

X ACTAS DO
Congresso
Internacional
**A CERÂMICA MEDIEVAL
NO MEDITERRÂNEO**
SILVES 22 a 27.outubro'12



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**X CONGRESSO INTERNACIONAL A CERÂMICA MEDIEVAL NO MEDITERRÂNEO SILVES - MÉRTOLA, AUDITÓRIO DA FISSUL,
22 A 27 DE OUTUBRO DE 2012**
*10TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. SILVES & MÉRTOLA, 22-27 OCTOBER
2012*

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Não é bem como um texto escrito em belos caracteres góticos ou cúficos, contando a história de um milagre, registando um contrato encomendado pelo príncipe, ou denunciando a ameaça do reino vizinho. Não é como qualquer frase gravada na pedra ou pergaminho, que além de denunciar a sua origem de classe, porque necessariamente produzida no seio de uma elite, esconde sempre nas suas entrelinhas uma carga ideológica, quantas vezes indecifrável ou falaciosa. Ao contrário, os fragmentos de cerâmica arqueológica recolhidos numa camada estratigraficamente reconhecível, embora não pareça, são mais fiáveis, autorizando uma mais segura e escorreita informação histórica. Por vezes, quase sempre, são minúsculos ou mesmo insignificantes os fragmentos. Por vezes, quase sempre, nem sequer a forma é reconhecível e muito menos reconstituível. E no entanto a sua informação histórica é sempre preciosa. O simples perfil reclinado do lábio, a forma grácil de arquear a asa, aquela pincelada rápida de traço avermelhado ou a pequena mancha de esmalte melado são os indícios suficientes para reconstituir com verosimilhança a forma e a idade do jarro ou cântaro de água, e, com ele, alguns gestos de trabalho da camponesa que o usou e até, sem errar muito, o seu local de fabrico. Estes simples e informes fragmentos cerâmicos permitem aproximar-nos e mesmo compreender a história daqueles a quem nunca foi dado o direito de ter história, daqueles que nunca comandaram exércitos, que nunca decidiram da paz e da guerra, daqueles que nunca habitaram palácios ou castelos. À primeira vista a gramática ornamental destas bilhas e tigelas sistematiza línguas estranhas e aparentemente indecifráveis. E no entanto, os seus códigos, sem serem isotéricos, referem-se indirectamente a espaços culturais, a zonas de influência que ao longo dos séculos marcaram o Mediterrâneo, na sua fantástica diversidade. As referências mais antigas, ainda relacionadas com os entrançados romboidais da cestaria e da tecelagem, denunciam origens neolíticas e sobretudo permanências das sociedades nómadas dos tuaregues, rifenhos e pastores ibéricos. Na linguagem vegetalista com referências orientalizantes e sobretudo no que se refere à enorme e variada simbologia da Flor de Lotus de época califal, destaca-se, como é natural, a memória dos jardins e vergéis do Nilo, da Mesopotâmia e mesmo da Índia e da China. Nos encadeados de volutas de gavinhas com folhas de videira, sentimos ainda perene a longínqua referência das festas dionisíacas e báquicas da cultura greco-romana a que a Pérsia islamizada esbateu ou anulou o cacho de uva, transformando-o em inofensiva pinha. Esta linguagem cifrada, estas referências decorativas, são sinais de civilização, são marcas indelévels que identificam formas de pensar, zonas de fabrico, caminhos de intercâmbio, que permitem folhear com segurança as páginas da história.

O Presidente do Campo Arqueológico de Mértola
Cláudio Torres

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AS CERÂMICAS NO SEU CONTEXTO
POTTERY WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

THE SOUND OF SILENCE. SCRATCHED MARKS ON LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN POTTERY FROM NUNNERIES: PRACTICE AND SIGNIFICANCE

And the sign said, “The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls, and tenement halls and whisper the sounds of silence.”

*The Sound Of Silence
Simon ‘n’ Garfunkel*

Abstract: From the Council of Trent (1545-1563) scratched marks appear on tableware, especially from several female religious communities. They are elementary signs made by users on tableware and cooking containers. Few scholars have analyzed the problem, in particular focusing on the Modern era: signs are mostly interpreted as identity marks, related with forced nuns and enclosure, that characterized the Reform and the Counter Reformation. However, our paper concerns only specific practice: we analyse only scratching on individual items of tableware in the particular context, that is, the late medieval nunneries. Sample area is Venetian lagoon and Po valley between the end of the 13th and the 15th century. **This** is an attempt to underline differences between Medieval and Modern practices.

Sommario: A partire dal Concilio di Trento (1545-1563) la prassi di siglare i contenitori da mensa all'interno di contesti religiosi femminili italiani è strettamente legata alla personalizzazione degli oggetti, in risposta al desiderio di affermare la proprietà personale e dunque la propria individualità all'interno di comunità che l'autorità ecclesiastica, invece, voleva sempre più indifferenziate e in regime di comunione dei beni. Tuttavia il fenomeno di siglare a cotto i recipienti ceramici con segni di natura alfabetica o meno, realizzati al di fuori del contesto produttivo in modo non sistematico dai fruitori finali dei beni, appare diffuso in contesti monastici della laguna veneziana e dell'area padana già molto tempo prima. Abbiamo esempi significativi già dalla fine del XIII secolo, con un picco nel XIV e alcuni attardamenti nel pieno XV secolo. Ciò denota una prassi e un significato cronologicamente e culturalmente molto differenti da quanto avviene dalla seconda metà del XVI secolo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marks scratched on pottery are widespread in the nunneries of the Venetian lagoon and Po valley. The case studies we illustrate date from the end of 13th century to the end of the 15th century. We briefly analyse the occurrence of scratched marks on pottery from San Giacomo in Paludo, San Lorenzo di Ammiana (Venice), Santa Perpetua (Faenza), San Paolo (Modena), Santa Chiara (Forlì) and Sant'Antonio in Polesine (Ferrara); these last two being examined through published data and not seeing the actual objects. We would like also to contextualize these findings with those known outside the sample area (Fig. 1).

Scratched marks on pottery, dated to the second half of the 16th century and onwards, have been linked with reactions that closely followed the Council of Trent (1545-1563), such as the increasing cost of the dowry when entering a nunnery, and increasing seclusion (Gelichi, Librenti 1998; Gelichi, Librenti 2001; Guarnieri 2006). Scratching was a typical act made by nuns themselves. These marks were symbols of personal property that nuns made on undifferentiated objects that were very common inside the nunnery, and apparently for use by the whole community.

In this period, the spread of scratched marks has been linked to the introduction of table settings made to order and decorated with inscriptions of the name of the appointed



Fig.1 Localization of Italian religious communities mentioned in the paper.

Saint or his/her symbols, or a very typical representation of his/her life.

In the same period, vessels marked for use in specific rooms, such as the dining room or the infirmary, appear. Moreover, there are some examples of tableware made to order for a

particular nun, depicted with her given name or the family name, or the coat of arms of her family. These last decorations were, as mentioned, made to order by artisans. Thus, we can suppose that a single nun acquired her own table setting, demonstrating a strong desire to customize everyday objects (Gelichi 1998; Gelichi 2001; Librenti 1998).

In these modern contexts, scratched marks, although made quickly and in an impromptu manner, were very similar to made-to-order decorations. They were, ultimately, a demonstration of the will to express individuality in a community where religious authority imposed uniformity on nuns, and where all lived in communion with one another. This is a practice chronologically and socially well defined, incidental to the rules of the Council of Trent that radically changed the everyday life of religious people.

When scratched marks were identified in the earliest contexts, mostly attributable to the 15th century (Francovich 1982; Nepoti, Guarnieri 2006; Baldassarri *et alii* 2012, pp. 504-504), they were seen as early manifestations of the same need for affirmation of individuality. A similar extension of interpretation was also made for some findings of the Late Medieval Period, although observations on the cultural distance that separated the 13th and 14th century monastic life from that of the modern era were stated. In Sant'Antonio in Polesine, marks made on the foot of jugs have been read as units of measurement, associated with a medicinal function (Nepoti 2006).

In San Giacomo in Paludo vessels with scratched marks are numerous, and are similar to vessels found in other Venetian nunneries. Chronology (between the 13th and 14th centuries), amount and some characteristics could no longer relegate this phenomenon to a mere anticipation of a later practice (Gelichi 2004; Gelichi *et alii* 2004, pp. 171-177; Baldassarri *et alii* 2012, pp. 504-504).

Scratched marks on pottery, alphabetical letters or not, made in an unsystematic way after the manufacturing process by end users of goods, appeared in nunneries throughout the lagoon of Venice and the Po valley. All are dated back long before the 16th century. Scratched marks on pottery from six different nunneries into the Po valley have been analyzed, dating from the end of 13th century to the end of the 15th century. These occurrences indicate a practice and significance chronologically and culturally very different from what had happened during the Counter-Reformation.

L.S.

2. SCRATCHED MARKS IN THE SAMPLE AREA

All the vessels with scratched marks that we analyzed belonged only to nunneries, except for Santa Perpetua in Faenza. This community was supposed in the past to have been a monastery, but recently new research based on written sources indicated that it was a double community: males and females were living in a single building, although the rooms of the two groups were apart and rigidly separated.

Thus, we may suggest that pottery with scratched marks found in Faenza has to be assigned to the female part of the community (Liverani 1960; Gelichi 1986; Ferri *et alii* 2012).

All finds belonged to nunneries of a very high, high, or at least substantial standard of living. It has been not possible to determine whether some religious orders scratched better or more than others. However, scratching appears to be linked with individual pots. All nuns were quite rich, and belonged to the leisured or upper classes. Written sources do not suggest that there were social tensions inside the community.

Nuns disposed of scratched vessels as they did with normal household waste. They have been found in pits, old sewage systems, foundations, and so on. We can gather that vessels were not 'special', and that they were thrown out as common rubbish. When most of the waste deposit was available, and therefore countable, we noticed that vessels with scratched marks were between 5% and 18% of the total of pottery.

Marks were made with various tools. In San Giacomo in Paludo and in Santa Chiara in Forlì nuns merely scratched (Fig. 2), although using different tools, in other sites they also drilled. In Santa Perpetua in Faenza marks are very tidy (Fig. 3). However, it is clear that hard surfaces and

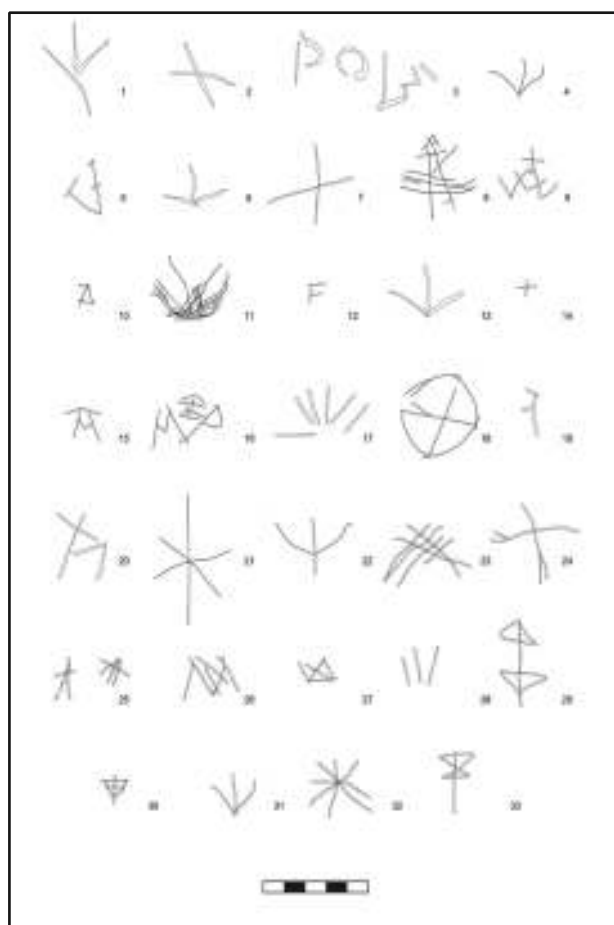


Fig.2 Scratched marks on pottery from San Giacomo in Paludo (Venice, Italy).



Fig.3 Scratched marks on “maiolica arcaica” jugs from San Perpetua in Faenza (Venice, Italy).

inadequate instruments made the execution of scratches very difficult. Even in the same context, it is evident that writing skills varied, and often results were quite poor. Even when the represented object was the same, marks were made by different people in different ways; sometimes roughly or carelessly.

Marks made on tableware were meant for a single user (bowls). They are especially located in parts of the container out of plain sight when in use (i.e. under the foot). Santa Perpetua in Faenza is an exception: here marks were made on the lower part of the foot of jugs. However jugs, because of the shape of the spout, were not put away upside-down, as nuns probably did with bowls. Thus, marks on jugs could still be considered as being on a secondary part of the vessels. In San Giacomo in Paludo and in Santa Perpetua a low percentage of marks were made on kitchen ware. Both instances (because of frame and position, and types of marks) could indicate an unusual method of identification, perhaps connected with the practical needs of the kitchen.

The types of scratched marks vary greatly, although it is possible to see some similarities between different contexts. Crosses are used in nearly every case, comprising between 9 and 15% of the total. Likewise, notches under the foot occur in almost all nunneries, scratched from one to six times. They can represent the total number of scratched marks, just a small percentage, or they can be completely absent. Finally, complex symbols, significantly similar in different contexts, and letters, are quite common. Letters could be arranged as a single letter, a pair, or a group of three.

M.F.

3. OUTSIDE THE PO VALLEY

Scratched marks prior to the 15th century have been documented in other contexts outside the Po Valley and in the international arena. In Italy two nunneries stand out: San Matteo in Pisa (Baldassarri *et alii* 2012) and Santa Maria di Bano in Tagliolo Monferrato, Alessandria (Giannichedda 2012). Vessels of the former (founded in the 12th century and abolished in the 19th, and converted into a prison) have been correlated to the whole eight centuries of the presence of nuns. Marks were absent in the oldest pottery, and occur from the 14th century onwards. Marks of the first half of 14th century are considered as an ancient practice, and not necessarily connected with the nunnery and its inhabitants; while in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, the appearance of letters, and then of full names of the nuns, has been interpreted as an expression of the will of affirmation of their own identity, and as an appropriation of common materials, similarly to the interpretation of this phenomenon in the Counter-Reformation (Baldassarri *et alii* 2012, pp. 504-504).

Santa Maria di Bano was a Cistercian monastery from the early years of the 13th century that went into a slow and inexorable decline towards the end of the Late Medieval Period, until its divestiture in the second half of the 15th century (Polonio 2012; Piana Toniolo 2012). Marks, interpreted as indications of ownership because of the recurrence of similar signs, have been recognized in about 40 vessels, mainly tableware for individual use. The presence of scratched marks on unglazed ceramics and on a spindle whorl are exceptional occurrences. Marks were made mostly on the base, or close to it on the outer wall. There are letters or pairs of letters and other symbols, some of them being very similar to other contexts analyzed: there are the letters ‘B’ and ‘R’ and a symbol similar to a stylized tree (Giannichedda *et alii* 2012). In Genoa the only mark documented is on a bowl similar to the Venetian glazed ware, recovered in an accumulation of waste dated to the first half of the 13th century (Cabona *et alii* 1986). It is not possible to connect the vessel to a specific type of consumer. The mark consists of a vertical line with three pairs of oblique lines radiating from it, perhaps a phytomorphic representation, similar to some specimens found in the Venetian lagoon and with a mark from Santa Maria di Bano. Other vessels with marks have been documented in Padua (Cozza 1988) and Ferrara (Cornelio Cassai 1992), but only on a single container in each context.

L.S.

4. ABROAD

Outside national borders, signs have been recognized on pottery of the mid-13th and 14th centuries retrieved from the ruins of a Dominican convent at Aix-en-Provence (Richarté 2009). Marks were on tableware, depicting monograms or coats of arms. They have been interpreted as a signal of property, with the community that used these vessels having a high standard of living and being able to

recruit women from aristocratic families. In the Netherlands and Germany, the research focused on the last decades of the Medieval Period, that is, from the end of the 15th century, and the Modern Age (Thier 1995, De Groote 2005). The only reported examples relevant to our study are five cooking ware containers from the Cistercian monastery of Herkenrode, Belgium, dating back to the 13th century (De Groote 2005, p. 35).

Outside the monastic world, scratched marks were found even in the Late Medieval Novy Svet shipwreck, on tableware supplied to the crew (Morozova 2012).

Finally, one of the best-known and most extensive repertoires of scratched marks is undoubtedly that of Corinth (Morgan 1942; Riavez 2007).

Marks were made on tableware, for individual and collective consumption, produced between the 11th and 13th centuries. Morgan interpreted them as marks of potters who produced the vessels, or of the merchants who distributed them. The presence of scratched marks even on imported specimens, for example on 'proto-maioliche' of Italian origin, however, seems to question the link between this phenomenon and the production (Morgan 1942, n°17-23; Gelichi 2013). In addition, it seems unlikely that the artisan marked the vessel by painstakingly scratching it after firing. Finally, if these signs played a role in the production or distribution chain, comparable to that of the stamps on bricks or vessels from the Roman Period, their occurrence would have been widespread. Conversely, in Corinth as in other contexts, their presence is widespread, but nevertheless episodic.

Moreover, Morgan considered as a single class scratched marks made after firing the vessel and those painted and in some cases glazed, but being in a hidden spot of the ceramic object, that is, on the foot or the lower surface. This is the only common feature of these two types of signs. These considerations allow us to relate the materials of Corinth with a ceramic bowl found at the Benedictine monastery of San Silvestro in Nonantola (Modena). The vessel has been identified as the typology 'Incised sgraffitos medallion style', produced in Corinth (Gelichi 2013). Both the vessel and the wall in which it was found date to the 12th century (Dall'Armi 2013; Gelichi 2013). Obvious signs of wear and tear have been recognized under the foot, indicating that the object had been well used before being placed in the wall of the apse (Gelichi 2013). Because of the place of origin and the presence of the scratched mark, this bowl resembles items reported by Morgan.

Unfortunately, in the current state of documentation, the relationship between the signs attested in the two shores of the Mediterranean is just assumed. It is impossible to say whether the practice in Corinth was characteristic of particular social groups, since it was not possible to determine in which area of the city marked objects were recovered, and then connect them to their end users. In Italy, on the other hand, in the 12th century marking was very episodic.

Later statements are from the second half of the 13th-14th centuries, when this phenomenon was fairly widespread, especially in women's religious communities, and developed particularly early in the Veneto region. In this same period, trade between the two regions multiplied, and recoveries of Byzantine pottery in the lagoon increase, as well as those of Venetian pottery in Corinth (Riavez 2012). However, the hypothesis that the Italian phenomenon could be considered within the dynamics of cultural exchanges between the two Mediterranean regions remains a conjecture.

M.F.

5. THE 14TH CENTURY

Scratched marks are not attested only on pottery objects; however, in the archaeological record, the number of items in other materials, such as wood or metal, is so restricted that it is not possible to verify a similar scratching practice. Scratched wooden containers had been recovered in other countries, for instance in the medieval hospital of St. Mary in London (Thomas 2004, p. 37), and they have been explained as a form of customisation. However, wooden artifacts in northern Italy are quite rare, and mainly from very specific areas, such as Ferrara. There, the characteristics of the ground have preserved many organic materials, but wooden table sets are still unusual finds. Among them, it is possible to count only two marked wooden bowls: one from a 14th century waste dump in Piazza Castello (Gelichi 1992a, p. 86 e p. 88, fig. 15, n°3) and the other, dated back to the 15th century, from rubbish dumped in underground brick structure in the aristocratic residence of Palazzo Paradiso (Felloni *et alii* 1985, p. 218). In any case, they were not scratched. The marks were brands on the external surface of the ends: a circle (or the letter O), and a letter A. This technique suggests that they were not marks made by users; on the contrary, they were probably made during the production or trade of these items.

This paper does not aim to analyse any particular marking procedure, neither recognizing a common attitude behind any strategy, adopted by users, in distinguishing everyday objects. On the contrary, the research attempts to understand the meaning of a specific practice, – scratching individual items of tableware – in a specific context, that is, the late medieval nunnery, where this attitude seems to have found its most typical expression.

Not all the medieval female religious communities scratched their table sets; furthermore, when scratched marks were made, they did not occur on all containers. The key to understand the meaning of the phenomenon could be understood in this dichotomy.

In nearly all case studies, scratched marks were extremely abstract and cursive, as if they had been roughly made. There is also a clear relationship between scratched marks and the individual's use of dishes. Jugs from Santa Perpetua in Faenza are the only exception: signs were drawn with care and competence, and there is no apparent connection between objects and individual use.

Synthesizing, it is possible to affirm that, in general, scratched marks were the expression of the need to distinguish some containers from others (not marked), according to their function.

Single elements of table sets, even if of the same ceramic type and colour, have variations in shape, some significantly different. It is plausible that they were not bought in large stocks produced by a single workshop: on the contrary, they were probably acquired by nunneries in small batches or, in some cases, one by one. The scratched marks as property symbol is not the only possible interpretation, or the most obvious: they did not necessary distinguish a specific container from other identical ones. Furthermore, recurring marks and their variety do not seem unequivocally attached to names of nuns, even when the identity of the members of a community is known from written sources.

Considering just the alphabetical scope and the complex symbols easy to understand, a religious vocabulary seems to have been adopted. The monogram MA, a symbol of the Virgin par excellence (Capelli 1967, p. 211), recurs more than once, the letter F could be an abbreviation for Fides, Christian Faith, and the letter B for Beatus or Beata (Capelli 1967, pp. 30-31). Some complex symbols are evocative of the sacred sphere, for instance, the Calvary is clearly recognisable. Going further in the interpretation, other signs could be read as allusions to names or attributes of saints to whom religious communities were dedicated. In San Lorenzo of Ammiana the acronym SLA and an interlaced element, perhaps a grill, have been found (fig. 4). Moreover, in San Giacomo in Paludo there is a sign not attested elsewhere, composed of three converging lines, perhaps a sort of stylization of Saint James' clam shell (Ferri 2010a; Ferri 2010b; Moine 2014).

Who could have been able to decipher these marks?

Alphabetical elements indicate different authors with varied expertise: some letters and monograms are perfectly drawn, others were written with difficulty: signs appear inverted or mirror-image, revealing an inexperienced, or even extemporized, writer (Clanchy 1993, p. 132). Therefore, it is reasonable to wonder if the meaning of these letters was really understood, or if they were duplicated as merely graphical elements. During the middle ages, the ability to write short notes on ephemeral and makeshift materials, such as wood or wax, as well as the capability of deciphering single letters or isolated words were more common than it is generally held (Clanchy 1993, pp. 118-121). Many texts, for example maxims, prayers, or names, were quite widespread on the instrumentum domesticum, on dress accessories or textiles; moreover their meaning were generally understood by those who used them, even if not very literate (Clanchy 1993, 124; Jourdan 1995). Certainly, single words, viewed as symbols, were recognised, linked to a specific sound, and understood in their social and religious meanings. In this manner, the role of scratched alphabetical elements is not so far from that of mere symbols (Cardona 1981, pp. 37-48;

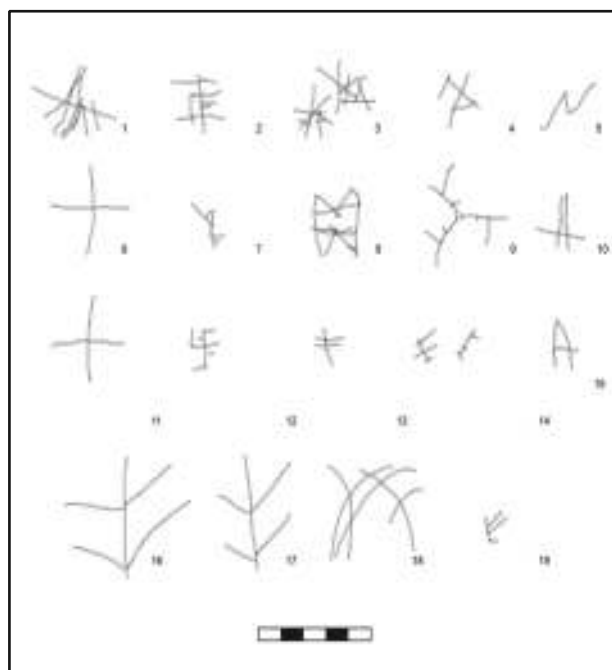


Fig.4 Scratched marks on pottery from San Lorenzo in Ammiana (Venice, Italy).

Cardona 1982; Bartoli Langeli 1995). Moreover, letters and short texts played a significant part in many ritual, medical, and religious performances (Jolly 2002; Peters 2002; Skemer 2006; Gilchrist 2008; Barroca 2011). In substance, it is possible to claim that large part of the medieval population was quite familiar with letters, at least with their symbolic value and their connection with material culture.

Similar or identical scratched marks in distant locations suggest that a shared and well-known vocabulary was also adopted and probably understood outside religious communities. For example, many graffiti bear a resemblance to decorations on everyday items then widely used in our sample area. Moreover, they were depicted on some pottery types, such as 'San Bartolo', directly by potters (Ferri 2010a, tav. II). Except for the capacity measure on a jug from Ferrara, which could be related to pharmacopeia or spice conservation, there is no clear connection between the shape and size of containers and the scratched marks; for instance, simple letters decoration on white 'maiolica arcaica' (Gelichi 1992b), trading marks on various items or surfaces (Mazzucato 1988, pp. 42-44; Fazzini 2004), or property marks of private residences. The latter have significant similarities with our scratched marks. Moreover, they have been well documented in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods in Friuli (Italy), where they have clearly been identified as family symbols (Isabella 1995; Zug Tucci 1992).

Cooking containers, usually large enough to suggest collective food preparation, are poorly documented in our records, and display very different marks from tableware. It is not hard to suppose a practical function concerning cookery. Indeed, medieval cooking containers were not impermeable,

and marks could have distinguished pots for different gastronomic preparations, perhaps with incompatible tastes. Conversely, the religious meaning seems the most coherent interpretation of signs on tableware.

C.M.

6. READING THE CONTEXT

Recently, scholars have underlined the fact that many features of everyday medieval life were ritualized. That is to say, specific actions were performed and considered to be effective and causative. Thus, practices, today interpreted as merely superstitious or meaningless, were held to be true and efficient in the specific social context in which they were employed (Pecci 2009). For instance, it is possible to mention formulae connected to food processing and consumption, or the habit of blessing food before eating. These everyday rituals could be clearly understood only in the perspective of sympathetic magic, which was considered to have an ontological value (Gilchrist 2012, p. 12). Ritualized actions were perceived as being governed by a specific rationality and perfectly able to attain concrete goals (Gilchrist 2012, pp. 10-14; Kieckhefer 1990; Fanger 1998; Gilchrist 2008). During the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age, what we can define as magic, tolerated as a curative operation or condemned, always implied religious elements. Therefore, actions, to be effective, had to incorporate the religious nature of reality (Jolly 2002, p. 25). Furthermore, regarding protection, it was well known that spiritual or immaterial characteristics were transmitted through physical contact. In our case, the quality expressed by the symbol moved to the container, from the container to the food, and then to the consumer (Woolgar 2006; Gilchrist 2008). Many cures which, as well as meals, were mainly prepared by women, worked in the same way (Augenti, Gilchrist 2011). From this point of view, scratched marks could be interpreted more as apotropaic practices directed to an individual, rather than as an expression of a relationship between a specific bowl and a specific person. The two cooking pots from Santa Perpetua, exceptionally small and decorated with scratched marks similar to the tableware, supports this interpretation. In fact, their small size suggests that they were not employed for cooking communal meals, although it is possible that they were reserved for particular preparations (Grassi 2004, pp. 70-73).

To summarize, people who used the tableware, irrespective of the original decoration, felt the need to distinguish some bowls from others, with made-up, but well known, signs, probably with a religious meaning. This practice could have been related to informal aspects of religiosity and spirituality, maybe intended to identify some containers, perhaps used in a specific period of the year, during which diet played an important ritual role, such as holy feasts or fasts, or to distinguish a particular food. Although it is still not possible to exclude memorial practices completely, the practice could have commemorated defunct members of the community, remembered not for their personal identity, but for a particular form of devotion (Librenti 2006, p. 235; Sweetingburgh 2010).

A relationship between scratched marks and food could contribute to explain their presence, especially in female religious communities. Monastic rules, regardless of gender, prescribed periodic fasts and discouraged the consumption of some foods, such as meat, considered liable to distance the soul from God. In general, asceticism was strictly connected to the ability of controlling starvation (Montanari 1988; Montanari 1997). Moreover, the relationship between women and food (prepared, distributed, donated, or refused) was stronger, since the symbolic meaning of nourishment encompassed one of the main feminine social functions: feeding, helping the weak, looking after children (Muzzarelli, Tarozzi 2003; Walker Bynum 1992). During Late Medieval Period, female mysticism developed a growing emphasis on carnality and physicality (Walker Bynum 1992, p. 66). While a near total rejection of food was an extreme and privileged form of contemplation, practised only by extraordinary and charismatic women, the so-called anorexic saints, ordinary nuns followed more moderate diets. However, food processing, cooking, and consumption played a significant role in female spirituality, evoking activities which characterized women inside and outside the cloister (Bell 1987; Walker Bynum 1992, p. 48).

M.F.

7. TOWARDS THE 16TH CENTURY

During the 15th century archaeological evidence of scratched marks on tableware decreased drastically. Some isolated cases have been identified, for example the maiolica bowls discovered in the area of the Malatestiana library in Cesena (*Archeologia di un percorso* 2006, p. 111). Nevertheless, the only consistent contexts inside the studied area can be attributed once again to female religious communities: Sant'Antonio in Polesine (Guarnieri 2006) in Ferrara and San Paolo in Modena.

In the vessels with scratched marks found in an underground room datable to the 15th century in the Benedictine monastery of Sant'Antonio in Polesine in Ferrara, the scratched marks were made on the base or under the feet. Almost all the finds could be attributed to the shape of the bowl and to a size compatible with individual use. If, from the point of view of the use to which these vessels were destined, no substantial differences can be found from the finds recorded in previous centuries, the situation changes radically when the subject represented by the scratched marks is analyzed. Less than 30% of the marks represent an image: a cross or a complex symbol, while the large majority of scratched marks were letters. There are single words, monograms, and a large number of single letters, above all T, A, and R, which occur very frequently. The comparison with the decoration on the tableware used in the monastery allows us to identify their meaning with reasonable certainty. Most of the abbreviations refer to the title of the monastery: T instead of tau, the symbol of Sant'Antonio, and A for the initial of his name. Others designate rooms dedicated to specific uses, such as the refectory (R), the infirmary (F), or the rota. One of the most evident characteristics is the repetition of the single scratches, which allows us to identify well-defined groups in the range of scratched pottery. The second significant element is that

most of the scratched marks, and almost all of those whose meaning is comprehensible, display a type of personalization also present on objects made especially for the monastery (Guarnieri *et alii* 2006, p. 139). On the imported vessels, or on those of exceptionally high quality which were kept separate from the usual supplies of the religious community, there is no personalization (Guarnieri *et alii* 2006, p. 141). Furthermore, it must be pointed out that, at least in the waste dump, the complex symbols can be mainly attributed to the sign of the cross (Guarnieri *et alii* 2006, fig. 11, n°51, p. 167; fig. 13, n°81, p. 169). It is therefore rather difficult to assume the existence of a collection of dishes marked to indicate individual ownership, or generically for warding off evil. Finally, in the finds from the Modern Age, the evidence of the scratched marks seem to be limited to those marked with the initial or acronym of the name of the religious institute, and those which corresponded to a specific room inside the monastic buildings (Librenti, Vallini 2006).

San Paolo in Modena (still unpublished) is a good example of scratching practices at the turn of the Counter-Reformation. Recent excavations have recovered two contexts in which the community disposed of household waste, the first dated to the end of the 15th century, the second to the end of 16th century. In the earlier waste dump about three-quarters of the containers were tableware, and at least 6% were made to order. Scratched marks occur on only 3% of the artifacts, almost exclusively tableware. Marks do not show great care, or wide variability. They are mainly crosses: this particular instance deviates significantly from the 13th and 14th century case studies, and could be assigned to an episodic phenomenon, perhaps dictated by practical needs.

The second context, dated to the late 16th century, shows a very different situation. Firstly, the practice of commissioning tableware had been reduced to an exceptional occurrence (only two vessels). Pottery with scratched marks increased to more than 30%, of which a good number (12%) were glazed kitchen vessel. Moreover, most of the marks were single letters or pairs of letters referring to the title of the nunnery (64%) or to the refectory (9%).

Marks seem to counterbalance the lack of customized containers, especially those related to the emblem of the nunnery, which at this time was quite common. Therefore, this context was fully incorporated into the Counter-Reformation background. In this period, indeed, the marks stressed the need to affirm collective or individual ownership of everyday objects. It was a symptom of social distress: a reaction to rules imposed by the Church hierarchy, or the result of social tensions inside the community.

L.S.

8. COOKING AND EATING

A further significant difference in the 16th century context can also be found in the number of kitchen vessels with scratched marks. If in the 15th century the glazed cooking pots of the monastery of San Paolo in Modena only

occasionally had scratched marks, different from those found on tableware, those of the following century were mostly marked, in most cases with the letter P, which was also found on the dishware used at the table. This is the only example among the cases analyzed in which it is possible to recognize a correspondence between the marks and the vessels for use in the preparation and consumption of food. A correspondence of this type was observed in a nunnery from a completely different period (Richarté 2009). Another similar case, dated to the beginning of the 16th century, was identified in Flanders (De Groote 2005).

In order to gain a better understanding of the processes by which this custom was introduced, we should briefly consider the kitchenware as a whole used by the community in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Like almost all archaeological sites, the dig in San Paolo did not uncover vessels in metal, which was widely used between the end of the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, but which was often recycled, and thus is almost always absent from waste deposits.

The 15th century kitchen in San Paolo shows a considerable number of glazed cooking pots items, most of which are small, and which make up more than half of the pottery cooking vessels. The number of objects of limited dimensions, presumably suitable for the preparation of small portions, increases if we also consider some larger examples made in coarse ware pottery. Furthermore, at least a third of the glazed vessels were small, suitable for the preparation of one or two portions. There were signs or scratched marks on only one of these vessels.

In the more recent context glazed cooking pots were slightly larger than required for one person, but clearly insufficient for whole community. Nearly all glazed cooking pots were scratched, usually with the letter P, frequently attested also on late 16th tableware of the nuns. The capacity of 15th century cooking pots suggests that some nuns benefited from customized meals, perhaps prepared for medical or disciplinary reasons, or for an out-and-out form of privilege, maybe related to those familiar groups, which had so deeply influenced the social composition of nunneries before the Counter-Reformation (Zarri 2000, pp. 89-100).

The cooking implements of San Paolo after the Council of Trent appear to be not very different from those of the 15th century. Scratched marks on San Paolo pottery do not suggest a relation between objects and individuals: on the contrary the repetition of few signs, mainly the letter P, seems only to distinguish some containers from others without any other characterisation. However, scratched marks on pottery within Counter-Reformation nunneries seem to symbolize a form of opposition, collective or individual, to norms which strictly forbade any sort of personalisation.

C.M.

9. BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

In spite of the fact that there are only two contexts from the 15th century which make it possible to analyze this practice in detail, we are able to point out that the practice tended to evolve noticeably with respect to the Medieval Period, although within different time frames.

It can generally be stated that while during the 13th and 14th centuries these marks probably corresponded to particular characteristics relative to rituals, commemorations of events and social relations; during the 15th century, and even more so in the 16th century, they expressed a concept of individual or collective ownership, relative to a person, a room, or an entire community. This hypothesis is suggested mainly by the change in the marks themselves, with a transformation from a religious inspiration, either to a conspicuous decrease in their number, as for example in San Paolo, or to an extreme standardization of the graphemes. They are mostly reduced to alphabetical abbreviations referring to the nunnery itself, by means of an allusion to its name or to one of its rooms.

This kind of change did not seem to have occurred everywhere at the same time, and did not appear exclusively in the scratched marks. Monastic communities began to equip themselves with personalized tableware, and the need to mark everyday objects spread. This is probably a more general phenomenon, which involved society as a whole: to mark or take possession of an object by means of a sign, because it was a possession, because it was made by someone, or because it was received as a gift, is a custom which became increasingly common in the 15th and 16th centuries (see Gilchrist 2012, p. 127; Isabella 1995; Zug Tucci 1982; Vaschetti 1986; Vaschetti 2006).

If, as has been hypothesized, the custom of scratching marks represented a form of non-codified ritual practices, we must take into consideration the profound change in the attitude towards 'magic' and its perception between the end of the Medieval Period and the beginning of the Modern Age. Even though it remained closely connected to religion, 'magic' changed from being considered a natural fact, due to the reciprocal interaction of different material and spiritual elements, which included medical practices, religious rites and superstitious acts, to be considered a specific discipline with negative connotations which could be learned in textbooks (Wade 1998). In other words, all those customs which today would be defined as superstitious, and which called for divine intervention in order to achieve results, were no longer considered rational and normal, but particularly unacceptable, because they were the result of a pact with a demonic element. Whoever carried them out, or asked others to perform them, faced condemnation by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Women, in particular, were recognized as those who carried out these activities. This distinction was probably not far from the truth, given that most of the rituals under censure were connected to curative or charitable intentions, which were traditionally in the area of female competency.

Before the Council of Trent, the custom of scratching marks on the pottery used in nunneries was not a statement of individual ownership. Ownership, at least in this phase, was shown in other forms, connected to the possession of exotic objects which were particularly luxurious or decorated with the emblems of the owner's family. When users marked artifacts, they did this impersonally for example with simple crosses, or with indications that the object was the property of a religious institute, or destined for a particular use. In the latter case a particular type of personalization which was already present on artifacts made on commission, reappeared, in a sense underlining it. The presence of scratched marks on 15th century tableware has also been found outside the area studied: already appearing on the tableware from the nunnery of Santa Marta in Siena (Francovich 1982, pp. 276-322).

M.F.

10. AFTER THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

In the 15th century, it was still a collective custom, because rather than indicating many distinct personalities in relation to the number of nuns in the community, it seems substantially to indicate large groups; with or without marks, or with the emblem of the institution or a particular room. It cannot be totally excluded that the root of these scratched marks may derive from necessity, such as the allocation of objects to a particular room, making it possible to replace them in the correct position after use. Regarding this, we cannot ignore that it was in the 15th century that numerous groups of nuns, generally from the same family unit, began to form inside the communities in nunneries (Zarri 2000, pp. 89-100). Each of these groups could create their own space inside the institution, for example shared cells, where meals could be eaten, together with all the members of this group, but isolated from the communal dimension which was imposed by the rules (Zarri 2000, pp. 89-100). The dividing line between this custom and the clearly individual practice which led nuns to introduce a large number of personalized objects, and also to engrave their own names on cooking vessels, only became evident after the Council of Trent.

In the territory of modern Italy, the scratched marks of groups of letters, initials, monograms or entire words in which it is possible to recognize some personal names, appeared, again in female religious communities, only during the late 16th century, when we see, for example, the finds from San Giovanni in Persiceto (Gelichi 1986), the sporadic evidence of San Paolo in Modena, or the earlier specimens discovered at the Conservatory of Santa Caterina della Rosa in Rome (Tesei, Zanini 1985, pp. 436-437). During the following century, similar marks were reproduced more and more frequently (Gelichi, Librenti 1998; pp. 83-109; Tesei, Zanini 1985; Gelichi, Librenti 2001, p. 18 e p. 21).

In the more recent context (US 325), glazed cooking pots were a little less common than coarse ware. Furthermore,

except for rare examples, they were slightly larger than required for one person, but clearly insufficient for whole community (nevertheless, it is not possible to ignore the absence of metal cooking pots in excavations, Cianciosi, Sabbionesi 2011). Nearly all glazed cooking pots were scratched, usually with letter P, frequently attested on the late 16th tableware of the nuns. It is likely that, at least a part of meals were not prepared for the whole community, but it was probably cooked in different quantities and qualities for small groups of religious women (see, but in a different century, Grassi 2004). The capacity of 15th century cooking utensils suggests that some nuns benefited from customized meals, perhaps prepared for medical or disciplinary reasons, or for an out-and-out form of privilege, maybe related with those familiar groups which had so deeply influenced the social composition of nunneries before the Counter-Reformation (Zarri 2000, pp. 89-100).

The cooking tools of San Paolo after the Council of Trent appear to be not very different from those of the 15th century. Indeed, large coarse ware suitable for communal meals were associated with relatively small cooking pots, among which there were few single-serving meal containers.

Scratched marks on San Paolo pottery do not suggest a relation between objects and individual persons: on the contrary, the repetition of a few signs, mainly the letter P, seems only to distinguish some containers from others, without any other characterization. There is still no explanation for this practice; maybe some items of pottery were reserved for nuns, and others for lay-sisters, or perhaps they were the prerogative of particular groups in the cloister. However, scratched marks on pottery within Counter Reformation nunneries seem to advocate a form of opposition, collective or individual, to norms which strictly forbade any sort of personalization.

In conclusion, our contribution is an attempt at reading the complex dialogue between material culture and social groups through a specific attitude in a specific kind of community. Evaluating numerous cultural and historic variables helped us to define several problems, and probably to amplify the sound of silence hidden in everyday objects. Our interpretation remains a proposal and not a statement. In our opinion, the path to the true meaning of things always depends on understanding the background and circumstances.

C.M.

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