

ANCIENT IRANIAN POTTERY & MOSAICS

"The taste and talent of this people can be seen through the designs of their earthen wares"

Late Professor of Iranian Studies Roman Ghirshman

The history of the art of pottery in Iran goes back into ancient time. When agriculture came into existence and cultivation started on Iran's plateau by the primitive races of this land, people made utensils of killed clay in order to meet their needs.

Fingerprints of primitive natives of Iran can be seen on these earthenware. The first earthenware were two kinds, black utensils and red ones, both of these had very simple construction.

Gradually, simple earthenware, were being decorated by geometric designs. Studying these designs shows us that Iranians were very skillful in making designed earthenware and represented these designs in a very lively and beautiful manner. Iran could be called the main birth place of designed

earthenware utensils. Designing earthenware in Iran started about 4 thousand years BC

The earthenware belonging to four thousand year BC had been killed more carefully in newly made kilns. The shapes and forms of these earthen show that, invention of the pottery rotating machine must have been done in that time.

The artists by using this new machine made different kinds of utensils like: piped pots, bowls and jars for storage of corns and grains.

Among excavated earthen belonging to this age, some primitive earthen statues in the form of animals and birds were found which were used more ornamentally rather than anything else.

During the past hundred years, many valuable remnants earthenware from different civilizations have been found in "Sialk" "Tape Misar", "Shush" "Tepe Gyan" "Tape Hasanlu" and "Tal-e Bakun" in Persepolis. Studying these works will reveal the changing process of art of pottery in Iran. Images of horns of cows and reindeers, wings of birds and shouts of lions are some kind of decorative design of pottery in fourth Thousand Year BC. The strength and durability of this art caused its glory and spread all over Iran's plateau and even beyond there.

At the end of third century and in second century BC pottery became a little delicate and some times decorated by engraved designs. The earthen statue of a wild goat excavated in "Kalar Dasht" at the foot of "Alborz" mountain is a sample of the art of pottery of this age.



Sialk painted pottery

One of the oldest known dwelling places of Mian on the plain is "Sialk Hill" in south of Kashan. The board of archaeologists of "Louvre Museum" have found many earthen utensils through the excavation of this hill. In the earthen, found in Sialk, there are,snakes, wild goats and horses as well as geometric designs on these earthenware.

The sun and horse are the symbol of Indo-European tribes. The other designs found on Sialk's earthen are simple lines curved lines, intersecting lines, plants and flowers and simple geometric designs. The earthen works of Sialk belong to 10th up to 9th century BC

More earthenware than any other thing were found in Sialk graves and these made a lot of information accessible. Everything in these earthen, the strength of their paste, kilning temperature, enameled color surface, designs and styles which have symbolic values are novel, each sign symbolized a man, some of these earthen were used in shrouding and burial ceremonies. There are images of a hunter, warrior and a roaring lion, painting on two pieces of engraved earthenware belonged to Sialk. In addition to these some "Plytons" were found in the form of animals and specially birds, among the earthen utensils of Sialk.

In "Khuzestan Plain" in Shush, French archaeologists excavated more than 83 hills belonging to prehistory during the years 190 up to 1946, and found varieties of earthen works. D. Macconn the chief of the board of excavation in Shush studied these works in the art of pottery point of view.

Among the explored earthenware in Shush there are gray earthenware, designed by images of birds, sea beasts, wild goats humped cows and geometric images. The dwellers in Shush inspired their designs through nature. The artists engraved their supposed designs on earthenware, then colored the trenches red and white. Earthenware of Shush are very valuable artistically and are elegant. They are made of fine clay.

Dr. E. Smith famous archaeologist discovered valuable earthen objects in two years of excavations done in Tepe Hisar" of "Damghan". They belong to the beginning of four and second centuries BC.

The earthenware discovered at the lower part of the hill were made of red clay, all hand made but the earthen which belonged to the beginning of the second thousand year BC were made by using the pottery rotating machine, these earthen are brown and buff in color, different kinds of decanters, vases and chalices provided with a stand in these excavations were found, which have an importance in prehistoric art of pottery of Iran. The designs on these utensils are in two forms, superficial and engraved. Perfect earthen utensils belonging to the first thousand year BC made by "Hasanlu" civilization in Azarbaijan were also found. These earthen are the works of artists of "Mannai" tribes. Earthen piped containers are the most interesting containers of this prehistoric region. Potter artists made the handle of these containers in different forms like the head of a ram, goat or foxes, some earthen tripods in Hasanlu graves were found which have been used for putting pots on them. Some of the earthen tripods are engraved. "Hasanlu" earthen are gray, red and yellow in color. These earthen were used in shrouding and burial ceremonies of the dead. The human or animal who was buried in that ceremony, was represented as a statue or an engraved earthenware. "Hasanlu's" earthenware completely look like "Khoorvin" earthenware.

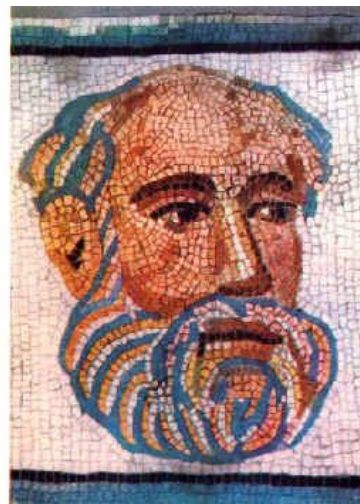
"Khoorvin" was the capital of Mad, it was located 80 kilometers west of present Tehran on the slope of "Alborz" the remnants of Khoorvin were found accidentally through a number of graves "Khoorvin" tribes buried earthenware accompanied with the dead. The earthen containers of this region have a long pipe which were used for burial ceremonies.



Bishapoor Mosaic

They were black, gray and red in color. Khoorvin's potters have made earthen statues without any ornaments and, simple (in the 7th and 8th century BC), just like old traditions of ancient dwellers of plateau of Iran.

The art of pottery in 'Amlash' a mountainous region in south west of Caspian Sea belongs to 9th and 8th century BC. The art of Amlash has a special characteristic which symbolizes its high value. Potters of Amlash show a beautiful initiative, so that the Man of the Twentieth Century is impressed by these masterpieces belonging to three thousand years ago. Potters were also sculptors. Their initiative and creation is wonderful. The earthenware belonging to 'Amlash' have not any designs on them the artists were very eager to make utensils in the form of animals.



Bishapoor Mosaic

From some regions like "Kurdistan" "Lorestan" and "Takhte-Jamshid" valuable earthenware were found, which symbolized the high skill of ancient potters in Iran. There were interesting earthen utensils found in "Tepe Giyan" in Nahavand which were created extremely elegantly and tastefully, on these containers one can see images of human, storks, ducks, herons and goat. There are other simple images on earthenware of "Giyân". These utensils belong to 1st and 11th century (BC). Earthen rhytons in Iran, some of which are considered to be masterpieces of art of pottery were observed by archaeologists and art specialists.

One of these earthen rhytons was found in suburb of "Makoo" in north west of Iran (Azarbaijan) which is in the form of a horse head. There is another rhyton found in Shush (south of Iran).

The elegance, beauty and art of these two rhytons show that the potters of plateau of Iran in north and south, were salient artists. Some earthen enameled rhytons with colored ornaments belonging to "Ziwiye" region are kept in Iran Bastan Museum.

Regarding the numerous rhytons it seems these valuable utensils have been produced in a big workshop. This collection of earthen have a considerable artistic value because of their construction and artistic painting, they are found among the explored objects of Ziwiye, in the excavation of the grave of an "Ashkani's Prince". It was usual to use rhytons in the form of the head of an animal, for drinking water during the eighth and seventh century.

During the Achaemenid dynastic era (550-330 BC) the first empire of Iran, the art of pottery started its evolution, using enamel on the earthenware have been created by the artists of this era. The art of ceramic which is a part of the art of pottery started in Iran in this age. Regardless of ceramic objects belonging to ancient Egyptians, the oldest ceramic utensils are explored in Iran. These objects are kept as prehistoric ceramic utensils in "Iran Bastan" Museum and other important museums of the world. Most of the ceramic objects belonging to Achaemenid era are painted and made perfectly artistic from the form and design point of view. We have inherited valuable works of Achaemenid ceramic.



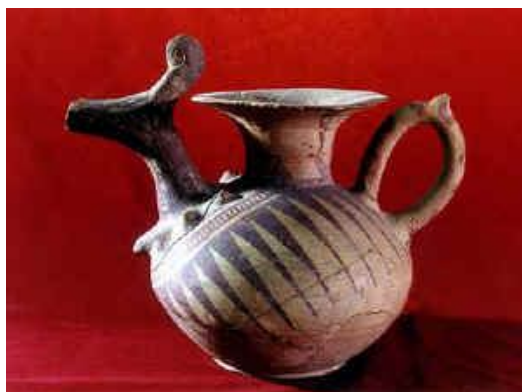
Bishopoor Mosaic

The primitive kilns for drying earthenware in Iran, one of the oldest of which is found in Shush, belonging to seventh century (BC), were considerably improved in Achaemenid dynastic era. Parthian (91-312 BC) were the followers of the art of pottery of Achaemenid. Enameling which had mainly been used in order to make ceramic during Achaemenid dynasty, was used for earthen utensils in this era, some scholars believed Chinese Acquired enameling of earthenware from Parthian artists.

Enameled earthenware in green color were found in China, belonging to "Hann" dynasty (206-220 BC). These earthenware are much like Parthian's earthenware. It seems that, this skill has been transmitted to China in Parthian dynastic era. Parthian ceramics consisted of usual tumblers, kinds Of rhytons, flasks, ewers and earthened casks covered by a light blue, green or gray enamel. They have also made coffins of enameled kilned earthen Sassanian ceramics (224-642 A.D.) are very similar to Persian ceramics, some of the Sassanian's enameled earthenware are found in green or light blue with engraved designs.

Other samples of earthenware of this age are found unenamelled. But they have made embossed designs on them by using seals and mold.

One of the distinguished characteristics of ceramics of Iran is its variety and spread all over the country. Potter artists followed their special artistic method where ever they lived "Vandenberghe" believes the reason for creation of variety in styles and shapes in earthenware of Iran, is her ecological condition. "Unlike Beynolnahrein ceramics in different shapes, have been found, and this differentiation between these two countries are caused by geographical conditions of these lands.



Sialk painted pottery

However making of earthenware enameled utensils were popular in Iran during Partains and Sassanian era, but after appearance of Islam in Iran, the art of pottery was developed. The most successful achievement of the artists of Islamic era was the use of nice and different color in painting the earthen-wares when enameling them.

Different earthen utensils of this age (7th century A.D.) in different colors and enamels were created by the artists in "Rey", "Shush" "Estakhr" and "Gorgan" these utensils are the most supreme products of Islamic era. Images of animals, birds and plants decorated the earthenware of this age. Earthenware were made by yellow clay, and Persian Muslim artists attained maturity in enameling and painting on earthenware. Islamic potters decorated in three ways, engraving designs on the earthen, producing images by using molds, and creating embossed designs on their works.

source:

<http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Art/pottery.htm>