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MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC CERAMICS IN THE REAL ACADEMIA DE BELLAS ARTES DE SAN FERNANDO

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Abstract: The holdings of the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* include a collection of fifteen high-quality pieces of Islamic ceramic, mostly Persian and made in the 12th and 13th centuries. This article is the first one to deal with these little known works. It includes a discussion of their provenance and the historical context of their manufacture. It then goes on to catalogue the individual pieces, detailing their technique, decoration and current state of conservation. The aim is to bring out the importance of this singular collection, extraordinarily rare in Spanish museums.

Keywords: Ceramics, stonepaste, monochrome glazed ware, underglaze painted ware, luster ware, enamel painted ware (*mina'i*), Iran, medieval Islamic art.

CERÁMICA ISLÁMICA MEDIEVAL EN LA REAL ACADEMIA DE BELLAS ARTES DE SAN FERNANDO

Resumen: Los fondos de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando poseen una colección de quince piezas, de alta calidad, de cerámica islámica, persa sobre todo, y fabricada durante los siglos XII y XIII. Este artículo es el primero dedicado a estas obras pocas conocidas. Incluye una discusión de su procedencia y el contexto histórico de su fabricación antes de ofrecer un catálogo de las piezas individuales, detallando la técnica, la decoración, y el estado actual de conservación. Con este trabajo se pretende sacar a la luz una colección singular, extraordinariamente rara en los museos españoles.

Palabras clave: Cerámica, pasta de frita, cerámica vidriada monocroma, cerámica pintada bajo vidriado, loza dorada, cerámica pintada esmaltada (*mina'i*), Irán, arte islámico medieval.

INTRODUCTION

In July 1987 the Museum of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (ASF) received a bequest of 103 Egyptian and Oriental antiquities from the estate of Dña. Gloria Marcela Faure Yusta. Although bequeathed by Dña. Gloria, these works originally belonged to her sister Dña. Isabel Faure Yusta, who was married to 'Ata 'Afifi, a wealthy Egyptian businessman and political leader*. The couple apparently lived in Cairo for some time during their married life, and it was probably there that they assembled the antiquities collection today at the ASF.

The ASF gift acknowledgment (*acta de recepcion*) itemizes the 1987 donation according to the contents of the eight vitrines in which the objects had been installed in Dña.

Gloria's residence on the Calle Príncipe de Vergara in Madrid. Vitrine seven contained twelve pieces described as glazed Oriental ceramics (*cerámica vidriada oriental*), while the eighth vitrine displayed three identified as luster ware (*cerámica de lustre dorado*). It is these fifteen colorful ceramics —comprising previously unknown works of art from the medieval Islamic world— that are the focus of this study.

The long and rich history of Islamic ceramic production witnessed various periods and places of significant artistic creativity and productivity, resulting in objects notable for their wide range of utilitarian functions and high level of artistry¹. The small but select collection in the RABASF museum dates from the late-12th to the early-13th centuries, often referred to as the Seljuq period², when potters in Iran, and as well as in neighboring Syria, produced fine, glazed ceramic objects decorated in diverse techniques. Whereas in previous eras, pottery throughout the Near and Middle East was made of natural clay, in the 12th century a new artificial substance or fabric was developed that totally revolutionized the ceramic industry. Known as stonepaste (also fritware or siliceous ware), this material was composed of ground quartz mixed with small amounts of crushed glass and refined clay.³ During firing in the kiln these ingredients fused together to form a pure white body that was exceptionally strong and versatile. Although the initial impetus for the development of this composite fabric may have been to emulate the whiteness of porcelain imported from China, Islamic potters quickly began to exploit its potential for a large variety of shapes, colored glazes and decorative techniques and designs.

All of the RABASF pieces consist of glazed stonepaste, specifically fourteen vessels for the eating and serving of food (bowls, dishes, pitchers, etc.) and one animal sculpture. As a collection they represent four of the main typologies of Islamic medieval ceramics: monochrome glazed wares (cat. nos. 1-8), underglaze painted wares (cat. nos. 9-10), luster ware (cat. nos. 11-13) and enamel painted wares known as *mina'i* (cat. nos. 14-15)⁴. While every type has its distinctive characteristics, to be discussed at the start of each catalogue grouping below, they share certain ubiquitous features. The particular properties of stonepaste that resulted in vessels with fine and hard bodies, like those in the RABASF collection, also made it possible for their surfaces to be decorated with pierced, incised, carved and molded designs under transparent and colored glazes as well as with pigments painted under and over the glaze. The RABASF collection contains examples of all these techniques together with the most common forms of ceramic decoration such as abstract and stylized motifs, vegetal and floral designs, geometric patterns, figural and animal representations and inscriptions in Arabic and Persian. This same range of imagery also appears on medieval Islamic metalwork, a conjunction of media that extends to the shape of many ceramic objects, including several in the RABASF collection, which follows metalwork prototypes⁵. Thus ceramics belong to a large class of Islamic artistic production, dubbed the “arts of the object,” which elevated the functions of daily life into an aesthetic experience through material and form⁶.

The fabric, techniques, decorative forms and high quality of the fourteen drinking, eating and serving vessels in the RABASF make it all but certain that they were made in Iran (e.g., Persia) during an intense phase of ceramic production that flourished from approximately the last quarter of the 12th century through the first two decades of the 13th⁷. (The animal sculpture may have originated in Syria during the same approximate period, as will be discussed in its catalogue entry, number 8). Notwithstanding the vast quantity and diversity of Persian stonepaste attributable to the late-12th and early-13th

centuries surviving today, only the town of Kashan, located in central Iran, has been securely documented as an important production center, with especial renown for its under- and overglaze painted decoration, including luster ware and *mina'i*. Wares from Kashan were traded widely throughout Iran, and greatly influenced the region's ceramic industry, albeit not always to the same high level of quality.

During the mid-1940s some one hundred pieces, many similar to recognized Kashan craftsmanship, were found packed in large storage jars in the ruined site of Gurgan (also spelt Jurjan) near the Caspian sea, leading to the assertion that this town also supported ceramic manufacturing in medieval times⁸. Although archaeological excavations undertaken several decades later have confirmed the presence of pottery kilns at Gurgan, prevailing scholarly opinion holds that the pieces initially unearthed in the early, uncontrolled digs were likely the supply of a local merchant who had imported them from Kashan and then hid them for safekeeping on the eve of the Mongol invasions⁹. While this hypothesis may never be substantiated, it is a fact that the works discovered in the 1940s—sometimes referred to as the Gurgan horde—almost immediately began to be dispersed on the commercial art market and from there to enter private and public collections worldwide.

Whatever their specific origin, the RABASF's medieval ceramics exemplify the dual nature of the Islamic arts of the object: they are simultaneously works of art and art that works.

While little is known today about the specific circumstances of Dña. Isabel Faure Yusta's collecting interests and activities, it is possible to reconstruct the general milieu and context in which she seems to have acquired her fifteen medieval Islamic ceramics¹⁰. During the period between the first and second world wars, Cairo and Alexandria boasted a number of important collections of Oriental and Islamic art¹¹. Among the most prominent collectors were Prince Youssef Kamal, a member of Egypt's ruling family, and Dr. 'Ali Ibrahim Pasha, an eminent physician and president of Cairo University. Both men were involved in establishing the Cairene society known as "Les Amis de l'Art" (sometimes called the Society of Fine Arts Lovers) in 1921, as was Mohammad Mahmud Khalil, president of the Egyptian Senate and a political and business associate of Dña. Isabel's husband¹². Furthermore, Prince Youssef Kamal and Dr. 'Ali Ibrahim were among the lenders to a major exhibition of Islamic art, featuring many cases filled with medieval Islamic ceramics, held in Cairo in February-March 1947¹³. Two other Cairo residents who lent to the exhibition were Clement Ades and his nephew Raymond who had inherited an important collection of Islamic ceramics from his father Elie the previous year¹⁴. Yet another significant source of loans was Jacques O. Matossian, an antiquarian art dealer based in Alexandria and specializing in Egyptian, Coptic and Islamic art¹⁵. Given that one of the three luster ware pieces now in the RABASF (cat. no. 12) once belonged to Matossian, it is likely that he was the dealer from whom Dña. Isabel acquired this and at least one other object¹⁶. Indeed, by virtue of being an active center for Islamic art collecting, Egypt, and more particularly Cairo, also functioned as a major market for Islamic ceramics during the 1920s through the 1940s. Among the objects available for sale in the Egyptian capital around 1945 were large numbers from the so-called Gurgan horde, nearly all intact and in excellent condition¹⁷. This is where Clement and Elie Ades, for instance, are said to have bought their pieces of Gurgan ware, some of which are paralleled by examples in Dña. Isabel's collection¹⁸. Many of the Ades and Matossian pieces and three of Dña. Isabel's are featured in the first monograph on Gurgan ceramics, which was published in Cairo in 1949¹⁹. All this places Dña. Isabel among an elite group of Persian art collectors in Egypt at the middle of the 20th century.

CATALOGUE

Like the majority of medieval Islamic ceramics, none of the RABASF pieces is signed or dated. It is thus on the basis of their material, techniques and styles that twelve of the fifteen pieces are here attributed to Iran during the late-12th to early-13th centuries. Of these, the two beautiful luster ware dishes (cat. nos. 12 and 13) can be identified more specifically as having been made in Kashan, possibly circa 1200-1220. The charming animal sculpture (cat. no. 8) might have come from the town of Raqqa, a flourishing medieval manufacturing center on the Euphrates River in northern Syria. The enamel-painted bowls resembling medieval *mina'i* (cat. nos. 14 and 15) have been so heavily restored and over-painted, doubtless before their acquisition by Dña. Isabel, that it is difficult today to be sure of their original appearance and production. Other than these two works, all the RABASF ceramics are in remarkably good condition.

MONOCHROME GLAZED WARES²⁰

CATALOGUE NUMBERS 1 - 8

Eight of the fifteen RABASF ceramics are covered with turquoise-blue glaze, among the most ubiquitous of the various monochrome glazes found on medieval Islamic stonepaste wares. The popularity of this color was doubtless due in part to the simplicity of its production, requiring only the addition of copper oxide to a basic alkaline glaze, opacified with tin oxide. Furthermore, turquoise was long regarded as felicitous or lucky throughout the Near East. So Dña. Isabel may have favored pieces with this particular color, rather than those covered with other common monochrome glazes such as cobalt blue or green, both because of its bright sheen and its association with good fortune.

Although the surfaces of fine monochrome glazed ceramics are often smooth, a large number of pieces feature some form of additional embellishment. Three of the RABASF's four bowls (cat. nos. 1-3), for instance, are incised with various abstract and stylized designs that were probably executed swiftly with a thin, sharp instrument resulting in an overall sketchy effect. The surface treatment of the fourth bowl (cat. no. 4) is more elaborate; in addition to incised lines, its decoration consists of a pattern of small holes, which were pierced into the walls when the frit body was in a "hard" state, and then filled in with glaze during firing, creating transparent "windows" or fenestration. Designs also could be more deeply and carefully carved, such as the wide scroll on the neck of the double-handled jug (cat. no. 7), or carved and molded, as with the benedictory inscription encircling the body of the tall-necked pitcher (cat. no. 6). Sometimes the surface treatment could be very subtle, such as the indentations pressed into the upper body of the RABASF's other pitcher (cat. no. 5).

These monochrome glazed vessels are also noteworthy for their simple and elegant shapes, including the flared profile and high foot ring of the RABASF's four bowls and the globular bodies and tall necks of the pitchers. The jug is particularly striking, with its sharply ridged body and twin handles, and may have been modeled on a metalwork prototype.

The eighth, and most distinctive, piece of RABASF's monochrome glazed wares belongs to a large corpus of animal, bird, and human figurines that have long appealed to modern-day collectors and that presumably had the same attraction for their original, medieval owners.

Whereas the seven vessels clearly served utilitarian functions, the small camel carrying a palanquin or litter seems to have been purely decorative (cat. no. 8). Its production and ornamentation, however, would have been a more complex process than that necessary for the bowls, pitchers and jug, and required the separate fabrication of its various component parts.

One feature that the delightful camel sculpture does share with five of the RABASF's monochrome wares (cat. nos. 1-5), as well as the two underglaze painted pieces (cat. nos. 9-10), is the iridescence of its turquoise glaze, particularly noticeable on the right side. Such deterioration of the glassy surface typically occurs when glazed objects are buried and exposed to moisture or salts in the soil. A number of the ceramics said to have been unearthed in the 20th century from the ruins of the Iranian site of Gurgan/Jurjan, discussed in the Introduction to this catalogue, shows the same tell-tale signs of glaze degradation as the RABASF pieces.

1. BOWL

RABASF INV. NO. 12

Stonepaste, incised under turquoise glaze.

Height: 8.4 cm; diameter: 16.8 cm.

Interior decoration: Three irregular concentric rings (two just below rim and one above bottom of bowl) frame a wide band of slightly diagonal indentations that have caught the glaze unevenly, creating a color contrast. The glaze has pooled very thick and dark in the bottom.

Condition: Iridescence on one side of both interior and exterior.

2. BOWL

RABASF INV. NO. 14

Stonepaste, incised under turquoise glaze.

Height: 8.5 cm; diameter: 18.5 cm.

Interior decoration: Two concentric rings below rim and above four cloud-like, triangular panels with "tails" that curve towards the bottom of bowl.

Condition: Overall crazing and light iridescence on the exterior.

Related works:

Watson 2004, cat. no. L.22 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LSN 18 C: green glaze).

Grube 1976, cat. no. 110 (Keir Collection, London: cobalt blue glaze).

Yoshida 1972, fig. 99 (unidentified Japanese collection: incised cloud design under "blue and-white" glaze).

3. BOWL

RABASF INV. NO. 15

Stonepaste, incised under turquoise glaze.

Height: 8.1 cm; diameter: 18.3 cm.

Interior decoration: Two concentric rings below rim and above five triangular panels, formed by roughly intersecting and overlapping lines, each enclosing a large, tripartite scalloped cloud.

Condition: Some areas of iridescence.

4. BOWL

RABASF INV. NO. 11

Stonepaste, incised and pierced under turquoise glaze.
Height 8.1 cm; diameter: 17.6 cm.

Interior decoration: Two concentric rings below rim and above four pairs of rough circles (the upper circle is small and flat and the lower one large), joined by a short diagonal line, and alternating with four longer diagonal lines. The edges of the circles are pierced with five to ten small holes, creating the effect of windows when the bowl is held up to the light.

Exterior decoration: Two registers of eight indentations that correspond to the interior piercings.

Condition: Noticeable iridescence on one side of both interior and exterior.

Related works:

Bluett and Sons 1976, cat. nos. 9 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London, C.38-1978: turquoise glaze) and 10 (present whereabouts unknown).

Fehervari 2000, cat. no. 119 (Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait, CER255TSR: cobalt glaze).

Oriental Ceramics, vol. 4: color pl. 28 (Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran no. 3338: turquoise glaze).

Watson 2004, cat. nos. L.19 and L. 20 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 280 C and LNS 755 C: green glaze).

Wilkinson 1973, p. 263, cat. no. 1 and p. 277, fig. 1 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 38.40.188: turquoise glaze).

5. PITCHER WITH STRAIGHT NECK AND HANDLE

RABASF INV. NO. 8

Stonepaste, turquoise glaze.
Height: 23.6 cm; width: 15.8 cm; diameter of base: 8.9 cm.

Decoration: The upper part of the globular body is impressed with a series of fourteen indentations. The apex of the handle is marked with a small pointed knob or thumb-grip.

Condition: Some pitting of glaze and slight iridescence on the left side.

Related works:

Grube 1994, cat. no. 184 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 519: described as “one of the most successful examples of a relatively common type;” similar shape, although proportions of body and neck different, and similar indentations where body and shoulder meet; turquoise glaze, heavily iridesced).

Idemitsu 1979, p. 185, fig. 287 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: very similar shape, although proportion of body slightly different; blue glaze).

Lane 194, pl. 55 (formerly Eumorfopoulos Collection: slightly different body shape, luster painted over blue glaze).

Watson 2004, cat. no. L.13 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 1030 C: spouted ewer with similar indentations, turquoise glaze).

6. PITCHER WITH STRAIGHT NECK AND HANDLE

RABASF INV. NO. 5

Stonepaste, molded and/or carved under turquoise glaze.
Height: 22.1 cm; width: 14.1 cm; diameter of base: 8.9 cm.

Decoration: The upper part of the globular body features several bands of decoration, of which the largest consists of a formulaic, benedictory inscription in Arabic, punctuated with split leaves, four little birds and a fox-like quadruped. The apex of the handle is marked with a small pointed knob or thumb-grip.

Inscription in Arabic:

العزو الاقبال و الدولة و السلامة و السعادة و البقاء لصواحيبه

“Glory and prosperity and dominion and well-being and happiness and long life to its owner”

Condition: Craze on neck and lower body.

Literature: Bahrami 1949, pl. VIII (credit: Collection Mrs. Ata Bey Affifi).

7. JUG WITH PAIRED OR TWIN HANDLE

RABASF INV. NO. 4

Stonepaste, incised under turquoise glaze.

Height: 20.1 cm; width: 16.2 cm; diameter of mouth: 9.8 cm; diameter of base: 6.2 cm; handle height: 9.9 cm.

Decoration: The neck is deeply incised with a broad band (6 cm) of floral (petal) and leaf scroll design, with a sharp ring or ridge at the bottom.

Comments: The carinated (ridged or angled) shape of the body is noteworthy and follows a metalwork model. The twin handle, with its two separate parts joined by five rectangular links and two knobs or thumb-grips, is also distinctive.

Condition: Pronounced crazing on the upper body and some overall pitting.

Literature: Bahrami 1949, pl. XII (credit: Collection Mrs. Ata Bey Affifi).

Related works:

Froom 2008, cat. no. 19 (Asian Art Museum, Avery Brundage Collection, San Francisco, B60P1927: a sketchier scroll design on neck and paired handle with knobs, turquoise glaze).

Grube 1976, cat. no. 170 (Keir Collection, London: body less carinated, overglaze-painted in luster).

Grube 1994, cat. no. 179, (Khalili Collection, London, POT 727: similar body profile described as “unusual;” lightly incised scroll design, cobalt glaze. Grube gives additional comparanda and comments that other known surviving pieces lack the “perfect balance of form and definition of profile” of the Khalili piece).

Ishiguro 1986, cat. no. 69 (Ishiguro Collection, Tokyo, E 30.65: white glaze with cobalt blue streaks).

Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: color pl. 9 (Yoshitoshi Imagawa Collection, Konagawa: paired handle with knobs, turquoise glaze); vol. II: monochrome fig. 99 (Hachiro Ninomiya Collection, Fukuoka: paired and linked handle with knobs, blue glaze); vol. II: monochrome fig. 104 (Izumi Mikami Collection, Konagawa: cobalt blue glaze).

Watson 2004, cat. no. L.12 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 850 C: much larger with similar scroll design on neck, turquoise glaze).

8. CAMEL WITH PALANQUIN

RABASF INV. NO. 13

Iran or Syria (Raqqā), mid-12th to mid-13th century.

Stonepaste, turquoise glaze.

Height 20.4 cm; width (tip of nose to rump): 14.2 cm; base: 7.9 x 9.7 cm.

Production and decoration: The twin-humped camel stands on an oblong base. Its head and body were made in a two-part mold, while the legs were hand-formed. The closed palanquin (or litter) was made from stonepaste sheets and stamped with designs on its side and back panels and with additional strips and circles for its upper sides. The tubular struts that support the litter and attach it to the camel's body were hand-formed, as were the three pointed finials that surmount its pitched roof. The oblong base was also rolled out of a section of stonepaste and attached to the camel's feet. The litter's slant may indicate that it slipped backwards before firing. The camel's body is covered with a blanket, as suggested by the molded ridges on its sides and rump. The lower section of the palanquin is decorated with a lattice-like pattern and the upper section with a large-zig-zag design alternating with small circles. A small figure—possibly a musician—with its arms akimbo sits or squats on the back of the litter, above the camel's tail.

Condition: Pronounced iridescence on the animal's proper right side and lighter areas of iridescence on the left.

Comments: The RABASF camel belongs to a group of over 400 small figural and animal sculptures, including some twenty other camels, most of which apparently functioned as decorative objects. Such figurines seem to have been popular in both Iran and Syria from the middle of the 12th to the middle of the 13th century. This example may have been created in the Syrian city of Raqqā on the Euphrates, which boasted a major ceramic industry during the first half of the 13th century. The construction of its palanquin and the possible presence of a musician suggest that the camel may refer to ceremonial, religious or military processions, including the Muslim pilgrimage caravan to Mecca²¹.

Related work:

Grube 1966, p. 8, fig. 20; *Oriental Ceramics*, vol. 11: monochrome pl. 257; Canby, Beyazit et al. 2016, cat. no. 140, attributing the related work to Iran or Iraq, 12th to early 13th century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.59: The camel's head and neck are more horizontal and its litter more vertical than on the RABASF camel, and the decoration includes what appear to be flute-playing musicians seated on either side).

UNDERGLAZE PAINTED WARES²²

CATALOGUE NUMBERS 9 - 10

Although it had long been the practice of Near Eastern potters to decorate earthenware vessels with painted decoration, it was only with the introduction of artificial, white stonepaste in the 12th century that designs could be painted with oxide pigments directly onto the ceramic surface before being covered with a transparent, alkaline glaze. The colors most often used for this medieval underglaze painted decoration were chromium black, which was very stable, and blue derived from cobalt and with a tendency to “run” during the firing process and thus to look more like a blue wash. The alkaline glaze applied over the painted decor could be either colorless or turquoise, as on both RABASF pieces.

The relative ease with which underglaze designs could be painted resulted in an extensive repertoire of abstract and representational motifs that combined to create an equally extensive range of striking compositions. The RABASF bottle (cat. no. 9), for instance, features writing (actually illegible) in two different forms of script juxtaposed with lines, circles, triangles and leafy scrolls, while the body of the cock-headed ewer (cat. no. 10) is decorated with multi-unit medallions alternating with bold black lines. Such designs were clearly meant to emphasize each vessel's specific shape and form: the lobed mouth and globular body of the bottle, and the cock's head and pear-shaped body of the ewer.

Both these pieces of underglaze painted ware derive their shapes from metalwork vessels. In the case of the cock-headed ewer the form dates back to artistic traditions in pre-Islamic Iran.

9. BOTTLE WITH MULTI-LOBED MOUTH RABASF INV. NO. 6

Stonepaste, painted in black and cobalt blue under a turquoise glaze.

Height: 29.4 cm; width: 17.9 cm; diameter of mouth: 7.8 cm; diameter of base: 9.2 cm.

Decoration: Each part of the bottle has a distinctive decoration. The mouth is decorated just below the lip with a black band inscribed with illegible, cursive script, and its lobes with an alternating design of a sketchy leaf scroll and an ovoid medallion with split leaves. These motifs appear to be "washed" in blue where the cobalt ran during firing. There is also a pseudo-inscription band in angular script around the neck between thick black lines. The flat shoulders are decorated with a sketchy scroll in black, and blue wash. The body's main decoration consists of a series of rather flat circles outlined in black, punctuated with black dots, and filled in with blue wash. The circles are framed above and below with pseudo-inscriptions on black ground, similar to those beneath the lip, which are linked to the circles by slightly curved black lines. The connection points are marked by a series of curving triangular panels filled in with sketchy dashes. The lower body is decorated with fish-like or elongated leaf forms and a very thick and irregular black band above the foot ring.

Condition: One side is extremely iridesced.

Comments: The overall shape of this bottle, with its globular body, straight neck and multi-lobed mouth or cup, derives from medieval Islamic metalwork. Quite a large number of similar vessels, with both lobed and smooth mouths, are known. Some have monochrome glazes and many are overglaze painted in luster, rather than underglaze painted as here. All have distinctive decorations.

Related works with multi-lobed mouths:

Bahrami 1949, pl. XXVII (Tehran Museum: white glaze, underglaze painted in blue and black) and pl. LXII (Maximo Etchecopar Collection, Buenos Aires: overglaze painted in luster).

Bahrami 1949 pl. LXXXVII; Watson 1985, pl. 83 & pp. 94, 106; Stanley 2004, color fig. 102 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.165-1977: overglaze painted in luster); <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/OI66698/bottle-unknown> (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.37-1978: overglaze painted in luster).

Bahrami 1949, pl. LXXXIX; Bluett and Sons 1976, cat. no. 43 and repro. p. 39 (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: overglaze painted in luster).

Bluett and Sons 1976, cat. no. 47 and repro. p. 44 (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: overglaze painted in luster).

Grube 1976, cat. no. 164 (Keir Collection, London: overglaze painted in luster).

Grube 1994, cat. nos. 147, 155, 162, 171, 195, 196, 245, 246 (Khalili Collection, London: POT 197-molded body, cobalt glaze; POT 1199-molded body, overglaze painted in luster; POT 1665-molded body, green glaze; POT 823-molded body, cobalt glaze; POT 526-turquoise glaze; POT 190-turquoise glaze; POT 1208-molded body, overglaze-painted in luster; POT 167-molded body, overglaze painted in luster).

Idemitsu 1979, color pl. 40 and monochrome fig. 286 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: molded decoration, turquoise glaze).

Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: monochrome fig. 106 (King Tsi Lee Collection, Tokyo: overglaze painted in luster); vol. II: monochrome fig. 134 (Toshio Ogawa Collection, Tokyo: overglaze painted in luster); vol. II: monochrome fig. 172 (Juro Ishizaki Collection, Tokyo: underglaze painted in dark green with touches of blue, transparent glaze).

Oriental Ceramics, vol. 4: monochrome pl. 128 (Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, no. 4766: overglaze painted in luster, said to be from Gurgan).

Pancaroglu 2007, cat. no. 75 (Plotnick Collection, Chicago: overglaze painted in luster and cobalt blue).

Watson 1985, fig. 30 (British Museum, London, 1928,7-21,11: overglaze painted in luster).

Welch 1972, vol. 2, pp. 122, 127 and 129 (formerly Collection Sadruddin Aga Khan, now Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, P.27 and P.28: overglaze painted in luster).

10. COCK-HEADED EWER

RABASF INV. NO. 7

Stonepaste, molded and painted in black and cobalt blue under a turquoise glaze.

Height: 25.4 cm; width: 14.3 cm; diameter (oval) of mouth: 4.6 cm; diameter of foot ring: 8.2 cm.

Production and decoration: The molded cock head is indented at the top and striped in black as if to represent a cock's comb. The beak, which is partly pierced on the left side and indented on the right, and one "cheek" are outlined in black. The protuberance under the beak may represent the cock's wattle. The lip of the mouth is edged in cobalt, and the neck encircled with a thick black line. Thick vertical lines in black divide the body into five panels. Each panel is decorated in the center with an ovoid medallion enclosing curved and V-shaped lines, and branching into leafy designs at the top and bottom. Above each medallion there is a single black dot and straight line, while below (so just above the foot ring) there is a smaller ovoid medallion with curved designs. No two panels are identical, and the black painted designs are all very sketchy. A black line runs down the middle of the handle, which is adorned with a small and flat knob or thumb-grip.

Condition: Some areas of crazing, iridescence and re-touching.

Comments: The cock (or cockerel)-headed ewer has a very long history in Near Eastern art dating back to the first millennium BCE and with a complex symbolism involving

religious and apotropaic beliefs about the sacred power of light. Silver versions created in Iran during the Sasanian period (224-651) were copied in China in porcelain. In the 10th century Chinese porcelain examples reached the Islamic world, and during the 12th and 13th centuries were recreated in stonepaste with different glaze and decorative types. Especially elaborate versions were produced with double, reticulated shells, curved handles resembling a cock or rooster tail, and more detailed decoration. The medieval revival and elaboration of this vessel form coincided with a further development of its iconographic significance under the influence of mystical Sufi ideas²³. Some of the known vessels of this type have beaks that are fully slit (i.e., open), allowing their liquid contents to ooze or pour out. Since the beak of the RABASF ewer is only partly pierced, it could not have functioned as a spout, and the ewer's contents could only have been emptied from the mouth at the top.

Related works (single-shell)²⁴:

Bahrami 1949, pl. XCI (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: overglaze painted in luster).

Bowie 1970, cat. no. 181 and repro. p. 71 (Seattle Art Museum).

Folsach 2001, fig. 172 (David Collection, Copenhagen, Isl. 23: molded body, painted in black and blue under a turquoise glaze).

From 2008, p. 66 (Asian Art Museum, Avery Brundage College, San Francisco, B60P1997: molded body, turquoise glaze).

Grube 1976, cat. no. 138 (Keir Collection, London: underglaze painted in black[?]).

Grube 1994, cat. no. 149 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 855: molded body, turquoise glaze).

Idemitsu 1979, color pls. 38 and 39 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: 38-overglaze painted in luster; 39-white glaze, previously published Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: monochrome fig. 90 as Sazo Idemitsu Collection, Tokyo, and Mikami 1978, color pl. 11); monochrome figs. 283 and 310 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: 283-incised designs, white glaze; 310-underglaze painted in luster, blue glaze).

Ishiguro 1986, cat. no. 23 (Ishiguro Collection, Tokyo, E 7.64: underglaze painted in black, turquoise glaze).

Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: color pl. 13 (Setsuya Hashimoto Collection, Tokyo: molded body, overglaze painted in luster); vol. I: monochrome fig. 89 (Sammy Y. Lee Collection, Tokyo: incised design, blue-green glaze); vol. I: monochrome fig. 102 (Itsuo Art Gallery, Osaka: molded body, overglaze painted in luster); vol. II: monochrome fig. 161 (Atami Art Museum, Shizuoka: lajvardina); vol. II: monochrome fig. 168 (Junkichi Mayuyama Collection, Tokyo: underglaze painted in black, blue and green).

Mikami 1966, cat. nos. 43 and 44 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: 43-molded and overglaze painted in luster; 44-cobalt glaze, previously published Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: monochrome fig. 138 as Matsunaga Memorial Museum, Kanagawa)

Mikami 1978, color pl. 11 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: white glaze, previously published Mikami 1966, cat. no. 37).

Oriental Ceramics, vol. 4: monochrome pl. 123 (Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, no. 4415: white glaze).

Oriental Ceramics, vol. 11: monochrome fig. 256 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 19.68.2: painted in blue under a transparent glaze).

Pancaroglu 2007, cat. no. 87 (Plotnick Collection, Chicago: overglaze painted in luster).

Paris 1977, cat. no. 150 (Musée du Louvre, Paris, MAO 248: painted in black under turquoise glaze).

Watson 1985, fig. 31 and pp. 33 and 67 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.160-1928: molded body, overglaze painted in luster).

Watson 2004, cat. no. L.11 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 93C: turquoise glaze)

Welch 1972, vol. 2, pp. 138-139 (formerly Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection, now Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, p. 34: overglaze painted in luster).

Yoshida 1972, fig. 60 (Itsuo Art Museum, Ikeda, Osaka Prefecture: overglaze painted in luster).

LUSTER WARE (*REFLECTOS METALLICOS*)²⁵

CATALOGUE NUMBERS 11 - 13

Of the various types of fine ceramics made in medieval Iran, luster ware was among the most highly prized. The sophisticated process of luster decoration had a long history of development and use elsewhere in the Islamic world and was introduced into Iran, possibly by Egyptian craftsmen, during the late 12th century. The epicenter of the Iranian luster ware industry was the town of Kashan where expert ceramic makers applied this refined form of overglaze decoration to stonepaste objects and developed distinctive painting styles and motifs. The technique itself involved two steps: first, a piece was glazed, generally in opaque white, and fired; then metallic pigments, usually a mixture of copper and silver oxides, were painted onto the hard, alkaline glaze and refired in a reducing kiln. This second firing left the oxide pigments in their elemental state, tightly bonded to the glazed surface. After firing, the object was polished to reveal the thin, metallic layer, which gives the decoration its characteristic lustrous and reflective sheen.

The decoration of Iranian luster ware frequently features animals, such as the gazelles and birds on the RABASF's cup, which also has a pair of handles resembling lions (cat. no. 11). The two figures, seated in seeming conversation beside a fish pond, who fill the center of one of RABASF's two large luster dishes represent another typical form of figural imagery (cat. no. 12). As on other examples of this iconographic type, the size of the personages and the curve of their backs are a perfect complement to the dish's open, round shape. Equally characteristic is the way the figures' faces and gesturing hands stand out, by virtue of having been painted in reserve, in contrast to their richly-patterned clothing that melds with the background of tight spirals, leafy scrolls and plump-breasted birds²⁶. Symmetrical geometrical compositions were also greatly favored by medieval Persian artisans, and the RABASF's second dish (cat. no. 13) is a splendid example of this style of luster ware decoration.

All three of the RABASF luster vessels also bear inscriptions written in cursive script, another ubiquitous element in the decorative repertoire of medieval Persian overglaze painted ceramics²⁷. Although the writing on the double-handle cup appears meaningless, the two dishes are inscribed with selected quatrains or verses from a variety of Persian poems, largely on the theme of unrequited love, and with good wishes to their owners. These verses have been identified and translated by Manijeh Bayani, a leading expert in the epigraphy on medieval Persian ceramics, who has also published an invaluable overview of the form and meaning of such inscriptions²⁸. While it is possible to make a loose, and

possibly metaphorical, connection between the love verses and the iconography on the first RABASF dish, there may be an even more explicit relationship between the function of the second dish and its inscriptions, which include a quatrain involving drinking and a couplet about eating from the great Persian epic poem the *Shabnama* (Book of Kings). Whatever the precise verbal-visual correlation, if any, the inscriptions contribute to the rich artistry and cultural complexity that characterize luxurious luster ware pieces such as these.

11. CUP WITH DOUBLE ANIMAL HANDLES

RABASF INV. NO. 3

Stonepaste, painted in luster over an opaque creamy white glaze.

Height to handles: 14.8 cm; height to mouth: 14.2 cm; width handle to handle: 20 cm; diameter of mouth: 10.9 cm; diameter of base: 9.5 cm.

Production and decoration: The two molded handles are probably meant to represent lions and are attached to the cup with their noses and feet. The vessel's luster-painted decoration also features a row of running gazelles under the rim and full-breasted birds enclosed in medallions around its mid-section. The two narrow bands of writing that frame the medallion band consist of repeated Arabic letters and words in a cursive script and do not actually say or mean anything. The lowest band of decoration, just above the base, contains a series of arches enclosing a "chain-and-stripe" design. Inside the mouth there is another "inscription" in an angular script. Overall the luster decoration is painted in a very loose and sketchy style.

Condition: Some very slight re-touching in the lower band of "writing."

Comments: This was a popular shape for cups during the medieval period and probably derived from metalwork. Many surviving examples have pouring spouts in addition to handles. Gazelles and birds are common motifs in the decoration of Persian luster ware.

Related works:

Bahrami 1949, pl. XLVIIa (Maximo Etchecopar Collection, Buenos Aires: with spout, overglaze painted in luster).

Grube 1976, cat. no. 158 (Keir Collection, London: with 2 spouts, overglaze painted in luster).

Grube 1994, cat. no. 262 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 255: with 2 spouts, overglaze painted in luster).

Idemitsu 1979, monochrome fig. 302 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: with spout, blue glaze).

Mikami 1962-64, vol. I: monochrome fig. 104 (Rimpei Okazaki Collection, Okayama: overglaze painted in luster); vol. II: color pl. 16 (Sammy Y. Lee Collection, Tokyo: with spout, overglaze painted in *mina'i* [and luster?]).

Mikami 1966, cat. no. 25 (Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo: with spout, monochrome glaze).

Paris 1977, cat. no. 292 (Musée du Louvre, Paris, MOA 58: with spout, overglaze painted in luster).

Watson 1985, fig. 42 and pp. 68 and 80 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.362-1918: with spout, overglaze painted in luster); fig. 75 and p. 104 (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: with spout, overglaze painted in luster).

12. DISH

RABASF INV. NO. 2

Stonepaste, painted in luster over an opaque white glaze, with a splash of blue.

Height: 7.4 cm; diameter: 32.8 cm; diameter of base: 13.6 cm; height of foot: 1 cm.

Decoration: The interior is decorated with two inscription bands, written facing each other (i.e., upside down in relation to one another): one on the rim and the other on the upper walls. The rim inscription is reserved against a luster ground, while the other is written in luster over the white glaze. The inscriptions encircle a large central field with two figures seated by a fish pond. The figures' facial features and hair are painted in luster, and their heads set off with "halos" in reserve. The figure to the right holds a flower (or perhaps the front of his/her robe), while his/her companion gestures out with both hands, as if in conversation. The designs on their robes differ slightly: the robe of the left figure has a scroll pattern with open leaves and that of the right figure is decorated with stems and solid leaves. The background between and around the figures consists of curved or curled leaves (resembling lily pads) on stems and plump birds in reserve against a very tight spiral designs scratched through the luster ground. There is an oval "splash" in bright blue right next to and in front of the head of the left-hand figure. A "sky canopy," filled with loose luster spirals, floats above the figures' heads. The fish pond at the bottom is edged with a grassy sward and the water is rendered with tight spirals scratched through the luster ground. Three fish, painted in reserve, swim through the water, the middle one swimming up-side-down. The exterior decor consists of nine large circles in reserve outlined in luster and punctuated with dots and leaf-like markings. The interstices are filled with oval and triangular forms.

Condition: The exterior luster painting is degraded.

Comments: The dish's wide profile and decoration, including two bands of facing inscriptions, are typical of the luxurious luster wares created in Iran, and more specifically in the town of Kashan, during the late-12th and especially the early-13th century. Its blue splash is also fairly usual, and probably resulted when a drop of colored glaze fell from another piece being fired in the same kiln. Cobalt and turquoise were regarded as beneficial colors in the medieval Islamic world and a small patch, however unintended, must have been considered acceptable²⁹.

Rim inscription: Although visually continuous, the inscription actually consists of three separate sets of Persian verses – two quatrains (designated A and B) and one couplet (C) – written in reserve against a luster ground. The verses begin at 7 o'clock and proceed counter-clockwise around the rim.

Quatrain A, by an unidentified poet writing about the pain of love, appears within the decoration of a number of Persian luster ware and underglaze painted vessels. (See Related works, below.) Here it is written from 7 to 3 o'clock:

ای رای تو سال و ماه آزدن من
 فارغ ز من و شاد بغم خوردن من
 گفتی نکنم با تو دگر بدعهدی
 این نیز نکردن تو بر گردن من

Oh you, whose will it is to hurt me for years and months,
 Who are free from me and glad at my anguish,
 You vowed [not to] break your promise again,
 It is I who has caused this breach.

Quatrain B, also on the theme of love, was composed by the pre-eminent luster ware and *mina'i* potter and decorator Abu Zayd, active in Kashan from the 1180s to 1219/20. Its earliest known instance is found on an enamel-painted bowl dated 1187-88. The quatrain then became part of the standard repertoire of Kashan artisans.³⁰ Here it runs from 3 to 10 o'clock.

من مهر تو در میان جان آوردم
 با او همه خورده در میان آوردم
 آخر ز همه جهان بر آوردم سر
 تا عشق تو بر سر جهان آوردم

I carried your love to the heart of my soul.
 I discussed the smallest matters with it.
 Until I overcame the entire world.
 In order to bring your love to the world.

The final, short couplet (C) is formulaic and appears frequently on luster ware vessels and tiles. It runs from 10 to 7 o'clock.

نگهدار بادا جهان آفرین
 بهرجا [کی باشد خداوند این]

May the Creator of the world protect
 [The owner of this bowl] wherever [he may be].

Upper wall inscription: This seems to be in Arabic and may consist of at least one quatrain and a couplet, written in luster over the white glaze and framed by two thin luster lines. But unlike the rim inscription, it is so badly written that it cannot be read. This raises the possibility that rim and wall texts were written by two different scribes (or scribe-potters). Alternatively, the scribe who wrote the rim inscription may not have known Arabic and copied a text without knowing what he was copying.

Literature: Bahrami 1949, pl. LXXII (credit: Collection Jacques O. Matossian).

Related works (selected):

Bahrami 1949, p. 62 (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A); p. 120 and pl. LIII (Collection Jacques O. Matossian: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A).

Blair 2008, fig. 1 (David Collection, Copenhagen 45/2001, dated Jumada II 600/February-March 1204: figural imagery and Persian inscriptions, quatrain B).

Grube 1994, cat. nos. 156 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 1493: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A), 212 (POT 696: Persian inscriptions: quatrain A), 214 (POT 1454: Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 219 (POT 1057: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C), 261 (POT 498: Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 268 (POT 491: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C), 274 (POT 221: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A), 275 (POT 826: Persian inscriptions, quatrain B and couplet C), 276 (POT 164: Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 277 (POT 1562: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C), 280 (POT 1563: figural imagery), 281 (POT 19: Persian inscriptions, couplet C).

Kiani 1984, pls. 42.1, 42.2 and 43.2 (Unidentified collections, three luster ware bowls excavated at Gurgan: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C).

Oriental Ceramics, vol. 4: color pl. 36 (Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, no. 8224, dated 608/1211, said to be from Gurgan: figural imagery; see also Watson 1985, color pl. F); monochrome pls. 125 and 127 (nos. 4080 and 4771, said to be from Gurgan: figural imagery).

Pancaroglu 2007, cat. nos. 74 (Plotnick Collection, Chicago: Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 75 (Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C), 76 (exterior decoration and Persian inscriptions, quatrain A and couplet C), 79 (blue splash), 85 (figural imagery), 86 (figural imagery), 91 (Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 92 (Persian inscriptions, quatrain B), 93 (Persian inscriptions, couplet C), 95 (exterior decoration).

Pancaroglu 2012, fig. 24.1 (St. Louis Art Museum 65:1954, dated 600/1203-04: Persian inscriptions, quatrain B).

Watson 1985, figs. 52 (Raymond Ades Family Collection, on loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K.: figural imagery), 64 (University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, NEP-19, dated Safar 608/July 1211: figural imagery), 65 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 32.52.2: figural imagery), 68 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.163-1977: figural imagery), 107 and 108 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 07.670, dated 607/1210 and 11.40 dated Sha'ban 604/February 1208: figural imagery), pl. E (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.51-1952, dated 604/1207-08: blue splash), pl. F (Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, no. 8224, dated 608/1211: figural imagery; also reproduced in color *Oriental Ceramics*, vol. 4: color pl. 36).

Watson 2004, cat. no. O.15 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 210C, dated Shawwal 614/January 1218: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A), O.16 (LNS 211 C: Persian inscriptions, quatrain A), O.17 (LBS 31 C: Persian inscriptions, quatrain B).

13. DISH

RABASF INV. NO. I

Stonepaste, painted in luster over an opaque white glaze.

Height: 7.1 cm (over irregular); diameter: 22.6 cm; diameter of foot: 7.5 cm; height of foot height: 3.2 cm.

Decoration: The rim is painted with a thick line of luster encircling a wider band with an illegible Arabic inscription in angular script against a background of loose luster scrolls. The decoration of the walls and central field consists of four zones: 1) a Persian inscription written in cursive script and divided into six segments; 2) a band of six oval medallions, enclosing an interlace pattern and spirals and linked by a scroll design in reserve, which project to separate the inscriptions; 3) a second Persian inscription written in cursive script and divided into six segments; 4) a central circular medallion with a loosely-drawn four-part scroll in reserve against luster ground that resembles the scroll design in zone 2 and with the same scalloped edge and finials. The exterior of the dish is decorated with 34 luster lines forming a “chain-and-stripe” motif.

Condition: Some abrasion on the rim.

Comments: The luster decoration of this dish is very brassy, indicating a predominance of copper oxide in the pigment, and the drawing and painting of its composition very delicate and of extremely high quality. It is quite likely that the piece was made in Kashan, probably circa 1200-1220. The “chain-and-stripe” pattern on the exterior is found on many pieces associated with the so-called Gurgan horde, including others typical of Kashan production. (Catalogue number 11 has a sketchier version of the same design feature. Other examples are cited in Related works below).

Rim inscription: The writing resembles the angular script known as Kufic and bears the characteristic of certain Arabic letter forms, but not a word is legible.

Wall (zone 1) inscription: This consists of two separate Persian quatrains (A and B) on the theme of love. The last verse of quatrain B is written in zone 2.

Quatrain A: This poem has been attributed to Kamal al-Din Isma'il (d. 635/1237-38), and appears in a section of a poetic anthology dealing with intoxicating drinks.³¹ The *shajari rubab* mentioned in the first line refers to a stringed instrument in the form of a short-necked guitar with a parchment surface. The Kachghari in the second line refers to an oasis town (Kach-ghar or Kashgar) along the rim of the Tarim Basin in what is today the southern part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (also sometimes called East Turkestan) of the People's Republic of China.

من دوش بکاسی (کذا [کاسهء] رباب شجری
می نالیدم ترانی (کذا [ترانهء] کاچ غری (کذا [کاچغری])
با کوزی (کذا [کوزهء] می درآمد آن / رشک پری
گفتا کی اگر کاسه زنی کوزه خوری

Last night on a *shajari rubāb*'s bowl
 I was lamenting a Kachghari song.
 That self-admiring fairy came out with the bottle of wine
 [and] said: If you play the *rubāb* (bowl), you will drink what is in the bottle.

Quatrain B: A lover's lament, by an unidentified poet.

این دل داغ غم عشق تو بر جان دارد
 هجر تو جهانی بمن چو زندان دارد
 آن دل کی / همی طاقت وصل تو نداشت
 هیئات / کجا طاقت هجران دارد

This scarred heart has the anguish of your love in its soul.
 Your separation makes my world like a prison.
 That heart that did not have the strength of being united with you;
 Alas! How could it have the strength of being separated from you.

Center (zone 2) inscription: This consists of two separate Persian couplets (A and B).

Couplet A: This comes from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), completed in 1010 A.D. by the Persian poet Firdausi³².

بخور هرچ داری / فزونی بده
 تو رنجیده ای بهر / دشمن منه

Eat whatever you have, and give excess away,
 If you are vexed, do not put it on account of the enemy.

Couplet B: The first part of a formulaic phrase, found in various versions on many Persian ceramics and other objects³³.

عز اقبال / مهتری او سرور
 از [خداوند این مبادا دور]

May glory, prosperity, grandeur and joy
 [Be not far from the owner of this vessel]

Related works (selected):

Grube 1994, cat. nos. 276 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 164: chain-and-stripe motif), 280 (POT 1563: interior decoration and Persian inscriptions, couplet A).

Pancaroglu 2007, cat. nos. 75, 77, 87 and 91 (Plotnick Collection, Chicago: chain-and-stripe motif), 80 (said to have been found in Gurgan, interior decoration), 76 and 81 (Persian inscriptions, couplet B).

Watson 2004, cat. nos. N.7 (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, LNS 35 C: Persian inscriptions, couplet A), O.17 (LNS 31 C: chain-and-stripe motif and interior decoration), O.18 (LNS 106 C: chain-and stripe motif), P.7 (LNS 88 C: Persian inscriptions, couplet B).

MINAI (ENAMEL PAINTED)³⁴

CATALOGUE NUMBERS 14 - 15 (RE-WORKED IN MODERN TIMES)

Whereas luster decoration in Iran during the late-12th and early-13th centuries represented the continuation of a long Islamic tradition, that of enamel decoration constituted a re-invention or re-discovery of a technique last employed in the Near East during Roman times, with Kashan once again the most active, even perhaps the sole, medieval production center. Like luster ware, it involved painting on the surface of an object that had already been coated with glaze, usually opaque white or turquoise. Instead of a single metallic pigment, however, this technically-complex process employed a vibrant polychrome palette, called in Persian *haft rang* or seven colors. Designs were first painted in blue, green and sometimes purple onto the raw glaze and fired (known as the in-glaze stage), and then with red and black enamel pigments and re-fired (the overglaze stage). Gilt leaf was sometimes fixed in yet another firing to further enrich the overall chromatic effect.

Besides being extremely colorful, these pieces are characterized by a wide range of figural scenes. Some of the iconography is generic, such as enthronement or hunting scenes, while other images represent popular narratives from medieval Persian literature. The decoration on the RABASF bowls, for instance, relates to two well-known tales in the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), the great Persian epic completed by the poet Firdausi in 1010 A.D. The central decoration of catalogue number 14 depicts the popular story of the Persian prince Bahram Gur (later the Sasanian king Bahram V, r. 420-438) and his slave girl Azada, while the composition of catalogue number 15 recalls episodes from a *Shahnama* adventure romance featuring a warrior named Bizhan and his lady-love, princess Manizha. Both these stories were frequently depicted in illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* from the 14th century onwards, and indeed the decorative style of *haft rang* ceramics has much in common with early Persian miniature painting.

The combination of brilliant color schemes and lively imagery made these wares particularly popular among European and American collectors of Persian ceramics in modern times, when they began to be called by the Persian term *mina'i*, meaning enameled. The very popularity of *mina'i* on the international art market, however, led to the widespread practice of “restoring” or “enhancing” objects in less than perfect condition through a variety of means, including the re-assembling of broken ceramic pieces, the fabricating of missing pieces, and the selective (and sometimes wholesale) re-painting of surfaces³⁵. Both RABASF bowls of the *mina'i* type have been subjected to this kind of clever treatment, presumably before they were acquired by Dña. Isabel, as both visual inspection and preliminary scientific examination reveal. Whereas the bodies of the two works may be composed, in whole or in part, of genuine stonepaste, their overall appearance

and painted decor are no longer original. Rather than authentic examples of *mina'i*, they should be considered modern re-workings of this type of luxury ceramic production from medieval Iran.

14. BOWL WITH FIGURAL DECORATION (MODERN) RABASF INV. NO. 10
 Stonepaste (presumed), painted in enamel colors over a turquoise glaze.
 Height: 9.2 cm; diameter: 18.7 cm; height of foot ring height: 1.9 cm; diameter of base: 8.2 cm.

Decoration: A black band with pseudo-kufic inscription and arabesque design in white runs under the bowl's green rim. Its interior is painted with three figures mounted on a single humped camel, evidently meant to depict the classic narrative of Bahram Gur hunting with his lute-playing slave girl Azada as recounted in the *Shahnama* and other Persian texts. (See Comments below.) Bahram Gur sits astride the camel's mid-section, with his left arm stretched back as if pulling on a bow. Azada holds a lute or harp-like instrument and appears in back of Bahram Gur, but does not actually seem to be seated on the camel. Likewise, the figure in front of Bahram Gur seems to be behind the camel, as if standing, and hanging onto Bahram Gur. What looks like the camel's hump may actually be Bahram Gur's raised leg as in other, authentic examples of the same scene. The black and white saddle blanket also may be masking parts of Bahram Gur and Azada's bodies. Their mount is at least very camel-like with a saddle blanket adorned with tassels, hairy upper legs and a supercilious expression. The small deer or gazelle scratching its ear in front of the camel fits with the standard iconography for the scene, although it too is probably over-painted. There is a bird immediately behind the camel, which may be partly original. Four large knotted and scroll-like motifs flank the central figural group. There is a large medallion and two smaller finial-like devices overhead and two red rosettes and a split-palmette motif beneath the camel's feet. An inscription in Persian, not yet deciphered and possibly illegible, encircles the bowl's exterior.

Condition: Preliminary inspection with a UV light (May 2012) and X-ray scanning (December 2013) reveals that the bowl is composed of a large number of separate pieces, which probably did not all belong together originally. The decoration has been greatly re-painted over the assembled pieces, doubtless to mask the bowl's composite fabric.

Comments: One day the young Persian prince Bahram Gur went hunting on a camel with his favorite slave girl Azada riding behind and carrying her lute. They soon came upon a pair of gazelles and Azada challenged Bahram to change the buck into a doe (by shooting off its antlers), the doe into a buck (by shooting arrows into its head), and to pin together the deer's ear, ear and foot (by first nicking its ear with a pebble and then, when it raised its hoof to scratch, firing another arrow through the head, ear and foot). Bahram Gur achieved all this and expected Azada to praise him, but instead the slave girl protested that such a feat could only be the work of the devil. Whereupon Bahram Gur threw her from the camel and trampled her to death. The story was frequently represented on medieval and later ceramic and metalwork objects, as well as in numerous illustrated manuscripts.

Related works:

Simpson 1985, pp. 133-43 discusses the representation of Bahram Gur and Azada on medieval objects, and pp. 144-45 lists known ceramic examples. Selected examples

are reproduced; see especially figs. 5, 6, 9 and 10, which include various details found on the RABASF bowl, such as the gazelle scratching its ear, the bird and the over-head medallion.

Other examples are now known: http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/124989/Bowl_Depicting_Bahram_Gur_and_Azada/set/9843f1b1339ccec94b596c0ac55f0048?referring-q=86.227.11 (Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, 86.227.11: this includes an additional figure standing behind the camel, as well as Azada trampled underfoot.)

Brend and Melville 2010, cat. no. 16 (Private Collection, U.K.: this shows Azada both seated on the camel and lying under its feet, as well as two smaller figures, one seated and another running, overhead).

15. BOWL, WITH FIGURAL DECORATION (MODERN) RABASF INV. NO. 9

Stonepaste (presumed), painted in enamel colors over a turquoise glaze.

Height: 6.1-6.7 cm; diameter: 19.9 cm; foot ring diameter: 8.4 cm.

Decoration: The exterior is decorated in four zones: under the rim, there is a band of kufesque inscription; on the walls, a row of galloping horsemen and one standing figure, all separated by motifs that look like little balloons; around the base, a band of fleur-de-lys and finials in red, blue and green(?); on the base, a large split-palmette motif in black.

The center of the interior is painted with a standardized enthronement scene and features an enthroned figure wearing a turban and flanked by two standing attendants. The space beneath the throne is filled with a split geometric motif. The enthronement is encircled by a continuous design resembling star tiles in red and green. The interior walls are decorated with two concentric rings of 12 figural scenes of variable width, separated by columns and spandrels. These scenes seem to represent episodes from the well-known tale of Bizhan and Manizha, as recounted in the *Shahnama* and other Persian texts. The inner ring includes scenes 1 to 5, and the outer ring scenes 6 to 12. The scenes begin at 9 o'clock and proceed counterclockwise, as follows:

1. A enthroned figure and a seated figure holding a cup, plus a horse with crossed banners above and a standing figure behind;
2. A man seated in a pit or building flanked by two standing figures;
3. A horse with a banner and a seated groom;
4. A naked prisoner, escorted by a dressed figure, plus a figure holding a door (possibly a representation of stocks) lead by a figure holding an axe;
5. A camel with bird flying behind;
6. An enthroned figure and a standing figure;
7. Three figures: one figure with bow, another under a doorway, and a third gesturing;
8. Three figures: one seated in a tent, another wearing a crown and seated to the left, and a third standing to the left;
9. Three figures: one seated next to what looks like a chest or cabinet, and two others seated to the left;
10. Three figures: seated in front of a double-grilled window, possible representing a castle;
11. A naked prisoner being led by a clothed escort;

12. A large doorway flanked by a standing figure who gestures to his right, and by a seated figure wearing a headdress with 2 ribbons (?) who also gestures to his right.

Condition: Both exterior and interior decoration have been totally over-painted. Preliminary inspection with a UV light (May 2012) and X-ray scanning (December 2013) was inconclusive, although it did reveal several large cracks and a repaired area on the rim.

Comments: The exterior decoration is comparable to that found on many medieval Persian ceramics, as is the enthronement scene depicted in the center of the interior. The decoration on the interior walls is far more unusual, but various of its scenes, especially in the inner ring, also appear on the celebrated Freer Beaker in Washington, D.C., an intact *mina'i* drinking vessel decorated with a sequence of twelve scenes related to the Bizhan and Manizha story and dating from the late 12th to early 13th century. The Freer Beaker was reproduced in several scholarly publications and sale catalogues between 1911 and 1939. These reproductions may have served as the model for some of the imagery on the RABASF bowl³⁶.

Related works:

Simpson 1981, 2013a and 2013b (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., F1928.2)

Brend and Melville 2010, cat. no. 15 (Khalili Collection, London, POT 875: This fragment of an authentic medieval *mina'i* bowl shares several elements of both the interior and exterior decoration of the RABASF bowl, although it has been identified as representing another narrative story, also from the *Shahnama*).

NOTES

- * My appreciation to Professor Víctor Nieto Alcaide for sharing genealogical and family information related to Dña. Isabel. Professors Joel Beinin and Robert Vitalis kindly provided details about 'Ata 'Afifi, sometimes referred to as 'Ata 'Afifi Bey. (The Turkish title Bey literally means "governor" or "chieftan", but in modern parlance is the equivalent of "sir"). 'Ata 'Afifi's father Ahmad was a high-ranking Egyptian government official and significant.
- 1 The art historical literature on Islamic ceramic history is extensive. The following discussion is based on GRUBE, Ernst J., *Cobalt and Lustre: The First Centuries of Islamic Pottery*, London: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1994; PANCAROĞLU, Oya, *Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection*, Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago/New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007; and WATSON, Oliver, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*, London: Thames & Hudson in association with The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait National Museum, 2004, with a very useful glossary on pp. 507-508. For additional detail about materials and techniques, see KEBLOW BERNSTED, Anne-Marie, *Early Islamic Pottery: Materials & Techniques*, London: Archetype Publications, 2003, and for further study based on archaeological, petrographic and chemical investigations, see MASON, Robert B. J., *Shine Like the Sun: Lustre-Painted and Associated Pottery from the Medieval Middle East*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, Inc., in association with Royal Ontario Museum, 2004.
- 2 CANBY, Sheila, BEYAZIT, Deniz, RUGIARDI, Martina, and PEACOCK, A.C.S., *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016. For a succinct discussion, see PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- 3 MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 8, 170-72; CANBY, BEYAZIT, RUGIARDI and PEACOCK, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-87.
- 4 The stonepaste body is easily visible in cat. nos. 1 through 13, but can only be inferred for cat. nos. 14 and 15, where the ceramic fabric is obscured by modern over-painting.
- 5 In general on this point see TABBAA, Yasser, "Bronze Shapes in Iranian Ceramics of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 98-113; WATSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-16; and WATSON, Oliver, "Pottery and Metal Shapes in Persia in the 12th and 13th Centuries," in Michael Vickers, ed., *Pots and Pans: A Colloquium on Precious Metals and Ceramics in the Muslim, Chinese and Graeco-Roman Worlds*, 3 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 3: 205-212.

- 6 On this point see PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-33.
- 7 The invasion of Iran by the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan (1219-1222) devastated the ceramic industry, which did not resume active production of high-quality wares until the 1260s. Mason, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-65.
- 8 BAHRAMI, Mehdi, *Gurgan Faiences*, Cairo: Le Scribe Egyptian S.A.E., 1949 (reprint ed., Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1988). This monograph was preceded by a brief article by the same author: "Faïence émaillées et lustrées de Gurgan," *Artibus Asiae* 10 (1947), pp. 100-105.
- 9 For a report of scientific excavations conducted in the 1970s, see KIANI, Muhammad Yusuf, *The Islamic City of Gurgan*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1984; and FARZANEH, Qáeeni, *Ceramik of Jorjan*, Tehran: Glassware and Ceramics Museum of Iran, 2000. For a summary of current scholarly opinion about the Gurgan finds, see PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, p. 124, and MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 138 and 222.
- 10 The assumption here that Dña. Isabel, rather than her husband, was the actual collector is based on the fact that two pieces (RABASF cat. nos. 6 and 7) were published in 1949 as belonging to "Mrs. Ata Bey Afffi." BAHRAMI, *Gurgan Faiences*, pls. VIII and XII.
- 11 www.egy.com/community/04-12-16.phb (accessed 15 August 2014).
- 12 BEININ, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
- 13 *Exposition d'art Musulman*, Cairo: R. Schindler, 1947.
- 14 WATSON, Oliver, "Persian Wares: The Clement Ades Gift to the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Connoisseur* 200 (January 1979): 14. See also note 19, below.
- 15 *La Bourse Egyptienne*, 15 Fevrier 1933.
- 16 BAHRAMI, *op. cit.*, pl. LXXII (RABASF cat. no. 12). This same publication describes (pp. 43-44) what is now RABASF cat. no. 6 as in the J. Matossian collection, but reproduces it in pl. VIII with a caption crediting Mrs. Ata Bey Afffi [sic] as its owner. This suggests that Dña. Isabel purchased the piece from Jacques Matossian after Bahrami had written his book, which seems to have occurred sometime between the spring of 1947 and May 1948 (judging from the dates mentioned in the book's Preface and Foreword respectively), and prior to its 1949 publication. Other works formerly belonging to Matossian are today in the Musée du Louvre, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Cleveland Museum of Art; and the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- 17 BAHRAMI, *op. cit.*, p. 9 states that the "the first examples of the recently discovered pottery [from Gurgan] ... were offered on the Tehran market in 1945, and found their way to Cairo."
- 18 For the Ades collections, see: *The Gurgan Finds: A loan exhibition of Islamic pottery of the Seljuq period from the Raymond Ades Family Collection*, London: Bluettt & Sons Ltd., 1976. In his Foreword to this exhibition catalogue (p. 2), Raymond Ades explains that he inherited everything from his father [Elie Ades] in October 1946 and that his father told him that "he had acquired all these pieces during the last year [i.e., 1945-46] and that he believed that they had all come from the Gurgan area." R. Ades also mentions that the collection of his uncle Clement "came from the same source." The Raymond Ades Family Collection is presently on loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, U.K., while the Clement Ades collection belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Pieces in the two Ades collections comparable to those in the RABASF collection are listed in the individual catalogue entries here.
- 19 BAHRAMI, *op. cit.*
- 20 FEHERVARI, Geza, *Islamic Pottery: A Comprehensive Study based on the Barlow Collection*, London: Faber and Faber, 1973, pp. 75-76; GRUBE, Ernst J., *Islamic Pottery of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, London: Faber and Faber, 1976, pp. 158-176; GRUBE, *Cobalt and Lustre*, pp. 162; SOUSTIEL, Jean, *La céramique islamique: Le Guide du Connoisseur*, Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1985, p. 86; WATSON, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*, pp. 314-323; MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-31.
- 21 My deepest appreciation to Dr. Melanie Gibson for sharing her expertise about such figurines, including their attribution, and for a copy of her invaluable doctoral dissertation: GIBSON, Melanie, "Takūk and Timthāl: A study of

- glazed ceramic sculpture from Iran and Syria *circa* 1150-1250," Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2010. See chapter 5.5 for camels. For a summary of these findings, see Eadem, "The Enigmatic Figure: Ceramic Sculpture from Iran and Syria c. 1150-1250," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 73 (2008-2009): 39-50. See also now CANBY, BEYAZIT, RUGIARDI and PEACOCK, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-26 for more on the significance of the camel in Seljuq times. For a history of the ceramic industry in Raqqa, see JENKINS-MADINA, Marilyn, *Raqqa Revisited: Ceramics of Ayyubid Syria*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006.
- 22 GRUBE, *Cobalt and Lustre*, p. 157-158; PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, p. 23; SOUSTIEL, *op. cit.*, p. 86; WATSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-45 and 508; MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-33.
- 23 The history, function and meaning of such vessels are thoroughly discussed in the following publications: MELIKIAN-CHIRVANI, A. S., "The Wine Birds of Iran from Pre-Achaemenid to Islamic Times," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, n.s. 9 (1995): 41-97; GIBSON, *Takūk and Timthāl*, chapter 6.1.
- 24 For pertinent discussions and listings of related works, see GRUBE, *Islamic Pottery*, pp. 186-92 and GRUBE, *Cobalt and Lustre*, cat. no. 149.
- 25 WATSON, *op. cit.*, 38-40, 347-61 and 508; WATSON, Oliver, *Persian Lustre Ware*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985, pp. 31-44; WATSON, Oliver, "Pottery and glass: Lustre and enamel," in Rachel Ward, ed., *Gilded and Enamelled Glass from the Middle East*, London: British Museum Press, 1998, pp. 15-16; MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-30.
- 26 PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, p. 128; MASON, *op. cit.*, p. 149, motifs KL 19-21.
- 27 PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 and 118; BLAIR, Sheila, "A Brief Biography of Abu Zayd," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 164-169.
- 28 BAYANI, Manijeh, "A Note on the Content and Style of Inscriptions," in PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55; and the same author's "Notes on Inscriptions," in FROOM, Aimée, *Persian Ceramics from the Collections of the Asian Art Museum*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2008, pp. 123-124. For a useful compendium of such inscriptions, see also GRUBE, *Cobalt and Lustre*, pp. 332-336.
- 29 WATSON, *Persian Lustre Ware*, p. 104.
- 30 BLAIR, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
- 31 SHIRVĀNĪ, Jamāl Khalīl, *Nuzbat al-majālis*, M.A. Riyahi, ed., Tehran: Zavvār, 1375/1955-1956, p. 179, no. 253.
- 32 DABIR-SIYAQI, Muhammad, ed., *Shāhnāmeḥ-ye Hakīm Abu'l-Qāsem-e Ferdawsi*, Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Ibn Sina, 1956, vol. 2, p. 662, line 1607 and vol. 5, p. 2509, line 31.
- 33 See the many examples listed in GRUBE, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-336.
- 34 PANCAROĞLU, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24, 109-114; WATSON, "Pottery and glass," pp. 16-17; WATSON, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*, pp. 55 and 363-71; MASON, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-32.
- 35 This practice was already recognized in scholarly literature on Persian ceramics of the 1930s and 1940s, and has been confirmed in recent years through careful scientific testing and conservation studies of pieces (some of considerable renown) in private and museum collections world-wide. See WATSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 68 and 71-74; DE LAPEROUSE, Jean-François, STAMM, Karen and PARRY, Vicki, "Re-examination and Treatment of Mina'i Ceramics at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," in Lisa Pilosi, ed., *Glass and ceramics conservation 2007* (Nova Gorica, Slovenia: Girški Museum, 2007), pp. 112-19; MCCARTHY, Blythe and HOLOD, Renata, "Under a microscope: The examination of the Freer Siege Scene Plate," <http://asia.si.edu/research/articles/minai-battle-plate.asp>.
- 36 POPE, Arthur Upham, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1938-1939, vol. 5: pl. 660. This same reproduction may have been the source for the imagery on another bowl, also repainted in modern times and now in the Museum of Modern Art, Doha (PO-230). See CHRISTIE'S, London, sale 15 October 2002, lot 206; MICHELSEN, Leslee Katrina and OLAFSDOTTER, Johanna, "Telling Tales: Investigating a *Mināī* Bowl," in David J. Roxburgh, ed., *Envisioning Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Honor of Renata Holod*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014, pp. 46-87.

Note of the Editorial Committee of the review *ACADEMIA*:

In the issues indicated below various news items and articles were published on the collection donated by Gloria Marcela Faure Yusta to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando:

Boletín *Academia*, second half year of 1987, n° 65, p. 420; Boletín *Academia*, first half year of 1992, n° 74, pp. 259-273; Boletín *Academia*, first half year of 1993, n° 76, pp. 433-459; Boletín *Academia*, 2006, n° 102-103, pp. 61-102.

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3D VIRTUALISATION OF THE COLLECTION

RABASAF's digital humanities laboratory has set up a 3D virtualisation of the present 15-piece ceramic collection by means of close-range photogrammetry. The collection can now be viewed interactively and free of charge at the following web link:

www.rabasf.com/es/museo/obras-en-3d/ceramica-persa

Alternativamente en: sketchfab.com/rabasf

Or scanning the following QR code with any handheld:



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Catalogue n° 1 BOWL.



Catalogue n° 2 BOWL.



Catalogue n° 4 BOWL.



Catalogue n° 3 BOWL.



Catalogue n° 5 PITCHER.



Catalogue n° 6 PITCHER.



Catalogue n° 7 JUG.



Catalogue n° 8 CAMEL.



Catalogue n° 10 COCK-HEADED EWER.



Catalogue n° 9 BOTTLE.



Catalogue n° 11 CUP.



Catalogue n° 12 DISH.



Catalogue n° 13 DISH.



Catalogue n° 14 BOWL.



Catalogue n° 15 BOWL.