THE MEDICEAN LEGACY
AND THE GENIUS OF CARLO GINORI

By Oliva Rucellai
Curator, Museo Richard Ginori della Manifattura di Doccia, Firenze

In 1534 the Medici became Dukes and subsequently Grand Dukes of Tuscany, a title that they held until 1737 when Gian Gastone, the last of the Medici Grand Dukes, died without an heir. Their political influence in Europe had been decreasing more and more over the years, but, despite their decadence, their fame and prestige as patrons of the arts endured. Their collections attracted visitors from all over the Western world and Anna Maria Luisa de’ Medici, Gian Gastone’s sister (she survived him by six years), was so aware of their importance to the city that she left them to the new rulers on the condition that they were never moved. They belonged to Florence and had to remain in Florence forever.

With this generous gesture Anna Maria Luisa proved to be more far-sighted than she probably ever imagined. The focus of this article is to show how Carlo Ginori, founder of the Doccia manufactory, took advantage of the cultural and artistic environment in which he lived and which was mainly the result of Medici patronage.

Carlo Ginori (1702-1757) belonged to an old Florentine family. His father had emigrated to Portugal and, thanks to his ability in trade, restored the family wealth. He died in 1708 leaving Carlo a substantial fortune which, when combined with his own remarkable personal qualities, made him both powerful and successful too. Highly intelligent and energetic, he was a brilliant politician, so much so that he aroused the envy and rivalry of Count de Richcourt, the Regent’s representative. To get rid of him, he made him Governor of Leghorn in 1746. Carlo Ginori was truly concerned with the economic development of Tuscany and made many attempts to set up new profitable activities, such as Angora goat farming, coral fishing and land reclamation. In the long run, however, porcelain proved to be by far his most successful enterprise.

Grand Prince Ferdinando de’ Medici, the youngest son of the Grand Duke Cosimo III, had a collection of ceramics and a passion for blue and white Chinese porcelain. By 1693, there was a porcelain room in the Uffizi and even Gian Gastone had a porcelain collection, though it is almost entirely lost. Above all, there was a Florentine precedent for the mysterious art of porcelain making. In 1586 Francesco I de’ Medici, who was famous for his interest in alchemy, had started a small and prestigious production of soft-paste porcelain which continued at least until about 1610. Carlo Ginori considered himself ideally placed to continue the production of Medici porcelain, which was one of the earliest attempts to make porcelain in Europe. On some extremely rare pieces of Doccia porcelain one can find the mark that was used by Francesco I on his soft-paste porcelain: the Brunelleschi dome, the dome of Florence cathedral. The decoration of objects bearing this mark is in blue under glaze, like most Medici porcelain, and was also stenciled. The use of stencil was an ingenious way to overcome the lack of experienced painters, typical of these early days. As far as I know, no other 18th century porcelain factory adopted it.

Carlo, like Francesco I, was fascinated by the scientific and technical implications of porcelain making and himself experimented with samples of materials that were sent to him from all over Tuscany. He created a vast mineral collection which he called the Museo delle Terre, (Museum of the Earths) also known among contemporary scientists as the ‘Museo Ginonio’. Unfortunately the kaolin mines that he discovered in the Grand Duchy were of poor quality, therefore he had to import kaolin from Austria and the Veneto. In addition, the first kilnman and the Anreiers, the painters who taught the porcelain painting technique to the local workers, all came from Vienna.

The Anreiers brought the decorative style of Du Paquier to Doccia but, in turn, were inspired by local sources. K.W. Anreiter painted a famous series of 20 plates (only seven survive to the present day) depicting Turkish figures with animals and flowers: they derive from watercolors by Jacopo Ligozzi, an artist who worked for the Grand Duke between 1570 and 1627. Paintings in the Medici collection by the Flemish artist Otto Marusey Van Schriek inspired two other unique objects, one of which is signed by Anreiter’s son, Anton. They depict with lenticular precision a forest scene with reptiles and insects. Though unusual, both Ligozzi’s and Van Schriek’s inspired decorations are remarkable examples of the Florentine influence on foreign artists and of the kind of cultural interaction that a porcelain factory could generate.

Apart from decoration, where Oriental and Viennese influence played a prominent part, it was in the sculpture from Doccia that the Medicean legacy had the strongest impact. Sculpture held a very special place in Carlo Ginori’s heart: this was highly significant, due to the major role that sculpture played in Florence. The Tuscan city had a long-standing reputation for its sculpture dating back to the Renaissance; the Piazza della Signoria, the city’s main square, was then, as it is today, an open air sculpture gallery and Florentine bronze founders were highly regarded all over Europe. The Medici collection of antique statues was one of the most admired and envied by western princes and rulers including Louis XIV. Carlo Ginori was so determined to make sculpture the strength of Doccia that early on he provided the factory with a spectacular collection of plaster and wax models. Around 1744 he acquired from Foggetti and Soldani’s heirs most of the models they had in their workshops, in many cases with moulds as well. Most of the surviving original waxes are on display in the Museo di Doccia; plater and terracotta models are also to be found in the museum and factory store rooms. Many were added later, of course, and many are lost, nevertheless the existing models are a wonderful document of Florentine taste of that time, as well as of the history of the factory. Additional major sources are a late 18th century inventory of models, listed room by room, as displayed in the villa of Doccia and the mould archive in the factory.

The 18th century inventory is still kept in the Ginori family archive in Florence and in 1982 K. Lankheet published it and identified many entries. It is extremely precious and useful because it describes many models with the author’s name. Unfortunately, recent studies have proved that it was not always accurate. There are...
some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.

More important, but not easily accessible, is the factory archive. It consists of a huge hangar filled with models without any attribution at all. There are also some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.

More important, but not easily accessible, is the factory archive. It consists of a huge hangar filled with models without any attribution at all. There are also some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.

More important, but not easily accessible, is the factory archive. It consists of a huge hangar filled with models without any attribution at all. There are also some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.

More important, but not easily accessible, is the factory archive. It consists of a huge hangar filled with models without any attribution at all. There are also some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.

More important, but not easily accessible, is the factory archive. It consists of a huge hangar filled with models without any attribution at all. There are also some mistakes in attributions and there are also models without any attribution at all.
used to cast the bronze which was later chiselled and finished by hand.

The porcelain shows more substantial variations than the bronze version, it differs in the inclination of David’s chest and the base which is much thinner, altering the position of the plumed helmet. In the upright position, it would have shown its fine chiselling but it also would have been too high changing the whole proportion of the group. For this reason we can assume that the Doccia modellers had the helmet laying on its side with the sword added. For technical reasons it would have been difficult to make the helmet stand as in the bronze version, it was seems suspended, with no support at all; it would have been almost impossible to obtain the same effect in porcelain because of the distortion in the kiln. The draperies of David’s clothes; the modelling of Goliath’s back and the decoration of his boots appear rougher or are even absent in the wax version, were it seems suspended, with no support at all; it would have been almost impossible to obtain the same effect in porcelain because of the distortion in the kiln.

There are two possibilities: either the wax cast was acquired together with the moulds or the moulds were made in the factory by copying the wax. If the Doccia modellers copied the wax by hand in order to make another model and then make moulds of it, how could their version have details that are missing in the wax itself? We should assume that the wax was damaged in some way later on, after the plaster moulds were made, or that the Doccia artist had another source to copy from.

In the case of David and Goliath we have four different versions, but of other groups, we have only one example. In fact the same series made for the Palatine Electress, also includes a group by Soldani, the other leading Florentine sculptor of the time, which is now in Milan at the Museo Civico of the Castello Sforzesco. It depicts Christ, Mary Magdalene and the Pharisee and is the only known version of an original bronze group by Soldani. It is not the only case of a Doccia porcelain group documenting a lost bronze, but it is particularly important because it belongs to the Palatine Electress series. We can observe here, more than in the David and Goliath, a typical feature of Florentine late Baroque groups: it is meant really to be viewed head on. These groups are often described as ‘pictorial’ because they are closer in conception to a painted scene or relief rather than to a sculpture in the round. They are narrative and the figures are complemented by props that create a setting. This pictorial character is also to be found in sculptures for table decoration but we must be careful. These groups were not intended as dessert decoration, even though they can be considered as an expression of the same taste.

In some porcelain versions the pictorial quality is enhanced by painted decoration such as in the group of Christ and the Woman of Samaria, after Girolamo Ticciati, one of Foggini’s pupils. Religious subjects were an exception for bronze groups and were strictly related to the taste of some members of the Medici family. Mythological groups were produced more frequently and usually conceived as pairs.

One of the most expressive, yet perfectly well balanced, is the one in the Museo Stibbert in Florence, after a pair by Soldani Benzi.

The pair Andromeda and the Monster (Figure 4) and Leda and the Swan by Soldani Benzi show minor differences in the porcelain and bronze version (private collection).

These groups were made with many moulds (15 for Leda and the Swan). Some parts were assembled after firing, such as the different parts forming a figure’s body. Others were assembled after firing. The porcelain version of Diana and Callisto, (Museo Stibbert), if compared with the wax model, shows the absence of the dog and the central figure in a different position which, as a recent restoration showed very clearly, is separated from the rest. The restoration was a good opportunity to see how these groups were assembled. In this case, the base was divided into two blocks that were fired separately and then mounted with the help of a sort of porcelain hook, glue and stucco to hide the junction between the two parts. The new restoration
left the junction uncovered on purpose. As I said before, these groups were not meant as centrepieces or desserts, they were sculptures in their own right. Carlo Ginori bought the models and moulds by the best florentine sculptors of his time because he wanted to use porcelain as an alternative to bronze.

Nevertheless, some of these models were eventually adapted for table decoration too. An interesting example, existing also in a single figure version, is a feature of late-Baroque Florentine sculpture: the reference to the 16th century tradition of Mannerism. Models by Giambologna or Michelangelo never went out of fashion, and late Baroque Florentine artists like Foggini or Soldani were still making bronze copies of them or adapting them to new functions. In this case, porcelain reliefs of Michelangelo’s Twilight and Aurora, flanked by figures of the sea, formed a centrepiece by Soldani 29. It was the most elaborate centrepiece ever produced by the Ginori factory, the so called ‘Sea and Earth’ centrepiece, and its metamorphosis deserves a more detailed account than it can be given in a few lines.

The monumental porcelain centrepiece28 of the Doccia Museum is another interesting combination of different sculpture models and introduces an important feature of late-Baroque Florentine sculpture: the reference to the 16th century tradition of Mannerism. Models by Giambologna or Michelangelo never went out of fashion, and late Baroque Florentine artists like Foggini or Soldani were still making bronze copies of them or adapting them to new functions. In this case, porcelain reliefs of Michelangelo’s Twilight and Aurora, flanked by figures of the sea, formed a centrepiece by Soldani 29. It was the most elaborate centrepiece ever produced by the Ginori factory, the so called ‘Sea and Earth’ centrepiece, and its metamorphosis deserves a more detailed account than it can be given in a few lines.

The monumental porcelain centrepiece28 of the Doccia Museum is another interesting combination of different sculpture models and introduces an important feature of late-Baroque Florentine sculpture: the reference to the 16th century tradition of Mannerism. Models by Giambologna or Michelangelo never went out of fashion, and late Baroque Florentine artists like Foggini or Soldani were still making bronze copies of them or adapting them to new functions. In this case, porcelain reliefs of Michelangelo’s Twilight and Aurora, flanked by figures of the sea, formed a centrepiece by Soldani 29. It was the most elaborate centrepiece ever produced by the Ginori factory, the so called ‘Sea and Earth’ centrepiece, and its metamorphosis deserves a more detailed account than it can be given in a few lines.

The monumental porcelain centrepiece28 of the Doccia Museum is another interesting combination of different sculpture models and introduces an important feature of late-Baroque Florentine sculpture: the reference to the 16th century tradition of Mannerism. Models by Giambologna or Michelangelo never went out of fashion, and late Baroque Florentine artists like Foggini or Soldani were still making bronze copies of them or adapting them to new functions. In this case, porcelain reliefs of Michelangelo’s Twilight and Aurora, flanked by figures of the sea, formed a centrepiece by Soldani 29. It was the most elaborate centrepiece ever produced by the Ginori factory, the so called ‘Sea and Earth’ centrepiece, and its metamorphosis deserves a more detailed account than it can be given in a few lines.

The monumental porcelain centrepiece28 of the Doccia Museum is another interesting combination of different sculpture models and introduces an important feature of late-Baroque Florentine sculpture: the reference to the 16th century tradition of Mannerism. Models by Giambologna or Michelangelo never went out of fashion, and late Baroque Florentine artists like Foggini or Soldani were still making bronze copies of them or adapting them to new functions. In this case, porcelain reliefs of Michelangelo’s Twilight and Aurora, flanked by figures of the sea, formed a centrepiece by Soldani 29. It was the most elaborate centrepiece ever produced by the Ginori factory, the so called ‘Sea and Earth’ centrepiece, and its metamorphosis deserves a more detailed account than it can be given in a few lines.
For the porcelain see Galeazzo CORA and Angelo FANFANI, La porcellana dei Medici, Milano 1986

For more information on the porcelain see LANKHEIT 1982, p. 119 where this model is said to be made of 14 moulds.

The model is by M. Soldani Benzi. For the porcelain see LANKHEIT 1982, p. 125, fig. 118.