

THE KÜTAHYA POTTERY IN ARMENIAN MUSEUMS

The Kütahya pottery at present is the important part of the State and private museums of all the world¹. As the product of an individual pottery, it was studied and published by famous scientists of the Middle East Art and Archaeology as K. Otto Dorn, A. Lane, R. Hobson, J. Carswell and C.J. Dowsett, A. Sakisian, Tahsin Öz, O. Aslanapa, Y. Miller etc².

In spite of the fact, the Kütahya pottery of the Armenian Museums (The National Historical, The National Ethnographic and the Etchmiadzin Museums), by different reasons, were out of their attention. Our paper is devoted to the research of that pottery, especially, to the collection of the National Historical Museum of Armenia (Yerevan) in which are hanging ornaments, lamps, tiles, bowls, pitchers etc.

Firstly we have to draw attention to the tiles which date early 16th century to indicate the production of tiles and pottery presumably since that time. Our investigation allows us to claim that at the beginning the tiles produced in the Kütahya workshops bore the influence of Damascus pottery centre. The earliest tiles in our collection are three fragments No. 10150 (1-3) quite distinctive in colour and design from the later tiles. They are mainly decorated by floral patterns and arabic letters which are not deciphered because of the loss of the whole panel. These tiles are painted in light and dark cobalt blue under a white glaze. The designs are mostly reserved. The absence of red colour and the floral designs of carnations, tulips, roses and other types of flowers which often decorate the later Kütahya tiles also confirm the early date of these tiles. The style of the Arabic letters, the designs and the painting of these tiles remind the examples which decorate the mihrab in the Mosque of Hisar Bey (1487 AD) in Kütahya. A Turkish reference states, that Rustam Pasha, the vezir of Sultan Suleyman in the 16th century ordered to build a tile workshop in Kütahya for decorating one of the mosques of Constantinopolis³. This evidence asserts, that in 16th century Kütahya already had a pottery workshop to produce tiles and no matter, whom it belonged to. So, the idea, that Kütahya pottery was famous only from the beginning of 17th century, is not acceptable. This opinion was usually based on Evliya Çelebi's travel notes, where

¹ The Major collections of Kütahya pottery are in the Benachi Museum, Athens, the estate of late Alexander Benachi, Alexandric; The British Museum, The Victoria and Albert Museum, The estate of the Late R.H.R. Brocklebank London, The Godman Collection, Morsham, England, The Topkapu Saray Museum, Istanbul, etc.

² K. Otto Dorn, *Türkische Keramik*, Ankara, 1957; A. Lane, "The Ottoman Pottery of Ysniik", *Ars Orientalis*, II, 1957; R. Hobson, *A Guide to the Islamic Pottery of the Near East*, London, 1932; J. Carswell-C.I. Dowsett, *The Kütahya Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James*, Oxford, 1972; A. Sakisian, *Pages d'art Armenien*, Paris, 1940; O. Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar Devrinde Kütahya Çinileri*, İstanbul, 1949; Y. Miller, *The Artistic Ceramic of Turkey*, (in Russian) Leningrad, 1972, etc.

³ O. Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar Devrinde Kütahya Çinileri*, İstanbul, 1949, p. 79-80.

he informs that one of the 34 quarters of the towns was populated by infidel pottery makers (A.J.Armenians)⁴.

But the problem of the first Armenian settlers and the organization of the community is very interesting for investigating the role that Armenian craftsmen played for the production of the pottery and needs a further study.

We can surely point that the earliest records of Armenians in Kütahya is a reference to an Armenian church in the town at the end of the 14th century. The colophon of a manuscript dated 1391 states that it was given to the Church of Kütahya by Rouzbak son of Mkrtych of Ani, who appointed a secular priest named Abraham as its supervisor. In the 15th century there were references to two Armenian churches in Kütahya dedicated respectively to the Holy Mother of God and St.Sarkis between the 15th and 18th centuries. It was built in 1444-45 by the secular priest Constantine and twelve householders. Two contemporary secular priests also mentioned were Kirakos and Grikor. The record book is of considerable interest as it also provides the first reference to the pottery making in Kütahya. Amongst the 17 donors to the church whose names are listed under 1444-45 is a potter called Murad who gave a mantle. The second church is named St.Sarkis and was built in 1485-88 by Astuatsatur of Kafa and there is mentioned deacon Abraham's name, who was the son of a potter. So, these evidences prove that in 15th century the pottery making in Kütahya was wide spread⁵.

Kütahya had an Armenian population during the Byzantine Empire. But they mostly settled in 14-15th centuries. A part of the population were the inhabitants from Ani, who, after the fall of the powerful city preferred Kütahya as their new settlement. Probably, as the sources mention, between them were pottery artisans, who brought the secret of their craft and put it in new conditions, promoting the development of their own trade and culture.

In that sense, very interesting is the ewer in Godman's collection with an interesting Armenian poetical inscription dated 978/1529 AD. Another example also bears an Armenian inscription. This vessel is in commemoration of Abraham, servant of God, Kütahya in the year 959 (1510 March 11). These two pots also point out the early development of the ceramic industry in Kütahya and the role of Armenian artisans had in organizing it.

For, the Ottoman Empire, the second half of the 16th century is famous because of the very high political and cultural life. The construction of mighty buildings required a great quantity of tiles which as we notice were ordered not only in Yznik but in Kütahya also. A defter dated 1600 besides other trades, remarks the tile artisans occupied in Yznik and Kütahya workshops⁶.

In the States Museum of Armenia are stored and demonstrated nearly 15 tiles (No.10177-10183, 8728-10150,10189) which date 17-18th centuries. The decor-motives are various, and the dominant colours are white, red, blue, turquoise, green etc. The patterns are painted by these vivid colours on white background and are similar to the tiles produced in Yznik (the examples of Hermitage Museum). The painting shows a definite attempt at naturalism. And the impression we get is as if the artist tried to depict in bright colours a spray or a bunch of flowers (Fig.1).

⁴ Y. Miller, p. 157.

⁵ See J.Carswell-C.Dowsett, vol.II,p.2. The sources used in their book were not available for us to use (Most are kept in the Nubarian Library in Paris) so we took note of their references.

⁶ T. Öz, *Turkish Ceramics*, p.29.

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One of the tiles is painted in light and dark cobalt blue. The central flower is elaborated and surrounded by feathery leaves, within, in reserve are tiny white flowers. The flowers spring from two thick stems. Each corner of the tile is filled with a quarter of medallion, containing a spray of leaves and flowers (Fig.2). Another tile is depicted with a large medallion filled with a chain of running vines and a flower with pointed petals (Fig.3). Each corner of the tile is enriched with stylized floral patterns.

An arabesque of geometrical and floral designs painted in black, red, light and dark cobalt blue cover the background of another square tile (Fig.4).

Very interesting design has the border of a tile, the ground which is painted in cobalt blue. The pattern is a running vine. The leaves which have five petals with pointed tips. The center of the leaves are decorated by a palmette of the fleur de lis type. All spring from a base line decorated with semicircles (Fig.5). The comparison of our tiles Yznik examples makes it possible to relate them. The museum does not possess tiles with Christian subjects, a circumstance which is very popular for the 18th century Kütahya tiles and by hundreds decorate the walls of the St.James Cathedral in Jerusalem.

In early 18th century the potters of the Armenian Community of Kütahya were well known all through the Ottoman Empire and Europe and they became already the patrons of their own work. The egg shaped hanging ornaments made of pottery is the results of their private production. In our collection they are of a large number (20 examples, 3500-3520) and vary in sizes and designs (11 cm. diam x 12,5 cm. high; 9,5 cm. diam x 12 cm high; 10,8 cm. diam x 13 cm. high; 12 cm. diam x 15 cm. high etc.). They usually serve no functional purpose and were mostly brought to Jerusalem or to Etchmiadzin (rarely) from Kütahya by Armenian pilgrims as votive offerings for the church. The examples we discuss are from the Etchmiadzin Museum and were offered as a present to the State Museum in 1931. They are painted in various colours: green, yellow, blue and the designs are angels, seraphims, barred crosses, palmettes, medallions of stylized floral patterns. Some examples are glazed plain white or turquoise. We often see honeycomb patterns on white background and a ring of hatched pointed petals painted in dark cobalt blue (Fig.6). Our examples do not have inscriptions, but similar hanging ornaments in the St.Lazar convent bear the date 1718-19 or 1739-40. So our hanging ornaments certainly could be dated 18th century also.

The Kütahya pottery lamps as a rule mostly follow the general shape of the metal prototypes. Our example (3520) 17 cm. long has a pear shaped body and is surmounted by a flaring neck on which probably sat the glass dish containing the oil and wick. Three pierced lug handles surround the lamp and are intended for attaching the chains. The lamp's neck and body through the sides are embellished with vertical cut designs and chevrons. The lamp is glazed plain white. Similar lamps but with different ornaments decorate the Gulbenkian Library and the St.Theodore Church. The salt cellars in this collection are of very poor quality and are intended for domestic use. They are made of crude porcelain, painted in dull grey glaze and only a single example is decorated with simple crosses in cobalt blue.

Till now we are aware of a few vessels with Armenian monograms. They are extremely rare. We are informed of five dishes inscribed with Abraham Vartabet's monogram and date 1718-19.

The vessel in our collection (8654) is painted on a white background in light cobalt blue by tiny floral patterns. Inside the vessel on the bottom is an Armenian monogram which we deciphered. The letters are Armenian Ղ, Ն, ի, Կ, Ո, Ա, and we spelled the name ՆԻԿՈՂՈԱ. We guess that probably it's the name of the person who ordered, or who made it (Fig.7). Kütahya was in very close cultural and

trade connections with Tokat, where existed another mighty Armenian community. The city was famous for its copper mines and craftsmen occupied in metal working. In the State Museum of Armenia are kept two flasks made of copper with the relief figure of St. George as a horseman and a serpent under his feet. A similar ceramic flask of Kütahya production is in the Hermitage Museum and these evidences indicate the cultural and trade contacts between these two cities. Even painter artisans were invited from Tokat to Kütahya to adorn the vessels. Pottery painters Hovaness, Mikayel and Toros, who left signs on different wares come to Kütahya from Tokat. The cup at our disposal is a present to the Armenian Museum from a person who by birth was of Tokat and that is an improvement to show the Kütahya Tokat cultural ties. The cup is painted on a grey background in light cobalt blue and red and black outlines. The cup has a flat bottom and a flaring body to the plain inverted ring. The main patterns are elaborated central feathery flowers, springing from a thick stem. The petals are enriched by red dots. Another simple flower within it has pointed tips. These patterns and the colouring palette are very typical to the 18th century Kütahya pottery (Fig.8).

The history of the 19th century Kütahya pottery is not well known. But according to records of the travellers C. Texier, W. Browne and others the Kütahya workshops were revived in the last quarter of the 19th century and this was the foundation of the modern industry. The designs on pots were inspired by Yznik and Islamic patterns. But the city little by little became empty. Especially migrated the craftsmen. The possessor of a largest pottery workshop in Kütahya Hadji Minassian settled in Jerusalem and invited his workmen Balian and Kashan to work in his workshop.

They Produced different pots. One of their workshops pitcher is in the State Museum of Armenia. It has a solid round base, large body and a long flaring neck to the inverted rim. The pitcher's surface is painted with an over all pattern of circle scales in brown colour. Three large pointed medallions enclose a spray of flowers and feathery leaves painted in blue, red and green. The bunch of flowers spring from a thick stem. The pitcher belongs to the modern Kütahya industry and it is confirmed not only by the crude technique the pitcher is made, but also by the inscription preserved under the pitchers base. There in black paint is written a short inscription in Armenian letters but in Turkish meaning.

Եստիկեար սանըմ Գարեգին Պալեանա Հաջի Կարապետ, հաջի
Մինասեան, 28 օգոստոս 1915

That means " Let it be suitable for you Garegin Balyan From Hadji Karapet Hadji Minassian 1915 August 28" (Fig.9).

There is also a bowl with cover and a water flask in the Etchmiadzin Patriarchal Museum which belongs to the late modern productions of Kütahya pottery. We are informed that the water cup of the famous Armenian composer Komitas, who was born in Kütahya is kept in the Museum of Etchmiadzin as a relic of his country. A beautiful complete collection of late Kütahya pottery is stored in the Sardarapat Museum and it will be worked out in near future.

By the result of our short research we tried to show, that Kütahya as Yznik was also a well established pottery centre. For the development of the pottery very important were the clay supplies surround the town, the rich palette of paints and the skilful artisans, who were not only potters, but high qualified artists in designing the pottery. The Armenians who lived in Kütahya also had their honest lot in the development of

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the pottery. After the fall of Ani, some inhabitants choosed Kütahya as their new settlement and since the 14th century occupied a constant place in the Ottoman empire.

In spite that in 18th century the Armenians were the patrons of their own work and mostly produced pots in Armenian and European taste, but they carried out the request of the court and prepared tiles for the mighty buildings Top-Kapu Harem, Ulu Djami Mosque etc. in Turkey.

So, the Kütahya Armenian potters produced different ceramic wares as for Christian, so as for the moslim population.

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