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The
Potteries of Persia

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Figure 1.—Assyrian or Babylonian Trophy Cup. About 1000 B.C. Turquoise blue, silver and gold iridescence. Relief decoration, a royal personage on horseback. Kelekian Collection.

THE POTTERIES OF PERSIA

BEING

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ART OF CERAMICS
IN THE NEAR EAST



COMPILED BY

DIKRAN KHAN KELEKIAN

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*Figure 2.—Persian-Arabic Susian Bowl. Eleventh Century.
Deep blue ground, inscription in turquoise blue.
H. O. Haremeyer Collection.*

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THE POTTERIES OF PERSIA

The comparatively recent opening up of the Near East to explorers and archæologists has introduced to the civilized world an art of incomparable beauty, richness and charm,—all that remains of a civilization of another epoch, of a period when the peoples of the Oriental countries



Figure 3.
Mosque Tile. Dated 515 Hegira.

occupying all that territory between the Black Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the boundaries of India, were at the zenith of their national, political and intellectual powers. The products of Persia found in the excavations of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Persia, during the last decade, bear testimony to the splendor of that Golden Age which gave to the world the beautiful verses of the poet-philosopher, Omar Khayyam. Warm, inspired and tensely filled with the joy and the tragedy of Life, these sweet

and melancholy songs have taken their place among the literary masterpieces of all time.

Of the same quality of inspiration was the contemporary art of Persia, an art which found its expression—as all art that lives inevitably must—in the decoration of those objects which are associated with the daily lives of the people, in their carpets, their hangings, their potteries, their arms, the furnishings of their mosques, the illustrations of their religious and scientific books. Of decoration *per se*, of “Art for Art’s Sake,” there

has not yet come out of Persia one single example. Had the Persian term of temporal power lasted through a cycle of centuries, instead of having been overturned and built up a score of times in its brief history, that country might in time have given to the world an abstract art; and then we should have had a Persian style of sculpture and of mural painting, influenced perhaps by the Greek art which preceded it, as the Greek art in its turn was inspired by the Egyptian.

Unfortunately Persian art never reached that advanced stage of development. What remains of it, however, is enough to indicate that the artists who contributed to the luxury of the Persian potentates were as genuinely gifted as any that ever lived. Certainly, they had a wonderfully acute and refined sense of color, and the harmonious color combinations in their carpets, their textiles and their potteries is their particular and personal contribution to the progress of art. Their creations, often *naïve* in design, though always gracious, possess a flawless color quality, living and vibrating as the verses of the silver-tongued poet of their time; and in sharp enough contrast to the formal, symbolic conceptions of the Egyptians and the cold and classic beauty of the art of Greece.

The Persian art is nearer to the spirit of the time in which we live. It is more human than its predecessors. We understand it with the heart



Fig. 4.— Turquoise Blue Sultanabad Bowl. Dated 677 (1299 A.D.)



*Figure 5.—Fostat Vase. Eleventh Century.
Lustre decoration of foliage and birds. Kelchian Collection.*

as well as with the intellect. Discriminating collectors who have come to know it in recent times, have grown to love it with a deep and abiding affection as something quite within the scope of their own emotional experiences. Modern students go to the Museums to study it for that which it especially has to teach them, finding in the principles of this art, now more than seven centuries old, not one quality incompatible with the needs of their present-day artistic activity.



Figure 6.—Rakka Jug. Tenth Century.

As the Greek art followed the Egyptian, and the Roman art that of Greece, so the Persian art took from its predecessors such tenets as the epoch and the requirements and the tastes of the people demanded. It seems reasonably certain that they borrowed whole from Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, the lovely turquoise green and the deep *lapis lazuli* blue which appear and reappear in all the Persian potteries. And quite as consistently and inevitably, the influence of this art made itself felt on those which followed it. Spain and Italy both owe much of the glory of the Renaissance to Asia Minor and to the

artists who flourished there after the Mohammedan conquests.

The Spanish potters unquestionably learned their craft from Arab and Persian workmen. There is even on record the story of Persian artisans—expatriated from Bagdad because they were surpassing in skill their masters—going to Spain in the days of Cordova's splendor, to spread there the artistic propaganda of the East. So too, the Genoese and Venetian velvets of the Renaissance felt the Oriental influences. Often, indeed, they were made with Oriental designs frankly copied, which the Italian artists did not even take the trouble to change or adapt.



Figure 7.—Rhages Koyal Bowl. Thirteenth Century.

We must concede then to Persia at the height of her civilization an art which has left an indelible impression on the large development of universal art, and all lovers of beauty of line and of color must allow that Persia's contribution to the art of all ages is singularly ingratiating.

The collector who has had an opportunity to

study for a term of years the Persian potteries as they have come out of the excavations, finds the history of their conception, perfection and ultimate decline told in the character of the productions belonging to the different epochs. Much detailed information of course remains yet to be accumulated and so far, unfortunately, no one has made so exhaustive a study of the finds in the excavations in Asia Minor, as Dr. Fouquet has done in the refuse heaps of Fostat. This learned scholar's researches have greatly helped collectors of Persian potteries to classify the faience of Asia Minor with some semblance of exactitude. Fortunately also, dated pieces are constantly coming to light, each of which contributes to extended enlightenment on this interesting subject.

There seems to have been a revival in Egypt of the art of pottery making, sometime during the first two centuries of the Hegira, and the Egyptian workman of those days added to certain traditional methods in practise in the Pharaonic periods, the techniques brought to the newly established city of Fostat by stranger workmen. Which of these influences were of Persian origin, only time and study will determine. We have the valuable documents of the Persian traveller, Nassiri Khosrau, who has



Figure 8.—Polychrome Rhages Bowl. Thirteenth Century.

fully and minutely described certain potteries in vogue in Egypt, during



Figure 9.—Reverse of Freer Bowl.

the ninth century, 1046, which were unfamiliar to him, and therefore presumably not known in his native country. Among them is the clear "lettuce white" glaze, sometimes found with a rice grain border, occasionally ornamented in color, but often in monochrome alone. This pottery is believed by some authorities to be an imitation of Chinese porcelains, which were beginning to be imported into the western countries about



Figure 10.—Rhages Bowl. Thirteenth Century.

that time. They could, however, quite as reasonably have come out of Syria or Babylonia, since these two countries were directly responsible for the renaissance of pottery making in the Near East. We have no record of any rice-grain porcelain having been made in China as early as the ninth century, whereas we have seen some white specimens in the Bagdad, Achemenide and even among the Greek and Roman potteries.

The pottery of Nassiri Khosrau's day in Persia was probably a much cruder product than that known in Egypt, which by reason of its situation and its historical associations attracted thither more travellers and therefore more importations than could the troubled, disputed little country in the heart of Western Asia.

The earliest dated piece of pottery of Persian origin, I have yet seen, is a star mosque tile. It bears the date 515 of the Hegira and is now in my possession (*Fig. 3*). It is of a fine turquoise blue, with a border of Arabic writing in which is incorporated the date. The form and the general character of this tile, which was found in the ruins of a mosque in the interior of Persia, are crude, but the color is remarkable, and it has moreover a fine iridescence, owing to the length of time it has remained buried in the earth. We may assume that this is not the first piece of pottery made by Persian artisans, and we may therefore reasonably expect to see come out of Persia other specimens of the same period or even earlier.



Figure 11.—Exterior of Louvre Bowl.



Figure 12.—Rhages Bowl. Thirteenth Century.

As far as we have any records, therefore, the Fostat potteries antedate the Persian. They were made for the most part, it appears, by Arabian and Syrian workers, who had either emigrated there or been taken as prisoners and kept because of their skill to assist the native artists.

This interchange of methods and traditions must have been fairly general during the first centuries of the Mohammedan dispensation. Obviously it helped the cause of art, but it has made peculiarly involved the task of the archæologist, for it is extremely difficult to tell which were indigenous styles in pottery and which were imported to the several seats of manufacture by alien workmen.

The reign of Haroun-Al-Raschid, famed in song and story for its splendor, must of necessity have given a wonderful impetus to Arabian and Persian productiveness. This monarch's lifetime and those of his sons was the Arabian "Golden Age"; and certainly so far, the specimens



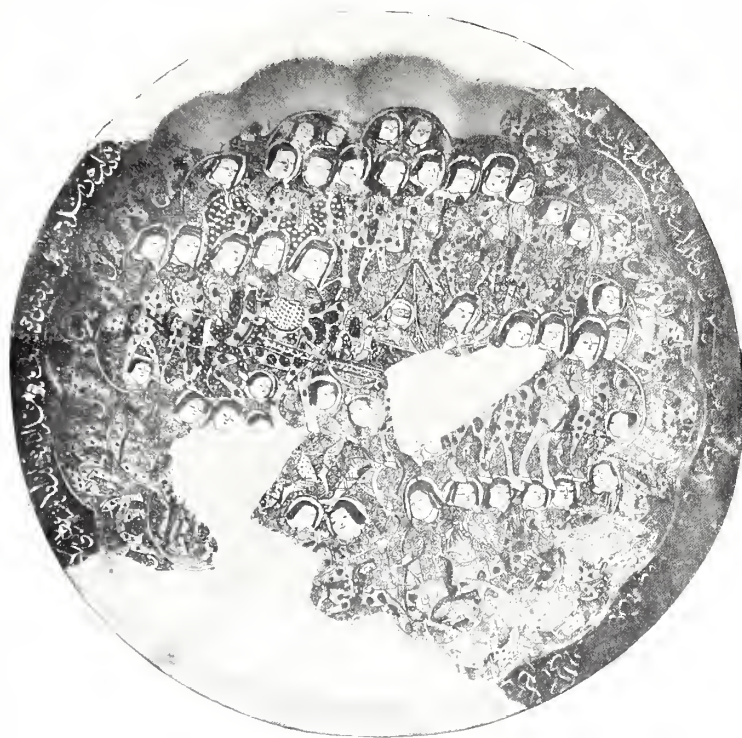
Fig. 13.—Sultanabad Plate, Dated 673 (1295 A. D.)

of pottery found at Rakka, once the seat of the Empire, indicate that the native artisans had reached a degree of skill commensurate with the demands made upon them by these luxury-loving rulers.

Many of the Rakka finds may be credited to this period, although the beautiful script on some of the decorated bowls, vases, and pitchers would seem to indicate a further technical advance than was known to the artists of that epoch. No dated

Rakka pieces have yet been found. The best of them may be placed at about the tenth or the eleventh centuries. Until the eleventh century, Arabic was the language in common use in Western Asia. The characters of this script were considered as a form of design and were used as such, being often added with telling effect to the decoration of bottles, plates or bowls, or again composing a running design covering a series of tiles in a mosque frieze. Later the Persian script was introduced, and in nearly all the pottery made after the eleventh century, the inscriptions, if any, are in this beautiful and erudite language, often designated as "the Latin of the Orient."

In the excavations made at Sultanabad, some of the loveliest specimens of Persian potteries have lately been found. Many of them are fortunately intact, and the perfection of the forms of the bottles, vases and bowls coming from the diggings point to an improvement in technique over the Rakka wares. In the Rakka potteries, the lovely turquoise blue, so intimately associated with all Persian art, is quite frequently found. Some magnificent large blue vases, absolutely intact, very beautiful in color and heavily incrustated with iridescence, have come from the Rakka diggings. In this set of finds, decoration does not appear to play a very important part. In the Sultanabad pottery, we can remark the introduction of the use of the living form as ornamentation, birds, animals, fish, and even human figures, appearing frequently in the bowls and small cup-shaped plates. The blue of this pottery begins to be darker, though I have had one or two perfect Sultanabad specimens in clear turquoise blue. The



*Figure 14.—Rhages Plate. Thirteenth Century.
Shades of brown, remarkable composition, many figures on horseback,
wearing different costumes, Kelekian Collection.*

pitcher and vase Sultanabad forms are extremely graceful and more varied than those found at Rakka, indicating either a greater play of individual fancy among the workmen who produced it, or the introduction of some foreign mode, possibly of either Greek, Roman or Babylonian parentage.

There is a lovely warm gray, often found among the Sultanabad faience



Figure 15.—Persian Bowl. Thirteenth Century.

which does not belong to any other of the Oriental potteries, nor was it ever imitated elsewhere. The under glaze is gray and the decoration, either flat or with the raised figures sometimes found among Fostat specimens, is outlined in black. Whatever the original effect of this color scheme may have been, certainly, after the lapse of time and the softening effect of the earth's action on the vases, jugs, and plates, it is as harmonious an ensemble as any modern so-called Impressionist could hope to obtain with all his color resources. Partly covered with iridescence, these beautiful potteries take on all the delicate tints of mother of pearl, and they recall in their range of tones, high up in the scale, the palette of a master colorist of the *plein air* school. Much of the Rakka and Sultanabad pottery is heavily coated with iridescence. The later potteries, having a smoother and thicker enamel, have not taken on this accidental addition to their beauty.

About contemporaneous with the Sultanabad potteries are the Rhages or Rhé wares, quite distinctive in decoration and far more ambitious than anything ever made elsewhere in Persia. In these productions, as in some of the Sultanabad pieces, the human figure is used with a fine artistic sense. I have now in my collection a very wonderful Sultanabad plate



Fig. 16.—Sultanabad Bottle. Thirteenth Century.

in brown lustre tones (*Fig. 14*), the interior surface entirely covered with a myriad of figures on horseback, each figure wearing a different costume, and each horse differently caparisoned. If this plate were intact it would be a priceless addition not alone to the history of ceramics but to the history of costume as well. As it is, it gives a sufficiently vivid impression of the magnificence of a regal procession of the time. The largest figure piece I have yet seen come out of Sultanabad, is a brown bowl, 50 centimètres in diameter, now in the Boston museum (*Fig. 15*).

This bowl is decorated in the centre with six medallions, con-

taining seated figures in different costumes. An outer row of medallions contain the signs of the Zodiac, and the border of this magnificent composition is a procession of figures seated astride tigers and leopards. Neither of these pieces is dated, but I have in my collection a dated turquoise blue bowl coming from Sultanabad. (*Fig. 4*). It has on the outside a border in Arabic. The date, luckily has been saved in this inscription, although a small section of the writing is missing. It is 677 of the Hegira. A brown Sultanabad plate in the Patterson collection is also dated, (*Fig. 13*). It was made in 673 of the Hegira. These two pieces help to place the period at which the other potteries found at Sultanabad must have been made.

Since Sultanabad and Rhages were both destroyed by an invasion of the Tartars in 1221, all the potteries found in the ruins of these cities must belong to an earlier date. The most interesting and perhaps the earliest of the Rhages or Rhé potteries are a series of bowls having a white ground decorated with figures. The drawing of the figures is naive, but their placing as units in the general composition is masterly and could scarcely be excelled by even the most consummate decorative



*Figure 17.—Large deep blue Persian Vase. Dated 685 (1307 A.D.)
Relief ornament of foliage and animals. H. O. Havemeyer Collection.*

artists of our day. In the Rhages potteries appears, for the first time in Persian ceramic art, a wide color range. The figures are gorgeously clothed, and the finest of these bowls and *coupes*, were doubtless made to commemorate some event in the lives of the reigning sultans. I have recently acquired a bowl (*Fig. 7*), whose only decoration is a group of seated figures. In the centre is a personage of rank, presumably a king, since he wears on his forehead a *sorgoudg*. This individual is surrounded by eight female figures, perhaps the women of his harem, who are entertaining him with singing and dancing. Three of these women are playing guitars; two of them hold wine cups.

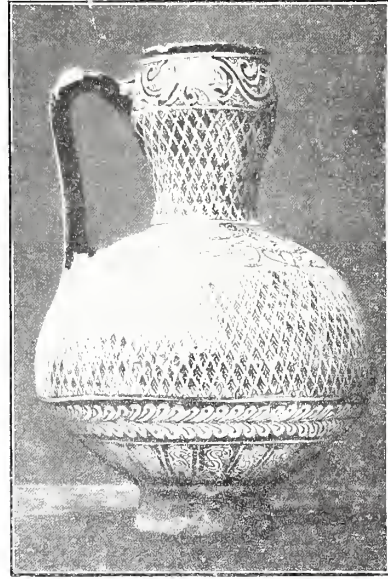


Figure 18.
Persian Lustre Bottle. Thirteenth Century.

Another bowl of this character is in the collection of Charles Freer, (*Fig. 8*). The decoration consists of two figures on horseback, persons of exalted station, no doubt, representing two countries. They meet under a blossoming tree, to all appearances amicably. This bowl bears an inscription in Arabic, which like many of the legends to be found on these potteries is poetic and flowery, and recalls strongly the turn of expression common in the Rubayat. It reads: "Glory, Triumph, and the Help of God, a Brilliant Victory, the Perpetual Respect of his Subjects, the Sheltering Protection of his Faithful Followers, Confusion to his Enemies, Wise, Benevolent and Far-Reaching Impulses, with Riches, Happiness and Health." Very likely, this list of tangible and intangible benefits represents the pious wish of some zealous artisan for his Royal patron on the occasion of a signal conquest.

Sometimes these Persian potteries bear more intimate inscriptions, and they give the impression that they were genuine labors of love. A vase in the Godman collection has a running inscription as interesting for its text as for its date. It is: "I am wandering in the desert separated from my well-beloved. I write these words on this gourd that they may be a remembrance of me in the year 609." (A.D. 1231). "Trusting that she

of whom I dream evermore may refresh herself by putting this pitcher to her lips. That she will recognize my writing and think of me and take pity on my love."

The bottle must have been a love token, made with real inspiration by an artist who worked for the æsthetic satisfaction of producing a beautiful object, which might one day reach the eyes of his loved one. Whether it ever fulfilled its mission we do not know, but the vase exists to-day nearly 700 years after the lover and his "well-beloved" lived their little idyll, to immortalize the pretty romance. It forms a part of one of the finest collections of Oriental potteries in existence, and its date has aided greatly the researches of modern scholars, who are more interested in the sequential study of ceramic history than they are in the human episode in which the bottle played so picturesque a part. The date on this bottle is important, since it establishes the fact that the metallic lustres were made as early as the thirteenth century, though they did not in all probability reach their perfection of development before the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth.

Among the very early Persian potteries, relief ornament is frequent, a tendency acquired no doubt from Syria and Babylonia, since we see

on some of the remote Syrian vases and jugs a ground of solid color with a raised decoration of conventionalized leaf forms, picked out in black. Sometimes the relief decoration was of a more ambitious character, as may be seen in the wonderful Assyrian jar reproduced as the frontispiece of this pamphlet. This jar is of a clear turquoise blue and



Figure 19.—Sultanabad Plate. Thirteenth Century.

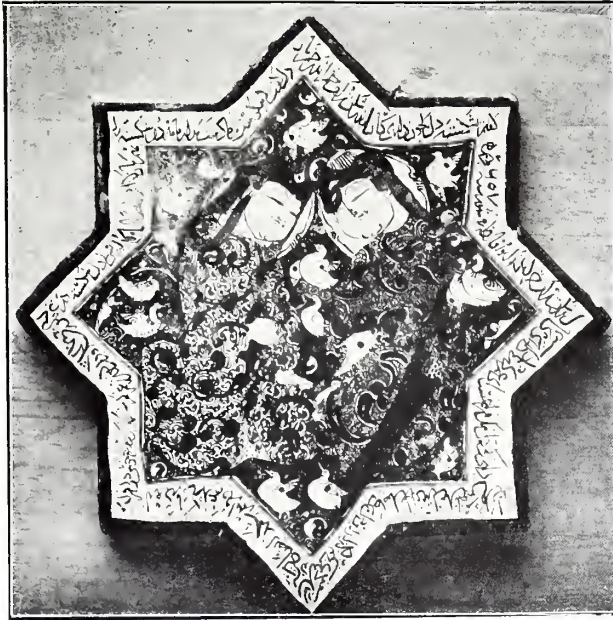


Figure 20.—Persian Star Tile. Dated 657 (1279 A.D.)

been made in one solid color, either turquoise blue or deep *lapis lazuli*. The finest dark blue specimen I know is that now in the very choice collection of potteries made during the last few years of his life by the late Mr. H. O. Havemeyer, of New York. The vase (Fig. 17) is large and has a design in relief on the curved surface of

depends for its ornamentation on the strength of the relief, and not on any after-application of color.

The Persian workmen developed the decorative principles which came to them from outside, and introduced animals and birds into the running designs on their friezes and their pottery. Very often an entire vase or jug will have



Figure 21.—Persian Lustre Star Tile. Dated 673 (1295 A.D.)

running gazelles and foliage. About the neck is a border inscription containing the date 685 (1301). This splendid specimen was found at Keshan.

Four or five quite distinctive styles grew out of the several varieties of Persian potteries known to have been made prior to the fourteenth century, each of them accnting some one of the characteristics peculiar to the original and more primitive wares.

The rich palette of the Rhages art gave its color inspiration to certain of the pottery makes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

It has been my good fortune to help the study of ceramic history by bringing to light one manifestation of the polychrome school, the Koubatcha or Daghestan plates and bowls. The history of the finding of this pottery is interesting. It was about five years ago, soon after the opening up of some of the remote provinces of the Caucasus to European communication, that an Italian traveller returning from a voyage to the East, brought back with him eight plates of a character of decoration which I had never seen. They were all large, about 35 centimetres in diameter, of a rich ivory ground and



*Figure 22.—Ruby and Yellow Lustre Bottle.
Fourteenth Century.*

ornamented with designs in many charming and harmonious color combinations. Feeling sure that these plates were akin to the Persian potteries, I bought them all, and immediately despatched a messenger to Persia to look for more. He spent many months in a fruitless search and came back empty-handed.

Later another of my agents undertook the quest. He set out for the East, and at Boukkara, by a stroke of good luck, he encountered two Circassians, Hassan and Aumeratta, who had come in to a local fair with a variety of merchandise to sell. In their pack was one of the polychrome plates. Having stumbled on this scent, my man with the assist-

ance of the two natives, succeeded in penetrating to the little town in the Circassian hills, where the first plates came from. Here he found the source which has since sent out so many of these lovely polychrome potteries. Where they were made is still a mystery. This district now owned by Russia, was formerly a province of Persia, and although it is far from the central cities of the kingdom, it must have been a favorite retreat, possibly in time of political disturbances, for the people who in those days were rich enough to own these works of art, doubtless so considered then, as now. Such plates as the finest of the Koubatchas, were never made for common use. Some of them ornamented with busts (*Fig. 24*) appear to have been portraits of the rulers, the court ladies and the personages of rank in the locality. Wherever was the ceramic centre of this district, it must have been, in its day, a place of sufficient consequence to attract thither Persian workmen from the older seats of pottery manufacture. Possibly these artists were Armenian Christians, who may have emigrated from Ispaham to escape persecution, or Mahomedan workmen, who may have been enticed to Daghestan by a prodigal court ready to pay them well for their handicrafts.

In any event the products of this ceramic school have a truly artistic distinction. I have seen some of the most lovely tones in these Koubatcha plates ever achieved through the arbitrary medium of the potters' art. Remotely, they suggest the Damascus and Rhodian wares, and they may, indeed, be the link hitherto missing which will account for the brilliant palette of the Damascus and Rhodian workmen. The Koubatcha pottery has an even wider range of color and design, and a tonality utterly lacking in the harsher products of the later school. Were the Damascus and Rhodian potteries a coarsened development of Koubatcha traditions? Perhaps we shall some day know.

Authorities differ on the parentage of the Damascus and Rhodian art, but since the ceramic industry was at its height in Persia at the time



*Fig. 23.—Persian Lustre Bottle.
Sixteenth Century.*



Figure 24.—Koubatcha Plate. Sixteenth Century.

of its manufacture, the sixteenth century, it is more than likely that these two styles were at least inspired by Persian influences. They were of a fine milky white ground and a clearer enamel than any of the Persian potteries, except the disputed Gombroon wares. In a general way, the two styles strongly resemble each other. The Da-

mascus ware is perhaps the more refined (*Fig. 27*). They are both handsome and very decorative, and their showy ornament must have become generally popular, for a similar workmanship was transplanted to Constantinople and used in many of the mosque tiles made there.

They were made during the sixteenth century. The British Museum owns a fine Damascus lamp, a gift of the late Mr. Drury Fortnum. It is from the Mosque of Omar and it bears the date 1549 of our era.

While the local specialty of the kilns which supplied Koubatcha must have been the polychrome plates and bowls, some very fine turquoise plates have also been found in that locality. They are of the same lovely blue as some of the early Rakka potteries, and their decoration is almost invariably black, the designs being simple, conventional leaf and geometric forms. In the Walters' collection, at Baltimore, there is a Koubatcha turquoise plate, dated 885 (1507) (*Fig. 26*). Another dated turquoise plate is in my own collection (*Fig. 25*).

Very likely much turquoise pottery was made elsewhere in Persia, at about this period. The blue varies, but within a narrow range, and it never reproduces exactly the intenser turquoise of the Pharaonic potteries.

Like all of Persia's productions it is more mellow in its tones than anything ever made in pottery in any other land.

The Kutahia wares found at Anatolia must have been developed a little later than the Koubatcha potteries. Specimens are known to have been made in the beginning of the sixteenth century. This



Figure 25.—Koubatcha Plate. Dated 878 (1495 A.D.)



Figure 26.—Koubatcha Plate. Dated 885 (1507 A.D.)

pottery commences to show a greater sophistication than its predecessors, and in its diversity of form it is nearer to the porcelain of our own day, than are the finer show pieces of Persian origin. The designs are small (*Figs. 29 and 30*), and they are applied with a crisp and sparkling contrast of clear color notes, a treatment which makes



Fig. 27.—Damascus Plate. Fifteenth Century.

this pottery effective as decoration. It is not, however, as convincingly the product of artistic workmen as are the Persian specimens, and it is altogether lacking in their rich tonality. Its parentage is still obscure, but there are in existence Armenian records which tell of an emigration of Armenian potters from the sacked cities of Sultanabad and Rhages to Kutahia, some time during the thirteenth century.

The Kutahia mug reproduced in Fig. 29 is a tangible proof of

the origin of these wares, for it is ornamented with an inscription in Armenian and dated 1727. The small plate (Fig. 31), is interesting also as an example of Kutahia figure composition. It is dated in Armenian characters, 1719.

Each set of pottery makers in the Near East seems to have had a color preference quite personal to their wares. The Kutahia artists used canary yellow, pure, as a light accent in the decoration of their productions. The Rhodian potteries are distinguished by a clear coral red, applied in relief in the floral forms. A very lovely mauve tone was the particular color choice of the Damascus potters.

Like the Rhodian and Damascus potteries, the Kutahia wares were made with clear white or cream white grounds. The Koubatcha potters must have used cream white, for the polychrome plates have all the quality of fine old ivories.

The early Persian colorists do not appear to have fancied the arbitrary use of white. Their refined taste led them rather to the lighter creams and grays and blues, as happier grounds on which to pose their after-ornamentation. There is one exception to this prejudice in the Gombroon wares, which are those "lettuce white" potteries remarked in Egypt by Nassira Khosrau. These potteries were afterward introduced into Persia, and they were made there as early as the thirteenth century. Since their chief claim to distinction is their fabrication, they were never very freely ornamented. They are believed to have been made of a mixture of pipe clay and glass, and so they cannot, strictly speaking, be

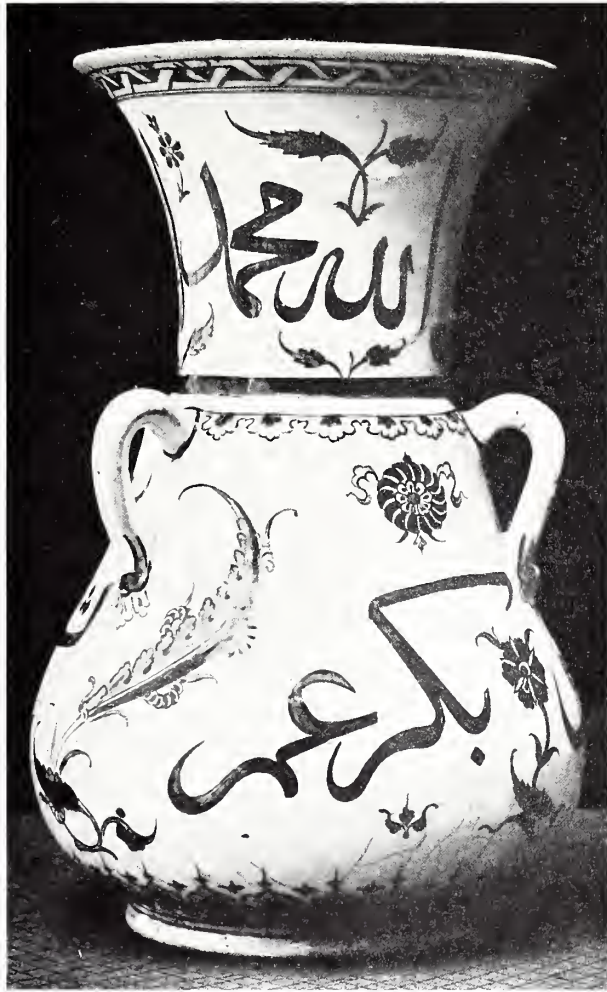


Figure 28.—Rhodian Lamp. Sixteenth Century.
Color ornament, inscription containing the names of God and his prophets.
H, Walters Collection.

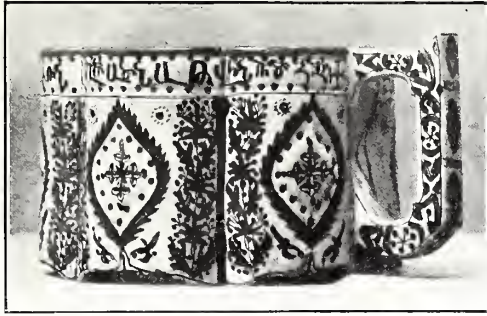


Figure 29.—Kutahia Mug. Dated 1727.

bably the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the time which saw the development of the metallic lustre potteries. The birth place of this particular kind of faience is still undetermined. It was known at a very early date in both Fostat and Syria, and from one or the other of these sources, it reached Persia where it was already being made in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as some of the Veramin tiles bear testimony. Many fine star tiles with metallic reflections have also come from Rhages, some of them having figure decorations. In these earlier examples, the process was secondary to the ornamentation, and the potters had not yet commenced to develop their medium at the expense of the decoration. The color range of the metallic wares has always been limited. In the first examples, brown is used freely, with touches of both dark blue and turquoise blue. Very rarely the telling aubergine or egg-plant tint appears.

In the later specimens, we find the two favorite colors, brown and blue. The bowls are almost without exception in deep blue and brown, the outside being blue and the inside a white ground with a brown design, or this scheme is reversed. Sometimes also the bowl may be all blue or all brown,

classified either as porcelains or faience. They are smooth and translucent, often with a rice-grain transparent border. What decoration they have is in a solid dark color, most frequently black, but sometimes also blue.

The period of greatest technical skill among the Persian artisans was probably

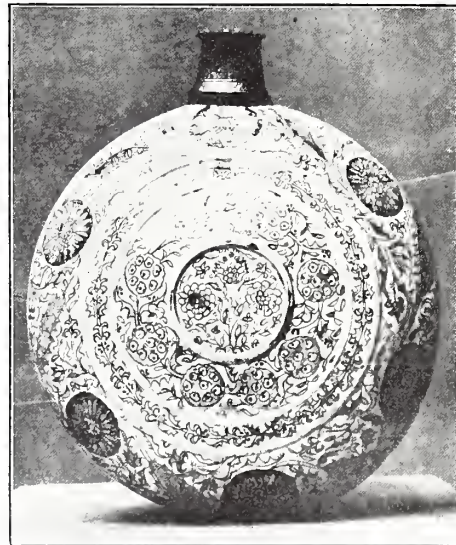


Figure 30.
Kutahia Flask, early Seventeenth Century.



Figure 31.—Kutahia Figure Plate. Dated 1719.

The vase and bottle shapes of the best metallic potteries are very graceful and designed with a fine feeling for proportion. Most of them are in blues and browns, either alone or in combination. I know, however, of a few handsome specimens in ruby red. One fine red bottle is in the Havemeyer collection. Another is in the Theodore M. Davis collection (*Fig. 22*). Still another forms part of the Edward Moore collection at the Metropolitan Museum, and an unusually beautiful red bowl is owned by Mr. Freer. This particular ruby tone was exceedingly difficult to produce, and these four examples therefore demonstrate the delicacy and skill of the potters of that epoch.

The chemical composition which gives the rare, rose copper-lustre, to these sixteenth century Persian potteries, constitutes their special beauty, and since the reflections are in rose, amber, and gold, the workmen chose their under-colors well. On the deep blues and browns, the play of warm lights is extremely beautiful.

About the time



Figure 32.—Persian Plate, probably late Sixteenth Century.

that this branch of pottery making was being perfected in Persia, the Mohammedan conquests carried the mode into Spain, where at this period the Hispano-Moresque plates were made. These plates are often gorgeous in their effects and they are much sought after to-day for their decorative value. There is a dated Spanish plate in the Walters' collection (*Fig. 36*), which was made in 1603, a little later than the best of the Persian lustre ware. The Spanish plates are larger and showier than anything ever made in Persia.

The Italian Gubbio and Deruta potteries belong to the same family, and appeared about the same time as the Spanish lustres, through the round-about channels of Spanish-Italian interchange of commerce. In neither country was this pottery developed to quite so refined a lustre as it was by the Persian workmen. Nor was it so rich in color. Whether the subtle differences in the application of ceramic principles were a temperamental, a national, or a climatic manifestation, who shall say? But at all events, the sympathetic understanding of the use of color in pottery decoration belongs to Persia.

Persia's influence on Italian art is sometimes even more directly felt than in the lustre wares, for occasional specimens of pottery are discovered having the Italian marks, which are unmistakably the work either of Persian, or of Persian-taught artists. I have lately acquired a handsome flower jar, coming from the Lanna sale, which has all the characteristics of the Rhodian wares *Fig. 34*. The colours and the style of ornament belong to Rhodes, but the material is harder than that of any Rhodian piece I have ever seen, more

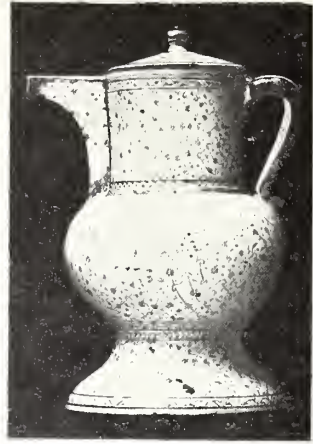


Fig. 33.—Damascus Pitcher made in Italy. Sixteenth Century.



*Figure 34
Rhodian Flower Jar. Sixteenth Century*

nearly porcelain than pottery, and it bears the Caffagiola monogram. This specimen must therefore have been made in Italy and it is entirely probable that it is the work of an artist imported to the Caffagiola pottery to instruct the Italian workmen.

I know of only two other pieces of pottery of this character bearing this mark. One is owned by Mr. Charles Read and the other by the British Museum.

Another Persian-Italian example has come into my possession from the Spitzer sale (*Fig. 33*). It is a large white pitcher of an unusual shape, having a scroll floral decoration identical with that often to be seen on the sixteenth century Damascus blue and white ware. This pitcher too, resembles porcelain rather than pottery, being thinner than the Persian products. A still earlier Persian influence is apparent in the potteries lately discovered in some excavations made near Rome. The recent finds resemble in a very marked degree the Persian potteries of the thirteenth century. These similarities are interesting, since they accent the far-reaching importance of Persian standards during the period of that country's artistic productiveness.

The decline of the art of pottery making in Persia began about the

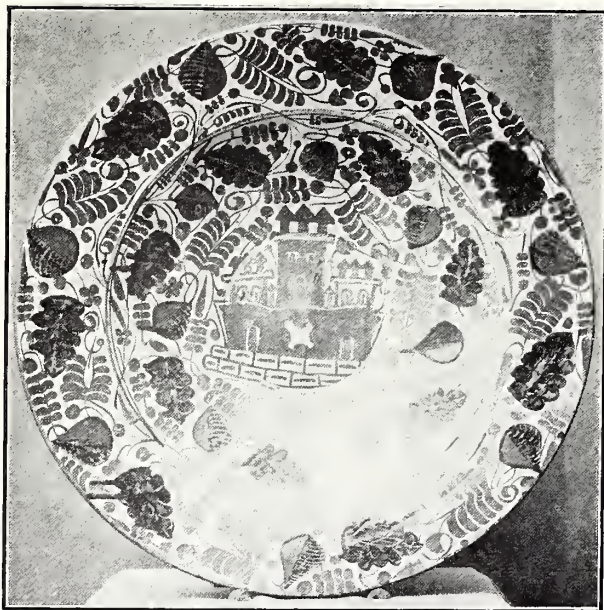


Figure 35.—Hispano-Moresque Lustre Plate. Fifteenth Century.

end of the seventeenth century. Until that date no outside influences had encroached on the native tastes and tendencies. Such fashions as were carried into the country from outside, became amalgamated with the indigenous styles, changed, adapted, naturalized, we may say, until their very source is dubious and provides a subject for endless

discussion among modern scholars. There can be no two opinions, however, as to the origin of the influence which determined the character of the eighteenth century potteries in Persia. It is indisputably Chinese, and it was introduced in Persia during Shah Abbas' reign. Since it is no longer a direct manifestation of the taste of a people, it ceases to have the charm of the styles which led up to it. The deep blue of the decoration on a clear white ground is still Persia's own *lapis lazuli*, inimitable in its tint. Also, the pottery itself is well made, its forms are graceful, its enamel clear and smooth; but it is no longer the vivid, personal expression of a poetical race.

During the centuries of shifting boundaries in Western Asia, certain Chinese characteristics had from time to time crept into the art of Persia. Prior to the eighteenth century, the alien tenets had been subjected to a happy process of translation which made them thereafter Persian in spirit. The blue and white ware, however, is a hybrid creation, foretelling the weakening of the national artistic convictions.

Nothing of importance has been made in Persia since this ware. It marked the beginning of the end of a splendid art. For another century, thereafter, the turquoise potteries, coarsened and deepened in color, were manufactured here and there where some of the old traditions remained handed down from father to son.

Sporadic efforts have been made, even within the last century to revive the pottery industry in Persia,—but in vain. As well try to re-create the Renaissance of Italy. Persian pottery-making as an industry exists no more. It is a lost



Figure 36.—Hispano-Moresque Plate. Date 1603.

art. And now the work of the archæologists has begun on the enduring but elusive documents of the past. Will they ever quite yield up their secrets? At least we are learning from them day by day a little more concerning the epochs that saw their development and the peoples who created them.

It is an absorbing and a fascinating study, this delving among the relics of a by-gone time, and it pays for the trouble, for the better Persian art is known, the stronger is its artistic appeal. Already some of the most scholarly men of our time have occupied themselves in seeking to read its lessons. In France, where Persian explorations are a national privilege, there have been published useful hand books, setting forth the results of these researches. Dr. Fouquet's "Contribution à l'Etude de la Céramique Orientale" and the "Manual d'Art Muselman" by Gaston Migeon, are full of valuable data which are useful to the student. In England, Mr. Henry Wallis and Mr. Charles Read have both contributed the results of their intelligent study to the accumulating literature on Persian art.

Although the brilliant realization of this art is in the past, its fullest interpretation and appreciation are still in the future. Meanwhile, the enlightened lover of the beautiful, awaiting a translation of the message of this art of another era, may vaguely feel, across the ages, its abiding charm. The challenge of any truly inspired art knows no arbitrary boundaries of time nor space; nor does it need the intervention of human speech to tell its story to the sympathetic soul.



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