

## **A Study of the Motifs of Golabeh Potteries Painted on a Pea-Colored Background: Case Example of Tehran Bonyad Museum**

### **Abstract**

In the first centuries of Islam, flower-patterned pottery was considered the most common pottery in the eastern lands of Iran. This type of pottery is known as "Samani pottery" since it was mostly made during the Samanid period and within the boundaries of this kingdom. There are many examples of this type of pottery in museums and collections around the world, some of which have a detailed identification and some of which have not been studied yet. The current research aims to preserve and identify ۷۰ painted Golabeh pottery vessels on a pea background located in the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum in order to examine its visual characteristics. Also, since a general monograph of the pottery collection of the Tehran Bonyad Museum has not been published so far, it seems compulsory to document the mentioned pottery for the purpose of relative dating, determination of possible manufacturing centers, and clarification of identification details. This research has been done by descriptive-comparative method and by collecting information via field and library method. The Golabeh pottery studied in this research are decorated with various decorative patterns including: geometric, plant, animal, human motifs and illegible inscriptions. The production of these pottery was almost certainly during the ۳rd and ۴th centuries Hegira and in the course of the Samanid rule. Also, it seems that North-Eastern Iran (the city of Neishabur) was the possible center of making the stated potteries.

### **Research aims:**

۱. Documenting the Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-background located in the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum for the purpose of relative dating, determination of possible manufacturing centers and explanation of detailed identification.
۲. Identifying the motifs executed on the Golabeh pottery painted on the pea-background located in the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum.

### **Research questions:**

١. Where are the possible centers for the production of Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-background located in the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum and what historical period are they related to?

٢. What types of motifs are applied Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-background?

**Keywords:** Golabeh painted pottery, Tehran Bonyad Museum, Neishabur, Samanid era

## **Introduction**

The rich history of Iranian pottery has a great diversity in shapes, patterns and decorations. The works left over from the Iranian millennia and centuries display a rich, bright and vibrant civilization. Pottery is one of the oldest arts that has been the manifestation of the worldview of human civilization. From past periods, earthenware has been a means beholding a special function to express people's beliefs and the artistic and cultural originality of Iranians; thus, this has instigated artists to take note the issues related to everyday life when in creating, designing and decorating earthenware that portray the structure of the political and social environment and the surrounding nature. In the second century A.H., during the Abbasid rule, relations with China expanded (Tang period) and many Chinese works were exported to Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Egypt by sea or land. Alternatively, the presence of Chinese artists in the Abbasid court and the persuasion of governors and local rulers caused Iranian potters, especially in the third century AH. to imitate the works of the Far East. In the archeological excavations of the famous Islamic cities such as Rey, Shush, Siraf, Gorgan, Neishabur, Estakhr, Saveh and areas of Mazandaran and Turkestan, pottery influenced by the art of the Tang period, mostly belonging to the second, third and fourth centuries Hegira were obtained (Mohammad Hassan, ٢٠٠٥: ٤٧, Karimi and Kayani, ١٩٨٥: ٢١). In the early Islamic centuries, the art of pottery developed tremendously in Iran, and Iranian artists achieved remarkable success in adapting designs and techniques from other lands and transforming them into a new form in accordance with local facilities.

Pottery industry was simple, practical and useful in the beginning of Islam, and during its initial stages, practicality of the works was preferred over their beauty, nonetheless, gradually decorative designs played a significant role in pottery production. It is noteworthy that during the Islamic era, the pottery industry received more attention and, unlike many other arts, images of living creatures were used in a significant way during this time, which is the clear example of such pottery art and in the Golabeh pottery attributed to the Samanid period. The decorative

elements of such products are diverse and mixed, such as abstract motifs, figures and pseudo-inscriptions. In this regard, with the aim of introducing and identifying the motifs created on the Golabeh pottery painted on the pea-background located in the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum, it is necessary to answer these questions: ۱. Which possible centers were the birthplace of the mentioned pottery. ۲. What patterns do the pottery behold?

For the first time, Wilkinson introduced and classified the patterned Golabeh pottery from the excavations of the Metropolitan Museum in Neishabur (۱۹۷۳). Other researchers also studied and analyzed this type of pottery (Lane, ۱۹۴۸), Gerobe, (۱۹۷۶), Fehrevari, (۱۹۷۳), (۲۰۰۰), Watson, ۲۰۰۴). Pankaraoglu (۲۰۰۷) and Guchani (۱۹۸۵) studied the Kufic inscriptions of this type of pottery as the subject of his research. Moreover, Golabeh pottery has also been studied in theses and articles resulting from archaeological excavations and investigations (Mousavi, ۱۹۹۷; Mortezaei, ۲۰۰۲; Chobak, ۲۰۰۴; Mortezaei and Kayani, ۲۰۱۵; Mousavi Haji and Atai, ۲۰۱۶). The motifs of this type of pottery have been investigated by researchers including Fitzherbert (۱۹۸۳). Bullitt has also studied different pottery styles and their relationship with different social positions (۱۹۹۲). In addition to Sassanid art, Shabiri Dozini finds Manichean, Byzantium and Sogdian influences to be identified in Neishabur pottery designs of the Samanid era (۲۰۰۹). Hosseini Yazdi considered Neishabur pottery to be the first visual works of the early Islamic period (۲۰۱۱). Citing archaeological evidence, Ataei considers, in addition to Neishabur, Afrasiab, Central Asia, Greater Khorasan, Sistan, a part of the southern coasts of the Mazandaran Sea and Kerman, to be the range of the Golabeh painted pottery (۲۰۱۲). Also, Tamdan has investigated the use of clay covering in the history of Iranian pottery (۲۰۰۶). The techniques of making and decorating Golabeh pottery have also been the attention of other researchers including Keblow (۲۰۰۳). Nevertheless, until now, Golabeh pottery painted on a pea background preserved at the treasury of the Tehran Bonyad Museum, in the form of a monograph, have not been introduced. The upcoming research has investigated the visual characteristics of the studied samples in a descriptive-adaptive way, and the data collection has been gathered in a field-documentary way.

## **Conclusion**

The use of Golabeh painting technique, at the same time as the emergence of independent Iranian movements and dynasties; particularly during the Samanid era, was presented as the most extensive and diverse type of pottery in the eastern lands of Islam. Despite the use of the same manufacturing technology in this type of pottery, the existence of a variety of designs including geometric, herbal, animal, human and inscriptions made such potteries stand out as

a turning point in the art of Islamic pottery during the first centuries. This research was conducted based on the study and examination of ۳۰ samples of Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-colored background preserved at the Tehran Bonyad museum, in a descriptive-adaptive manner, and the method of collecting information was field-library. The purpose of presenting this research was to introduce, date, determine the possible place of manufacture and to classify the motifs of the studied samples. Patterns of study pottery of this research are: ۱- geometric patterns ۲- herbal patterns ۳- animal patterns (birds and animals) ۴- human patterns and ۵- illegible inscriptions. In most cases, the exterior decorations of the pottery are simple in contrast to inner decorations; in a number of cases, the outer surface of some pottery is unornamented. The investigations carried out on the motifs of Golabeh pottery can briefly be stated as follows: A-Geometric motifs: the geometric motifs used in these vessels include: texture motifs, decorative strips and interwoven strips; other motifs are woven, circle, triangle and wavy patterns or parallel lines, ivy-like designs, and integrated geometric-herbal motifs. Other motifs include; rhombus, star, heart and crescent moon patterns that are less used motifs. B- Herbal motifs: including flowers, leaves, abstract motifs from the stems of plants. C- Animal motifs: including bulls, goats, horses, felines (leopards), rabbits, mythical beasts, and fish; also it should be noted that bird motifs are an important part of animal motifs, rooster, peacock and hoopoe are the main motifs of birds. D- Human motifs: Human figures include horse rider, the figure of a warrior, and a human figure holding a trophy. E- Illegible inscriptions. F. Color, the element of color in which ternary color combinations (yellow, green, black) have been studied among the common combinations in Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-colored background. Only in one case, a quadruple combination (yellow, green, red and black) is observed. In the examined samples, the yellow color is usually dominant and green is used in smaller levels, nonetheless, in some samples, green is present as the dominant color. G- Form: samples of the form of the Golabeh pottery include: ۱. bowl with a convex body and smooth edge ۲. bowl with a convex body ۳. bowl with a convex body and an inclined edge out ۴. vessels in the shape of a pincher with a convex body that is the most abundant. In order to date and determine possible manufacturing centers for the samples under study, based on matching motifs and according to the shape of the pottery that was examined, after collecting information and checking the details of similar samples, by referring to the website of foreign museums ( Metropolitan Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum, Harvard Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Asia and Lakma Art Collection, Barekat Gallery and Gallery Titles) and visiting domestic museums (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran Water and Earthenware Museum), it was finally determined that the Golabeh pottery painted on a pea-colored background, located in the treasury of the

Tehran Bonyad Museum, were probably produced in the third and fourth centuries A.H. in the city of Neishabor.

## References

Al-Rifai, Anwar. (۱۹۹۸). History of art in Islamic lands. Translated by Abdulrahim Kanawat. Mashhad: Academic Jihad. [In Persian].

Akashe, Servat. (۲۰۰۹). Islamic painting. Translated by Seyyed Gholam-Reza Tahami. Tehran: Islamic Propaganda Organization, art field. [In Persian].

Atai, Morteza, Mousavi Haji, Sidersol and Kolabadi, Rahela. (۲۰۱۱). Gulabeh patterned pottery (types, extent, dating). Negreh Scientific Research Quarterly, ۲۳: ۷۱-۸۷. [In Persian].

Bulliet, R. W. (۱۹۹۲), Pottery Style and Social Status in Medieval Khorasan, Archaeology, Annales and Ethno history, A. B. Knapp (ed.), Cambridge University press, pp. ۷۰-۸۲.

Brand, Barbara. (۲۰۰۴). Islamic art, translated by Mahnaz Shayestehfar. Tehran: Institute of Islamic Art Studies. [In Persian].

Chobak, Hamida. (۲۰۰۴). The cultural sequence of Jazmurian - the old city of Jiroft in the Islamic period, supervisor: Mohammad Yusuf Kiani, doctoral dissertation in the archeology of the Islamic period. Tarbiat Modares University. [In Persian].

Connell, Ernest. (۱۹۹۷). History of Iranian art (۰) Islamic art. Translated by Yaqub Ajand. Tehran: Mola. [In Persian].

Demand, Maurice Esson. (۱۹۰۷). Guide to Islamic Industries, translated by Abdullah Faryar. Tehran: Book Translation and Publishing Company. [In Persian].

Ettinghausen, Richard and Umberto Cerato, Bombachi. (۱۹۹۷). Samanid art and Ghaznavi art. Translated by Yaqub Ajand. Tehran: Mola. [In Persian].

Ettinghausen, Richard and Grabar, Elek. (۲۰۰۰). Islamic art and architecture (۱). Translated by Yaqub Azhend. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian].

Fehervari, Geza. (۱۹۷۳). Islamic pottery, a comprehensive study based on the Barlow Collection, London: Faber & Faber.

Fehervari, Geza. (۲۰۰۰), Ceramics of the Islamic world in the Taregh Rajab museum, London & New York: I.B Tauris.

Fitzherbert, T, (۱۹۸۳), Themes and Images on the Animated Buff Ware on Medieval Neishabor, Unpublished, Master's Thesis, University of Oxford.

Firoz, Shahrukh. (۱۹۶۶). Pottery, no place, no place. [In Persian].

Gojrestani, Saeed. (۲۰۰۰). Teaching the art and technology of pottery and ceramics. Tehran: University of Art. [In Persian].

Grube, Ernest.j. (۱۹۷۶). Islamic Pottery of the Eight to The Fifteenth Century in The Keir Collection, London: Faber and Faber.

Grube, Ernest J. (۲۰۰۰). Islamic pottery, the seventh volume of the ten-volume collection of Islamic Art. Compiled by Nasser Khalili. Translated by Farhanaz Haeri. Tehran: Karang. [In Persian].

Jenkins, Marilyn. (۱۹۸۳). Islamic Pottery: A Brief History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, vol. ۴۰, no. ۴, pp. ۱-۰۳. ۱۹.

Karimi, Fatemeh and Kayani, Mohammad Yusuf. (۱۹۸۰). Pottery art of the Islamic period of Iran. Tehran: Iran Archaeological Center. [In Persian].

Kayani, Mohammad Youssef. (۲۰۰۰). History of pottery and pottery in Iran. Tehran: Nasim Danesh. [In Persian].

Keblow Bernsted, Anne-Marie. (۲۰۰۳), Early Islamic Pottery Material and Techniques, Archetype Publication, London.

Henshaw, CH. M. (۲۰۰۹). Early Islamic Ceramics and Glazes of Akhsiket. Uzbekistan, Unpublished PhD thesis, UCL University.

Lane, Arthur. (۱۹۴۸). Islamic Pottery from The Ninth to The Fourteen Centuries A.D in The Collection Sir. E. Hitchcock, Faber and Faber Limited, London.

Lane, Arthur. (۱۹۷۴). Early Islamic Pottery, London: Faber & Faber, (Fourth revised impression (no date).

Marzban, Parviz and Marouf, Habib. (۲۰۰۱). An illustrated collection of visual arts, Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian].

Mohammad Hassan, Zaki. (۲۰۰۰). China and Islamic arts. Translated by Gholamreza Tahami. Tehran: Art Academy. [In Persian].

Mortezaei, Mohammad and Kayani, Mohammadyoussef. (۲۰۰۶). "Study and analysis of uncovered pottery from the archaeological excavations of ۱۳۸۱ to ۱۳۸۴ in the historic site of Jurjan". Journal of Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of Tehran University, ۱۱۱-۱۲۹. [In Persian].

Mousavi Haji, Sidersol and Ataei, Morteza. (۲۰۰۹). Studying a collection of Sistan pottery samples. Zahedan: General Department of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism of Sistan and Baluchistan. [In Persian].

Mousavi, Mahmoud. (۱۹۹۷). Archaeological exploration in the historical city of Harira, Kish Island. Archaeological Report (۱), Research Institute of Archaeology, Tehran: ۲۰۰-۲۳۸. [In Persian].

Naji, Mohammadreza. (۲۰۰۷) Sasanian culture and civilization in the Sasanian territory. Tehran: Amir Kabir. [In Persian].

Norton, F. H. (۱۹۹۱). Ceramics for ceramicists. Translated by Shaban Ali Taksari. Tehran: Gutenberg. [In Persian].

Papadopoulo, Alexander. (۱۹۷۹). Islam and Muslim Art, Translated from the French by Robert Erich Wolf, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated.

- Pancaroglu, Oya. (۲۰۰۷). Perpetual Glory (Medieval Islamic Ceramics from The Harvey B. Plotnick Collection), Chicago, The art institute of Chicago.
- Quchani, Abdullah. (۱۹۶۵). Nishapur pottery inscriptions. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. [In Persian].
- Rahimi, Afsun and Mehran Mateen. (۲۰۰۳). Fine ceramics technology. Tehran: Publishing Company. [In Persian].
- Rogers, M. (۱۹۹۵). Pottery Arts of Iran. Under the supervision of R. W. Freyeh, translated by Parviz Marzban. Tehran: Forozan. [In Persian].
- Shabiri Dozini, Mehdi. Investigating the features of depiction in Neishapur Samani pottery Master's thesis, Shahid University. [In Persian].
- Tamdan, Maleeha and Sarpolaki, Hossein. (۲۰۰۶). Gulabeh Pottery (Investigating the use of glabeh or mud coating in the history of Iranian pottery), Golestan Honar, ۳: ۵۴-۷۰. [In Persian].
- Watson, Oliver. (۲۰۰۴). Ceramics from Islamic Lands, the Alsbah collection, Kuwait National Museum, United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson.
- Wilkinson, Charles k. (۱۹۷۳). Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Wilson, J. Christie. (۱۹۳۸). History of Iranian Industries, translated by Abdullah Faryar. Tehran: Farhang-Sera (Yasauli). [In Persian].
- Wolff, Hans E. (۱۹۹۳). Ancient handicrafts of Iran. Translated by Cyrus Ebrahimzadeh. Tehran: Islamic Revolution Publications and Education. [In Persian].
- Yoshid, Mitsukuni. (۱۹۷۲). In Search of Persian Pottery, Translated by John M. Shields, New York & Tokyo & Kyoto: Weatherhill / Tankosha.