LUCA DELLA ROBBIA AND HIS
TIN-GLAZED TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES

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The stylistic development, architectonic quality, and expressive content of Luca della Robbia’s earliest tin-glazed terracotta sculptures are considered in relation to the sculptor’s close collaboration with the Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi. Luca’s experimentations with humanist subjects and his unconventional ornamentation of vault surfaces are also explored by examining the artist’s relationships with three Florentines: the artist Michelozzo, the humanist Nicolao Nicoli, and his patron Piero de’ Medici. It is in his Labors of the Months (1445-60), commissioned by Piero de’ Medici, that the changes in Luca’s style, technique, and production appear. This cycle, a turning point in his career, led to the creation of his distinctive tin-glazed terracotta ceiling (1462-66) in the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte, Florence. Lastly, a discussion of his process shows that in the fifteenth century Luca’s clay body and glaze chemistry are unique to his bottega, and that they represent an outstanding technical achievement in composition and application.

Approved:

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INTRODUCTION

During a sojourn in Florence, Italy, the contemporary visitor’s first impressions may be influenced today by the medieval architecture of the old city, comprised predominately of earth tones ranging from tan-colored storefronts to brick red clay rooftops. In this part of town, sunlight is obfuscated by tall buildings on narrow, dark gray cobblestone streets, where cast shadows make architectural details hard to see, depending on the time of the day. The most intense spray of color can be found only by looking up at the saturated cobalt blue sky on a sunny day. Nevertheless, a stroll down Via de Calzaioili can awaken the senses with the brilliant colors of Luca della Robbia’s terracotta sculpture on Orsanmichele (Oratory of Saint Michael).

The high relief sculptures and fresh, bold colors that Luca created for the stemmas (coats of arms) of various guilds, such as those of the stonemasons, the doctors and pharmacists, and the Mercanzia (merchants’ tribunal), immediately capture the viewer’s attention. It is because of these vibrant colors, still radiant more than five centuries since their creation, that I chose to investigate the tin-glazed terracotta work of a leading sculptor in fifteenth century Florence.

Luca della Robbia (b. 1399/1400-82) has been revered for the last five hundred years as a technological genius, the innovator of enameled terracotta sculptures in Italy. In this thesis a discussion of the tin-glazed earthenware process that Luca utilized—from creating clay bodies and glaze compositions to the kiln-
firing operations—will show how his unique discoveries led to a new art form that became enormously successful for him.

Besides the invention of tin-glazed terracotta sculpture, Luca also founded the della Robbia workshop, a thriving business that was sustained by three generations of della Robbias. The unmarried Luca lived with his brothers, sharing with them and their families his knowledge and prosperity. From 1446, he lived with his brother Marco and his family in Via Guelfa. When Marco died in 1457, Luca inherited the responsibility of supporting Marco’s wife and children. It was at this time that he took as his apprentice Marco’s son, Andrea. Andrea’s brothers and sisters also worked in Luca’s shop, which Andrea eventually inherited. In the sixteenth century, Andrea’s sons, Giovanni and Luca, ran the family business.

While Luca has been praised for his work in marble and bronze, he is most famous for his enameled terracotta images of the Madonna; yet, the many works attributed to him are varied in their artistic scope, among which are his decorative tiles, stemmas, and medallions for the interior and exterior walls of buildings. The focus of this research examines his earliest terracotta sculpture, created in the 1440s-1450s.

Two questions about the innovative Luca that are addressed in this thesis are why did he choose to work with enameled terracotta and where did he gain the knowledge to work with the material? Unfortunately, the literature on Luca reveals little direct information regarding these questions. Vasari’s accounts of his life are
repeated throughout most secondary sources, with most details that differ from Vasari concerned chiefly with the dating of Luca’s work.\textsuperscript{1} Sir John Pope-Hennessy speculated that Luca was exposed to classical antique statues through his friendship with Nicolao Nicoli, a philologist and collector of great distinction.\textsuperscript{2} Pope-Hennessy also believed that the thriving workshop of Nanni di Banco, a sculptor who mastered the classicizing style, was highly influential on Luca, and that he was probably trained in this shop. Although there is no form of written evidence to verify this, the visual proof can be found in Luca’s style. If one compares Nanni di Banco’s \textit{Saint Luke} or the predella reliefs on Orsanmichele to Luca’s \textit{Apostles} for the Pazzi Chapel, the similarities are astounding.\textsuperscript{3}

Other artists have also been considered influential on Luca’s formative period. Maud Cruttwell believed that he was highly influenced by Donatello and Ghiberti, a supposition backed by the seventeenth-century painter Filippo Baldinucci; both writers considered Luca one of Ghiberti’s apprentices working on Ghiberti’s first gates for the Florence Baptistery.\textsuperscript{4} According to Joachim Poeschke,


\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 17. See Fig. 34.

\textsuperscript{4} Maud Cruttwell, \textit{Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors} (E. P. Dutton & Co., 1902), 14. Filippo Baldinucci wrote \textit{Vocabulario toscano dell’arte del disegno} (Florence, 1681). He is also noted for \textit{Notizie dei professori di disegno} (1681-1688), 5 vols. (Florence, 1845-7).
Donatello and Ghiberti were the first sculptors in Florence working with terracotta.\textsuperscript{5} Poeschke also noted that the use of this material was sporadic until its reappearance in the Quattrocento, specially in 1410 with Donatello’s \textit{Joshua}.\textsuperscript{6} He attributed the new interest in terracotta to the popularity of the writings of the ancient Roman Pliny, whose discussion of the material seemed to verify for humanists that the sculptors of antiquity used terracotta. The germination of Luca’s idea for glazed terracotta sculptures, and his experimentation with the process could very well have developed while he was in Ghiberti’s workshop. Equipped as it was to work with clay (lost-wax process), the shop also produced glazed terracotta reliefs.\textsuperscript{7}

This thesis proposes that the most significant influence on Luca’s early glazed terracotta works surely came from the architect Filippo Brunelleschi. According to Pope-Hennessy, it is apparent that Brunelleschi’s intellectual curiosity, religiosity, appreciation for classicism and humanism, and his many artistic endeavors influenced Luca.\textsuperscript{8} While it is thus generally thought that the expressive content of Luca’s work, or the way he portrayed religious and secular themes, was shaped by his relationship with Filippo Brunelleschi (capomaestro of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 25.
\item Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 21, 24, 37.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Florence Cathedral from 1421 to 1428), questions noted earlier concerning Luca’s style and use of material or how Brunelleschi played a role in Luca’s development as an artist are not often developed in the literature on Luca. This thesis will show that Brunelleschi helped to inspire Luca and the introduction of enameled terracotta relief sculpture in Italy.

In this thesis the formal elements of Luca’s early terracotta works, executed while working in close collaboration with Brunelleschi—*The Resurrection, The Ascension*, and *The Pazzi Chapel Apostles*—are analyzed in the catalog entries. His association with Brunelleschi, comparisons of their works, and documents related to the sculptures will be examined in order to determine how much Brunelleschi influenced Luca. My research has also shown that after the death of Brunelleschi, Luca’s collaborations with other architects contributed to the changes in his style, technique, and production, all of which are considered in light of the type of contracts he received.
CHAPTER ONE

THE TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES OF LUCA DELLA ROBBIA

By 1441, Luca della Robbia had become fully aware of the infinite possibilities of manipulating terracotta, and his sense of exploration led him into a most challenging and rewarding specialization. Imagine Luca’s satisfaction after firing a kiln all day, cooling it down another whole day, unstacking the bricks from the wicket, or door, and feasting his eyes on the marvelous colors. Luca had talent, skill, and successful experimentations that were extraordinary and unrivaled. He was clearly in the right place at the right time and he channeled his energy into creating a network of the most influential and ambitious minds then in Florence (including Brunelleschi and Donatello). What made Luca’s art so exceptional? Among many factors that set him apart was his display of a very sensitive level of spirituality in his work. This expression of spirituality—revealed through his use of classicism, a bichromate palette, somber and contemplative figures, and balanced compositional designs—reflects upon the contemporary mood of Christian Florence.

During Luca della Robbia’s day, the largest, wealthiest church in a commune was usually associated with the identity of the commune.9 Thoughts of

Florence thus automatically conjured up images of the Duomo (Santa Maria del Fiore). One of the major guilds (Arte della Lana, or the Wool Merchants’ guild), wealthy Florentine families, charismatic archbishops, and highly talented and skilled artists in Florence were all associated with the reconstruction of the impressive structure. When people of the Quattrocento gathered to hear an inspirational sermon in Florence Cathedral, they had great hope for achieving life everlasting, for their redemption and salvation. Their aim was to strive to live a better life, to atone for their sins, and to end up in paradise rather than eternal hell.

Luca della Robbia’s role in this pragmatic, religious environment was extremely important. Considering the high illiteracy rate during the 1400s, and Saiber note that many artists devoted themselves to the writing of literature. It is through these writings that, “artists contributed substantially to the shaping of Florentine identity through their celebration of the city in monuments and texts.” In addition, city officials were opportunistic in disseminating political propaganda in their quest for power. Baldassarri and Saiber stated: “The intense competition for economic and political supremacy that characterized Quattrocento Florence brought about a significant change in the landscape of the city, punctuating it with stately symbols whose elegant architecture expressed underlying political aims.”

10 Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art: painting, sculpture, architecture (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 144-5. In this thesis, the term Duomo will be used interchangeably with Santa Maria del Fiore and Florence Cathedral. Florence Cathedral is the largest and highest architectural structure in Florence. Arnolfo di Cambio (capomaestro during the reconstruction in 1296) originally designed the structure which replaced the church of Santa Reparata. Francesco Talenti replaced Arnolfo after he died and possibly altered the original plan of the cathedral and campanile. Today, the cathedral, consisting of the dome designed by Brunelleschi and the campanile designed by Talenti, Giotto and Pisano, is still the main focal point of Florence’s cityscape.

11 William J. Connell, Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 111. Dale Kent, in his essay titled Michele del Giogante’s House of Memory, discussed literacy as a necessary means for the Florentines to do business. Kent wrote: “Presumably to serve the needs of business, Florence had developed an educational system that created what appears to be the highest rate of literacy of any European society in the fifteenth century—over 30 percent of the population.” In 1427, imposed tax laws required that every citizen report taxable property (catasto). Record-keeping for the catasto revealed varying levels of literacy among the Florentine citizens. Although Florence had a high percentage of literate people, there
images were used to communicate biblical stories, reveal moral lessons, remind
people of sermons, and honor outstanding holy figures associated with the divine
holy family. For a large percentage of the population who did not comprehend the
Latin liturgy, images and visual representation were crucial.¹²

Because Luca’s use of enameled terracotta was innovative, and his colors
attracted attention immediately, his sculptures were often placed in areas that
prepared worshipers for the liturgy and its messages of hope. In his oeuvre are
many lunettes that were placed above doorways, welcoming the congregation into
the church and reminding them of Christian miracles as they exited.¹³ The
decoration of chapels, altars, and tabernacles was also an important part of his
work, each of which simply and clearly expresses messages of the benefits of faith
in Christ and everlasting life. The translation of raw clay and chemicals into
messages of the Divine comprised an enormous percentage of Luca’s aim as an
artist. While decorative tiles, stemma (coats of arms), and medallions showing
occupations of the months form a significant part of his oeuvre, more sizeable still

¹² Michael Baxandall, Giotto and the Orators: Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the
studied Renaissance images (compositions) by identifying linguistic and literary components as
humanism developed. Neo-classical Latin was so difficult to learn, that the study and learning of it
became the Humanists’ art. Baxandall described Latin as the language of an élite culture.

¹³ The Façade of San Domenico in Urbino was originally embellished with a door designed by
Maso di Bartolommeo and with Luca’s lunette of the Madonna and Child with Saints Dominic,
Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus and Peter Martyr seen in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in
Urbino. During the mid-to late-1500s it was seen by many who passed through Maso’s door.
are his many images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints who witnessed for Christ.

Filippo Brunelleschi can clearly be deduced to have been the artist who had the greatest influence on Luca’s early career, which is stylistically evident in the serene calmness and monumentality of Luca’s Christian themes. Unfortunately, my review of the literature revealed very few extant written documents concerning the relationship between the two artists, leaving two basic questions unanswered: how involved was Brunelleschi in Luca della Robbia’s art and his career as an artist and to what degree did Filippo influence his use of materials? Allan Marquand has suggested that Brunelleschi’s influence can be seen in Luca’s *Cantoria* for the Florence Cathedral.\(^{14}\) It appears that the marble used for the *Cantoria* came from the Carrara quarries and was ordered according to Brunelleschi’s measurements; Marquand also observed that the architectural elements of the *Cantoria* were similar to Brunelleschi’s style.\(^{15}\) Sixty-six years later, in 1980, Pope-Hennessy elaborated on Marquand’s research with additional information and speculation as to how Luca’s artistic style developed, notably through Brunelleschi’s influence. In brief, Pope-Hennessy considered Brunelleschi to have had the dominant voice in

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., 3. Three documents dated October 4, 1431, April 9, 1432, and August 28, 1438 record the payments and the ordering of the Carrara marble. Filippo Brunelleschi supplied the measurements for the marble.
the commissioned works for Santa Maria del Fiore.\textsuperscript{16} Like Marquand, Pope-Hennessy relied chiefly on stylistic evidence, especially as it relates to the architect’s, Brunelleschi’s, vocabulary. In Pope-Hennessy’s catalog raisonné of Luca’s work, he questioned why Luca, who was not an architect, incorporated so many classical architectural elements in his work.\textsuperscript{17}

Pope-Hennessy introduced examples of commissioned work designed by Brunelleschi, but executed by other artists.\textsuperscript{18} One of the artists working for Brunelleschi was his step-son, Buggiano, who worked on two lavabos, one for the North (New) Sacristy and another for the South Sacristy of Florence Cathedral. It appears that Buggiano was also responsible for an altar in the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo, and a pulpit in Santa Maria Novella, all designed by his step-father, Filipo Brunelleschi. Two altars in Santa Maria del Fiore, assumed to be predetermined by Brunelleschi, as well, were executed by Luca.\textsuperscript{19} As Brunelleschi relied on other sculptors to carry out work that involved human figures, and as he obviously had a

\textsuperscript{16} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 17. Pope-Hennessy proposed that Brunelleschi was the designer not only of Luca della Robbia’s \textit{Cantoria} but also of his altars. Commissioned works created by Luca for Florence Cathedral include the \textit{Cantoria}, bronze doors to the entrance of the north sacristy and the south sacristy, the \textit{Resurrection} lunette, the \textit{Ascension} lunette, two kneeling angel candlesticks, and two altars.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 17.


\textsuperscript{19} Two marble reliefs are known to exist from the altars: \textit{The Deliverance of St. Peter} and \textit{The Crucifixion of St. Peter}. The altars were never completed or installed. The reliefs are located in the Museo Nazionale, Florence.
strong bent toward architecture, Pope Hennessy proposed that it is reasonable to imagine the architectural elements in Luca’s sculptures were indeed influenced by Brunelleschi.\(^{20}\) The *Great Masterpieces of Italian Art*, a video based on G. C. Argan’s book *Storia dell’Arte Italiana*, claims that the architectural elements in Masaccio’s *Trinity* were drawn out by Brunelleschi.\(^{21}\) It appears that this capomaestro had many irons in the fire.

It was Pope-Hennessy who first posed an important question: who invented the use of enameled terracotta in Italian Quattrocento relief sculpture? Based on Brunelleschi’s advanced education, military career, and technical genius, Pope-Hennessy believed that the brilliantly colored tin-glazed terracotta sculptures of Luca della Robbia were, in actuality, Brunelleschi’s brainstorm.\(^{22}\) However, no written documentation exists to support this claim. Interestingly, Giancarlo Gentilini and Pope-Hennessy both stated that Luca della Robbia was encouraged to abandon marble and work with enameled terracotta; yet, besides a signed contract of 1441 for a tabernacle in Peretola, no other written evidence is available to suggest why he changed direction, and began to work almost exclusively in glazed terracotta.\(^{23}\)

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 21.


\(^{23}\) Giancarlo Gentilini, Francesca Petrucci and Fiamma Domestici, *Della Robbia* (Florence: Giunti, 1999), 11. See also: Pope-Hennessy, *Luca Della Robbia*, 37. The first contract that shows
The marble Tabernacle of the Sacrament in Peretola (Fig. 1) is the very first documented example of Luca’s glazed terracotta being incorporated with marble sculpture. Located in the Collegiata of Peretola, the tabernacle was commissioned in 1441, two years after his Cantoria of Florence Cathedral was completed. It was constructed to contain the Holy Sacrament in the Chapel of Saint Luke. Although the marble sculptural reliefs are not Luca’s strongest work, it is the combination of the tin-glazed tiles and the tin-glazed mosaic and relief friezes with the marble that draws attention.

A source of inspiration for the innovative background and inlay designs could have been Andrea di Cione, better known as Orcagna. Orcagna’s Tabernacle of the Miraculous Madonna in Orsanmichele, Florence, provides us with rich examples of highly decorated sculpture. Both glass and maiolica were used to increase the impact of the stories of the Virgin. The radiant color and texture surely impressed the pilgrims and the Laudesi who worshipped at Orsanmichele. On

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Brunelleschi’s involvement with Luca’s use of terracotta is for the Resurrection lunette in Florence Cathedral. The contract states that an antecedent work in enamelled terracotta was submitted to the Operaii, along with a cartoon of the lunette. The contract bound Luca to complete the Resurrection within one year.

24 See Appendix I.

25 Bernardo Daddi’s Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels (1347), a large panel painting slightly over 8’ 2" x 5’ 10", is the focal point of Orcagna’s tabernacle. Overwhelming in size and splendor, Orcagna’s tabernacle (with scenes depicting the life of the Virgin Mary) attracted pilgrims and Laudesi (Laudisti). The companies of Laudesi performed lauda, a poetic text that is sung to a form of music, on ferial and feast days. For more information on Laudesi, read the entry on lauda in Stanley Sadie, The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Washington, D.C.: Grove Dictionaries of Music, 1980), 10:541. See also: Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, 104. Hartt writes that the Society of the Virgin Mary (Laudesi) commissioned panel paintings in the early Trecento.
this tabernacle, *The Annunciation* relief (Fig. 2) and the *Caritas* (Fig. 3) are two prime examples of blue maiolica being used as a background; in each, the blue is highly visible in the candle-lit interior of Orsanmichele. Both glass and maiolica are extremely durable materials, and their presence on the tabernacle increased its brilliance and the longevity of the colored background. During the Middle Ages sculptors often had paint applied to their work. But the paint usually faded and deteriorated, and especially quickly on works exposed to the elements. Orcagna and his bottega of sculptors and craftsmen created *The Tabernacle of the Miraculous Madonna* of Orsanmichele between the years 1352 and 1360 to enshrine a miraculous painting in the grain market hall. Symbol of the power of the guilds, the hall was frequently visited by the guild members of Florence. In the early 1400s, when sculptors were creating statues of the patron saints of guilds, Orcagna’s richly decorated tabernacle would have been a spectacular sight for such young, budding artists as Luca della Robbia.

On Luca’s *Peretola Tabernacle*, architectural elements derived from antiquity, such as the arch, pediment, tympanum, fluted pilasters, and acanthus leaves of the capitals, correspond to the *all’antica* elements in Brunelleschi’s buildings. The capitals for the columns and pilasters of Brunelleschi’s Pazzi

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26 Pope-Hennessy, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, v. II, 16. At Orsanmichele the statues of guild patron saints created during the early-fifteenth century were Niccolò di Pietro Lamberti’s *Saint Luke*, Nanni di Banco’s *Four Crowned Martyrs* and *Saint Philip*, Ghiberti’s *Saint John the Baptist* and *Saint Stephen*, and Donatello’s *Saint Mark* and *Saint George*. These statues were specifically designed for the niches on Orsanmichele.
Chapel, for instance, are nearly identical to Luca’s, and are thought to have been
the inspiration for Luca’s tabernacle.27 Yet, Luca’s inspiration may have come not
only from Brunelleschi, but also from artists influenced by Brunelleschi. Donatello
and Masaccio are two contemporary artists whose work shows the influence of
Brunelleschi. They possibly were advised by Brunelleschi and may have worked
from his designs. Luca would have been in his early twenties when he first saw
Donatello’s Tabernacle of the Parte Guelfa (Fig. 4), with its putti, garlands, fluted
Corinthian pilasters, and conch shell niche. It is precisely this classical
architectural work, along with Masaccio’s Trinity (Fig. 5), that Luca’s Peretola
Tabernacle references.

Having exercised this sense of creative exploration with the use of tin-
glazed terracotta, in combination with the classicizing architectural elements that
Brunelleschi was promoting, along with Luca’s reputation for meticulously
working marble, Luca acquired a secure and enviable position in the early 1440s.
Concerning Brunelleschi’s contribution to Luca’s success, Gentilini commented:

It was thanks to Brunelleschi’s support that Luca
dared to experiment with employing glazed terracotta
for monumental works. One can just imagine the
great enthusiasm with which Filippo, who was very
friendly, must have supported and encouraged the
bold ex-perimentation of his friend, this experimen-

27 Pope-Hennessy, Luca Della Robbia, 33. See also: Marquand, Luca Della Robbia, 61. Pope-
Hennessy stated that the pilasters recall Brunelleschi’s pilasters for the Pazzi Chapel. Marquand
believed that the same stylistic character exhibited in Brunelleschi’s capitals, columns and pilasters
in the Pazzi Chapel can be seen in Luca’s Peretola Tabernacle.
tation aimed at creating unusual splendors and at competing with and surpassing the ancients in ingenuity and daring, as he himself had done with the construction of the dome of the Florentine Cathedral.  

Two very important pieces that solidified Luca’s future as an artist working with terracotta are *The Resurrection* (Fig. 6), and *The Ascension* (Fig. 7). The enameled terracotta lunettes were ordered by the Board of Works (Operai) of Santa Maria del Fiore, the most important commissioning body in Florence. They were constructed to fill the tympanums of the doors of the North Sacristy and the South Sacristy. Legal contracts and payments for *The Resurrection* and *The Ascension* help to date the works. Of special interest is the signature of Brunelleschi on both contracts. It is evident that, by 1446, the year Filippo Brunelleschi died, Luca was already a respected master: he had developed a friendship with Brunelleschi, he had already mastered the innovative tin-glazed terracotta process, and he had secured several commissions in Florence Cathedral because of the quality of his sculpture.

Like most Gothic cathedrals, the chevet of Santa Maria del Fiore faces east. Within the chevet is the Chapel of Saint Zenobious and of the Blessed Sacrament. Also in this chapel are Lorenzo Ghiberti’s bronze urn with the relics of Zenobious (1432-42) and Giovanni Balducci’s Last Supper (1589). Today, when entering the

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29 See Appendix II and Appendix III.
cathedral from the west, through the middle (main) door, and walking east toward the Chapel of Saint Zenobious, visitors first see the choir enclosure by Baccio Bandinelli (1555), with the high altar, the bishop’s chair, and the Crucifix by Benedetto da Maiano (1495-97) in full view inside the choir. Donatello’s stained-glass window (in the cupola over the crossing) depicts the Coronation of the Virgin (1434-38). The enormity of the interior space is daunting, with its great dome and cupola designed and completed by Brunelleschi in 1436. On the northeast side of the choir is Luca della Robbia’s Resurrection decorating the entrance to the Sacristy of the Masses. Luca had earlier created his Cantoria (1431-38) directly above the doorway of the sacristy, and in the late-fifteenth century, the sacristy was adorned with Luca’s figurative bronze door (1445-69). This sacristy contained the vestments, books, and other objects needed for the Mass. Southwest of the choir is Luca della Robbia’s Ascension, decorating the entrance to the Old Sacristy (Sacristy of the Canons). Donatello’s Cantoria (1433-39) was directly above.¹⁰

Santa Maria del Fiore (Saint Mary of the flowers) is the most impressive cathedral in central Italy. With its plan based on designs by Arnolfo di Cambio and its construction supervised by such artists as Giotto, Andrea Pisano, Orcagna, and Brunelleschi, the church was dedicated in 1436 to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ. There is a dual purpose for the interior of this cathedral, where one finds art glorifying not only Mary and Christ, and the enlightenment that Christ offers all

¹⁰ Both Luca’s and Donatello’s Cantorias were removed in 1688 and are now housed in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo.
mankind, but also illustrious citizens. For instance, niches along the side aisles contain busts of Brunelleschi, Giotto, and Arnolfo di Cambio, two frescoes depict cenotaphs of soldiers (Sir John Hawkwood [1436] and Noccolò Da Tolentino [1455-56]), and a monument is dedicated to Dante and the Divine Comedy (1464).

The meticulous compositional details of Luca’s sculpture, along with Brunelleschi’s friendship, secured his commission for The Resurrection and The Ascension lunettes in this impressive cathedral. In The Ascension (1446-51), the figures appear in very high relief, the composition is triangular, with Christ at the apex, and details of nature that are typical of the earlier Resurrection; however, he introduced a new color here, green. Although Brunelleschi is perceived to have been the dominant voice in the decisions about the cathedral’s design, he died in 1446, and the alteration in the color scheme is thought to derive solely from Luca.

It is important to note that the contract was altered after Brunelleschi’s death in order to include Luca’s changes. As for the lunettes, historians have compared the stylistic attributes to Giotto, Lorenzo Ghiberti and Paolo Uccello. Interestingly, the compositions are much more complicated than they initially appear to be. In The Resurrection (1442-45), as in Ghiberti’s bronze door panel for the Baptistery (Fig. 8), Luca successfully used perspective to suggest that the space recedes behind the figures, with the reclining, foreshortened figures and the tomb, trees and foliage overlapping each other. Luca’s scene is less tilted than Ghiberti’s and his Christ, more weighty and three-dimensional. He dominates the scene. Surrounded
by the blue sky, nothing overlaps the figure of Christ, who is proportionally larger and more quickly seen than is Ghiberti’s Christ. The blue background recalls Orcagna’s reliefs of the Tabernacle of the Miraculous Madonna. The settings of both sacristy lunettes, which are strengthened by the architectural molding, are similar in treatment to the settings of the Apostles in the Pazzi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence (Fig. 10).

Luca’s Pazzi Chapel Apostles (Figs. 10-22), closely associated in style to The Resurrection and to The Ascension, are framed by medallions that form an integral part of the architectural design of the Pazzi Chapel. On the north wall are Saints Matthias (Fig. 11) and Bartholomew (Fig. 12). On the east wall are Saints Matthew (Fig. 13), Peter (Fig. 14), John the Evangelist (Fig. 15), and James the Great (Fig. 16). South wall Apostles include Saints Andrew (Fig. 17) and James the Less (Fig. 18). On the west, the darkest wall, are Saints Simon (Fig. 19), Thaddeus (Fig. 20), Thomas (Fig. 21), and Philip (Fig. 22).

It is possible that the inspiration of these terracotta medallions was evoked by metal medallions or coins, so popular among the wealthier nobility, statesmen, and clerics. The Tuscan goldsmith Leonardo di Ser Giovanni, the well-traveled artist Pisanello (b. ca. 1395; d. 1455), Donatello’s assistant Paolo da Ragusa (ca. 1450), Bertoldo di Giovanni (b. ca. 1420; d. 1491) who was also trained by Donatello, the Florentine Niccolò di Forzore Spinelli (b. 1430; d. 1514), also known as Niccolò Fiorentino, and the architect and writer Leon Battista Alberti
(1404-72), were all medallists who could have inspired Brunelleschi and Luca della Robbia with their metal work (Figs. 23-4).\textsuperscript{31} The sixteenth-century bibliographer and artist Giorgio Vasari recorded in his most entertaining and enterprising compilation of artists’ biographies that Luca actually studied the art of goldsmithing with Leonardo di Ser Giovanni.\textsuperscript{32} This training and appreciation for metal objects most likely prepared Luca and Brunelleschi for the Metapontum and Clazomenae Greek coins (Fig. 25) and the late Roman coins that were brought into Florence by Nicolao Nicoli.\textsuperscript{33} Not only did the humanist disseminate examples of the classical figurative style, but the roundel (tondo) shape could also have been inspired by these classical coins and medallions.\textsuperscript{34}

Another source of inspiration for the clay medallions that Luca produced in abundance was his dear friend and competitor, Donatello. From 1434 to 1443, Donatello was working on the tondi of the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo, Florence. The four round stucco reliefs depicting the life of Saint John in the pendentives


\textsuperscript{33} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 15, 22, 24, 32. In his research, Pope-Hennessy found that Nicolao Nicoli freely gave advice and loaned coins and other objects to his favorite Florentine artists.

(Figs. 26-29) and the four round reliefs of the evangelists, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, on the side walls (Figs. 30-33) are thought to have been a completely new feature in the art of the Early Renaissance.35

In addition, the early 1400s gave Florence such great sculptors as Nanni di Banco, Bernardo Ciuffagni, and Niccolò di Pietro Lamberti. These three artists, along with Donatello, created statues that decorated the niches near the entrance of Santa Maria del Fiore.36 One cannot deny the stylistic similarities of Luca della Robbia’s Apostles and Nanni di Banco’s Saint Luke (Fig. 34), Bernardo Ciuffagni’s Saint Matthew, Donatello’s Saint John the Evangelist (Fig. 35), and Niccolò di Pietro Lamberti’s Saint Mark. Although they do not copy the cathedral statues, Luca’s appear to be derived from them. Clad in heavy drapery, seated with knees apart, and clenching objects dear to them, Luca’s Apostles are also proportioned to be viewed from below, with their highly detailed heads extended forward. Like the cathedral statues, Luca’s are contemplative, authoritative, and noble figures. I can imagine a very young and impressionable Luca being very enchanted with these four monumental marble figures on the façade of Florence Cathedral.

35 Wirtz, Donatello 1386-1466, 64. Not only were the figures in the pendentive tondi independent of the architecture, but also they were constructed with a new medium, pigmented stucco. Due to the framing, a refreshing sense of freedom of movement was the final result in each tondo. Read more about how Donatello liberated the figure from its architectural frame in Poeschke, Donatello and His World: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance, 41.

36 The statues of the four Evangelists are now located in the Opera del Duomo museum. Luca della Robbia would have been a young boy or teenager when the sculptors were engaged on this project (1408-15).
It is obvious that Luca worked in close collaboration with Brunelleschi when designing the Apostle medallions for this chapel, located in Santa Croce. The largest Franciscan basilica in Florence, Santa Croce was begun in 1294. Designed by Arnolfo de Cambio, it is a gothic structure like Santa Maria del Fiore. Famous for the frescoes by Giotto in the Peruzzi and Bardi Chapels and for Brunelleschi’s Pazzi Chapel, Santa Croce was considered to be an important meeting place for not only the congregation, but also the guilds and important families, like the Medici and the Pazzi.

Brunelleschi’s centrally-planned Pazzi Chapel has fluted pilasters dividing the walls and houses the medallions as part of the architecture, as they are set directly into the wall. The walls were constructed with the anticipation of the roundels. There are thirteen medallions representing the twelve Apostles. Four more medallions in the Chapel represent the Evangelists; these are located beneath the dome. Not to be mistaken as della Robbia roundels, these four polychromatic roundels have been attributed to Donatello.37

Cruttwell placed the Apostle roundels roughly between the years of 1440 and 1450.38 Due to the mystery surrounding the dates of the terracotta reliefs, one must examine the construction of the chapel itself. Documents pinpoint the

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37 John Pope-Hennessy, “The Evangelist Roundels in the Pazzi Chapel,” *Apollo* 106 (Oct. 1977): 262-69. Saint Andrew is represented twice: in a roundel above the entrance to the chapel and inside the chapel (see Fig. 9).

beginning of construction in 1429-30, and it was completed in 1443. The roundels are thought to have been installed after 1443.

The *Apostles* are offered to us as examples of ethical and social conduct. Their colors, the tin-glazed white against the cobalt blue concave background, allude to purity and spirituality. The figures are very somber and tranquil. They are in high relief, with the heads being almost fully in the round, and lines of gold are applied over the glaze. Five of the roundels are placed on a background of varying shades of blue concentric circles. Like gentle ripples in calm, blue water, they produce a meditative, reflective, and pensive state. Their importance is shown through their placement on the chapel walls, especially those tondi positioned next to the altar and above the entrance to the chapel. High on the wall encircling the interior of the chapel, they were meant to surround and keep company with the Chapter members as they listened to a sermon held at the altar.

Gärtner, a historian specializing in Renaissance architecture, remarked:

> Architect and sculptor were in agreement about the relationship between the architecture and the sculptural decoration. The tondi were not intended to disturb the architectural balance but to emphasize it in a harmonious way. Thus the colors are restricted to white and blue and the figures, all in frontal view, sit on horizontal strips of cloud.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{39}\) Peter J. Gärtner, *Filippo Brunelleschi 1377-1446* (Köln: Kölnemann, 1998), 64-5. Specifically on Luca’s style, Gärtner also noted that, “Luca della Robbia must be given credit for the solemn mood. His art made the co-existence of architecture and sculpture succeed.”
In comparison to Luca’s more harmonizing blue and white reliefs, a noticeable change in form, color, and symbolism occurred in works in which he collaborated with Michelozzo, especially those projects in which Piero de’Medici was involved. Piero apparently had a sumptuous taste and preferred a more ornate surrounding than Brunelleschi’s austere simplicity produced. Pope-Hennessy claimed: “Brunelleschi’s death seems to have removed not just a stimulus but a constraint, and thereafter, confronting other problems in conjunction with other architects, Luca developed the decorative potentials of his medium to a point which could not have been imagined before that time.”

Concerning Michelozzo and his sumptuous style, Gärtner wrote:

The architect who responded to this call for variety as did no other is Michelozzo (1396-1472). In his tabernacle in San Miniato al Monte we find four different capitals next to one another. Brunelleschi, by comparison, is restrained almost to the point of asceticism. In his two basilicas, San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito, there is but a single form. The Corinthian capital, which is found on the freestanding pillars and the wall pillars, the wall pilasters and the crossing pilasters.

From 1446 on, Luca’s work underwent a dramatic change. After Brunelleschi’s death, he incorporated more decorative elements into his work. His

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new highly decorated surfaces have brought their share of criticism, however, with writers questioning what Brunelleschi might have thought had he been alive to see Luca’s new art. Pope-Hennessy wrote that the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal was: “precisely the kind of integration of the arts to which Brunelleschi objected in the Old Sacristy.”

In his biography of Brunelleschi, the mathematician Antonio Manetti (1423-97) wrote about the changes that Antonio di Manetti Ciaccheri made in Brunelleschi’s plan for San Lorenzo. Manetti was very protective toward Brunelleschi and his reputation. He stated that Luca was also upset about the alterations because he thought they were made “in order to detract from Filippo’s fame, since whoever came there would think that, like the other things, they were Filippo’s work.”

The quotation shows a level of respect and genuine concern, by Luca, for the architects that he worked with and the quality of work that they expected.

Piero di Cosimo was the patron most responsible for Luca’s international fame, according to Vasari, who wrote:

Wherefore the Magnificent Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici, one of the first to commission Luca to fashion coloured works in clay, caused him to execute the whole of the round vaulting of a study in the Palace—built, as it will be told, by his father Cosimo—with various things of fancy, and like wise

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the pavement, which was something singular and very useful for the summer. And seeing that this method was then very difficult, and that many precautions were necessary in the firing of the clay, it is certainly a marvel that Luca could execute these works with so great perfection that both the vaulting and the pavement appear to be made, not of many pieces, but of one only. The fame of these works spreading not only throughout Italy but throughout all Europe, there were so many who desired them that the merchants of Florence, keeping Luca, to his great profit, continually at this labour, sent them throughout the whole world.45

Luca’s career depended on Brunelleschi, even after Filippo’s death in 1446. In 1461, Luca was chosen to design the ceiling of the newly built Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato, Florence. It was his association with Brunelleschi that landed him this contract. An entire ceiling was designed by Luca around five medallions, four of which depict the Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice. The fifth medallion is in the center of the ceiling and depicts a dove representing the Holy Spirit (Figs. 36-40).46 Yet, in viewing the highly detailed carving of the figures, decorative elements surrounding the figures, layers of outer moldings, and the highly ornate space between the medallions, it is immediately recognizable that Brunelleschian simplicity and

46 Pope-Hennessy, Luca Della Robbia, 48. The Holy Dove is surrounded by seven candlesticks in Luca’s roundel. Pope-Hennessy stated that they represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Revelation (2:5, King James Version), Saint John wrote: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Here he refers to the candlesticks mentioned in Rev. 1:11 and 1:20; the seven candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia Minor.
austerity are noticeably missing. The ornate space between the medallions, composed of tiles producing an illusion of cubes, is unusually glazed with harsh yellow, bright green, purple, and black. Although a new decorative feature for the Renaissance, the cube pattern reflects back to antiquity. Unlike the harmony, serenity, and somber atmosphere in the Pazzi Chapel, tension and energy hover over the frescoes and tomb in San Miniato. White outer moldings enclose layers of circles of flat tile. Three shades of blue decorate a scale or feather design, possibly representing angel wings. The moldings are standard patterns for Luca della Robbia. Form and symbol are elaborated upon in a much more obvious manner. Absorbed in the act of what they are communicating to the viewer, the winged virtues display their attributes. Luca not only provided us with symbolic material objects, but had the foresight to design significant details such as the positioning of the winged virtue, the direction that she faces, and where her gaze leads (toward the tomb or the altar).

Some background information about how the chapel came into being will help show the novelty of Luca’s contribution. Cardinal James of Portugal, born in 1433, was cousin to the reigning king, and the grandson of King John of Portugal. After studying civil and ecclesiastical law, he was appointed to the bishopric of Arras, and then to the bishopric of Paphos. During the latter appointment, he befriended members of the Florentine Medici family. Because James’ father had invested heavily in Italy, James knew and loved Florence. In 1459, after he became
Cardinal Deacon of Sant’Eustachio, he died near Florence from a lingering illness. His burial chapel was then very quickly erected in his favorite church of San Miniato. Luca’s four cardinal virtues were placed above his tomb, as they were intended to be a commentary on the lifestyle and notable accomplishments of the young Cardinal James of Portugal. Because the Cardinal had known that he was going to die, he drew up a will requesting a tomb to his memory in San Miniato al Monte. The chapel where his tomb is found was built by Giovanni Rossellino, following the design of Brunelleschi’s pupil, Antonio Manetti. The contract for the ceiling was awarded to Luca della Robbia in 1460, five months after Manetti died. It was signed by Bishop Alvaro.47

The Church of San Miniato (also known as Saint Miniatas), begun in 1090 and completed in 1207, was built by reformed Benedictines; these Cluniac Benedictines were replaced by Olivetans in 1373. Prior to the building of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, the most notable Renaissance feature in this Romanesque basilica was Michelozzo’s Tabernacle in the Chapel of the Crucifix (1447-48).48 However, if anything stands out overwhelmingly in San Miniato, it is


48 The church is on top of a hill, directly south of Santa Croce and the Arno. It is inescapably in view from almost anywhere in the Arno River valley. To reach the church, visitors must climb countless steps, but after entering through the north-west entrance, and walking east to the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, the sight of the magnificent, bold colors of Luca’s ceiling is well worth the walk. In addition to the contributions of Luca and Manetti, Antonio Rossellino designed the tomb, Alesso Baldovinetti created the panel painting of the Annunciation and fresco paintings of the
Luca’s ceiling. The green and yellow diapered pattern is a most complicated background that casts forward five bold medallions. It is the strength and boldness of the design of this ceiling that holds the attention of viewers. Neither somber nor tranquil, the design is the work of an artist undergoing a transformation in his style. Vibrant energy flows from his color usage. Even in the more traditional della Robbia roundels of blue and white, seen earlier in the Brunelleschi years, the shades of blue are varied here and displayed in concentric layers of scalloped shapes. In addition, he created a heavier usage of white molding, with each ring carrying a different pattern to outline the medallions. All five medallions are massed together in a grouping that defies the harmonious architectural geometry that Brunelleschi imposed on his projects. Important symbols, such as the cardinal’s coat of arms, which Fortitude holds (Fig. 37), are painted to stand out majestically. Thanks to the freedom Luca received during the project, the ceiling projects a dominant visual statement. Everything Luca touched exudes his confidence, but this is especially clear in this work, which shows a radical shift in his style.

The shift in Luca’s style may be explained by a project that preceded his decoration in the Cardinal of Portugal’s Chapel: Luca’s Labors of the Months (Figs. 41-52) created for the study of Piero de’ Medici in the Palazzo Medici.49

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49 Church Fathers and Evangelists, Piero and Antonio del Pollaiuolo executed fresco paintings of the Angels and the altar panel painting of Saints Vincent, James, and Eustace.

49 The roundels are now located in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
The study was drastically altered in design after 1659, but accounts before this period describe the della Robbia tiles and medallions on the vault of the ceiling.\textsuperscript{50} In these works, Luca’s ability to paint two-dimensional pictorial compositions rivals sculptural relief.\textsuperscript{51} Not only are the figures and landscapes accomplished in a different manner, with cobalt oxide and gold and solely by brush, but also the subject matter shows secular imagery. Stylistically more independent from the classicizing architectural ideals of Brunelleschi, each roundel contains a scene from every day life in Italy pertaining to the month that is highlighted. Signs of the Zodiac along with the sun are placed in the upper left hand band of daylight as the moon looms in the lower right band of night. For every month leaf and dart mouldings frame the scene.

When installed in the majestic Palazzo Medici, the Zodiacal medallions were possibly inlaid with the same type of cube pattern that appears in the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal’s ceiling. Although there are missing pieces to this puzzle, the knowledge that the entire room was tiled in a continuous manner is stated by Filarete and Vasari.\textsuperscript{52} Although the date of completion of the famous study is not documented, Pope-Hennessy safely suggested the year 1456, ten years

\textsuperscript{50} Filarete, \textit{Treatise on architecture; being the treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino}, translated by John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), v. 25, 325. See also: Vasari, \textit{Lives}, v. II, 123. They both offer eyewitness details of the study.

\textsuperscript{51} Marquand, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 91. Because of the new decorative method, the attribution of the roundels has been questioned by Marquand.

\textsuperscript{52} Filarete, \textit{Treatise on architecture}, v. 25, 325. See also: Vasari, \textit{Lives}, v. II, 123.
after Brunelleschi died. The geometric placement of twelve large roundels in a small room of about 10' x 13' would have been considerably challenging for Luca, after having worked with Brunelleschian spatial patterns in much larger spaces. Sumptuous decorative schemes would have been a novel experiment for Luca in the 1450s. Yet, Luca’s patron would not have had it any other way. Piero was the likely patron of many decorative works in the Palazzo Medici, where Paolo Uccello’s paintings were hanging on the walls, Benozzo Gozzoli’s frescoes were in the chapel, and work by Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo (images of Hercules) adorned the grand salon.

Luca’s shift toward sumptuous decorative schemes continued to evolve in the 1460s, and it is truly worth considering Piero di Medici’s study a stepping stone for the development of his later work. Although Donatello’s stucco tondi disrupt the architectural serenity of Brunelleschi’s Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo, Luca appropriated the basic idea of the roundel form. Yet his designs are in harmony with the architecture, and he pushed the limits of the form beyond what Donatello created. The results of Luca’s experiments can be seen in the ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal. In reviewing the chain of events and completed artwork, from Donatello’s tondi (c.1435), to Luca’s Pazzi Chapel Apostles (c.1445-50), to the study in the Palazzo Medici (c.1445-60), to the Chapel of the Cardinal (1462-66), we can observe the shift in Luca’s style. What could have influenced Luca to shift

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53 Pope-Hennessy, Luca della Robbia, 43.
from independent medallions on a spacious, vertical wall surface to a highly decorative and fully tiled surface on a vault? With his close ties to the Medici, Bishop Alvaro likely saw the *Labors of the Months* vault in Piero’s study, which encouraged him to hire Luca. And with Luca’s natural tendency to experiment with materials, form and architectural surface, it is very likely that the Medici commission inspired the unconventional, cul-de-four ceiling decoration at San Miniato al Monte.
CHAPTER TWO

LUCA’S PROCESS: THE MAKING OF TIN-GLAZED TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES

Luca solved the problem of creating enduring terracotta sculptures. His solution required the development of a craft that was not commonly mastered by sculptors. In order to appreciate Luca della Robbia as the innovator that Vasari thought he was,\(^\text{54}\) we must examine the techniques and processes he used in the making of his tin-glazed terracotta sculptures and compare these with the ways other sculptors were working. Two texts that date to the mid-1500s are instrumental in deciphering the mystery of Luca’s process: those by Piccolpasso and Biringuccio, the most informative sources on this subject.\(^\text{55}\) Piccolpasso wrote on the potter’s art and Biringuccio predominately on the sculptor’s art. However, the information that is most valuable to us is that concerning not the sculptor’s art but the potter’s art. Three other treatises also help to verify the techniques and processes of preparing the materials, sculpting, and firing kilns: Abū’l-Qāsim’s

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\(^{54}\) Vasari, *Lives*, v. II, 122-3. Vasari states that, “...after having made many experiments, he found that by covering them with a coating of glaze, made with tin, litharge, antimony, and other minerals and mixtures fused together in a special furnace, he could produce this effect very well and make works in clay almost eternal. For this method of working, as being its inventor, he gained very great praise, and all the ages to come will therefore owe him an obligation.”

Treatise on Ceramics (1301), Theophilus’ The Various Arts, and Benvenuto Cellini’s Treatise on Goldsmithing and Sculpture (1568). As we examine Luca’s formative period, and specifically the art discussed in Chapter 1, reviewing the technical processes that he mastered leads to a better understanding of what exactly may have contributed to his innovative approach to relief sculpture.

Many contemporary maiolica pottery books pay homage to Luca della Robbia. Maiolica is a polychrome form of tin-glazing. Although the term maiolica is now broadly used in contemporary ceramic terminology, shortly after Luca’s time it was used to refer exclusively to “luster.” According to Piccolpasso (c. 1557), luster was produced between 1490 and 1560. Due to this fact, and a document stating that Luca died in 1482, the term “tin-glazed” will be used in


57 The term maiolica is derived from the island of Majorca, which was an important trading center of tin-glazed pottery during the fifteenth century. The tin-glaze was first transmitted to Europe from the Middle East during the early Middle Ages. It flourished in Moorish Spain, spread to Italy, and to Northern Europe. For a discussion on maiolica, see Wendy Watson, Italian Renaissance Ceramics: From the Howard I. and Janet H. Stein Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001). Some historians often confuse the terms majolica and maiolica. In the late 19th century, in Great Britain, a style of decoration developed that incorporated brightly colored glazes on a light colored clay body. This ware was called majolica. The differences and terminology should be noted and observed. See Hamer’s dictionary for more details: Frank Hamer, The Potter’s Dictionary of Materials and Techniques (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1975).
reference to Luca’s work.  

The empirical research, artistic and technical aims of Luca della Robbia and his atelier 46 years before the golden age described by Piccolpasso, proves to be an important stage in the early development and maturation of tin-glazing in Italy. The tin and lead glazes were ideal for the relief-decoration that the della Robbia’s incorporated into their designs. The polychrome palette common to tin-glazing techniques consisted of colors such as yellow-ochre, cobalt-blue, manganese-brown, green, and especially tin white. Metallic oxides, used to produce the colors, were painted on a tin-glazed surface. The glaze served both to hide the buff body of the clay and to prepare a ground for the painting.

Sculpting clay was no easy task in Luca’s day. Due to the nature of his work, many hours were required in performing menial, manual labor, such as digging clay, grinding materials, collecting fuel, etc. No fewer than two strong backs were necessary to accomplish these tasks. Among Luca’s named assistants

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58 Piccolpasso, *The Three Books of the Potter’s Art*, iii. Ronald Lightbown and Alan Caiger Smith, noted in the preface:

> The golden age of Italian maiolica could perhaps be regarded as roughly 1480-1530, in which, in many centres, the fullest and most attentive harmony was achieved between design ideas and subject matter on the one hand, and the newly extended technical control of colours, glazes, clays and firing methods on the other.

59 Pope-Hennessy, *Luca Della Robbia*, 34. It is quite possible that Luca acquired technical knowledge and assistance from Florentine potters. Piero di Mazeo, the three brothers Mazo, Miniato and Piero di Domenico, and Giunta di Tagio were producing glazed terracotta vessels in Santa Croce and Ricorboli.
was Agnolo di Cristofano, who helped him with the Peretola tabernacle. In 1451, Luca’s nephew Andrea, then fifteen years of age, most likely helped in the workshop. Besides assistants, Luca also required a dry, well-lit, and spacious workshop, with plenty of table space. In the summer, his workshop needed to be well ventilated and protected from the intense sun and heat. During the winter months, the wet clay had to be protected from freezing temperatures, as did Luca and his assistants, particularly because hands that work clay are not efficient or productive if cold and stiff.

Finding a convenient location for his workshop must also have been important to the enterprising artist. Tax returns tell us that in 1446 Luca’s workshop was on Via Guelfa, which must have been an ideal location. His property included a house, a couple of outbuildings, and a garden, where he probably kept his kiln. However, when he executed his early work discussed in the previous chapter, the pieces may have been made, not on the Via Guelfa, but in a house owned by his father on Via Sant’Egidio or in a country estate on the River Arno. In consideration of the quantity of work that Luca produced, it is probable that he, along with the aid of helpers, built his own kiln(s) and fired his own work.

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60 See Appendix I for the Peretola Tabernacle contract.

61 The assumption that Andrea was in the shop is based not only on Renaissance customs and familial trends, but also on the level of mastery that Andrea acquired as an adult.


63 Ibid., 12.
Nevertheless, no documentation exists to determine the whereabouts of his kilns, or when he built them. The art of kiln building, like every step of working with clay and developing glazes, was a very secretive process. Having an area for a kiln under lock and guard was of utmost importance. Special refractory bricks were made for the reverberatory kiln and glaze kiln. Kiln bricks, higher in silica or alumina than the sculpture body, retained their shape and insulating qualities repeatedly throughout the life of the kiln. Because of the energy and effort needed to collect fuel, every inch of space inside a kiln was used.

According to Biringuccio, there were various types of furnaces and crucibles during the Renaissance, and each was developed to perform a specialized function.\(^{64}\) Piccolpasso’s reverberatory furnace was highly specialized.\(^{65}\) Being made of brick, it was about three feet wide and five feet long, and two feet high. Below this level is the chamber that kept the fire, and it measured one foot wide and one foot high on three sides.\(^{66}\) Inside this kiln were areas to calcine such minerals as tin. It is documented that 100 to 200 pounds of tin and lead would be calcined at one time.\(^{67}\)

Kilns were built both with and without a foundation. While the reverberatory kiln had a solid foundation, others were built behind walls on the

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\(^{64}\) Biringuccio, *The Pirotechnia*, 281.


\(^{66}\) Ibid., book 2, 57.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., book 2, 57, 60.
floors of houses. In the sixteenth century, semi-muffle kilns were popular, as the ware was protected from direct contact with the flame. They were usually small, perhaps three or four feet on all sides. Dried straw or willow-branches were the preferred fuels for the first three hours of firing. Broom or spartium were used for the fourth hour of firing. Although the description for Piccolpasso’s kiln dates about one hundred years after the death of Luca della Robbia, we can imagine that Luca’s kiln had a similar design that evolved into Piccolpasso’s model (Fig. 53). Larger kilns are more efficient for commercially, mass-produced items, such as the potter’s ware that can be stacked up inside the chamber. Irregular shaped sculptural objects are more difficult to stack, requiring a smaller chamber. However, the height of the interior chamber of one of Luca’s kilns had to be more than 37 3/8" (0.95 m.) and the width had to be more than 26" (0.66 m.) to contain the Candelabrum-bearing Angel of 1448-51, made for the Florence Duomo. During Luca’s early years, his largest sculpture in the round, The Visitation (1445), was produced for San Giovanni Fuorcivitas in Pistoia. Although 1.55 m in height, and 1.50 m. in width, the upper and lower parts of Mary’s and Elizabeth’s bodies were produced separately and then joined when the work was installed in the church.

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68 Ibid., book 2, 90.
69 Ibid., book 2, 65, 71.
70 Ibid., book 2, 65, 71. The kiln’s dimensions in Fig. 53 are approximately 10' wide, 12' long, and 8' 6" above ground.
71 The numerical estimates include a shrinkage rate of 15 %. As the temperature increases inside the kiln, water evaporates and particles of clay become compressed.
The width of the kiln determined how large the widest section of the relief sculptures could be, and producing sculptures in sections that were not necessarily placed in the kiln in the same firing gave Luca flexibility in the creation of these clay sculptures. Determining the largest modeled section of the Pazzi Apostles could possibly show that the width of the loading area of his kiln was no less than 60 \( \frac{3}{8} \)" (154 cm).\(^{72}\) In a rectangular kiln, a section containing an Apostle’s body could be placed diagonally from corner to corner, using the greatest distance.

A muffle or semi-muffle kiln could have been the solution to Luca’s problem with firing with unclean fuels in an up-draught kiln. In this type of kiln a shell, or lining, would enclose the loading area, protecting the clay objects from direct flame or ash deposits. Deposits of wood ash would have been avoided, as they alter the glaze wherever they fall, by either discoloring it or making it run. The shell consists of bag walls and a roof for a muffle kiln.\(^{73}\) A semi-muffle kiln possesses high bag walls only, allowing the flame to vent through the roof in manner of an up-draught kiln.\(^{74}\)

Most potters used clay saggars, or clay containers, that protected the glazed object not only from wood and broom ash, but also from the flame. When considering the size of Luca’s sculptures, even the smaller sections were too large.

\(^{72}\) The numerical estimates include the diameter of the roundel (134 cm) and an added shrinkage rate of 15 %.

\(^{73}\) To create an even distribution of flame within the kiln chamber, a bag wall made from refractory material is placed between the fire and the clay product.

\(^{74}\) Piccolpasso, *The Three Books of the Potter’s Art*, book 2, 89.
to be placed in a saggar. Today, refractory kiln shelves are used to stack items in a kiln. These shelves not only aid in stacking clay products in the kiln, but offer some protection from the ash, debris, and flame in a kiln. It must be noted here that shelves were not yet invented in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, the vertical stacking configuration of Luca’s sculptures in his kiln will always be a mystery.

When Luca loaded the sculptures, and all glaze experimentation pieces were placed in the kiln, the door, or wicket, had to be bricked up. Care was taken to overlap bricks and to mud up large cracks and crevices with a coarse clay body.\textsuperscript{76} Areas in the door were left open to allow the technician to peep into the chamber and to observe the kiln’s atmosphere. Through this spy hole, the technician could observe whether the firing was in oxidation or in reduction, and he could also see the color of the flame, which helped him visually estimate the temperature of the inside chamber. Glazed terracotta usually requires two firings. The first biscuit firing is usually a higher firing than the glaze firing. A biscuit firing ranges in the vicinity of 950\textdegree{}–1000\textdegree{} C or 1740\textdegree{}-1832\textdegree{} F. Today, Orton’s pyrometric cones $\blacktriangle 08 - \blacktriangle 06$ determine the end point of the biscuit firing.\textsuperscript{77} During the Renaissance, the atmosphere and color of the flame and the interior of the chamber

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., xxiii.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., book 2, 68.

\textsuperscript{77} The symbol $\blacktriangle$ refers to a pyrometric cone. Large cones are approximately 3” tall and have three sides. They are placed upright in a wad of clay and positioned in front of the spy-hole inside the kiln. Cones are formulated to melt at specific temperatures as the kiln is heated.
were monitored to determine the end point of the firing.\textsuperscript{78} As a safeguard, a ring or sample of clay inserted near the spy hole was drawn and inspected.\textsuperscript{79} Although it has not been determined if Luca fired his sculptures twice, all historical treatises on tin-glazed ceramics advocate firing the clay product two times. The second firing should range in the vicinity of 900\degree-950\degree C or 1652\degree-1740\degree F, or in contemporary terms, cone ▲010 - ▲08. In Luca’s time, monitoring the first hours of the firing of the kiln was necessary to avoid any cracking or bloating of the clay body. While the coefficient of expansion of the glaze was noted empirically, and only by observation, a scientific approach to processing and weighing out glaze materials would be necessary for once firing. Once firing required the knowledge and level of skill that only a master with many years of experience possessed. Without using the scientific methods that are popular today, glazes can crawl, leaving defects in the product.

Firing a kiln is an art in itself. It is essential to know the significance of the color of the flame and of the atmosphere inside the kiln. Luca fired his work in a clean oxidation atmosphere in an up-draught kiln. An up-draught kiln had vents on top of the kiln to allow the flame to escape. Today, down-draught kilns are considered to be more cost efficient in that the flame circulates in the chamber longer and flows through a flue that is close to the floor at the back of the kiln and

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., book 2, 69. The kiln often required a total of twelve hours of firing time.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., book 2, 90.
leads to a chimney. For Piccolpasso, the most important criteria for a good firing depended on a prayer to God and the phase of the moon.\textsuperscript{80}

The forming of the clay in Luca’s workshop has provoked different theories among historians. Did Luca work by the additive process, building up the clay? Did he carve away the clay? Perhaps he used molds and hired assistants. Molds were often used in the potter’s workshop, but it is not a common belief that they were used by Luca for his sculpture. It is possible that he used them for the egg and dart moulding surrounding his sculpture, but this has not been proven. As for the forming process, Cruttwell claimed that, “Nothing in his work is modeled mechanically, except, perhaps, the mouldings and architectural ornaments.”\textsuperscript{81} Hartt speculated that the sculptural pieces were formed on an armature, and then cut into pieces, turned over, scraped, and hollowed out, to create a somewhat even wall.\textsuperscript{82} Both Cruttwell and Hartt believed that the pieces were biscuit fired, and then joined together during the glazing process. Some joins are very apparent, but others blend into the overall design. Any suggestion that Luca’s mouldings were cast with a clay slip is disregarded. Hartt did not believe that Luca could have figured out the shrinkage rate of the clay to join all of the pieces together after the glaze firing. Instead, he believed that the mouldings were made by pressing a less liquid and

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., book 3, 109.

\textsuperscript{81} Cruttwell, \textit{Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors}, 8.

\textsuperscript{82} Hartt, \textit{The Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal}, 77.
more plastic clay body into a mold. What has not been mentioned in the literature is that while carving the clay, Luca had to allow for the inclusion of a thick marzacotto (and perhaps a coperta), and he had to also consider the effect of the marzacotto on the recessed areas of his clay sculpture. This required careful study and calculations on his part.

After Luca sketched his subjects on paper and decided the technique he would use to form his sculptures, he had to prepare his materials. Assistants were needed to collect clay from the river beds. Sticks, rocks, and leaves had to be removed from the clay body. Often, clay had to be aged to increase plasticity. When aged and ready to work, a metal instrument was used to beat it. The smaller particles of rock in the clay were broken down in this manner. To avoid breakage or explosions in the kiln, air pockets had to be removed because when seemingly harmless empty pockets of air fill with gas and water vapors, pressure develops and the clay wall blows out.

Luca’s terracotta clay bodies were excellent as large sculptural pieces because they have large, coarse particles to open up the clay body. During the intense, hot Tuscan summers, when clay objects dry quickly, the open clay body was ideal for large pieces to dry evenly. If the work was covered with material to slow down the drying process, warping and cracking would also be reduced. Potters today say that a body that holds its shape has good tooth. For Luca to

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83 Ibid., 76-77.
sculpt his large pieces, his clay body had to have good tooth, as well as be plastic. Calcium, a vital ingredient in a clay body, is important for making a clay body hard and to decrease the chances of warpage. Thanks to the editors of Piccolpasso’s treatise, we know the following:

The CaO (Calcium) content of chalky clays like genga for traditional tin-glaze wares was usually about 20 per cent. Analyses of various chalky clays were carried out by Brogniart at Sèvres in the mid-nineteenth century, giving the following CaO contents in the fired clays.84

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clay Body</th>
<th>CaO Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Della Robbia body</td>
<td>22.40 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delft body</td>
<td>18.05 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevers body</td>
<td>14.96 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouen body</td>
<td>20.24 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials were collected on a seasonal schedule. Clay was collected, most likely, after a rainy season. Wine lees, used for glazing, were collected after the grapes were harvested, made into wine, and racked into a clean container. Firewood was most likely collected and stacked during a dry period. In Luca’s Labors of the Months series, January is represented by a woodman felling trees. Broom was most likely collected during the summer, as hay is. While some materials were traded locally, others sometimes came from foreign soils. Flanders and England were famous as sources of tin.85

84 Piccolpasso, The Three Books of the Potter’s Art, xvi.
85 Ibid., book 2, 54.
The composition of the glazes was kept secret and guarded by the della Robbia family. As in many bottegas, recipes and techniques were religiously handed down from father to son. During Piccolpasso’s time, glaze chemicals had to be processed before they could be used. This was a crucial part of the production, and often a very lengthy process. It could not have been any easier for Luca. Tin from Flanders was used for white pigment. One requirement to achieve a perfect white was to calcine tin (turn it to ash after it was melted in an iron scoop, earthen pot, or kiln). The ratio of tin to lead varied, ranging from 1:4 to 1:7. Manganese, used for purple and brown, was found throughout Italy, and especially in Tuscany. The brilliant blue in Luca’s reliefs came from an oxide, called Zaffre, known as cobalt-oxide. It also had to be prepared by roasting cobaltite or erythrite.

For the potter, the decorating and glazing stages of the process often included layers of a marzacotto and coperta. The basic ingredients for a marzacotto are sand and wine lees. Tin was added for white. Lead was added to flux it out and reduce the firing temperature. Coloring oxides, such as antimony, copper, and zaffre, were added to this tin and lead mixture to produce yellow, green, and blue. The marzacotto was mixed together, put into a pot, and placed in

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86 There is a legend that Luca wrote down the recipe of his glaze on parchment and inserted it in the head of one of his sculptures. Unfortunately, this led to the destruction of many of his Madonnas. People were so interested in the “treasure” and how they would profit from the information that they smashed open many Madonna heads, hoping they would be lucky. For more information, see Fiamma Domestici, Della Robbia: A Family of Artists (New York: Riverside, 1992), 29.

87 Piccolpasso, The Three Books of the Potter’s Art, book 2, 56.
the fire chamber during a glaze firing. The marzacotto was then ready to use on the next kiln load of clay objects. A white “bianco” (dry, matt glaze) coated the clay. This bianco is loaded with tin oxide. The next step required painting with other metallic oxides to produce colors. A coperta, or glossy glaze, then covered the entire surface. Without a coperta, the colors would be dry or rough. The coperta was predominately a late-fifteenth-century invention and was applied only to targeted areas of a vessel. Published findings concerning Luca’s decorating and glazing techniques reveal that his process differed from the potter’s craft, as explained above. Kingery and Aronson have shown that Luca did not use an overlying lead silicate coperta over his marzacotto; their findings are based on microscopic examinations of the Labors of the Months (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum).

Luca’s glazes were analyzed in the research laboratory of the British Museum to determine the chemical composition of his glazes. The results of this investigation are noteworthy. In comparison with the potter’s tin glazes of the period, Luca’s glazes are considerably different. First, the percentage of tin oxide in Luca’s glaze is approximately three times higher than that of the potter’s ware. Second, Luca eliminated the sand that the potter’s added to their glazes. Third, there is a significant difference in the sodium and potassium ratio, with Luca’s

88 Ibid., book 2, 77.

glazes being higher in sodium and much lower in potassium. This chemical analysis is extremely important in that it is direct evidence that Luca was an innovator not only in regard to the combination of subject matter and material used in Italy, but also in the glaze chemistry for that time.⁹⁰

Kingery and Aronson have proven that the glazing techniques cited in Piccolpasso are different from those produced by the della Robbia bottega. In Appendix IV is a chart showing their chemical analysis of the glazes applied to Luca’s medallion series: Labors of the Months. The statistics recorded in the chart reveal the chemical makeup of the white glaze in Luca’s Labors of the Months, in a frieze attributed to Luca’s workshop, and in a sampling of seven maiolica pieces. Kingery and Aronson’s research provides valuable evidence setting Luca’s work apart from that of the tin-glaze production potteries in the Renaissance. Their analysis of the Silica (SiO₂) content, for instance, reveals that Luca used more than 10 % less silica in his glazes than appears in the average potter’s glaze at this time. However, any ceramist today would be astounded by the ratio of 41.1 % silica. A low fire glaze requires a smaller percentage of the refractory ingredients, which are silica and alumina. Silica is an extremely refractory material and comes from sand, flint, or quartz. It makes the glaze very durable and fit snugly to the clay body. In an earthenware glaze, the ratio of silica to other ingredients is often 2:1. This varies with the amount of flux that is added. In the table of Appendix IV, the lead

⁹⁰ Ibid., 223-24.
content (PbO) is extremely high, between 25.1 % and 28.4 %, in order to bring the firing temperature of the silica down. Should there not be enough lead or flux, the glaze would crawl or crackle. Lead is a very low fire flux, and will burn out of the glaze, leaving blisters and craters if fired too high. The same defect will result if it is exposed to a reduction atmosphere in the kiln firing. Because Luca’s glaze application was usually thick, the tendency to blister and leave craters increased.

Potassium (K2O), a flux was mostly derived from wine lees. According to Piccolpasso, the sediment from winemaking was burned to ash, and this ash was used in the glaze. The lees also could have kept the other glaze materials in suspension in a liquid state, thus avoiding settling in the glaze vat. The major difference between Luca’s and potters’ glazes lies in the percentage of tin (SnO2) used. The average maiolica white glaze has 6.1 %, but Luca’s work has between 11.8 % and 20.1 %. Tin is used as an opacifier. It makes the glaze opaque and brightens and intensifies other colors.

Calcium (CaO) in earthenware glazes is also considered refractory. It is used to produce a hard, matt glaze. Today, ceramists acquire their calcium from whiting or dolomite. Marble dust, chalk, or limestone could have been sources for

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Luca. The primary function of sodium (Na\textsubscript{2}O) was that of a flux, and it was probably derived from salt.\textsuperscript{93}

Besides the brief history of tin glazing and the explanation of various materials, elements, and tools used to work with terracotta, a brief description of Luca’s process of sculpting is warranted here. What follows is an analysis of the method Luca used to sculpt, decorate, and glaze *The Ascension*.\textsuperscript{94} To begin such a project as Luca’s, the artist made preliminary sketches and a final cartoon, all of which were composed with great care. Whether the sketches were done on paper with charcoal or by producing quick, clay models, the artist made many studies until the perfect composition was rendered. Perspective, figure proportions, line and color, symbolism and subject matter, and placement of the work as well as contractual agreements were all taken into account. With clay, shrinkage rates were calculated and the models were adjusted to compensate for the shrinkage. In Luca’s *The Ascension*, a wooden or plaster form in the shape of a pointed lunette would have been constructed to support the lunette relief. For wood supports, material or paper was used to cover the surface to inhibit the clay from adhering to the surface, and to encourage the clay to dry evenly. Plaster supports allowed the

\textsuperscript{93} Although it is uncertain where Luca found salt, Germanic potters used salt from the banks of the Rhine.

\textsuperscript{94} In my analysis of Luca’s *The Ascension*, I have incorporated the opinions of Cellini, Biringuccio, Hubbard and Motture concerning the best practices for creating sculptures. For more information see: Boucher, Radcliffe, Motture, D’Agostino, and Milano, *Earth and Fire: Italian terracotta sculpture from Donatello to Canova*, 83-95.
clay to release from the surface as the plaster absorbed the water. After the lunette support was executed, clay was then pressed onto the support, making a slab of equal thickness.

The following steps describe the forming and layering of the figures and objects in *The Ascension*. First, Luca had to be aware of the moisture content of his clay body in all stages of the work, as the combination of clay bodies that are not equivalent in moisture can promote cracking. After each stage of working *The Ascension*, Luca would have covered it with a damp cloth in order to keep it from drying too fast. Should the moisture level prove to be less than adequate, water would have been sprayed onto the work in progress. Clay slip would be used to apply more clay to the background slab, building the lowest relief. In this particular sculpture, the trees behind the Apostles and Mary were most likely built up first. After wedging to remove air pockets, coils were probably formed and pinched into shape to resemble leaves. With a coating of clay slip on the back, they would have been pressed into place. Carving tools with points would have been used to draw lines and detail edges. Metal loop tools would have been used to take clay away, creating smooth, realistic forms. To finish smoothing out an area, Luca would have applied a damp cloth to it. The next step included the modeling of the background figures of Mary, the Apostles, and Christ. The heads were probably sculpted on a smaller support. Large areas of the background were

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95 Similar to kneading bread dough, wedging thoroughly mixes the clay into one homogenous mass and removes air pockets.
probably removed where they were to be placed. Once the heads were hollowed out sufficiently, they were attached to the slab in the same manner as the trees.\textsuperscript{96} The lunette was divided into manageable sections which often corresponded to a natural line of division on the figure. For instance, should a section contain both a large area of the blue background and the upper part of a body, a fold in the drapery would be natural for the join. The figure of Christ was not divided, but remained whole on one section. The highest relief was added over the center, probably in the same manner. Care was taken by Luca to create even clay walls throughout the process. As the clay figures became half dry, or leather hard, more details would have been added by inscribing with a sharp tool, or removing with a loop tool.

The next stage in the making of \textit{The Ascension} included a lengthy drying period. To assure minimal cracking, slow drying was essential. Every section of the lunette would have been covered for days, maybe weeks, until the clay slowly dried. When dampness could no longer be detected, and the clay body was many shades lighter in color, the pieces would have been stacked in the kiln and fired. The firing process for a comparable sculpture today would take a minimum of four days, from stacking to unloading the biscuit. After unloading the sculpture, Luca would have set up a decorating and glazing area. In this area, he would have cleansed the surface of the sculpture with a damp rag, or a brush, removing any dust or debris. The colors, copper green for the trees and land and cobalt blue for

\textsuperscript{96} A metal loop tool was used to hollow out thick areas of clay work. Due to uneven drying, trapped air pockets, and the firing process, it was necessary to hollow out the object from the back.
the sky and background, were applied carefully by sprinkling or by brushing them on with hog bristle paintbrushes. Applying colors could be done in the glazing process and after the first coating of marzacotto was applied. The highly detailed lines of color, such as the blue eyebrows and eyelashes of Christ, for instance, were most likely applied on top of the marzacotto. The tin-glaze, which was applied to the figures, could also have been applied to Luca’s entire lunette. Any unwanted glaze was wiped off with a damp cloth. When the glaze was completely dry, the sections of The Ascension would have been loaded into the kiln for a second firing, this time at a lower temperature. From stacking to unloading, the entire firing process would have been no less than one week.97

As Luca unloaded The Ascension sections from the kiln, there would have been a delightful series of exclamations and observations about where certain sections had been placed in the kiln. Then, Luca would have carried the sections to an area where the assembly could occur. He would have examined the permanent colors, studied the pieces for defects, and investigated the shrinkage rates of the clay body. After joining the sections like a puzzle, gilding would have been applied with a thin brush, producing thin lines of gold like those that radiate from Christ’s body. The application of gold was often the responsibility of another

97 Qāsim, “The Treatise of Abū’l Qāsim of Kashan,” 114. It is relevant to note that large sculptural pieces required more time to cool in the kiln than pottery vessels. In Qāsim’s treatise from 1301, a recommendation of one week was necessary for smaller, thin-walled vessels.
To insure unbroken lines, the artist diligently painted the gold on after the sculpture was mounted into place. The mounting of the lunette was an elaborate project itself. A document records that special tackle was required to install lunettes. The individual pieces would be joined together as closely as possible, starting with the largest, most vertical piece.

As mentioned previously, opinions and tales about Luca by early historians and critics appear throughout history, starting with Vasari. One unfortunate view repeated by many critics concerns an objection to Luca’s tin-glazed surface. As recent as 1979, Sutton noted that a lecturer had the following to say about Luca’s work: “an art so subtle in modeling had its quality somewhat weakened by the addition of a covering of creamy glaze.” Despite this negative view, it is important to take into consideration the various steps of Luca’s particular sculpting process, and his constant experimentation. Luca’s method of tin-glazing terracotta was radically different from the many ways that sculptors decorated their works in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, when oil paints, tempera paints, metal leaf, and gilding were commonly used to decorate wood, stone, and bronze.

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98 Hartt, The Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, 75-76. In discussing the details of the roundels on the ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal, Hartt stated: “...from between each pair of feathers emerge three gold rays, painted on the glazed surface by Giovanni d’Andrea after the ceiling was safely in place.”

99 Pope-Hennessy, Luca Della Robbia, 14, noted that in August 1451, Andrea della Robbia retrieved tackle used to install lunettes; it was purchased from Maso di Bartolomeo.

surfaces. Luca instead created a body of work that sets itself apart from all other sculptors before him. With his new techniques in the forming process, glaze development, incorporation of permanent colors, and reinterpretation of subject matter, he executed highly valued monumental clay sculptures that made him a distinctive pioneer in Quattrocento Tuscany. His work was attractive to the richest guilds and was broadly popular with the citizens of Florence.
CONCLUSION

One of the first published authors who wrote of Luca della Robbia’s invention of tin-glazed terracotta sculptures in Europe was Giorgio Vasari. He stated:

But since, on reckoning up after these works how much there had come to his hand and how much time he spent in making them, he recognized that he had gained very little and that the labour had been very great, he resolved to abandon marble and bronze and to see whether he could gather better fruits from another method. Wherefore, reflecting that clay could be worked easily and with little labour, and that it was only necessary to find a method whereby works made with it might be preserved for a long time, he set about investigating to such purpose that he found a way to defend them from the injuries of time; for, after having made many experiments, he found that by covering them with a coating of glaze, made with tin, litharge, antimony, and other minerals and mixtures fused together in a special furnace, he could produce this effect very well and make works in clay almost eternal. For this method of working, as being its inventor, he gained very great praise, and all the ages to come will therefore owe him an obligation.  

Although Vasari wrote many years after Luca’s death, his contribution to the body of literature was, and still is, very useful in understanding the period. He not only

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shared with us what life was like for the artist in the fifteenth century, but what the motivational forces of the artist were as well. The above statement may be very plausible and credible. In consideration of the informative value of Vasari’s condensed biography, many questions still exist concerning the life and work of Luca della Robbia and his remarkable innovation of tin-glazed terracotta sculptures.

This thesis has examined relationships between artists, patrons, humanists, and artworks. It is evident that as Sir John Pope-Hennessy has postulated, Luca della Robbia was highly influenced by Filippo Brunelleschi, and the success of Luca’s career depended on him. In as much as Brunelleschi is deserving of this kind of credit, for he was a talented, gifted genius, and he controlled, directed, and guided artists who worked on projects with him, he nevertheless did not execute the actual works. In conjunction with his association with Brunelleschi, it was absolutely essential to investigate Luca’s sculptures made during his formative years (pre-1441). Luca’s work in bronze and marble also informed his terracottas, as this paper has suggested. My contention has been that an analysis of the style and written documentation of Luca’s early works in relation to his collaboration with the architect Brunelleschi is beneficial in determining the development of Luca’s career. Although Brunelleschi is given credit for the innovation of tin-glazed terracotta, Luca was responsible for developing and conceiving an entire oeuvre of glazed terracotta sculptures. Like other artists of his generation, Luca
was directly influenced by many artists at work in Florence in the early 1400s, as well as by Roman and Greek antiquities, and his body of work at its core shows subjects, forms, techniques, and styles popular at the time. From the influences of his mentor in the goldsmith shop, the collection of Nicolao Nicoli, his master teacher in sculpting (whether it be Nanni di Banco or Ghiberti), Brunelleschi, and Donatello, Luca’s own style developed along with a highly advanced sensitivity for technical process. While his artworks could not have existed without the accomplishments of the above-mentioned artists, his tin-glazed terracotta sculptures could not have existed without the accomplishments of the local potters and their willingness to share information. His work would not have come to fruition at all if it were not for a deep sensitivity for depicting religious subjects. His ambitiousness depended on his religious environment. He was able to masterfully manipulate the materials, integrate ideas from his artist sources, incorporate his work within the new architecture, and respond to the needs of his patrons.

In regard to Luca della Robbia’s style, noticeable changes were made after Brunelleschi’s death. Three people especially encouraged Luca to experiment and to expand his palette. The architect Michelozzo, his wealthy Florentine patron Piero de’ Medici, and the book collector Nicolao Nicoli all emboldened Luca to use color, humanist subjects, material, and space in such a way that was new and unusual as he changed his artistic goals with creative solutions. Luca’s usage of color adopted symbolic meaning along with a very pleasing and eye-catching
aesthetic quality. His experimentations with humanist subjects became popular, especially in the usage of the zodiac on the *Labors of the Months* roundels. He was not compelled to work only in low relief, but developed a series of paintings on terracotta as well. With Luca’s development as a decorator, came his bent toward the highly ornate, which challenged him to completely cover entire floor and vault surfaces.

Lastly, my investigation has shown that according to tests, Luca’s clay body and glaze chemistry were unique to his bottega. In the process of creating colors with tin and lead glazes, Luca developed a glaze that worked suitably in his favor, and with, I might add, a uniquely blended clay body. After Brunelleschi’s death, a very noticeable and expanded palette of color saturated his work. Luca’s clay body and glaze chemistry represent an outstanding technical achievement in composition and application.

Although there is much speculation about Luca’s life as an artist, who he studied under, when he first worked with terracotta, and which members of his family worked with him, historians almost always seem to retreat to studying the various attributes common to the Renaissance, such as the religious or humanistic subjects and iconography, the classicizing or naturalistic style, and the architectural setting in which his artwork is placed. By reviewing the literature, it is apparent that Luca was an astute student who kept abreast of all the developments in his period, and Sir John Pope-Hennessy has convincingly shown that Brunelleschi had
an enormous impact on Luca’s career. In addition to the advantages of having worked with the most illustrious architect, it was because of his adaptive nature that we are now able to appreciate the *Labors of the Months* that Piero di Medici commissioned and the turning point that they induced in Luca’s oeuvre. Even more apparent is the fact that Luca was a very successful businessman. With the knowledge he gained from the architects, patrons, humanists, painters, sculptors, and potters, he carved a comfortable niche for himself and his family in the very competitive Florentine marketplace. Evidence of this prosperous niche was profusely stated in Vasari’s biography: “The fame of these works spreading not only throughout Italy but throughout all Europe, there were so many who desired them that the merchants of Florence, keeping Luca, to his great profit, continually at this labour, sent them throughout the whole world.”\(^\text{102}\) An artist’s success is not entirely defined by extrinsic monetary rewards alone. It is also defined by the artist’s mission, the joy derived from carrying out that mission, the continual exploration to improve and to develop an oeuvre, the artist’s innovations, and the power, grace and quality of the body of work. Vasari so elegantly and impressively articulated these complementary values of success in the following statement: “Wherefore the world and the arts of design became the richer by a new, useful, and most beautiful art, and he gained immortal and everlasting glory and praise.”\(^\text{103}\)


\[^\text{103}\] Ibid., 128.


_____.. Vocabulario Toscano dell’Arte del Disegno. Florence, 1681.


APPENDIX I

PAYMENT RECORDS FOR LUCA DELLA ROBBIA’S
TABERNACLE OF THE SACRAMENT, 1441-42, SANTA MARIA NUOVA,
PERETOLA.\(^{104}\)

I. 1441. Lucha di Simone della Robbia, maestro
d’intaglio, de dare adì 4 d’aghosto fior. venti,
porto contanti, sono per parte d’un tabernacolo di
marmo per tenere il chorpo di Christo nella cap-
pella di Santolucha ; a uscita segnato p. p. a c. 66 .

E  adì 20 di giennaio fior. sei, porto contanti a
uscita, segnato p. p. a c. 95.......................................................... Fior. 6  __  __
E  adì 15 di febbraio fior. dodici, porto contanti a
uscita segnato p. p. a c. 101.................................................... Fior. 12  __  __
E  adì 17 di marzo fior. dieci porto di detto a uscita
segnato p. p. a c. 104............................................................... Fior. 10  __  __
E  de dare adì 7 d’aprile 1442 fiorini dieci larghi
d’oro porto contanti a uscita a c. 107............................... Fior. 10  __  __
E  adì 16 maggio giorini trenta doro larghi porto
contanti a uscita c. 114 anzi li paghamo per
lui a Domenicho di Cristofano che lavoro
collui.......................... Fior. 30  __  __
E  adì 2 giugno fior. dieci porto contanti a uscita
a c. 116.................................................................................. Fior. 10  __  __
E  adì detto lire quaranta, soldi 10 posto che
l’opera di Santa Maria del fiore de avere in
questo a c. 103, sono per 7 pezi di marmo di lib.
5400 per soldi 15 per libbra e erano auti della
detta opera che se n’havessi a far debitore detto
Lucha................................................................. Fior.

[Libro Debitori e Creditori 1441-1446, Segn. C., a c. 69.]

\(^{104}\) The payment records for Luca’s _Peretola Tabernacle_ are housed in the Archivio del R.
Archispedale di Santa Maria Nuova, Florence. The above transcriptions by Miss Eugenia Levi are
published in Marquand, _Luca Della Robbia_, 65.
2. 1442. Lucha di Simone della Robbia de dare
fior. ciento sette, lib. I, soldi 16, posto de avere in
questo a c. 69 sono chagione del tabernacholo
dove sta el Chorpo di Christo nella chappella di
Santo Lucha, il quale fecie detto Lucha.......................  Fior. 107 1 16
[Libro Debitori e Creditori, 1441-1446, Segn. C., a c. 154.]

3. 1443. Lucha di Simone della Robbia, maestro
d'intaglio, de dare fior. 107 1 16; i quali X auti
contanti levati dal libro vecchio de’ debitori seg-
nato b., c. 255.................................................................  Fior. 107 1 16
I detti danari sono per chagione del tabernacholo
del marmo dove si tiene il corpo di Christo nella
chappella di Santo Lucha, che n’ha a esser
paghato.

[Libro Debitori e Creditori 1443-1490, a c. 15.]
APPENDIX II

PAYMENT RECORDS FOR LUCA DELLA ROBBIA’S
RESURRECTION LUNETTE, 1442-45, SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE,
FLORENCE.\textsuperscript{105}

1. 1442, luglio 21. Item locaverunt Luce Simonis della Robbia,
scultori, ad faciendum in archo supra sacrestiam sui perghami Resurrexio-
nem Domini in terra cotta invetriata prout videntur alia laboreria fieri et
secundum designum factum et melius si melius fieri potest et promisit dare
perfectam hinc ad unum annum et operarii promiserunt dare illud pretium
fiendum per homines eligendos per consules et operarios qui tune temporis
erunt cum hoc quod possit dare duos suspectos; que omnia etc. promixit
actendere etc. sub pena lib. C. Presentibus Filippo Brunelleschi, Ridolfo
(Lotti), Andrea Lazeri, Simone Laurentii et aliis.
[Bastardelli, Serie No. III, c. 32.]

2. 1444, Gennaio 18. (New style, 1445.) Luce Simonis della Robbia
conductor ad faciendum unam storiam di terra conductam \textit{supra} (cancelled
and corrected) \textit{in} archum prima sacrestie, 1. L fp. pro parte dicti laborerii
facti et positi in dicto archu. [Stanzamenti, G, c. 31.]

3. 1444, Febbr. 26. (New style, 1445.) Luce Simonis della Robbia
intagliatori 1. CCCCXL sunt pro resto et integra solutione unius laborerii
invetriati (in margine: in quo est Resurrexio Domini nostri) facti et positi
in archo prima sacrestie, videlicet 1. CXL pro sua industria et inventione ad
inveniendum dictum laborerium et residuam pro suo magisterio dicti labo-
rerii alias libras C quas iam habuit super dicto laborerio in quo est Resur-
rexio domini nostri Jesu Christo (the last words after laborerio are
cancelled and the word laborerio is corrected into conducta). [Stanz.,
G, c. 38.]

\textsuperscript{105} The payment records for Luca’s \textit{Resurrection Lunette} are housed in the Archivio dell’Opera del
Duomo, Florence. The above transcriptions by Miss Eugenia Levi are published in Marquand, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 75.
APPENDIX III

PAYMENT RECORDS FOR LUCA DELLA ROBBIA’S
ASCENSION LUNETTE, 1446-51, SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE,
FLORENCE. 106

1. 1446. Die XI. mensis Ottobris. Operarii antedicti ...locaverunt et concesserunt, etc. Luce Simonis della Robbia scultori presenti et conducendi ad faciendum: Unam storiam terre cocte Invetriate illius materie qua est illa posita in arcu sacrestie que storia debet esse vid. Ascensio dni uni Yhu XRI, cum duodecim figuris apostolorum et matris ejus virginis marie et quod mons sit sui coloris treebores etiam sui coloris et secundum designum factum in quodam modello parvo, qui stare debet in opera usque ad perfectionem dicti laborerii et melius, si melius fieri potest. Quam storiam debet perfecisse hinc a dicto menses proximos futuros et posuisse super archum secunde sacristie et pro qua storia et Magisterio debet abere et pro suo magisterio labore et industria illud quod declaratum erit per officium operariorum ventuororum in uffitio existentium etc.

[Archivio dell’ Opera del Duomo di Firenze. Libro Alloghagion. Registro segnato I, c. 54 t.]

2. 1450. 23 Dicembre. Luca Simonis della Robbia lib. 150 pro parte locationis sibi facte de calmo suprasecundam sacrestiam.

[Delib. dei Consoli e Operai, c. 17 t.]

3. 1451. 30 Giugno. Luce Simonis della Robbia libras centum 50 pro parte solutionis unius storie per eum facte super archetto secunde sacristie. [Delib. cit., c. 47.]

106 The payment records for Luca’s Ascension Lunette are housed in the Archivio dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence. The above transcriptions are published in Marquand, Luca Della Robbia, 78.
APPENDIX IV

DATA DISPLAYING THE CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF DELLA ROBBIA GLAZES.\(^{107}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labors of the month</th>
<th>Frieze</th>
<th>Maiolica White (Average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SiO(_2)</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL2O3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SnO(_2)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PbO</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MnO</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NgO</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>CaO</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na2O</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2O</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FeO</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sb2O(_3)</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoO</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>As2O(_3)</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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</table>

\(^{107}\) This data is based on Kingery and Aronson’s research. Kingery, “The Glazes of Luca Della Robbia,” 221-225.
CATALOG OF SELECTED TIN-GLAZED TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES
BY LUCA DELLA ROBBIA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cat.</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1441-42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Tabernacle of the Sacrament</em> (Figure 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Figure 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1442-45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>The Resurrection</em> (Figure 6)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Figure 6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1446-51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>The Ascension</em> (Figure 7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Figure 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1460-65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Andrew</em> (Figure 9)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Figure 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1445-50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>The Twelve Apostle Roundels</em> (Figures 11-22)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(Figures 11-22)</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Matthias</em> (Figure 11)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Figure 11)</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Bartholomew</em> (Figure 12)</td>
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<td>(Figure 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1445-50</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Matthew</em> (Figure 13)</td>
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<td>(Figure 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1445-50</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Peter</em> (Figure 14)</td>
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<td>(Figure 14)</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint John the Evangelist</em> (Figure 15)</td>
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<td>(Figure 15)</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint James the Great</em> (Figure 16)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Figure 16)</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td><em>Saint Andrew</em> (Figure 17)</td>
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<td>Artist</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<td>c. 1445-50</td>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Luca della Robbia,</td>
<td>Saint James the Less (Figure 18)</td>
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<td>Saint Simon (Figure 19)</td>
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<td>Luca della Robbia, <em>December</em> (Figure 52)</td>
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1. *Tabernacle of the Sacrament* (Figure 1)
1441-42
Marble, glazed terracotta, and bronze
6' 6 ¾" x 8' 8 ⅛" (200 x 265 cm.)
Santa Maria, Peretola

Bibliography: Burlamacchi, 1900; Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, Petrucci, and Domestici, 1999; Marquand, 1914; Poeschke, 1990; Pope-Hennessy, 1980; Reymond, 1897; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

Important for being Luca’s first documented sculptural work that contains glazed terracotta, the *Tabernacle of the Sacrament* was originally commissioned for the choir chapel, dedicated to Saint Luke, in the church of Sant’ Egidio, which adjoins the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, Florence. The date of transfer to Peretola is unknown. On August 4, 1441, Luca received his first payment for the Tabernacle. By 1443, the final cost for this work was one hundred and seven florins. Records show that the marble was obtained from the Opera del Duomo, and Luca’s assistant on this project was Agnolo di Cristofano.

Even though the glazing is exquisite and the mosaic marquetry is exceptional, critics often value the marble relief, but downplay the glazed terracotta in comparison to the relief. Luca’s Tabernacle has an architectural frame that is similar to the frames in the Parte Guelfa niche at Orsanmichele (Fig. 4) and in Masaccio’s *Trinity* in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 5). Among the prominent

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108 See Appendix I, which has a copy of Marquand’s transcription. See also Pope-Hennessy, *Luca Della Robbia*, 234.

Brunelleschian architectural elements are the arch, pediment, fluted pilasters, and Corinthian capitals.

Luca’s *Tabernacle of the Sacrament* in Sant’ Egidio was meant to be viewed in conjunction with *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin* by Domenico Veneziano. While Domenico’s frescoes appear to have been on the right wall of the chapel, the intended location for the Tabernacle is still unfortunately inconclusive. The majority of the Tabernacle is in marble, with embellishments of glazed terracotta and bronze. A half-length figure of God the Father giving his blessing is in the pediment. In the tympanum of the Tabernacle is an image of the Pietà, with Christ supported by an angel and flanked by the Virgin and Saint John. Two winged angels hold a laurel wreath which surrounds a bronze roundel. In the roundel is an image of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove, below which is a rectangular door depicting Christ as the Man of Sorrows holding a cross and a chalice. The attribution to Luca of the latter bronze relief has been challenged.\(^{110}\) The original roundel of the Holy Ghost is now in the Museo del Bargello, Florence. The halos were once gilded and the wings had gilded highlights. Blue irregular shaped terracotta tiles provide a background for the lunette, a green garland of cherub heads and ribbons form a frieze, and glazed terracotta decorative patterns of rosettes, green fern leaves, and the arms of the Hospital (the crutch) appear at the

base of the Tabernacle. All the colors, especially the blues, green, and purple-violet, work in harmony.
2. *The Resurrection* (Figure 6)  
1442-45  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
6' 6 ⅜" x 8' 8 ⅜" (200 x 265 cm.)  
Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence

Condition: Nearly undetectable is the shivering of the glaze. Surface gilding appears in the way of golden rays, which are worn, more so on the right side of Christ. Traces of gilding also appear on the halo of Christ.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; De Foville, 1910; Domestici, 1992; Gaborit and Bormand, 2002; Marquand, 1914; Poeschke, 1993; Pope-Hennessy, 1980, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

The authorities of Santa Maria del Fiore commissioned Luca to provide a sculptural relief for the tympanum of the door beneath Luca’s *Cantoria*. Upon entering the Duomo and gazing toward the New (or North) Sacristy, the Sagrestia Nuova, and across the choir will reveal three works by Luca: his *Cantoria, The Resurrection* lunette, and bronze doors, all very prominently grouped together. The first documentation of the lunette is a contract signed by Brunelleschi and dated July 21, 1442. According to the document, the lunette was to be completed within one year; however, Pope-Hennessy has proposed that it actually took two years and seven months to complete the project. Two documents of 1445 (January 18 and February 26) list payments given to Luca by the Duomo’s administrators.  

Central to the focus of *The Resurrection*, Christ is shown having risen from the dead in a very noble manner. Soldiers lie asleep at the base of the tomb.

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111 Pope-Hennessy, *Luca Della Robbia*, 37. See also Marquand, *Luca Della Robbia: Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology III*, 75. See a copy of Marquand’s transcription in Appendix II of this paper.
Elaborately detailed uniforms tightly fit their relaxed muscles, and their gestures and bodies are very true to nature. Angels hovering around the solid, vertical Christ gaze adoringly at the miraculous savior. Christ’s divine nature is accentuated by his wounds and halo, as well as the simplicity of the golden rays, uncomplicated color scheme, and all’antica drapery.

The figures are joined together with impeccably planned modeling, reducing unnecessary lines caused by the abutment of sections. Gaborit and Bormand noted that there are at least twenty pieces to this tympanum, and that the largest of these measures at least one meter high. While the figures, tomb, and plants are shown in white against the flat blue background, a lighter shade of blue is noticeable in the clouds. Upon close inspection, Pope-Hennessy determined that Christ’s eyes are colored yellow with dark pupils.

Marquand has compared the composition to Ghiberti’s first bronze door and to a window in the drum of the dome designed by Ucello, both of his comparisons have been highly criticized by Pope-Hennessy. The angels alongside Christ, according to Domestici, are a Ghibertian compositional motif. Poeschke as well pointed out the similarity to Ghiberti, calling attention to the soldiers, especially the


113 Pope-Hennessy, Italian Renaissance Sculpture, 367.

114 Ibid., 367.

115 Domestici, Della Robbia: A Family of Artists, 19.
one leaning against a shield.\textsuperscript{116} Comparing Ghiberti’s graceful \textit{Resurrection} to Luca’s composition, Cruttwell observed that Luca’s drapery and forms reveal more strength.\textsuperscript{117} Cruttwell also found a resemblance among the angels of this lunette and those in Luca’s relief of the Crucifixion in Impruneta (\textit{Chapel of the Crucifixion}).\textsuperscript{118} An Endymion sarcophagus (moved from Saint John Lateran to the Palazzo Rospiglosi) depicts a sleeping soldier, whose limbs are raised in the very manner that Luca portrays one of his sleeping soldiers.\textsuperscript{119} De Foville considered the treatment of the soldiers, tomb, and angels to be in the tradition of Giotto.\textsuperscript{120} Also, Luca’s plants have details similar to those on the arch of Constantine. The face of Christ is of particular interest, as its characteristics later appear in his \textit{Apostles} of the Pazzi Chapel and the Impruneta altars.\textsuperscript{121} Closely related stylistically to the figures and the handling of drapery in \textit{The Resurrection} are those of Luca’s \textit{Visitation} at San Giovanni Fuorcivitas in Pistoia and his \textit{Madonna and Child with two Angels} at the Bode Museum in Berlin. Twenty years later, Verrocchio’s \textit{Resurrection} shows stylistically that it was inspired by this lunette. Despite the similarities that this composition has to other artists’ works, Pope-\textsuperscript{116} Poeschke, \textit{Donatello and his world: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance}, 413.

\textsuperscript{117} Cruttwell, \textit{Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors}, 37.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{119} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 37.

\textsuperscript{120} Jean De Foville, \textit{Les della Robbia} (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1910), 25, 43.

\textsuperscript{121} Cruttwell, \textit{Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors}, 70.
Hennessy proposed that Luca’s treatment of this subject matter was clearly the first “Renaissance” reinterpretation.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{122} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 38, 235.
3. The Ascension (Figure 7)
1446-51
Glazed terracotta with polychromatic palette
6' 6 ⅜" x 8' 6 ⅜" (200 x 260 cm.)
Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence

Condition: Nearly undetectable is the shivering of the glaze. There was possibly a miscalculation in creating the blue background on the right edge. There are shallow firing cracks and a minimal wearing of the surface gilding.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; De Foville, 1910; Marquand, 1914; Poeschke, 1993; Pope-Hennessy, 1980, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

The Ascension is located in the tympanum of the Old (or South) Sacristy, Sagrestia Vecchia, of Santa Maria del Fiore on the opposite side of the church from The Resurrection. The document for the commission of this work is dated October 11, 1446; the work was completed in 1451.123 Luca requested naturalistic colors for the mountains and trees in an amended contract. It also stated that the piece was to be completed in eight months. Marquand noted that only eleven apostles appear in the relief, whereas twelve were requested in the contract.124 Sir John Pope-Hennessy instead translated the contract to read eleven apostles.125 On August 5, 1451, the composition was appraised at 500 lire by Bernardo Rossellino and Pagno di Lapo Portigiani.126

123 Marquand, Luca Della Robbia: Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology III, 78. See also Appendix III. Three documents for the work exist, one of these is a contract and the other two list payments on December 23, 1450 and June 30, 1451.
124 Ibid., 76-77.
125 Pope-Hennessy, Luca Della Robbia, 235.
126 Ibid., 235.
Wearing a cruciferous nimbus, Christ ascends into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Kneeling, the Virgin and eleven Apostles are grouped, in semi-circles at Christ’s side (as stated in Mk 16:14-20). Marquand recognized Saint Peter in the front left and a beardless Saint Thomas on the right, with Saints Andrew and Bartolommeo nearby. Christ is modeled in a single piece without any parts joined. Detailed features include yellow irises, blue eyebrows and eyelashes. He is, like the figure of Christ in *The Resurrection*, the strong vertical focal point of the composition. Unlike *The Resurrection*, however, his body is much more loosely formed. *The Ascension* contains elements that were highly influenced by Ghiberti, especially the curved body of Christ and the long sweep of draperies. The eleven Apostles have impressed historians throughout the centuries. Tight-fitting draperies reveal form and muscle, relaxed and taut. In some of the men, the greenish-yellow eyes show as much detail as in those of Christ. Much of the surface gilding has survived the years of exposure to pollutants and cleaning. He used the color green for mountains, trees, and shrubs, the color white for figures, and blue for the background. Pope-Hennessy compared the pose of Christ to a Hellenistic Aphrodite in Mantua. As with *The Resurrection* lunette above the door to the Sagrestia Nuova, comparisons have also been made to the Christ in the

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Resurrections of Uccello and Ghiberti.\footnote{Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 38.} Because of glaze flaws, a few historians have mentioned that Luca had not yet mastered the new process of glazed terracotta sculpture.
4. *Saint Andrew (San Andrea)* (Figure 9)  
c. 1460-65  
Glazed terracotta with palette of blue, white, and green  
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence  

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; De Foville, 1910; Marquand, 1914; Poeschke, 1993; Pope-Hennessy, 1980, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

According to Marquand, the image found over the entrance of the portico of the Pazzi chapel at Santa Croce depicts the Apostle Andrew; the figure has also been identified as God the Father and Christ.\(^{130}\) Marquand’s research has also suggested that this could be a portrait of Andrea dei Pazzi, the commissioner of the chapel.\(^{131}\) Based on the style of the modeling of this figure, the piece has been dated c. 1460-65, placing it later than Luca’s images of the Apostles. The diameter of this tondo, which is 134 cm., is the exact circumference as the interior Apostle roundels. At the end of a long courtyard, the figure welcomes visitors to the chapel. Placed centrally above a continuous frieze and triangular pediment, the position exudes honor and power. Should the doors to the chapel be opened, the altar is directly in view. As the visitor steps onto the portico, and looks up, the glorious colors of Luca’s earthenware tiles shower the inside of the dome. The modeling or casting of the tondo appears to have been done in four sections: the head and shoulders, the right arm and cross, the remaining body, and the background. Facial features include the blue eyelashes and eyebrows, as in the

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\(^{131}\) Ibid., 98-9.
figure of Christ in *The Ascension*. Although here, undelineated gray-blue irises surround dark pupils. A very light green cross has been incorporated into the medallion. This is one of the roundels with concentric blue banding. Radiating golden lines originating at his body of the figure extend outward. Unlike the twelve Apostles, the figure in this entrance roundel does not have a halo. The figure was likely inspired by an antique statue. His posture is stately, noble, and confident. Possessing a cross in his right hand and book in his left, the figure on the outside entrance wall of the chapel shows attributes that are similar to those of Andrew depicted in the roundel inside the chapel, suggesting that the figure over the entrance also represents Saint Andrew.
5. The Twelve Apostle Roundels (Figures 11-22)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white
each roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

Located in the chapter-house founded by Andrea dei Pazzi in 1429, the roundels showing the twelve Apostles are a superb example of Luca della Robbia’s enameled terracotta sculptural reliefs. Complications arose when Andrea de’ Pazzi died on October 19, 1445, and Brunelleschi, who was the head architect, died in 1446, leaving the chapel unfinished. In 1451 Andrea’s sons arranged to complete the work. By 1457, certain stages of the construction were still underway, but by 1469 the chapel had been completed. Unfortunately, contracts, tax records, or other documents do not exist to identify the various stages of the construction or the commission of the many terracotta decorations installed in the chapel. Vasari attributed to Luca della Robbia all the glazed terracotta found in the chapel (including the four Evangelist roundels in the pendentives).\(^{132}\) The pendentive roundels have also been attributed to Donatello and, at times, to Brunelleschi. Far too many historians have debated the authorship of the Evangelist roundels, however, as their style and finish are unquestionably different from Luca’s terracottas; a discussion of these will therefore not be included in this catalog.

Historians have found dating of the Apostle roundels to be problematic. Marquand, who first cited the years 1430-40, also dated them between 1440 and 1450.\(^\text{133}\) Cruttwell suggested that they should be dated 1440-50.\(^\text{134}\) Pope-Hennessy believed that Luca started modeling them in the 1440s.\(^\text{135}\) As for the dating controversy of the reliefs, many comparisons have been made to *The Resurrection* lunette at Santa Maria del Fiore. For this reason, their dating remains close to 1445 for art historians. However, four historians ascribe later decades to the reliefs: Reymond, de Foville, and Schubring have suggested the years 1450-60, and Bode dated them 1470-78.\(^\text{136}\)

Displayed on the north wall of the Chapel, from left to right, are *Saints Matthias* and *Bartholomew*. *Saints Matthew, Peter, John the Evangelist* and *James the Great* are located on the east wall. South wall Apostles are *Saints Andrew* and *James the Less*. And on the west, the darkest wall in the Chapel, are *Saints Simon, Thaddeus, Thomas* and *Philip*. The marble-white Apostle figures on a blue ground are essential elements of the Brunelleschian architecture as they sit in the wall and become a part of the architecture. Framed by the gray pietra serena pilasters, frieze, and molding, the *Apostles* encircle the chapel just below the frieze, and above blind window frames. Symbolism is introduced in the color scheme of five


\(^\text{134}\) Cruttwell, *Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors*, 77.


of the Apostles: *Saints Matthew, Peter, John the Evangelist, James the Great* and *Andrew*. Honoring them are seven layers of blue that range in values, with the darkest blue on the widest circumference and the lightest blue shown next to the Apostle; these rings are thought to represent the seven circles of heaven. In addition, symbolic attributes are incorporated into each roundel.

As in *The Resurrection* and *The Ascension*, such features as the yellow irises with a dark blue boundary, gilded golden rays, and detailed eyelashes and eyebrows are also found on the Pazzi *Apostles*. The high relief, with heads protruding out from the roundels, reveals that the figures all have very individual characteristics, especially in gesture, form, and attributes. The bare feet, nimbus, robe and mantle are the additional commonalities that unite the roundels as a series. In addition, the luxurious feature of a gilded halo is found on each Apostle’s head. All roundels possess a blue background with a white glazed saint seated on a cloud. Because the saints are to be viewed from below, the legs of the figures were foreshortened, from hip to knee, to create an illusion of proportion and to allow an unobstructed view of the upper part of the saints’ bodies.

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137 Ibid., 98-9.
6. *Saint Matthias (San Mattia)* (Figure 11)  
c.1445-50  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;  
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

One of two saints on the north wall of the Chapel, *Saint Matthias* is  
depicted in deep reflection. Chosen to take the place of Judas, he displays no  
enthusiasm in this relief.\(^{138}\) Whether he is thinking of the tragedy of the cross or  
the perfidy of his predecessor in the Apostolate, as Marquand suggested, his left  
hand supports a very heavy head, with the gesture suggesting melancholy.\(^{139}\) He  
holds a book in his right hand, supporting it between his left leg and elbow.  
Matthias, according to Voragine, has numerous legends which were disseminated  
throughout history.\(^{140}\) Whether he is holding the book as a symbol of his education  
or because of his mission to preach the Gospel in Judea, his position near the corner  
of the wall is farthest away from the altar. The Apostle is not gazing toward the  
altar; instead, he dreamily gazes toward the west wall entrance to the chapel. His  
right arm carries a strong right angle that leads both to the book, which he so  
casually leans on as if it were an extension of his body, and to the east wall of the  

\(^{138}\) Acts 1:15-26 describes the event in which Matthias became an Apostle.  


\(^{140}\) Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), v. I,  
171-77.
chapel, where the altar resides. The head of Christ in *The Resurrection* located in Santa Maria del Fiore has been compared to the head of this saint.
7. *Saint Bartholomew (San Bartolommeo)* (Figure 12)  
c. 1445-50  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence

Condition: Slight glaze defects are located on the right shoulder, upper arm, right hand, and robe. Chips in protruding areas, such as the knife, tip of the nose, and toes, are discernable.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914; Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

To the right of *Saint Matthias* on the north wall is *Saint Bartholomew*, who maintains a slightly more casual posture. With his left hand propped on his knee and his head tilted back in reflection, he gazes toward the east wall of the chapel. Cruttwell described him as the most primitive of the Apostle figures, especially in his proportions, with the upper body much heavier than the lower.¹⁴¹ His ankles are revealed and drapery is gathered between his legs. While resting on a book, his right hand also holds a large knife. The knife suggests one of Voragine’s recorded legends that Saint Bartholomew was flayed while still alive.¹⁴² The figure’s appearance has been compared to the *Saint Andrew* roundel. Other comparisons have also been made to Donatello’s *Saint John the Evangelist*, located originally on the façade of the Duomo.¹⁴³


8. *Saint Matthew (San Matteo)* (Figure 13)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white roundel is 52 ⅞" (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

**Condition:** There is damage to the saint’s nose and the angel’s chin.

**Bibliography:** Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914; Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

*Saint Matthew* is the first figure on the left of the east wall, where the altar is located. The seated figure is surrounded by circles of varying shades of blue representing the seven circles of heaven, as noted earlier. Matthew’s attributes, a kneeling angel holding an inkpot and a book, are recognizable here. Clothed in rigid, tight-fitting drapery and holding a pen in his right hand, he is shown reviewing the text that he authored, the Book of Matthew. His head is slightly cocked to his left, and toward the altar. With lowered eyes, he reads from his book. The concave background is deeper than in some of the earlier roundels. This relief has been compared to Luca’s *Saint Matthew* on the bronze New Sacristy door in the Florence Duomo. The angel with the inkpot has been compared to the angels of Luca’s *The Resurrection* in Santa Maria del Fiore.\(^{144}\)

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 78.
9. Saint Peter (San Pietro) (Figure 14)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white roundel is 52 ¾” (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914; Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

The second figure on the east wall, Saint Peter, the fisherman and rock of the church, is curiously different than the other saints because of his archaic head. However, the concentric blue circles of heaven are sharpest in this Apostle roundel. With his head turned toward the altar and his eyes directed toward his brother Andrew, the saint holds a book with his left hand and gestures with his right. Having a fluted halo and papal keys, Peter holds up his right hand in benediction. His mantle is fastened with a pluvial button, crosses decorate the stole that intersects at his waist, and the hair on his head is divided into two tiers. Peter was considered the chief of the disciples, and his placement next to the altar is testament to his role. Pope-Hennessy considered this roundel to be drastically different from the others, in that the treatment of the head, halo, keys and book appear to be modeled in a different manner. Because of these differences, he questioned the authorship of this piece. There are technical variations in the

145 Derived from a classical source, hair and fluted halo are considerably different than the other Apostles.

146 For information on the keys of the kingdom, see Matt.: 16:13-18 for information on the keys of the kingdom.

147 Pope-Hennessy, Luca Della Robbia, 237.
glaze on *Saint Peter’s* right hand, right knee, and book. Luca’s successors were very much inspired by the modeling of this Apostle, as copies of it surfaced in seven different locations.\(^{148}\)

\(^{148}\) Cruttwell, *Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors*, 78.
10. *Saint John the Evangelist (San Giovanni Evangelista)* (Figure 15)  
c.1445-50  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
roundel is 52 ¾” (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence  

Condition: Damaged areas include the missing eagle head and a section of the  
saint’s hair over the right temple.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;  
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

Located to the right of the altar, *Saint John*, the writer of a Gospel book and  
the Book of Revelation, is represented with a live eagle by his side, his Apocalyptic  
and Gospel attribute.149 In deep contemplation over what he just wrote in the book  
he holds in his left hand, he examines each word. The feather pen in his right hand  
is raised and poised, waiting for inspiration to write the next important line of the  
text. His head is turned away from the altar and tilted toward the book. He is  
honorably placed directly next to the altar, a testament to his personal relationship  
with Christ and God.150 It is widely believed that Saint John lived to an extreme  
old age.151 He is therefore often represented with a long beard and a bald head.  
Shown in slight contrapposto, he has elaborate drapery that falls neatly in regular  
folds.

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149 See Rev. 8:13.  
151 Ibid., 63.
11. *Saint James the Great (San Jacopo Maggiore)* (Figure 16)  
c.1445-50  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence  

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;  
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.  

Located to the far right of the altar and in very close proximity to his  
brother John, *Saint James the Great* is honored as the patron saint of Jacopo dei  
Pazzi. His attributes are the walking staff and scallop shell. Judea, Samaria, and  
Spain were centers for his mission of spreading the word of God.\(^{152}\) He has been  
compared to the figure of Christ in *The Resurrection*, Santa Maria del Fiore. In  
addition, the dating of this piece possibly correlates to that of *The Resurrection*  
lunette.\(^{153}\) Modeling and glazing of one section includes the figure, the right arm,  
and the background directly beneath the right arm. This representation of James  
has been compared to a less noble altarpiece designed by Luca in Pescia.\(^{154}\)  

\(^{152}\) Ibid., II, 369.  


12. *Saint Andrew (San Andrea)* (Figure 17)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white
roundel is 52 ¾” (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Condition: A section of the cross has been broken.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

*Saint Andrew* appears seated in a classical pose on the south wall of the
Pazzi Chapel. He is shown with the Latin cross and a book, his attributes. He
gazes into the Chapel toward his brother Peter, who returns a loving gesture and
blessing. Roundels of Saint Andrew appear over the portico of the chapel (see
Fig. 9) and on the interior, due to his special significance for the patron, Andrea dei
Pazzi. The figures in both roundels have similar physical features and attributes.
Having once been a Galilean fisherman, Saint Andrew performed many miracles.
Legends place Andrew in Scythia, Ethiopia, Greece, Nicaea, and Achaea. It is in
Achaea that Andrew was crucified and became a martyr.\(^{155}\) The head and the
adjoining background are considered one separate section. The glazing of another
section includes the right arm and the background directly beneath the right arm.
Noticeable modeling differences appear in this figure compared to the other
Apostles. These include a higher instep, resulting in higher knees, and the
complicated mantle.

13. Saint James the Less (San Jacopo Minore) (Figure 18)  
c.1445-50  
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white  
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter  
Santa Croce, Florence  

Condition: Apparent glaze deterioration is visible at the outer edge of the roundel. Damage is noticeable on the nose and left hand.  

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914; Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.  

Saint James the Less can be found to the right of Saint Andrew on the south wall. For attributes, he carries a book and club, or fulling stock. Unusual details in his drapery include a collar, cord and tassel, and knot in his girdle. James the Less, or James the Just, as he was sometimes called, was the first Apostle to deliver mass in Jerusalem after the Ascension of Christ. It is thought that he was related to Christ and he is sometimes called the Lord’s Brother. Although he was not the brother of Christ, his physical features often suggest that he was, as the two looked very much alike. James attained martyrdom when an angry mob threw him off of a high wall, stoned him, and then beat him with a fulling stock.¹⁵⁶ In the Pazzi Chapel, Saint James the Less glances over the fulling stock in his right hand toward the altar, the place of sacrifice.  

14. *Saint Simon (San Simone)* (Figure 19)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Bibliography:  Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

*Saint Simon* is placed to the far left on the west wall of the Pazzi Chapel.
His head is turned to the right as he glances toward his brother James the Less.
Simon traveled to Egypt, Jerusalem, and possibly Persia with his brother Jude to
preach the Word of God. Various sources state that he lived to be 120 years old
and that he was crucified.\(^{157}\) Unfortunately, accurately naming the saints of the
west wall has been problematic. Often, there is confusion in identifying Simon and
Philip, who is likely the figure placed to the far right on this wall. The saint shown
here in Fig. 19 is *Saint Simon*, according to Pope-Hennessy and Gentilini. The
same figure is instead considered to be *Saint Philip*, according to Planiscig,
Marquand, and Cruttwell.\(^ {158}\) The physical appearance and age of the saint in Fig.
19 are very similar to the Apostle Thaddeus to his right, who was supposedly his
brother. In any case, this figure’s right hand has been studied because of its
exceptional modeling.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., v. II, 633-639.

\(^{158}\) Marquand, *Luca Della Robbia: Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology III*, 106. See
Della Robbia*, 40.
15. Saint Thaddeus (San Taddeo) (Figure 20)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Condition: Shortcomings include an abnormally modeled left foot and spotty glaze application on the drapery.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914; Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

Saint Thaddeus is seated between Saints Simon and Thomas on the west wall of the Pazzi Chapel. He was known by other names, one being Jude of James because he was the brother of James the Less, as well as the brother of Simon. He preached in Mesopotamia, Pontus, Egypt, and Persia. Priests in the city of Samir, according to legend, slew him and delivered him to martyrdom. Nevertheless, his attributes are the short lance and a book. His body twists in contrapposto as he gazes far off in the distance to his left and perhaps to the entrance to the chapel. As with Saints Simon and Philip, there is little agreement on the identity of the saint shown in Fig. 20. Marquand considered this saint to be Thaddeus. Cruttwell has identified him as Saint Paul. Marquand compared this saint with other representations of Saint Paul (Impruneta), showing that there are striking differences. He also argued that if this were Saint Paul, his enormity as a major figure in Christianity would be out of place here, as he is placed on the same wall.

160 Cruttwell, Luca & Andrea della Robbia and their Successors, 79.
as *Saints Simon, Thomas, and Philip*. Being one of the later pieces executed by Luca for this project, it has been suggested that Luca’s nephew Andrea assisted with this Apostle.
16. *Saint Thomas (San Tommaso)* (Figure 21)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white
roundel is 52 ¾" (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

Shown beside *Thaddeus*, *Saint Thomas* is reading a scroll, holding it with both hands while balancing a book on his lap with his elbow. He is on the west side of the Pazzi Chapel, opposite the altar wall, but he does not look toward the altar for he is very much absorbed in the act of reading. Upon walking through the entrance of the chapel from the portico, *Saint Thomas* would be directly on the viewer’s left. He is represented as a young, clean shaven, and studious man. One historian suggested that the scroll in his hands represented the girdle of the Virgin.161 Preaching in India, Thomas converted many sovereign souls.162 He is known as the Apostle who doubted the Resurrection of Christ. As conveyed by John, Thomas wanted not only to see Christ’s wounds, but also to touch them.163

The modeling of his hair has been compared to Luca’s candelabrum-bearers in Santa Maria del Fiore. His mantle forms interesting lines around his neck, revealing shoulder muscles and very naturalistic anatomy. Realistic anatomical features, such as the feet, are also revealed under the drapery. Pope-Hennessy


163 See Jn 20: 19-29.
suggested that this saint dates later than the others, and could very well be the work of Andrea della Robbia.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca Della Robbia}, 237.
17. *Saint Philip (San Filippo)* (Figure 22)
c.1445-50
Glazed terracotta with bichromate palette of blue and white
roundel is 52 ¾” (134 cm.) in diameter
Santa Croce, Florence

Condition: Damage to glaze on the nose.

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Domestici, 1992; Gentilini, 1992; Marquand, 1914;
Planiscig, 1940, 1948; Pope-Hennessy, 1996; Vasari, 1550, 1568; Voragine, 1941.

The Saint, portrayed as a young, clean-shaven man on the far right of the west wall in the Pazzi Chapel is *Saint Philip*. Turned toward *Saint Thomas*, he is found to be reading a book. Legends place Philip in Scythia preaching the Word of God, and in a city in Asia called Hierapolis. He was martyred by crucifixion.  

Again, we are faced with difficulty in the naming of the saints of the west wall. Often this saint is confused with *Saint Simon*, who is placed to the far left on the same wall. Almost in profile, the saint shown here holding a book is Saint Philip, according to Pope-Hennessy and Gentilini. The saint represented in Fig. 19 is instead considered to be Saint Philip by Planiscig, Marquand, and Cruttwell. Noticeable features are the profile, classical drapery that falls over the back of the cloud on which he is seated, and an open book. It is said that this book contains illegible text. The exposure of feet is unseen in the other Apostles. His right foot is especially well modeled. Positioned slightly to his right, with his head turned and

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tilted, and lacking a beard, he has a much more impressive neckline than do the other figures in the Apostle roundels. Because of his positioning to the side, his thighs do not appear to be as shortened as those of the other Apostles are. An impeccable, formal posture allows the drapery to fall in simple folds. While his construction is similar to Saint Bartholomew, this figure is thought to be later in date.
18. Ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal (Figures 36-40)  
c. 1462-66  
Glazed terracotta with polychromate palette of blue, white, yellow, brown, and purple  
each roundel is 6’ 6 ¾” (200 cm.)  
San Miniato al Monte, Florence.  


Being associated with Brunelleschian architecture, Luca della Robbia was chosen in 1461 to design the ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato, Florence. Luca was around 61 years of age when he started this project, and his style was fully mature; however, his art still reflected the ideals of the 1430s.

Three extant documents record payments that Luca received for his work, the sum of which adds up to 138 florins. An initial contract on April 14, 1461, however, cited that the vault was to cost 150 florins. Luca received payments on April 9, May 13, July 6, and July 21, 1462, with the payment on September 26, 1466 completing the transactions between the Bishop Alvaro and Luca. ¹⁶⁷

Luca designed the entire ceiling around the medallions. Usually his medallions “float” on architectural surfaces, but these do not. They contain images of the four cardinal virtues, with a central medallion of equal size containing an image of the dove of the Holy Spirit. The background between the medallions is filled with rectangular tiles, treated to form a continuous surface, which thus

visually restricts the medallions. These tiles produce an illusion of hundreds of tiny cubes. This pattern was used as early as 80 BC, and is an antique design, which became a contemporary design as well for Luca. Unlike Luca’s colors in previous commissions (blues and whites and harmonizing primary and secondary colors), here he used harsh yellows, bright greens, purple, and black. White outer moldings enclose circles of flat tile. Scales or feathers are represented on the outer circle of the medallions; a conventional design of the period, it appears in three shades of blue. These feathers are reminiscent of angel wings, and each virtue has wings. The moldings are standard design patterns that Luca used throughout his work. The medallion with the Holy Dove is divided into seven exactly equal segments, each centered on one of seven candlesticks representing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each candlestick is individualized, with each unique and individually modeled. The virtues that appear on the ceiling, representing 

*Fortitude, Prudence, Justice, and Temperance*, were intended to be a commentary on the virtuous lifestyle and moral attitude of the deceased Cardinal of Portugal. These winged figures are gentle, adolescent, and girlish, with pear-shaped faces, loosely flowing locks of hair, wide open eyes, and parted lips, as if they are talking.

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169 Ibid., 48. The Holy Dove is surrounded by seven candlesticks in Luca’s roundel. Pope-Hennessy states that they represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Revelation (See Rev. 2:5 King James Version), St. John wrote: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Here he refers to the candlesticks mentioned in Rev. 1:11 and 1:20; the seven candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia Minor.
They vanish into clouds just below their waistlines. While the faces and drapery are white, the background, eyebrows, eyelashes, and pupils are blue.
19. *Fortitude*, detail from the Ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal (Figure 37)
c. 1462-66
Glazed terracotta with polychromate palette of blue, white, yellow, and brown roundel is 6' 6 ¾" (200 cm.)
San Miniato al Monte, Florence


*Fortitude* brandishes a mace in her right hand and a shield bearing the cardinal’s arms in her left hand. The cardinal virtue *Fortitude* is a symbol for courage. A person who is deemed to have this attribute has the ability to be steadfast and level-headed when faced with a dangerous situation. The cardinal’s soul must have held steadfastly to the good and refused to yield to the fear or pain of his illness. Luca’s *Fortitude* is very ready for battle. She is in a frontal pose, with her head in three-quarters view. Her body disappears into a layer of clouds at her thighs. Armor and drapery cling tightly to her body. The entire figure in tin-white stands out against the cobalt blue background. In the modeling, two joins are barely perceptible. One join is located below the collar, and the other runs along a fold of the angel’s cloak. Highly detailed elements include her hair, wings, and garment decoration. Three courses of egg and dart and leaf and dart molding encircle the cardinal virtue. An angel wing or fish scale pattern in varying shades of cobalt blue frames the entire ensemble, with a final course of tin white molding for the outer frame. The diapered cube pattern connects to the white molding in a continuous manner without noticeable joins.
20. Justice, detail from the Ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal. (Figure 38) 
c. 1462-66
Glazed terracotta with polychromate palette of blue, white, yellow, and brown 
roundel is 6' 6 ¾" (200 cm.)
San Miniato al Monte, Florence


Justice balances an orb in her left hand and tightly grips a sword in her right hand. The cardinal virtue Justice is a symbol for equity. A person who possesses this attribute has the ability to be strong and firm in decision making, especially if a transaction takes place, or if a person is wronged. The Cardinal of Portugal was known for assisting with conflicts in a fair manner and was thought to be deserving of this attribute. Justice is in a frontal pose, with her head in a three-quarters view. Her body disappears into a layer of clouds at her thighs. Drapery is gathered high directly below her breasts. Highly detailed elements include her wings, hair, garment fringe, and radiating gilded lines. The entire figure is shown in tin-white against a cobalt blue background. Three courses of egg and dart and leaf and dart molding contain the cardinal virtue. As with the other virtues, an angel wing or fish-scale pattern in varying shades of cobalt blue frames the entire ensemble, with a final course of tin-white molding. The diapered cube pattern connects to the white molding in a continuous manner without noticeable joins. The motifs of the fish-scale patterns and cube patterns help to accentuate the apparent mobility of this figure, whose body is seemingly turning to look toward the cardinal’s tomb.
21. *Temperance*, detail from the Ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal. (Figure 39)  
c. 1462-66  
Glazed terracotta with polychromate palette of blue, white, yellow, and brown  
roundel is 6' 6 ¾" (200 cm.)  
San Miniato al Monte, Florence  


The cardinal virtue of *Temperance* takes delight in pouring water from a jar  
into a cup, with both in high relief to show their significance. This attribute  
describes a person who is in control of desires and pleasures, but especially  
emotions. She is slightly turned to her right, so the viewer has a nearly full view  
of her right shoulder. Her head is in profile, with her hair flying behind her head.  
Drapery clings tightly to her body, which appears thigh-deep in clouds. Highly  
detailed elements include her wings, hair, and garment fringe. Like the other  
virtues, *Temperance* is shown in tin-white against a cobalt blue background. Three  
courses of egg and dart and leaf and dart molding decorate the border around the  
cardinal virtue, with an angel-wing or fish-scale pattern in varying shades of cobalt  
blue framing the entire ensemble. The final, outer frame is a course of tin-white  
molding. As with the other medallions, the diapered cube pattern connects to the  
white molding in a continuous manner without noticeable joins. The three-  
dimensionality of the cube patterns helps to accentuate the high-relief appearance  
of the jar and cup, which are the important symbols in this medallion.
22. Prudence, detail from the Ceiling of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal. (Figure 40)  
c. 1462-66  
Glazed terracotta with polychromate palette of blue, white, yellow, and brown  
roundel is 6' 6 ¾" (200 cm.)  
San Miniato al Monte, Florence  

Bibliography: Cruttwell, 1902; Hartt, 1964; Marquand, 1914; Pope-Hennessy,  
1980.

The virtue Prudence is typically depicted as a Janus-headed figure. The  
Janus head has two faces. One sees forwards and the other backwards, with  
Prudence therefore knowing what is happening everywhere. Both faces are in  
profile and are commonly portrayed as an old man and a young woman. His beard  
mingles with the locks of hair that frame her face. She is gazing into a convex  
mirror that gives her a wider perspective of what is around her. The figure’s body  
appears in an almost frontal pose, showing her wings, hair, and drapery as highly  
detailed. Her left hand clutches a friendly serpent, a reminder to be wise as  
serpents, as relayed by a biblical passage (Matt 10:16); this attribute describes  
someone who possesses practical wisdom. Traces of gilded, radiating lines appear  
around the left wing. The entire figure is tin-white against a cobalt blue  
background, with three courses of egg and dart and leaf and dart molding framing  
the cardinal virtue. As with the other virtues, an angel-wing or fish-scale pattern in  
varying shades of cobalt blue frames the entire ensemble, with a final course of tin-  
white molding. The diapered cube pattern connects to the white molding in a  
continuous manner without noticeable joins. The drapery of this figure, which
clings tightly to her body and is gathered below her breasts, flows behind her,
indicating a forward, turning movement of the figure. Just below her thighs, clouds
are gathered, concealing the lower part of her body. Like the other virtues, this
figure portrays a lively personification of the traits ascribed to the cardinal.
23. *Labors of the Months* (Figures 41-52)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
dimensions for the roundels range from 22 ⅛" to 23 ¾" (56.2 to 60.3 cm.), with the individual measurements stated in each entry
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Bibliography: Filarete, 1965; Marquand, 1914; Pope-Hennessy, 1980; Vasari, 1550, 1568.

In his treatise on architecture, Filarete described the study of Piero de’ Medici, noting the following about Luca’s roundels:

The pavement of his study [is also] most ornate, as is the ceiling with glazed terra-cotta made in fine figures so that it causes greatest admiration in anyone who enters it. The master of these glazed terra-cottas was Luca della Robbia, as he is called by name. He is a most noble master of this glazing and in sculpture, as he has demonstrated.¹⁷⁰

Despite this first witness account, because the roundels were not sculpted, but drawn and painted instead, some historians have refused to accept the *Labors of the Months* as Luca’s. And, even though Vasari praised the *Labors of the Months*,¹⁷¹ modern writers, like Cruttwell, have rejected the roundels on the basis of style.¹⁷² Pope-Hennessy noted that the Labors were likely not created before 1455. It is thought that in Piero’s study they were arranged in three rows, with each row

¹⁷⁰ Filarete, 325. It is believed that Filarete lived c. 1400-69.
having four medallions.\textsuperscript{173} There is a curvature to the roundels, suggesting that they were designed and produced specifically for the vault of this study. Tiles would have fully covered the floor and vault of the study in a way similar to the ceiling decoration of the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal at San Miniato. Unfortunately, the floor tiles have been lost. Pope-Hennessy has proposed that the iconography of the tiles depends on the literature in Columella’s \textit{De Re Rustica}.\textsuperscript{174} Although the idea of depicting the Labors of the Months came from northern Europe, the northern labors did not coincide with southern living in Italy. Luca therefore had to revise the iconography to work with his environment.

The roundels are severely cracked in various areas. This is perhaps due to the fact that they became the ornaments on a fountain after the Medici Palace was sold to the Riccardi in 1659. The Museo Campana purchased the roundels in the nineteenth century, and they are today in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{173} W. R. Lethaby, “Majolica Roundels of the Months of the Year at the Victoria and Albert Museum,” \textit{The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs} 9, no. 42 (1906): 404.

\textsuperscript{174} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Luca della Robbia}, 242. Exerpts of \textit{De Re Rustica} for January, March, April, May, September, October and December describe precisely the subjects of Luca’s Labors.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 241.
24. *January* (Figure 41)  
c. 1445-60  
Glazed terracotta  
23 ½" (59.7 cm.)  
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)  

Condition: Various firing cracks are evident. A section of the lower right band appears to be different than the rest of the band.  


The Labor for the month of *January* was represented by Luca as a man felling trees in the forest. An energetic and intense man, he has determination written in every muscle of his face; with his massive legs spread apart, he swings an axe at a young tree, its trunk no taller than himself. A cord of wood is in the process of being stacked behind him, the design of which shows Luca’s expertise in perspective and shading techniques. The sun, with the sign of Aquarius (water bearer) shines brightly from the upper left band of daylight, causing deep contrasts in the shading on the right side of the objects and figure. The band of daylight corresponds to the length of daylight available for that month, as the dark band below represents the amount of night. Overlapping faggots lie half-hazardly on the ground behind the woodsman. The month of the year, “IANVARIS,” is inscribed on the center of the night band, and the letters “DIES” and “RE 9 ¼” are in the day band. The limited colors include white, yellow, and various shades of blue. The leaf and dart molding of the frame is glazed in white. The roundel is slightly curved and concave.
25. *February* (Figure 42)  
c. 1445-60  
Glazed terracotta  
23 ⅝” (60 cm.)  
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)  

Condition: Various firing cracks are evident. A section of the band appears to have been altered.


*February* was the month for grafting fruit trees in Italy. With weight shifting onto his right leg, a young man with thick curly locks notches through the bark of a tree in order to graph what he hopes will become fruit bearing branches. Shading, the handling of drapery folds, and leaf and dart molding are similar to the January roundel; however, the length of the daylight band is larger. The words “DIES” and “RE 10 ½” are inscribed on the band, which also contains an image of a fish, representing Pisces, and a golden-rayed man, symbolic of the sun. The low relief frame, decorated with a leaf and dart motif is glazed in white.
26. *March* (Figure 43)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
23 ½" (59.7 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Various firing cracks are evident; these severely extend across the lower section of the roundel where the base of the vine and the shins of the man are located.


In this March scene, a middle-aged man prunes vines, possibly in anticipation of an excellent grape harvest for winemaking. Holding in his hands a sickle-shaped knife, he is about to snap the vine clean after he sees the last desired outside bud. In his position he can easily prune the twiggy ends of the branches. The man’s right arm is extended away from his chest in order to use the widest surface area of the blade, and his legs are spread wide to support his contorted body. Luca’s image records the care that this man has taken to train the vine on a trellis, high above the ground, to deter insects from getting at the juicy, ripe fruit. The head of the ram, representing Aries, and the golden haired sun-man are found in the upper left band of daylight, which is growing longer in length as the months proceed. Inscribed on the daylight band are the words “DIES” and “RE 12,” with “MARTIVS” in the night band, where a nearly full moon also appears. Like the other months, the framing of this month has a low relief leaf and dart molding glazed in white.
27. *April* (Figure 44)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
23" (58.4 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Various firing cracks, especially through the right shin and left foot of the young man.


A young man training vines on a trellis is portrayed in *April*. Lacking the twiggy ends, the branches are now being tied in position, ready to yield another crop in September. A main leader is allowed to take the vine up at least 4 feet, to where the vine splits in two directions. The young man has a blade between his teeth, and is stepping forward with his right leg, bracing his posture with his left toes, and pulling taut on a knot. The bull, representing Taurus, is located over the golden haired sun. “DIES” and “RE 13 ½” are boldly inscribed in the band of day, with “APRELIS” in the band of night. A moon is located close to the word Aprelis. The frame of this medallion also shows a low relief leaf and dart molding, glazed in white.
28. *May* (Figure 45)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
22 ⅜" (56.8 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Firing cracks extend across the mid section of the roundel. A crack travels through the trees and into the sun.


The trees and foliage in Italy are lush in May, and this roundel depicts exactly that. The entire background is filled with trees and undergrowth. It is time to lay down the grass, and a young man is accomplishing this with a scythe. He holds its handle with a stiff right arm, while maneuvering it with his left. The outer band displaying the length of day and night shows much more light blue for the longer days in May. The words “DIES” and “RE 14 4/9” appear inscribed on the band, along with “MAIVS.” Also in the band are images of the sun, moon, and the Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux, embracing each other. As with the other medallions, a low relief leaf and dart molding that encircles the scene is glazed in white.
29. *June* (Figure 46)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
22 ¼" (56.5 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Various cracks travel from the center of the roundel extending out toward the edge. A section of the molding on the lower left side has been cracked.


The spring wheat is mature and ready to reap in this scene of June. Bundles are tied and placed in the local area of the young man who is farming. They will soon be placed on a maw to dry. The young barefoot man bends over in a very awkward position, with his left leg forward, and his right leg back supporting his weight. In his hand he holds a curved blade with a short handle, preparing to tear into a handful of wheat stalks. Luca made the field of wheat appear to go on forever in the background, indicating that it is a good season, a good harvest. The outer light band, symbolizing daylight, is now much larger than in the previous months. The darker band, symbolizing night, carries the inscribed words “DIES,” “RE 19 1/3,” and “IVNIVS.” A sun and moon appear, as is typical in the other roundels, but a crab is shown here, the symbol for Cancer. Typical of the other roundels, a low relief leaf and dart molding, which is glazed in white, frames the scene.
30. *July* (Figure 47)
c. 1445-60  
Glazed terracotta  
22 \(\frac{8}{8}\)" (56.2 cm.)  
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: A horizontal crack extends across midsection, with various cracks on outer edge of roundel. The border on the left appears to be different in appearance.


In Italy, once the wheat dries during the intense sun-filled days of July, it needs to be threshed. In July, a young barefoot man steps forward with a wooden thresher, and is ready to swing and come down on the maw, releasing the berries from the stem. Wearing a very short tunic, he is centered between two different types of trees. The inscribed words, “DIES,” “RE 14 2/3,” and “IVLIVS,” appear in the outer band. Also on the band are images of the golden haired sun, the full moon, and the sign of Leo, a lion, which appears over the sun. Here also is a low relief leaf and dart molding, glazed in white.
31. *August* (Figure 48)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
22 ⅜" (56.8 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: A vertical crack extends down the left midsection, with various cracks on outer edge of roundel. A crack extends across the upper half, and one crosses through the oxen.


In the scene of August, a barefoot man is ploughing the soil in preparation for a crop. He uses a team of stout, muscular, and horny oxen. Perspective is displayed with the usage of smaller trees in the distance, with one large central tree in the middle ground. The light comes from the sun in the band representing daylight. Above the sun rests the Maiden, the sign for Virgo. The moon rests below in the deep blue band of night. The words “DIES,” “RE 13 ½,” and “AVGVSTVS” also appear inscribed on the band. Here also is a low relief leaf and dart molding, glazed in white.
32. *September* (Figure 49)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta, 23 ¾" (60.3 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: A horizontal crack extends across midsection. Traveling down the right side is a large vertical crack. Parts of the molding look different.


In Italy, September is the month for harvesting grapes. It can be seen in this *September* that the vine in the roundel is very old, as it has a thick base. The leaves are shown alternating in a decorative fashion along the tips of the vine, with heavy bunches of swollen grapes hanging above the collector's head. The young collector stands with one leg braced against the vine trunk. While one hand supports a handful of grapes, the other snips it from the vine. Panniers on a mule are almost full bragging a bumper crop. Wildflowers are found under foot. The band of daylight contains the sun, the moon, and the balance, the sign of Libra. The words inscribed on the band are “DIES,” “RE,” and “SEPTEMBER.” A low relief leaf and dart molding is glazed in white in this roundel as well.
October is the month to sow seed for winter wheat. In this *October*, an effeminate figure, with a delicate, sinewy, female frame and long hair, is hand broadcasting seed in a meticulously ploughed field. The figures right hand releases seed, while the left arm holds the basket that contains the seed. Two trees stand in the background. The band representing daylight and night are almost equivalent. Words in the band read: “DIES,” “RE 10 ½,” and “OCTVBER.” Discernible images are the moon, the golden haired sun, and a scorpion, representing Scorpio. Like the other roundels, a low relief leaf and dart molding is glazed in white around the scene.
34. *November* (Figure 51)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
23 ⅝" (60 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Many severe cracks. One major break runs vertically through the legs of the figure. Another break travels across the bottom, through the word November. And yet, another major break travels through the upper section of the tree.


November is the month for olive picking. Dominating this roundel of *November* is an olive tree filled with fruit, and the young man seated in the crotch of the olive tree is shown picking olives. Reaching out, he grabs a branch with his left hand and runs his right hand down it, stripping it clean from the fruit. A woven egg basket hanging from a broken branch is placed below to catch the handful of fruit. The ladder propped against the tree awaits the young man’s climb down.

The horizon line is very low in this roundel because of the figure’s presence in the tree. The band of light cobalt blue representing day is smaller than in the previous couple of months, while the band of dark cobalt representing night is larger. The words appearing in the band read: “DIES,” “RE 9 1/5,” and “NOVEMBER.” The images in the band show the moon, the golden haired sun, and the archer, symbol of Sagittarius. Here also is a low relief leaf and dart molding, glazed in white.
35. *December* (Figure 52)
c. 1445-60
Glazed terracotta
23 ½” (59.7 cm.)
Palazzo Medici, Florence (now Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

Condition: Many cracks run horizontally and vertically. One major break runs vertically through the sky. Another break travels across the bottom through the grass, and another major break travels to the right of the tree.


Two hogs are shown in *December*. They linger in the background next to a tree, while a young man prepares troughs for planting. He uses a narrow tipped spade with a long handle. In front of the hogs, and behind the male figure, is a beautiful tree with leaves. The light cobalt blue band representing day is much smaller here than the dark cobalt blue band representing night. The words inscribed on the band read: “DIES,” “RE 8 2/3,” and “DECEMBER.” Images in the band depict the moon, golden haired sun, and the sign of Capricorn, which is a sea goat. Like the other roundels, the frame shows a low relief leaf and dart molding, glazed in white.
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