

Mina'i wares 12-13C



These dishes were made in Kashan towards the end of Seljuk rule in Iran.

The development of Mina'i ware, which is Persian for 'enamelled' - alternatively known as 'heft-rengi' meaning seven coloured, enabled the use of a greater colour palette – seven colours in all – and allowed the picture to be applied with a brush for finer details. Gold leaf was also used. Mina'i ware was probably only made at Kashan.

The black, white, purple, brown, green and red enamels are made of a liquefied coloured glass paste which is applied over the glazed surface of the ceramic vessel to complete the details of its decoration. The blue was sometimes painted under and sometimes over the glaze. The decorated vessel would be subject to a further firing to fix the enamels onto the glaze permanently. These vessels were clearly not intended for day-to-day use as the decoration is inside the dish and is quite delicate. They were valued as decorative items of the household and would be passed down between generations. If the decoration fell off over time they would be repaired rather than renewed.

The same workshops produced both lustre and Mina'i wares. It is believed that two prominent families of potters living in Kashan in central Iran, were responsible for the majority of Iran's lustred and enamelled wares during the 12th and 13th century.

When the Mongols sacked Kashan, Mina'i ware production slowed down and then evolved to meet the taste of the new mongol rules – Lajvardina wares.

Bowl with rider on horse: (Left)

In the dish on the left, the knight on his horse may represent the hero Rustam riding on his horse Rakhsh, in an episode from the epic - Shahnameh (The Epic of Kings), written by Ferdowsi in the 10th Century. The story is about pre-Islamic Iran. In the story, Rustam is the champion of champions and is involved in numerous stories, constituting some of the most popular (and arguably some of most masterfully created) parts of the epic. Rustam occupies a position in Iranian legend somewhat analogous to that of Hercules in Greek and Latin literature. As a young child, he slays the maddened white elephant of the king with just one blow of his grandfather's mace. He then tames his legendary stallion, Rakhsh. To cut a long story short:

Flocks of horses were brought from all around by his Dad for Rustam to choose his battle steed. Rustam tests each one by pressing down on it's back – at which each horse sank under the pressure. He then sees a massive, powerful mare followed by its colt which was also strong and powerful. It had the chest and shoulders of a lion, the strength of an elephant and the colour of rose leaves scattered upon a saffron ground, etc. Rustam makes to snare the colt but the horse breeder warns him that for three years the mare has stopped anyone from getting on the colt – quick as light, Rustam snares the colt, jumps on its back – the mare moves to pull him off but Rustam whispers a few words in its ear and it backs off and so Rustam and his new colt Rakhsh ride off like the wind to save Iran.

Drinking vessel: (Middle)

The little drinking vessel has four sphinx-like creatures and a seated man dominating the body of the vessel. Two bands of script appear, on the inside of the rim and below the sphinxes.

It is believed that supernatural creatures such as these sphinxes appeared in Islamic art, especially on Persian objects and architecture, to evoke good luck.

Bowl with three men sitting by a pool: (Right)

On the dish with the three men (Sufi mystics?) sitting under a canopy by a pool in a garden, the script around the edge of the bowl is in the geometric 'Kufi' style. It is illegible.