234 Pen-box of brass inlaid with gold and silver  
Length 31.5 cm, width 9 cm, height 8 cm  
* Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 4461, purchased 1917  
* Egypt, Mamluk period, 1361–3  
* Inscription in the lower margin on the inside of the lid:  
   The main theme of this decoration suggests that embroidery patterns might have provided the sources for the motifs.  
* Published: Devische (1919, pp. 247–50); Wiet (1923, pp. 123–37); Cairo (1966, no. 81).

235 Qumqum bottle for sprinkling rose-water or orange flower-water, of beaten brass inlaid with gold and silver  
Height 22 cm, diameter (maximum) 9 cm  
* Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 13111, formerly Harari Collection  
* Egypt, Mamluk period, 14th century  
* The main thuluth inscription between bands of chinoiserie lotus and stylized flying birds is broken by lobed medallions containing thuluth inscriptions inlaid in gold, exactly similar in content to the principal inscription but with their shafts arranged radially.  
* Inscription on neck:  
* Published: Wiet (1923, p. 217), Cairo (1966, no. 79, pl. 15).

236 Candlestick of beaten brass, body enhanced with niello  
Height 41 cm, diameter (base) 39.5 cm  
* Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 4297, purchased 1916  
* Egypt, Mamluk period, 14th–3  
* Inscription on rim:  
* Published: Wiet (1932, p. 118).
Mirror of steel encased in gold and silver
Diameter 20.8cm
British Museum, London, no. 2960.5-11.1
Egypt or Syria, Mamluk period, mid-14th century
For the household [wife] of the honourable, lofty, kingly, most noble, possessing, unique, valiant, master, authentic, the lady with distinguished and protected veil.
For the household [wife] of the honourable, lofty, kingly, possessing, the great amid, treasure house [of excellence], help, succour, unique, valiant, well-ordering, master, most perfect, authentic, most excellent, chief of armies, superb, most glorious, pre-eminent the lady with distinguished and protected veil.

Helmet of steel decorated with gold wire
Height 39cm, diameter 23cm
Musée de l’Armée, Hôtel National des Invalides, Paris, no. H 447
Turkey, Ottoman period, between 1481 and 1512
Inscription around base: allahumma ana sayyidina wa hikmat ana min al-`adhami wa al-mujaddid bihul ouda al-nafir al-`abidin wa al-mujaddid bihul ouda al-nafir al-`abidin
"Oh God, I am the head-piece for the head of the valiant angel, the bold, the emperor of the world, giving victory to Islam, possessing God’s help and support, al-Malik al-Mu`izz ad-Dawla al-Nasir Sultan Muhammad Khãn, may God make his adherents and his followers glorious.”

Material: Steel and gold wire

This helmet is of a type designed to fit over a man’s turban and is typical of helmets used in Turkish and Mamluk domains in the 15th and 16th centuries. This particular example is noteworthy as it was made for the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (1483–1512). The inlay technique employed here is different from that used on bronze and bronze of this and earlier periods. Instead of cutting or punching shaped recesses to hold particular pieces of inlay, the steel workers used a technique called hifj-gart. In this technique the whole surface of the object is “toothed” with a chisel to achieve a rough surface. The design is then drawn onto this roughened surface onto which the gold wire is then hammered. Kffield-gart is still practised today in certain countries such as India and Tunisia.

Published: Zaki (1961, p. 27); Pâris (1979, no. 180)
230 Sword of damascened steel
Length 93cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 5267

Inscription
al-nāṣir inzāl al-Malik al-‘Alā‘
Mādīnī Bū ʿAish
al-ʿAlā‘ Mādīnī Bū ʿAish
al-ʿAlā‘ Mādīnī Bū ʿAish
al-ʿAlā‘ Mādīnī Bū ʿAish
al-ʿAlā‘ Mādīnī Bū ʿAish

Height 4cm, width 20cm
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, no. II 1178
Spain (Granada), Nasrid period, late 15th century

Towards the end of the last century the Marquess of Villanueva in Madrid
is reputed to have had in his possession the costume, sword, dagger, double-handed sword
and knife of the last Amir of Granada, Abū ʿAbdullāh Muhammad XI. See
Ranço (1879, pp. 64–7). These articles were evidently captured,
along with Muhammad himself, at the battle of Las Navas in 1212 by one of
the ancestors of the Marquess. The finest of Muhammad’s arms, and the
only one bearing his name, is the sword in the Army Museum, Madrid.
This sword is very similar but not quite so elaborate. There is no
inscription. Published: Zahi (1966, pp. 143–57); Cairo (1967, no. 91).

231 Sword with steel blade,
incomplete wooden shash covered
with leather and furnished with mounts of gilt
brass and gold filigree and enamel
work
Height 4cm, width 20cm
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, no. II 1178
Spain (Granada), Nasrid period, late 15th century

Towards the end of the last century the Marquess of Villanueva in Madrid
is reputed to have had in his possession the costume, sword, dagger, double-handed sword
and knife of the last Amir of Granada, Abū ʿAbdullāh Muhammad XI. See
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along with Muhammad himself, at the battle of Las Navas in 1212 by one of
the ancestors of the Marquess. The finest of Muhammad’s arms, and the
only one bearing his name, is the sword in the Army Museum, Madrid.
This sword is very similar but not quite so elaborate. There is no
inscription. Published: Zahi (1966, pp. 143–57); Cairo (1967, no. 91).

232 Dagger with steel blade
Length 4cm, breadth of blade 2.7cm
Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, no. 1890.280, originally in the
Richard Collection
Turkey, Ottoman period, late 15th–early 16th century

Inscription is the first couplet of a
poem (ghazal) by the Ottoman poet
Necât (died 1509) inscribed below the
sword in a nasta’liq calligraphy
Bic ʿaṣ ʿudalān hānun-i
bārīvārmandān
N‘ala be yok newārman wa iṣlāh
yamandān
‘I besought a drink of water
from your trenchant dagger.
What if but once you should let
me drink, what would you lose?‘
‘I besought a sign of favour from
your piercing glance.
What have you got to lose for once
by letting me have a taste of your
favours?‘
Technically and aesthetically this
dagger is of the highest standard. The
steel blade is of a flattened diamond
section with a curved cutting edge
and central perforation. It is
decorated with interlaced sebæque
foliage, the inscription inlaid in gold.
The pistol-shaped hilt is of grey-
green jade. This example may be
compared to a dagger which belonged
to Selmān I (1512–20) in the Topkapı
Palace Museum, Istanbul. The
dagger was worn as a dress accessory,
thread into the belt which an
Ottoman gentleman wore over his
haftars. The content of the inscription
supports a civilian rather than a
military use.
Published: London (1931, no. 832); Rome (1926, no. 406, pl. LXII).

233 Dagger of damascened steel
Length 4cm
St Louis Art Museum, no. 14.92, previously in the
Richard Collection
Persia, Safavid period, early 17th century

Inscription under dragon mouth
Sāḥibbāh Muṣṭafā Qālī Khān
Qasqāl‘ī
‘In owner of Muṣṭafā Qālī, the
Qahqah.‘
This dagger was made in the early
17th century for a leader of the
Qahqah tribes who inhabit the
country between Shiraz and Jafshan.
It has a damascened steel blade; that is,
a steel blade with a watered pattern
known in Arabic as janhar and in
Persian as fard. The watered pattern
or damask in Persian blades is due to
the crystalline structure of the steel,
in particular the distribution of
pearlite and cementite crystals in the
metal. These crystals come about due
to the particular way the steel is made
and their distribution depends upon
the method of heating and forging
the steel cakes during the manufacture
of the blade. The visual effect is due
to the use of etching acid which reacts
differently when it comes into
contact with pearlite and cementite,
thus producing a bichrome appearance.
Published: London (1931, no. 832R); Pome and Askerman (1938–9, pl. 1425D),
Wetich (1973–4, no. 40, pl. 71, p. 33).

234 Plaque of open-work steel
Length 38.2cm, height 13.5cm
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, no. M.5,1919
Persia, Safavid period, 16th century

The inscription reads
ma dibā bādi‘Allāh muṣīmman
[aic] b Al‘
‘and of his brother, lion of God,
named ‘All.‘
Acquired in Shiraz early this century,
this plaque is said to have adorned a
royal Safavid tomb. The style of the
scroll work suggests a 16th century
attraction.
Unpublished
Door panel of open-work steel
Height 34.3cm, width 25.4cm
British Museum, London, no. OA 297
Persia, Safavid period, dated 1693–4

The inscription reads

‘Ismatu mina Salamatu wa Ismahu
Isamul Ilah al-‘rajmat al-rajam sama
2103 h’

‘It is from Solomon the merciful, the compassionate, the
year 1103 of Hijri’
(Sura XXVII of the Koran contains the
story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. It includes many details not
found in the Old Testament and in verse 30 (above) the Queen of Sheba
starts to read her nobleman a message from Solomon demanding submission. It may be that this door panel was once a set inscribed with a
large portion of this sura. On the other hand, the inclusion of this story
on a door panel may be interpreted as an act of exaltation on the part of Shah
Selim I (1666–94) under whose reign it was made.

Unpublished.

Standard of pierced steel inlaid with gold
Height 60cm, width 25.4cm
Royal Armoury, Stockholm, no. 20/6, precisely in the collection of Prince
Sachsenkroy, St Petersburg
Persia, Safavid period, 15th–16th century

This standard, or banner, is of a type
still produced in Persia today. Though it may have had a military
purpose it is more probably a religious object, designed to be
carried on the top of a pole in the
Maharram procession – the annual Shi‘a tribute to the two Imams,
Hasan and Husayn (killed at the battle of Karbala in Mesopotamia in 680).
The inscription, which originally embellished the border of the
standard on both sides, is now too badly effaced to be reconstructed,
though the names of Muhammad, the
Prophet, and of Hasan, are still
legible. Banners such as these are still
made by Persian craftsmen called
shahakhi-ad, or state freeasons, who
utilize drills, files and fretsaws
to produce arabesque designs. See
Wulff (1946, pp. 72–3).
Published: Stockholm (1949, no. 237)

Four open-work steel plaques from the armature of a
door
Height 13.5cm, length (maximum) 30cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 1142/2–4, formerly Hariri
Collection
Persia, Safavid period, 17th century

Each plaque bears a different half-page
inscription referring to
Muhammad, to Qumay, to a warrior,
perhaps All, and to Hasan and
Husayn, his two offspring. The
verses, however, are out of sequence
so that it is very difficult to reconstuct
either the original sense of the
original or deduce the original
number of plaques. The plaques are
apparently cast, not forged. The
nasalq inscriptions in heavily
arabesqued Persian are on an open-work ground of spiral scrolls and
flowers.

Published: London (1931, nos. 273, 47, X, V, 278, H, II, IV),
Pope and Ackerman (1958–9, pl. 138).

Dish of bronze decorated with enamelling and copper
chiselled plates, originally gilded
Diameter 22.6cm
Tierar Lundsamnon
Ferdinand, inbrot, precious in
the collection of Arrow von Linden
North Mesopotamia, 1114–44

Outside inscription is undeciphered.

Inside inscription

al-sharaf al-shahr al-khizir
al-sa‘ud al-qamar
al-marj al-mu‘a‘im
al-ma‘lum wa al-munm wa al-mu‘a‘im
al-mu‘a‘am al-mu‘a‘im wa al-munm wa al-qamar
al-qamar wa al-mu‘a‘im
(‘The amir, chief of armies, the
great, the fortified by God, the
victorious, Nizâr-al-Din [giving
victory to religion] Ruhm-al-Dawla
[pillar of the state] savior of the
[Muslim] community, leader of the
[Muslim] nation, leader of
legions, crown of kings and sultans,
slayer of infidels and polytheists,
Ab Sawaym Sunqar Belk, the
father of Sultan son of Dawud,
son of Utruj, sword of the
commander of the faithful.’

This dish is one of the most celebrated
‘problem pieces’ of Islamic
metalwork as it is the only known
eparated Islamic object and its
inscription shows a disconcerting
ignorance of genealogy and Turkish
inscriptions. Dâwûd was the son, not
the father, of Sunqar and his title was
Ruhm al-Dawla. As well as in form
and decorative layout, this dish is the
earliest known example of a genaillion, a
type of vessel used for ritual
washing produced in large quantities in
13th–14th century Linsges, but
totally unknown in Islam apart from
this single piece. In technique it is
chiselled, not enamelled, which
follows the Byzantine, not Syrian, enamel tradition. In the centre of the
dish, Alexander the Great is shown
riding to heaven but the other
representations are essentially
Islamic in inspiration. That it was
made for the Utruj ruler Dâwûd
(1114–44) is clear, but as for its
provenance, the latest authority has
suggested that it was the product of a
north Mesopotamian workshop,
working in the Byzantine tradition.

Published: Karabuevich (1914, p. 36);
van Berchen and Strozewski (1924, pp. 120–6, 348–54, pl. XXII); Farm and
Marrin (1921, no. 1006, pl. 130); Neuwald-Thomson and Spuler (1973, pp. 307–8,
pl. XII).
240 Pair of earrings of gold, inlaid with turquoise and pearls and decorated with filigree
Lengths 18.2cm and 16.2cm
National Museum, Damascus, no. A2739, found at Aleppo, Syria, Ayyubid period, 13th century

Many early Islamic earing forms, like those of other items of Jewellery, were based on forms inherited from the Roman or Sassanian worlds. These examples are unusual in the form of their central masses—a cube topped by a pyramid. But earrings, with a central dome or cone and large numbers of pendant wires with beads and other shapes attached are known from both the Roman and Parthian empires. And their popularity in early Islamic times is indicated by the large numbers of silver cones found in such earrings found in a hoard near Chircum in Transoxiana, 8th century. One earring has its pendants attached directly to the ring.

Published: Damascus (1969, p. 269, fig. 117)

241 Anklet of silver, sheet metal and chased
Diameter (inside) 7.5cm
Iraq Museum, Baghdad, no. A 10336
Mesopotamia (Samarra), 11th-13th century or later

This example and a companion piece were found in the ruins of the Qasr al-Ashiqi one of the palaces of the 9th century Abbasid capital at Samarra. Their decoration suggests that they may be rather late in date, but the popularity of chased sheet metal anklets in Abbasid times is indicated by a gold piece decorated with drinking figures and musicians. See Berlin-Dahlem (1971, no. 157).

Published: Hamid (1967, fig. 6)

242 Bracelet of gold, once inlaid with five precious stones
Diameter (inside) 11.5cm
National Museum, Damascus, no. A1039, found at Romna in 1939
Syria, Fatimid or Ayyubid period, 11th-12th century

Inscription on shorter arm
al-ar’ra’ama al-dulma al-n’ada
al-baqiya al-tenfaj al-khalid
‘perpetual might, enduring, happiness, eternal success.’

Inscription on longer arm
al-barba al-habiq [sic] al-barba
al-nu’ma al-shinilla al-nami
al-’a’iz al-dal’m al-ma’aqam al-malizum al-ma’u’ma al-zafa
al-baqiya li-sahihbi
‘true and pious blessing, complete favour, growth, perpetual, fixed and continuous glory, favour, enduring felicity to its owner.’

Published: Damascus (1969, p. 269, fig. 115)

243 Necklace with three pendants in gold with pearls and semi-precious stones
Length 28cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 13140
Egypt, Ayyubid period, 13th century

This necklace is composed of twenty-four bars each with gold filigree ornament in a gold shell worked in repoussé and each with a drop-pendant set with seed-pearls, amethysts and other semi-precious stones. The bars are held together by two gold chains which run between the filigree and the repoussé shell. There are three pendants all circular with fine filigree, but the outer pendants set with a bloodstone. The centre pendant hangs down from a down-turned crescent with an inscription in polychrome translucent chinoiserie enamels, ‘Yaz al-din, perpetual glory,’ and is set with a carbon dark amethyst.

Published: Musaffa (1935, p. 201)
Cairo (1996, no. 18)

244 Pendant of thin gold plate on a silver core
Height 4cm, width 3.2cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 12137
Egypt, Fatimid period, 11th century

The crescent-shaped pendant is worked on both sides with beaded wire hammerted on to a gold base. The obverse bears a circular medallion with a bird and a cross in translucent enamels (green and red) with gold cloisons. The ground is somewhat decayed. Loops of gold wire on the outer and inner edges of the crescent evidently served to attach jewelled chains.

Published: Hanafi (1937, fig. 245)
Musaffa (1935) Cairo (1996, no. 4)
245 Steel grill with gilding
Height 5cm, width 7.5cm
Imam Reza Museum, Mashhad
Persia, Timurid period, 1414/5
This grill was presented to the shrine in 1414 by Shahrukh. It was made. Some of the internal rods have disappeared and the gold inscription has been deleted in a few places. The pattern is of vertically placed diamond shapes, crossed by parallel horizontal bars. Above the grill is a naskhi inscription in relief.

246 Copper mihrab, engraved and enamelled
Imam Reza Shrine Museum, Mashhad
Persia (Mashhad), Safavid period, 16th century
This portable mihrab was made for Behshir Rizghi, Bahrism Mirzah, governor of Mashhad in 1566-77.
Unpublished

247 Gold-embossed inlaid plaques
Imam Reza Museum, Mashhad
Persia, Safavid period, 1602
There are three plaques, two larger and one smaller, inscribed in nasta’liq as follows:

a. amara bi-‘l-imāra ḥādhā al-panjara
b. tvālī ṣā’d al-aṣ’ār

There is another inscription below recording repairs and embellishments carried out in 1545/6 by Muhammad Beg Ḥāfiz al-Turkmān; it is a small inscription to the right, above and below the main inscription, is another inscription saying the work of Ḥaj Muhammad bin ‘Ali Ḥāfiz al-Iṣfahānī in Muḥarram 1414/5.

Published: Mashhad (no date).

Ceramics
Almost two hundred pottery vessels and tiles, ranging over nine hundred years, are included in this exhibition. The visitor cannot fail to respond to the brilliant decorative effects and the technical virtuosity of the Islamic potters. If their pottery alone were to serve as an indication of its culture, the Islamic achievement can stand on an equal footing with that of China.

Islamic pottery is made either of earthenware, that is fired clay, or of “frit”, a harder and more compact material than earthenware, which was developed in the 12th century. Vessels for the most part were thrown on the wheel. When, however, a particular shape could not be obtained in this way or when relief decoration was required, then the body material was pressed into an earthenware mould (no. 249) or modelled by hand. Simple vessels for daily practical use were supplied by local industry. In the past as in the present, it was not unusual to find such an industry in villages as well as in towns. A characteristic which the Islamic potter shares with his fellow craftsmen working in other materials is an innate desire for decoration. In some cases this could be achieved by comparatively simple means such as the large storage jar of earthenware (no. 248) where the potter has combined designs incised in the malleable clay with a sharp instrument, with patterns formed of pieces of clay attached to the surface. In the larger urban centres, however, techniques such as this could not long satisfy the artistic aspirations of the potter. Here his principal preoccupation was the application of coloured decoration to the surface of his wares; and it is this preoccupation which has directed the whole course of the ceramic history of the Islamic world.

A rudimentary way of applying colour to a pottery surface is to paint on the unfired vessel with a thin wash of clay or slip as it is usually called. The slip could be stained to the required colour—usually black or red—by the introduction of a mineral pigment. In the Near East this technique goes back to earliest times and was used in certain parts of the Islamic world. It suffered from one great disadvantage: when fired, the slip, insecurely attached to the body material, had a tendency to flake.

The only satisfactory way of attaching colour permanently to the pottery surface is by means of glaze. This is a vitreous substance which when applied to the surface of the vessel and fired in the kiln, becomes a thin glass coating. Glaze may originally have been developed in order
to render earthenware waterproof which is otherwise porous. But since
glaze can be coloured, its use as a means of decoration presented
endless possibilities. And it is with the development of glaze techniques
that the Islamic potters achieved their greatest results.

It is due to no accident of selection that by far the greater part of the
pottery displayed in the exhibition was made in Syria and Egypt,
Persia and Mesopotamia. All the great artistic movements took place
in these countries that form the heart land of the Islamic World. Each
had a long established ceramic industry experience in a limited range
of glazing techniques. It is likely, too, that the glass making industry,
also well established in these countries, played a part in influencing the
development of glazes. Above all, the unifying force of Islam made
possible the free movement of craftsmen within the empire; so that
decorative styles and techniques were disseminated rapidly from one
centre to another.

One result of the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate at
Baghdad, and from 836–83 at Samarra, was that the potters of
Mesopotamia were stimulated to create new wares in order to meet the
demands of a refined and luxury-loving court. Inspiration was
provided by the white porcelains of T’ang China. These reached
Mesopotamia by the sea route across the Indian Ocean and up the
Persian Gulf to Basra. Since porcelain was not known in the Near
East, these imported pieces were greatly valued. The local potters of
Mesopotamia, endeavouring to emulate the smooth white surface of
these porcelains, hit on the idea of covering their buff-coloured
earthenware with a glaze rendered opaque by the introduction of tin.
In fact, some of the early tin-glazed dishes are close copies of T’ang
originals. But the Mesopotamian potters were far from content with
mere imitation. They now began to paint in blue and green in the white
tin glaze (nos. 253–7). Although they painted rather simple designs and
Arabic inscriptions which might include the potter’s name, the
coloured glazes tended to blur at the edges when fired (no. 255). All the
subsequent innovations in glaze techniques were directed to discover-
ing a method of controlled painting on pottery.

One method discovered by the Mesopotamian potters was that of
painting in lustre. The lustreous pigment consisted of a compound of
sulphur, silver and copper oxides painted on the fired tin glaze and
fixed in a second firing in a reducing kiln. The result is a thin metallic
film imperceptible to the touch and more or less lustrous.

Although the first to paint in lustre on pottery, the Mesopotamian
potters may have acquired the technique from the glass makers of
Syria and Egypt who had discovered the secret of painting in lustre on
glass certainly by the end of the 8th century (no. 119). At first the
Mesopotamian potters used lustre paint as an overall covering of
dishes with relief moulding (no. 249) evidently to simulate the
appearance of a vessel of bronze, brass or gold. In this case the lustre
was applied to a transparent lead glaze sometimes stained with patches
of green. They next adopted it as a painting pigment on the opaque
white tin glaze (nos. 258–66). In some of the earliest pieces decorated in
this way, they used lustre pigment of various tones to produce a
polychrome effect (no. 258) but after the middle of the 9th century, they
used a monochrome palette. For their designs, they drew on
carved wood and stucco (no. 261) and motives which go back to
Sasanian Persia such as the winged palmette (no. 259) and a stylised
bird holding in its beak a foliage sprig (no. 262). In the 10th century, they
introduced human figures which they rendered in a summary and
stylised fashion reminiscent of contemporary textiles from Egypt
(no. 265).

Towards the end of the 10th century, the Egyptian potters of
Fatimid Egypt were also painting vessels in lustre. They must have
learned the technique from immigrant potters of Mesopotamia. The
series assembled in this exhibition (nos. 267–276) provides a
splendid example of the Fatimid style of decoration: abstract foliate
ornament (no. 271), naturalistically drawn animals (no. 268), the
fabulous griffin (no. 273) and a boat under sail and with banks of oars
(no. 269). The painters of these vessels were artists of standing and
some among them signed their work (nos. 271–2, 276). Occasionally
the opaque white ground was replaced by opaque green (no. 271) or
turquoise (no. 278).

Syria, too, was producing lustre painted pottery in the 12th century.
The decoration of these Syrian wares (nos. 298–300) has much in
common with those of Fatimid Egypt and from this it may be assumed
that it was Egyptian potters who brought the technique to Syria.

With the fall of the Fatimid dynasty in 1171, lustre painted pottery
seems no longer to have been produced in Egypt. The technique had a
great future, however, in Syria and Persia.

Another solution to the problem of combining painted designs with
glaze was made by the potters of eastern Persia which in the 13th
century was united with the lands beyond the Oxus under a Persian
dynasty, the Samanids (874–999). At Nishapur and Samarkand
(Afrasyab), principal cities of the Samanid kingdom, the potters
painted their designs in coloured slips which they then covered with a
transparent lead glaze (nos. 279–81). This glaze was necessarily
colourless: but when the slip painting was restricted to black, the
transparent glaze was sometimes stained green or yellow (no. 294).
Seldom has the Arabic script been used to greater effect than in these
wares where the inscription provides the sole decoration (nos. 279–83).
In others, ‘contour’ panels are introduced as a foil to the inscriptions.
Another group is painted in polychrome slip with geometric designs (no. 292). Many of the designs are those of Mesopotamian lustre wares (nos. 291, 293, 297).

Another way of decorating pottery was to incise designs through a white slip into the clay surface. When covered by a transparent glaze, whether colourless or stained green or amber, the incised lines appear as dark brown or black. The technique was practised in Persia (no. 321) as well as in Syria and in Egypt from the Fatimid to Mamluk periods (nos. 319–20). Decoration executed in this technique was purely linear. In the district of Garrus in north-west Persia, the technique was slightly varied; the ground was cut back to the clay so that the design on the slip was left standing in very low relief (nos. 322–4). The potters of this region also made tiles which they covered with a transparent green glaze (no. 255).

At another centre in north-west Persia, possibly Aghkand, the incised technique was adapted to quite another purpose. As has already been mentioned, glaze colours when applied to a glaze have an unfortunate tendency to run during firing. It was found, however, that incised lines could serve to some extent as barriers to prevent this. Here then was another step forward on the way to polychrome decoration on pottery: and the fine bowl signed by the potter Abū Ţālib shows how effective this type of decoration can be (no. 326). Abū Ţālib was evidently working in a metropolitan centre since his handling of this decoration is in the style which was inaugurated in Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria under the rule of the Great Seljuqs and their successors. Seljuq decoration is alive with an almost nervous energy. Birds and animals move against a background of scrolling arabesques in which the split leaf is prominent.

Besides a radical change in the style of decoration, important technical discoveries were made in pottery and glazing techniques in the Seljuq period. Inspired by the fine porcelains imported from Sung China, the Persian potters discovered a way of producing a body clay harder and whiter than that of earthenware. This was the 'frit' material referred to above. Ground quartz was mixed with the clay so that when fired, glaze and body became perfectly fused. Because the 'frit' body was more malleable and easier to manipulate than earthenware, vessel shapes from the 12th century onward are of greater elegance and refinement. It was even possible to produce vessels with walls thin enough to be translucent.

Among the earliest of the Persian frit wares are those inspired by the carved Ting ware of China such as the exquisite carved white bowl (no. 327). Though the form and technique are Chinese, the undulating scrolls are wholly Islamic. In other bowls, the decoration is lightly carved and the ground pierced through with small holes. When filled with the transparent glaze, these holes are translucent if held to the light. The colourless glaze was sometimes replaced by a transparent glaze of turquoise or green.

Slip painting was revived for a short period in the second half of the 12th century, probably in western Persia. The technique was similar to that of the slip painted wares of east Persia described above. In these later wares a rather thick black slip was applied to the surface of the vessel and the ground of the design cut back to the body, thus producing a firm and incisive outline: the vessel was then covered with a transparent glaze either colourless or turquoise (nos. 328–9).

The first attempts at polychrome decoration on the frit body were made by incising the outlines of the design in order to contain the colours in much the same manner as on the Aghkand wares. It is not known where precisely this ware, known as 'lakah', was produced; but it was probably made in Persia, Syria and perhaps Egypt (nos. 340–2).

The technique of lustre painting on pottery reached Persia only in the last quarter of the 12th century when it may have been brought by Egyptian potters seeking new patrons after the fall of the Fatimid Dynasty. The earliest Persian lustre ware was made in the city of Rayy (near Tehran); and certain details of the decoration are clearly derived from the Egyptian lustre painted vessels (nos. 345, 346). One characteristic is the filling of the whole area of the face of the dish with large scale figures – human or animal – often reserved in the lustre ground (no. 344). Occasionally the lustre painting was laid on a blue glaze (no. 349). It seems that the production of the Rayy lustre wares was already in decline soon after 1200. Leadership in ceramic production had already passed to Kashan, a city about 160 miles to the south of Tehran. Its potters were to achieve fame far beyond the boundaries of their native city. The bowl painted in lustre with touches of blue and turquoise (no. 350) is among the earliest of the Kashan lustre wares and shows the typical Kashan style of decoration which is quite distinct from that of Rayy.

It may have been the potters of Kashan who were responsible for a most important technical innovation made around 1250. This was the discovery of underglaze painting. We have seen that painting in a tin glaze was unsatisfactory owing to the blurring of the colours in firing. Slip painting while not suffering from this disadvantage, allowed little freedom of the brush. The same applies to the Aghkand and lakah technique. Underglaze painting was made possible by the discovery that coloured pigments such as cobalt and manganese white upt to run under a lead glaze, remain perfectly stable under an alkaline glaze. The potters of Kashan seem to have been the first in Persia to have used the technique. Besides painting in black under a colourless
glaze (no. 360), they also painted in black and blue under a turquoise as well as a colourless glaze (nos. 356–60).

In yet another ware the Persian potters were able to extend their palette to as many as seven colours, by painting both under and over the glaze. The overglaze colours were applied to the fired vessel in the form of a glass paste or enamel which was then fixed to the vessel's surface in a second firing. The technique is similar to that of the enamelled glass of Syria (no. 352). Some examples of this ware which is known as 'minaţ', the Persian word for enamel, are decorated with narrative scenes or details evidently derived from contemporary manuscript miniatures such as the little horsemen on the bowl (no. 351), of which the colours include blue and green under the glaze and black and red enamels. Others are decorated with geometric and arabesque designs (nos. 352–4); and occasionally gilding was added (no. 355).

Raqqâ, a Syrian city on the Euphrates, was also an important centre of pottery which started production towards the end of the 12th century. Like Kashan, it was producing both lustre-painted and underglaze painted pottery which shares certain features with that of Fatimid Egypt; and perhaps Egyptian potters, too, emigrated to Raqqâ after 1171. The potters of Raqqâ excelled in the fluent drawing of their decoration in which they introduced Arabic script, often decorative rather than meaningful (no. 363), and intricate arabesques (no. 398). Occasionally they introduced human and animal figures (no. 397). At its best the decorative painting of the Raqqâ wares has rarely been equalled, such as the bowl, painted in underglaze blue, black and red (no. 396).

The Raqqâ pottery did not survive the devastation of the city by the Mongols in 1259. The Mongol invasions of Persia in the 1220's were equally destructive. Rayy seems not to have recovered but the Kashan potters seem to have resumed production in the second half of the 13th century. Lustre pottery continued to be made (no. 361); but the principal effort went into the manufacture of tiles for religious buildings as far distant as Mashhad. A fine panel of interlocking star and cross tiles (no. 379) once adorned the walls of a mausoleum at Veramin near Teheran. The large frieze, decorated in relief with Koranic quotations in a majuscule kufic script, is an example of the skill with which these potters were able to handle a large scale design (no. 376). One particular family – a certain Abû 'îthîr and his descendants – manufactured lustre tiled mibrabs of which seven survive. Two frieze tiles (no. 374) were made by a member of this family.

The Mongol dynasty of the Ilkhanids set about rebuilding the civilisation of the empire they had won, with the same energy they had devoted to its destruction. The unification of Asia under the rule of the Great Khan resulted in an unprecedented exchange of trade and ideas. The style of decoration developed towards the close of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century shows a predilection for motives of Chinese origin such as the lotus, dragon-phoenix and cloud band. The style is well exemplified in the products of a pottery centre in the region of Sultanabad in north west Persia and accessible to Tabriz, the Ilkhanid capital. The Sultanabad potters produced two wares. In the one, the vessel was covered in a grey slip on which decoration was painted in black and raised white slip under a transparent glaze (no. 364) and in the other, the decoration was rendered in underglaze black and a turquoise blue (no. 368). The underglaze wares of Sultanabad were imitated in Syria (nos. 314–5), and at the beginning of the 14th century lustre painting on pottery was revived at Damascus, perhaps by potters who had migrated from Raqqâ after its destruction by the Mongols in 1259. The lustre painting was applied to a deep blue glaze, the decoration consisting of naskhi and elaborately knotted kufic inscriptions combined with foliate scrolls (no. 311) or peacocks (no. 313).

Other wares of Ilkhanid Persia include the so-called layhârâ' type, so called because the decoration of red and white enameled and gold leaf was laid on a resonant blue glaze the colour of lapsi lazuli (îşân) (no. 369).

With the establishment of Timur's empire, tile production became an important industry in the great conqueror's capital city, Samarkan. In the great tomb complex which he built for members of his family around the shrine of the Shah-e Zinda, a much venerated Muslim saint, the facades of the mausoleums were covered with tiles of almost every technique. Some of the most effective were carved in relief under glazes of various colours (nos. 391–2) and were following an already established tradition, an example of which is the fine relief carved tile from a mausoleum in Bukhara of the middle of the 14th century (no. 390).

Some of Persia's finest glazed tilework was made in the 15th and 16th centuries but the production of glazed pottery seems to have declined. The blue and white porcelain of Ming China was much in demand in Persia and other countries of the Near East from the 15th century onwards and the few surviving Persian glazed vessels of the period are obviously inspired by Chinese originals (no. 395). There was, however, a revival of the pottery industry under Shah 'Abbâs I and his successors. The potters attained considerable technical excellence with the frit body as in the beautifully potted dish and bowl (nos. 403–4) and a large dish with floral decoration carved through an underglaze blue (no. 399). Lustre painting was also revived and was often combined with underglaze blue decoration (nos. 401–2). The drawing on pottery of this period is fluent and the decoration when not derived from Chinese blue and white porcelain consists of flowers, birds and animals rendered in the current artistic idiom of which the painter Rîzâ 'Abbâsî was the leading exponent.

If the principal ceramic developments took place in the central lands of Islam – Syria and Egypt, Persia and Mesopotamia – there are two other countries of the Islamic world whose pottery holds an important place in the history of ceramics. These are Turkey and Spain. Although revetments of glazed tile mosaic were being made in Anatolia as early as the 13th century, the Anatolian potters produced no wares of consequence until the establishment of a factory at Iznik in
north west Anatolia at the beginning of the 15th century. The early
wares of Iznik are of no great quality but at the end of the 15th century
the Ottoman court at Istanbul began to patronise the establishment.
From just before 1500 to around 1600, this factory was turning out
vessels and tiles remarkable for their quality of design and execution.
The earliest products are decorated in underglaze blue, the designs
often combining Chinese floral scrolls and cloud bands with the
classical Islamic arabesque (nos. 405-11). In the second quarter of the
16th century, turquoise and green were added to the palette and
naturalistically rendered flowers are a prominent feature of the
decoration. Around the middle of the century, the Iznik potters were
employing a palette of blue, turquoise, sage green, purple and black
(no. 413). From 1560 this palette was modified, the sage green being
replaced by a sea green, the purple by a brilliant red and designs are
outlined in black. The decoration consists largely of flowers among
which the rose, carnation and tulip are readily recognisable
(nos. 414-9).
The Iznik potters made tiles for religious buildings in Istanbul and
the other cities of the empire. There are two magnificent examples in
this exhibition, a panel possibly from a mosque and another from an
imperial tomb (nos. 420-1).
In Muslim Spain under the Caliphate of Cordoba the principal
artistic effort was directed to architecture and its decoration. The finest
glazed ware of the period was in turquoise and manganese on a
white tin glaze—a technique derived from contemporary Egypt
(no. 422). But it was not until the 14th century that pottery became a
well established industry. The main centre was at Malaga which was
under the rule of the Nasrid kings of Granada. Here were produced
the famous vases with wing handles—their form a remote descendent
of the Roman wine amphora—painted in lustre and blue with
arabesques in a form peculiar to Andalusia. These also form the
decoration of the important lustre painted bowl (no. 423).

248 Jar, unglazed, decorated with
carved and applied ornament
Height 65cm
Iraq Museum, Baghdad, no. A7703
Mesopotamia, 9th century
A series of large storage jars with
elaborate decoration are assigned to
northern Mesopotamia where they
are found in great profusion, though
pieces were evidently exported
considerable distances, see Reifinger
(1951). This jar is an example of the
earliest group. The applied
decoration is made from pieces of
clay rolled in the hand and formed
into simple shapes on the surface of
the jar with further detail incised.
The band of animals which
surround the body of the jar are
depicted in a curious primitive style
that is characteristic of the group.
Published: Baghdad (1973, no. 12, p. 60).

249 Dish with moulded
decoration, yellow glaze covered
with lustre and touches of green
Diameter 31.7cm
Staatliche Museen Preussicher
Kulturbesitz, Museums für Islamische
Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem, no. Bal. 1969,
excavated at Babylon
Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, 9th
century
The decoration was formed by
pressing the clay over a mould in
which a pattern was carved causing
the design to stand in relief. The
design has obvious associations with
metalwork and the all-over glaze of
yellow, possibly covered with a lustre
coating, enhances this similarity. As
the glaze tends to degrade it is often
difficult to determine whether it was
originally provided with lustre or not.
This particular technique is probably
one of the earliest Islamic fine wares
to have been produced. Judging from
the relatively few pieces known, it was
not produced over a long period. The
design of this dish shows a combina-
tion of late classical motifs, such as
the swastika band, and Sassanian
elements, such as the peacock border
and half-palmettes, characteristic of
Unayyad and Abbasid art.
Published: Berlin-Dahlem (1971, no.
103, pp. 52-5).

250 Bowl of unglazed clay with
moulded decoration
Diameter 12.5cm
National Museum, Damascus,
no. 17261 A, found at Raqqa
Mesopotamia (al-Hira), Abbasid
period, 8th century
The inscription is moulded on the
exterior:
shin 'inam Ibrahim al-nasirini
minnim ... [n'um'i] in-Hira
[khfr]' Abur Sulayman...Amr
al-Mu'tasim
'Made by Isahim the Christian,
out of the things [made] at
al-Hira for the Amir Sulayman
son of the Prince of the Believers
[the Caliph].'
The inscription is a most important
document. Sulayman is thought to be
the son of the Caliph al-Manṣūr
(754-775) who founded Baghdad.
The pot was made at al-Hira just
south of Kufa on the lower reaches of
the Euphrates, but was found in its
evacuations at Raqqa in Syria. The
inscription indicates that this bowl
was made to a particular order and it
is surprising to find a dedication to
such a highly-placed individual on a
utilitarian vessel of this type. In fact,
dedications to individuals are only
rarely found on Islamic pottery. The
lower part and base of the bowl
contain decorated bands. The body is of
extreme, almost egg-shell, thinness.
Published: Damascus (1969, p. 174,
fig. 77).
251 Ewer moulded in sections with relief decoration, unglazed
Height 37.2cm
National Museum, Damascus, no. 7047-54
Syria, Abbasid period, 9th or 10th century

This piece represents the continuation into Islamic times of a type of ware that had been produced for many centuries in Egypt and Syria. The decoration consists of floral or vine scrolls in a late classical manner. Other pieces, perhaps made further east, show Sassanian designs. The handle is restored.

Published: Damascus (1969, p. 174, no. 3)

252 Dish with moulded decoration, covered with green and brown glazes
Diameter 14.7cm
Egypt, Abbasid period, 9th century

Glazed moulded relief wares were made during the 9th century in both Egypt and Mesopotamia and have telling differences: the Egyptian pieces have a slightly coarser body material and are decorated with brown and green glazes, the Mesopotamian pieces have a fine body and are usually decorated with yellow and green glazes or lustre, see no. 248. The technique of moulding pottery in relief can be traced back to the Roman period in Egypt and it is thought that it was taken from there to Mesopotamia. However, one piece in the British Museum, London, has an inscription which states that it was made in Egypt by a potter from Baura in Mesopotamia. The interior of this dish shows a half-palmette motif.

Unpublished

253 Bowl painted in blue on an opaque white glaze
Height 9.5cm, diameter 12cm
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, no. AKB 713, NF 506, Gerald Rattinger Collection
Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, 9th century

Tin-glazed wares of the Abbasid period, in shapes other than shallow bowls or dishes, are rare. This cup is the only known example of this shape though its band of palmette motifs is typical of the decoration of the blue on white wares.

Published: London (1969, p. 111, no. 9)

254 Bowl painted in blue on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 23.5cm
Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt am Main, no. 1875-4
Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, 9th century

The inscription is not entirely clear and may be the signature of the potter. A bowl with an identical border pattern has the words ‘amal Šahh, “work of Šahh”, in place of this inscription, though written in a different hand, see Lane (1947, pl. 90). The half-moon border which occurs in this bowl in an elaborate form is a motif also found on Abbasid lustre wares. It was used on Egyptian lustre wares in the 11th and 12th centuries and at the end of the 12th century is found on Persian wares.

Published: Düsseldorf (1973, p. 36, no. 25)

255 Bowl painted in blue on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 20.5cm
Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich, no. 28-9-83
Mesopotamia or Persia, Abbasid period, 9th century

Inscription in the centre.
burah bi-salihı’ amal Muhammad al-...ili
‘Blessing to its owner, the work of Muhammad the...’

Several other pieces by this potter are known, each in the same technique and with the same design of bunches of sprays, see London (1969, no. 6). Wares of this type are often only decorated with brief blessings to the owner and a signature. Tin-glazed wares, i.e. those covered with an opaque white glaze, were first developed in Mesopotamia when they were painted in blue or decorated with lustre. By the end of the 9th century wares painted in blue were also being made in Egypt and Iran. This bowl is reported to have come from Kavy in Persia.

Published: Düsseldorf (1973, no. 24, p. 32)

256 Bowl painted in blue on an opaque white glaze with splashes of green
Diameter 38.3cm
Iraq Museum, Baghdad, no. A 6942, found at Samaara
Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, 9th century

The extensive splashes of green have obscured part of the signature written in blue. Only mal’ amal, ‘made by... ’ shows clearly, but enough of the name of the potter remains in order to identify him with the potter who signed other pieces such as a bowl in a private English collection which is also splashed with green, see London (1969, no. 10) and a fragment excavated at Nishapour whence it had. No doubt, been exported, see Wilkinson (1973, p. 183, no. 4). Though several versions of the signature of the potter exist, a clear reading is still not possible.

Published: Baghdad (1973, p. 60, no. 15)
257 Bowl painted in blue on an opaque white glaze with splashes of green
Diameter 14 cm
National Museum, Damascus, no. A 2719/69, found at Aleppo in the 9th century

The inscriptions on wares of this class are often of the potter’s signature though the exact reading of the inscription on this bowl is unclear.

The splashes of green glaze running down from the rim in deeps towards the centre are commonly found on wares of this type. The green colour in the form of a highly fused glaze was probably applied on the raw white glaze before firing and did not mix with the white glaze because of the viscosity of the latter during firing. The splashes are often thought to be in imitation of imported Chinese splashed wares of the 12th century. However, no well authenticated piece of Chinese origin has yet been discovered in the Middle East. This fact and a discrepancy in the dates between the Chinese and Mediterranean versions make an independent study of the technique seem the more likely explanation, see Watson (1970, pp. 39-40).

Published: Damascus (1964, pl. 246, fig. 138)

258 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 26.5 cm
Statliche Museen Preussicher Kulturbesitz, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem, no. Samml. 1162, excavated at Samarra Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, mid-9th century

Lustre wares using more than one lustre colour were produced in Mesopotamia prior to the adoption of the monochrome palette some time in the second half of the 9th century. The polychrome wares are characterised by rather broad designs, often filled with varying patterns. The design of this bowl is unique and shows a highly stylised eagle with outstretched wings holding in its beak a curiously sprays. Animals and birds in heraldic poses holding sprays in their beaks are common in lustre painting in the 10th and 11th centuries both in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Published: Same (1939, taf. XIII, pp. 40-41); Kühnel (1939, pp. 114-17, fig. 4); Berlin-Dahlem (1974, no. 168, pl. 33)

259 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 20.5 cm
Dr. Ulfah Schmitz-Frontal Collection, Federal Republic of Germany, acquired in Persia Mesopotamia, Abbasid period, 9th century

This piece is typical of Abbasid lustre wares in which an attempt is made to cover the whole surface with a varied pattern of different textures. In this bowl the main design, that of a Sasanian wing motif, is somewhat submerged in an overall pattern. The inspiration for this rendering may be sought in the perforated designs of contemporary stucco work. Similar designs, including the wing motif, also occur in Koran manuscript illuminations of the period. The decoration contrasts with the very plain treatment of the blue on white wares which were made in the same area, and perhaps even in the same workshops.

Published: Dusseldorf (1971, no. 100, p. 82)

260 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 27 cm
Musée du Grand Mosque, Kairouan
Found in North Africa, 9th century

This piece presents an unique design for lustre ware of this period, a field of foliage surrounded by a guilloche border which is intersected by four ‘spalashes’. Splashes combined with lustre are otherwise unknown, as is the border decoration. This may possibly indicate that it is a local North African product rather than an import from Mesopotamia. Similar foliage is however found on the imported lustre tiles decorating the mihrab of the mosque at Kairouan.

Unpublished

261 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 35 cm
Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, no. 391, found at Isfahan Persia, 9th-10th century

One of the most impressive of the early lustre vessels, both in design and technical finish. The wide lustre border is unusual, as is the use of the peacock eye motif as an interior band. The central design of interlocking half-palmettes is found on other vessels and was taken to Egypt along with the lustre technique sometime in the 10th century. Lustre was exported widely throughout the Islamic world and is very certain whether the large number of early lustre vessels found in Persia are of local manufacture or are imported wares. No distinctive features of design and technique have yet been found which distinguish pieces found in Persia from those of Mesopotamia.

Published: Melikhon-Chitivani (1972, fig. 110)

261 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 35 cm
On loan to the Brooklyn Museum, no. L. 47.1, 9th century
Mesopotamia, 10th century

From the abstract design of the Abbasid lustre wares there developed another type of decoration usually assigned to 10th century Mesopotamia. Here the designs of animals and figures, in varying degrees of stylisation, are set in a background of stippled contour panels. The bird (peacock) on this bowl bears little resemblance to the highly stylised eagle of no. 258 but still bears a foliate sprays in its beak, an iconicographic trait that had existed in pre-Islamic times in both the Christian Middle East and in Persia.

Published: Brooklyn (1969-6, pl. 1)
263 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 22.5 cm
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, no. 1958.46, gift of Sir Alan Karila
Mesopotamia, 10th century

Amongst lustre painted wares with contour panels are a number of pieces decorated with human figures with large almond eyes and noses delineated by two parallel brush strokes. The influence of Central Asian motifs has been discerned in these wares, for example in the pose of the seated prince with a cup in his hand, as it is found in this bowl. The facial features, however, may have been derived from Christian sources, especially textiles, where similar iconographic conventions are found. The bowl has been restored with fragments from another vessel. The word above the left shoulder of the figure reads 'ayalum, 'the work of . . .', but no name is given.

Published: Fehervari (1965, fig. 8, and 1975, p. 46, no. 59, pl. 118).

264 Dish decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 31.2 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, no. MAO 131, gift of F. Hemborg
Mesopotamia, 10th century

Inscribed on the base is Barakh fī-yīḥīsīh, 'Blessing to its owner.' The peacock-eye motif of the border, the bird filling the central field, the half-palmette forming the tail and the spray of foliage held in the beak are all characteristic elements of Mesopotamian lustre wares. This dish has no contour panels and is related to a group of which several examples are reported to have been found in Persia, though local manufacture cannot be assumed.

Published: Paris (1971, p. 46, no. 31); Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler (1975, Abb. 13).

265 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 20.5 cm
Danish Collection, Copenhagen, no. 5/12268
Mesopotamia, 10th century

On the base of the bowl appears the word Barakh, 'blessing.' The decoration of interlocking half-palmettes is used here to cover the whole interior of the bowl. The design in this example has certain affinities with the 'bevelled' style of plaster work and wood carving, as used both in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The way in which the motifs interlock is common in all techniques as is the way in which the tails of the palmettes curl sharply on themselves.

Published: David-Drux (1975, pp. 114-5, no. 35, pl. 118).

266 Dish decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 30.5 cm
Danish Collection, Copenhagen, no. 5/12968
Mesopotamia, Abbassid period, 9th-10th century

The inscription round the rim is a repetition of the phrase Barakhu fī-yīḥīsīh, 'Blessing to its owner.' The rather unusual design contained within a contour panel background is formed by angular half-palmette motifs arranged in a cruciform. The shape of this dish, with its broad rim, shallow well and absence of foot-ring, is derived from a metal shape and was popular throughout the 9th and 10th centuries.

Published: David-Drux (1975, pp. 114-5, no. 35, pl. 118).

267 Dish painted in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 18 cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 16335
Egypt, early 10th century

The interior of the dish is filled with a stylised representation of a duck or swan. The style is characteristic of lustre wares from 10th century Mesopotamia but which have also been attributed to Egypt. The exterior has monochrome rings on a ground of dots and hatched lines. On the base is a signature, possibly to be read as Dālākh, the father of the Egyptian potter Muslih, known from many inscribed lustre examples on both.

Published: Unpublished.
269 Bowl painted in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 28.5 cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 7500. Found at Bahyuna in Upper Egypt
Egypt, 12th century

The decoration represents a barge with a single bank of fourteen oars, anchors at prow and stern, and a schematically represented triangular rigged sail. Below are three fish with staring eyes. The boat and the fish are strikingly similar to the ships of Hathepsut on the reliefs at Dayr al-Bahari which went to Paris c. 1495 BC, see Housan (1951, fig. 3). The interior of the bowl is decorated with double rounds and rather crude foliate trails in reddish lustre.

Published: Wirt (1930, no. 44); Cairo (1989, no. 93)

270 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 13.5 cm
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem, no. 1.262
Egypt, Fatimid period, late 10th–early 11th century

The kite-shaped motifs are decorated with what may be a corrupt rendering of the word zafar, 'Triumph', replacing the bars.

Published: Pinder-Wilson (1957a, p. 141, fig. 1); Berlin-Dahlem (1974, no. 302); Düsseldorf (1973, no. 106, p. 89)

271 Bowl decorated in lustre over a green glaze
Diameter 21.5 cm
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem, no. 1.264
Egypt, Fatimid period, early 11th century

The rounded sides of the bowl bear a kufic inscription with elegant serifs, 'Nu nameh wad al-buhra hulila' 'Complete favour and perfect blessing'.

The inscription is painted on a ground of irregular panels with spidery scrolls. The exterior and base are covered with thinnish glaze and have double rounds on a scrawled hatched ground with the signature of the potter Muslim in a cursive script.

Published: Housan (1951, p. 101); Cairo (1989, no. 98)

272 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 25 cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 14938
Egypt, Fatimid period, 11th century

The decoration of this bowl consists of a griffon reserved on a ground of two foliate trains which spring from its tail. The exterior is evenly glazed and has schematic decoration in gold lustre. The vessel has not been well potted and the rim, in particular, shows two marked indentations over which the fine lustre design was nevertheless painted.

Published: Housan (1951, p. 104); Cairo (1989, no. 99)

273 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 24.5 cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, no. 14938
Egypt, Fatimid period, 11th century

The interior of this bowl is decorated with three almond-shaped medallions containing animals, possibly cheetahs, with bold heart-shaped palmettes between. The exterior has traces of over-fired scumbled circles in lustre. The contrast between the fine decoration and the poor potting is striking.

Unpublished
276 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque white glaze
Diameter 27.5 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1174/8
Egypt, Fatimid period, 11th century

The decoration represents a seated woman, or perhaps a youth, with the face in three-quarter profile wearing a crown below which appears a fringe, forehead and long tresses falling to the shoulders. The wide-sleeved dress is created by heart-shaped palmette scrolls and shows no folds. A beaker is held in each hand, beside which in the left hand is the signature of the potter, Ṣafā'. The exterior of the bowl is not glazed at all and the thin glaze shows a body markedly more red than other Fatimid lustre pieces. There are traces of over-fired lustre circles.

Published: Hasan (1931, p. 92); Yusuf (1969, p. 184); Cairo (1969, no. 128)

277 Jar decorated with opaque green, yellow, purple and white glazes
Height 30.5 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1174/8
Egypt, Fatimid period, 10th-11th century

The decoration is of alternating eight-pointed stars and crosses, each of the former containing an inscription, baraka khiwdna, 'perfect blessing', in purple. Pieces in this technique are often attributed to Fayyum, but there is still no conclusive evidence for their manufacture there.

Published: Hasan (1931, p. 321); Cairo (1969, no. 95)

278 Bowl decorated in lustre on an opaque turquoise glaze
Diameter 15.5 cm
National Museum, Damascus, no. 2354/6
Egypt, Fatimid period, 12th century

The Egyptian potters had already experimented with lustre painting on coloured glazes, see no. 275, but the painting on an opaque turquoise glaze is perhaps the most successful. The rich turquoise colour does not drown the lustre decoration as is the tendency of the dark blues, compare no. 312. The pseudo-inscription that forms the main motif on this bowl occurs in a similar fashion as a border motif in Persian lustre wares of the late 12th century. However, Persian lustre decoration is never found on monochrome turquoise glazes in spite of the popularity of that colour for other wares.

Unpublished

279 Dish decorated with white and black slips under a transparent glaze
Diameter 27 cm
St Louis Art Museum, no. 283-77
East Persia or Transoxiana, 12th century

In spite of the simple technique this epigraphic ware is probably the most refined and sensitive of all Persian pottery. Nishapur and Al-Khurasan, near Samarkand, are both major find spots and the ware is presumed to have been made in both places. The decoration relies entirely upon different variations of kufic script, and the distortions and embellishments of the letters often render the inscriptions difficult to read. Such a difficulty may not have been encountered at the time of manufacture as the inscriptions consist of aphorisms and proverbs which were, no doubt, widely known. In spite of this purely epigraphic decoration no example is known which contains the signature of a potter, or a date. On this dish, the inscription reads: al-taddītī qa'il al-'amal ya'nnin isn al-nādām k... 'Deliberation before action protects you from regret...

The superfluous letter 'k' is used as a space-filler at the end of the inscription.

Published: Ebnīn (1967, p. 376); Berlin-Dahlem (1971a, p. 524, no. 350)

280 Dish decorated with white and dark brown slips under a transparent glaze
Diameter 36 cm, height 11 cm
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem, no. 128/60
East Persia or Transoxiana, 10th century

This piece exemplifies the Eastern Persian epigraphic ware at its most restrained and elegant. The inscription has little point and the distortion of the letters consists only of the elongation of certain strokes.