

Kütahya patterns : out of the blue?

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Although Turkish ceramics have a long history, it is fair to say that they are better known for the 16th and 17th centuries Ottoman production of Iznik, the ancient Nicea, than for the more exotic 18th century tiles and vessels from the kilns in Kütahya. The town itself lies inland about 100 kms South-South-East both of Iznik and Bursa. The polychrome decoration on tiles and small cups with saucers and ewers, have in recent years become collectors' pieces, yet *Kütahya patterns out of the blue?* is the concern of this paper. The title may sound rather flippant nonetheless the use of the colour blue in this particular ceramic decoration remains at the centre of the present research. How can one explain the advent in Kütahya of what appears to be a new type of *blue and white* production early in the 18th century? The polychrome pieces will be the subject of a further study.¹

Out of the blue indeed! Half a century ago Arthur Lane wrote about *poor drawing and inferior colours* on Iznik wares after 1640.² However in neighbouring Iran there was no such poor drawing, colours were excellent and cobalt blue never ceased to be used by potters up to the Afghan invasion in 1722 and the fall of the Safavid dynasty. Earlier the influence of captured Tabrizi craftsmen on the tile work of Istanbul mosques after the Persian defeat of Chaldiran (1514) is well documented, yet no later similar influences have ever been mentioned, although on several occasions in the last few years, late Safavid dishes and water sprinklers have been mistaken for Kütahya wares. The confusion arose when new patterns originating in China, such as the *cone* pattern, were immediately adopted by the Safavid potter and only later by the potteries of Kütahya. Thus parallels can be discovered between Persian and Kütahya productions of the early 18th century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, THE ARMENIAN NETWORK

Over the centuries ramifications between scattered Armenian communities grew to form a remarkable network across Eurasia and in particular between Persia and the Mediterranean world. The silk trade and other commercial activities were in the hands of the New Julfan merchants in the 17th and 18th centuries.³ Besides, records gathered by John Carswell attest a 15th century presence of an Armenian population in Kütahya. In 1444, an Armenian potter, Murad, offered a mantle to a priest in the church of the Mother of God in Kütahya.⁴ In his recent research Garo Kürkman mentions a land survey recording a kiln in 1537, and decrees in 1579 about tiles, and in 1608 about cups. The earliest agreement between the state and the cup makers' guild is dated AH1178 (AD 1764). Sixty-nine journeymen are listed and also thirty-four master craftsmen, mostly Armenian names.⁵ In the 1670s Evliya Çelebi traveled to Kütahya and recorded three Armenian and three Greek districts out of thirty four in existence.⁶

¹ Kütahya designs and Asian trade, in *Patrons, Traders and Makers, People and art in the Islamic Middle East*, a conference held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, April 27-28 2007, forthcoming.

² Lane 1957, p. 58.

³ Herzog 1993, pp 287-304. Ghougassian 1998.

⁴ Carswell 1972, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁵ Kürkman 2006, pp 51, 52, 84, pp 108-113.

⁶ Kürkman 2006, p. 68.

Furthermore, archaeological work in the town under Faruk Şahin⁷ has confirmed the existence of a 16th century blue and white production close to that of the famous ewer and bottle in the British Museum.⁸ An inscription on the ewer reads as follows: *This vessel is in commemoration of Abraham, servant of God, of Kütahya in this year 959/1510, March 11th. 1524 AD is the date read at the top of the shoulder of the neckless bottle. The rest of the inscription reads: Bishop Ter Martiros sent word to Kütahya: May the Mother of God intercede for you: send one water-bottle (surahi) here. May Ter Martiros receive it in peace. In the year 978/1529 on the 18th of March this bottle was inscribed. Another text can be read inside the base: Ter Martiros sent word from Ankara: May this water-bottle [be] an object [of] Kütahya for this monastery of the Holy Mother of God.*

These two dated pieces and the archaeological finds show a decoration similar to that of the Iznik production during the first half of the 16th century. That Kütahya kilns supplemented those of Iznik throughout the 16th century is now evident. While 17th century Iznik ceramics failed to keep up earlier standards of quality and design, the Kütahya potteries must have also maintained some output to justify the renewed 18th century production as a fresh decorative vocabulary suddenly appeared on the market. Hence, what could be the reasons for the survival of the potteries in Kütahya and how did a new set of shapes and designs appear *out of the blue*?

Archaeological finds in Kütahya and in a number of harbours such as London and Amsterdam as well as aboard shipwrecks, have proved the popularity of Kütahya cups and saucers around the world in the 18th century, displaying a variety of designs including the symptomatic *cone* design. Sale catalogues regularly illustrate colourful series of Kütahya wares with new shapes such as jugs and coffee pots indicating close contacts with European fashion. Was this *cone* design, either in blue or polychrome, directly borrowed from Chinese dishes and ewers, or could there have been indirect influences through Persia? Persian potters, it seems, were the first to take over this *cone* design before the turn of the century.

THE CONE DESIGN

It was only by 1683 that the potteries of Jingdezhen in China were officially reopened under the Qing emperor Kangxi (r.1662-1722). The renewed activities of the kilns responded to imperial needs and to the ever increasing demand for Chinese high fired wares from Asia and indeed from Europe. Their designs were no longer connected with either earlier Chinese *Kraak* wares of the Ming dynasty, or with *Transitional* export pieces; new motifs were adapted to a different and alien Qing taste with flowery outlines close to textile embroideries.⁹ Among these export ware motifs one of the more popular was the *cone* design (figs 1 & 1a).

The early Kangxi patterns of the new dynasty are well represented in the Topkapi Serai Museum collection.¹⁰ According to the size and shape of the object the *cone* motif is repeated in various numbers: four, six, eight or just one *cone* on certain ewers. Their contours can be fairly straight or with small wisps and densely packed fillings or lined with converging branches. As early as the last decade of the 17th century some of these variations were reinterpreted by the Safavid potter on dishes of medium size, more often in fours and sixes (figs 2 & 2a). A double blue ring, acting as a signature, can be noticed inside the base of some of these dishes. This feature appeared originally on Kangxi bowls.

⁷ Şahin 1981, pp 259-286.

⁸ Kürkman, pp 53, 56.

⁹ Tregear 1979, pp 149-158, p.151.

¹⁰ Krahl 1986, vol. 3, pp 979-985.



1
Wash bowl, Kangxi, W: 33 cm, inv. 4675
Topkapi Serai Museum.



1a
Ewer Kangxi, H: 32 cm, inv. 4680
Topkapi Serai Museum.



2 – 2a
Dish, Persian, front and back, W: 20.3 cm; Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. 1166-1876.

With the arrival on the Persian market of such new designs the potter immediately expanded his decorative vocabulary during the rule of the last active shah of the dynasty, Shah Sultan Husayn (r.1694-1722). In the Victoria & Albert Museum catalogue of blue and white Safavid ceramics the use of the *cone* design is well illustrated by a Persian ewer (fig. 3), quite clearly inspired by the new production of Jingdezhen.¹¹ Other Chinese designs were taken over, such as the so called aster pattern which should require further study.

Regina Krahl has used the word *cone* to describe the new shape, although on occasions she replaces it by the word *palmette*. In the present context the word *cone* will be preferred to *palmette* since the latter has slightly different connotations in earlier Islamic art. No doubt the shape originated in Islamic lands. The Gujarati designers and dyers of the middle Ages knew what themes would be popular in Egypt when among their designs they created special tree and cone shapes for their fast dyed cottons.¹² Similar shapes were later woven into Mamluk silks (fig. 4), Safavid and Mughal brocades which found their way to Far Eastern markets through traditional channels of trade and the dealings of East Indian companies from the early 17th century. Finally this foreign *cone* pattern was adopted by the potteries under the rule of emperor Kangxi.

¹¹ Crowe 2002, nos. 352, 355, 356, 434, 435, 436, 437.

¹² There is a number of related examples in Barnes 1997.



3
Ewer, Persian, H: 22.7 cm,
Victoria & Albert Museum,
inv. 189-1977.



4
Mamluk textile, detail,
after the Topkapi Palace
Museum, inv. 13/1689.



5
Tile composition,
the Selimiye mosque, Edirne,
1568-1574.

In no way should the *cone* be confused with the ogival shape made famous on Iznik tiles such as those in the Sultan's loggia of the Selimiye mosque in Edirne (1568-1574) on the Bulgarian border (fig. 5). As mentioned above the Safavid blue *cone* has often lead auction houses astray, when it has been interpreted as a typical Kütahya pattern. A four-cone dish from the Victoria & Albert Museum is a case in point (fig 2 & 2a); at first site it could be labeled Kütahya. Yet by looking at the outer decoration, no mistake can be made. Fan shapes with ribbons have never been painted on the outer flange of a Kütahya dish! Another case of mistaken identity from a sale catalogue is provided by the bulbous part of a sprinkler (fig. 6). When placed alongside another sprinkler base with an Armenian monogram with similar cones (fig. 6a), it is evident that they have the same *cone* decoration which relates them to a ewer with the same monogram (fig. 3). The shape of the ewer itself belongs to similar Persian ewers of the late 17th century. Kütahya ewers or coffee pots do not have the same profile (fig. 7).



6
Sprinkler body, Persian,
H: 10 cm,
Christies sale, London,
October 10 1999, lot 403b.



6a
Sprinkler body, Persian,
H: 11.5 cm,
Victoria & Albert Museum
inv. 1248-1876.



7
Coffee pot, Kütahya,
H: 17 cm,
Arts Décoratifs, Paris,
inv. 8214.

There exists a third piece, a white incised dish, 23 cm wide, with the same monogram boldly set at the centre of it.¹³ Could these three pieces be part of an early 18th century dinner service? The owner of the monogram is Paron Safraz, who died in 1717; he was one of the richest merchants of New Julfa, the Armenian town across the river from Isfahan. The importance of the Armenian merchant community to which he belonged, as well as the part played by the community in the economy of the Safavid state, has been demonstrated earlier. Suffice is to remember its extensive network stretching from Lisbon to Canton, inclusive of Lhasa from the 1680s until 1717.

FURTHER CONNECTIONS AND CHRONOLOGY

If a link exists between Persia and Ottoman Kütahya through the *cone* design in blue and also in polychrome, what further links can be detected which would combine shape and/or pattern? The shape of the late 17th century ewer of Paron Safraz is different from the 1510 blue and white Ottoman ewer. In turn it is replaced by coffee pot and jug shapes brought to Kütahya workshops, I have suggested, by the Armenian community in contact with the requests of the European market. The *cone* pattern survives the passage of time, not the shape.



8 & 8a

Dish, Kütahya, front and back, W: 18.9 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum inv. 597-1874.

Three more designs, in the blue and white colour scheme and less *Out of the blue?*, demonstrate further connections, one with Iznik, the two others with Chinese origins. The first design could be a debased version of an Iznik flower spray, possibly closer to Ottoman embroideries; it is applied to medium size dishes and coffee pots. On a dish from the Victoria & Albert Museum (597-74) flower sprays decorate the outside and broad cones the inside; and a double ring appears inside the base of the dish (figs 8 & 8a).¹⁴ An expanded flower spray covers both sides of a coffee pot (fig. 7), the shape of which totally differs from 17th century Persian ewers as noticed earlier. Unexpectedly four flower sprays also decorate the back of a polychrome dish illustrating the archangel Gabriel; it is dated 1718 (figs 9 & 9a), which makes possible a dating of this type of decoration to the first quarter of the 18th century.

The second design, a single leaf, has a longer history. It first appears on a 1667 Chinese medium size dish and later the Vung Tau wreck around 1690 carried a large number of such Chinese dishes.

¹³ Crowe 2002, no. 354.

¹⁴ This dish (figs 8 & 8a) was mistaken for a Persian dish in the early V&A accession books. The correct attribution to Persia was made at a later date.



9 & 9a

Archangel Michael dish, front and back, W: 22 cm, dated 1718, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. 279-1893.

During that period several Persian leaf variations were produced in a variety of styles (fig. 10).¹⁵ And it was with some surprise that a small bowl from a mid 18th century ship wreck off Kartal in the Marmara Sea also produced a small bowl with a similar leaf pattern at the bottom of it (fig. 10a).¹⁶



10

Dish, Persian, W: 15.5 cm, Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran.



10a

Bowl Kütahya, W: 7 cm, çini kosk, Istanbul.

The third design belongs to a more complex set of patterns. The decoration on the broad flange of a blue and white Kütahya basin consists of a treble scroll with a separate motif as divider consisting of a shell-looking device (figs 11 & 11a). The original design of the scroll belongs to the realm of textiles,¹⁷ whereas the shell shape refers to the European Baroque style, and was first used in ceramics on flanges of Chinese export porcelain plates (figs 12 & 12a). It must have taken a fairly sophisticated Kütahya designer to combine both designs on one dish!

¹⁵ Crowe 1979, pp 390-398.

¹⁶ Kürman p. 217.

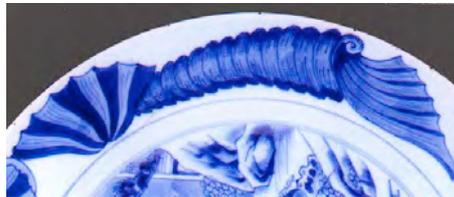
¹⁷ Crowe Y., Kütahya and caravans, forthcoming in *Oriental Art*.



11 & 11a
Basin, Kütahya, approximately 28 cm wide
Present location unknown



12 & 12a
Plate, Chinese export porcelain, W: 28.5 cm
British Museum Frank collection, inv. F587



CONCLUSION

If in the first place there has been earlier confusion between Persian ceramics and those produced in Kütahya, would it not indicate a fairly close connection between the two ceramic productions of Persia and Kütahya at the turn of the 17th century? It is tempting to suggest that some potters from the area of Isfahan/New Julfa might have emigrated west at the time of heightened tension between Shah Sultan Husayn and his Armenian subjects from the early years of the 18th century. The Safavid dynasty was to collapse in 1722 under the attacks of the Afghans. It is well known that at the end of the 17th century, laws against religious minorities had been loosened in Turkey making Ottoman territory more attractive to Persian Armenian craftsmen. As a result potters would have been attracted to Kütahya where they could settle in a more congenial environment. Their early awareness of Chinese new designs combined with closer contacts with the Mediterranean world explains the renewal of designs as well as shapes. The Persian *cone* pattern survived in its original design for a while, so did the painting of a double blue ring inside the base of dishes. These are interesting pointers to an influence and to a presence of Persian potters in Kütahya in the 18th century. The combined international demand for and significant revival of the Kütahya potteries was likely due to the renewal of designs from Persia through their potters as well as through a direct influence from Chinese motifs on export porcelains for the European market.

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