
LAMPS OF TUNKAT FROM THE 9TH–12TH CENTURIES (TYPOLOGY AND ARTISTIC DECORATION FEATURES)

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Annotation:

This article analyzes the form, technique, and artistic features of lamps discovered at the archaeological site of the city of Tunkat (9th–12th centuries). During the study, several types of glazed and unglazed lamps in white, brown, and silver hues were examined, and their typological classification was carried out. Each specimen is described in terms of technical measurements, decorative patterns, manufacturing techniques, and intended use. The analysis revealed a harmonious synthesis of Islamic artistic aesthetics, Kufic inscriptions, and local stylistic traditions in the production of these lamps. The lamps of Tunkat represent an important archaeological source for illuminating the material culture of medieval Central Asia.

Keywords: Tunkat, lamp, glazed ceramics, 9th–12th centuries, Kufic script, ornamentation, Ilak, archaeology, artistic tradition.

Between the 9th and 12th centuries, the Central Asian region experienced a period of significant cultural development, particularly in urban planning, craftsmanship, and artistic ceramic production¹. The city of Tunkat, which served as the political and cultural center of the Ilak oasis, played an important role as one of the key centers of this progress. Archaeological excavations conducted at the site have uncovered a variety of ceramic artifacts widely used in the daily life of the medieval population, including both glazed and unglazed lamps. These lamps, distinguished by their technical workmanship, artistic decoration, and symbolic-religious meanings, reflect the socio-aesthetic thinking of their time.

Among the Tunkat lamps, examples of white, silver-gray, and brown glazed ceramics, as well as unglazed specimens, have been identified. Some of these are adorned with Kufic inscriptions, which demonstrate the synthesis of Islamic culture with local artistic traditions. Furthermore, the morphological diversity of the lamps—round, cylindrical, faceted, or leaf-shaped handles—illustrates the high craftsmanship and refined aesthetic taste of medieval artisans.

The research findings indicate that the lamps of Tunkat were not only practical lighting devices but also artistic and spiritual artifacts embodying the cultural and aesthetic values of their era. As such, they represent a significant source for studying the material and artistic heritage of medieval Central Asia.

¹ Askarov, A., Isabekov, B., Jorakulov, B., Mamirov, O., & Ismoilov, U. (2023). *Archaeological investigations conducted at the Tunkat site in 2023*. In *Archaeological Research in Uzbekistan: 2023*, p. 73.

In our research, the lamps were classified into several types according to their shape and decorative features:

1. Silver-glazed, round cylindrical lamp;
2. White-glazed lamps with pseudo-inscriptions;
3. Brown-glazed lamps (faceted-bodied illuminator).

Unglazed, round cylindrical lamp. This type of lamp is represented by a single specimen discovered in a family bathhouse located in the farming fields to the south of the Angren–Almalyk highway in Tunkat. The lamp, made of pottery, still retains traces of shiny silver-colored glaze at its base². Its height is 4.3 cm; the diameter of the base is 4 cm; and the mouth diameter is 3 cm. The mouth extends forward. However, this part is broken. The handle on the back side is also broken, though its trace remains visible. The body diameter measures 7.3 cm, and the wall thickness is 0.5 cm. The neck part of the lamp (<<<<< >>>>>) is decorated with patterns of this form. Beneath these ornaments, twelve circular motifs—six on each side—are drawn. Inside the circles, six dot-shaped designs resembling flower petals are depicted. This lamp was used in its time in the washing room during nighttime.

White-glazed lamps with pseudo-inscriptions. The inner and outer surfaces of these lamps are coated with a white glaze and decorated with elegant pseudo-inscriptions executed in black paint in the Kufic style of the Arabic script. A total of five lamps of this type have been identified.

The first lamp was discovered in the corridor section of a residential structure. Its preserved total length is 11 cm, and its height is 4.5 cm. The diameter of the base measures 4.8 cm, while the mouth diameter is 3.3 cm. The mouth extends forward; its tip is broken, with a preserved length of 4.6 cm. Burn marks are visible on the front part of the lamp, and beneath these dark traces are small, dark brown decorative spots. On the body of the lamp, that is, on both sides, rectangular ornaments framed in dark brown color are painted in Arabic style.

The decoration on the left side consists of a dark brown rectangle measuring 2.2–3.5 cm, with a thickness of 0.3–0.4 cm, containing inscriptions in Kufic script of the Arabic alphabet. The decoration on the right side is also a dark brown rectangle, 2.5–5.3 cm in size and 0.3–0.4 cm thick, likewise containing inscriptions in the Kufic style.

The second lamp was discovered in 2023 during archaeological research in the corridor section of a residential structure at the Tunkat site³. Its preserved total length is 11.7 cm, and its height is 3 cm. The base diameter measures 4.2 cm, while the mouth diameter is 3.5 cm. The lamp is short-necked, with the handle missing. The spout extends forward and measures 5 cm in length. On the front part of the lamp, there are small, dark brown spot-like decorative traces.

On the body of the lamp, specifically on both sides, rectangular ornaments outlined in dark brown color are painted in the Arabic style. The decoration on the left side consists of a dark brown rectangle measuring 2.2–5.5 cm with a thickness of 0.3–0.4 cm, containing inscriptions in Kufic script of the Arabic alphabet. The decoration on the right side is a dark brown rectangle measuring 2.1–5.4 cm in size and 0.3–0.4 cm thick, also containing inscriptions executed in the Kufic style.

² Jo‘raqulov, B., Masidikov, E. (2025). *Tunkat yodgorligidan topilgan o‘rta asrlar oilaviy hammomi. Ijtimoiy-gumanitar fanlarning dolzarb muammolari*, 5-jild, 6-maxsus son (Iyul), 14–19-betlar.

³ Askarov, A., Isabekov, B., Jorakulov, B., Mamirov, O., & Ismoilov, U. (2023). *Archaeological investigations conducted at the Tunkat site in 2023*. In *Archaeological Research in Uzbekistan: 2023*, p. 73.

The third lamp was also discovered in the floor layer of the second room of a residential structure. Its preserved total length is 6.9 cm, and its height is 3.1 cm. The base diameter measures 5.5 cm, while the mouth diameter is 2.8 cm. The lamp is short-necked, with the handle missing. Traces indicate that the spout extended forward, though it has not been preserved.

On the body of the lamp, particularly on both sides, rectangular ornaments framed in dark brown color are painted in the Arabic style. The decoration on the left side consists of a dark brown rectangle measuring 3–5.8 cm with a thickness of 0.3–0.5 cm, containing inscriptions in Kufic script of the Arabic alphabet. The decoration on the right side is also a dark brown rectangle, 2.8–5.8 cm in size and 0.3–0.5 cm thick, containing Kufic-style inscriptions.

The fourth lamp was also discovered in Room 10 of a residential structure. It is short-necked, with only the body part preserved, while the remaining sections could not be identified. The preserved total length is 5.5 cm, and its height is 3 cm. The base diameter measures 5 cm, and the mouth diameter is 3 cm. On the front part of the lamp, there are small, dark brown spot-like decorative traces.

On the body of the lamp, specifically on both sides, decorations in black and dark brown colors were applied using the Arabic alphabet. The decoration on the right side consists of Kufic-style inscriptions of the Arabic script placed along a line 0.5–0.6 cm thick.

The fifth lamp was also discovered in the corridor section of a residential structure. Its preserved total length is 11.7 cm, and its height is 3 cm. The base diameter measures 4.2 cm, while the mouth diameter is 3.5 cm. The lamp is short-necked, with the handle missing. The spout extends forward and measures 5 cm in length. On the front part of the lamp, there are small, dark brown spot-like decorative traces.

On the body of the lamp, particularly on both sides, rectangular ornaments outlined in dark brown color are painted in the Arabic style. The decoration on the left side consists of a dark brown rectangle measuring 2.2–5.5 cm with a thickness of 0.3–0.4 cm, containing Kufic-style inscriptions of the Arabic alphabet. The decoration on the right side is a dark brown rectangle, 2.1–5.4 cm in size and 0.3–0.4 cm thick, also containing Kufic inscriptions.

Brown-glazed lamps (faceted-bodied illuminators) date back to the 9th–12th centuries and belong to the group of glazed lighting vessels widely distributed throughout Central Asia⁴. The lamp is made of high-quality ceramic, well-fired, and finely crafted. Its surface is covered with a translucent brown glaze. The body is elongated in form, and its handles are typically designed in the shape of leaves.

The first lamp was discovered in the lower part of the trench next to the second excavation shaft. The entire surface of the lamp is smooth and coated with a glossy brown glaze. The leaf-shaped handle demonstrates the artisan's skill and sense of design. These decorations confirm the continuity of artistic traditions characteristic of the 12th century⁵. The lamp's total length is 15.8 cm, its height including the handle is 7 cm, the mouth diameter is 2.8 cm, the base diameter is 4.5 cm, the spout measures 7.2 cm, and the handle diameter is 2.1 cm.

⁴ Masson M.E., Bernshtam A.N. *Istoriya kultury Uzbekistana*, M., 1951.

⁵ Ильясова С.Р., Ильясов Дж.Я. Арабская эпиграфика Ташкента в IX – X вв. // Вклад Узбекистана в развитие исламской цивилизации. Сборник тезисов докладов, международной конференции, посвященной объявлению города Ташкента столицей исламской культуры 2007 года Исламской организацией по образованию, науке и культуре – ISESCO. Ташкент – Самарканд: Имом Бухорий маркази нашриёти, 2007. – С. 245–248.

The second lamp was discovered in the corridor section of a residential structure. The entire surface of the lamp is smooth and coated with a glossy brown glaze. The handle and spout are broken and not preserved. The preserved total length is 15.8 cm, the height is 3.6 cm, the mouth diameter is 2.8 cm, the base diameter is 4.8 cm, and the preserved portion of the spout measures 4.3 cm.

Conclusion: The city of Tunkat in the Ilak region became one of the major centers of Eastern Islamic culture during the Arab conquest and the subsequent periods. The introduction of Islam by the Arabs, along with its associated artistic traditions, was one of the key factors in the development of glazed ceramic production⁶. This process was strongly influenced by Arab cultural models during the Samanid period, while in the Karakhanid period it acquired distinct local characteristics, reflecting indigenous artistic sensibilities and technological approaches. Based on the research of L.G. Brusenko⁷, E.V., and Saiko⁸, it has been established that the glazed vessels discovered in Tunkat stand out for their diversity in shape, decoration, and technical execution. According to Ilyasova's⁹ analyses, particularly during the Karakhanid period, glazed ceramic products became more localized, representing examples distinguished by complex decorative-compositional solutions. The use of cobalt, copper, and iron oxide-based colors in glazing, as well as the inclusion of Kufic inscriptions and stylized plant-like and geometric elements in the designs, clearly reflects a local artistic mentality harmonized with Arab-Islamic cultural influences.

Thus, the development of glazed ceramics in Tunkat represents not only a significant achievement in craftsmanship but also holds special importance as an archaeological source that clearly reflects intercultural interactions and their synthesis.

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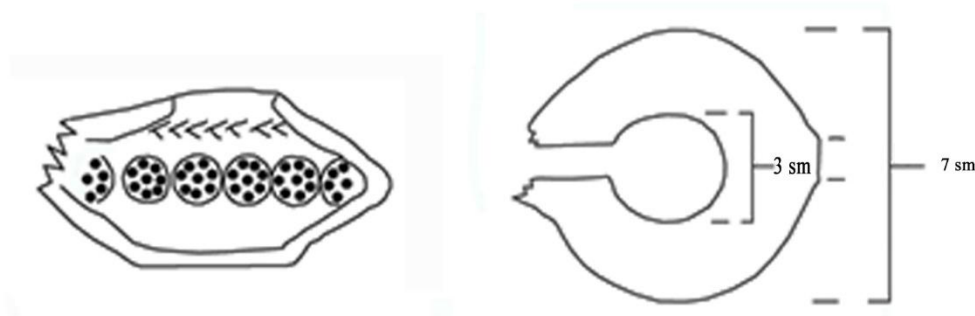
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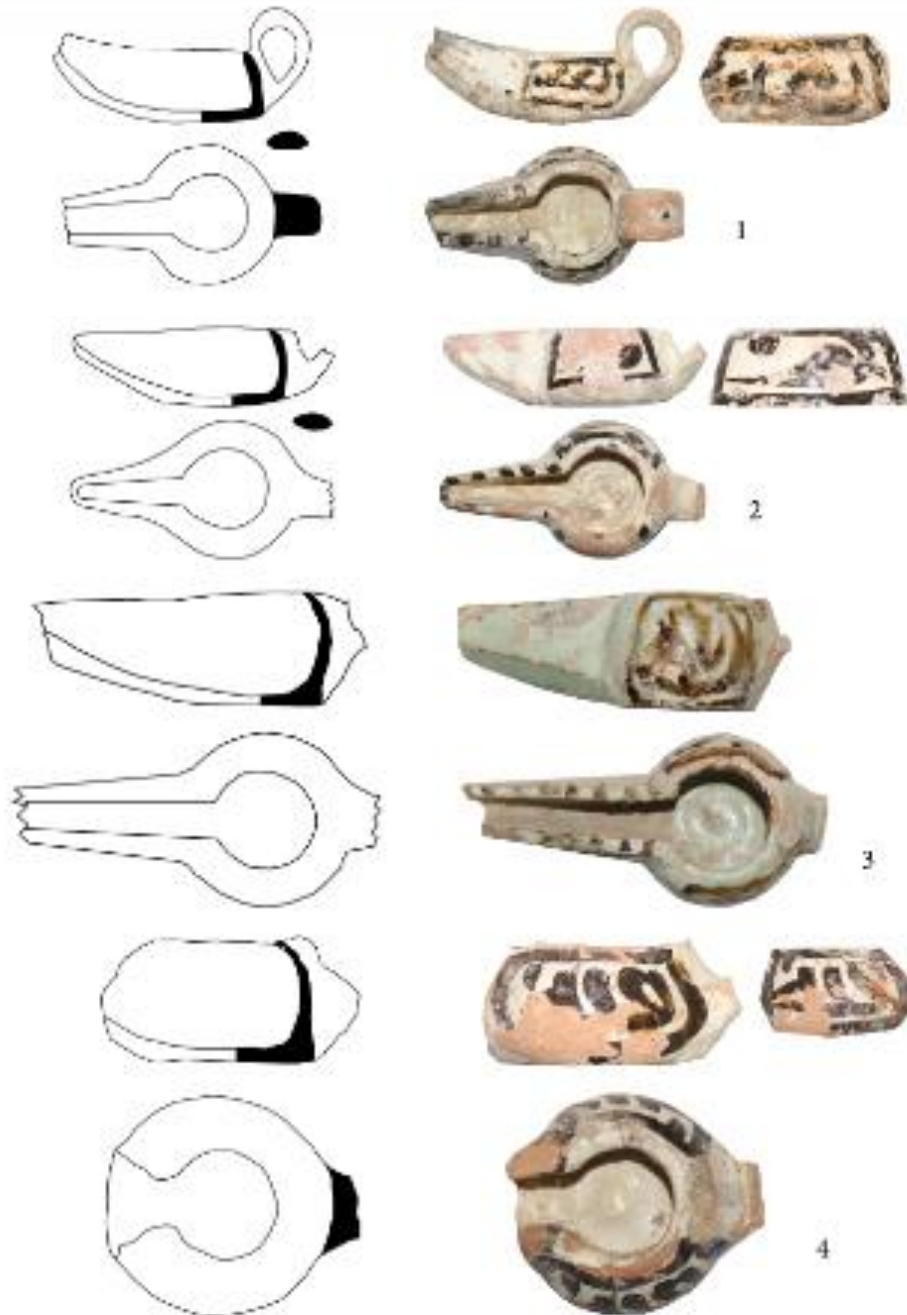
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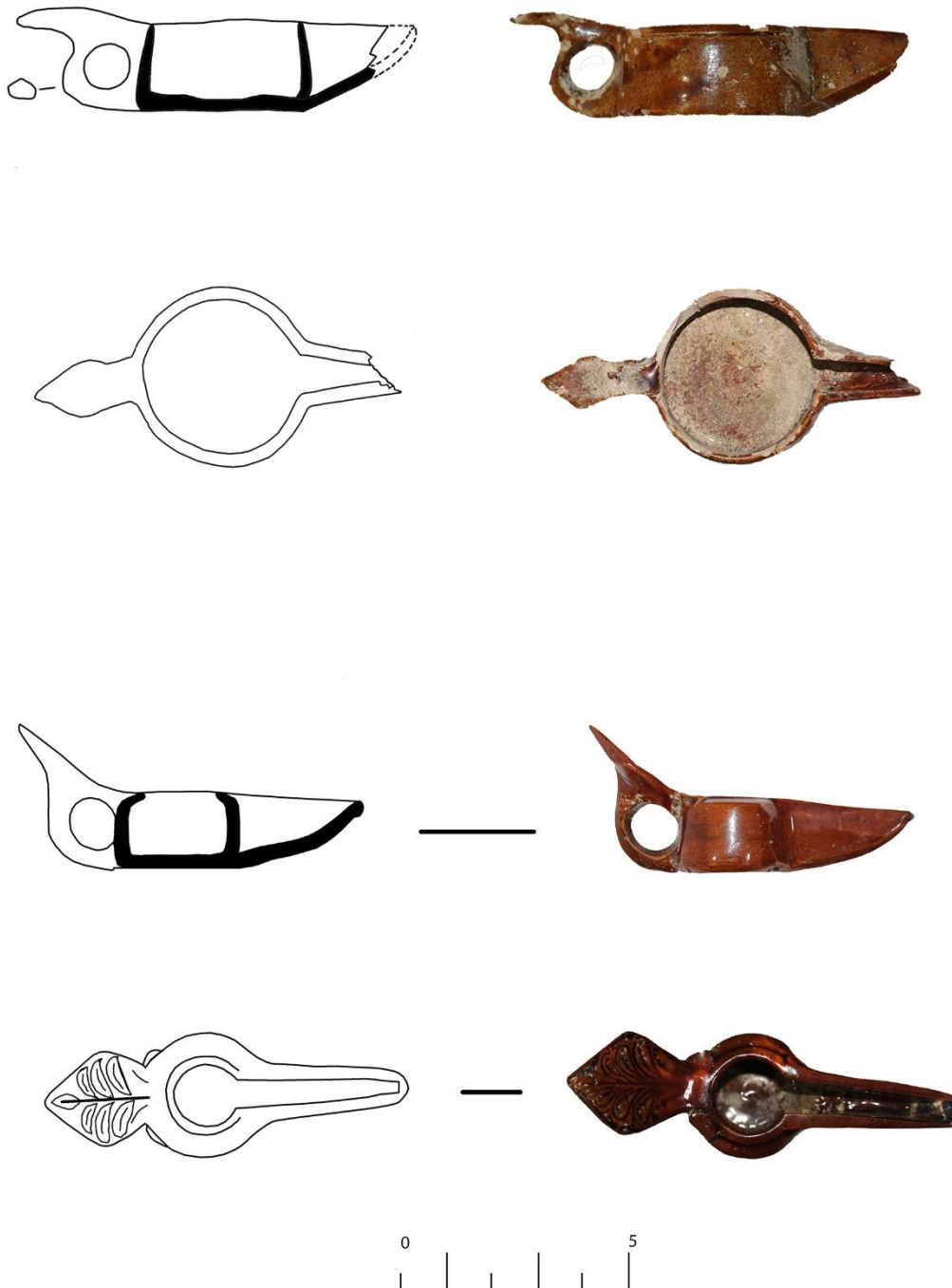
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Silver-glazed, round cylindrical lamp



Brown-glazed lamps (faceted-bodied illuminator).



Brown-glazed lamps (faceted-bodied illuminator)