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ARTICLE

Processes of the circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East during the Abbasid-Chinese ceramic exchange, eighth–tenth centuries CE

Wen Wen

Independent scholar
Email: wenwencrystal@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the different mechanisms of the circulation of Chinese ceramics in the Middle East during the Abbasid-Chinese ceramic exchange during the eighth–tenth centuries CE. Although trade has been used conveniently to denote the circulation of Chinese wares in the Abbasid Caliphate, it is not the only mechanism that existed. There were also other possible processes of circulation, such as ceramics sent as tributes, diplomatic gifts, and samples, and secondary distribution through looting and pilgrimage. Not all Chinese wares shipped to the Middle East were luxury goods. Different types of Chinese wares had different functions and commercial and aesthetic values in the Middle East. It is an oversimplification to describe the circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East as merely the result of the luxury goods trade.

Keywords: Exchange; circulation; trade; ceramic; Abbasid; Chinese; Middle East; Indian Ocean

The current debate relating to the so-called 'Samarra Horizon' mainly focuses on the visual similarities between some Chinese ceramics and Islamic glazed ceramics and whether China or the Abbasids initiated individual ceramic styles and techniques. The broader question regarding the mechanisms of the circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East during this Abbasid-Chinese ceramic exchange has not yet been explored sufficiently. Trade has been used as a convenient explanation for the circulation of Chinese wares in the Abbasid Caliphate. These Chinese wares tend to be indiscriminately described as 'luxury goods'. It is necessary to interrogate these existing preconceptions rather than simply use them without question. Trade was inevitably the primary driver behind the circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East during the eighth to tenth centuries CE, yet there were also several other possible drivers than merely commercial interest.

Exchange, trade, processes of circulation, and luxury goods

Exchange and trade

Cultures in ancient times unavoidably interacted with each other. Their interactions can be identified by the presence of components of one culture within another.[1] The intensity

[1] G. D. Mumford, 'International Relations between Egypt, Sinai, and Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age to Early Persian Period (dynasties 18–26: c.1550–525 B.C.): A Spatial and Temporal Analysis of the Distribution and Proportions of Egyptian(izing) Artefacts and Pottery in Sinai and Selected Sites in Syria-Palestine', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1998), p. 2.

of interactions can be gauged by the frequency and quantity of these components.[2] The movement of materials from one culture to another can be achieved by one-way transactions (transfer) and two-way transactions (exchange).[3] Studying exchange helps to identify and measure interactions between cultures and to understand changes and developments in various aspects of ancient societies, which were sometimes externally stimulated by the exchange.[4]

Most exchanges take place in the form of trade. Polanyi defines trade as 'the mutual appropriative movement of goods between hands'.[5] Trade enables products that are unavailable for a group to be acquired externally by peaceful means.[6] It embodies the exchange of products, knowledge, beliefs, values and power.[7] To a certain degree traces of trade can be identified archaeologically by the physical remains of the infrastructure of trade, for instance, marketplaces, warehouses, shops, and port facilities.[8] Trade can also be conducted in the form of barter, through freelancers or middleman, between groups or governmental institutions, without the existence of a marketplace.[9] Merchant communities living outside their countries in associated networks, namely merchant or trade diasporas, can also serve as cross-cultural brokers.[10] Arabs and Persians were once among the largest merchant diasporas across the Indian Ocean, moving along the coastal areas, establishing settlements, and participating in the Indian Ocean exchange.[11] Their settlements in China facilitated the exchange between China and the Middle East.

Processes of circulation

Although trade was the most observed driver behind the circulation of materials, they were also circulated via several other processes in ancient times, including redistribution, allocation within the unit of production, gift without expectation of return, reciprocal exchange, tax, tribute, theft, plunder, and religious network.[12] Not all of the above processes have a direct economic benefit. Within archaeological patterns, these various mechanisms can rarely be ruled out.[13] The traditional preconception of trade relationships across the Indian Ocean seems to have dominated both the historical and archaeological narrative and discourse. Commercial trade has been understood as almost the only

[2] C. Renfrew, 'Trade as an action at a distance: questions of integration and communication', in *Ancient Civilization and Trade*. School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series, (eds) J. Sabloff and C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (Albuquerque, 1975), p. 5.

[3] M. Smith, 'The archaeology of ancient state economics', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004), p. 84.

[4] P. Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade in World History. Studies in Comparative World History* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 1.

[5] K. Polanyi, 'The economy as instituted process', in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, (eds) K. Polanyi, C. Arensberg and H. Pearson (Glencoe, 1957), p. 266.

[6] K. Polanyi, 'Traders and trade', in *Ancient Civilization and Trade*, (eds) Sabloff and Lamberg-Karlovsky, p. 133.

[7] P. Beaujard, 'The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African world-systems before the sixteenth century', *Journal of World History* 16.4 (2005), p. 412.

[8] N. Cahill, *Household and City Organisation at Olynthus* (New Haven, CT, 2001), pp. 112–113.

[9] Renfrew, 'Trade as an action at a distance', pp. 42–43, 48–51. C. Renfrew and P. Bahn, *Archaeology* (New York, 2008), p. 374. B. Stark and C. P. Garraty, 'Detecting marketplace exchange in archaeology: a methodological review', in *Archaeological Approaches to Market Exchange in Ancient Societies*, (eds) B. Stark and C. P. Garraty (Colorado, 2010), p. 34.

[10] A. Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic world. Volume I: Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, Seventh–Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden, 1991), p. 66.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 67–85.

[12] Smith, 'The archaeology of ancient state economics', p. 84. Beaujard, 'The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African world-systems before the sixteenth century', p. 415.

[13] G. Feinman and C. Garraty, 'Preindustrial markets and marketing: archaeological perspectives', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010), p. 178.

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mechanism behind the movement of materials across the Indian Ocean.[14] Other processes of movement have not been explored sufficiently. Pilgrimage, tribute, diplomacy, looting, and piratical activities all have added to the rich web of movement across the Indian Ocean.

Identifying different processes of circulation

Even though different processes of the circulation of materials have different mechanisms, the disposal patterns of durable goods that survived through time and their quantities can occasionally be very similar within these different processes. Marketplace trade brings a larger volume and diversity of goods, higher efficiency in trade, goods from more remote areas, and a more comprehensive range of conversions among various types of commodities.[15] In contrast, reciprocal exchange tends to result in a lower volume of goods, and unequal and small spheres of distribution.[16] Both reciprocal and administered exchanges generate a strong correlation between high-value goods and elite contexts; the distribution patterns of high-value imported goods frequently replicate local social hierarchies.[17] However, through the operation of commercial trade, high-value goods can also be distributed in nonelite contexts, though in lower frequencies than in elite contexts.[18] Under the operation of trade, value usually determines the price consumers are willing to pay, and price determines the distance over which imported products will travel.[19] When the costs are high, some imported products tend to be restricted to elite contexts, in which case the effect of trade will be difficult to differentiate from that of reciprocal exchange, administered exchange, and redistribution of goods through social hierarchies.[20]

Luxury goods

Luxury goods have often been associated with long-distance trade. Luxury goods in art historical and archaeological research normally refer to products that are expensive and sometimes exotic. Polanyi puts spices, cosmetics, incenses, rare woods, and elaborate artefacts in the luxury goods category in ancient times.[21] Luxury goods typically include a range of items that are valuable in terms of social status display, of restricted ritual use, or that represent wealth.[22] Luxuries do not have to be materials, but archaeologically visible material luxuries are much easier to identify.[23] Imported, exotic, strange, and potentially valuable items are most easily identified.[24] However, it needs to be pointed out that not all exotic items are luxurious, and not all luxurious items are exotic. When imported goods

[14] J. Hawkes and S. Wynne-Jones, 'India in Africa: trade goods and connections of the late first millennium', *L'Afrique orientale et l'océan Indien: réseaux d'échanges et globalisation,* June 2015, http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1752 (accessed 3 October 2022).

[15] K. Hirth, 'The distributional approach. A new way to identify marketplace exchange in the archaeological record', *Current Anthropology* 39.4 (1998), p. 455.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 456. Smith, 'The archaeology of ancient state economics', p. 90.

[19] Hirth, 'The distributional approach', p. 460.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 459. M. Fulford, 'Approaches to quantifying Roman trade: response', in *Quantifying the Roman Economy. Methods and Problems*, (eds) A. Bowman and A. Wilson (Oxford, 2009), p. 258.

[21] Polanyi, 'Traders and trade', p. 146.

[22] Stark and Garraty, 'Detecting marketplace exchange in archaeology', p. 36.

[23] R. Maclean and T. Insoll, 'Archaeology, luxury and the exotic: the examples of Islamic Gao (Mali) and Bahrain', *World Archaeology* 34.3 (2003), p. 559.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 562.

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are only circulated within restricted social circles, they may become the luxuries of an upper class. Just as not all the circulation of goods takes place in the form of trade, neither does luxury goods circulation. For example, reciprocal gift-giving and the administered exchange of luxuries are commonly conducted in hierarchical societies among elites to communicate and reinforce their status, ritual prerogatives, and esoteric knowledge.[25]

Trade was undoubtedly the primary process for the circulation of Chinese ceramics in the Islamic lands. Nevertheless, evidence shows that there must have been multiple mechanisms behind their circulation there. Not all Chinese ceramics were luxury traded goods.

Chinese ceramics as diplomatic gifts or tributes

As early as the seventh century CE, there are records of Chinese courts receiving delegates from the Arab caliphates. For instance, during the seventh and eighth centuries CE, there were around 37 delegates from the Arab caliphates to the Chinese Tang court recorded in Chinese official chronicles (see Appendix 1).[26] Abu Zayd Al Sirafi also recorded a story of a man called Ibn Wahb, descendant of the Quraysh tribe, who left Basra when the city was seized by the Zanj in 871 CE for Siraf where he boarded a ship to China. He arrived in a city called Khanfu (Guangzhou), then travelled for about two months to Khamdan where the great king of China lived. Ibn Wahb managed to meet the great king by claiming himself to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad's lineage and they had a pleasant conversation. Eventually, Ibn Wahb received a sumptuous prize (gift) (فسره ذلك وأمر لي بالجائزة السنية) from the king and returned home.[27]

The story of Ibn Wahb presents an exciting adventure in an exotic land, which would appeal to audiences in the Islamic world and satisfy their fantasies about mysterious remote lands and the enormous treasures and precious, luxurious, and exotic goods that were brought over the sea. Although Ibn Wahb's story is a mixture of fictional narratives and the real adventure experiences of sailors and travellers, it corresponds to what is recorded by Chinese official chronicles—that, from time to time, delegates from the Arab caliphates (or those who claimed themselves to be delegates) sent by the caliphs presented themselves to Chinese courts.

Ibn Wahb and delegates from the Arab caliphates in the end all received some royal gifts to be taken back with them. Although very little is known about what diplomatic gifts were bestowed by the Chinese courts, given the popularity of Chinese ceramics in China at that time and its extensive distribution along the Indian Ocean, it is reasonable to conjecture that among these royal diplomatic gifts were some Chinese ceramics that were later taken back to the Middle East and presented to the courts or circulated via other processes.

According to the Persian historian Abu'l-Fadl al-Bayhaqi (995–1077 CE), 2,000 Chinese ceramics were presented by the governor of Khurasan Ali ibn Isa ibn Mahan (r. 803–807 CE) to the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809 CE).[28] Among them were 20 pieces of '*chini faghfuri*', which were presumably wares of imperial quality.[29] Ali ibn Mahan presented himself to the Caliph, who was in Rayy in 805 CE, to investigate the

[25] J. B. Fleisher, 'Housing the market: Swahili merchants and regional marketing on the eastern African coast, seventh to sixteenth centuries AD', in *Archaeological Approaches*, (eds) Stark and Garraty, pp. 155–156. Stark and Garraty, 'Detecting marketplace exchange in archaeology', p. 36.

[26] Li Sijing 李嗣京 and Wang Qinruo 王欽若, *Ce Fu Yuan Gui* 册府元龟, Wuxiutang 五绣堂. See Appendix 1.

[27] T. Mackintosh-Smith and J. Montgomery, *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India and Mission to the Volga*, (eds and trans) A. Al-Sirafi and A. Ibn-Faḍlān (New York, 2014), pp. 84–85.

[28] A. Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery* (London, 1947), p. 10.

[29] R. Kauz, *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea* (Wiesbaden, 2010), p. 108.

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discontent and complaints provoked by Mahan's misgovernment. He brought an immense number of precious objects to the Caliph, 'including horses, slaves, clothing, musk and wealth, whose like had never been seen before'.[30] Among the treasures brought by Mahan were also the 2,000 Chinese ceramics. It remains unknown how Governor Ali ibn Mahan obtained these ceramics: they could have been traded to Khurasan where he was based or brought to him as diplomatic gifts. What is certain is that these Chinese wares were later redistributed in the Middle East as tributes to the Abbasid Caliph.

In addition to the above literary references, some highly exquisite Chinese wares, which were supplied to the court and government in China, were found in a number of sites in the Middle East, albeit in small amounts. It can be argued that the '*chini faghfuri*' mentioned by Bayhaqi would have been similar to these highly exquisite wares which were of 'imperial quality'.

Fine Chinese white porcelain

Chinese whiteware has been found in Islamic sites dating from the eighth to tenth centuries CE. Some were fired to stoneware status, whereas others were fired to porcelain. During the Tang and Five Dynasties period, several kilns in China managed to produce extremely refined white porcelain, some of which was tribute ware to the court and government, such as Xing kilns in Hebei Province.[31] Xing kilns mainly produced white stoneware and porcelain.[32]

A number of Islamic sites have Xing whiteware finds, including Samarra, Nishapur, Siraf, Fustat, Aththar, al-Qaraw, and possibly Susa.[33] Among them is an exquisite white porcelain cup with a fish relief motif on the interior found in Samarra (Figure 1). Samarra was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate from 836 to 892 CE. The city declined after the Caliph al-Mu'tadid (r. 892–902 CE) returned to Baghdad. An almost identical cup (Figure 2) was found in the excavations of Xing kilns. Such refined white porcelain with delicately executed motifs is highly likely to have been made for the court or government by Xing kilns as tribute ware. Although a ceramic cup of such top level quality could have been available to the market at a high price and with limited access, it is still possible that this Samarra white porcelain cup may have been among the diplomatic gifts from the Chinese court or tributes from a governor of the Caliphate to the Abbasid court in Samarra, just like those brought back by Arab delegates who had been received by the Chinese court and those '*chini faghfuri*' presented by Ali ibn Mahan.

Secret Colour (Mi Se) ware

Another type of highly exquisite Chinese ware of 'imperial quality' for the period between the eighth to tenth centuries CE is the Secret Colour (Mi Se) ware. Although Secret Colour ware was only produced for a very brief period, it remained among the most precious and luxurious wares in later centuries for its unprecedented fineness and the alleged bluish-green glaze colour which had never been achieved before. Secret Colour ware is a unique variety of Yue greenware, which used to be produced exclusively for the royal courts of

[30] Al-Tabari (trans.) and C. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Vol. 30: The 'Abbasid Caliphate in Equilibrium: The Caliphates of Musa al-Hadi and Harun al-Rashid A.D. 785–809/A.H. 169–193* (New York, 1989), p. 251.

[31] Zhao Qinggang 赵庆钢 and Zhang Zhizhong 张志忠, *Xing Kiln in its Millennium* 千年邢窑 (Beijing, 2007), pp. 8–9.

[32] Feng Xianming 冯先铭, *Chinese Ceramics* 中国陶瓷 (Shanghai, 2001), p. 329.

[33] W. Wen, 'Chinese ceramics in the Islamic world from the eighth to tenth centuries CE', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2018), pp. 55, 73, 90, 94, 106, 111 and 131.

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Figure 1. A white porcelain cup with fish relief motif found in Samarra. Source: Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra*, p. xxiv.

Figure 2. A white porcelain cup with fish relief motif found in the Xing kilns. Source: Zhao and Zhang, *Xing Kiln in its Millennium*, p. 111.

the Tang Dynasty and the Wu Yue kingdom.[34] Although Secret Colour ware is believed to have a bluish-green glaze, as described in verses of poems and evidenced by the Secret Colour glazed Jingping (bottle) found in the Famen Temple (Figure 4, right), excavations of kiln sites have discovered Secret Colour ware which does not have the perfect bluish-green glaze. Nigel Wood also points out that many Secret Colour ware sherds he has examined are covered by grey-green glaze typical of Yue ware but much more refined.[35] The author has identified nine sherds from the excavations of Samarra, Fustat, and Siraf which possess the features observed on Secret Colour ware vessels and sherds found in archaeological excavations in China.

Archaeological excavations and research have revealed several kiln sites in Zhejiang province producing Secret Colour ware in the Tang and Five Dynasties periods. Housi'ao kilns in the Shanglin Lake area were the primary kilns firing Secret Colour ware.[36] Large quantities of stoneware saggars used for firing Secret Colour ware were found at Housi'ao kilns. One saggar was incised with 'Luo Hu Shi Mi Se Wan' (罗湖师秘色椀, a Secret Colour Bowl of Luo Hu Shi) (Figure 3). The Secret Colour Jingping found in the underground palace of the Famen Temple dates to before the fifteenth year of the reign of Xiantong (874 CE) (Figure 4, right). The earliest datable evidence for Secret Colour ware from the excavations of Housi'ao kilns is during the reign of Dazhong

[34] Zheng Jianming 郑建明 and Shen Yueming 沈岳明, *The Secret Colour Yue Ware. Secret Colour Ware of the Tang and Five Dynasties from Housi'ao Kilns in Shanglinhu Area* 秘色越窑, 上林湖后司岙窑址出土唐五代秘色越器 (Beijing, 2017), p. 7.

[35] Personal correspondence with Nigel Wood.

[36] Zheng Jianming 郑建明 and Shen Yueming 沈岳明, *The Secret Colour Yue Ware*, p. 24.

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Figure 3. A Saggar fragment with inscriptions of 'Luo Hu Shi Mi Se Wan' from Housi'ao kilns, Site Y64. Source: © Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics.

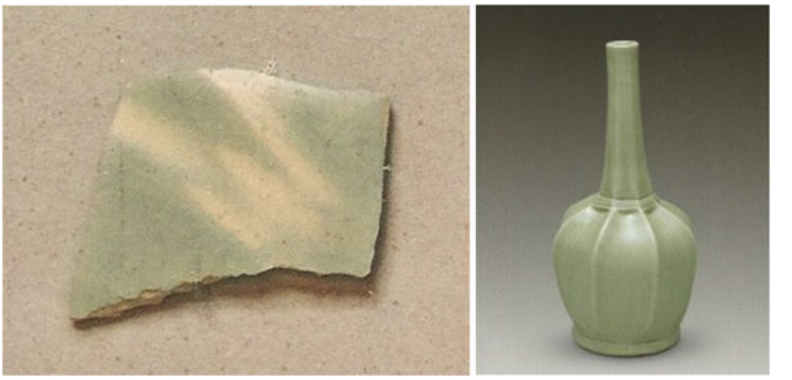

Figure 4. Left: A bluish-green glazed sherd found in Samarra. Source: Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra*, p. XXIII: 11; Right: A Secret Colour Jingping found from the Famen Temple. Source: Zheng and Shen, *The Secret Colour Yue Ware*, p. 170.

(847–860 CE) and from Hehuaxin kilns during the reign of Huichang (841–846 CE). The production of Secret Colour ware entered its heyday in the Housi'ao kilns during the reign of Zhonghe (881–884 CE) and declined after the mid-Five Dynasties period (around 930 CE).[37] It shows that the Secret Colour ware was only produced for a brief period, roughly from the 840s to 930s CE.

Although there are still debates about the definition of Secret Colour ware and whether those found from the above kiln sites fall within the same genre as the one found in the Famen Temple, the author tends to believe that the initial intention of firing this unique genre of Yue greenware was to achieve a delightful greenish-blue glaze colour which would stand out from the general grey-green glaze colour observed on the majority of Yue greenware. However, due to the limitations of firing techniques, mastery of firing conditions, and preparation of raw materials, only very few vessels managed to achieve the expected greenish-blue glaze colour. It would not be surprising to find out that most of the Secret Colour ware sherds retrieved from the excavations of the Housi'ao kilns were not the 'right' bluish-green colour and were thus discarded as wasters. Even

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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those successfully fired were not always covered by the expected bluish-green glaze. It can be argued that what could define a successfully fired Secret Colour ware is not just the right bluish-green glaze colour, but the quality of the body and glaze which greatly outweighs normal Yue greenware.

The unparalleled quality observed on Secret Colour ware is attributed to several factors. The shape of Secret Colour ware is more delicate, and the glaze is even finer and thicker than normal Yue greenware.[38] Each vessel was fired individually within a saggar in a reduction atmosphere. These saggars were made of the same highly refined refractory clay for the body of the Secret Colour ware itself, whereas saggars for firing other ceramics would usually use normal refractory clay that is far less refined than the stoneware and porcelain body material. Saggars for Secret Colour ware would be sealed by glaze during firing and had to be broken afterwards to remove the vessels inside. These saggars thus would be fired into stoneware state together with the Secret Colour vessels contained inside, and so could not be reused for another firing. Many flawed vessels were discarded at kiln sites with only a very small proportion achieving the desired quality. All these factors contributed to the high cost of producing Secret Colour ware.

Sarre has reported a special genre of Chinese ceramics from the excavations of Samarra (No. 210, I-N No. 1136–1140) (Figure 4, left), describing them as 'stoneware with grey fabric and bluish-green glaze (Category IX.b), a very rare genre in Samarra and very few found'. He also cited Zimmermann's comments that this genre of ceramics never occurred again in Chinese ceramic history.[39] These five pieces from Samarra (No. 210, I-N No. 1136–1140) may have come from the same vessel. The bluish-green glaze thickly applied on a light greyish body is a distinguishing feature of Secret Colour ware, as discussed above.

Excavations in Fustat have yielded a base fragment of grey fabric with a bluish-green glaze of fine quality falling in drops on the exterior, decorated with two flying phoenixes incised with fine lines on the interior (Figure 5, left).[40] Fustat was founded in 641/642 CE and prospered as the capital of the Muslim regime in Egypt, the most important cultural and economic centre in North Africa until its destruction in 1168 CE. Fustat was rebuilt afterwards but had declined by the fourteenth century CE. Excavations of the Housi'ao kilns have discovered a glazed base fragment of a bowl with motifs of two incised phoenixes (Figure 5, right), which is identical to the one found in Fustat. This Housi'ao fragment dates to the early Northern Song period (late tenth to early eleventh century CE), and the Fustat base fragment is highly likely to have been produced in the Housi'ao kilns in the same period. Although Housi'ao greenware produced in the early Northern Song period is not technically categorised as 'true' Secret Colour ware, which was primarily produced in the late Tang and Five Dynasties period, the most exquisite ones from the Northern Song period have a highly refined glaze and body close to that of Secret Colour ware. Many were found in royal tombs of the Northern Song and Liao dynasties. Like Secret Colour ware, these phoenix-motif greenware fragments from the Housi'ao kilns and Fustat were highly likely to have been among those of 'imperial quality' and supplied to the court. The one from Fustat was perhaps brought there as a diplomatic gift from the Song court.

In addition, there are at least three fragments at the British Museum from the excavations of Siraf which also possess characteristics of Secret Colour ware (No. 2007,6001.8673; 2007,6001.9743; 2007,6001.9963) (Figure 6). Siraf was a busy and affluent port in the

[38] According to Nigel Wood, Chris Doherty, and Ma Hongjiao's analysis of some Secret Colour ware fragments, Secret Colour ware has almost the same glaze and body compositions as normal Yue greenware.

[39] F. Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra* (Berlin, 1925), pp. 57–58. In Herzfeld's Finds Journal of the excavations of Samarra, these Secret Colour ware fragments were registered under I-N No. 1136–1140.

[40] B. Gyllensvärd, 'Recent finds of Chinese ceramics at Fostat I', *Bulletin Östasiatiska museet* (1973), p. 97.

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Figure 5. Left: A bluish-green glazed fragment with incised phoenix motif found from Fustat. Source: Gyllensvärd 'Recent finds', Figure 17. Right: A bowl with an incised phoenix motif from Housi'ao kilns, Site Y66, Early Northern Song period. Source: © Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics.

Persian Gulf from around the ninth century CE, visited by ships and cargoes from the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and across the Indian Ocean. Siraf declined in the eleventh century CE and gradually became deserted afterwards.

Being possible Secret Colour ware of imperial quality and supplied to Chinese courts, this genre of ceramics was only found in extremely limited quantities and, so far, only in capital cities (Samarra and Fustat) and in a big port (Siraf). Such fragments have not been identified in other Islamic sites. Presumably, a few Secret Colour vessels from the Housi'ao kilns were sent by courts in China to the courts in Samarra and Fustat as diplomatic gifts or bestowed on someone like Ibn Wahb who later brought them back to the Islamic world where they were finally presented to the court, just as happened to Ali ibn Isa ibn Mahan's tributes to the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid.

Chinese ceramics circulated as containers

Dusun ware has been found in 41 sites in the Middle East (Figure 7), most of which are ports (yellow dots), village-level (green dots), and town-level (blue dots) settlements in the Persian Gulf.[41] Nishapur, Sirjan, Samarra, and Fustat are the only inland city-level settlements (red dots) where Dusun ware has been found. Sirjan was the late Sasanian and early Islamic capital of Kirman Province and the largest city of southern Iran by the tenth century CE.[42]

Dusun ware was named after a tribe in northern Sabah (modern Kadazan) in Malaysia where this type of ware was highly valued by the locals.[43] Dusun ware, the majority of which comprised storage jars, was mainly produced in the Chinese Tang period and is characterised by a patchy greenish or brownish glaze and coarser body fabric compared to the more refined Yue greenware. Dusun storage jars tend to have lug-handles, either two pairs or four pairs below the rim or neck on the shoulder of the vessel. It is generally believed that Guangdong Province was one of the places producing Dusun storage jars.[44]

[41] See details in Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 207 and Appendix 6. Excavations of an Abbasid mosque in al-Ain, UAE, also discovered Dusun ware sherds.

[42] A. Williamson, 'Survey of excavations in Iran, 1969–70', *Iran* 9 (1971), p. 177.

[43] T. Harrisson, 'Dusun jars: from Mayfair to Sabah', *The Sarawak Museum Journal* xii.25–26 (1965), p. 69.

[44] Huang Ying 黄莹, 'Guangdong celadon on the Tang Maritime Silk Road. Research on Guanchong kilns in Xinhui, Guangdong 2014 唐代海上丝绸之路上的广东青瓷, 2014 年广东新会关冲窑址和馆藏实物调查记', *Silk Road* 丝绸之路 V (2016), p. 247.

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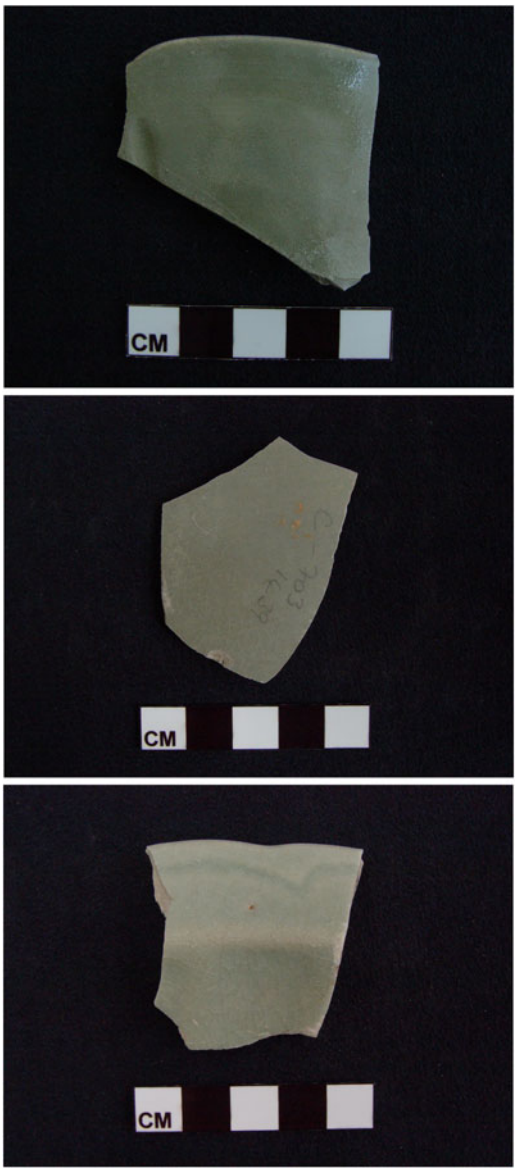

Figure 6. Three possible Secret Colour glazed fragments from Siraf. Source: © British Museum.

Some Dusun jars and bowls from Guanchong kilns in Xinhui city, Guangdong Province, have inscriptions of legible and illegible numbers and characters on their shoulders or feet (Figure 8).[45] Two Dusun storage jars in the Princessehof Museum also have inscriptions below the necks. The inscription on the left of Figure 9 has been deciphered by Roderick Orlina as the Persian word for 'wine' in Pahlevi, a middle Persian script.[46] The

[45] Liu Chengji 刘成基, 'Guanchong kilns in Xinhui, Guangdong Province 广东省新会官冲古窑址', *Cultural Relics* 文物 6 (2000), p. 41.

[46] E. Ströber, The Collection of Chinese and Southeast Asian Jars (Martaban, Martavanen) at the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands (2016), https://www.princessehof.nl/img/uploads/jars_research_Eva.pdf, p. 43, (last accessed 4 May 2018).

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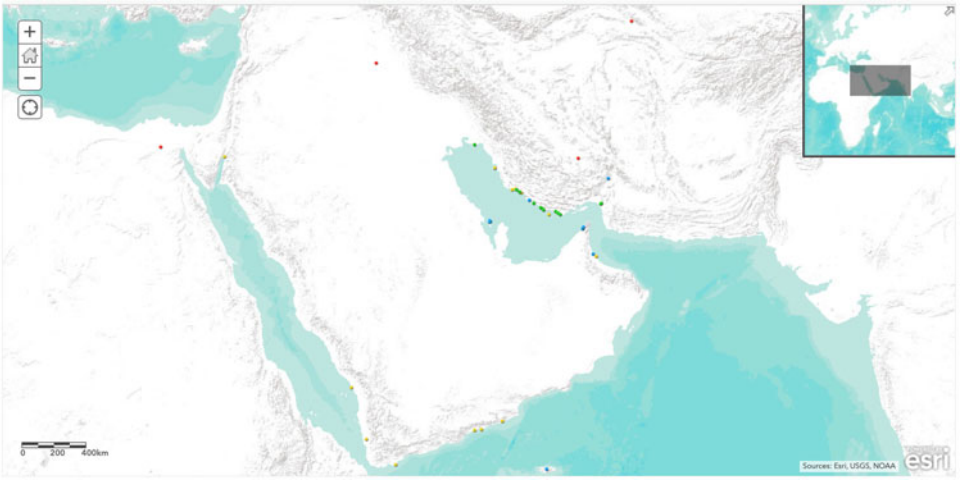

Figure 7. Sites in the Middle East with Dusun ware, eighth–tenth centuries CE. Source: Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 230.

inscription on the right of Figure 9 is an old Turkic Manichaean script possibly meaning 'oil'.[47] Dusun storage jars rescued from the Belitung shipwreck (Figures 10 and 11) and Siraf (Figure 12) also carry legible and illegible inscriptions. The Belitung shipwreck was an ancient Arab dhow of the ninth century CE rescued off Belitung Island in the Java Sea.

There are around 265 pieces of Dusun ware in the British Museum's collection of Siraf ceramic finds. Around 191 fragments came from jars, 43 fragments from bowls, and 31 fragments from vessels the shape of which cannot be identified. Some Dusun jars and bowls found in Siraf at the British Museum can be linked to Guanchong kilns with more certainty.[48] It seems that the majority of Dusun ware shipped to the Middle East were storage jars.

Dusun jars were used primarily as containers for other products. On the Belitung shipwreck, Dusun jars were found to have contained piles of Changsha painted bowls and star anise. One Dusun jar had nine lead ingots inside it. Some Dusun jars were found empty as they presumably had contained perishable goods or liquid.[49] The inscriptions on the two Dusun jars in the Princessehof Museum indicate that Dusun storage jars may have been used as containers for liquid goods. Arab dhows carried a variety of popular products from China and India to the Middle East in the medieval period (Table 1).[50] Spices like ginger, cinnamon, pepper, betel leaves, and cloves as well as other perishable products listed below might have been contained in Dusun jars loaded on ocean-going ships. Al-Muhassin ibn Ali al-Tanukhi (939–994 CE), a Muslim scholar living in Basra and Baghdad, mentioned that Dusun ware was prized in early Islamic society. Thirty of

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[48] Huang Ying, 'Guangdong celadon on the Tang Maritime Silk Road', p. 255.

[49] M. Flecker, 'A ninth-century Arab shipwreck in Indonesia: the first archaeological evidence of direct trade with China', in *Shipwreck, Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds*, Exhibition catalogue, National Museum of Asian Art (Washington DC and Singapore, 2011), p. 110, https://asia.si.edu/research/exhibition-catalogues/shipwrecked-catalog/ (accessed 3 October 2022).

[50] J. Zarins and A. Zahrani, 'Recent archaeological investigations in the southern Tihama plain: the sites of Athar and Sihi', *Atlal* 9 (1985), p. 88.

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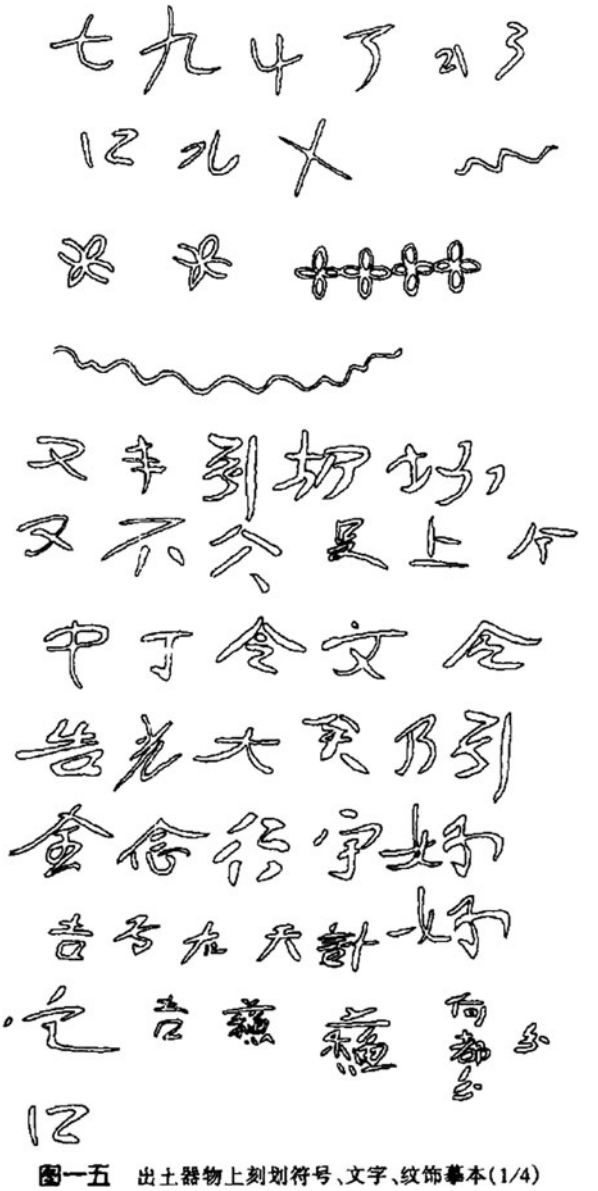

Figure 8. A collection of inscriptions on Dusun ware from Guanchong kilns. Source: Liu, 'Guanchong kilns', p. 41.

them contained 'Ghaliya' perfume, the best of which was made during the Caliph al-Wathiq (842–827 CE).[51]

Dusun ware was shipped across the Indian Ocean from China to the Middle East, perhaps not as a ceramic product like whiteware and greenware, but as 'by-products' of other desired goods. Dusun ware has been found mainly in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf, which was of great importance in seafaring and transport from the eighth to tenth centuries CE in the Indian Ocean network. This was the destination for ocean-going ships loaded with Dusun jars and the products they contained. After the arrival of ocean-going

[51] D. Whitehouse, 'Excavations at Siraf. Third interim report', *Iran* 8 (1970), p. 5.

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Figure 9. Two Dusun storage jars with inscriptions in the Princessehof Museum. Source: Ströber, The Collection of Chinese and Southeast Asian Jars, pp. 43–44.

Figure 10. A Tang Dusun jar with an inscription below the rim from the Belitung shipwreck. Source: Photo by the author, New York, 2017.

Figure 11. A Tang Dusun jar with an inscription below the rim from the Belitung shipwreck. Source: Photo by the author, New York, 2017.

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Figure 12. A Dusun ware fragment with inscription found in Siraf. Source: © British Museum, No. 2007,6001.6436.

Table 1. Traded goods from China and India to the Middle East.

Textiles	Silks	Sandalwood	Bamboo
Ivory	Ebony	Carnelian	Turquoise
Lapis lazuli	Coral	Tortoiseshell	Palm fibre
Betel leaves	Pepper	Cinnamon	Ginger
Cloves	Gums	Dyes	Varnish
Indigo	Perfumes	Aloe	Ambergris
Camphor	Arabic gum	Musk	

ships in big ports like Siraf, cargoes would be unloaded and distributed to local ships which would continue their journeys to other parts of the Middle East. A few ships with Dusun jars would also sail along the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, albeit not as many as those sailing to the Persian Gulf.

Incense, spices, perhaps oil and wine in these Dusun jars would be further transported inland to urban centres with courts, elite houses, and markets. In this case, one would expect to find numerous remains of Dusun jars in inland sites; however, there is the opposite distribution pattern here. Dusun jars, which functioned as containers for incense and spices, were hardly found in inland sites where these goods were to be consumed. What might have happened is that for the inland transport, other local containers replaced Dusun jars after their arrival in ports. Dusun jars may have been reused in other practical or non-practical ways, for example, as container jars for transportation in the seas and oceans. Krahl also proposes that Dusun jars served as packing cases for more valuable goods and were probably not intended for sale on their own. Furthermore, she thinks Dusun jars may have been reused for several voyages.[52]

The stimulus for the circulation of Dusun ware and its value in the Middle East and across the Indian Ocean perhaps did not lie in its being high-fired stoneware to be used as tableware or luxurious displayware, but rather as robust containers for the long and

[52] R. Krahl, 'Green wares of southern China', in *Shipwreck, Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds*, p. 185.

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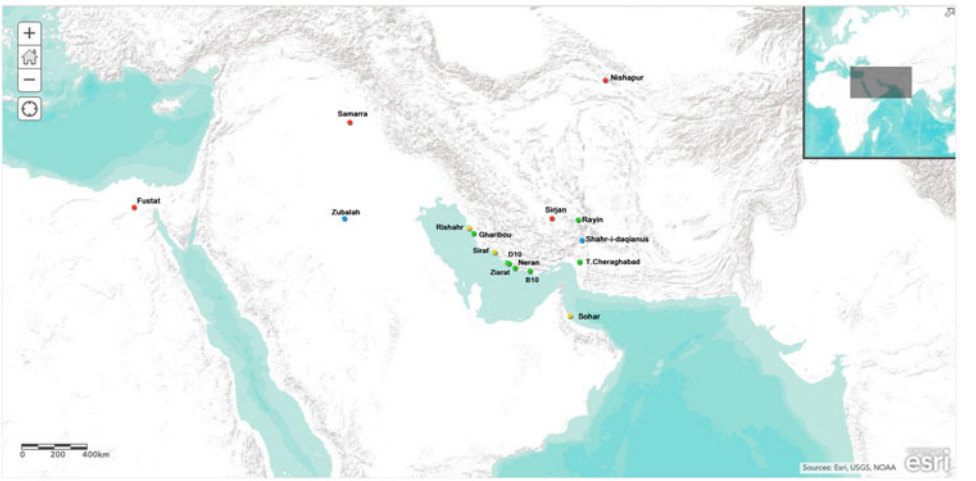

Figure 13. Sites in the Middle East with Chinese splashed ware and blue painted ware, eighth–tenth centuries CE. Source: Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 266.

arduous sea journeys. This explains the distribution of Dusun ware primarily along coastal areas and hardly at all in inland areas. Thus, it may not be precise to describe the circulation of Dusun ware in the Middle East as the result of the trade of Dusun ware itself; rather, it is the result of the trade of products contained *inside* the Dusun ware.

Chinese ceramics possibly commissioned as samples

Compared to Chinese whiteware, greenware, Changsha ware, and Dusun ware, Chinese green splashed ware and blue painted ware dating to the eighth to tenth centuries CE were found in far fewer sites in the Middle East and in much smaller quantities. Among the 167 Islamic sites dating to the eighth to tenth centuries CE studied in the author's DPhil research, only 16 of them have uncovered Chinese splashed ware and painted ware.[53] These include four city-level settlements (Samarra, Fustat, Sirjan, and Nishapur), two big ports (Siraf and Sohar), one town-level settlement (Shahr-i-daqianus), and one pilgrimage route station (Zubalah). The rest are village-level settlements and small ports in the Persian Gulf on the Iranian side, including Rayin, B10, D10, T. Cheraghabad, Neran, Ziarat, Rishahr, and Gharibou (Figure 13).[54] Sohar was another busy and prosperous port in the Persian Gulf occupied since the first century CE until the present time. The apogee of Sohar as a seaport was during the ninth to the twelfth centuries CE.[55] Shahr-i-daqianus was a primary town with a citadel from the Islamic period until the Mongol period. [56]

Only surface surveys were conducted in some of the above sites, with only one fragment of Chinese green splashed ware found in each surveyed site. In excavated sites, such as Fustat and Siraf, Chinese splashed ware and painted ware were found in slightly

[53] Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 205. Chinese greenware (celadon) was found in 70 sites, including Murwab; whiteware in 42 sites; Dusun ware in 40 sites; and Changsha ware in 29 sites throughout the studied area in the Middle East. Murwab in modern Qatar has a greenware sherd, now in the National Museum of Qatar. This site was not included in the author's research in 2018. For the quantities and types of Chinese ceramic finds in each site, see Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', Chapters 3 and 5.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[55] M. Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, 'La céramique chinoise de Qalʿat al Ṣuḥâr', *Arts Asiatiques* 43 (1988), p. 87.

[56] A. Stein, *Archaeological Reconnaissance in North-western India and South-eastern Iran* (London, 1937), p. 151.

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Table 2. Quantities of Chinese green splashed ware and blue painted ware found in sites in the Middle East, eighth–tenth centuries CE.

Site	Settlement type	Quantity of Chinese splashed ware and painted ware
B10	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[58]
D10	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[59]
T. Cheraghabad	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[60]
Neran	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[61]
Ziarat	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[62]
Rishahr	Port	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[63]
Gharibou	Coastal settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[64]
Rayin	Inland settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[65]
Siraf	Port	64 at the British Museum[66]
Samarra	City	Unknown
Nishapur	City	Unknown
Sohar	Port	Unknown
Sirjan	City	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[67]
Fustat	City	5 at the storage in Cairo[68]
Zubalah	Pilgrimage route station	1 from the surface survey, possibly a lead-glazed splashed ware[69]
Shahr-i-daqianus	Inland settlement	1 green on white splashed glazed ware from surface survey[70]

larger amounts; however, still far fewer than other types of Chinese wares found in the same site (Table 2).[57] It should be pointed out that even though the British Museum holds around 64 Chinese green splashed ware and blue painted ware sherds from Siraf, this does not necessarily mean there were 64 intact vessels. The fact that the majority of these Siraf sherds are rather tiny and fragmentary indicates that many of them may just have come from the same vessel.

[57] Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 106 and Appendix 7. In Fustat, for example, Tadanori has identified 2,069 pieces of Chinese whiteware and 941 pieces of Yue greenware which could date to the period from the eighth to tenth centuries CE. At the British Museum, there are around 421 pieces of Yue greenware, 328 pieces of whiteware, 265 pieces of Dusun ware, and 225 pieces of Changsha ware from the eighth to tenth centuries CE.

[58] S. Priestman, 'Settlement and Ceramics in Southern Iran: An Analysis of the Sasanian and Islamic Periods in the Williamson Collection', (unpublished Master's dissertation, Durham University, 2005), p. 307.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 307–308.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 307–308.

[66] Based on the Siraf ceramic finds at the British Museum.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 307–308.

[68] Y. Tadanori, 'Chinese porcelain from Fustat based on research from 1998–2001', *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 76 (2013), p. 4.

[69] S. Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah: The Pilgrim Road from Kufa to Mecca* (Riyad, 1980), p. 280.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

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Figure 14. Left: A Chinese green lead glazed sherd with a dragon motif found in Nishapur. Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art, No. 38.40.274. Right: A green splashed white glazed four-lobed bowl with dragon motif found on the Belitung shipwreck. Source: Photo by the author, New York.

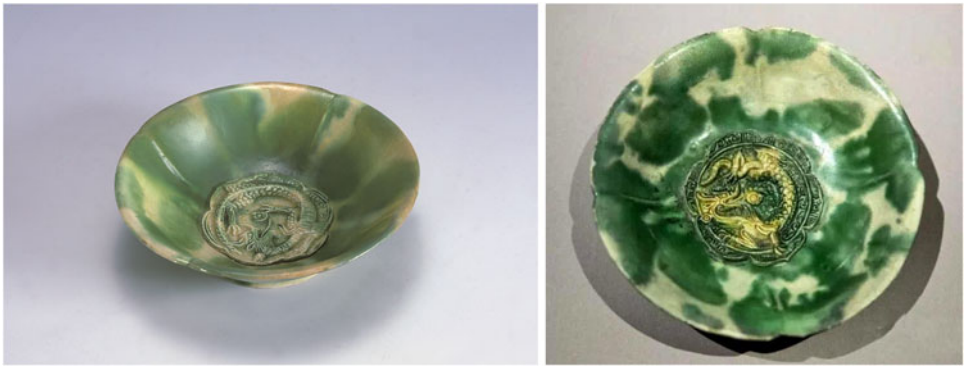

Figure 15. Left: A green splashed white glazed four-lobed bowl with dragon motif found in the Yangzhou port. Source: © Yangzhou Museum. Right: A similar bowl from the Belitung shipwreck. © Asian Civilisations Museum.

The majority of Chinese green splashed ware sherds found in these sites are not of 'superior quality' when compared to whiteware and greenware. Some were only fired to earthenware status whereas others were fired to stoneware. However, a number of them exhibit unusual features and qualities, thus distinguishing them from others.

A sherd from a green lead-glazed vessel with a moulded medallion decoration of dragon motif in the middle of the inner bottom was found in Nishapur (Figure 14, left).[71] Another three bowls with almost identical green splashed glaze and dragon medallion motif were found on the Belitung shipwreck and in the ancient Yangzhou port in China (Figures 14, right, and 15). They were produced in the early ninth century CE presumably in Gongxian kilns. Chinese potters may have borrowed ideas from contemporary metalworks to make these unusual-looking bowls, which were imitating their Persian counterparts (Figure 16). These Chinese bowls with a Persian metalwork prototype finally found their way to the Yangzhou port, the Belitung ship, and Nishapur in Iran. In light of

[71] C. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period* (New York, 1973), p. 257.

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Figure 16. Left: A Tang silver bowl with gilded twin-fish relief decoration from the hoard of Hejiacun, Xi'an. Source: © Sha'anxi History Museum. Right: A Sasanian silver bowl with a medallion relief decoration, fourth century CE. Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art, No. 55.57.

their scarcity, insofar as there are so far only four pieces of this genre discovered in the whole world and the decoration on each of them is completely unique, it is hard to believe that this type of ware was ever mass produced. It remains a puzzle as to why these unique bowls were made and who might have commissioned them. It is, of course, possible that these unique looking bowls were also commercial traded goods; however, one should also explore the possibility that they might have been commissioned as samples for Muslim patrons in the Middle East or were perhaps ordered to be made by the Chinese court or government for a Muslim guest or delegate.

In Samarra, a fragment of a green splashed white glazed cup with a 'pipe' attached on one side (Figure 17) was found. The same cups were found on the Belitung shipwreck (Figure 18) and from the excavations of Gongxian kilns (Figure 19) dating to 841–907 CE. The exotic shape, exquisite decoration, refined body, and glaze unseen on other Chinese wares are indicative of the uniqueness and preciousness of these cups. Like the dragon medallion bowls discussed above, this type of cup has not been found in

Figure 17. A green splashed cup fragment with an attached 'pipe' from Samarra. Source: Photo by the author, British Museum.

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Figure 18. Green splashed cup with attached 'pipe' from the Belitung shipwreck. Source: Photo by the author, the Changsha Kilns Museum.

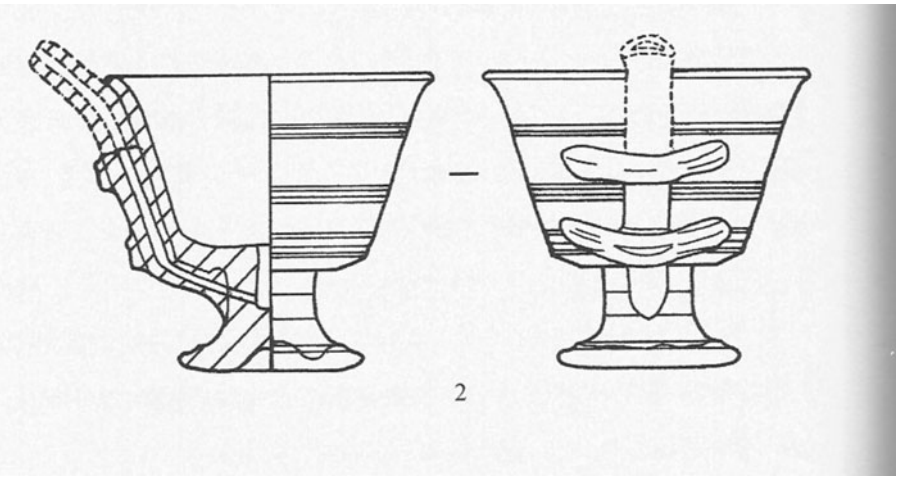

Figure 19. Green splashed cup with attached 'pipe' from Gongxian kilns. Source: Henan Cultural Relics and Archaeology Institute, *Gongyi Huangye Kilns*, p. 218.

Chinese tombs and seemed to have been produced for the Middle East. The fact that this type of cup has only been identified in Samarra, the Belitung shipwreck, and Gongxian kilns in extremely limited numbers suggests that these cups were only produced once or twice in small numbers. It makes one wonder if they were commissioned for the Middle East by either the Chinese court or a Muslim delegate and shipped from Gongxian kilns via the Indian Ocean to Samarra. Like the dragon medallion bowls, these 'pipe' cups were not necessarily traded commercial goods. The question remains: who commissioned these unique looking cups and for whom were they were made?

So far only one sherd of Chinese high-fired blue painted whiteware has been found in the Middle East in Siraf (Figure 20) produced by Gongxian kilns in around 841–907 CE.[72] Three Chinese high-fired blue painted white glazed dishes were rescued from the Belitung shipwreck (Figure 21). Excavations of Gongxian kilns, Yangzhou port, and a

[72] Henan Cultural Relics and Archaeology Institute 河南省文物考古研究所, *Gongyi Huangye Kilns* 巩义黄冶窑 (Beijing, 2016), p. 17.

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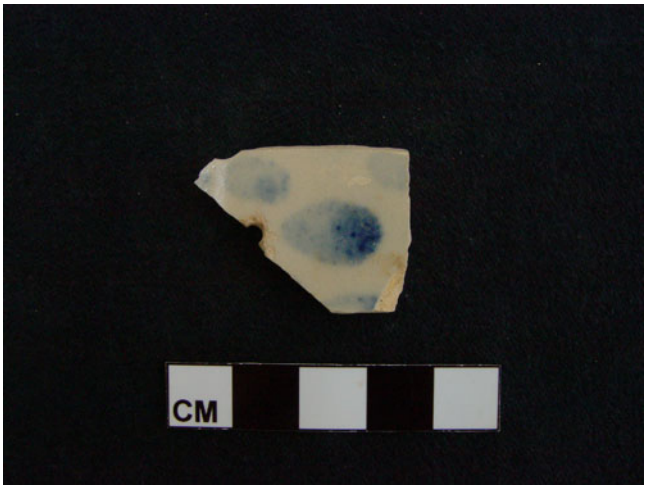

Figure 20. A fragment of Tang blue painted white glazed stoneware from Siraf. Source: © British Museum, No. 2007,6001.5010.

Figure 21. Tang blue and white stoneware dish from the Belitung shipwreck. Source: © Asian Civilizations Museum.

tomb in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, also uncovered high-fired blue painted whiteware. The University of Hongkong Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston have two intact high-fired blue painted white glazed vessels.[73]

Although not tribute ware of 'imperial quality', this high-fired, blue painted whiteware genre is still unusual and unprecedented. Its presence in the Yangzhou port, on the Belitung shipwreck, and in Siraf, and the fact that some of those found in Gongxian kilns, Yangzhou, and the Belitung shipwreck are decorated with quadrilateral motifs (Figure 21), which are normally observed on contemporary Islamic glazed ceramics, indicate that some high-fired blue painted whiteware was presumably intended for Middle Eastern patrons, with the rest supplied to domestic patrons as burial goods. Only very few of them survived the journey and made their way to patrons in the Islamic lands, such as this single piece of blue painted whiteware found in Siraf.[74] This genre of ware was most likely only produced briefly in the early to mid-ninth century CE in limited amounts, with only very few intended for the Islamic lands. Perhaps some high-fired blue painted ceramics were commissioned as samples for Middle Eastern patrons.

[73] See more details in Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 272.

[74] For the debate on the Samarra Horizon blue painted whiteware and its Chinese counterpart, see W. Wen, 'Preconceptions on Samarra Horizon, green splashed ware and blue painted ware revisited through Chinese ceramic imports, eighth–tenth centuries CE', *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World* (forthcoming 2021).

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Figure 22. Sites in Qatar, Bahrain, and al-Hasa Oasis with Chinese ceramic finds, eighth–tenth centuries CE. Source: Map by the author.

In Samarra, the only confirmed location where Chinese splashed ware was excavated is within the Harem of Dar al-Khalifa (دار الخليفة caliphal palace).[75] Dar al-Khalifa was the principal residential palace for the Abbasid caliphs in Samarra with a public ceremonial function. It was founded in 836 CE and its last known occupation was in 884 CE.[76] Herzfeld excavated one of the domed reception halls and named it Haram in his Finds Journal and in Sarre's publications.[77] Apart from those excavated from Dar al-Khalifa, some ceramic sherds were given by local people who picked them up in ruins, which were recorded by Sarre and Herzfeld as *hadiyyah* (هدية gift). Even without sufficient evidence to support such a hypothesis, in Samarra Chinese green splashed ware may have been largely supplied to Dar al-Khalifa.

In addition to commercial trade, we must be open to other processes by which Chinese splashed ware and blue painted ware were circulated in the Middle East. Some of them may have been part of the commercial activities of Muslim merchants; however, those unique looking genres (only very few of which have been identified) and their movement to and circulation in the Middle East might have been driven by factors beyond simply a commercial act, such as being special commissioned objects by either the Chinese court or Muslim delegates or merchants, in which case they were perhaps sent as gifts or brought back to the Middle East as samples not for sale.

Looted Chinese wares

In addition to the above alternatives to trade as the means of circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East, Chinese wares were also involved in looting and piratical activities in the region. Qatar, Bahrain, and al-Hasa Oasis in Saudi Arabia have a few sites with Chinese sherds dating to the eighth to tenth centuries CE found from archaeological surveys and

[75] In Herzfeld's Finds Journal of Samarra, Inventory Nos. 565, 784, 838, 839, 850, 900, 909 include Chinese splashed ware fragments. Inventory Nos. 565 and 850 were found in the Harem. Inventory No. 784 was obtained as *hadiyyah* (gift).

[76] A. Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra* (London, 2007), p. 135.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

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excavations, including al-Na'man, Murwab, al-Hasa, Dhahran, Qatif, Barbar, Qal'at al-Bahrain, Jidd al-Hajj, A'Ali, and Bilad al-Qadim (Figure 22).[78] The Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf was not involved in the Indian Ocean exchange as much as the Iranian coast in the early Abbasid period, although there were still a number of active ports and trading towns in the region. Bahrain, the al-Hasa oasis, and its adjacent coastal area were more populated from the ninth to eleventh centuries CE when the Qarmathians, who ruled this area, carried out piratical activities on the trade route in the Persian Gulf and levied high taxes on ships passing by.[79] Rougeulle proposes that the presence of some isolated Chinese sherds in these Qarmathian sites could very well be considered as traces of piratical activities rather than as evidence of real participation in the Indian Ocean trade which brought in Chinese ceramics.[80]

What might have happened was that Chinese wares were looted by the Qarmathians en route to ports in the Gulf. They took these Chinese wares back to their settlements in al-Hasa oasis. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that Chinese wares were traded normally from more 'international' ports in the Gulf such as Siraf to sites in al-Hasa oasis and other Qarmathian settlements, piratical activities and looting were still highly possible drivers behind the circulation and second distribution of Chinese wares in this region.

Chinese wares on the pilgrimage route

Not many sites in the inland area of Arabia have Chinese ceramic finds in the early Abbasid period. Two of them are pilgrimage route stations. Zubalah (زبالة) used to be one of the largest stations on Darb Zubaydah, a pilgrimage route between Kufa and Mecca. This site can be dated to the early Islamic period with remains of cisterns, wells, fortresses, and settlements.[81] Darb Zubaydah was primarily in use during the Abbasid period, although some stations had already been in use in pre-Islamic periods.[82] Saad A. Al-Rashid conducted a field survey on Darb Zubaydah in the 1970s.[83] One shoulder fragment from a Chinese stoneware vessel with a lead glaze similar to one from Siraf dating to the ninth and tenth centuries CE was found in Zubalah.[84] This is likely to be a Chinese splashed ware fragment due to its lead glaze. Another pilgrimage route station with a Chinese ceramic find is Fayd (فيد). It used to be one of the most important and strategically located stations and a primary administration centre of Darb Zubaydah.[85] It also served as a storage point for food and supplies intended for use on the return journey. Its importance could be compared to Basra and Kufa as a city well known for its castle and fortress.[86] One Chinese ceramic fragment found in Fayd is now in the Fayd-Riyad University Museum; its body contains potassium, aluminium, silicate, and traces of iron and titanium. The glaze covering both sides of this small fragment contains calcium,

[78] Wen, 'Chinese ceramics', p. 159.

[79] A. Rougeulle, 'Medieval trade networks in the western Indian Ocean (8th–14th cent.): some reflections from the distribution pattern of Chinese imports in the Islamic world', in *Tradition and Archaeology, Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean. Proceedings of the International Seminar Techno-Archaeological Perspectives of Seafaring in the Indian Ocean 4th cent. B.C.–15th cent. A.D. February 28th–March 4th 1994*, (eds) H. P. Ray and J.-F. Salles (New Delhi, 1996), p. 164.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[81] Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah*, pp. 81 and 280.

[82] J. Knudstad, 'The Darb Zubayda project 1396/1976', *Atlal* 1 (1977), p. 41.

[83] Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah*, p. 329.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91 and 93.

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potassium silicate with aluminium, and traces of zinc, iron, titanium, and barium. It dates to the ninth and tenth centuries CE.[87] However, no illustration or photo of this sherd is available, so it is therefore difficult to determine by which kiln site this Fayd Chinese ceramic sherd was produced.

The abovementioned Chinese ceramics were probably personal belongings of some pilgrims on their way to or back from Mecca. Although they were presumably initially traded goods brought to the Islamic lands and later sold to these pilgrims, their circulation and redistribution in Zubalah and Fayd were more a result of the pilgrimage along Darb Zubaydah than of direct trade between these two pilgrimage route stations and markets where Chinese wares were available for sale.

How were Chinese ceramics used in the Islamic lands?

The excavations at the Christian Monastery of Wadi al-Tur in the Sinai Peninsula have unearthed Chinese greenware, Islamic lustreware dishes, together with crosses and fragments of the Bible in one of the rooms.[88] Arguably, some churches and monasteries in the Middle East may have placed exotic Chinese ceramics and valuable Islamic glazed ceramics, such as lustreware, on their altars alongside crosses and bibles. Chinese ceramics may not have carried any particular religious significance; however, it is not difficult to imagine that churches and monasteries would place what they perceived to be the most precious objects on altars to adorn them and to honour the holy crosses and the Bible. A similar situation occurred in Java, where Chinese ceramics, including Guangdong bluish-green glazed ware, Changsha ware, green splashed whiteware, and Yue greenware were found in temples.[89] In Samarra, drinking bowls, including Chinese greenware, were found scattered around the remnants of a fountain in the centre of the courtyard of the Congregational Mosque of Mutawakkil.[90] Possibly, Chinese greenware was used as containers for the ritual ablution before prayers in the mosque.

The appreciation of exotic Chinese wares and fine Islamic glazed wares must have been established in the Islamic lands during the eighth to tenth centuries CE. Glazed ceramics fired at a higher temperature and of a better quality than unglazed wares introduced not only a new artistic and aesthetic form, but also a new container genre for food and drink. The increasing popularity of glazed ceramics may have been directly or indirectly facilitated by the attitudes of Islam towards golden and silver vessels, which were, to a certain degree, regarded as lavishness and related to an extravagant lifestyle. Instead of abandoning all the joyfulness brought by sumptuous banquets and glowing utensils, there was a way to get around the doctrines. Lustreware was invented to convey a visual resemblance to golden and silver vessels. Chinese ceramics, shimmering with mild light refracted by their translucent surface with a touch of smoothness and believed to possess the magic of purification for whatever was contained inside, amazed patrons in the Middle East. Their exotic appearance was also favoured by people in the Middle East, where Chinese ceramics were used and appreciated in different ways from their normal values and functions in China. The discovery of Chinese ceramics in the above locations presents a clue for the possible ways in which Chinese wares may have been used after reaching the Middle East.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 295.

[88] M. Kawatoko and Y. Shindo, *Artifacts of the Islamic Period Excavated in the Rāya/al-Ṭūr Area, South Sinai, Egypt* (Tokyo, 2009), p. 3.

[89] T. Mikami, 'The ceramic trade in late Tang and Five Dynasties period 晚唐、五代时期的陶瓷贸易', *Wenbo* 文博 2 (1988), pp. 58–59.

[90] T. Leisten, *Excavation of Samarra* (Mainz am Rhein, 2003), p. 81.

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Conclusion

Different types of Chinese ceramics arrived in different areas and levels of settlements in the Middle East. Their amounts in these Islamic sites vary hugely too. The distribution patterns and quantities of different types of Chinese wares in the Middle East are indicative of circulation processes more than merely commercial trade. Some very rare genres found in Islamic lands might have been gifts, tributes, or samples. Dusun storage jars were perhaps not traded for their own sake but were by-products of traded goods contained inside them. Therefore, we must open to the possibility that the circulation of Chinese wares in the Middle East during the eighth to tenth centuries CE was the result of more than just commercial activities. There were other processes of circulation, such as ceramics that were sent as tributes, diplomatic gifts, samples, and even through looting and secondary distribution of pilgrimage. It is also important to note that not all Chinese ceramics arriving the Middle East were necessarily treated as luxury wares. For example, Dusun ware and some green splashed ware were produced with a less refined body, glaze, and decoration than most Yue greenware and whiteware. Different types of Chinese wares held different functions and commercial and aesthetic values in the Middle East.

Conflicts of interest. None.

Appendix 1: Arab delegates to the Chinese Tang court, seventh–eighth centuries CE

Time	Delegate	Gifts for the Chinese court
August of the second year of Yonghui (651 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
June of the sixth year of Yonghui (655 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
May of the second year of Yonglong (681 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Horses and local products
May of the first year of Yongchun (682 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Local products
The third year of Chang'an (703 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Horses
The second year of Jingyun (711 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Local products
July of the fourth year of Kaiyuan (716 CE)	Arab Caliphate	One gold thread robe, one jade, and one glass bottle
June of the seventh year of Kaiyuan (719 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
March of the twelfth year of Kaiyuan (724 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Horses and Dipterocarpaceae
May of the thirteenth year of Kaiyuan (725 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Local products
March of the thirteenth year of Kaiyuan (725 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Local products
March of the sixteenth year of Kaiyuan (728 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
February of the seventeenth year of Kaiyuan (729 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Local products
December of the twenty-first year of Kaiyuan (733 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
December of the twenty-ninth year of Kaiyuan (741 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
July of the third year of Tianbao (744 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Horses and treasures

(*Continued*)

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Appendix 1: (*Continued.*)

Time	Delegate	Gifts for the Chinese court
May of the fourth year of Tianbao (745 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
May of the sixth year of Tianbao (747 CE)	Arab Caliphate	Six leopards
December of the eleventh year of Tianbao (752 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
March of the twelfth year of Tianbao (753 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
April of the twelfth year of Tianbao (753 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
July of the twelfth year of Tianbao (753 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
December of the twelfth year of Tianbao (753 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	Thirty horses
April of the thirteenth year of Tianbao (754 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
July of the thirteenth year of Tianbao (754 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
The fifteenth year of Tianbao (756 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
The first year of Zhide (756 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
May of the first year of Qianyuan (758 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
December of the first year of Qianyuan (758 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
December of the first year of Shangyuan (760 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
May of the first year of Baoying (762 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
December of the first year of Baoying (762 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	
January of the fourth year of Dali (769 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
December of the seventh year of Dali (772 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
July of the ninth year of Dali (774 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
January of the seventh year of Zhenyuan (791 CE)	Arab Caliphate	
September of the fourteenth year of Zhenyuan (798 CE)	Abbasid Caliphate	

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