

This is a repository copy of *A New Approach to Mīnā'ī Wares: Chronology and Decoration*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/141057/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

McClary, Richard Piran orcid.org/0000-0001-5663-5708 (2017) A New Approach to Mīnā'ī Wares: Chronology and Decoration. *Persica*. pp. 1-20.

<https://doi.org/10.2143/PERS.25.0.3214904>

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

A NEW APPROACH TO *MĪNĀ'Ī* WARES: CHRONOLOGY AND DECORATION

Richard Piran McClary
Edinburgh University

Mīnā'ī wares are recognised as the most luxurious ceramic wares ever conceived and executed in the Muslim world,¹ yet they remain surprisingly poorly understood. Much of the current literature on *mīnā'ī* follows the general chronology, if not sites of production, as laid out by Arthur Lane in 1947.² However, as early as 1976 Ernst Grube hinted that the established chronology of *mīnā'ī* production may need to be pushed back.³ The case for a reassessment of the chronology of production is one of the main suggestions put forward in this paper. Although it has been claimed that there is no evidence for the production of *mīnā'ī* wares prior to 1180,⁴ the palace kiosk of the Rūm Saljūq sultan Kilij Arslān II in Konya, securely dated to 1174, is known to have been decorated with a large number of *mīnā'ī* tiles. That building can be used to push the chronology of the development of *mīnā'ī* back into the early years of the 1170's.

Although much attention has been given to the vessels, few words have been devoted to the significant corpus of architectural *mīnā'ī* tiles, executed in exactly the same manner and featuring similar styles of decoration.⁵ By bridging the gap between the study of ceramic vessels and the study of ceramic revetments more can be understood about both categories of ceramic wares. The far larger corpus of vessels and vessel sherds can aid in the understanding of the tiles, while the more secure dating for many of the tiles can help in establishing a more accurate date range for similar vessels. It is the study of the tiles, and how their decoration relates to the vessels, that comprises the greater part of this study.

The *mīnā'ī* technique

All *mīnā'ī* wares have a stonepaste (fritware) body.⁶ The well-known treatise written by the Kāshānī potter Abū'l-Qāsim in 700/1301 contains a recipe for stonepaste. In it he calls for a

¹ E. Grube, *Islamic Pottery of the Eight to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, London, 1976, p.208.

² A. Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, London, 1947, p.42. See a similar chronology, with the wares featuring large figures though to have been produced first and the miniature ones later, in R. Holod, "Event and Memory: The Freer Gallery's Siege Scene Plate", *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 42, 2012, pp.194-220; p.210.

³ Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, p.198 states that it is impossible to establish unequivocally that the entire body of *mīnā'ī* painted pottery was produced only after the middle of the twelfth century.

⁴ O. Watson, *Ceramics From Islamic Lands*, London, 2004, p.363. R. Mason, M. Tite, S. Paynter and C. Salter, "Advances in Polychrome Ceramics in Islamic World of the 12th Century AD", *Archaeometry* 43 (2), 2001, pp.191-209; p.192 gives the timespan of production as the last thirty years of the twelfth century.

⁵ There are at least 54 full or partial *mīnā'ī* tiles believed to have come from the palace kiosk in Konya, along with twelve other tiles (or fragments) which cannot be associated with any specific building. Of those, one is in the British Museum, one in the David Collection in Copenhagen, while three are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. At least five *mīnā'ī* tiles or tile fragments are in the museum at Kunya Urgench in Turkmenistan, with a further complete tile in the National Museum in Ashgabat.

⁶ R. Mason, *Shine Like the Sun; Lustre Painted and Associated Pottery from the Medieval Middle East*, Costa Mesa, 2004, p.131. In addition, an octagonal tile of unknown size, with interlocking octagonal decoration and featuring blue, red and turquoise on a white base, is in the possession of Jean Soustiel. See J. Soustiel and Y. Porter, *Tombs of Paradise: The Shah-e Zende in Samarkand and the architectural ceramics of Central Asia*, Saint-Rémy-en-l'Eau, 2003, p.222.

ratio of ten parts of quartz, called sugar stone (*shukar-i sang*), ground and sieved through coarse silk, combined with one part ground glass frit and one part of white clay.⁷ The majority of *mīnā'ī* wares are decorated over a white glaze, but there are several examples of both vessels and tiles where the painted decoration is over a turquoise glazed base. In almost all cases the wares would have been fired in an enameller's kiln, called a muffle.⁸ The palette used to decorate *mīnā'ī* wares includes a blue which appears to sink into the glaze, a glossy blue which stands out on the glaze, along with turquoise, brownish red, manganese purple, green, brick red, black and white enamels. In addition, many wares have gold leaf added on top.⁹

***Mīnā'ī* collecting and originality**

Ceramics decorated with *mīnā'ī* painting are extremely popular now, but this was not always so. In the early twentieth century there was a taste for collecting lustre, but not *mīnā'ī*.¹⁰ This is revealed by taking a brief look at the accession numbers of most *mīnā'ī* wares in major museums, which tend to start in the 1920s,¹¹ although a tile in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, examined in detail below, was lent to them in 1894. This makes that tile among the earliest examples of *mīnā'ī* ware to have entered a major museum collection.¹²

To attempt the analysis of the decoration of a *mīnā'ī* vessel without having conducted a technical study beforehand is to approach thin ice with a heavy foot. Many of the vessels in public and private collections have experienced such extensive repainting and restoration that their current appearance may be radically different from when they were first made.¹³ A bowl in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha has been shown to have experienced extensive overpainting and to have a much altered inscription. Only sixty percent of the inscription

⁷ See J. Allan, "Abū'l Qāsim's Treatise on Ceramics", *IRAN* Vol. XI, 1973, pp.111-20; pp.113-4. Analysis by Mason of 55 samples of Kāshān stonepaste petrofabrics has shown they consist predominantly of quartz grains. The samples show a high content of chert (fine grained microcrystalline sedimentary rock), being up to 50% of the body, with an additional 5-10% crystalline quartz. In addition there is 2% each of muscovite (mica) and opaques, plus up to 1% brown haematized amphibole. See Mason, *Shine Like the Sun*, p.206. These findings show that the recipe given by Abū'l-Qāsim is more a general guide than an exact description of the constituent components of Kāshānī stonepaste.

⁸ R. Hobson, *A Guide to the Islamic Pottery of the Near East*, London, 1932, p.44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁰ O. Watson, "Museums, Collecting, Art History and Archaeology", in *Damaszener Mitteilungen Band II, 1999, Gedenkschrift für Michael Meinecke (1941-1995)*, Mainz, 2000, pp.421-32; p.426. The Goodman Collection, one of the earliest major private collections of Islamic pottery, contained twenty complete pieces of lustre, but not a single piece of *mīnā'ī*. See *ibid.*, pp.426-8 for a study of the early history of *mīnā'ī* collecting. In contrast, Pancaroğlu argues that *mīnā'ī* was one of the most sought-after ceramic types in early-twentieth century Europe (O. Pancaroğlu, *Perpetual Glory; Medieval Islamic Ceramics from the Harvey B. Plotnick Collection*, New Haven and London, 2007, p.114). The discrepancy may lie in the definition of 'early' in this case.

¹¹ For example, of the 89 examples of *mīnā'ī* wares in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, one of the largest collections, consisting of a mix of sherds, tiles and full vessels, only two were acquired before 1912, with sixteen more entering the collection before 1917. The rest of the objects were acquired after 1920.

¹² In addition, a few *mīnā'ī* sherds and a partially complete bowl were given to the British Museum in 1891 (acc. no. 1891.06-26.64). Watson, *Museums*, p.427.

¹³ Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, p.195. Since Grube made this point, many of the better known pieces in public collections have been scientifically examined, and much of the more recent overpainting has been removed. The same cannot be said for most privately held objects. See also O. Watson, "Fakes and Forgeries in Islamic Pottery", *Oriente Moderno* Nr. 2, Kunst und Kunsthandwerk im Islam 2: Bamberger Symposium der Islamischen Kunst 25. – 27. Juli 1996, 2004, pp.517-39; p.523.

consists of original sherds, with the rest being an amalgam of random sherds from other vessels.¹⁴ For this reason, the *mīnā'ī* tiles removed from the palace kiosk of Kilij Arslān II in Konya, along with excavated vessel and tile sherds from across the Islamic world, can act as a control. While often fragmentary, they remain for the most part unmolested and unrestored, and thus are more reliable as evidence. Even though the surviving corpus of *mīnā'ī* tiles is small, examples of almost all the technical, decorative and iconographic elements seen in the far larger corpus of vessels can be found. In addition to those on a white base, turquoise glazed tiles, of eight-pointed star form and featuring figural decoration, along with similarly coloured lozenge-shaped filler tiles, can be seen in several collections around the world.

***Mīnā'ī* dating**

The widespread diffusion of *mīnā'ī* ceramics from Iran is clear, based on the number of different vessels and sherds found around the Middle East and as far east as Afghanistan¹⁵ and Turkmenistan. Alas, a firm dating for their production and distribution is far harder to ascertain. Studying tiles that were attached to a datable structure can provide a *terminus ante quem* for their production and importation. Such a date can then be tentatively extrapolated to cover vessels with near-identical decoration and painting techniques.

Precedents for the decoration of *mīnā'ī* wares

It appears likely that the uniquely Persian style of figural painting, seen in later manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, developed in the ceramic arts of Iran in the twelfth century. The wider colour palette employed in the production of *mīnā'ī* wares indicates that it was the most likely forum for the development of the techniques subsequently employed in the arts of the book.¹⁶ Being a unicum, the single surviving pre-Mongol painted manuscript, a copy of *Varqa va Gulshāh* attributed to the late-twelfth to early-thirteenth century and now in Istanbul,¹⁷ cannot be forced to stand in for an otherwise unknown school of painting. In order to find any possible non-ceramic precedents for the techniques used to decorate *mīnā'ī* wares, it is to larger-scale mural painting that attention must be focused. References have previously been made to the wall paintings in Pendzhikent, thought to date from the seventh or eighth

¹⁴ L. Michelsen, and J. Olafsdotter, "Telling Tales: Investigating a *Mīnā'ī* Bowl", in D. Roxburgh (ed.), *Envisioning Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Honour of Renata Holod*, Leiden/Boston, 2014, pp.66-87; p.73 and p.83. See also *ibid.*, p.67, fig.4.1, p.80, fig.4.8 and p.82, fig.4.13.

¹⁵ Three sherds of *mīnā'ī* ware were collected, between 2003 and 2005, from an elite mountain-top residence near the Ghūrid-era minaret of Jam in Afghanistan. See A. Gascoigne and R. Bridgman, "Pottery from Jām: A Medieval Ceramic Corpus from Afghanistan", *IRAN* Vol. XLVIII, 2010, pp.107-51; p.115 and p.117, fig.3, nos. 2, 3 and 4, as well as p.144, fig.15.A for a colour image of one of the sherds.

¹⁶ Robert Hillenbrand has recently argued that ceramics, especially wasters, were a far cheaper medium upon which to practice painting than either paper or parchment (R. Hillenbrand, "Content versus Context in Samanid Epigraphic Pottery", in A. Peacock and D. Tor (eds.), *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World*, London, 2015, pp.56-107; p.64). For a study of the connections between painting on ceramics and painting on paper in the thirteenth century, see R. Hillenbrand, "The Relationship Between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics in 13th-Century Iran", in R. Hillenbrand (ed.), *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia*, Costa Mesa, 1994, pp.134-45.

¹⁷ M. Simpson, "The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker", *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 12, 1981, pp.15-24; p.21. For a detailed study of the manuscript see A. Melikian-Chirvani, "Le roman de Varqe et Golshāh: Essai sur les rapports de l'esthétique littéraire et de l'esthétique plastique dans l'Iran pré-mongol, suivi de la traduction du poème", *Arts Asiatiques* 22, 1970, pp.1-264.

centuries.¹⁸ However, a more contemporaneous example, consisting of a large stucco panel, can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York¹⁹ (fig. 1). The style of painting in that panel, which is very similar to that used on *mīnā'ī* wares but on a larger scale, is a continuation of that used to decorate the walls of the second Banijurid palace in Hulbuk (late tenth to mid-eleventh century), in southern Tajikistan.²⁰

When looking for precedents of the style of *mīnā'ī* wares in earlier ceramics produced in the Islamic world, there appears to be some degree of continuity from the epigraphic Sāmānid wares of the tenth century. It was in that tradition where the use of epigraphy and pseudo epigraphy around the rim of vessels, so commonly seen on *mīnā'ī* vessels, was first employed in the context of Islamic ceramics.²¹ Similarly, the large-scale figures seen on what appears to be the latter phase of *mīnā'ī* wares are not entirely dissimilar to those found in the polychrome figural buff wares produced during the Sāmānid period in Nishapur. They often feature Kufic epigraphy around the rim with large seated figures in the centre, or horses with riders.²² The combination of oversize polychrome figures on a predominantly white ground and the extensive use of geometric patterns and Kufic epigraphy suggests some degree of continuity between the tenth-century Sāmānid and the twelfth-century Saljūq wares. It is on *mīnā'ī* wares that elements of the two different Sāmānid ceramic aesthetic strains were fused. This is despite the technique of both vessel production and method of decoration having changed significantly over time.²³

A more suitable format than *mīnā'ī* painted tiles for the monumental and long-lasting display of polychrome images would be hard to imagine. This is due to the combination of the durability of the material, the lack of wear suffered by tiles, their individual small scale and concomitant detail, combined with the large areas that can be covered with multiple tiles. The ability to take miniature detail and combine it with monumental scale is the key to understanding the phenomenon of *mīnā'ī* painted tiles.

One of the most pressing questions revolves around the issue of why the *mīnā'ī* technique fell out of use after such a relatively short period.²⁴ There was a prevalence of lustre-painted tiles in the second decade of the thirteenth century in Anatolia. In addition, there was also widespread use of the lustre technique on ceramics produced in Iran in the years following the efflorescence of artistic and architectural development, after the conversion of the Ilkhanids to Islam, at the end of the thirteenth century. This may be seen as

¹⁸ Simpson, *The Narrative*, p.22.

¹⁹ The section, painted on stucco, is dated to the thirteenth century and measures 49.5cm x 59.1cm (acc. no. 52.20.1).

²⁰ P. Siméon, "Hulbuk: Architecture and Material Culture of the Capital of the Banijurids in Central Asia (ninth-eleventh centuries)", *Muqarnas* XXIX, 2012, pp.385-421; p.407 and p.409, fig.21a. A similar style of painting can be seen in the Qarakhānid wall paintings from the palace in Samarkand. See Y. Karev, "Qarakhanid Wall Painting in the Citadel of Samarqand: First Report and Preliminary Observations", *Muqarnas* XXII, 2005, pp.45-84.

²¹ Hillenbrand, *Content versus Context*, p.66 states that the use of pseudo-epigraphy on Sāmānid wares allowed for the creation of unbroken patterns that were broadly based on Arabic letter forms.

²² See 40.170.14 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art for a large seated figure on a *mīnā'ī* bowl with epigraphy around the rim.

²³ See Watson, *Ceramics From*, p.214 for an epigraphic example of Sāmānid ware, and *ibid.*, p.219 for a bowl with geometric decoration. For figural examples from Nishapur featuring Kufic epigraphy around the edge see Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, p.83, fig.42, and C. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period*, New York, 1973, p.45, fig.62a. *Ibid.*, pp.20-1 discusses the bowl and makes comparisons to both Sasanian silverwares and the seventh- to eighth-century wall paintings at Pendzhikent.

²⁴ Writing in 700/1301, Abū'l-Qāsim states that the production of seven-colour vessels, meaning *mīnā'ī*, had passed into oblivion (Allan, *Abū'l-Qāsim*, p.115).

a testament to the success of some of the aesthetic elements pioneered in *mīnā'ī* wares, but does not provide an answer as to why lustre had overtaken *mīnā'ī* so completely by the early thirteenth century across the wider Iranian world.

Architectural *mīnā'ī* tiles

We now turn to the most significant known example of the use of *mīnā'ī* tiles in an architectural context. The palace kiosk in Konya, located at the north end of the citadel, was a two story building constructed from brick and timber with a square plan and a balcony supported on brick *muqarnas* brackets²⁵ (fig. 3 (L)). The interior and the exterior of the upper section of the building were decorated with tiles, both monochrome and *mīnā'ī*. The dating of tiles from the kiosk is based on a number of different pieces of evidence. The (now lost) epigraphic band of tiles from the north façade gave the name of Kilij Arslān II²⁶ (r. 551-88/1156-92). In addition, the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelabi recorded a date for the building of 1173-4, which must have been based on a, now missing, inscription.²⁷ The most compelling evidence for the date of the kiosk is the result of dendrochronological analysis of timbers from the building, and comparison with a large tree ring database. This resulted in the establishment of a secure date of 1174,²⁸ which corroborates the date given by Çelabi. The presence of *mīnā'ī* tiles on a dated building, and not on any later Rûm Saljûq buildings, suggests that the tiles were imported and added to the building in the initial phase of construction. Despite the wide range of tiles seen in the Sivas hospital and tomb complex built at the behest of 'Izz al-Dīn Kay Kāwūs I in the second decade of the thirteenth century, there are no known examples featuring the *mīnā'ī* technique.²⁹ Furthermore, the royal palace of the Rûm Saljûqs at Beyşehir, south of Konya (*circa* 632/1235), had extensive lustre tile decoration, with evidence of on-site production of ceramics,³⁰ but no *mīnā'ī* tiles. Assuming the date of 1174 for the production and importation of the tiles to Anatolia makes them among the earliest datable examples of *mīnā'ī* painted stonepaste.³¹ This in turn allows for the proposal of a hypothesis regarding the date of other wares. A bowl in the British Museum³² features a seated figure with almost identical hand positions, as well as sphinxes of the type seen on a tile from the kiosk (fig. 7). A previously unpublished tile in the Victoria and Albert Museum (figs. 2, 3 (R) and 8 (R)) is of a very similar type to ones formerly attached to the Kilij Arslān II palace kiosk in Konya, and now held in Berlin, Istanbul and New York. It is presumed here to be from the Konya kiosk, and is assessed on that basis.

²⁵ For a study of the kiosk see F. Sarre, *Der kiosk von Konia*, Berlin, 1936.

²⁶ The tiles can be seen in *ibid.*, pl.4. See R. McClary, *The Rûm Saljûq Architecture of Anatolia 1170-1220*, Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2015, p.205 for a translation of the epigraphy.

²⁷ Ü. Bates, "Evliya Çelabi's Comments on the Saljûqs of Rûm", in R. Hillenbrand, (ed.) *The Art of the Saljûqs in Iran and Anatolia*, Costa Mesa, 1994, pp.257-62; p.260.

²⁸ P. Kuniholm, "Dendrokronoloji yöntemi ile tarih olmuş osmanlı antıları", in U. Baram and L. Carroll (eds.), *Osmanlı Arkeolojisi*, Istanbul, 2004, pp.100-140; p.140.

²⁹ For a detailed study of the hospital in Sivas, see McClary, *The Rûm Saljûq*, pp.275-380.

³⁰ R. Arık, "Architectural Tiles from the Kubad-Abad Excavations" in B. Böhlendorf-Arslan, A. Uysal, and J. Witte-Orr, (eds.), *Çanak, Late Antique and Medieval Pottery And Tiles In Mediterranean Archaeological Contexts, BYZAS 7*, İstanbul, 2007, pp.489-500; pp.496-8.

³¹ There is also a *mīnā'ī* sherd dated Ramaḍān 563/1168 in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin. My thanks go to Robert Hillenbrand for bringing the existence of this sherd to my attention.

³² Acc. no. ME OA 1930.7-19.64.

Another star tile from Konya, featuring a seated figure in the centre with associated turquoise and cobalt blue lozenge surrounds, can be found in the Louvre in Paris.³³

A close inspection of the glazed surface of the tile in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows that the thin coating of blue enamel has taken on the crazing pattern of the glaze beneath, thus proving that, unlike the colour applied to many vessels, it cannot be a later addition (fig. 2). The same can be seen in the surviving traces of gilding. The unglazed rear of the *mīnā'ī* tile in the Victoria and Albert Museum allows for a better understanding of the nature of the body of the object than is possible with the majority of vessels, which are glazed on both sides. The stonepaste body can be seen to be irregularly bonded together, with extensive joints, fissures and seams visible across the entire surface (fig. 3 (R)). This suggests that, despite the decorative and material similarities, the fact that the tiles were thicker than vessels and the rear was not intended to be visible allowed for the body of tiles to be a little more crudely executed than was the case with vessels.

The style of painting used to decorate *mīnā'ī* wares is clearly suited to close scrutiny, and such a miniaturist technique seems at first glance to be ill-suited to observation from a distance. However, a reconstruction of the original composite appearance based on the fragments of square *mīnā'ī* tiles thought to be from the exterior of the palace kiosk in Konya and now in Istanbul,³⁴ shows that the composition becomes more than the sum of its parts (fig. 11). Indeed, over large areas it would often have been the case that the vegetal elements dominated the figural.

The brushstrokes employed on a bowl in the British Museum (fig. 7 (L)) and the *mīnā'ī* tile in the Victoria and Albert Museum are very similar. The quality of the painting on two bowls in the British Museum which feature sphinxes,³⁵ and the corpus of tiles from the kiosk in Konya, is somewhat more free and less precise than the vessels signed by, or attributed stylistically to, Abū Zayd.³⁶ Given the presumed earlier date of the tiles than any of the dated vessels, the difference in brush strokes, and the longevity of Abū Zaid,³⁷ it appears likely that the vessels and tiles under discussion in this article predate the more refined works executed in the Abū Zaid style. They may be seen to represent the first phase of the development of *mīnā'ī* painted ceramics. Furthermore, the poorer quality of the painting on many of the tiles and vessels, when compared with the artistry of Abū Zaid, suggests that they were executed by different, and less technically gifted, artists.

Similarly, the headgear, hairstyle and morphology of the leonine body of the sphinxes are almost identical on a *mīnā'ī* bowl, a detail of which can be seen in figure 7 (L), a Konya tile (fig. 7 (R)), and many other examples. The same can be said for the delineation of the point at which the wing is attached to the body. In addition, two similar bowls in the British

³³ The composition consists of thirteen tiles, acc. nos. OA 7254 a - m. The Louvre also has a further five fragmentary kite-shaped tiles on a turquoise ground from the same building, acc. nos. 936/267 – 936/271. See Sarre, *Der Kiosk*, pl.7.

³⁴ Three further fragments of the square exterior tiles survive, held in Berlin. See Sarre, *Der Kiosk*, pl.5. The fragments feature corner sections of the decoration, as well as the lower legs of the horse seen in the larger Istanbul sections.

³⁵ Acc. nos. 1930,0719,62 and 1930,0719,63.

³⁶ For the full known corpus of works signed by Abū Zayd see S. Blair, “A Brief Biography of Abū Zayd”, *Muqarnas* XXV, 2008, pp.155-76; pp.169-72.

³⁷ He signed and dated vessels between the years of 1186 and 1219-20 (*ibid.*, pp.169-72). It was only during the first two years that the vessels are *mīnā'ī*, as for the rest of the period only lustre ware bears his name.

Museum,³⁸ thought to have been acquired in Rayy,³⁹ feature very similarly executed sphinxes and seated figures to those found on the tiles from Konya.

Origins

The understanding of the corpus of *mīnā'ī* wares would be greatly aided by a comprehensive database of the intact wares and sherds. Whilst there are many objects in private hands, a catalogue of all the holdings in the major public and institutional collections around the world would be a great aid to the scholarly understanding of this type of ceramics.⁴⁰ The existence of a limited number of other tiles, which do not appear to be associated with Konya, indicates that there was likely to have been a far larger corpus of *mīnā'ī* painted tiles employed on, presumably palatial, buildings across the wider Iranian world.⁴¹ A number of fragments of *mīnā'ī* tiles, excavated by Soviet archaeologists and now on display at the museum in Kunya Urgench, survive from the site of the later mausoleum of Najm al-Dīn al-Kubra (figs. 4 and 6). Of the five tile fragments in Kunya Urgench⁴² one is part of either a square or eight-pointed tile and features the lower leg of a horse, delineated in a very similar manner to the square-tile fragments from Konya⁴³ (fig. 11 (L)). Another kite-shaped tile from the same site features red outlined vegetal decoration in gold leaf on a blue ground (fig. 4 (L)), which is also very similar to tiles used in Konya, over 3,500km away. The tiles in Kunya Urgench represent the eastern-most extent of *mīnā'ī* tiles, while two sherds of vessels recently excavated at Merv, one of which features a face⁴⁴ (fig. 5 (L)), mark the eastern extent of vessels. Lest it be thought that the distribution of *mīnā'ī* wares was restricted to lands under Islamic rule, a figural vessel sherd recently excavated at Dvin, in Armenia, demonstrates the wider distribution of such wares beyond the Islamic world.⁴⁵ The style of decoration of the sherd from Dvin, in the west, is almost identical to the sherd excavated in Merv, with the blue leaves and red fruit on a branch, and two short lines used to delineate the mouth and nose of the figures on both sherds.

³⁸ Acc. nos. ME OA 1930.7-19.23 and ME OA 1930.7-19.24.

³⁹ Hobson, *A Guide*, p.38 states that fragments were acquired at Rayy by F. D. Goodman, and given to the British Museum in 1891.

⁴⁰ This is a project currently being undertaken by the author.

⁴¹ See Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, p.209, fig.250 for a tile in the Keir Collection (acc. no. VAMExh.1969, no.139). The Freer Sackler Gallery has a kite-shaped tile with a turquoise ground, measuring 9.7 x 7.6 x 1.8cm (acc. no. FSC-A-28), formerly in the possession of Myron Bement Smith. There is an arrowhead-shaped tile in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (acc. no. 20.120.104), along with two larger square tiles.

⁴² In addition a nine-pointed star shaped *mīnā'ī* tile featuring a horse and rider from the same site is held in the National Museum in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

⁴³ The fragment, acc. no. KDMM no.1534, measures 2 x 3cm and has been reset, post-breakage, with a fragment of blue monochrome tile.

⁴⁴ The sherd was excavated in 2009 and measures 1.8cm across. The face features a variation of the dot and line technique to delineate the mouth and nose.

⁴⁵ The sherd, found in a twelfth to thirteenth-century layer, was excavated in 2008 by Dr. Astighik Babajangan. Personal communication (11/11/2015). In addition a magnificent, and largely intact, *mīnā'ī* bowl has been excavated 66km north of Dvin, at Aparan. See A. Kalantaryan (ed.), *Armenia in the Cultural Context of East and West: Ceramics and Glass (4th-14th centuries)*, Yerevan, 2009, p.128 and pls. XXXIX-XL.

Production site

There is a general consensus in the more recent literature that Kāshān is likely to have been the primary, and probably sole, production site for *mīnā'ī* wares.⁴⁶ The only relatively recent exception to this view is the attribution of a pilgrim flask in the Khalili Collection to an Anatolian atelier, based on the somewhat duller colour palette in comparison to most other wares.⁴⁷ However, based on the appearance of two reunited sections of a sherd in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,⁴⁸ each of which has different levels of colour loss and degradation (fig. 5 (R)), it is more likely that the Khalili flask was also produced in Kāshān, not Anatolia.⁴⁹ The flask probably lost its colour as a result of burial and subsequent reaction with the soil, and should not be seen as evidence of another production site.

Watson has suggested that Rayy can be eliminated as a production site.⁵⁰ Although Pope's mention of wasters having been found at Rayy⁵¹ remains problematic, even he acknowledged the primacy of Kāshān as a production centre.⁵² While there is still no definitive proof that all the *mīnā'ī* wares were produced in Kāshān,⁵³ a comprehensive programme of petrographic analysis has shown that all the *mīnā'ī* wares tested by Mason were made in Kāshān.⁵⁴ Future excavations and testing may shine more light on this subject, but for now there is no case for upsetting the apple cart regarding the accepted site for the manufacture of *mīnā'ī* wares. The destruction of Kāshān and the killing of the population in 621/1224, as reported by the chronicler Ibn al-Athīr,⁵⁵ may well have been the final nail in the coffin for *mīnā'ī* production.⁵⁶ While craftsmen skilled in the art of lustre production were working in Anatolia for the Rūm Saljūq sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Kay Qubādh I (r. 1220-1237),⁵⁷ no dated examples of *mīnā'ī* are known after 616/1219.⁵⁸ It may be that having fallen out of fashion in the latter part of the twelfth century, the skills finally died with the Mongol devastation of Kāshān.

⁴⁶ Watson, *Ceramics From*, p.363. Mason, *Shine Like the Sun*, p.131 offers the same opinion.

⁴⁷ E. Grube, *Cobalt and Lustre; The first centuries of Islamic pottery*, London, 1994, p.211.

⁴⁸ Acc. no. 20.120.126 consists of two pieces, broken and re-joined.

⁴⁹ No *mīnā'ī* wasters are known to have been found in Anatolian excavations.

⁵⁰ Watson, *Ceramics From*, p.363.

⁵¹ A. Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art From Prehistoric Times to the Present*, Volume II, Oxford and New York, 1939, p.1537 notes that six wasters had been found in Rayy by 1939, while at least 60 wasters, along with kilns, had been found in Kāshān by the same point in time.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.1568. Pope cites numerous contemporary written sources that attest to the reputation of Kāshān as a key centre of ceramics production.

⁵³ K. Koss, B. McCarthy, E. Chase and D. Smith, "Analysis of Persian Painted *Minai* Ware", in B. McCarthy, E. Chase, L. Cort, J. Douglas, and P. Jett (eds.), *Scientific Research on Historic Asian Ceramics; Proceedings of the Fourth Forbes Symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art*, London, 2009, pp.33-47; p.34.

⁵⁴ Mason et al., *Advances in Polychrome*, p.202.

⁵⁵ D. Richards (tr.), *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rīkh. Part 3 The Years 589-629/1193-1231: The Ayyubids after Saladin and the Mongol Menace*, Aldershot, 2008, p.246. Ibn al-Athīr states that although the city had initially escaped destruction at the hands of the Mongols, they returned and destroyed the city.

⁵⁶ Watson, *Ceramics From*, p.373 states that all ceramic production virtually ceased in Kāshān for 40 years. In contrast, Fehérvári appears to dismiss the account of Ibn al-Athīr, arguing that Kāshān was spared the Mongol destruction, and that ceramic production continued (G. Fehérvári, *Ceramics of the Islamic World in the Tareq Rajab Museum*, London, 2000, p.148).

⁵⁷ Arik, *Architectural Tiles*, p.496. A kiln was found in the south of the Kubad-Abad palace complex, and the clay used for the tiles came from the nearby Beyşehir Lake.

⁵⁸ O. Watson, "Documentary *Mīnā'ī* and Abū Zaid's Bowls", in R. Hillenbrand (ed.), *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia*, Costa Mesa, 1994, pp.170-80; p.171.

Chronology

Renata Holod proposes a chronology with the wares signed by, and attributed stylistically to, Abū Zayd forming part of the earlier phase of production, and the corpus of wares with a brighter colour palette, such as the Freer battle scene plate, representing the latter phase, from *circa* 1200-1220.⁵⁹ The counter-narrative proposed here puts the Abū Zayd style wares as the product of a later one of probably multiple ateliers. In contrast, the wares with a more free, less precise style of painting,⁶⁰ including the Konya tiles, should be considered as being generally, but not necessarily entirely, earlier. A purely linear process of development, while taxonomically desirable, is of course far too tidy for the real world. It may be assumed, based on the wide range of surviving works in the corpus, that there was a continuum of production of *mīnā'ī* ceramic wares by craftsmen working at multiple levels of excellence, throughout the second half of the twelfth century.

A recent list of known vessels and tiles signed by Abū Zayd covers the period from 1186 to 1219-20, and features both *mīnā'ī* and lustre wares.⁶¹ The *mīnā'ī* bowls are the earliest, with none dated after 1186-87. This means that in a career of *circa* thirty-four years, all the known objects from the first two years, numbering seven bowls, are *mīnā'ī* decorated wares. The rest of the signed objects,⁶² from the following three decades, consist of lustre-painted wares, either vessels or tiles. Such a clear divide does suggest that not only did Abū Zayd stop working in the *mīnā'ī* technique in the late 1180s, but that the method appears to have fallen more generally out of fashion around the same time. Following this line of argument, it may be the case that the vast majority of the surviving undated and unsigned vessels should be viewed as products of the late twelfth rather than the thirteenth century. If we look beyond the work of Abū Zayd, to all the *mīnā'ī* wares dated by epigraphy, a similar pattern can be seen. Of the ten dated examples that are accepted as authentic, (two of which are works of Abū Zayd), eight are from the period between 1180 and 1186-7. It is only the final two that are more recent, with one in Tehran dated 604/1208, and another in the Keir Collection dated 616/1219.⁶³ The dendrochronological evidence for the date of 1174 for the Konya kiosk, and by extension its associated tiles, adds further weight to the case for the development of the miniature style of *mīnā'ī* painted vessels to have occurred nearer the middle than the end of the twelfth century.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Holod, *Event and Memory*, p.210.

⁶⁰ Robert Hillenbrand aptly describes the painting style as being “at once hurried and confident” (Hillenbrand, *The Relationship*, p.138).

⁶¹ See Blair, *A Brief Biography*, pp169-172.

⁶² S. Blair and J. Bloom, “Signatures on Works of Islamic Art and Architecture”, in *Damaszener Mitteilungen Band II*, 1999, *Gedenkschrift für Michael Meinecke (1941-1995)*, Mainz, 2000, pp.49-66; p.54 states that Abū Zayd left more signatures than any other potter in medieval Iran. In addition to the wares signed by Abū Zayd, there is a *mīnā'ī* bowl in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo signed by Abū Tāhir b. Abī Ḥusayn, (*ibid.*, p.55.).

⁶³ Watson, *Documentary Mīnā'ī*, p.171 The Tehran bowl is in the Iran Bastan Museum, no. 3985. See Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, pp.201-2 and pl.143 for the bowl in the Keir Collection.

⁶⁴ Mason, *Shine Like the Sun*, p.266 suggests a date range for the production of *mīnā'ī* wares from between 1175 and 1200.

Arrangement of decorative elements

The collapse of the Konya kiosk in 1907⁶⁵ and the removal, and subsequent dispersal, of the surviving tiles means that their original location in and on the building remains a mystery. However, if the net of inquiry is cast beyond the realm of architecture, and towards smaller objects, some clues emerge. A large *mīnā'ī* vase⁶⁶ hints at the possible composition and arrangement of tiles in an architectural setting (fig. 9 (L)). The lower register features star-and-cross patterns delineated in relief, while the shoulder has a band of relief-moulded *mīnā'ī* figures on horseback. Above is a band of epigraphy, with the neck of the vessel decorated with interlaced vegetal decoration. It is likely that the decoration of palaces, such as the one in Konya, followed a similar composition, albeit on a larger scale. The vessel can be seen, *pars pro toto*, as an example of microarchitecture in regard to ceramic revetments. A rectangular relief tile in Berlin⁶⁷ (fig. 9 (R)), clearly part of a band of decoration featuring hunting scenes, provides evidence for the existence of large-scale compositions of the type seen on the shoulder of the large *mīnā'ī* vase in the Sarikhani collection. Monochrome star-and-cross glazed tiles from the Konya kiosk survive in the Karatay Madrasa Museum in Konya,⁶⁸ as do numerous fragments of tiles featuring depictions of horsemen. The large vase fits somewhere in between the arrangement of tiles on palaces, and the replication of similar compositions in miniature on the surface of vessels. Such uses of the same patterns and forms across a wide range of scale demonstrates the almost fractal-like nature of the vocabulary of ornament employed on *mīnā'ī* wares of all shapes and sizes.

The only major exception is the near ubiquity of epigraphy or pseudo-epigraphy around the inner rim of bowls, yet a virtual absence from the surviving corpus of tiles. The only known example on a tile is large section in the museum at Kunya Urgench in Turkmenistan. It features a black horse below an upper band of white cursive epigraphy, all painted over a turquoise base⁶⁹ (fig. 6).

For an example of the direct connection between not only the imagery seen on tiles and vessels, which is undeniable, but also the format, attention must now turn to a bowl in the David Collection in Copenhagen⁷⁰ (fig. 8 (L)). The inside of the bowl features hexagonal sections containing seated figures with their hands in different *mudra*-like positions. The hexagons are surrounded by six triangles decorated with vegetal patterns, giving the interior decoration of the bowl a very similar appearance to the Konya tiles, although on the Copenhagen bowl none of the figures have halos.

Further evidence of the use of tile-like compositions, of the kind used in Konya, on vessels can be seen on a fragment of a bowl in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (fig. 10 (L)). It has painted decoration that replicates in miniature the composition of wall

⁶⁵ M. Önge, *Conservation of Cultural Heritage on Alaeddin Hill in Konya from the Nineteenth Century to Present Day*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 2011, p.144.

⁶⁶ The vase, measuring 82cm in height, was sold in London by Christies in 2010 (lot 108 in sale 7871). It is now in the Sarikhani Collection in Oxfordshire.

⁶⁷ The tile, on a turquoise ground, is in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin (acc. no. I.6218).

⁶⁸ See McClary, *The Rūm Saljūq*, p.203, figs 3.35 and 3.36.

⁶⁹ The fragment measures 14 x 10cm, the inscription, in Persian, appears to read “two men and one way” (kindly translated by Tarek Teba). In addition, a large turquoise-ground tile in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 67.5, features part of a monumental inscription, but this is of a different nature to the epigraphy seen on the vessels.

⁷⁰ The bowl (acc. no. Isl 166), measures 18.5 cm across. See Pope, *A Survey Vol.5*, pl.659 B.

tiles seen in Konya.⁷¹ In addition, a bowl in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge features a different variation of a similar tile-like decoration,⁷² (fig. 10 (R)). Such objects provide further evidence for the stylistic, aesthetic and formal connections between the tiles on the one hand and the vessels on the other. In this case it is the eight-pointed star tile that is represented, along with small square sections. The only known example of the depiction of a building with tiles on a *mīnā'ī* vessel can be seen on the famous battle-scene plate in the Freer Gallery.⁷³ This adds further weight to the close connection between the *mīnā'ī* ware patterns and the forms used on a macro scale on buildings, and on a micro scale on vessels.

Iconography and meaning

It is to the shared iconography, and the possible meanings, that attention will now turn. In the absence of fact, conjecture flourishes. Sheila Blair disagrees with Firouz Bagherzade's reading of an enthroned prince with courtiers as depicting Shī'ī ceremonies associated with *ta'ziyya*.⁷⁴ Her refutation of such a reading of the images on *mīnā'ī* wares is supported by the presence of such a motif on one of the Konya tiles,⁷⁵ executed for the palace of a Sunnī ruler in Anatolia. Even if the image was intended by the artist to depict such an event, the absence of any epigraphic content makes such a reading of the iconography by the audience in Konya very unlikely.

Ernst Grube describes the arm and hand positions of the seated figures on the *mīnā'ī* wares in the Keir Collection as "ceremonial gestures", but offers no further explanation as to their possible meanings.⁷⁶ While there is no evidence providing a clear answer, the similarities to Buddhist painting styles are striking.⁷⁷

The somewhat larger and more detailed seated figure on the inside of a bowl in the British Museum has a similar striped pattern on the robe to that seen on the Victoria and Albert *mīnā'ī* tile, but with the addition of a rinceaux pattern in the vertical stripes.⁷⁸ In many of the wares, both tiles and vessels, the figures have *tiraz* bands on the upper section of both sleeves. In addition, many have a nimbus in gold with a black outline that does not extend above the headgear. Many vessels, as well as several tiles, feature seated figures with similar hand positions. In addition, the figures painted on the Konya tiles and many of the surviving vessels feature a very particular hairstyle, with the hair being rounder and thicker at the bottom, presumed to be the result of long braids having been looped up. Such a style is

⁷¹ The sherd (acc. no. 20.120.124), is accompanied by two smaller fragments of the same vessel which feature the same pattern.

⁷² The bowl, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, acc. no. C.132.1935, is 20.9cm wide.

⁷³ See Holod, *Event and Memory*, pp.194-220 for a detailed analysis of the plate and its decoration.

⁷⁴ Blair, *A Brief Biography*, p.168. *Ta'ziyya* is the commemoration of the death of Husayn and 'Alī during the first days of Muḥarram, marked by the bestowal of a robe of honour to the *naqīb*, or head of the Shi'ites. See also F. Bagherzadeh, "Iconographie iranienne: Deux illustrations de Xel'at de l'année 583/1187 apr. J.-C.", in L. de Mayer, and E. Haerinck, (eds.) *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis Miscellanea in Honorem Louis Van-den Berghe*, 2 vols. Ghent, 1989, vol. 2, pp.1007-28.

⁷⁵ See McClary, *The Rūm Saljūq*, p.200, fig.3.31 B.

⁷⁶ Grube, *Islamic Pottery*, p.206. *Ibid.*, p.207, illustration No.148, features seated figures, one of which has similar hand positions but in reverse, to those found on the tile in the Victorian and Albert Museum, and the bowl in the British Museum.

⁷⁷ For contemporaneous Tibetan Buddhist examples see S. Kossak and J. Singer, *Sacred Visions; Early Painting from Central Tibet*, New York, 1998, pp.54-90.

⁷⁸ O. Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware*, London, 1985, p.79, fig.51 gives the date 583/1187 (acc. no. 1945, 10-17,261). See *ibid.*, p.70 and pp.84-5 for details of the bowl.

employed on the anthropomorphic figures as well as the mythological sphinxes seen on a number of wares (figs. 7 (L) and (R)), and was not limited to ceramics.⁷⁹

Although the term ‘miniature style’ is more commonly used in the context of lustre wares, it was probably developed for use on *mīnā’ī* wares.⁸⁰ Indeed, it is easier to make a distinction between monumental and miniature styles when studying *mīnā’ī* wares. The works signed by, or associated with, Abū Zayd are generally monumental in style, tending to feature large figures which fill the majority of the surface of the vessel. In contrast, the majority of the anonymous and generally un-dated wares feature a miniature style of painting.⁸¹ This is as true for the Konya tiles as it is for the far larger corpus of bowls, jugs, cups and other vessels.

The images on several vessels are clearly connected to scenes from the *Shāhnāme*, based on either the decoration or the epigraphy.⁸² In contrast, identifying the possible meaning intended by the patron and craftsmen regarding the fragmentary remains of the Konya tiles, which lack any epigraphy or identifiable narrative elements, is far harder. In order to parse any meaning from the decoration, beyond the shop-worn associations with the ubiquitous ‘princely cycle’, the contemporary understanding of some of the imagery employed on the tiles, and similarly decorated vessels, must be investigated. By addressing the perception of the various figural images depicted on the Konya kiosk tiles, a case for viewing the decorative programme of the kiosk as reflecting paradise becomes tenable.

One of the six-pointed star tiles from Konya, now in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin, features a seated musician playing what appears to be an oud (fig. 12 (L)). While music is not mentioned in the description of paradise in the Qur’ān, it formed part of the conception of the pleasurable life and had certain religious associations.⁸³ The image on the tile may be interpreted as reflecting both the luxury of the present world and the promise of the future one.⁸⁴

The figure of the mounted falconer has been argued to have had eschatological meaning in Islamic iconography,⁸⁵ with the falcon being the hunter in paradise.⁸⁶ The

⁷⁹ This style can be seen in greater detail in larger stucco figures of the period. See S. Heidemann, J. Lapérouse and V. Parry, “The Large Audience: Life-Sized Stucco Figures of Royal Princes from the Seljuq Period”, *Muqarnas* XXXI, 2014, pp.35-72; p.36, fig.1 and p.47.

⁸⁰ Watson, *Persian Lustre*, especially p.70.

⁸¹ For the largest selection of published images of *mīnā’ī* vessels painted in a miniature style, see A. Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art From Prehistoric Times to the Present*, Volume V, Oxford and New York, 1938, pls.656-676, along with pl.680 B and pl.694 A.

⁸² For a more recent study see E. Atil, “The Freer Bowl and the Legacy of the *Shāhnāme*”, in *Damaszener Mitteilungen Band II, 1999, Gedenkschrift für Michael Meinecke (1941-1995)*, Mainz, 2000, pp.7-12

⁸³ M. Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Medieval Islamic Symbolism and the Paintings in the Cefalù Cathedral*, Leiden, 1986, pp.106-7. *Ibid.*, p.109 cites Abū Hafs Suhrawardī, who wrote in the twelfth century that in the Sūfī tradition, God reveals himself through music.

⁸⁴ For a counter-argument that images of musicians in Islamic art are usually simply representations of entertainment scenes, see A. Contadini, “Picturing music in Islamic art”, in R. Ward, (ed.), *Court and Craft: A Masterpiece from Northern Iraq*, London, 2014, pp.46-51.

⁸⁵ D. Shepherd, “Saljūq Textiles – a study in iconography”, in R. Hillenbrand (ed.), *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia*, Costa Mesa, 1994, pp.210-7; pp.211-2. She cites as evidence a (fake) “Būyid” silk - see *ibid.*, p.216, fig.204. Although S. Blair, J. Bloom and A. Wardwell, “Reevaluating the Date of the “Būyid” Silks by Epigraphic and Radiocarbon Analysis”, *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 22, 1992, pp.1-41; p.17 demonstrate that the silk in question was actually produced between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, the wider iconographic arguments made by Shepherd still stand. See R. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia: The Arabs in the East*, London, 1993, pl.8 for an image of a Būyid gold medal featuring a similar mounted figure with a falcon, held in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

prominence of the falconer on the fragment of a large square tile from Konya, now in Istanbul (fig. 11 (L)), and the well-established role of sphinxes as the guardians of paradise,⁸⁷ with at least one surviving tile featuring a sphinx (fig. 7 (R)), suggests that the decoration of the Konya kiosk may have been intended to represent heaven on earth. Baer argues that in the minds of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Muslims the sphinx was vividly associated with light, and was regarded as a celestial creature of paradise.⁸⁸ Although sphinxes occur quite often on *mīnā'ī* vessels⁸⁹ and horsemen are common, there do not appear to be any that feature mounted falconers in particular. Of course, it should not be assumed that the presence of a mounted falconer must imply a paradisiacal association. In the context of a hunting scene, such as one seen on a metal inkwell from Herat and dated to the twelfth century,⁹⁰ a more prosaic and exoteric interpretation must be assumed. However, when taken together, the combination of images with possible paradisiacal associations that were attached to the kiosk in Konya makes for a rather more compelling case than any single image could.

When viewed through the prism of paradise imagery, the reason why so many of the figures on the tiles have gold halos begins to make more sense. There is a ubiquity of halos around the heads of figures on both vessels⁹¹ and tiles. This, coupled with the possibility of an association in the minds of the contemporary viewers with paradise, allows us to dismiss the argument that the presence of a halo necessarily denotes the ruler.⁹² To understand why so many of the figures on tiles, and numerous vessels, feature halos it may be instructive to look east, to the long tradition of Buddhist painting in China and Tibet. The addition of halos to all figures in a painted composition was a well-established practice in the religious mural paintings of Buddhist China by the sixth century.⁹³ Even more pertinently, the motif was still in use in Tibetan *thangka* paintings in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹⁴ The halo appears to have been a multivalent symbol, as there are times when it clearly did denote a ruler. However, it may have retained an aura of sanctity in the Iranian context, and when used on multiple figures in the same composition it could have been intended to show that all the protagonists were in paradise.

⁸⁶ Shepherd, *Saljūq Textiles*, p.212.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.212.

⁸⁸ E. Baer, *Sphinxes and Harpies; An Iconographical Study*, Jerusalem, 1965, p.65.

⁸⁹ The motif was not limited to the ceramics of the period. A brass and silver inlaid box from Iran, dated to the twelfth century, features a sphinx with a very similar delineation of the front leg and wing as seen on *mīnā'ī* wares. See E. Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art*, Albany, 1983, p.74, fig.54. Its present location is unknown.

⁹⁰ The copper and silver inlaid inkwell, in the Nuhad Es-Said Collection, shows a mounted falconer in a roundel. Another roundel features an archer, and there are guard bands with running animals. See J. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork; The Nuhad Es-Said Collection*, London, 1982, pp.32-5, especially the image on p.33.

⁹¹ See Pope, *A Survey Vol.5*, pl.659 A for a particularly striking example.

⁹² An argument proposed in Heidemann, Lapérouse and Parry, *The Large Audience*, pp.44-7. The item cited by the authors (a turquoise *mīnā'ī* bowl, acc. no. 57.36.5 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), does appear to depict a ruler in the centre, as he is larger, on a throne, and the only figure with a halo. However, given their ubiquity on so many other wares, the presence of a halo alone cannot be said to have always been used to denote a figure as a ruler.

⁹³ For images of the Buddhist paintings in the Dunhuang Caves dated to the early sixth century, see R. Whitfield, S. Whitfield and N. Agnew, *Cave Temples at Dunhuang: Art and History on the Silk Road*, London, 2000, p.60. *Ibid.*, p.37 shows an early-Tang dynasty painting (seventh century), with gold leaf highlights, in a similar manner to later *mīnā'ī* wares.

⁹⁴ For a selection of twelfth-century *thangka* paintings in which every figure has a halo, see Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, pp.73-81.

Yuka Kadoi has argued that there is substantial evidence for the artistic impact of China on the painting tradition in Iran from as early as the beginning of the eleventh century.⁹⁵ This is particularly clear in the fashion for the moon-face (*māh rū*) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, seen in painting across a variety of media. The *māh rū* became associated with ideal beauty during the spread of Buddhism,⁹⁶ and it may be that the origin of the seated moon-faced figures with enigmatic hand positions, reminiscent of *mudras*, also lies in the Buddhist painting tradition of China or Tibet, even if the meaning did not translate into the ateliers in Kāshān.

So much for the argument that the tiles from the Konya kiosk may be interpreted as portraying paradise. What of the use of almost identical sphinxes on bowls, and should they be viewed in the same light? It would be taking interpretation too far to use the presence of a single motif on a vessel to imply a wider meaning. Alas, it seems that some questions regarding the intended meaning of certain symbols must, in the absence of any supporting evidence, remain unanswered.

Unlike vessels, which each have to be treated in and of themselves, the tiled composition in its original state may be assumed to have been more than the sum of its parts. The existence of one sphinx and one mounted falconer may only be interpreted so far. However, the fragmentary remains of other tiles, and visible grout lines suggesting the presence of far more tiles in old photographs of the kiosk⁹⁷ indicates a far richer vocabulary of ornament than seen on any single vessel. Consisting of many parts, the overall arrangement of tiles from Konya must be understood as having been by far the largest *mīnā'ī* composition known to have ever existed.⁹⁸

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1. Painted stucco wall panel (thirteenth century). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Fig. 2. Detail of *mīnā'ī* tile. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London
- Fig. 3. Kilij Arslān II Kiosk, Konya (after F. Sarre, *Der kiosk von Konia*, Berlin, 1936, pl.1) (L), and rear of a *mīnā'ī* tile. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (R)
- Fig. 4. *Mīnā'ī* tile fragments, excavated in Kunya Urgench, Turkmenistan
- Fig. 5. *Mīnā'ī* vessel sherd, excavated in Merv, Turkmenistan. The Ancient Merv Project (L), and two re-joined *mīnā'ī* sherds showing different levels of colour loss. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (R)
- Fig. 6. *Mīnā'ī* tile fragment excavated in Kunya Urgench, Turkmenistan
- Fig. 7. Detail of horse and sphinx from a *mīnā'ī* bowl in the British Museum (1930,0719,63), British Museum, London (L), and a six-point *mīnā'ī* tile with sphinx from Konya. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (R)
- Fig. 8. *Mīnā'ī* bowl. David Collection, Copenhagen (L), and *mīnā'ī* tile from Konya. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (R)
- Fig. 9. Large *mīnā'ī* vase. Christies (L), and a relief *mīnā'ī* tile. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (R)

⁹⁵ Y. Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran*, Edinburgh, 2009, p.124-125. She cites the similarity between the illustrations of *The Book of Constellations* by al-Šūfī (400/1009) in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the Chinese-style ink painting called *baimiaohua*. Brend sees a strong Central Asian Buddhist aspect to the paintings (B. Brend, “A Reconsideration of the Book of Constellations of 400/109-10 in the Bodleian Library”, in R. Hillenbrand, (ed.) *The Art of the Saljūqs in Iran and Anatolia*, Costa Mesa, 1994, pp.89-93; p.90).

⁹⁶ Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, p.126.

⁹⁷ See Sarre, *Der Kiosk*, pl.1.

⁹⁸ The sheer diversity in shapes and styles of *mīnā'ī* tiles found across the Islamic world, despite such a small corpus, suggests that their use was far more widespread than first thought. Further archaeological excavation may, in time, shed further light on this topic.

- Fig. 10. *Mīnā'ī* sherd featuring tile-like patterns. The Metropolitan Museum, New York (L), and a *mīnā'ī* bowl with a different variation of tile-like decoration. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (R)
- Fig. 11. Fragments of square *mīnā'ī* tiles from Konya (now in Istanbul) (L), and a reconstruction of their original appearance (R)
- Fig. 12. *Mīnā'ī* tile with figure playing the lute from Konya. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (L), and a section of an eight-point star *mīnā'ī* tile. Karatay Museum, Konya (R)



Fig. 1. Painted stucco wall panel (thirteenth century). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Fig. 2. Detail of *mīnā'ī* tile. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Fig. 3. Kilij Arslān II Kiosk, Konya (after F. Sarre, *Der kiosk von Konia*, Berlin, 1936 pl.1) (L), and the rear of a *mīnā'ī* tile. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (R)



Fig. 4. *Mīnā'ī* tile fragments, excavated in Kunya Urgench, Turkmenistan



Fig. 5. *Mīnā'ī* vessel sherd, excavated in Merv, Turkmenistan. The Ancient Merv Project (L), and two re-joined *mīnā'ī* sherds showing different levels of colour loss. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (R)



Fig. 6. *Mīnā'ī* tile fragment excavated in Konya Urgench, Turkmenistan



Fig. 7. Detail of horse and sphinx from a *mīnā'ī* bowl in the British Museum (1930,0719,63), British Museum, London (L), and a six-point *mīnā'ī* tile with sphinx from Konya. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (R)



Fig. 8. *Mīnā'ī* bowl. David Collection, Copenhagen (L), and *mīnā'ī* tile from Konya. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (R)



Fig. 9. Large *mīnā'ī* vase. Christies (L), and a relief *mīnā'ī* tile. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (R)



Fig. 10. *Mīnā'ī* sherd featuring tile-like patterns. The Metropolitan Museum, New York (L), and a *mīnā'ī* bowl with a different variation of tile-like decoration. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (R)

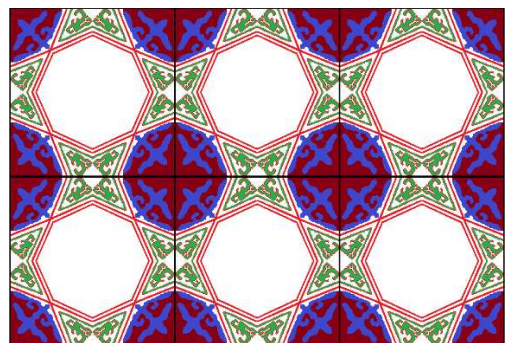


Fig. 11. Fragments of square *mīnā'ī* tiles from Konya (now in Istanbul) (L), and a reconstruction of their original appearance (R)



Fig. 12. *Mīnā'ī* tile with figure playing the lute from Konya. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (L), and a section of an eight-point star *mīnā'ī* tile. Karatay Museum, Konya (R)