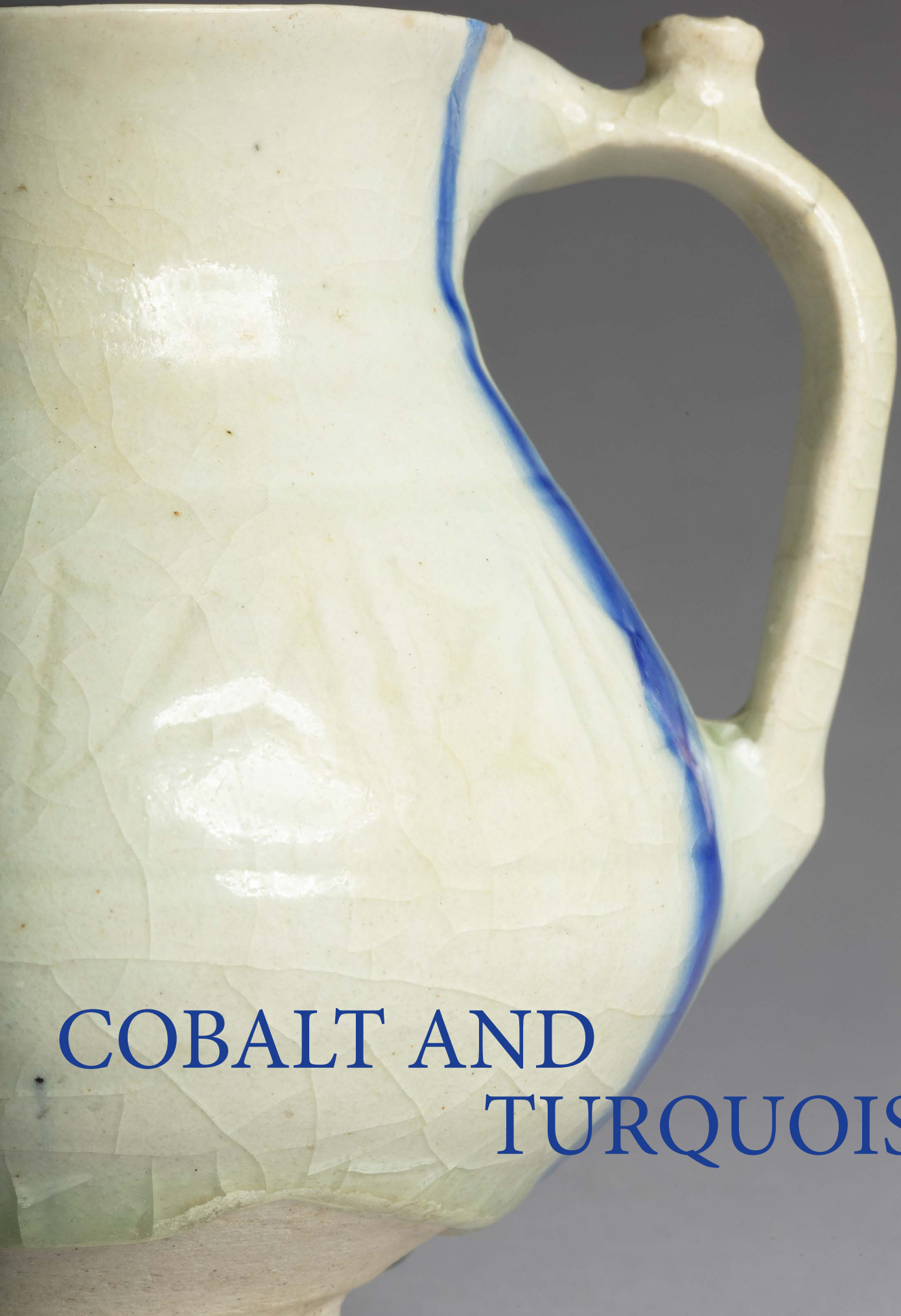


SAM FOGG



COBALT AND
TURQUOISE

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‘Cobalt and Turquoise’ is a focus exhibition exploring the use of blue pigments and glazes in the ceramics workshops of Kashan during the period between c. 1150-1350. The twelve objects presented here reflect the diverse production of medieval Iranian pottery workshops and their experimentation with glaze and underglaze-painting combinations to decorate fine stone-paste vessels.

Arabic sources attest to the fact that colour and material held great meaning in medieval Islamic aesthetics. The colours used to decorate objects held aesthetic, formal, and iconographic significance. The colour ‘blue’ as a referent for water makes it an obvious choice for the decoration of vessels designed to hold and pour liquids, but its expansive symbolic potential means that ‘blue’ also functions a symbol for the watery spheres of the heavens and the earth.

The use of luscious blue glazes and pigments is not only of aesthetic interest, but also marks the astonishing technical achievements of medieval Persian potters, who sourced and manipulated minerals and other natural materials to create ceramic bodies, pigments, and glazes. Emerging from the alchemical environment of the kiln, the manipulated elements combined to form and decorate a diverse range of ceramics with vibrant colour schemes. The fine stone-paste ceramic wares produced at Kashan and other regional centres were desirable commodities across the medieval Islamic world and beyond, and remain so day.

The exhibition opens with a fine ‘silhouette-ware’ jug (no. 1) painted with a thick black engobe slip under a vibrant turquoise glaze. This early example of an underglaze slip-painted ware marks an important transitional moment in the history of Iranian ceramic production, from clay-slip painting to the new underglaze painting style. The majority of the exhibition focusses on a group of underglaze-painted pots and jugs made in Kashan at the time when the workshops were at their peak between c. 1180-1220.

A water jug decorated with pigment-laden strokes of cobalt blue and incised decoration (no. 3) and a ‘grain-de-riz’ bowl with pierced and glaze-covered walls (no. 4) illustrate the Kashan potters’ attempts to transpose the translucence and emulate the decorative effects of Song Dynasty porcelain using Iranian materials and forms. Other pieces, like a rare enameled, overglaze-painted ‘*minā`i*’ dish (no. 2), a pierced bowl with ‘water-weed’ design undulating beneath a vivid, aqueous surface of transparent turquoise glaze (no. 5), and a biconical bowl with Persian poetic inscriptions (no. 7) reflect the technical and aesthetic achievements unique to the Kashan potters.

Diana Luber

1

A 'SILHOUETTE-WARE' JUG WITH SCROLLING PALMETTES

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1150-1200

13.4 cm diameter x 13 cm height; 'Silhouette'-ware stone-paste jug with globular body rising from a low foot, with straight neck and single handle connecting the rim with the shoulder; painted in black clay slip, carved away, under a transparent turquoise glaze. Repaired clean breaks to handle and body, chipping around the rim.

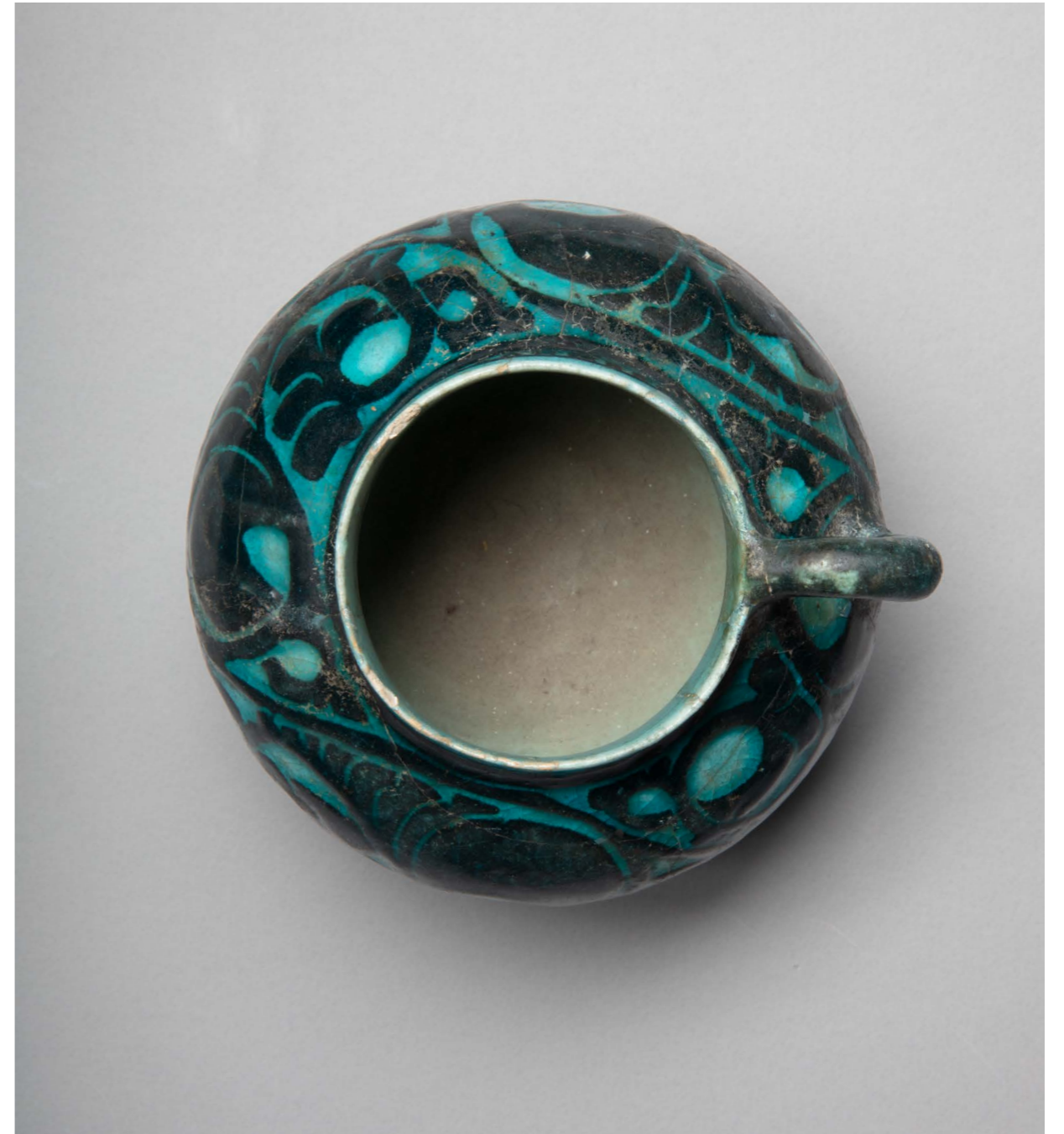
Provenance
Mansour Gallery, early 1970s
Private European Collection, early 1970s, until 2014



The globular body of this elegant 'silhouette-ware' jug balloons out from a low, unglazed foot, before terminating in a short, straight neck with a single handle.

The ornament of the body is dominated by a design of fleshy, scrolling half-palmettes rendered in relief in a thick black slip. The details of the design were applied directly to the stone-paste body of the vessel with a thick black engobe slip and then carved away and covered with a transparent turquoise glaze, resulting in the silhouette-like effect for which this early type of underglaze-painted vessel is known. 'Silhouette-ware' ceramics were the earliest underglaze-painted wares to be produced at Kashan and other ceramic centres in twelfth century Iran. These wares represent both a rupture and continuity with earlier Iranian ceramics production, because they combine the use of clay-based slips used in ancient Iranian pottery decoration with the new underglaze painted style that emerged in the twelfth century.

The design of the jug is carefully attuned to the proportions of the body of the vessel. The lower half of the jug is decorated with broad, repeating vertical bands of pigment, which narrow as they approach the foot of the vessel. Short, squarish vertical strokes also decorate the straight neck of the vessel. The geometric quality of the upper and lower registers serves to emphasize the fleshy, curvilinear forms of the scrolling palmettes that sprawl across the proud, curving chest of the vessel. Globules of turquoise glaze fired and vitrified in the kiln drip down towards the foot, but do not cover it entirely, leaving the bare stone-paste body of the vessel just visible and offering an enticing insight into the production process. A closely related jug probably made in the same workshop is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 1970.36); while another similar jug with thick vertical stripes and an incised inscription is now in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (see Arthur Lane, 1947, pl. 51B).





2

A MINA'I DISH WITH FLORAL INTERLACE OVER TURQUOISE GLAZE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1180-1200

20.8 cm diameter x 4 cm height; polychrome overglaze painted 'minā'ī' ware dish of shallow, slightly everted form on low foot, with turquoise base glaze over white stone-paste body; overglaze-painted with black, white, blue and red enameled pigments in successive firings. In excellent condition, with repaired breaks.

Provenance

Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



A fine example of *minā`i* ware, this enameled pottery dish features interlacing decoration in the form of a flowering rose surrounded by an Arabic inscription.

Minā`i ceramics, also known as 'haft-rang' or 'seven-colored' wares, are well-known for the brief period of their production c. 1175-1220 and for the complexity of the production process. Polychrome enameled ceramics made in the *minā`i* style required multiple firings to allow for the successive application and adhesion of glazes, glaze colorants, and overglaze pigments in the kiln. The time-intensive process for *minā`i* wares allowed the potters to achieve a vibrant, multi-colored palette whilst maintaining a relatively high level of control over the movement of the pigments on the ceramic body. The technique thus allowed for a wider cadre of designs and more varied colour palette than lustre-painted or underglaze-painted ceramics, which explains why *minā`i* wares often feature some of the most complex compositions to appear on twelfth and thirteenth century Iranian ceramics.

The decoration of this dish consists of an intricate, interlacing arabesque design that forms a large rose motif, rendered in red, blue, black and white pigments enamelled over a rare turquoise base-glaze. A black epigraphic band containing Arabic benedictions applied in white pigment encircles the central design. The pigments were adhered to the base glaze in successive application and firing stages, starting with the black pigments and continuing with the blue, white and finally the red portions of the design. This vessel falls into the 'style 4' category of *minā`i* wares with arabesque designs in vitrified pigments over a turquoise base glaze (see R. McClary, 2024, pp. 20-22). Related examples of 'style 4' *minā`i* wares include a bowl with interlace motifs in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (inv. 31.737), and two sherds in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv. 680-1900 & C.943.1921).





والله اعلم بالصواب

3

A JUG WITH DASHES OF COBALT AND INCISED DECORATION

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

12.2 cm diameter x 12.3 cm height; stone-paste jug rising from a short, splayed unglazed foot, with a globular body narrowing to a wide, slightly flaring lip, with single handle and thumb-stop connecting the rim to the widest point of the vessel; incised pseudo-Kufic inscriptions and cobalt painted onto the vessel of the body beneath a transparent glaze. Intact jug in excellent condition.

Provenance

Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



The evocative dashes of bright blue cobalt pigment that decorate the incised white body of this intact jug hint at its function as a vessel designed for holding and pouring water. Rising from a short, angled foot, the globular body of the jug balloons outward to its widest point, where an epigraphic band of decorative, incised script encircles the body. The vessel narrows at the shoulder and then flares out again at the rimless lip, which is connected to the widest part of the body by a simple handle with thumb-stop. Three quickly applied dashes of cobalt flow down the vertical axis of the body of the vessel from the rim, highlighting its undulating form and illuminating the incised decoration at its waist. Three strokes of cobalt pigment also decorate the interior of the vessel. The simple but powerful cobalt decoration is captured under a transparent glaze which stops just short of the conjunction of the body with its splayed foot, suggesting that it was submerged in the glaze while an artisan at the workshop held it upside down by its foot.

Incised blue-and-white stone-paste wares like this one were probably produced in emulation of the hard, white-bodied, translucent quality of Song Dynasty (960-1279) porcelain export wares that were appearing on the Islamic market at the time. Contemporary porcelain from twelfth and thirteenth century China often features subtle and nearly invisible incised decoration like that on this jug, as seen on a dish in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv. C.109-1039). However, the Kashan potters took great strides in developing a distinctive aesthetic and experimented with new forms that diverge from Chinese porcelain typologies. A closely related Persian jug of nearly identical form is now held in the David Collection, Copenhagen (inv. 40/1966). The form of the jug is typical of the Kashan production of the first two decades of the thirteenth century. Varieties of the form also appear in contemporary *minā'i* and lustre-painted wares, such as a related jug in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 17.120.23), as well as in earlier Iranian earthenware typologies of the ninth and tenth centuries. The clean lines and astonishingly intact, thin walls of the vessel mark it out as a superior example of its type.





4

A BOWL WITH 'GRAIN DE RIZ'-STYLE OPENWORK DECORATION AND COBALT RIM

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1180-1220

18.8 cm diameter x 9.3 cm height; stone-paste bowl with rounded form and vertical walls, resting on a slightly splayed pedestal foot, with pierced openwork decoration to the rim under a transparent glaze, the lip of the bowl and a pair of birds in the well painted under the glaze with blue cobalt pigment, with restored breaks visible throughout the body of the vessel.

Provenance

Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



The elegant 'grain de riz' style of pierced openwork decoration that encircles the rim of this thin bowl with high walls takes the form of a continuous lattice.

The layer of transparent glaze over the openwork lattice creates a translucent effect, allowing light to pass through the walls of the vessel. The subtle pierced work around the rim is complemented by the modest application of blue cobalt to the rim of the vessel under the same thin layer of transparent glaze. Aside from these elements, the vessel is undecorated save for a pair of addorsed birds painted in cobalt at the centre of the interior. The thoughtful composition and proportions of this blue-and-white bowl are amplified by the interplay of pigment and light with the thinness of the body of the vessel and the perforations around the rim.

The use of stone-paste ceramic technology developed in Iran in the second half of the twelfth century allowed potters working in the Kashan workshops to experiment with new forms and decorative techniques. For example, the pierced and glazed openwork detailing illustrated here allows light to penetrate through the wall of the vessel, emphasizing the thinness of the walls of the vessel and introducing a numinous, translucent quality to the object. The moulded, incised and perforated ceramics made at Kashan during the period c. 1150-1220 emulate the hard white bodies and translucence of Chinese porcelain made during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The 'blue-and-white' style of decoration that appears on this bowl was also popular both in Song dynasty China and the medieval Islamic world. However, it is impossible to pinpoint an origin for blue-and-white wares in either context, given the intense exchange and simultaneous contact between the two centres of fine ceramics production.

Perforated ceramic forms of this type may also be related to a group of contemporary pierced metalwork vessels. The form and decoration of our bowl can be compared to examples held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 12.33.1) and the Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. MAO 303).





5

A BOWL WITH 'WATER-WEED' DESIGN AND PERFORATED FRIEZE UNDER TURQUOISE GLAZE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

20.3 cm diameter x 10.2 cm height; truncated conical stone-paste bowl on a slightly splayed foot, underglaze-painted in black with 'water-weed' design beneath a transparent turquoise glaze, the band near the rim with pierced openwork filled with glaze. In excellent condition with repaired breaks and some abrasion to the glaze in the well of the vessel, iridescence to the interior and exterior.

Provenance

Harvey B. Plotnick Collection, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A, 1990s-2000s, dispersed in 2013

Published & Exhibited

O. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory, Medieval Islamic Ceramics From The Harvey B. Plotnik Collection*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007, p. 106, no.64.



This bowl is a masterpiece from the Kashan workshops that combines a distinctive under-glaze painted 'water-weed' design with incised stone-paste decoration under a luscious, transparent turquoise glaze. Seaweed-like, vegetal fronds rendered in a black underglaze pigment spread out across the curving well of the bowl. The glossy black paint gives the impression of sea life gently undulating beneath the aqueous, shimmering surface of the turquoise glaze. The decoration is enhanced by a perforated band covered with transparent turquoise glaze that encircles the rim of the vessel, and which allows light to move through and across the vertical wall of the vessel. The design of the vessel plays with materials, light and translucence, and evokes the wonder of an underwater world miraculously formed out of clay.

As discussed above, incised and perforated designs on Kashan ceramics were probably first developed to imitate the translucence of contemporary Chinese porcelain (nos. 3-4). In this case, however, the vivid turquoise glaze used to seal the fluid underglaze decoration of the pot illustrates the distinctive flair for experimental design that became the leitmotif of the Kashan potters. The workshops experimented with a variety of form, designs pigment, and glaze combinations, and were seemingly unbound by convention. This shimmering, lively bowl reflects the combination of a number of the techniques developed at Kashan together in one object. A closely related bowl with 'water-weed' design under a turquoise glaze is now held in the David Collection, Copenhagen (inv. Isl 27).





6

A BOWL WITH RADIATING COBALT STRIPES

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

20.2 cm diameter x 10.6 cm height; biconical stone-paste bowl rising from a short foot, the interior and exterior painted with tin-oxide slip and cobalt blue radial decoration, fired under a transparent glaze, with repaired breaks.

Provenance
Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



The radiating cobalt blue stripes of this stone-paste bowl contrast with its bright white ground beneath a glossy transparent glaze. The stripes radiate from the centre points of both the interior and exterior of the vessel and widen as they climb the vertical walls and approach the thin rim of the bowl. The fine, curving body of the bowl is enhanced by the rich blue strokes of pigment that trace across its curvilinear form. The simple but powerful decoration also emphasizes the high, vertical walls of the bowl. The ability to form thin, high walls like this reflects a subtle technical accomplishment made possible with the invention of a durable stone-paste ceramic body in twelfth century Iran. Raised on a short, unglazed foot, this simple vessel has a timeless elegance that emphasizes the union of geometry with form.

Kashan ceramics of this period are notable for their fine stone-paste bodies, a flexible ceramic fabric made of ground glass, quartz, and clay, which allowed potters to make stronger and thinner vessels in a variety of more complex and daring forms. It also allowed them to imitate the hard, white quality of Chinese porcelain without access to kaolin clay. The use of a flexible stone-paste body here, combined with the style of underglaze painting that emerged in the second half of the twelfth century, allowed the potters at Kashan to approximate the qualities of Chinese porcelain but also to forge a distinctive potting style. Related conical bowls with cobalt blue stripes are held in Oxford, The Ashmolean Museum (inv. EA1978.2341), and in Houston, the Museum of Fine Arts (inv. TR:430-2015).



Left: Photograph of cat. no. 6 in the Paris home of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, before 2013.



7

A BOWL WITH RADIAL DECORATION AND POETIC INSCRIPTIONS

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

19.1 cm diameter x 8.9 cm height; truncated biconical stone-paste bowl on a vertical foot, underglaze-painted in chromium black and cobalt blue oxides beneath a transparent glaze, with repaired breaks.

Provenance

Harvey B. Plotnick Collection, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., 1990s-2000s

Published & Exhibited

O. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory, Medieval Islamic Ceramics From The Harvey B. Plotnik Collection*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007, p. 99, no.57.



The classic biconical form of this stone-paste bowl is painted in cobalt blue and black pigments beneath a transparent glaze. The cobalt blue and chromium black oxide pigments contrast starkly with the bright, white body of the vessel. The radial decoration of the bowl surrounds a central interlacing knot motif with six lobes at the centre of the well of the vessel. The central motif is encircled by a band of scrolling vegetal motifs in black, against a blue ground, and a bold, brushy border of cobalt blue pigment that has bled slightly under the glaze. The cavetto of the bowl is dominated by 'pinwheel'-style decoration that alternates between epigraphic bands in black and black frond motifs rendered against a cobalt ground. Rich, blue strokes of cobalt pigment border each epigraphic band.

The white characters of the epigraphic inscriptions are carved away from the black pigment. The inscriptions, in both Arabic and Persian, contain poetic verses as well as classical benedictory formulae:

'A pearl shines at the time when there is a red rose, and a garden shines where there is a red rose, and the nightingale sings in the tongue of the red rose, wine shines in red vessels.'

'May the Creator of the World protect the owner of this [bowl] wherever he may be.'

The poetic inscription on this bowl emphasizes its possible use in the context of entertaining, perhaps in a festive, springtime setting. The mention of wine makes a subtle reference to the practical use of the bowl as a vessel for holding liquids, or perhaps for offering food to guests in a context where wine was being consumed. In any case, the combination of poetic inscriptions with bold cobalt and black pigments makes for an elegant and powerful composition.





8

A LARGE BOWL PAINTED IN BLACK AND COBALT UNDER TURQUOISE GLAZE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

30 cm diameter x 12.2 cm height; large, tapered biconical stone-paste bowl on a short unglazed foot, the stone-paste body painted with chromium black and cobalt blue oxides under a transparent turquoise glaze, with Persian inscriptions etched into the black radial segments; repaired breaks throughout the vessel and particularly around the rim with some restored inclusions and heightening, some iridescence and abrasion to the glaze in the well, all commensurate with age and preservation in an archaeological context.

Provenance

Private Collection, England, 1980s
ArtCurial, Paris, France, 2015



This substantial, tapered bowl is a magnificent example of underglaze-painted stone-paste wares from the period when the Kashan ceramics workshops were functioning at their peak in the first two decades of the thirteenth century. Underglaze painted wares, including 'pinwheel'-style wares like this one, were introduced into the Kashan repertoire at this time. Painted in chromium black and cobalt blue oxide pigments under a transparent turquoise glaze, the design of this vessel is defined by its radial decorative scheme, which splits the bowl into sixteen distinct sections. The larger, turquoise wedges of the design are each painted in black with vegetal ornament and divided into three subsections. Each segment is dominated by a large, scrolling 'fleur-de-lys'-style palmette motif in the cavetto; a floral head flanked by two bird forms in the intermediary section; and a single 'chequer-tree' motif in the triangular section at the very base of the bowl. Some of the elements of the design, like the 'chequer-tree' motif, are borrowed from contemporary lustre-painted ceramics, while other elements are unique to the underglaze-painted genre.

The placement of each element reflects the intelligence of the design, which proposes multiple angles of viewing to the viewer, and a change of perspective as the gaze moves from the triumphant palmettes of the cavetto pointing towards the rim of the bowl; and the diminutive 'chequer-trees' which point toward the centre-point of the bowl. Meanwhile, eight black, epigraphic bands inscribed with Persian poetry and outlined with thick strokes of cobalt alternate with the wider, turquoise and black wedges of the design. The inscriptions, which are scratched away from the black pigment, follow the tapering direction of the radial sections inward to the base of the bowl and lead the reader's eye toward the central well. The exterior of the bowl is punctuated with swirling 'water-weed' motifs that seem to bob and float upward through the aqueous turquoise glaze toward the rim of the vessel.

There is a level of ambiguity in the intelligent design of this bowl, with the vegetal motifs combining to suggest anthropomorphic or other figural forms.





9

A SMALL JUG WITH SWIRLING PALMETTES AND INSCRIPTIONS UNDER A TURQUOISE GLAZE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

17.5 cm diameter x 12.1 height; stone-paste cup raised on a short foot with squat, globular body and ring handle with thumb-stop rising from shoulder and connecting to slightly everted rim, painted in chromium black and blue cobalt oxides under a transparent turquoise glaze, the interior also with transparent turquoise glaze, the foot unglazed. One small repaired hole in the body, craquelure and some iridescence consistent with age.

Provenance

Harvey B. Plotnick Collection, Chicago, U.S.A., 1990s-2000s

Published & Exhibited

O. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory: Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection*, New Haven, 2007, p. 105, no. 63.



A wide, horizontal register of scrolling vegetal decoration dominates the decoration of this small yet perfectly formed vessel. The two primary bands of vegetal ornament are punctuated by thinner, incised black epigraphic bands. The upper register, with interlacing palmette design of alternating vegetal elements, is set between two epigraphic bands. One appears just below the widest point of the vessel and the other encircles the rim of the jug, which is painted with a thin application of cobalt. The cobalt application extends to the ring handle. A band of elegant 'water-weed' motifs fill the lower register of the design, and completes the exterior decoration of the vessel. The upward directional pull of the aqueous, 'water-weed'-style tendrils emphasizes the globular, curving form of the ceramic body. The harmonious interplay of ceramic form and painted decoration on this cup reflects the virtuosity and distinctive aesthetic sensibilities of the potters of thirteenth century Kashan.

The pleasing, globular form of this cup is the result of formal innovations in ceramics production in Iranian pottery workshops that followed the introduction of stone-paste bodies into ceramic production. The technical innovation of the stone-paste body allowed for new formal aesthetic possibilities and experimentation. Due to the remarkably thin, yet robust vessel walls formed from a combination of glass, quartz, and clay, stone-paste ceramics could be fired in a variety of different and complex forms while maintaining complex and dramatic shapes. The white colour of the frit body also allowed for innovations in glazing practices. Coloured pigments, often black and blue, could be applied directly to the ceramic body and then covered with a transparent glaze. In the case of this Kashan cup, black and cobalt oxides were painted directly on to the body of the vessel and then fired underneath a transparent turquoise glaze.





10

A JUG WITH SIMPLE BLACK DECORATION UNDER VIBRANT TURQUOISE GLAZE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1220

16.2 cm diameter x 16 cm height; stonepaste jug rising to a globular form from a short, slightly splayed foot, with straight neck and single handle, underglaze-painted in chromium black oxide beneath a transparent turquoise glaze. Intact jug in remarkable condition.

Provenance

Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



Despite its seemingly simple form, this jug would have been amongst the most challenging forms for the potters to produce in the ceramics workshops at Kashan, due to its large, curving globular body and upright, vertical neck. The near identical measurements of the widest portion of the body and the height of the vessel illustrate the attention the potters paid to the perfection of form and proportion. The simple, striped ornament on the otherwise plain body of this turquoise jug emphasizes the elegance of the form of the vessel and the extraordinary ability of the potters at Kashan to produce complex ceramic forms using stone-paste bodies. Three regularly placed pairs of thick, vertical dashes of black pigment starting at the ridged neck of this vessel separate and descend along its high shoulder, globular body, terminating just before the body meets the unglazed foot of the vessel. In one instance, the brushstrokes of pigment on the body of the jug meet at the ridged neck of the vessel, recalling the appearance of a ribbon or other textile that might have been knotted around the neck of the jug to hold a linen covering in place. This detail also lends the vessel an anthropomorphic quality, as if it were bedecked in ribbons or other adornments. Quick, regular daubs of black pigment also decorate the lip and single handle of the vessel which attaches the neck to the widest point of the body.

The vibrant turquoise glaze that dominates the decoration of this otherwise simple jug may reference the functional use of the object as a vessel for holding and pouring water. Colour plays an important symbological role in the arts of the medieval Islamic world, with ceramics and other objects of use often toying subtly with the overlaps between functionality and decoration, meaning and ambiguity.





11

A LARGE FRAGMENT OF A TURQUOISE-GLAZED FUNERARY STELE

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1200-1250

44 x 41 x 5 cm; large fragment of a stone-paste stele with monochrome turquoise glaze over moulded naskh inscription, projecting right and left borders. Some small chips to the surface and minor repaired breaks at corners.

Provenance

Collection of Hagop Kevorkian, Paris, France, before 1980, and possibly as early as 1905-1907
Private Collection, Geneva, Switzerland, 1980s
Collection of Jean Paul Crozier, Paris since the 1990s
On loan to the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1990s, from the aforementioned collection

Exhibited and Published

Céramiques Islamiques dan les Collections Genevoises, exh. cat., Geneva, 1981, p. 57, no. 89



This substantial fragment of a turquoise-glazed funerary stele is inscribed with a moulded, cursive naskh dedication to a fallen warrior. It was probably part of a larger glazed-tile composition for a tomb that was embedded in the interior of a mausoleum. During the thirteenth century, the use of turquoise glazed tiles and steles as tombstones and in mausolea became more common. Tiles of this type were probably produced at Kashan, where the workshops controlled the majority of ceramics production from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. The Seljuq (r. 1037–1194) tradition of decorative tile production was later taken up and expanded in the Kashan workshops of the Ilkhanid period (r. 1256–1335), which were dedicated almost exclusively to producing great numbers of tiles for use in the decoration of architectural interiors. This large turquoise tile is a rare and early example of Kashan stele production before the Mongol invasions of c. 1220–1221.

The vigorous calligraphic inscription that covers this tile is comparable to a group of monochrome turquoise-glazed, moulded calligraphic tile fragments also produced in Kashan in the thirteenth and later in the fourteenth century. A closely related, large glazed ceramic tombstone, cast in two pieces and covered with an opaque, turquoise glaze, is now in the David Collection, Copenhagen (inv. Isl 107). Another large square tile with moulded inscription is held in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv. 535-1900.), while an inscribed ceramic stele with turquoise glaze with a niche design is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 25.93). These examples of monochrome Kashan tiles feature moulded designs and evoke the architectural form of a mihrab niche. Though our tile does not feature any moulded designs as such, it must once formed part of a larger decorative scheme for a mausoleum.



12

A 'SULTANABAD' BOWL WITH FLYING PHOENIXES

IRAN. PROBABLY KASHAN
C. 1260 – 1320

16.5 cm diameter x 8.6 cm height; frustoconical, stone-paste bowl raised on a short foot, painted in blue cobalt and black chromium oxides under a transparent glaze that pools at the base of the interior vessel. Intact bowl in exceptional condition.

Provenance

Collection of Xavier Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, France, formed in the mid-1990s - early 2000s



Three phoenixes fly in tandem against a lush backdrop of blue foliage at the base of this mesmerizing Sultanabad-style bowl. The thick rim of the bowl creates a transfixing frame and viewing portal for the underglaze-painted decoration that covers the interior of the bowl beneath a glistening, thick layer of transparent glaze. The phoenix figures are rendered with a few quick lines of black paint in the so-called 'grisaille' style. The ground decoration for the birds is finished with a diluted layer of cobalt oxide pigment over a ground of leafy, branching fronds just sketched out in black. Decorated with white circles just barely daubed out of a thick layer of cobalt blue pigment, the rim must have been dipped into a vat of pigment before it was fired under a transparent glaze. Thick droplets of cobalt and transparent glaze remaining under the rim at the interior of the vessel offer material insight into the glazing and firing process.

The so-called 'Sultanabad' style refers to a group of underglaze painted wares of this type that were unearthed at the site of Sultanabad in the early 20th century. The wares, which were probably produced at Kashan, are evidence of the continuity of the production of fine underglaze-painted stone-paste ceramics in the years after the Mongol conquest in the region around the years 1220-1221. Despite the continued production of such wares, new tastes and stylistic tendencies are apparent in the decoration and form of this vessel. The vessel shape and iconography of this bowl, notably the inclusion of the phoenix, show the influence of Chinese designs, which played a key role in Ilkhanid artistic production into thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This bowl is closely related to a vessel with similar design and form, now in the National Museum, Kuwait (inv. LNS 317C).





Related Literature

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