

A New Expression in the Representation of Animal Motifs: A Case Study of Glazed Potteries of Raqqa of the 12th and 13th Centuries AD.

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Abstract

The city of Raqqa, one of Syria's most important art centers, is a turning point for Ayubi art in the 12th and 13th centuries AD. The study of archaeological collections in museums around the world reveals unique and evolved features in how motifs are drawn. Particularly in the way of depicting animal motifs, they have found a more naturalistic view in comparison to the motifs of the past (motifs found in Tel Minis). Syrian artists have tried to apply efficient visual arrangements to draw more dynamic motifs using the principles of representation of motifs. Drawing of animals and motifs in a way that encourages the audience to acknowledge the concept of movement is the most prominent feature of these works. Hence, in this paper it is sought to present the overall recognition and mastery of Syrian artists in displaying creatures and animal motifs.

The approach of this research is descriptive-analytical, data is gathered via documentations and relying on the study of numerous examples based on the written studies of historical books and archives of museums around the world including the Metropolitan Museum, the Victoria Albert Museum, the Louvre Museum, the Museum Fitzwilliam, Smithsonian Museum (Freer Art Gallery), Damascus National Museum, Cincinnati Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Ashmolean Museum, Cleveland Museum, Walters Baltimore Museum of Art, The David Collection, etc. In order to better perceive the movement of the patterns and motions, sample images are linearized with Corel DRAW Graphics Suite X7 and

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animal motifs are separated from background images. The motifs are reserved for the analytical study of visual features, archaeological findings and collections in museums.

Research aims:

- 1- Studying and introducing animal motifs of 12th and 13th century AD. Syrian pottery of the city of Raqqa.
- 2- Reviewing the characteristics of the Syrian pottery of the Ayoubi period in Raqqa region.

Research questions:

- 1- What are the stylistic features of the animal designs of the Ayoubi pottery?
- 2- What features and elements are applied in the design of these motifs?

Keywords: Pottery, Raqqa, Syrian Art, Ayoubi period, patterns and motifs

Introduction

The two cities of Raqqa and Tel Minis are important centers of Syrian pottery production in the Islamic civilization. Due to the importance of Raqqa ceramics from the perspective of design and construction, in this study, earthenware and glazed containers of this area are studied. As can be inferred from the preserved potteries of the worldwide museums, during the mentioned period, the city of Raqqa was one of the most significant centers outside the territory of Iran producing a remarkable amount of exquisite and technically distinct vessels and tiles. Khalili introduces the most important Ayoubi pottery centers in Syria; "In the twelfth century, pottery production in Syria changed due to the emergence of stone pulp and decorative metal painting on the glaze. It is undoubtedly the most well-known Syrian middle pottery" Raqqa" (Khalili, 2005: 223-225).

Studying the form, type of glaze and decorative methods and visual syntax of Raqqa pottery clearly shows its similarity to Islamic pottery in other Islamic nations; however, in the illustration of animal motifs there is a little difference; apparently, the design of animal motifs in Raqqa is much more naturalistic and with smoother lines than the examples of other Islamic lands which their differences cannot be explained in this paper. It should be noted that porcelain and enamel containers of animal motifs of the Raqqa city are included in a wide and varied range; hence, in this study only the animal designs of cattle and other

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domestic animals have been studied and animals such as birds have been analyzed in other research studies.

Studying the unique collection of Raqqa pottery specimens in various museums around the world reveals exclusive features, at least in terms of illustration. Animal motifs in Syrian potteries of the Ayoubi period have gradually coming out of a drying condition (pure silhouette). The type of design and how the motions and dynamics of the motifs are depicted is a clear alteration in Raqqa pottery in the 12th and 13th centuries. Therefore, the particular type of design and presentation of the element of movement can be considered the style of animal motifs in the pottery of Syria in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Studies on pottery in the Ayoubi period in Syria, and especially in the Raqqa region, as one of the most potent areas of Iranian pottery in the Seljuk era, are limited to archaeological reports by Western scholars, resulting in the publication of books by museums including The Metropolitan Museum. Such books are usually limited to descriptions of artifacts of the current museum, and unfortunately no comprehensive and coherent research has been performed on all artifact preserved in collections and museums worldwide with specifically focusing on their animal motifs.

A number of the artworks of Ayoubi pottery, including Tel Minis pottery and Raqqa pottery, have been reported in archaeological excavations in various areas, or in specialized Islamic pottery books and catalogs of private collections, but one of the most significant published studies on such pottery artworks has been acknowledged by Marliyn Jenkins. She has studied and introduced many potteries of the Metropolitan Museum related to the Raqqa region; however, most motifs under study are herbal and inscriptional designs (Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, 2006). Jonathan Bloom has also completed his Master's thesis on the study of clay pottery (Bloom, Jonathan.1975). David Khalili has also referred to these potteries in his studies (Islamic Pottery, 2005).

Conclusion

According to the accomplished studies, the animals' motifs on Syrian earthenware and especially on the Raqqa region are very diverse and have unique drawing features. The application of diverse animals has often been the subject of illustrations by artists of this period. The illustration of such motifs is highly artistic, accurate and bold. Although the influence of various cultures and civilizations, including Egypt, Greece and Iran, on all levels can be traced at various levels in regard to such potteries, it seems that the Syrian

artist was able to exploit the potential of these influences to serve his native art and to maintain a lasting art while retaining its unique features, and hence creates a standalone style with exclusive features. Evidence for this claim is the significant difference between the animal designs applied on the potteries of Raqqa and those of other Islamic era glazed artworks in areas such as Iran, Iraq and Egypt. The motifs are often single and centered in the vessel and sometimes have a duplicate pattern on the body of the vessel.

But generally speaking, what is clear about the design of the drawings in the Ayoubi period and especially in the area of Raqqa is the desire for naturalism by the Syrian artist, as well as the ability to decorate such magnificent artworks. The result of such an insight is the precision in the image of the animals in the various positions that have led to the design of the animal state as a "holistic" figure in the animal, or in other words, the animal's drawing in accordance with the general body line. In addition to presenting a state-of-the-art design, the use of the "moving" element is a turning point in the predominant depiction of animal motifs on Ayoubi glazed potteries, which has been well illustrated. Representation of the element of movement as expressed in the Raqqa pottery as an indicator and independent style is exaggerated in a number of patterns. For instance, in regard to the legs of the animal, one foot forward and the other foot in the opposite direction, a slender and lean body with head tilted back and stretched hands are often seen. In other motifs, the animal is presented in a dignified manner, the head and chest are prominently displayed while the hands and feet are moving in an eloquent manner.

In addition to the balance in the use of the features and combined elements of the potteries of Raqqa and the elegance and beauty of the lines, the fluidity and flexibility of the lines, the free and bold design and the adherence to the design of the animal's sculpture can be highlighted as the unique features of the glaze vessels.

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