

Islamic Art and Material Culture Subject Specialist Network

4. An Introduction to Islamic Ceramics: **Nineteenth-century European imitations of Islamic ceramics.**

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, designers began to look to other world cultures for inspiration. This was encouraged by the great international exhibitions beginning in 1851, when arts and crafts from around the globe were brought for sale in England and Europe. Large collections of Islamic ceramics began to be formed in Paris and London, These were sold at celebrated public auctions fuelling demand for Iznik ware and lusted ceramics, and for less expensive copies as well as wares in the fashionable Islamic taste.



Fig. 1 Fire surround, English, c. 1854, designed by Owen Jones for the Alhambra Court at Crystal Palace, C.350:1, 2-2009

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1171023/fire->

The patterns, shapes and materials found in Islamic ceramics provided a large body of material for ceramic artists to draw from. However, European ceramic designers often borrowed from shapes found in metalware, or designs found on carpets, and sometimes the only obvious connection was in the name of the pattern: 'Alhambra', 'Baghdad', 'Old Rhodian' or 'Turkish'.

Inspiration was drawn from publications on world ceramics, increasingly illustrated with the recently invented photographic medium. For the first time the architecture and tilework of foreign lands became more accessible to craftsmen, who shared these with consumers. In addition, such books as Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 1856, offered hundreds of graphic reductions of three-dimensional forms for reproduction as painted or printed designs, all neatly, if incorrectly catalogued by geography, for example as 'Moresque' or 'Indian'.

Increased travel meant that consumers were more aware of these names and places. From the mid-nineteenth century a French, company known as Edme Samson & Cie, made reproductions of fashionable historic objects. These were rarely decorated with their factory mark, at best perhaps a simple 'S'. Production included Turkish and other medieval objects. Some of

their wares have had the marks erased and were resold as originals by merchants. Such reproductions become forgeries if knowingly sold as a genuine article (See Toolkit 5 [Fakes and Forgeries](#)).

Further Reading

Altman, Francesca Vanke. "'we May Borrow What Is Good from All Peoples' Christopher Dresser and Islamic Art". *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 - the Present* 29 (2005): 42–52.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/41809365?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Florence Slitine, *Samson genie de l'imitation*, Paris, 2002

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Tile after an Iznik tilework design
Earthenware, transfer-printed in black and painted in blue and turquoise
Minton Hollins & Co., Stoke-on-Trent, c. 1890
Dimensions: 20.3 x 20.3 cm
C.238-1976
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O278080/tile-minton-hollins-co/>

The transfer-printed design on this tile is a close copy of an Iznik tile of about 1540-50, but is probably based on a printed image, similar to those reproduced in *The Grammar of Ornament*, rather than a real object.



Tile inspired by Iznik pottery
Earthenware, painted in black with colours
Probably Pilkington & Co., near Manchester, c. 1907
Dimensions: 20.1 x 20.1 cm
C.207-1976
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O161828/tile-pilkingtons-tile-and/>

The colours of this tile are based on an Iznik palette of the late sixteenth century. Even the subject matter, carnations and tulips, is derived from Iznik sources, as is the symmetrical decorative scheme with the thick raised red slip. However, the actual design is in the European Art Nouveau style.



Inkwell inspired by 'Persian' art
Earthenware painted in black under a turquoise glaze
Samson & Cie, Montreuil, Paris, c.1870-90
C.55-2015
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1318883/inkwell-with-insert-samson-cie/>

This fascinating inkwell is based on a metal ware candleholder made in Northwest Iran around 1300-1350. The "nozzle" is removable and forms the cover of the ink holder. The base is an octagonal star tile. The decorative technique of painting in black under a turquoise glaze is also an Iranian invention of the thirteenth century. However, no such historical object ever existed. The French potters invented it to appeal to the market interested in Islamic art, especially rare and unusual items.



Vase with handles (left)
Earthenware with transparent turquoise glaze
Maw & Co., Jackfield, c. 1871
3398-1901
Height 19.1 cm
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O150262/vase-maw-co/>

The shape of the vase is based on an ancient Greek vessel, however, the turquoise glaze imitates Iranian wares, as found on the bottle on the right made during the Safavid period, c. 1700. (621-1889). The Chinese produced a similar turquoise glaze in the eighteenth century.



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Vase with lustre decoration
Earthenware
William Frend De Morgan, Chelsea, c. 1880
Height 24.5 cm
C.265-1915

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O150326/vase-de-morgan-william/>

The technique of lustre painting was a closely held secret of skilled potters passed on to the next generation and rarely recorded. The skill was lost for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Around 1873-4, the English Arts and Crafts artist William Frend De Morgan rediscovered the technique through experimentation in decorating stained glass. The design of wind swept leaves (*saz*) is borrowed from Iznik art, but here combined with designs from other sources, such as Chinese Kangxi blue-painted porcelain with flowers in compartments.



Jug with 'Persian' design
Earthenware, transfer-printed in black, painted in enamels and gold
Designed by Christopher Dresser for Old Hall China Company, Staffordshire, 1884-1902
Height 19.9 cm
C.74-2012

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1247580/persian-jug-christopher-dresser/>

This jug was part of a table service, the pattern was called 'Persian'. The rectilinear shape was also produced with a chinoiserie-printed pattern called 'Shanghai' and another known as 'Hampden'. In reality only the name is an obvious link with Islamic art. A superabundance of decoration similar to this example, became associated with Islamic art, which is why these highly decorated objects were identified as 'Persian' or 'Moorish' with no obvious visual associations.



Dish with Iznik inspired design
Porcelain, painted in coloured slip and gold
Albert Louis Damousse, using a blank from Sèvres, France, c. 1890
Diameter 22.9 cm
486-1896

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O99248/plate-damousse-albert-louis/>

The technique of thick slip, similar to red Armenian bole found on Iznik wares, was used to decorate this dish. Iznik floral designs were also the source of inspiration for this independent ceramicist. However, the palette and composition are European.

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Coffeepot
Fritware, overglaze colours
Kütahya, Turkey, about 1725
Height 18.7 cm
599-1874
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85345/coffee-pot-unknown/>



Coffeepot, copy
Porcelain, overglaze and underglaze green
Samson & Cie, France, c. 1850-1920
Height 17.3 cm
C.174-1928
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O297418/coffee-pot-samson-cie/>

In 1928, the V&A acquired the coffeepot on the right as an example of rare Kütahya ware. Named after the place of production in Kütahya, a city located in the centre of Turkey, the ware dates to the eighteenth century (1730-1800). It is a fine fritware resembling Chinese porcelain. The shapes included handleless cups, coffee pots, bowls and pilgrim flasks. However, in the 1980s, when the coffeepot was compared with genuine examples, it was identified as a copy, the paste or body was a hard-paste porcelain made in Europe, probably at the Samson factory, based in France at Montreuil, Seine-Saint-Denis, from 1864. They specialized in copying historical ceramics and usually marked their wares, discretely, with a dubious 'S', which could also be misread as a foreign letter. The copy is much heavier, denser and whiter than the original on the left, which is a creamy-coloured fritware. The colours are also different, especially the green which has flowed in the glaze. The result is brash in comparison with the mid-eighteenth century model. It is remarkable that demand for Kütahya ware was sufficiently high that imitations were made in France for the collector or, possibly, museum market so early.