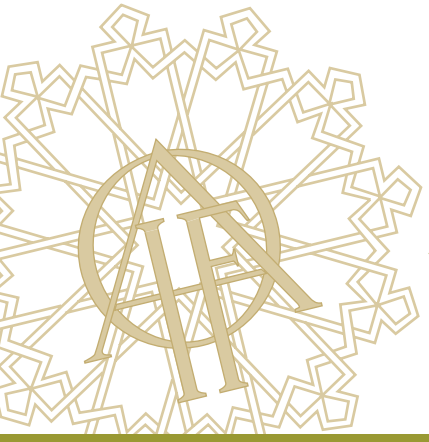
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ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

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Notes on Islamic Graffito Ware of the Near East [avec 7 planches].

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NOTES ON ISLAMIC GRAFFITO WARE OF THE NEAR EAST

BY

AḤMAD ʿABD AR-RÂZIQ

The common features of this Ware [1], which is distributed all over the Near East, are a red or reddish buff earthenware body, a coating of white clay or slip, and a transparent lead glaze which has a faint yellowish tone when it is not actually coloured green or purplish brown by means of metallic oxides. The glaze and slip are applied with care on the decorated surfaces, but on the exterior of bowls and dishes they are often represented only by a few random drops or splashes.

The decoration is formed by incising through the white slip coat with a narrow pointed instrument, so as to expose the red body beneath, either in fine lines traced with a stylus or by scraping away wide areas of slip around the pattern, which is left standing in white on a red ground. The former decoration we may distinguish as incised and the latter as champlevé [2].

It should be added that painting in liquid clays, or slips, is sometimes used to supplement both these kinds of decoration and even in some cases as a substitute for them.

Incising, carving, and painting in slips are all simple and natural pottery processes, and it is hardly possible to say when or where they were first used on this type of ware in the Near East.

Few of the specimens found in Egypt, Ephesus, Salonika, the Crimea, Corinth, Athens [3] or in the region of Constantinople can be said with certainly to be earlier than the tenth or eleventh century [4].

[1] A few years ago the name Gabri was given to this kind of pottery in the belief that it was made by the fire-worshipping « Gabri» inhabitants of Persia, before the establishment of Islam. Gabri is still used as a trade term for this and other early persian wares.

[2] This French term, which we have adopted for want of a better one in English, is normally applied to enamelled metal-work, in which the field of the design is cut away so as to form cavities for the enamel.

[3] D.T. Rice, *Byzantine Art,* 1954, p. 215.

[4] The Egyptian specimens quoted by Fouquet (*Contribution à l'Etude de la Céramique,* p. 125) are of a different type, viz. that with decoration in raised outline as found at Sâmarrâ and Susa and therefore irrelevant.

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The incised type was found at Sâmarrà and Susa, but not the champlevé. Both are seen among the Brahminabad fragments and both are found in some quantity at Rhages and on other sites in Northern Persia.

Indeed it is from Northern Persia that most of our champlevé specimens have come. Various provenances are habitually given by traders — Rhages, Veramin, Zanjân, Hamadân, Amul — but so far no kiln-site evidence has been produced to show where the ware was made. There is little doubt that it was found in the earliest strata at Rhages, and it is likely enough to have been made there. Much is also stated to have come from Zanjân, but there is reason (short of actual proof) for supposing that Zanjân ware was not made there but at Yasukend, near Sinneh in Ardalân. This is the typical Persian champlevé ware with boldly cut decoration of birds, animals, human figures, and cufic inscriptions in floral scrolls. The designs stand out in yellowish white against a warm reddish brown ground, and they are frequently variegated with splashes of green and purplish brown. Sometimes the green extends over the whole surface. The rendering of the animals and birds is often spirited and artistic, that of the human form is usually coarse and grotesque, but perhaps the most attractive specimens are those with bands of ornamental cufic characters, while the floral scrolls, which are almost Gothic in feeling [1], often have great beauty. The warm colouring of the yellows and reddish browns is pleasing, but the ware on the whole must be regarded as a kind of peasant pottery ranking with the slip-wares of seventeenth-century Europe, and lacking the refinement of the buff faïence of Sâmarrâ and the white ware of Rhages and Rakka.

The character of the ware is seen in the bowl with the camel (Pl. XVII, A) and that with a bird (Pl. XVII, B) which are typical specimens of Yasukend-ware. They are of red ware, with a small base slightly concave, and their colouring is yellowish white and reddish brown relieved by splashes of green.

The ewer (Pl. XVIII, A) is decorated in good style with cufic characters which can be read as li-sâ-hi-bi-hi, « to its owner », and which we can date from the style of the script to the eleventh century. This is about the period to which we may ascribe the other champlevé specimens with animal and human designs and foliage scrolls, because of their general similarity in the style to the inscribed specimens. We have at present no other means of dating them more exactly, and they doubtless cover a considerable range of years, perhaps from the tenth to the twelfth century.

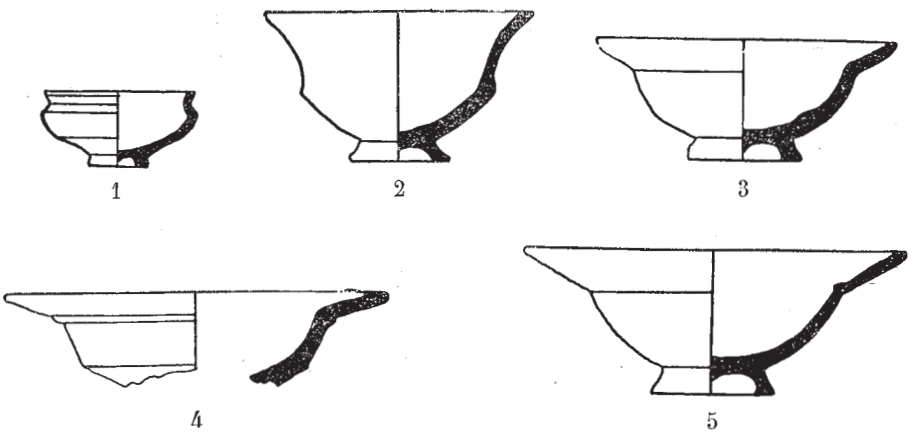
There are other kinds of graffito slip-ware besides this bold champlevé type. There is, for instance, a finely incised pottery with very little of the background scraped away, and having neat small designs which give something of the effect of the stamped ornament of book-bindings (Pl. XVIII, B), while another kind has designs merely incised in thin lines. There is again a cruder kind of ware (Pl. XIX, A) with designs of grotesquely rendered animals, birds and scrolls under a yellowish glaze stained and spotted with green, in general

[1] Hobson, *A Guide to the Islamic pottery of the Near East*, 1932, p. 25.

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effect somewhat resembling pokerwork [1]. Specimens of this ware have been found at Rhages, Zanjân, and Âmul.

Âmul is credited with another type with strongly incised birds and beasts coloured with yellow and ochreous red in addition to the more usual green and manganese. The background is sometimes filled in with rather angular scrolls which are more suggestive of coral branches than foliage, sometimes with circles and groups of dots. Other specimens have the main designs painted instead of incised, or again there are pieces with a combination of painted and incised ornament. They are certainly Northern Persian types, but it is only hearsay



evidence which connects them with Âmul, a city on the southern shores of the Caspian and on the route between Northern Persia and Samarkand. Plate XIX, B illustrates an interesting bowl which, though not of graffito class, is mentioned here because it is reputed to be of Âmul make. It has a reddish buff body dressed with black clay and painted in white with a griffin and four swans on a ground dotted in Samarkand style.

If indeed this kind of pottery ceased to be made in Persia in the twelfth-thirteenth century and it is by no means certain that it did, it is curious that it was apparently only just reaching its full development in Egypt at this time, under the rule of Mamelukes, 1250-1517 A.D.

A study of various forms of Egyptian ware indicates that Egyptian potters who produced them had mastered their trade. The graceful curving lines, the perfect proportions, the elaborate contours of the vessels, the variation in the degree of curvature of the sides, the different forms of the rims and bases all speak eloquently of the talent of these potters.

From the wide range of shapes, three forms seem to be uncommon in early Egyptian Islamic pottery; they are the carinated form with an externally concave rim (Fig. 1), the double curve bowls where the sides first bend outwards and then inwards (Fig. 2) and the shallow bowls curving out into a wide flat rim (Figs. 3-5). These forms were common in

[1] *A Survey of Persian Art,* vol. 5, plate 585 *B.*

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the Mediterranean basin outside Egypt. It should be noted that the actual form of the vessels in this period cannot be considered as a sound criterion in distinguishing various kinds or assigning dates because the differences in shapes may be only casual differences.

The Egyptian graffito ware is glazed on the inside as well as the outside [1], but a few were glazed only on the inside. Most of the potters used monochrome glazes : yellow, brown, green, or manganese but sometimes polychrome glazes were used as well.

Some vessels were glazed in two different colours, the inside being different from the outside, other vessels have the two different colours on the outside only while the inside is monochrome. A few vessels even had three different colours : mostly green, yellow and brown.

As for the patterns, it should be observed that the majority of this type usually had designs on the inside while the outside was entirely plain. Some examples were decorated on both the inside and the outside and a few pieces had patterns only on the outside; these were probably used as vases (Pl. XX, B).

With regard to the motifs depicted on the outside, we notice that they run directly below the rim in narrow or wide bands. The patterns of these bands are made up either of parallel oblique streaks or an undulating floral stem with leaves on either side. It seems that the potters of that period preferred a kind of fret pattern which appears on many sherds. Sometimes a procession of fish or an inscription in the Naskhi style on plain or floriated background with a sort of fret pattern drawn above and below it were used [2].

The motifs that decorate the inside include nearly all the repertoire of Islamic ornament.

The rims, when simple, are marked by a plain narrow band that runs around the vessel and sometimes they are not even indicated [3].

The flat pronounced rims are decorated in various ways. Streaks of various colours — brown, yellow, and green — drawn obliquely, chevrons, outlined relief floral patterns, elaborate incised arabesques, thin parallel lines with a drip that runs directly below them, a kind of fret pattern or a floral stem with leaves on both sides — all these patterns are seen separately on the rims [4]. The sides are either plain (Pl. XXI, A 1) or patterned (Pl. XXI, A 2). The beautiful designs decorate them very greatly.

Fret patterns, dots, wavy lines in curves, circles, triangles, drips or crescents are among the motifs of these sides (Pl. XXI, A 3). Bands of Naskhi or mock inscription, tressed patterns (Pl. XXI, A 3) and floral stems are also used.

Other fragments have six-petaled rosettes separated by illegible Arabic words, circles containing the cup design, fleur-de-lys, a horse-shoe, the target (Pl. XXI, B).

(1) Fouquet, *Contribution à l'Etude de la Céramique Orientale,* 1900, p. 123 ; see plate XX, A.

(2) Aly Baugat, *La Céramique Egyptienne de l'Epoque Musulmane,* 1922, plates 132-133.

(3) M. Marzouk, « Egyptian Graffito Ware », *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts,* vol. XIII, 1959, figs. 15, 18, 19.

(4) Marzouk, *op. cit.,* fig. 13.

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These motifs are presumably armorial badges. On the inside the bases are either decorated with some of the armorial badges previously mentioned or with other heraldic emblems such as the scimitar, the napkin, the lion or the fesse [1].

Other patterns are also used on the bases for decorative purposes; simple and elaborate arabesques, interlaced patterns, quadruped animals [2], circles filled with triangles and lozenges arranged with great beauty and regularity, or a radiating pattern that covers the whole base.

The word بركة « blessing » artistically treated was sometimes used to fill the whole base of the vessel. To sum up the predominent shapes and motifs of these vessels, or rather of these sherds, one can say that they are very similar to contemporary metal work. Undoubtedly, many of these motifs and some of the shapes of these vessels were done under the inspiration, more or less direct of the Mamluk metal-work [3]. Even the technique of inlaying which is considered as one of the real glories of Islamic art, is perfectly imitated in these earthenware vessels.

The ware itself is generally dark red, sometimes a lighter red, and the cream and yellow tints are obtained by washes of white slip under the lead glaze. To which period can this Egyptian graffito ware be attributed? This is the question I will now try to answer. In fact the mounds of Fustât were the most important source of this kind of ware. These mounds had unfortunately undergone three main catastrophes, namely, the ruthless sack of manure diggers who were only thinking of the benefit to antique dealers, the casual search made by Dr. Fouquet to which we referred before, and the excavation conducted by Aly Bahgat, ex-Director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.

This excavation was not carried out under any scientific control. No record was made of the position and level of the huge quantities of sherds contained in these mounds. Nothing is said about the relation between these sherds and other objects found beside them which may be dated or datable, and it is not said which fragments came from lower and which from higher levels.

Thus a unique opportunity for determining the history and sequence of the medieval pottery of the Near East was lost. Moreover the literary sources are silent on the subject of manufacturing pottery in Egypt in the middle ages.

The Kom-el-Dikka excavation conducted by Prof. Wace [4] in Alexandria throws in sufficient light on this kind. The only clue that may help in giving an approximate date to this ware, is the armorial blazons displayed on some of them.

Half a century ago, Herz Bey said that had it been possible to classify the armorial bearings in chronological order, a great step would have been taken in the history of Arab pottery [5].

(1) This is a three-fielded shield without emblem, see plate XXII, A.

(2) Aly Bahgat, *op. cit.*, plate 138.

(3) M. Marzouk, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

(4) Nearly all the pottery finds of the Kom-el-Dikka excavation were of « graffito ware ». See Marzouk, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

(5) Max Herz, *Catalogue Raisonné du Musée Arabe du Caire*, p. 209.

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Now Herz's wish has been, to a great extent, realised through the perfect study of Saracenic Heraldry by Dr. Mayer published in 1933. It became possible, through his study, to arrange many of these armorial emblems chronologically.

The arrangement of the sherds with blazons in chronological order, i.e. from lower to upper levels showed that their sequence was as follows : fleur-de-lys, six petaled rosette, fesse, cup, scimitar and napkin.

In turning to Mayer's Saracenic Heraldry and chronologically arranging the earliest dated examples which bear the same blazons [1] we get the following results : the fleur-de-lys, 1154-1173 A.D.[2] ; rosette, 1285 A.D.[3] ; the fesse, 1324 A.D.[4] ; the cup, 1331 A.D. [5] scimitar, 1330 A.D.[6] ; and napkin, 1343-1344 A.D. [7].

It has been proved that Kom-el-Dikka hill is an artificial mound formed by man who left succeeding layers of deposit there as years went on. In the light of the previous discussion it is quite likely that its formation began during the later days of the Ayyubid period and continued during the time of the Bahari Mamluks.

This suggestion can be explained by further evidence which may give it additional strength. A big quantity of sherds that was found in the upper levels and on the surface

[1] Needless to say that there are many objects which bear these blazons and are of later dates but we have chosen the earliest dated example of each to be on more solid ground. It was amazing to find that the chronological order of these dated examples corresponds with the actual position of Kom-el-Dikka finds in the undisturbed levels. It should be remembered that these dated examples may be either made in Egypt or Syria ; but this makes no difference as both countries were considered as one country under the rule of the Ayyubid and Mamluks.

[2] The fleur-de-lys appears for the first time in Muslim heraldry as the blazon of Nur ad-Din Mahmoud ibn Zanki, the Atabeck. It is found over the mihrab of Nur ad-Din's madrasah in Damascus, built between 1154 and 1173 A.D. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 22 ; Creswell, « The origin of the Cruciform plan of Cairine Madrasa », *C.B.I.F.A.O.* t. XXI, 1923, p. 27.

[3] The rosette is one of the oldest devices used under the Ayyubids, and to judge from its frequent occurrence on pottery, must have been very popular with the early Mamluks. The oldest example belongs to Shihab ad-Dawla Kafur as-Safawi, originally an eunuch of Malik al 'Adil. He died in 1285 A.D. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 135.

[4] Because of an inscription that appeared on this blazon giving the name of Ala-ad-Din who was styled « البريدى Baridi », despatch-rider, it is considered as the blazon of Baridi. Bakhtamur al-Husami who was appointed governor of Alexandria in 1323 A.D. and died here in 1324 A.D. had a blazon of this kind. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 52, 99.

[5] The cup was one of the most common blazons. The earliest example with a dated inscription which refers to the office of cup-bearer is that of Turji «طرجى» one of the Mamluks of Muhammad ibn Qalaun. He died in 1331 A.D. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 141.

[6] The earliest example of a scimitar with bands on the middle field of a three-fielded shield belongs to Qiglis al-Nasiri, originally a mamluk, and armour bearer of Muh. ibn Qalaun. He was charged with various missions. He died in 1330 A.D. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 190.

[7] The napkin was a piece of cloth in which clothes and chancery deeds were wrapped up. The earliest dated example with known biographical date belongs to Aqbugha min Abdel-Wahid Al-Nasiri originally a mamluk of Muh. Ibn Qalaun, then his jamdar. He was executed in 1343-1344 A.D. See Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 67.

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is decorated with almost the same patterns as those seen on the basin now in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art, attributed to the period Al-Nasir (Pl. XX, A).

Thus we can say that, the manufacture of this ware apparently continued in Egypt through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and somewhat similar pottery was probably made at the same time in Cyprus and other places along the Eastern Mediterranean, e.g. Smyrna, Ephesus, Miletus, Salonika, Athens.

This Cyprus pottery though constructed on familiar lines, has a distinctive character. The body is a light red or reddish buff clay which has the usual wash of white slip on the interior, and sometimes on the exterior as well. The ornament is rather roughly executed with a stylus which cuts through the white slip into the red body, and it is covered with the usual yellowish lead glaze variegated with splashes of green and brownish yellow.

In general tone the ware is lighter than the normal Egyptian graffito [1], the potting is less finished, and feet of bowls and cups are thicker and more splayed. Further, the designs used differ in one important feature from the Egyptian types, namely in the frequent occurrence of the human form in the decoration. An exceptional bowl in the British Museum is decorated with whorls of white slip under a green glaze. The shapes, too, of the Cyprus wares are peculiar, especially those of goblets (Pl. XXIII, A) and bowls.

There is no evidence to show whether this was made on the spot or imported from Egypt or elsewhere; but its individual character certainly points to local manufacture.

The pottery found during J.T. Wood's excavations at Ephesus, 1863-1874, and at Athlit Castle in Cyprus [2] includes a variety of types of graffito wares of the incised and champlevé kinds, slip decorated wares, unglazed water vessels with reliefs, and blue and white silicious-glazed pottery of fifteenth-century Anatolian type. How much was of local make it is difficult to say; but moulds for forming the raised ornament on the water vessels, and tripod supports or spurs for the graffito ware, excavated at the first place, prove that these two sorts at any rate were made on the spot.

The graffito ware [3] has a red body with the usual white slip dressing and a lead glaze coloured in places with green, yellow, brown, and manganese. The varieties of decoration are numerous, floral motifs, birds, animals, and geometric patterns were the usual subjects. It approximates closely to the Mamluke pottery of Egypt in general appearance.

The direct influence of Islamic art is to be seen in the use of cufic script to form a decorative band around the rim of the dish or bowl. One of the finest examples with such decoration in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum at Berlin comes from Miletus; it is probably to be assigned to the eleventh century [4].

[1] The fine bowl, with a bird, maybe an ostrich, displayed inside it (see plate XXII, B) though found in Cairo, has all the characteristics of the Cyprus group.

[2] The Athlit castle are proved to be not later than thirteenth century, as the castle was abandoned in 1291. See Joan Du Taylor, *Medieval graves in Cyprus,* in *Ars Islamica* vol. V, p. 81.

[3] Wallis, *Persian Ceramic Art,* 1891, pls. III to VI of the Appendix.

[4] D.T. Rice, *op. cit.,* p. 217.

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As time progressed, the line drawing and the incised techniques tended to merge, and when this took place, additional colours, notably deep brown and green, were used for the glazes. Fine bowls of this style, very Persian in appearance both with regard to technique and design, have been found on most Byzantine sites all over the Near East.

The important bowl with a bird among foliage scrolls [1] is closely analogous in technique to the Cyprus wares. It is reputed to have been found in Syria [2]. Possibly it is a Syrian variety of the Cyprus type. The decorative design and the colouring are reminiscent of some of the Northern Persian pottery, and it may be regarded as a link between to eleventh-century Persian wares and late Byzantine graffito pottery of Cyprus.

[1] See plate XXIII, B. This bowl is now in the Museum of Islamic Art at Cairo.

[2] Another bowl in the British Museum with a mounted archer among foliage scrolls has been found also in Syria, near Aleppo. See Hobson, *op. cit.*, fig. 39.

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A



B

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A



B

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B

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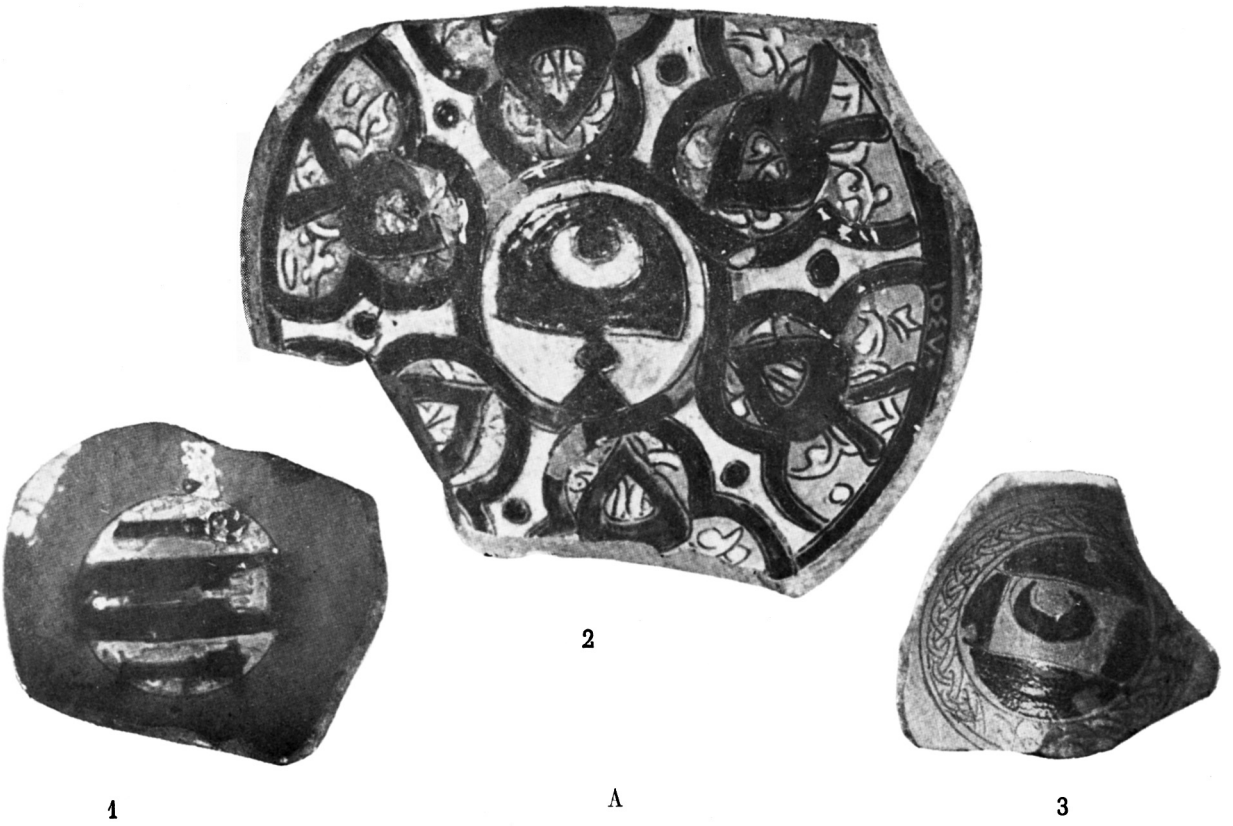


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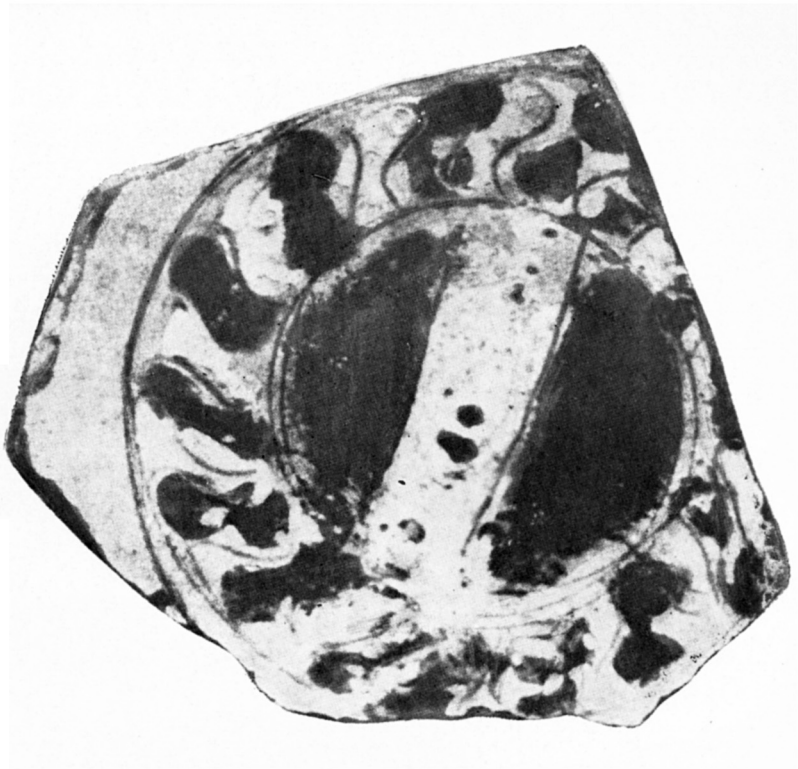
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