

Foreword

It is now many decades ago that as a young curator in the Victoria and Albert Museum I began to see that the “collectorly mode” of study of Islamic pottery – the concentration on ‘masterpieces’ in Museum and private collections – could no longer advance the subject. While such “connoisseurly” endeavour had built great collections and had provided the founding texts of our field, we had reached an impasse. Without the archival records and plethora of documentary pieces that builds the understanding of European or Chinese fine pottery, the art-historical study of Islamic pottery risked becoming lost, particularly in evermore speculative interpretation of the symbolism of motifs. What was missing was any real feel for the actuality of production, trade and consumption of what are essentially cheap mass-produced commodities.

The greats of our subject – HENRI MIGEON, ARTHUR LANE, ERNST KÜHNEL, amongst others – always recognised the importance of archaeology as a prime source of information; but their interest was primarily in establishing provenance – from which site did the great wares come?

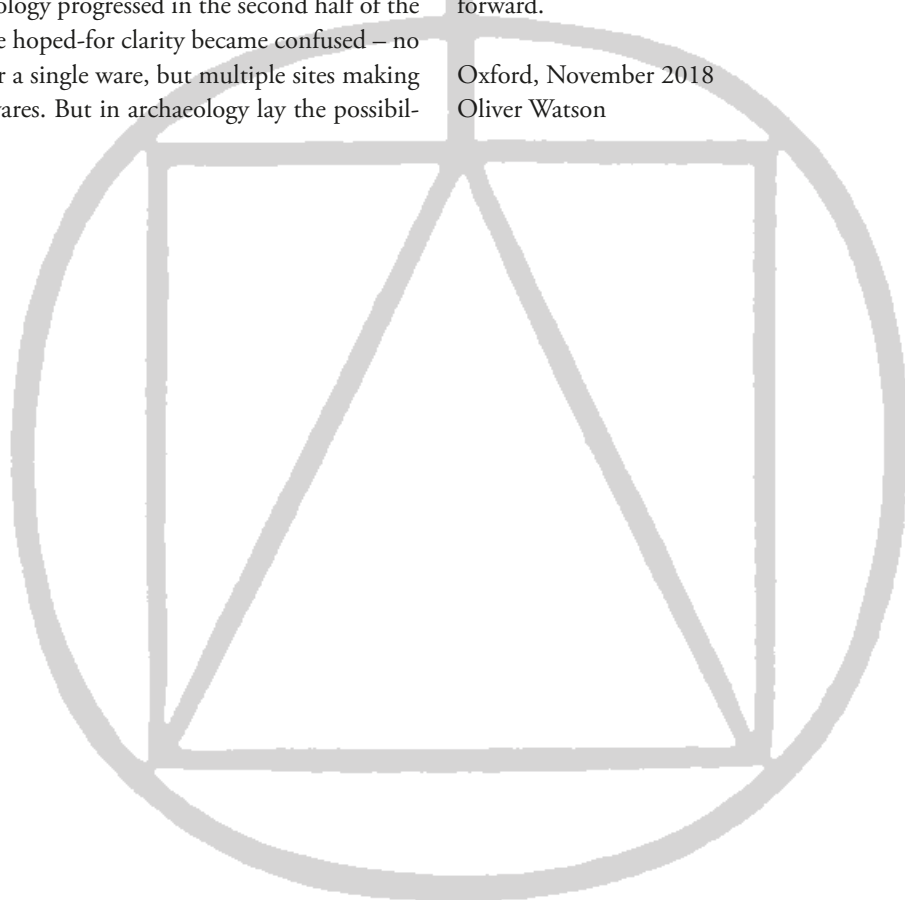
As Islamic archaeology progressed in the second half of the twentieth century, the hoped-for clarity became confused – no longer a single site for a single ware, but multiple sites making many often similar wares. But in archaeology lay the possibil-

ities and the sources for the next stage of study. Art historians have interests distinct from those of archaeologists, though the source material is the same. And it is archaeological data that provides art historians with answers to some of their most pressing questions – the origin and spread of techniques, the development and diffusion of motifs, the impact of trade, the relationship to other materials. Archaeology is then helped in turn by these studies.

This work illustrates beautifully the resulting synergy: an energetic knowledgeable archaeologist with wide experience in the field and an impressive command of the relevant bibliography (in sources difficult of access and in languages challenging to many of us) looks in detail at a decidedly non-archaeological collection. The attributions, comparisons and references transform what would otherwise be a meagre list of suggestions.

The Bumiller Collection is not a collection of masterpieces, but of groups of ‘ordinary’ things illustrating for the most part simple techniques and basic forms. Dr SIMÉON’s work has turned them into things of prime interest, and shows us a way forward.

Oxford, November 2018
Oliver Watson



Foreword

Ceramics of the Islamic World have long fascinated art historians and collectors alike. Already in medieval Europe, ceramics from the Islamic world were appreciated for their wide variety of coloured glazes. They were presented in prominent locations such as the belfries of Italian churches, where they took pride of place among ceramics of European origin. These, in turn, tried to follow suit of the advanced techniques that were current in the Islamic world. Later, ceramics from Iran and from the Ottoman realm that were traded to Europe became coveted objects of private and princely collectors who kept them in their households or displayed them on certain occasions. Museums of applied arts, originating in the 19th century, were eager to acquire Islamic ceramics as models of successful design. One might say that in this respect ceramics are typical of Islamic art at large, but here, the two aspects of practical use and aesthetic pleasure appear particularly closely connected.

Against this background, it is no surprise that ceramics play a significant part in most collections of Islamic art. Frequently, the Middle East is well represented, with the famous classes of ceramics from Abbasid Iraq, Fatimid Egypt, Saljuq Iran and Zengid-Ayyubid Syria dominating for the centuries of the pre-Mongol period. As to Khurasan, the exciting figural ceramics from Nishapur and the engobe wares from Nishapur and Afrasiyab with their elegant epigraphic decoration have always been popular with collectors and museum curators. However, there are few collections in which a focus lies on Khurasan or Central Asia. From this point of view, the particular character of The Bumiller Collection deserves attention.

Manfred Bumiller has been known as a collector of Islamic art with a pronounced interest in the field of bronzes from Khurasan. Starting in the 1980s, he brought together an extraordinary number of pieces, aiming at a systematic coverage of functions and shapes, of decorative techniques and motifs. While the core of The Bumiller Collection always consisted in the Khurasan bronzes, ceramics were also present from the beginning. It was a sign of the collection's wide interest that he wanted to give a wider view of the material culture of Khurasan and neighbouring regions. Aesthetic considerations came second in his motivation; rather, he intended to gather pieces that could serve for comparison with shapes and motifs of metalwork, and finally to give an overview of ceramics that were current in Islamic Iran and Central Asia before the Mongol era. Therefore, acquisitions of ceramics that can be attributed

to present-day Afghanistan and neighbouring regions of Central Asia were continually on his agenda, and this part of the collection grew parallel to that of metalwork, albeit at a slower pace. Considering the character of The Bumiller Collection as a study collection, it was a highly welcome addition that the University of Bamberg made a deposit consisting of more than eight hundred fragments of ceramics originating from Iran, from the bequest of Heinz and Ingeborg Lushey, catalogued by the present curator Verena Daiber.

PIERRE SIMÉON has made himself known as an expert of the pre-Mongol ceramics of Central Asia. With his doctorate on the ceramics that had been excavated in the palace of Hulbuk in Tajikistan, he found himself in the lucky situation to work on a body of material of the highest importance: Accumulated in a princely residence that was rebuilt several times during the early Islamic period, it covers a significant chronological span and a broad range of wares, from the common to the most prestigious, so as to give a highly relevant cross-section of ceramics in pre-Mongol Central Asia. PIERRE SIMÉON had just published his book on the Hulbuk ceramics when he followed an invitation to Bamberg to talk in the archaeological guest lecture series in the winter of 2011. On this occasion, he made contact with Manfred Bumiller, and the plan for a publication of the ceramic collection was developed. From his experience, PIERRE SIMÉON was determined that the material should be published to archaeological standards, since only the combination of drawings and photographs can form a solid basis for comparisons. During his stays in Bamberg, he devoted himself with a remarkable investment of time, skill and patience to the project of cataloguing the ceramics of The Bumiller Collection. The Bumiller Art Foundation can only express the warmest thanks for this commitment.

With the demise of Manfred Bumiller in 2018, the collection has lost its endeavouring founder, who had consecrated all of his energies to the care of the collection. The publication of the ceramics was one of the projects that were dear to him and that were on his mind during the last years in which he worked in the rooms of his museum. He did not live to see the present volume. It can also be understood as a publication in his memory.

St. Andrews, October 2018
Lorenz Korn

Preface by the editor

“From Ordinary to Luxury” is both a profound study of Central Asian ceramics and the start of the new series “Studies on The Bumiller Collection” that is dedicated to the development of the collection of the University Museum of Islamic Art in Bamberg.

PIERRE SIMÉON’s expertise and hands-on experience as an archaeologist are invaluable assets for the knowledge of Iranian and Central Asian pottery. Apart from that – and this advantage cannot be overstated – he opens up our eyes for the invaluable works of our Russian colleagues, which has gone without adequate acknowledgement for too long due to the language barrier.

The work is based on the glazed and unglazed pottery from The Bumiller Collection, assembled during decades by the late Manfred Bumiller (1928–2018). To make this volume a con-

sistent manual for the pottery from Iran and Central Asia, the few pieces of Iznik and Spanish lusterware were left aside to be published separately. Also a number of doubtful pieces were not included. They may well give valuable information on how to distinguish the original from the forgery. But this is a chapter of its own and needs a thorough and separate study.

After a break of ten years we are very happy to launch the new series of Studies on The Bumiller Collection with a book on material largely neglected and barely studied in a comprehensive way. May it be a handbook for whoever works on and is interested in the field of Islamic ceramics from the area that spreads from the Zagros to the borders of China.

Verena Daiber
Curator of The Bumiller Collection

