

THE MAJOLICA PRODUCTION OF NORTHERN-CENTRAL SICILY (16TH - 18TH CENTURY AD): ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

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Collesano and Polizzi Generosa are considered among the most important historic centres of the Madonie, a mountainous area located at the northern part of central Sicily. Ceramic workshops dedicated mainly in the production of tiles and various wares are present in this area since the 12th century as attested in the historical records. At Polizzi Generosa the majolica art had flourished between the 15th and the 16th century and reached very high levels of expression before it regressed and finally ceased during the first two decades of the 17th century AD. On the contrary, at Colessano the majolica production reached its apex between the 17th and the 18th century AD. Both the historical records and the historic-art studies have demonstrated that the majolica manufactures produced at Polizzi Generosa and Collesano were widely circulated in western Sicily and, moreover, were being exported to Palermo.

The object of the present contribution is the mineralogical, petrographic and chemical study of representative samples of the aforementioned manufactures. Thin sections examination and X-ray fluorescence analysis of their ceramic body have allowed to characterize the fabric of the local productions and to reconstruct many details of the production cycle. This task was accomplished through the comparison with series of data previously acquired, following similar analytical protocols, from raw materials which were traditionally utilised by the local craftsmen. Furthermore, the laboratory research has been expanded in order to include the enamelled surface, aiming to individuate the pigments used for the decoration motifs of the pavement tiles (black, dark green, light green, yellow, sky-blue). For this second task, XRD, FTIR and SEM/EDS were the analytical techniques which were called into play.