

## 5.2

# IRANIAN BLUE-AND-WHITE CERAMIC VESSELS AND TOMBSTONES INSCRIBED WITH PERSIAN VERSES, C. 1450–1725

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The export of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain from the Jingdezhen Kiln to major Middle Eastern cities commenced in the late fourteenth century at the latest. For example, Wang Dayuan, a fourteenth-century Chinese traveler, enumerated the “Blue-and-white flower vase” among the commodities that were traded in Mecca in his *Daoyi zhilue jiaoshi* (Report of the Island Barbarians; c. 1350).<sup>1</sup> Further, an illustration from a copy of Khvajū Kirmani’s (d. 1352) *Khamsah*, which was transcribed in Baghdad (Iraq) in 1396, depicts an outdoor feast in which the fictional Persian prince, Humay, and Chinese princess, Humayun, sit in front of three blue-and-white pear-shaped bottles with elongated necks.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a local copy of a Yuan blue-and-white dish has been excavated from Hama, the Syrian city that was sacked by Timur (r. 1370–1405) in 1402.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, items of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, datable to the late Yuan period (c. 1350–68), have been found among the porcelain collections in the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul (Turkey) and the Mausoleum of Shaykh Safi in Ardabil (Iran).<sup>4</sup> Examples were also excavated in Fustat (Egypt) and were among the materials extracted from a shipwreck in the Red Sea.<sup>5</sup>

Across the Middle East, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain quickly became a source of inspiration for the local potters and tilemakers who were skilled in underglaze painting. Its color, motifs, design, and shape were avidly copied by those who lived in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluks (1250–1517),<sup>6</sup> Anatolia under the Ottomans (c. 1300–1922),<sup>7</sup> as well as Iran under the Timurids (1370–1508), Aq Qoyunlu (1396–1508), and Safavids (1501–1736). This study discusses Chinese-inspired ceramics inscribed with Persian verses produced in Iran under these three dynasties (hereinafter referred to as Iranian blue-and-white ceramics). Unlike Chinese porcelain, Iranian blue-and-white ceramics are a collection of pottery whose designs were painted in cobalt blue and other pigments on an artificial body that had been prepared from a mixture of ground quartz with a small amount of glass frit and white clay before the application of a clear alkaline glaze.

The extant evidence indicates that Persian inscriptions, written in Arabic script, became popular on Iranian craft objects, such as ceramics and metalworks, only after the late twelfth century.<sup>8</sup> During the Khwarazm-Shah (c. 1077–1231) and Ilkhanid (1256–1353) periods, glazed tiles and vessels were adorned with Persian verses by more than fifty authors of many different backgrounds.<sup>9</sup> Among these authors was Abu Zayd Kashani, who was a prolific

potter active in Kashan (Iran) before the Mongol invasion of this city in the 1220s. He was skilled in overglaze luster-painting as well as polychrome in-glaze- and overglaze-painting techniques and left more than thirty signed vessels and tiles, dated between 4 Muharram AH 582/27 March 1186 CE and AH 616/1219–20 CE.<sup>10</sup> The earliest dated work signed by this potter bears an inscription on its exterior.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that he himself was not only the maker of this bowl but also the author and inscriber of a poetic inscription on the same side (*qā'ilu-hu wa kātibu-hu Abū Zayd ba'da mā* [*'amila-]hu*).<sup>12</sup> However, the near-total absence of epigraphic and textual evidence for the existence of such potters-cum-poets as Abu Zayd in Iran until the late fifteenth century suggests that he had been an exceptional figure for pre-Mongol Iran.

Thus the question borders on cultural shifts after the late fifteenth century during which people in Iran exhibited an enormous interest in the art of versification, one that spread beyond the royal court to the general population.<sup>13</sup> In demonstrating the growth of the knowledge of Persian poetry among Iranian craftsmen after the late fifteenth century, a phenomenon that can be inferred from primary sources such as *inshā'* (a guide to letter writing for scribes) and *tazkīrah* (an anthology of selected verses of poets accompanied by their biographical notes), written in Persian, this study analyzes the Persian verses that were inscribed on Iranian blue-and-white underglaze-painted ceramic vessels and tombstones (some of them still unpublished), which are datable to between 1450 and 1725. Although previous studies partially deciphered and/or identified some of the verses inscribed on these objects, most of them have been barely studied.<sup>14</sup>

Before investigating the content and context of the Persian verses that were inscribed on Iranian blue-and-white ceramic vessels and tombstones, we shall briefly examine what can be inferred from contemporaneous primary sources in Persian about the life of a skilled potter-cum-poet. Here, *tazkīrah* (the genre of biographical anthology) is consulted as a type of source.<sup>15</sup> The biographical information there provided generally comprises where and how the poets lived and earned their living. For instance, the life of Mawlana Mani Mashhadi (d. 1517–18), a Mashhad-based potter, was described in two different Persian translations of 'Ali-Shir Nava'i's *Majālis al-nafā'is* (Assemblages of Precious Objects; completed in 1492, with additions until 1499) in Chaghatai language [see following Sources (1) and (2)], as well as in *Tuḥfah-yi Sāmī* ("Gift of Sam"); completed c. 1550–51) by Sam Mirza [see Source (3)].

Source (1):

He was from Mashhad. This young man was handsome and witty. Although his mother and father [Mani Mashhadi's parents] excelled in pottery making (*kāsah-garī*) and painting (*naqqāshī*), the pottery masters of the Chinese empire (*ustādān-i qalam-rav-i Khaṭā'ī*) neither accepted them as disciples nor considered them fitting to be their apprentices or pupils.<sup>16</sup> [Conversely,] he [Mani Mashhadi] was accepted because everything he did seemed to be good since he was perfectly elegant in his beauty, calligraphy, and speech.<sup>17</sup>

Source (2):

A man from Mashhad. He was exceedingly perfect and beautiful, as well as at the summit of beauty and grace. In painting (*naqqāshī*), he was a Mani of his time; he was only second to Yusuf in elegance and beauty. Considering that his father excelled in

pottery making (*kāṣah-garī*), and he [Mani Mashhadi] excelled in painting and drawing on his father's ceramic vessels (*naqsh va taṣvīr-i kāṣah'hā*), he adopted Mani as his penname. In fact, it is believed that he astonished the people of China and Northern China (*ahl-i Chīn va Khaṭā*) with his paintings on ceramic vessels (*naqqāshī-yi kāṣah-yi ū*); he was considered infallible in this work.<sup>18</sup>

Source (3):

His father had been a pottery maker (*kāṣah-gar*); in the beginning, he also engaged in the craft. Subsequently, owing to his talent and excellence in poetry, he was employed in the service of Muhammad Muhsin Mirza, also known as Kapak Mirza, the son of Sultan Husayn [Bayqara] Mirza [the Timurid ruler of Herat, r. 1469–1506] and became one of [his] close servants. ... Later in his life, he and Prince Muhammad Muhsin Mirza fell into the hands of the Uzbek at the Holy Shrine of [Imam] Riza [in Mashhad] and were killed in AH 923 [1517–18 CE].<sup>19</sup>

These biographical entries on Mawlana Mani indicated something beyond the fact that Mashhad had been the production site of ceramics—almost certainly the production site of blue-and-white underglaze-painted ceramics—in the late fifteenth century. Regarding the life of a potter who worked on underglaze painting techniques and composed Persian poetry, the following three points are evident: first, Mawlana Mani of Mashhad, a physically attractive man who was often compared with the prophet Yusuf (Joseph), pursued a career in pottery making as a young man, following in his parents' footsteps, and was responsible for decorating the ceramics.<sup>20</sup> Second, Mawlana Mani's skill in painting ceramics was comparable to those of "the masters of the Chinese empire" or "the people of China and Northern China," as well as Mani (d. c. 277), the founder of the Manichean religion whose fame as a distinctive painter persisted for centuries among the Persian-speaking population.<sup>21</sup> Finally, and most importantly, Mawlana Mani abandoned his career as a potter at an early age, although he subsequently enjoyed the patronage of a Timurid prince on account of his distinction as a poet. Thus, the question that arises concerns the kind of poetry a potter-cum-poet as Mawlana Mani might have produced during the late fifteenth century and beyond. The following section examines the contents of the Persian verses that were inscribed on Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones, and also discusses the implications of these biographical fragments.

### **Persian Verses Inscribed on Iranian Blue-and-White Ceramic Tombstones**

Muslims have marked their graves with tombstones since the first century of Islam, notwithstanding the orthodox prohibition against commemorating the dead.<sup>22</sup> Made of marble, stucco, or simply of stone, many of these tombstones have survived for centuries.<sup>23</sup> Tombstones fabricated from these materials are certainly found in Iran, but those made of faience tiles tend to be relatively more popular. By the mid-thirteenth century, Iranian potters had started fabricating ceramic tombstones, generally in the form of an upright rectangle that echoes a mihrab (prayer niche).<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the inscription of epitaphs on ceramic tombstones, the utilization of Persian verses became popular around the beginning of the seventeenth century, replacing Qur'anic verses, Hadith quotations, and the prayer for the Fourteen Infallibles (i.e., the Prophet

Muhammad; his daughter, Fatimah; and the Twelve Imams) in Arabic, the sacred language of Islam, that were generally in use in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Regarding the epitaphs that were inscribed on Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed the almost simultaneous utilization of the following two types of Persian poetical verses: traditional verses, which were carefully selected for their funerary context (Type I), and specially composed verses, which included the names of the deceased and/or *abjad* numerals—in other words, numerical values that are attached to letters (Type II), as will be discussed below. There are, at least, eleven examples of Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones that correspond to Type I; they are all in museum collections and lack provenance.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, there are, at least, four examples of Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones that could be categorized as Type II; they are *in situ* in religious buildings in Yazd.<sup>26</sup>

The Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones corresponding to Type I are dated between Jumada I AH 1018/August–September 1609 CE and Ramadan AH 1083/December 1672 CE–January 1673 CE. In shape, these are either upright rectangles with a triangular upper section or with the sides curving slightly toward the rounded top. Regarding the layouts of the inscriptions, each of the examples corresponding to this group comprises four to six rows and is occasionally divided into two columns down the middle. They are characterized by the following two features: conventional Persian verses, which were selected with the utmost deliberation to fit the funeral context, and the visual representations of the personal belongings of the deceased and/or animals and plants.<sup>27</sup> The verses that were inscribed on the epitaphs corresponding to Type I have themes ranging from a humble entreaty, cited as if it was being spoken by the deceased, and blessings containing references to the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants (sometimes with a Shi'ite implication), to a commentary on the transience of human life, which is compared to the fleeting nature of flowers.<sup>28</sup> Among such verses are those by Abu Sa'īd b. Abi al-Khayr (d. 1049), 'Attar Nishapuri (d. 1230), Sa'di Shirazi (d. 1291–92), Salman Savaji (d. 1376), and 'Urfi Shirazi (d. 1591). For instance, the blue-and-black underglaze-painted ceramic tombstone of Hasan Khan Beg b. Zu'l-Faqar Bik Shamlu (d. Shawwal AH 1050/January–February 1641 CE), which is at the Institut du monde arabe, Paris (inv. no. A1-86-3), has the following verses from the odes of Salman-i Savaji (d. 1376) inscribed on it (Figure 5.2.1):

Alas! The sun in the day of youth  
 had a short time to live, when the last dawn [came]  
 Alas! All at once, a rose is not blooming [anymore],  
 it fell because of autumn storms

Regarding the images that are painted on the surfaces of the tombstones, they included items such as a turban, a stool, a pen case, an inkwell, a set of weapons (a sword, a shield, and arrows in a quiver), a coffin, a book (probably the Qur'an), a horse, a deer, a bird, a flower, plants (ferns and foxtails), trees (willows and pines), rocks, a bottle, rings, bracelets, a pair of chains, an incense burner, a mirror, a pair of scissors, a knife, hair pins, and one-sided/two-sided combs. Some of the motifs were gender-specific, while others were not. For instance, the painting of a turban and a set of weapons without their owner seems to have been illustrated exclusively on men's tombstones.<sup>29</sup> Such motifs were occasionally depicted in post-Ilkhanid Persian paintings to imply the owner's death.<sup>30</sup> It is possible to hypothesize

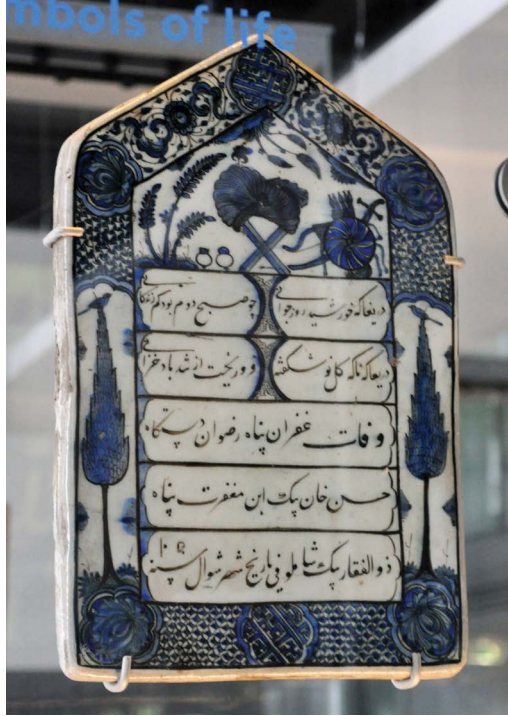


Figure 5.2.1 Made in Iran. Tombstone. Fritware, painted in blue and black under clear transparent glaze. Shawwal AH1050/January–February 1641CE. d. 40 cm. Paris, Institut du monde arabe, inv. no. A1-86-3.

that these motifs served as graphic allusions to the death of their possessor in late medieval and early modern Iran for a high-status audience.<sup>31</sup>

Conversely, the blue-and-white ceramic tombstones corresponding to Type II are characterized by the presence of specially composed verses that included the names of the deceased and/or *abjad* numerals, which encode the years of their deaths. Some were decorated to depict a seated male figure, whereas others were devoid of figural representations. These are either shaped in an almost square-like rectangle or an upright rectangle with a triangular or three-pronged upper section. Each of the examples corresponding to this group has a textual layout comprising six to approximately fourteen lines divided into two or three columns, thereby allowing for lengthier lines of poetry. For instance, a blue-and-black under-glaze-painted ceramic tombstone for Sayyid Husayn (d. AH 1132/1719–20 CE) comprised an inscription with lengthy Persian verses, including the name of the deceased, as well as his death year (i.e., AH 1132) coded within the verses in the form of *abjad* numerals: the phrase, *makān-i Ḥusayn āmadah qaṣr-i jannat* (the place where Husayn arrived at [is] the palace of heaven), could be calculated as 1132.<sup>32</sup>

The next question bears on the authorship of the poems inscribed on the pieces corresponding to this group. Considering the number of potters-cum-poets that were recorded in the late-seventeenth-century Persian *tazkirahs*, the inscribed poems may have been composed by the potters.<sup>33</sup> It is also possible that a more experienced, “professional” poet who was an expert in the composition of chronogram poems was employed in each tombstone

project.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, the utilization of this form of poetry involving specific objects of art seems to correlate with the growing interest in Persian poetry among Iranian craftsmen after the late fifteenth century, as evidenced in the primary sources; the display of literacy refinement as seen in this group of ceramic tombstones is also evident in other medium such as textile from the late seventeenth century, though very few examples have survived to date.<sup>35</sup> As such, Mawlana Mani (d. 1517–18), the Mashhad-based potter-cum-poet cited above could be counted a sort of pioneer who anticipated later developments.

### Persian Verses Inscribed on Iranian Blue-and-White Ceramic Vessels

This section investigates the contents of the Persian verses that were inscribed on Iranian blue-and-white ceramic vessels, which are datable to between 1450 and 1725, discussing their implications. In this period, we recognize the strong connection between the contents of these inscriptions and the materiality of the vessels during the era of interest. Such a connection was revealed by Sayyid Rasul Musavi Haji and his colleagues in 2015, although their study employed a small sample size.<sup>36</sup> Among the twenty-seven pieces that these scholars examined, twenty-five comprise verses that include a minimum of one word that alludes to the shape, material, or function of the vessels. The author(s) of this study identified a wide variety of words that were employed to describe the shapes of the underglaze-painted ceramics: *murgh* (bird), *ṣaḥn* (dish), *saḥn* (a misspelling of *ṣaḥn*, discussed later), *surāḥī* (flask), *kūzah* (pottery), *namakdān* (salt container), *ṭabaq* (tray), *sāghar* (bowl), *qāb* (vessel), *kāsah* (plate), *jām* (cup), *qadaḥ* (goblet), *qurṣ* (i.e. disc), and *qalyān* (water pipe).

Some words were employed to illustrate specific typologies of vessel. For example, the words *murgh*, *surāḥī*, *namakdān*, and *qalyān* were inscribed on a bird-shaped ewer,<sup>37</sup> a flask with a flat circular body,<sup>38</sup> a salt container,<sup>39</sup> and a tray carrying a quadruped placed above an octagonal-shaped body, respectively. A close consideration of the last example in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (inv. no. VG-366) (Figure 5.2.2) revealed that this example had a design incised through a white slip and painted in blue and black under a clear transparent glaze, after which it was decorated with a pseudo-swastika motif and a Y-shaped motif that was derived from Chinese Kraak porcelain; further, it depicted a man dressed in either European or Chinese attire, on each side of the body. This example is datable to the late seventeenth century. Its function is not clear, but a small spout on its shoulder and a projection inside a trefoil arch-shaped opening on its body revealed that it is possibly intended to be an incense burner. The inscription, on the square tray carrying a quadruped placed above the octagonal-shaped body, reads as follows:

From your lips, the *qalyān* (water pipe) draws enjoyment  
The reed in your mouth becomes [sweet as] sugar cane  
Around your lips, there is no tobacco smoke

This poem can be identified as an amatory one that was attributed to Ahli Shirazi (d. 1535–36).

In summary, it has been demonstrated that some words were exclusively employed for specific shapes, e.g., *murgh*, *surāḥī*, *namakdān*, and *qalyān* for a bird-shaped ewer, a flask with a flat circular body, a salt container, and a vessel that emits smoke. Going by the available evidence, the verses that were inscribed on these examples are not recorded in other





Figure 5.2.2 Made in Iran. Incense burner (?). Fritware, incised through a white slip and painted in blue and black under clear transparent glaze. Late seventeenth century (undated). h. 24 cm, d. 6.4 cm. Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. VG-366. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum/photo by Elena Katrunova.

pieces. Therefore, they might have been specially composed or deliberately selected as the inscription on these specific types of shapes.

Conversely, different words were inscribed on the surfaces of small serving dishes. Words such as *ṣaḥn* (*Isaḥn*), *ṭabaq*, *sāghar*, *qāb*, *kāsaḥ*, *jām*, *qadaḥ*, and *qurṣ* were employed as inscriptions on vessels of this specific shape. It is possible that these words were not considered to designate different shapes and were interchangeable. Put differently, it refers to a wide range of vocabulary, which the potters utilized to designate a specific type of vessel. This hypothesis may be supported by substituting the word *ṣaḥn* (dish)<sup>40</sup> with *qāb* (vessel)<sup>41</sup> or *kāsaḥ* (plate),<sup>42</sup> which occurs in a frequently cited blessing on the owners in the form of a poem:

May this *ṣaḥn* (dish) always be full of wealth,  
May [it] always be surrounded by friends  
[May] favor from this *ṣaḥn* (dish) never become empty,  
May anyone who eats [from it] be sound



Figure 5.2.3 Made in Nishapur, Iran. Dish. Fritware, painted in blue under clear transparent glaze. Dated AH 929/1522–23 CE. d. 34.5 cm. Tokyo, Middle Eastern Culture Center, inv. no. 11820-75.

Taken together, the examined pieces indicate that a strong connection exists between the contents of Persian poetical inscriptions and the shapes, material types, or functions of these ceramic vessels. However, regarding the relationship between the surface decoration—for instance, colors, motifs, and design—and the poetical inscriptions on each object, the evidence of the connections between both elements are unclear. One of the few exceptions of this case may be a dish, which was produced in Nishapur and underglaze-painted in blue and dated AH 929/1522–23 CE, now at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (inv. no. 11820–75) (Figure 5.2.3). It was decorated with two birds perched on a flower spray and accompanied by verses that referred to the words *ṭabaq* (tray) and *gul* (rose):

Why do you scrunch yourself up so small within the petal like the rosebud?  
Spread them out on the *ṭabaq* (tray) like a *gul* (rose)  
Your cheek has blushed like the *gul* (rose)  
[because] the *gul-i ṣad-barg* (hundred-petalled rose) has been [scattered] on this *ṭabaq* (tray)

Some of the poetical inscriptions can be linked to the works of poets of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, while the others are still unidentified. The identifiable examples include verses by ‘Umar Khayyam (d. 1131), Nizami Ganjavi (d. 1209), Humam al-Din Tabrizi (d. 1314–15), Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1390), Shah Ni‘matullah Vali (d. 1431), ‘Abd al-Rahman Nur al-Din Jami (d. 1492), Khvajah Shihab al-Din ‘Abdallah Bayani (d. 1516–17), and Ahli Shirazi (d. 1535–36). Among them, the ghazals, which were composed by Hafiz Shirazi, one of the most influential poets of fourteenth-century Iran, are the most inscribed. This result is not surprising, considering the popularity of utilizing ghazals as the inscriptions on objects of art, such as metalwork and textiles in the late fifteenth century and beyond.<sup>43</sup>

Four pieces—two dated examples from the late fifteenth century, one undated from the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, and another undated example from the seventeenth century—contain the ghazals of this poet in their inscriptions. For instance,



the following ghazal by Hafiz (the second distich of ghazal no. 474) was inscribed on an underglaze-painted dish (in blue and dated AH 878/1473–74 CE) that was produced in Mashhad, with minor alterations:

I have washed [i.e., I have shed tears from] the courtyard/dish (*ṣaḥm*) of the palace of my eyes, but for what kind of benefits? [/]  
For this house does not deserve to imagine your vision [/]

Notably, the word *ṣaḥm* has two meanings: courtyard and dish. In the original context, this word means no more than courtyard; however, when this distich appears on the surface of a ceramic dish, it functions as wordplay and serves to amuse and surprise the audience. Put differently, this distich might have been deliberately adopted as an inscription on the dish.

A repertoire of poems that are appropriate for inscriptions on Iranian blue-and-white ceramic vessels might have been shared among the potters through oral communication. Some orthographic errors that were observed in the Persian poetical inscriptions indicated that such spelling errors were due to the potter inscribing words that were heard from someone reciting the relevant poems (rather than transcribing a written model). Such a hypothesis could be validated by the poetical inscription on a blue-and-black underglaze-painted dish from the Idemitsu Museum of Art (inv. no. 12342) (Figure 5.2.4); here, the word *ṣaḥm* (dish) with the letter *ṣād* was spelled as *saḥm* with the letter *sin*. The letters *ṣād* and *sin* differ significantly in shape, although they can be pronounced similarly and can be easily mixed up during oral communication.<sup>44</sup> Notably, the verses inscribed on this bowl are the frequently cited blessings on the owners in the form of a poem, as discussed above. Considering the frequent occurrence of this verse and its variants on the surfaces of Iranian blue-and-white bowls that are datable to the seventeenth century, it is also possible that these potters had memorized this inscription but without knowing the correct spelling of the word *ṣaḥm* (dish).<sup>45</sup> In both cases, it could be argued that the misspellings in the inscriptions might reflect an increasing interest in the art of versification, which spread beyond the royal court to the general population after the late fifteenth century, as indicated by the primary sources.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 5.2.4 Made in Iran. Dish. Fritware, painted in blue and black under clear transparent glaze. Late seventeenth century (undated). d. 28.5 cm. Tokyo, The Idemitsu Museum of Art, inv. no. 12342.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, a certain person who excelled in pottery making (particularly in the painting of ceramics) and poetry may have existed in Mashhad at the turn of the sixteenth century. His poetical skill was such that he enjoyed the patronage of one of the Timurid princes. Second, the most relevant finding of the analysis of the Persian verses that were inscribed on blue-and-white tombstones from the seventeenth century is the almost simultaneous deployment of different types of verses during that period: traditional Persian verses, which were selected with the utmost deliberation for their funerary context, and the specially composed verses, which included the names of the deceased and/or *abjad* numerals. Finally, a strong connection between the contents of the poetical inscriptions and materiality of the vessels, as well as misspellings occurring in the inscriptions, provide further evidence for the growth of appreciation of Persian poetry among craftsmen in Iran after the late fifteenth century, not only in the form of written but also quite possibly in the form of oral transmissions.

## Notes

- 1 Wang Dayuan, *Daoyi zhilue jiaoshi* [Report of the Island Barbarians], ed. Su Jiqing (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2000), 353.
- 2 British Library, Add. MS. 18113, fol. 40b. See also, Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 120–24.
- 3 Poul Jørgen Riis and Vagn Poulsen, *Hama: Fouilles et recherches de la Fondation Carlsberg, 1931–1938: Les verreries et poteries médiévales* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1957), fig. 777.
- 4 John Alexander Pope, *Fourteenth-Century Blue-and-White: A Group of Chinese Porcelains in the Topkapu Sarayi Müzesi* (Istanbul, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1952); Idem., *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1956), 59–81, pls. 7–29.
- 5 Tadanori Yuba, “Chinese Porcelain from Fustat Based on Research from 1988–2001.” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 76 (2013), 1–17. John Carswell, *Blue & White: Chinese Porcelain Around the World* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), 175–82.
- 6 Yui Kanda, “Revisiting the So-Called Ghaybi Workshop: Toward a History of Burji Mamluk Ceramics.” *Orient* 52 (2017), 39–57; Riis and Poulsen, *Hama*, fig. 777.
- 7 Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby. *Iznik: the Pottery of Ottoman Turkey* (London: Alexandria press in association with Thames and Hudson, 1989).
- 8 Following the Arab invasion, as well as the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in 651, the Iranians began gradually to embrace Islam, adopting the Arabic script. In the subsequent two centuries, Arabic (the language of the Arabs and the Qur’an) became predominant as a written language. By the ninth century, Persian poetry had been modeled after the Arabic ode to eulogize the Persian-speaking rulers, and verse composed in Persian became immensely popular in Eastern Iran and Transoxiana under the Samanids (819–999). However, the rise of Persian as a literary language did not seem to be accompanied by the production of craft objects with poetical inscriptions in Persian: see Bernard O’Kane, *The Appearance of Persian on Islamic Art* (New York: Persian Heritage Foundation, 2009) 8, 25. The inscriptions on the slip-painted earthenware produced in Nishapur and Samarqand under the Samanids were entirely in Arabic. See Charles Kyrle Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), 92. ‘Abdallah Quchani, *Katibah’ha-yi Sufal-i Nishabur* (Tehran: Muzah-yi Riza ‘Abbasi, AP 1364/1973); Oya Pancaroğlu, “Serving Wisdom: The Contents of Samanid Epigraphic Pottery.” In *Studies in Islamic and Later Indian Art from the Arthur M. Sackler Museum*, ed. Rochelle L Kessler (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2002), 59–75.
- 9 For the analysis on the social backgrounds of the poets whose poems were cited as inscriptions on the luster-painted tiles from the architectural complex of Takht-i Sulayman (c. 1270), see Tomoko Masuya, “The Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaiman.” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997), 377–400.

- 10 For the list of objects signed by Abu Zayd Kashani and those attributed to him on the basis of style, see Sheila Blair, “A Brief Biography of Abu Zayd.” *Muqarnas* 25 (2008), 169–72.
- 11 This is a bowl dated 4 Muharram AH 582/27 March 1186 CE, painted on opaque turquoise ground with blue in-glaze color and red and black overglaze enamels at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 64.178.1).
- 12 Oliver Watson, “Documentary Mīnāī and Abū Zaid’s Bowls.” In *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1994), 170. It is worth mentioning that no evident connection existed between the content of the poetical inscription and materiality—i.e., material, technique, surface decoration (color, motifs, and design), and shape or function—of this bowl. Such incongruity between poetic content and visual imagery was one of the prominent features of the object of arts in Iran during the late medieval period. See also Grace Guest and Richard Ettinghausen, “Iconography of a Kāshān Luster Plate.” *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961), 25–64.
- 13 The cultural florescence under the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506), the Timurid ruler of Herat, is often referred to as “Timurid Renaissance” by scholars. This phrase, particularly the word “Renaissance” is highly problematic because the literary movement for a return to writing poetry in the classic style (so-called Khurasani and Iraqi styles of the ninth–twelfth centuries) began only after the mid-eighteenth century.
- 14 A possible explanation for the dearth of a study that focuses on the Persian poetical inscriptions until quite recently may be the relatively small size of the corpus, which has been inscribed on the Iranian blue-and-white ceramics that were produced during the period of interest. Regarding the extant studies, consult Musavi Haji, Sayyid Rasul, Murtiza ‘Ata’i, and Maryam ‘Asgari-visharah, “Barrasi-yi muhtava-yi va shikli-yi katibah’ha-yi manzum-i farsi dar sufalinah’ha-yi duran-i Timuri va Safavi.” *Negareh* 10, 36 (2015), 18–37; Yui Kanda, “Persian Verses and Crafts in the Late Timurid and Safavid Periods.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Tokyo, 2020).
- 15 Regarding the previous studies that examined *tazkirahs*, see Anatoly Ivanov, “Faiansovoe bliudo XV veka iz Mashhada.” *Soobshcheniia Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitazha* 45 (1980), 64–66; Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, and Gauvin A. Bailey. *Tamerlane’s Tableware: A New Approach to the Chinoiserie Ceramics of Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1996); Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly, *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014). Notably, these consult *tazkirahs* to investigate the production site of ceramics.
- 16 The meaning of this sentence is unclear. Ivanov, “Faiansovoe bliudo XV veka iz Mashhada,” 64, citing this and two other sources for the first time, interpreted the subject of this sentence to be Mawlana Mani himself rather than his parents. It should be noted that the references to China in Source (1) and (2) are literary conventions and not to be taken literally.
- 17 Sultan Muhammad Fakhri Harati. “Majalis al-nafa’is (Lata’if-namah).” In Mir Nizam al-Din ‘Alishir Nava’i, *Tazkirah-yi majalis al-nafa’is*. Ed. ‘Ali Asghar Hikmat (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-yi Manuchihri, AP 1363/1984), 67 (no. 159).
- 18 Hakim Shah Muhammad Qazvini, “Majalis al-nafa’is (Tarjumah-yi Hakim Shah Muhammad Qazvini).” In *Tazkirah-yi majalis al-nafa’is*, 240–41 (no. 159). See Ivanov, “Faiansovoe bliudo,” 64, for Ivanov’s translation.
- 19 Sam Mirza Safavi, *Tazkirah-yi tubfab-yi Sami*. Ed. Rukn al-Din Humayun Farrukh (Tehran: Intisharat-i Asatir, AP 1384/2005–6), 201 (no. 289). See Ivanov, “Faiansovoe bliudo,” 64, for Ivanov’s translation. See also, Golombek et al. *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age*, 23, for a partial summary of this account. The account of his death, as recorded in Source (3), seems to correlate with the fact that Mawlana Mani’s tomb is in situ in the Holy Shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad. See Ghulam Riza Jalali, ed. *Mashahir-i madfun dar haram-i Razavi* (Mashhad: Astan-i Quds-i Razavi, AP 1387/2008), vol. 2, 173–74.
- 20 Yusuf is among the prophets mentioned in the Qur’an and is the equivalent of Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons (Genesis 37–50). The Qur’an and the Book of Genesis described him as a handsome figure.
- 21 In these areas, any talented painter was generally compared with Mani, as exemplified by the case of Kamal al-Din Bihzad (d. 1535–36) who worked as a head of the royal workshops in Herat and Tabriz. Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 181–87.

- 22 Tombstones that bear distinctively “Islamic” inscriptions such as prayers for the Prophet Muḥammad and quotations from the Qur’an emerged from the period between 690 and 720; yet it was not until the 790s that a formulaic pattern became established, including a standardized confession of faith. See Leor Halevi, “The Paradox of Islamization: Tombstone Inscriptions, Qur’anic Recitations, and the Problem of Religious Change.” *History of Religions* 44, 2 (2004), 122.
- 23 In Egypt, for instance, see Hussein Rached, Hassan Mohammed Hawary, and Gaston Wiet, *Catalogue général du musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*. 10 vols (Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1932).
- 24 One of the earliest published records of Iranian ceramic tombstones shows the date of AH 655/1257–58 CE. It was produced using a molding technique and decorated with turquoise-blue glazing. It bears a Qur’anic verse (97:1–3) as well as an epitaph that opens with *bādhā marqad* (“this is a tomb of...”), followed by the name of the deceased and the year of his death, all in Arabic. For this, see Iraj Afshar, *Yadgar’ha-yi Yazd: mu’arrifi-yi abniyah-yi tarikhi va asar-i bastani*. 3 vols. (Tehran: Anjuman-i asar-i milli, AP 1348–54/1970–75), 1:52, 472, pl. 18/5.
- 25 See Kanda, “Persian Verses”, Appendix 2, 46–59, for the catalogue of Type I. As such, it is difficult to ascertain whether they were used in enclosed settings or in outdoor graveyards.
- 26 See Kanda, “Persian Verses”, Appendix 2, 60, for the catalogue of Type II. See also, Fatiima Danish Yazdi, *Katibah’ha-yi islami-yi shahr-i Yazd* (Yazd: Subhan-i Nur. AP 1387/2007–8), 254–55, I098; 259, I102.
- 27 These representations often accompany the motifs inspired by Chinese “Kraak” porcelain, a type of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain that was imported to Iran from the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Such motifs include a Y-shaped motif, a circled lozenge motif, a square cell motif, a pseudo-swastika motif, and a peony scroll reserved in white. While the personal belongings usually appear within a pointed/round arch at the top, the Kraak motif appears within a series of bands that surrounds the arch and in horizontal inscriptional bands below.
- 28 Yui Kanda, “Kashan Revisited: A Luster-Painted Ceramic Tombstone Inscribed with a Chronogram Poem by Muhtasham Kashani.” *Muqarnas* 34, 1 (2017), 277.
- 29 See, for instance, a blue and black underglaze-painted ceramic tombstone for Haji Ahmad b. Sharif Haji Muhammad Tahir Mirza (?) (d. Jumada I AH 1018/August–September 1609 CE) at the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery (inv. no. 1950.P.251); a blue and black underglaze-painted ceramic tombstone for Hasan Khan Beg (d. 1641; see the text above); a blue and black underglaze-painted ceramic tombstone for Malik valad-i Husayn (d. Dhu’l-Hijja AH 1052/February–March 1643 CE) at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. 1822–1876); and a blue and black underglaze-painted ceramic tombstone for Mirza ‘Abdallah b. Mirza Huma (d. Rajab AH 1054/September–October 1644 CE), at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart. As for the last two examples, see, Kanda, “Kashan Revisited,” 278, figs. 4 and 5. It is worth noting that the Ottoman male tombstones were often topped with carved representations of the deceased’s turban and comprised inscriptions with the chronogram poem in Ottoman Turkish.
- 30 One of such examples is depicted in an illustration from the manuscript of *Shāhnāmāh* (Book of Kings), which was commissioned by Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76) in the early sixteenth century. It illustrates the mourning scene of King Faridun over the head of his beloved son, Iraj; here, the crown of his murdered son lies on the stool alongside his sword, arrows, and quiver. See Sheila Canby, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 98, 336.
- 31 It is worth noting that the epitaphs inscribed on the Iranian blue-and-white ceramic tombstones corresponding to Type I indicate the noble origins of the deceased. Some are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (e.g. *sharīf* and *sayyidab*), while other have the aristocratic titles of *biḡ* and *biḡum*.
- 32 *makān-i Husayn āmadah qaṣr-i jannat* (1132): *mīm* (40), *kāf* (20), *alef* (1), *nūn* (50), *hē* (8), *sīn* (60), *yeh* (10), *nūn* (50), *alef* (1), *mīm* (40), *dāl* (4), *hē* (5), *qāf* (100), *šād* (90), *rē* (200), *jim* (3), *nūn* (50), *tē* (400). See [http://coe.aa.tufs.ac.jp/abjad/JJP/?page\\_id=23](http://coe.aa.tufs.ac.jp/abjad/JJP/?page_id=23) (accessed November 2, 2022) for the calculation result. See Danish Yazdi, *Katibah’ha-yi islami-yi shahr-i Yazd*, 259, I102, for this example. It is decorated with a seated male figure.
- 33 Muhammad Tahir Nasr-abadi, *Tazkiraab-yi Nasr-abadi: mushamil bar sharh-i hal va asar-i qaribi hazar shā’ir-i asr-i Safavi*. Ed. Vahid Dastgirdi (Tehran: Furughi, AP 1361/1982–83), 148, 382; See also Golombek et al. *Persian Pottery*, 23.
- 34 As for a luster-painted ceramic tombstone, an example was inscribed with a chronogram poem, which was specially composed to commemorate the death of the entombed (d. 1560) by a professional poet, Muhtasham Kashani (d. 1588). See Kanda, “Kashan Revisited,” for this example.

- 35 For instance, so-called Mahan carpet, dated AH 1067/1656–57 CE and dedicated to the mausoleum of Shah Ni'matallah Vali (d. 1431) in Mahan, has the poetical inscription containing a chronogram of the date AH 1067/1656–57 CE and the names of the patron. For this example, see Chapter Five of Peyvand Firouzeh, *Intimacies of Global Sufism: The Making of Ne'matullabi Material Culture between Early Modern Iran and India* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, forthcoming). The fragments of this carpet are now possessed by the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina (inv. nos. 2111/I, a, b; 2112/I, a, b; and 2113/I, a, b, c).
- 36 Musavi Haji et al. "Barrasi-yi muhtava-yi va shikli-yi katibah'ha-yi manzum-i farsi." Among the twenty-eight pieces that were consulted in this study, ten had been analyzed by Musavi Haji and his colleagues.
- 37 A blue underglaze-painted bird-shaped ewer (dated AH 857/1453–54 CE) at the Musée de Sèvres (inv. no. 22687).
- 38 A blue underglaze-painted flask (dated AH 930/1523–24 CE) at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. C. 1973–1910).
- 39 A blue underglaze-painted salt container (dated AH 1037/1523–24 CE) at the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin (inv. no. I. 4231).
- 40 There are at least three pieces on which this blessing with the word *ṣāḥn* (with the letter *ṣād*) is inscribed: an early seventeenth-century dish painted in black, blue, and green with yellow and red slips under clear transparent glaze at the Louvre Museum (inv. no. AD2778); another early seventeenth-century painted in black, blue, and green with yellow and red slips under clear transparent glaze at the Brooklyn Museum (inv. no. 42.212.31); the other early seventeenth-century painted in black, blue, and green with yellow and red slips under clear transparent glaze at the Kuwait National Museum (inv. no. LNS320).
- 41 There are at least four pieces on which this blessing with the word *qāb* is inscribed: a dish dated AH 1084/1673–74 CE, painted in blue, green, and red and incised on black slip under clear transparent glaze at the David Collection (inv. no. 4/1986); another dish dated AH 1088/1677–78 CE, painted in blue and black and incised on black slip under clear transparent glaze at the Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum, Japan (inv. no. 5795); another dish dated AH 1088/1677–78 CE, painted in blue, green, and red and incised on black slip under clear transparent glaze at the British Museum (inv. no. G. 308); the other dish dated AH 1109/1697–98 CE, painted in blue and black and incised on black slip under clear transparent glaze at the British Museum (inv. no. 1896,0626.5). The last two examples have a longer version of this blessing.
- 42 There is at least one piece on which this blessing with the word *kāsab* is inscribed: a seventeenth-century dish painted in blue and black under clear transparent glaze at the National Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci" in Rome (inv. no. 12582/13951).
- 43 For instance, a late-sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century brass torch standing at the Islamic Museum of Art, Doha (inv. no. MW.219.213), is inscribed with *ghazal* no.78 of Hafiz; a pair of so-called Ardabil carpets, dated AH 946/1539–40 CE, contain inscriptions with *ghazal* no. 51 of Hafiz. They are now at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. 272–1893) and the Los Angeles County Museum (inv. no. 53.50.2), respectively. The *ghazal* number presented here corresponds to that of following edition: Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi, *Divan-i Khvajah Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi*. Ed. Ḥusayn Pazhman Bakhtiyari (Tehran: Ilmi, AP 1318/1939–40).
- 44 One of the verses inscribed on a blue underglaze-painted flask (dated AH 930/1523–24 CE) at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. C. 1973-1910) also contained this type of misspelling. Here, the word, *ṣarāḥī* (a long-necked flask), with the letter, *ṣād*, was misspelled as *surāḥī* with the letter, *ṣīn*. For this example, see, Musavi Haji et al. "Barrasi-yi muhtava-yi va shikli-yi katibah'ha-yi manzum-i farsi," 26–28.
- 45 The orthographic errors in the poetical inscriptions are also found in ceramic tombstones that were produced in Iran during the late Safavid period. Such examples may perhaps indicate that the potters and tile makers in charge of inscribing the poems were either dictated to by those who recited the verses to be inscribed or had memorized the verses but without remembering the correct spelling of each word. For instance, an amber-glazed sgraffito ceramic tombstone for Muhammad Karim b. Muhammad Sadiq (d. 1709–10) at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. 546–1878) was inscribed with a Persian poem, including the word, *ghabr*, with the letter *ghayn* rather than the correct spelling, *qabr* (tomb), with the letter *qāf*. For this example, see Kanda, "Kashan Revisited," 278, Fig. 6.

46 It is probable that such popularization went with a tendency to repetition of verses and less original composition. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the possibility that some of the potters could not properly scribe the Persian Arabic characters even after such social change occurred must be considered. In fact, there is a group of late-fifteenth-century Iranian blue-and-white ceramic vessels that was possibly decorated with pseudo inscriptions. For such example, see Sarikhani collection, inv. no. I.CE.2301. See Oliver Watson, *Ceramics of Iran: Islamic Pottery in the Sarikhani Collection* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2020), 356–57, cat. no. 184; Hermitage Museum, inv. no. VG-2654; Golombek et al. *Tamerlane's Tableware*, 230, pl. 75 a, b) and inv. no. VG-781.

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