

A TELL MINIS LUSTRE POTTERY BOWL

Islamic, 12th Century

Ceramic

Height: 8 cm - Diameter: 23.5 cm

Reference: 4070



The inscription on the exterior can be read: Min san'a abi mashhur khass (One of the works of Abi Mashhur. Private (commission))

This bowl relates to a group of about one hundred ceramic vessels consisting of lustre painted and monochrome-glazed, incised and splashed vessels which were found in 1959 in a cave at Tell Minis, a village in the vicinity of Ma'arrat al Nu'man in Central Syria, between Hama and Aleppo. The Tell Minis finds were 12th century in date, but differed considerably from those known then, such as Egyptian Fatimid wares, Raqqa wares and Persian Rayy and Kashan wares. They did, however, relate to wares found at Hama as suggested by Arthur Lane and Bagn Poulsen, then director of the David Collection, who had published the Hama excavation finds. Already in 1907 Gaston Migeon had suggested a Syrian origin for various items which were related stylistically to the Tell Minis group. The group was put together by Oliver Watson and Venetia Porter who identified the characteristics of the vessels belonging to this group (Porter, V. and Watson, O.: "Tell Minis Wares", Syria and Central Near Eastern, Three Studies in Medieval Ceramics, Oxford, 1987, pp. 175-248). In addition to those pieces a further group or related bowls and dishes has been published, to which the present bowl closely relates, which most authorities accept as being a part of the same group. Two other examples from the group have been sold through these Rooms, one of which was particularly close to the present bowl, depicting two peacocks with entwined necks (13 October 1998, lot 256). A further very similar bowl with single bird is in a private

collection in America.

The present lot can be compared with a bowl in the Musée National de Céramique in Sèvres, depicting a bird set against floral scrolls (Porter and Watson, op. cit., pp. 208 and 225, no A16) or one with two birds in the Khalili Collection (Heavenly Art, Earthly Beauty, exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam, 1999, no. 223, p. 241). In terms of shape and quality of the lustre close comparisons can be made with a calligraphic bowl in the Freer Gallery of Art (Porter and Watson, op. cit., pp. 209 and 227, no. A 24) and a bowl depicting a peacock in the Keir Collection (Porter and Watson, op. cit., pp. 208 and 225m no. A18).

It has been argued that Tell Minis wares ultimately are indebted to the potteries of Fatimid Egypt. This is evident in the frit body, the vessel shapes and the lustre decoration. Neither frit nor lustre had been used in Syria before the Fatimid period. Following the tentative chronology for Fatimid ceramics, it has been suggested that the occurrence of frit in Tell Minis wares would point to a 12th century date for the group (Porter and Watson, op. cit. p. 190). The close resemblance between Fatimid wares and Tell Minis wares has been interpreted as a sign that potters from Fatimid Egypt were working in Syria, either concurrently with the Fatimid period in Egypt,

or having moved there as a result of its collapse.

CONDITION

Of conical form with slightly everted rim, on short foot, the white ground painted in deep copper lustre with a bold bird on a ground of bold scrolling vine, two thin concentric bands around the rim, the exterior with a band of stylized kufic, intact.

PROVENANCE

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