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Historiography Of The Scientific Study Of Glazed Ceramics In Uzbekistan: Stages And Directions

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Abstract

The article examines the historiography of the scientific study of pottery and glazed ceramic art on the territory of Uzbekistan. Covering the period from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the research is divided into six conventional stages: the initial descriptive-collecting stage; the stage of large-scale field research; the stage of specialized archaeological and art-historical studies; the independent direction developed within Western Oriental studies; the stage of integrated research during the years of independence; and the recent stage of interdisciplinary research employing natural-scientific methods. The article considers the leading research centers and scholars active at each stage, their principal findings, and identifies the methodological priorities characteristic of each period.

Keywords: ceramics, pottery, historiography, archaeology, Afrasiab, Samarkand ceramics, Oriental studies, post-independence research, cataloguing.

Introduction

The scientific study of pottery and glazed ceramic art on the territory of Uzbekistan constitutes a distinct field of research with a long and complex history of its own. Possessing a millennium-old tradition, this branch of craftsmanship has attracted the attention of Orientalists, archaeologists, art historians and ethnographers across different periods, functioning on one hand as an archaeological source and, on the other, as a phenomenon of artistic and aesthetic significance. Analyzing the history of ceramics research reveals not only the volume of accumulated knowledge, but also the evolution of methodological approaches, the expansion of research scope, and the emergence of distinct "historiographical schools" within the discipline.

The purpose of this article is not merely to compile a chronological list, but to demonstrate which methodological priorities prevailed at each historical stage, which research centers took the lead, and the continuities and, at times, the disputes between them. Such a historiographical overview carries not only academic but also practical significance: the scientifically grounded organization of museum exhibitions and the accurate dating and attribution of artifacts all rely on the body of scholarly knowledge accumulated over centuries of research.

The Initial Stage: The Second Half of the Nineteenth Century – the 1920s–1930s

The first steps toward the scientific study of glazed pottery on the territory of Uzbekistan were taken in the second half of the nineteenth century, within a process carried out by Russian specialists in the course of material collection and amateur-style archaeological work. Rather than systematic scholarly research, this period was characterized by the collecting of pottery items by interested individuals and collectors and their subsequent transfer to museums. A vivid example is the famous eleventh-century jug decorated with a bird motif held in the State Hermitage collection: it was acquired at an archaeological site by A.A. Polovtsov, an official residing in Tashkent, in 1896, and later transferred to the Hermitage collection in 1906 [2].

In the early twentieth century, and particularly within the activities of the Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts, founded in Tashkent

in 1895, the first scholarly statements began to appear. However, genuine scientific-archaeological study of the medieval glazed pottery of Uzbekistan began only in the 1920s–1930s. This period is characterized by V.L. Vyatkin's research on Afrasiab, the ancient site of Samarkand: in his work, the author for the first time introduces the pottery materials of the Afrasiab cultural layers into scholarly circulation [1]. During the same period, G.V. Grigoriev published the results of archaeological reconnaissance conducted in the Yangiyul district of the Tashkent region, describing glazed bowls and a lamp found at the site of Old Tashkent (Shuturkent) [3].

In the 1930s, D.D. Bukinich, an engineer-hydrotechnician, archaeologist and botanist, also made a significant contribution to the study of pottery materials: in the course of his research around the Bozsut Canal, he dated the fragments of glazed vessels he discovered to the tenth–twelfth centuries and argued that their imagery reflected pre-Islamic, specifically Sassanid-era Zoroastrian traditions [4]. At the same time, M.E. Masson's studies on the periodization of the ancient history of Samarkand [5] and B.P. Denike's generalizing article on the applied art of Central Asia [6] were published – early examples of attempts to situate pottery within a broader cultural-historical context.

Thus, the defining feature of this initial stage was the predominance of material collection, field observation, and early attempts at descriptive classification. Although a unified chronological system for the development of pottery had not yet been established during this period, it was precisely this stage that created the initial source base necessary for the more systematic research that followed.

The 1930s–1940s: Large-Scale Field Research and Early Classifications

In the 1930s–1940s, the collection of data on pottery across Uzbekistan and the whole of Central Asia expanded considerably, coming to encompass other regions as well – Khorezm, the Tashkent oasis, and Surkhandarya. As a result of the work of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition, led by S.P. Tolstov, the major studies "Ancient Khorezm" and "In the Footsteps of the Ancient Khorezmian Civilization" were published [7]. This direction was later continued by N.N. Vakturskaya, who published the results of the 1952 excavations at the site of Urgench and developed a chronological classification of medieval

Khorezmian pottery covering the ninth to seventeenth centuries – a work that served for many years as the principal foundation for the periodization of pottery in the region [8].

Alongside this, A.I. Terenozhkin published his research on ancient pottery traditions in Khorezm, as well as the results of excavations of material-culture sites along the Tashkent Canal and at the Oqtapa hill near Tashkent [9]. V.V. Veimarn, in his general surveys of Central Asian art, examined pottery alongside other forms of applied art [10]. During the same period, G.V. Grigoriev introduced into scholarly circulation the results of research at the site of Tali-Barzu, while V.A. Shishkin, in 1945, published the pottery materials discovered in the course of research at the Chor-Sutun hill and mosque among the ruins of Old Termez [11] – work that represents one of the first important steps in the study of pottery in the Surkhandarya oasis.

A general characteristic of the research conducted during this period is that it was carried out predominantly by archaeologist-historians, and pottery materials were analyzed mainly within a broader archaeological and historical context. Pottery was not yet regarded as an independent object of research but rather as an auxiliary source for broader historical-archaeological reconstruction. Nevertheless, the rich factual base accumulated precisely during this period created the necessary foundation for the specialized monographic studies undertaken in the 1950s–1980s.

The 1950s–1980s: Specialized Archaeological and Art-Historical Research

The Ceramics of Samarkand and Afrasiab

This period marked a qualitatively new stage in the study of Uzbek pottery – dedicated monographic studies devoted to the pottery of individual cities and regions began to appear. Sh.S. Toshkhodzhaev's 1967 monograph "Художественная поливная керамика Самарканда IX – начала XIII веков" occupies a special place in this respect [12]: the author, for the first time, organizes the rich material of Samarkand (Afrasiab) pottery into a coherent scholarly system, establishing its artistic styles and chronology.

The further study of Afrasiab pottery is associated with the name of G.A. Shishkina, who, in her 1969 candidate dissertation, illuminates the history of Samarkand in light of the stratigraphic data from the western

part of the Afrasiab site, and who later, in her 1979 work "Глазурованная керамика Согда," reveals the developmental dynamics of Sogdian pottery on the basis of extensive archaeological material [13].

The Ceramics of Chach (Tashkent) and Ilaq

Y.F. Buryakov's contribution to the study of pottery in the Tashkent oasis is of particular importance. In 1961–1962 he published works on artistic pottery discovered at the Tunket site and on inscriptions found on glazed vessels there, revealing the extensive network of pottery centers in the Ilaq region, including towns such as Kavardan, Abrlig and Namudlig [14]. This direction was later continued, in the 1970s–1980s, by L.G. Brusenko, who published a series of articles devoted to the artistic pottery of Binkat (ancient Tashkent), including a special study of zoomorphic motifs in Binkat pottery of the tenth–twelfth centuries, and who, in her concluding monograph "Глазурованная керамика Чача IX–XII веков," systematically organized the decorative system of the pottery of the Chach oasis [15].

The Art-Historical Direction: L.I. Rempel and G.A. Pugachenkova

Another important feature of the research conducted in the 1950s–1980s is the formation of an art-historical school oriented toward studying pottery not merely as an archaeological source but as an artistic-aesthetic phenomenon. In his major collection "Искусство Среднего Востока," L.I. Rempel analyzes the decorative system of pottery in close connection with other forms of applied art [16]. G.A. Pugachenkova, beginning with her 1950 article "Самаркандская керамика XV в.," consistently investigated the stylistic features of Timurid-era pottery [17]. It is precisely in the works of Rempel and Pugachenkova that pottery is, for the first time, evaluated not merely as a household object but as an expression of the artistic thought of a given period — an approach that also served as a methodological foundation for later research conducted during the period of independence.

It was also during this period that Soviet scholars began critically assessing the impact of state policy and organizational reforms on traditional pottery-making between 1920 and 1980: the incorporation of pottery production into the system of artels, courses and schools, and the transformation of traditional decorative culture, are noted in the historiography as a distinct "boundary" phenomenon.

The Study of Central Asian and Islamic Ceramics in Western Oriental Studies

Alongside Soviet historiography, a number of important studies devoted to the glazed pottery of Transoxiana were also carried out within Western European and American Oriental studies. The French researcher M. Pézard may be regarded as the earliest representative of this direction: in a work published in 1920, he was the first among Western scholars to introduce examples of Central Asian pottery into scholarly circulation [18]. In 1925, E. Kühnel divided Samarkand glazed pottery into two large groups – vessels bearing Arabic inscriptions and those bearing vegetal ornament [19] a classification that served as a benchmark for later researchers for a long time.

In the 1930s, R.L. Hobson examined Samarkand pottery as part of the broader Near Eastern pottery tradition [20], while A. Pope, in his major study of Iranian pottery, conducted a comparative analysis of Afrasiab material with the pottery of Nishapur of the tenth–twelfth centuries [21]. A. Lane's 1947 work devotes considerable attention to the analysis of Samarkand vessels [22]. In the second half of the twentieth century, major specialists in Islamic art – E. Grube, J. Moulérac and G. Fehérvári published substantial studies devoted to pottery of the Islamic period [23]; the problems of the development of Timurid-era pottery received special attention in the general art-historical works of L. Golombek, M. Subtelny and R. Ettinghausen [24].

The articles by J. Kalter and G. Helmecke published in the 1997 catalogue of the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart, as well as T.W. Lentz and G.D. Lowry's major study "Timur and the Princely Vision" [25, 26], played an important role in introducing monuments of Uzbekistan's artistic heritage to the Western scholarly community. Taken together, these foreign studies made it possible to evaluate Uzbek pottery within the context of the history of world Islamic art; however, the majority of them are based on the analysis of individual pieces held in museum and private collections, and often fall short of the complex archaeological-historical approach characteristic of regional research.

The Period of Independence: The Integrated Study of National Pottery Schools

Following Uzbekistan's attainment of independence, scholarly interest in the national artistic heritage, including traditional pottery, rose

to a qualitatively new level. This was driven both by the intensification of processes of national self-awareness and by the activities of international organizations such as UNESCO in the field of intangible cultural heritage protection – Uzbekistan was admitted to UNESCO membership in 1993 and ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008. This period was also reflected in state policy: the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 17 November 2017 "On Measures for the Further Development of Handicrafts and Comprehensive Support for Craftsmen" provided state-level encouragement for scholarly research in the field of traditional applied art, including pottery.

D.K. Mirzaakhmedov published a series of articles devoted to the glazed pottery of Bukhara in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries and of Tashkent in the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries [27]. J. Ilyasov conducted research on material from Samarkand and Chaganiyan, while S. Ilyasova, in her 2008 candidate dissertation, undertook a comparative artistic analysis of the glazed pottery of Shash and Fergana from the ninth to the early thirteenth centuries [28].

The most significant culminating achievement of this direction is the fundamental 2016 monograph "Нет блага в братстве..." by S.R. Ilyasova, J.Y. Ilyasov, R.A. Imamberdiev and Y.A. Iskhakova [2]. This study offers a comprehensive, catalogue-based analysis of the glazed pottery of the Tashkent oasis (Shash) from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, based on more than 500 items.

A. Anarbaev examined regional pottery in the context of the development of medieval urban planning [29]. G. Zununova, together with D. Alimova and Z. Arifkhanova, analyzed the cultural-semiotic functions of traditional pottery items [30]. A.A. Khakimov's decades-long research is devoted to summarizing the dynamics of the development of the ornamental style of Uzbek glazed pottery over the ninth to twentieth centuries, and under his leadership the "Master-Apprentice" pottery school was established in Tashkent [31]. E. Gyul examined questions of intercultural dialogue [32], while K.B. Akilova analyzed the problems of the development of twentieth-century Uzbek folk applied art in a broad context in her doctoral research [33].

As a summarizing achievement of research conducted during the period of independence, particular note should be taken of S.Sh. Alieva's

2018 doctoral (DSc) dissertation, "The Main Stages and Artistic Features of the Development of Uzbekistan's Glazed Pottery from the Ninth to the Early Twenty-First Century" [34]. This study represents the first major work in the historiography of regional pottery to examine nearly a millennium of development as a single, continuous tradition, employing an interdisciplinary approach; it divides the history of pottery into three main periods (the ninth to early thirteenth centuries, the fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries, and the seventeenth to twenty-first centuries).

International Scholarly-Organizational Cooperation and Cataloguing Projects

Major projects carried out within the framework of international scholarly-organizational cooperation during the years of independence also deserve particular mention. In 2011, the International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS), operating under UNESCO, published the collective study "The Artistic Culture of Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the 9th–15th Centuries. Volume I. Ceramics" [35], which for the first time presents the pottery of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan within a single regional-chronological framework.

Such international projects, together with workshops and research centers established with UNESCO support in centers such as Rishtan, Gijduvan and Boysun, cataloguing atlases such as the 1999 "Atlas of Central Asian Artistic Crafts and Trades," the "Blue of Samarkand" international symposium held in Tashkent in 2000, and the proceedings of the 2007 international seminar "Керамика Узбекистана" – all attest to the formation, in contemporary historiography, of a new paradigm oriented toward studying pottery not merely as an archaeological source but as a living, evolving element of intangible cultural heritage. In recent years, this trend has intensified further, with a growing number of interdisciplinary studies combining historical-art-historical analysis with religious studies and semiotics, as well as with natural-scientific methods.

Conclusion

The historiographical overview presented above demonstrates that the scientific study of pottery and glazed ceramic art on the territory of Uzbekistan constitutes a coherent process spanning nearly a century, extending from the earliest descriptive-collecting work to complex, interdisciplinary research in the twenty-first century. The rich factual base

accumulated by Soviet-era archaeologists and art historians, combined with research within Western Oriental studies, developed during the period of independence into a coherent scholarly conception, systematized along the lines of regional schools.

At the same time, a number of problems in the historiography of pottery still await full resolution: these include the precise chronological periodization of certain local centers, the reconstruction of the technological characteristics of pottery schools that have disappeared (such as those of Shahrisabz, Kasbi and Madir), and the introduction into scholarly circulation of materials in archival and museum collections that remain uncatalogued. Today, the creation of a new, expanded atlas of Uzbekistan's glazed pottery centers remains among the pressing tasks facing the field.

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