

Seljuk dishes:



In 1055, Baghdad was taken by the Seljuks, who were Sunni muslims. They were a branch of the Oghuz Turks originating from east of the Aral sea in the area of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. (East of the Caspian which is east of the Black Sea).

Turquoise Bowl 12C – top left

This is a turquoise glazed bowl using the scratching technique, but here the incised design deliberately penetrates right through the body of the bowl in some places. When it was glazed the holes were blocked with transparent glaze - so that light, but not fluid, could pass through them. Muslim master-potters who had seen examples of Chinese pottery in their travels may have developed this technique in an attempt to imitate a contemporary type of translucent Chinese porcelain.

Pedestal dish – top middle, Dish - top right

These are examples of Silhouette ware. A light body has been covered with a dark clay slip. The slip has been carved to expose the light body underneath. The whole bowl has then been covered with a transparent turquoise coloured glaze so it looks turquoise over the light body and black over the slip to create the blue and black effect.

Turquoise is a popular colour as it protects the owner from the “eye of envy” and negative happenings.

An important characteristic of Islamic art is the use of Scrollwork, arabesques, geometric motifs and interlacing patterns.

(An arabesque is a complex, ornate design of intertwining floral, foliate and geometric figures.)

Pedestal dishes – bottom

The so-called pedestal bowl or cup bowl was a popular type during the Seljuk period in Iran. Alternate panels show confronting sphinxes/horses – probably recalling Sasanian (pre-Islamic) iconography (it appears in several such bowls). The confronting riders on horse-back exchange a ring which symbolises

God giving life to the King, or creating him monarch. The ring is a symbol of God's deputy on Earth. In some ways, this is basically an investiture scene.

The alternative panels show images of confronting sphinxes – sphinxes are a good luck creature so this is a good luck symbol.