My first acquaintance with Woody was in Ann Arbor where our offices were close to each other; our paths crossed again on my first visit to my family in Baltimore. At the time my research was concerned with Persian blue and white ceramics of the 17th century, and in the stores of the Walters Art Museum Woody brought to my notice some interesting examples which allowed me to make better sense of certain Chinese elements visible on the decoration of Safavid vessels. In the stores we also discussed other ceramics of the world of Islam, looking at Iznik dishes and the later Kütahya holdings of the collection, but these, at the time, were not my immediate concern. Yet I did keep in mind one particular piece, a bowl with its lid, an unusual shape in the Ottoman world of the 18th century (48.1732 a, b). The opportunity to study it has now arisen in order to honour both a colleague and a friend (pl. 1).

The polychrome painting is of excellent quality and the whole decoration shows more refinement than usual. Only the clumsy composition and painting on the lid seems to indicate a different hand from that of the bowl, but this will be discussed after the description of the decoration on the bowl itself (Pl. 6). All of it is outlined in fine black lines, possibly with the use of chromite1. An identical band underlines both the inside and the outside of the straight rim; it consists of four alternating motifs, a spotted diaper of three to four lozenges in black, and a panel limited by two green and yellow triangles which encompass one half of a red petaled flower with a trilobed leaf on either side (Pl. 2). Two different compositions with four flowers and leaves alternate around the body itself: one with a stalk undulating upwards from left to right (Pls. 3 & 4), the other with its stalk hanging downwards in the same direction (Pls. 5 & 6). Such plants bare no resemblance to any known flowers or attributes which are very strange elongated leaves with one serrated edge. The walls inside the bowl are plain, and a single central decoration consists of one flower taken from the same repertoire as the flowers on the outside; it is encompassed by similar serrated green leaves. A double blue line surrounds the composition (Pl. 7). Two blue lines, one thick the other thin, surround the top of the foot ring.

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Plate 2. Bowl: inner band.


A closer examination shows that the outline in black creates a firm contour for both flowers and leaves with added smaller geometric spaces filled with dots, stripes or zigzags. By contrast irregular colours of green, blue, yellow and deep purple, which looks almost black, overrun the fine black lines. Only the red, not unlike the earlier sealing wax of Iznik fame, remains almost within its given place or can slightly hide the fine black line. But what is one to make of the sprays and their so-called flowers? The larger sprays may have been painted first, some of the red ones upside down. The added stalks divide the spray into two groups, each with two flowers, one with a dominant colour of blue, the other with red. Some yellow painting enhances the top of the blue flowers as well as additional small bulges on the lower stem. The two other sprays occupy a slightly smaller space (pls. 3 & 4). The stalk is shorter with a double bend towards its tip. Again four flowers add up to a spray. This time the colour red dominates the composition and one leaf on pl. 1 is yellow. On three occasions, green leaves end in a squiggle. Finally four pairs of peculiar-looking insects fit into whatever space remains between the sprays. They all have a pair of legs and whiskers; most of their dotted bodies end in a squiggle, and an extra one may spring from the back of the body.

As noticed earlier, the inside of the bowl has a rim band similar to the outer one. The walls are plain and a central flower composition is surrounded by a double circle. It is difficult to decide how to look at it. The V shape of the double leaf frame may indicate a direction with the red petals hanging downwards and a green plummet at the top. A touch of light purple creates a slight feeling of depth towards the base of the V shape. As to the lid, its haphazard painting contrasts sadly with that of the bowl (Pl. 8). Shapeless contours with messy colours and a coarse border to the base of the lid are not enhanced by the restoration of the broken areas. Two elongated shapes separate two pairs of pseudo-trees with dotted branches and enclosed by leaves. Only the fine herring bone pattern at the base of the knob has been neatly painted in black with a fine brush. It recalls the rim bands of the bowl itself.

In spite of many sales catalogues available in recent years\(^2\), the strange nature of such an exuberant design on the bowl has always been a puzzle, though an attempt has recently been made to explain its origins\(^3\). The fact that a number of pieces have Armenian texts, signatures and dates has made it possible to place the production of this type of Kütahya ceramics chiefly in the 18th century. Yet production of ceramics by Armenian potters is mentioned by John Carswell at the early date of 1444/5, when a potter in that town called Murad donated a mantle for a priest in the church named the Holy Mother of God; both name and date appear in a book listing gifts given to that church in Kütahya. Carswell was indeed the first to study methodically the production of vessels and tiles while Dawsett traced the presence of an Armenian population in Kütahya to the colophon of a manuscript dated 1391; the manuscript was a gift to the local Armenian Church\(^4\).

Although ceramics with the name of Kütahya have been collected since the 19th century, and their shapes and decoration have been described on a number of occasions, no studies have been made to unravel the origins of their 18th century decoration. At first sight the designs on their surfaces are most disconcerting and their weird outlines are difficult to connect with any known patterns in

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\(^3\) Crowe Y., Kütahya and caravans, forthcoming in Oriental Art NS 51/5.

the eastern parts of the Mediterranean world, the Ottoman Empire. Yet these facts have not prevented recent Turkish collectors from buying most pieces offered in the salerooms, although entries in catalogues have only consisted of descriptions. No comments have been made explaining these strange designs5.

**Wider connections**

Could it be that the study of one type of material prevents inquiries into other types, so that concentrating exclusively on ceramics excludes the study of textiles or lacquered objects, or even book bindings? All too often specialists do not look beyond their own field, unaware that by restricting their research to one specific area they miss the wider geographical picture, although the world of Islam offers a great variety of cross-fertilization. And here, beyond media and geographical contexts, one more factor intervenes in the unravelling of the origins of Kütahya designs. That is the part played by a minority population, the Armenians, the oldest Christian population in the world. Over the centuries their long and troubled history witnessed many shifts of population: from the central lands of Armenia with the Saljuq invasion of the Byzantine Empire in 1071 to the Lesser Cilician kingdom of Armenia centred round its capital Sis and the rich port of Ayas praised by Marco Polo6. It survived until the death of its last king Leo V in 1375. By the end of the 14th century sea ports of an *Armenia maritime*, were already scattered round the eastern parts of the Mediterranean, from the Crimea to Venice. During the 15th and 16th century more merchant communities settled in the Balkans.

Yet another forced displacement of population took place in 1603. Having been entertained lavishly by the important Armenian merchant families of Julfa, Shah Abbas I, the ruler of Persia (1588-1629), decided to associate them to his realm. At a time of intense warfare against the Ottomans, he created a waste land on his north-western border, partly by transporting the whole population of Julfa not only to his new capital Isfahan and the lands around it, but also to the silk producing areas south of the Caspian7. Through their knowledge of international trade, especially that of silk and precious stones, these rich merchants, about twenty families, acquired a position close to being that of bankers to the Safavid dynasty8.

Further significant settlements in India should be mentioned since the earliest Armenian Church in the Mughal Empire was established in Agra by 1563. Travellers and factors of the Dutch East India Company (the VOC, Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie) and the English East India Company (the EIC) regularly mention the presence of Armenian merchants whenever they reach market places or landing stages around the Indian Ocean9. And it is this presence of Armenian merchant communities in India which appear to be the missing link between Kütahya in the Ottoman Empire and the Indian subcontinent. This statement may come as a surprise, yet it is one to be considered when one bears in mind the vast international Armenian network across Asia, from the Mediterranean to the Sea of China.

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5 For example the sale of Haroutune P. Hazarian’s collection, Bonham & Brooks, London May 2nd 2001.
Although Armenian trading by sea is mentioned in a number of contemporary documents\textsuperscript{10}, references to caravans and Armenians on the land routes are far more frequent. European travellers refer to them as they praise all at once their frugality and thriftiness. Besides, their caravans were safe to join, since Armenian merchants were neither political nor religious threats to any of the lands they crossed. Caravans starting from Agra or Lahore would reach Isfahan via Multan, Qandahar and Birjand. From the capital, different itineraries could be followed to reach the Mediterranean. There were two routes via Tabriz: the northern one, which could go through Erevan, Erzerum and end in either Istanbul or Smyrna. The southern route would lead to Van, then Dyzarbakir, Urfa and reach Aleppo and its port Alexandretta\textsuperscript{11}. A further combination of sea and land routes would include shipping from India to Bandar Abbas or more likely Basra to join caravans on their way to Aleppo. Using the Red Sea seems to have been less popular owing to local shipping shared by Gujarati and Ottoman shipping bound for Cairo\textsuperscript{12}. It should also be remembered that a well-appointed system of caravanserais lined the various land routes, providing shelter and food along the way.

Besides the enduring fashion for Indian painted cottons in Europe from the early days of the East Indian Companies, and despite laws forbidding the use of such textiles in 1686, 1700 and 1709 in France and in England in 1700 and 1720, the demand for them never lessened. Design and colours would change throughout the 18\textsuperscript{th} century as taste differed and altered from one European country to the other. The shipment of painted cottons, also known as chintzes, was an important part of the trading of the East India companies; nevertheless the land routes of the caravans were frequently used by Armenian traders to reach the eastern seas of the Mediterranean. Besides the conveying of chintzes the Armenian merchants also provided them for use in their own households and furthermore for church hangings. Indian painted cottons can still be seen in treasuries of both the cathedral of Ejmiacin near Erevan and the convent of the cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem. These church hangings, such as large curtains, are usually drawn across the altar until the celebration of the Eucharist. They often carry a representation of the crucifixion, whereas the history of the Armenian Church and clergy appear on single panels as well as on polychrome tiles.

Consequently it is possible to relate the international trading of goods, such as textiles, with various Armenian communities across Asia, so that Indian painted cottons with their exotic designs could reach Kütahya and its community of potters\textsuperscript{13}. The religious church cotton hangings were only one aspect of the delivered textiles, and it is evident that the local population was also eager to acquire other Indian cottons, such as palampores, always of a better quality than those produced in Persia or the Ottoman world\textsuperscript{14}. Exuberant flowers are less a part of the decorated borders of the religious panels; these show controlled flowery scrolls. On the other hand flowering

\textsuperscript{10} Aghassian M. and Kévonian K.: Le commerce arménien dans l’Océan Indien aux 17e et 18e siècles, in \textit{Marchands et homes d’affaires asiatiques dans l’Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine}, eds. Lombard D. and Aubin J., Paris 1981, pp. 155-181, p. 159. For a short time in the mid 17\textsuperscript{th} century, a few ships were flying Armenian colours, red and yellow with a symbolic lamb of God. But usually Armenian merchants relied on the shipping capacities of the English and Dutch fleets.


\textsuperscript{12} Tuchscherer M., le commerce en Mer Rouge aux alentours de 1700 : flux, espaces et temps, in \textit{Res Orientalis} V 1993, pp. 159-178.

\textsuperscript{13} For further details on the continental links between India and the Mediterranean, see Crowe, forthcoming \textit{Oriental Art}, 51/5.

trees and their exotic yet fanciful flowers animate a variety of hangings as can still be seen in a number of museum collections; these would also include earlier fragments produced in Gujarat, and designed to satisfy the taste of different markets.15

Solving the mystery

By the early decades of the 18th century an exotic variety of flowers had invaded the surfaces of chintzes; the outlines of these flowers bear no relation to any known botanical species; and it would seem to be the exuberance of these blossoms which attracted the Kütahya potters. Yet the impressionistic flowers and leaves on the pot are a far cry from the detailed designs on the cottons. The simplified brush stroke is the answer to the problem of how to master intricate details on a rounded surface with limited space. A clear transfer of the outline is as far as the copyist can deal with the design, although the slightly runny colours are as vivid as those on earlier Iznik wares. Yellow is the one colour which strikes an original note as its shade is more vibrant. On most surviving pieces of chintzes that colour is no longer visible, although it existed at the time of its painting.16 Yellow is the one colour which fades early in the life of an Indian painted cotton, and over the years it takes on a pale beige tint as can be seen on the leaf before the serrated points (pl. 9).

The flowers can be organised in two groups, according to their shape. The first consists of blooms with a tighter configuration, and they are usually attached to the downward branch pair (Pls. 5 & 6, Pl. 10 drawing a). The shape of blooms in the other group is more open, and red seems to dominate the colour scheme (Pls. 2 & 4, Pl. 10 drawing b). The intricacies of the floral designs on the chintzes would be difficult to reproduce on a ceramic surface, when locally there exists no tradition of minute copying similar to that of European miniaturists working on enamels. In effect the greatly simplified outline adds to the whimsical style of the Kütahya painting. A further feature typical both on textiles and the bowl is a shape comparable to a tuft of plumes. This feature appears with every flower in red, green, yellow and even in black (Pl. 1, Pl. 10 drawing C).

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16 A yellow background is still visible on a large spread acquired by the British Museum and illustrated in the British Museum Magazine No. 33 Spring 1999, pp. 17-9.
Two more details on the bowl offer plausible points of comparison with chintzes. The green serrated leaves are typical of chintz design by the end of the 17th century and recall those on the fragment from the Victoria & Albert Museum (Pl. 9). Another feature consists of the reproduction of insects, a well established theme in Mughal and Persian miniatures and textile designs (Pl. 11) proceeding from original plates in European books. The Kütahya potter has emphasised both legs and antenna thus creating a fanciful insect, and he has also added strange squiggles which, on chintzes, only extend certain leaves (Pl. 12). As for the borders below the rim of the bowl, they follow numerous patterns on Kangxi export porcelain. Thus both sources of design, Indian textiles and Chinese porcelain, illustrate an interesting search of the potter for renewed inspiration not only from foreign ceramics but also from different media. As it is often the case, it is the design which takes first place, regardless of the support.

A final look should be cast at the lid which fits the bowl (Pl. 8). The difference in the painting with the bowl itself as noticed earlier, is surprising and could indicate the replacement of a broken part. Yet a search for a similar style of painting through sale catalogues and other publications was

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17 Engraving by Nicolaes de Bruyn, 1594, in Flowers and plants, drawings, prints and photographs in the collections of the Rijksmuseum print room and library, compiled by Peter Schatborn, Amsterdam 1994.
rewarded when a teapot and a covered bowl came to light. The decoration of the teapot provides a few references to the motifs painted on the Walters bowl (Pl. 13). The tree shapes with globular leaves are repeated four times on the Walters’s lid, and the green leafy branches belong to the same brush. As for the other motifs it is difficult to perceive a thatched hut on both vessels though they proceed from a same model on Chinese porcelain. A fragment of a green balustrade is visible next to the springing of the handle to the teapot. This small detail recalls more elaborate imitations of Chinese balustrades painted on Persian blue and white ceramics of the late 17th / early 18th century. The survival of a few designs such as these small details suggests the possibility of a tie between Persian and Ottoman potters.

In this first attempt to unravel the origins of Kütahya decoration, only the main features of one polychrome bowl with its lid have been studied. Already two different brushes have been detected, and in reviewing a larger selection of Kütahya pieces, it should be possible to organise its production according to workshops. Besides, there are a number of blue and white dishes and basins which require further investigation. An almost pyrotechnic decoration on a basin which would have had at one time a matching ewer will conclude this series of pictures (Pl. 14). The Armenian/Turkish inscription conveys the date and the name of the owner.

In the Armenian year 1193/1744 on Monday May the 8th, this basin was inscribed; it belongs to Öhannes, son of David. May he use it to his benefit, Amen. May this inscription convey even more wishes.


19 Crowe : catalogue nos. 413, 416.