BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

POTTERY TRADITIONS OF THE FERGANA VALLEY
(The examples of Akhsikent and Pop)

Tojixon Davlatxujayeva Yo'ldosh qizi
doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23334362

Abstract. The history of pottery in Central Asia dates back to the Neolithic period of the Stone Age; the oldest pottery fragments have been discovered at Neolithic settlements within the territory of Uzbekistan, such as Jeitun, Kelteminar, and Hissar. Initially, people crafted simple clay vessels by hand; these were crude, thick-walled, and awkward to use. Regarding their shape, these early vessels were typically egg-shaped or had rounded bottoms. By the Eneolithic period, ceramic wares began to be decorated with plant motifs and various patterns.

Later, with the advent of the Bronze Age, the invention of the potter's wheel significantly simplified the production process. Consequently, the volume of output increased, and pottery began to play a major role in trade. Extensive cultural ties and trade relations fostered the development of pottery and spurred competition. The craft expanded across all regions of Uzbekistan, leading to the establishment of distinct schools of pottery. A prime example is the Namangan pottery school—one of the oldest and most distinctive artistic craft traditions in the Fergana Valley. Namangan potters developed unique, large-scale production traditions and became significant rivals to the potters of Rishtan. Potters from the Akhsikent and Pop areas of the Namangan region gained renown for crafting earthenware featuring distinctive styles and colors.

Keywords: Valley craftsmanship, distinctive features of pottery, archaeological research, Akhsikent ceramics, Pop city, Pop potters, restoration.

Introduction. Uzbek folk applied arts have an ancient history. The historical buildings in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Khiva, and Fergana, along with unique works of art created by masters of applied decoration, constitute our spiritual heritage. Arts such as pottery, jewelry making, knife making, skullcap making, decorative painting, and *ganch* (carved plaster) work—refined over centuries—remain deeply rooted today, continuing to showcase the immense creative potential of our people. The development of Uzbek craftsmanship and its promotion to the global stage remain matters of great importance. To this end, the country's leadership pays significant attention to artisans and the sector, creating extensive opportunities for these crafts to be elevated to the level of fine art [1]. Capitalizing on these opportunities, skilled artisans from the Fergana Valley are creating exquisite examples of craftsmanship. These traditions continue to be cherished and elevated in value as the ages pass.

Materials and methods. Research conducted at the Akhsikent site—a major economic and political center of the Fergana Valley—as well as at the Gurumsaroy and Kirkhujra settlements in the Pop district, has yielded handmade pottery and items decorated with various patterns using mineral pigments, crafted by artisans during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages[2]. Focusing specifically on Akhsikent, the site has been studied by both foreign and local archaeologists since the late 19th century. N.I. Veselovsky first carried out excavation and exploratory work there in 1885[3]. By 1914, I.A. Kastane had conducted research identifying the site's excavations and establishing that the city had been destroyed by an earthquake[4]. M.E. Voronets investigated the area's cultural layers between 1950 and 1951[5]. In the 1960s, large-scale expeditions were launched by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, led by Y.G. Gulomov and involving I. Akhrorov[6]. Between 1957 and 1959, staff from the Namangan

Museum of Local History conducted work under the leadership of A. Chulanov. Furthermore, A. Anarbayev—a Doctor of Historical Sciences and a scholar at the National Archaeological Center of Uzbekistan—has conducted long-term research at the site, discovering and studying an ancient artisans' quarter, defensive walls, a blacksmith's workshop, and unique wall paintings dating back to the Karakhanid era[7]. In recent years, foreign scholars such as Garry Beckman and Erik McAllister have also been conducting international research into Akhsikent's ancient metallurgy, unique crucible steel, and pottery traditions. Researchers including A. Anarbayev, S. Kubayev, Sh. Omonov, Sh. Nasriddinov, I. Bekmirzayev, and others have published information regarding the craft artifacts discovered at the Akhsikent site in scholarly collections, articles, and other literature.

Ceramics and glass artifacts dating back to the 10th century, found in well-defined stratigraphic contexts, have been discovered in the Axsikent area. Materials from this same period were also found on the floors of three rooms in Axsikent and in the corridors of a residential complex excavated in the northeastern section of the citadel (dating to the Domonqol period) in 1968. Finds include intact and fragmentary glazed and unglazed ceramic vessels, stone art objects, and 10th-century copper coins. Furthermore, the Timurid era has been extensively studied, with craft artifacts from the 14th and 15th centuries being discovered and analyzed.

Additionally, the city of Pop—considered one of the "gateway" cities of the Fergana Valley—appears in historical sources under the name "Bob." There are approximately ten archaeological sites in the area, where various historical written records and material artifacts have been discovered and studied. Notably, Professor B. Matboboyev has conducted high-level research there [8]. Research has also been carried out by A. Anarbayev, scholars from the National Centre of Archaeology, and faculty members and students (both undergraduate and master's level) from Namangan State University. The pottery tradition of Gurumsaroy, located in the Pop region, is also of significant importance. A unique national school of pottery was established there, fully preserving the most ancient and archaic characteristics of the Fergana Valley[9]. Archaeological research has uncovered unique *oinochoe*-type vessels (featuring a specialized spout for pouring water) and ceramic ware that embody Hellenistic, Sassanid, and Sogdian traditions. This demonstrates that the tradition of working with clay in the Pop region dates back several millennia.

In recent years, research at the ancient settlement of Qirqhujra—located in the village of Kelachi in the Pop district—has yielded handmade, decorated pottery. Two fragments of handmade, decorated ceramic vessels belonging to the Eylaton type (dating to the 6th–5th centuries BCE) were discovered in the citadel area[9]. A fragment of the body of a decorated ceramic vessel was found in the *shahristan* (the city proper). The fragment is burnished on both sides and features a brown geometric pattern; horizontally arranged equilateral triangles form a hatched design. The triangles are oriented with their vertices pointing upward, and a thin line runs through their centers[10]. The techniques used to craft these items in the valley carry distinct symbolic meanings.

Results and Discussion. Research conducted by Y. G'ulomov in the Axsikent area during the 1960s established that the city's history dates back to the ancient period—specifically the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE—and identified it as the "Afrasiyab of Fergana"[11]. I. Ahrorov scientifically substantiated the existence of two distinct urban phases at the site: the ancient city of Axsikat and the later Axsikent, which flourished during the reigns of the Timurid rulers Umarshayx Mirzo and Babur[12]. Professor A. Anarbayev has also continued his work, uncovering previously unknown aspects of the past and providing scholarly validation for these findings to the community of historians and archaeologists. Today, Axsikent enjoys worldwide renown. During a visit in February 2019, President Sh.M. Mirziyoyev highly commended the research conducted at the site[13] and issued several directives for the further expansion of the complex. He emphasized that

the complex would play a pivotal role in the future study and preservation of other archaeological sites across the Fergana Valley, utilizing Axsikent as a central hub. Currently, Axsikent operates as an "open-air museum"[14]. Research activities are ongoing; new archaeological layers are being uncovered, helping to reconstruct a vivid picture of history. I am personally delighted to have completed an internship at this complex, where I participated in the discovery and restoration of various handcrafted artifacts.

Conclusion. In conclusion, it should be noted that the pottery crafted by artisans of the Fergana Valley has found widespread application across various fields—such as household use, construction, and art—thereby acquiring unique significance and perpetuating the traditions and values of the Uzbek people over the centuries.

References

1. Usta Vahobjon Buvayevning G‘urumsaroy xalqaro ilmiy-amaliy anjumanidagi “G‘urumsaroy kulolchilik maktabining tabiiy sirdan foydalanish usullari” (Toshkent-Rishton, “Ochun” nashriyoti, 2023)
2. Qirqhujra (Chilhujra deb ham nomlanadi) obyekti 1982-yilda Madaniy meros agentligi tomonidan arxeologiya yodgorligi sifatida ro’yxatga olingan. 2013-yildan A. Anarbayev yetakchi tadqiqot olib bormoqda.
3. Веселовский Н. И. О раскопках в Наманганском уезде близ селения Ахсы // Протоколы заседаний и сообщения членов Туркестанского кружка любителей археологии (ТКЛА). – Ташкент, 1896.
4. Кастане ИА. Древности Ферганы // Протоколы заседаний и сообщения членов ТКЛА. – Ташкент, 1915.
5. Воронетс М. Э. Археологические исследования на городище Ахсикент в 1950-1951 гг. // Труды Института истории и археологии АН УзССР. – Ташкент, 1954. – Вып. 6.
6. Гуломов Я.Г., Ахроров И. К истории изучения городища Ахсикент // История материальной культуры Узбекистана (ИМКУ). – Ташкент, 1961. – Вып. 2.
7. Ахроров И. Древний Ахсикент (по археологическим данным) // Автореферат диссертации кандидата исторических наук. – Самарканд, 1968.
8. Анарбаев А. А. Ахсикент – столица древней Ферганы. – Ташкент: Тафаккур, 2013. – 230 б.
9. Анарбаев А.А., Баратов С.Р., Саидов М., Кубаев С., Насриддинов Ш. Археологические исследования городища Чильхуджра а 2013 году // Археологические исследования в Узбекистане 2013-2014 года. Вып.10. - Самарканд, 2016. - С. 31. Р. 18.9,10.
10. Матбабаев Б. Х. Древний Поп (по материалам археологических исследований) // История материальной культуры Узбекистана (ИМКУ). – Самарканд, 1999. – Вып. 30.
11. Матбабаев Б. Х. Культура Ферганы в эпоху раннего средневековья (по материалам грунтовых погребений). – Ташкент: Фан, 2008.
12. Буряков Ю. Ф. Историческая топография древних городов Ферганы (Баб-Поп) // Из истории древней и средневековой культуры Узбекистана. – Ташкент,1982.
13. Илясова С.Р. Керамика Мунчактепе (V–VIII вв.) // Археология Узбекистана. – Самарканд, 2011. – № 1 (2). – С. 45-52.
14. Анарбаев А. А.., Максудов Ф А. Фергана в системе оборонительных сооружений (на примере Баба-Попа) // Вопросы археологии и истории древнего мира. – Наманган, 2005.