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Stylistics of Pottery in the Ardabil Style: A Case Study of Ardabil-Style Pottery from the Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum

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Abstract

Among archaeological materials, pottery provides valuable evidence for reconstructing cultural, technological, and artistic developments. Changes in vessel forms, manufacturing techniques, fabrics, tempers, colors, and decorative motifs can contribute significantly to the identification of cultural and chronological patterns and provide insights into the technological skills and artistic practices of pottery producers. This study examines the stylistic characteristics and chronological development of Ardabil-style pottery preserved in the Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum. The research employs a field- and museum-based method, descriptive–analytical and library-based research. The pottery assemblage examined consists primarily of confiscated archaeological objects transferred to the museum. Since the provenance and precise archaeological contexts of many of these objects were not documented, comparative analysis was undertaken using comparable specimens preserved in the National Museum of Iran, as well as materials recovered from archaeological sites in Iran and neighbouring regions. The study of Ardabil-style pottery represents an important aspect of the archaeology of northwestern Iran. Most known examples have entered museum collections through illicit excavations, whereas specimensrecovered through controlled archaeological excavations remain relativelylimited. The assemblage includes a variety of vessel forms, including jugs, cups and drinking vessels, vessels with trefoil-shaped rims, handled vessels, spouted vessels, drainage elements, and bases. The predominant colors are red, orange, and pale green, while the decorative repertoire consists mainly of geometric motifs, including triangular patterns, hatching, and buttonlikeornaments. Based on stylistic and comparative evidence, the pottery examined in this study can be broadly dated from the prehistoric period to the Late Parthian period, with the principal chronological range extending from the Late First Millennium BCE (Iron Age III) to the Late Parthian period. The results contribute to a better understanding of the formal,decorative, and chronological characteristics of Ardabil-style pottery and its place within the archaeological traditions of northwestern Iran.

Keywords: Northwest Iran, Ardabil-Style Pottery, Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi Al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum, Parthian-Period Archaeology.

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Introduction

Pottery is one of the most important forms of material culture and reflects various aspects of human life, including subsistence, technology, economy, social practices, and cultural interaction. Its production began during the Neolithic period and continued, with considerable technological and stylistic developments, into the present day. As one of the earliest forms of craft production, pottery was initially developed to meet fundamental human needs and subsequently underwent significant changes in manufacturing techniques, vessel forms, fabrics, and decorative traditions. Archaeologists have therefore employed pottery as an important source of evidence for identifying cultural diversity, reconstructing patterns of use, and establishing chronological frameworks across different regions and periods (Fagan, 2011: 467).

Iran is regarded as one of the earliest and most significant centers of pottery production, where a wide range of ceramic traditions developed over long periods. Throughout the history of pottery production, changes and innovations in vessel form and decoration have occurred in response to both internal cultural developments and interactions with neighbouring and more distant communities. Such transformations may reflect processes of cultural continuity and change, as well as economic and social interactions between communities. Furthermore, pottery is particularly valuable for archaeological research because of its production, distribution, exchange, transportation, and consumption. Consequently, ceramic assemblages provide important evidence for investigating relationships among different cultural groups within a region, as well as interactions between distinct regional cultural traditions. For this reason, pottery should be examined from multiple perspectives and through different analytical approaches (Majidzadeh, 1991: 9).

Geographically, northwestern Iran encompasses the present-day provinces of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, and Ardabil. Owing to its strategic geographical position, this region has maintained continuous cultural contacts with neighbouring areas, including Anatolia, Armenia, and the Caucasus. Archaeological and historical evidence indicates that during the Iron Age, northwestern Iran was involved in interactions with several political and cultural entities. These included the Urartians and Mannaeans during the ninth century BCE, the Scythians during the eighth century BCE, and Assyria, whose influence and military activities extended into the region from the early first millennium BCE. By the seventh century BCE, the region had also become closely associated with the emergence and expansion of the Median polity (Talaei, 2008: 149).

The Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum in Ardabil houses a valuable collection of archaeological and historical objects, including artefacts displayed in its galleries and stored in its repositories. A portion of the museum's collection consists of objects confiscated by law-enforcement authorities from individuals involved in unauthorized excavations. Consequently, many of these artefacts lack secure archaeological provenience and contextual information, and in some cases their authenticity has also been questioned. Despite these limitations, many of the objects are relatively well preserved and possess distinctive aesthetic and technological characteristics.

Among the archaeological materials preserved in the museum is a group of elaborately decorated ceramic vessels commonly referred to as "Ardabil-style pottery", which constitutes the principal subject of the present study. Until recent decades, numerous examples of this ceramic tradition had reportedly been recovered through unauthorized excavations and subsequently entered international art and antiquities markets, including foreign auction houses. The lack of reliable archaeological contexts for many of these vessels has considerably complicated their chronological and cultural interpretation.

In terms of morphology, Ardabil-style pottery encompasses a variety of vessel forms, including single- and double-bodied jars and decorated cups. Previous studies have identified and discussed examples of this ceramic tradition in northwestern Iran, particularly in the regions of Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and West Azerbaijan. Among the scholars who have reported and studied related pottery assemblages are Charles Allen Burney (Burney, 1979), Robert H. Dyson (Dyson, 1965), Roman Ghirshman (Ghirshman, 1954), and Ernie Haerinck (Haerinck, 1997). Their studies provide an important comparative basis for examining the morphological, stylistic, and chronological characteristics of Ardabil-style pottery.

Research Questions and Hypotheses: Because the Ardabil-style pottery examined in this study was not recovered through controlled archaeological excavations, its precise archaeological contexts and absolute chronological framework remain unknown. Establishing a relative chronology is therefore essential for determining the cultural and chronological position of this pottery within the archaeological sequence of northwestern Iran, particularly in the Ardabil region. Accordingly, the present study addresses the following questions:

1) Can Ardabil-style pottery be regarded as a distinctive ceramic tradition of northwestern Iran, particularly Azerbaijan, during the historical period, especially the Parthian period?

2) To what extent does Ardabil-style pottery represent a continuation or transformation of earlier ceramic traditions, particularly regarding vessel form, morphology, and decorative motifs, from the prehistoric periods into the historical period?

3) What is the chronological position of Ardabil-style pottery within the ceramic sequence of northwestern Iran, and what evidence can be used to establish its relative chronology?

The principal hypothesis of the study is that Ardabil-style pottery is broadly contemporary with pottery characterized by triangular decorative motifs and represents a distinctive ceramic tradition of northwestern Iran extending from the Achaemenid period into the early Parthian period, potentially as late as the second century BCE. It is further hypothesized that the distribution of this ceramic tradition was not restricted to the Ardabil region but extended into neighbouring areas, including the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, eastern Anatolia, and Armenia.

Another hypothesis is that the decorative repertoire of Ardabil-style pottery is predominantly geometric and reflects a long-standing tradition rooted in the ceramic traditions of the Bronze and Iron Ages of the first millennium BCE. From this perspective, certain decorative elements may have continued, with stylistic modifications, into the Parthian period. Similarly, the morphological characteristics of these vessels may demonstrate a degree of continuity with ceramic forms dating from the first millennium BCE through the historical periods.

Particular attention is given to the relationship between Ardabil-style pottery and the tradition of triangular-decorated pottery, which is widely represented in the ceramic assemblages of the first millennium BCE. The present study hypothesizes that Ardabil-style pottery may represent a continuation and transformation of this decorative tradition. Although the two groups differ in vessel morphology and formal characteristics, similarities in the use of geometric and triangular motifs may indicate a degree of cultural and stylistic continuity between them.

Research Methods: The present study employs a descriptive–analytical approach, combining documentary research with field- and museum-based investigations, to establish a relative chronological framework for 16 pottery vessels preserved in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum. Of these, six vessels were displayed in the museum galleries, while the remaining specimens were preserved in the museum repository.

The research process consisted of several stages. First, the selected vessels were systematically documented through photography, technical

drawings, and the preparation of detailed descriptive and technical records, including information on vessel morphology, dimensions, fabric, surface treatment, and decorative characteristics. Subsequently, the documented specimens were subjected to comparative analysis with comparable pottery assemblages preserved in other museums and with ceramic materials recovered from archaeological sites in northwestern Iran and neighboring regions. This comparative approach was used to identify similarities and differences in vessel forms, decorative motifs, technological characteristics, and stylistic attributes and, consequently, to establish a relative chronological framework for the Ardabil-style pottery examined in this study.

Research Background

The earliest scholarly attribution of Ardabil-style pottery to a specific chronological period was proposed by Charles Allen Burney following his field investigations at Yaniq Tepe in the 1960s. Burney attributed this ceramic tradition to the Late Iron Age III (Burney, 1960). Subsequently, in 1964, Robert H. Dyson examined a substantial assemblage of Ardabil-style pottery recovered by unauthorized excavators from cemeteries in the Ardabil region. Based on its formal and decorative characteristics, Dyson associated this pottery broadly with the Hasanlu I ceramic tradition and, particularly in terms of its decorative repertoire, with Hasanlu IIIA, a phase in which triangular-patterned pottery became prominent. He consequently proposed a chronological range extending from the Achaemenid to the Parthian periods (Dyson, 1964).

Roman Ghirshman also referred to related ceramic materials in his discussions of Iranian archaeological remains and emphasized their significance within the broader development of Iranian pottery traditions (Ghirshman, 1989). Haerinck subsequently undertook a comparative study of Ardabil-style pottery and related ceramic materials from Mingachevir in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Anatolia, northwestern Iran, and Germi in Ardabil Province. Based on these comparisons, he assigned the pottery to a chronological range extending from the Achaemenid period to the Late Parthian period (Haerinck, 1997: 145).

As noted above, the majority of known Ardabil-style pottery derives from unauthorized excavations and lacks secure archaeological contexts. Consequently, many of the chronological attributions proposed for this ceramic tradition are based primarily on stylistic and comparative evidence rather than on firmly stratified archaeological contexts. More reliable chronological evidence is provided by the scientific excavations conducted

at the cemeteries of Germi by Kambakhsh Fard. Based on coins recovered from the graves, Kambakhsh Fard attributed the associated Ardabil-style pottery to the Parthian period (Kambakhsh Fard, 1998). This chronological interpretation is also broadly consistent with the research conducted by S. Piran on Ardabil-style pottery preserved in the National Museum of Iran. Piran proposed a relative and absolute chronological range extending from the end of Iron Age III to the end of the Parthian period (Piran, 2003: 17).

Ardabil-style and triangular-decorated pottery have also been documented during archaeological surveys and investigations at several sites in northwestern Iran. Examples have been identified at the Qonaq Qeyran fortress, where they have been associated with the Achaemenid period (Valdebigi *et al.*, 2014: 5). Related ceramic materials have also been reported from sites such as Buyini Yoghun Fortress in Nir County (Pourfaraj, 2017), the Bonab Plain (Kazem Nezhad Asl, 2016), and Yaniq Tepe (Burney, 1960), among other archaeological sites in the region.

Taken together, the available evidence suggests that the chronology of Ardabil-style pottery remains a matter of scholarly discussion, largely because of the absence of secure archaeological contexts for a substantial proportion of the known assemblage. Nevertheless, the combination of stratified archaeological evidence, associated finds such as coins, and comparative stylistic analysis provides a basis for proposing a relative chronological framework extending broadly from the Late Iron Age III through the Parthian period. The present study seeks to reassess this chronological framework through a systematic examination of the Ardabil-style pottery preserved in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum and comparison with securely dated archaeological materials from northwestern Iran and adjacent regions.

Azerbaijan Region

The historical region of Azerbaijan, corresponding broadly to the present-day provinces of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, and Ardabil in northwestern Iran, is characterized by a predominantly mountainous landscape and a strategic geographical position. Situated at the intersection of the Iranian Plateau, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the South Caucasus, and the Caspian basin, the region has historically functioned as an important corridor for human mobility, trade, and cultural interaction (Faizkhah *et al.*, 2009: 26). Its geographical position contributed significantly to the development of diverse settlement patterns and to sustained cultural contacts between communities in the Iranian Plateau, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus.

The present-day geographical configuration of Azerbaijan is largely the result of complex geological processes, including orogenic movements, tectonic activity, and volcanism. During the Tertiary period, major geological transformations contributed to the formation of the region's present mountainous topography and geological structure (Darvishzadeh, 1991: 659). The resulting combination of mountain ranges, intermontane valleys, plains, and river systems has played an important role in shaping patterns of human settlement and communication throughout different historical periods (Pirnia, 1991: 87).

During the first millennium BCE, the region formed part of the political and cultural landscape of western and northwestern Iran and was associated with the territory of Media. In classical and later historical sources, parts of the region were also referred to as Atropatene, a designation traditionally associated with Atropates, the local ruler who established an autonomous political entity in the region following the fragmentation of the Achaemenid Empire and the subsequent Macedonian and Seleucid periods (Dyakonov, 2007: 859). The political and geographical position of the region facilitated interactions with neighbouring areas while also allowing earlier cultural traditions to persist. In some cases, these traditions interacted with contemporary cultural developments, resulting in new forms of material culture and artistic expression that were characteristic of northwestern Iran and its neighbouring regions (Haerinck, 1997: 110).

Throughout the pre-Islamic period, the region experienced successive phases of political incorporation and relative autonomy under different ruling powers. The emergence of the Median polity and, subsequently, the formation of the Atropatene political entity represent important stages in the historical development of northwestern Iran (Christensen, 1998: 114). These political transformations did not necessarily result in the complete replacement of earlier cultural traditions; rather, archaeological evidence indicates varying degrees of continuity, transformation, and interaction among local and external cultural traditions.

During the Islamic period, Azerbaijan continued to occupy an important geopolitical position. From the early centuries of the Islamic era, the region underwent substantial political, economic, and cultural transformations. The arrival and expansion of Turkic-speaking groups, particularly from the Seljuk period onward, contributed to significant changes in the political and cultural landscape of Azerbaijan and neighbouring regions of the Caucasus. Maragheh and Tabriz subsequently emerged as major political, economic, and cultural centers, particularly during the medieval period.

In later centuries, Azerbaijan remained an important center of political and cultural developments. The Safavid period was of particular significance because of the close association of the region, especially Ardabil, with the origins and early development of the Safavid dynasty. Subsequent periods, including the Zand and Qajar eras, also played important roles in the political and historical development of Azerbaijan (Shaabani, 1998: 27). The region's long history of interaction among local traditions and external influences provides an important context for understanding the development and transformation of its material culture, including its ceramic traditions.

Ardabil-Style Pottery

Ardabil-style pottery is a distinctive ceramic tradition characterized by bold painted decoration and was first defined and named by Ernie Haerinck. These vessels generally have a cream or beige-colored slip and are decorated with large, prominently executed motifs. The decorative repertoire is predominantly geometric and includes simple triangles filled with hatching, rhombuses, and groups of parallel lines. In addition to geometric motifs, some vessels bear representations of animals, particularly birds and antelopes. The painted motifs are generally executed in relatively matt colors, most commonly bright red, orange-red, and dark brown (Haerinck, 1997: 142, 146).

The chronology of Ardabil-style pottery has been the subject of different interpretations. Based on ceramic evidence from Yaniq Tepe, Charles Burney initially assigned this pottery tradition to the Late Iron Age III (Burney, 1960). Haerinck subsequently revised this chronology and proposed a date extending from the sixth–fifth centuries BCE to the second century BCE (Haerinck, 1997: 110; Piran, 2003: 20). Piran later attempted to establish a more precise chronology through thermoluminescence (TL) analysis of Ardabil-style pottery. The samples analysed included four pottery vessels from confiscated collections and two pottery fragments from the archaeological site of Zahhak Castle and Yaniq Tepe. According to Piran, the TL results indicated a date corresponding to the Late Parthian period (Piran, 2003: 128). In addition, comparison with Ardabil-style pottery from Sarein, which was considered broadly contemporary with Bichorom pottery and dated to the Late Parthian period, together with comparative evidence from Zahhak Castle, was used to support the proposed chronological attribution (Ibid).

It should be noted, however, that the chronological interpretation of Ardabil-style pottery remains problematic because a considerable

proportion of the known examples lack secure archaeological contexts. Consequently, chronological assessments based on stylistic comparison, laboratory analyses of samples from poorly documented collections, and comparisons with materials from excavated sites should be evaluated separately in terms of their evidential reliability. Securely excavated and well-dated contexts therefore remain particularly important for establishing a more reliable chronological framework.

Regarding vessel morphology, Haerinck classified Ardabil-style pottery into two principal groups: cups and jars. This remains the most general morphological classification proposed for the tradition to date (Haerinck, 1997: 115). The known geographical distribution of Ardabil-style pottery has largely been reconstructed from materials recovered through commercial and illicit excavations, particularly from graves in Ardabil Province, as well as from the comparative studies of Dyson (Dyson, 1965) and Roman Ghirshman (Ghirshman, 1966: 94). The absence of reliable archaeological provenience for many of these vessels has consequently limited the possibility of establishing a precise spatial and chronological distribution.

Given that a substantial proportion of the Ardabil-style pottery available for study has entered collections through unauthorized excavations and illicit trafficking, the assemblage preserved in the Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum provides an important, although contextually problematic, body of material for comparative study. According to the museum records, this collection was confiscated from individuals involved in the illicit trade of antiquities in Ardabil Province in the 1990s and has subsequently been preserved in the museum repository. Of the 16 vessels examined in the present study, six are currently displayed in the museum showcases, while the remaining specimens are kept in storage.

Because the original archaeological contexts and precise findspots of these vessels are unknown, the present study does not attempt to establish an absolute chronology for the assemblage. Instead, it employs a relative chronological approach based on comparison with securely or more reliably dated ceramic materials from the National Museum of Iran, archaeological sites in northwestern Iran and neighbouring regions, and comparable materials from the broader Azerbaijan region. Particular emphasis is placed on similarities and differences in vessel morphology, decorative motifs, fabric characteristics, and stylistic attributes to clarify the chronological and cultural position of the Ardabil-style pottery preserved in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum.

Classification of Vessel Forms

Based on morphological characteristics, the Ardabil-style pottery examined in this study can be divided into three principal vessel categories: 1) jars, 2) cups or bowls, and 3) drinking vessels.

1. Jars

The assemblage contains 12 small- and medium-sized jars. Based on their morphological characteristics, these vessels can be divided into four main types:

- Jars with a handle and a vertical spout terminating in a trefoil-shaped mouth;
- Jars with two lateral handles, some of which are modelled in the form of animal figures, particularly goats;
- Jars with a narrow neck and globular body; and
- Handleless jars with rounded or globular bodies.

Haerinck compared some of these jar forms with examples recovered from the Republic of Azerbaijan and proposed a second-millennium BCE date for the comparative material. Similar morphological characteristics have also been reported from Takht-e Soleyman and Level IV at Hasanlu (Haerinck, 1997: 146). The jars in the present assemblage are frequently decorated with button-like motifs, and most have clearly defined bases. One distinctive form is a jar with a spout projecting from the lower part of the vessel, referred to as a "double-spouted" or "double-tube jar" in the relevant literature. The unusual morphology of some of these vessels has led to suggestions concerning their possible ritual or ceremonial functions.

One particularly distinctive vessel has two lateral handles modelled in the form of goats. The legs of the animals are attached to the shoulder and neck of the vessel, while their horns curve towards the rim and are connected to it, creating a symmetrical arrangement on either side of the opening. The spout is incorporated into the raised lower portion of the globular body. Similar zoomorphic elements have been interpreted as representations of animals such as goats or horses (Haerinck, 1997: 147). Comparable examples are also represented in the Ardabil-style pottery collection of the National Museum of Iran.

The chronological and cultural origins of this vessel type have been discussed by several researchers. According to Speiser (1933), one of the earliest examples was recovered from Level III at Tell Pila. This vessel has been compared with Khabur-type ceramics and dated to the Late Bronze Age (1600–1300 BCE). Haerinck, however, discussed comparable examples within a later chronological framework and associated them

with the post-Achaemenid and Parthian periods, based partly on their morphological similarities to vessels reported from Pasargadae and Bagram and attributed to the Achaemenid–Parthian transition or later periods. He also cited examples from Tell Maghuz and Tell Shamlu as comparative material (Haerinck, 1980).

These chronological differences demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between the earliest known examples of a vessel form and the chronological attribution of the Ardabil-style specimens under study. Morphological similarity alone cannot establish contemporaneity, particularly when the archaeological contexts of the specimens are unknown. Accordingly, comparative evidence is used in the present study primarily to establish a relative chronological framework rather than to assign an absolute date to individual vessels.

2. Cups and Bowls

Two vessels in the assemblage can be classified as cups or bowls. They are characterized by relatively wide openings, angular bodies, and considerable depth. Both vessels are decorated with geometric motifs, including cross-hatched patterns, applied to both the interior and exterior surfaces. Their morphology and decorative treatment provide useful comparative evidence for identifying relationships between the Ardabil-style assemblage and other ceramic traditions of northwestern Iran.

3. Drinking Vessels

Two handleless drinking vessels have been identified. They are approximately 17 cm high, with mouth diameters of approximately 12 cm. Both have flat bases and relatively cylindrical bodies. Their distinctive morphology and proportions suggest that they may represent a less frequently documented form within the Ardabil-style ceramic repertoire and therefore constitute a potentially significant addition to the known range of vessel forms.

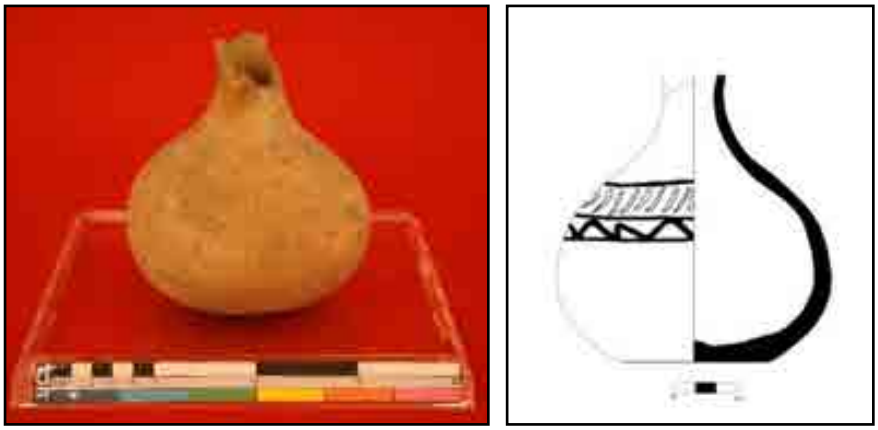
Technical and Decorative Characteristics: The pottery assemblage exhibits a color range dominated by red brick, light brick, and pale green tones. Most vessels are decorated with geometric motifs, although several examples also bear zoomorphic representations. Considerable variation can be observed in the execution of the painted decoration. On some vessels, the motifs are carefully and precisely executed, whereas on others the designs appear to have been applied more freely, with less emphasis on geometric regularity.

The ceramic fabric is predominantly brick-red in color and generally contains mineral and ceramic inclusions, including grog (chamotte), relatively coarse sand, and fine windblown sand. Most vessels appear to have been wheel-made, although some specimens show characteristics consistent with production on a slow-rotating wheel. The painted decoration is primarily executed in red ochre.

The decorative repertoire is predominantly geometric and includes simple triangular motifs, both hatched and solid, fan-shaped designs, chevrons, filled lozenges or diamonds, and star motifs. In addition to these geometric elements, several vessels display animal representations. The combination of geometric and zoomorphic motifs, together with variation in the execution of the designs, constitutes one of the principal stylistic characteristics of the Ardabil-style pottery examined in this study.

Examples

1) A handleless jar with a narrow neck, spherical body, flat base, and a broken, incomplete rim. The vessel body is decorated with geometric motifs, consisting of zigzag and hashuri patterns arranged in two horizontal registers encircling the lower part of the body. The ceramic fabric is brick-red in color and covered with a pale buff slip. The decorative motifs are painted in ochre. The temper is sand inclusions, and the vessel was manufactured using slow wheel rotation. The object is heavily covered with sediment deposits, which obscure the surface and hinder clear observation of the decorative scheme (Fig. 1).



◄ **Fig. 1: Narrow-necked jar, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).**

2) A vertically handled jar with a narrow neck, an elongated, almost oval body, and a convex base. The vessel is undecorated. It is wheel-made from brick-red clay fabric and covered with a light brick-red slip. The object is complete and well preserved (Fig. 2).

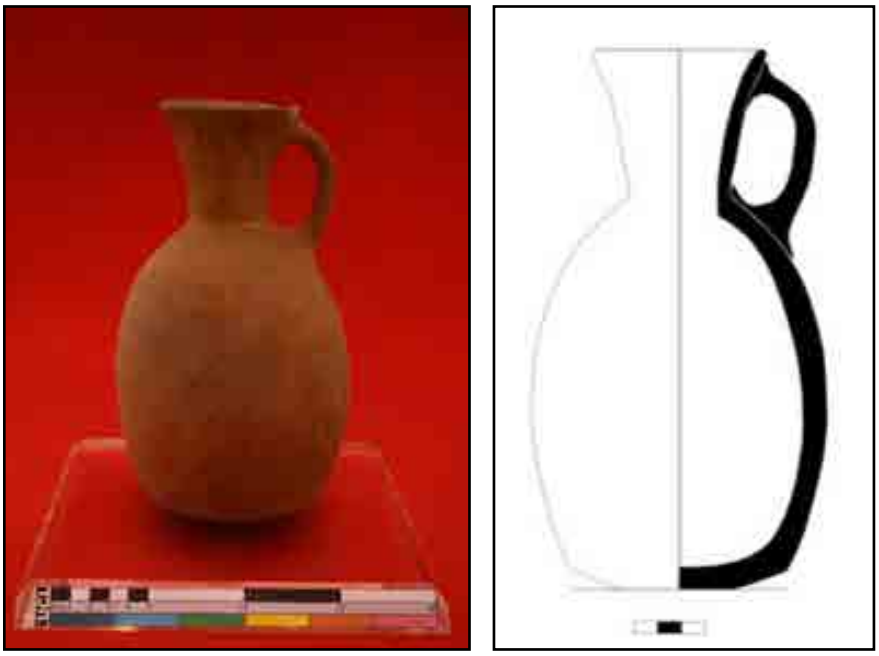


Fig. 2: Narrow-necked jar with handle, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

3) A handleless jar with a spherical body and a broken, incomplete rim. The interior surface is decorated with triangular geometric motifs, while the exterior bears triangular motifs on the body and a row of enclosed triangles within a rectangular frame encircling the vessel. The vessel is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric containing sand as temper. The surface is covered with a buff-colored slip, with ochre-painted floral motifs. The object is poorly preserved and incomplete; sediment deposits, surface abrasion, and weathering obscure parts of the decorative scheme and prevent full observation of the original motifs (Fig. 3).

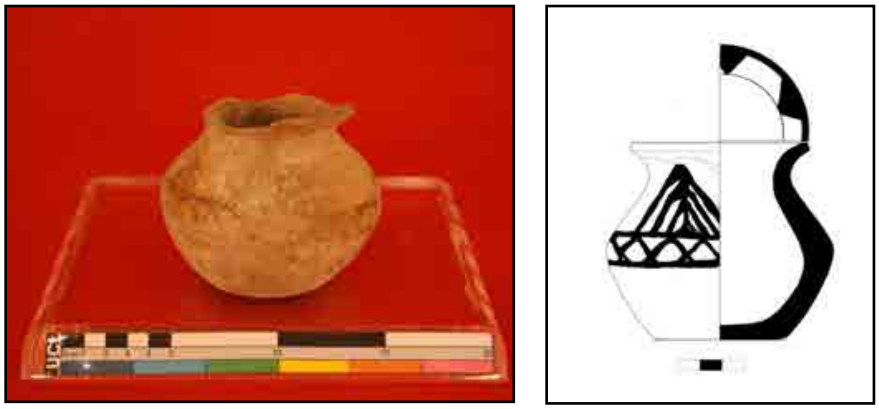


Fig. 3: Handleless jar – spherical body, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

4) A small shallow bowl with a handle, flat base, and a small spout. The rim extends into a small lug handle with perforation, while a small projection on the rim serves as a spout. The exterior surface of the rim is decorated with geometric motifs consisting of ochre-painted hatched

designs. The vessel is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric containing sand inclusions and is covered with a light brick-red slip. The object is complete and well preserved (Fig. 4).

◀ **Fig. 4: Handled shallow bowl, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).**

5) A deep bowl with a wide mouth. The interior surface is decorated with geometric motifs arranged around the rim, while the interior base features an oval medallion containing geometric designs. The decoration is executed in ochre and applied in an irregular and coarse manner. The vessel is wheel-made and has a rounded profile. The ceramic fabric is tempered with sand inclusions and is covered with a brick-red slip. The object is complete and well preserved, although affected by sediment deposits (Fig. 5).

◀ **Fig. 5: Deep cup (bowl) with a wide mouth, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).**

6) A handleless jar with a narrow neck, spherical body, and flat base. The exterior surface of the vessel, extending from the neck to the shoulder and body, is decorated with three horizontal bands of solid lines encircling the vessel. Below these bands, a decorative register contains hollow triangular motifs arranged in a zigzag pattern around the body, painted in ochre. The vessel is wheel-made with a rounded profile. The ceramic fabric

is brick-red and tempered with sand, and covered with a light brick-red slip. The object is well preserved, although some areas of the rim show faded surface coloration (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: A jar with a narrow neck and no handle, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

7) A handled jar with a clover-shaped mouth, an almost spherical body, and a handle connecting the rim to the shoulder of the vessel. The vessel is undecorated. It is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand inclusions and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is partially preserved, with a broken and missing section of the rim, while parts of the surface are covered with sediment deposits (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Handled jar with clover-shaped spout, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

8) A handled jar with an applied handle. The vessel has a pear-shaped mouth, an almost spherical body, and a flat base. The exterior surface of the rim is decorated with applied button motifs, while the exterior body, extending from below the rim to the upper part of the body, bears ochre-painted geometric motifs consisting of triangles and hatched designs. Similar hatched geometric motifs are also present on the handle. These

motifs were executed using an incision technique. The interior surface of the rim is decorated with geometric hatched motifs extending around the entire rim. The vessel is wheel-made, with a rounded profile, and is produced from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with chamotte and sand inclusions. It is covered with a buff-colored slip. The vessel is complete and well preserved. This vessel form is comparable to examples documented in the pottery assemblage from the Germi excavation (Fig. 8).

◀Fig. 8: Handled jar with pear-shaped mouth, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).

9) A handled jar with a clover-shaped mouth; the handle is applied and extends from the rim to the body of the vessel. The vessel has a spherical body and a flat base. The exterior surface of the rim and body is decorated with geometric motifs, including two solid ochre-painted horizontal lines encircling the vessel. The vessel is wheel-made with a rounded profile, produced from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand inclusions, and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is complete and well preserved (Fig. 9).

◀ Fig. 9: Handled jar with clover-shaped spout, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).

10) A handled jar with two handles attached on opposite sides of the rim, one of which incorporates an attached animal-shaped spout. Two additional tubular spouts are positioned on either side of the base and function as supports, providing stability for the vessel. The exterior surface of the body is decorated with ochre-painted geometric motifs consisting of hatched triangles and hollow triangular designs arranged around the vessel. The vessel is made of brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with chamotte and sand inclusions and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is poorly preserved, with one handle partially broken and the rim and vessel edges damaged and incomplete (Fig. 10).

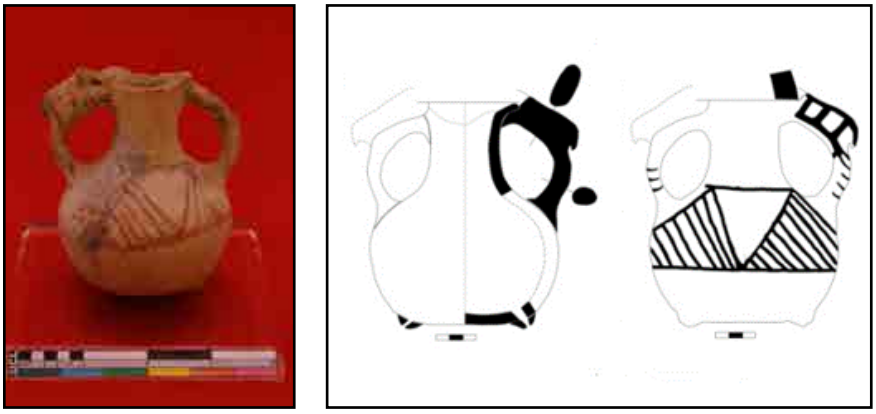


Fig. 10: Handled jug, with a spout, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

11) A small handled jar with a narrow neck and two tubular spouts positioned on either side of the base, serving as supports for the stability of the vessel. Geometric decoration begins below the neck and extends across the body. The neck is decorated with solid triangular motifs, while the body bears an ochre-painted decorative frame composed of intersecting and non-intersecting hollow triangles. Hatched geometric motifs are also present on both handles. The vessel is made of brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand inclusions and covered with a brick-red slip. The object is complete and well preserved, although sediment deposits cover parts of the surface (Fig. 11).

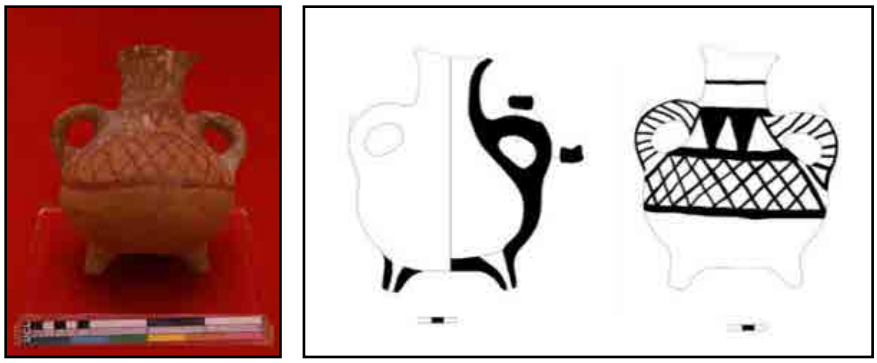
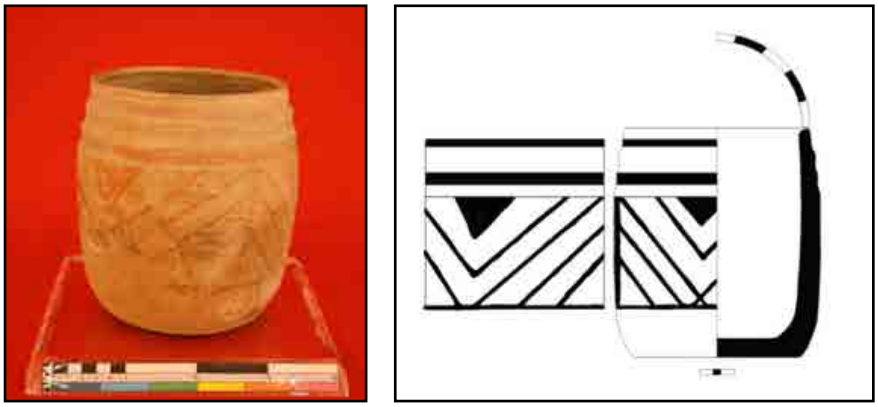


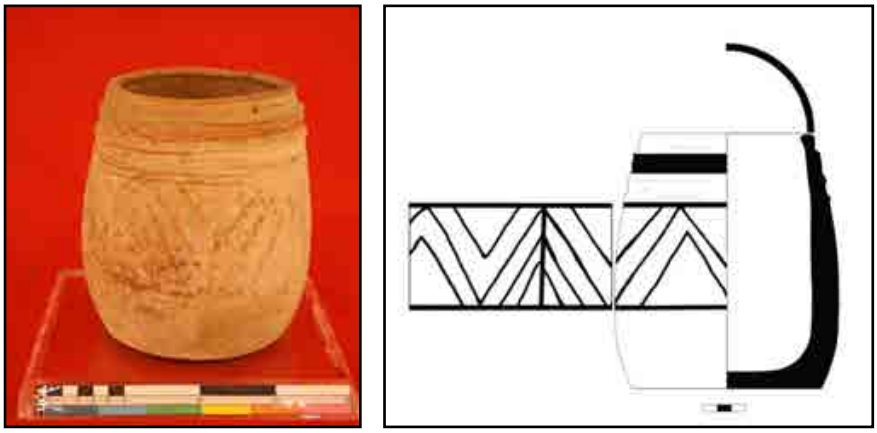
Fig. 11: Small handled jar with narrow neck, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

12) A handleless drinking bowl with a cylindrical body and flat base. The exterior surface is decorated with geometric motifs. The rim bears encircling linear decoration, while the body is decorated with ochre-painted geometric motifs consisting of solid and hollow chevrons. The vessel is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with rounded coarse sand and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is complete and well preserved, although the surfaces are covered with sediment deposits (Fig. 12).



◄ **Fig. 12: Handleless drinking bowl with cylindrical body, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).**

13) A handleless drinking bowl with a cylindrical body and flat base. The exterior surface bears geometric decoration, with encircling linear motifs around the rim. The body is decorated with solid and hollow geometric motifs painted in ochre. The vessel is made of brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with rounded chamotte and coarse sand inclusions and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is complete and well preserved; however, sediment deposits and surface abrasion in some areas obscure parts of the decorative scheme (Fig. 13).



◄ **Fig. 13: Handleless drinking bowl with cylindrical body, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).**

14) A handled jar with a vertical spout connected to the rim by a small bridge. The vessel has a spherical body and flat base. Applied button motifs decorate the spout and handle. The interior surface of the rim is decorated

with incised hatched geometric motifs extending around the rim, while the exterior body bears a row of solid ochre-painted triangular motifs. The vessel is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand and covered with a brick-red slip. The object is poorly preserved, with a broken and incomplete rim (Fig. 14).

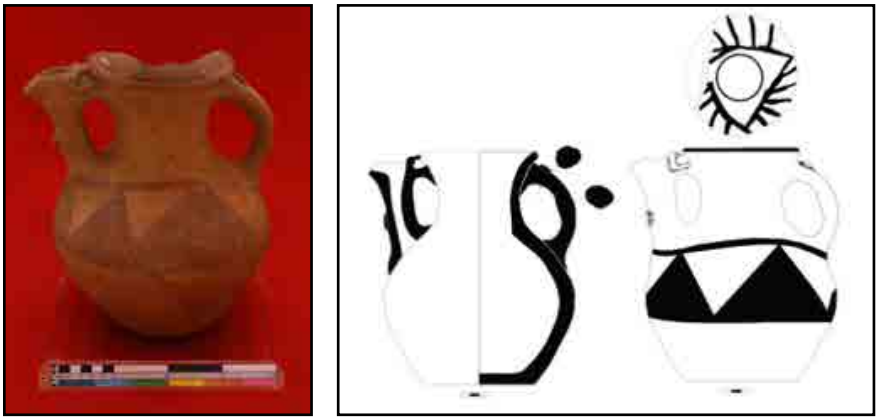


Fig. 14: Handled jug with vertical spout (Archaeology Museum, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

15) A jar with two tubular spouts positioned on either side of the base and two zoomorphic handles in the form of goats attached to the rim and shoulder. The forelegs of the handles are attached to the rim, while the hind legs are attached to the shoulder. The heads of the animal-shaped handles are turned backward toward the rim and arranged symmetrically. The exterior surface of the vessel is decorated with ochre-painted geometric motifs consisting of hollow chevron-shaped triangles. The vessel is made of brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand and covered with a brick-red slip. The object is complete and well preserved (Fig. 15).

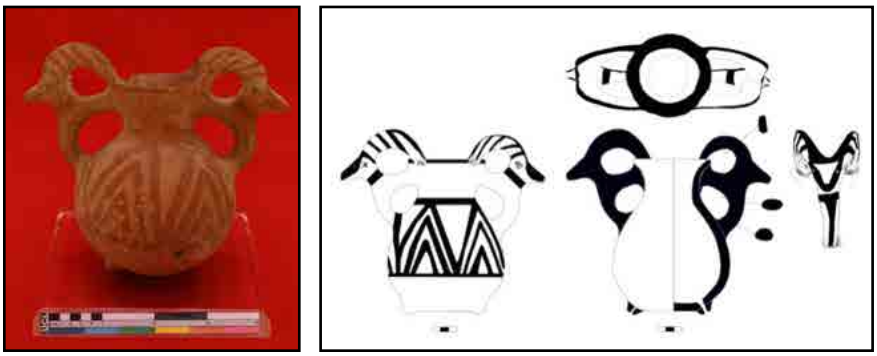
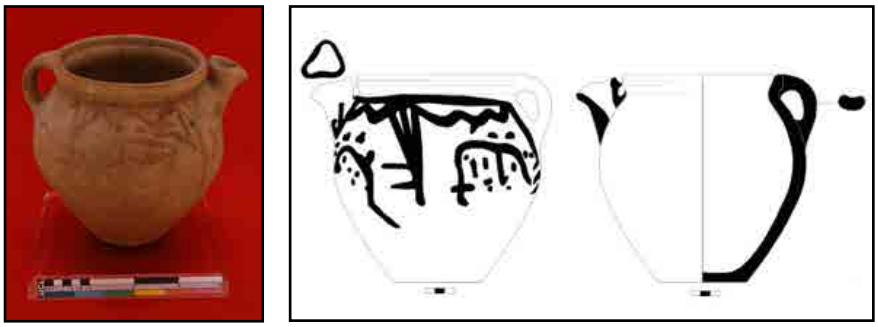


Fig. 15: Jar with two pipe drains, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018). ▶

16) A large, handled jar with a small spout featuring a clover-shaped mouth, a spherical body, and a flat base. The exterior surface of the body is decorated with indistinct ochre-painted geometric motifs. The vessel is wheel-made from brick-red ceramic fabric tempered with sand inclusions and covered with a buff-colored slip. The object is complete and well preserved, although parts of the surface are covered with sediment deposits (Fig. 16).



◀ Fig. 16: A jar with a handle and a clover spout, Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).

Study of Northwestern Iranian Pottery in Terms of Decoration and Form

Northwestern Iran has played an important role in the cultural, economic, and political developments of the Iranian Plateau and its neighbouring regions since the first millennium BCE. The region's strategic geographical position, together with its extensive cultural contacts with Anatolia, the South Caucasus, Mesopotamia, and other parts of the Iranian Plateau, contributed to the emergence and transformation of diverse ceramic traditions. Nevertheless, the sequence of ceramic developments in northwestern Iran from the Late Iron Age through the emergence of Parthian political authority remains incompletely understood. This is particularly evident in the transition from Iron Age III to the subsequent historical periods, when significant changes occurred in local political structures, settlement patterns, and material culture.

The ceramic tradition of Iron Age III in northwestern Iran, conventionally dated to approximately 750–600 BCE, comprises a diverse range of vessel forms and decorative traditions. These ceramic assemblages provide valuable evidence for understanding local cultural practices and the development of regional identities. Among the most distinctive painted ceramic traditions attributed to this period and its subsequent phases are the Triangular Style and what has subsequently been termed the Ardabil Style. The emergence and distribution of these painted ceramics provide an important basis for examining cultural continuity and transformation from the Late Iron Age into the Achaemenid and Parthian periods.

In discussing the chronological and cultural changes that occurred in northwestern Iran, Levin proposed the addition of an Iron Age IV phase to the conventional sequence of the Iron Age, particularly to account for the poorly understood period between the Late Iron Age and the emergence of the Parthian period (Levin, 2007: 476). The appearance of painted pottery during this transitional phase represents a significant development when compared with the ceramic traditions of the Early and Middle Iron Ages

and with the characteristic triangular-decorated pottery associated with Iron Age III.

Dyson initially employed the designation Hasanlu IIIB in his discussion of painted pottery from northwestern Iran (Dyson, 1958). Subsequent investigations at sites such as Ziwiye (Dyson, 1963; 1965) and Yaniq Tepe (Burney, 1962) contributed substantially to the identification and interpretation of these ceramic traditions. Although painted pottery has been recovered from a relatively limited number of archaeological sites, its occurrence within the ceramic sequences of northwestern Iran is characterized by recurring technological and stylistic attributes, including particular color combinations, fabric characteristics, tempering practices, vessel forms, and decorative motifs (Henrickson, 1994: 115).

Triangular-Decorated Pottery

Triangular-decorated pottery constitutes one of the most recognizable ceramic traditions of northwestern Iran during the Late Iron Age and subsequent periods. Its decorative repertoire includes a variety of geometric and figurative motifs, such as triangular patterns, incised or painted geometric designs, suspended or pendant motifs, circular elements, drop-shaped motifs, and representations of birds. The associated vessels generally have angular or shallow profiles, sometimes with concave bodies and relatively thin rims. Some examples exhibit tulip-shaped or related morphological characteristics. The geographical distribution of this tradition extends principally across southern, western, and northwestern Azerbaijan, Armenia, northern Kurdistan, and eastern Anatolia (Fayzkhah, 2009: 287).

Some decorated vessels are characterized by handles modelled in the form of animals standing on their hind legs. Their surfaces may be covered with a pale green or buff-green slip and decorated with cream and reddish-brown motifs. The decorative repertoire includes simple triangles, solid geometric motifs incorporating crosses, groups of parallel lines, and both solid and hatched designs. In some cases, the decoration includes a frieze of animals, particularly running or galloping deer and goats. These motifs are generally concentrated on the shoulder and upper body of the vessels.

Because many of these vessels have not been recovered from controlled archaeological excavations, their precise chronology remains uncertain. Nevertheless, comparative evidence from excavated sites in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the occurrence of similar specimens at several archaeological sites in Iran suggest that at least some forms may be associated with the Achaemenid or Early Parthian periods (Haerinck, 1978:

35–36). Such comparisons should, however, be regarded as evidence for relative chronology rather than as definitive chronological determinations for vessels lacking secure archaeological contexts.

Relationship between Triangular and Ardabil Styles

Dyson, in his study of the Hasanlu III ceramic sequence and his comparison of triangular-decorated pottery from northwestern Iran with ceramic traditions from the eastern regions of the Achaemenid Empire, distinguished different regional expressions of painted pottery, including what he termed the Western Triangular Style (Dyson, 1999). Haerinck subsequently examined painted jars and vessels preserved in various museum collections and associated with the Ardabil region and proposed the term Ardabil Style for this group of ceramics (Haerinck, 1978).

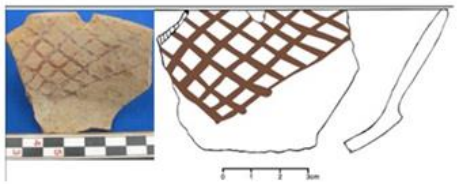
In his classification of ceramics of the pre-Parthian period, Haerinck identified Yaniq Tepe as an important site because both Western Triangular pottery and Ardabil-style pottery occur there. He consequently regarded the site as a potential zone of interaction or overlap between the distribution areas of these ceramic traditions (Haerinck, 1997). However, the contextual evidence from Yaniq Tepe requires careful consideration. The Ardabil-style pottery reported from the site was recovered from a refuse deposit rather than from a clearly defined stratigraphic sequence. Therefore, the available evidence does not by itself demonstrate a chronological development, direct convergence, or evolutionary relationship between the Western Triangular and Ardabil styles (Burney, 1962; Summers & Burney, 2012).

More recent archaeological investigations in northwestern Iran have provided additional evidence for reconstructing ceramic developments between the Iron Age and the Parthian period. Continued excavations at Hasanlu (Khatib Shahidi, 2004; Kroll, 2012), excavations at Kul Tepe Hadi Shahr in Jolfa (Khatib Shahidi & Abedi, 2011), investigations at Zahhak Castle in Hashtrud (Qandgar *et al.,* 2004), excavations at Buini Yoghun Castle in Nir (Pourfaraj, 2017), archaeological surveys of the Bonab Plain (2000; 2004), investigations at Qonagh Qeyran Castle (Valdbeigi *et al.,* 2014), and archaeological surveys along the eastern shores of Lake Urmia (Omrani, 1993; Ajurloo, 2007; Ebrahimi, 2012) have all contributed to a better understanding of the ceramic sequence and cultural developments of the region.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the transition from the Late Iron Age to the Achaemenid and Parthian periods in northwestern Iran was characterized by considerable ceramic diversity and by the

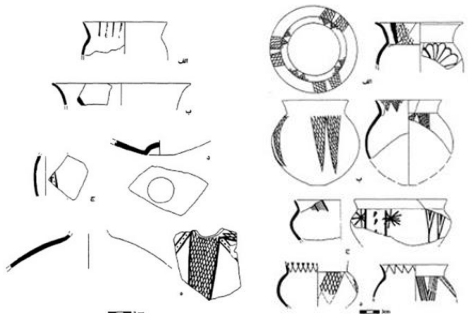
persistence, transformation, and regional differentiation of earlier decorative traditions. The relationship between Triangular Style pottery and Ardabil-style pottery is therefore best approached through comparative analysis of morphology, decoration, fabric, technology, and archaeological context rather than through assumptions of direct stylistic continuity. The pottery preserved in the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Museum, despite its uncertain archaeological provenience, provides an important comparative assemblage for investigating these relationships and for evaluating the proposed chronological position of Ardabil-style pottery within the broader ceramic sequence of northwestern Iran.

Table 1: Samples of pottery from north-west Iran (Authors, 2018). ▶

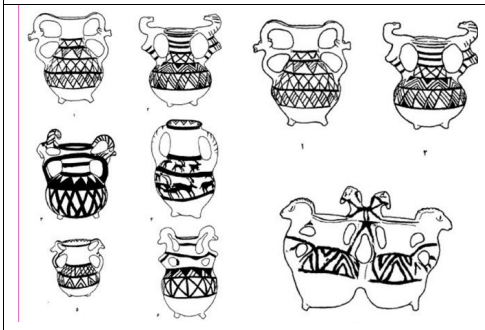


Painted pottery fragment from Boini Castle in Yoghun (Pourfaraj, 2017: 45).

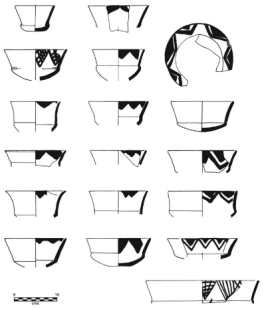
Pottery with a triangular pattern from Aqrab Tepe (Muscarella, 1973).



Classical "imported" triangular vessels from Hasanlu Tepe (Faizkhah & Aliyun, 2009: 382)



Double-rolled vessels discovered in Azerbaijan (Faizkhah, 2009)



Woven vessels from Yaniq-Tepe (Summers, 2013)

The Ardabil-style pottery collection preserved in the National Museum of Iran includes a number of vessels originating from the Foroughi Seized Collection, which was confiscated at the Bazargan border in 1988. In 1996, these objects were catalogued and examined by specialists under the

supervision of the Cultural Heritage Department of Tehran Province and the National Museum of Iran. In addition to this collection, the comparative corpus includes pottery fragments recovered through archaeological excavations at Zahhak Castle in East Azerbaijan and from Charles Burney's excavations at Yaniq Tepe in 1960 (Burney, 1960).

Based on morphological characteristics, Sedigheh Piran classified the vessels represented in these collections into three principal categories: 1) jars, 2) cups, and 3) drinking vessels (Piran, 2003: 62). These vessels generally feature cream-colored to buff-colored slips and are characterized by relatively large painted motifs. In many cases, the decorative designs were executed with limited concern for geometric regularity or precision. On some specimens, traces of surface finishing and smoothing tools remain visible beneath or on the slipped surfaces.

The painted decoration is generally matte and was executed primarily in ochre, dark and light brown, and reddish-orange pigments. The ceramic fabric is predominantly brick-red, orange, or buff in color and contains fine sand and grog (chamotte) temper, with occasional fine white mineral inclusions. Based on macroscopic examination, the fabrics may generally be classified as semi-coarse to semi-fine. However, accurate characterization of their mineralogical composition, provenance, and firing conditions requires petrographic and archaeometric analyses.

The decorative repertoire is predominantly geometric and includes simple triangular motifs, both hatched and solid, fan-shaped motifs, solid lozenges or diamond-shaped elements, and linear designs. In addition to geometric decoration, some vessels feature zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations, including birds, goats, deer, dogs, human figures, cross-shaped trees, and circular motifs interpreted as possible solar symbols. Piran has noted similarities between some of these zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations and motifs documented in the rock art and petroglyph traditions of northwestern Iran. Comparable imagery has been reported from several locations in Ardabil Province, including Aq Morad, Moshiran, Shakili Dash, Qaleh Qahqeh, and Ganakh Qeyran (Piran, 2003: 63–65). These parallels may contribute to discussions concerning the symbolic repertoire of the region; however, such comparisons should be approached cautiously, as formal similarities alone do not necessarily demonstrate direct cultural or chronological relationships.

Comparative analysis of Ardabil-style pottery from the National Museum of Iran, the Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum, and comparable assemblages from neighboring regions reveals several recurring morphological and decorative

characteristics. These include large jars with handles and relatively vertical spouts, frequently terminating in trefoil-shaped or zoomorphic mouths. Their bodies are commonly decorated with large-scale geometric motifs (Tab 2: Figs. 1–4).

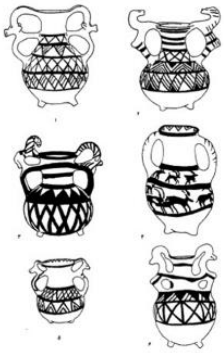
Another distinctive vessel form is the handleless drinking vessel, characterized by a cylindrical body and flat base. Its exterior surface is decorated with geometric motifs. The rim is encircled by a band of linear decoration, while the body bears solid and hollow geometric motifs executed in ochre (Tab 2: Figs. 5–6).

A further distinctive form is the double-spouted jar, characterized by two tubular spouts projecting from the lower part of the vessel and two zoomorphic handles modeled in the form of goats positioned near the rim. The forelegs of the animal figures are attached to the rim, while the hind legs are attached to the shoulder of the vessel. Their heads are turned backward toward the rim, creating a symmetrical composition on either side of the vessel. The exterior surface is decorated with geometric motifs, particularly hollow or outlined triangular patterns executed in ochre (Tab 2: Figs. 7–9).

The recurrence of these vessel forms and decorative elements in collections from Ardabil, the National Museum of Iran, and archaeological sites in northwestern Iran provides an important foundation for comparative studies. In particular, the combination of trefoil or zoomorphic spouts, animal-shaped handles, painted geometric motifs, and distinctive fabric and surface treatments may be considered among the principal stylistic attributes associated with Ardabil-style pottery.

Table 2: Samples of Comparable pottery (Authors, 2018). ▼

Fig. 1: Jars With trefoil-shaped rims. Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).	Fig. 2: Jars Spouted Jar in the Bird shape (National Museum of Iran Archives, 2018).	Fig. 3: Jar from the Yaniq Tepe site (Summers & Bunery, 2012)

Fig. 4: Mingechaur jar, Azerbaijan IA3 (Bijeb, 1960: xita6JIO).	Fig. 5: Drinking vessel -bowl, with cylindrical body, Sheikh Safi-al- Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).	Fig. 6: Drinking vessel-bowl, with cylindrical body, in Juno, Azerbaijan. (de Morgan, 1896)
Fig. 7: Two-spouted Jar; Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum Archaeological Museum (Authors, 2018).	Fig. 8: Two-spouted Jar (National Museum of Iran Archives, 2018).	 Fig. 9: Two-Spouted Jar (Fayzkhah & Aliyoun, 2009)

Conclusion

Northwestern Iran occupied a strategically important position during the first millennium BCE and was continuously involved in cultural, economic, and political interactions with neighbouring regions, including Anatolia, Armenia, the South Caucasus, and Mesopotamia. Its diverse geographical and environmental conditions supported the development of successive settlements and contributed to the persistence and transformation of local cultural traditions. During the first half of the first millennium BCE, the region was influenced by, and interacted with, several political and cultural entities, including Urartu, Manna, Assyria, the Scythians, and, subsequently, the Medes. These interactions contributed to the formation of a complex cultural landscape in which local traditions were maintained while simultaneously being transformed through contact with neighbouring communities.

The present study examined 16 Ardabil-style pottery vessels preserved in the Archaeological Museum of the Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili Mausoleum. Because these vessels lack secure archaeological

contexts and were not recovered through controlled excavations, their absolute chronology cannot be established directly. Accordingly, the study employed comparative and stylistic analysis to establish a relative chronological framework based on vessel morphology, manufacturing characteristics, decorative motifs, and comparison with pottery from archaeological sites and museum collections in northwestern Iran and neighbouring regions.

The analysis demonstrates that the Ardabil-style assemblage is characterized by a distinctive combination of morphological, technological, and decorative features. The principal vessel forms include narrow-necked jars, handled vessels, vessels with tubular spouts, trefoil-mouthed vessels, cups, and cylindrical drinking vessels. Most specimens appear to have been produced on a potter's wheel, including the slow wheel in some cases. The fabrics are generally brick-red to pale greenish or related tones and contain grog (chamotte), sand, and, in some specimens, fine windblown sand. Surface treatments and painted decoration vary, but the dominant decorative repertoire consists of geometric motifs, including solid and outlined triangles, hatching, fan-shaped designs, chevrons, filled lozenges, stars, and parallel lines. A smaller number of vessels also bear zoomorphic motifs, particularly representations of goats, deer, birds, and other animals.

From a functional perspective, the vessels may provisionally be divided into two broad groups. The first comprises ordinary jars, cups, and drinking vessels that could have served domestic or subsistence-related functions. The second includes distinctive vessels, particularly jars with one or two tubular spouts and zoomorphic handles, whose unusual morphology and elaborate decoration may indicate ceremonial or ritual functions. However, because the archaeological contexts of the museum specimens are unknown, functional interpretations must remain tentative.

Comparative analysis indicates that Ardabil-style pottery shares several morphological and decorative characteristics with ceramic assemblages documented in northwestern Iran, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, Armenia, and eastern Anatolia. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not support treating Ardabil-style pottery and Triangular Style pottery as identical ceramic traditions. Rather, they appear to represent distinct but partially overlapping traditions that developed within the broader cultural sphere of northwestern Iran. Their similarities in the use of geometric motifs, particularly triangular decoration, suggest

the possibility of stylistic interaction or shared regional conventions, whereas differences in vessel morphology, decorative organization, and geographical distribution indicate that each tradition maintained its own distinctive characteristics.

The chronological evidence suggests that the origins and development of Ardabil-style pottery should be sought within the ceramic transformations of the Late Iron Age and the Achaemenid period. Comparative evidence indicates that the tradition continued into the Early Parthian period and possibly later phases of the Parthian period. The relationship between Ardabil-style and Triangular Style pottery therefore appears to reflect a process of continuity, transformation, and regional interaction rather than a simple linear development from one style into the other.

The hypothesis that Ardabil-style pottery represents a characteristic ceramic tradition of northwestern Iran during the Achaemenid and Early Parthian periods is broadly supported by the comparative evidence. Likewise, similarities between its decorative repertoire and earlier geometric traditions suggest that certain elements of the first-millennium BCE ceramic tradition continued into later periods, although these similarities should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of direct cultural continuity. More securely excavated assemblages and archaeometric studies are required to establish the chronological sequence and technological characteristics of the tradition with greater precision.

Overall, Ardabil-style pottery represents an important component of the ceramic traditions of northwestern Iran. Its distinctive combination of vessel forms, geometric and zoomorphic decoration, and technological characteristics provides valuable evidence for understanding cultural interaction and ceramic development in the region from the Late Iron Age through the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. The study of well-documented archaeological contexts in future excavations, together with petrographic, compositional, and other archaeometric analyses, will be essential for refining the chronology, provenance, technology, and cultural significance of Ardabil-style pottery.

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Author Contributions

The contribution of all authors to the writing of the article has been equal.

Conflict of Interest

In adherence to ethical publication standards, the authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either personal or financial, that could have influenced the content or conclusions presented in this research.

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سبک‌شناسی سفال‌های سبک اردبیل: مطالعهٔ موردی سفال‌های سبک اردبیل، موزهٔ باستان‌شناسی بقعهٔ شیخ صفی‌الدین اردبیلی

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چکیده

منطقهٔ شمال‌غرب ایران به‌دلیل موقعیت استراتژیک و اهمیت خاص خود، وجود فرهنگ‌های مختلف بشری در ادوار گذشته از پیش‌ازتاریخ تا دوران معاصر، نقش مهمی در ارتباطات فرهنگی خاور نزدیک ایفا کرده است. سفال به‌عنوان یکی از عوامل انتقال مفاهیم، که نتیجهٔ تغییر و تحولات دوران گذشته ظاهر شده و به‌وسیلهٔ اشکال و تزئینات غنی خود، گویاتر از همهٔ ساخته‌های بشری، مفاهیم هنری هر دوره را بیان می‌کند. تحولات علاوه‌بر موارد تکنیکی ساخت، نقوش، جنس و رنگ ایجاد شده و میزان خلاقیت هنری صنعتگران بر آثار سفالین مشاهده نمود. هدف از پژوهش حاضر سبک‌شناسی سفال‌های سبک اردبیل موزهٔ باستان‌شناسی بقعهٔ شیخ صفی‌الدین اردبیلی بوده است؛ از این‌رو، نوشتار حاضر به روش مطالعات میدانی-موزه‌ای (مستندنگاری، عکاسی، طراحی) و توصیفی-تحلیلی (کتابخانه‌ای) است. سفال‌های مورد پژوهش جزو اشیاء توقیف شده‌ای است که به موزهٔ باستان‌شناسی بقعهٔ شیخ صفی‌الدین اردبیلی انتقال‌یافته است. به‌دلیل بی‌شمار بودن این نوع اشیاء در سایر موزه‌ها و مجموعه‌ها قابل تفکیک بودند، اما ازلحاظ تاریخی و یا موقعیت مکانی مشخص رعایت نشده است؛ درنتیجه به مطالعات تطبیقی، با سایر نمونه‌های مشابه موجود در موزهٔ ملی، محوطه‌های باستانی ایران و مناطق همجوار پرداخته شده است. مباحث سفال سبک اردبیل، یکی از اساسی‌ترین موضوعات سفال شمال‌غرب ایران است. اغلب این نوع سفال‌ها از طریق حفاری‌های غیرمجاز و قاچاق به‌دست آمده و نمونه‌های یافت‌شده از کاوش علمی اندک هستند. سفال‌ها ازلحاظ شکل، شامل: کوزه، پیاله و آبخوری‌ها، به‌صورت دهانهٔ شبدری، دسته‌دار، لوله‌دار، آبریز، و پایه‌دارمی‌باشند. رنگ اکثرا سفال‌ها قرمز متمایل به نارنجی و رنگ نخودی و تزئینات هندسی شامل: نقوش مثلثی، هاشور، تزئینات برجستهٔ دکمه‌ای و ... است. محدودهٔ زمانی سفال‌های موردمطالعه از لحاظ نقش از دوران پیش‌ازتاریخ تا اواخر اشکانی و ازلحاظ فرم از اواخر هزارهٔ اول پیش‌ازمیلاد (عصر آهن III) تا دوران تاریخی (اواخر اشکانی) درنظر گرفته شده است.

کلیدواژگان: شمال‌غرب ایران، سفال سبک اردبیل، موزهٔ بقعهٔ شیخ صفی‌الدین اردبیلی، باستان‌شناسی دورهٔ اشکانی.

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