

Xanto and Ariosto

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# Xanto and Ariosto



15. *Ruggiero on the Hippogriff*, by Francesco Xanto Avelli. Urbino, 1531. Maiolica plate, 45 cm. diameter. (County Museum of Art, Los Angeles).

FRANCESCO XANTO AVELLI was not the most talented pottery-painter of the Renaissance, but he is the most interesting and eccentric personality in the history of maiolica. At times his work seems a delightful microcosm of renaissance culture, at times he can only be judged a preposterous parody of the artistic and cultural aspirations of 'Renaissance man'. His style, his iconographical sources, and his literary interests have been the subject of a good deal of scholarly work in recent years, and a central interest of the great maiolica scholar to whom this issue of this Magazine is dedicated. This article aims to add one minor aspect to the picture, by discussing a group of Xanto's works with scenes from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.<sup>1</sup>

What we know of Xanto's life is deduced from the inscriptions on his works, from the autobiographical details in the sonnet sequence in praise of Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, which survives in a manuscript in the Vatican and has been elegantly published by Francesco Cioci, and from a small group of documents in the Urbino archives.<sup>2</sup> It is not a great deal, but it is more than we

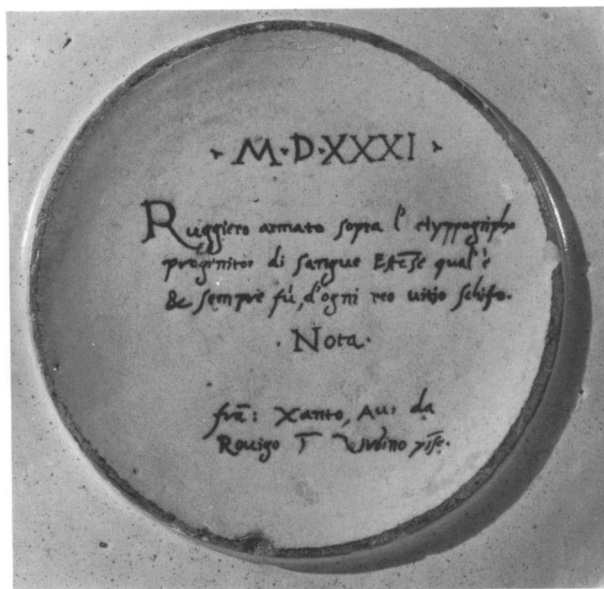


16. *The massacre of the innocents*, by Marco Dente da Ravenna, after Baccio Bandinelli. Engraving, B XIV, p.24, no.21. (British Museum, London).

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted for help in preparing this article to David Chambers, Armando de Guio, John Mallet, Olga Mikhailova, Julia Poole, Timothy Schroder and Beatrice Tavecchio.

<sup>2</sup>The principal literature on Xanto up to 1987 is listed by T.H. WILSON: *Ceramic Art of the Italian Renaissance*, London [1987], p.52. The main subsequent contri-

butions are F. CIOCI: *Xanto e il Duca di Urbino*, Milan [1987]; *Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi 1980*, Rovigo [1987]; A. HOLCROFT: 'Francesco Xanto Avelli and Petrarch', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 51 [1988], pp.225-34.



17. Detail of the reverse of Fig. 1.

have for any other maiolica painter of the sixteenth century. Xanto's first unequivocally signed and dated work was made in Urbino in 1530-31, and he appears to have remained based in the city until at least 1542, the date of his last signed work. Although a number of unsigned pieces dating from before 1530 can, in the light of John Mallet's work, be firmly attributed to his hand, there is no clear evidence as to when he was born, when or why he left his home town of Rovigo, or where he lived before his arrival in Urbino. A document in the notarial archives in Urbino records that he was in 1530 one of a group of pottery workers who formed a kind of trade union in an attempt to raise their wages.<sup>3</sup> Xanto was evidently not one of the economic aristocracy of the maiolica business who owned their own workshops, but an employee or freelance painter. There is no evidence known to me that he ever had a workshop of his own, though a document of 1542 is reported as indicating that in that year he took on two assistants.<sup>4</sup>

The leading workshop owners in Urbino responded to this 'unionisation' by blacklisting the workers concerned, and it is a tempting hypothesis that it was in some way as a response to this that Xanto started to sign works more fully and consistently than any maiolica painter previously. If future discoveries confirm this connexion, it will be amusing to see how a process that at first sight seems to be a quintessential renaissance instance of the rise of the craftsman to the status of self-conscious renaissance artist has a more mundane economic explanation. (This does not make it less interesting to the social historian of art.)

Another of Mallet's observations is the fact that on numerous pieces painted by Xanto and lustred between 1531 and 1533, apparently in the workshop of Maestro Giorgio in Gubbio, the person applying the lustre seems to

have made a deliberate effort to obscure the artist's signature and the words 'in Urbino' (but not the subject-inscriptions) with lustre scrolls.<sup>5</sup> Although this may not have been a personal vendetta against Xanto, since the same thing was done in 1533 to at least one other Urbino painter working in association with him,<sup>6</sup> it re-inforces the view of Xanto in these years as something of a rebel, an eccentric, and an outsider, a man with high aspirations who never quite 'made it'. It is evident from the sonnets in praise of Francesco Maria that Xanto took himself seriously as a poet and a courtier. No documentation has been found that the Dukes of Urbino regarded him in this elevated light, nor have I seen any pieces by him bearing the arms of any member of the ducal family.

A dish by Xanto in the British Museum, dated 1532, apparently a free illustration to one of his sonnets, is inscribed on the reverse as being from the 'XXV canto dil Rovere vittorioso, di F.X.A.R. pittor'. (canto 25 of *Rovere the Victorious* by F.X.A.R., painter). This claims for Xanto not only the status of courtly poet, but also that of 'painter'.<sup>7</sup> Although there are occasional other instances in which a maiolica-painter is described as *pittore* or *pictor*, it is a pretentious word, aspiring to the elevated social status of painters like Raphael or Michelangelo. One is reminded of Cellini; or of the famous Cafaggiolo plate in the Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>8</sup> in which an elegantly-dressed and fastidious-looking maiolica painter displays his skill to an aristocratic couple: both plates can be seen as manifestoes by pottery-painters seeking to present themselves as 'real' artists.

Xanto was an enthusiastic reader of Italian poetry and exceptionally well-read for a sixteenth-century artisan. Alison Holcroft's valuable study of Xanto's inscriptions from Petrarch concludes that he knew Petrarch's *Trionfi* intimately, and that he had read Ovid and Vergil in Italian; but that historians aroused his interest less, and that he did not demonstrably read any language other than Italian.<sup>9</sup> Cioci has noted how often Xanto's inscriptions form lines of verse.<sup>10</sup> As it happens, he was not the only sixteenth-century maiolica-painter who wrote poetry – 'Il Solingo Durantino' a few years later did so as well<sup>11</sup> – but the barbarous inscriptions on some maiolica are a reminder that many maiolica-painters could hardly even read. Xanto's literary aspirations are unique among contemporary craftsmen.

He is also unusual among maiolica-painters in that he frequently chose to illustrate recent history or, more often, to construct elaborate allegories around current events such as the sack of Rome in 1527. Given this combination of interest in Italian poetry and a taste for subjects other than the stock favourites from Ovid and Vergil, it is not surprising that Xanto's subject matter includes scenes from

<sup>3</sup>L. PUNGILEONI, in G. VANZOLINI: *Storie delle fabbriche di majoliche metaurensi*, Pesaro [1879], I, p.337; F. NEGRONI: 'Nicolo Pellipario: ceramista fantasma', *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, 14 [1986], p.18.

<sup>4</sup>*Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. 'Avelli'. I have never seen the piece said by A. DUBRUJEAUD (*Faïences italiennes de la collection Al. Imbert*, Union des Arts Décoratifs, Paris [1911], no.463) to be marked FATA IN BOTEGA DI F.X.R.D URBINI 1532, but am prepared to bet it was spurious.

<sup>5</sup>J.V.G. MALLET: 'Xanto: i suoi compagni e seguaci', in *Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo*, cited at note 2 above, pp.67-68.

<sup>6</sup>G. BALLARDINI: *Corpus della maiolica italiana*, Rome [1933-38], II, no.110, Figs.105,

294, is by the painter 'L'. Cf. *ibid.*, no.106, Figs.103, 291, which has the handwriting that MALLET (*loc.cit.* at note 5 above, p.77) identifies as that of Giulio da Urbino.

<sup>7</sup>WILSON, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, no.75; CIOCI, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, pp.60-61.

<sup>8</sup>B. RACKHAM: *Victoria and Albert Museum, Catalogue of Italian Maiolica*, London [1940], no.307.

<sup>9</sup>HOLCROFT, *loc.cit.* at note 2 above, p.234.

<sup>10</sup>CIOCI, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, p.41.

<sup>11</sup>G. ALBARELLI: 'Il solingo durantino', *Faenza*, 25 [1937], pp.103-04.

the greatest of Renaissance poems, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

Lodovico Ariosto (1474-1533) was a member of an important Ferrarese family and spent most of his life in the service of the Estensi, especially of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, the younger brother of Duke Alfonso I. *Orlando Furioso*, dedicated to Ippolito, is an epic romance combining heroic deeds in the manner of the *chansons de geste* with fantastical tongue-in-cheek episodes, bordering deliciously on the ludicrous, of monsters, magicians, preternaturally fair ladies, and discomfited knights of varying intelligence. It was first published in 1516 and was an immediate success, going through many more or less unauthorised printings before an enlarged and definitive edition was published in 1532, the year before the poet's death. An edition of 1530 included a simple woodcut to each canto, and in 1542 an elaborately-illustrated edition was published by Giolito in Venice.<sup>12</sup>

Of the five dishes by Xanto known to me which have scenes from *Orlando Furioso*, the most ambitious is the earliest. It is a large plate, which once belonged to Sir Bernard Eckstein and in 1949 passed into the omnivorous collection of William Randolph Hearst, and from there to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Figs.15 and 17).<sup>13</sup>

The scene is from canto 4, stanza 46, of the definitive edition of *Orlando Furioso* (and also of the original edition of 1516).<sup>14</sup> Ruggiero, one of the central characters in the poem, imprisoned by the magician Atlante, has been rescued by the woman-knight Bradamante. Bradamante loves Ruggiero and they are destined to marry in the last canto and become ancestors of the Este family. No sooner, however, has Ruggiero been rescued, than he mounts the magic 'Hippogriff', which flies off with him, leaving Bradamante flabbergasted. Although this seems to be the scene represented, the link to the text is tenuous. Bradamante is not present, nor is the magic shield that plays a crucial part in the story visible. The Hippogriff is shown as a simple winged horse like Pegasus, and does not correspond to Ariosto's careful description in stanza 18 of the canto, where the creature is described as having a griffin's wings, forefeet, and head, and the hind parts of a horse.<sup>15</sup> Nor does the architectural background correspond to the poem, where Atlante's castle has magically disappeared, leaving only wild countryside:

... e a un tratto il colle  
riman deserto, inospite e inculto;  
né muro appar né torre in alcun lato,  
come se mai castel non vi sia stato.<sup>16</sup>

The sixteen other figures in the scene are presumably meant to represent the knights and ladies liberated with Ruggiero, but they do not in any detail correspond to the text. In fact, they are a selection of figures extracted, in



18. *Orlando and his friends finding the arms of Ruggiero*, by Francesco Xanto Avelli. Urbino, 1532. Maiolica plate from the Pucci service, 26.5 cm. diameter. (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



19. *Abduction of Helen*, by Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael. Engraving, B XIV, p.170, no.209. (British Museum, London).

Xanto's characteristic 'scissors-and-paste' technique, from engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi and his associates. The old men at the centre and the far right, and the man with a baton on the left are copied out of the large 'Massacre of the Innocents' engraving by Marco da Ravenna after Bandinelli (Fig.16). Other figures are extracted from at least seven other engravings.<sup>17</sup> Most of the figures taken from engravings correspond in size to the originals (though they are sometimes reversed), suggesting that Xanto may

<sup>12</sup>G. AGNELLI and G. RAVEGNANI: *Annali delle edizioni ariostee*, Bologna [1933].

<sup>13</sup>Sold Sotheby's, London, 30th-31st May 1949, lot 10. LACMA 49.26.3.

<sup>14</sup>The pre-1532 texts are collated in *Orlando Furioso di Lodovico Ariosto secondo le stampe del 1516 e del 1521*, Società filologica romana, Rome [1909-11]. Such is the vagueness of Xanto's detail that it is also possible that the scene intended is in fact *Orlando Furioso*, 10, 91 (9, 79 in the first edition).

<sup>15</sup>On Ariosto's own use of the Pegasus motif, see R.W. LEE: 'Ariosto's Roger and Angelica', in I. LAVIN and J. PLUMMER eds.: *Studies in late medieval and Renaissance painting in honor of Millard Meiss*, New York [1977], I, pp.302-19.

<sup>16</sup>*Orlando Furioso*, 4, 38 (both editions).

<sup>17</sup>The *Massacre of the Innocents* is BARTSCH, XIV, p.24, no.21. The other engravings used are BARTSCH, XIV, p.6, no.4; p.89, no.104; p.177, no.217; p.200, no.247; p.264, no.352; and perhaps p.12, no.10, and p.316, no.420. Of these, 4, 21, 104, 217, and 247 are much the same size as on the prints. The figure from no.352 is bigger than in the print. I have not traced an engraved source for the ill-drawn figure right of centre holding a club, and it may be a composite or variant, done with less than Xanto's usual skill.



20. *Astolfo in the land of women*, by Francesco Xanto Avelli. Urbino, 1532. Maiolica plate from the Pucci service, 26.1 cm. diameter. (British Museum, London).

have traced figures and perhaps used *spolvero* or some other form of mechanical transfer. It seems impossible to make of this scene anything approaching an accurate illustration of Ariosto's text. Xanto seems rather to have arranged a composition of figures round the central idea of an armed knight on a winged creature, and to have been mainly interested in producing an elaborate composition full of virtuoso-looking figures in up-to-date Raphaellesque style.

One question that arises here is whether Xanto expected his clients to recognise the relationship of his compositions to engravings. It could be maintained that there is a sophisticated visual joke going on, particularly when erotic



21. *Astolfo and the Harpies*, by Francesco Xanto Avelli. Urbino, 1532. Maiolica dish, 26 cm. diameter. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

figures from the *Modi*, by Marcantonio after Giulio Romano, are adapted for quite different purposes. At the other extreme, one may regard Xanto as trying to work out a labour-saving mechanical technique to produce sophisticated-looking figure compositions which he was unable to produce unaided; in this view, he would have to be numbered among the '*poveri pittori che non hanno molto disegno*', who according to Vasari were among the intended market for Marcantonio's engravings.<sup>18</sup> It is debatable where the truth lies between these two views, and one's opinion may depend on a subjective estimate of Xanto's artistic success.

The inscription on the reverse of the dish reads: '*M.D.XXXI. Ruggiero armato sopra l'Hyppogripho progenitor di sangue Este[n]se qual'è & sempre fù, d'ogni reo vitio schifo. Nota. frá: Xanto. Av: da Rovigo i[n] Urbino pi[n]se*'. This has previously been translated: 'Ruggiero armed on the Hippogriff, the ancestor of the Este family, which is and always was guilty of every filthy vice. Francesco Xanto Avelli of Rovigo painted this in Urbino'.<sup>19</sup> '*Schifo*', in this interpretation would be an adjective qualifying '*vizio*', and meaning 'filthy', and '*reo*' would be an adjective qualifying '*sangue*' and meaning 'guilty [of]'. There are, however, problems about this interpretation, for which the word order is decidedly artificial. Such vitriolic hostility towards the Este family on Xanto's part would be hard to account for. Alfonso I d'Este was not notorious for an immoral lifestyle, and was on good terms with Xanto's hero, Francesco Maria of Urbino, although they had been on opposite sides in the campaign preceding the sack of Rome in 1527.<sup>20</sup> If Xanto had personal motives for hating the Este, they are not evident elsewhere in his work. An alternative translation of the inscription would interpret '*schifo*' as a variant (perhaps for the sake of the rhyme with '*Hyppogripho*') of the word '*schivo*', meaning 'averse from'. This completely reverses the sense, since the meaning is then 'which avoids, and always has done, every wicked vice'. Italian friends whom I have consulted feel that this is indeed the more likely translation, in which case the inscription becomes a conventional, if contorted, compliment. It seems over-clever to suppose that the ambiguity is deliberate and that Xanto intended a veiled insult beneath an apparent compliment.

The troublesome phrase appears to be an echo of one of Ariosto's minor poems, the first *Eclogue*, which is deservedly little read nowadays. This poem, written in 1506, is a dramatic dialogue on the model of Vergil's *Eclogues*, dealing in pastoral guise with a contemporary scandal at the Ferrarese court when Duke Alfonso's brothers Giulio and Ferrante were discovered in a plot to murder the Duke

<sup>18</sup>G. VASARI: *Le Vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*, ed. G. MILANESI, Florence [1878-85], V, p.417; cf. P. COLLINS: 'Prints and the development of istoriato Painting on Italian Renaissance Maiolica', *Print Quarterly*, 4 [1987], p.225.

<sup>19</sup>In the Sotheby's sale catalogue, *loc.cit.* at note 13 above, and by T. SCHRODER: 'Decorative Arts of the Renaissance', *Apollo*, 124 [1986], p.406.

<sup>20</sup>J. HOOK: *The Sack of Rome 1527*, London [1972], p.109, calls Francesco Maria 'a friend of Duke Alfonso of Ferrara'. It seems just possible that Xanto may have detested Alfonso because he held him responsible as a 'collaborator' in the sack of Rome.



22. Fragment of a dish, perhaps with a scene from Ariosto. Attributed to the Master of the Bergantini Bowl. Probably Faenza, c.1525-30. Maiolica, 14.5 cm. by 20 cm. (Hermitage, Leningrad).

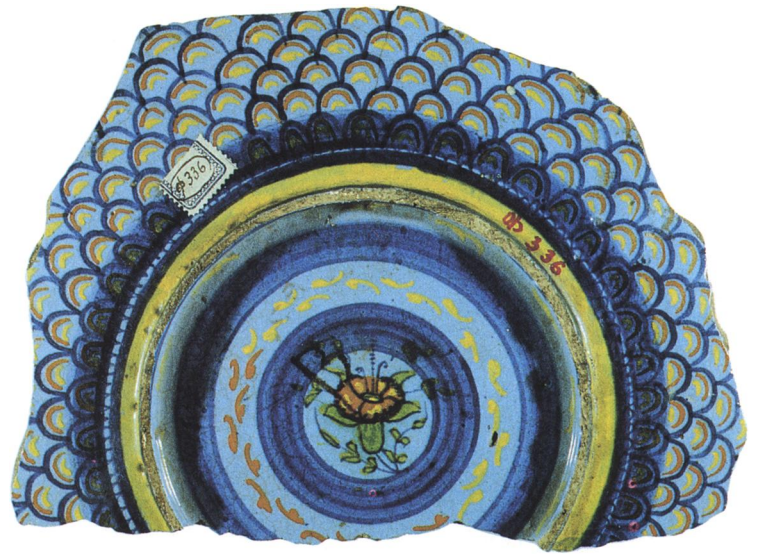
and Cardinal Ippolito. Giulio is represented in the poem by 'Iola', and one of the speakers says:

Ma che sia Iola d'ogni vizio reo  
meraviglia non è, ché mai di volpe  
nascere non viddi pantera né leo.<sup>21</sup>

The *Eclogue* had not been printed in 1531, nor was it readily accessible, since Ariosto was notoriously reluctant to allow his early works to be distributed. In 1532 no less a person than Guidobaldo Della Rovere, heir to the Duchy of Urbino, had difficulty getting hold of some of Ariosto's poems, and a correspondent in Ferrara wrote to him: 'I send you a few of Messer Lodovico Ariosto's poems, which I have assembled against his wishes and with difficulty; he does not like them being seen, saying that they are faulty and embarrassing to him'. If Ariosto's minor poems were so hard to get hold of in the Duchy of Urbino, how did Xanto know the *Eclogue*? There seems here to be some support for the previously-formulated hypothesis that Xanto spent time in Ferrara before he came to Urbino.<sup>22</sup>

Three of Xanto's Ariosto subjects are on pieces dated 1532. Two of these form part of what was probably the largest armorial *istoriato* service painted up to that date, bearing the arms of a member of the Pucci family of Florence. The service has recently been the subject of an admirable catalogue by Julia Triolo.<sup>23</sup>

The first is a plate in the Fitzwilliam Museum (Fig. 18)<sup>24</sup> illustrating an episode towards the end of *Orlando Furioso*, in canto 41, stanzas 25-29 of the 1532 edition (37, 25-29 in



23. Reverse of Fig. 8.

the first edition). Ruggiero has been shipwrecked; the abandoned ship, bearing his horse Frontino, a sword called Balisarda, and his armour, has drifted onto the Egyptian coast. Three knights, Orlando, Brandimarte, and Oliviero, discover the ship and divide the spoils between them, Orlando taking the sword, Brandimarte the horse, and Oliviero the enchanted suit of armour. Although the ship has shrunk to a slightly ludicrous little boat and there is no attempt to provide any Egyptian local colour to the background, Xanto has represented the main elements of the story fairly accurately. The figures, including the horse, are taken from the Abduction of Helen print by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael (Fig. 19), or the close version of it by Marco da Ravenna.<sup>25</sup> The figures are all



24. *Grifone fighting with the people of Damascus*, by Francesco Xanto Avelli. Urbino, 1537. Maiolica plate, 27.5 cm. diameter. (Formerly Pringsheim collection).

<sup>21</sup> *Egloga*, I, pp.58-60, in ARIOSTO: *Opere minori*, ed. C. SEGRE, Milan and Naples [1955], p.277.

<sup>22</sup> G.B. SIVIERO, in *Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo*, cited at note 2 above, p.16. The letter, from Marco Pio, is printed by G. BARUFFALDI: *La Vita di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, Ferrara [1807], pp.294-95.

<sup>23</sup> J. TRIOLO: 'Francesco Xanto Avelli's Pucci Service (1532-1533): a Catalogue', *Faenza*, 74 [1988], pp.37-44, 228-84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, no.8. No.C10-1953.

<sup>25</sup> BARTSCH, XIV, p.170, no.209, or p.171, no.210.

much the same size as those in the engraving, so that again some kind of tracing process seems likely. The boat is loosely based on the boat in the print. The process of adaptation here has the merit of ingenuity, though it is faintly absurd as a scene of men recovering booty from a shipwreck. The subject itself is not particularly picturesque or dramatic, and one may wonder whether Xanto's motive in choosing it was not simply that it could be represented by a neat adaptation of figures from a favourite engraving.<sup>26</sup>

The inscription on the back of the Fitzwilliam plate reads: '.1532. Nel agitato Legno trova Orlando di Ruggiero l'armi Nel.XXXVII ca[n]to del furioso d[i] .M.L.Ariosto. frà: Xa[n]to .A. da Rovigo, i[n] Urbino'. (In the storm-tossed wood Orlando finds the arms of Ruggiero. In canto 37 of the *Furioso* of Messer Lodovico Ariosto. Francesco Xanto Avelli of Rovigo in Urbino). The poetic word 'legno' for ship (which Ariosto also uses), the rhythm, and the tortuous word order again reflect Xanto's tendency to give his inscriptions the form of poetry. The canto number is that of the episode in the original version of the poem, and indicates that in this year, when the definitive edition of the poem was first printed, Xanto continued to use an earlier edition.

The other surviving *Orlando Furioso* subject from the Pucci service, in the British Museum,<sup>27</sup> illustrates an episode in canto 20, verses 88-91 (18, 88-91 in the 1516 version (Fig.20). Astolfo, an English knight, has arrived in the land ruled by women, where men are deplored as an unpleasant biological necessity. Any man who arrives there has to kill ten men in battle and make love to ten women in one night or be put to death. Astolfo is fortunately equipped with a magic horn which has the power of terrifying anyone who hears it. Sounding his horn, Astolfo puts the women and everyone else within earshot to flight and he and his companions make good their escape. Xanto sets the scene in a building of contorted perspective, representing Ariosto's 'teatro' (though the poet meant an open amphitheatre). On the left is Astolfo on horseback sounding his horn, while various men flee in panic. The lack of women, the central element in the story, suggests that Xanto was more interested in his figure composition than in illustrating the poem. The figures are assembled from five different engravings by Marcantonio, including two of the *Modi*.<sup>28</sup>

The third 1532 example (Fig.21) is a lusted dish in the

Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>29</sup> with the inscription: '*Astolpho che l'Harpie persegue & scaccia. .Nel.XXX. canto dil Furioso d[i].M.L.Ariosto.*' [Astolfo who pursues and chases off the Harpies] frà: *Xanto .A. da Rovigo, i[n] Urbino pi[n].:*'. The representation (*Orlando Furioso* 33, 126; 30, 97 in the first edition) is another free illustration to Ariosto's text. The Hippogriff is again a Pegasus-like winged horse, Astolfo has a sword but no horn, and the Harpies are represented with the faces of attractive young women, not with the hideous faces which Ariosto gives them:

. . . tutte  
volto di donne avean, pallide e smorte,  
per lunga fame attenuate e asciutte,  
orribili a veder più che la morte.<sup>30</sup>

In these respects the plate resembles the illustration opening canto 31 in the edition of *Orlando Furioso* published by Zoppino in Venice in 1530; it seems likely that Xanto knew this edition, the only extensively illustrated one then existing. The canto number given in the inscription is correct for any of the editions preceding 1532.

The final Ariosto subject by Xanto (Fig.24) was sold in 1939 from the Pringsheim collection; I do not know its present whereabouts.<sup>31</sup> The inscription on the reverse is given as: '*Solo Griffo[n] co[n]tra Damasco tutto*' 'Grifone alone against all Damascus', with the signature *FXR* and the date 1537. Grifone is shown on a bridge, fighting off several men. This probably represents the tournament between Grifone and the eight champions of Damascus from *Orlando Furioso* 17, 92-104 (first edition 15, 92-104), but the detail is wrong: the tournament took place in a piazza and on horseback, and Grifone fought his opponents in succession, not simultaneously.<sup>32</sup> The composition is reminiscent of the woodcut in the Zoppino edition of the poem, but the actual figures are taken from Marcantonio's *Abduction of Helen* engraving (Fig.19). The iconography, with the prominent bridge, which is not in the woodcut, is reminiscent of Horatius defending the bridge, and the inscription on the reverse is a modified quotation from Xanto's favourite literary source, Petrarch's *Trionfi*, referring to Horatius: '*Quel che solo contra tutta Toscana tenne un ponte*'.<sup>33</sup> I do not know of any treatment by Xanto of Horatius on the bridge, but he made much use of Petrarchan tags like this, and occurrences of the subject with the same Petrarchan line on two pieces made in Pesaro and dated 1541 may reflect a lost version by Xanto.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup>In a paper to be published shortly in *Papers on Italian Renaissance Pottery*, ed. T.H. WILSON, JULIA TRIOLO argues that the Ariosto subjects in the Pucci service represent the category of epic.

<sup>27</sup>WILSON, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, no.222 (the piece was not, as wrongly there stated, in the Rattier collection); TRIOLO, *loc.cit.* at note 23 above, no.7.

<sup>28</sup>The figures are, as stated by TRIOLO, from Bartsch, XIV, p.183, no.226; p.104, no.117; p.89, no.104 (not, as stated by WILSON, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, B XIV, p.345, no.464); and two of the *Modi*. The figures on nos.226 and 117 are roughly the same size as on the plate, but no.104 is smaller in the engraving than on the plate. The originals of the *Modi* do not survive, so it is hard to tell whether the figures are the same size; see L. LAWNER: *I Modi*, Milan [1984].

<sup>29</sup>RACKHAM, *op.cit.* at note 8 above, no.724; formerly Rattier collection, sold Paris, 21st-24th March 1859, lot 7.

<sup>30</sup>*Orlando Furioso*, 33, 120 (30, 96 in the 1516 edition).

<sup>31</sup>*Catalogue of the Renowned Collection of Superb Italian Maiolica . . . of Dr Alfred Pringsheim of Munich*, Sotheby's, London, 7th-8th June, 19th-20th July, 1939, lot 181; E. MOLINIER, in *La Collection Spitzer*, IV, Paris [1892], no.47.

<sup>32</sup>It is possible that the scene represented is actually the slightly later episode when Grifone massacres the unarmed people of Damascus in revenge for his humiliation: *Orlando Furioso*, 18, 4-6 (first edition, 16, 4-6); but the parallel with the woodcut suggests that the tournament is the more likely subject.

<sup>33</sup>*Triumph of Fame*, 1, 80-81.

<sup>34</sup>One (in a private collection), marked '*fato in Pesaro*', illustrated in *Faenza*, 64 [1978], tav.XIV; another (Rome, Palazzo Venezia), illustrated by P. BONALI and R. GRETA: *Girolamo e Giacomo Lanfranco dalle Gabicce*, Rimini [1987], tav.3; both are dated 1541. An undated example is described by MOLINIER, *op.cit.* at note 31 above, no.43, but not illustrated. The same tag occurs with a representation of Horatius on the 'Ripanda' sketchbook in Lille, which may have served as a pattern book for maiolica painters; see B. JESTAZ: 'Les modèles de la majolique historiée, bilan d'un enquête', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 79 [1972], p.222. On the usage of such Petrarchan tags later than Xanto, see HOLCROFT, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, p.229, note 35.

It is clear that Xanto had read *Orlando Furioso*. The subjects chosen for the five plates are from different parts of the poem and are not merely (as is often the case with maiolica with Ovid subjects) simply the incidents of which woodcuts occur in illustrated editions of the poem. On the other hand, the inscriptions are not actual quotations from the poem, in contrast to Xanto's quotations from Petrarch, whose work he knew much more intimately. Xanto cannot be said to show much interest in accurate illustration of the text; the subjects seem to have been chosen for their suitability for virtuoso-looking figure compositions, or because they could be illustrated by ingenious adaptations of figures from favourite engravings of Xanto's. This lack of interest in accurate or readily comprehensible illustration of a story is characteristic of Xanto. In both his literary subjects and his allegories, it looks as if he was mainly interested in 'pegs' on which to hang figure compositions, and in literary inscriptions which would enhance the impression. Many of Xanto's allegories are obscure and have eluded detailed exegesis;<sup>35</sup> if the analogy with the narrative subjects holds, it may be that no such exegesis is possible. There is, it would seem, an element of bluff running through Xanto's work.<sup>36</sup>

These five plates illustrate not only Xanto's attempts to show himself up-to-date in his reading and sophisticated in his visual language, but also how eccentric his work is in iconography. These plates with Ariosto subjects have almost no precedents and no known followers. They are nonetheless some of the earliest, most colourful, and most curious of all illustrations to this most enjoyable of renaissance poems.

*Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*

#### Appendix. Other maiolica up to c.1550 with subjects from Ariosto

1. Dish with portrait of 'Rugieri': Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This and the following dish have been controversially attributed by Jörg Rasmussen to the workshop of Giovanni Maria, Castel Durante, and dated c.1510-20. 1516 is not a *terminus post quem*, because the same characters occur in Boiardo's earlier *Orlando Innamorato*.<sup>37</sup>
2. Dish with profile of 'Astolfo': formerly W.R. Hearst collection. This is probably by the same painter as the 'Rugieri', and possibly from a single set.<sup>38</sup>
3. A fragment in the State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, portrays fashionably-dressed ladies and men looking at a beast with an eagle's head, reptilian scales, and wings like a dragon. It was ingeniously argued by O.D. Dobroklonskaya that this is the Hippogriff from *Orlando Furioso* and that the scene is from the fourth canto of the poem. The fragmentary state of the piece leaves it unclear whether the creature had the hind-parts of a horse which Ariosto gives the Hippogriff; and the correlation of the subject with the text of the poem is uncertain. Through the kindness of Mrs Olga Mikhailova of the Hermitage, I am able to illustrate this beautiful piece in colour (Figs.22 and 23). On the reverse is a flower and the letter B. Dobroklonskaya suggests (following Fortnum) that the reference is to the Ferrarese artist Benvenuto Tisi, called Garofalo (1481-1559), who sometimes used a flower as a signature, and that the plate could have been made on a design by him by a Faentine artist in Ferrara. However the style is not much like Garofalo's. The painting seems to be by an artist called the 'Master of the Bergantini bowl', and it seems more plausible that the 'B' indicates that the piece was made around 1525-30 in the Faenza workshop of Piero Bergantini.<sup>39</sup>
4. A pair of plates with 'Astolfo' and 'Marfisa', perhaps c.1530, sold at the Pringsheim sale, Sotheby's, London, 7th-8th June, 19th-20th July 1939, lot 94.
5. An *istoriato* plate in the Louvre shows Guidon Selvaggio in the land of women. It is attributed by Giacomotti, for no very obvious reason, to Rimini and dated around 1540.<sup>40</sup>
6. A series of plates by 'El Frate' (Giacomo Mancini of Deruta) have subjects taken from the woodcuts in the 1542 illustrated edition of *Orlando Furioso*. Several are dated 1545.<sup>41</sup>
7. A lustred *istoriato* plate in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows Angelica chained to the rock, with Ruggiero flying to her rescue. It is dated 1549 and attributed by Rackham to Orazio Fontana.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup>E.g. WILSON, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, no.220; CIOCI, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup>Xanto's general disregard of narrative detail makes it likely that the British Museum *Rovere vittorioso* plate, despite the looseness of the correspondence and a problem of chronology, is indeed an illustration to sonnet 25 of the Vatican sonnet sequence: WILSON, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, no.75; CIOCI, *op.cit.* at note 2 above, pp.154-55.

<sup>37</sup>J. RASMUSSEN: *Italian Majolica in the Robert Lehman Collection* (The Robert Lehman Collection, Vol.X), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York [1989], p.244, Fig.63.6.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p.245, Fig.63.9. If Dr Rasmussen had lived to see his catalogue into print, I cannot believe he would have kept to his view that the portrait dishes illustrated form a stylistically coherent group.

<sup>39</sup>C.D.E. FORTNUM: *A Descriptive catalogue of the Maiolica . . . in the South Kensington*

*Museum*, London [1873], p.493; A. DARCEL and A. BASILEWSKY: *Collection Basilevsky*, Paris [1874], no.361; G. LIVERANI: 'Fata in Faenza in la botega de Maestro Piero Bergantini', *Faenza*, 17 [1939], p.7, tav.6b; O.D. DOBKROKLONSKAYA: 'K voprosu o svyazi italyanskoy maioliki XVI v. s literaturoy', *Trudi Gosudarstvennovo Ermitazha*, 6 [1961], pp.206-12; O. MIKHAILOVA, in *Prikladnoye Iskusstvo Italii*, exh.cat., Hermitage, Leningrad [1985], no.379; O. MIKHAILOVA, in *Zapadnoyevropeyskoye Prikladnoye Iskusstvo . . . iz Kolleksiya A.P. Basilevskovo*, exh.cat., Hermitage, Leningrad [1986], no.149.

<sup>40</sup>J. GIACOMOTTI: *Catalogue des majoliques des musées nationaux*, Paris [1974], no.918.

<sup>41</sup>Examples are listed by C. FIOCCO and G. GHERARDI in their excellent volume of the *Catalogo Generale* of the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza, *Maioliche umbre*, part 1 [1988], p.322.

<sup>42</sup>RACKHAM, *op.cit.* at note 8 above, no.732.