

Purple Ceramics with Metallic Lustre in Al-Rabdha Islamic Site

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Abstract: The research studies some potsherds that were found in al-Rabadha site on the west of the Arabian Peninsula south-east of Madinah. These potsherds (fragments) are the remains of various ceramic plates and pots that belong to the pattern of metallic luster ceramics. However, their pattern has certain features that make it different from the metallic luster ceramics that spread in the Islamic World during the second half of the 3rd century AH (the 9th century AD). This is due to the fact that it is purple. The importance of the study stems from the fact that scientists have admitted that this pattern is not widely spread in the Islamic countries that are known for manufacturing metallic luster ceramics (e.g. Iran, Egypt and the Levant). This pattern is restricted to certain rare samples that were found in Samarra, Iraq and are available in global museums worldwide. The existence of similar samples at al-Rabadha site that dates back to the 3rd century AH (the 9th century AD) is of great significance. It urges us to question whether this purple pattern is of relevance to the metallic luster pattern that spread in Iran, Egypt and the Levant or not.

Keywords: Found in al-Rabadha site on the west of the Arabian Peninsula south-east of Madinah, pattern of metallic luster ceramics, metallic luster ceramics that spread in the Islamic World during the second half of the 3rd century.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research studies some potsherds that were found in al-Rabadha site on the west of the Arabian Peninsula south-east of Madinah. These potsherds (fragments) are the remains of various ceramic plates and pots that belong to the pattern of metallic luster ceramics. However, their pattern has certain features that make it different from the metallic luster ceramics that spread in the Islamic World during the second half of the 3rd century AH (the 9th century AD). This is due to the fact that it is purple.

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The study had three sections. The first section dealt with the manufacturing style of the purple metallic luster ceramic pattern. The second studied the artistic characteristics of this pattern; and the third handled the reasons behind the existence of this pattern at al-Rabadha site during the Islamic Era.

2. MANUFACTURING PURPLE METALLIC LUSTER CERAMICS

Using metallic luster did not begin with familiar ceramic patterns. However, it was used as an ornamental style during the manufacture of glass during the Pre-Islamic Era; specifically, during the early period (image 1). In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London two preserved pots were found and were depicted by ornaments similar to those found on Coptic textile ornaments in Egypt and the plant ornaments of the Bawit Monastery in Upper Egypt. These recently mentioned ornaments belong to the transitional phase between the Byzantine Era and the Islamic Era. The Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo also possesses two glass pieces that date back to the middle of the 2nd century AH (the 8th century AD) ornamented in metallic luster style.



There was an interesting story about using metallic luster in ceramics that reflects the ingenuity of the Muslim ceramist in Iraq during the middle ages. Right after the phases of copying the Sasanian ceramics as well as the Byzantine and Chinese ceramics, the Muslim ceramist evolved towards the creativity phase. Thus, he added to the worldwide familiar ceramic types a fresh new type: *the gilded clay*. This invention makes us wonder whether this happened because of the copying phase through which the ceramist had passed through; or are there other factors that interacted with the copying factor and eventually led to this creativity?

Some attribute this invention to a principal factor, namely the progress of ceramics manufacture occurring in Iraq during the Abbasid Era. At that time, people realized that ceramics could create masterpieces that are worth appreciation. Simultaneously, there was beautiful chinaware imported from the Far East that flooded Baghdad markets and gave the ceramist the inspiration for his invention.

What had been mentioned before exemplifies part of the true picture, while this was also partly due to Islam that had both general and specific influence on this invention. The general influence is noticeable in the care this religion gives to manufacture in general making sure that these manufactures are functionally skillful and perfectly made. This was done through the *Muhtasib* (morality policeman) who used to describe the right working mechanism to experienced craftsmen. The specific influence of Islam on inspiring the ceramist to get to this invention lies in collecting and writing down the Hadith (speeches) of Prophet Mohamed at the beginning of the Abbasid Era.

Among these speeches of the Prophet, there existed what invited people to abstinence and fight the love of extravagance in their souls. Thus, people were made to hate silver and gold tools that were popular before Islam and during the Omayyad Caliphate Era in the Levant. However, ceramists were aware of the fact that the love of extravagance is inherent in every soul; and that the luster of gold is magically charming. It was not easy for rich people to avoid using silver and gold plates and pots vessels. Yet, they were aware of the consensus of jurists of Islam on the prohibition of using these silver and gold vessels for drinking, eating and lavation. Therefore, they sought for a manufacture method that casts on ceramics a golden luster. They carried out many experiments to achieve their goal. They, finally, succeeded in their invention that gave ceramics the beauty of gold. Their hands could produce such wonderful examples of ceramics masterpieces that mix the skill of the manufacturer with the ingenuity of the artist. Whoever uses these masterpieces will

enjoy the beauty and splendor of gold and be congruent with Prophet Mohamed's Hadith and the interpretations of the jurists.

Normally, in these experiments, the ceramist made use of his past experiments when he imitated the Chinese Ceramics, specifically the porcelain of the Tang Family¹. After several experiments, he discovered the white dim glassy painting². That dim glazing became a turning point in the manufacture of Islamic ceramics in general. Moreover, the ceramist could also benefit from his experiments imitating the Byzantine embossed ceramics trying to cast a nearly metallic luster on the imitated pots³.

Contrary to what some people think, creativity in the manufacture of ceramics was not just a result of the progress in the field of ceramics manufacture during the Abbasid Era and the flood of Far East chinaware to the market of Baghdad. There were two main factors that played an important role in this creativity. These were the attitude of Islam towards silver and golden pots, as well as the desire of the ceramist to produce an alternative until he eventually succeeded in inventing *the gilded clay*. This style was not familiar in China despite its deep rooted history in the manufacture of ceramics.

As for the mechanism used by the manufacturers, they started by forming the pot using ordinary clay. They, then, covered it with a thin layer of pure clay known for them by the name '*slip*'. After that, they cooked it in the oven, took it out to be glazed, and then painted by the dim white glassy paint. After that, they put it in the oven again to stabilize the glaze. Next, they took it out to be ornamented, painted on using a mixture of sulfur and red copper oxide which make it purple. This was done through the proportions presented by Zara when he analyzed the purple luster potsherds.

	material	percentage
1	salicylic acid	29.45%
2	copper oxide	38.69%
3	iron oxide	9.33%
4	titanium oxide	5.28%
5	magnesium oxide	8.24%
6	calcium oxide	3.96%
7	water	0.50%
8	lost during heating	5.34%

These materials are dissolved in the salicylic acid (or any other acid) with the aim of making a liquid that is used by the ceramist if he is a good artist. Otherwise it will be given to a better ornamenting artist for drawing different ornamenting items such as plants, calligraphy, geometrical, or a combination of them. Finally, the ceramist returns the ornamented pot to the oven to stabilize these ornaments on it. For this purpose, the oven should be low-heated; i.e. with little air, much smoke and no flame. This is because a highly-heated oven can affect the metallic liquid used in ornamenting. Shortly after, the ceramist takes the pots out of the oven. If the previously mentioned processes are successful, we will notice that the metallic mixture used for ornamenting has left a sparkling layer that cannot be realized through touching except in the parts where the paint accumulated randomly and they look like a lump of gold.

It is natural for this *gilded clay* to be the most precious of ceramics due to the various processes through which the pot passes till the ceramist finishes manufacturing and ornamenting. The pot might get corrupted in each of these steps of work. This, in turn, increases the cost of production; and hence, the price goes up.

¹ Porcelain is a kind of ceramic made of special clay that was available in the Middle Ages, but it was discovered in other parts of the world, and has the privilege of resisting very high temperatures. Thus, it was thin-sided, had a metal resonance and was milky white.

² The glazing that was used to cover ceramics was transparent and it reflected the color of the clay. Then, the ceramist discovered the dim glassy paint by adding tin oxide to the glassy liquid used before.

³ When the ceramist imitated the relief ornament Byzantine ceramics, he glazed it with a sparkling material whose components are not known till today and which had a nearly metallic luster.

As far as the manufacture of luster metallic ceramics is concerned, many scientists had many inquiries and attempts to define the origin and habitat of this industry. The researcher believes that scientists will agree that the ceramics under study originated in Iraq, provided they give it enough thought.

The problem of identifying the origin of purple metallic luster ceramics emerged in 1907 when the French scientist Migon tried to identify the origin for this kind of ceramics in his book on Islamic arts where he mentioned that the origin was Iran. In 1914, CH.Vignier supported this opinion in one of his studies which examined the new discoveries in Rajas. The view of these two scientists was supported by the fact that Iran had a deep-rooted history of ceramics before and after Islam. Archeological excavations in the cities of Susa and Saveh discovered a ceramics oven and carriers of pots (vessels) that had the metallic luster material on them. In 1920, the scientist Pzard supported the Iranian origin of the metallic luster ceramics in his book about the early Islamic ceramics and its resources.

In 1926, a new view emerged contradicting those of Zara and earlier studies. This is the view of the English scientist Butler who considered Egypt to be the origin of metallic luster ceramics. He supported his view by discovering pieces that had Coptic human features painted on them. Besides, there were also some pieces with paintings of fish, peafowls and grapes (etc.) which were typical Christian elements.

In 1925, the German scientist Zara published his excavations and assigned a whole book for the ceramics of Samarra. In this book, he proved that metallic luster ceramics originated in Iraq and specifically in the city of Samarra. He supported this view by mentioning that this kind of ceramics appeared during the 3rd century AH (9th. Century AD). That happened in a period that witnessed the rise and fall of the glory of Samarra. The other reason is that most of the antiques found in Samarra are perfect and in good condition showing diversity. On some of these antiques, there are plant ornaments mimicking nature and looking like the grout ornaments that only appeared in Samarra. Besides, Samarra was well known for the pattern of purple metallic luster ceramics which never existed in the centers which disputed over the origin of metallic luster ceramics in general. This can be illustrated by the models⁴ in hand that were probably transferred from Iraq to the city of al-Rabadha. The author will further investigate this point in the section about the spread of this ceramic pattern.

3. THE ARTISTIC FEATURES OF POTTERY PATTERN WITH PURPLE METALLIC LUSTER

A – Plant decorations:

Through the study of pottery potsherd which belong to pottery pattern with purple metallic luster which contain plant decorations, it was found that these decorations are stylized from nature and closely related to decorative elements carved on plaster of models of Samarra II and III which were common in wall decorations in Samarra and their influence extended on pottery and other practical arts.

We find decorations consisting of stylized plant branches that form spiral curves confined within triangular shapes painted with golden luster on a red-purple colored floor.



Image 2

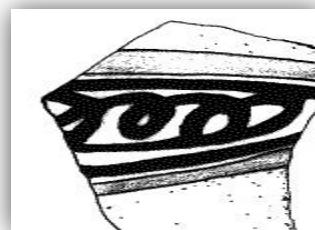


Figure 1

⁴ See images: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8

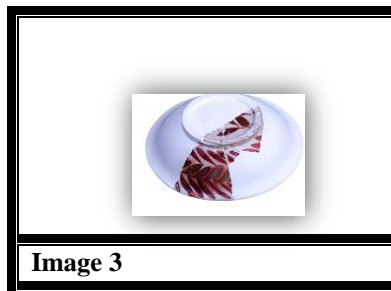


Image 3

It was also found that stylized plant leaves that take the form of almond which were scattered on an organized basis in horizontal rows that decorate the outer surface of the potsherd is part of a deep plate with a flat base (image 3), decorations are done with golden and purple luster neatly on a floor painted with opaque white color .

Among the plant decorations that were found on this pottery pattern were some plant branching from which stylized plant leaves, with irregular shapes formed with purple and golden luster on a floor of opaque white paint, emerge (image 4, Figure 2).

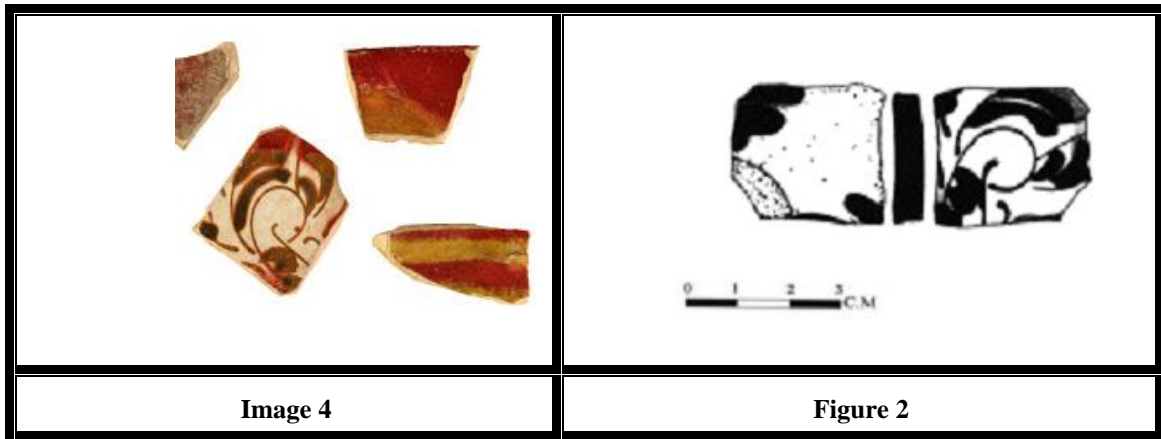


Image 4

Figure 2

As well as stylized plant leaves that are drawn irregularly and scattered on tools surfaces and one example is a potsherd that represents the edge of a plate of pottery pattern with purple metallic luster. These leaves were applied with golden luster on a purple painted floor (Figure. 3, image 5).

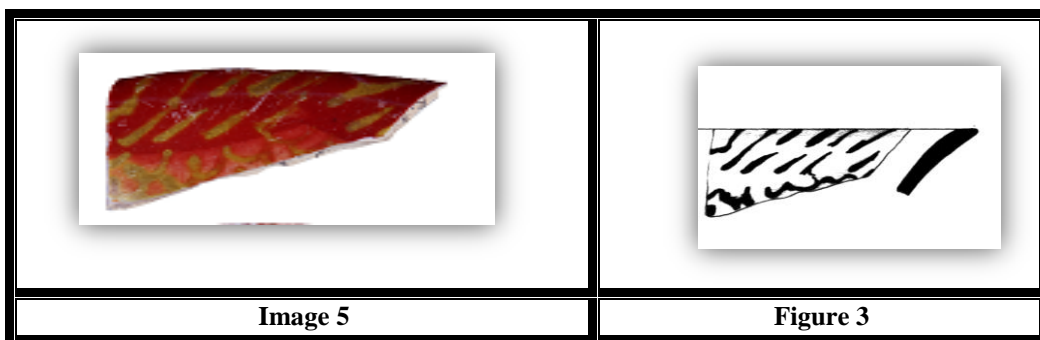


Image 5

Figure 3

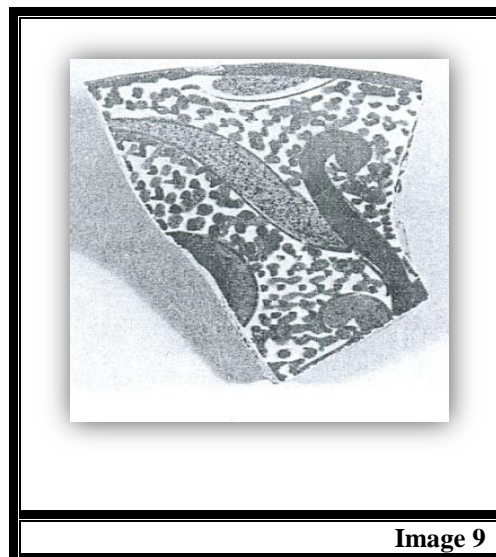
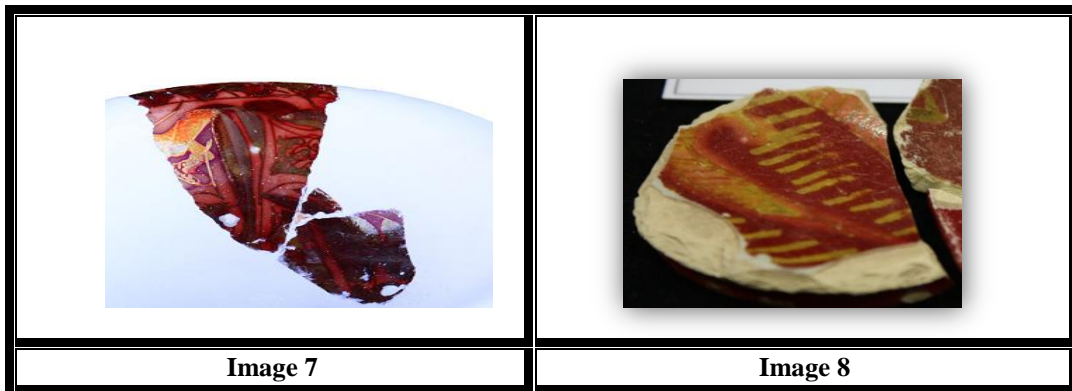
B – Geometric decorations:

Geometric elements were done on pottery with a metallic purple luster but are small in proportion compared with plant decorations. Scientists have noted in this regard that the metallic luster generally attributed to Iraq is characterized by a lack of geometric decorations. However, forms of circles and beam designs, as well as forms of spirals which form circles with dark points inside them- an element that are called "peacock eye"- were found. This element is the one of most important elements found on pottery in general and in pottery of Iraq during the 3rd Islamic century (8th century AD). A line going round the perimeter of the main decorative elements also appeared in pottery paintings with metallic purple luster. These elements are deemed as distinctive features of Iraqi pottery with metallic luster in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD).

We find that a line shape of a circular form inside a ceramic potsherd in the form of a purple metallic luster plate base drawn with golden glaze surrounded with stylized plant leaves, all executed with golden glaze on a purple color background (image 6).



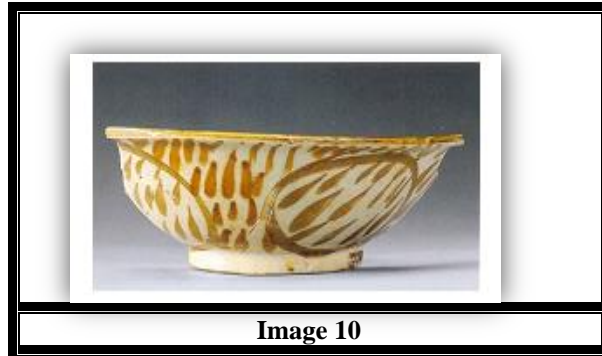
A line was found that surrounds stylized decorative elements that represent branching with dark points and stylized plant leaves (image 7). Also, forms of dashed lines that are drawn parallel to each other on a potsherd that represents the edge of the plate of ceramics of metallic purple luster done with decorations in gold color on a purple painted floor were found (image 8).



At the end of this point, we should draw attention to the fact that pottery models of metallic purple luster had no drawings of living organisms. At that time, paintings of living organisms such as humans, animals and birds had spread on ceramic tools with metallic luster in Iraq in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD).

These previous decorative elements used to represent one artistic style that spread in Iraq in pottery with metallic luster; sometimes, matching forms. For example, plant leaves which end in spiral ends found in image (6), figure (4), were found on the potsherd of pottery with metallic luster attributed to Iraq in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (image 9).

Plant leaves that take almond forms scattered neatly are found on the exterior or interior of pottery potsherd number (5), form (3) can be found also in the pottery plate attributed to Samarra in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (Watson, 2004: 187) (image 10).



Also at the site of al-Rabadha itself, there is a potsherd of pottery style of metallic luster attributed to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) preserved in the College of Tourism and Antiquities Museum in King Saud University. Its outer surface is decorated with almond plant leaves drawn irregularly (al-Saadoun, 2014: 412) (image 11).



The stylized circular leaves from which short plant branches emerge scattered irregularly in potsherd (4 & 7), equivalent ones had been found in a ceramic plate attributed to Iraq in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD). The space between the circular shapes had been filled with those leaves that decorate the outer surface of the plate of ceramic pattern with metallic luster attributed to Samarra in Iraq (Grube, 1976: 193) (image 12).



Moreover, a ceramic potsherd has been found in al-Rabadha location with the same shape of the stylized plant leaves decorating the outer surface of the ceramic potsherd of ceramic style with metallic luster attributed to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (al-Saadoun 2014: 215) image (13).



Image 13

Forms of plant branches, which form spiral extensions that fill the spaces that are similar to the triangle decorating the outer surface of ceramic potsherd (2), were found. A similar one was found in a ceramic potsherd with a ceramic pattern of metallic luster attributed to al-Rabadha site dating back to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (al-Saadoun 2014: 210), image (14).



Image 14

Thus, decorations found on ceramics of general metallic luster in the 3rd century (9th century AD) are highly similar. This made it difficult to attribute them to a particular region without relying on the analysis of mud from which those tools were made. However, scientists have acknowledged with regard to artistic qualities of the pottery pieces and potsherds of metallic luster have two artistic origins: one attributed to Iran and the other to Iraq and Egypt.

Some specialists ⁵ indicate that Iranian metallic lustering ceramics are distinguished by including living organisms, such as drawings of birds, animals and human inscriptions. Some of them indicate a relative ingenuity in drawing and attention to lines that give drawings a special tinge and strong expression. The other artistic section attributed to Iraq and Egypt specializes in stylized plant decorations from nature which are represented in conical shapes, palm fans, abstract elements and geometric drawings such as dashed lines (intermittent lines) and defaced circles called rooster eye or peacock eye and lines that circle around the decorative elements (Yassin 2002: 167).

Therefore, the ceramic group style which was discovered at the Islamic al-Rabadha site has a close link with ceramic products which are attributed to Iraq as will be seen from the study of factors and reasons for the existence of this potsherd in al-Rabadha in this era of Islamic history. This may suggest that this pattern was produced at the same time parallel to the production of normal luster that has spread in the Muslim world. However, the lack of continuity seems to indicate that it was not popular in international markets; and because purple color makes shadows that reduce clarity of decorative elements drawn on ceramic pots surfaces and adds mystery because of shadows resulting from decorative elements.

⁵ Arthur Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, (London, 1947); Fehervari Geza, *Ceramics of The Islamic World in The Tareq Rajab Museum*, (London , 2000); Hobson R.L, *A guide To The Islamic Pottery of The Near East*, The British Museum, (London, 1932).

4. REASONS FOR SPREADING THE MODEL OF PURPLE METALLIC LUSTER POTTERY IN THE TOWN OF AL-RABADHA

It is clear from the previous samples that there are many forms for this purple color. The decoration is done either with golden color on the background of purple color (image 2, 5, 6, 8), or with the purple color over the background of white color (image 3), or with golden and purple colors on the white background (image 4, 7).

While researching the history of the town of al-Rabadha where these pieces are discovered, it was found that all these antiques date back to the historical period between the 1st century AD (7th century AD) to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD).⁶

Tabari mentioned al-Rabadha while talking about Abu Thar al-Ghifari who came to al-Rabadha and designed a Masjid there and since then it really had grown into an urban society in the year 30 AH. (al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9: 265). al-Rabadha continued without change in population and architecture until the year 319 AH, and this is understood from what is mentioned by Yaqoot al-Hamawi who said: "I have read in the history of Abu Muhammad Ubaidullah bin Abd al-Majeed bin Sairan al-Ahwazi who said: In the year 319 AH, al-Rabadha was ruined due to continuous wars between its people and the people of Dhariah, so much so that the people of Dhariah took shelter with al-Qaramitah and sought their help against al-Rabadha which was ruined and her people left it, although it was one of the best stations on the road to Makkah (al-Hamawi, 1995, Vol. 3: 349).

We also see that al-Maqdisi describes al-Rabadha in the second half of the 4th century AH (10th century AD) as follows: "Its water is salty and it is a ruined place" (al-Maqdisi, 1991: 329), hence we do not see that al-Rabadha is mentioned in any of the books written by the later explorers; rather we see that the road between Kufa and Makkah had changed its course and this is based on the two journeys of Ibn Jubair (d: 614 AH/1217 AD) and Ibn Battutah (d:779 AH/1378 AD). The road to Makkah then started from Kufa (Najaf) until Ma'din al-Naqra and then from there to Madina Munawwara, then the caravans used the local road until they reached Makkah. For this reason the main road that connected Ma'din al-Naqra with Makkah through al-Rabadha was no longer used (al-Rabadha, 1986: 17).

Hence the potsherds of ceramics used in the research are dated from the period that is stretched from the 2nd century AH to the end of the 3rd century AH at the maximum proximity. This is known through the layers in which these pieces were discovered (al-Sa'doon, 2014: 598)⁷ and they are as follows:

Image	Layer	Region	Depth
1	Third	D	95 cm
2	Second	401	65 cm
3	Third	401	95 cm
4	Fourth	401	140 cm
5	Fourth	B	Depth 75 – 110 cm

It shows that the potsherds of ceramics used in the research were found between the first three layers, keeping in mind that according to the excavation reports related to the site of Rabadha, it is found that the site has reached to the sixth layer only, which indicates that these layers were representing the last stage of Rabadha's urban life, i.e. in the 1st half of the 3rd century AH at the maximum proximity.

Despite the fact that this Purple Metallic Luster ceramics existed in al-Rabadha during that early period of Islamic history, it is also found at another site inside the boundaries of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and that is the site of "Athar" in Jizan region south west of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This region is situated at a cape stretching inside the waters of the red sea known as 'Ras al-Tarfa'. Its history goes back to the early Islamic period and its inhabitedness

⁶ See Abu-diyah, Abdulsameea Ali, (1407 AH/ 1986 AD) *Taqreer an hafriyatAl-Rabadha Al-mawsem Al-tasea* [A Report on Al-Rabadha Excavations, Ninth Season]. *Al-Manhal*, No. 455, year 54, Vol. 49, pp. 259-271. See also: Al-Rashed, Saad Bin Abdelaziz, *Taqreer mabdaai an A'maal al-hafir fi mawqia al-Rabadha al-Islami, al-mawsem al-sadis* [A Preliminary Report on excavations at the Islamic archaeological site of Al-Rabadha Excavations, Sixth Season], Journal of College of Arts, Riyadh University [unpublished]. (1402-1404 AH/1983-1984 AD).

⁷ See also the Reports on Al-Rabatha Excavations, First ten Seasons: Abu-diyah, 1986 AD: 259-271. See also: Al-Rashed,1984 AD: 55.

continued until the 7th century AH (13th century AD). Yuris Zaranis who has presented a report about the excavations at this site has pointed that its history is relatively late (Yuris, 1985: 152).⁸

The potsherd bears the same characteristics found in the potsherd s discovered at the site of al-Rabadha (Image 15).

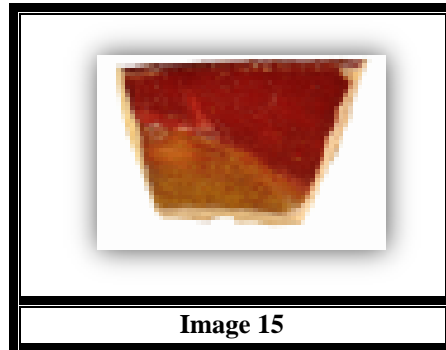


Image 15

From another perspective it is seen that in the palace of al-Jawsaq al-Khaqani⁹ in the year (218 AH – 833 AD) at Samarra¹⁰, the capital of Abbasid caliphate during the 3rd century AH (9th century AD), whose history also ended in the second half of the 3rd century AH and was completely deserted, some very rare ceramic tiles were found that represent a unique and important group in the history of making the Purple Metallic Luster ceramics (Yasin, 2002: 322)¹¹.

They contain drawings of a standing rooster from a side pose having a tilted tail surrounded by plant branches in round shape like the cave garlands. The decoration is done with golden luster on the purple background (Watson, 2004: 156), (image 16, 17).

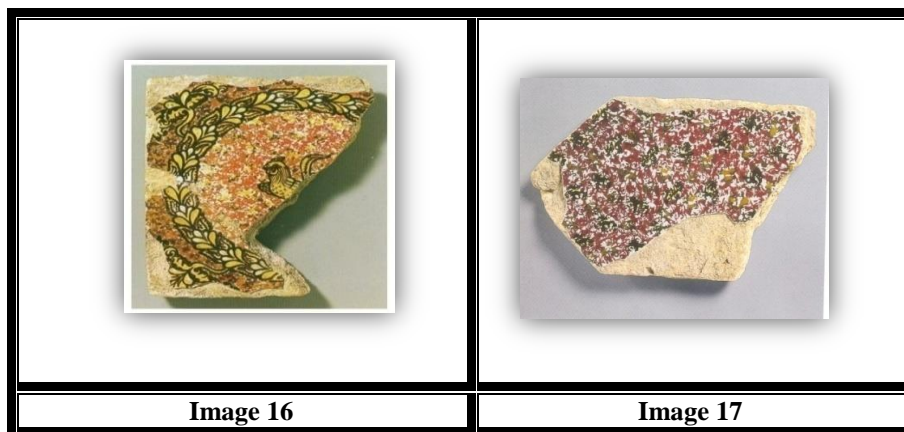


Image 16

Image 17

The fact that these tiles belong to this early period to which potsherd s found in al-Rabadha site also belong, ensures, in addition to their being from the model of purple metallic luster, the relationship between these potsherd s under study and those tiles, in spite of tracing them and their decorations back to Egyptian Coptic origins by Butler on the grounds that the rooster was an Egyptian symbolic element. Butler tried to prove his point by providing many examples of Coptic pieces having a drawing of rooster surrounded by cave garlands and with a piece of Fustat¹² having a drawing of a rooster on it dating back to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (Butler, 1926: 112).¹³

⁸ See: Al-Thanyyan, 2006: 92 – 96.

⁹ It is the palace of Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil. It is situated in Samara and built according to the Hiri and Abbasid style. It was built by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim bin Haroon al-Rashid on the riverbanks of Dijla.

¹⁰ The ancient city of Samara is situated on the riverbanks of Dijla. It was the capital of Islamic State of Abbasids. Its old name "Surra man Ra'aa" was corrupted. It was built by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim Billah to be the capital of his state. Samara remained as capital for almost 58 years i.e. from year 220 AH / 834AD to the year 279 AH / 892 AD.

¹¹ Watson Olivar, Ceramics From Islamic Lands Kuwait National Museum, (London, 2004) ; Al Janabi Tariq, Islamic Archaeology in Iraq, World Archaeology, Aol. 14, No.3 (Feb. 1983), PP. 305 - 327.

¹² This is the city built by 'Amr bin al-'Aas after the conquest of Egypt in the year 641 AD. It is situated near the Babylonian Fortress on the shores of river Nile.

¹³ Although this piece is attributed to the Fatimid period.

Although Butler has taken us from Samarra to Egypt to find the symbolic meaning of rooster's drawing, Zarah has a different opinion as he thinks that there is a strong and clear link between the drawings of these tiles and the drawings of Sasanide walls (Zarah, 1985: 65), this explains to us the origin of the artistic school from which this drawing is depicted; rather he thinks that the drawings in these tiles showing cave trees accompanied with drawings filling the gaps in the corners, the drawing of the rooster with his stretched feather are well known styles of the drawings that are in the overhanging pictures on Bustan¹⁴ arcade and silk cloths, although it is in formative style on the clothes and drawn in natural style on the tiles; he also affirmed that rooster's picture is Persian, according to Greek concept, as it had an important role in Persian religion and art. The scholars have also emphasized the depth of relationship between Iraq and Sassanid civilization (Marzooq, 1964: 85).

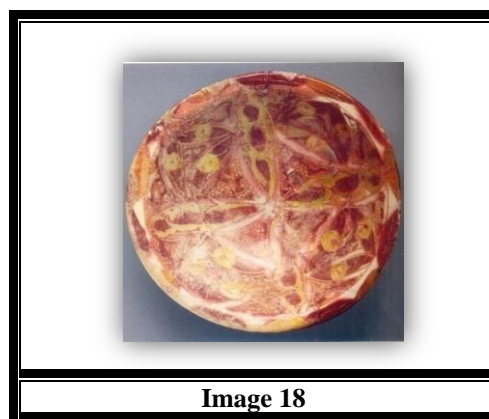
Some scholars and researchers¹⁵ think that the home of metallic luster ceramic is Iraq. They base this opinion on the existence of these tiles in the palace of al-Jawsan al-Khaqani in Iraq. Certainly the existence of the ceramic pieces of the model of purple metallic luster, at the site of al-Rabadha and also at the site of Athar in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their connection with the tiles discovered in the palace of al-Jawsan al-Khaqani indicates, or rather ensures, that there was a ceramic model, the metallic luster ceramic, that had been produced in Samarra and then exported to the land of al-Hijaz, and this could be the first stage of making and locating the metallic luster ceramic ; or it can be a parallel stage of producing the metallic luster ceramic in its different forms that were later spread in various parts of the Islamic world.

Moreover, Kuhnel emphasizes in a specialized study of metallic luster that the multi-color and uni-color metallic luster ceramic was found in Samara including that purple, golden and blue color ceramic (Kuhnel, 1936: 153).

Zara also says "that the most important element in the shining varnished pottery of Samarra, besides its perfect artistic accuracy, is the color. Moreover, the green and then the red dye of cherry or of red ruby color are both among the unique colors in the art of carving shining drawings in the East. They were only seen later in the drawings over glass utensils during the Toloni and Fatimid eras (Zarah, 1985: 18)¹⁶, as it is indicated through the existence of the complete utensils identical to those pieces found in the site of al-Rabadha , the topic of the study. Among them are the following:

A ceramic plate preserved in Kuwait National Museum attributed to Samarra in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) showing very clearly the purple color used in making out the botanical ceramic elements and also in the background made with faded purple color, let alone the golden luster surrounding some of the botanic decorations formed like almond shapes and modified round leafs characterize that stage of Samara model; the same modification that came up in the third century of Hijra (Grube Ernst, 1976: 185).

Image 18



In the outer surface of a plate preserved in National Kuwait Museum attributed to Iraq in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD), there appears the purple color in almond shapes spread in an organized horizontal way. Most likely they were modified round leaves (Grube Ernst, 1976: 184).

¹⁴ This is a village in western Iran, north of Karman Shah city. It is known for its statues engraved in the rocks from the Sassanid period belonging to King Khosrau the second.

¹⁵ Grube Ernst J. , The Art of Islamic Period , The Metropolitan Museum of Art , Vol. 23 , No. 6 , (feb. 1965) , pp.209 -220 . 'Helen Philon , Early Islamic ceramics , (London , 1980) .:Smith A.C. , Luster Pottery ,(London , 1986). See also: al-A'zami, Khalid Khalil Hamudi, 1394 H/ 1974 AD. Khazaf Samurra al-Islami, Journal of Somar, Issue 30, Baghdad, 150 – 196.

¹⁶ Helen Philon , 1980 : 96.

Image 19

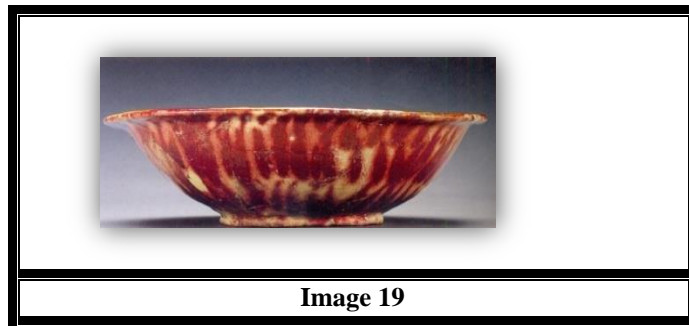


Image 19

The purple color is found in making the botanic decoration elements that decorate a flat plate of less depth; its structure of decoration is based on small branches with multiple petaliferous centering the plate and surrounded by two different shapes of modified botanic leaves; one is of almond shape and the other has a non-rectangle shape, close to the shape of lotus flower (Grube, 1974: 55), (Image 20).

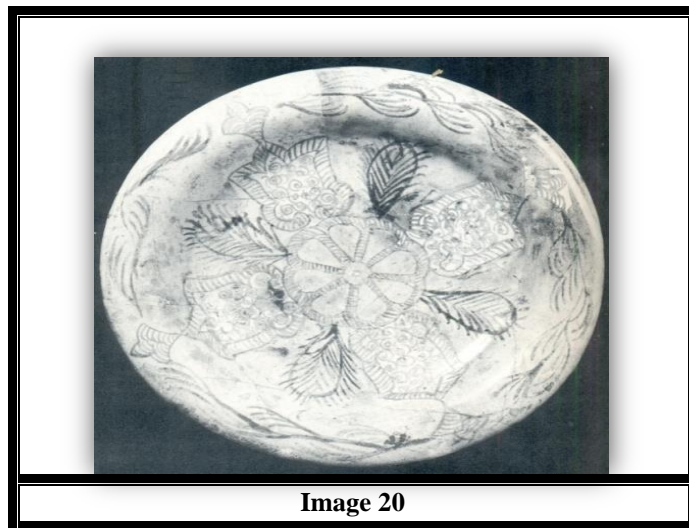


Image 20

To Samara is also attributed a ceramic deep plate that has flat sides, preserved in National Kuwait National Museum dating to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD), the purple color is used in its decoration and painting the entire outer side (Watson, 2004: 186), image 21).

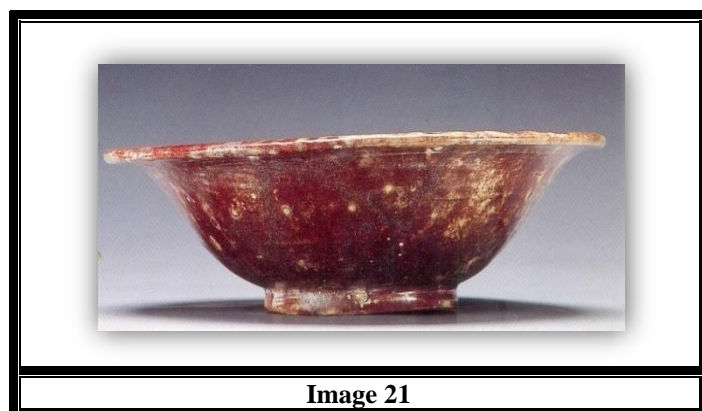


Image 21

To Samara is also attributed a group of pieces that represent parts of a side and body of plate made of metallic luster ceramic whose decoration is made of golden and purple colors on the white surface. Their decorations are made of almond leaves repeatedly scattered over the interior surface of the piece. Philon dates these pieces back to the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) (Helen Philon, 1980: 110) (Image 22).

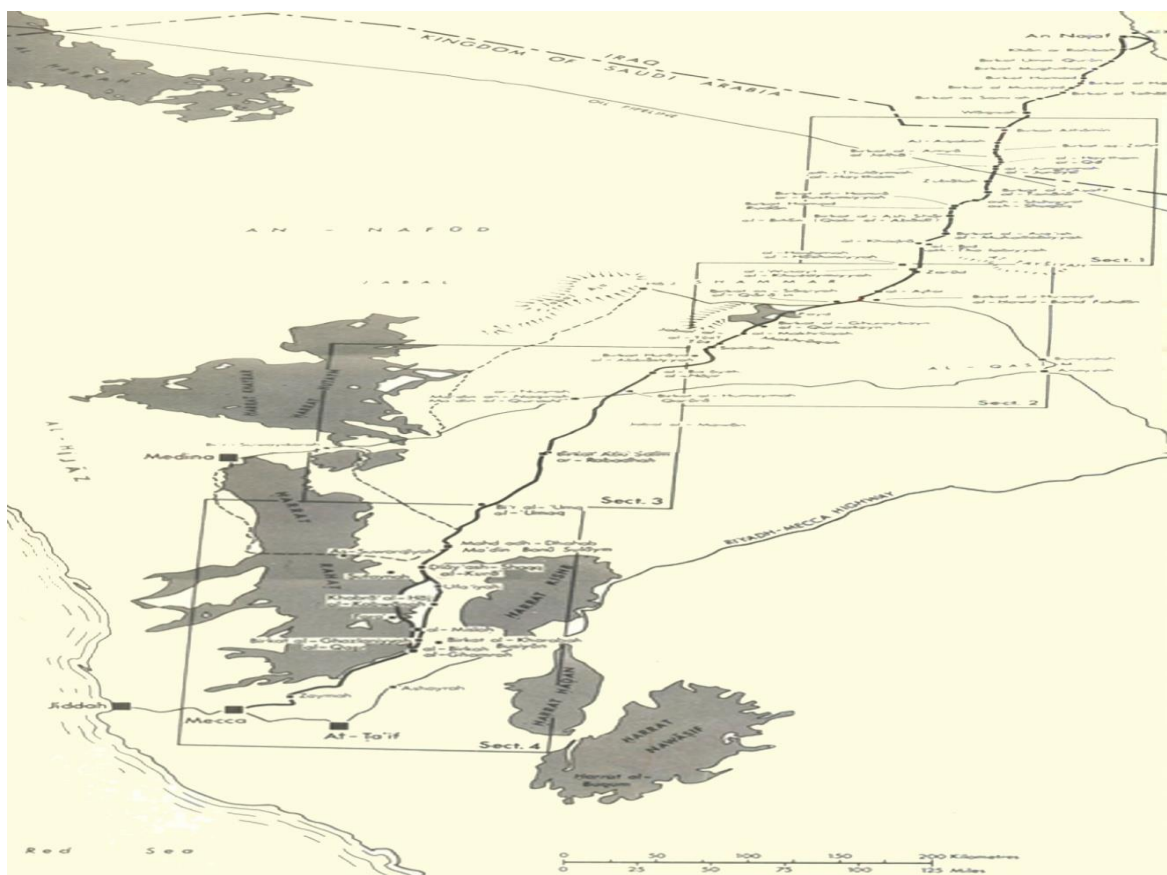


Image 22

These ceramic pieces that are unique in their accuracy and clarity of model, were found in the site of al-Rabadha and in Iraq also in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD). It pushes us to believe, as has already been indicated, that this model is like a parallel stage of metallic luster ceramic, or more accurately it is the first stage of making metallic luster ceramic and its homeland was Iraq, as it was not found in any other country famous for manufacturing metallic luster ceramic such as Egypt, Syria or Iran. These were found only in Iraq and then moved to al-Rabadha in that early period. The question is: how did these samples reached al-Rabadha from Iraq?

Ever since the beginning of the scientific archaeological excavations in the Islamic city of al-Rabadha in 1399 AH /1979 AD, the Archaeology Department at the College of Tourism and Archaeology, King Saud University has done much work at the site for twenty five years and unearthed many aspects of life there, including issues related to architectural models reflecting the evolution of early Islamic architecture. Multiple types of different archaeological finds, some locally produced and others imported from other cities of the Islamic world through the pilgrimage and trade, were also found at the site. al-Rabadha site, as well as its finds, has received the attention of scientists and researchers in the fields of archeology, art and history since it is a representation of the early Islamic period in the Arabian Peninsula, a matter that has made it especially prominent historically, archaeologically and artistically, (Al-Rashed, 1986: 16).

The Islamic city of al-Rabadha lies in the west of Arabian Peninsula, 204 kilometers to the South-East of Al-Madinah (map 1).



It lies on the verge of Western Hijaz Mountains (24-40 degrees longitude, 41-81 latitude), 7 kilometers away from Al-Qasim-Al-Madinah Highway, 15 kilometers to the south of *Mahd Al-Thahab* (previously known as *Maadin Beni Salem*) (Al-Rashed, 2003: 193).

As an Islamic city, al-Rabadha has been mentioned in various sources and biographies, and early travelers have always cited it as an important pilgrimage station on the Hajj routes (known in Arabic as *Durub Al-Hajj*¹⁷). It is known that ever since the early Islamic period there had been active travel and mobility activities, through well-trodden ways and routes, that were undertaken for various purposes including trade, seeking knowledge, or for pilgrimage. Movement between the holy places in Makkah and Madinah and across countries including Iraq, the Levant, Egypt, Yemen, Oman was through these routes, prominent among which was what came to be known as Hajj routes (*Durub Al-Hajj*) along which many stations and services were established to serve pilgrims on their travel. Local and state rulers took special care of these routes, so when Islam started to spread in Iraq, Persia, the Levant and North Africa, and numbers of Hajj-performing Muslims (pilgrims) started to increase, much more attention was still given to these routes (Al-Thanyyan, 2013: 55).

Al-Rabadhah was one of the places where many Abbasid princes and caliphs wanted to take rest. Prominent among those were Caliphs Abu-jaafar Al-Mansour¹⁸, Al-Mahdy¹⁹ and Harun Al-Rasheed²⁰ who launched many projects and established many charities along the hajj routes between Iraq and the holy places in Makkah and Al-Madinah. Later Abbasid ministers, leaders, and even women of nobility, copied the examples of the aforementioned caliphs (Al-Rashed, 1980:193).

Al-Rabadhah won more fame when the prophet's companion Abu-Thar Al-Ghifary²¹ moved to it in the year 30 AH (650 AD) during the reign of the caliph Uthman Ibn Affan (may Allah be Pleased with him) (Al-Rashed, 1993: 48).

The settlement of this companion there attracted many people to live in the city or even pass by it. According to some historical sources, Abu-Thar Al-Ghifary built a home and a mosque there, and many pilgrims and trade convoys passed by the city for trade at the city's market.

Moreover, many lovers of the city including merchants, pilgrims and artisans certainly lived there taking along their culture and art legacy, as embodied in different life aspects, thus making the place a mosaic of different cultures (Al-Hulwa, 1981: 58). Al-Rabadha, interestingly, witnessed the establishment of and development of the Kufa and Basra, as well as the foundation of the Abbasid caliphate capital, Baghdad, and Samarra, hence it had many cultural, economic and political ties with these cities (Al-Jasser, 1967:631); the Arabian Peninsula in general, where al-Rabadha lies, had important trade relations with the neighboring countries ever since ancient times, a matter which strengthened trade relations between the small Arab countries of that time, Makkah and the other states (Ghoneimah, 1922: 362). The old Kufic Hajj route had a deep economic impact on all regions and stations convoys pass by, which fuelled economic boom at the region (Mahran, 1993: 253), on one hand, and further pushed the trade relations between Al-Hirah, Makkah, Al-Hijaz and Iraq, on the other (Ali, 1974: 125).

Trade was not only conducted by merchants. The Kings of Al-Hirah had commercial activities as well. It was narrated that Al-Noman Bin Al-Munthir used to send a commercial convoy to the Peninsular markets every year to sell his trade and purchase in exchange animal skins, silk, gold and silver embroidery, and Yemeni/ Edeni garments (Al-Afghani, n.d: 275).

¹⁷ See Ibn Al-Atheer, Abu Al-Hasan Ali bin Abi-lkaram Bin Mohammed bin Abdel-Karim (1418 H) *Al-Kamil fi Al-Tareekh* [The complete Book of History], ten Volumes, Introduction and Commentary by Amr Abdul-Salam Tadmury. Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Alaraby, part 6, p. 296; Al-Hamadany Mohammed Al-Hasan Bin Ahmed (1396 H/1975). *Siffatu jazeera Al-Arab*. Introduction and Commentary by Mohammed Bin Ali Al-Akwaa (Riyadh: Dar Al-Yamamah lilbahthwa Al-Tarjama, KSA, pp 363-369); Burkhart, John Lewis. *Travels in Arabia*. Trans. Abdul-Aziz Bin Saleh Al-Hilabi and Abdul-Rahman bi Abdullah Al-Sheikh (Beirut: Daru Al-Risalah, p. 187)

¹⁸ Caliph Abu-Jaafar Al-Mansour. His full name is Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ali Bin Abdullah Bin Alabbas Bin Abdulmuttalib Bin Hasem; the second and strongest Abbasid caliph (AD 754 - 775). He is famous for establishing Baghdad as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate; he became caliph after the death of his brother Al-Abbas.

¹⁹ Caliph Abu-Abdullah Mohammed Al-mansour Bin Mohammed Bin Ali Al-Mahdy Billah, the third Abbasid caliph in Iraq. He became the caliph after the death of his father, Abu-Jaafar Al-Mansour (158 AH/ 775 AD).

²⁰ Caliph Harun Al-Rasheed Bin Mohammed Al-Mahdy, the fifth and one of the most famous Abbasid caliphs, the son of Caliph Mohammed Al-Mahdy; ruled from 785 to 809 AD.

²¹ Jundub Bin Junadah Al-Ghifary Al-Kinany (died 32 H/652 AD); one of the prophet's grand companions; the fourth, or the fifth, to adopt Islam and the first to greet the prophet with Islam's traditional greeting, and one of the few early Muslims to declare publicly his adoption of Islam in Makkah before Hejira (immigration).

al-Rabadha ceramic pieces, then, most probably came to the city from Iraq, particularly from commercial convoys coming from there.

5. CONCLUSION

The Arabian Peninsula, then, mirrors the products exported from the renowned industrial centers of the age; the existence of these products certainly reflects the trade ties established at this historical period, and the study of ceramics of this age unfolds many facts that help uncover the history of the Islamic art.

A close look at the history of al-Rabadha shows that the city was last inhabited within the historical period from the beginning up to the mid of the 3rd century AH, which provides firm evidence that the purple metallic luster potsherds belong to the early 3rd century AH.

The figures above indicate that the purple metallic luster potsherds have many shapes, some of which are glazed with golden color against purple background (images 2,5, 6,8), or with purple color against white background (image 3) or with gold and purple color against white background (images 4,7). It has also been shown that the purple metallic luster potsherds do not include pictures of living beings and are decorated with blurred plant and abstract geometrical shapes.

There exists remarkable similarity between the decorations on these potsherds and the other metallic luster ceramic ones in the Islamic world, which proves the relationships between al-Rabadha potsherds and the Iraqi products at this period.

The existence of a similar pattern between the archaeological finds at al-Rabadha and those of Samarra at this early period of Islamic history, as this study shows, reiterates that Iraq was the cradle of the metallic luster ceramics in the Islamic world. It is also probable that the metallic luster ceramic pattern found in al-Rabadha was produced concurrently with the one produced in Iraq which later spread from there to the rest of the Islamic world.

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APPENDIX I: IMAGES AND MAPS

List of Images:

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1	Two pieces of glass glazed with metallic lustre	Butler, Islamic pottery , 1926 , 105	3
2	6 potsherds of purple metallic lustre ceramics	Researcher's photo, College of Archaeology Museum, King Saud University.	9
3	A potsherd representing a part of the rim and	Researcher's photo, College of Archaeology	9

	base of a purple metallic lustre ceramic plate	Museum, King Saud University.	
4	Four potsherds of purple metallic lustre ceramics	Researcher's photo, College of Archaeology Museum, King Saud University.	9
5	A potsherd representing a part of the base of a purple metallic lustre ceramic plate	Researcher's photo, College of Archaeology Museum, King Saud University.	10
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7	a part of the rim and base of a purple metallic lustre ceramic plate.	Researcher's photo, College of Archaeology Museum, King Saud University.	11
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9	A potsherd representing the rim of a purple metallic lustre ceramic plate.	Helen Philon , early Islamic ceramics , p 25	12
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Map List:

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