

Ceramics, Textiles and Calligraphy

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Because representations of figures in Islamic art are not allowed, artists had to resort to other areas and techniques to find and show meaning in their artwork. Small objects and textiles both became very important to Islamic artists and Islamic culture. Ceramics, textiles, and calligraphy were more abundant, and these served as ways for artists to make their marks. This lesson covers:



BIG IDEA

With the absence of figural representations in Islamic art, production of ceramics, textiles, and calligraphy became major outlets for artistic expression.

1. Time Period and Location: Islamic Ceramics

This lesson covers examples of art from the 11th century to the early part of the 13th century. The works of art in this lesson come from within modern day Iran.

2. Small Objects and Calligraphy

Given the Islamic view on representational art, with the exception of architecture, the production of large public works was essentially non-existent during this time. This made the production of smaller objects and textiles particularly important, both as a form of artistic expression and as a form of personal art. Remember, representations of Allah and Muhammad are forbidden in artwork. However, the representation of human and animal forms was not expressly forbidden and was typically acceptable for personal works of art.



DID YOU KNOW

The traditional story booklets typically owned by wealthier Muslims used these images of representations of human and animal forms in the artwork of **miniatures**.

The production of textiles is also deeply rooted in the culture of Islam. These are figurative canvases for the display of beautiful arabesque patterns, and they are of particular importance in their use as prayer rugs. In the absence of representational art, calligraphy became one of the primary forms of artistic expression.



DID YOU KNOW

Calligraphy in Islam is symbolically a very important art form, particularly the **Kufic script**, which was used to record the first copies of the Qur'an.



Kufic script



TERMS TO KNOW

Miniature

A small-scaled version, i.e., painting, illuminated text

Kufic Script

Oldest form of calligraphy; the first copies of the Qur'an were written in Kufic script

3. Bowl with Kufic Border

Below is an example of calligraphy used as decorative enhancement.



Bowl with Kufic Border

11-12th century AD

Iran

This example is **Samarkand Ware** ceramic work. It is a bowl with a decorative Kufic border, which reads, "Planning before work protects you from regret. Prosperity and peace."



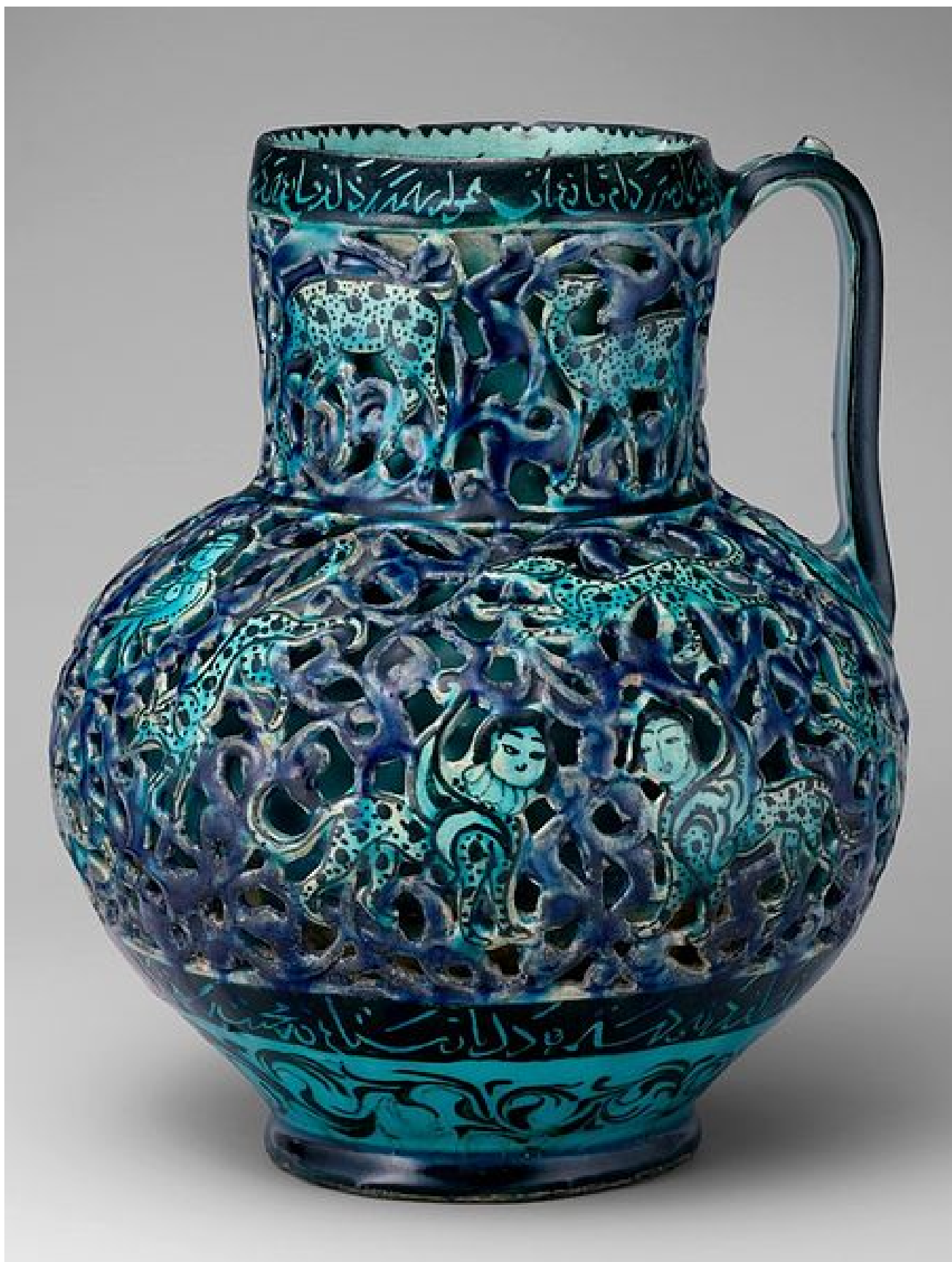
TERM TO KNOW

Samarkand Ware

An Islamic ceramic style characterized with decorations in green, yellow, pink, and brown

4. Macy Jug

Another type of ceramic work is called **Lusterware**. Here is an example called a Macy jug:



Macy Jug

Early 13th century

Iran

This jug is a striking example from the early 13th century. Notice the two layers: a solid inner layer that holds the liquid, and an open, decorative, outer layer that depicts harpies, sphinxes, and quadrupeds, or four-legged animals. Encircling the bottom in a difficult-to-see, lighter blue band, is a love poem written by an anonymous poet.



TERM TO KNOW

Lusterware

Middle Eastern in origin, a type of pottery decorated with glassy, metallic lusters



SUMMARY

During the **time period and location of Islamic ceramics**, many representations of figures in Islamic art were not allowed. This meant that artists showed meaning in their artwork using other techniques.

Small objects and calligraphy, as well as other textiles, became very important to the Islamic culture.

In this lesson, you looked at two examples of Islamic artwork from this period: a **bowl with Kufic border** and a **Macy jug**. The first piece of artwork was calligraphy used as decorative enhancement, and the last was an example of Lusterware.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Kufic Script

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Lusterware

Middle Eastern in origin, a type of pottery decorated with glassy, metallic lusters.

Miniature

A small scaled version i.e. painting, illuminated text.

Samarkand Ware

An Islamic ceramic style characterized with decorations in green, yellow, pink and brown.