

# A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



## **A Large Gombroon Bowl**

Safavid Iran, late 17th - early 18th century

Ceramic with underglaze decoration

18.5cm diameter, 7.1cm high

Stock No.: A5385

This delicate bowl of exceptional size is finely decorated around the wall with pierced (“fenestrated”) design based on reciprocal trefoils. In the centre is a small dome (omphalos) decorated with black and cobalt blue designs. There are further black decorative dots in groups of three on the rim. The base is glazed, and in the centre is a recess below the omphalos.

The term “Gombroon ware” refers to a group of Iranian ceramics dating to the later 17th and early 18th centuries. They are instantly recognisable by their plain white body, which is sufficiently vitrified to become almost glass-like in its translucency. The glassy appearance of this object was made of very fine fritware (made of crushed quartz, small amounts of white clay and ground-up glaze) which was decorated by directly piercing through the walls of the white porcelain-like body to form patterns that were then filled by a transparent glaze to create translucent windows, a technique first became popular in Iran during the twelfth century. Hence, the light shining through these incised lines creates a subtle play of translucency and opacity whilst also serving to emphasise the thinness of the walls – a characteristic of Chinese porcelain that Iranian potters aimed to emulate.

Gombroon ware is similar to contemporary Chinese export wares from the Dehua kilns, Fujian province, also in plain white. The increasing popularity of producing white ceramics in Iran during the seventeenth century was likely a response to the discontinuation of porcelain exports from China between 1643-83. However, the shapes reflect objects used by the local market, especially small shallow dishes with incised decorations, wine cups, rose water sprinklers, bases for water pipes, multi-necked flower vases, dishes, and spittoons or sand pots.

Historically, Gombroon was the name used by English traders to identify the strategic trading port

Bandar-e Abbas on the Persian Gulf. Hence, Gombroon was a point of export rather than a place of production. Possible centres for the production of Gombroon wares are Shiraz, Yazd, Kirman, or Isfahan, however, no archaeological evidence has supported these claims.

Comparative material:

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (C.7-1909);

The British Museum, London (1878,1230.609);

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1389-1876; 1399-1876; 1962-1910; 424-1872; and 1401-1876)

Reference:

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