

INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC MOTIFS AND PATTERNS UPON PAKISTANI POTTERY

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ABSTRACT

Islam is regarded both as the religion and as a way of life which extended and practiced by all cultures who embraced Islam in Arabs and in most of the Asian countries. Islamic art received contributions from the ancient traditions of Near East; from Iran; from the Central Asia and from the regional and folk trends that emerged in various parts of the Islamic empire. Islamic art may first be distinguished around the mid 7th century A.D. or the second half of the first Hejira century, in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph (661-750 A.D) and continued up to the modern times.

This article deals with the influence of Islamic motifs and patterns upon Pakistani pottery. Since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the artisans have incorporated some of the Islamic motif and patterns in their traditional ceramic designs for the sake of expressing association with Islam and Islamic art.

Traditionally it has been said by many scholars that in Islam representation of human being and other living things in any form and medium is prohibited because of the risk of idolatry, and considered to be as sin. Due to the iconoclastic controversy with the Christians around the mid 9th century, resulted in a strict prohibition of all figure representation in art.

Although Muslim artisan admired the beauty of nature and its endless formal variety and unity, the conception of harmony, the creative fantasy and imagination, which allowed them to express their artistic and creative urge in architecture, geometric and plant ornaments. A characteristic treatment of motif in Islamic art was to repeat a pattern progressively within established ornamental bands. The individual motif thus loses its independence through a seemingly endless repetition and no longer serves as a form of visual attraction. Therefore, the aesthetic intention of Islamic art is not conveyed by individual details but only in the grouping of the entire decorative field in which the details are submergded.

In the early period of Islamic art the most popular ceramic designs were colourful floral forms, imitation of me-

dallions and motifs of manuscript illuminations, geometric ornaments of a very simple character had already in the folk art of the Arabs and certain motifs of pre-Islamic times. The *Vine Tendril* was the dominant element among the plant motifs, occurring in wave, spiral and loop variations which are generally known as "arabesque" design. The stylized plant forms of the arabesque were particularly adaptable and hundreds of variants of the basic pattern have been traced.

The leaf either smooth or rough, veined or pierced, pointed, rounded or rolled, it was never shown in isolation but always as an organic part of the plant form. A spiral like or interlaced, penetrating through the leaves and branching, always in a continual pattern. Islamic art also incorporated some geometric and plant forms of other cultures and transformed them into purely decorative motifs, for example the "cloud bend" which was taken from the art of Eastern Asia, and was used widely in the art of Persia, India and Turkey.

From the earliest times pottery was the integral part of various civilizations, ceramic objects were made to be offered to divinities, to be deposited in tombs, to be given to important personages, or simply to satisfy the standards of taste or a demand for luxury. Such aims contributed to the continual refinement of techniques, to the creation of ever more harmonious forms, and of course, to the use of decoration.

In 750 A.D., the Umayyads were overthrown by the Abbasids, who changed the capital from Damascus to the new city of Baghdad. Cultural ties with the Mediterranean were now loosened, and Islam became primarily and Asiatic civilization. Persian art was the natural influence until the Mongols intervention in the thirteen century. The progress of Islamic art was inseparably linked with all cultures who came in contact with arab culture. Baghdad, Samarkand, Bukhara and Cairo in tern became the centers of art and craft.

Islamic pottery was intended for practical use, beside the cultural necessity, the appearance of the surface through motifs, patterns and colour were also of aesthetic interest. The study of Islamic pottery and decorative tile work, plates and vessels were highly appreciated for its motifs and patterns, shapes, ornaments and colours in eastern as well as in west-

ern countries. Some of the most popular patterns which often were used such as: *Dragon* pattern, *Lotus* pattern, *Palmetter* pattern, *Phoenix* pattern, *Sacred tree* pattern, *Vine* pattern, *Wing* pattern, *Rosette* pattern, *Spiral* motif, *Split-leaf* motif, *Grape-bunch* motif etc.

Following the late Greco-Roman and old Syrian designs, Umayyad period pottery shows great love for naturalistic motifs such as, *Sacred tree*, *The Palmettes*, *The Rosette*, *Paired wings* were popular motifs. *The spiral* motif was the most popular as a background, added with *Vine Tendrils* and *Vine Patterns* on jugs, plates and vases. Latter on in Abbasid period, *Half-Palmettes* became common pattern, like the *Vine*, degenerated by losing its middle lobe; it thus, assumed that the *Split-Leaf* which is generally associated with the term "*Arabesque*".

Figure No.1, is a rectangular border tile "stencilled" in shades of cobalt blue and turquoise on a white ground. It is decorated with central *Medallion* filled with symmetrically arranged *Lotus Blossoms* and *Split-Leaf Palmettes* reserved on a blue ground. In figure No.2, a panel of four tiles painted in rich cobalt blue, sealing wax, red in relief and emerald green on a white ground. Part of a large-scale repeat *Split-Leaf*, arabesques enclosing *Palettes* filled with flowers.

One of the interesting aspects of Islamic pottery is the use of Arabic or Persian calligraphy as a decorative motif. According to Arthur Lane:

Neither the Greek nor the Latin alphabets have ever so inspired artists with their usual beauty . . . Islamic script is powerful both in monogram and continuity. Its imperious leftward advance binds a design together more strongly and subtly than any repetitive frieze and the letters themselves can be most variously elaborated without sacrificing clarity.¹

Cufic and *Neskhi* were the most popular scripts for ceramic calligraphy, because of their rounded and cursive pen. Often both scripts are found together on the same object, creating different tonalities and overlapping of words.

In Khalifa Haroon-al-Rashid's time the pottery industry was encouraged and new techniques and methods were introduced such as porcelain (*chini*) and stoneware which were imported to Baghdad from the Far East and China. The

"apricot-coloured", the cream coloured and the "Mottled", greenish, brownish and the creamy white porcelain were highly admired by the Islamic craftsmen. Local glazed and unglazed pottery was also popular and often decorated with patterns scratched through the white slip to the underlying clay before the glaze was applied to the so called *Sgraffiato* techniques.

Due to the political and social changes in the Arab history during the Fatimid period in Cairo (696-1171) a Samarkand school of potters was formed. Where a gold-lustre and plain pottery developed, especially on the convex or straight-sided bowls with shallow foot-rings, like the Chinese wares. Lustre-painting was one of the Fatimid pottery-types, in which the vessels with carved decoration or incised in the body was covered with transport coloured glazes that creates a dark pools in the hollows. The incised lines were used to keep the colours from running outside the pattern, as was practiced in Chinese Tang pottery.

Lustre painting was the special technique which was used by the Muslim artisans. It is a technique in which a pot is first fired in a high temperature, then the design is painted in metallic oxides of silver and copper on to the glazed surface, and fixed by a second firing in a special kiln at low temperature. This turns the oxides into a warm gold lustre varying in colour from gold and copper, red to brown and olive. Lustre painting on a blue ground with semi-opaque white glass became popular in the sub-continent of India latter on. Lustre painting pottery was produced at Parisian school, particularly at Kashan, who were master designers of Islamic motifs and patterns.

After the Baghdad and Cairo schools of Islamic pottery, Samarkand, Saljuk and Turks in Asia became dominant and produced a surface glazed pottery rather than relying wholly upon the Chinese white porcelain.

In pottery, the fusion of various designs, designs and techniques from Turkey, Iran and Baghdad in Islamic art produced a typical type of blue pottery, by using, cobalt blue, turquoise blue, black and white tile of Turkey was in great demand in the Mughal court at Indian sub-continent. The art of

under-glaze painting was borrowed from the Central Asia and Persia. The lustre painted pottery also was very popular in India, both monochrome and polychrome lustre was produced basically with Islamic floral motifs, geometric patterns and the double winged motifs. According to J.M.Rogers:

The total absence of locally produced fine pottery at the Mughal Court suggests that such pieces were Persian exports to the Indian sub-continent . . . There are records of orders for Persian pottery by the English factories in the early 17th century Gujrat which may suggest that if found some sale on the Mughal market.²

In Pakistan, the history of pottery design is very ancient, it incorporate two distinct eras of ceramics, pre-Islamic and Islamic. The pre-Islamic pottery may have started around 5000 years ago in the ancient civilization of Mohen-Jo-Daro and Harapa. Since the archaeological exactions of various sites of the Indus civilization, so many pottery objects with human, animal and zigzag patterns are found.

In the Islamic period, there appeared two distinct sources of influences which introduced Islamic pattern and motifs of pottery upon Indo-Pakistan's ceramic industry. One was through the conquest of Sindh by Mohammad Bjn Qasim in 711 A.D., and other, the great Mughal empire in Indian sub-continent from late 15th to mid 19th centuries. Mughal Kings invited artists, craftsman, architects, poets and scholars from Persia and Central Asia, who influenced significantly the art and crafts of India and Pakistan.

Central Asian and Persian potters and designers brought new range of ceramic technique, colours, patterns, that were widely admired by the Indian Muslim artisans. Iranian designs and pattern can be seen at so many places, Mosques, Shrines and Saint tombs, such as, Tomb of Hazrat Bahaul-Haq and Shah Rukn-i-Alam at Multan; Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sindh, are overwhelmingly ornamented with Islamic patterns and motifs in blue and white tiles. According to Sajjad Haider:

The Shatas, a branch of the Samat tribe, who were the pottery craftsmen of Sindh, originally belonged to this region. They picked up the art of making ceramic ware from the Chines and the Arabs. Then they migrated to Hala, Nasser Pur, Sehwan and Shah Karim, where they continued to improve their art . . . The

artisans of Sindh began using the word "Kashi", for all ceramic ware, which is derived from Kashan ware . . . The designs are confined mostly to geometrical and arabesques, with foliage.³

The Persian patterns and motifs, such as, *Spiral* motif, *Lotus* pattern, *Palette* pattern, *Resettes* pattern and *Vine* pattern can be seen on Pakistani pottery. Their favorite colours are more like Central Asian colours pre dominantly cobalt blue, emerald green on a white ground, mostly decorated with bold *Split-Leaf*, and repetitive patterns of arabesque. Pakistani potters seemingly are deeply influenced by the Islamic motifs and patterns which they have incorporated with the local tile designs (Figure No.3).

Another popular technique of small geometric tiles is a mosaic tile technique which more likely seems to be the influence of early Moorish wall tiles, in which each bit of separate coloured small piece of tile was made for the larger design (Figure No.4).

In the Figure No.3 & 4 drawing geometric patterns are repeated. Because of the nature of the two dimensional surface and its three-fold, four-fold and six-fold characteristic that creates a natural relationship with pentagonal shapes. The other resultant shapes are derivatives "invented" for the greater freedom of repeats. Six shapes are represented here. In the centre is the decagon star, with the rhombic point emanations between each hexagonal petal with its two parallel sides. Next appears the irregular twelve-sided shape which enables the others to repeat.

The spinning motif within a square is possibly one of the most frequently applied patterns throughout Islamic Art. It has the particular quality of combining four symmetrical kite-like shapes around a central square. A twelve-sided polygon can be drawn in any given square such that four of its sides which are at right angles to each other lie in the edges of the bounding square. This Islamic pattern and motif is frequently seen in the wall decoration tile-mosaic at various places in Sindh and Multan tombs, for example, Jamia Masjid at Thatta, Mir tomb at Hyderabad and so many shrines in Pakistan.

In mosaic tile method, each of the geometric grid is made separately in different colours, and fixed on the wall.

Each colour and shape carry different texture and glaze. the most beautiful wall mosaic tiles are the tile of Iran, which are found at Kaum, Natinz, Meshed and Kashan. Some of the earliest mosaic tile have ornamented embossed calligraphy or inscription and coating of monochrome glaze, light blue or green patches of geometric grids. It was almost fashionable for the potters to make slightly embossed pattery, for creating richer and three dimensional surface. According to David James, the author of *Islamic Art*, said that:

... the geometry designs superimposed on a figure are very much related to the Islamic society, which functions under divine command. Thus, the space of the painting or the area of a pot is rarely free but usually defined and controlled in a reflection of the Cosmic order.⁴

Another example of mosaic tile called "woven" from which is commonly used as a decorative pattern in Persia and in Pakistan. The linear quality is proportionally expanded to appear as broad closed paths.

The exterior use of wall tile is frequently used in Pakistan, especially at religious and monumental places. The transition from enamelled and modelled thin tile can easily be seen. The central star-hexagon shape is used in combination with triangles and square like shapes, woven form is a very simple repeating pattern, or on making a repeating patchwork out of similar regular pieces. Variation will emerge as soon as the basic shapes of square, a triangle and a hexagon are fitted in its proper place (Figure No.5).

Small tile pieces are known as "Boreazia" or tile motif, which are used for different purposes and placed in different parts of the patterns and are joined together for completing a design. The five-pointed, six-pointed, seven-pointed and pentagon shapes have been also a very popular patterns in Islamic pottery. These patterns are generally used for mosaic-tiles. A mosaic technique is found when a artist or craftsman presses precisely cut ceramic pieces into a wet plaster ground, leaving the ground to create part of the pattern. Stars and pentagons are also used as a basic layout pattern to control the accuracy of the surface division and ensure the exact fitting together of the pieces of the pattern.

A large square tile from a border frieze (Figure No.6),

from Damascus, 16th century tile painted in shades of cobalt blue, sage green and touches of purple with black outlines on a white ground. the repeat border pattern consist of blue *trefoil*, cartouches containing arabesque motif. the space between which form reciprocal white *trefoil*. This type of pattern in negative and positive space arrangement of the arabesque ornaments are generally seen at the border tile at Masques, Shrines and Tombs in Pakistan (Figure No.7). The colour of the border tile is predominantly cobalt blue and green, which gives a horizontal stripe of colour effect of the patterns against white ground.

Many saints travelled from Iran to Pakistan and brought with them the dignity of mystic of blue colour, they also wore blue dress and deeply influenced the saints and common people of Sindh, Multan and Northern areas of Pakistan. The most common shades of blue were cobalt blue, indigo blue, ultramarine blue, turquoise blue and lapis lazuli. the blue colour was obtained from a precious stone lapis lazuli, and considered to be a noble or royal colour in Islamic culture. Persian blue or cobalt blue coloured pottery and tile is very popular in Pakistan, it is also represents nobility, truth and fidelity.

The potters of Hala and Multan overwhelmingly used almost all shades of blue in their tile and other pottery. In Lahore, potters developed the tile mosaic technique with the variety of colours such as, deep and light blue, green, yellow and brown. However, the design of the tile remained geometrical.

From the above comparative study of Islamic and Pakistani motif and patterns, it may be said that, over the period of centuries, artists and artisans of Islamic countries have remained keen observer of beauty of the nature and its geometric, rhythmic and symmetrical phenomenon. Also on the basis of religious beliefs and cultural similarities, artists have been getting influences of Islamic motifs and patterns in their own cultural art and crafts.

FOOT NOTES

1. Arther Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery: Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia*, (London: Faber and Faber, MCMXLVII), p.6.
2. J.M.Rogers, *Islamic Art and Design 1500-1700*, British Museum Publication, 1983, p.124-125.
3. Sajja Haider, *Tilework in Pakistan*, (Islamabad: National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, 1986), p.75.
4. *Ibid.*, p.46.

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3. Critchlow, Keith, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach*, Great Britain, Schocken Books, 1976.
4. Jenkins, Marilyn, Edt., *Islamic Art in the Kuwait National Museum*, London, Sotheyby Publication, 1983.
5. Lane, Arther, *Early Islamic Pottery: Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia*, London, Faber and Faber, 1956.
6. Nurhan Atasoy, Edt., *The Art of Islam*, UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, 1990.
7. Petsopoulos, Yanni, *Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans*, London, Alexandria Press, 1982.
8. Rogers, J.M. *Islamic Art and Design*, London, British Museum Publication Limited, 1983.
9. Sajjad Haider, *Tilework in Pakistan*, Islamabad, National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, 1986.

Figure No. 2



Figure No. 1





Figure No. 3

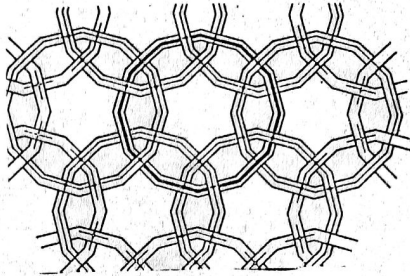


Figure No. 4

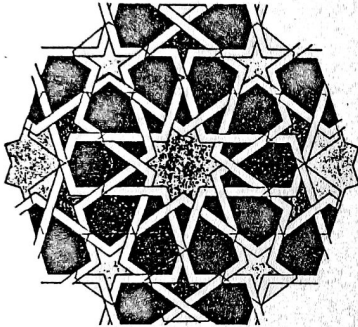


Figure No. 5



Figure No. 6

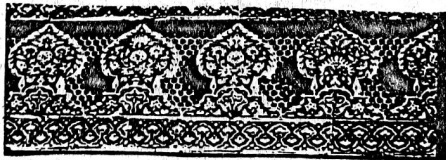


Figure No. 7