

The Fatimids | The Decorative Arts

‘The application of metallic lustre to decorate vessels is a quintessentially Islamic technique.’

The application of metallic lustre to decorate vessels is a quintessentially Islamic technique that first appeared in glasswork before becoming, famously, applied to pottery. In Egypt the technique used on glass was an innovation known since at least the 2nd / 8th century. Indeed, lustre pottery – due to Fatimid patronage of migrant potters – soon marked the high-point of ceramic production in Egypt, which also included other types of glazed pottery. The workshops of some master potters known to us, include the School of the Muslim and the School of Sa’ad. Another flourishing industry was devoted to metalwork. Artisans specialised in the production of three-dimensional animals and birds, cast- and beaten-metal vessels, scientific instruments such as astrolabes and surgical tools.



Name:

Bowl

Dynasty:

Hegira 5th–6th / AD 11th–12th century Fatimid

Details:

The British Museum

London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

Lustre decoration on glass had been practised in Egypt since the early Islamic period, and the technique was later transferred to the ceramic medium.



Name:

Fragment of a glass vessel

Dynasty:

Hegira 5th century / AH 11th century Fatimid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art

Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

The animal painted on this lustre-glass fragment recalls similar creatures on contemporary lustre pottery.



Name:

Plate with battle scene

Dynasty:

Hegira, second half of the 4th–first half of the 5th century / AD 10th–11th centuries
Fatimid–Zirid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art

Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:

An early example of a Fatimid ceramic dish that was made in North Africa, prior to the departure of the dynasty to Egypt.



Name:
Jar

Dynasty:
Hegira late 4th–early 5th century / AD late 10th–early 11th century Fatimid

Details:
Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:
A typical Fatimid-period lustre pottery jar embellished with bold calligraphic inscriptions and quirky rabbits.



Name:
Lion from a fountain

Dynasty:
Hegira 5th–6th century / AD 11th–12th century Fatimid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:
Metallic animals such as this bronze lion, found multiple uses as incense burners, fountainheads, or spouts for water vessels.
