

# An overview of medieval pottery production in Spain between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries

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## SUMMARY

*The thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in Spain marked a transition in pottery manufacture from Islamic to Christian production in the east of the peninsula. The chronology of particular styles in pottery decoration throughout Spain has been established from stylistic criteria and their occurrence in contemporary paintings. Green and brown wares seem to be introduced at the start of the period, and the chronology of the 'Pula-type' lustreware is discussed. Other medieval pottery types also exist which are less well known. Pottery studies in Spain are increasingly focussing on coarsewares, which are still rather poorly understood.*

## INTRODUCTION

The broad aim of this paper is to outline our current understanding of late medieval pottery production in Spain, focussing especially on pottery from the Valencian area. A general overview of development between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries is provided, highlighting a number of key questions currently facing researchers. These may be summarised as follows:

1. the transition between Islamic and Christian production in the east of the Iberian peninsula;
2. the chronology of pottery production;
3. the origin of early products (especially the relationship between Aragonese, Catalan, and Valencian workshops);
4. the relationship between Malagan and Valencian lustreware;
5. the definition of the so-called 'Pula style';
6. the existence of common but lesser-known decorated and coarse-ware pottery

### 1. Transition

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, pottery production differed greatly between the Christian Aragonese-Catalan territory and the Islamic Valencian area. In the northern Christian kingdoms pottery had a reduced fabric, with surface decoration either minimal or absent altogether. Technology was unrefined with a limited range of forms restricted largely to cooking pots and water storage vessels. The use of pottery was complemented with

other materials, such as wood or metal. In contrast, in the Muslim territories the production of ceramics had become highly developed, acquiring techniques such as glazing, sgraffito, and lustreware, and employing a wide variety of forms, from toys to huge storage jars with applied decoration. The market was also very complex, with both local and regional workshops as well as those specialising in pottery exports (Azuar *et al*, in press).

At the beginning of fourteenth century this panorama changed. Glazing techniques were introduced into Catalonia and reduced fabrics were slowly abandoned; decorated products appeared, and the range of forms widened. Something similar happened in Aragon, where pottery decorated in green and brown on a white background was suddenly produced in quantity. In the newly Christian kingdom of Valencia, there was a similar change, which merits further analysis.

The pottery industry in the Valencia area began at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, inheriting Islamic production traditions (in fact most potters were Muslims until a late date) and incorporating most of the Islamic forms, although with some slight variations. Forms more deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Christian society, such as those associated with eating habits, imitate pottery from the Catalonia area; for example, cooking pots in reduced fabrics which only became lead-glazed much later, or dishes (*talladors*) derived from wooden forms and unknown in Islamic culture. The rest of the pottery forms were taken directly from the Islamic range (e.g. those for

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that very similar pottery in green and brown was being produced at a number of non-Muslim centres across the north-western Mediterranean, with very similar dates and stylistic evolution to the Spanish examples (eg Berti, Capelli & Francovich 1986).

#### 4. Early Valencian lustrewares

Martínez Cavió (1982) has argued that during the lifetime of Felipe Boil I (?-1348), lord of Manises, or Pedro Boil II (1348-61), Malagan potters moved to Manises bringing lustreware techniques with them. In contrast, López Elum (1984) argues that their arrival was earlier, at the beginning of the century, because of the interventions of Pedro Boil I (who was sent to Granada as political ambassador of Jaime II in 1309-10). In support of his arguments, López Elum cites a document of 1325 in which Manises potters take an order for small bowls or *escudillas* 'operis terre picte consimilis operi Maleche' ('piece of earthenware in the same technique as Malaga').

The Nasrid origin for Valencian production of lustreware pottery seems not to be in doubt so the products of both centres are expected to be very similar. However, the similarities may not be so strong as recent works seem to demonstrate, such as Isabel Flores (1988) on the blue and lustreware pottery from the Alhambra, and Rafael Puertas (1992) on lustreware from Malaga. Pottery forms seem to be slightly different, a fact that can be best explained by the specialisation in the customs of the contemporary society, and by the survival and influence of local traditions. There are also differences in decoration. Generally though, the Nasrid influence is obvious in the Valencian pottery produced during the fourteenth century, such as the Early Valencian 'Malagan style' series (Lerma *et al.*, 1984) and the better known 'Pula type', which in turn has an influence over the other Valencian pottery types (green and brown, blue, etc)<sup>1</sup>. However, from the fifteenth century onwards, Manises introduces new themes which are, in their turn, imitated by Nasrid workshops.

#### 5. 'Pula-type' pottery

The name 'Pula-type' comes from the pottery, mainly lustrewares, found in the place of the same name in Sardinia. This group of pottery has been widely studied, for example by Blake (1986) and Berti and Tongiorgi (1985), who have tried to define its origin and characteristics.

From data obtained by chemical and petrological analysis and using wasters found in Valencia and Paterna, it now seems absolutely certain that this pottery was produced in the Valencian area, even if

the sources of inspiration belong to the Nasrid world (Blake *et al.*, 1992).

The definition given to this production is too elastic, however, and the suggested chronology (1325-1400) is too broad. As Blake points out, the finds from Pula are an heterogeneous group of vessels, mainly lustreware but with a very wide range of decorative motifs. So, for example, the finds include pottery in overall lustreware and lustreware and blue, and sometimes the gold lustre is used to define the profile of the drawing, and in others it is used to fill it. The arrangement of motifs also varies considerably and includes stylised vegetal motifs in radial patterns, geometric motifs as well as zoomorphic decoration. Elsewhere, Berti and Tongiorgi (1974) divide the *bacini* from this series into four decorative categories, with further subdivisions, but it is suggested that further in-depth study of this group is vital to try to establish a chronological classification rather than one focussed on styles of decoration.

#### 6. Other pottery

Finally, mention should be made of other contemporary medieval pottery types which are less well known than those discussed above, such as the green and brown decorated pottery produced in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), which imitated the Paterna production (Turina 1986) although more schematically. There is also a type of decorated pottery (green on white) from Seville, only recently recognised, which has similar characteristics (Lopez Torres & Rueda 1994).

Today, pottery studies in Spain are turning increasingly towards coarsewares, which are still rather poorly understood. In the Valencia area, Paterna and Manises exported both decorated and coarseware pottery, but in the production of the latter they competed with many other workshops whose products were locally distributed. It also seems that the coarsewares from the southern part of the province of Alicante have more parallels with pottery from Murcia than with Valencian products. Taken together with the apparent proliferation of small workshops, there are many parallels to production in the previous pre-Conquest Almohade period, and against this background, only places like Paterna or Manises seem exceptional and more actively commercial in outlook.

#### Footnotes

1. Blake *et al.* (1992) consider as unconvincing the decorative similarities which, in my opinion, exist between 'Schematic-style' green and brown wares and 'Pula-type' wares, although Pascual & Martí (1987) cite only one example which would support this. But there is copious archaeological evidence

for the changes in green and brown wares from the first so-called 'Classic' style into the 'Schematic' style (see Fig. 1). 'Classic' green and brown wares are stratigraphically associated with lustrewares of 'Malagan style' and, in turn, 'Schematic' green and brown wares with lustrewares of 'Pula-type'. There are so many differences between the two recognised styles of green and brown wares that it is impossible to understand their evolution without considering the role of outside influences on their production. For the most part, the decorated pieces in 'Schematic' style are small and appear to have been produced quickly, even carelessly; nevertheless, in those vessels of larger size, the decoration is often more detailed, displaying with clarity the motif of the 'hom' or 'tree of life' in a radial arrangement, in a thoroughly developed artistic style which is very similar to the motif most characteristic of 'Pula-ware' (see the range of motifs in Pascual & Martí 1986b, fig 56-57 and 72-74).

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## Résumé

Les XIII, XIV et XV<sup>ème</sup> siècles en Espagne marquent une transition dans la fabrication de la poterie à l'est de la péninsule d'une production Islamique à une production Chrétienne. La chronologie de quelques styles particuliers de décoration de poterie à travers l'Espagne a été déterminée d'après des critères de style et d'après leur représentations picturale dans des tableaux contemporains. Les vaisselles vertes et marrons semblent être apparues au début de cette période et la chronologie de la poterie mordorée du type 'Pula' est discutée. D'autres types de poterie médiévale moins bien connus existent aussi. Les recherches sur la poterie en Espagne se concentre de plus en plus sur les céramiques plus grossières, qui sont encore aujourd'hui mal comprises.

## Zusammenfassung

Vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert fand im Osten der Halbinsel der Übergang von islamischer zu christlicher Töpfereimanufaktur statt. An Hand stilistischer Kriterien und ihrer Darstellung in der zeitgenössischen Malerei wird eine Chronologie bestimmter Dekorationsstile über ganz Spanien erstellt. Es scheint, daß die grüne und braune Ware zum Beginn dieses Zeitraums aufkam. Die Chronologie der Glanzware vom "Pula Typ" wird erörtert ebenso wie andere weniger bekannte, mittelalterliche Tonwarenarten. Mehr und mehr konzentrieren sich die Untersuchungen in Spanien auch auf die einfache Grobware, über die wir immer noch wenig wissen.

