

B U L L E T I N

des
MUSÉES ROYAUX
D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE
PARC DU CINQUANTENAIRE
BRUXELLES

van de
KONINKLIJKE MUSEA VOOR
KUNST EN GESCHIEDENIS
JUBELPARK
BRUSSEL

TOME / DEEL 82

2011

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Alle briefwisseling betreffende teksten dient gericht tot het Redactiesecretariaat, Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, Jubelpark 10, B-1000 Brussel.

Drukkerij – Imprimerie: Peeters, Herent

ISSN: 0776-1414

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The Fustat Ceramic Collection in the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels: the Mamluk Assemblage

Valentina VEZZOLI

SUMMARY – The Royal Museums of Art and History hold a remarkable ceramic collection coming from the site of Fustat in Egypt. This assemblage provides valuable information concerning the history of ware productions of the Islamic period from the Eastern Mediterranean region and allows at reconstructing local productions and importations. The collection of the Mamluk period is particularly representative and includes the principal fine glazed productions, widespread in Egypt between the 13th and 15th centuries. A rich collection of ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’, Blue and Black underglaze wares and ‘Blue and White’ wares is documented. Moreover, the existence of ceramic importations from China is also represented. Local production is attested on the site and few ceramic wasters are preserved in the museums’ storerooms. This material evidence, even if not supported by archaeological data, can trace a general framework for the history of Fustat during the Mamluk period. This centre was above all an important production and commercial area that supplied a wealthy and multicultural society, which aimed at representing itself through material culture.

RÉSUMÉ – Les Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire abritent une remarquable collection céramique provenant du site de Fustat en Égypte. L’ensemble fournit une riche information sur l’histoire des produits céramiques à la période islamique dans la région méditerranéenne orientale et permet de reconstituer les productions locales et les importations. La collection de la période mamelouke est particulièrement représentative et inclut les principaux groupes de céramique glaçurée répandus en Égypte entre le XIII^e et le XV^e siècle. Un bel ensemble de « sgraffiato mamelouk », céramiques « bleu et noir » sous glaçure et céramiques « bleu et blanc », est bien documenté. De plus, l’existence de céramiques importées de Chine est également attestée. La production locale est confirmée sur le site et quelques rebuts de cuisson sont conservés dans les réserves du musée. Cette documentation matérielle, même si elle n’est pas étayée par des données archéologiques, peut fournir un cadre général à l’histoire de Fustat durant la période mamelouke. Ce centre était principalement un lieu de production et de commerce important qui approvisionnait une société nantie et multiculturelle qui cherchait à se présenter à travers sa culture matérielle.

SAMENVATTING – De Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis bezitten een belangrijke verzameling ceramiek afkomstig van de site van Fustat in Egypte. Ze levert kostbare informatie op over de geschiedenis van de ceramiekproductie in het oostelijke Middellandse Zeegebied tijdens de islamitische periode en laat toe om zowel de inheemse productie als de import te reconstrueren. Vooral het ensemble uit de Mamlukenperiode is bijzonder representatief. Het omvat fijn geglazuurde ceramiek die tussen de 13^{de} en 15^{de} eeuw wijdverspreid was in Egypte, waaronder een rijke collectie ‘Mammeluk Sgraffiato’, ‘Blauw-en-Zwart’ onder het glazuur geschilderde waar en ‘Blauw-en-Wit’ aardewerk. Bovendien is ook uit China geïmporteerde ceramiek aanwezig. Misbaksels die op de site werden aangetroffen en waarvan er enkele in de museumreserves bewaard worden, tonen aan wat ter plaatse werd vervaardigd. Zelfs als worden deze materiële getuigen niet door archeologische data ondersteund, toch laten ze toe een algemeen kader te schetsen voor de geschiedenis van Fustat in de Mamlukenperiode. Fustat was toen een belangrijk productie- en commercieel centrum dat een rijke en multiculturele gemeenschap voorzag van weeldeartikelen waarmee ze zich aan de buitenwereld toonde.

THE HISTORY OF THE FUSTAT CERAMIC COLLECTION IN THE ROYAL MUSEUMS OF ART AND HISTORY IN BRUSSELS

The Royal Museums of Art and History of Brussels (RMAH) own a remarkable collection of ceramic sherds coming from the site of Fustat, in Egypt¹. This assemblage has been collected during the early decades of the 20th century and has arrived in the museum under different circumstances. The most relevant collection has been offered by the Belgian scholar Armand Abel, professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the universities of Brussels and Ghent and at the Institut des Hautes Études de Belgique. During the 20's Abel spent a few years in Egypt, where he collaborated with the director of the Musée Arabe du Caire, Gaston Wiëtt, at the classification of part of the ceramic collection from Fustat. At this time he became interested in the Islamic world and decided to focus his researches also on the study of ceramics, publishing an important volume on the Egyptian potter of the Mamluk period, Gaïbī and a series of articles presenting the new Islamic collection of the RMAH².

Another group of objects was directly donated by the Musée Arabe du Caire in 1923³, while more exiguous collections have been purchased on the antique market or offered by private collectors⁴, among which we noticed an important number of ceramic wasters donated by the Kalebjan brothers of Paris in 1930⁵.

The RMAH ceramic collection from Fustat counts about 4000 sherds⁶ and is currently preserved in the storage rooms, except for a small group of objects exhibited in the Islamic hall⁷. After Abel's studies on the ceramic finds, this sherd collection was analysed

¹ This project was developed in collaboration with the curator of the section of Islamic Art and Oriental Christian Art of the Royal Museums of Art and History of Brussels, Mieke Van Raemdonck. I would like to thank her for the support she gave me during the study and analysis of the Mamluk assemblage. I am also grateful to her assistant, Suzi Van der Haegen, for her precious work in the storage rooms and to the Eva Coudyzer, person in charge of the database and thesaurus.

² ABEL 1930a; ABEL 1930b.

³ It counts 50 fragments and was registered in the RMAH in June 1923.

⁴ Some ceramic assemblages have been purchased on the antique market from Monsieur Eknayan (Paris, July 1920) and Monsieur Demotte (Paris, 1913 and 1920) or were donated by private collectors, Monsieur Mallon (Paris, January 1914) and Monsieur Gaudin (Paris, July 1920). Some fragments bear the label "Kom el Ghorab, March 1901", but their association with Fustat is not certain.

⁵ The note [ANON.] 1936, p. 71 says: "*MM. Kalebjan frères de Paris viennent d'offrir à nos Musées plusieurs centaines de fragments de céramiques arabes provenant de Fustat près du Caire. Il s'agit surtout de déchets de fabrication présentant un grand intérêt pour l'étude de la technique et de la décoration des poteries et faïences égyptiennes des XIV^e et XV^e siècles. On y reconnaît la plupart des thèmes décoratifs de cette brillante époque et les signatures de quelques maîtres potiers du Caire. Le don de MM. Kalebjan complète heureusement notre collection de tessons arabes, de la même époque et de la même provenance, étudiés et classés en 1929-1930 par les soins de M. A. Abel.*"

⁶ A group of boxes of uncertain origin, but very likely coming from Fustat, is also preserved in the storerooms of the RMAH. This material, more than 600-700 sherds, will be analysed in a second stage of this research.

⁷ The showcase consecrated to Fustat sherds actually displays a collection of 'Incised and Slip painted ware' of the Mamluk period bearing inscriptions, blazons and animal figures and some examples of oil lamps and

and organized in the 70's by Martine Maillard, who published an article on a selected amount of objects representing the entire Islamic period in Fustat⁸. Daliah Shany-Belkine later presented a contribution on the Fatimid lustre wares⁹.

This assemblage represents part of an immense material heritage of Islamic Fustat that arrived, especially during the early 20th century, in several museums and private collections all over the world. Even if some recent articles revealed part of this rich documentation¹⁰, this material remains mostly unpublished. Nevertheless, supporting data relating to ceramic evidence from Fustat also come from archaeological reports which provide, furthermore, important information on the original context of findings. The collection of the RMAH can be considered as a rich and representative assemblage of this heritage, including local ceramic productions (from Fustat) and imports. As most museums' collections, it is mainly composed of finely decorated and glazed items, which probably drew the attention of collectors and curators, while common wares, such as cooking pots, storage jars and everyday objects are not represented. This material consequently provides a partial view of the society living in Fustat during the Islamic period. Nevertheless, it supplies interesting data for the reconstruction of the history of fine ceramic productions documented in the region and more in general, in the Eastern Mediterranean area, allowing to highlight changes and evolutions of the decorative and technological repertoire of Islamic productions.

Even if this contribution is focused on the ceramic material dated to the Mamluk period (1250-1517), the RMAH collection offers a wider view on Islamic wares, from the 7th century until the Ottoman period. We mention in particular the rich assemblage of Fatimid lustre wares, Fatimid incised fritwares and underglaze painted productions of the 12th and 13th centuries¹¹.

FUSTAT AND CAIRO DURING THE MAMLUK PERIOD AN HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

The site of Fustat is primarily known for the role it played during the Early Islamic period. This centre was founded on the eastern bank of the Nile, near the settlement of Babylon and of the ancient town of Heliopolis, by the general of caliph 'Umār, 'Amr b. al-

decorated filters of jugs. It was conceived as a rotating showcase, in order to exhibit periodically different types of ceramics from Fustat.

⁸ MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977. This article was issued from her graduation thesis at the Université libre de Bruxelles, under the direction of Prof. Abel. I would like to thank Madame Maillard for providing information on her study of this material and on Abel's indications on provenance of artefacts.

⁹ SHANY-BELKINE 1980-1981.

¹⁰ We mention here some of the last contributions on Fustat sherds from Museum collections: MCPHILLIPS 2008; RUGIADI 2007-2008; WATSON 2004.

¹¹ For a general view of the Fustat collection of the RMAH see MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977.

‘Ās. Initially conceived as a military camp, it quickly turned into an elaborated urban centre. In 643 the first congregational mosque of Egypt was founded in Fustat (Mosque of Al-‘Amr) and gradually the town encompassed new quarters and areas, hosting religious and public buildings and residential structures.

During the Umayyad period Fustat was the capital of Egypt. Nevertheless, it lost this status, when new rulers decided to install their governorship in newly founded settlements, extending once again the borders of the urban area: the Abbasids founded the quarter of *Al-‘Aksar* to the north of the ancient city, and later the Tulunids (868-905) settled in *Al-Katā’i*, further northwards.

The most significant change in the urban structure of the area was the creation in 969 of a new capital, *al-Qāhira* (the victorious), built by the new ruling dynasty of Egypt, the Fatimids (969-1171) and conceived as a princely city separated by the rest of the town of Miṣr¹², protected by walls and doors. At this time, Fustat developed as a wealthy centre, a residence for several religious communities (Sunnis, Copts and Jews) and an area for industries and trades¹³.

Even if the town suffered some critical periods, especially under the reign of caliph al-Mustansir (r. 1036-1094), when it was partially abandoned and devastated by a series of epidemics and famines, and in 1168 when, in order to prevent Crusaders’ incursions, it was voluntarily set to fire, Fustat maintained its status of an important industrial and commercial area also under Ayyubids (1174-1250) and Mamluks rulers (1250-1517). It was especially between the 13th and 15th centuries that it was marked by a remarkable productive activity (ceramics, textiles and carpets, oil and sugar)¹⁴. Its harbour was at this time an exchange point for goods coming from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The international trade, spread between China, Iran and Europe, reflects the desire of a wealthy urban society to stock up on international products. Moreover, the Mamluk elite continued to patronage and to invest in the area of Fustat for the construction of religious and public buildings¹⁵.

The archaeological documentation frequently contributed to the comprehension of the urban organization and development of the site of Fustat. The area was in fact deeply

¹² During the 10th century the area including the settlements of *Fustat*, *Al-‘Aksar* and *Al-Katā’i* was known under the name of *Miṣr*.

¹³ The organization of Fustat during the Fatimid period was particularly complex. If, on the one hand, it was a residential area, organized following confessional criteria (with a diversified social stratification), on the other hand it was also an important industrial and commercial centre. Several workshops, in fact, were identified: glass and ceramic industries, textiles workshops, sugar refineries, but also mills and ovens. National and international objects passed from Fustat’s harbour: spices and perfumes, luxury textiles, precious glassware and ceramics. Furthermore, the Fatimids built in this area important funerary installations and mosques. GOITEIN 1999; DENOIX 2000, p. 128-137; GAYRAUD 1998.

¹⁴ The presence of important installations for the productions of ceramic artefacts is abundantly documented by archaeological evidence (BAHGAT & MASSOUL 1930). Written sources are particularly rich in details concerning the production of precious artefacts in Fustat, cfr. DENOIX 1992.

¹⁵ DENOIX 1992.

investigated by national¹⁶ and international missions since the beginning of the 20th century. It was the *Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe d'Égypte* that started investigations on the site and defined a well-developed project of recuperation and protection of the archaeological area of Fustat¹⁷. Other important research activities followed: the American Research Centre in Egypt (1964-1972) conducted several campaigns which focused on the study of the urban fabric and material culture¹⁸; the Japanese Islamic Archaeological Mission¹⁹ (1978-1999) especially addressed its investigations to the city centre (*Ahl al-Raya* area), where archaeologists identified a long-term residential area with evidence of pottery kilns and water-supply structures (7th-14th centuries)²⁰ and the *Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*²¹ (since 1985) investigated the plateau of Istabl 'Antar, to the south of Fustat, where a complex funerary and residential area had been brought to light.

Although these investigations revealed interesting information on the urban aspects of Fustat, especially during the Early Islamic period, the organization of the area under the Mamluks remains still unclear and vague. Archaeological layers attributed to this period were strongly affected by later constructions and material evidence frequently appears in mixed and unstratified contexts (pits and mounds)²². Nevertheless, the abundant presence of ceramic artefacts on the site and the identification of wasters and kilns constitute precious indicators of the high development of the ceramic industry located in Fustat and of the quality and variety of ceramic types documented there²³. Judging by the extent of imported items identified on the site, it emerges that important economic contacts existed with China, Iran, Syria, North Africa and Europe.

¹⁶ Several Egyptian missions worked on the site and brought to light a consistent part of the urban space of Fustat. These missions were directed by Dr. Husayn Rashīd, Dr. Hasan al-Hawrī, Dr. Jamāl Mahriz, Prof. 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abd al-Tawwāb, Dr. Mustafā Shīna and Dr. Fahmi 'Abd al-Ālīm.

¹⁷ BAHGAT & GABRIEL 1921.

¹⁸ Various detailed reports were written by G. T. Scanlon (director of the American mission) and by W. Kubiak during their investigations on the site of Fustat; most of them appeared in the *Journal of American Research Centre in Egypt*. We mention here the conclusive report, SCANLON 1989.

¹⁹ Several Japanese institutions operated in the field: the Waseda University organised first campaigns (1978-1980), later supported by the Idemitsu Museum of Arts (1981-1984), direction of Kiyohiko Sakurai; the Middle Eastern Culture Centre in Japan organized the 1985 archaeological mission (direction of Tsugio Mikami) and the 1998-1999 campaigns (direction of Mutsuo Kawatoko). Reports were published in 1992 (in Japanese) and a summary work on material culture was published in the collection of the Research Centre for Islamic Area Studies of Waseda University (KAWATOKO & SHINDO 2010).

²⁰ SUKURAI & KAWATOKO 1992; KAWATOKO & SHINDO 2010.

²¹ The final publication on archaeological excavations directed by Roland-Pierre Gayraud (LAMM, Université de Provence) is forthcoming. Among former reports we mention here: GAYRAUD 1997 and GAYRAUD 1998.

²² Despite of the big amount of ceramic artefacts of the Mamluk period identified at Fustat, it is still difficult for archaeologists to provide a precise and documented chronological sequence.

²³ The tradition of producing ceramic artefacts is still alive in Fustat.

THE CERAMIC COLLECTION

The ceramic assemblage of the Mamluk period presented in this contribution counts about 1300 pottery sherds and it is exclusively composed of glazed productions. The analysis of the ceramic material is based on the observation and definition of ceramic body types²⁴ and surface treatments. In a second phase, the study tries to provide some considerations on the production and distribution of the wares and the chronology.

Two main kinds of ceramic body sherds have been differentiated in our collection. The first one is a red/dark red clay body, quite porous, with medium mineral inclusions (peculiar alluvial clay of the Nile area), associated to incised and slip-painted glazed items (about 500 sherds). The second one is a whitish/yellowish frit body²⁵, quite porous and gritty, employed together with an alkali transparent glaze that usually covers a painted decoration (about 700 sherds).

The entire assemblage has been photographed²⁶ and introduced in the database and the most significant objects have been drawn. Quantitative data are also provided but they cannot be considered as representative of the complete material evidence from Fustat during Mamluk times, since they lack information concerning the criteria of selection and of the original context of finds. Nevertheless, they are indicative for the nature of the RMAH collection.

The ceramic typology presented here reveals the main features of fine ceramic productions spread in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean during the Mamluk period. It will become clear in the following pages that the Mamluk pottery industry was not characterized by the introduction or the experimentation of new technological methods; it rather exploited former techniques and re-used them in order to create a new decorative vocabulary, satisfying new tendencies and fashions, also under the influence of Chinese and Central Asian productions.

²⁴ The analysis of ceramic bodies is based on macroscopic observations supported by published data on Fustat material. Further petrographic and chemical analysis will be effectuated in a later stage of this research.

²⁵ This ceramic group is known in specialized literature under several names: *faïence*, *stonepaste ware*, *soft-paste ware*, *siliceous ware*, *synthetic ware* or *fritware*. They all indicate a ceramic body made of ground quartz, glass and depurated white clay. Some petrographic analysis show that glass is frequently absent in the fabric (TONGHINI 1998, p. 39, 89). During firing (beyond 900°C) clay and quartz cast up and create a glass matrix that can be extremely compact. This technique was described by Abu al-Qasim in his 14th century treatise, *The Virtues of Jewels and the Delicacies of Perfumes*, where he mentioned the ingredients of this fabric: “*The first (substance) is hajar-i maha, known in Arabic as hasat, and by craftsmen as shukar-i sang. It is a white, clear, shiny stone, less clear than rock crystal, but clearer than white marble [...] Its deposits are in many places*” and again “*The ninth substance is a white, sticky, strong clay. It is found everywhere but the white one is rarer. The Kashani type is white and very strong, and the craftsmen call it Warkani and Luri after a village and the Lurs. One type it is like white snow, and its mine and the mountains of the Na’in near Isfahan. It is mixed with plaster and used to whitewash the houses*”. ALLAN 1973, p. 111-120 and WATSON 2004, p. 25.

²⁶ The entire collection of Fustat has been photographed by Marc-Henri Willot Parmentier, photographer of the RMAH, except for a small group of sherds which are photographed by the author.

1. RED CLAY WARES

The first group presented in this paper is characterized by a red or dark red fabric, quite porous, containing a significant amount of inclusions²⁷. It is made of an alluvium clay, typical of the Nile banks and abundantly documented in the region. This group is particularly diffused during the Mamluk period, when it appears associated with different surface treatments: the plain incised decoration, the slip-painted decoration and the incised and raised slip decoration.

Rarely represented in this collection, but common in archaeological contexts, is the group of red wares with monochrome glaze.

A. Incised and carved wares with raised slip decoration (Mamluk Sgraffiato) (Pl. 1-5)

This is the largest group (for the Mamluk period) and counts about 327 fragments. It appears frequently mentioned in literature as ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’²⁸.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

The decorative repertoire is incised or carved in a layer of whitish, probably frit, slip²⁹, which covers both the surfaces of the vessel (the outer one can be just partially covered). Incised patterns are later marked by a further layer of raised coloured slip (white, red or dark brown), creating a relief decoration. The object is finally covered by a thin layer of transparent coloured glaze (yellow, brown and more rarely, green³⁰).

The decorative and morphological repertoire associated to this group seems to have been strongly influenced by the contemporary metal inlaid industry³¹. Calligraphic decoration is particularly common, generally placed on the upper part of the vessel and alternated with circular shields containing blazons. A medallion, representing one of the emblems of Mamluk offices, is usually located in the centre of the artefact. The most represented figures associated to this repertory are³²:

²⁷ For a description of the petrofabric associated to this production see: MASON & KEALL 1990, p. 180.

²⁸ WALKER 2004; AVISSAR & STERN 2005, p. 38.

²⁹ The analysis of Mason and Keall (MASON & KEALL 1990, p. 180-181) on the Fustat material evidenced that: “The slip of the sgraffiato sherds consists of angular quartz in a glass matrix, and so represents an application of stonepaste over the vessel”. At the moment no analysis has been effectuated on the slip of the material at the RMAH.

³⁰ Just 10%-15% of the objects shows a green glaze that frequently covers just one of the two surfaces, while the other one remains yellow.

³¹ The inlaid golden or silver decoration of metalwork reminds to the raised slip patterns of ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’ that probably were effectuated in order to reproduce the same effect. See also ATIL 1981, p. 148.

³² For an interpretation of blazons and other figures we refer to the work of MAYER 1933.

- the lion: not very common in this collection³³; originally it represented the emblem of Baybars (1223-1277)³⁴
- the eagle: one-headed eagle with unfolded wings and head turned to the left (Pl. 1: n° 1)³⁵
- the *fleur-de-lis*: it first appears as the blazon of Nūr al-Dīn b. Zankī (1118-1174) and continued to be frequently employed in Ayyubid and Mamluk period³⁶
- the cup: it is one of the most recurring blazons, representing the office of the ‘cup-bearer’, *sāqī* (Pl. 1: n° 2-3; Pl. 2: n° 7; Pl. 3: n° 3)³⁷
- the polo-sticks: it represents the charge of the ‘polo-master’, *jūkandār* (Pl. 1: n° 4)³⁸
- the napkin: very recurring blazon associated to the ‘master of the robes’, *jamdār*; and represented as a rhomb. It is frequently located between two horizontal bands (Pl. 1: n° 5)³⁹
- The sword: very common in the RMAH collection, it represents the ‘armour-bearer’, *silahdār* (Pl. 1: n° 8; Pl. 4: n° 5). Sometimes the sword is located between two vertical bands or inside a shield. Even if quite rare, we also documented examples with sword and crescent moon (Pl. 1: n° 7)⁴⁰
- the pen-box: scarcely represented, it stands for the ‘pen-box holder’, *dawādār*, a secretary of lower rank at the Mamluk court⁴¹ (Pl. 1: n° 9)
- the crescent moon (or horseshoes)⁴²: it is often located between two horizontal bands (Pl. 1: n° 11)
- the three-fielded shield: it often occurs as blazon of Baḥrī Mamluks, in particular associated to amirs of the second half of the 13th century. The central band has usually a different colour⁴³ (Pl. 1: n° 10)
- the rosette: it is not a symbol or mark of office, but it usually appears associated to other emblems. It was very popular especially during the 14th century. This collection presents exclusively six-petalled rosettes⁴⁴ (Pl. 1: n° 12)

Even if frequently fragmentary and sometimes undecipherable, the inscriptions seem to bear honorific titles, praises, blessing words. They usually employed standardized expressions honouring the Mamluk officer, owner of the object, but they never mention

³³ The lion appears more frequently associated to the following ceramic group: plain incised ware.

³⁴ MAYER 1933, p. 9.

³⁵ MAYER 1933, p. 9-10.

³⁶ MAYER 1933, p. 22-24. This figure, as the lion, is frequently associated to plain incised ware (IS.F.0319, Pl. 6: n° 1).

³⁷ MAYER 1933, p.10-11.

³⁸ MAYER 1933, p. 16-17.

³⁹ MAYER 1933, p. 14-15.

⁴⁰ MAYER 1933, p.13.

⁴¹ MAYER 1933, p. 12-13. “The typical pen-box consists of four elements: the first, containing the ink-pot, the second the sand-pot and the starch paste-pot, the third a receptacle for thread (for cleaning pens), the fourth two or three receptacle for reeds”.

⁴² Mayer suggests that this symbol can be interpreted as an horseshoes. MAYER 1933, p. 25-26.

⁴³ MAYER 1933, p. 17.

⁴⁴ MAYER 1933, p. 24-25. Considered as a symbol of the Qalāwūn family in ATIL 1981, p. 183.

his personal name⁴⁵. Published objects from museum collections or from archaeological contexts provide a rich repertory of such expressions: *al-amir al-kabir* (le grand amir), *al-ajall* (the magnificent), *al-muhtaram* (the respected), *al-'ali* (the sublime), *al-mahdūm* (the well-served), and so on. Inscriptions are frequently executed in *thulūth* script.

Some objects issued from Fustat, Alexandria and Luxor also bear the name of the maker, *Sharaf al-Abawān*⁴⁶, who seems to have produced a consistent quantity of inscribed glazed objects. This name was probably associated to a workshop rather than to a single potter. No evidence of this presence has been identified in the RMAH collection. Some inscribed examples from Brussels assemblage are⁴⁷:

- IS.F.0329.2: المخدم, *al-mahdūm* (the well-served) (Pl. 3: n°1)
- IS.F.1479: لعالي, *li-'alī* ([for] the great) (Pl. 3: n° 2): horizontal bars and points are frequently added as decorative motifs and have not to be considered as part of the inscription
- IS.F.0313 and 0134 (Pl. 3: n° 3): المولى, *al-mawlawī*, framed between two horizontal bars, the first one representing an *alif*
- IS.F.0300: بركة, *barakā* (benediction), (Pl. 3: n° 4)
- IS.F.0071: المعموره, *al-ma'mūrā* (the populated), المحرسه, *al-mahrusā* (the protected), (Pl. 3: n° 5)
- IS.F.0020: *al-mahdūm, al-mawlawī*

Some examples show part of the expression *مما عمل برسم ال*, *mimā 'umil bi-rasm al-* (one of the thing made under the order of ...).

The outer surface rests frequently undecorated, just covered with glaze. Sometimes it can be adorned with simple incised or slipped geometrical patterns. The outer base is often unglazed, but slipped.

Shapes and functions

All objects are wheel-made and show marks of the tripod (on the inner surface) used to separate and pile vessels in the kiln⁴⁸. It has been suggested that these objects could have been fired together with slip painted and underglaze fritwares⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ Unlike metalwork, glassware and textiles, which frequently bear inscriptions mentioning the complete name of the patron, ceramic vessels very rarely offer information concerning names of attendants and officers commissioning these objects.

⁴⁶ Published artefacts mentioning this name can be found in: ATIL 1981, p. 148-149, no. 95; WATSON 2004, p. 413, LSN 458 C i (unillustrated sherd); MARZOUK 1957 (from Alexandria) and [LUXOR] 1996, n. 325.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to Prof. Jean-Charles Ducène (Université libre de Bruxelles) and Naïm Vanthiegem (PhD student at the Université libre de Bruxelles) for their precious help in the identification and translation of inscribed objects.

⁴⁸ An example of a tripod from Fustat is documented in the collection of RMAH.

⁴⁹ WALKER 2004, p. 36-37 states that: "It is possible that most, if not all, of these glazed wares were produced in the same workshops. That there was no term for "sgraffito" (otherwise known as "incised and slipped pottery") in Mamluk Egypt may

The morphological repertoire is mainly characterized by open forms. The most common shapes are hemispheric bowls with inverted rim (Pl. 3 and 5) and truncate-conical bowls sometimes with high foot (Pl. 2); quite recurring is also the bowl with ledge rim (Pl. 4). Rare are vessels with a flat base (Pl. 5: n° 7).

Closed forms are also attested: sphero-conical jugs; bottles, probably with spout and lids of jars (Pl. 4: n° 8).

Most of these objects were used as tableware, for consuming and serving food and drinks. They have been interpreted as “barrack wares”⁵⁰ employed for kitchens and tables of attendants of the Mamluk military elite. Some findings bear, in fact, inscriptions connecting them to their original function: “*made for the kitchen of ...*”⁵¹.

Leading figures of the Mamluk elite probably employed for their tables more expensive and precious vessels, such as inlaid metal objects, imported Chinese porcelains or enamelled glasses.

B. Plain Incised Ware (Pl. 6)

Belonging to the group of red earthenware is also this assemblage of objects characterized by an incised decoration executed in a layer of beige slip under transparent coloured glaze. Examples with raised slip painted decoration, as documented for the former type, are not present in this group. Inscriptions and blazons are also attested, but geometrical, floral and animal designs are more common. 78 fragments are present in the RMAH collection.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This group is characterized by a fine incised decoration executed in a layer of beige slip and covered by a transparent yellow or green glaze (green glaze usually covers just one of the surfaces, the other one remains yellow). If bichrome glaze is represented, polychrome glaze is definitely rare. Incisions are thin and create a large variety of decorative patterns: epigraphic or pseudo-epigraphic motifs, geometrical figures (stars, interlacing lines, nets) and floral or animal motifs (fishes, lions, birds and eagles), frequently executed on a scribbled background. The *fleur-de-lis* figure is particularly common (Pl. 6: 1). Some objects bear additional inscriptions that have been interpreted as following: IS.F.1475, 1465

indicate that most workshops did not specialize in sgraffito manufacture. In this scenario, sgraffito would have been produced by the same potters that made underglaze-painted wares and fired them in the same kilns. The range of potters' signatures and their products supports this argument. The names of Ghaibi, al Ustadh al-Mašri, Ghāzāl, and Shaykh al-Šina'ah are inscribed on both sgraffito and underglaze-painted wares”.

⁵⁰ WATSON 2004, p. 408.

⁵¹ WATSON 2004, p. 411, Cat.R.18; MILWRIGHT 1999, p. 509 from FOUQUET 1900.

and 1477 (Pl. 6: 7-8) probably presented the name of the potter, but it is now possible to read just the word *عمل*, 'amal (work of...).

The outer surface is usually undecorated, but we identified two objects characterized by a simple slip painted decoration⁵².

Shapes and functions

These objects are wheel-thrown and show marks of tripod on the inner surface. Few examples seem to have placed in the kiln upside down, since drops of glaze run from the base upwards. Some wasters and second choice objects have been also documented. The morphological repertoire is very close to the former group: truncated-conical and hemispherical bowls, sometimes with pedestal foot.

C. Slip painted ware (Pl. 7)

This group of red earthenware painted with whitish slip patterns under transparent coloured glaze counts about 50 fragments.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This group is characterized by a decoration painted in whitish clay slip⁵³ on the inner surface of the vessel and covered by a transparent coloured glaze (yellow glaze predominates)⁵⁴.

The decorative repertoire is standardized: floral motifs are particularly popular, a medallion with a stylized flower is located on the centre of the vessel and other floral or geometrical figures cover the walls; epigraphic and pseudo-epigraphic patterns are also quite common and are perfunctorily executed; animals are represented, especially fishes and birds; and simple geometrical figures also appear (Pl. 7). Few examples show a decoration on the exterior, which is usually simpler.

Glaze and slip are well preserved, just in few cases the slip comes off the ceramic body.

The outer surface is completely glazed, excluded the base, and remains unslipped.

⁵² IS.F.1480 has been decorated with a black slip, while IS.F.5738 with a whitish slip.

⁵³ MASON & KEALL 1990, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Very rare are examples painted in black/brown slip on a layer of whitish slip under transparent coloured glaze.

Shapes and functions

All the objects are wheel-made and frequently show marks of the tripod. The Fustat collection of the RMAH is constituted exclusively by open forms and in particular by small bowls with ledge rim or hemispherical bowls.

D. Production centres and chronological evaluations

The ceramic groups presented here not only share a similar ceramic body, but also present some correspondences as regards the morphological and decorative repertoires. As abundantly attested by archaeological evidence (kilns and ceramic wasters), they were all produced in Fustat and it is probable that they were manufactured in the same workshop and fired in the same kiln. Even if findings are numerous and local manufacture is attested on the site, these productions lack of archaeological data able to provide a valid chronological sequence on their appearance, development and decline. It is thus necessary to seek other supporting data in order to provide a solid dating.

Incised and slip-painted wares were particularly widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, during the 12th and 14th centuries, drawing on previous traditions well-known in the region⁵⁵. It is especially the group of ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’ that seems to be more distinguishable and as a consequence, more easily connectable to a determined span of time. This production, in fact, provides a completely new expression of traditional techniques (incision, carving and slip painting), creating an innovative and original decorative vocabulary made of standardized honorific inscriptions and distinctive blazons. It was especially since the reign of Nāṣir Muhammad (1285-1341) that the use of amiral inscriptions and blazons in architecture and material culture (glasswork, ceramic and metalwork) enhanced. Sgraffiato Mamluk production definitely established itself in the 14th century. The absence of composite blazons connected to officers serving Burji Mamluks and the lack of inscriptions bearing the name of amirs and sultans of the 15th century, leads Esin Atıl to suggest that this ware ceased to be produced at the beginning of the 15th century⁵⁶.

In 2004 Bethany Walker tried to provide deeper chronological observations concerning the development of ‘Incised and Slip Painted Ware’ in Mamluk Egypt, suggesting that especially Cypriot incised productions⁵⁷ played an important role in the emergence of Mamluk incised wares⁵⁸. She considers the group of ‘plain incised wares’ as the bond

⁵⁵ Sgraffiato decoration was abundantly employed in association with glazed ware since the Abbasid time and continues to be particularly popular in Egypt also during the Fatimid period.

⁵⁶ ATIL 1981, p. 149.

⁵⁷ WALKER 2004, p. 21-25.

⁵⁸ These productions were manufactured with local Nile alluvial clay.

between eastern Mediterranean sgraffiati and ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’, dating this first phase of Mamluk incised wares to the second half of the 13th century. The development of Egyptian incised wares evolves in what she defines as the ‘Military Style’ (phase 2), which corresponds to the group with amiral inscriptions and blazons⁵⁹. If the presence of Eastern incised productions in Egypt is attested by archaeological evidence⁶⁰ and its influence on local production is thus possible, it is more difficult to confirm through archaeological documentation the evolution of ‘plain incised ware’ to ‘Mamluk sgraffiato’. Given the correspondence as regards the morphological and decorative repertoire (blazons and honorific inscription have been documented also for ‘plain incised ware’)⁶¹, it is very likely that these two groups coexisted. For the same reasons, also the group of ‘slip painted ware’ can be considered as belonging to the same technological, decorative and chronological horizon⁶².

Esin Atıl, on the contrary, explained the existence of different incised productions as the reflection of a diversified system of Mamluk society: ‘incised and slipped wares’ with inscriptions and blazons were purchased by officers, while ‘plain incised wares’ bought by the general public. According to her, while inscribed productions disappeared in Burji period, ‘plain incised wares’ continued to be produced until the end of Mamluk period⁶³.

If plain incised and slip painted productions seem to have a longer duration, already popular in Egypt at least from the 13th century and documented also later, the group of the so-called ‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’ is probably the expression of a well-defined society in a determined span of time, dated between the end of the 13th and the 14th centuries. This group has to be considered as the representation and materialization of Mamluk elite in its own territory; these objects were in fact very rarely documented outside Egyptian borders⁶⁴.

2. FRITWARES

A considerable group of Mamluk ware (about 700 fragments) is characterized by a white to yellow ceramic body, porous and friable, made of ground quartz mixed together

⁵⁹ WALKER 2004, p. 28-32, fig. 11.

⁶⁰ Alexandria: KUBIAK 1969, p. 17; FRANÇOIS 1999, p. 112-113; Rāya and Tūr al-Kilānī: KAWATOKO & SHINDO 2009, p. 29.

⁶¹ As documented in the assemblage of the RMAH.

⁶² On the contrary, GIBBS 1998-1999, p. 25 suggests that Slip Painted, also produced in Fustat, was employed in the 15th century as substitutes for Sgraffiato ware.

⁶³ ATIL 1981, p. 148-149.

⁶⁴ For instance, this production was not documented in Syria that usually shares with Egypt several similarities in the ceramic production during the Mamluk period (especially as regards fritwares with underglaze decoration and slip-painted ware). Few examples have been issued from important Mamluk administrative centres, such as Jerusalem (AVISSAR 2003, pl. 19.2: 7) and Safed (unpublished, but reported by AVISSAR & STERN 2005, p. 38).

with a small amount of clay, frequently known in literature as *fritware*⁶⁵. With few variations in colour and compactness, the material of this collection presents a homogeneous ceramic body that can be associated to different types of surface treatment. Underglaze painting is particularly popular and is well represented in the RMAH collection. This decorative technique, which appears in association to frit bodies during the 12th century, is widely exploited by potters, also during the Mamluk period.

The assemblage presented here shows a motley variety of underglaze decorative types, which will be treated separately in our study; nevertheless some comparative and general observations are necessary and will be developed in the following paragraphs. Underglaze wares are characterized by a monochrome, bi-chrome or polychrome decoration painted under a transparent coloured (turquoise or cobalt) or uncoloured glaze. One of these groups also presents raised patterns painted with slip. The collection also owns a group of fritwares covered by an opaque greenish glaze (imitating Chinese Celadon imports) and a modest group of objects painted with lustre on cobalt glaze. The groups identified are:

- a. black and blue painting under colourless glaze
- b. black and blue painting with raised slip decoration under colourless glaze (so-called ‘imitation of Sultanabad ware’)
- c. black, blue and red painting under colourless glaze
- d. blue painting under colourless glaze (‘Blue and White ware’)
- e. black under coloured glaze (turquoise and cobalt)
- f. ‘Celadon imitation’ ware
- g. lustre ware

It is difficult, at a macroscopic analysis, to determine if the ceramic body was covered by a layer of slip in order to create a homogenous white ground for the application of designs. Recent studies demonstrate that the presence of slip, usually considered as a distinctive feature of this group, is not certain and that a thin white layer of frit (similar to the slip) can be the result of a smoothing of the surface⁶⁶.

Mamluk fritwares were massively produced, exported⁶⁷ and imitated. Excavations in Fustat brought to light a significant number of kiln wasters that are also represented in this collection. Moreover the RMAH own some artefacts that seem to copy this material through the use of a coarser, probably cheaper, clay.

⁶⁵ See note 25 for further considerations on the terminology related to this ceramic production.

⁶⁶ LAZZARINI & TONGHINI 2012.

⁶⁷ Mamluk fritwares were found in the entire Mediterranean region, sold on the international market and also used (in the case of *albarelli* and jars) for the transportation of other products.

A. Black and blue painting under transparent uncoloured glaze (Pl. 8-10)

This group counts about 290 sherds and it is the most common decorative type associated to fritware productions documented in the collection of the RMAH.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This group is characterized by a bi-chrome decoration painted in black and blue under a layer of uncoloured transparent glaze.

On the inner surface, the decorative repertoire is usually quite complex (Pl. 8-10), showing epigraphic patterns, floral motifs, radial bands and medallions. Quite common is a group of bowls characterized by a radial structure decorated, alternatively, with floral and epigraphic patterns. In few cases, designs are executed *en réserve*. The inner surface can be also enriched with splashes of turquoise glaze.

The outside is often completely glazed (including the base) and simply decorated with underglaze painting: interlacing brackets, triangles, lozenges, vertical lines and more rarely, epigraphic patterns.

The glaze is often broadly applied and frequently runs in form of thick drops with a greenish (rarely turquoise) tinge.

Even if not frequent, underglaze wares with bi-chrome painting can bear signatures of potters on the base. The RMAH collection provides two examples (not represented): IS.F.1107 shows the signature of أبو لو, Abū L[ū] and IS.F.1319 the signature of the more famous غيبي, Ghaībī, frequently identified as “author” of objects decorated in blue under colourless glaze (see later).

A group of objects presents the addition of green to the painted repertoire. The quality of the design can vary considerably. One of the item is signed by Ghaībī (Pl. 10: n° 5).

Products imitating blue and black fritwares have been also detected and seem to have been quite common in Fustat. They are characterized by a completely different ceramic body that can be red or yellow, quite gritty and porous, with a wide range of inclusions. The vessel is then covered by a layer of white slip (probably a frit slip). Motifs are often executed without precisions and glaze is thickly applied (Pl. 10: n° 6-7).

Shapes and functions

All the exemplars we analysed are wheel-thrown. Even if not regularly documented,

a relevant part of this assemblage shows the marks of the tripod. The presence of wasters suggests that they were locally produced. One of these exemplars bears a signature (Pl. 10: n° 4) interpreted as: *سار الفاخوري المصري*, “*Sār (?)*, *al-fākhūrī al-miṣrī*”, probably indicating someone working or coming from Miṣr, the name employed for Fustat during the Mamluk period⁶⁸.

Open forms predominate: bowls with simple rim (Pl. 8: n° 1-3), small bowls with ledge rim (Pl. 9: n° 1-3), and wide dishes (Pl. 9: n° 8), but also some fragments of jars have been identified (Pl. 8: n° 7-8).

B. Black and blue painting with raised slip decoration under colourless glaze (‘Sultanabad Imitations’) (Pl. 11: n° 1-6)

This material shares several similarities with the former group, but what makes it peculiar is the addition of raised slip painting with the purpose of imitating the distinctive decorative repertoire of the so-called ‘Sultanabad ware’ (50 fragments). This production, originating from Central Asia, became very popular in Syria and Egypt especially during the 14th century. Mamluk potters took inspirations from Ilkhanids and Golden Horde productions, characterized by a main figure (usually an animal or a human) standing on a background of leaves and buds patterns, and then tried to develop a distinctive local production⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Abel gave an interpretation of this object and published it: “*Cette pièce n’est pas de nature à encourager les collectionneurs-amateurs, ceux qui recherchent dans la pratique de la céramographie une jouissance d’ordre esthétique avant tout. Elle a pourtant apporté, avec son aspect monstrueux, un précieux appoint à la chronologie de la céramographie égyptienne d’époque arabe. C’est un rebout de four, et un rebut de four signé. Il est constitué de fragments de quatre pièces qui s’écroulèrent les unes sur les autres au cours de la cuisson et restèrent collés ensemble. Lors de défournement, le ringard du potier les a extraites rageusement et elles sont allées s’entasser dans les collines de décombres pour attester un jour de l’origine égyptienne de plusieurs séries de pièces signées. Car notre chance se trouve ici accrue du fait que la pièce inférieure porte la signature de l’artiste. En 1928, au cours d’une première recherche nous avons lu, un peu hâtivement ce nom : Sal al Aduri al Misri. Al aduri, en arabe, pouvait s’interpréter comme un surnom signifiant : le piocheur. Comme ce nom pouvait s’adapter à un céramiste, nous cherchâmes pas plus avant jusqu’à quand M. Gaston W’iët, le savant directeur du Musée Arabe du Caire, qui voulut bien revoir notre Gaïbi, nous signala qu’il fallait probablement lire al Fakhuri. Al Fakhuri veut dire : le potier. Nous avons donc adopté cette lecture [...]*”. On the basis of a deep analysis of the decorative repertoire and on comparisons with the artist known as Al Ustadh al Misri, Abel suggests that Al Fakhuri was probably active during the 1280s². ABEL 1930b, p. 68-70.

⁶⁹ The difference between Iranian and Syro-Egyptian productions have been usually related to thickness of bodies and decoration quality, but recently these categories of identification have been questioned (SOUSTIEL 1985, p. 232, fig. 261; FRANÇOIS 1999, p. 25). Rosalind Haddon recently published a detail study which focused on the distinction of stylistic and morphological differences among Mamluk, Ilkhanid and Golden Horde productions (HADDON 2011). Following her study, it emerges that Mamluk productions can be recognizable because of the use of red colour in the decorative layout (never found in examples for Iranian and Golden Horde area). Moreover, Mamluk potters seem to accentuate details, sometimes in a quite coarse way. Trifoliolate leaf is typical of Mamluk items. As regards shapes, common to the three groups are hemispherical bowls. Mamluk productions differs for a high percentage of *albarelli* and medium storage jars, usually employed for trade.

Some objects bear inscriptions offering chronological information. It’s the case, for example, of base fragments

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This group is characterized by a complex decoration constituted by blue and black painting and relief patterns executed with slip under a transparent colourless (sometimes greenish) glaze. Designs can be also effectuated on a coloured slip background (white, dark green or black) that covers all the surface of the artefact.

Other subgroups, showing little variations in the execution of the same decorative repertoire, have been identified:

- a. underglaze painting in black and blue, sometimes with turquoise splashes (not very common) without raised slip decoration (Pl. 11: n° 5)⁷⁰
- b. underglaze painting in blue, black and red (just one item: IS.F.0406, not represented)

The decorative repertoire is frequently located on the inner surface (even if closed shapes have been documented), while the outer surface presents a simpler decoration, painted in black and made of vertical or interlacing lines and dots. The base usually remains unglazed.

The main surface is densely decorated: the ground is often adorned with a repetition of tri-lobed leaves, accompanied with small lines, dots or concentric circles (Pl. 11: n° 1-6). The principal representation is frequently an animal figure or an inscription. We documented swans and more rarely, savage beasts. One object is decorated with flowers and presents on the outer base a symbol that can be interpreted as potter's mark.

Shapes and functions

We especially remark open forms (bowls with simple or ledge rim), but a few fragments of jars have also been identified (Pl. 11: n° 6). They have a cylindrical neck and everted rounded rim. These objects were employed as tableware but also for transporting and conserving goods. This kind of decoration is frequently associated to *albarelli*, abundantly found on the European market. Artefacts are wheel-thrown.

C. Black, blue and red painting under colourless glaze (Pl. 11: n° 7-11)

The RMAH hold a significant group of objects characterized by a polychrome

kept at the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge (inv. C510-1991): 'made in the year 45', 745 H/ 1345-6 AD.

⁷⁰ This object can be easily ascribed to the former group (see also Pl. 10: n° 2), but it represents a decorative repertoire closer to Sultanabad imitations.

decoration painted under a transparent colourless glaze, but most of them present a more compact and whiter ceramic body and have to be associated to a former phase of fritware production. The group ascribed to the Mamluk period is definitely more exiguous and, as already exposed, characterized by a thick whitish body, quite porous and friable. It counts about 25 fragments.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This group is characterized by a decoration painted in blue, black and red under transparent colourless glaze.

The inner surface presents a standard decoration, frequently made of epigraphic or pseudo-epigraphic designs, floral motifs and geometrical figures (Pl. 11: n° 7-11).

On the exterior, the glaze reaches the base of the artefact, but it does not cover it completely (the base rests unglazed). The glaze is sometimes thickly applied and has a greenish tinge.

Shapes and functions

This group is principally characterized by open forms, hemispherical and truncated-conical bowls; closed forms are also attested and a lid of jar has been identified (Pl. 11: n° 7). All objects are wheel-thrown. Marks of tripods have been detected.

D. Blue painting under colourless glaze ('Blue and White') (Pl. 12-15)

This is one of the best-represented groups within the collection of the RMAH and counts some 195 fragments. Objects have been finely decorated with blue patterns painted under colourless glaze. The decorative layout frequently draws on the repertoire of Ming Blue and White porcelains (1368-1644), abundantly imported in the Near East and identified in archaeological excavations at Fustat⁷¹.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

The inner surface, decorated with blue painting under transparent colourless glaze,

⁷¹ SCANLON 1984, p. 116, 118, Pl. 5-6; KAWATOKO & SHINDO 2010, pl. 10: 4.

usually presents a fine and complex decoration, especially characterized by floral patterns (Pl. 12-14): pomegranates (Pl. 12: n° 9-10), flowers bouquets (Pl. 12: n° 14; Pl. 14: n° 4, 7) or lotus flowers. Quite rarely animal figures are also documented: fishes, birds and beasts.

Very rarely glaze is thicker and can hide the decoration (Pl. 12: n° 5). Just one exemplar shows splashes of turquoise glaze added to the decorative scheme.

On the exterior the decoration is usually simpler than inside. It's composed of drops-shapes blue figures (Pl. 13: n° 2, 5), vertical blue bands (Pl. 12: n° 14) and more rarely floral patterns (Pl. 13: n° 3; Pl. 14: n° 7). In some case black painting patterns can be associated to this group (Pl. 12: n° 13).

The base usually remains unglazed, except when signed or marked. Sometimes glaze is coarsely applied, without covering completely the painted patterns. It frequently runs in form of big drops.

The base often bears the signature of the artist (or the group of artists working for an atelier) who decorates the object. This collection owns a rich variety of signed artefacts. The most represented artist is definitely غيبي, Ghaībī (Pl. 12: n° 1-3), whose name appears also in abbreviated form, without diacritic signs or with a single letter غ (Pl. 12: n° 4-5); but we also identified the name of غزال, Ghazāl (Pl. 12: n° 8-9). Other objects were probably decorated by foreigner artists, such as عجمي, 'Ajamī (the stranger) (Pl. 12: n° 13); عمل الشامي, 'Amal al-Shamī; عمل الهرمزي, 'Amal al-Hurmuzī (Pl. 12: n° 10-11). This can be considered as the proof of the moving of specialized craftsmen towards Fustat, which was at the time undoubtedly a rich productive centre.

We also attested other types of marks: virgules (Pl. 12: n° 7), horizontal lines (Pl. 14: n° 4) and letters ح, ت (Pl. 14: n° 7) or the emblem of the 'polo master' (Pl. 12: n° 15).

Shapes and functions

These objects are wheel-thrown, but we documented also a box made with rectangular plates (Pl. 15: n° 1). Open forms are particularly common and diversified: bowls and dishes of different dimensions (hemispherical bowls and dishes with ledge rim, Pl. 13-14), small cups and vases (Pl. 15). As regards closed forms, we identified especially jars (Pl. 15: n° 4, 6). Most of the pieces shows marks of tripod.

E. Black painting under coloured glaze (Pl. 16)

This ceramic group, particularly popular during the 12th and 13th centuries, is well documented among the artefacts of the RMAH collection. As regards the material ascribed to the Mamluk period, even if more exiguous than former productions, about 150 ceramic

sherds were counted.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

The quality of the decorative layout can vary, but in general surfaces are quite perfunctorily decorated. Drawings are painted with thicker lines. The decoration is black and it is executed under a turquoise or cobalt glaze (a group with turquoise-green glaze is also documented) that can be thick and can hide the drawing under it.

The decoration patterns are especially pseudo-epigraphic designs, geometrical figures or floral and arabesque motifs.

On the outside the surface is not well covered by glaze. One of the items also presents an incised decoration on the exterior.

As already seen for other items, some potter's marks are documented on the back of the base, but we never identified signatures.

Shapes and functions

We documented especially wheel-thrown shapes, but moulded artefacts have also been identified. Open forms are very common: hemispherical bowls with simple rim and bowls with ledge rim. Among closed forms we identified: *albarelli* (Pl. 16: n° 6), jars and jugs (Pl. 16: n° 5) and lids (Pl. 16: n° 10).

Some of the objects show marks of tripod.

F. Celadon Imitations (Pl. 17)

The RMAH collection of celadon imitations counts about 10 fragments; the museums also preserve some original Chinese productions found on the site of Fustat⁷². This group takes inspiration from Sung (960-1279) and Yüan (1260-1368) Chinese porcelains that reached the Mediterranean market during the 13th and 14th century, and are characterized by a thin and compact body covered by an opaque green glaze.

Although this group is not particularly consistent, archaeological excavations in Fustat (and elsewhere in Egypt) have shown that it appears to be one of the most common productions of the 14th century⁷³.

⁷² They count 6 sherds that will be the subject of further research.

⁷³ In 1968 Scanlon calculated the average number of sherds collected during excavations (14-26 September) and established that the largest group of the Mamluk period was 'Celadon imitation ware' and the second one,

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

Both surfaces are covered by a thick layer of greenish glaze. The decorative repertoire is quite modest, limited to a central pattern, usually moulded or incised. A moulded medallion can be placed over a hole that pierced the foot of the vessel; this decoration is usually associated to big vessels⁷⁴. Epigraphic and pseudo epigraphic motifs have been noticed, as in the case of IS.F.4828.2 (Pl. 17: n° 8), which says: *كل وشرب محمد*, “eat and drink Muhammad”. If this object was produced for a specific person (Muhammad) is difficult to say. Frequently big dishes and bowls are associated to a collective consumption of foods, but this object can probably demonstrate that a “private” consumption also existed. Objects can present also a moulded (Pl. 17: n° 6-7) or incised (Pl. 17: n° 4-5) decoration. The representations of fishes on the inner base is particularly frequent.

The exterior is simply glazed and the base usually remains unglazed.

Shapes and functions

Objects have been manufactured with a wheel or a mould and in some cases the two techniques were associated.

We document especially open forms, frequently imitating Chinese originals, quite diversified: small cups (Pl. 17: n° 1-3) but also big bowls and dishes.

G. Lustre Ware

This production is rare in the RMAHs collection and counts just 4 fragments.

Surface treatment and decorative repertoire

This collection is not representative for the decorative repertoire of Mamluk lustre productions, since artefacts are fragmentary and surfaces not well preserved.

Patterns are painted in golden lustre on a layer of transparent cobalt blue glaze. The painting is thick and quite coarsely applied. We identified pseudo-epigraphic and geometrical motifs.

Sgraffiato wares. SCANLON 1971, p. 220-233. See also FRANÇOIS 1999, p. 29-30.

⁷⁴ “A technique devised to help the drying and firing of what could be exceptionally large bowls. The wafer was applied, as in the original Chinese process, during the glazing and floats on the top of the layer of green glaze that was first applied”, WATSON 2004, p. 417.

Shapes and functions

All the objects are wheel-thrown. Just bowls and dishes have been identified.

H. Production centres and chronological evaluations

During the Mamluk period the ceramic industry of glazed fritwares grows intensively, reaching a level of mass production with several centres of manufacture, located in Egypt and Syria, producing for an international market.

This growing industry was vigorously influenced by the technological and decorative repertoire established during the 12th and early 13th century that it reinterpreted in order to satisfy new trends in fashion (particularly influenced by the contact with Central Asia and China productions) and to favour a cheaper and more standardized manufacture. Artefacts were thickly potted, characterized by a gritty and porous ceramic body, yellowish or whitish, covered with a thick layer of alkali glaze that tends to come off.

Very distinctive for this period is underglaze painting, attested by monochrome, bichrome or polychrome decoration executed under transparent coloured or uncoloured glaze. This technique developed in the ceramic industry of the Islamic world in the 12th century, but Mamluk potters used it in order to create a completely new decorative vocabulary, reflecting the taste of a multicultural society.

Fustat was certainly one of the main centres of production of fritwares; archaeological investigations, in fact, brought to light relevant evidence for the production activities of the site, which is attested by several pottery kilns⁷⁵ and by a great amount of ceramic wasters, also documented in the RMAH collection.

Nevertheless, without precise data on the original contexts of finds, it is usually quite difficult to distinguish Egyptian from Syrian fritware productions. Syria, in fact, was also an important production centre⁷⁶, which suggests that an international Mamluk style existed and that it was not dependent on regional models.

The study of the collection of the RMAH, supported by archaeological evidence from Egypt and Syria, allows to highlight developments and evolutions that are reflected in

⁷⁵ Two kilns dated to the 14th century were identified by Bahgat and Massoul in 1914 and 1923. One of the two kilns clearly produced celadon imitations. BAHGAT & MASSOUL 1930, p. 24-29, pl. O: 135.

⁷⁶ At Damascus, in the early 20th century, de Lorey identified two pottery kilns producing fritwares, attributed to the Mamluk period. These results were never published, but Migeon mentioned them in his publication of 1923 (MIGEON 1923). Kilns probably produced 'blue and black underglaze wares', 'blue and white wares' and 'Sultanabad imitation wares' and they were located in the area of Bab al-Sharqi. Other studies were published on material apparently found in Damascus: CARSWELL 1979, p. 19, pl. XVIII, figs. 12-15 and JENKINS 1984, pl. 9: c-d. Further evidence can be found in the production of tiles, employed for architectural decoration of several buildings in Damascus, especially in the 15th century (MEINECKE 1988).

the ceramic production of the Mamluk period. Nevertheless, the archaeological data cannot always provide a reliable chronological sequence.

The late 13th and the 14th centuries are marked by the continuation of the renowned Ayyubid ware production, attested in particular by the presence of polychrome underglaze painted ware (the use of red colour decreases in the Mamluk period) and of lustre wares. The Mamluk lustre production, characterized essentially by a golden lustre decoration on a cobalt blue glaze, was active until the early 15th century and Damascus was one of the main production centres⁷⁷. The 14th century is also marked by the significant presence on the ceramic market of black and blue wares⁷⁸ and so-called 'Sultanabad ware' imitations. If the manufacture of Sultanabad imitations is limited to this century, the black and blue decoration, which was subject to evolutions and variations, continued to be produced also later. As attested, in fact, by the rich collection of the RMAH, this ware is characterized by a remarkable variety of styles and motifs and the quality of products can vary considerably: in addition to the main assemblage of fine decorated items, we also documented a group of vessels, thickly potted and perfunctorily decorated. Moreover, coarser clay body were also employed together with a black and blue underglaze decoration.⁷⁹ The addition of green to the decorative patterns (typical of Damascus ware production of the 16th century) was probably introduced in the 15th century⁸⁰.

During the 14th century, the influence of a growing international trade, which brought to Egypt a remarkable quantity of imported items, especially from China, affected local production. Sung (960-1279) and Yüan (1260-1368) Celadons, characterized by a hard grey body covered by a jade-green glaze, became particularly popular in the Near East, abundantly attested by archaeological evidence in Fustat and elsewhere in Egypt. A local imitation quickly spread and became one of the most common productions. During archaeological excavation in Fustat, in fact, Scanlon realized that this was the most widespread production on the site⁸¹.

At the end of the 14th century – beginning of the 15th century, the group of Ming (1368-1644) Blue and White porcelains, abundantly imported in the Near East, influenced the development and diffusion of blue underglaze painted productions ('Blue and White Ware'). First attestations of these products are documented, for instance, in Hama⁸² and Damascus⁸³ before the Timur invasion of the early 15th century. The 'Blue and White Ware' seems to predominate on the ceramic market during the 15th century.

⁷⁷ JENKINS 1984, p. 104; WATSON 2004, p. 396-397.

⁷⁸ Some fragments excavated in Hama bear an inscription dated to the 44 or 45 of the Hegira, 1343-1344 (RIIS & POULSEN 1957, p. 206 and 291-292). A similar date is found on an object of the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo (JENKINS 1984, p. 104, note 11).

⁷⁹ This variety of manufacture is also attested for other productions, such as wares with black painting under coloured glaze.

⁸⁰ WATSON 2004, p. 425, Cat. S.7.

⁸¹ SCANLON 1984.

⁸² RIIS & POULSEN 1957, p. 9.

⁸³ MIGEON 1923.

Chinese motifs conquered the decorative repertoire of ‘Blue and White Ware’ (lotus blossoms, chrysanthemums, peonies and flower bouquets) but were reinterpreted following the Mamluk style. This was a high-specialized production that required particular competences for manufacturing (and decorating). A specialized industry consequently developed, as attested by the presence of signatures on the base of artefacts. Name of local and foreign potters are documented and were very likely associated to a workshop more than to a single artist’s activity⁸⁴. The RMAH hold a significant collection of objects signed by Ghaībī, Ghazāl, but also by al-‘Ajamī, al-Hurmuzī, al-Shamī, artists that reached Fustat in order to work in a developed and international industrial centre.

The name of Ghaībī was particularly known in Syria and Egypt. In Damascus he probably made the tiles that decorate the complex of Ghar al-Dīn Khalīl al-Tawrīzī al-Dasārī⁸⁵, dated to the 1423-4, but he also worked intensively in Fustat, as attested by ceramic findings bearing his signature⁸⁶.

Mamluk fritware production was internationally traded: ceramic objects known as “da Domasco” or “domaschini” (but probably coming also from Egypt) appear in the 14th and 15th centuries European inventories⁸⁷. Material evidence from Mediterranean harbours is increasing and it will certainly provide more data to the study of pottery trade⁸⁸.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The Royal Museums of Art and History of Brussels hold a remarkable collection of ceramic artefacts of the Mamluk period coming from the site of Fustat in Egypt.

The ceramic typology presented here provides an overview on fine glazed productions widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean between the 13th and the 15th centuries, allowing to define local productions and imports. This study also offers the chance of approaching the material evidence coming from a museum collection as a social marker, used as a medium for interpreting a particular historical context.

⁸⁴ JENKINS 1984, p. 104.

⁸⁵ JENKINS 1984, p. 104.

⁸⁶ ABEL 1930a.

⁸⁷ SPALLANZANI 1978. Recently a study on findings from the lagoon of Venice attested the presence of a remarkable quantity of ‘Blue and White’ and blue and black fritwares in the Adriatic region (TONGHINI & LAZZARINI 2012).

⁸⁸ TONGHINI 1998, p. 54-55; TONGHINI & LAZZARINI 2012, p. 102-407.

1. Fustat: industrial and commercial centre

During the Mamluk period the site of Fustat was an important productive and commercial centre. The ceramic industry was particularly well developed on the site and certainly produced red clay wares (incised and slip painted glazed wares) and fritwares (monochrome and bichrome decoration painted underglaze). Common glazed and unglazed productions were also manufactured, but they are not represented in this assemblage.

Fustat also received and diffused many imported items: celadon wares and blue and white porcelains from China reached its harbour and reflect the existence of a well-organized and rich international trade during the Mamluk period. The commerce with the Mediterranean region was particularly developed: objects coming from the Byzantine world, Syria and Western Europe reached the coasts of Egypt, while local products were exported together with spices, perfumes and precious goods. The ceramic industry seems to specialize in the production of specific containers, especially jars, employed to transport these items.

2. Technological and decorative repertoires: influences and exchanges

The vitality of the international trade during the Mamluk period also facilitated the exchange of technologies, traditions and experiences, and encouraged the creation of a multicultural society. The material evidence issued from this collection attests to the important impact of Central Asian and Chinese technological and decorative repertoires on the local ceramic production.

The displacement of craftsmen and artists also played an important role. Fustat welcomed foreign artisans that found there perfect working conditions (we identified here: Ghaībī, al-‘Ajamī, al-Hurmuzī, al-Shamī, ...).

3. Objects and social representation

The collection of ‘Incised and Slip painted ware’ (‘Mamluk Sgraffiato’), characterized by honorific titles and blazons representing different offices of the Mamluk military elite, witnesses the desire of part of this society to express itself through its material culture. This production represents Mamluks in their own territory (it is very rarely attested elsewhere) and for a well-defined period, the late 13th and the 14th centuries, when the desire of auto-representation of the elite and of their military staff was particularly developed, as attested also by the monumental architectural development of Cairo.

Mamluk Sgraffiato has been suggested to be considered as “barrack ware”, ordered for the kitchen and the table of the many retainers working for the Mamluk military elite, while Sultan and amirs consumed their food and drinks in more expensive and more precious vessels, such as inlaid metal objects, porcelains or enamelled glasses.

4. Food habits

Little is known about the food habits of medieval Cairenes and the material from this collection provides only a few cues of reflection. It is known that food was generally served, and probably consumed, in big communal bowls (diameter: 32-28 cm). The *qas'a* is frequently mentioned in medieval sources, indicating a big communal bowl made of glazed ceramic⁸⁹. Big dishes and bowls, usually thickly potted, are in fact well represented in this assemblage.

According to Lewicka, “Although Cairene table culture, like that of the rest of the medieval Arabic-Islamic world, generally followed the ancient tradition of using common vessels, in the eight/fourteenth century one could observe tendency to use individual tableware, as the local men, most probably of the middle- or upper classes, ate from their own bowls (*ḡubdiyya*) and drunk from their own goblets (*keḡḡ*).”⁹⁰. For instance, one vessel from this collection bears the inscription “eat and drink Muhammad” that can be interpreted as an invitation addressed to the owner of the object. This may indicate a private use of it⁹¹. Smaller bowls and cups were also abundantly documented and were probably used to serve different functions. Moreover a specialized production of jars and other containers (*albarelli*) existed. These items were frequently exploited for trading goods outside Egypt.

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⁸⁹ LEWICKA 2011, p. 428.

⁹⁰ LEWICKA 2011, p. 429.

⁹¹ I would like to thank Dr Lewicka for her comments on my presentation “Fustat of the Mamluks. Reconstructing Mamluk society through the study of artefacts: the ceramic collection from the Royal Museums of Art and History of Brussels”, given at the *Colloquium of the History of Egypt and Syria during the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk period*, Ghent 9-11 May 2012.

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CATALOGUE

The following drawings are in scale 1:4. All the pictures have been taken by Marc-Henri Willot Parmentier, photographer of the Royal Museums of Art and History of Brussels, except for a small group of sherds photographed by the author (inventory number: IS.F.0001-0548). We mention here the material from Fustat already published by ABEL 1930b and MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977.

Label:

— — — — — = limit of the glaze on the outer surface

— — — — — = limit of the slip on the outer surface

Dotted areas indicate rest of clay coiled to the vessel.

Black and blue strokes = painting decoration under transparent glaze

Pl. 1. Incised and slip painted ware ('Mamluk Sgraffiato'). Blazons.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. IS.F.4922D | 7. IS.F.0266 |
| 2. IS.F.5924I | 8. IS.F.0286 |
| 3. IS.F.0297 | 9. IS.F.5924 MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 13d. |
| 4. IS.F.0321 | 10. IS.F.0256 |
| 5. IS.F.0265 | 11. IS.F.0239 |
| 6. IS.F.0252 | 12. IS.F.0308 |

Pl. 2. Incised and slip painted ware ('Mamluk Sgraffiato')

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. IS.F.0338 | 5. IS.F.0002 |
| 2. IS.F.0083 | 6. IS.F.0027 |
| 3. IS.F.0190 | 7. IS.F.0299. Marks of tripod |
| 4. IS.F.0068 | |

Pl. 3. Incised and slip painted ware ('Mamluk Sgraffiato')

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. IS.F.0329 | 5. IS.F.0006 |
| 2. IS.F.1479 | 6. IS.F.0028 |
| 3. IS.F.0313 | |
| 4. IS.F.0300 | |

Pl. 4. Incised and slip painted ware ('Mamluk Sgraffiato')

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. IS.F.0144 | 6. IS.F.4920 |
| 2. IS.F.0332 | 7. IS.F.0335/6 |
| 3. IS.F.0302 | 8. IS.F.0031 |
| 4. IS.F.0323 | 9. IS.F.0174 |
| 5. IS.F.0287 | |

Pl. 5. Incised and slip painted ware ('Mamluk Sgraffiato')

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. IS.F.0314 | 5. IS.F.5626D |
| 2. IS.F.0015 | 6. IS.F.0334 |
| 3. IS.F.0310 | 7. IS.F.0193 |
| 4. IS.F.0176-0179. Unfinished item | |

Pl. 6. Plain Incised Ware

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. IS.F.0319 | 5. IS.F.0304. Marks of tripod |
| 2. IS.F.0343 | 6. IS.F.1480. Marks of tripod |
| 3. IS.F.0326. Marks of tripod | 7. IS.F.1477 |
| 4. IS.F.0084 | 8. IS.F.1465 |

Pl. 7. Slip Painted Ware

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. IS.F.1460. Marks of tripod. | 5. IS.F.1457. Marks of tripod |
| 2. IS.F.1469 | 6. IS.F.1455. Marks of tripod |
| 3. IS.F.1467. Marks of tripod. | 7. IS.F.1459. Marks of tripod |
| 4. IS.F.0209 | |

Pl. 8. Black and Blue Painting under Colourless Glaze

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. IS.F.0641 | 5. IS.F.0628 |
| 2. IS.F.0640 | 6. IS.F.0618 |
| 3. IS.F.0648 | 7. IS.F.0616 |
| 4. IS.F.0551 | 8. IS.F.0900 |

Pl. 9. Black and Blue Painting under Colourless Glaze

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. IS.F.0560. Marks of tripod | 5. IS.F.0906 |
| 2. IS.F.0666 | 6. IS.F.0657 |
| 3. IS.F.0621 | 7. IS.F.0681 |
| 4. IS.F.0605 | 8. IS.F.0665. Marks of tripod |

Pl. 10. Black and Blue Painting under Colourless Glaze

1. IS.F.0880
2. IS.F.0663
3. IS.F.0658
4. IS.F.5792. Ceramic waster. ABEL 1930b, fig. 5c-d.
5. IS.F.1101. Black, blue and green painting under colourless glaze. Fritware
6. IS.F.1177. Black and blue painting under colourless glaze. Clay yellowish body
7. IS.F.1170. Black, blue and green painting under colourless glaze. Clay red body

Pl. 11. Black and blue painting with raised slip under colourless glaze ('Sultanabad imitations') and Black, blue and red painting underglaze.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. IS.F.0397 | 7. IS.F.0515 |
| 2. IS.F.0407 | 8. IS.F.0511 |
| 3. IS.F.0402 | 9. IS.F.4983 |
| 4. IS.F.5385 | 10. IS.F.0539 |
| 5. IS.F.5703. No raised slip decoration | 11. IS.F.0886 |
| 6. IS.F.0378 | |

Pl. 12. Blue painting under colourless glaze (Blue and White Ware)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. IS.F.1435. ABEL 1930b, fig. 6b. | 9. IS.F.1092 |
| 2. IS.F.1091 | 10. IS.F.1437 |
| 3. IS.F.1088 | 11. IS.F.1108 |
| 4. IS.F.1081 | 12. IS.F.1134 |
| 5. IS.F.1085 | 13. IS.F.1104 |
| 6. IS.F.1141 | 14. IS.F.4357 |
| 7. IS.F.0802 | 15. IS.F.1132. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 31b. |
| 8. IS.F.5632.2 | |

Pl. 13. Blue painting under colourless glaze ('Blue and White' Ware)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. IS.F.0837. Marks of tripod | 4. IS.F.1428 |
| 2. IS.F.0778 | 5. IS.F.0806. Marks of tripod |
| 3. IS.F.1137 | 6. IS.F.1448 |

Pl. 14. Blue painting under colourless glaze ('Blue and White' Ware)

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. IS.F.4357. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 31a. | 6. IS.F.0829 |
| 2. IS.F.0804 | 7. IS.F.1454 |
| 3. IS.F.0794 | 8. IS.F.0795 |
| 4. IS.F.0799 | 9. IS.F.1431 |
| 5. IS.F.5823 | |

Pl. 15. Blue painting under colourless glaze ('Blue and White' Ware)

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1. IS.F.5819 | 6. IS.F.1449. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 32. |
| 2. IS.F.0782 | 7. IS.F.0841 |
| 3. IS.F.1451 | 8. IS.F.0834 |
| 4. IS.F.0746 | 9. IS.F.5799 |
| 5. IS.F.0843 | |

Pl. 16. Black painting under coloured glaze

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. IS.F.1001 | 7. IS.F.1019. Marks of tripod |
| 2. IS.F.5807. With red painting | 8. IS.F.0972 |
| 3. IS.F.5818 | 9. IS.F.0942 |
| 4. IS.F.1029. Marks of tripod | 10. IS.F.1017 |
| 5. IS.F.1000 | 11. IS.F.5643. Marks of tripod. Colourless glaze |
| 6. IS.F.0992 | |

Pl. 17. Celadon imitations

1. IS.F.4389. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 22b.
2. IS.F.4837
3. IS.F.1310
4. IS.F.1537
5. IS.F.1167
6. IS.F.4828.1. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 23a.
7. IS.F.4828. ABEL 1930b, fig. 16b.
8. IS.F.4828.2. MAILLARD-AZARNOUSH 1977, fig. 23b.

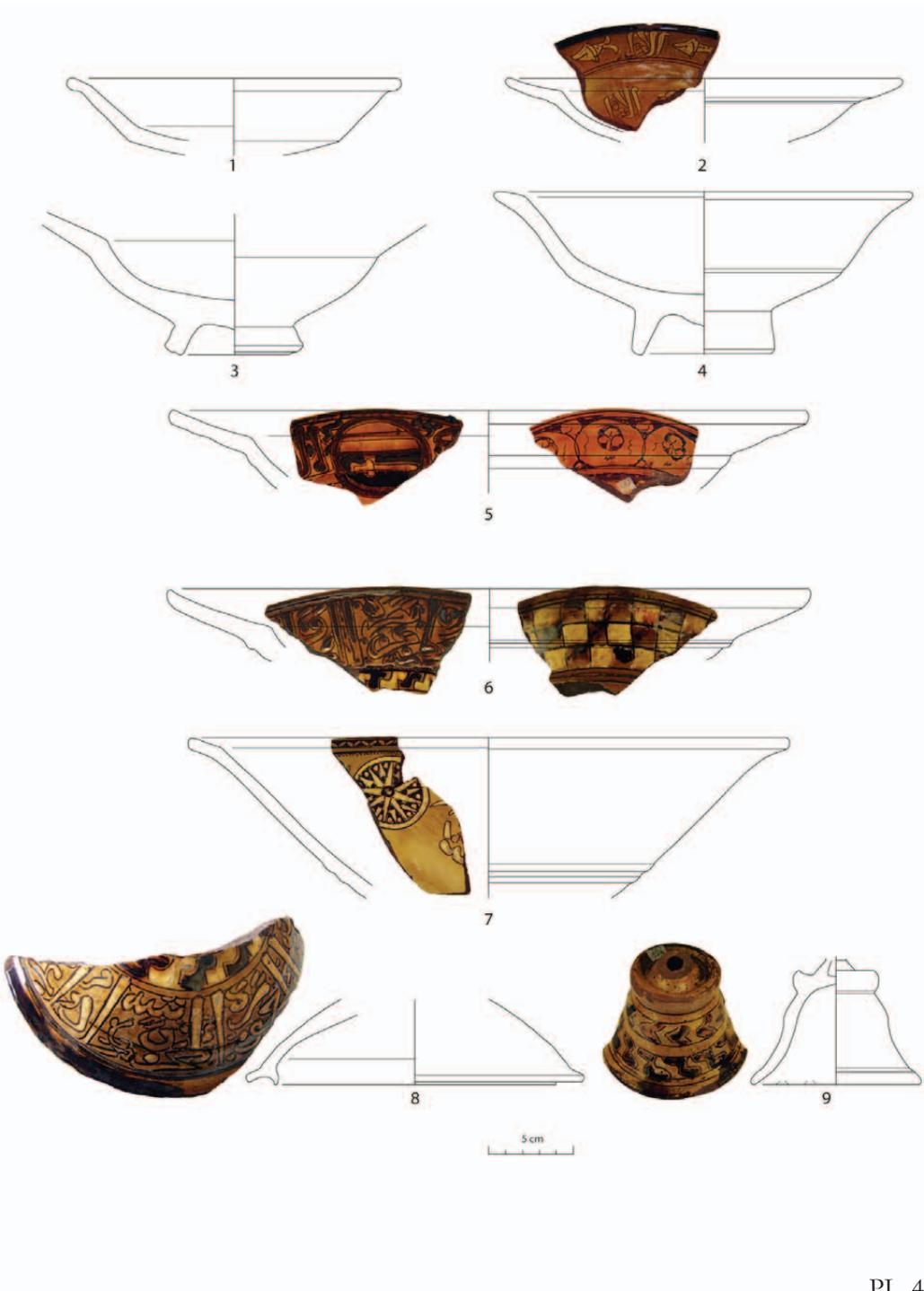


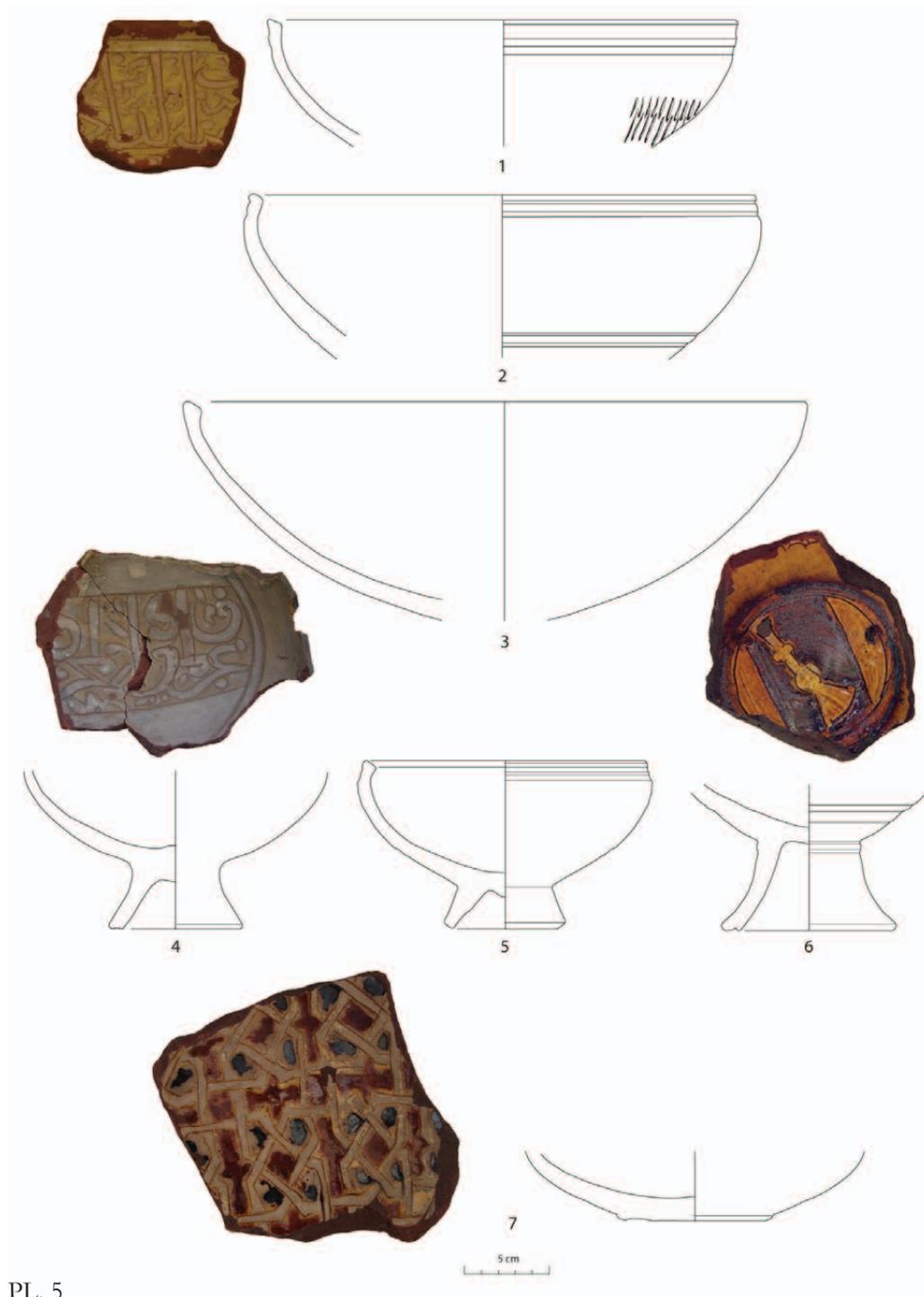
PL. 1





PL. 3





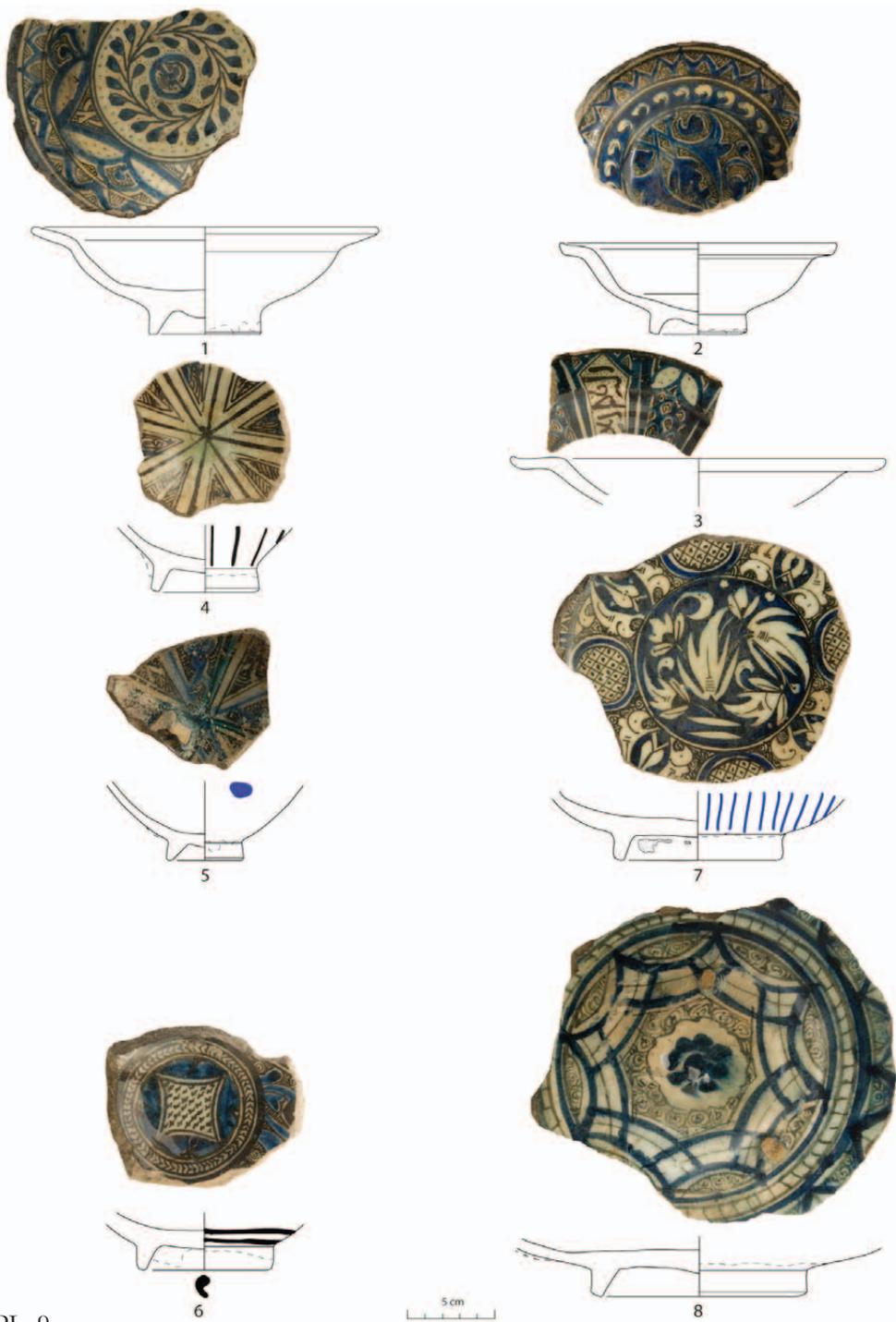
PL. 5





PL. 7





PL. 9





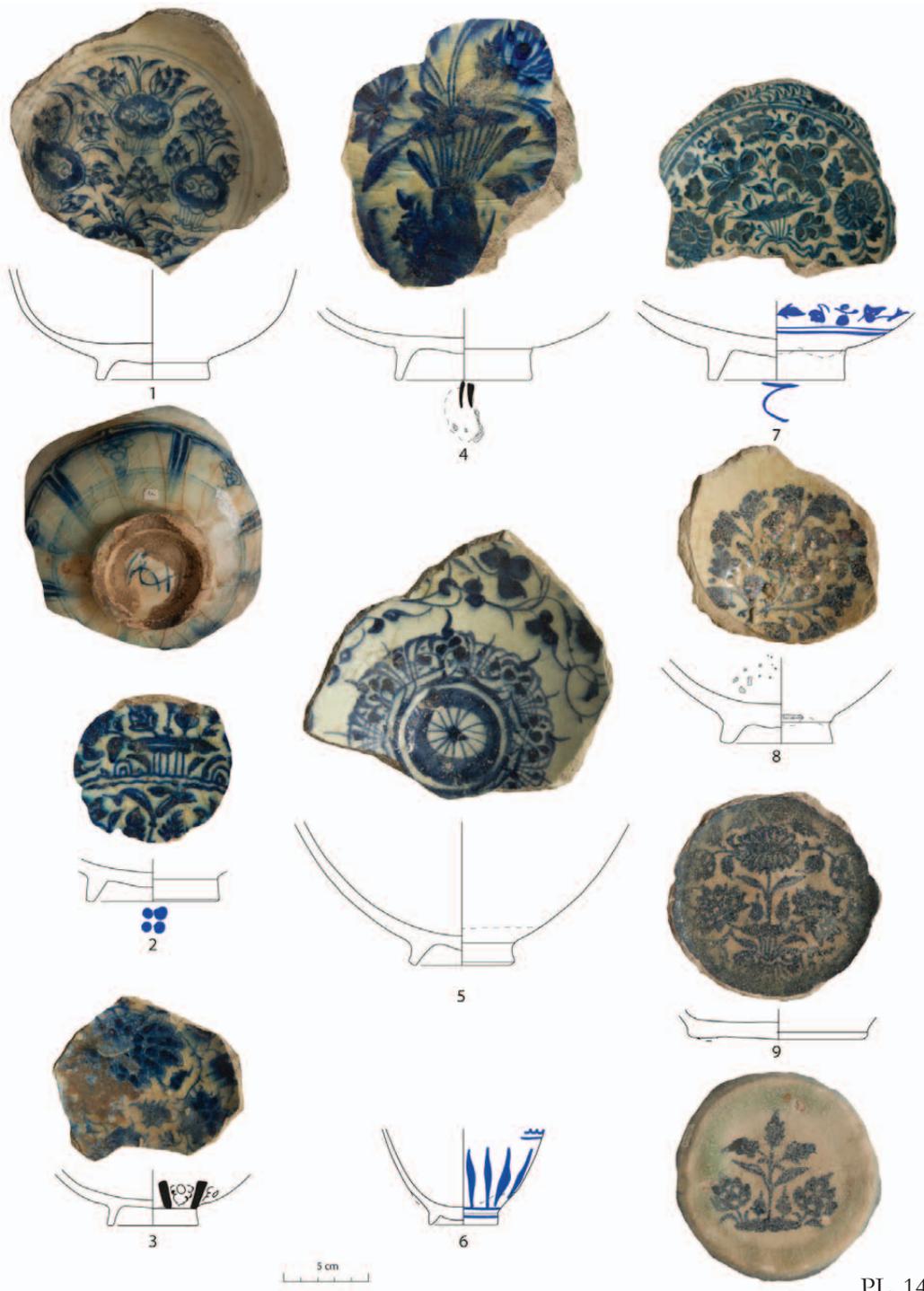
PL. 11



PL. 12



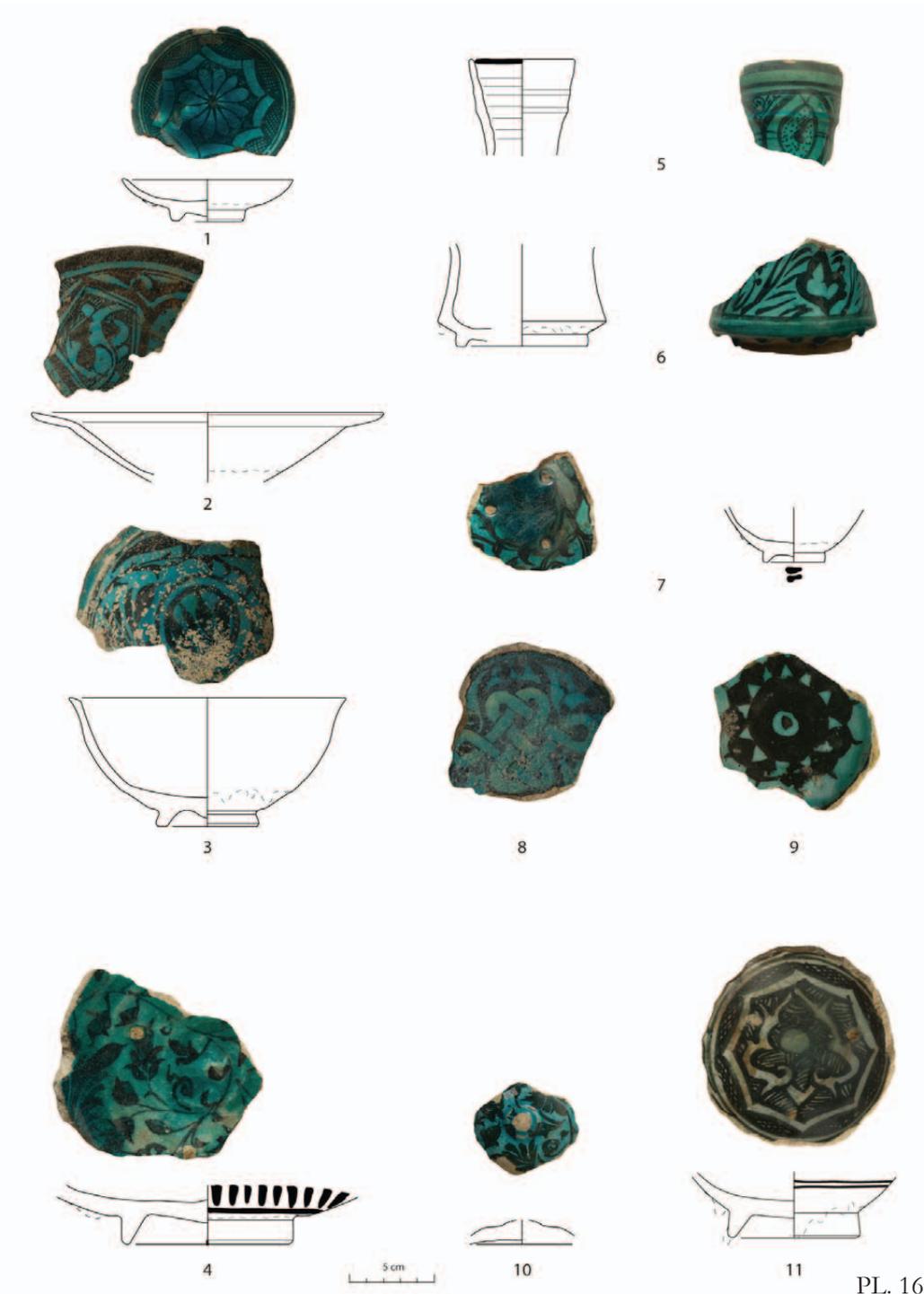
PL. 13

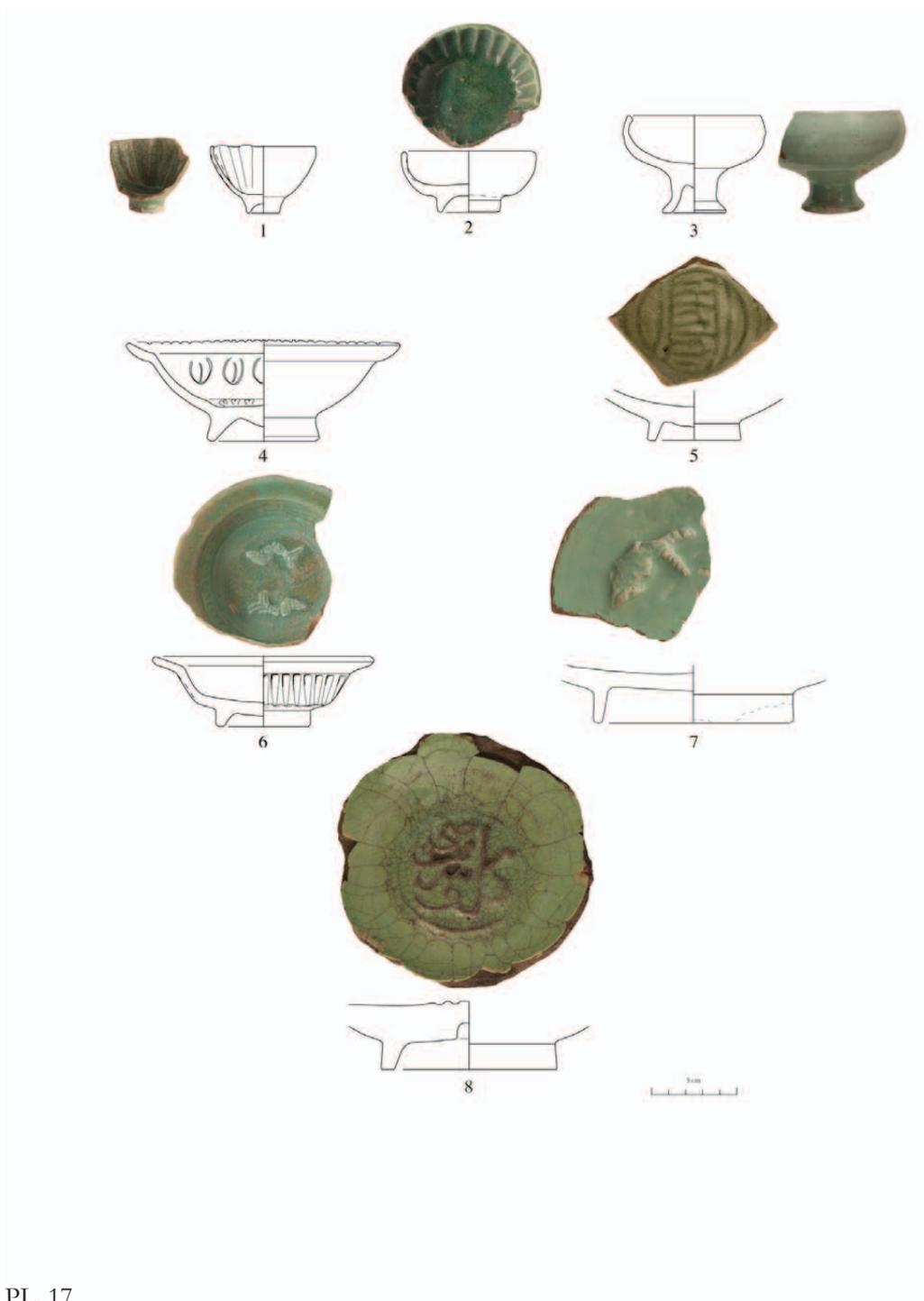


PL. 14



PL. 15





PL. 17