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REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
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Castle of Monreale

Patrimonio culturale
SARDEGNA Virtual Archaeology



■ Archaic Pisan majolica jug (mid-fourteenth century)

The artefact, recovered during the excavation campaign of 1992 in the so-called "butto" (dump) of the castle of Monreale, is characterised by a pear-shaped body, a three-lobed rim and a ribbon handle (fig. 1).

It belongs to a widespread formal typology, characterised by a decoration with geometric and phytomorphic elements in copper green, enclosed in frames outlined in manganese brown and distributed on the anterior wall of the belly and neck of the vase.

The glazing in the lower part of the piece is missing (fig. 2). Other fragments of brims, walls and handles of jugs in archaic majolica have also been recovered from the same environment, which can all be dated around the middle of the fourteenth century.



Fig. 1 - Archaic Pisan majolica jug from the castle of Monreale (photo by R.A.S.).



Fig. 2 - Front view of the archaic Pisan majolica jug from the castle of Monreale (photo by R.A.S.).

Archaic Pisan majolica was produced from the second / third decade of the thirteenth century until the second half of the fifteenth century. Its abundant presence in Sardinia demonstrates the commercial and political influence of Pisa, in particular from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries, before the Aragonese conquest carried out between 1323 and 1326 (figs. 3-4).



Fig. 3 - National Art Gallery of Cagliari, jug from the so-called "Pula Foundation" of Pisa-Liguria production (from <http://www.pinacoteca.cagliari.beniculturali.it/imagePreview.php?id=411>).

Three production stages have been identified: from 1210/1230 to 1280 (initial production, with the probable presence of Iberian workers in Pisa); 1280-1350 (expansion of the morphological and decorative range); 1350-1478 (greater variety in the morphological range, gradual decline of the aesthetic quality).

The artefacts are mostly ceramic tableware and include both closed forms (jugs) and open ones (bowls).

After being made at the lathe and dried, the vases were subjected to a first firing in an oxidizing environment (to give a rosy colour to the mixture), thus obtaining the "bisque", that is, the ceramic body without any coating. A layer of stanniferous enamel, generally white, was then spread over the bisque (outside the vase if it was a closed shape, inside if it was an open shape) and a transparent lead layer made the less visible parts water-proof.

After drying the enamel, the decorations were made solely by using green, obtained with a mixture of copper oxide, and black/brown, obtained with manganese oxide. The vase then underwent a second firing to set the colours of the decoration.



Fig. 4 - Archaic Pisan majolica jugs found in the church of San Domenico in Cagliari (from PORCELLA, SECCI 2012, fig. 3, p. 514).

■ Credits

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