

Wares from the Garrus district of Iran 9-10C



Top two dishes:

These are examples of Gabri ware – they come from the Garrus district which lies in the mountainous region of western Iran.

The decoration uses a scratching technique called Sgraffiato. This engraving technique imitates metalworking methods, but, like lustre ware, they made an acceptable substitute for the more costly metals.

Lower two dishes:

In 945, Baghdad was taken over by the Buyids, who reduced the Abbasid Caliph to a mere figurehead. The Buyids were Shi'ite but tolerant of other religions.

Another important technique not exclusive to Islamic potters, was slip decoration – carved ware. Like the two previous examples, these dishes come from the Garrus district. The slip-carving technique involves using coloured clay-pastes (in this case a white slip) to coat or decorate the earthenware vessel. Once the decoration has been carved or incised through the coat of clay-paste, the exposed areas of the body are painted with a dark or black pigment to highlight the contrast, after which the vessel is glazed and fired.

Pottery is incredibly important in archaeology as, unlike metals and glass, it can not be melted down and re-used - once broken, it is thrown away. Also it can not corrode or rot so it is generally the most common find on a particular archaeological site, and in some cases it may be the only artefact found at a site.

Figural imagery plays an important role in Islamic art. The Hadith (or oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) prohibit the representation of human beings and

animals in a religious context – but does not rule it out for secular art. Figural imagery is almost universally avoided in mosque decoration or in Qur'ans but figures frequently appear in secular art and architecture. A key aspect is that false images – targets of worship - are forbidden. Another is whether the artist is trying to imitate the work of God – if you try to create an accurate image in this life God may ask you to bring it to life in the next and if you don't, there is no paradise for you! So figurative representations don't tend to have a 3D effect or show shadows – the artist is alluding to the figure, not trying to create it.