



Section 5. Statistics

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PATTERNS AND INSCRIPTIONS IN MEDIEVAL AZERBAIJANI MINIATURE ILLUSTRATED CERAMICS: HARMONY AND SYMBOLS

Sadagat Mammadli¹

¹ Researcher of the Department of Numismatics and Epigraphy of
the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology of ANAS

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Abstract

This article examines the patterns and inscriptions found on medieval Azerbaijani miniature illustrated ceramics, emphasizing their symbolic meanings, stylistic harmony, and cultural significance. The study is mainly devoted to several artifacts preserved in the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, representing the Tabriz ceramic school and the artistic synthesis of calligraphy, miniature painting, and ornamental design in the Safavid and pre-Safavid periods.

Keywords: *Medieval Azerbaijani ceramics, Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, Tabriz school of art, Islamic calligraphy, Safavid artistic heritage, Miniature illustration*

Introduction

Ceramic art in medieval Azerbaijan represents one of the most expressive forms of artistic creativity, where miniature illustration, ornamental design, and calligraphy blend into a harmonious unity. The interaction between visual symbols and inscriptions not only enhanced aesthetic appeal but also conveyed religious, political, and philosophical messages. These artistic features illustrate the sophistication of Azerbaijani artisans and the influence of Tabriz, a leading cultural and artistic center of the medieval Islamic world.

From the 11th to the 19th centuries, Azerbaijani ceramic production evolved alongside developments in miniature painting and ar-

chitecture. Especially during the Safavid dynasty, ceramics were not mere utilitarian objects but carriers of ideological and aesthetic expression (Nasiri, N., 2012). The use of Arabic inscriptions and Persian poetic fragments reflected both religious sensitivity and intellectual refinement (Aslanapa, Oktay, 1997).

A minai-type plate discovered in Tabriz features a seated ruler identified as Shah Ismail. He is depicted enthroned, flanked by tamed wild beasts symbolizing royal power and divine protection (Efendi, Rasim, 1976, 2007). Court attendants stand respectfully on either side. An inscription in Arabic script reads: "Shah Ismail Abu al-Muzaffar 789". Considering the historical

timeline, the numbers likely represent 987 AH (1579–1580 CE). However, stylistic inconsistencies suggest a later attribution, possibly to Shah Ismail II. The artistic exe-

cution demonstrates refined craftsmanship, characterized by delicate lines, a balanced composition, and symbolic representation of sovereignty (Fig. 1).

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 3 a.



Another masterpiece preserved in the Azerbaijan National Museum of Arts (inventory no. Ç-146) depicts Shah Abbas I in relief on a tile measuring $43.5 \times 33.5 \times 3$ cm. The right side bears the inscription “Shah Abbas al-Awwal” and the left, “Aghayi Mir Jalil al-Din, al-faqir fi, 6 Muharram al-

Haram 1222”. This indicates that the piece was created by artist Aghayi Mir Khalil al-Din on March 17, 1807. The tile displays deep cobalt blue and turquoise hues, floral arabesques, and geometric frames (Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom, 1994). The combination of inscription and orna-

ment exemplifies aesthetic harmony – the written word complements visual symbolism, creating a dialogue between power, faith, and art (Fig. 2).

The jar (Ç-121-1, Ç121-2), also from Tabriz, stands 63 cm tall and dates to the late 18th–early 19th centuries. Its surface illustrates scenes inspired by Ferdowsi's

Shahnameh, with inscriptions naming “Firudun” and “Keykavus”. Through narrative depiction, the vessel becomes a storytelling medium, merging literature and fine art. The use of vivid colors, flowing lines, and calligraphic elegance demonstrates how miniature aesthetics influenced three-dimensional ceramic art (Fig. 3 a, 3 b).

Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Another Tabriz jar (Ç-122, Ç-122-1-2) bears the inscriptions ‘Shah Ismail’ and ‘Shah Abbas.’ Inspired by Safavid iconography, it symbolizes dynastic continuity and divine legitimacy. The repetition of royal names in calligraphic form transforms writing into or-

Figure 4 b.



Figure 6 a



nament – a sacred and aesthetic symbol of authority and unity (Grube, Ernst J, 1976), (Fig. 4 a, 4 b).

A remarkable example from southern Azerbaijan (inventory no. Ç-123) is an 11–13th-century earthenware plate

decorated with Arabic inscriptions: “La ilaha illallah” (There is no god but Allah), “Al-mulk lillah” (Sovereignty belongs to Allah), and “Al - izzatu lillah” (Glory and power belong to Allah). These phrases are not merely decorative; they express spiritual protection and divine harmony (Watson, Oliver, 2004). The Tabriz school’s influence is visible in the intricate vegetal motifs and symmetrical layout, reflecting the artist’s intention to achieve visual balance and spiritual depth (Fig. 5).

Figure 6b.



Several ceramics preserved in the National Museum of Azerbaijan Art (Ç-156, Ç-156(2) and Ç-213) bear the same inscription in Arabic: “Tawakkaltu... tawakkul takfa sall tu ta min amal tawakkul takfa. This formula refers to trust in God and the sufficiency of faith (tawakkul). The repetition of such expressions on everyday objects demonstrates the integration of spirituality into material culture and everyday life (Fig. 6a, 6b, 7).

Figure 7.



Conclusion

Thus, the research shows that medieval Azerbaijani miniature ceramics are not only household items, but also works of art with deep artistic, ideological and spiritual content. In these examples, the unity of ornament, miniature image and calligraphy serves to form a high aesthetic harmony and reflects the political, religious and cultural mindset of the period (Habibov, Nazim, 1981). The analyzed exhibits prove that the Tabriz ceramic school played an important role in the development of Azerbaijani applied art, especially during the Safavid period, this field of art was enriched with images with ideological and symbolic meaning. Images of historical figures such as Shah Ismail and Shah Abbas, motifs of the “Shahnameh”, as well as Arabic inscriptions, expressed ideas such as power, divine

protection, faith and spiritual values in artistic form (Firdowsi. *Shahnameh*). At the same time, calligraphic inscriptions on ceramics act not only as decorative elements, but also as symbolic expressions with religious and philosophical content. This feature shows the mutual relationship of writing and image in Azerbaijani ceramic art and proves that they together create a single artistic composition (Karimov, Karim, 1987). Consequently, these ceramic examples preserved in the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art clearly demonstrate the high artistic level of medieval Azerbaijani art, the influence of the Tabriz school, and how the aesthetic principles of Islamic culture were embodied in applied art. The study of this heritage is of great importance for a deeper understanding and preservation of the history of Azerbaijani art.

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Contact: sedaqetmemmedli@yandex.com