

**THE ART OF THE PRECURSORS:
A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF
EARLY ITALIAN MAIOLICA
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS**

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The Art of the Precursors: A Study in the History of Early Italian Maiolica with Illustrations by
Henry Wallis

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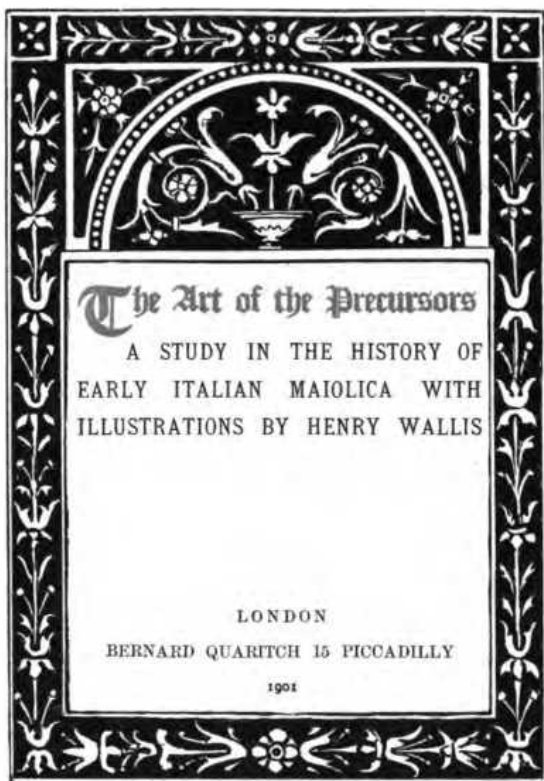
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BY THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

THE aim and object of the present volume is the illustration of a series of examples of early Italian Maiolica which has come to light in the course of recent excavations in Italy. The work has been undertaken in the belief that it is on a basis of illustration alone that any satisfactory art-history can be solidly built. Mere words, however skilful the word-painter, can never render an accurate picture of a work of art, whereas a simple outline at once shows what the most elaborate verbal description will fail to express. Had the first historians of Maiolica taken the trouble to give representations of the objects they described, their abounding errors, inevitable, perhaps, in the preliminary stage of all enquiry, would not so long have passed current in the works of their successors, since having the illustrations for reference the mistakes would soon have been discovered and corrected.

It is true that hitherto the examples of the art throughout its entire course have not all been known to the historians. Those belonging to its period of maturity and decline in the XVIIth century have been sufficiently numerous and accessible. But precisely those primitive essays, precious because they show the qualities peculiar

to the season of youth, and which once outgrown are never renewed, had disappeared, apparently without hope of recovery. The specimens which have been lately found are comparatively few in number; they may, however, be accepted as an approximate representation of this particular phase of Italian ceramic art.

Their acquisition has not indeed been accompanied by a corresponding discovery of written documents indicating their date or the potteries where they were made. Had one to choose between the objects themselves and any amount of writing relating to them, there would be little hesitation as to which were the more important. Nevertheless, the history of Maiolica cannot be written with certitude without reference to contemporary records of one sort or another. Yet it must be confessed, judging from what has been already published by Italian writers, that those relating to the XVth century and earlier are both scanty and deficient in the information requisite to localize the wares and to set forth their examples in chronological sequence. I must therefore crave the indulgence of the reader for the general terms so often employed in dealing with these topics.

I am only too well aware of the disadvantage of being obliged to use qualifying phrases, consequent on the necessity of frequently having to balance remote probabilities, the results then only permitting conjectural conclusions. My chief source of consolation is the conviction that the reader will prefer being brought face to face with the perplexing problems still unsolved, rather than be amused with theories, however ingeniously woven. And I venture to hope that much may be pardoned so long as the endeavour is made to avoid being misleading.

I would fain also indulge a hope that the publication of the following illustrations may lighten the labours of future workers