

Kütahya and caravans

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Forthcoming

In his *Later Islamic Pottery* of 1957 Arthur Lane described the useful wares of Kütahya as *often very pleasing* while contrasting them with the *not attractive* tile work made in the same location in the 18th century¹. The town itself lies inland about 100 kms south-south-east of both Bursa and Iznik on the Anatolian plateau. The ceramic production has been studied more seriously during the last thirty years by John Carswell who has methodically published catalogues and articles dealing with collections of Kütahya wares such as those in the Sadberk Hanim Museum in Istanbul. The two volumes publication of his invaluable research on the tiles from the Armenian cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem has become the standard work on the subject of Kütahya pottery. In addition to the photographs and commentaries on the tiles, the study of ceramics in the adjoining monastery is considered and studied in relation to a number of pieces scattered in various collections and museums². Among new shapes produced in the 18th century, candlesticks and lemon squeezers have also caught his attention.

Recently two publications on Kütahya wares and a number of sales have revived general interest into the many intriguing patterns on bowls, ewers, pilgrim flasks, incense burners, coffee pots and cups, shaving bowls and dishes³. Although such ceramics can be seen in most museum collections, little has been written about the origins of the decoration applied to these shapes. Following a long standing tradition in western Asian ceramics, they are painted either in cobalt blue or in several colours, *çok renkli*, the use of polychrome seemingly re-appearing in a new style towards the second quarter of the 18th century.

Polychrome ceramics are of course well known among Chinese and Japanese export wares of the period and they certainly influenced European decoration, yet to my knowledge the new decoration using blue and white or polychrome colouring on Kütahya wares has not yet been properly decrypted. It is clear from both the new edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam and from John Carswell's work, that until now Kütahya wares have only been described in their historical context, without any mention of sources for their original decoration. Indeed evidence of the early Armenian presence in Kütahya is confirmed by the colophon of a manuscript date 1391 stating that it was a gift to the church of that town. Besides, a book of recorded gifts made between the 15th and 18th centuries to the church of the Holy Mother of God of Kütahya mentions in particular the gift of a priest's mantle by a potter called Murad in 1444/5⁴. That an important Armenian population migrated west after the collapse of Greater Armenia following the battle of Manzikert in 1071, and

¹ Lane A., *Later Islamic Pottery*, London 1957, p. 65.

² Carswell J. and Dowsett C.J.F., *Kütahya tiles and pottery from the Armenian cathedral of St. James*, Jerusalem, 2 vols., Oxford 1972. Rogers J.M., Review article in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* XXXII, no 1/2 1975 pp. 119-124. Altun A., Carswell J. and Öney G., *Sadberk Hanim Museum, Turkish Tiles and Ceramics*, Istanbul 1991.

³ Çını R., *Kütahya Çinicilçji*, Istanbul 2002. Kenaan-Kedar N., *The Armenian Ceramics of Jerusalem, three generations, 1919-2003*, Jerusalem 2003. Sale catalogues: Sothebys London, October 14th 1987, *The collection of Haroutune P. Hazarian*, Bonhams & Brooks, London May 2nd 2001; Drouot-Montaigne, Paris November 13th 2001.

⁴ Carswell and Dowsett, vol. 2 p. 2.

settled in Anatolia and Syria with the establishment of the Kingdom of Cilicia thereafter in south-eastern Anatolia, is not surprising. Further evidence is given by Lane when he refers to an Armenian presence in Kütahya in documents dated to 1608 and 1669. And Kütahya cups are mentioned as dutiable goods in Tokat further east in 1700 and so forth⁵.

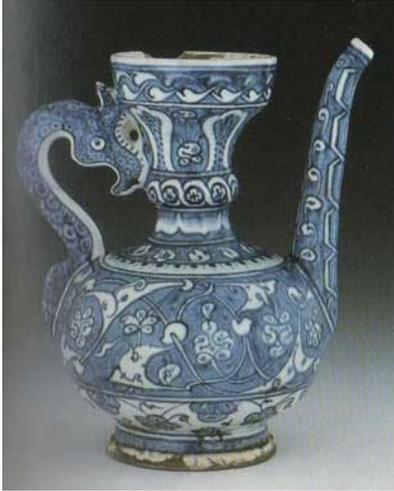


Plate 1.
Ewer, H: 17.5 cm. G.1983.1.
Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

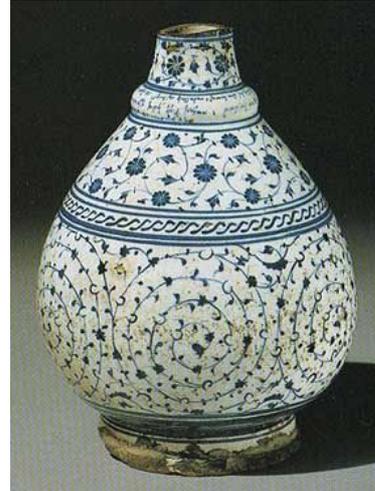


Plate 2.
Bottle, H: 23 cm. G.1983.16.
Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

The British Museum possesses the two famous 16th century pieces with dated Armenian inscriptions inside their base rings, a ewer of 1510 and a water bottle of 1529, both originally in the Godman collection (Pls. 1, 2). The ewer inscription translates as follows: *This vessel is in memory of Abraham, servant of God, of Kütahya, in this year 959 [1510], March 11.* As to the two inscriptions of the water-bottle, both are longer: *Bishop Ter Martiros sent message to Kütahya. May the mother of God intercede for you: send one water bottle here. May Ter Martiros hold it with pleasure. In the year 978 [1529] March 18. This water bottle was inscribed.* The text is placed on the ring set at the base of the neck. A second inscription lies inside the base and reads as follows: *Ter Martiros sent message from Ankara: May this water-bottle [be] a gift from Kütahya to the monastery of the Holy Mother of God*⁶. Besides the information given by these two dated containers, excavations of kilns in Kütahya, conducted in the late 1970s and published in 1981⁷, have produced enough shards to demonstrate the important production of Kütahya wares from the 15th century onwards (Pl. 3). It is now clear that the production of local potters would have complemented the over-stretched production of Iznik in the more prosperous days of the 16th and early 17th centuries as witnessed even in 1670 by Evliya Celebi: *Kütahya has thirty-four quarters among them the quarter of the infidel china-makers. Their [production is] not only for local production. But the dishes of Iznik are more world-famous*⁸. That the town should have continued to produce ceramics in the 18th century is hardly surprising as documented orders were coming in from Jerusalem and from farther afield. It is unlikely that this could have happened by chance.

⁵ Lane, p. 63. Akalin Ş. and Yılmaz Bilgi H.Y, *Delights of Kütahya, Kütahya tiles and pottery in the Suna & Inan Kiraç collection*, Istanbul 1997.

⁶ Nersessian V., *Treasures from the Ark*, London 2001, pp. 146, 147.

⁷ Şahin F., *Kütahya çini-keramik sanati ve tarihinin yeni buluntular açısından değ ierlendirilmesi*, in *Sanat Tarihi Yıllı ğı IX-X*, Sanat Tarihi Enstitüsü 1979-1980, Istanbul 1981, pp. 259-286.

⁸ Carswell and Dowsett, vol. 2, p. 8.

The decoration on the two British Museum pieces conforms to the Iznik style of the period, the first thirty years of the 16th century, when for a short time intense blue and white compositions were reflecting the transformation of Chinese porcelain designs into a dignified Ottoman decoration. On the other hand the so called *golden Horn* style, derived from ornamentation for *tughras*, official signatures on documents, was applied to the illustrated water-pourer. As to further Iznik production of the 16th and 17th centuries, vessels and tiles included, it has now become one of the most well known and sought after type of ceramics in the world, and yet no comprehensive study has been written on the origins of the later 18th century Kütahya decoration, either in blue and white (Pl. 4) or in polychrome (Pl. 5). Large unwieldy blossoms, curling leaves, as well as delicate cones, are painted on large wares whereas polychrome designs usually cover smaller dishes, bowls, cups without handles and taller pouring vessels. So far catalogues have given adequate descriptions of motifs painted on the objects but without any explanations as to the origins of these motifs. In fact they owe little to earlier patterns on Iznik wares. What could then be the origin or origins of 18th century decoration on Kütahya wares? There are a number of possible sources, in Persia and farther afield.



Plate 3.
Two Kütahya shard drawings after Çahin,
see footnote 7, p. 283, figs. 35a & b.

Plate 4.
Kütahya blue and white dish
W: 27.6 cm. Bonhams & Brooks London
sale, May 2nd 2001, lot no. 420.

Plate 5.
Kütahya polychrome dish
W: 26.6 cm. Bonhams & Brooks London
sale, May 2nd 2001, lot no. 418.



Attributions of Safavid blue and white ceramics to Kütahya

Recently, a blue and white Persian neckless pourer has been wrongly attributed to Kütahya⁹ (Pl. 7). The reason for such a mistake is due to the lack of awareness of the path followed by some Chinese motifs originally painted on Qing export wares towards the end of the 17th century: these are the cone shape and also the aster flower although including the latter is beyond the scope of this paper. First to imitate cone shapes in ceramic decoration were the potters of Persia before the end of the Safavid rule in 1722. The cone often appears on medium sized dishes and also on a neckless water sprinkler (No. 1248-1876) in the Victoria & Albert Museum (Pl. 6); it is similar to the so-called Kütahya example in the London sale (Pl. 7). Furthermore, the Museum example happens to have the monogram of a famous merchant from New Julfa, Paron Safraz, who headed the family business from 1701 until his death in 1717. There are two more pieces in the collection with a Safraz monogram, a ewer and a small dish. It is quite possible that this tableware could have been produced in the neighbourhood of Isfahan, perhaps in the area of Qumisha (Shahreza) seventy-five km. south of the capital¹⁰.



Plate 6. Sprinkler, H: 12.8 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum no. 1248-1876. Author's photograph.

Plate 7. Sprinkler, H. 10 cm, Christie's London sale, October 10th 1999, second part of lot no. 403.

Plates 8. 9. Dish, W: 20.3 cm. inside and outside, Victoria & Albert Museum no. 1166-1876. Author's photograph.

Groups of cones also appear in fours on medium size Persian dishes, also painted in blue, thus again imitating Chinese originals of the same period (Pl. 8)¹¹. Other medium size Persian dishes may be painted with the so called aster pattern. In both types of decoration, the outside of the dish displays four fans with ribbons (Pl. 9)¹². Such a motif does appear on the back of pieces which have

⁹ Christie's London, *Islamic, Indian and Armenian Art and Manuscripts*, October 12th 1999, no. 403.

¹⁰ Golombek L., Mason R.B. and Proctor P., *Safavid potters' marks and the question of provenance*, in *Iran* 39 2001, p.209.

¹¹ Victoria & Albert Museum no. 1166-1876, 20.3cm wide.

¹² Victoria & Albert Museum no.994-1876, 23.9cm wide.

been mistaken for Kütahya wares. 1876 is the year of the accession number on the Museum pieces, and it proves, if need be, their Persian origin since they were acquired in the second half of the 19th century by Murdoch Smith while he was engaged in collecting Persian artefacts for the Victoria & Albert Museum¹³. Late 17th century Iznik wares, it should be noted, are not usually decorated with cone motifs as opposed to Ottoman textiles. On the other hand similar Persian vessels decorated with cone motifs have been excavated as far afield as Turkmenistan at New Nissa, and at old Qandahar in Afghanistan¹⁴.

Nevertheless the cone becomes a favourite motif on both blue and white and polychrome Kütahya wares. It is tempting to link the similarity between the cone patterns of Persia and Kütahya with the dramatic events of 1722 in Isfahan when Shah Sultan Husayn submitted to the Ghilzay Afghans and delivered the town into the hands of their leader Mahmud, son of Mir Uways¹⁵. The Armenian community of New Julfa was the first to be dramatically penalised by the invaders thus provoking an important exodus of the population. Not surprisingly by that time some great Armenian trading families had already started to expand their earlier establishments in Ottoman Turkey and India; trading with Russia was also established during the second half of the 17th century. But for some less fortunate members of the Armenian community the time had now come to immigrate to more hospitable lands. One knows the ease with which potters in particular move to more profitable grounds when need be, and it would make sense for potters of the Isfahan area to relocate to less threatened regions of the Ottoman empire where they could find a well established population of Armenian potters. Kütahya would have certainly been high on the list of possible refuges for craftsmen able to contribute new ideas to a more conventional decorative repertoire.

Dated Kütahya ceramics

Dated glazed tiles and vessels provide an interesting insight into the production of Kütahya kilns in the 18th century. Some rather plain blue and white tile panels were ordered for the harem of the Topkapi Saray palace in 1709. They can be seen in Murad III's bedroom, the *Golden Way* and the Ocakli Sofasi. A pourer with its matching dish both dated 1716, belongs to the collection in the Armenian Cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem. Although its blue and white decoration of leafy garlands of stylised tulips and other flowers echoes earlier Iznik designs, it hardly rivals their quality. Most of the blue and white tiles attributed to Kütahya are of a rather simple design and cannot compete with the glamorous production of earlier Iznik kilns¹⁶.

Forty-five inscribed polychrome tiles with biblical and historical scenes still survive in the same monastery of Saint James and are dated to 1718. Although the scenes are painted in a rather naïve style, the fact that the decoration is polychrome indicates that the local potters of the time had a whole range of colours at their disposal. The same date of 1718 also occurs on a series of polychrome vessels:

A bowl, W: 22 cm, representing Archangel Michael. The Victoria & Albert Museum.

¹³ Vernoit S., *Islamic art and architecture : an overview of scholarship and collecting, ca. 1850-1950*, in *Discovering Islamic Art*, ed. Vernoit S., London 2000, pp. 1-61.

¹⁴ Crowe Y., *Persia and China; Savavid blue and white ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum 1501 -1738*, London 2002, p. 23 note 3, p. 226.

¹⁵ The Afghan occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721-1729, compiled, annotated and translated by Floor W., in *Cahiers no. 19 Studia Iranica*, Paris 1998, published by L'association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes.

¹⁶ Nersessian V., pp. 150, 151.

A dish, W: 22.4 cm, depicting the beheading of John the Baptist. The convent of Saint Lazzaro, Venice.

A dish, W: 21 cm wide, with Saint Sargis and his son Martiros riding white horses.

A bowl, W: 18.5 cm, with the twelve apostles painted inside around a central star. On the outside mainly painted in blue, a hunting scene, an enthroned figure and soldiers by a fortified castle with canons. Both vessels are in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels.

A bowl, W: 20 cm, with Christ enthroned surrounded by the twelve apostles placed around the Holy Sepulchre at the centre. Two putti among giant flowers decorate the outside in blue on a white ground. The Benaki Museum, Athens.

A dish, W: 15 cm, with Saint Sargis and an attendant behind him both on horseback. The Cincinnati Art Museum.

A preliminary list of well-known dated vessels has been compiled as follows:

1726 A six-lobed polychrome incense holder, W: 13.5 cm, with a central medallion surrounded by six flower sprays and dotted leaf dividers. Six serrated lozenge panels framed by vertical flower bands decorate the outside. The Cincinnati Museum of Art,

1739 Two polychrome hanging ornaments with winged angel faces, in Jerusalem.

1740 A polychrome five-lobed incense holder, W: 11.8 cm, with winged angel faces. San Lazzaro monastery.

1741 A polychrome jug, H: 18 cm, with *strange*¹⁷ flowers and one bird. The Gezirah Museum, Cairo.

1744 A polychrome deep basin, W: 26.6 cm, part of a ewer and basin set. A garland of *strange* flowers and leaves are set on the large flange with a curious fish in the centre of the basin (Pl. 10). San Lazzaro monastery.

1765 A blue and white ewer, H: 23.5 cm. Sothebys London sale April 12th 1989, no. 135.

1766 A blue and white deep basin with central lid, also dated 1215 in Arabic, W: 30.9 cm. The Hetjens-Museum, Düsseldorf.



Plate 10. San Lazzaro basin, W: 26.6 cm. Author's photograph.

¹⁷ The adjective strange is used here to describe this specific type of fanciful Kütahya vegetation.

When comparing the brushwork on polychrome figurative tiles with similar painting on the group of vessels dated 1718, no great difference appears in the style applied to both tiles and vessels. The outlines are simple, the compositions fairly naïve and most figures are painted in a frontal position. Admittedly there is more scope for decoration when surfaces of objects are larger than a tile about 17.5 cm square. The compositions are more elaborate, yet the style is the same. All vessels and tiles appear to have been produced in the same or similar workshops. Yet as well as the winged angel faces among the later dated material, the *strange* flowery composition decorating two particular pieces stand out quite forcefully. Such *strange* designs have been qualified as *fantastic* by Carswell¹⁸. These pieces are the 1741 jug and the 1744 deep basin (Pl. 10). Surprisingly no research has been done questioning the origins of such *strange* designs. There is no precedent for them in either Iznik or even Persian motifs although, as mentioned earlier, the cone motif of Chinese origin, at least in ceramic design, appears to have migrated from Persia to Kütahya in the late 17th or early 18th century. The motif possibly arrived in Kütahya with Armenian potters when the Safavid dynasty collapsed following the surrender of the capital Isfahan to the Afghans. These potters would have found the decorative repertoire in these Ottoman workshops rather pedestrian, and in need of new sources of inspiration.

Further examples of unusual decoration in blue or polychrome on Kütahya dishes and containers, have appeared in recent auction catalogues, and their intriguing painting with a brisk brush are comparable to the designs on the 1741 jug and the 1744 deep basin¹⁹. Such new awareness of either different ceramic shapes or totally new designs raises the question about ways and means of their seemingly sudden appearances. In general, answers have been found down the centuries in the case of Chinese export ceramics influencing the potter's production across Asia, as well as the effect of Central Asian and Chinese textiles on ceramic designs in western Asia²⁰. Could it be possible that once again foreign designs have a part to play in *strange designs* in the case of Kütahya ceramics? Research into international trade links by land routes during the 17th and 18th centuries²¹ could bring some light on this question, since recently the maritime activities of the EIC and the VOC have been researched in greater depth²².

International trade and the Armenian network

Other studies have analysed more closely the commercial expansion of the Armenian network after the forced transfer of the merchant population of Julfa by Shah Abbas I in 1604, in particular to Isfahan, his new capital, and thereafter to the area of new Julfa across the Zayenda river from Isfahan itself. Although earlier Armenian establishments had been in operation on the eastern Mediterranean coast and in Venice, where the first printed Armenian book appeared in 1512, the Armenian network based in New Julfa now stretched from eastern Asia to the Atlantic coast of

¹⁸ Carswell J. and Dowsett C.J.F., pp. 87, 88.

¹⁹ Bonhams & Brooks, Knightsbridge, *Islamic & Indian Art*, May 2nd 2001, nos. 420, 454. Drouot-Montaigne, *Arts d'Orient*, Paris, November 13th 2001, nos. 409, 418, 420, 455. Sotheby's, *Arts of the Islamic World*, London April 30th 2003, no. 89.

²⁰ Crowe Y., Slip painted wares and Central Asia, in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 1985-1986, 50 1987, pp. 59-67. Late 13th century Persian tilework and Chinese textiles, in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, ns. 5, 1991, pp. 153-161.

²¹ Herzig E.M., The volume of Iranian raw silk exports in the Safavid period, in *Iranian Studies* 25 1992, pp. 61-79.

²² The English East India Company (EIC) was founded in 1600, and the Dutch Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) in 1602.

Europe; and it was chiefly geared to the silk trade in the hands of about twenty merchant families operating from within Persia²³. Early in the 17th century, this trade was managed directly by the Safavid Crown for the coffers of the royal household, the *khassa*. But after the death of Shah Abbas in 1629, the silk trade soon became the personal domain of the Armenian traders. The East India companies, both Dutch and English, had to pay cash for their purchases of silk bales, a fact which irked the Europeans. The silver bullion went directly into the royal mint with the result that silver supplies of hard currency increased and remained within the country.

Chaplain Ovington travelling to Surat in 1689 comments on the vast network created by the Armenians: *Armenians who above any of the rest travel the farthest, spread themselves in all parts of Asia, as well as Europe, and are as universal merchants as any in the world. The Armenians are civil and industrious, their language is one of the most general in all Asia, and they have spread themselves in vast colonies very far in Anatolia, Persia, the Holy Land, Egypt, Russia and Polonia, and range by private persons and families, like Jews in all parts, and like them are as subtle and diligent in their traffick. For they have always had a celebrated name for merchandise*²⁴. Two statements stand out in this quotation from Ovington's text. The first one is the fact that Armenians have spread themselves in *vast colonies very far* and *travel the farthest*. It is indeed their incredible ability to travel widely especially by land which enabled them to evaluate and keep in touch with the fluctuations of the market in general. In fact their presence across Anatolia and in Istanbul is well known, so are some of their bases in Basra, Bursa, Izmir, Aleppo, Venice, Marseille, Lisbon and Amsterdam. Russia should also be mentioned since a Russian trade agreement had been signed only in 1667 and confirmed in 1671, and Ovington would have been aware of it. By 1689 the Armenians had managed trade privileges on Russian soil at the expense of other Oriental merchants. Although Ovington does not mention India, since he was sailing to Surat, he probably implied that India was also part of the broad Armenian network. It was in Surat that one Khwaja Minas owned several ships and bought the *Hopewell* from the English East India Company in 1665. The same year tension arose with that company about shipping most of the Armenian trading community to Bombay²⁵. By 1668 Bombay had become the headquarters of the English East India Company. Further details dealing with Armenians settling in India have been recorded by Mesrobian J. Seth and published in 1895. He mentions a church built in Agra as early as 1563 with eight tombstones ranging in date from 1645 to 1701. He also lists tombstones now in the Calcutta Museum dated 1646 and 1693, the latter tomb belonging to a native of New Julfa. Among further dates, 1724 marks the foundation of the present Armenian church in Calcutta and 1712 that of a church in Madras²⁶.

The Armenians [...] range by private persons and families is the second statement made by Ovington. These leading Armenian families in New Julfa numbering only about twenty, succeeded in expanding their international trading network by keeping to set rules. Each family unit, a form of a joint family system, was the basis for all trading. There could also be outside members, agents and smaller firms with which contracts, *commenda*, would be signed. Herzig summarises thus the features of the Armenian family firm: *The family possesses [...] the cohesion and the clear pattern of authority. [...] Confidence in one's associates is necessary in a joint economic activity; [...]*

²³ Ghougassian V.S. *The emergence of the Armenian diocese of New Julfa in the seventeenth century*, Atlanta 1998.

²⁴ Ovington J., *A voyage to Surat in the year 1689*, ed. Rawlinson H.G., London 1929, p.133.

²⁵ Maloni R., *European merchant capital and the Indian economy: Surat Factory records 1630-1668*, New Delhi 1992, p. 369, note 6.

²⁶ Seth M.J., *History of the Armenians in India*, 1895, reprint New Delhi 1988.

*complete trust was essential. [...] Partners were all shareholders in a patrimony held jointly in Julfa and controlled by the current patriarchal or senior partner*²⁷.

For instance in the early 18th century there were about twenty partners of all ages in the Shahriman firm with permanent *factories* in Surat, Livorno and Venice where the family eventually settled at the end of the 18th century. On the other hand the lives of Khwaja Minas Tarxanean's descendants illustrate well the broad range in time of the family's activities. Khwaja Minas himself was one of the signatories of a letter sent in 1671 by the head of the community, the *kalantar*, to Alexis I (1620-1676), the first tsar to open Russia to the outer world and assign a district of Moscow to foreigners, the *Nemetskaïa Sloboda*. Khwaja Minas died in 1701 when his son Paron Safraz became the head of the family concern until his own death in 1717²⁸. The family scattered after Emniaz, the last surviving son, was executed by Nadir Shah in 1746. Some moved to Basra and others to India where strong commercial links had already been established. Later one descendant became a jeweller to Catherine the Great, and there were remaining descendants in Tiflis around the 1880s. A further factor in the management of the family firm was the role played by agents sent abroad. A *commenda* with one agent Aghazar, lasted from 1702 to 1716, with his business travels taking him chiefly to Venice, Amsterdam and Moscow. Another, Stepanos Hayrapetean, was travelling to Erzurum, Livorno, Izmir and Baghdad from 1719 to 1730 before settling for the last five years of his life in Surat²⁹.

Yet such a trading system had to be based on more than blood relationship and trust. It should be remembered that Armenian communities succeeded to survive numerous upheavals by identifying themselves with their own church, their own beliefs and their own writing. A religious and cultural revival took place under the leadership of the second Primate of the diocese of New Julfa, Khachatour Kesaratsi, from 1623 to 1629 and from 1631 until 1646; the newly settled Armenians benefited from his talents as preacher, organiser and even as a painter and a singer. Under his leadership new churches were built and splendidly decorated, and the Saint Saviour's monastery, the seat of the primate, became a centre of higher education for the clergy. Another school for training future merchants, with a printing press by 1636, was headed by the lay educator Kostand Varzapet³⁰. He was the author of an important text book known as *Ashkharhajoghov* (a general collection or encyclopaedia) which contained rules of trade, as well as lists of trade routes for New Julfa merchants with instructions on currencies, weights and measures used across Asia and Europe³¹. A fixed-term act of liquidation for 1729 of an association between two merchants in April 1727 at Surat illustrates the way in which business operated across the Armenian network according to these set rules³².

²⁷ Herzig E.M., The family firm in the commercial organisation of the Julfa Armenians, in *Etudes Safavides*, ed. Calmard J., Paris-Tehran 1993, pp. 287-304, in particular pp. 295-296.

²⁸ His monogram appears on three blue and white ceramics in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. See Crowe Y., The Safavid potter at the crossroad of styles, forthcoming in *Iran and the world in the Safavid age*, (Tauris) London 2007.

²⁹ Herzig, E.M., p. 303.

³⁰ Ghougassian V.S., *The emergence of the Armenian diocese of New Julfa in the seventeenth century*, Atlanta 1998, pp. 171-172. Herzig (1993) also mentions a mid-18th century Armenian law book devised in Astrakan, see footnote 27, pp. 290-294.

³¹ Ghougassian V.S., The Armenians of New Julfa and their cultural heritage, in *Het Christeljik Oosten* 52 2000, pp. 201-220.

³² Aghassian M. and Kévonian K., The Armenian merchant network: overall autonomy and local integration, in *Merchants, companies and trade: Europe and Asia in the early modern era*, ed. Chaudhuri S. and Morineau M., Cambridge 1999, pp. 74-94.

Trade and travelling

Even casual reading of travellers' accounts, makes one also aware of the constant presence of Armenian merchants *en route* across or around western Asia. The sea route was not the favourite way for those younger members of the Julfan trading families to travel over long distances, or for their own agents or agents of lesser firms. Admittedly passages or the renting of boats belonging to East India companies was not unusual, but this was done mostly to travel the sea routes from the sorting ports of Surat and later Bombay or Madras and other ports such as Tranquebar in Danish hands on the east coast of the Indian subcontinent. The sea journeys would then include calling at Bandar Abbas and at ports up the Gulf with Basra as a starting point for caravans³³. By the mid 18th century Basra's Armenian population appears to have been around fifteen hundred.

Obviously the most important were the land routes and these have been often described by 17th and 18th centuries European travellers. Jean Chardin (1643-1713), perhaps one of the most captivating figures of his time³⁴, gives a vivid account of his remarkable travels (1665-1680), the first volume of them being published in 1686. He acquired vast experience in dealing with Asian traders as he travelled across western Asia at first on his father's account, and subsequently for himself as he acquired a fluent knowledge of the Persian language. Chardin's life almost coincides with that of Louis XIV whose actions leading to the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, led to him settling in London where his commercial abilities were appreciated not only by the East India Company but also by members of the Royal Society including John Evelyn. Charles II ennobled him in 1681. The following year he joined the East India Company as a share holder within months of obtaining English nationality. This enabled him to act in London and the Netherlands as a recognised authority between the EIC and the Dutch government (1683) or Armenian traders (1688).

A summary of Chardin's journey east from late 1671 until September 21st 1673, when he was received by Shah Sulayman, gives an insight into the route he followed mainly by land: from Livorno on a Dutch boat to Izmir, Istanbul including a trip to Edirne, on to Caffa on the Black Sea, then through Mingrelia to Tiflis, Erivan, Nakshvan, Tabriz, Saveh, Kashan and finally Isfahan. The following spring finds him in Bandar Abbas where he notes on April 23rd, that four Dutch ships have arrived loaded with goods from China: spices, sugar, ivory and *des toiles blanches et peintes de toutes sortes*³⁵. By the end of the year he is back in Isfahan where the caravan for Qandahar is ready to set off on a journey via Isfahan, Birjand and Farah, and would probably end in Agra. Besides being a very ancient road, *La route d'Isfahan à Candahar [...] est la plus ordinaire et [...] les marchands aiment mieux [la] prendre, parce que l'on trouve presque partout de l'eau*, as reported by another French traveller Tavernier. He adds that its famous fortress is the best in the whole of Asia. He also mentions that merchants and their caravans still use this land route to convey amongst other goods, the finest cottons made in India³⁶.

Recently there has been a tendency to concentrate research on sea routes in publications on the East India Companies and their naval activities, at the expense of caravan roads. Ship lists, it must be noted, mention regularly painted cloths. Yet by consulting less well known travel documents it soon becomes clear that old land trade routes were still in use.

³³ Raynal G.T., *Histoire philosophique et politique des Etablissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Genève 1782, vol. II p. 59. The first publication was printed anonymously in 1770 in Amsterdam.

³⁴ Van Der Cruysse D., *Chardin le Persan*, Paris 1998.

³⁵ *Voyages de Monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse. Et autres lieux de l'Orient*, Amsterdam 1711, 3 vols, vol. III p. 177.

³⁶ *Voyages en Perse et description de ce royaume par Jean-Baptiste Tavernier marchand français*, ed. Pia P., Paris 1930, pp. 241-242.

That Armenians and their goods would also travel on the Qandahar road to and from India is illustrated by two rock inscriptions near Ziarat. The site lies some hundred kilometres north-north-east of Quetta³⁷. The first inscription reads as follows: *Bless and remember Rustam, the son of Mul-masih Aku* (Jacob). The second one is just the fragment of a name: *son of [...] Aslan*. Such rock inscriptions have been found down the centuries on many caravan routes; one of the most famous tracks remains that following the upper Indus valley connecting the plains of northern India to the Turkestan and Kashgar areas³⁸. These lasting statements were carved on rock faces on the edges of tracks when climatic hazards, such as great frost, snows or floods, compelled caravans to stop for a while, thus giving them time to carve personal graffiti; these have survived well beyond the lives of its carvers and now stand as witnesses to earlier caravans of merchants and pilgrims.

While the caravan roads from India should not be neglected, as noted by Steengaard³⁹, the well trodden land routes across the Iranian plateau and Anatolia to Izmir, Bursa and Istanbul also retained their importance; thus in the context of the Armenian network, every main town in Anatolia after the collapse of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia in 1375, visibly had an Armenian community. In the case of Aleppo, William Biddulph singles out in 1600 the presence of Julfites among the Armenians of the town⁴⁰. Besides, such was the importance of international trade that the whole area was served by an impressive network of caravanserais⁴¹. Further itineraries from the Indian Ocean to the shores of the Mediterranean, would have used both types of transport, by sea and by land, sailing up the Gulf, and then trekking from Basra via Baghdad to Aleppo and Latakia and near by harbours.

Patterns also travel

In his encyclopedic work, first published anonymously in 1770, the French Abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal states that in India Armenians would buy raw cotton and oversee the whole process of producing textiles from the weaving stage to the final product. The cottons were then sent from the Coromandel Coast to Isfahan via Bandar Abbas. From there they were dispatched all over Iran, the Ottoman Empire and Europe under the name of *Perses*. Here is the French text:

Ces négocians [Arméniens] avaient entrepris depuis longtemps le trafic des toiles. Ils n'avaient été supplantés, ni par les Portugais, qui n'étaient occupés que de pillage, ni par les Hollandais, dont les épiceries avaient fixé toute l'attention. On pouvait craindre, d'ailleurs, de ne pouvoir soutenir la concurrence d'un peuple également riche, industrieux, actif, économe. Les Arméniens faisaient alors – ce qu'ils ont toujours fait depuis. Ils passaient aux Indes; ils y achetaient du coton; ils le distribuaient aux fileuses; ils faisaient fabriquer des toiles sous leurs yeux; ils les portaient à Bender-Abassi, d'où elles passaient à Isfahan. De-là, elles se distribuaient dans les différentes

³⁷ Russell J., Two Armenian graffiti from Ziarat, Pakistan, in *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes XXI* 1988-1989, pp. 4773-75.

³⁸ Zabern P. von, *Between Gandhara and the Silk roads, rock-carvings along the Karakorum highway*, an exhibition catalogue, Mainz 1987.

³⁹ Steengaard N., The route through Qandahar: the significance of the overland trade from India to the West in the seventeenth century, in *Merchants, companies and trade, Europe and Asia in the early modern era*, ed. Chaudhuri S. and Moreneau M., Cambridge 1999, pp. 55-73.

⁴⁰ Baibourtian V., *International trade and the Armenian merchants in the seventeenth century*, New Delhi 2004, p. 54.

⁴¹ Siroux M., *Caravanserais d'Iran et petites constructions routières*, Le Caire 1949. Kiani M.Y., *The Iranian caravanserais during the Safavid period*, unpublished thesis, SOAS London 1970. Kiani M.Y., *Iranian caravanserais*, in Persian, Tehran 1995.

*provinces de l'Empire, dans les états du grand-seigneur et jusqu'en Europe, où l'on contracta l'habitude de les appeler Perse; qoiqu'il ne s'en soit jamais fabriqué qu'à la côte de Coromandel*⁴².

Some of the larger painted cottons, often called *palampores*, were specially made for Armenian churches as altar curtains, and can still be seen in the treasury of the Etchmiacin cathedral (Pl. 11) as well as in the monastery of Saint James in Jerusalem⁴³. No doubt these exotic textiles also appealed greatly to the Armenian communities who, through trade, were well placed to avail themselves of these *chintzes*, not only for church curtain-screens, but also for domestic purposes. Smaller lengths of *chintzes*, another name for painted cottons, reached the homes of Armenian families and could be used in upholstery and garments as was the case in European households.



Plate 11.

Fragment of a textile hanging, Ejmiacin cathedral, Armenia. Author's photograph.

Already appreciated in Egypt by the 11th century⁴⁴, Indian painted cottons gained fame from the moment the East India Companies and their multiracial providers dispatched them to western Europe. Their fast dyes, their durability and the great appeal of their exotic designs made them a favorite at all levels of society to the point that by the early 18th century their import was banned to protect the production of linen and wool fabrics both in England and France, but to little effect. Their joyful array of colours went beyond the formal if striking display of Ottoman and imported Italian textiles although the latter remained attractive and appreciated⁴⁵. It is the presence of this exotic range of patterns which seemingly appealed to the Kütahya potters when they realized that new designs might attract a sophisticated type of clientele whose taste no longer required the weakened Iznik patterns produced in the 17th century but searched for fresh decoration on dinner services, at the time a new concept. This new departure coincided with the discovery of European porcelain in Saxony, and with the imports of brilliant polychrome vessels from China and Japan. Thus the moment would have come for the Kütahya potters to compete not only in the field of the blue and white range of colours but also in multi-coloured designs. What better source of inspiration than certain floral patterns from these exotic *chintzes*?

If the geographical and historical path of Indian painted cottons is a manageable task, the demonstration of their influence on Kütahya ceramic design remains a much greater challenge and can only be sketched at this early stage of research. The multiple influences involved in their patterns for a world market, make the unraveling of the designs, a long-term quest. At a glance, one can detect in turn European, Ottoman, Persian, of course Mughal, south-east Asia and Japanese

⁴² Raynal G.T., *Histoire philosophique et politique des Etablissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Genève 1782, vol. II p. 22. The first publication was printed anonymously in Amsterdam in 1770.

⁴³ A set of photographs is in the hands of Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger.

⁴⁴ Barnes R., *Indian block-printed textiles in Egypt. The Newbury collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, 2 vols. Oxford 1997.

⁴⁵ Atasoy N., Denny W.B., Mackie L.W. and Tezcan H., *Ipek, Imperial Ottoman silks and velvets*, London 2001.

motifs. Such a complex study requires enormous resources of time and combined help. Hence among the numerous surviving Indian painted cottons, two relatively small examples from the collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum will be used here to illustrate the relationship between a few designs on two Coromandel *chintzes* and those on Kütahya ceramics. These are a small bodice (15 9-1950, 28 cm x 50 cm) (Pl. 12) and a double-sided rectangular fragment (IM 15-1919, 122 cm x 30 cm) (Pl. 13). They will be referred to as samples number one and number two.



Plate 12.
Bodice in Coromandel painted cotton
early 18th century
28 x 50 cm. no. 15 9-1950.
Author's photograph.
Courtesy of the Trustees
of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Plate 13.
Folded piece of Coromandel painted
cotton, early 18th century
30 x 122 cm when unfolded
no. IM 51-1919. Author's photograph.
Courtesy of the Trustees
of the Victoria & Albert Museum



In both cases, the striking complexity and exuberance of the designs is disconcerting, yet the sheer lushness of the patterns commands a closer look at the elongated leaves and large composite flowers. The leaves flow and bend as if they were blown by a swirling wind. Their tips turn inwards and their edges are cusped, jagged or straight. A large repertoire of fillers is applied to the surface of the leaf itself. On *chintz* number one (Pl. 12), one notices in particular a scrolling stem with small leaves and flowers, a diaper pattern, series of small dotted sprigs and a cornucopia pattern of successive overlapping small blue and red fan shapes. With a smaller repeat on *chintz* number two (Pl. 13), the leaves follow a similar pattern: the cusped upper edge contrasts with the lower jagged. The surface of the upper half has a pattern of dots, the lower one a filler of minute leafy branches (Pl. 14). If one considers one of the three strange flowers on the polychrome dish, the red outer decoration is cusped with a dotted design close to that on the *chintz*. The surrounding pair of leaves has serrated inner leaves (Pls. nos. 5, 15).

Already large flowers on *chintzes*, some resembling exploding lotuses and chrysanthemums, have taken on unrealistic forms which set them into the realm of fantasy. On Kütahya ceramics the interpretation of such unbotanical vegetation becomes even more fantastic, suggesting a complete disregard for the originals, yet the greatest leap into the world of imagination. This is not without some parallels in illuminations on the great Armenian manuscripts in the 13th century⁴⁶. If the ceramic painter cannot reproduce all the nuances of the painted cottons yet he creates a similar if impressionistic vision of the complex lotus forms as seen in the pairs of flowers on *chintz* no. 2 (Pls. 13, 5).



Plate 14.
Coromandel painted cotton, Plate no. 13, detail.



Plate 15
Dish Plate no. 5, detail.

Further details, such as series of small dotted stems, are visible below the leaves on the bodice (Pl. 12) and on the hexagonal tile (Pl. 16). They appear frequently on vertical shapes, on Kütahya ceramics such as beakers and containers. A further detail consists of delicate tendrils which spiral to fill elegantly empty spaces. They can be seen above the *chintz* leaf (Pl. 14) and are used in a tighter manner on the flange of the San Lazzaro deep basin (Pl. 10). Checker-board, scale and especially grid patterns, are also recurrent features, which not only belong to the world of *chintzes* and Kütahya wares as well as tiles (Pls. 16 and 17), but are also part of the decoration on European ceramics such as can be seen on this detail of an early 18th century *faïence* dish from Rouen (Pl. 18).

One last comment should be made in this preliminary *rapprochement* between Indian painted cottons from the Coromandel coast and Kütahya wares. It is the presence of a striking vivid yellow, different by its brilliance from earlier yellows in Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey. It was a new type of yellow presumably created in Kütahya to recall the yellow colour on the Indian *chintzes*. However there is no yellow visible on the surviving cottons. Yet a closer inspection of these cottons reveals areas with shades of a pale brown colour, the colour of faded yellow. It is a fact that yellow being a dye far less stable than blues and reds, does not keep its brilliance for long. By contrast fired colours on ceramics do survive the passage of time and bear witness to more fleeting shades in other materials (Pls. 5, 10).

⁴⁶ Nersessian Der S., *Armenian Art*, London 1978.



Plate 16 .
Hexagonal tile, W: 19.5 cm
Bonhams & Brooks London sale
May 2nd 2001, no. 462.



Plate 17.
Square tile, W: 21 cm
Christies London sale, October 12th 1999, no. 406.



Plate 18.
Rouen faience dish, detail
Musée National de la Céramique, Sèvres
MNC 23 145
Author's photograph.

Although the links between Indian painted cottons of the late 17th and early 18th centuries and designs on Kütahya ceramics, may at first have appeared far fetched, the historical coincidence between Armenian international trade with the spread of a great variety of goods, including Indian painted cottons, did not occur by chance, neither did the political events which marked the latter part of Safavid history. These pages are but the beginning of an attempt to unravel cross-cultural exchanges between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean world. The field requires more work, as the studies of textiles never cease to bring forth new transfers. This may also be an opportunity to ponder on the fact that design is an art without frontiers and that art in the world of Islam, remains based on design whatever the material involved.

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