



Rare Italo-Moresque Albarello

Tuscany, 15th century

Tin-glazed earthenware, painted in blue

33.5cm high, 14.5cm diameter

Stock no.: A5784

Provenance: German private collection purchased between 1949 and 1971; thence by descent.

In addition to this albarello, only 24 other examples with similar blue and white pseudo-Kufic decoration are known. The majority of these albarelli are housed in museums, including the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza (accession no. [24886](#)), Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres (accession no. [MNC22667](#)), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (accession no. [DC46](#)), Naples, Getty Museum (accession no. [84.DE.96](#)), the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (accession no. [C. 181-1991](#)).¹

Three are displayed in the ceramics room at the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession nos [1150-1904](#), [1143-1904](#), and [1147-1904](#)), and the latter shares the same flat base, white glaze, and straight sides as our example. A fourth albarello in the same museum (accession no. [372-1889](#)) is emblazoned with a coat of arms identified as belonging either to the Marzalogli family or the Buffoni family of Bologna, leading to the suggestion that the entire group was commissioned for a pharmacy owned by the patron family.² The majority of jars in this group measure between 21 and 25cm high. Only three measure between 27.5cm and 33.5cm high, making the present example one of the largest known.³

Large quantities of Hispano-Moresque lustreware were imported into Italy from Valencia during the 14th and 15th centuries. Blue and white lustreware with pseudo-Kufic decoration, such as an albarello in the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. [488-1864](#)), may have provided a prototype. '*Albaregli damaschini*' are mentioned in 15th century inventories. The term initially denoted their origin [Damascus, Syria], referring to jars like the 15th century pair in the Aga Khan Museum (accession nos [AKM567](#) and [AKM568](#)), but later was used more generally to indicate any jars with blue decoration.⁴

The central band of ornamentation features pseudo-Kufic script. Kufic script was well known in Italy, especially Tuscany, where artists had been incorporating it into altarpieces since the beginning of the 15th century. Ugolino di Nerio, Gentile da Fabriano, Masaccio, and Filippo Lippi are Florentine artists who created altarpieces featuring the Virgin with clothing or nimbus embellished with pseudo-Kufic script. The Barbadori altarpiece, today in the Louvre (accession no. [339](#)) by the Florentine artist Filippo Lippi, completed in 1438, features pseudo-Kufic script on the hem of the Virgin's clothes.

An albarello of this type is depicted in an altarpiece of the Virgin and Child with Saints by the Sienese artist Giovanni di Paolo, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena (no. [191](#)). The altarpiece was completed after 1453, giving rise to speculation that this group was made in mid-15th century Siena.⁵

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

[1] For a comprehensive list see Hess, Catherine. *Italian Maiolica: Catalogue of the Collections*. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1988. pp. 36-38, cat. 10.

2] Hess, Catherine. *Italian Ceramics: Catalogue of the J. Paul Getty Museum*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002. p. 72.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 71.

[4] Poole, Julia. *Italian Maiolica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p. 22.

[5] 'Pharmacy jar: C.181-1991', *The Fitzwilliam Museum*, retrieved online via <https://collection.beta.fitz.ms/id/object/48308> on 09/01/2025.