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Chinese Influence on Islamic Glazed Ceramics
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General information and bibliography on Islamic history and art have been given by Qamar Adamjee in the first lecture of this series. Below is given information particularly relevant to the study of ceramics in the Islamic world.

Fine decorated pottery is one of the glories of artistic production in the Islamic world. Though unable to make high-fired porcelain of Chinese type, the Middle Eastern potters exploited the potential for colour and design provided by lower-fired wares, and their inventions were not only of local but of global impact.

This lecture will look examine the relationship between Islamic pottery production and the role that Chinese imports played in their innovation. The usual simple story of Chinese “influence” will be examined to reveal a surprising, more dynamic and more complex relationship between them. New archaeological finds underline the way in which the old story turns out to be an inversion of the truth...

Main ceramic production centers, wares and important find sites:

C9th-10th Abbasid Iraq: fine wares made in Basra, important archaeological discoveries in the royal city of Samarra, north of Baghdad.

Tin-glazed wares, lustre decoration, painting in cobalt blue

C11th-12th Fatimid Egypt: especially the site of Fustat (Old Cairo)

Luster decoration, invention of fritware

C12th - C14th

Fine luster and overglaze-painted fritwares from Kashan in central Iran, and from Raqqa in Syria

C16th -C17th

Fine underglaze-painted wares from Iznik in Anatolia, supplying the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul

C16th-C18th

Underglaze-painted wares often copying Chinese blue-and-white imported porcelains, in Safavid Iran

Ceramic terms

All Islamic pottery is technically earthenware, fired at 1000 degrees centigrade or less. In the early centuries ways are found of disguising clay body-fabrics to give a white ground for decoration - in particular the use of tin-glazes or white slip coatings. In the C11th, the invention of an artificial "fritware" body provides a white fabric and enables new decorative techniques. Underglaze-painting on a fritware body becomes the norm for all fine ceramics. Almost all Islamic pottery is fired only once - body and glaze together without a biscuit firing. Only some decorative techniques - luster and minai - require a second firing.

Glaze: a thin coating of glass on the surface of a pottery vessel which provides a impermeable and smooth finish. Glazes, like glass, are made of silica fluxed with lead-oxide ("lead glazes") or with alkaline plant ash ("alkaline glazes"). These can be colourless and transparent, coloured with various metal oxides, or made opaque by the addition of tin-oxide.

Tin-glaze: a glaze made opaque and white by the addition of tin-oxide.

Slipware: wares made of red or buff clay, covered with a thin layer of diluted white clay to provide a white ground, usually under a transparent lead glaze.

Fritware: an artificial ceramic body, composed of ground quartz with small additions of white clay and glaze mixture. Developed in C11th Egypt, it provided a white-bodied ware capable of copying new fine Chinese imported porcelains. It becomes the standard Islamic fabric for fine wares.

Luster decoration: a complicated but spectacular decorative technique in which metallic pigments are bonded to the surface of a glaze in a second firing, giving metallic and mother-of-pearl reflections

Minai: a collectors term for mediaeval Iranian pottery decorated with overglaze enamels in a second firing

Underglaze painting: a decorative technique in which coloured pigments are painted on the surface of a vessel before being covered with a transparent glaze.

Porcelain: a very high-fired white-bodied ware made only in China (until its discovery in Europe in the C18th), and exported in quantity from the C9th onwards

Blue-and-white: Chinese porcelains decorated in underglaze-painted cobalt blue, and copies made in the Middle East

Bibliography:

The key text:

Oliver Watson, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*, NY, 2005 (a comprehensive study where much further bibliography is given)

Classic texts:

Arthur Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, London, 1947 (Beautifully written, now rather out of date)

Arthur Lane, *Later Islamic Pottery*, London, 1957 (still a key text)

Major key studies:

Krahl, Regina (ed.), *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds*, exhibition catalogue, Washington and Singapore, 2011 (important publication on the Belitung wreck - a 9th dhow from the Persian Gulf full of Chinese wares, shipwrecked in the Java Sea)

Oliver Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware*, London 1985 (a history of the technique in Iran)

Krahl, R. and Erbahar N., *Chinese Porcelains from the Topkapi Saray Museum*, Istanbul, 3 vols, London, 1986 (major publication on the Chinese wares in Istanbul, with important introductory chapters)

Pope, John A., *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardabil Shrine*, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 1956 (illustrated catalogue of early Chinese blue-and-white in Iran)

Atasoy, N., and Raby, J., *Iznik, The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey*, Alexandria Press & Thames and Hudson, London, 1989 (the major work on Iznik pottery)

Oliver Watson, "Revisiting Samarra: the Rise of Islamic Glazed Pottery", *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie*, v. 4, J. Gonnella with R. Abdellatif und S. Struth (eds), Ernst-Herzfeld-Gesellschaft, Wiesbaden, 2014, pp. 123-142