

Malaga jugs, submersed in 1362 and Alhambra vases. A study in decoration and iconography

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Advanced reading and interpretation of the arabic inscriptions of the wellknown pieces of Malaga lustreware at the Berlin Museum of Islamic Art (Sarre, 1903) may now, studied in parallel to the decoration of five not enough known jugs from the northgerman coast and west of the city Museum (Sarre, 1936; Hartmann, 1969; 1975) cause a discussion in iconography. The final conclusion will point out, that choice as arrangement of arabic formulas and of figures like the «khams», or so called Hand of Fatima, should have been in use for muslims as well as for christians up to the presumable function of a vessel, but fitting by common tradition and specially by the knowledge of the Arab constellations to Muslim culture as to Christian rite.

Shoulder and neck of the fragment of an Alhambra vase at Berlin (Figs. I A-B; IV A) do not present any written hint to a production at Malaga, as Sarre suggested in comparison to the writing inside the base of the prominent bowl in the same museum (Fig. I C), which exactly reads malaqi, indicating its origin from that place or of its master. The interior of that bowl now presents not only arabesques and plaited bands in alternating, radiating segments, but these contain expressively the writing baraka and yumn (Figs. I D; IV D). Such interweaving of ornament and words for blessing and benediction points to a humble, muslim tendency and occurs abundantly during the fourteenth century period of installation of the nasrid palaces at Granada. Here, arranged at the interior of a bowl, one should but understand the wish of effecting personal wellbeing to the user.

Special differentiation and selection of pious wishes presents further the above vase fragment with its arrangement of medaillons, containing writing, or bordered by it, at neck and shoulder. It becomes obvious, that a central axis —and

only at one side— had been preferred in its decoration by selecting here stronger or more wishes. At the neck the sequence of medaillons (Figs. I B; IV C) containing the lettering al-'afiya lihi becomes interrupted by one with the ornamental affronted pair of the formula Allah akbar. On the shoulder at the right as at the left side the border of the medaillons (Figs. I A-B; IV B) reads repeatedly al-'afiya lihi, but in the central one follows al-yumn wa l-iqbal... al yumn wa l-iqbal... al yumn. All this promotes the idea, that such a vase had been intended to be placed with only one side visible. Murphy first supposed that such vases should have had their place in niches or recesses of walls, like at the Cuarto Dorado and the Sala de Comares. Now, from my experience, there remains only one niche, indicating such destination in the Generalife palace (Fig. III D). This niche offers, under a vault, enough space for setting a big vase in a wooden kursi, and its construction with a zone of stalactites alongside the ground proves to have been intended for supporting a board for jugs or bowls, because of a sixteenth century persian illustration, showing the distribution of water from a big vase in such a niche and with such a board (Figs. I D; III B).

The places at the northwest German coast (Fig. V A), in 1931, 1955 and somewhat afterwards five fragmentary jugs were saved (Figs. II; V-VI), are remains of the low land north and south of the fourteenth century Hever-Strom with its dominant harbour and city: Rungholt. As nowadays at the coast, the settlements in the country will have been far scattered, with single groups of houses, built on artificial hills (Warft) surrounded by water during storm. The area became mainly submersed in january 1362 at a stormy flood tide. It had been the historic Edomsharde district, known by treaties of trade with Hamburg and in 1355 with Bruges (Weck-

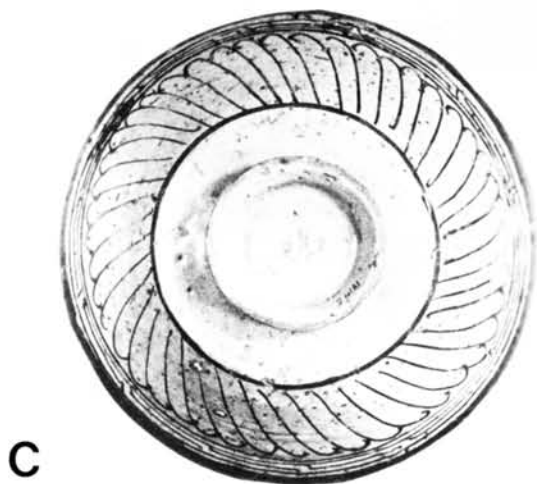


Fig. I, A, B: Fragment and details of the Alhambra vase at Berlin; blue and lustre on white, H. 39-44 cm, Diám. 66,5 cm; Inv. Nr. 00,113. C, D: Bowl at Berlin; lustre on blue at the interior, H. 8 cm, Diam. 23 cm; Inv. Nr. I. 4181.

mann-Wittenburg, 1962), Bruges being cited 1411 as a staple place for fayence from Valencia (Kühnel, 1925). Rung-holt had been the place of a convent, and near to it were at least eleven settlements, which had their own chapels—as indicated by names like Fedderiksmancapel. Other pottery, saved from that site, proved to be Siegburger Steinzeug from the Rhine, green glazed and unglazed types, but also one unique fragment of an unglazed amphora of a type known from Sicily in the thirteenth century (Gabrieli, 1979, fig. 189 and 284).

The first discovered jug (Figs. II B; V B; VI C), in the museum at St. Peter Ording, Inv. Nr. AB 406 (Sarre, 1936) studied lately, presents inside its foot not yet observed Arabic

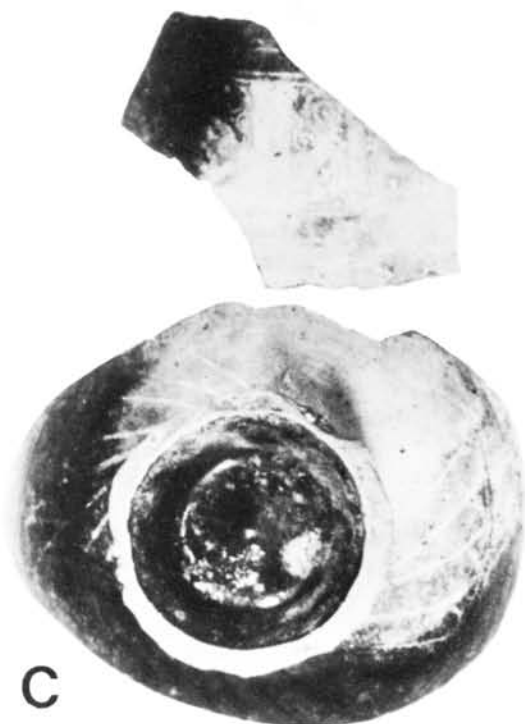
letters and scrolls in lustrepainting. By comparison to a fragment at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Frothingham, 1951) these letters are obviously to be read malaqi, hence establishing a further and historic proof for the export of that industry. Its decoration follows the type of two jugs in the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Frothingham, 1951), specially the rows of dots, filling the framed field with the inscription. The arab text, not exact in its writing, will indicate wishes, like baraka and yumna. Inside the neck occur painted vertical shields with scrollwork. In view to its presumable use in its time it should be considered that this jug was saved from a countryside well at the Tatinger fen, a place of low medieval ground and there and then the only possibility for fresh and sweet water.



A



B



C



D

Fig. II, A: Fragmentary jug at Husum; originally blue and lustre on white, H. 20 cm, Diam. 11,5 cm; inv. Nr. K 3264. B: Fragmentary jug at St. Peter Ording; blue and lustre on white, H. 21 cm; Inv. Nr. AB 406. C, D: Fragments of a jug at Nordstrand; weathered glaze, H. 11 cm, Diam. 11,5 cm.

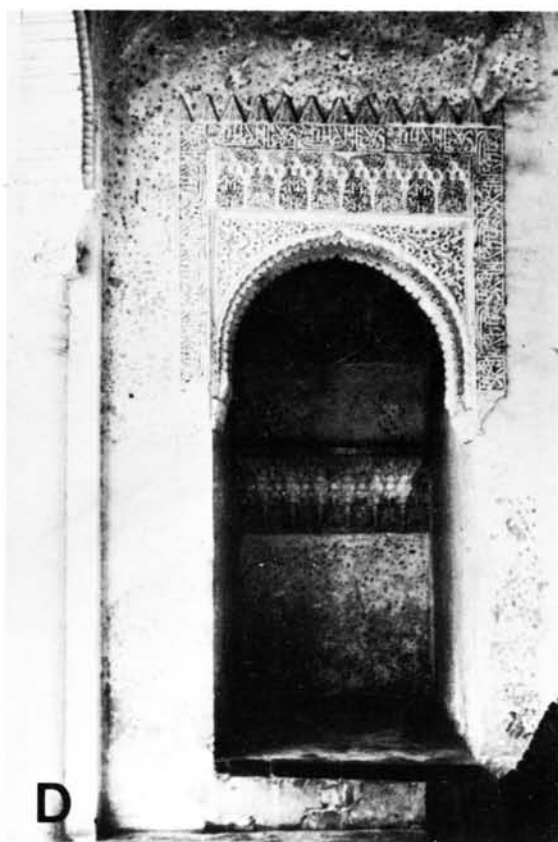
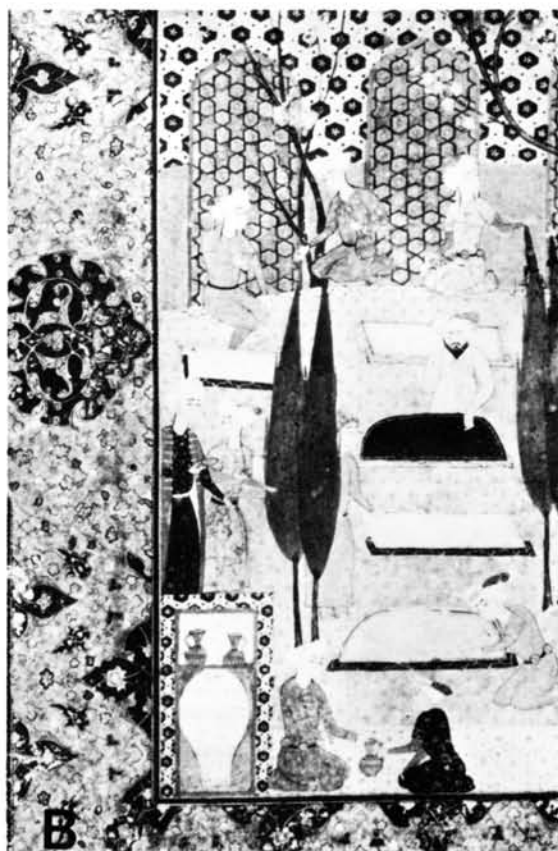


Fig. III, A: al-thurayya, third mansion of the moon; ill. in *Kitab Matali 'as-Sa'ada wa Manafi' as-Siyada*, 990 A.H. (1582 A.D.); Paris, Bibl. Nat., Ms. suppl. turc 242, fol. 34v. B: Distributing of water, ill. in *Kulliyat of Ahli-i Shirazi*, 973 A.H. (1565 A.D.); on sale at Wiesbaden, 1969. C: El moro devoto, ill. in *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria*, 1257 A. D. D: Niche in the NW of the arcade in front of the kings room at the Generalife, Granada.

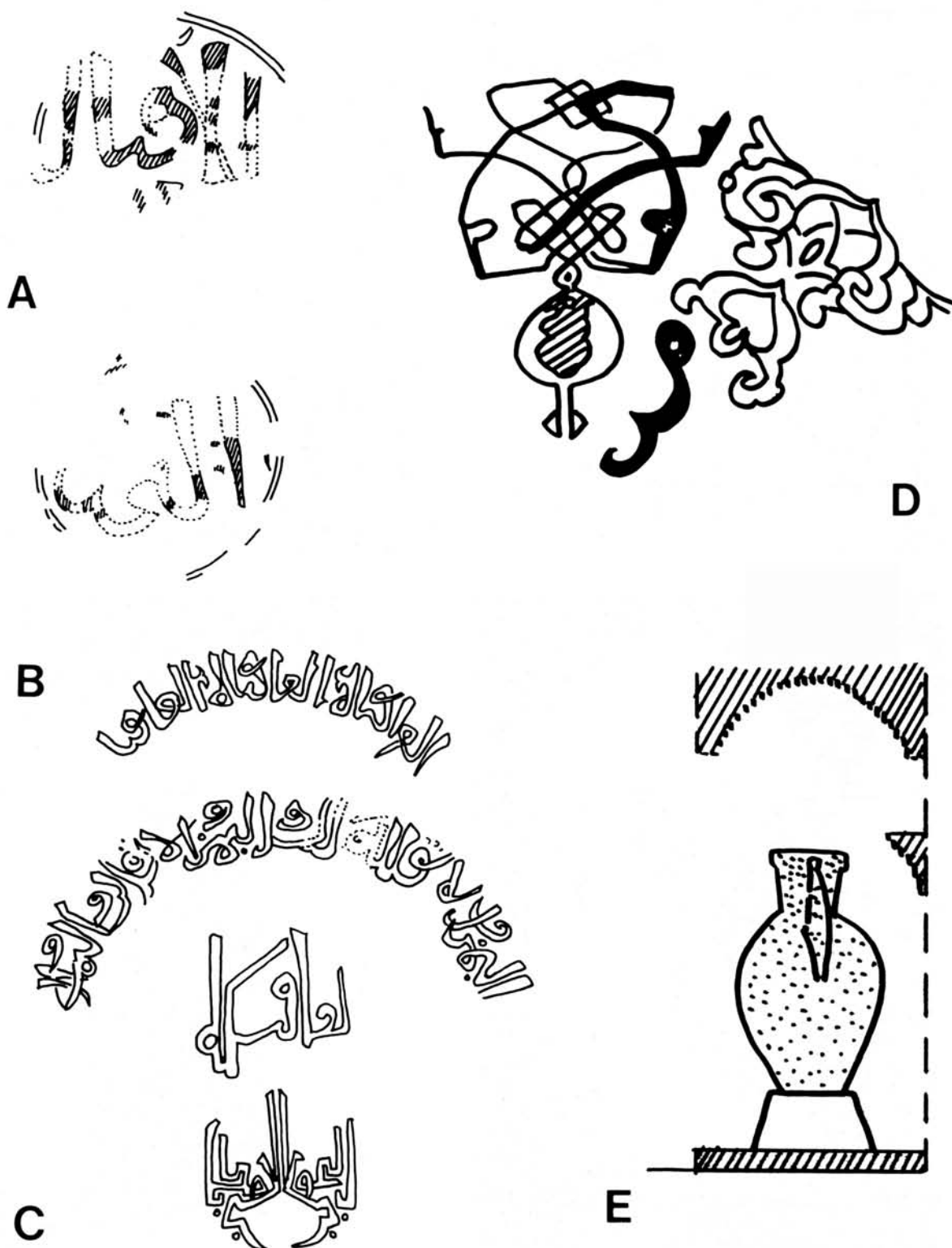


Fig. IV, A, B, C: Inscriptions at the front of the vase-fragment I-A, B. D: Ornament including lettering inside the bowl I-B, C. E: Hypothetic assemblage of a vase in a niche, compare I-A and III-D.

Together with further fragments the body of such a jug (Figs. II C-D; V C) were saved from the ground by E. A. Dethleffsen during ebb-tide from the area northwest of the Hallig Sudfall, west of Nordstrand. That special place should be identified with the fourteenth century settlement VedderingmansCapell, and for the area longlasting observation and excavations have cleared up the situation of the harbour and Rungholtia city (Dethleffsen, 1957; Hartmann, 1975). The colours of glaze and brushwork are faded, but the type of decoration in white, blue and lustre can still be observed. The lower part of the body is filled by the same broad band of gadroons like at the Berlin bowl, followed up to the shoulder by small bands and a main border with elegant, cursive Arabic lettering, accompanied by scrolls. The base of the foot is now incomplete, but shows the typical Spanish shape.

A more complete jug, now in the Nissen-Haus museum at Husum (Inv. Nr. 3264; Figs. II A; VI B) came from the same ground. Its glaze and colours have changed to a black and grey tinge because of the embedding in the mud under the sea, but the original areas of white for the ground, blue for the writing and lustre for the lines and ornaments are clearly distinguished. The underside of the foot is filled by a spider in lustre, on the shoulder –following a checkerboard band– reads a sequence of writing, al-yumn and l-‘afiya in repeating, accompanied by little flowers, and on top a line with a short version of al-‘afiya. Round the neck follow two lines with squares and spired, fourpointed stars, near the rim but a special border with dotted ground, a palmette under the spout and at both sides a medaillon, including the palm of a hand with one round mark beneath the centre. Inside the neck figures of palmettelike trees are outlined in lustre and bordered by two bands.

A fragmentary body of the type fig. II C-D and a jug, comparable to the above one have been saved by G. Kruse from the Trendermarsch at the same historic area (Fig. VI A, nach Hartmann; Hartmann, 1969; 1975). The profile of the fragment had been cut down already in its time and resembles a beakerlike bowl. Its decoration were gadrons and a frieze with some remaining curves. The drawing of the jug preserves the vivid impression of the colours shortly after the saving. There are only two shades, so that the drawing should have been done in lustretechnique. The small profile of the foot is followed by a herringbone pattern, body, shoulder and neck are girded by three friezes, separated two times by checkerboard bands, once by a border with scrolls. The friezes present, spared from the dotted ground like at the jug at Husum (Fig. VI B), repeated medaillons with the palm of a hand with stretched fingers and inscribed with a circular mark at its base.

The main effect of the arrangement and choice of decorations on these jugs as on the Alhambra vases seems to be that in the most obvious and most functionable areas of the vessel special figures and arabic words became assembled. Could it not be that besides the palmette, the palm of the hand, the arabic wishes al-yumn, al-iqbal, al-‘afiya, possess a common, genuine value? In a literary sense, these words prove to express beyond wishes for physical good health the desire for vitality, as granted by God. Then al-yumn means not only good luck, but good fortune, auspiciousness, prospering, al-iqbal not purely wellbeing, but advanced fortune –also in regard to health. The figure of the conspicuous palm of a hand with stretched fingers and presenting one or two circular marks was in view to painted tiles (González, 1929; Fig. VIII A) discussed as the hand of the Lord, also the Hand of

Fatima, but special in view to lustre fayence vessels as the khams and the Hand of Fatima (Ettinghausen, 1954). For the rise of that in the Maghreb wellknown motif we can not find in the thirteenth to fourteenth century any trace of historic evidence as to the lady Fatima herself, in literature nor in illustrations or by coincidence of written and painted decoration in applied arts. On the other side the arabic term for the palm of the hand, kaff, proves real evidence in literature as the hand of the caliph, in decorative art as the print of the hand of Ali –venerated by shiite muslims in Mosul in the thirteenth century and later in Ardebil (Herzfeld, 1911). Foremost but «kaff» occurs, indicating the place of parts of constellations, sometimes of single stars (Kunitzsch, 1961). For man they build a group of astronomic or astrometeorologic importance, and thus they became indicated by their inscribed name our outlined figure at the arabic astrolabe (Figs. VII A-C; Minorsky, 1971; Schwarz, 1980; Barret, 1949). Here we find the hand «kaff», belonging to Cetus, the hand «yad», belonging to Jauza’, foremost but the arm with the kand «kaff al-khadib» in Cassiopeia, as we know it, supplied with two circular marks, indicating stars, from the illustrations in the Kitab as-suwar al-kawakib al-thabita’ by as-Sufi (Wellesz, 1959). So the absolute new question arises: if figurations, genuine termed «kaff», could by some reason have been selected for embellishing fayence vessels in the way of an emblem (Zick-Nissen, 1975).

If we look for such vessels in Spain, the most prominent ones are the Alhambra vases (Ettinghausen, 1954; Kube, 1940; Frothingham, 1951), specially the sample now at the Ermitage-Museum and that from Jerez in the National Museum of Archaeology at Madrid. The Leningrand vase, painted with lustre only, presents on its wing-like handles the hand, connected with the raised forearm, inscribed «al-‘afiya». The hand presents one spared, circular mark at the right wing, two at the left, where the forearm bears a palmette with arabesques. The vase at Madrid presents in the same position again the hand with two circular marks and with the forearm, filled by palmettes. On the reverse of the handles this figuration reoccurs, but circumscribed by an outline in shape of the sole of a foot. The surrounding area both times is filled by ornamental tirazes and thin lined, eightpointed crosses –resembling a formula for a star. Further the palm of these hands is obviously ornamented, a feature, pointing to the arab custom of henna staining of fingers down to the palm, also of toes and sole. Such staining was and is specially in use and connected with water-rites for a bride, because of the common belief of causing baraka, i.e. blessing in the sense of abundance (Dalman, 1964). Stimulated by such situation we propose to introduce for the figure of hand and arm the term «kaff» instead of the before attributed term «khams» in the discussion of the decoration of the Alhambra vases as to that of the related jugs.

The peculiar figure of the hand with forearm, painted 1422 in blue on tiles, inserted in the vault of St. Gregory’s chapel at Toledo (Fig. VIII A) had been published as the Hand of the Lord (González Martí, 1929), but then became introduced to the discussion of the iconography of muslim, spanish fayences by R. Ettinghausen, here interpreted as the hand of Fatima in a context of generalization of that motive. For further deduction down to fatimid Egypt he added the illustration of a bowl (Fig. VIII B) at the Detroit Art Institute, decorated in lustre technique. Now it turns out that this sample does not fit at all with our knowledge of fatimid lustrepainting (kind answer by Mahmoud Hussein, Cairo Uni-

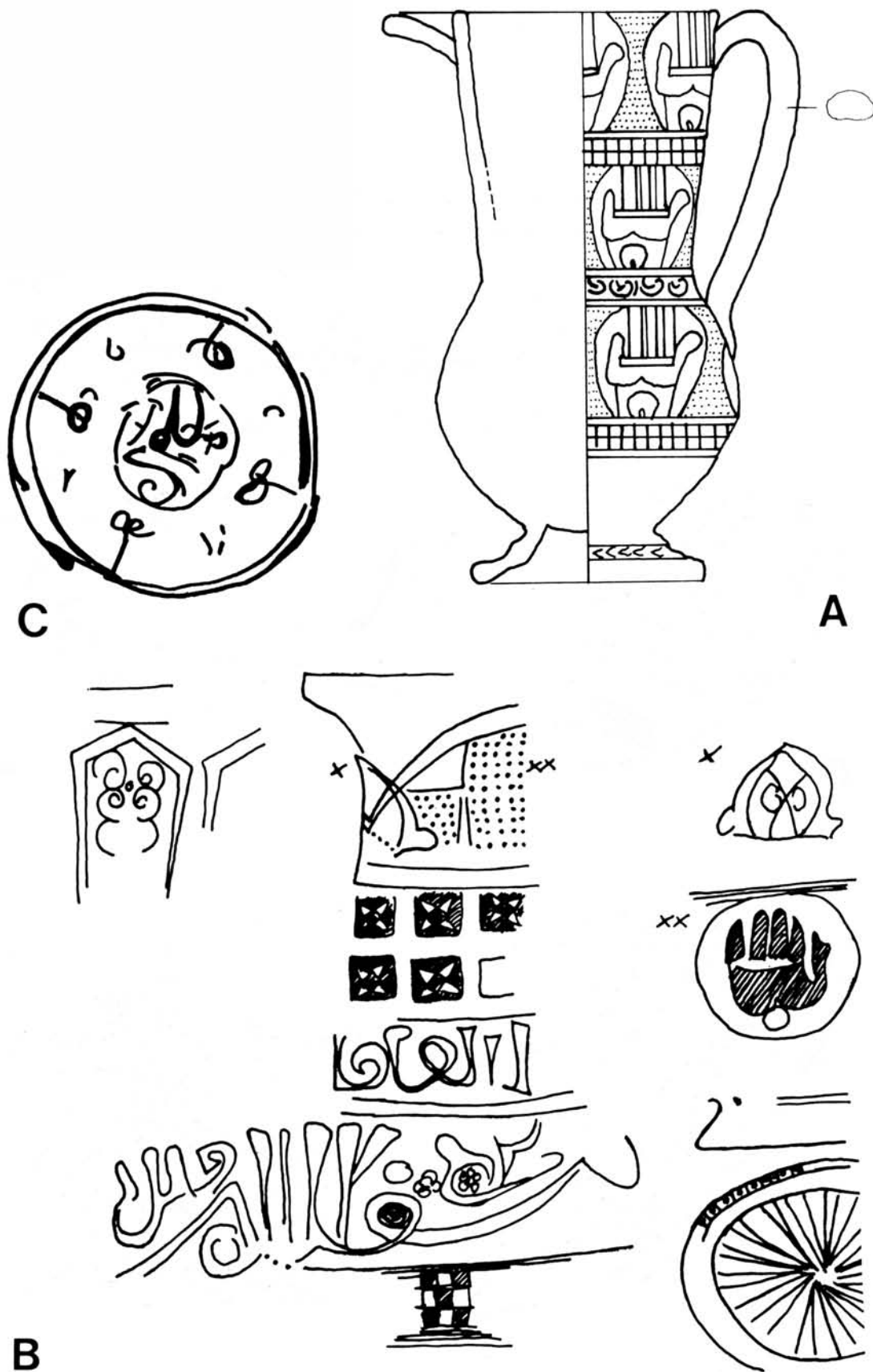


Fig. VI, A: Jug at Marne; painting presumedly in lustretechnique, H. 21,8 cm. B: Notes on the decoration of the jug II-A. C: Lettering inside the foot of jug II-B.

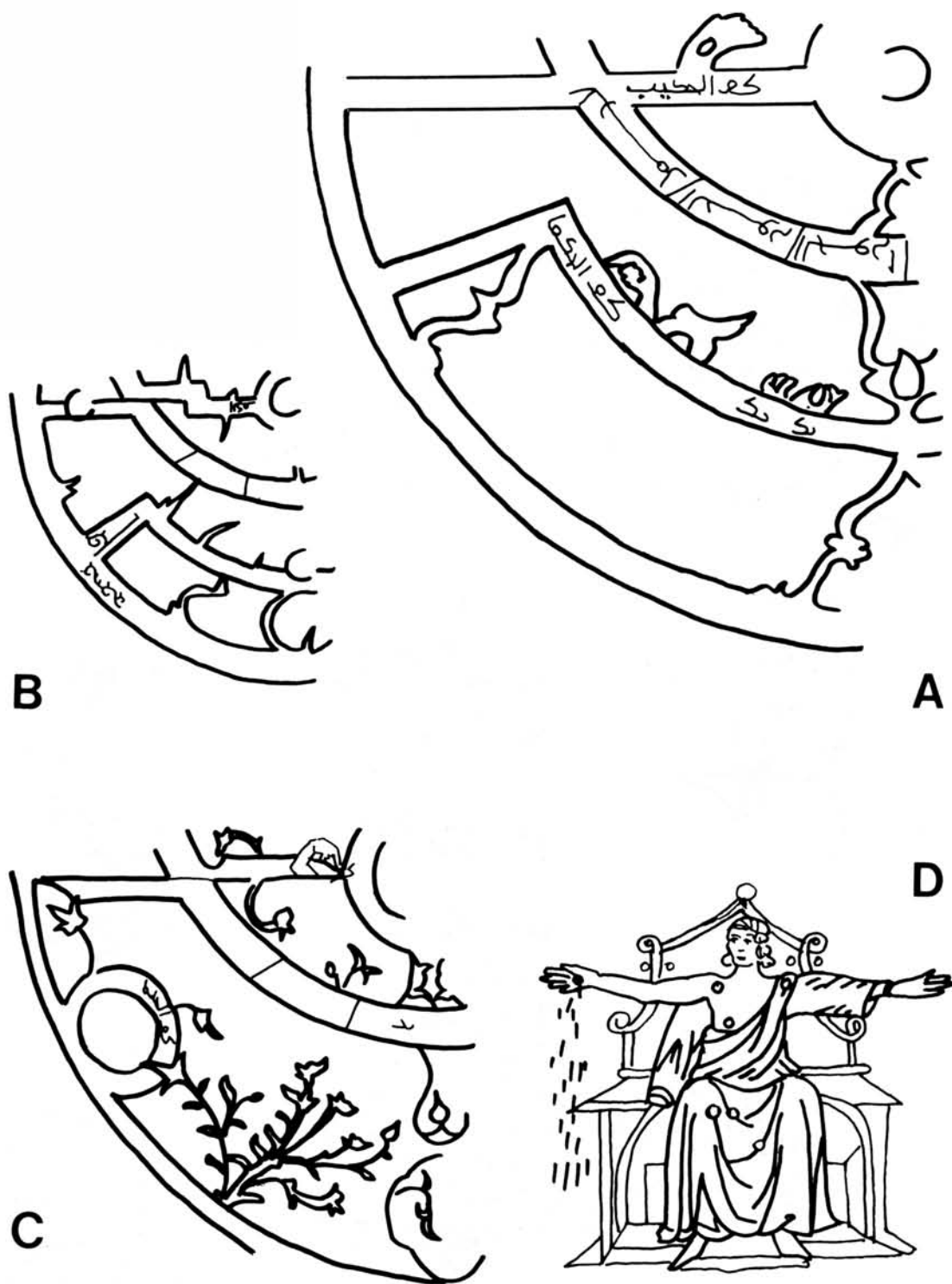


Fig. VII, A, B, C: Sections of astrolabes, indicating kaff al-khabid, kaff al-djadma, yadd, according to the zodiac from al-haml to al-djauza (A = Teheran; B = Berlin, made at Toledo 420 A.H. i.e. 1029 A.D; C: London, made at 633 A.H. i.e. 1236 A.D.). D: Constellation Cassiopeia in Liber Introductorius of Michael Scotus, copy from the 14th ct., Munic, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Clm 10268.



Fig. VIII, A: Position and painting of the tiles at the vault in St. Gregory's chapel at the convent de la concepcion Francisca, Toledo, dated 1422 A.D. B: Fragment of a bowl, the repairs omitted, Detroit Institute of Art.

versity). In its most peculiar outlining it seems to correspond exactly to unglazed vessel fragments of the thirteenth century, excavated at Murcia (Navarro Palazón, 1980), and as well to the lustre drawing on square tiles from the fourteenth century church of San Bartolome in Cordoba (Exhibition at Toledo, November 1981 on occasion of the II Coloquio Intern. de Ceramica Medieval del Mediterraneo Occidental). The photograph of the bowl proves further that the lower part looks heavily restored, specially the drawing of the support of the central hand with forearm. So the figure of the stained hand as the masters craft must be of spanish origin, and here they fit in our group. But does it point to muslim features? The whole arrangement with flanking figures, holding objects like sticks and posing on a rocky ground, causes the proposal of interpreting the scene parallel to the traditional presentation of the crucified at Golgotha, or of the as-

cending Christ at the Mount Olive. Such christological interpretation becomes supported by observing that the position of the tiles at Toledo proves beyond the reproduction by R. Ettinghausen, to end with an sixpointed, starshaped area (Fig. VIII A; Torres Balbas, 1949), inscribed with the monogram of Christ IHS. The more, these sixteen tiles in the vault are follow ed downwards by again sixteen starshaped tiles, but now posed upside down, so that the gothic letters seem to spell SM, pointing to Maria, the virgin. Observing in such a christian context the marked hand with forearm one feels tempted to interpret this as a symbol for Jesus Christ and the two flanking «keys» —at least once there are no key bits indicated— as hints to lance and ysoy, the arms of Christ (Fig. VIII A; González Martí, 1929; Domínguez Bordona, 1930; Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie I, 1968). These also could be seen in the sticklike objects the two figures at

the Detroit bowl hold (Fig. VIII B); they do not occur at the vases. That symbol points to a christological and mozarabic background (Leclercq, 1935): Jesus is said by Ignatius to have been born and baptized for purifying the waters; it is the time of easter, when the clerk beneficiates the wells, when at saturday water for remedy is fetched at daybreak from the water-course, and eastertime astronomical covers the period, where the above cited stars (Figs. VII A-C) are observed as to their sinking and reoccurring fifty days later.

A further christian of raised arms with the stretched palm of the hand, including a circular mark, are present at the marble-icons of the zoodochos phigi, a type of the later 5th to 14th century (Muthmann, 1975). Maria is shown as orans, and some prove that water flowed from a perforation of her hands. The sample at Constantinopel is said to have spent water for the annual ceremonial bath of the emperor. One sample reached in its time Sicily.

A most striking illustration of a seated woman with stretched arms, the one hand pierced and pouring a stream (Fig. VII D) concerns again the kaff al-kahdib. It is the description of the constellation Cassiopeia in the liber introductorius by Michael Scotus (Boll, 1903; Zick-Nissen, 1975). He taught at Toledo and at Sicily in the early thirteenth century astronomy with particular arabic features. The manuscript at Munic shows on her right hand two stars, in her left one, and from the text one can decipher... manu dextra... perforata de qui... stigmatum currit gradis rivus sanguis.

Thus the arabic astronomic tradition may offer by names of stars and constellations the best parallel to the figure of the marked hand at our vessels. Two times single stars with peculiar qualities own the denomination kaff, they belong to the extended arms of al-thurayya. This peculiar arabic constellation they only name as an-najm because of its value beyond every star-i.e. najm. Building the third station of the moon (Fig. III A; Hartner, 1975) is expected to grant abundant rainfall or dew during its period of setting and rising in spring and in autumn (Hommel, 1968; Ethé, 1868; Wiedemann, 1916). The arabic version is related by the persian al-Biruni (Ramsay Wright, 1934): ... the arabs do not picture the constellations at the zodiac in the way described: the pleiades, thurayya..., they set down as a head with two bands, one of which is the khadib, which was mentioned in Cassiopeia... whose fingertips... are stained with henna; if we proceed from these towards the pleiades, we find a series of stars which represent the wrist, the elbow, the shoulder and the shoulder-joint... the other hand is the kaff al-jadhma' from stars in the head of Cetus; it is called jadhma', amputated, because the row of stars which extend to it from the pleiades is shorter... the thurayya... six stars... like a bunch of grapes... specially poets say seven, but this is a mistake... distinguished as an-najm.

In view to the period of setting (nau) and unvisibility of althurayya from april to may al-Qazwini (Ethé, 1968) further relates, that it is praiseworthy and the best of all constellations in spring. If one follows next the frequent occurrence of althurayya, of al-thurayya with the stained hands, in the verses of arab-spanish poetry (Cabanelas, 1925; Continente, 1981; García Gómez, 1943; Hoenerbach, 1973; Rubiera Mata, 1976), it seems certain, that her figuration was well understood, because only kaff al-khadib in Cassiopeia owns an outline with two stars and an arm, and has as part of al-thurayya the henna-staining. That figure of a hand apparently in the thirteenth to fourteenth century may be understood in several ways: for the ecclesiastical calendar it indicated the period of easter with the benediction of water; for the agricultural year it indicated hope for rainfall and dew; in arab and muslim tradition it set a signal for blessing and fertility, vitality. So it occurs legally and makes sense, when an astrolabe without any figural pointers, presents as the only embellishment a flowering scroll in the section of al-thurayya (Fig. VII B).

The decoration of the tall vases, from which two survived in the palaces of the Alhambra, while the Leningrad and the Jerez vase —showing the figure of the hand— came from churches, should thus have been arranged in view to some use of special and blessed water. If now jugs, datable from that period and from places of christian population and bare of luxury, but with a convent and chapels, present again a «kaff», we argue, that they had been chosen for use at christian rites as baptism, spending of the sacraments or for washing the hands of the clerk afterwards. That jugs of their shape have been in use at the altar is proved by the fresco of St. Gregory's mass in that chapel at Toledo; that amphorae have been in use for baptizing is proven by spanish miniatures like in Las cantigas de Santa Maria (Fig. III C; Domínguez Bordona, 1930; 1962), or in the biblia de San Luís at the Toledo cathedral, as fourteenth century frescoes in Bohemia, at Praha and Karlstyn.

So these samples of western mediterranean fayences obtain importance for a further step in our knowledge of medieval pottery because they prove that the choice of arabic verbal wishes as of figures of constellations for their embellishment had been due to the function of the vessel. Stimulated by the revived tradition of arabic astronomy and its aspect of meteorology, as of health in a cosmic sense, such figures entered as motives the applied arts in muslim as in christian communities.

For support to these studies I owe thanks to professor Wohlenberg at Husum as to Mr. Dethleffsen and Kruse, the Berlin State Museums, as the University of Madrid —enabling me to join the colloquy on ceramics 1982, the Hochschulfilmreferat of the Free University of Berlin for technical supply.

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