



CERAMICS XIV. THE ISLAMIC PERIOD, 11TH-15TH CENTURIES

CERAMICS

xiv. The Islamic Period, 11th-15th centuries

Saljuq and post-Saljuq periods (429-654/1038-1256)

Earthenware. There is very little firm evidence for either localization or precise dating of pottery made in Persia in the 5th/11th and early 6th/12th centuries, as few controlled excavations have been undertaken and very few dated specimens have been recorded. Nevertheless, a large variety of pottery types from different parts of the country has been attributed to this general period, notably incised and slip-carved earthenwares, which have been published under a variety of labels, as proper attributions have so far been impossible (for detailed discussions and bibliographies, see Fehérvári, 1973, chap. 4; Grube, 1976, pp. 106-12, 347-49; Soustiel, 1985, chap. 3). One of these types is sgraffiato ware ([Plate xii](#)), in which the design was incised in thin lines through a white or buff slip into the darker ceramic body; it is often assigned to the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries (Lane, 1965, pls. 30-31A; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 583-88), but Florence Day (p. 57, fig. 3) has read the date 836/1432-33 in the incised inscription on the exterior of one bowl in the Art Institute,



Chicago (no. 33.18; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 586A), which suggests that the ware continued to be made in Persia over a long period of time. Another approximately contemporary technique involved cutting away parts of the slip to reveal larger areas of the ceramic ground as a dark foil against which floral, calligraphic, and frequently figurative designs are set (Plate xiii); these slip-carved wares have generally been dated to the 6th-7th/12th-13th centuries (Lane, 1965, pls. 31B, 32B, 33B; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 595-96, 612, 620, and 743-50). An intermediary type, in which strong green and manganese-purple glazes serve to pick out parts of sgraffiato designs (Plate xiv), has been attributed in the literature to the Āmol district at approximately the same period (Lane, 1965, pls. 32A, 33A; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 623-30; see also [āmol ware](#)). A similar, approximately contemporary type, in which incised figural designs and floral scrollwork are filled in with colored glazes on an off-white ground (Plate xv), has been associated with the Āḡkand district (Lane, 1965, pl. 34B; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 607-11).

In the same general period a great variety of unglazed pottery with incised, carved, and molded designs was being produced all over Persia, continuing a tradition that had originated in the Umayyad and Sasanian periods. This pottery is often very difficult to date, and detailed study is required before it can be properly classified, yet it displays a variety of calligraphic (Plate xvi) and figural designs that should easily distinguish Saljuq and later examples from their predecessors (Lane, 1965, pl. 36; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 753-54; for a piece dated 612/1215-16, see Migeon, p. 16 no. 30, pl. 10; Grube, 1976, p. 343). For a detailed discussion of these types and the literature see Fehérvári (chap. 4), Grube (1976, pp. 106-12, and the bibl., sec. 10, for the literature), and Soustiel (chap. III).

Frit wares. The most important event in the ceramic history of medieval Persia was the introduction of an artificial body, generally known as “frit,” possibly inspired by technology first developed in Egypt, whence some potters immigrated at the collapse of the Fatimid dynasty (297-567/909-1171; Lane, 1965, pp. 37-38). It was compounded of such materials as powdered quartz (*ḥajar-e mahā*, *šokar-e sang*), a particularly fine white clay found near Kāšān, and potash (*šakār*, *qalī*; Allan, 1973, pp. 111-13, 116-18), which, when fired at high temperatures, fused into a fine, thin, dense body to which glazes of similar “glassy” ingredients adhered much more easily than to the earthenware body of earlier periods. New developments in the use of fluxes for these glazes also permitted painting under a translucent glaze, a technique



that had been almost impossible before. Details of this new ceramic technology are recorded in a unique text, written in 700/1301 by Abu'l-Qāsem 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Alī b. Moḥammad b. Abī Ṭāher, a member of a family of Kāšān potters that can be traced on signed and dated works from the 6th/12th to the 8th/14th century (*Survey of Persian Art*, p. 16-66; cf. Bahrami, 1949, pp. 76ff.; idem, 1944-45; Watson, 1985, app. 1; text and Ger. tr., Ritter, et al.; Eng. tr., Allan, 1973). These technical innovations made possible some of the most spectacular ceramic wares ever created in Persia.

The centers where these new ceramics were produced are still a matter of scholarly debate. Although Arthur Upham Pope's specific identifications of a number of them (*Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 1541ff.) have been largely discarded, there can be little doubt that many of the ceramic types developed during this period were produced in more than one locality. One of the major centers was certainly Kāšān, from which ceramic artists traveled to other parts of the country to produce their wares for local consumption, especially tiles for architectural decoration. A number of surviving vessels and tiles are signed by artists with the *nesba* (attributive name) al-Kāšānī or simply Kāšānī, suggesting that in that period it was understood to mean that the artist actually came from Kāšān (see, e.g., abu^v ṭāher; abu^v zayd b. moḥammad b. abī zayd kāšānī). This conclusion seems confirmed by a luster-painted bowl signed by Moḥammad b. Moḥammad al-Nīšāpūrī, who added that he was “dwelling in Qāšān” (*kāteboho Moḥammad ebn Moḥammad al-Nīšāpūrī al-moqīm be-Qāšān*; Bahrami, 1949, p. 92, pl. XLIX; Grube, 1968, p. 85). The earliest securely dated objects with the *nesba* Kāšānī are two bowls in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (nos. 64.178.1-2), dated respectively 4 Moḥarram 582/26 March 1186 and Moḥarram 583/March 1187; one is signed by **Abū Zayd al-Kāšānī**, but only the *nesba* of the second signature is preserved. Mehdi Bahrami has published (1949, pp. 126-27 no. 1, pls. 5b, XLVIII) a tile dated Šafar 601/September 1204 and signed by Moḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Kāšī (generally accepted as short for “al-Kāšānī,” though, as *kāšī* also refers to tiles, for which Kāšān was famous, it may simply mean “the tilemaker”). Aside from Kāšān, there must have been many other centers where fine frit wares were produced, as attested by the quantity of finds from various parts of Persia and the discovery of wasters and sometimes kilns.

A total of about eighty dated objects and a considerably larger number of dated tiles have been recorded from the 6th/12th to the mid-7th/13th centuries, but many of the published dates require verification. As tiles were used



mainly for the decoration of religious buildings, they may have been considered more important than other objects, though even the latter sometimes have inscriptions with religious, often specifically Sufi, connotations (Grube, 1976, pp. 356-66; Watson, 1985, pp. 201-06). The extensive sequence of dated tiles is helpful, in establishing a fairly accurate chronology for related ceramic vessels and other objects. The earliest firmly dated ceramic object recorded for this period is a fragmentary vase with luster painting (see below; British Museum, London, 1920.3-26.1; Hobson, p. 18, fig. 25; *Survey of Persian Art*, p. 1672 no. 1, pl. 636B). The inscription encircling the body includes the date Moḥarram 575/June 1179. Gaston Wiet (pp. 63-64) read the date on an underglaze-painted ewer with openwork in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (no. 16159), as 562/1166, which was accepted by Pope as the earliest date on a ceramic object of the Saljuq period (*Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 1696 no. 137A, 1612 n. 1), as well as by Mohamed Mostafa (1955, p. 56, fig. 51; 1979, p. 55, fig. 51) and Kristian Jakobson (p. 45, fig. 5); the reading was, however, questioned by Bahrami, who gave the date as 657/1259 (1949, p. 59 n. 1). The inscription has not been published.

Frit wares can best be classified according to means of decoration.

1. Monochrome glazed wares. Although monochrome glazed wares were not new in this period, the new ceramic body permitted production of thinner-walled vessels and more refined shapes, and the new glazes made possible more brilliant color effects. Glazed wares, in a variety of forms and in colors ranging from pure white to deep [cobalt blue](#), reached unprecedented heights. As they were probably still “competing” with imported Chinese wares (see [xiii](#), above), these monochrome pieces quite frequently have no additional decoration, but carved, incised, molded, or occasionally pierced designs have been added to some examples and the surfaces entirely covered with brilliant monochrome glazes ([Plate xvii](#), [Plate xviii](#); see Lane, 1965, pls. 38-44; Fehérvári, 1973, pls. 26-34; Grube, 1976, pp. 158-76; Soustiel, chap. IV). Potters working in this technique even produced small ceramic sculptures of animals and human beings (Grube, 1976, pp. 373-374), some of them with additional underglaze or luster painting (see below), as well as curious small objects resembling buildings with open courtyards filled with human figures engaged in various ceremonies. The use of these “house models” has not yet been established (for a list of recorded pieces, see Erdmann, 1965, pp. 41-42). Jean Soustiel (p. 103, fig. 106) has suggested that they are representations of Nowrūz ceremonies. There is a luster-painted example of the closed type with



a relief of a couple embracing in bed (Museum für islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, no. I.39/59, Erdmann, 1961, p. 14 fig. 22; cf. the similar piece in the Metropolitan Museum, no. 20.120.66, and Pittsburgh, no. 72.61.4), suggesting a connection with marriage ceremonies. The most elaborate piece recorded is also in the Metropolitan Museum (no. 67.117; [Plate xix](#)); it shows a couple standing in front of a man on a *menbar* (pulpit), with other figures seated along the sides of the open courtyard.

2. Slip-carved wares. These pieces are similar to earlier slip-carved wares, but the decorative effects were achieved by covering the white ceramic body with a deep-brown or black slip, then cutting it away to leave the design, figural and floral or calligraphic, silhouetted against the light background of the vessel ([Plate xx](#)); sometimes the design was coated with a deep cobalt-blue or green glaze (Lane, 1965, pls. 50-51; Grube, 1976, pp. 177-84 nos. 128-32; Soustiel, p. 86, figs. 77, 99-100).

3. Underglaze-painted wares. One of the most impressive innovations in pottery decoration of this period was free underglaze painting of the vessel surface, usually in black on a white ground under a colorless glaze, sometimes with the addition of some cobalt-blue glaze on the surface (Lane, 1965, pls. 84-91; Grube, 1976, pp. 184-94; Soustiel, pp. 86ff.). Both extremely fine floral designs, based on a variety of leaf and arabesque forms of almost calligraphic quality ([Plate xxi](#)), and elaborate figural designs appear on these objects. Some of the most elaborate examples of this type have been attributed to Gorgān (Bahrami, 1949); many such pieces are covered with a blue or turquoise glaze. Perhaps the most striking examples of this ware, however, are those in which the actual vessel bodies are encased in outer shells through which openwork patterns have been cut. These tours de force of ceramic art are rare, though less so than their fragile construction might suggest (for a list of nineteen pieces, see Grube, 1976, p. 188 n. 2; cf. Bahrami, 1949, pp. 58ff., pls. XIX-XXI; others, including an unusually fine cock-spouted ewer in the Detroit Institute of Arts [1989.34; *Detroit Free Press*, August 27, 1989, Section H], have since come to light). The most famous example is a small ewer dated 612/1215, now in the Metropolitan Museum (no. 32.52.1; [Plate xxii](#); Lane, 1965, fig. 83B); there is an unpublished companion piece in the Nour collection (London).

4. Luster-painted wares. Luster painting (see xiii above) in pale gold-brown or deep chocolate-brown on ceramic objects of all kinds is one of the major forms of ceramic decoration of this period. Designs range from small-scale floral and geometric patterns to detailed, almost illustrative figural compositions. Many



centers have been proposed on the basis of style, in particular a presumed earlier production at Ray, one of the principal cities of the Saljuqs and then of the Ildegizids, and a later one at Kāšān. Of the two “styles” the first is closer to the Fatimid manner, with designs reserved in white against a solid luster ground (Plate xxiii); the earliest dated Persian ceramic object of this period, the fragmentary vase in the British Museum mentioned above, belongs to this group. The second style is characterized by dense, all-over patterning, in which the distinction between figure and ground becomes more and more blurred (Plate xxiv; Ettinghausen, 1936); the earliest dated object of this period is a luster bowl in the Barlow collection in The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Fehérvári, 1973, p. 93, no. 105, pl. 46). It now appears, however, that these “styles” represent two overlapping phases in the general development of Persian luster painting and must probably be associated with the principal center at Kāšān, which remained active into the Il-khanid period. That both styles were in use simultaneously at Kāšān is confirmed by a large bowl (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 09.103; Plate xxiv, Plate xxv) decorated on the interior with an elaborate pattern typical of “Kāšān” style and on the exterior with an equally typical “Ray” pattern. Oliver Watson (1985) has presented arguments for identifying a variety of other styles with Kāšān as well (cf. Grube, 1976, pp. 210-54; Soustiel, pp. 90ff.). There can be little doubt, however, that centers like Gorgān also produced luster-painted pottery in quantity.

5. Overglaze polychrome-painted wares (so-called *mīnāʾī* “enameled”). One of the most versatile decorative techniques of the Saljuq period, equaling underglaze-painted wares in that respect, was polychrome overglaze painting, sometimes enhanced by gilding. Many of the designs were probably derived directly from wall paintings and manuscript illustrations of the period, which are now almost entirely lost. In fact, several pieces appear to bear scenes from Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma*, in particular a beaker in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (28.2; D’yakonov; G. D. Guest; Simpson), and fragments of a small bowl now in the Nour collection (Schmitz). Others record historical events, for example, a large plate also in the Freer Gallery (43.3; Atıl, 1973, pp. 112-15 no. 50); Renata Holod has identified the subject as a battle/siege, probably after a wall painting (for the relation between manuscript painting and painting on pottery, see Melikian Chirvani, 1967; for literary evidence on the existence of both wall painting and manuscript illustration in early Islamic Persia, see idem, 1988, pp. 40-45).



Although a large number of production centers have been proposed for this ware, especially by Pope (*Survey of Persian Art*, chap. VII), there is very little evidence for localization. The two bowls in the Metropolitan Museum with the signature Abū Zayd al-Kāšānī (Plate xxvi) and the *nesba* al-Kāšānī respectively (see above), as well as pieces on which luster painting associated with Kāšān is combined with *mīnāʾī* technique (e. g., a bottle in the Freer Gallery, no. 29.9, Atıl, 1973, pp. 104-05 no. 46; a bowl fragment in the Keir collection, London, no. C15, Watson, 1988, p. 153, color pl. 42; and a fragmentary star tile with a scene from the *Šāh-nāma*, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 706), suggest an attribution of certain related *mīnāʾī* wares to that center. But such wares were almost certainly produced in more than one place, as is attested by the extensive use of *mīnāʾī* tilework in the Saljuq palace at Konya in Anatolia, which must have been locally produced (Sarre; cf. Grube, 1976, pp. 356-66).

6. Tiles. Throughout the Saljuq and post-Saljuq periods tiles were made for use in architectural decoration. Decorative techniques ranged from plain monochrome glazing to polychrome overglaze painting (very rare) on both flat and molded surfaces. There is a considerable literature on luster-painted tiles in particular (see especially Bahrami, 1937; *Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 1675ff., supplemented by Grube, 1976, pp. 362-64; Watson, 1985, app. III). The shapes and sizes are as varied as the techniques (Plate xxvii), the most common being small interlocking crosses and stars covering large wall surfaces, usually dados, bordered at the top by friezes of larger tiles with molded inscriptions, often being picked out in luster or cobalt-blue glaze (see cobalt). Tilework often took on monumental form in *meḥrābs* (prayer niches), some of which consisted of very large single tiles with molded arches resting on columns and inscriptions, mostly from the Qurʾān. Larger *meḥrābs* were composed of groups of tiles assembled on the *qebḷa* (the direction of Mecca) walls of mosques or tombs. A fair number of such *meḥrābs* have survived, for example, that from the Great Mosque in Kāšān, now in (East) Berlin, which was made by Ḥasan b. ʿArabšāh in Šafar 623/February 1266 (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 704).

Il-khanid period (654-736/1256-1336)

The Mongol invasions of Persia (615-55/1218-57), though extraordinarily destructive in many ways, appear to have had only a limited effect on the production of fine ceramics. The traditions established in the 6th/12th and early 7th/13th centuries appear to have continued almost without interruption. Stylistic changes, owing primarily to new contacts with the art



and culture of the Far East, are obvious, but there was no real technical break between earlier ceramics and those of the Il-khanid period. With the possible exception of *mīnāʾī* ware, nearly all wares produced in the early 7th/13th century continued to be made into the early 8th/14th century. Even a few dated *mīnāʾī* pieces clearly belong to the period of the Mongol invasions (e.g., a bowl in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. C.81-1918, dated 640/1242; R. Guest; Lane, 1965, pl. 72A). Furthermore, the so-called “lajvardina ware” (< Pers. *lājvard* “lapis lazuli”) was closely related to *mīnāʾī* ware, though in a stylistically and thematically different vein, characterized by deep lapis-blue matte glazes, with black, white, red, and gold overglaze-painted patterns of almost exclusively abstract and floral character (Plate xxviii; Lane, 1965, p. 43, pl. 75; Grube, 1976, pp. 254-57; Soustiel, pp. 201ff.; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 751-52); some of them also have turquoise (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 677; Lane, 1965, pl. 74B) and white (Soustiel, fig. 232) grounds.

Whereas Chinese motifs are secondary on these overglaze-painted wares, contemporary luster-painted wares exhibit a striking Far Eastern iconography, both floral and figural. Lotus and peony blossoms, dragons and phoenixes (Plate xxix), cloud bands, composite horned creatures with cloven hooves (*ch’i-lins*; sometimes written *qui’lin*), and Chinese lions became stock decorative elements, and human figures were rendered in a mannered way, with elongated torsos and squarish facial features, rather than the pudgy, full-moon faces of the earlier period. Of course, details of dress, especially headgear, were changed as well. The general painting style is broader, the individual elements larger and less delicate, and the luster a deeper red or purple, rather than the brownish tones of earlier wares. Whereas cobalt-blue glaze had occasionally been added to luster pieces in the preceding period, under the Il-khanids cobalt blue became a dominant “second color” on luster wares. A considerable number of dated pieces extending from the mid-7th/13th to the 8th/14th century illustrate the evolution of the Il-khanid luster-painting style (see, e.g., *Survey of Persian Art*, pls. 714-15, 773-75).

A similar development can be followed in underglaze-painted wares, in which changes in technique, style, and iconography reflect a general progression from highly stylized and technically perfect manner of the Gorgān wares to broader, less carefully executed, and technically often inferior wares (Plate xxx), for example, a stemmed bowl in the Victoria and Albert Museum dated 674/1276, with its running glazes and very sketchy design (no. C.53-1952; Lane, 1965, pl. 94; cf. pls. 95A [dated 729/1329], 95B-30; *Survey of Persian Art*, pls.



728-30, 773-75; Soustiel, fig. 235). That the piece is dated nevertheless suggests that it was considered an important work at the time.

This ware was eventually replaced by “Sultanabad (Solṭānābād) ware,” on which floral and sometimes figural designs were built up in low relief in a heavy whitish slip, usually on a pale-gray ground (Plate xxxi). The individual elements are outlined in black and brown underglaze painting. There is also a type with a cobalt-blue or black-and-white, rather than gray, ground, but the effect is much the same. The crowded designs are almost “swallowed up” in dense, small-scale floral background patterns, sometimes interspersed with larger lotus blossoms, and few pieces achieve the monumentality of the earlier wares from which they were derived (Reitlinger, 1944-45; Lane, 1965, pp. 10ff.; Grube, 1976, pp. 261ff.; Soustiel, pp. 198ff.). This type was more widely distributed than any other and had the greatest impact on 8th/14th-century ceramic production both in Persia, where similar wares were probably produced in a great many centers, and outside Persia, where it was widely imitated. For example, the Mongols of the Golden Horde at Saray Berke and Saray Batu in southern Russia (623-907/1226-1502; see Lane, 1957, pp. 13-15; Federov-Davidov) and the Mamluks of Syria and Egypt (Soustiel, pp. 223ff., fig. 254; Lane, 1957, pls. 10-12) produced pottery that at first sight is often indistinguishable from the original wares of central Persia.

Other ceramic types of this period include a monochrome relief-decorated ware, which resembles Sultanabad ware in technique and surface decoration. The most common motif is a bird with outspread wings against a background of small scattered leaves (Plate xxxii) that only rarely form a distinguishable lotus or peony flower. On most pieces the principal elements of the design are in a slip relief, but some are simply painted without relief. Both the gray ground of the common Sultanabad ware and cobalt-blue and turquoise examples are known (e.g., Soustiel, pp. 220-01, fig. 231). A very few pieces include representations of animals or purely abstract floral designs; they have been attributed to Jovayn (Ettinghausen, 1973, fig. 1).

A closely related group consists of small hemispherical bowls decorated with combinations of geometric, floral, and epigraphic motifs painted in black, blue, and turquoise on a generally off-white ground and coated with a thin colorless glaze (see, e.g., Sotheby Sale catalogue, October 17, 1984, lot 117; Lane, 1957, pl. 6A). A considerable number of such pieces have survived, and it is not certain whether they were all made in one center or, as seems more likely, in a variety of centers in Persia. Some examples, especially those with



radial designs and the addition of a deep manganese purple, have close counterparts in contemporary Syrian wares (see Qaddūmī, p. 81).

A type of heavy earthenware decorated with abstract geometric or floral designs and with figural compositions in green, turquoise, manganese purple, and black on an off-white ground has been attributed either to northern Persia in general or to Varāmīn in particular (Reitlinger, 1938; Soustiel, pp. 204-05, fig. 230). The ware has a very individual character and is almost certainly the product of a single atelier. It is also relevant to the question of the contribution of Persian pottery to the development of pottery as an art form in the West, for early Italian majolica, especially from Tuscany, appears to have been inspired by imported pieces of this ware (from the vast literature on the origin of “proto-majolica,” see Whitehouse, 1978; Reitlinger, 1938; Soustiel, fig. 247 n.).

The first true imitations of Chinese wares by Persian potters after their earlier fascination with Tang and Sung wares (see xiii, above) were of celadons (Plate xxxiii). They were almost certainly made in the Ilkhanid period (Soustiel, pp. 196-97; Lane, 1957, p. 105, pl. 86 [where the ware is dated to the first half of the 8th/14th century]; Grube, 1974, pp. 243-44 [suggesting the Timurid period]). On the other hand, once established, the ware seems to have become a favorite of Muslim potters and appeared in various guises into the 10th/16th and even the 11th/17th centuries (for a *qalīān* [water pipe] base, dated 1049/1658-59, see Lane, 1957, pl. 88B).

The most striking aspect of ceramic production in the Il-khanid period was the continuity of tile manufacture, especially relief-molded and luster-painted tiles and monumental tile *mehṛābs* (Plate xxxiv), representing an unbroken but evolving tradition that extended from the early 7th/13th to the 8th/10th century. Vast architectural surfaces were covered with tiles, often including examples of the *lajvardina* variety, heavily painted on the surface with patterns in gold. A great many dated and signed tiles have survived, and a detailed study of them could lead to a far more precise understanding of the development of the medium than is now available. The best-documented assemblage of such tiles comes from the summer palace of Abaqa Khan (663-80/1265-81) at Takht i-Sulayman (Takht-e Solaymān; see Naumann; idem and Naumann, pp. 39ff.; lists of dated tiles can be found in *Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 1667ff.; Watson, 1985, pp. 176ff. [also including other signed objects]). Nonetheless, only a fraction of this material has so far been recorded, and very few pieces have been published (see Grube, 1976, p. 369).



The post-Ilkhanid and Timurid periods

Very little is known about pottery production in the period between the death of Abū Saʿīd in 736/1335, the end of the Il-khanid dynasty, and the establishment of Timurid power in Persia toward the end of the century. In this period, which Gerald Reitlinger justly labeled “interim,” major cultural activities continued at Tabrīz, Baghdad, and Shiraz, but it has not yet been possible to associate surviving pottery with any of these centers. It is characteristic of the scholarly literature that this period has usually been ignored and that discussion generally moves directly from Il-khanid to late Timurid and Safavid ceramics. Yet it seems to have been in this interval that one of the most important forms of Persian ceramic art was developed, the renowned blue-and-white ware, painted in various shades of cobalt blue (and black) under a thin colorless glaze.

Blue-and-white wares. A considerable period of experimentation with purely Persian or generally Islamic designs, consisting of geometric and calligraphic motifs executed in blue or black, sometimes with additional turquoise, on a white ground, led gradually in the late 8th/14th century to the adoption of designs inspired by Chinese models, executed exclusively in cobalt blue on a white ground. The earlier wares ([Plate xxxv](#)), of which so far not a single dated example has been recorded, seem to have been found mainly in eastern Persia; Nīšāpūr has generally been claimed by dealers and collectors as the main source, though very few pieces have so far been published (e.g., Ettinghausen, 1973, especially figs. 2-4; Allan, 1981, pp. 110ff. nos. 312ff., especially nos. 325ff., a series that perfectly illustrates the development of the type from the late 7th/13th to the early 9th/15th century). On the other hand, these wares have been found in the Zāhedān region (sherd collection of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Rome, including wasters), Kermān (sherd collection of Umberto Scerrato, Rome; for examples of a finer but still basically non-Chinese ware, see [Plate xxxvi](#), Grube, 1976, nos. 257-58; Watson, 1988, no. C39; Anavian, pl. 80), and Susa (sherd collection of Jean Soustiel, Paris), and various sites in Iraq (e.g., Nippur [Gibson], the Dīāla plain [Adams, fig. 15/17 A-C]). Persian examples are often confused with those from Syria (Watson, 1988, p. 163 nos. C26, C27i, attributed to Syria; Atıl, 1981, nos. 72-76, also attributed to Syria though reliably reported to have been found in the vicinity of Nīšāpūr; see Grube, 1988-89).

The origins of Persian blue-and-white ware inspired by Chinese models are still uncertain, but renderings in Timurid painting see Ashton; Gray; Grube,



1974, pp. 236ff.; Medley) leave little doubt that it first appeared at the Timurid courts of Central Asia, though it is still difficult to distinguish between representations of imports from China and of native production. An important link is provided by the pottery produced in the eastern provinces of the Persian empire, especially in Central Asia (see, e.g., Vakturskaya, especially pp. 324ff., pls. 43-44; for a review of the literature, see Grube, 1974, pp. 238-40) and the vicinity of Nīšāpūr. A great deal of blue-and-white painted ware has been found in these regions, though very little has so far been published (see Curatola; Watson, 1988, p. 175 no. C40; Grube, 1974, pp. 369, 371-72; idem, 1988-89, pp. 180-82, figs. 42-52, 55-59; Watson, 1987, p. 305, figs. 21-22; cf. [Plate xxxvii](#), cf. Folsach, fig. 142). None of this material is dated, but, in addition to the uncertain renderings in datable miniature paintings of the period, there are a few other chronological indicators. For example, a fixed terminus ante quem is provided by a group of small blue-and-white decorated bowls found embedded in the roof of a building completed before the middle of the 9th/15th century in the East African city of Kilwa (Chittick, pp. 23-24, pls. XI-XII).

Two small blue-and-white bowls published by Arthur Lane (1957, pls. 18-19) illustrate particularly well the change from traditional Persian to Chinese-inspired designs; one piece is decorated with a central flying bird and floral elements largely conforming to Persian design principles, but the second is decorated with a perfect floral scroll copied directly from early Ming blue-and-white ware (cf. Watson, 1988, nos. C36-38). Aside from Central Asia, this latter type of pottery has been found at many sites in Persia (Bivar and Fehérvári, p. 47; Frierman and Giauque, pp. 183-84; Caldwell and Fehérvári; Whitehouse, 1969, p. 57; sherd collections mentioned above) and may well have been made in a variety of centers; it is also known from Iraq (sherds from various sites in the collection of the Oriental Institute, The University of Chicago). The earliest dated example is a “spittoon” in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh (no. 1888.570), which, according to an inscription on the base, was made for Mawlānā Ḥosām-al-Dīn Šīrāzī in Mašhad in 848/1444-45 (Grube, 1974, p. 235 [with an unfortunate misprint of 1344 for 1444], pl. XXIV/1-2). The decoration, a floral scroll with long, pointed leaves reminiscent of Chinese bamboo, is executed in an oblique underglaze green, rather than blue, on a white ground. An inscription on a blue-and-white decorated jar in the Mūza-ye Īrān-e Bāstān, Tehran, originally read as dated 870/1465 (Godard, p. 334, fig. 153), was subsequently read as 970/1562 (Day, p. 53). An important large plate in Leningrad, recently published, was, according to its inscription, made in



Mašhad in 878/1473-74, which provides both a fixed date and, taken together with the “spittoon,” an indication of a production center (Ivanov; *Masterpieces*, p. 108 no. 76).

The fashion for blue-and-white clearly dominated ceramic production throughout the 9th/15th century and continued uninterrupted into the 10th/16th century; it has been suggested (Grube, 1974, pp. 237-38, figs. 17-18, 22-27; cf. Fehérvári, 1985, p. 191; Soustiel, figs. 280-81; Denny) that a group of blue-and-white decorated plates of the so-called “Kubachi” (Qobači) type may also belong to the 9th/15th century.

Luster- and underglaze-painted wares. There is more information about the continuation of luster-painted ceramics into the later 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. Dated pieces (e.g., a luster-painted bowl of 822/1419 sold in Paris, Drouot catalogue, October 2, 1986, lot 235), especially tiles (*Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 1685-87; Day, pp. 49ff.; Watson, 1985, pp. 196-97; Watson, 1975, pp. 68-73 nos. 1-7), have survived in considerable numbers, probably demonstrating a continuous tradition of luster painting from the Il-khanid into the Safavid period. Various other types of pottery were also produced in the Timurid period, notably a black-under-green (or sometimes blue) painted ware, of which four dated examples have survived, two of them published (Grube, 1974, pl. LII/42-43 [873/1468-69, 885/1480-811; [Plate xxxix](#)]). The other two, dated 878/1473-74 and 900/1494-95, have been recorded (*Survey of Persian Art*, p. 1692 nos. 171, 174) but never illustrated. The decoration is executed in a very particular manner: The plates and bowls characteristic of this ware are painted with a solid black slip through which fine scrollwork and inscriptions have been incised; sometimes small compartments are reserved from the slip and filled with floral designs. The whole is covered by a deep green or blue glaze of brilliant quality. A considerable number of these pieces are known (Grube, 1974, pls. LII-LV; idem, 1988-89, p. 208, figs. 58-59), and they, too, are closely linked to Kubachi ware of the 10th/16th century. An attribution to northern Persia has therefore been suggested (Lane, 1957, pp. 34-36, 79), but fragments have been found in many other places, including Nīšāpūr (Grube, 1988-89, fig. 59). Eventually designs came to be painted more freely (Grube, 1974, figs. 19, 56-57); most of them were floral, but cloud bands ([Plate xxxviii](#); cf. Grube, 1974, figs. 58-59; idem, 1988-89, figs. 58-59), fish (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 788 [late 9th/15th century]; Lane, 1957, pl. 52A [first half 10th/ 16th century]; Grube, 1974, fig. 21 [9th/15th century]; Soustiel, fig. 294 [Bukhara? 9th/15th century]), ducks (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 787B), and dragons ([Plate](#)



xl; cf. Grube, 1988-89, fig. 57; Watson, 1988, p. 170, ill. C35) also appeared. Although it is difficult to date some of these pieces, technical and stylistic affinities with other works dated later in the 9th/15th suggest that this group also belongs to the late Timurid period. More problematic is a related type, consisting of middle-sized shallow plates decorated almost exclusively with spirited floral patterns of an almost calligraphic nature in black paint under a green or light-blue glaze. Although a considerable number of examples have survived, no dated piece has been recorded, and dates ranging from the 9th/15th to the 11th/17th century have been proposed (Lane, 1957, pl. 52B [ca. 1009/1600]; Fehérvári, 1973, nos. 169-70 [9th/15th century]; Grube, 1974, figs. 54-55 [9th/15th century]; Soustiel, fig. 292 [late 11th/16th-early 17th century]; for the principal literature, see Grube, 1976, pp. 371-72; idem, 1988-89).

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