novella XXX.
- 27 « madama illustrissima ...diporta ora leggendo, ora disputando, ora sentendo dolcissimi musici cantar e sonare, ed ora altri piacevoli ed onesti giuochi facendo. » ... BANDELLO, *Novelle*, parte II, novella V.
- 28 A. BELLUZZI, *Il Palazzo di Marmirolo presso Mantova*, in *Giulio Romano*, ed. by E. H. Gombrich et al., Milano 1989, pp. 520-521.

- 29 I. LAUTERBACH, *The Gardens of the Milanese 'villeggiatura' in the mid-sixteenth century*, in *The Italian Garden : Art, Design, and Culture*, ed. by J. D. Hunt, Cambridge 1996, pp. 127-159. For details on Charles V's stay in Mantua, including details of banqueting, see L. GONZAGA (supposed author), *Cronaca del soggiorno di Carlo V in Italia (dal 26 luglio 1529 al 25 aprile 1530 : Documento di storia italiana estratto da un codice della Regia Biblioteca universitaria di Pavia*, Milano 1892.
- 30 « ...fasta per lima et per l'altra una purgone buona della sanire che mi caresana il male che ho havuto ritrovandomi essere stata qualche dì senza febre, per il che si conosceva che sicuramente io potevo recrearmi col pigliar aere, del consiglio delli medici et ordine dello illustrissimo signor mio, me ne sono venuta a star qua nel Palazzo del The, che è fuori della città un tiro che balestra o poco più, luoco tanto ameno et delizioso quanto si possi desiderar et di buono aere, ove non manca comodità alcuna et così già quatro giorni vi sono con assai piacere... » ; Margherita Paleologa to Anna d'Alençon, 10 May 1533, ASMn, AG, b. 2934, lib. 306, c. 47r.-v, transcribed by D. FERRARI, *Giulio Romano : repertorio di fonti documentarie*, Roma 1992, I, p. 556.
- 31 Isabella gave « el palazzo et loco de Porto cum suoi giardini, et possessioni vicini et la colombara de moscatelli com tutte le lor pertinentie, et el molino di porto » to « Margarita di Monferrato Duchessa di Mantua », 22 December 1535, ASMn, AG, b. 332, cited in BROWN, *Al Suo Amenissimo Palazzo di Porto*, p. 35 ; and BELLUZZI, *Le residenze di campagna di Isabella d'Este*, p. 106.
- 32 A. BELLUZZI, *Palazzo Te a Mantova*, Modena 1998.
- 33 In 1512, a courtier wrote to Federico II Gonzaga, then held hostage in Rome, about how his mother wore « una vesta in dosso da li candelerii d'oro, che porta per insignia et impresa » ; cf. A. LUZIO and R. RENIER, *Il Lusso di Isabella d'Este*, « Nuova Antologia », ser. 4, 63, 1896, pp. 441-469 ; G. GEROLA, *Un'impresa ed un motto di casa Gonzaga*, « Rivista d'arte », 12, 1930, pp. 381-402.
- 34 P. GIOVIO, *Dialogo delle Imprese militari e amorose* (Venezia 1556), ed. by M. L. Doglio, Roma 1978, p. 129 : Isabella « fece dipingere nel suo palazzo suburbano, chiamato Porto... una bella impresa, che fu il candelabro fatto in triangolo » with the motto « sufficit unum in tenebris ».
- 35 The *impresa* dates to 1502 or earlier, as Isabella came to Ferrara for celebrations in honor of Lucrezia Borgia « vestita di una bella camora richiamata di quella invencione di tempi e pause » ; cf. A. LUZIO and R. RENIER, *La Coltura e le Relazioni Letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga : La Coltura*, « Giornale storico della letteratura italiana », 33, 1899, p. 51 ; *id.*, *Il Lusso di Isabella d'Este*, p. 464.
- 36 OVID, *Metamorphoseos vulgare*, Venezia 1497. Later editions were published in the sixteenth century.
- 37 In June 1511, Isabella received a report from her Mantuan agent about a banquet that took place while Federico II Gonzaga was held hostage in Rome. According to the agent, « after dinner one who played the monochordo very well was presented ; then there came musicians and they played violins and sang » ; translated by R. STRONG, *Feast : A History of Grand Eating*, London 2002, p. 163. For the Italian, see A. LUZIO, *Federigo Gonzaga ostaggio nel Vaticano*, « Archivio di Storia Patria Romana », 9, 1886, pp. 509-582. « ...Finito il disnar si apresentò uno che sonò di manochordo benissimo : li vene una musichae sonorno con violini et li cantorno dentro », *ibid.*, p. 524.
- 38 W. F. PRIZER, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo da Pavia, 'Master Instrument-Maker'*, « Early Music History », 2, January 1982, pp. 87-127 ; C. M. BROWN, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo da Pavia : Documents for the History of Art and Culture in Renaissance Mantua*, Geneva 1982.

- 39 « Volemo che faciate a quelli maestri da spalere cinquanta tondi di coramo, con dentro lavorata l'arma della casa nostra et quella di Monferrato ligati insieme... » ; Federico Gonzaga to Francesco Gonzaga, 22 July 1531, ASMn, AG, b. 2969, lib. 46, c. 44v. Cf. FERRARI, *Giulio Romano*, I, p. 404 ; AHRENDT, *The Cultural Legacy*, p. 95.
- 40 Calandra to Federico Gonzaga, October 28, 1531, ASMn, AG, b. 2516, cc. 103r-105r. Cf. FERRARI, *Giulio Romano*, I, pp. 464-466 ; F. HARTT, *Giulio Romano*, New Haven 1958, I, pp. 263, 320, doc. 142, cited by AHRENDT, *The Cultural Legacy*, p. 78.
- 41 A. BARTSCH XV (89) no. 53 ; BARTSCH XV (295) no. 28.
- 42 BELLUZZI, *Palazzo Te*, pp. 162, 532.
- 43 The Mount Olympus impresa was used to decorate multiple rooms of the Palazzo del Te. The device was placed in the *camera delle imprese* (room of the devices), the *sala dei cavalli* (hall of the horses), the *camera dei venti* (room of the winds), the *camera degli imperatori* (room of the emperors), and the *camera delle vittorie* (room of the victories).
- 44 Th. CRÉPIN-LEBLOND and P. ENNÈS, *Le dressoir du prince : services d'apparat à la Renaissance*, exhibition catalogue (Écouen 1995), Paris 1995, no. 31 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *Introduction to Italian Maiolica*, in *The Hockemeyer Collection : Maiolica and Glass*, Bremen 1998, p. 35 ; J. M. MUSACCIO, *Marvels of Maiolica : Italian Renaissance Ceramics from the Corcoran Gallery of Art Collection*, Charlestown 2004, p. 30 ; C. HESS, *Brilliant Achievements : The Journey of Islamic Glass and Ceramics to Renaissance Italy*, in *Arts of Fire : Islamic Influences on Glass and Ceramics of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by C. Hess, Los Angeles 2006, p. 26. The dish is inscribed : « Davit como Dio volse uccise/ Goliad gigate cola fromba/ Nella botega Di Mo. Guido/ Durantino In Urbino ».
- 45 G. CAMPORI, *Maiolica e porcellana di Ferrara : nei secoli XV e XVI*, Pesaro 1879, p. 18 : « I cibi abbiano miglior sapore nei piatti di terra che in quelli d'argento ».
- 46 MUSACCHIO, *Marvels of Maiolica*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- 47 F. DENNIS, *Scattered knives and dismembered son : cutlery, music and the rituals of dining*, « Renaissance Studies », Jan. 2010, pp. 156-184 ; *id.*, *Music in At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by M. Ajmar-Wollheim and F. Dennis, London 2006, pp. 228-43.
- 48 C. RAVANELLI GUIDOTTI, *Musica di smalto*, Ferrara 2004 ; DENNIS, *Scattered knives*, p. 176 ; J. V. G. MALLET, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, ed. by D. Chambers and J. Martineau, London 1981, cat. n. 198 ; H. C. SLIM, *Music in Majolica*, « Early Music », Aug. 1984, pp. 371-373.



fig. 1 : NICOLA DA URBINO, *The Story of King Midas*, ca 1524, maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware), diameter : 27,5 cm, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



fig. 2 : NICOLA DA URBINO,
*The Council of Apollo and
Minerva*, ca 1533, maiolica
(tin-glazed earthenware),
diameter : 27,5 cm, London,
The British Museum



fig. 3 : NICOLA DA URBINO,
*The Council of Apollo and
Minerva* (reverse), inscribed :
« del Chonseiglio de/apollo e
minerva », ca 1533, maiolica
(tin-glazed earthenware),
diameter : 27,5 cm, London,
The British Museum



fig. 4 : Anonymous, *Dish with Open Music Book and Gonzaga Coat of Arms*, ca 1525, maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware), diameter : 24,5 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum