

The Exhibition of Abruzzese Art at Chieti **By Ettore Modigliani**

MANY pages of this periodical would be required for a complete account, illustrated by the most important and characteristic objects, of this most interesting exhibition, which, together with that of Italo-Byzantine art at Grotto ferrata and that of the art of the Marshes at Macerata, has reawakened the attention of all students, collectors and lovers of ancient Italian art. But, since space in the pages of THE CONNOISSEUR is too valuable, I have to confine myself to some summary remarks to give at least some idea of the importance of this exhibition which, bringing to the light so many characteristic examples of the ancient Abruzzese arts and crafts which had been little known to the student, has raised the veil which covered one of the aspects of the multiform Italian soul, and has rendered a real service to the study of art.

Only a few works of Abruzzese sculpture and painting were available for the exhibition. Among the former is the beautiful statue of St. Sebastian, dated 1478, the work of Silvestro di Giacomo da Sulmona; and among the latter two pictures: one, the *Marriage of St. Catherine*, with the signature, *Mactheus pictor de Campl* [o], a hitherto entirely unknown Abruzzese painter; the other a fifteenth century *Madonna and Child*, with the signature of Nicola da Guardia-grele. This Nicola is probably the famous Abruzzese goldsmith, who lived at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and many of whose

goldsmith's works can be admired at the Chieti show. This picture—the only one which bears the master's name—thus affords evidence that he also achieved distinction as a painter.

The shortcomings of the paintings and sculptures are made up for by the other sections, and above all by the goldsmiths' work. From the smallest villages, from the most humble market-places near Sulmona, Aquila, Teramo and Chieti, from churches and convents, from municipal and private collections, have been sent processional crosses and monstrances, reliquaries and pastoral staves, chalices and patens in such numbers and such diverse styles, that it is safe to say a similar collection can never again be brought together. Here we have seen the strange "Crosses of the

Dead" of the Sulmona School, which are not worked with the graving-tool, but sunk with the die; the beautiful silver crosses of the sixteenth century, richly wrought and bordered in brass, which have been sent from the province of Aquila; the silver arms of S. Flaviano di Giulianova, dated 1394, by Bartolomeo da Teramo; the wonderful pastoral staff of Atri, probably French work of the fifteenth century; the cross of Collar-mele, with the Orsini arms, and another signed *Amicus Antoni notarii Amici de Sulmone* (fifteenth century). But above all we have admired the splendour of the works of Nicola di Andrea da Guardia-grele, that is to say, the silver crosses of



CHASED SILVER CROSS, BY NICOLA DA GUARDIAGRELE
SIGNED AND DATED MCCCCXXII. S. MARIA MAGGIORE, LANCIANO

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ENAMELLED SILVER MONSTRANCE
BY NICOLA DA GUARDIAGRELE
SIGNED AND DATED MCCCCXIII.
S. FRANCO, FRANCAVILLA

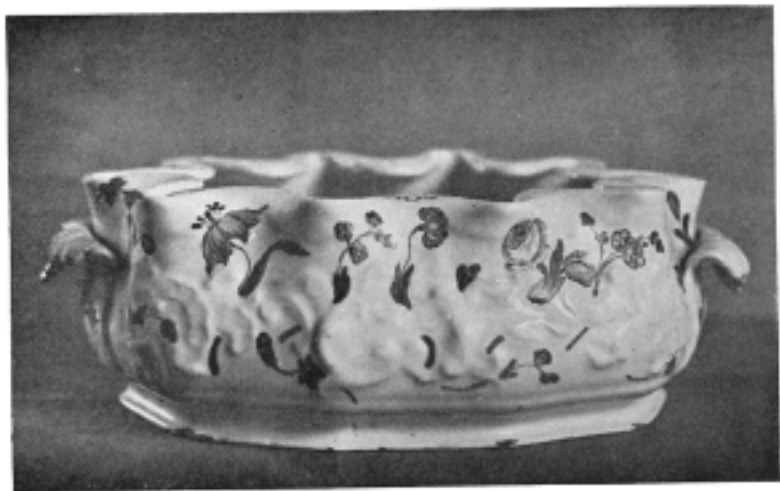
Lanciano (1422), of Guardiagrele (1431), of Aquila (1434), and of Monticchio (1436); and the silver monstrances of Francavilla (1413) and of Atessa (1418), all decorated with exquisite translucent enamel and bearing the signature of the famous goldsmith, who was a follower of Ghiberti, but whose work nevertheless bears the imprint of a strong individuality and reflects the artistic

objects, from the examples of the oldest Faenza type of the end of the fifteenth century to the first specimens of real Abruzzese work of the seventeenth century; from the works of the phalanx of the great majolica workers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Grue, Gentili, the Cappelletti, etc., to those of Fuina, with whose name, in the last years of the eighteenth century, the glorious life of Abruzzese majolica comes to an end. The greatest triumphs are achieved by the productions of Castelli, a little village at the foot of the Gran Sasso d'Italia, which can boast of the oldest, the most active and most perfect majolica works. But notable examples are also shown by the old factories of Bussi, Torre de' Passeri, and Palena. Abruzzese majolica ware, having been imported into Naples, infused life, so to speak, into Neapolitan ceramics, and was in its turn influenced by the latter. The Neapolitan specimens are therefore of peculiar interest, as showing this reciprocal influence.

Passing reference must be made to the coins and seals, keys and ironwork, wood-inlay and costumes. Among the latter is a most beautiful lady's dress, from the Albanese colony in Villabaddessa. A few words also must be said of the carpet and lace section, which is beyond doubt the most characteristic of the entire exhibition, and has proved of especial interest to the feminine visitors. Just as Castelli was the cradle of Abruzzese majolica, so Pescocostanzo, a very small village nestling against the mountains near Sulmona, is the place where the carpet and lace industries flourished most, and are still flourishing. At the exhibition are some beautiful examples of seventeenth and eighteenth century work. Only one sixteenth century carpet is

traditions of his own district. It is not too much to say that his intensity of dramatic feeling, and the solemn grandeur of line of some of his figures seems to predict already the terrible spirit of Michael Angelo.

The majolica section is equally important as regards copiousness and beauty of the examples shown. There are five rooms filled with plates, albarelli, inkstands, jardinières, and kindred



JARDINIÈRE BY GESUALDO FUINA EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MAJOLICA



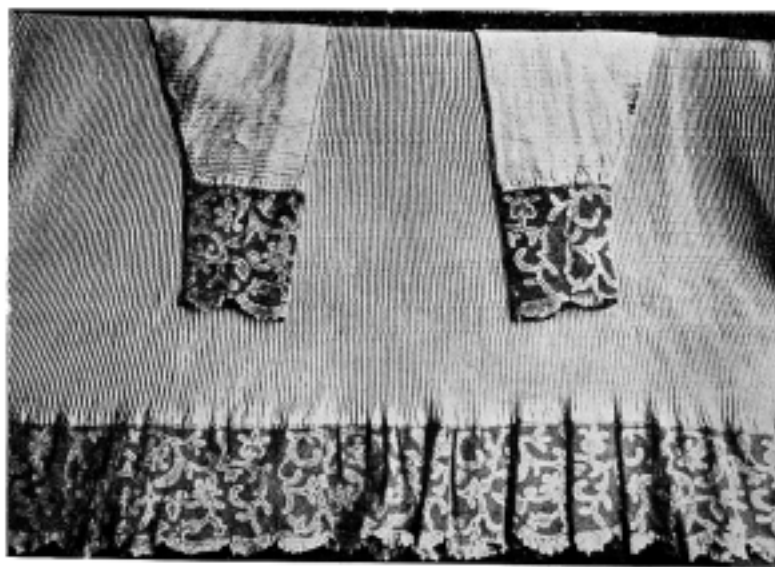
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MAJOLICA PLATES BY CARLO ANTONIO GRUE



SILK AND WOOL EMBROIDERIES, PESCOSTANZO
SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES



WOOLLEN CARPET, REPRESENTING THE SIEGE OF TROY
PESCOCOSTANZO, SIXTEENTH CENTURY



TUCKED SURPLICE, WITH BORDER AND CUFFS OF PILLOW LACE
AQUILA, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

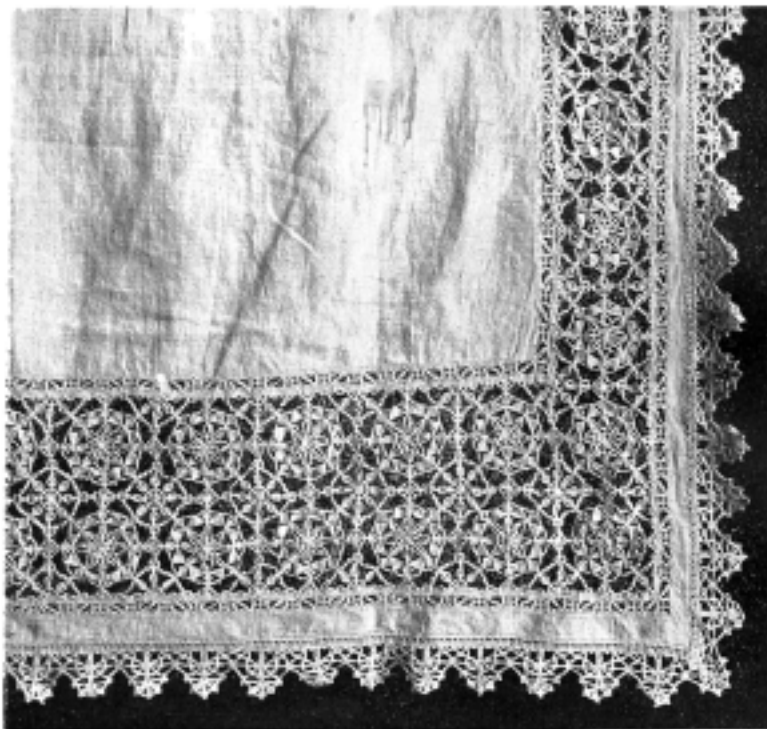


TABLE CLOTH WITH RETICILLA BORDER, AQUILA, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

shown, a very curious woollen fabric, with a representation of the siege of Troy executed in a kind of embroidery in coloured materials. All the other carpets are decorated with motifs, which often recall those of Byzantine and Arabic art, which is hardly surprising, if one remembers that the coasts of this country were in constant communication with those of the East.

There are innumerable specimens of lace, especially of needle point, among which we notice some exceedingly clever and original combinations, especially some very fine reticilla borders, in which the linen ground of the design is removed and the parts are held together by a network of thread. The opposite method is followed in some other original needlework shown here, worked in coloured silk and wool, the design being given by the colour of the ground, whilst the needlework is used for all the parts which do not belong to the design. Beside the needle point laces, *punto a reticilla*, *punto rialtato*, *punto di Milano*, *punto in aria*, etc., we must not forget the pillow lace, in the making of which Aquila fights for supremacy with modest little Pescocostanzo, and of this lace we are able to reproduce a wonderful piece, in imitation of the old examples, made for the Queen widow, for whom over 2,000 bobbins are busy at work. Thus, in the Abruzzi district the arts of embroidery

and lace-making are to-day assiduously cultivated, together with the art of majolica. To-day, as in the past, whilst the men are attending to the hard labour of the field, the mothers and sisters, tottering old women and girls scarcely more than children, are busy with the gentle work of the needle and bobbin. From these humble cottages, and wrought by expert fingers, issue miracles of fine work and good taste, which help to adorn the ball dress of the Society lady as well as the coarse linen chemise of the Abruzzi peasant bride. And the poor women of the Abruzzi continue to transmit uninterruptedly, in accordance with tradition, from mother to daughter, those forms, motifs and systems and their good taste, just as language, instincts, sentiments, energy and the diseases of the blood are transmitted.



PILLOW LACE EXECUTED AT AQUILA FOR QUEEN MARGHERITA