LIFE IN EARLY NISHAPUR

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This article is condensed from a lecture given to the New York Academy of Sciences last winter. It is based on results of the Museum’s excavations in Persia.

The acquisition of objects of value by digging for them on ancient sites has a long but not particularly honorable past. Looting and learning have often gone hand in hand, with sometimes the one and sometimes the other taking the lead. Eventually archaeological digging was done with the express intention of corroborating history as it was known from literary sources, such as the Odyssey and the Bible, and much work was done to that end at Troy and in Assyria, Egypt, and Palestine. Nowadays, some of our knowledge of early man in the remote past is being gained almost entirely from archaeological excavations. We must remember, however, that the archaeologist is always in danger of basing too much on too little. Even museum curators have been naïve enough to believe that digging surely would give them definite answers to embarrassing questions of date and provenience. And so archaeology, from being an acquisitive child (and, like all children, none too careful of how and where it gets things), has come to be considered an oracle.

To try to understand the past without losing oneself in it is a reasonable and profitable intellectual pursuit, though we know that each age can only see the past in its own peculiar and limited way. It is well, however, to look at that past as honestly and completely as possible and to avoid Oliver Goldsmith’s indictment: “Of all the learned, those who pretend to investigate remote antiquity have least to plead in their own defence when they carry this passion to a faulty excess. They are generally found to supply by conjecture the want of record, and then by perseverance are wrought up into a confidence of the truth of opinions which even to themselves at first appeared founded only in imagination.”

The part that archaeological excavation can play in this examination of the past is distinctly limited, and, if any clear understanding is wanted, it is necessary to supplement it by information from other sources and by other means. Literature, the visual arts, ethnography and anthropology all can be of assistance, but each of these will prove incomplete and unsatisfying if pursued solely along its own lines.

In literature some things are never written; in painting some things are never depicted; and time sees to it that, no matter how carefully

ABOVE: Carved plaster dado with yellow ocher bands, from a 10th century house in Nishapur
an ancient site is excavated, only a certain amount of the original material remains. The result is that, willy-nilly, false emphasis is placed on that which is preserved. The objects found may be, and often are, in puzzling disorder. The living people in the locality may, and frequently do, preserve many customs of those who lived before them, but it is often exceedingly difficult to judge just how the old and new habits are intertwined.

The reports written of Nishapur in early Islamic times contain much contradictory material. This need hardly be a matter of surprise, for there is no reason to think that those who visited foreign parts and strange places in ancient times were any more exact in their reports or less affected by their emotions and personal peculiarities than they are today. It was just as possible then as it is now to damn a city or a whole country because of an unfortunate encounter with a tough and unsympathetic official. The following quotation from the poet Muradi is, I am sure, an example of this: “Be careful not to go to Nishapur if you are not closely protected by the sultan, for in this city neither merit nor high birth is a safeguard, and the respects due to a man are not recognized.”

The early literary records run the whole gamut from praise to blame. Anwari, a famous poet of the late twelfth century said: “How excellent is the city of Nishapur . . . if there be a Paradise it is here, and if this be it not then it does not exist.” At the other extreme we have a learned man who, alas, as some learned men do, got a little sour: “For six years,” he says, “science and culture have kept me imprisoned in the dust heap of Nishapur.” As this man goes on to say “I have so excelled in all the accomplishments that anyone has mentioned, that in all the world I have no second,” we can consider his powers of judgment distinctly warped. Some writers show a better sense of proportion. Of Rayy, once a great Persian city near Teheran and on the main road to Nishapur, Ibn Haukhl wrote in the tenth century, “Except for Baghdad it is indeed the finest city of the whole East, though Nishapur in Khurasan is more spacious.”

At present Nishapur is a small town about ninety miles southwest of Mashhad on the main road that goes from Teheran to Afghanistan. This road is one of the great highways of Asia and has been called the “Khurasan road” and the “great silk road.” Khurasan is now the northwest province of Iran, but in earlier Muslim times the name, which means the Land of the Rising Sun, was applied to a much vaster area, including both Bokhara and Merv. It was sometimes used to designate the land right up to the Oxus river. Nishapur was, on occasion, the capital city of this vast area, though other cities, were effective and usually successful rivals.

Nowadays Nishapur is mostly a by-stop catering to the pilgrim tide that flows to the shrine of the Imam Riza, the eighth imam, at Mashhad, about fifty miles to the East. The Imam Riza, much revered in Persia, died in the beginning of the ninth century, supposedly poisoned by the Caliph Mamün, son of Haroun er Rashid. Both the Imam Riza and Haroun er Rashid are buried in Mashhad, the Imam Riza in a silver shrine, which is almost worshiped, while that of Haroun er Rashid is neglected, if not actually desecrated. Each, however, has become more or less immortal, the one through the religious faith of Shi’ite Muslims and the other through the fabulous but highly informative stories known to us all as The Thousand and One Nights.

Nishapur existed as a city before either of these men lived. Its very name betrays its origin, for Shapur was the name of several Sasanian kings. There is reason to believe that the Sasanian city was used for at least a whole century after its capture by the Arabs. The city was then rebuilt several miles away in the same plain as is customary in Persia. This was the site excavated by the Museum.

In Nishapur, no buildings found by the Museum could be definitely dated before the beginning of the ninth century, though some may have been erected in the late eighth century. Much was probably built by ‘Abdallah ibn Tahir and by ‘Amr ibn al Laith, who wished, according to report, to conquer a place where the grass was rhubarb, the earth was covered with vegetation, and the stones were turquoises.
Brickmaking in modern Nishapur. The depression below ground level has resulted from the constant digging of clay. Bricks are made in the same way today as they were in the 10th century.

These qualifications may seem utterly fantastic to anyone unacquainted with the city. But Nishapur is still famous for its rhubarb and the syrup made from it, the plain is still exceedingly fertile, and the turquoises found in the mines a few miles away are still the finest obtainable, an interesting example of "historical" words put into the mouth of a conqueror.

The city that flourished in the early days of Islam now lies beneath a vast area of land, which is cultivated even though it is thick with fragments of ancient brick and pottery. The flatness of the plain is broken here and there by the ruins of walls and by hillocks formed of the old buildings—the sun-dried bricks have again become the earth from which they were made. Dominating the site is a great mound, known as Tepeh Alp Arslan, named after the famous Saljuk Turkish conqueror of the eleventh century. It is not composed of the accumulated detritus of many ages but was erected in the ninth century and formed the platform on which the citadel was built. This practice of making raised earthen platforms was not confined to Nishapur; the citadels at Bokhara and Samarkand are raised above the plain in the same fashion. The top of the mound was covered with small dwelling places, following the pattern set by Sasanian fortresses, such as that of Kasr-i-Abu Nasr at Shiraz.

Both the citadel and the town were enclosed by walls made of trodden, puddled earth. The citadel had two gates and the city four—one to the East being called ominously the War Gate. Wars were frequent, and the city changed hands repeatedly between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. Several of these affairs were exceedingly bloody, and we read of slaughter even in the great mosque itself, the floor covered with bodies and invisible from the blood in which they lay. Persians, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols all used the sword ruthlessly in this city. The
chief blame seems to rest on the Mongols, who built separate pyramids of the heads of men, women, and children.

Although Nishapur appears to have considerably recovered, in 1267 it was struck by an earthquake. Pur-i-Bahā then described the minarets as broken, the libraries upside down, all the colleges forsaken, and the Friday mosque in ruins. In 1270 he speaks of old Nishapur being young again like an old man regaining his boyhood. The resurrections of the city were extraordinary despite such catastrophes.

There undoubtedly were caravanserais near the gates and within the bazaar in ancient times. Long strings of camels came there, rested and went. Similar buildings still exist, for the traffic of motor trucks has by no means entirely displaced the heavy and powerful camels of the region. The ancient bazaar was built in the form of a cross and, as is usual in the Near East, was divided into sections, according to the nature of the goods sold and made there. Nishapur was especially famous for its silk and cotton weaving. There were, however, many other things locally made and, in addition, many imported goods from China and from Iraq, if not from even further to the west.

Near the encircling walls and by some of the largest buildings were great depressions in the ground from which clay had been taken for making bricks. In early Islamic times, most bricks were sun-dried, and the buildings, when complete, were usually covered with a coating of mud and chopped straw, which in some instances had an additional thin coat of white plaster. Generally, the city must have been of a dun color, with some of the larger and more important buildings glistening white. It is probable that, on certain occasions, some buildings were just whitewashed before the arrival of important persons, as is often the case in the country in the present century.

Kiln-fired bricks were also used, the kilns being near the walls or even outside them. The fire burned the clay a bright yellow, as is the case at the present time. There were exceptions to this, however, and in the Saljuk period, i.e., the eleventh and twelfth centuries, elaborately carved bricks were fired to a dull red color.

These special bricks were of huge size and were carved with inscriptions and ornament. They were used as decorative bands on the surfaces of some of the mosques and other such buildings. Our excavations revealed a detail that had not previously been known. The background of such cut and carved bricks was colored bright blue or a vivid red from a pigment containing cinnabar. It is probable that the decorated surface was painted white. In another form of decoration introduced in Saljuk times the brick, instead of being made of a natural clay, was made of a composed body and was covered with a bright blue alkaline glaze. There was an intermediate technique in which scraps of flat blue glaze were fitted into holes cut in the bricks.

There were many mosques in the city. One of the most important was built by 'Amr ibn al Laith toward the end of the ninth century. We have a fairly full description of it, but it cannot be verified, as the remains have yet to be discovered. It appears to have had three arcades

Mosque of Ibn Tulun, Cairo, ix century. 
The piers with four engaged columns are plastered brick, like those in Nishapur.
around a great court and eleven gates flanked by marble columns. The chances are fairly good that the piers of the arcade were like those of the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, related in style to the famous mosque at Samarra in Iraq, a ninth-century building. I think this is likely, for some piers of the same type, and certainly of the ninth century, were uncovered in our excavations. Some of the mosques were of considerable size. We read, for example, that the mosque of Mutarriz, which was sacked by the Ghuzz Turks, held 2,000 persons. On the other hand, other places of worship were exceedingly small, and many people had shallow plaster prayer niches in their houses.

Some of the most important buildings in Nishapur were the religious colleges, known as madrasehs. There were many madrasehs in the city and one of the first great Saljuk madrasehs was built there. At this time, the Sunni form of Islam was the official one, and the special form taught in Nishapur was the Shafi doctrine. Religion and politics as well as religion and law were most closely allied. The Nizam el Mulk was the great statesman or wazir of the eleventh century. He endeavored, by means of the madrasahs, or colleges, to achieve some cohesion in the vast state under Saljuk rule and to combat the propaganda of the Shi’a sect and other dissidents who were active in the khanegahs, or cloisters. We have records of quite a number of the doctors and jurisprudents who taught in these colleges of which, according to Nasr-i-Khusrau, there were no fewer than seventeen in Nishapur alone. The most famous of them and the one whose influence has probably lasted longest is Ghazzali, whose writings are supposed to have influenced Thomas Aquinas. His works are still read, and his ideas are still actively discussed both in Persia and elsewhere.

There are many literary references to scholarship in Nishapur. One of the earliest concerns ‘Abdallah ibn Tahir, the great governor of the early ninth century, who, though he ordered the destruction of an illuminated Zoroastrian book, is quoted as saying “Knowledge must be accessible to the worthy and the unworthy: knowledge will look after itself and not remain with the unworthy.”

About the end of the tenth century a book was written by a Nishapur scholar named Jaushari entitled Tarikh-i-Ulema-Nishabour—which was a history of the doctors of Nishapur, but the work unfortunately has disappeared, though it was used by later writers, more particularly by Ibn Khallikan in his biographical dictionary written about 1250. From this latter book and from the Tarikh-i-alfi, the Millennial History, written in 1588, we get some sidelights on the learned men of Nishapur and amongst them an incident in which Omar Khayyam, the great mathematician and poet, plays the leading role. Omar Khayyam was supposed to believe in the doctrine of metempsychosis. One day when an old college was being repaired, he was walking with a group of students and saw that one of the donkeys bringing bricks would on no account enter the madraseh. Omar Khayyam smiled, went up to the donkey, and recited extemporaneously the following quatrain:

Oh lost and now returned yet more astray,
Thy name from men’s remembrance passed away,
Thy nails have now combined to form thy hoofs,
Thy tail’s a beard turned round the other way.

The donkey then entered and the students asked why his verse had such a magical effect. Omar Khayyam smiled and said, “The spirit which has now attached itself to the body of this ass formerly inhabited the body of a lecturer in this college, therefore it would not come in until now when, perceiving that its colleagues recognized it, it was obliged to step inside.”

From the ninth to the twelfth centuries there was much disputation on religious matters, but the strife, though sometimes vehement and deadly, was not more bloody than in Christendom, perhaps even less so. Nishapur was a hotbed for various sects. There were the liberals who believed the Koran was created—and the “fundamentalists” who believed the Koran literally and who, considering it divine and uncreated, were logically driven to maintain that it existed before it was written. There were many Shi’ites who believed that ‘Ali and those most closely related to him, the prophet’s cous-
in, should be caliphs. It is to this faction that the great majority of Persians now belong, but during almost the whole of the early period of Nishapur's history it was to the orthodox, or Sunni, sect that its rulers belonged.

Another religious force strong in Persia and Nishapur was Sufism, which gave a mystical turn to Islam. The Sufis believed not only that there was no God but God, but that there was nothing but God. One of the extreme Sufis, Al Hallaj, who was born in Khurasan, speaking of God, said, "Betwixt me and Thee there lingers an 'It is I' that torments me. Ah, of Thy Grace, take away this I from between us." It was in-
deed taken away from him, for, by maintaining that he was the Truth (which was considered tantamount to saying that he was God), his fate was sealed and he was beheaded. Some of the greatest minds were influenced by the Sufis, one of the most important being Ghazzali. He went almost as far as Al Hallaj in speaking favorably of the formula “There is no it but He.” One reference to a book known as the Mishkat al Anwar—the “Niche for Lights”—written by Ghazzali will give an indication of the hair-splitting and logic-chopping that went on in Nishapur and other centers of learning. He quotes a couplet from Al Hallaj which runs:

I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I.
We are two spirits immanent in one body.

He treats this critically and then gives another verse in which he describes the deceptive appearance of wine in a clear glass. He then points out that there is a difference between saying, “The wine is the wine-glass” and “it is as though it were the wine-glass,” and he indicates that a man unconscious of his own consciousness is in a state called in the language of metaphor, identity, and in the language of reality, unification.

In many of these religious matters, however, political interests were often involved, and it is not easy to assess how much the theological strife of the day affected the learned circles of the city. For the general population it probably made little difference. The one thing that seems certain is that most of the time there was room for a considerable difference of opinion between the various sects of Islam. Some of their various adherents could, when things got too hot, avail themselves of the art of dissembling their true beliefs without falling from grace, while outwardly conforming with that which was publicly professed. Even between the adherents of different religions enmity was not too great, for Abu Muslim, the great and unscrupulous champion of the Abbasisds, nevertheless was a friend of Sinbad of Nishapur, a Zoroastrian, who after Abu Muslim’s death attempted a revolution with fatal results, his death in 755 being due to his political activities.

Although there were so many mosques and madrasehs in Nishapur, we were reminded by several finds in the excavations that there were other religious faiths in the early city. Before the eighth century, when Islam was adopted, Zoroastrianism was the chief religion of the country, and in the following centuries there must still have been a considerable number of people of this faith, although we found no concrete evidence to prove it. We did, however, find several objects decorated with crosses, quite obviously used as a Christian symbol and not as a haphazard decorative device. Records
have come down to tell us that there were enough Christians of the Nestorian faith in Nishapur to have their own bishop. From Benjamin Tudela, who was in Isfahan in 1168, we know that there were also Jews living there.

There were probably some Manichaeans too in Nishapur. These followers of Mani, who lived in the third century after Christ, spread his dualistic faith in Europe and Asia and were persecuted in Christendom and Islam. Their numbers were probably temporarily increased during the tenth century, when those in Mesopotamia were driven out and obtained temporary refuge in Khurasan before proceeding further East to Turkistan, where remains of their paintings have been preserved. They believed in the use of the arts for the dissemination of their faith, and it is possible that the early ninth-century paintings in Nishapur reflect some of their ideas. Unfortunately the

scenes are so fragmentary that it is impossible to be sure of the subject matter. There are, however, human heads with blue haloes and fierce looking demons.

In one figure, the head of a woman, two peculiarities may be noted: the very small size of the mouth, which fulfills the mark of beauty as favored in Persian poetry—"a mouth smaller than an eye"; and the two black spots beneath the eyes. These last are not tears, but are either tattoo marks or, more probably, artificially induced scars. The practice in Iran seems to have gone back to Parthian times, and perhaps to long before that. As Dr. Schuster points out, however, the custom has persisted among the Mongols. To my mind, this curious custom is perhaps related to the prevalence of the salaq, the circular scar left by a boil that often breaks out on the cheek, to which the inhabitants of the Near East and Turkistan are very susceptible. It is not inconceivable that these artificial beauty spots were made to remove the stigma of such blemishes in much the same way as has been done in the West with moles and patches. In any case, this strange fashion is in no way peculiar to Nishapur; it was and is widespread.

Other paintings, found in their original positions on the wall, have, in addition to purely decorative designs, certain human elements which obviously once conveyed some special
meaning. On one panel, for instance, can be seen pairs of groping hands, each with a circular device on the palm. In another, the hands stretch out to small pyramids of fruit or to a black disc. These features are not in any of the ninth-century paintings that have been found so far, in Iraq or elsewhere.

In small elements from the painted plaster filling of a squinch of the ninth century, two prominent eyes appear. The use of this motif is very widespread both in time and place. It is still one of the peculiarities of small Mediterranean ships. In early Nishapur, it occurs not only in wall paintings but on a number of small metal objects, and we are reminded that the Scythians and other nomad tribes near this area used this symbol frequently. It can be associated with no one religion but would seem rather to be evidence of some superstition common to large groups of men. In Nishapur, not only was the eye itself depicted in this particular way but charms were worn to defend the wearer against the evil eye. These were supposed to attract the attention of the evil eye, diverting it from the wearer. As defense against the same threat, charms were also written from the Koran and, in the case of the well-to-do, placed in cylindrical containers such as one of silver gilt, with an inscription in niello work, which has been preserved from the early ninth century. The inscription is a particularly potent one, for it is the chapter of unity and its recitation was equal in merit to the reading of a third of the whole Koran.

Modern Persians preparing for the spring festival of Noruz. The earthenware pitcher has wheat growing on it, a survival of an ancient custom celebrating the renewed fertility of the earth.

Another indication of unorthodox beliefs or myths was found in the form of some broken molds made of well-levigated clay. The subject of a bird (here perhaps human-headed) flying upwards, with a human figure against its body, is, of course, well known and goes back to long before Greek times, as far back indeed as about 2600 B.C. in ancient Sumer. The subject crops up again and again. It figures in the Persian epic poem, the Shahnameh, in the story of the albino hero named Zal.

Concerning more material things, a matter of the utmost importance in the relatively dry region of Khurasan was the procurement of water. Several early writers have remarks to make about the water supply of Nishapur. They note, for example, that it was rather far below the surface of the earth and, according to at least one report, one could descend as many as 100 steps to reach it. The longest flight
of stairs to a source of water that was revealed by the excavations was 33 steps and the 100 can probably be taken for an exaggeration. Water channels did pass deep beneath the surface of the city, and one dissatisfied visitor suggested that Nishapur would have been a much nicer place if the water had been on the surface and the inhabitants down below. Another traveler, keeping his criticism to the water alone, unjustly condemned it as brackish.

The water was brought from the near-by mountains by means of underground aqueducts in the form of small tunnels lined with pottery hoops shaped much like horse collars. These hoops are still being made, in kilns on the outskirts of the modern town. The water eventually came out at surface level and was used to irrigate the land. This means of conducting water has a long history in Iran and goes back to at least the first century. Its distribution has always been a most fruitful source of trouble. Recognizing this, 'Abdallah ibn Tahir, who built part of Nishapur in the early ninth century, had the “Book of Canals” written. It served as a guide for the legal distribution of water for at least two centuries. There are literary references to reservoirs of water at Nishapur, but, apart from a few small pools, their number would seem to have been in no way exceptional. It would seem rather that the main way of getting water was from subterranean chambers, through which the underground watercourse passed. The finest one was a domed octagonal structure built of kiln-fired brick, with seven recesses and entered by a steep flight of stairs. The water emerged from the tunnel and flowed into and from a tank into which women could dip their pitchers and men their goat skins. There were also innumerable wells, often in very close proximity to latrine

One of the excavated houses of x century Nishapur, showing the central fireplace. Charcoal was burned in a pot sunk in the hole. In modern Persia braziers are not sunk in the ground.
charcoal fire was used as the Persians in the country still use a charcoal brazier. Over it is placed a wooden framework known as a koursi, and over this structure quilts are thrown. People then sit or lie around, with most of themselves beneath the covers. It is a most ingenious, simple, and economical way of keeping warm. But as a Persian once said to me, “It is very pleasant indeed to sit beneath a koursi, but one doesn’t get much work done.”

On the plaster floors rugs were scattered, which, with their brightly colored wools, introduced some color into the white interiors of the houses. Just before the close of our work in Nishapur we discovered that the original plaster floor (for it was composed of many layers) of an important building had been painted in red and blue. This was a simple version of a technique which in an eight-century Ummayad palace in Syria had been used to show elaborate hunting scenes.

The most gaily painted places were bath houses, both public and private, as far as we are able to tell. Considerable license has always been practiced in Muhammedan countries in the decoration of these places. They were re-plastered and repainted over and over again. One that we excavated had lively scenes, though unfortunately it was possible only to guess at most of them. Animals, birds, human figures, and winged angels were painted on the walls. There is no doubt whatever that the miniature paintings that have been preserved from the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century bestiaries, of which pages exist in the Morgan Library and the Metropolitan Museum, followed this earlier tradition of painting in direct line.

The fact that people usually sat on rugs on the floor had its effect on the manner in which rooms were decorated. It was a perfectly natural and sensible thing to have the wall decoration, if there was any at all, in a band about a yard high, forming a dado. These dados were sometimes not merely painted but carved and painted, with the decoration cut directly in the plaster after it had been applied to the wall. The Persians were, and still are, very skillful at this work and they succeeded in making most interesting patterns of light and dark, filling in

pits. I believe that the minimum distance considered necessary to insure absence of pollution is at least 200 yards. In Nishapur, the distance was nearer two than 200. The wells were often, but not always, in open courts on which rooms of the house opened.

The houses themselves were usually built of sun-dried brick and, apart from the poorest hovels, were covered within by coats of fine white plaster, which were renewed when necessary. The floor also was covered with white plaster, easily kept clean, a custom still prevalent in Persia. A feature that seems to be peculiar to ancient Nishapur was the intrusion of a sunken pot in the center of the floor. The orifice was usually surrounded by a small rectangular molding. Charcoal was placed in the vessel and air was introduced at the bottom by means of an inclined pottery pipe. It might be wondered how such a small amount of fuel could possibly heat a whole room, and of course it could do no such thing. This central sunken
Glazed bowl, 1x or x century. The stylized design gives us factual information: Persians used straight swords, hunted with cheetahs, and bound their horses tails. In the Teheran Museum

regular geometrical shapes with varied but closely related ornament. The leafy forms are highly conventional, but they are treated with much ingenuity. Other elements, such as birds' heads, are often introduced, showing that the tradition of the north Persian art of Luristan and of the Scythians was anything but dead. The main borders of these plaster panels were usually painted a golden ocher, and the backgrounds of inscriptions, which were always in Arabic, never in Persian, were painted blue.

By means of plaster the inhabitants of early Nishapur were able to have small glass windows. The glass has a yellowish tinge and is always undecorated when used for this purpose. The technique of setting glass in plaster in the Near East has survived until the present day, but in western Europe weather conditions did not allow it to be used and the practice of setting glass in lead came became took its place. The use of glass was widespread and many fine pieces have survived, although most of them are broken. Engraved plates and cut-glass bottles show great technical skill. The bottles and
decanters were used for wine, which was made and drunk in Nishapur. Although some glassware was probably imported, glass was made in Nishapur itself.

Glass was used for medical purposes, and we found visible evidence of this at Nishapur in the form of cupping glasses. They were operated by sucking a long curred tube that was annealed to the cup itself. The same type, but of metal, is still used in Central Africa. Medical knowledge in the Muhammedan world at this time was far more advanced than it was in Europe, and Persia was well in the vanguard.

For domestic use glazed pottery was far more common than glass, and most of it was fired in domed kilns. Very few of the many utensils made of it were flat plates for the simple reason that food was not cut up on individual platters and transferred to the mouth by a fork. It was eaten with the right, the honorable, hand. In all decent society the hands were washed before and after eating—in elegant circles with rosewater.

All the pottery used in Nishapur was not made locally, for during the ninth and tenth centuries a fair amount was imported from China and Iraq. In the tenth century there seem to have been importations from other cities in Khurasan. The pottery from China must always have been rare and costly. From Iraq came the highly prized lusterware which the potters of Nishapur were unable to make. However, they copied the pottery from both China and Iraq, getting at least a superficial resemblance by using another technique if the original one was beyond their powers.

The outstanding earthenware of Nishapur was boldly and sparsely painted in black on white and is often of great distinction. In complete contrast to this was another ware which, although less pleasing in appearance, for it is crowded with decoration, is nevertheless of much interest. Together with the remains of the wall paintings it gives us some idea of the dress that was worn by the people of Nishapur and even a hint or two of some of their manners and customs. Silks decorated with roundels containing birds and garments with armbands of Arabic inscriptions were really worn by the wealthy. Of the clothes themselves nothing was found in the excavations although a fragment of ancient cloth made by a man of Nishapur is preserved in the Museum. The bowls show us men and women drinking wine, as indeed they did, but from tapering beakers with straight sides and not the concave ones that are usually illustrated.

Fantastic though some of the decoration may seem to be, it should not be dismissed too quickly. Men did wear flowers in their hair, if accounts of certain convivial gatherings are correct. An animal sitting behind a horseman, strange and winged though he be, reminds us that hunting with cheetahs was practiced in Khurasan until the seventeenth century, the animal being trained to sit behind his master's back on the horse's rump. A wall painting shows another method of hunting still practiced in the Near East—hunting with a falcon.

A mold used for making pottery gives us a glimpse of another pastime—that of making music. Some actual bone pipes were found in a tenth-century house, but that shown in the mold made a hundred years or so later is of a different nature and like the zummara which is now played in Egypt. Music in early Muslim times was not just a repetition of traditional folk songs. There was much work being done on the theory of music and many changes were being made in the actual instruments—particularly the lute, the name of which is a corruption of the arabic el’ood.

All sorts of objects that were found give us side lights of life in the ancient city. They range from weapons of war to the pieces used in the less dangerous games of chance and skill. Some of these things are strange to us, but others, such as children's toys and piggy banks, tell us clearly that neither centuries nor distance makes that life entirely remote. It is to be admitted that here are many details of which we know nothing. Yet if we knew as much of it as we know of our own day we should probably understand it no better. We should not be able to see the wood for the trees. Unfortunately no one has ever been able to tell us the exact number of trees there have to be for us to see the wood, whether it be ancient or modern.