

The Islamic pottery of Fez and the Majolica

All the available information on the Islamic pottery of Fez leads to the conclusion that this production has experienced only very few changes during the last millennium. The whole repertoire of production is carried out in a purely traditional way, and is identical to Spanish Majolica. The changes concern only the introduction and adoption of some new industrial colors, while all the opacifying, glazing and firing techniques have remained unchanged.

The craftsmen continue using the same local clays that have been used for centuries, they follow the same techniques in preparing them (Fig. 1.a-b), and they still use the traditional potter's wheel (Fig. 2 and Fig.3).

All the pottery workshops use the traditional kiln composed of two rooms (Fig. 4): the inferior room that is used mainly for the first firing of achromatic pottery, and the superior room that is used mainly for the second firing (for decorated pottery) (Fig. 5). Decorated pottery is usually subjected to two firing stages: in the first stage the raw ceramic bodies are fired after drying in the sun.

Following this the fired body is dipped in a liquid glaze material composed of a finely ground mixture of lead oxide, tin oxide and sand in water. The glaze is produced by adding to every 100 kilos of lead metal between 5 to 10 kilos of tin metal depending on the color and opacity desired: this mixture is then fired in the kiln (Fig. 6) to produce the desired oxides in powder form. In addition 50 kilos of sand are added to the 100+ kilos of the lead and tin oxides in order to produce the lead-tin silicate glaze.

After dipping in the glaze the body is allowed to dry again for a minimum of one day before applying the decoration (Fig. 7). Just before the beginning of the decoration, the vessels are sometimes dipped in salt water.

This is then followed by a second firing stage.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

