Ceramic Pharmacy Jars (*Albarello*) 13-16th century
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This project examines the production, uses and migration of ceramic pharmacy jars from the 13 to 16th century. This will be accomplished by a combination of research and physical examples created by the artist.
Each piece created by the artist is a best representation or replica of a museum piece from the time period. In most cases modern techniques of creation were utilized. However, the artist is well versed and knowledgeable with the methods used in period. It would be difficult, hazardous, and monetarily prohibitive to recreate the museum pieces presented. However, in creating the pieces the artist can realize the difficulty of producing the shapes and mastering each décor. It also gives the public an excellent hands-on piece to examine and experience the jars look and feel. I have also included the "medicines" they may have contained.
The artist has provided a photo of each museum piece replicated. Under each museum piece is an explanation from the museum concerning the history, use, and general information of each jar.

The artist is personally fascinated with the pharmacy jars from 13-16th century. They show a progression of how potters and ceramic technology innovated through the centuries. Starting in Syria, Jar #1 is the earliest known ceramic example of an albarello. We see the first example of the "bamboo" shape which was replicated through the centuries without much change. I also chose to reproduce the blue Raqqa jar to show the unique decorative style from that area and the innovative use of fritware. Black decoration was first painted on the ware and a turquoise glaze was then applied. Ceramics from the Raqqa area often decorated other ceramic pieces with underwater scenes of fish and vegetation and then covered with the blue turquoise glaze. This gave the appearance of being underwater and are quite striking.

Jar 1 and 2 were created using Fritware. Fritware (or stonepaste) was brought to Iran from Egypt and displaced the earthenware clays in the area to produce finer pieces of ceramics. It consists of ten parts ground quartz, one part ground glass and one part fine white clay (Recipe from the 14th Century Treatise of Abu'l Quasim). Fritware could be molded or thrown to produce very large, thick pieces like tile or fine translucent pieces like fine dinnerware. It could be fired at the low temperatures of earthenware, but could produce wares that were harder and more resilient. Stonepaste or Fritware, was just one of the innovations Persian potters developed around the 11th century allowing them to create a variety of forms that could rival Chinese ceramics. "It is clear that the import of new kinds of thin walled, incised Chinese porcelain acted to spur the development of the frit body." (Watson 55). Jar 1 and 2 were most likely used as transport jars as well as Jars used by apothecaries. The thick fritware material would make them durable for transport of spices from Syria across the world and eventually used and disposed of in London, England.

Jar 3 was created in Spain. As noted, the shape has not changed in 300 years. The decoration still has Islamic inspiration, but you can also see the influences of Europe. Similar decorations can be found on illuminated manuscripts. The main innovation here is the use of luster to decorate the jar. On the replica I created I have just used black line where the expensive luster would have been. I may decide to add the luster at a later date, but cost prohibitive for me at this time.

Jar 4, 5 are Italian. Like Jar 3, the decoration still has Islamic inspiration, but you can also see the influences of Europe. The Italians were not able to create the lusterwares of Spain at that time, so they attempted to copy the look with the use of paint to simulate the effect. Their innovation was Maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware). The white background decorated with brilliant colors, blues, greens, yellows, oranges, white, black, and brown, and mid 1500's several tones of luster colors such as ruby red, pink, yellow, and reddish brown.

Jar 6 I choose to replicate because it is from France and had a clear message to keep out! The text is Gothic Textura Quadrata which helps date the piece. European Jars often have writing, messages, contents written on the outside of the jars in contrast to the jars made in the Middle East. Middle Eastern Jars will have pseudo Kufic script that are used mainly for decorative purposes. It is interesting to note the Middle Eastern potters were quite capable of writing Kufic script and messages. They are prominent on much of the dinner ware and household goods they produced. However, on the Albarello/apothecary jars you will rarely find any real writing on the jars that indicate their contents, owner's name, or an inspirational message.

1. **Albarello, or storage jar, with tear-drop shapes**

Dated to the early 1200s, this small jar is one of the earliest known ceramic examples of an albarello, or storage jar. In the medieval and early modern periods this form became popular beyond the Muslim world, particularly in Spain and Italy. Albarelli were primarily used to store herbs and other substances used for medical purposes. In the Islamic world albarelli, or storage jars, were produced in a range of shapes and sizes based on the kind of substance they were designed to contain. However, unlike those produced in the West, Islamic albarellos rarely bear inscriptions specifying the content.

Current Location: Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PH
https://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/object/EA1956.178
Associated place: Syria (place of creation)
Date: early 13th century (1200)
Material and technique: fritware, with painting in black under a turquoise glaze
Dimensions: 21.3 cm (height) 12.5 cm (diameter) at mouth 8.7 cm (diameter)



2. Albarello, Drug Jar, Vessel

This is a group of albarellos or jars found in a chalk-lined cesspit on an archaeological site on Fenchurch Street, London, England. These jars were made in Syria and probably traded through Italy. They are made of 'fritware' (a type of fine, white pottery) and decoration includes checkered, floral and panel designs. They would have been purchased in London for their contents - medicinal herbs and spices (Sumac, Alleppo Pepper from Syria)- rather than for their appearance. English doctors studied the works of great Arab medical authorities such as Avicenna and Averroes. Many spices and drugs were thought to have healing qualities. They were traded and stored in special jars like these.

Current Location: London Museum, No. 1 Warehouse, West India Quay, London E14 4AL OBJECT IDS: FER97[1074]<3926> & FER97[1074]<3925>
Associated Place: Syria
Date: Late Medieval; 14th century (1300-1400)
Material: fritware, with painting in blue under clear glaze
Dimensions: H 160 mm, DM 113 mm (overall)

3. Pharmacy Jar

Lusterware is the term used to describe a glazed earthenware ceramic decorated with an iridescent finish. The technique for creating this finish was developed in the ninth century under the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate in present-day Iraq. The medium involves a technique that is difficult to master, but if completed successfully, the surfaces of the ceramic objects display an iridescent sheen which is achieved through multiple firings and the application of a metal-based pigment (including silver, copper, tin, or a combination of these). Lusterware manufacture is still difficult to understand from a technical perspective because for generations, production was kept secret to protect workshop practices from being replicated by competitors. Therefore, pigment formulas and trade techniques were passed down from master to pupil and rarely recorded.

Knowledge of the technique for creating lusterware made its way to the Iberian Peninsula by the twelfth century, when most of the region was still under Islamic rule. By the 1400s, the Iberian center of lusterware production was in Manises, near the city of Valencia. Previously a Muslim taifa, or principality, the Kingdom of Valencia was conquered in the thirteenth century by James I for the Crown of Aragon, and it was here that Christians and Muslim potters worked, sometimes together, for a diverse clientele with a voracious appetite for high quality lustered wares.

Current Location: Current Location: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10028. Object #46.85.9
Date: early 15th century
Associated Place: Made in Spain
Material: Tin-glazed earthenware
Dimensions: Overall: 12 3/8 x 7 1/4 in. (31.4 x 18.4 cm)

4. Pharmacy Jar (albarello) with Foliate Decoration

The influence of Islamic design on European art forms can be seen in this albarello-an Italian ceramic jar used as a storage container, primarily for medicine. Some of the vessel's patterns mimic Islamic motifs, and even its shape and method of decoration originated in the Middle East. Decorating the jar involved a type of glaze that created a white surface on which the ocher and dark-green ornament would appear bright and clear. The ivy-leaf pattern is derived from Valencian lusterware, which was imported into Tuscany in large quantities during the 1400s. Italian potters, who at the time had not yet learned how to produce the sheen of lusterware, simulated the effect with paint as seen on this piece on the brownish leaves.

This type of jar could be held easily because of its inward-curving sides, and the opening could be sealed with paper or parchment. The albarello shape was inspired by the use of bamboo segments as storage containers in the Far East. This ceramic shape became widespread in the Middle East and then in Europe.

Current Location: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10028 On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 307. Object # 16.154.4
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/463707
Associated Place: Montelupo, Tuscany, Italy
Date: 1450 – 1470
Material: Tin-Glazed Ceramic Earthenware
Dimensions: Overall: 9 1/8 x 5 9/16 in. (23.1 x 14.2 cm)

5. Storage jar (albarello)

Storage vessels were among the most frequently produced maiolica wares in late medieval and Renaissance Italy. Made in fairly standard shapes, they were designed to fit with dozens of others on a shelf, often in a pharmacy or shop. Their handles therefore tend to fit within the vessel's profile, and the cylindrical albarello type is generally narrower at the middle than at the top or bottom, making it easy to grip. Other common features include inscriptions indicating contents and flanged lips to help secure cloth, parchment, or paper lids/seals. The decoration, usually more elaborate on one side than the other, can sometimes link pieces to a known dispensary or specific workshop or artist.

Current Location: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028; Object # 20.93.1
Date: ca. 1500
Associated Place: Italian, perhaps Naples or environs
Material: Maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware)
Dimensions: Overall (confirmed): 12 3/16 × 6 7/8 × 6 7/8 in. (31 × 17.5 × 17.5 cm)

6. Beauvais sgraffito albarello

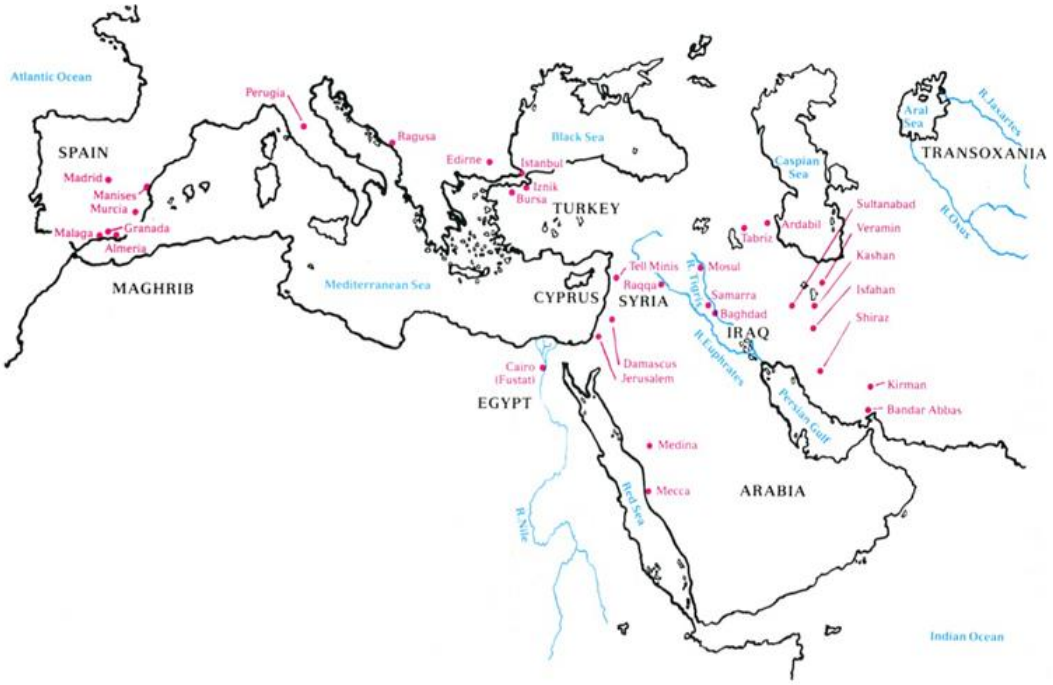
This drug jar or albarello, is from Beauvais in central France. It has double slip sgraffito decoration, which is achieved by scratching through the topcoat of white slip (liquid clay colored with metallic oxides) to expose the red slip underneath. The vessel is further embellished with green and blue glaze, foliate motifs, and the inscription: 'VA T'EN QUITTE' (possibly meaning 'get out of here'). This was an apt warning on a container designed to hold hazardous and/or precious ingredients. The jar would have been sealed with a cap made from parchment or pig's bladder.

Current Location: London Museum, No. 1 Warehouse, West India Quay, London E14 4AL OBJECT ID: A4925
Associated Place: Beauvais in central France
Date: Early 16th century (1501-1550)
Material: Ceramic, Earthenware
Dimensions: H 165 mm, DM 90 mm

My Replica Pharmacy Jars

GLOSSARY OF CERAMIC TERMS:

Alkaline glaze: a glaze fluxed with alkali e.g. soda or potash.
Earthenware: a ceramic body made from clay maturing at c. 850-1200 C.
Flux: a substance which determines melting and fusion point of a glaze e.g. lead oxide, soda or potash.
Frit: a pulverized, insoluble glass formed by the fusion (or fritting) of the various materials being used. frit is obtained by pouring molten glass into water.
Fritware: Ceramic material composed of ground quartz and small quantities of clay and finely ground frit.
Glaze: vitreous (glassy) coating applied to the surface of a pot to make it impermeable or for decorative effect.
Kufic: geometric form of Arabic script.
Lead glaze: a glaze fluxed with lead oxide.
Lustre: a metallic sheen on the surface of a glaze used for its decorative effect.
Maiolica: tin-glazed earthenware. "Around 1430–60, the range of colors available for decorating maiolica expanded from purple-brown derived from manganese and green from copper, to blue from cobalt. By the early sixteenth century, a full range of colors was available: blues, greens, yellows, oranges, white, black, and brown, and several tones of luster colors such as ruby red, pink, yellow, and reddish brown."(1.).
Minai ware: pottery decorated in overglaze colors.
Porcelain: a ceramic body made of felspathic clay maturing at c. 1350-1400 C.
Potash: is made up of potassium salts mixed with potassium carbonate ($K2CO3$).
Pseudo Kufic: geometric form of script that mimics Arabic script. Used for decorative purposes.
Sgraffito ware: ceramics decorated with incised designs under the glaze (see no. 5 [EA1978.1759]).
Slip: a semi-fluid colored clay used either for coating a pot or decorating it before glazing.
Stone-paste: an artificial ceramic body made, according to the medieval Persian potter Abu'l-Qasim Kashani, from ten parts of ground quartz, one part of ground glass (alkaline) frit and one part of fine white clay. The stone-paste body of sixteenth century Iznik pottery also contained lead-rich frit.
Stoneware: a ceramic body made from clay, harder and heavier that earthenware, maturing at c. 1200-1300 C.
Tin glaze: a glaze (lead- or alkaline-fluxed) opacified with tin oxide.
underglaze painting: Painting applied to ceramic material before a transparent, or monochrome or colored glaze for Islamic objects, is applied. The technique was initially developed in China.



Map showing centers of ceramics production in Islamic Ceramics by James Allan.

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3. London Museum, No. 1 Warehouse, West India Quay, London E14 4AL Website: https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk
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