

THE FAIENCE OF MEDIEVAL ARMENIA IN THE
9TH—14TH CENTURIES

SUMMARY

This work is devoted to the comparatively least studied of the medieval crafts—faience in Armenia. The great amount of material which has been accumulated during the past years by the systematic excavations done in the medieval cities of Armenia: Ani, Dvin, Anberd, Garni and in other medieval sites serves as a basis for this study. The organizing, development and the production of medieval pottery was helped by many factors (a rich supply of clay, the necessary mines, and the great number of skilled craftsmen, etc.

There are many Armenian manuscripts of alchemy which have reached us from the Middle Ages and together with the examples of archeological finds and written sources from other countries of the Middle Ages create a complete picture of the production of glazed pottery. The intention of this study is to try to give a full picture of the production of glazed pottery in Armenia and to give the special features of development during the many historical periods (9th—14th centuries).

Faience of the 9th and 10th centuries basically is found in Dvin. As to the means of preparation it is divided into three groups.

Group I—Faience decorated with a colourless covering and impressions made by cobalt. They have bowl-like forms and wide, round bottoms. The clay is of yellow colour. Most of the decorations on the vessels are vegetative. As to their shape, to the quality of the clay, and the characteristics of the ornaments, these vessels are compared with the material found in Samara (the excavations done by F. Zare). This type of earthenware was known also in Iran (A. Pope). The discoveries from Dvin evidently, are of Mesopotamian origin and belong to the second half of the 9th century.

A typological analysis of a few of the glazed bowls show their native origin.

Group 2—Most of the lustred vessels found

in Dvin were probably imported from the production centres of the Near East. For example, from Samara, and in that sense, the Arabic inscriptions which decorate the vessels have a special significance.

The inscriptions have been studied by Krachkovskaja and Hertzveit. The specific styles of the inscriptions which decorate the vessels help the specialists to determine the place where they were produced. This fact reaffirms the cultural and economic ties which Armenia had with Nishaboo and Egypt. Nevertheless some of the lustred vessels found in Dvin, with their characteristics and ornamentations, and as to the quality of the clay, in their form, and the sign of the craftsmen, unquestionably have been prepared in the workshops of Dvin.

Group 3—Polychromed, lustred faience. For this kind of pottery is characteristic by its fine crack and geometrical decorations (arrow-like) circles, wavy and straight lines. The colour of the glass has different shades of brown, green and bright red lustre.

Fragments of these kinds of pottery were found during the very first years of the archeological excavations done in Dvin. Generally in the central quarters of the city or in the 9th century complexes. By studying the quality of the polychrome faience of Dvin and also the characteristic ornaments, we noticed that they have close analogies with those vessels found in the layers of earth of the 9th century in Samara and Fustat. This evidence substantiates that they were imported to Armenia from the previously mentioned production centres and belong to the 9th century.

Chinese seladones—In Armenia, Chinese seladone vessels of the 9th century are presented with a few fragments. They were found in the wells of the Palace of the Bakradounle kings in Ani and belong to the 9th century.

In the second half of the 11th century, due to the invasion of the Seljuks, the political

situation got worse. But, at the end of the 12th century, the united armies of Armenia and Georgia freed Armenia from the Seljuk invaders.

After that, great opportunities were created for the rebuilding of the cities, the development of trade and different crafts. At that time, the faience of Armenia became an excellent branch of artistic pottery and took a great leap forward. This was due to the demands of the local and foreign market.

At the beginning of the second half of the 10th century, Ani became a large trade centre, between the East and Byzantine Empire. A large amount of faience which is very rich and which forms a varied collection has been found in Armenia and which is dated to this period, the second half of the 10th century. This enables us to separate them into the following groups.

Group 1—Faience of soft clay and superposed ornaments. a—with superposed rose; b—coiled relief ornaments, superposed with almond-formed decorations and masks; c—mask-like ornaments; d—faience as an architectural decoration.

Group 2—Faience with depressed sides.

Group 3—Faience with soft crock and perforated ornaments.

Group 4—Faience with soft crock, perforated, and decorated with cobalt.

Group 5—Fine, white faience.

Group 6—Faience of hard rock and scratch ornaments.

Group 7—Lustered faience. a)—on a white background decorated with lustre; b)—polychrome glazed (Minal); c)—glazed with dark cobalt and ornaments with lustre; d)—decorated with cobalt and transparently glazed, e)—decorated with inscriptions and vegetative motives, and covered with white, transparent glaze.

Group 8—Chinese seladones.

Most of the material, due to the quality of crock, forms and special characteristics of the ornaments, is specific to the local production.

The abundance of pottery vessels shows that they were in wide use in the 12th centuries by the greater majority of the people. The production of the pottery of Dvin and Ani was

noted for its superb quality. And it had a big demand in the markets of the Caucasus and the Middle East. As some of the specialists suggest (N. Mamayashvili) the perforated bowls of the 11th century which were found in Dmanisi had been imported from Ani. The same can be said about the faience decorated with mask-like ornaments which have been found in Syria (Al-Mina).

Studying the material at hand we conclusively show that in the 11th—13th centuries, Armenia had two large producing centres of ceramics, one in Dvin and the other in Ani. Ani bore the strong influence of Dvin. This is confirmed by the similarity in shape, the form of the ornaments on the vessels found in Dvin and Ani.

The difference is only in the quality of the clay. This fact is explained, first of all, by the close cultural ties between these cities and, secondly, by the migration of some of the population from Dvin to Ani, when at the end of the 10th century Ani became the capital of Armenia. We suggest that among the migrants to Ani, were craftsmen, who brought with them the traditions of the production of ceramics in Ani and continued to practice them in their new surroundings.

In comparing some of the material available with the material of the large centres of the Near East, we can see that the shape and the quality of the clay is very similar. The rest of the material which is of a large quantity, has no analogies and that gives us the opportunity to assert that they are of local origin. In this way it is possible to separate the characteristics of Armenian pottery-making centres, which were Ani and Dvin. The faience vessels found in the medieval fortress-cities of Anberd and Garni are few, and evidently they were brought from Ani and Dvin. That is confirmed by the fact that faience found here is very similar to the ceramics made in Dvin and Ani.

Medieval glazed pottery was used as architectural decorations also. In Dvin, contrary to Ani, the buildings were built of unburned bricks and were decorated with gypsum ornaments, mosaics, and the use of bricks in a geometric style. This was done with the intention

of giving the building a finished artistic style. In many cases, faience vessels were also used. In this respect, some plates are very interesting. They are painted with cobalt glaze. They have the same measurements (9x5 cm.) and have been placed in the walls to complete the decorations of the houses. Besides the mass production of faience in Armenia, the examples of imported faience is highly valued. In studying the different types of faience (lustre, Minai, Seladone) it is possible to notice that during the 12th-13th centuries Armenia's main partner in trade was Iran. And through Iran, Armenia had trade connections with China. The proof of this is the discovery of seladones in Ani, Anberd, and in Garni. During the 12th-13th centuries Armenia imported the following kinds of faience:

1. faience with over-covered decorations; a) lustred faience; b) polychromed faience (Minai); c) faience covered with cobalt and decorated with lustred glass.

2. faience first decorated and then glazed; a) faience decorated with cobalt and covered with transparent glaze; b) faience decorated with vegetative motives and Arabic inscriptions.

3. Chinese seladones.

In the first half of the 13th century, after enduring the assaults of the Seljuks, Armenia was subjected to a new invasion by the Mongolian tribes. The history of Armenia of this period, is noted for its decline in its economic and cultural life.

In 1236, the raids by the Mongolians completely destroyed the city of Dvin. Life in Garni continued. According to the opinions of Bapken Arakelian and Grikor Garaghanian, after the destroying of Dvin, the craftsmen moved to Garni, where they continued their work in new surroundings. Life in Anberd also continued until the 14th century. This fact is confirmed by the presence of faience found during the excavations there. The fortress of Dicknuni in the 10th century was one of the most important strongholds of the Arabs. But, according to the works of the historians, the role and significance of the fortress of Dicknuni remains disputable. Some of the investigators consider Dicknuni as the summer residence of the Mongols (D. Bagratse and M.

Brosse). The others reject this conception (Ya. Manandian, N. Togarski). But faience of the 13th-14th centuries has been found in Dicknuni.

During the invasion of the Mongols, life continued in Ani. In the 13th-14th centuries buildings were built, money was struck in the mints and the crafts developed. The faience and tiles found during the excavations show that pottery-making was one of the important crafts. The faience found in these medieval places is divided into the following four groups.

1. Faience decorated with cobalt.
2. Polychrome decorated faience.
3. Lustred faience.
4. Tiles.

The faience of the first group are ornamented with dark cobalt and covered with transparent glaze. They have geometric or botanic ornaments. This kind of faience has been found in Garni, Anberd and Ani. In Khorezmum and Sara-berki this type of pottery is dated to the 13th-14th century. This proves that this kind of earthenware was distributed in the large territories won over by the Mongols.

The faience of the second group is characterized by polychromal decorations and the covering by transparent glaze. It is few in number and was found during the excavations in Ani and Dvin. The decorations are dense and mainly are of geometric and vegetative designs.

This kind of faience has been discovered in Sara-berki, Agha-Bazar and in Khorezmum and belong to the 14th century.

The third group is the lustred pottery which was imported. The faience found in Ani has a special interest and they are of Iranian origin. In this work, the examples are described in detail. They have dark blue tones, gray and golden shades of lustred ornaments. We often come across pictures of animals (deer) and the motives remind us of Iranian lustred pottery of the 12th-13th centuries. But, in the styles and colour-shades, there is a big difference. And they belong to the Iranian Sultanabad pottery centre and are dated to the 14th century.

Tiles-Armenia lost its independence in the 14th century and production was compelled to accept foreign traditions. This is confirmed by

the fact that tiles were used in architectural buildings. The tiles in Saint Mary's Church in Yeghvard are interesting.

These tiles have different shapes (square and many-cornered and so on). As to its artistic and subjective meaning, the tiles are separated into the following three groups.

Square tiles from the first group are decorated with botanic, geometrical motives and pictures of animals. They are painted with brown and golden lustre. The decorations are done in relief. We read an inscription of Firdousi's poem „Shahnameh“. Studying these tiles and comparing them with examples of Iranian tiles, we conclude that they have been made in the 13th—14th centuries (Ray Kashan and Sultanabad).

The tiles of the second group have large sizes and the pictures of animals and plants have been done on a plain surface. The inscriptions are written horizontally and there are fragments from the Koran.

The third group is composed of octonary-cornered tiles which are decorated by dark cobalt blue and golden—coloured lustre. In the centre of one of them is pictured a lake with fish in it. Beside the lake, is pictured a large tree with birds on it. There is no doubt that these types of tiles are from Iran and belong to the 12th—13th century.

In the 13th—14th centuries, Armenia had two large ceramic producing centres—Ani and Garni. And in these workshops the craftsmen also produced falence.

The tiles of the 13th—14th centuries are dated by their technique of making and the characteristics of the ornaments. Sometimes the place where they were found has helped us to determine the date. For example, some of the tiles were found in the cellars of the hotel in Ani dated to the 14th century (Toramanian, Togarski).