

## Islamic Arts - Examples

### Iznik Dishes 16C



Phase 1 Iznik Blue and White dish (Cabinet Number 1)



Phase 3 Iznik Dish with red spotted blue tulips (Cabinet Number 4)



Phase 3 Iznik dish with saz leaf (Cabinet Number 6)

Between 1514 and 1517, Sultan Salim the Grim conquered Tabriz in Iran, Damascus in Syria, and Cairo in Egypt, and obtained large quantities of Chinese ceramics. These ceramics were brought back to the Ottoman court in Istanbul where the court artists were able to use them as prototypes for their designs. These were then sent as stencils to Iznik, a small lakeside town in northwest Anatolia, where he had set up of pottery works to supply ceramic tiles for the construction of his new Royal palaces and mosques. He brought the Iranian potters from Tabriz to man these potteries. The Iznik tile and ceramic industry flourished from then on and until the 18th century when the pottery works were moved to Kutahya, some 70 miles south of Iznik.

Iznik ware production went through three phases, which were determined by developments in the manufacturing technology and aesthetic taste;

1. To begin with, they were fairly close fritware based copies of Chinese blue and white porcelain, like the blue and white example here made in about 1520.
2. Then apple green and turquoise were added to the colour palette – these were called Damascus ware. Potters from Iznik went to Damascus just after the discovery of green and turquoise colours so they took this technology with them. Once at Damascus they continued producing the wares but never moved on to the reds which were subsequently developed in Iznik, which is why the blue-green-turquoise dishes are called Damascus ware.
3. Finally it developed into the pottery many regard as the finest of all Islamic ceramics with the addition of sealing wax red (or Armenian bole) and the use of beautiful floral designs which continued in manufacture from about the 1550s to 1700. At this important phase, some 300 potters were engaged in the manufacture of tiles and vessels.

Our examples are from the first and third phases (not Damascus ware).

The Blue and White phase 1 dish, Cabinet Number 1, has clear inspiration from Chinese porcelain dishes such as the Yang Blue and White dish in the Chinese section made for export to the Islamic world.



In the examples with red, Chinese influences are still strongly present. On dish Cabinet Number 4, the central design of floral sprays emerging from the cavetto (edge of the moulding-concave quarter circle) can be traced back to the early Ming dynasty where similar sprays were depicted emerging from a single ribbon-tied bunch on the cavetto's lower margin. The earlier Yuan dynasty used a "breaking wave" motif to the rim, seen here in a more stylised form. This design become a standard feature of Iznik dishes and continued to be used well into the seventeenth century. The wave motif gradually became more stylised and allow experts to

accurately date Iznik plates. Also the tulip is used, indicating Turkish origins, as the tulip was a very special flower of that region. The decoration is underglazed on a fritware base.

Another dish Cabinet Number 6 shows a classic Iznik design with a floral display starting from a small clump of leaves on the inner edge of the rim (the cavetto) and featuring a large curving bi-coloured saz leaf, in this case in green and cobalt blue. This feathery, serrated, swordlike, curvilinear, two-color leaf became known in Turkey as the saz leaf. Saz is a word of ancient Turkish origin that indicated an enchanted forest full of fantastic spirits. Saz leaves and hatayi blossoms (chinese style blossom) were major elements in virtuosic calligraphic pen-and-ink drawings of floral and fantasy subjects executed by Persian and Ottoman court artists, using the saz qalami (qalam is Persian for pen), in what is known as the saz style. The style evolved during the reign of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman I, the Magnificent (reigned 1520-1566), and became the predominant court style of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the sixteenth century. The design also incorporates large sprays of roses flattened in three-quarter profile with serrated leaves and just opening buds as well as blue and red tulips. The rose to the right dangles from a long broken stem. This is a motif that is seen in Iznik pottery designs from the 1540s onwards. Although it appears a minor thing, it is surprising how it adds to the spontaneity and interest of the design. The decoration of spotted tulips with blue petals and red dots is apparently very rare.