

Glazed Earthenware from the 10th to the 13th Century

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In the 9th century CE; the production of glazed and painted earthenware vessels¹ and tiles in the Near East already had a long tradition of production. The use of glazes dates back long in the history of pottery making. Beside vessels, such as e.g. from 1st millennium BCE Ziwiye in Iran, it is best exemplified by the production of polychrome tiles, demonstrated abundantly by examples from Choga Zanbil (Iran, late 2nd millennium BCE), the Procession Street and Ishtar Gate built by Nebukadnezar II in Babylon in the early 6th century BCE and the Achaemenid palaces in Susa. However, the pottery produced in the centuries preceding the Islamic era, particularly during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, is characterised by monochrome turquoise, blue, green or buff alkaline, and partly lead glazed types.² Their production continued for many centuries well into the Islamic era, with often little changes in shape and technology, even until today.³

In the 7th/8th century CE, the range of shapes became more diverse: while continuing preceding traditions, new forms were introduced, at least in the eastern Islamic lands, some revealing a proximity to stone vessels or metalware.⁴ The (re-)appearance of decorations using colour-contrasting effects to enhance the visual impact of patterns, which are painted or splashed on colour-slipped or glazed surfaces, marks the beginning of a new era in pottery production in the late 8th or 9th century. Coupled with the introduction of new recipes for producing coloured and clear, transparent and opaque glazes, such as tin-lead glazes, with the addition of glass frit to the clay body in order to reduce



Fig. 1 Bowl, black calligraphy, glaze eroded
(... al mujmil/mujmal... (?)) cat. no. SP1

the sintering temperature, and the use of various pigments to produce a brighter colour palette, the time from the 9th to the 13th century witnessed a proliferation of pottery types.

The ease of movements of goods and people and the promotion of trade within the large region subsumed under the umbrella of Umayyad and Abbasid hegemony and their neighbours prompted the dissemination of know-how from Egypt through Central Asia, India and China. Generally subsumed under the label 'Samarra horizon', the heterogeneity, date, production and dispersal of glazed earthenware in the 9th century is still discussed. While some innovations, as for example the creation of opaque white-glazed and splashed wares, are ascribed to influences from China, others, such as polychrome glaze-painting, are considered indigenous developments.

Khorasan as the most important eastern province participated in the network that promoted the circulation of luxury items and status goods in the heartland and the peripheries of the Abbasid Empire and beyond. Yet, embedded in a cultural environment marked by a strengthening Iranian identity and the recollection of past virtues, the workshops also developed distinct aesthetic values. They are expressed by particular decorative styles that were not en vogue in the western regions, but shared with its immediate neighbours to the north, particularly Transoxania. The large amount of sherds

1 Monochrome glazed and painted unglazed earthenware as well as glazed fritware are dealt with in other chapters in this volume.

2 Kéblow Bernsted 2003, 1.

3 See Müller-Wiener/Franke, *Monochrome Glazed Earthenware*, this volume.

4 Resemblances to stone vessels can be seen in thick-walled small bowls with carved decoration, e.g. Fehérvári 2000, cat. nos. 11 and 12.



Fig. 2 Bowl, with the name 'Su'ad' (?) in the centre (cat. no. SP17)



Fig. 3 Base, with white interlaced bands under a milky black glaze (HNM 89.079)



Fig. 4 Bowl incorporating two vessels, re-painted, modern copy? (cat. no. SP80)



Fig. 5 Dots on a white ground, eroding slip (left), decayed glaze (HNM 89.024)



Fig. 6a Bowl with unusual red calligraphy



Fig. 6b Fine red fabric, buff slip, clear glaze (HNM 89.024)



Fig. 7 Jug with black and red decoration, trimmed body; the rim is chipped off (cat. no. SP27)

and complete vessels of these sophisticated and rather expensive to produce types found in excavations and museum collections alike reflects the scope of exchange and the dimensions of demand and production. Nevertheless, they account for but a small percentage of the domestic utilitarian furnishings, an assemblage that often remains unpublished.⁵ While slip-painted pottery is attested for Sistan, Ghur, Hilmand/Nimroz, and even Banbhore in Sindh, the quantities get lower there. The archaeological evidence from Central and Western Iran indicates that slip-painted types were distributed beyond Khorasan across the desert into Kerman and northern Fars, but in small numbers and not further beyond. According to P. Morgan and J. Leatherby, Sirjan yielded a limited corpus of 10 to 15 sherds, as well as a couple of other sites, such as Shahr-e Qumis, Jiroft, and Zaranj (in Afghan-Sistan).⁶

Due to a limited corpus of well-stratified and contextualized assemblages, the relative chronologies and regional attributions are still difficult to refine. However, with a growing corpus of contextual data and archaeometric provenance studies that lead to the identification of sub-regional stylistic traits and technological markers, fresh looks at old material and new excavations provide a chance to create a patterned cultural landscape.⁷ This 'finger-printing' of types is all the more important as, regardless of the place of production, the types are widely scattered. Within this large domain, the principal urban centres that provide archaeological evidence

5 At Nishapur (Rante/Collinet 2013, 136-171): less than 20%, but the numbers are low, in general. Wilkinson (1973, 290) does not provide percentages.

6 Morgan/Leatherby 1987, 18-21; 56. - Morgan 1994b, 55.

7 Most recently, Ilyasov (2014) has attributed the "Lilac Ware" to Tashkent (*Shash*).

are Nishapur, Lashkari Bazar, Merv, Samarqand and Tashkent.⁸ Other sites have remained more or less unpublished or were exposed to limited explorations, such as Ghazni, Kandahar, Balkh, Termez, Jam and Bamiyan.⁹ The same applies to pre-Timurid Herat and its surroundings, which were explored only recently.¹⁰

Therefore, the rediscovery of a larger collection of decorated glazed wares from the 9th to 13th centuries in the Herat Museum in 2004 is a welcome addition to the known corpus, assuming that the function of Herat as a provincial museum implies a provenance from

within the region.¹¹ This assumption is supported by related occupations uncovered in Herat and at sites in its hinterland.

Among the c. 120 vessels are no truly extraordinary objects, but a couple of good quality examples representing the different stylistic and technological types. Unfortunately, many vessels are in a poor state of preservation, despite previous restorations, some even to a critical extent. This is particularly true for the glazes - some are eroded, others have a milky appearance¹², only a few are perfectly clear (Figs. 1-3).¹³

The appearance of some vessels raises doubts about their authenticity. In addition to the quality of the glaze, these are based on the quality of the fabric, on aspects such as composition, colour, and touch, on technological details, such as shaping and the lack of traces of use, and, in some cases, on the mode of execution or application of the decoration. The reworking of ancient vessels is also quite common (Fig. 4).¹⁴ On the other hand, these criteria, particularly the fabric and glaze, are in many cases associated with seemingly authentic features, leaving some uncertainty of whether these are local or even workshop-related features or rather modern replicas, particularly since comparable objects can be found in other publications.

8 See the previous note for Nishapur. For Lashkari Bazar: Gardin 1963. - Merv: Pushnigg 2006; Hermann et al. 1997. - Samarqand: Shishkina/Pavchinskaja 1992; Grenet 2008. - Termez: Houal/Le Maguer 2013. - Khulbuk: Siméon 2009.

9 On Ghazni: A. Fusaro, work in progress. - Kandahar: McNicoll et al. 1996. - Balkh: P. Siméon, work in progress. - Jam: Gascoigne 2010; Thomas 2012. - Bamiyan: Shahr-e Gholghola, Shahr-e Zohak: UNESCO/DAFA, work in progress; Gardin 1957b.

10 For a summary see Franke 2008c; Franke 2014. The publications are in preparation by U. Franke and Th. Urban.

11 Based on a cursory documentation carried out in 2005 by the author, a first overview was published by Müller-Wiener 2008. To my knowledge, there is no prior publication on the pottery in the museum.

12 For example black (cat. nos. SP29-31; 36 and others) or red slips (cat. nos. SP44; 45; 47; 51 and others).

13 Mostly white slips and, among others, cat. nos. SP38 and SP46.

14 See for a further discussion the last part of this group 'Miscellanea'.



Fig. 8 Dotted yellow-staining black-on-white circles (cat. no. SP50)

Helpful in assessing this issue is archaeological material, available from Nishapur and the other sites mentioned above, and, for Herat, the collections of the German-Afghan Archaeological Mission as well as two boxes with sherds of unknown provenance, but most likely from an archaeological site.¹⁵

On the following pages an overview of the types used to group the vessels in the catalogue is presented. In view of the vast number of publications devoted to this particular pottery group, the types and sub-types are not discussed in extenso in the text, and only general observations and descriptions of the criteria are provided. Specific features in related with the object are addressed in the catalogue, as well as references with dates and provenance.

The catalogue is divided into two large groups, the Slip-Painted Pottery, abbreviated as 'SP' (cat. nos. SP1-79, and 'Miscellanea', cat. nos. SP80-87), and Splashed and Incised Pottery, abbreviated as 'SI' (cat. nos. SI1-12). Each group comprises a number of types defined by technological and/or stylistic criteria.¹⁶ This typology is commonly used, basically following Wilkinson's system, with minor differences.¹⁷ The general qualitative characteristics of

15 Many are included in the catalogue of this chapter, in connection with related vessels. They are referred to as 'unprovenanced'.

16 In this, the typology varies from Morgan's (1994b, 55-59), who uses variously morphological and stylistic or technologies criteria in Types 1 to 4 and 5 to 7, while Type 8 and another group are both 'Miscellanea', making it difficult to identify commonly used terms and assign objects to his groups.

17 The differences, mainly introducing the types 'Polychrome Ware' and 'Polychrome Buff Ware', are discussed in relation with the respective types. See also Fehérvári 2000, 50. Wilkinson's (1973, 205-212) 'Opaque Yellow' and 'Opaque White' wares are not attested, and as suggested by Watson (2004, 239), it appears useful to distinguish them from white-slipped vessels.



Fig. 9 Buff bowl with blackened and eroded slip and glaze (cat. no. SP16)



Fig. 10 Sherd affected by erosion (HNM 89.053)

the groups are described at the beginning, while type-related specifics are addressed under the respective headings.

Dating is kept on a rather general level, since not every type can be assigned to a clearly defined period. Keeping in mind the long persistence of production for some types across a large area, in various workshops and by more or less gifted craftsmen, and the 'ordinary' imprecision, both for relative and absolute chronology, of archaeological dating (except for signed objects), it was preferred to suggest a wider chronological range, being aware, however, of the potential variation. The dates proposed for Slip-Painted pottery in relevant publications usually falls into the span from the 10th to the 11th century, while Glaze-Painted and early Splashed Wares

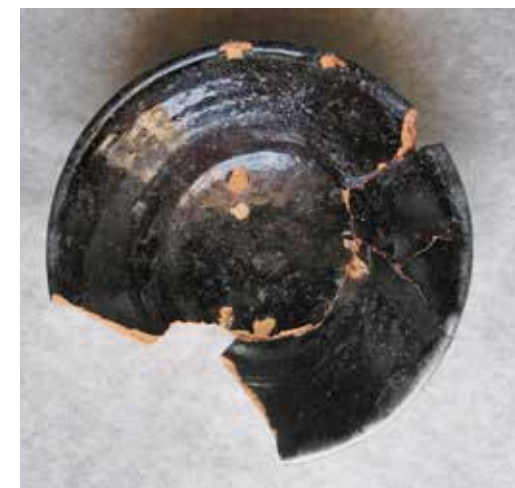


Fig. 11a Bowl with S-shaped rim, shiny glaze and tripod marks (HNM 89.097)



Fig. 11b Reverse of the same bowl, flat base, possibly a fake?



Fig. 12 Incised sherd with glaze drops, misfired

are sometimes dated as early as the 8th-, but more commonly to the 9th century. Colour-Splashed and Incised types remained in use until the earlier 13th century, usually the pre-Mongol era.¹⁸

Slip-Painted Pottery (cat. nos. SP1-87)¹⁹

The large group of earthenware vessels subsumed under this heading shares a fine earthenware fabric covered by a slip, most often white, red or black. The decoration, painted with a coloured slurry is applied on top of the slip with a brush on the slip and covered with a transparent glaze when dry (Fig. 5). The fabric is a well-levigated clay fired to orange-red or red, rarely buff²⁰, and tempered with small, mineral inclusions deriving from fine sand. The vessels are generally well-made, wheel-thrown and carefully finished. Sometimes, the lower body is scraped to remove excess clay. Some of the outer bodies reveal traces of trimming or rouletting (cat. no. SP30). Bowls and dishes, the most frequent shapes, as well as plates have shallow disc bases, usually with an extended section and a concave, rarely horizontal base plate. Ring bases are the exception (cat. no. SP23). Rims are usually straight, rarely flaring, with a round lip. Apart from Polychrome Buff Ware, which has distinct forms, the sub-types share the most typical shapes. These are bowls with straight, flaring or slightly convex sides. Closed shapes, such as small jugs and jars, are uncommon (cat. no. SP11; Fig. 7). They are made of the same fabric, but have thicker walls and are less carefully finished. Some bowls show a horizontal section between the base and the onset of the walls (cat. no. SP7). To judge from the traces of carving, the clay was removed with a blade. This feature is also present in other collections, on bowls with various designs and shapes attributed to Nishapur, Afrasiyab or Afghanistan.²¹ It was also noted on green-glazed bowls²², but the finishing is much smoother on painted vessels.

The inner surfaces of open shapes are fully covered with thick white, black or red slips. About two thirds of the outside are slipped, sometimes just above or even up to the base (Figs. 6a,b). The base plate is slipped in only a few cases (cat. nos. SP26; 27; Fig. 29b). Closed shapes, predominantly short-necked jars and small bottles, are slipped all over from the inner neck to the base. The irregular borders show the way the vessel was dipped into the thick slurry, which ran down in stripes during drying (cat. nos. SP17; 34; 38). The quality of the slips and clear-cut borders indicate a bisquit-firing before the application of slips and glazes.

The patterns were painted on the sun-dried slip. A number of examples show the enhancing of calligraphy and patterns by incising details into boldly

18 Most frequently quoted are Wilkinson 1973, Fehérvári 2000, Grube 1994, Watson 2004, Gardin 1963, Gardin 1957b, Shishkina/Pavchinskaja 1992 and Soustiel 1985, plus other collections and specialized publications, detailed in the catalogue entries and the bibliography. Although Lashkari Bazar has produced important material, it is not easy to work with since the book has only black-and-white images (Gardin 1963).

19 Watson 2004, 205 Group G.

20 Different from a note made by Morgan 1994b and Grube 1994b.

21 In case sections are illustrated; see for example Watson 2004, cat. nos. Ga.1; Ga.3; Ga.15; G.a.19; Gb.1; Gb.2; Gb.12-reportedly from Afghanistan; Gb.14; Gb.15.

22 See Müller-Wiener/Franke, Monochrome Glazed Earthenware, this volume.