The decoration on this tile is known as lapislazuli, a technique which emerged in the second half of the 13th century. Lapislazuli is derived from the Persian word for lapis lazuli, the semi-precious stone. The whole tile was coated with a cobalt-blue glaze over which the decoration was painted in red, white and gold. The tile features a raised inscription taken from the Qur'an which reads:

thou Allah forgive thee...
The decoration on this tile is known as Isfanli, a technique which emerged in the second half of the 13th century. Isfanli is derived from the Persian word for lapis lazuli, the semi-precious stone. The whole tile was covered with a cobalt-blue glaze over which the decoration was painted in red, white, and gold. The tile features a raised inscription taken from the Qur'an which reads:

that Allah forgive thee ...
Calligraphy on Domestic Artefacts

The relationship between artisans and technicians in the Islamic lands is of considerable historical and contemporary interest. Cooperation between a calligrapher, a potter and a metalworker, for example, was essentially practical with obvious social and economic benefits. This synergy has maintained its hold, with varying degrees of persistence, in every field of Islamic art until the present-day.

The ancient communities of artisans and technicians were no different from professional associations of today. The potter and the metalworker were no different from the calligrapher in some respects. Each craftsman had his own suppliers of good material – clay, metal, glass etc. and his own technical needs and aesthetic priorities. In the modern-day world of Islamic art, Turkish calligraphers most aptly illustrate the interdependence of craftsmen upon each other’s skills. In Turkey, a master masterer shows his latest and most successful work to his favorite calligrapher or calligraphers before showing it to anyone else. The calligrapher in his turn informs his favorite masterer of his latest work and decorative needs. The same applies with the paper expert, the reed-pen merchant and most importantly the ink-maker.

Discovering Meanings

Sometimes, scholars of Islamic calligraphy find it difficult to decipher the words on pottery, metalwork, textiles etc. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the artisans at times may have been illiterate technicians who had no understanding of the words they were transferring. Secondly, the tools required to transfer writing from paper to another material, such as metal or pottery, were very different from the calligrapher’s reed pen, the original instrument of Islamic calligraphy. Chinese art demonstrates the benefits of the use of the same equipment when rendering calligraphy on different surfaces. In China, the only tool employed on both paper and pottery is the brush. The harmony between calligraphy and painting in Chinese art lies in the artist’s knowledge of brushwork, whose boundaries are almost unlimited.

The Beauty of the Whole

When examining calligraphy on objects other than paper it is important to remember the demands of aesthetics. Artisans obviously wanted calligraphy to enhance rather than to dominate their work. Almost all the masterpieces of pottery with calligraphic inscriptions retain a balance between the formal beauty of the object, its shape and colour, and that of the size and even the type of script that is rendered on the surface.
APHY ON DOMESTIC ARTEFACTS

The relationship between artisans and technicians in the Islamic lands is of considerable historical and contemporary interest. Cooperation between a calligrapher, a potter and a metalworker, for example, was essentially practical with obvious social and economic benefits. This synergy has maintained its hold, with varying degrees of persistence, in every field of Islamic art until the present day.

The ancient communities of artisans and technicians were no different from professional associations of today. The potter and the metalworker were no different from the calligrapher in some respects. Each craftsman had his own suppliers of good material – clay, metal, glazes etc. and his own technical needs and aesthetic priorities. In the modern-day world of Islamic art Turkish calligraphers must apply illustrate the interdependence of craftsmen upon each other's skills. In Turkey, a master masker shows his latest and most successful work to his favourite calligrapher or calligraphers before showing it to anyone else. The calligrapher in turn informs his favourite masker of his latest work and decorative needs. The same applies with the paper expert, the reed-pen merchant and most importantly the ink-maker.

DISCOVERING MEANINGS

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THE BEAUTY OF THE WHOLE

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A SELF-PAINTED BOWL WITH QUR'ANIC INSCRIPTIONS

SHARQIYAH, CENTRAL ASIA

DATED AH 900/CE 1592

11½ (H) x 36 (B) cm

KRUNG-THAILAND

This bowl successfully combines a long and simple Kufic-Abbasid inscription in red and manganese decorated fields and is the only known example of this type of pottery (polychrome-on-white ware) which is dated. The inscription, which makes two circuits around the cavity (internal wall of the bowl), is taken from the Qur'an (Surah al-Qalam, LVIII, verses 51 to 52). The date can be seen in the centre on the top, and reads ‘three hundred’. But there is another reason why this piece is unique – the design: why was it painted in polychrome and not only in manganese, like contemporary epigraphic vessels? Perhaps the artist intended to emphasize his script, and also wanted to imitate what he saw around him in contemporary architecture. In architecture, Kufic-Abbasid inscriptions were executed in relief against fine red brickwork. It is possible that the red dotted fields, speckled with tiny black and red four-lobed patterns, recalls decorative brick patterns (an excellent example of which is the Samanid mausoleum in Bukhara, which was built just a few years before this vessel was made). The artist may have tried to make his work more impressive to emphasize the fact that it was made at the end of the 3rd century of the Muslim era.
A SMALL SLIP-PAINTED BOWL

NURABAD, IRAN
10th century
7 (0) x 9 (0) cm
Kenji-Arai

The method of decorating pottery with slip (semi-fluid clay which can be stained with various colours with the introduction of mineral pigments), developed at some point in the 11th century in eastern Iran. The slip is used on this bowl, black slip laid on to an ivory slip ground, is generally called black-on-white ware. The band of script running around the cavetto says:

... livelihood is distributed by [God among people] and greed ... 

The single line of script across the base reads:

May he do that which is praiseworthy.

SLIP-PAINTED WARE
WITH TWO LARGE ROUNDELS

NURABAD, IRAN
10th century
8.5 (0) x 23 (0) cm
Kenji-Arai

Various coloured slips were used by the eastern Iranian potters to decorate bowls and this one has been painted with manganese and tomato red slip. Such slip-painted bowls can be classified generally as polychrome-on-white ware (see page 95). There are two large roundels in the cavetto, containing four semi-palmettes and an oval-shaped element in the centre. On either side there are two words, written in simple Kufic-Islamic script in a mirror style (the text can be read from either the right or the left) which reads al-wass, meaning 'good fortune'.
A SMALL SLIP-PAINTED BOWL

NISHAPUR, IRAN
10th century
7.8 (0) x 9.8 (0) cm
Kore-Antons

The method of decorating pottery with slip (semi-fluid clay which can be stained to various colours with the introduction of mineral pigments), developed at some point in the 10th century in eastern Iran. The way slip is used on this bowl, black slip laid on to an ivory slip ground, is generally called black-on-white ware. The band of script running around the cavetto says:

... livelihood is distributed by (God among people) and great...

The single line of script across the base reads:

May he do that which is praiseworthy.

SLIP-PAINTED WARE
WITH TWO LARGE ROUNDELS

NISHAPUR, IRAN
10th century
8.5 (0) x 23 (1) cm
Kore-Antons

Various coloured slips were used by the eastern Iranian potters to decorate bowls and this one has been painted with manganese and tomato red slip. Such slip-painted bowls can be classed generally as polychrome-on-white ware (also page 99). There are two large roundels in the cavetto, containing four semi-palmettes and an oval-shaped pattern in the centre. On either side there are two words, written in simple Kufic-Abbasid script in an inrunner style (the text can be read from either the right or the left) which reads al-yarum, meaning 'good fortune'.

A LARGE SLIP-PAINTED BOWL

NISHAPUR, IRAN
10th century
10 (0) x 34 (1) cm
Kore-Antons

This bowl carries a proverb inscribed in an ornate Kufic-Abbasid script where the vertical shafts of the letters tie themselves into knots or swell to become split palmettes. The script does not display any diacritical marks and so is very difficult to read. The four dots mark the beginning and end of the proverb and it reads:

He who believes in recompense is generous to the opposite.
A SLIP-PAINTED JUG FEATURING A COLOURED SLIP GROUND

NISBUPUR, IRAN
11th century
15.5 (H) x 10 (D) cm
Arabic-Iranian

Potters were not limited to using a white slip ground, they could coat the vessel with other coloured slips. This jug carries a manganese ground slip with decorations in white.

The jug displays two variations of the Kufic-Abbasid script. There is a pseudo-Kufic-Abbasid band running around the body. A second pseudo-epigraphic band can be found on the lower part of the neck, but it may be read as the repeated word of al-barakah, meaning 'blessing'. On the rim there is a floral scroll, while the handle is decorated with dots and leaves.
A Slip-Painted Jug Featuring a Coloured Slip Ground

Nishapur, Iran
10th century
15.5 (H) x 10 (D) cm
Kenji Amako

others were not limited to using a white slip ground, they could coat the vessel with other coloured slips. This jug carries a manganese ground slip with decorations in white.

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SLIP-PAINTED YELLOW-STAINING
BLACK WARE

Nishapur, Iran
10th century
12.6 (H) x 34 (D) cm
Kenji Amako

This bowl is an example of yellow-staining black ware. This ware is similar to the black-on-white ware on page 96 (top), the only difference being the addition of a chrome compound to a certain amount of black slip before application to the bowl's surface. Once fired, the areas of augmented black slip were rendered yellow.

There are two inscriptions in the cavetto: one facing inward, the other outward. There is an inscription across the base, which can be read as al-hurrakah, meaning 'blessing'.
A Fatimid Lustre Bowl

Egypt
Late 10th Century
5.5 (H) x 24 (D) cm
Kunst-Akademie

Lustre technique is one of the most important inventions of the Islamic potters. A compound of sulphur, silver and copper oxides was found to produce a thin metallic film when fired which gave vessels a shiny surface imitative of precious metals. This technique was first used by potters of 9th-century Iraq and was probably developed from the lustre technique used on glass by Egyptian artisans. Towards the end of the 10th century the technique was found in Egypt, probably introduced by migrant potters from Iraq.

The decoration on this bowl is painted in golden-yellowish lustre. In the centre there is a large animal, probably a lion, whose tail ends in a leaf. Beneath the lion there is an almond-shaped pattern which was popular on early lustre bowls from Iraq. The rest of the central area is dotted. The rim carries a foliated (some letters end in leaf shapes) Kufic-Abbasid inscription which may be read as:

blessing to the owner (twice)

then perhaps:

cour [in God] is sufficient

and:

ask [from God and it] will be given
A Fatimid Lustre Bowl

Egypt
Late 10th century
5.5 (H) x 24 (D) cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum

One of the most important inventions of the Islamic potter. A compound of sulphur, silver and copper oxides was vitrified when fired which gave vessels a shiny surface imitative of precious metals. This technique was first used by a glassblower and then by the lustre technique used on glass by Egyptian artisans. Towards the end of the 10th century the technique was found in Egypt, probably introduced by migrants from Iraq.

The bowl is painted in golden-yellow lustre. In the centre there is a large animal, probably a lion, the lion there is an almond-shaped pattern which was popular on early lustre bowls from Iraq. The rest of the rim carries a foliated (some letters end in leaf shapes) Kufic-Abbasid inscription which may be read as:

blessing to the owner (twice)

then perhaps:

trust [in God] is sufficient

and:

ask [from God and it] will be given

A Large Kashan Lustreware Jug

Kashan, Iran
15th century
35 (H) x 24 (D) cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum

In the 12th century Islamic potters made an important discovery—a material known as fritware. Fritware was a clay substitute made from ground quartz and clay. The chief attributes of fritware are its malleability and pure white appearance.

This fritware jar has a remarkable shining golden-yellow lustre decoration. The decoration of the body is divided into two halves by a narrow, curving epigraphic band. Above, on the upper part of the body there is a wide band with birds (typical of Kashan), arranged in two rows. The birds are reserved in white over the golden-yellow lustre ground with some details highlighted in lustre. Below the curving band there is a pseudo Kufic-Abbasid inscription reserved in white over the lustre ground. This is followed by a series of floral designs based on the split-palmette motif and separated by a version of the 'chain' motif. The shoulder carries a second curvilinear inscription and a band of running animals.

Three further epigraphic bands, two of them in Kufic-Abbasid script, decorate the neck with a wider zone of floral patterns.
**A Sultanabad Bowl**

**Iran, Ilkhanid Period**

Late 13th–early 14th centuries

9.75 (H) x 21.5 (D) cm

_Kamyar Amirabadi and Djermi_

Pottery of the Ilkhanid period is sometimes named after the city of Sultanabad in western Iran. This fine ware bowl features underglaze blue and black decorations. At the base there is a round blue medallion with black painted floral scrolls. It is surrounded by a black band with a pseudo-epigraphic inscription in a curvilinear style carved out with a sharp tool. The cavetto carries four elongated cartouches (oval decorative devices often filled with inscriptions) filled with pseudo Kufic-Ahmad characters in blue on a scroll ground.

**A Silhouette-Ware Plate**

**Iran**

12th century

6.5 (H) x 24.5 (D) cm

_Kamyar Amirabadi and Djermi_

This plate is an example of what is known as silhouette ware. The plate was covered in a coating of black slip and then the decoration was carved out of the slip with a sharp tool. The white body of the plate would be obvious after this initial stage. After the immersion of the entire plate in a transparent blue glaze, followed by firing, the once-white areas were filled with blue glaze. The everted sloping rim is decorated with a pseudo Kufic-Ahmad inscription over a scroll ground. This plate is interesting as it also has traces of underglaze painting—notice the black band around the rim.
A SULAYMANIH BOWL

Iran, Luristan Period
Late 13th-early 14th centuries
9.15 (0) x 21.5 (0) cm
KNOCKED AND CRUSHED

esteemed after the city of Sultanabad in western Iran. This fritware bowl features underglazed blue and black round blue medallions with black painted floral scrolls. It is surrounded by a black band with a pseudo-epigraphic design with a sharp tool. The cavetto carries four elongated cartouches (oval decorative devices often filled with inscriptions) filled with pseudo Kufic-Abbasid characters in blue on a scroll ground.

A SILHOUETTE-WARE PLATE

Iran
12th century
6.5 (0) x 22.5 (0) cm
KNOCKED AND CRUSHED

in silhouette ware. The plate was covered in a coating of black slip and then the decoration was carved out of the coating which would be obvious after this initial stage. After the immersion of the entire plate in a transparent blue lead glaze were filled with blue glaze. The everted sloping rim is decorated with a pseudo Kufic-Abbasid inscription plate is interesting as it also has traces of underglaze painting - notice the black band around the rim.

A CHINESE PORCELAIN DISH

China
Late 15th or early 16th centuries
6 (0) x 38 (0) cm
REPAIRED TO RIM

The inscription encircling the rim is from Sura al-Ma'idah (5), a short surah which sums up the unity of Allah. As with the metal vessels on page 111, this dish was probably made by the local Chinese community for their own use. The signature on the reverse side of the plate is that of the artist, al-Hajj Ali al-Fath.
A SMALL TRIPOD

Iron, Zhou Dynasty
15th century
9.5 (H) x 10 (D) cm

Korean Annals

This is a small tripod bowl with a lid. It is made of cast brass and carries engraved decoration. The rounded body rests on three conical feet and the bowl has a vertical rim to accommodate the lid. The dome-shaped lid is topped by the figure of a sitting lion. The shape of the bowl and some of the decorative motifs, such as the cloud formations, betray Chinese influence.

The upper part of the body carries a Kufic-Ahmad inscription which may be read as:

Glory, honour, well being and good fortune

The lid also carries a decorative band showing a Kufic-Ahmad inscription, identical to that on the body.
A SMALL TRIPOD

Iron, Timurid period
15th century
9.5 (H) x 10 (D) cm
Khorasan-Khurasan

small tripod bowl with a lid. It is made of cast brass and carries engraved decoration.
body rests on three conical feet and the bowl has a vertical rim to accommodate the lid.
upturned lid is topped by the figure of a sitting lion. The shape of the bowl and some of the
decorative motifs, such as the cloud formations, betray Chinese influence.

upper part of the body carries a Kufic-Arabic inscription which may be read as:

glory, honour, well being and good fortune

The lid also carries a decorative band showing a Kufic-Arabic inscription, identical to that on the body.

A FATIMID BRONZE LION

Kufic, Fatimid period
11th-12th centuries
22 (H) x 15 (L) cm
Kufic-Arabic

This standing lion is made of cast brass with engraved and openwork decoration. This object is thought to be an
incense burner – the lion’s head opens up and enables the owner to fill the body with burning charcoal and incense while the openwork decorations on the
body allow the smoke to escape, perfuming the room. The tail ends in a three-lobed acroterion.
The lion carries an engraved Kufic-Arabic inscription around the neck which has become somewhat indistinct, it reads:

glory, honour, well being and good fortune
A BUCKET WITH ENGRAVED DECORATION

KURDISTAN, IRAQ
LATE 12TH-EARLY 13TH CENTURIES
21 (H) x 18 (D) CM
MARKED WITH KURDISH-ARABIC

A benedictory epigraphic band runs below the rim and the following words can be deciphered:

glory, prosperity, wealth, happiness, well being, safety, tranquility, good health, blessing, compassion, comfort and long life in the owner.

The pictorial elements of the decoration reinforce the calligraphic message written in kufi with scenes showing a dancer, a musician playing on an 'ud, another musician playing the harp and someone (probably a nobleman) sitting in a cross-legged position holding a cup in his right hand, with a plate of fruit on his right. The cartouches are filled with floral scrolls. Above each cartouche is a long and narrow band showing stars facing each other over starfillwork. A narrow epigraphic band, written in Kufic-Ahmadawi script, runs around the lower part of the body. A second epigraphic band, written in Kufic-Ahmadawi script, decorates the flat lip.

It is arranged in four elongated cartouches separated by small roundels with floral designs in-between. A series of lotus petals decorate the footring.
A BUCKET WITH ENGRAVED DECORATION

Khorasan, Iran
Late 12th-early 13th centuries
21 (H) x 18 (D) cm
Inscribed with Kufic-Arabic

A benedictory epigraphic band runs below the rim and the following words can be deciphered:

glory, prosperity, wealth, happiness, well being, safety, thanks, existence, good health, blessing, compassion, comfort and long life to the owner.

The pictorial elements of the decoration reinforce the calligraphic message written in Kufic with scenes showing a dancer, a musician playing on an oboe, another musician playing the horn and someone (possibly a nobleman) sitting in a cross-legged position holding a cup in his right hand, with a platter of fruit on his left. The cartouches are filled with floral scrollwork. Above each cartouche is a long and narrow band showing laurels facing each other over scrollwork. A narrow epigraphic band, written in Kufic-Arabic script, runs around the lower part of the body. A second epigraphic band, written in Kufic-Arabic script, decorates the flat lip.

It is arranged in four elongated cartouches separated by small roundels with floral designs in-between. A series of lotus petals decorates the looping.

AN INLAID INKWELL

Khorasan, Iran
Late 12th century
11 (H) x 9 (D) cm
Kufic-Arabic and Persian

This style of inkwell was popular during the late 12th and early 13th centuries in Iran. The inkwell is made of cast brass with engraved silver and copper inlaid decoration. Originally the body had three hinges and the lid had three hooks, which are now missing. The decoration of the body is divided into three horizontal sections: the upper one carries an epigraphic band written in Kufic inlaid with silver, repeating three times the phrase:

glory and prosperity . . . to the owner.

The central band is decorated with silver inlaid scrollwork and the lower one has a Kufic-Arabic inscription which reads:

good fortune and blessing . . . to the owner.

A PORTABLE PEN CASE

Khorasan, Iran
Late 12th century
2.5 (H) x 26.4 (L) x 3.5 (W) cm
Inlaid

This portable pen case has a wedge-shaped body and is made of a hammered brass sheet which has been engraved and decorated with inlaid copper and silver. At the head of the pen case is a small hook and looped ring, from which the case could be attached to a belt. The top side of the case has two openings, one with a lid in the shape of a door. Below this there are four roundels, three of which depict seated scribes working on documents. The back of the case carries an elaborate arabesque design, while the sides are decorated with a silver inlaid benedictory inscription in Kufic.