



Inv. no. Isl 141

FAIENCE BOWL WITH PSEUDO-CALLIGRAPHY

IRAN, NISHAPUR; 9TH-10TH CENTURY

H: 7.5; DIAM: 26 CM

Pseudo-calligraphy (illegible but decorative script) plays a symbolic role of the same kind as true calligraphy. The Arabic script, whether it can be read or not, in itself has an almost holy character. Arabic letters were used to convey God's word to man, and even a letter-like ornament would in some contexts be viewed as a metaphor of the Divine.

Exquisite bowls like this one from Nishapur in Iran must presumably have been decorated intentionally with purely ornamental pseudo-calligraphy. There are, however, examples of similar decorations with genuine Arabic letters, but made by artists who were not completely familiar with the Arabic language.

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Joachim Meyer, Rasmus Bech Olsen and Peter Wandel: *Beyond words: calligraphy from the World of Islam*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2024, cat. 34, p. 170;