

INVESTIGATING THE CULTURAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND CHINA IN THE SAFAVID PERIOD (CASE STUDY: BLUE AND WHITE POTTERY FROM HOWZDAAR CITY, SISTAN)

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Abstract: One of the main ways to understand the interactions and cultural relations of societies in different historical eras is to analyze and compare cultural materials with each other. The cultural connection of the Sistan region, especially the historical city of Howzdaar in the south of this plain, with the neighboring areas and other cultural regions, and the similarity of the artworks of different areas in certain periods, shows the economic, social, and cultural relationship between those regions. As an element related to art and daily life, pottery expresses cultural relations and commonalities between different regions. The Sistan plain includes the northern parts of Sistan and Baluchistan province, now divided between Iran and Afghanistan. This plain is where humans have constantly interacted with the natural environment. This area has always housed a significant population due to its suitable and unique environmental features. On the other hand, due to its strategic and military location, it has been the focus of various governments in the past. During the archaeological field studies in this area, a site/city belonging to the Islamic era was discovered. From this site, called Howzdaar City, 237 potsherds known as blue and white pottery were identified, recorded, and studied. Blue and white pottery is one of the most famous pottery made in China. The production of this pottery started during the Tang period and continued until the Qing period. In the Tang period, this pottery made its way to the court of caliphs and then to other markets. The peak of the use of this pottery in Iran was during the Safavid period. Iran's location on the Silk Road route and the expansion of cultural and commercial relations between Iran and China caused the influence of Chinese art on Iranian works of art in such a way that in this century, the production of pottery influenced by the pottery of the Ming period was noticed by the Safavid kings. The research aims to introduce, classify, and typology the blue and white pottery of Howzdaar City. Further, the connections of this region with China and Iranian cities such as Kerman, Neyshabur, Samarkand, and Tabriz located on the silk trade route are examined. Documentary studies and field surveys were the basis of the methodology of this research. The results showed that the blue and white pottery of Howzdaar City in the Safavid period has many similarities with samples produced simultaneously in China and the areas mentioned above along the silk trade route, which indicates extensive cultural relations between these regions.

Keywords: blue and white pottery, Howzdaar City, Sistan, China, cultural interactions.

چکیده: یکی از راه‌های عمده درک برهمکنش‌ها و روابط فرهنگی جوامع، در دوره‌های مختلف تاریخی، تجزیه و تحلیل و مقایسه مواد فرهنگی با یکدیگر است. ارتباط فرهنگی منطقه سیستان، به طور اخص شهر تاریخی حوض‌دار در جنوب این دشت، با مناطق همجوار و دیگر مناطق فرهنگی و مشابهت آثار هنری مناطق مختلف در ادوار مشخص، بیانگر ارتباط اقتصادی، اجتماعی و فرهنگی میان آن مناطق است. سفال به عنوان عنصر مانوس با هنر و زندگی روزمره می‌تواند بیانگر روابط و مشترکات فرهنگی میان مناطق مختلف باشد. دشت سیستان بخش‌های شمالی استان سیستان و بلوچستان را در بر می‌گیرد که اکنون میان دو کشور ایران و افغانستان تقسیم شده است. این دشت منطقه‌ای است که انسان در آن دائماً در کنش و واکنش با محیط طبیعی قرار داشته است. این منطقه به علت برخورداری از ویژگی‌های مناسب و منحصر به فرد محیطی، همواره جمعیت قابل توجهی را در خود جای داده و از سوی دیگر به علت موقعیت استراتژیک و نظامی، مورد توجه حکومت‌ها و دولت‌های مختلف در ادوار گذشته بوده است. امروزه در بخش کوچکی از این سرزمین که در ایران قرار دارد، شهر تاریخی حوض‌دار واقع شده است. طی بررسی‌های باستان‌شناسی در پروژه بررسی و گمانه‌زنی جهت تعیین عرصه و پیشنهاد حریم محوطه‌های موجود در منطقه حوض‌دار به سرپرستی نگارنده اول در تیر ماه سال ۱۳۹۸ که منجر به شناسایی و بررسی شهری از دوران اسلامی گردید، از این شهر تاریخی تعداد ۲۳۷ قطعه سفال موسوم به سفال آبی و سفید شناسایی، ثبت و ضبط و مورد مطالعه قرار گرفت. سفال آبی و سفید از معروف‌ترین سفال‌های ساخته شده در چین است. ساخت این سفال از دوره تانگ آغاز و تا دوره چینگ ادامه می‌یابد. اوج استفاده از این سفال در ایران به دوره صفوی باز می‌گردد. قرارگیری ایران در مسیر جاده ابریشم و همچنین گسترش روابط فرهنگی و تجاری بین ایران و چین سبب تأثیر هنر چین بر آثاری هنری ایران شد به گونه‌ای که در این قرن ساخت سفال‌های متأثر از آثار سفالی دوره مینگ مورد توجه شاهان صفوی قرار گرفت. این پژوهش با هدف معرفی، طبقه‌بندی و گونه‌شناسی سفال‌های آبی و سفید شهر حوض‌دار انجام شده است. همچنین، ارتباطات این منطقه با چین و شهرهای ایران مانند کرمان، نیشابور، سمرقند و تبریز واقع در مسیر تجارت ابریشم مورد بررسی قرار می‌گیرد. مطالعات اسنادی و بررسی میدانی مبنای روش‌شناسی این پژوهش بود. نتایج نشان داد که سفال‌های آبی و سفید شهر حوض‌دار در دوره صفوی شباهت‌های زیادی با نمونه‌های تولید شده همزمان در چین و مناطق مذکور در مسیر تجارت ابریشم دارد که حاکی از روابط فرهنگی گسترده بین این مناطق است.

کلیدواژه: سفال آبی و سفید، شهر حوض‌دار، سیستان، چین، برهمکنش‌های فرهنگی.

I. Introduction

Pottery has always been used due to its practical and aesthetic features, and the beautiful and well-made pottery of Iran's prehistoric era (especially the fifth millennium BC), historical and Islamic eras is proof of this claim. In the Islamic period, pottery was one of the prominent elements of Islamic art (Allen, 2004: 4). One of the important centers of Iranian pottery in the Islamic era was the Sistan area in the cultural region of southeastern Iran. Citing historical sources, there is no doubt that the Sistan area was very important and prestigious during the Islamic era. The Howzdaar City in Sistan, Iran, as one of the cities of the middle Islamic centuries, has a very favorable position for archaeological studies due to the large amount of diverse cultural materials. Cultural interactions in the Sistan area during the Safavid period and the similarities that can be seen in the material culture of the societies of this area have always been of interest to researchers of culture, history, archaeology, and architecture. Today, due to the new archaeological investigations in the historical area of Howzdaar, it is possible to study these cultural features. This research aims to study some cultural similarities through the typological comparison of pottery in a wider geographical area. The importance and necessity of this study lies in the fact that, in addition to highlighting common cultural elements in Howzdaar City itself, it shows the cultural convergences of this area with China. The Safavid period was a very important historical stage in this area and its prosperity can be seen in the form of a large number of archaeological sites belonging to this period. From this point of view, the main question of the research is, how were the interactions of the historical city of Howzdaar with China during the Safavid period?

To better understand the cultural connections of the historical city of Howzdaar in the Sistan Plain with China, it is necessary to examine and compare the similarities of the cultural materials of this area, especially the blue and white pottery with Chinese examples. The data, on the one hand, evaluates and specifies the degree of connection and the role of the Howzdaar area in the cultural interactions of the two regions of Sistan and China. On the other hand, it reconstructs the cultural relations of the two countries in the Safavid period. Therefore, 237 blue and white pottery from the project of surveying and determining the core zone and proposing the buffer zone of Howzdaar Area's Sites, Sistan¹ were selected for

comparative study. This article tries to discuss the results of this study.

II. Research methodology

In the current research, the main approach is based on a comparative study. The necessary data has been collected in two ways, field and documentary. First, the pottery samples collected from the historical city of Howzdaar were recorded, documented, designed, and classified, and then a typological comparison was made. Before all, the technical characteristics of blue and white pottery are of interest. In the following, the analysis of the statistical results obtained from the typology and the comparative study of the pottery types is presented. The blue and white pottery of the Howzdaar site in the southeast of Iran, which is one of the most important cultural characteristics of the Safavid period, is compared with similar samples from China.

III. Research background

"Cultural Region of Sistan and Hirmand Civilization" refers to the geographical region that starts from the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush and continues to the final lakes of Sistan. In the geographical and historical sources of the Islamic era, clear information has been mentioned about the importance and position of the southern plain of Sistan (Hodud al-Alam, 1983; Yate, 1986; Tate, 1983; Ibn Hawqal, 1986; Jihani, 1989; Istakhari, 1961; Lestrangle, 1994; Dehmardeh, 2006; History of Sistan, 2008; Malik Shah Hossein, 2004; Sistani, 1988). However, the archaeological information about this area has been limited to a few projects and no detailed work has been done in this area of Sistan. The archaeological projects in this area include the following.

1- Following the implementation of the big project of preparing the archaeological map of the country, the Sistan plain was surveyed. In this survey, between 2007 and 2009, in the southern part of Sistan, the Howzdaar area's sites were also recorded (Mousavi-Haji & Mehrafarin, 2009).

2- Excavation at Rostam Castle in Sistan to find the surrounding moat, foundation, and alcove.

3- Doctoral dissertation with the title "Chronology and Spatial Analysis of Islamic Era Settlements in Sistan's Howzdaar Area with Emphasis on Rostam Castle" (Saadatian, 2019).

4- Systematic survey of Howzdaar City in the summer of 2019 during the project of sounding to

¹ This article is taken from the Archaeological research project "Surveying and Determining the Core Zone and Proposing the Buffer Zone of Howzdaar Area's Sites,

Hamoun County" which was carried out under the permission of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Studies No. 9810973 dated July 12, 2019, conducted by Mohammad Keikha.

determine the core zone and propose the buffer zone of Howzdaar area's sites, Hamoun County, conducted by Mohammad Keikha. In this study, the relative chronology of the site and its relationship with the surrounding sites were presented (Keikha, 2019).

The complex of buildings of Howzdaar City is the remains of one of the cities of the Islamic era in the southern part of the Sistan Plain with an area of about 40 km², in the east-west direction. This site is located 60 km southwest of Zabol City, 3 km west of the Zabol-

Zahedan road, at an altitude of 497 meters above sea level, and the geographical coordinates N:334134 and E:3380541 (Fig. 1). On the western front of this historical city and approximately 10 km from it, there is the historical area of Kandari, and on the northeastern front is the Shahr-e Sokhta site. In this site, there are 180 features including 2 castles, 3 stables, 12 mounds, 16 furnaces, 6 Windmills, 15 cemeteries, 14 tombs, about 120 buildings, and a set of water supply systems (canals and moats) (Fig. 2).

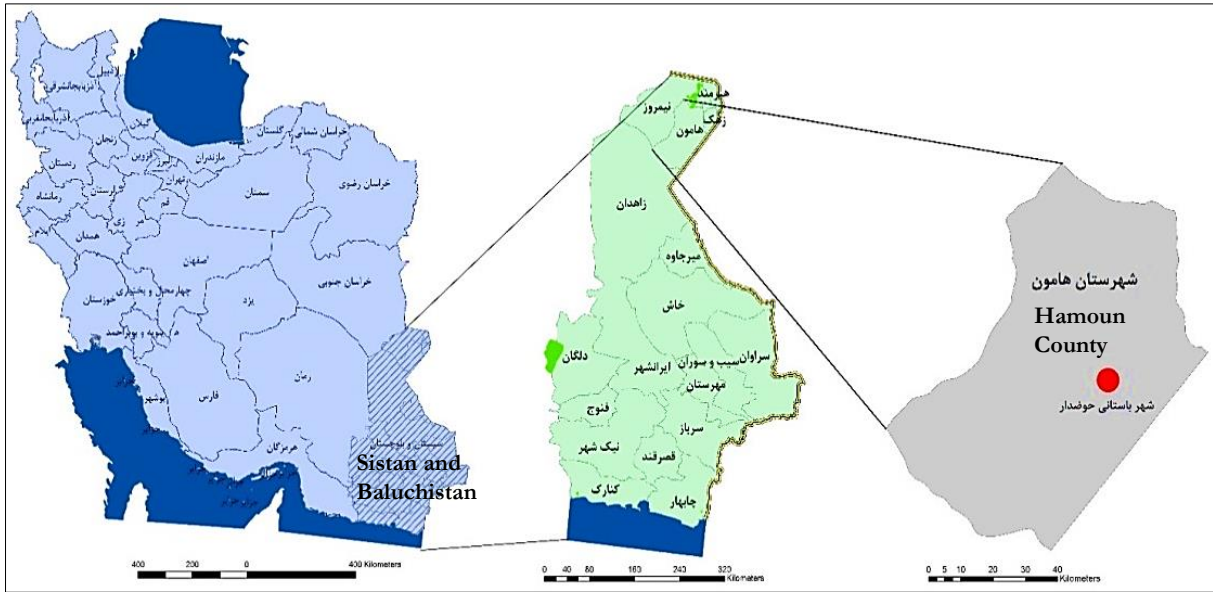


Figure 1. Map of Sistan and Baluchistan province, Hamoun County, and the location of Howzdaar historical area (Authors, 2021).

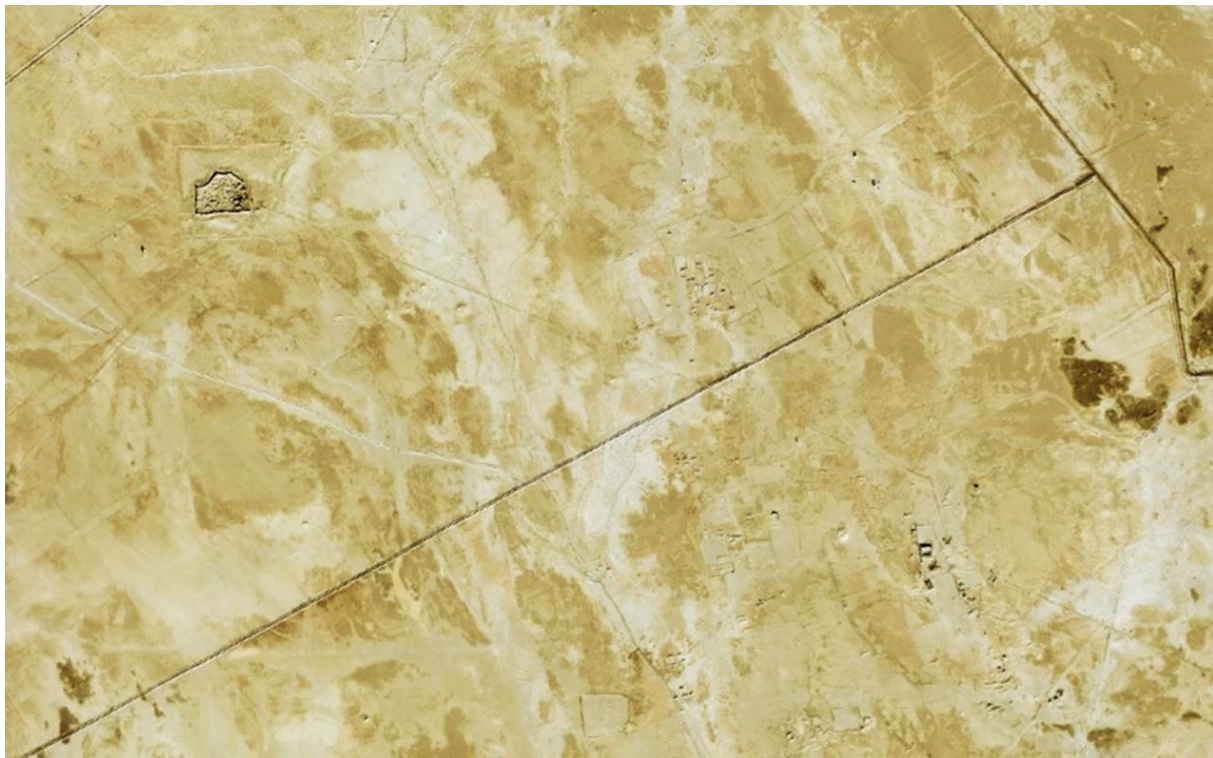


Figure 2. Distribution of findings in the Howzdaar area (Authors, 2021).

IV. The background of blue and white pottery production in China

The Tang Dynasty, which was a prosperous era of social development in ancient China, ruled China between 618 and 907 AD. During this period, the porcelain-making industry developed rapidly. The porcelain made in that period was known for its great variety, colored glazes, and many shapes. Productivity growth, technological progress, social stability, cultural prosperity, and socio-economic conditions provided suitable conditions for the invention of blue and white porcelain in the Tang Dynasty. However, few blue and white ware from the Tang Dynasty can be found in China because most of it was exported abroad. The origin of the production of the first blue and white ware in the Tang Dynasty can be considered to be Gongyi, Henan Province, China (Li et al., 2017: 358-359, 364).

As described, the production of blue and white pottery in China began at the same time as the Tang Dynasty and continued until the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912 AD). These pottery are considered one of the most important porcelain products made in China in different periods, from Yuan to Qing (Dias et al., 2013: 3047). After the destruction of the Yuan Dynasty, the foundation of the Ming Empire was laid, which ruled China for 276 years between 1368 and 1644 AD. The Ming Dynasty was a period of great prosperity in the production of white porcelain, which showed one of the most important and highest levels of technology in this type of production (Ibid: 3057). The most important blue and white pottery production center in China can be considered Jingdezhen located in the south of China in the northeast of Jiangxi (Sarmadi and Toriki Baghbadrani, 2010: 114). There were two ways to make pottery in China; A part was under the monopoly of royal workshops and furnaces and a part was under the control of local furnaces. The export of Chinese porcelain began in the Tang Dynasty, and during the Ming and Qing dynasties, blue and white porcelain was exported to foreign countries in a large volume as a valuable trade item. A high amount of blue and white porcelain was obtained from shipwrecks in the Ming and Qing eras in the coastal areas of China, which not only indicates the boom in the export of blue and white porcelain but also confirms the spread of trade through the Maritime Silk Road (He et al., 2021: 1-2).

V. Blue and white pottery in the Safavid period in Iran

One of the brilliant stages in Iranian pottery is the Safavid period. Besides, this era is considered the peak period of blue and white pottery production, so that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish some of these vessels from the original Chinese examples. The blue

and white vessels made by Iranian workshops, as was common since the Timurid period, had Chinese or Iranian designs or a combination of both (Demand, 2004: 198; Allen, 2004: 54). Among the Safavid rulers, Shah Abbas I played a significant role in the production and trade of blue and white pottery. For this purpose, he settled three hundred Chinese potters with their families in Iran to train Iranian potters directly under their supervision in the china-making industry. Iranian potters made blue and white dishes by adapting Chinese designs, which became a serious competitor in the global commercial market due to their similarity to Chinese pottery (Alipour, 2016: 185; Sarmadi and Toriki Baghbadrani, 2010: 114). The best examples of these vessels belong to the late 10th and 11th centuries AH, but in the 12th century, these products gradually declined (Demand, 2004: 198). In the middle of the 9th century AH, potters probably produced blue and white ware in five centers for court use and sale in the market. The two centers of Neyshabur and Tabriz continued their production until the early Safavid era, and the third center, Mashhad, was revived again in the 11th century of AH (Golombek et al., 2001:207). French traveler Chardin mentioned Shiraz, Mashhad, Yazd, Kerman, and Zarand as Iran's most important pottery and porcelain production centers in the 17th century AD/11th AH (Chardin, 1993: 880). In general, it can be said that the most important production centers of blue and white pottery in the Safavid period were Kerman and Mashhad. However, besides these two centers, we can also mention the cities of Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Ghobira, Yazd, and Neyshabur which had pottery workshops (Akbari and Sadeghi Taheri, 2014: 78; Alipour, 2014: 205-204; Mahjour, 2005: 127). The characteristics of the pottery produced by some of these centers are mentioned below.

Kerman: The blue and white pottery made in Kerman is very high quality, made of soft dough with designs such as flowers and plants in the style of Chinese blue and white ware. However, the main designs, general decorations, and backgrounds are arranged in Iranian style (Mahjour, 2005: 133). During the Safavid period, the importance of the city of Kerman in the production of pottery was so great that both Persian and European sources emphasized that Kerman was the center of production of the best Safavid ware (Golombek, 2006: 152). One of the factors that made Kerman important as a center in the production of pottery during the Safavid era was the proximity of Kerman to Bandar Abbas, which was on the route of the Maritime Silk Road. This geographical location caused the producers of pottery works to benefit from the new styles of pottery production on the one hand, and on the other hand to facilitate their export (Alipour: 2016, 187; Akbari & Sadeghi Taheri, 2013: 79). At the same time, a famous potter named

Seyyed Ahmad known as "Agha" was making pottery in Kerman, which could not be easily distinguished from porcelain (Golombek, 2006: 152). Multi-colored pottery with various motifs and Celadon pottery (Akbari & Sadeghi Taheri, 2013: 82-83).

Mashhad: The city of Mashhad is known as another important center for making blue and white pottery. Since the end of the Timurid period, the potters of this city made great efforts to make blue and white pottery, and this caused the development of these pottery works. The decorations of Mashhad ceramics, which are made of hard mud and dark blue color, are influenced by Chinese motifs in a way that is very similar to Chinese ceramics (Akbari & Sadeghi Taheri, 2014: 81 and 79; Mahjour, 2005: 133). According to Lin, Mashhad pottery has a delicate and thin body, which is stronger and better than Kerman pottery (Alipour, 2016: 187). In general, Mashhad pottery can be classified in the following ways. The first group is earthenware which is made in imitation of porcelain. In the decorations of this group, there are Chinese motifs in the middle and Buddhist symbols around. One of the other characteristics of Mashhad workshop productions is the creation of surface differences for the production of blue and white ceramics, which led to the production of vessels with semi-embossed patterns (Mahjour, 2005: 133). The next group includes ceramics that are distinct from China's blue and white ceramics. In this group, the background of the works is white, with blue motifs drawn on it. These motifs are drawn with black and sometimes dark blue lines (Akbari & Sadeghi Taheri, 2014: 81).

Neyshabur: In Neyshabur, pottery was made from stone paste as well. The motifs of this group include

animal (influenced by Chinese animal motifs in the Ming period), plant, and geometric motifs. The blue and white pottery of Neyshabur and Tabriz are very similar. The reason for the similarity between Neyshabur and Tabriz ware is that in the late 9th and 10th centuries AH, some of the potters of this region migrated to Tabriz and transferred the method of making and decorating this type of pottery there (Alipour: 2016, 188).

Yazd: The potters of Yazd succeeded in making white, semi-transparent pottery with a soft paste from the end of the 10th century AH. The decorative motifs of these ceramics were similar to Chinese pottery in the Ming period. The only difference between these works is that the works of Yazd were produced better than Chinese pottery. The reason for this is that Yazd terracotta patterns were designed with blue and dark blue colors (Kambakhsh Fard, 2010: 473).








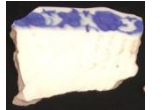
VI. Classification and typology of blue and white pottery of Howzdaar City

The samples of blue and white pottery from the Howzdaar site can be divided into three main groups. (1) Blue and white pottery with clay paste, (2) Blue and white pottery with stone paste body, and (3) Blue and white pottery with black border.

1- Blue and white pottery with clay paste

These ceramics have clay pastes in various color spectrums of buff. Patterns such as Chinese rock and wave patterns and azure blue plant motifs decorate their white background (Table 1). Most of these ceramics belong to the 8th and 9th centuries AH. Similar pottery has been obtained from eastern Iran (Neyshabur) and Syria.

Table 1. Blue and white pottery with clay paste (Authors, 2021).

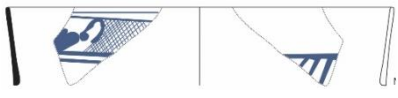



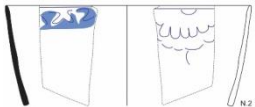





Pottery no.	Source of comparison	Design	Image
1	Dias et al., 2013: Table 1, A8/480 Neyshabur (British Museum) (Golombek et al., 1996: 200, p1.41)		
2	Krahe, 2016, fig. 133 Dias et al., 2013: Table 1, A8/469 Eastern Iran (Kuwait National Museum) (Watson, 2004: 451. cat. U4)		
3	Syria (American University of Beirut Museum) (Carswell, 1979: p1. XIV)		
4	Krahe, 2016: fig. 133		

2- Blue and white pottery with stone paste body

The colors of the designs of the existing samples range from pale blue to azure on a white or milky background. Plant designs are the dominant motif of this type of pottery. Geometric motifs, landscapes, Buddhist symbols, and potter's marks are other motifs of this type of pottery (Table 2). During the Safavid period, the quality of Iranian blue and white pottery

products reached such a level that European merchants could sell them as original Chinese productions. In response to this market, Iranian potters began to imitate the signs on the base of many porcelain vessels. For non-expert people, these Iranian ceramics seemed authentic enough (Golombek et al., 2001: 207-208). Similar to these ceramics were also obtained from Tabriz and China.

Table 2. Blue and white pottery with stone paste body (Authors, 2021).








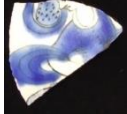


Pottery no.	Source of comparison	Design	Image
1	Tabriz (Armitage) (Golombek et al., 1996: p1. 71), ? (Museum of the American University of Beirut) (Carswell, 1979: p1. XIV), Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Crowe, 2002: 27), and Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Wilkinson, 1963: fig. 8)		
2	Wen et al., 2019: Fig. 1 (C) N.2 China (Valenstein, 1989: 185, Fig. 181)		
3	Tabriz (Armitage) (Golombek et al., 1996. p1. 71), ? (Museum of the American University of Beirut) (Carswell, 1979, p1. XIV), Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Crowe, 2002: 27), and Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Wilkinson, 1963: fig.8) Krahe, 2016: fig. 87		
4	He et al., 2021: Fig.2. c		
5	Dias et al, 2013: Table 1, A08/096 & 085 Tabriz (Armitage) (Golombek et al., 1996: p1. 71), ? (Museum of the American University of Beirut) (Carswell, 1979: p1. XIV), Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Crowe, 2002: 27), and Iran belonging to the 12th century AH (Wilkinson, 1963: fig. 8)		

3- Blue and white pottery with a black border

The main motifs of this type of pottery are blue on a white background, and black color is only used to border the details of the motifs. Most of these potsherds have a body made of stone paste and some samples are also made of clay. Plant, geometric, animal, and human motifs have decorated the surface of these ceramics

(Table 3). Previously, the method of painting with black color was a distinguishing feature for vessels produced in Mashhad workshops, but recent research shows that vessels with this feature were produced in Kerman and perhaps other centers as well (Watson, 2004: 446). This type of pottery has been obtained from Kerman, Samarkand, Neyshabur, and China.

Table 3. Blue and white pottery with a black border (Authors, 2021).

Pottery no.	Source of comparison	Design	Image
1	Kerman (Mason, 2003: 276, KIR.12)		
2	Samarkand (Museum of the Observatory of Elgh Beyg) (Carswell, 2000: 100, Fig. 108)		
3	China (Valenstein, 1989, fig. 18)		
4	Neyshabur (Metropolitan Museum of Art) (Golombek et al., 1996: p1.V)		
5	Dias et al., 2013. Table 1, A8/482 He et al., 2021: Fig.2. b		

VII. Statistical analysis and typology of pottery

According to the objectives of the research, an effort was made to focus part of the cultural characteristics of the historical city of Howzdaar on the finds of blue and white pottery. In this regard, these pottery were classified and finally compared and evaluated according to the variables considered for each class. Its description is given below.

1- Statistical study based on the type of piece

The blue and white pottery of Howzdaar City was classified into 4 different types, including incomplete vessel, rim, body, and bottom. After studying 237 potsherds, it was found that the body with 111 pieces, or 47% is the most frequent, and the incomplete vessel with 1 piece, or 1% is the least frequent. Besides, the base is 54 pieces or 23% and the rim is 71 pieces or 29% (Fig. 3).

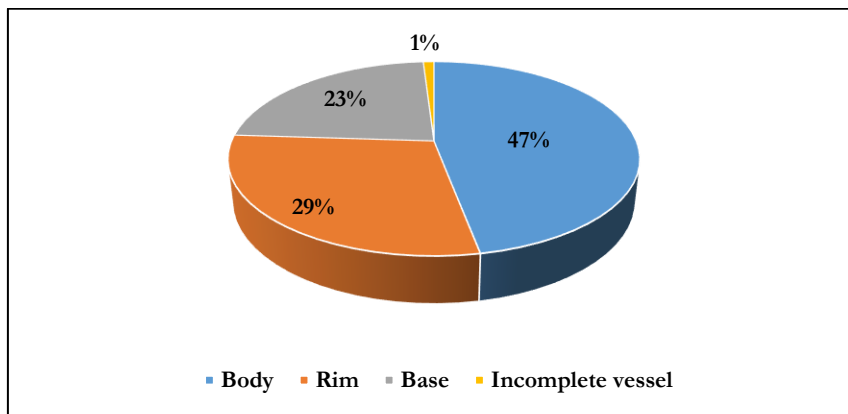


Figure 3. Statistical study of pottery based on the type of piece (Authors, 2021).

2- Statistical study based on the type of form

These pottery are grouped into 4 different types, including small bowls, bowls, cups, and plates. The

small bowl with 29 numbers or 41% is the most frequent and the plate with 1 number or 1% is the least frequent. The number of bowls is 27 or 38% and the

number of cups is 13 or 20%. It is necessary to mention that 165 pieces of the samples (body and base) had no identifiable form. Therefore, the percentage of the form

of the pottery is based on the number of pieces that have an identifiable form (Fig. 4).

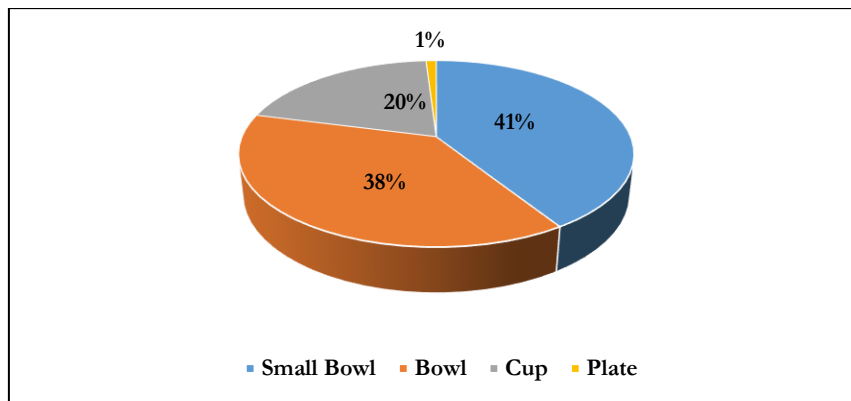


Figure 4. Statistical study of pottery based on form type (Authors, 2021).

3- Statistical study based on motif type

These pottery are divided into 6 types, including geometric, plant, animal, human, combined (geometric and plant), and potter's mark. Geometric motifs with 142 numbers or 60% were the most frequent and

Potter's sign with 1 number or 1% was the least frequent. In addition, there are plant motifs with 81 numbers or 33%, animal motifs with 3 numbers or 2%, human motifs with 2 numbers or 2%, and combined (geometric and plant) motifs with 3 numbers or 2%. (Fig. 5).

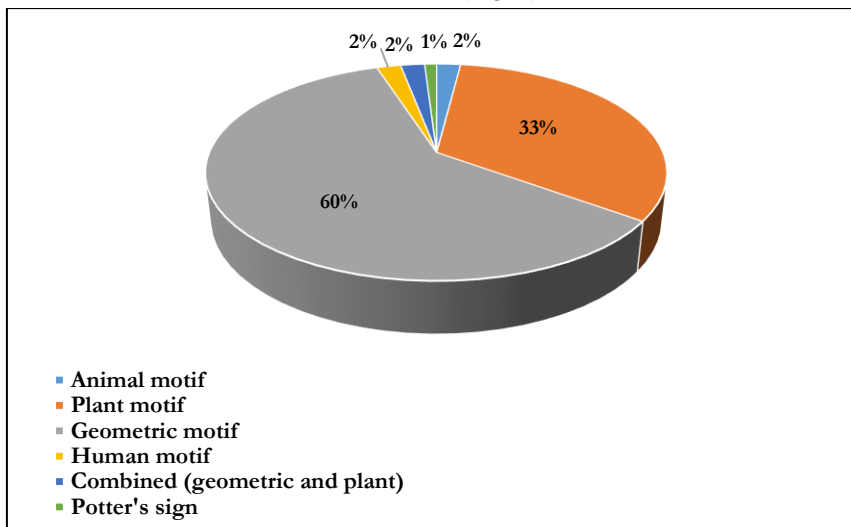


Figure 5. Statistical study of pottery based on the type of motifs (Authors, 2021).

4- Statistical study based on quality

In terms of production quality, these pottery are classified into three types fine (1-3 cm), medium (4-7 cm), and rough (8 cm <). Fine pieces with 109 numbers

or 46% are the most frequent and rough pieces with 20 numbers or 9% are the least frequent. Further, there are 107 pieces, or 45% with medium quality in this collection (Fig. 6).

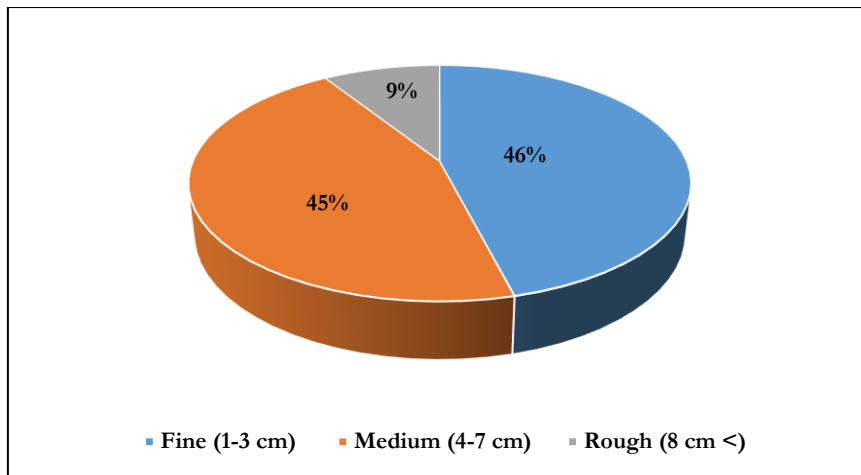


Figure 6. A statistical study of pottery based on the type of production quality (Authors, 2021).

VIII. Cultural interactions between Howzdaar City and China in the Safavid period

From the end of the reign of the ninth emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Hong Jie (1487-1505 AD) to the end of the reign of the sixteenth emperor, Chong-Jen (1627-1644 AD), coincided with the rule of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736 AD) in Iran. The two countries of China and Iran have had extensive cultural, economic, artistic, and commercial relations with each other for a long time. The existence of the Silk Road, which connected East and West Asia as a communication route, played a key role in these communications. According to historical sources, with the beginning of the prosperity of this road at least from the 2nd century BC, commercial relations between China and Rome began. These relationships and economic prosperity continued in the Islamic era (Razavi, 2008: 74-73). During the Safavid period, these connections increased due to trade, competition, and attention to blue and white pottery in the world. China, as the primary producer of this product, and Iran, as another center for the production of this type of pottery and an important country in the trade route of the Silk Road, which played a major role in connecting the East to the West of the world, were the two main poles of the production and export of this pottery (Sarmadi and Toriki Baghbadrani, 2010: 111). The art of pottery in the Safavid period was not immune to the influence of foreign arts due to trade exchanges, so that the peak period of producing blue and white pottery, which was made in imitation of Chinese pottery, was at that time. Therefore, in this research, the blue and white pottery found in Howzdaar City and other sites of Iran belonging to the Safavid period, and the blue and white pottery from China belonging to the Ming period (contemporary with the Safavid), were compared. The results of the typological comparisons of the studied pottery show many similarities between these samples and the pottery of

Neyshabur, Tabriz, Kerman, Samarkand, and China. This similarity confirms the existence of cultural relations between this area and the neighboring regions, the northwestern regions of Iran and China. Since all the mentioned cities are located on the Silk Road, this similarity is conceivable and indicates the existence of a wide communication and cultural network between these regions. These extensive connections provided the basis for the development of Iranian blue and white pottery to the point where it competed with Chinese pottery in the Ming period in international trade.

IX. Conclusion

In this research, the blue and white pottery of the Howzdaar area of Sistan, found during an archaeological research project in this area, was investigated. A total of 237 pieces of indicative pottery known as blue and white pottery were selected and after carrying out typology and comparative study, they were studied to investigate cultural connections. In this regard, two types of field information and documents were used to achieve the goal. The results show that there is a lot of harmony between the Iranian blue and white pottery with the Chinese pottery in the Ming period. In addition, there are many similarities between the pottery of the Howzdaar site and the blue and white pottery found in the sites of Kerman, Neyshabur, Samarkand, and Tabriz. One of the main reasons for this similarity is the location of all these sites on the Silk Road. This location caused strong connections between China in the Ming period and Iran in the Safavid period. Among all the centers of Iran such as Neyshabur, Tabriz, Mashhad, Kerman, Yazd, Isfahan, Ghobira, Kashan, and Shiraz that produced blue and white pottery, Kerman and Mashhad are known as the two main poles of production of this pottery. Iranian potters in these centers succeeded in producing pottery with the

quality of Chinese pottery and in this way competed with Chinese pottery in the world markets. Because evidence of pottery-making such as kilns, pottery tripods, Furnace welding, etc. were found in the Howzdaar area and its surrounding areas, it seems that

the pottery of this area is of local production. Since Howzdaar City was located on the east-west trade route, the techniques of making this pottery were influenced by the important pottery centers of the Safavid period, such as Kerman, Khorasan, etc., and entered Sistan.

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