

Chapter XXII

Between Connoisseurship and Technology: A Review*

Any museum with even a minimal collection of Islamic art and every dealer in Asian art can own and display several complete, composite or fragmentary ceramic objects. Every year archaeological expeditions add tens of thousands of sherds and dozens of fully preserved dishes and plates, and, more rarely, closed containers such as ewers and vases, to what is already available. But the modalities for handling, sorting out, explaining and otherwise dealing with all these millions of items are pathetically few and very rarely used to their fullest potential. One of them is what I will here rather loosely call connoisseurship. A specialist “knows” through his acquaintance with a vast number of objects, some of which are dated and localized, that certain decorative features and certain techniques of manufacture make an object twelfth-century Rayy or eleventh-century Egyptian. A second modality is narrowly technical. Through a host of constantly improving techniques of scientific observation, an object’s time and place of manufacture can be determined with striking accuracy. Theoretically this means that they make grouping objects into some meaningful organization both easier and more secure than it was before.

In both approaches the objective of the investigation seems clear enough: to situate an object in time and space and thereby to transform it into a historical document. But for what kind of history? Of ceramics? Of art? Of Islamic civilization? Obviously the time-consuming techniques of connoisseurship and the resource-consuming techniques of scientific analysis cannot be applied to millions of fragments. But what comprises the critical mass of information about objects that is required to ensure the correctness of the answers provided to the historian? Two recently published books have made it possible to pursue this and other related methodological questions and to raise some important issues about all the so-called industrial or decorative arts – for many of these same questions arise when one deals with textiles, glass, and even, although to a lesser extent, metalwork.

* First published in *Muqarnas*, 4 (Leiden, 1988), pp. 1–8.

The first of them, Jean Soustiel's *La Céramique Islamique*, a book eagerly awaited by those who knew of its gestation, finally appeared in 1985, published under the auspices of the Office du Livre in Fribourg, Switzerland. The French version is a lavish and beautiful publication of over 400 large pages with two columns of text, nearly 500 photographs and drawings of truly superior quality – even small images are clearly visible, systematic technical analyses of sherds, reviews of pertinent sites and excavations, an extensive and elaborate glossary, and a huge bibliography, which is probably as complete as a single scholar can make it.

An almost palpable passion for ceramic objects is apparent on nearly every page and from the quality of the illustrations. The passion will, of course, not surprise those who are acquainted with the distinguished collector and antiquarian who wrote the book. The sheer magnitude of the scholarly effort, however, has already catapulted his tome into the place hitherto held by Arthur Lane's two slim volumes, *Early Islamic Pottery* and *Later Islamic Pottery* (London, 1947 and 1957), which, especially the first, had done their duty for a generation and a half. The high price of this book may, however, prevent it from becoming everyone's manual, as Lane's books were. Furthermore, it raises some subtle problems of method and procedure, which may also limit its usefulness as an introduction to Islamic ceramics, but I would not have been led to these more critical issues if it had not been for its extraordinary achievements.

It is not really possible to "review" the book in the traditional sense of pointing out its virtues, identifying errors or areas of disagreement, and concluding by praising its passionate sensitivity to the ceramicist's craft and a cultural breadth that allows its author to provide both generally accurate historical surveys and discussions on every pertinent subject, including alchemy. It is not even possible for a single scholar properly to discuss each of the fifteen chapters through [2] which Soustiel has provided a history of ceramic objects (he hardly deals with their use in architecture) in Islamic lands. Some of them (on the Abbasids, Mongol Iran, northern Iran, the Turcoman "link," Azerbaijan and the Caucasus) are fascinating and provocative breakthroughs, while others (Seljuq Iran, Ottomans) do not quite do justice to their topics. But in either case, Soustiel has exhibited extraordinary courage in venturing synthetic statements about fifteen time-and-space sequences before the preliminary work that is needed to justify such generalities has been done, some exceptions for Fatimid luster in Egypt and Iranian thirteenth-century ceramics notwithstanding. The full review of this book will only be possible when years of studies have been completed on archaeological data, iconography, decoration, cultural settings, technology, scientific thought and the host of other topics it touches upon, but which are as yet insufficiently developed within the consciousness of the historian of Islamic art.

Instead of pursuing one of these topics or of summarizing in greater detail the book's content, I would like to consider this volume in terms of two

methodological questions directly involved with the so-called decorative or industrial arts. The first of the two questions is practical. Does this book help sort out the almost infinite number of existing ceramic fragments? Does it provide criteria of identification that can be learned and then applied to the millions of sherds in museums and in excavation storerooms awaiting their correct labels? The second question is theoretical. Like any manufactured object, a piece of pottery is the product of a very large number of acts and, therefore, of choices and decisions. It is also affected by the choices and decisions that established ceramic objects from the Islamic world – but not Western medieval pottery or Islamic glass beads – as items worthy of collecting. The questions then become: what is the balance of choices or the cluster of decisions which best explains any one object? How does one identify those choices and decisions? Were they always the same?

The first question is not a new one. Archaeologists have long criticized Lane's books as useless for their purposes, and art historians rarely learn much from archaeological reports on ceramics. Soustiel has been careful to cite and acknowledge the results of excavations, and for certain types of fancier wares his examples and definitions may be useful to the archaeologist, but the fact remains that the vast majority of the types uncovered in an average excavation are not even mentioned in this book. Why they are absent will become apparent when the second set of questions has been dealt with. They are important because they will lead us to the author's approach or approaches and the purpose of his discourse.

I shall begin with a few random thoughts. The first was inspired by the title of the luxurious series of which the book is part. It is called *Le Guide du Connoisseur*, and while the word *connoisseur* does not have in French the concrete ideological and methodological implications of the word "connoisseurship" in English and American art history, it does have connotations of someone "in the know," with a sense of discrimination, and an intellectual and sensuous, if not social, elitist. As part of the series, then, this book will be about works of art as much as it will be about pottery.

The second thought emerged from a remark on page 12 that describes ceramics as a "scientific and economic epic," indicating thereby that its importance lies in the technology it exploits and exemplifies and in the role it has played as a determinant of social taste or of international trade. A ceramic object, like a *waqfiyya* or a price list in a chronicle, is a source documenting the social and economic activities of a time, and therefore it is pertinent to the historical discourse about that time.

On pages 35–38, which contain some of the most eloquent passages in the book, Abbasid innovations of the late eighth and ninth centuries are – and in my judgment correctly – attributed to a new scientific thinking and to a hitherto nonexistent technological inventiveness. But in the remainder of the book the author discusses technology, not in terms that governed the

way the object was produced, but in terms of how we analyze and describe objects today. For instance, bodies or slips are almost always described primarily in terms of colors (often rather obscure ones like “between gray-red and gray-brown” on p. 255), which may serve useful diagnostic purposes for contemporary analysis, but is hardly likely to have been as significant and as precise in the manufacturing process. The control of body colors was limited because of the vagaries of the firing procedures, and so many Islamic techniques of painting and glazing were invented in order to hide the color and the texture of bodies.

On page 41 Soustiel introduces the very interesting idea that for Abbasid times a distinction has already to be made between official and government-controlled ateliers on the one hand, and what he calls “traditional” pottery, on the other. But this very fruitful hypothesis with well-documented parallels in textiles [3] and in post-seventeenth-century European ceramics is hardly mentioned again, although it could well explain a great deal about Ottoman ceramics as well.

Finally, Soustiel constantly identifies objects as “school of,” “attributed to,” “influenced by,” implying an organized workshop system operating for a market or a patronage. To discuss an object he generally uses the sort of analytical process that is applied to a drawing or a painting in post-Renaissance Western collecting, one that assumes the existence of qualitative attributes associated with identifiable places of manufacture. But is it legitimate to treat like a work of post-Renaissance art the product of an industrial system, however simple?

These examples illustrate, on the one hand, the wealth of ideas and approaches found in Soustiel’s book and, on the other, the apparent absence of a full commitment to any one of them. It would be simple enough to say that the book, like so much good current writing on Islamic art, is full of internal contradictions and has failed to come to grips with its material because it has not properly isolated or handled according to their own rules and practices such diverse components as technology, scientific thought, patronage, governmental structure, history, social context, economics of trade, availability of materials, international contacts, the management of vast numbers and so on. The problem of handling simultaneously a large number of manufactured objects and a set of very disparate categories of analysis, description and explanation is particularly acute with ceramics. The absence of a resolution, in fact even of a consideration, of this problem is, in my opinion, one of the reasons for the intellectual stagnation so often found in discussions of industrial arts, except when they deal with a single unusual object. Considering the importance of the industrial arts in the Islamic aesthetic tradition, it is easy to see how that stagnation has affected the field at large.

Following a classical conception of connoisseurship as a method for knowing and for learning, the primacy of the individual object is established

from the very beginning. The very size of the book and quality of its illustrations compel the reader to attend to them. The objects are also arranged hierarchically. Some are large or in color, one or at most two on a page; others are in black and white and set in rows of six to a page with longish captions. The implications – once again most appropriate ones in the practice of connoisseurship – are first, that objects can and ought to be ranked in importance, quality or exemplarity, and, second, that this ranking can be expressed, among other ways, through the manner of their presentation. In practice, of course, other more mundane and sometimes self-interested considerations have directed the decisions made by editors, owners or authors, but, for the purposes of this essay, I shall assume only the highest scholarly motives in the creation of this particular book or any other one like it.

The visual impressions and judgments the plates reflect are also supposed to be translated into writing. On that level, however, something interesting occurs. Captions for the small, and presumably therefore lesser, objects contain interesting and at times even important discussions, while captions for the visually highlighted objects are minimal and their discussion left to the text. As a result, whatever the author has to say about them is less immediately accessible, at least for the casual reader, and the visually featured objects are not given an equivalent verbal appreciation.

This, however, is a relatively minor criticism, for careful reading will usually lead to the appropriate passage. A much more serious problem appears, however, once the passages are found, because too many different objectives are sought in a text which deals simultaneously with individual objects and with classes of objects. On page 45, for example, Soustiel discusses a celebrated plate at the Freer Gallery (Fig. 1), usually dated to the ninth century. It was presumably (according to him definitely) found in Susa in the Mesopotamian Valley at a site now within the borders of Iran and for nearly a century the scene of major French excavations. The caption only identifies its technique, a molded design under brown ocher tin glaze. In the text, Soustiel argues that it is not really a luster piece, as it is usually presented in the scholarly literature; he compares it to contemporary Byzantine pottery, a point whose importance has totally escaped me as I fail to see why it matters. Then follows what could be called an interpretative passage:

More than any other, this group [i.e., the one to which this plate belongs according to the technique of its manufacture] assimilated a maximum of foreign influences: Western techniques and Romano-Eastern glazes; decoration inspired by Hellenistic and Roman fauna and flora, Sasanian palmettes, wings, and arches; lobed borders and knotted rinceaux recalling China. But, paradoxically, it is the one which best expresses the profound originality of Islamic art, with a “monumental” Kufic epigraphy, an almost perfect science of the arabesque, as is exemplified by these pearled and crisscrossing borders which owe everything to Islam. [4]



1 Flat dish. Iraq,
ninth century

Although there is much in this statement that is odd, dubious or meaningless, my purpose is not to criticize this particular example of art-historical prose, but rather to point out that the author has approached the object from four different directions – technique of manufacture, description of surface decoration, ancestry of technique and motifs, and contextual explanation. Of the four, the first in rank is the technique of manufacture, because it is what separates this group from any other. Most of the text, however, deals with decoration and ancestry. Mention is even made of features such as Kufic writing which do not appear on any of the objects from the group that are illustrated. This is possible and presumably acceptable because the text does not in fact deal simply with a collection

of illustrated objects, but with a class of objects illustrated by one or more examples.

Theoretically there is nothing wrong with this [5] characteristically art-historical procedure. A contradiction or a paradox does occur, however, because most of the discourse about the objects is visually and historically analytical, while the basis on which they are grouped is scientific and technical. It is a contradiction, because one of two possibilities must obtain. Either a technique is merely the vehicle for expressing and transmitting visually appreciated motifs and the motifs ought to be the basis for ordering objects, because they express the social and cultural rationale for the object, or the social, cultural, managerial and financial investments involved in making ceramics (or any industrial art) and especially in developing new techniques with very different visual effects justify the ordering of objects according to technical definitions. These, however, must be more precise than they appear in the example I have quoted, and they must also be explained as responses to some challenge, to some need, which may or may not be reflected in any one object's design. In other words, if the technique is the primary attribute of a ceramic object, then it must be understood and explained first. This is so even in instances such as the later *mina'i* pieces in Iran, where the usual explanation for the new technique is that it fulfilled the desire to adorn objects with more complex, more colorful and more precise images than was possible with other methods then available. From a technological perspective, what is interesting is less what was put on an object than how an industry could meet or perhaps (although this is unlikely in the Middle Ages) create a taste. The problem with the passage quoted from Soustiel's book, as with many comparable passages, is not that the wrong things are being said or implied, but that the assumptions underlying the procedures used have not been fully thought out.

The discussion of these issues has been enriched by another recent volume entitled *Ceramic Masterpieces: Art, Structure, and Technology* by W. David Kingery and Pamela B. Vandiver (New York: The Free Press, 1986). The authors are scientists specializing in the contemporary technology of glass and ceramic manufacture, but, like Soustiel's, their book vibrates with a passion for all things ceramic. The central premise of the book is simple. It is that "each ware has a particular structure that determines the properties of the ceramic" (p. 3). By structure, the authors mean "the composition and arrangement of the physically and chemically different constituents that make up a ware" (*ibid.*). Here, in other words, the singularity or interest of any one group of objects lies in its physical structure. The book provides a stunningly clear series of definitions and of instructions on how to proceed with the sort of analysis that begins with the naked eye and may end up with the microscope or with photoluminescence, and all beautifully illustrated with micro photographs (often in color) and with lucid drawings.

Why, one may ask, concentrate so much of one's efforts on how to search for evidence invisible to the naked eye? Two reasons are provided or implied.

One is that the positive and incontrovertible identification of manufacturing details leads to the reconstruction of techniques that were usually kept secret among artisans and for which, with the one notable exception of thirteenth-century Iranian luster, we have almost no written evidence. The scientists are in this instance providing something akin to the Morellian details of art-historical analysis which, by their inescapability and consistency, identify an artist and a process of creating. Observations of the type introduced by Kingery and Vandiver would answer traditional art-historical queries about date, place, means of production, even attribution to an atelier, with a certitude unavailable through more superficial, even if immediately perceptible, definitions such as Soustiel's for the Freer plate. The difficulties are that these observations are expensive to make and that they have to be made on the basis of fairly large quantities of material before the conclusions legitimately expected from them can be accepted. These difficulties are part and parcel of the temptations science has been waving in front of humanists for decades and which nearly always end up being too expensive to be practicable.

The second justification for a scientific procedure, of particular importance for Islamic ceramics, is what might be called the phenomenon of technological transfer. By that I mean the development of new techniques in order to copy or imitate the effect of an alien type of ware or to meet a new taste or a new need. A typical example in medieval Middle Eastern ceramics is imitation Chinese ware. It is generally agreed, even though Soustiel demurs, that on several occasions between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries Middle Eastern ceramicists searched, mostly in vain, for ways to produce wares like Chinese ones. In the process they succeeded in discovering techniques which gave some of the effects of Chinese types, but which are more interesting for the ways in which medieval Islamic motifs and ideas appear on them than they are as Chinese imitations. Other examples are the new taste [6] for surface decoration and the need for mosque lamps, both of which led to the creation of several new ways of making and decorating earthenware.

In order to create these or any other new techniques, the industrial or artisanal order had to have the means to translate a visual impression or a verbal request into the know-how of its place and time. Such transfers could be numerous, as happened in the ninth century in Iraq and perhaps Egypt, or limited, as was the case in fifteenth-century Iran; their effects could be of long or short range and under internal or external pressures, as happened with luster wares and blue-and-white wares respectively. There are probably other variables as well. In each case of transfer, a concrete activity took place which is exemplified by specific objects whose technical structures should reveal both what an artisan wished to do and especially what he could do.

At the extreme, any new creation – from a soufflé to a portrait – that succeeds in finding an appropriate technique can be treated as an example of technological transfer. On a more sensible level, stylistic changes are instances

of technological transfer just as obviously as manufacturing ones, and failures to meet formal challenges, as in late seventeenth-century Iranian painting, represent the inability to transfer a visual impression or expectation into a language hitherto not used for that purpose. When, for whatever reason, technological transfers no longer occur, a culture either depends solely on imports for the type or rejects it completely as a foreign object, at times even with ideological justifications. Examples of both still occur all the time, because of the existing industrial and technological relationships between states or cultures, and their psychological or intellectual implications continue to shape political and emotional attitudes in many parts of the world.

The notion of technological transfer is a useful tool for clarifying art-historical issues such as style, influence, revival, imitation and so on. Because of the obvious industrial and technical processes involved in their manufacture, the number and ubiquity of their examples, and the possibility of focusing on specific places or times through archaeology, ceramics offer a unique opportunity to develop paradigms, or at least hypotheses, for explaining the absence or presence of technological transfers.

It is clear, then, that a technological approach to ceramics has advantages – an adequate and specific terminology, and the ability to raise the “right” kinds of questions for dealing with an industrial art. But it is not all that simple. Half of the Kingery–Vandiver book (160 pages out of 324) deals with only ten objects from ancient Egypt, China, Iran, Turkey and Europe, each of which is subjected to a complex discussion with a wonderful spread of drawings and of photographs. While it may be that not all ceramic fragments need be subjected to this kind of detailed analysis, it is impossible to know how many are needed to create a net sufficiently fine to contain all but the most extraneous and original objects. It must be a great many, however, since the potential for significant variation is enormous, if not infinite. Another difficulty is that the Kingery–Vandiver work will be useless if it is not followed up, but it is not all clear that it can be. How is one to apply to every new object the features they so lovingly describe? By a fascinating twist, it is the scientist–technician who has become the connoisseur bending over every object with love and fervor, studying and recording every bubble in the glaze and every stroke in the paint, and it is the art historian claiming to guide the *connoisseur* who provides the lists and beautiful photographs interspersed with eloquent phrases.

Before my conversion to technological scientism is suspected, let me make my second observation. At its elementary level, it is symbolized by the color plate (plate 10) of the Kashan lusterware with a handsome rider in foliage discussed at great length in the Kingery–Vandiver book, but printed mirror reversed (its black-and-white version, fig. 5.1, is correct). In itself an unfortunate though not important lapse, it does somehow reflect the fact that the text itself is most wonderfully precise in its incontrovertible technical descriptions of things that cannot be seen by the naked eye, but, though it

contains a more or less acceptable historical summary, it ends with a desultory paragraph (p. 120) that mentions neither the rider nor the inscription – that is to say, the only things that can be seen and surely the major, if not the only, items that were appreciated by the plate's original user or users. This emphasis might have been explained by the scientific and technological character of the book, were it not that the word “art” is prominently displayed in the title and is central to the authors' construction.

To sum up, then, there is a great deal in common between the approaches of the connoisseur and of the technical analyst. They are alike in being fascinated with individual objects. One explains how an object was made, the other what it looks like. One establishes the level of technological and therefore socioeconomic competence needed to make an object; the other [7] evaluates its performance. Both approaches, when they discuss a single object, imply that it belongs to a class, and both assume that epistemological progress consists in multiplying significant subgroups within any one technically defined group. Both might even agree that every object can be shown to be unique. Kingery–Vandiver propose mechanisms for identifying this possible uniqueness, as well as for grouping objects in several different ways.

One can easily argue that the two approaches are complementary and that both are needed. The Kingery–Vandiver approach may be useful for analyzing most of the 500 objects that Soustiel chose to discuss, and Soustiel's visual criteria based on surface ornament may have to be the way to decide which objects to analyze first. But, although theoretically possible, matching the two approaches would not in practice be feasible, because even though the technique for making each object is carefully identified in captions and in the text, and even though the assumptions of connoisseurship are implied in the book's presentation, Soustiel's opus is neither a work of connoisseurship nor a manual of technology. It is an attempt to write the *history* of a technique and a prolegomenon to its aesthetics. As a historian, he orders sequences of objects in time frames within certain territories. At times these frames correspond to dynastic or other culturally defined entities; at other times they only reflect sets of objects that exist and therefore must have come from somewhere. This is how the so-called Aghkand and Sari wares came to form a northern Iranian ceramic culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As a lover of pottery, Soustiel expresses his taste and preferences. Thus, for instance, he downplays the rich iconography of Fatimid lusterwares and of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iranian plates, but shows admiration, which may not be shared by all, for early Islamic pottery and Kubatcha wares.

As a historian, Soustiel transforms every ceramic object into a work of art, i.e., a potentially unique expression of a desire or need. But is this a reasonable thing to do when dealing with a product of the industrial arts? After all, between the maker of centuries past and the contemporary historian, critic,

technologist and connoisseur stands the user for whom the object was made. His role is also important, but the problem is how to figure out what it was.

Let us assume for a moment that we have accomplished a number of technical descriptions sufficient to identify securely x number of techniques with y number of variants and that, properly labeled and defined, the objects which belong to any one of these techniques have been ranked and evaluated according to agreed-upon criteria of judgment. We would still not know why this particular object was made in this particular way. We know how it was made and whether it was a common object or one of some special visual or technical merit, but we cannot set it in a more elaborate context than that of use – drinking, pouring, holding edibles or unguents, and so forth. In fact it may even be appropriate to deal with the industrial arts by beginning with function, by seeing objects first as pitchers or goblets, almost regardless of technique. From the point of view of the user, this exclusivity with ceramics is as arbitrary as is a similar technocentrism for metalwork or glass.

If beginning with the user leads first to the use to which the object was put, the fact that the object is ceramic is not pertinent except in terms of its relative cost, availability, adaptability to mass production, and other essentially economic, if not mercantile, considerations. Here and there, especially for medieval Iran, whose pottery has been studied more fully than other media, one can detect more complex motives behind objects: sacred or secular commemoration, gift-giving, mystical evocation, storytelling and so on. These explanations are usually the result of investigations of particular objects, but they introduce additional observations and possible procedures for the further study of ceramics. One is that the decoration of ceramic objects can and frequently does belong to a world of artistic creativity that is broader than pottery alone. Certainly ceramic shapes were at times imitated in metalwork. There may well be compositions peculiar to ceramic shapes, but I doubt that there are exclusively ceramic decorative motifs, as there are, for instance, textile motifs, because of the greater stringency of the manufacturing process in the latter. If this is so – if there is no visual specificity to the decoration of ceramic objects – then does a history restricted to ceramics make any sense except on a purely technical level, that is, in terms of the evolution of manufacturing ceramic objects? Beyond that level it disappears into the history of all the arts and techniques of a time, where it plays a variety of possible roles.

Soustiel's examples highlighted by large photographs illustrate the many roles played by ceramics. Some were clearly chosen because they are masterpieces of art, at least according to the critical judgment of today, and only accidentally of ceramics; others simply represent [8] the best available example of a particular ceramic type. By confusing the two categories, aesthetics and typology, a methodological confusion is created as well: the evaluation of the past is based on today's categories, not those of the past.

Another observation is that the social and personal activities suggested by ceramic objects require more attention than they have been given in either book. It is not merely a matter of knowing more about ceremonies, or about drinking and eating habits, but also of sensing how these activities have operated through the centuries. The results of technological descriptions and qualitative judgments must lead to the economic potential of a place or of an owner and to the taste and needs of a people. The evidence from ceramics must here meet with whatever is gathered from other sources. But within the comparative history of world ceramics, it is the *Islamic* moment in Middle Eastern history that transformed a common technique into a vehicle for complex visual messages. Years ago some of us proposed the explanation for this transformation to be the patronage of a rich bourgeoisie who wanted to express its own Muslim values, but either did not have expensive materials available or for reasons of piety did not wish to use them. Possibly the argument still stands, but at a level of generality that does not explain each of the randomly selected objects chosen by Kingery and Vandiver. But even if it can explain why an art of ceramics appeared, it cannot explain its evolution, the differences between Iran and Egypt, or the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, or the spectacular production of ceramics in Ottoman times. Is it even conceivable that nearly a thousand years of brilliant history could have been inspired by a single cause?

It is encouraging to see elaborate books on ceramics beginning to appear, now that we have had a series of books dealing with metalwork. Soustiel's will no doubt be discussed for a long time, as its wealth of experience and intelligence becomes assimilated. Kingery and Vandiver have proposed a perfectly clear and exacting program for the systematic analysis of ceramics and therefore the creation of a coherent basis for the study of the technique. If neither book has come to grips with the fundamental problem of the industrial arts, which is how to deal with masses of objects, perhaps it is because there is no way. It may be that we are destined to remain fettered to specific discussions centered on a particular object or to our own instinctive or arbitrary preferences extracted from the huge mass of objects that remain. If so, we must acknowledge that, at least on a theoretical plane, we have gone as far as we can both with visual connoisseurship and with technical analysis. Before turning again to the makers, we must know better who the users were.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this seems to be that the technology available for ceramic analyses and even (although less so) for the visual ordering of objects by a lover of ceramics like Soustiel is further along than the techniques historians of art possess for processing the results thus garnered. If a historian were suddenly told that a ceramic object was made in Mosul in 1193, about all he would do about it would be to decide, probably wrongly, that all objects like it were from that time and place as well. Art history does not yet command the means to integrate the industrial arts into the fabric of

the societies that produced them, and to do that is its primary task. Only when that has been accomplished will historians be able to elicit answers from ceramics and approaches to ceramics rather than simply to be led by the results of others.

