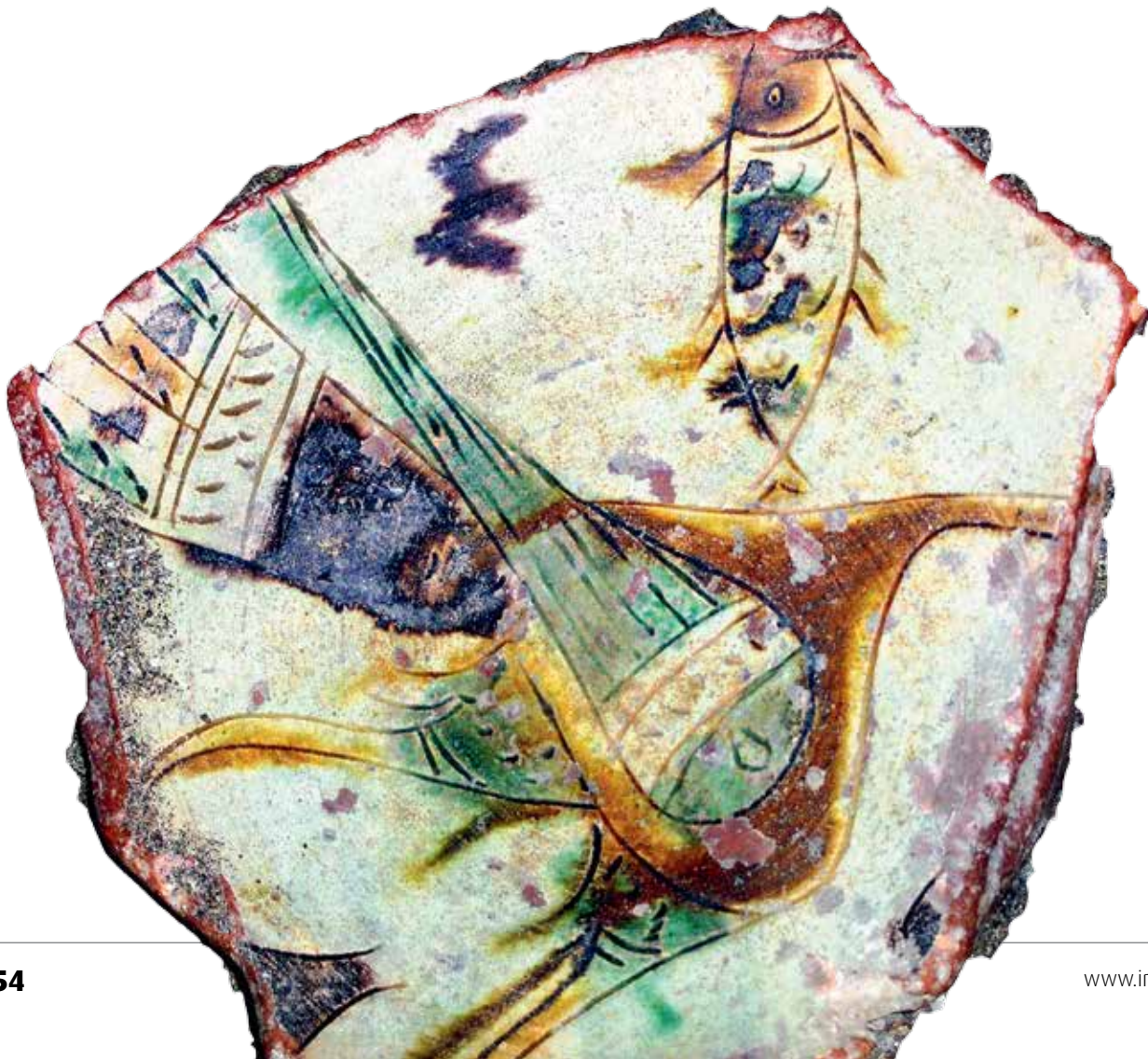


# IMAGES ON POTTERY FOUND IN BAKU



Pottery, which originates from the late Stone Age, has ancient roots and is one of the mass industries, has passed a path of development that is thousands of years long and has become one of the mass production spheres turning from one form into another. The city of Baku, which is rich in necessary fuel, water and clay suitable for making items of pottery, is one of the main centers of pottery.

Pottery is considered the ABC of archaeology – its main point of reference. Most of the great achievements of the archaeological science are linked to this craft. Studying the chronological consistency of archaeological monuments that are thousands of years old, the everyday life of the population and the aesthetic taste of craftsmen is of exceptional importance. Extensive studies about the development of pottery in the Old Town, ordinary items of pottery, dyed dishes, faience, glazed dishes and dishes with engraved patterns are more interesting.

The results of many years of archaeological excavations show that most of the material-cultural artifacts discovered in all the medieval cities of Azerbaijan, including in Baku, are items of pottery. The study of the material that was found proves that the production of faience dishes was well-developed in the Middle Ages. This was due to the development of the technique of producing faience dishes. As a result, high quality household and utility dishes were made.

During excavations carried out in the Old Town, a rich collection of dyed, unglazed, glazed, china, faience and celadonite dishes was discovered. Among them household items (table and kitchen dishes and containers for keeping and carrying food products) were found.

Most of the items of pottery, mainly dishes and bowls, found during archaeological excavations are decorated with geometrical and floral patterns, as well as images of animals, birds, fish and rarely of humans.

Early medieval dishes depict running antelopes, zebu or cheetahs. Images of animals were placed against the background of green ribbons with unopened flower buds. The animal's body was dyed with ferric oxide, while the horizontally folded edges of basins were decorated with carved chains or traditional dotted triangles. When I saw this scene on a dish, I was inspired by the skilful craftsman's mastery and thought of these couplets:

The Mugan plain is totally green in this dish,  
On seeing the hunter, the little antelope runs in fear  
Ah, so innocent is his face  
What artist admires those eyes?

He probably embodies a black-eyed beauty  
In love and separation  
Or maybe it is too far from the reality  
And is a figment of a genius artist's imagination.

The glazed ceramics found in the cultural layers of the Old Town stand out for their diverse forms and rich decorations. In the lower layer belonging to the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly table dishes such as plates, bowls and so on are found. These are dishes with engobe images, glazed engobe or transparent dishes and polychromic yellow-green-brown dishes.

Most of the items of pottery found in many years of archaeological excavations in the Old Town, mostly plates and bowls are decorated with geometrical and floral ornaments and images of animals, birds, fish and rarely of humans.

A fragment of a bowl depicting a bird (pigeon) found





among stamped ceramics in the Old Town in 1971 draws attention. The bird's wings, fan-like tail, head and sharp beak are depicted in a more expressive way. Its eye is depicted as a white circular dot on a black background. Curly plant branches are depicted in the dish on the back of the bird. There are straight wavy lines in front of the bird and behind its back, which look like a cage. Similar stamps with an embossed pigeon image are also known from the settlement of Bandovan.

It is known that the pigeon is holy for many peoples, including Azerbaijanis. The fairytales of a number of eastern peoples present the Holy Spirit or God in the form of a pigeon. In Khorezm, mermaids are depicted as pigeons. This plot, which is historically regarded as holy, is considered to be linked to the holy aquatic environment in many cases.



An original skillfully made polychrome glazed bowl with five pigeon images engraved on it found during excavations north of the Maiden Tower in 1964 is also of interest. The birds are depicted clockwise one after another.

Another glazed bowl depicting a pigeon made with an engobe and drilling method was discovered on the eastern slope of the Baku plateau in 1982. Unlike





the image on the previous bowl, the pigeons here are moving anticlockwise. Under one of the glazed bowls with a polychrome image there is a picture of a concentric circle with narrow lines between them, and one of the lines is filled with little teeth. The smallest circle depicts three original scaly fish swimming clockwise one after another. The images of fish are placed so that an equiangular triangle with hooked tips forms among them reflecting the heads of the fish. By their form, the fish resemble the Caspian gold fish. There is a stamp in the form of converging lines on the bowl.

During excavations carried out in the territory of the Siratagli religious-architectural monument (place of worship) in 1964, a glazed bowl depicting a fish was found in the internal side of a 12<sup>th</sup> century cultural layer. The image was beautifully made with engobe. On the image, the wings and gills of the fish were depicted on both sides as a leaf-shaped figure with sharp tips, while its scaly body had narrow converging lines that formed squares and rhombuses. The stamp at its bottom is not distinct.

Among the bowls and plates decorated with animal images, a polychrome bowl discovered during excavations in 1939 in the layer of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the lower part of the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and depicting a running zebu against the background of branches draws attention.

The Mongol invasion, which suddenly interrupted the prosperous life of the Azerbaijani city, as well as a

number of unfavorable natural factors had a negative impact on the production of ceramics. The falling artistic and technical quality of ceramics after the Mongol invasion is proved by materials from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently, changes are observed in artistic traditions in the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Obviously, the 15<sup>th</sup> century can be considered a period of revival of lost traditions in many spheres of craftsmanship, including in the production of ceramics. There are several reasons for that. One of the main reasons is the new status of Baku – it became the capital of the state of the Shirvanshahs, and in the late Middle Ages, in the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the variety of this type of ceramics expanded. Along with table dishes, utility items (pitchers, jugs, lids and household items – lamps) as well as construction ceramics were also glazed.

If in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries the period of the prosperity of craftsmanship and culture in Azerbaijani territory was characterized by the rich decoration of ceramic dishes and their variety, the best samples of 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century ceramics are distinguished by the high quality of products. Table dishes were distinguished by their thin faience, high ring-like bottom and high quality of firing. One of the innovations in the ceramics of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries is the presence of faience-like dishes. Unlike the samples of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, dishes with engobe images rise to a new level of quality.

As far as construction ceramics are concerned, it must be noted that the main construction materials of the Shirvan-Absheron architecture school are not fired bricks, but local limestone. Construction ceramics are represented mainly by tiles - facing slabs here. Blue, turquoise and sometimes green glazed monochrome tiles of various shapes were found in the layer of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Blue-glazed big red tiles of various sizes were found in the upper cultural layer of the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of these tiles depicts a blue bird among the shoots of a plant.

The number of china products in both layers is very small. Groups of faience products decorated with cobalt are found in the upper layer of the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the lower layer, we can observe fragments of a faience bowl with engobe images of trays against a black background, as well as fragments of a dish depicting a lamp against a cobalt background. A faience dish found in the lower layer of the area northwest of the Palace of the Shirvanshahs in 1974 is also of great interest. That small dish is circular and glazed. On the outer layer of

the bowl, one centimeter under its ledge, around its perimeter, there is an embossed inscription in Arabic script giving a blessing to the owner of the dish, and along the inscription there are images of birds.

A blue floral pattern is engraved inside another faience bowl found near the aforesaid bowl. There are images of birds drawn in the same color among lines of plants. The discovery of those faience bowls proves that there were centers producing faience products in Baku and that it had economic and trade relations with the medieval Iranian cities of Rey, Kashan, Sultanabad and others.

In general, similar samples of faience products depicting people, animals or birds are found in Shamakhi, Gabala, Beylagan, Barda, Ganja, Shabran, Derbent, Nakhchivan, Sheki and in monuments in some Middle Eastern countries.

Among the crafts that existed in the Old Town in the developed Middle Ages, weaving was also well-developed. Foreign travelers who visited Baku in that period recorded in their manuscripts and diaries that the local population produced a large amount of high quality silk, linen and wool fabrics, carpets and other types of products for the local and foreign market.

Small cattle was bred on the vast pastures in the vicinity of Baku. Tender sheep wool created grounds for the development of weaving. For this reason, weavers in the city produced various types of clothes and bed linen from wool. Various types of patterned carpets were common in a vast area in Shirvan. The carpets and rugs made by Baku carpet-weavers with great skill and taste were highly rated in many countries.

It must be noted that images of people, animals, birds and floral patterns on pottery and metal products belong to older periods manifest themselves more graphically on pieces of decorative-applied art, including carpets and fabrics in the developed Middle Ages. We can observe this in various images on material-cultural samples discovered in the Old Town during archaeological excavations.

It is clearly seen that many types of decorations typical of Eastern culture dominate images on carpets. For example, images of fantastical birds and animals typical of Chinese culture dominate fabrics and carpets belonging to the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Stylized images of flowers, people, birds and fantastical animals are more common among decorations and images used on carpets and fabrics. ❀



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