The word fashion is commonly used to denote any prevailing mode or style, especially, as Webster's dictionary curiously puts it, in polite society. We use it when we speak of the shape of women's clothes, of the manner in which men permit hair to grow on their faces, of the way we decorate the walls of the rooms in which we live.

The word suggests selection rather than necessity, so that when we speak of fashions we mean the adoption of certain characteristics and the rejection of others. Yet this selection is not entirely one of free choice as might at first be thought, and an enquiry into the relation between freedom and necessity is not altogether idle when we consider man's handiwork and the fashions which, for a limited period, delight the human eye. It is, in fact, an enquiry we are bound to make when we desire to understand any human being or his works.

Limitations in fashion are imposed by the availability and the nature of the material used and the technique employed to create that which is desired. The relation of technique to fashion is of great importance, and it is perhaps not without significance that the words fashion and technique are closely linked in that both are derived from root words meaning make. There are occasions when a change in technique entails but the slightest visible modifications, as, for example, when a painter substitutes oil for egg as his medium; but there are others in which the results of such a change are very striking indeed. The difference in color when a potter alters the composition of his glaze, which is his vehicle for color, can be truly astonishing. How great this change may be, and how marked its effect on fashion, may be seen in the glazed earthenware of several countries. An example of such a major change is very clearly shown when we compare the pottery made in Nishapur in the ninth and tenth centuries with that made there a couple of centuries later. In order to understand this change of prevailing color we must have some knowledge of the technique employed by the potters in the production of their wares.

To those to whom glazing is a complete mystery and who perhaps think that pottery is dipped in great vats of molten glass, it may be said that a raw glaze undeveloped by fire is opaque and has the consistency of light cream; when pottery vessels are covered with it they look as though they had been coated with sugar icing. In order to color the glaze the potter uses metallic salts or oxides which can be applied beneath or on top of the unfired glaze or mixed with the ingredients of the glaze itself. The color of these oxides often bears no resemblance whatever to the color of the glaze after it has been vitrified by the heat of the kiln.
The glaze used by Nishapur potters during the ninth and tenth centuries was predominantly lead with silica and other ingredients added, so composed as to vitrify at a low temperature. This type of glaze did not appear first in Nishapur but had previously been used in both the east and the west of Iran. By the addition of copper it was tinted a clear green; from chrome and antimony two different hues of yellow could be produced, and a third, more brownish in color, could be achieved from iron. Blacks were obtained from manganese and iron, that from the former being purplish and that from the latter brownish. Still another black had chrome in its composition, which stained the glaze in the vicinity of any decoration drawn with this pigment a bright, clear yellow.

The Nishapur potter first applied a wash of an imported white clay over most of his vessels, as the local clay burned a reddish color and would therefore dull any transparent tints. Such a wash, known as an engobe, forms a reflecting surface which performs the same function for transparent glazes that white paper does for transparent water colors.

The relation between color and design in the pottery of Nishapur is very close: certain designs imply certain colors, so that it is possible, if one is well acquainted with this pottery, to know the color even if one is only shown a black and white photograph. The absence of "borrowing" by a group of potters who made one ware from a group making another ware, even in the same city, is truly remarkable—for as far as we know no pattern was copyrighted.

At times, however, there is confusion between a clear and precise linear pattern and the color afterwards applied. Though this was very fashionable in Persia, to our eyes it shows an unfortunate combination of two different and ill-blended techniques. It was not the result of technical necessity but was freely chosen and, in various forms, was repeated several times in the course of Persian ceramic history. One of the most popular ceramic wares of this first period of Nishapur glazed pottery, a combination of yellow and green on a white ground, illustrates this confusion very clearly (see ill. above). It is an imitation of a certain Chinese ware of the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906), known vulgarly as "egg and spinach" ware. In Nishapur spots of purplish brown were commonly added on the white areas. This type of ware
usually had patterns scratched by means of a point into the white engobe before the glaze was applied, a process not borrowed from the Chinese. These graffito designs, no matter how freely drawn, had a certain inherent delicacy, but the green and yellow splashes were generally applied so strongly and allowed to run so thickly that the scratched patterns are only visible if the vessel is looked at near at hand.

In another popular Nishapur ware of the same time the green and yellow do not negate but supplement the initial design (ill. p. 99). In this case it is not scratched by a point but is boldly drawn in purplish-black on a buff engobe. A distinctive feature which probably had much to do with making this ware a popular fashion was due to the technical ability of the potters, for they used antimony to produce a strong, opaque, mustard yellow, the brilliance of which was unaffected by the duller-colored ground.

In great contrast to this last ware but produced by the same technique of underglaze painting was another which, because of its simplicity and restraint, is attractive to many modern eyes (illustrated above). Covered first by a thin wash of white clay, the vessel was sparingly decorated in black under a colorless glaze. The black and white were sometimes reversed, though in Nishapur this occurred but rarely. This simple color scheme was extended and a bright tomato-red clay was added to the palette, and in some types a dull greenish clay was also introduced. Considerable variety was achieved by combining and by superimposing these white and colored clays in different orders. The technique was perfected to an extraordinary degree, but fashion for the most part kept the design clean and the color range simple and harmonious.

The effect of imported wares on the fashions of local potters reveals very clearly the limitations imposed by technique on fashion. Some imported wares were expensive, but as they appealed to the local taste the Nishapur potters endeavored to cater to this demand. As they were not always able to master completely the original technique they had either to use it as best they could or copy the style as closely as possible in a technique they did know. Two of these wares, both from Irāk, had a white opaque lead glaze on which designs were applied either in blue and green or in metallic lusters. The Nishapur potters learned that by adding tin to their formula for lead glaze they could make these enamel-like glazes. They had no trouble in decorating them with green splashes but, not knowing the use of cobalt at
this time, they were not able to reproduce the blue and had to use black instead. Thus the Nishapur fashion was black and green on white instead of blue and green on white—a change forced by a technical limitation. The ware was quite popular and serves to show that in pottery fashion, as in so much else, there is a tendency when one cannot make what one likes to like what one can make.

The secret of decorating in luster was kept from the Nishapur potters, and in their efforts to reproduce it they had to abandon the opaque glaze and to employ another technique altogether, one in which they had always excelled, underglaze painting. To imitate monochrome luster they applied a greenish clay on the white engobe under a colorless glaze. For polychrome luster they used a brownish pigment and tinted the glaze here and there with touches of transparent yellow. These local wares had but a superficial resemblance to true luster and enjoyed but a limited popularity, probably because of the inadequacy of the technique.

It will have been noticed that blue has not figured in any of the wares so far mentioned as fashionable in Nishapur during the ninth and tenth centuries. That the absence of a clear vivid blue from the glazed earthenware was due to a limited technique rather than to taste is shown by the lavish use of this color in the ninth-century wall paintings which were uncovered in the excavations of the Near Eastern Expedition in Nishapur. The formula for the glaze used on all these wares contained so much lead that from copper, from which under certain conditions a strong blue can be got, it was impossible for them to get anything but green. They apparently did not know that if they had used cobalt they could have produced a sapphire blue. But the Nishapur potters could and did produce another type of blue from copper; in order to do this, however, they had to use another type of glaze in which alkali was combined with the lead. The blue which they got at this time was not very pure, having a greenish cast because of the continued presence of some lead in the formula. Blue was never combined with any other color, and the bowls with this type of glaze were always undecorated. They never seem to have been very fashionable, perhaps because they were not bright enough to suit the taste of the Nishapurians.

In the eleventh century the potters of Nishapur began to make a new type of pottery which is immediately distinguishable from the old. The difference, however, is far from being superficial, for it is not limited to color, shape, and design. Before that time the body of all pottery made in Nishapur had been of natural clay more or less well levigated. Now a white,
gritty, composed body was used, containing ingredients such as kaolin—a white clay previously only used as an engobe or for underglaze slip painting—flint in the form of sand or finely ground pebbles, and feldspar. This change provided certain distinct advantages: the white engobe could be dispensed with as the body itself was white, thus eliminating the flaking off of the white clay, which so often happened when it was improperly applied.

The Nishapur potters now began to use a new type of glaze also. This was an alkaline glaze; for they had found that they could dispense with lead entirely and use soda ash. Both the composed gritty body and the alkaline glaze had been used, in slightly different forms, for millennia in Egypt and Mesopotamia; they were used, in fact, long before the invention of the lead glaze. Now after having been almost, if not completely, discarded during the first few centuries of Islam they were both re-introduced and eventually developed to a degree of technical excellence surpassing anything that had been done before. We do not know for certain where this revival began, but it was nowhere more skillfully exploited than in Persia.

The effect upon fashions in color of the introduction of this alkaline glaze into Nishapur was very striking indeed; for though some of the same metallic compounds were used to tint the glaze, the resulting colors were entirely different. Copper, which with the lead glaze produced a vivid green, now tinted the alkaline glaze an equally vivid turquoise blue. Clear, brownish golden yellows could no longer be obtained from iron, nor could iron be used for painting decoration in a brownish black on a white ground. Manganese, which had made a purplish black, could now be employed to produce a fine clear purple. At this same time the Nishapur potters began to use cobalt as a coloring agent and so were able to achieve a sapphire blue either as a simple colored glaze or locally, for example, as streaks on a white ground. They did not, however, discover that green could be made with this type of glaze from chrome and copper—although this was done elsewhere in Persia.

With this new technique and the introduction of cobalt the potters were able to produce with great facility white, turquoise blue, sapphire blue, purple and, for use in combination with any of these colors, black. These became dominant and replaced the older color schemes, yellow with green and purplish black, black and red on white, green and black on opaque white. Because of this the art of using lead glazes deteriorated instead of developing, and it was not long before they were used merely for the cheapest and coarsest wares. The fashion produced by the new techniques was overpowering.

The basic technical changes of body and glaze appear to have stimulated the skilled potters of Nishapur; new shapes and designs were introduced, and old methods, such as making pottery in molds, were adapted, refined, and used more cleverly than ever before. Potters started to carve as well as to scratch the surface

Part of a large blue-glazed tile. xi or xii century. Height 15\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches
of their wares and to pierce them so that when the holes were filled with glaze a pattern in translucent spots would result (ill. p. 102). In spite of these advances they made only transparent glazes and abandoned the use of tin to make an opaque glaze. The color scheme was restricted to that mentioned above. For painting under the glaze they never used any color but a strong black, in which cobalt was probably present.

No color was more fashionable than turquoise blue, and its use was rapidly extended beyond household wares. Pottery amulets of this color were worn suspended from the neck. Turquoise, it must be remembered, has always been considered in the Near East a fortunate stone, and none was finer than that mined near Nishapur. Its virtues may have been present in this cheap and almost equally brilliant imitation. Turquoise glazes were soon used to embellish buildings, not only as small insets, but also as glazed carved tiles of considerable size (see ill. p. 103).

The potters were now thoroughly equipped to produce such tiles; for the more porous body reduced the danger of warping and cracking in the kiln that was likely to occur with unprepared clay. For some time most of the tiles were of this one color. Cobalt, used to produce a blue of a different quality, was probably more expensive than copper, but there is evidence that the severe restriction of color in these glazed tiles was not entirely a matter of choice or expense but was in part due to some technical difficulties. Contemporary unglazed carved bricks found in the same area of excavation at Nishapur had backgrounds painted red as well as blue.

It is from monochrome glazed tiles like those made in Nishapur in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and not from the ninth-century lustered tiles of Irak made in the older technique, that polychrome tilework was developed. The fashion spread to other Eastern lands. In a mosque in Konia, a town in Turkey where the Saljuk Turks had been driven from Iran by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, are two polychrome tile panels. One of these gives a man’s name, and the other says in Persian, “I made this decoration, a work which will not be repeated; I cannot stay here but this stays as a memorial.” Yet such work was repeated, and on a grander scale, and this form of ceramic art revolutionized the external appearance of the mosques of Persia; for the potter had become so technically competent that he could fulfill the demands of a fashion to sheath domes and minarets in shining, many-colored splendor.

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