

BOOK REVIEW

by Charles C. Kolb, National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, DC 20506

Ceramics from Islamic Lands by Oliver Watson, (New York: Thames and Hudson, in association with the al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait National Museum, 2004. 512 pp., 930 colour illustrations, 23 appendices, 2 bibliographies, glossary, index, ISBN 0-500-97629-5, \$65.00 hardcover).

Watson, an expert on Islamic pottery who has written extensively on the subject, was formerly Chief Curator of the Department of Ceramics and Glass of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; he is currently developing a new Middle Eastern section within the museum. The volume is dedicated to his mother, Katherine Watson (1917-2001), who was also a scholar of Islamic art. The "Preface" for this volume (p. 7) was prepared by Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, a collector, donor, and benefactor, who holds the copyright for this volume. The specially commissioned photography was undertaken by Fraser Marr and Muhammad Ali.

The volume has seven chapters (supplemented with 56 colour illustrations and 256 endnotes) which present essential background on the subject. The seventh chapter provides a clear and concise assessment on the related topics of ceramic restoration and forgeries. These clear, well-written essays provide a basis for 23 lavishly illustrated appendices which present object descriptions and catalogue references to ceramics held in the Al-Sabah Collection at the Kuwait National Museum. In "Chapter 1: Islamic Pottery: Art, Archaeology and Collecting" (pp. 11-22, 2 illustrations, 63 endnotes) Watson defines "Islamic pottery" and presents a brief history of collecting, noting the contributions made by archaeology. This essay emphasizes 19th century collecting, "fashions in collecting," and the documentation of disappearing ceramic industries. "Chapter 2: Making and Designing" (pp. 23-33, 2 illustrations, 31 endnotes) provides background on clay sources and the selection process, mixing clays, throwing vessels, the use of moulds, glazes and glazing, kiln firing, and the use of slip decoration. Watson's "Chapter 3: Ceramic Families and Technical Traditions" (pp. 34-43, 2 illustrations, 60 endnotes) has pertinent information on polychrome glaze-painting, opaque white glaze wares, in-glaze painting, lustre painting, slip painting, "splashed" wares, the preparation of frit bodies, Sultanabad and panel styles, and the effect of Chinese blue-and-white painted porcelain on the production of Islamic wares. A basic early history of Islamic wares is presented in "Chapter 4: Islamic Pottery to A.D. 1000" (pp. 44-51, 2 illustrations, 28 endnotes). With "Chapter 5: Islamic

Pottery A.D. 1000-1400" (pp. 52-59, 1 illustration, 40 endnotes), Watson details ceramics from Fatimid period Egypt, Fritwares, incised earthenwares (12th-13th centuries), the impact of the Mongol invasions on pottery manufacture, and wares produced in Egypt (13th-14th centuries). Production in Syria and Egypt, Iran, and Turkey are discussed in "Chapter 6: Islamic Pottery from A.D. 1400" (pp. 60-67, 1 illustration, 44 endnotes). "Chapter 7: Restoration and Faking of Islamic Ceramics: Case Histories" (pp. 68-89) includes "Fakes and Forgeries: An Introduction" by Oliver Watson (p. 68) and a long essay entitled "Restoration and Faking of Islamic Ceramics: Case Histories" by Kirsty Norman (pp. 69-89); the latter has 46 colour illustrations and a bibliography of 18 items.

An "Introduction" by Oliver Watson (p. 91) provides the organizational concept for the catalogue which has 23 appendices (summaries of which follow). The catalogue focuses on approximately 400 objects in the Sheikh al-Sabah collection, citing description, date, dimensions, inventory number, and provenance. "A: Unglazed Wares" (pp. 92-195, 130 illustrations) has six subsections: Syria and Egypt in the Early Islamic Period; Iran and the Eastern Iranian World; The Medieval Period in Syria; The Sphero-conical Vessel; Filters (strainers to remove foreign matter such as insects); and Moulds. "B: Early 'Green-Glazed' Wares" (pp. 156-165, 18 illustrations) has a subsection "From Glaze to Clay." The four subsequent appendices have no internal divisions: "C: Early Wares: Polychrome Glaze-painting" (pp. 166-169, 5 illustrations); "D Opaque White Glazed Wares" (pp. 170-181, 27 illustrations); "E: Abbasid Lustreware" (pp. 182-197, 40 illustrations); and "F: Splashed Wares" (pp. 198-203, 11 illustrations). There are seven subsections in Appendix "G: Slip-painted Wares" (pp. 204-245, 92 illustrations): Calligraphic Designs; Abstract Designs; Animal Decoration; "Yellow-staining Black" Decorated Wares; Imitation Lustreware; "A Unique Fragment"; and Later Provincial Slipwares. The unique fragment is reconstructed from polychrome vessel sherds recovered at the archaeological site of Afrasiyab that depicts a female lute player and her instrument. The subsequent appendix, "H: Buffwares" (pp. 246-251, 13 illustrations), is followed by "I: Iranian Incised Wares" (pp. 252-271, 47 illustrations) with five internal headings: Plain Incised Ware; Garras Ware (from northwestern Iran, especially the site of Takht-i Sulaiman); Aghkand Ware (made in northwest Azerbaijan and Georgia rather than produced in the town of Aghkand, Iran); Amol Ware (found in northern Iran near the Caspian Sea coast); and Incised Ware from Afghanistan (from Lashkari Bazar and "Bamiyan").

Charles C. Kolb