

**C. DRURY
E. FORTNUM**



MAIOLICA

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Maiolica

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Sydney Caldwell

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Introduction

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Balancing the humblest of materials with the loftiest claims of art, Maiolica unfolds as a meditation on how tin-glazed earthenware became both a record of Renaissance craft intelligence and a touchstone for modern connoisseurship, tracing the tension between useful vessel and painted image, regional habit and cosmopolitan taste, archaeological fact and aesthetic judgment, so that the reader learns to see in a shard or charger not merely decoration but a network of skills, patrons, and ideas that traveled across kilns, courts, and collections, and it stages, with patient clarity, the debate over what constitutes originality when workshops repeat patterns and techniques evolve under the pressure of demand and emulation.

Maiolica is a work of art history by C. Drury E. Fortnum, composed within the museum-driven scholarship of Victorian Britain in the late nineteenth century. Addressed to readers seeking a reliable guide to Italian tin-glazed pottery, it reflects the close study of objects then being assembled in public collections, notably those that helped define curatorial standards at London's South Kensington Museum. Neither a mere catalogue nor a speculative essay, the book functions as a concise handbook: it introduces terms, situates major types, and frames the subject within the broader revival of interest in Renaissance decorative arts that animated the period's pedagogy.

In its premise, the volume offers a carefully structured survey of material, technique, and style, moving from definitions to distinctions among forms and modes of ornament. Fortnum writes in a measured, exact voice, favoring observable evidence and comparative method, and the tone is instructive without pedantry. Readers encounter lucid explanations of how opaque glaze, colorants, and firing interact, alongside judicious notes on attribution and workshop practice. The prose is descriptive rather than rhapsodic, yet an undercurrent of admiration for the potter's intelligence is clear, lending the work a steady rhythm that suits both the newcomer's curiosity and the specialist's need for clarity.

Several themes course through the book. It treats technique as a historical agent, showing how the properties of tin glaze condition artistic possibility and constraint. It treats regional variation as a language, attending to the signatures of centers and workshops without reducing them to stereotypes. It questions how we assign authorship to collaborative production and how taste, in different eras, elevates certain types while neglecting others. It also confronts the difficulty of naming and classifying objects whose makers rarely signed their work, proposing a disciplined way of looking that balances ornament with form, material evidence with the histories collectors record.

These concerns remain contemporary. The book's emphasis on methodical comparison and provenance-aware description speaks directly to current debates about authentication, attribution, and the responsibilities of museums and collectors. Its attention to the afterlives of

objects in study rooms and galleries anticipates today's questions about how institutions narrate craft, labor, and design. For readers interested in material culture, the analysis models slow, evidence-based interpretation; for makers, it illuminates process in a way that bridges art and technique. As an historical document of scholarship, it also lets us see how a canon of decorative arts was assembled, contested, and taught.

The reading experience is therefore both practical and reflective. Fortnum pauses over motifs and subjects commonly encountered on tin-glazed wares, clarifying how narrative scenes, heraldic devices, and abstract ornament function within the constraints of shape and glaze. He distinguishes between fashionable effects and durable structures of form, guiding the eye to rims, backs, and footrings as well as to painted fronts. Throughout, he encourages comparison across objects and types, so that the reader acquires habits of looking transferable to any gallery of ceramics. The result is a companionable guide that turns museum visits into exercises in informed attention.

Maiolica matters now because it offers two vantage points at once: a window onto Renaissance ceramics and a record of how nineteenth-century scholarship built tools for seeing them. Its patient taxonomy continues to anchor discussions, even as new science and social history expand the field, and its sober prose leaves space for fresh interpretations without foreclosing debate. For students, curators, collectors, and the curious, it remains a disciplined invitation to look harder and think more historically about

objects that blur the boundary between art and use, reminding us that the history of design lives in things we hold as well as admire.

Synopsis

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Maiolica by C. Drury E. Fortnum presents a systematic account of Italian tin-glazed earthenware, setting out the material's historical scope, principal centers, techniques, and stylistic character. Drawing on museum holdings and documented collections known in his day, Fortnum organizes the subject to guide readers from broad origins to specific workshops and types. He aims to distinguish what is securely attributable from what remains conjectural, while clarifying terminology that had been inconsistently applied. The book positions Italian maiolica within a wider ceramic tradition, explaining how form, function, and decoration intersect, and offering criteria by which examples might be identified, compared, and responsibly classified.

Fortnum begins by tracing the emergence of tin-glazed earthenware in the Italian peninsula, noting channels through which techniques and motifs were transmitted around the Mediterranean. He observes how early Italian production absorbed influences from imported wares and adapted them to local tastes and uses. Functional vessels, including pharmacy jars and table pieces, provide the earliest evidence for regional practices. Through materials, glazes, and decorative habits, he establishes a groundwork for understanding later developments. By emphasizing observable features over unsupported anecdotes, he frames technical adoption and stylistic change as cumulative

processes shaped by commerce, workshop inheritance, and patron demand.

The study then turns to the principal manufacturing centers, distinguishing their vocabularies of form, palette, and ornament. Fortnum compares the traits associated with towns renowned for innovation and output, showing how local conditions encouraged particular specializations. He treats the rise of narrative painting on pottery alongside areas celebrated for lustre or bold graphic patterning, and he relates production scale to courtly, civic, and ecclesiastical commissions. Where documentary anchors exist, he links objects to named workshops; where evidence is weaker, he demonstrates how typological features assist cautious attribution. The result is a map of regional identities that accommodates both overlap and distinction.

A substantial section examines fabrication: the body, the tin-rich glaze, pigments stable at various firings, and the sequencing of decoration. Fortnum describes how potters and painters coordinated their tasks, how forms were thrown, molded, or assembled, and how surfaces were prepared for line and wash. He explains the particular demands of metallic lustre and the risks introduced by multiple firings. Shapes such as dishes, albarelli, and ewers are analyzed for how use drives design. By anchoring stylistic analysis in procedure, he shows why certain effects recur in specific places and periods, and how technique constrains, yet enables, invention.

Decoration receives parallel attention. Fortnum surveys ornamental systems—from geometric borders to grotesques—and the growth of narrative imagery that draws on literary

and pictorial sources. He notes heraldry, inscriptions, and devices that indicate function or patronage, and he shows how print culture furnished models for figure groups and architectural settings. The book addresses devotional themes, secular mythologies, and emblematic programs, situating them within Renaissance habits of collecting and display. Fortnum tracks the migration of motifs across workshops, distinguishing replication from reinterpretation, and he relates imagery to the intended context, whether apothecary, household, gift exchange, or ceremonial service.

Fortnum's connoisseurial chapters treat signatures, dates, and marks, while confronting the challenges of overpainting, restoration, and misattribution. He formulates criteria for separating period practice from later imitation, urging comparative study of glazes, palettes, brushwork, and wear. Catalogued specimens from museums and private holdings allow him to build reference groups, against which outliers can be tested. He also discusses provenance indicators such as arms and inscriptions, and he recommends a disciplined reliance on converging evidence. Throughout, the book models a method that privileges material observation and documentary corroboration over style labels alone.

The volume concludes by consolidating a historical and analytical framework for Italian maiolica that remains serviceable to students, curators, and collectors. Fortnum demonstrates how a careful taxonomy of techniques, centers, and motifs clarifies the relationships among objects and periods, and how cross-cultural exchange underlies

much of the medium's vitality. Without foreclosing debate on specific attributions, he furnishes the tools for more secure judgments and richer contextualization. The work's lasting significance lies in establishing common ground—terms, criteria, and exemplars—on which subsequent research can build, preserving both the discipline's rigor and its appreciation of the art's variety and invention.

Historical Context

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Charles Drury Edward Fortnum (1820–1899), an English antiquary and collector, wrote *Maiolica* in the late nineteenth century amid Britain's expanding museum culture. Produced in association with the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) and later issued by Oxford's Clarendon Press, the volume surveyed Italian tin-glazed earthenware as a historical and artistic phenomenon. Fortnum's perspective was shaped by his roles as Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and benefactor of the Ashmolean Museum, where his donations formed a cornerstone of its Renaissance collections. The book speaks to a milieu that prized ordered catalogues, technical description, and museum-based education for artisans and the public.

Fortnum's subject, Italian maiolica, flourished principally between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in centers such as Faenza, Deruta, Gubbio, Urbino, Pesaro, Castel Durante, and Cafaggiolo. Workshops served courtly patrons—including the Medici and the dukes of Urbino—and urban markets, producing istoriato wares painted with narratives from Ovid, the Bible, and Roman history. Painters like Nicola da Urbino, Francesco Xanto Avelli, Orazio Fontana, and the Patanazzi family adapted imagery from engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael and Giulio Romano. Technical mastery included tin-opacified glazes and polychrome palettes, with careful firing schedules. Fortnum

organized these traditions by place, painter, and chronology, reflecting Renaissance specialization and taste.

Maiolica's technology drew on a Mediterranean exchange. Tin-glazing and metallic lustre had long histories in Islamic ceramics, transmitted to Italy via trade with the Iberian Peninsula. Hispano-Moresque wares—circulating through ports associated with Majorca, from which the term “maiolica” likely derives—stimulated Italian experiments. Deruta developed golden lustre, while Gubbio, under Maestro Giorgio Andreoli in the early sixteenth century, achieved celebrated ruby and gold effects applied over painted decoration. By mid-sixteenth century, Italian kilns synthesized lustre, istoriato painting, and refined forms, exporting wares across Europe. Fortnum situates Italian innovation within these routes, underscoring documented ties among Valencia, Venice, and central Italian workshops.

Production was embedded in guilds and civic oversight. Potters belonged to craft confraternities, regulated for clay sources, kiln placement, and market quality. Workshops were family enterprises, with painters, throwers, and kilnmen collaborating. Output ranged from pharmacy jars (albarelli and galletti) commissioned by hospitals and apothecaries to elaborate table services commemorating marriages and ducal pageantry. Documentation includes contracts, tax registers, and the mid-sixteenth-century treatise *Li tre libri dell'arte del vasaio* by Cipriano Piccolpasso, which details clays, pigments, and firing. Fortnum repeatedly invoked such records and surviving marks and dates to attribute objects, connect painters to centers, and reconstruct workshop practices.

In Fortnum's lifetime, renewed interest in Renaissance decorative arts coincided with political change in Italy. Unification (formally proclaimed in 1861) and subsequent suppression of many religious houses led to the dispersal of monastic and ducal holdings, placing maiolica on an international art market. British and French museums strengthened collections, while dealers in Florence and Rome supplied connoisseurs. The Great Exhibition of 1851 and its successors energized design reform, resulting in the South Kensington Museum's acquisitions to instruct students of the National Art Training School. Fortnum's book interfaces with those acquisitions, offering reliable attributions, dates, and typologies to guide display and pedagogy.

Fortnum built on and systematized earlier scholarship. Eighteenth-century antiquary Giovanni Battista Passeri compiled notices on Pesaro and Urbino pottery; the nineteenth-century recovery and study of Cipriano Piccolpasso's mid-sixteenth-century manuscript—preserved at the South Kensington Museum—supplied technical primary evidence. Within Britain, figures such as John Charles Robinson at South Kensington and Augustus Wollaston Franks at the British Museum promoted serious study and cataloguing of ceramics, organizing loans and advising purchases. Fortnum adopted a connoisseur's method—comparing signatures (for example, Xanto's dated dishes of the 1530s), monograms, and stylistic hands—while addressing kiln technology and restoration. His volumes, illustrated with plates, aimed to reconcile aesthetic judgment with documentary proof.

The book's institutional life mirrored Fortnum's commitments. A concise handbook aligned with South Kensington's Art Handbooks series guided museum visitors and design students; a later, expanded treatment through the Clarendon Press at Oxford consolidated decades of notes. Meanwhile, Fortnum's gifts to the Ashmolean, including maiolica, bronzes, and small sculpture, significantly enriched Oxford's teaching collections and galleries. The Ashmolean acknowledged his benefaction with dedicated cataloguing and display. Fortnum's classifications—centers, painters, shapes, and glazes—filtered into museum labels and reference files, standardizing terminology used by curators and collectors across Britain and beyond and shaping the canon displayed to the public.

Maiolica reflects its era's faith in ordered knowledge, public museums, and the didactic value of applied arts. Fortnum codifies a Renaissance craft tradition as fine art, yet remains attentive to workshop collaboration, technical process, and the risks of overpainting and forgery then circulating on the market. The book exemplifies Victorian connoisseurship—balancing taste with evidence—while serving design reform by making motifs, forms, and color schemes accessible. In presenting Italian wares within a Mediterranean and European network, it resists parochial narratives. The result is a reference that both memorializes nineteenth-century collecting and provides tools still useful to curators, dealers, and scholars.

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CHAPTER I.

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It is right, first, to explain that in this dissertation we shall make constant use of two or three words borrowed from foreign languages; one is *bodega* or *bottega*[\[1\]](#), implying something between a workshop and an artist's studio[\[1q\]](#), which it would be difficult to express by a single English word: another is *fabrique*, meaning the private establishment of a master potter of that day, the idea of which cannot be so well conveyed by factory, pottery, or studio (itself an imported word), all of which are therein combined and modified.

The history of pottery and its manufacture is a subject of great extent; because from a very early period of human existence, known to us only by the tangible memorials of primitive inhabitants, the potter's art appears to have been practised. At first the vessels were of coarse clay, rude and sun-dried or ill-baked, and occasionally ornamented with concentric and transverse scratches; from which state they gradually developed to the exquisite forms and decoration of the Greek pottery; but it would seem that however universal the production of vessels of baked clay, the art of applying to them a vitreous covering or glaze was an invention which emanated from the east, from India or Egypt, Assyria or Babylon.

On this point Dr. Birch, in the introduction to his erudite work on ancient pottery, says: "The desire of rendering terra-cotta less porous, and of producing vessels capable of retaining liquids, gave rise to the covering of it with a

vitreous enamel or glaze. The invention of glass has hitherto been generally attributed to the Phœnicians; but opaque glasses or enamels as old as the eighteenth dynasty, and enamelled objects as early as the fourth, have been found in Egypt. The employment of copper to produce a brilliant blue coloured enamel was very early, both in Babylonia and Assyria; but the use of tin for a white enamel, as recently discovered in the enamelled bricks and vases of Babylonia and Assyria, anticipated, by many centuries, the re-discovery of that process in Europe in the fifteenth century, and shows the early application of metallic oxides. This invention apparently remained for many centuries a secret among the eastern nations only, enamelled terra-cotta and glass forming articles of commercial export from Egypt and Phœnicia to every part of the Mediterranean. Among the Egyptians and Assyrians enamelling was used more frequently than glazing, and their works are consequently a kind of fayence, consisting of a loose frit or body, to which an enamel adheres, after only a slight fusion. After the fall of the Roman empire the art of enamelling terra-cotta disappeared among the Arab and Moorish races, who had retained a traditional knowledge of the process. The application of a transparent vitreous coating or glaze over the entire surface, like the varnish of a picture, is also referable to a high antiquity, and was universally adopted, either to enhance the beauty of single colours or to promote the combination of many. Innumerable fragments and remains of glazed vases, fabricated by the Greeks and Romans, not only prove the early use of glazing, but also

exhibit in the present day many of the noblest efforts of the potter's art."

It is true that on the Greek, Etruscan, and Roman pottery a subdued and hardly apparent glazing was applied to the surface of the pieces, but it is so slight as to leave a barely appreciable effect upon the eye, beyond that which might be produced by a mechanical polish, and so thinly laid on as almost to defy attempts at proving its nature by chemical investigation; it is, however, supposed to have been produced by a dilute aluminous soda glass, without any trace of lead in its composition, the greater portion of which was absorbed into the substance of the piece, thereby increasing its hardness and leaving only a faint polish on the surface of the ware.

In Egypt and the east the use of a distinct glaze (*invetriatura* of the Italians), covering the otherwise more porous substance of the vessel, appears to have been known and to have arrived at great perfection at a very remote period. It was in fact a superior ware, equivalent to the porcelain of our days, and from the technical excellence of some of the smaller pieces has been frequently, but wrongly, so called.

It will perhaps be as well, before entering further into the consideration of the subject, to define and arrange the objects of our attention under general heads.

Pottery (*Fayence, Terraglia*), as distinct from porcelain, is formed of potter's clay mixed with marl of argillaceous and calcareous nature, and sand, variously proportioned, and may be classed under two divisions: Soft (*Fayence à pâte tendre*), and Hard (*Fayence à pâte dure*), according to the

nature of the composition or the degree of heat under which it has been fired in the kiln. What is known generally in England as earthenware is soft, while stone ware, queen's ware, &c. are hard. The characteristics of the soft wares are a paste, or body, which may be scratched with a knife or file, and fusibility, generally, at the heat of a porcelain furnace.

These soft wares may be again divided into four subdivisions: unglazed, lustrous, glazed, and enamelled. Among the three first of these subdivisions may be arranged almost all the ancient pottery of Egypt, Greece, Etruria, and Rome; as also the larger portion of that in general use among all nations during mediæval and modern times. We shall be occupied with the glazed and enamelled wares: the first of which may be again divided into siliceous or glass glazed, and plumbeous or lead glazed.

In these subdivisions the foundation is in all cases the same. The mixed clay or "paste" or "body" (varied in composition according to the nature of the glaze to be superimposed) is formed by the hand, or on the wheel, or impressed into moulds; then slowly dried and baked in a furnace or stove, after which, on cooling, it is in a state to receive the glaze. This is prepared by fusing sand or other siliceous material with potash or soda to form a translucent glass, the composition, in the main, of the glaze upon siliceous wares. The addition of a varying but considerable quantity of the oxide of lead, by which it is rendered more easily fusible but still translucent, constitutes the glaze of plumbeous wares: and the further addition of the oxide of tin produces an enamel of an opaque white of great purity,

which is the characteristic glazing of stanniferous or tin-glazed wares. In every case the vitreous substance is reduced to the finest powder by mechanical and other means, being milled with water to the consistency of cream; into this the dry and absorbent baked piece is dipped and withdrawn, leaving a coating of the material of the bath adhering to its surface. A second firing, when quite dry, fuses this coating into a glazed surface on the piece, rendering it lustrous and impermeable to liquids. The two former of these glazes may be variously coloured by the admixture of metallic oxides, as copper for green, iron for yellow, &c.; but they are nevertheless translucent, and show the natural colour of the baked clay beneath.

VITREOUS OR GLASS-GLAZED WARES.

The vitreous, silico-alkaline or glass-glazed wares, were of very ancient date and in all probability had their origin in the east, in Egypt, or India, or Phœnicia; indeed the discovery of glass, which has always been attributed to the latter country, would soon direct the potter's attention to a mode of covering his porous vessel of baked earth with a coating of the new material; but the ordinary baked clay would not take or hold the glaze, which rose in bubbles and scaled off, refusing to adhere to the surface, and it became necessary to form the pieces of a mixed material, consisting of much siliceous sand, some aluminous earth, and probably a small portion of alkali, thus rendering it of a nature approximating to that of the glaze, and to which the latter firmly adhered. In some instances, on the finer examples which may probably have been exposed to a higher temperature in the oven, the glaze and the body of the

piece have become so incorporated as to produce a semi-translucent substance, analogous to some artificial porcelains. In its nature this glaze is translucent, and accordingly we find that when ornamented with designs, they are executed directly on the "biscuit" or unglazed surface of the piece, which then receives its vitreous covering through which they are apparent. By means of an oxide of copper the exquisite turquoise blue of ancient Egypt, "scarcely rivalled after thirty centuries of human experience," was produced. The green colour was, perhaps, given by means of another oxide of the same metal; violet by manganese or gold, yellow by silver or perhaps by iron, and the rarer red perhaps by the protoxide of copper. We also find that bricks and vases of similar glazing, brought to its greatest perfection in Egypt, were made by the Babylonians and Assyrians.

Throughout Babylonia the sites of ancient buildings afford fragments of glazed pottery. The glaze of those brought from Borsippa by the abbé Beauchamp, in 1790, was analysed and found to contain neither the oxides of lead nor tin, but to be an alkaline silicate with alumina, coloured by metallic oxides. A more recent analysis of Assyrian examples shows that with a base of silicate of soda or soda glass and oxide of tin the opaque white has been produced, being the earliest recorded example of "enamelled" ware. A small quantity of oxide of lead was also found in the blue glaze on tiles from Babylonia. At Warka, probably the ancient Ur of the Chaldees, Mr. Loftus discovered numerous coffins or sarcophagi, piled one upon another to the height of forty-five feet, of peculiar form, and

made of terra-cotta glazed with a siliceous glaze of bluish-green colour. They are formed somewhat like a shoe, an opening being left at the upper and wider end for the insertion of the body, and closed by an oval lid which, as well as the upper part of the coffin, is ornamented with figures and plants in relief. They are supposed to be of the Sassanian period.

The metallic lustre in decoration was applied, apparently at an early time, to pottery glazed with a siliceous coating, and appears to have established itself in Persia. On specimens from Arabia it is also found, and its use in combination with this glaze may possibly have preceded the manufacture of lusted wares coated with the stanniferous enamel, by the eastern potters of the Balearic islands, Spain, and Sicily.

In northern India, at Sind, and in Persia, wares are made at the present day of precisely the same character as the ancient pottery under consideration. Pieces from the former locality, which were exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1871, are composed of a sandy argillaceous frit, ornamented with pattern in cobalt blue beneath a siliceous glaze. Indeed their agreement in technical character with some of the pottery of the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians, and with that produced in Syria and Persia during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, is most remarkable. Persia also now produces inferior wares of the same class, specimens of which, as well as some of those from India, are preserved in the South Kensington museum: the engraving on the opposite page represents a wall tile (no. 623) of the seventeenth century.

We thus see how widely spread, and at how early a period, the use of this most ancient mode of glazing was established and brought to perfection. It was the parent of all those wares now known as Persian, Damascus, Rhodian, or Lindus.

PLUMBEOUS, OR LEAD GLAZED WARES.

The silico-plumbeous or lead-glazed wares were for many ages and still are the most common, and, in Europe, the most widely spread class of pottery: indeed, throughout the northern and western countries lead, in combination with glass, seems to have



been the earliest and until the fifteenth century the only means known of glazing soft pottery[2q].

We have seen that a certain amount of lead has been found in some of the blue coloured glazes of Babylonia, and (says Dr. Percy) “probably employed as a flux;” if so, this might have been the spring of its general adoption for the purpose of producing a more easily fusible and therefore a more ready and more manageable coating; but in the east it