

From Iznik to Jerusalem

Ceramic in Cross-cultural Encounters

The exhibition "From Iznik to Jerusalem" presents the intercultural encounter between the traditions of Turkish ceramics and the Armenian ceramics of Jerusalem, and their affinity for Chinese ceramic art. Although each of these traditions reflects the time and place in which it was created, they all focus on richly depicted and stylized motifs from the botanical world.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries a unique ceramic tradition evolved in the cities of Iznik and Kutahya on the Anatolian Plateau. This tradition features a style and technique that combines the influences of Turkish ceramics, Persian illuminations and Chinese ceramics. The latter is perhaps the most dominant, and therefore ceramics from that period are also called "Chini" in Turkish. This encounter came about following the import of Chinese ceramic vessels to the court of the Ottoman sultans and the exposure of local ceramic artist to this tradition.

The Iznik and Kutahya traditions reached their zenith in the mid-16th century with the addition of a fresh range of colors to the blue-and-white palette that was typical of the early part of the century. These colors included turquoise, purple, olive green and, later, a hue of red known as "Iznik red." In addition, the Chinese patterns and stylized Muslim motifs were replaced by naturalistic vegetal motifs from the Turkish botanical world including cypress trees (symbolizing the Tree of Life), plum branches, pomegranates as well as roses, hyacinths and especially tulips. A unique motif is the long, serrated, curling saz leaf. The vegetal motifs are drawn with a slender, precise black outline, and the flower stems intertwine harmoniously.



Dish from Iznik
Turkey
16th century
Eretz Israel
Museum
Tel Aviv



Tile from Iznik
Turkey
16th century
Eretz Israel
Museum
Tel Aviv

The encounter between Turkish ceramics and the city of Jerusalem took place in the first half of the 16th century by the Turkish Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the ruler of the Ottoman Empire. He built extensively in Jerusalem and undertook to restore the tiles on the outer walls of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; an Umayyad period edifice which was completed in 691 CE, under the Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. Beneath the central dome of the octagonal structure is a large bedrock outcrop. According to Muslim tradition, the prophet Mohammed ascended from this rock to heaven on his night journey. In Jewish tradition, this rock is the Foundation Stone from which the world was created; it is considered the Holy of Holies of the First and Second Temples. The Dome of the Rock was one of the earliest Muslim buildings whose outer walls were covered in colorful tiles. These did not survive over the years and underwent several phases of renovation and conservation.

Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent initiated the replacement of the original tiles with glazed ceramic tiles from 1545 to 1566. In another renovation in the first half of the 18th century, damaged tiles were replaced with new ones and in 1874, the tiles in the southwestern and western parts of the structure were replaced.

The exhibition presents a number of tiles that covered the Dome of the Rock and were created in the Turkish ceramic tradition. Also shown a historical photograph of the building taken on May 22, 1918, during the visit of the British governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs, in the company of Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, and the Grand Mufti Kamal el-Husseini.

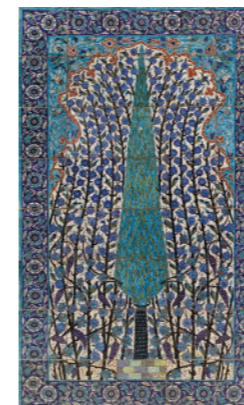


Tile from the
Dome of the
Rock, Jerusalem
18th century
Rachel Milstein
and Mario Czech
collection

In 1919, the Pro-Jerusalem Society established by Ronald Storrs to develop and preserve the city, invited ceramicist David Ohannessian to Jerusalem to restore the Dome of the Rock's tiles. Ohannessian, born to a Christian Armenian family in Turkey, worked in Kutahya as a ceramic artist and conservation expert of local ceramics and headed one of the prominent ceramics workshops in the city. He was involved in the tiling of buildings in both Kutahya and Istanbul, such as the central post office and the tomb of Sultan Rashid IV in Istanbul. He also took part in conservation in the Holy City of Mecca.

Ohannessian was forced to leave Turkey in 1915 due to his Armenian origin, and he fled with his family to Syria. In Aleppo, his path crossed with the British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes, and with his mediation, Ohannessian was invited to Jerusalem for the Dome of the Rock restoration project.

To carry out the task, Ohannessian opened a workshop that would supply the tiles to cover the building. He traveled to Turkey and returned to Jerusalem with a group of Armenian artists, including Nishan Balian and Megherdich Karkashian. Together with them, he established the Dome of the Rock tiles workshop. However, the earthquake that struck Jerusalem in 1927 created a budgetary deficit which stopped the project. Ohannessian continued to work in the Old City. He was given a workshop on the Via Dolorosa where he worked on public projects, such as the fountain niche at St. John's Ophthalmic Hospital and the wall tiles in the lobby of the American Colony Hotel. He also created ceramic vessels that were greatly in demand in the local market.



David
Ohannessian
Wall in the
American
Colony Hotel
Jerusalem, 1923

Ohannessian's works feature precise and delicate lines that follow the Turkish ceramic tradition, but the motifs are executed in a unique style. His most common motifs come mainly from the botanical world and include grapevines, cypress trees, floral designs and birds.



Dish from
Ohannessian
workshop
Jerusalem
1919-1948
Nishan Balian
collection
The Armenian
Ceramics
Jerusalem

Additional Armenian ceramic workshops began working at the time. In 1922 Nishan Balian and Megherdich Karkashian, formerly of David Ohannessian's workshop, opened their own workshop in the city, named Palestine Pottery. The workshop focused on producing functional and decorative ceramics for the local market and for export.

The influence of Turkish ceramics and of the works of David Ohannessian figure prominently in the Balian-Karkashian works that was produced between 1922 and 1963. Nevertheless, the workshop developed unique subjects and a unique style. The ceramic vessels are adorned with vegetal motifs: flowers (tulips, roses, hyacinths and almond blossoms), grapevines and grapes, cypress trees, arabesques and saz leaves, to which were added illustrations from the Old and New Testaments.

The illustrations on the vessels are drawn in black outlines separating the colors. The motifs are stylized and create movement and flow; however, as opposed to the multi-layered complexity of composition in the Turkish ceramic tradition, the motifs are painted in a single frontal row.



Vase from Balian-
Karkashian
workshop
Jerusalem
1922-1948
Nishan Balian
collection
The Armenian
Ceramics
Jerusalem



**Dish from Balian-Karkashian workshop
Jerusalem
1948-1963
Nishan Balian collection
The Armenian Ceramics
Jerusalem**

In 1963, the Karkashian and the Balian families went their separate ways. The Balian family established an independent workshop called "Palestinian Ceramics" and Marie Balian became its lead artist.

Marie Balian was born in Lyon, France and studied art in her native city. In 1954 she married Setrak Balian (son of Nishan Balian) and followed him to Jerusalem. After the joint Balian-Karkashian workshop closed down Marie Balian started her painting career. In her earlier works she painted on ceramic tiles and vessels, and in the early 1980s she began working on large-scale tile paintings. Her typical subjects include birds, figures from biblical stories, trees and vegetal motifs (cypress, palm, almond and grapevine) and flowers (tulips, roses, hyacinth and wildflowers). The composition is usually symmetrical and the designs are free-flowing.



**Marie Balian Vase, 1990
Nishan Balian collection
The Armenian Ceramics
Jerusalem**

Balian's work draws on various traditions – Turkish and Armenian ceramics, motifs from Turkish and Persian carpets, manuscript illuminations, floor mosaics from the churches of the Holy Land, copper vessels and even the embroidery on Palestinian dresses inspire her works.

The Turkish and Jerusalem Armenian ceramic traditions were influenced by Chinese ceramics. The encounter between the Chinese and the Islamic cultures began as early as the 7th century, with the rise of Islam. Chinese ceramics were extensively exported to the Muslim world and in the first half of the 16th century, Iznik and Kutahya ceramic artists came under the influence of the ceramic vessels of the Yuan (1271–1368) and the Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. They were inspired by the patterns of flowers, grape clusters, clouds and waves, which were painted in blue on a white background under a transparent glaze. However, the Chinese motifs underwent a process of change and accommodation to Islamic art. Chinese stylized clouds, for example, became symmetrical arabesques and lotus flowers, which were unknown in Turkey, became stylized and distant from their botanical source. These were all added to local Turkish vegetal motifs. The exhibition presents Chinese ceramic vessels of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1644–1911) and the Turkish, and Armenian of Jerusalem ceramic works that they influenced.



**Vase
Qing Dynasty
17th-18th
centuries
The Wilfrid Israel Museum of Asian Art and Studies**

The Chinese ceramic tradition, which influenced Turkish ceramics, still inspires contemporary ceramicists. Ekrem Yazici was born in the city of Afyonkarahisar, Turkey and studied art in his native city. After completing his studies he embarked on a 10-year journey throughout Europe, Canada, Japan and China. He currently lives and works in the city of Jingdezhen, China, known as the "Porcelain Capital" because it has been producing pottery for 1,700 years. In his work, Yazici carefully incorporates classic Muslim motifs and traditional Chinese subjects and style. The ceramic dishes in the exhibition are decorated with Muslim calligraphy that features delicate Chinese blossoms.



**Ekrem Yazigi Istif, 2015
Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures**

Martha Rieger is an Israeli ceramic artist who was born in Brazil. In her work "Blue and White Made in China" Rieger incorporates Western European ceramic tradition with Chinese production techniques, style and ornamentation. To produce the large ceramic eggs, Rieger traveled to a traditional Chinese workshop in the city of Jingdezhen.



**Martha Rieger Blue and White Made in China 2015
Lent by the artist**

Oval, hollow ceramic eggs in various sizes figure prominently in Turkish ceramics from Iznik and Kutahya and in the Armenian ceramics of Jerusalem. The eggs are perforated at both ends so they could be suspended, and were once hung as decorations in mosques and churches, sometimes above an oil lamp. Some scholars propose that the egg shape is connected to the custom of bringing ostrich eggs back as mementos of pilgrimage to Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula, where ostriches were common.



**Pottery egg from Jerusalem
20th century
Zeev and Miri Holtzman collection**

The exhibition "From Iznik to Jerusalem: Ceramic in Cross-cultural encounters" presents a journey that crosses countries, cultures and periods, in which the ceramic tradition from China made its way to the ceramic tradition in Turkey and from there to Jerusalem. This journey continues to this day, with contemporary ceramicists creating works inspired by these traditions of the past.

From Iznik to Jerusalem: Ceramic in Cross-cultural Encounters

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Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures, Be'er Sheva, Israel
Director and Chief Curator: Dr. Dalia Manor; Curator: Dr. Sharon Laor-Sirak

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Photos: Vladimir Naikhin

Front photo: Tile from Iznik, Turkey, 17th century, Israeli Museum, Jerusalem

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