

ITALIAN MAIOLICA

FROM THE
ARTHUR M. SACKLER
COLLECTIONS

THE FINE ARTS MUSEUMS
OF SAN FRANCISCO

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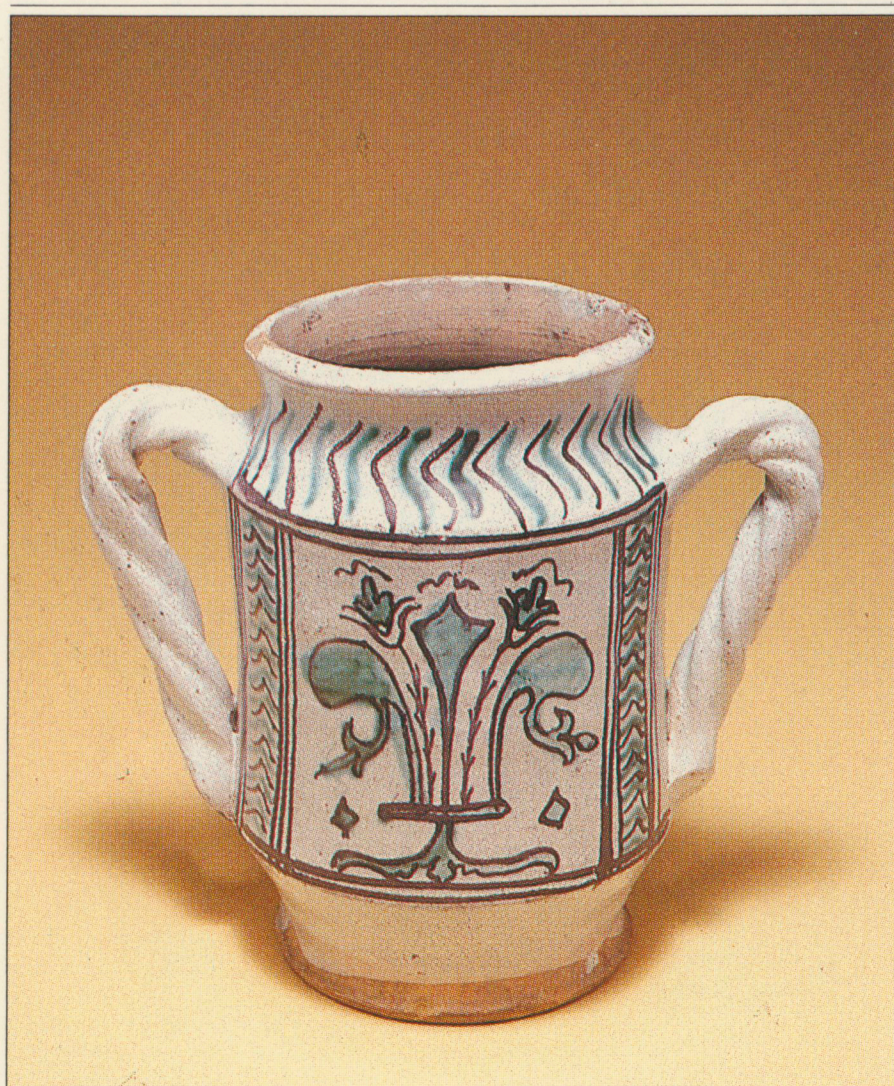


THE EXHIBITION includes over one hundred Italian tin-glazed, polychromed earthenwares dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. It features the brilliantly colored examples that were produced when maiolica reached the height of aesthetic quality during the Renaissance in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

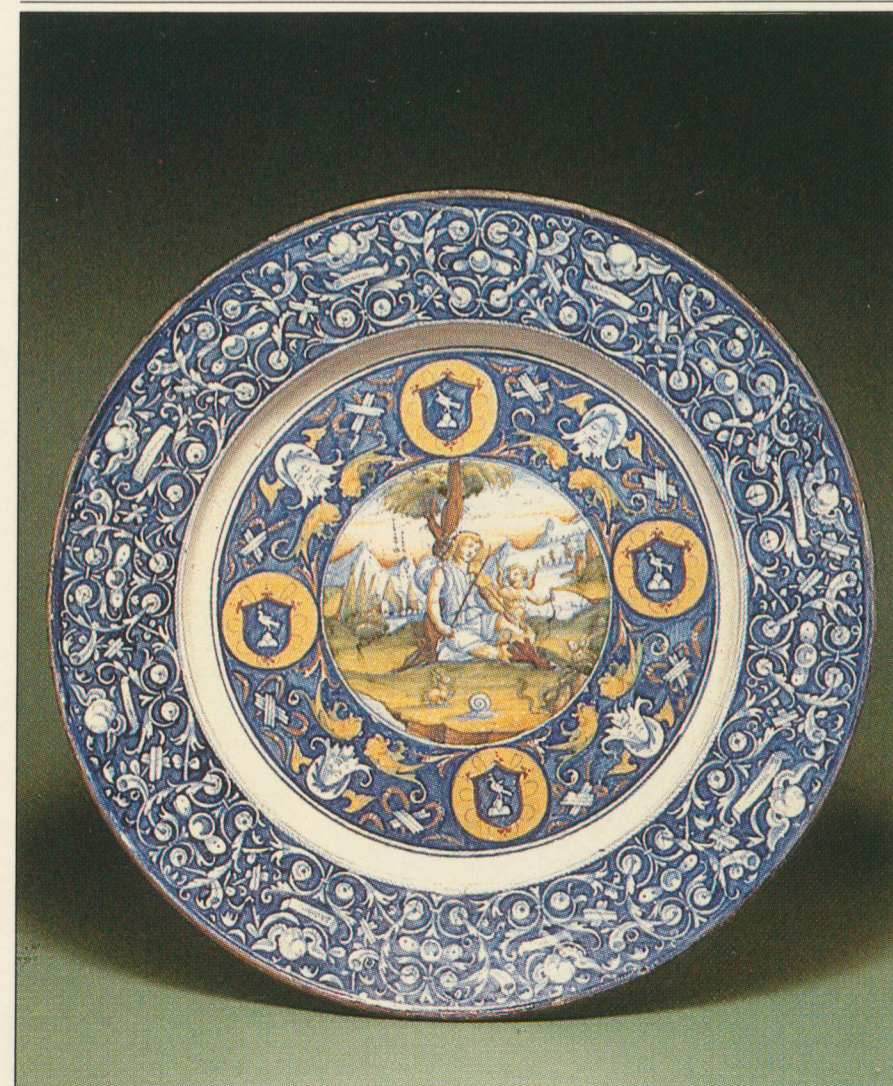
The technique of manufacturing tin-glazed ceramics was probably introduced into Italy in the eleventh or twelfth centuries by Islamic potters who had settled in Sicily and the southern part of the Italian peninsula. Middle Eastern Islamic potters had developed a method of coating bisque-fired, porous clay bodies with tin ash suspended in lead glaze, attempting to imitate the fine white clay bodies of Chinese porcelainous stoneware. This process created a velvety, absorbent, milky white surface that could be decorated with polychrome designs after drying. A second firing fused tin glaze and decoration to an even, glossy surface, locking the brilliant colors into the glaze. It was impossible to retouch designs painted on the absorbent surface; nor was it possible to see the actual colors before they were fired. The maiolica painter learned to render brushwork rapidly with skill and confidence. A third firing in a reduction atmosphere (more carbon, less oxygen), following the application of metallic oxides of silver or copper, produced iridescent lustre glazes imitating shiny Islamic metalwork surfaces.

Ceramic workshops throughout the Italian peninsula eventually produced their own distinct versions of tin-glazed wares. Islamic tradition, with some technical innovations, was adapted to their indigenous medieval pottery traditions. Italian potters in the early fifteenth century also were imitating the more sophisticated Hispano-Moresque tin-glazed wares, primarily those with lustre decoration, of Valencia (Manises), Spain, imported into Italy via the Spanish island of Majorca (nos. 1 and 2). The lustre-decorated imports flowing through Majorca, transit point and headquarters for trading vessels traveling between Spanish and Italian ports, may be the source of the term *maiolica*. The term may also derive from the Spanish expression for lustre ware, *obra de málequa*. Whatever its derivation, the term originally denoted wares decorated with metallic lustre glazes, but its sense later broadened to include all Italian tin-glazed earthenware. *Faïence* in French and *delftware* in English refer to the same ceramic substance.

Deruta in Umbria was probably the first center to produce lustre decoration in Italy near the beginning of the sixteenth century. Yellow in varying hues was its characteristic lustre color (nos. 39, 40, 41, 44 and 45). The lustre technique spread to Gubbio, also in Umbria, where a ruby lustre color was developed (nos. 46-55). Both centers produced molded wares with relieved surfaces to show off the lustre's brilliant iridescent sheen (nos. 54 and 55).



9.
ALBARELLO
(drug pot)
Tin-glazed earthenware
Florentine zone,
15th century
Height 8¼ in. (20.6 cm)
Obverse: decorated with
a fleur-de-lis;
Reverse: undeciphered
monogram in
mirror image
Accession no. 79.5.2



19.
PIATTO DA POMPA
(display plate)
Orpheus Charming
the Animals
Tin-glazed earthenware
Faenza, circa 1530-1535
Diameter 17 in. (43.2 cm)
Four medallions on
the inner border
of the rim include
the coat of arms
of Falconi, a family
of Fermo, Parma
and Rome.
Accession no. 79.5.20

The transformation of materials by fire is part of the appeal of all ceramics, but the obliteration of the manufacturing process in maiolica's transformation must have appealed especially to the Renaissance mentality. Indeed, the "concealment of the art" characteristic of ceramics was more fully in accord than painting with some Renaissance ideals of art.

As with other Renaissance decorative arts, maiolica was acquired by ecclesiastical patrons and aristocratic families in Italy — such as the Medici of Florence, the Orsini of Rome, the Estense of Ferrara — and in other parts of Europe. Its use was both functional and ceremonial. Bowls, dishes, plates and wine coolers were used at table, but maiolica gained new significance as luxury ware for decoration, display and as gifts given for commemorative occasions.

Other types of ornamental maiolica, utilitarian in function, were produced in great quantities to furnish the large sets of elaborately decorated and labeled drug containers commissioned by monastic pharmacies (nos. 32, 57, 107, 109 and 110). Inscribed *albarelli* (drug jars) reveal names of medicinal remedies and sweet concoctions supplied by Renaissance apothecaries.

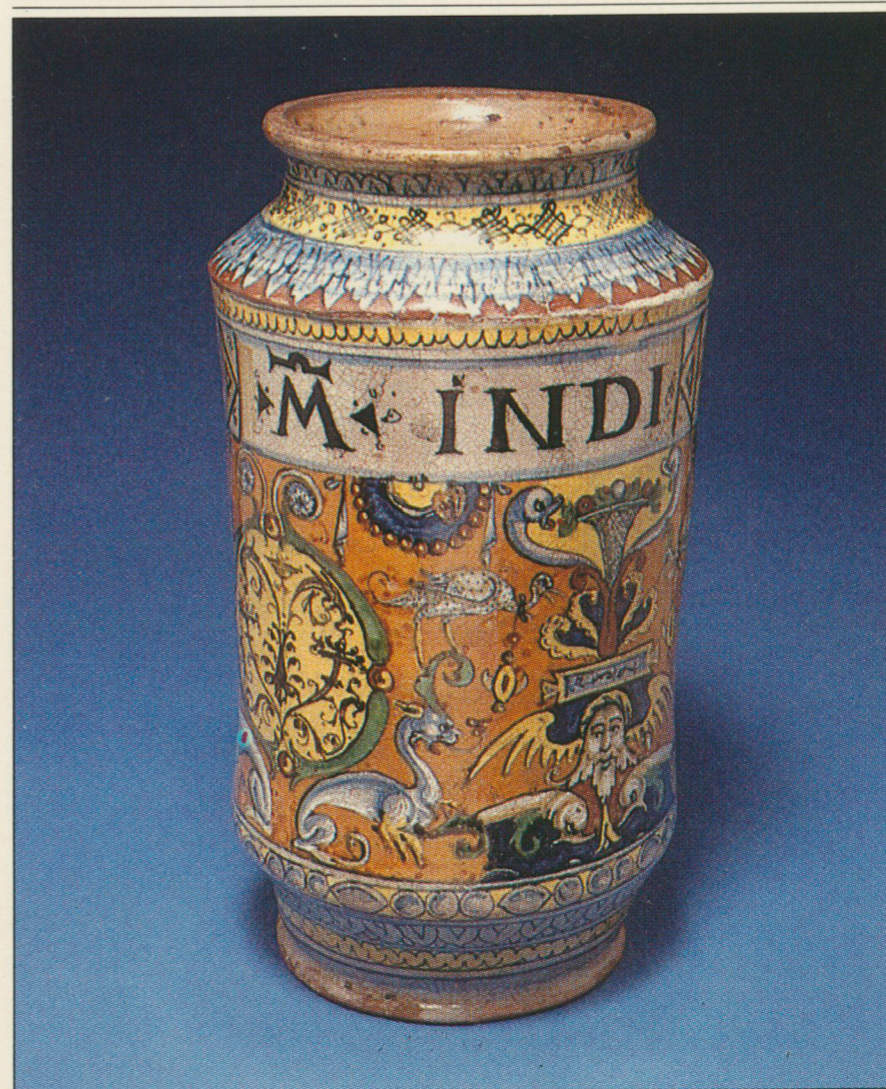
Maiolica achieved its finest expression in the development of *istoriato* ware, ceramics painted with complex narrative scenes. The ceramic form often became little more than a vehicle or canvas for ceramic painting, a carrier of

elevating themes or an object of virtue. Subjects were derived from Greek and Roman mythology, the Bible, ancient and contemporary history, literature and allegory. Several *istoriato* plates and dishes in the exhibition illustrate popular episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Daphne, fleeing from Apollo, transformed into a laurel tree (nos. 69, 81 and 91); the Rape of Europa (no. 46); Actaeon transformed into a deer by Diana (no. 70); the beginning of the story of Callisto's eventual transformation into a bear (no. 85); and the contest between the Muses and the Pierides that transformed the latter into magpies (no. 84). Others represent compositions or figures derived from paintings by major Renaissance artists such as Perugino, Pinturicchio, Raphael, Giulio Romano and Titian, or from etchings after their works by engravers such as Marcantonio Raimondi and his Roman school (no. 68).

By the sixteenth century, following the development of printing, the maiolica painter's decorative repertory increased considerably as illustrated books and engravings of ornamental motifs, available for the first time, were published specifically for decorative designers. The visible evidence of the world of classical antiquity, however — tombs, villas and palaces, and their pagan cupids, satyrs, sphinxes, chimeras and grotesques — was the main inspiration for Renaissance designers. Maiolica painters often combined several elements from among various aesthetic influences: from the East, through Venice and her



39.
PIATTO DA POMPA
Profile Portrait
of a Roman Poet (?)
Tin-glazed earthenware
Deruta, circa 1515-1530
Diameter 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.
(45.08 cm)
Accession no. 82.3.8



32.
ALBARELLO
Tin-glazed earthenware
Siena, circa 1500-1510
Height 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (29.2 cm)
Inscribed: M INDI
Accession no. 82.8.20

Islamic metalworkers, arabesque designs characterized by formalized leaves and branches continuously interlacing; from the ancient world around the Mediterranean, ornament such as acanthus foliage and palmettes; from ancient Rome, military trophies often combined incongruously with Christian themes.

It is sometimes difficult to identify the wares of different centers of maiolica production because contemporary influences affected them all and because maiolica painters often moved around. Nevertheless, maiolica vessels inscribed with the name of a *bottega* (workshop) located in a specific center, or with a phrase such as *fatto in Pesaro* (made in Pesaro) are the basis for grouping similar works around that center. If a date of manufacture appears on a work, it also may be used to date unmarked wares of similar design. Only a small portion of Italian maiolica produced in the sixteenth century carried signatures or monograms of the craftsmen responsible for their potting or glaze painting. None, however, exist in the Sackler collection. Many of the Sackler vessels are attributed to known maiolica painters because of their similar brushwork and, in some cases, the similarity of handwriting found in their inscriptions with that of other signed pieces (no. 82).

The objects in the exhibition are divided into groups that essentially follow traditional attributions to specific centers. Trace element analyses of clays have been used in an attempt to confirm or deny those attributions, as have thermoluminescence analyses of clay samples, assuring the authenticity and general dating of the maiolica.

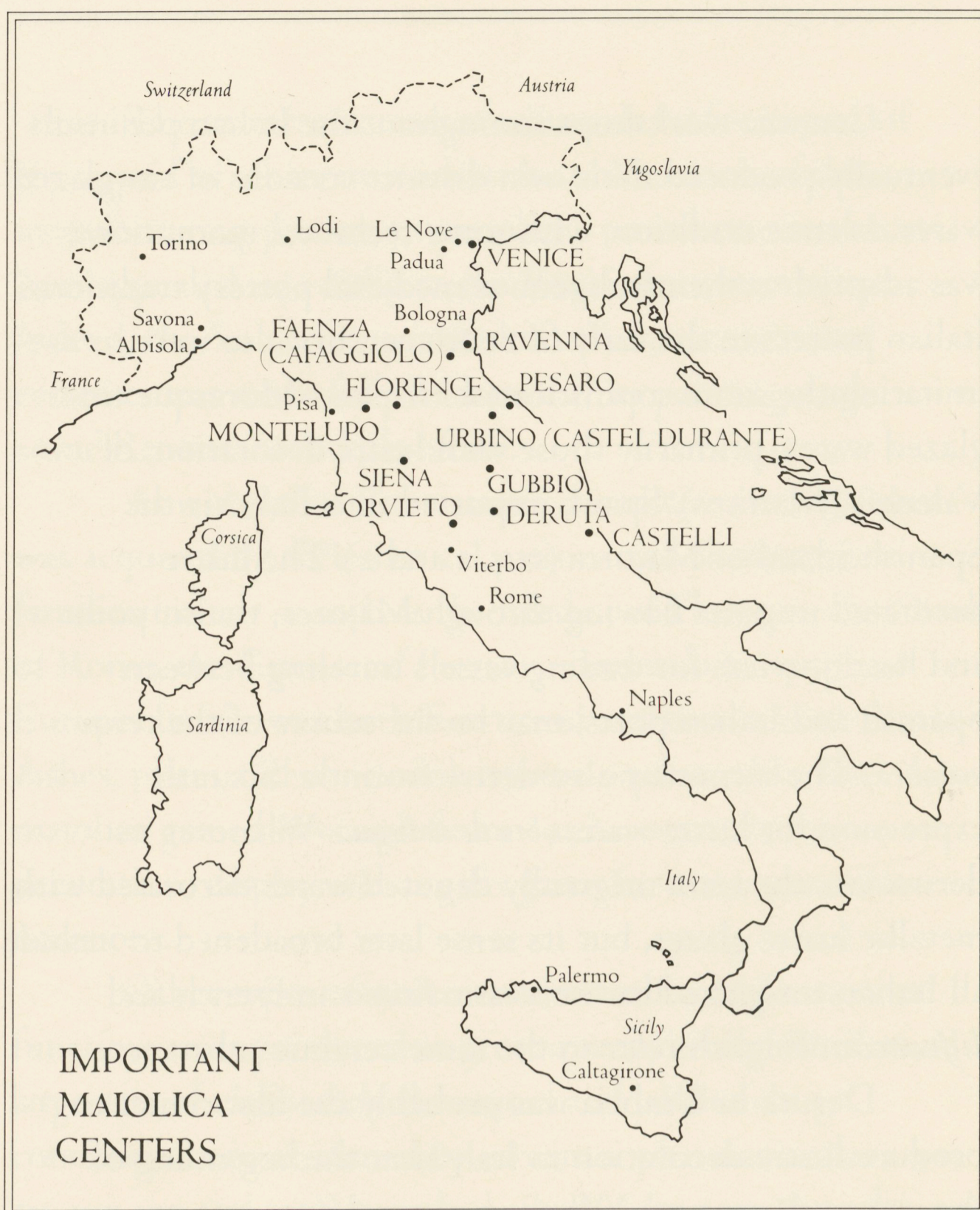
Tuscan potteries in and around Florence and Faenza workshops in the Emilia Romagna were important centers of maiolica production by the last quarter of the fifteenth century. At the turn of the sixteenth century there were others at Montelupo and Cafaggiolo, near Florence, and at Siena. Also at that time potteries at Deruta and Gubbio became famous for their ceramics with metallic lustre glazes. During the 1520s, workshops in the Duchy of Urbino — in Castel Durante, Urbino and Pesaro — led in the production of *istoriato* ware. Venice was another important maiolica center whose workshops supplied customers throughout Europe. Not all of the maiolica centers are represented in the Sackler collection, although many of their names are on the adjacent map. Capitalized names refer to those centers that we believe produced the maiolica in this exhibition.



47.
TONDINO
 (dish)
 "Cardinal's Hat"
 form with the
 Rape of Europa and
 Cadmus Led to Thebes
 Tin-glazed earthenware
 with lustre highlights
 over the glaze
 Workshop of Maestro
 Giorgio Andreoli
 Gubbio, circa 1525
 Diameter 10³/₈ in.
 (25.8 cm)
 Accession no. 78.2.8



59.
TAZZA
 (amatorial cup)
 Tin-glazed earthenware
 Probably Castel
 Durante, 1547
 Diameter 8³/₄ in.
 (22.2 cm)
 Inscribed and dated
 on the banderole:
Madalena Diva 1547
 Accession no. 78.2.18



68.

PIATTO DA POMPA

Scene of The Abduction of Helen, after an etching by
Marco Dente da Ravenna

Tin-glazed earthenware

By Nicolò da Urbino

Urbino, circa 1530-1535

Diameter 20³/₈ in. (51.1 cm)

Accession no. 78.2.20

Cover
Illustration

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