On the origin of compendiario majolica coming from excavations in Amsterdam

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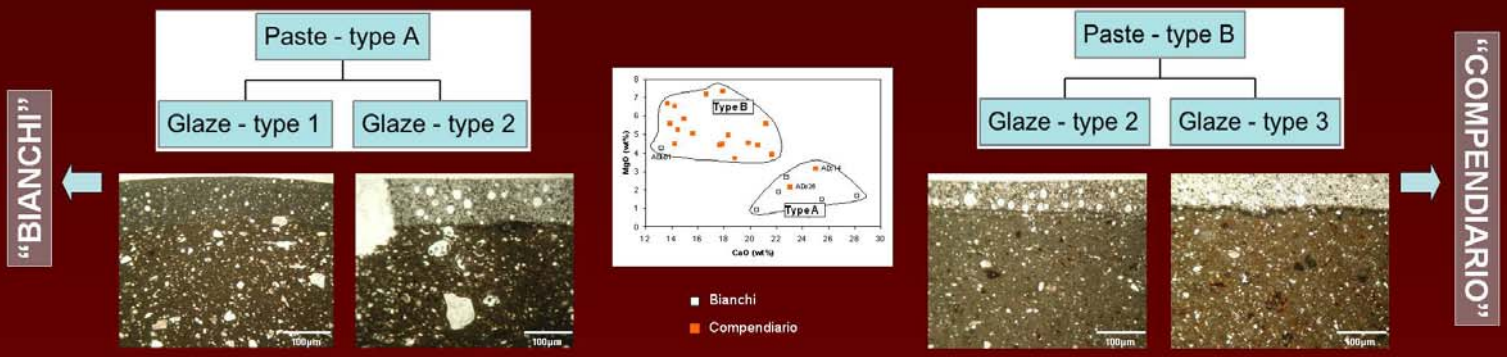
BACKGROUND

Archaeological excavations in Amsterdam by the Office of Monuments and Archaeology (BMA) over the past 40 years yielded series of 17th century faience ceramics. Apart from local Dutch products the Amsterdam archaeological record also contained Italian products, mainly from Liguria and Tuscany. Besides, there were found tin-glazed ceramics in the so-called compendiario style as well as completely white wares. These have been attributed to the production workshops in Faenza, but for the majority of the compendiario finds and white wares this attribution seems incorrect according to some archaeological deductions.
The identification of imported ceramics from the Mediterranean was an important issue in the archaeological analysis of the role of Amsterdam as a centre in an expanding maritime network in the 17th century. Comparative stylistic research within the framework of a master thesis at the University of Amsterdam raised questions on the validity of these identifications. There were indications for diverse production centres in Italy and even of production of Italian style ceramics outside Italy. Therefore verification of origin on the basis of archaeometric research of the pastes and glazes was opportune.

PREVIOUS PHASE (2006-2007)

A first step of the described project was focused on the study of twenty-five representative fragments of imported *bianchi/compendiario* majolica found between the many sherds of Dutch tin-glazed ceramics in archaeological excavations in the centre of Amsterdam. Except for one sherd, which is a fragment of a vase on a pedestal, all the other samples belong to open shapes, mostly plates and bowls. They are completely white or polychrome (yellow, orange and blue) decorated fragments in compendiario style, consisting of different kinds of garlands around a scene usually with a putto figure; they sometimes present "*baccellate*" or "*traforate*" shapes.



CURRENT PHASE (2008-2009)

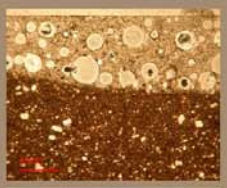
1° STEP: NEW CHARACTERIZATION


SAMPLES FROM FAENZA

Twenty-four majolica fragments have been chosen for a comparative study.

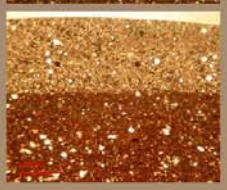
PASTES

- Homogeneous composition
- Carbonatic paste (18% CaO e 4% MgO)
- Amount of silice around 50-56% SiO_2
- Amount of iron around 6 % Fe_2O_3



COATINGS

- Homogeneous composition
- SiO_2/PbO 2-2.5:1 (51-55% SiO_2 and 21-25% PbO
- Amount of alcali arounf 5% K_2O+Na_2O
- Whitening power given by tin bioxide (7% SnO_2)
- It can be evidenced a difference in the presence or absence of bubbles.



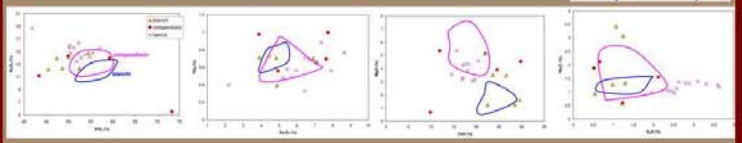
SAMPLES FROM AMSTERDAM

Ten more samples have been selected and analyzed by SEM-EDS and thin sections to verify the previous data. The six *bianchi* fragments and the four *compendiario* ones are not well distinguishable concerning the microstructural and chemical results, for both pastes and coatings.

2° STEP: COMPARISON

PASTES

- The new *bianchi* fragments from Amsterdam fall in the field of the first group of analysed *bianchi*.
- Samples from Faenza constitute a group of reference which don't show correspondences with the samples from Amsterdam. Only for some chemical elements it is possible to evidence some slight superimposition.



COATINGS

- Tin glazes of the new fragments coming from Amsterdam show the same variability of the samples taken into consideration in the previous phase.
- Tin glazes of the fragments recovered from archaeological excavation in Faenza show a more homogeneous composition, different for all elements from the composition of the Dutch majolica. Less evident is the difference for what concerns the SnO_2 and PbO amount, due to the standard formulations.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT PHASE

Without taking into account a few exceptions, the investigations have confirmed the presence of two groups (one with about 12% SnO_2 in the glazes, the other with 6-9% SnO_2) among the Dutch samples, with the new ones that enlarge the *bianchi* group. More homogeneous data resulted from the analyses carried out on the Italian samples from Faenza, which all show fine-medium pastes and glazes with around 7% SnO_2. By considering the results of pastes and glazes it could be deduced that only a few samples of Dutch majolica can be attributed to Faenza; the provenance of the others is still not clear. So, next step will be the comparison with data on ceramic fragments from other Italian production centers (especially Ligurian) and from France.