

Original article

THE POTTER “SUHAYL” “سهيل”: AN ARTISTIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY BASED ON A NEW SIGNATURE

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Abstract:

The signatures of Muslim craftsmen recorded on some of their products, are considered the only source for identifying their names and artistic styles. These skillful potters are considered to be the main reason for the progress and prosperity of the Islamic ceramic industry. During the Abbasid era (132-656 AH/750-1250 AD), the glazed and decorated ceramics in blue and black colors were identified by recording the signatures of many of their makers. At the same time, contemporary historical sources in most cases- made no mention of these craftsmen. Therefore, this research aims to shed light on an unknown potter named “Suhayl” “سهيل”, to show his artistic style, to identify some of the potter's contemporaries, to attribute some ceramic pieces of that have no signatures to him and his contemporaries, and also to determine the time and place where he practiced his craft. All the previous explanations in this work are based on the signature of the potter mentioned above, which was recorded on two bowls.; The first bowl is in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo under the registration number (16005), the second in the Metropolitan Museum in New York under the registration number (63.16.2). The above aims of this study are demonstrated by a detailed descriptive and analytical study of the two bowls mentioned and by comparing the signature of this potter with other contemporary potters, as well as by tracing the inscriptions on other products from the same period.

1. Introduction

The Abbasid era (132-656 AH/750-1250 AD) is characterised by a variety of ceramic styles that were known during this period. Among them is, a style known as glazed ceramics due to its technique, in which the vessels were coated on their inside and out with an opaque white glaze of tin oxide. In this style, the blue colour was mainly used for decoration. The colors green and black were also used in rare cases [1, 2]. The glazed ceramic style was produced in imitation of Chinese ceramics, which were brought directly from China to Iraq at this time [2,3]. Because China enjoyed a wide reputation for its ceramic products, which enjoyed a high status among the Abbasid caliphs and were preferred as gifts over other antiques, evidence of this is the gift sent by Ali Ibn 'Issa, the governor of Khorasan, to the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, which included “two hundred pieces of Chinese ceramic, including plates, cups, and other items that had never been seen in the palace of any king, and another thousand pieces of Chinese ceramic, including large vessels, wide cups, and large and small Chinese vases.” This admiration was an incentive for Muslim potters to imitate Chinese ceramic in order to increase their profits and to try to please the public taste that preferred this ceramic [2]. The decorations of this style mainly comprised inscriptions, fig. (1-a), and sometimes

plants, fig. (1-b) and geometric decorations, fig. (1-c). Sometimes the artist combined vegetal and geometric formations, fig.(1-d), inscriptions and vegetal formations, fig. (1-e), and geometric and inscriptional decorations. The production of this type of ceramic continued in Iraq between the two centuries (2- 4 AH/8-10 AD) [4,5] and most examples were found in the city of Samarra (221-279 AH/836-892 AD), such as the blue and white ceramic [2,6,7] dating to the 3rd century AH/9th century AD. This type of ceramic is known by this name because the surface of the vessels is covered with an opaque white or cream-colored glaze, behind which there is decoration limited to inscriptions that differ in their content, some of which are legible, fig. (1-f) and others illegible, fig. (1-g). These decorations were painted in a dark blue colour consisting of cobalt oxide or black paint. This type of ceramic often contained the signatures of their makers in the inscriptions [2]. Among these, 'Omar“عمر”, fig. (1-a), Saleh“صالح”, figs. (1-f & 1-h), Khalid “خالد”, figs. (1-I & 1-j), Abu Al-Yumn^(a)[8] “أبو اليمين” or Abu Al-Toqa^(b)[9] “أبو التقى”, figs. (1-k & 1-l), and among them are also “Muhammad Al-Sini” “محمد الصيني”, Al-Ahmar“الأحمر”, Kothair bin Abdullah “كثير بن عبد الله”, Abi Khalid“أبي خالد”, and Abu Al-'Aon[5,8] “أبو العون”, and among them also, “Ibrahim Al-Basri” “إبراهيم البصري”, Mo'az“معاذ”, Muhammad Al-Basri

“محمد البصري”, *Abu Ishaq* “أبو إسحق”, and *Bin Kheldan* “بن خلدان” [10], the name of each of them is preceded by the word ('Amal)(عمل) to designate the potter who completed this work with his own hands or under his supervision. Most of these signatures were executed on the inside of the vessel and in Kufic script in the center of the vessel or in one of its corners, although in most cases there were no further decorations, perhaps to emphasize the significance of the vessel. This ceramic was made as follows: The vessel is shaped according to the desired shape on the ceramic wheel and then left to dry. After that, it is coated with a layer of white or butter-colored paint or liner and left to dry. Then, it is put in the kiln for a preliminary firing. After that, it is coated with a layer of transparent glaze and left to dry. After that, the desired decorations are drawn on the vessel over the glaze layer and then it is put in the kiln for a final firing in order to fix the decorations with the glaze layer. We notice that the decorations of this type of ceramic are not defined ends and their colors are sometimes faded due to their implementation over the glaze layer and their exposure to decomposition due to frequent use.



Figure (1) **a**, a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, measuring (5.3×19.3 cm), decorated with the potter's signature in Kufic script, in the form “Amala Omar” “عمل عمر” (After: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/25/1/2024>), **b**, a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, sizes (5.7×20 cm), preserved in the Victoria and Albert Collection in London, record number c.405-1940), decorated with floral arrangements. (After: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O279610/bowl-unknown/25/1/2024>), **c**, a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq or Iran, discovered in Nishapur, dimensions (6.2×21.5 cm), preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, record number 39.40.6), decorated with floral arrangements. (After: <https://collections.artsmia.org/25/1/2024>), **d**, a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, sizes (6.4×20 cm), preserved in the Christies Gallery, and decorated with floral and geometric compositions. (After: <https://www.christies.com/25/1/2024>), **e**, a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, decorated with illegible epigraphic inscriptions, decorations and floral motifs, (After: <https://www.pinterest.com/25/1/2024>), **f**, Abbasid glazed ceramic bowl, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, dimensions (7×20.3 cm), preserved at the Detroit Institute of Arts, decorated with the potter's signature with the wording “Amala Saleh”, “عمل صالح” (After: <https://dia.org/collection/bowl-/25/1/2024>), **g**, Abbasid glazed ceramic bowl, Iraq, Basra, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in NY, record number (36.159.4), dimensions (6×20.3 cm), decorated with illegible inscriptions, (After:

<https://www.pinterest.com/25/1/2024>), **h**, detail of the potter's signature in the form “Amala Saleh” “عمل صالح”, **i**, a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, decorated with the potter's signature in Kufic script with the wording “Amala Khalid” “عمل خالد”, (After: <https://www.pinterest.com/25/1/2024>), **j**, detail of the potter's signature in the form “Amala Khalid” “عمل خالد”, **k**, Abbasid glazed ceramic bowl, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in NY, record number (36.159.4), dimensions (5.5×20.5 cm), decorated with the potter's signature in the form “Amala Abu Al-Yumn/ 'Amala Abu Al-Toka”, “عمل أبو اليمن/ عمل أبو التقي” (After: <https://www.pinterest.com/25/1/2024>), **l**, a detail of the potter's signature in Kufic script in the form “Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Yumn/ Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Toqa” “مما عمل أبو اليمن/ مما عمل أبو التقي”.

2. Descriptive Study

In this table, a descriptive study was conducted of the two bowls bearing the signature of the potter “Suhayl” “سهيل”, through their shape, raw material, current condition, Storage location, registration number, size, date, source, and a detailed descriptive study of the two mentioned bowls, as listed in tab. (1)

Table (1) descriptive study of the two studied bowls

Characteristics	Bowl (1), fig. (2-a)	Bowl (2), fig. (2-b)
The shape	bowl	bowl
The raw material	earthenware	earthenware
The condition	Broken, restored and missing small parts	Broken, restored and missing small parts
Storage location	Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, Hall (1)	The Metropolitan Museum, NY
Registration number	16005	63.16.2
The Size	Diameter 23 cm	Diameter: 19.7 cm, height: 5.4 cm
The date	Abbasid era, 3 rd century AH/9AD	Abbasid era, 3 rd century AH/9AD
The Source	Purchased from the heirs of the late Ali Pasha Ibrahim	Rogers Fund, 1963
Description	inside and out, decorated with an inscription written in blue which reads “Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl” “مما عمل سهيل”.	A pottery bowl glazed creamy white inside and out, decorated with an inscription in blue that reads “Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl” “مما عمل سهيل”.



Figure (2) **a**, a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, registration number 16005, decorated with the potter's signature in Kufic script in the form “Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl” “مما عمل سهيل” published for the first time, **b**, a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in NY, with registration number (63.16.2), dimensions (19.7×5.4 cm), decorated with the potter's signature in Kufic script in the form “Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl” “مما عمل سهيل” (After: metmuseum.org/, 1/29/2024)

3. Analytical Study

These two bowls belong to the Abbasid ceramic which known as glazed ceramic. Their outer surfaces are decorated with an epigraphic inscription written in Kufic script in blue colour on a white background and can be read as “Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl” “مما عمل سهيل”, figs. (3-a & b), which refers to the potter

“*Suhayl*” “سهيل” who completed this work. It seems that the mentioned formula was common among potters when recording their signatures on their artistic works of ceramic vessels, as the potter’s name is preceded by the word “*Amala*” “عمل”. There are no other decorations on the two bowls examined, neither inside nor outside, which emphasizes the potter’s desire to show his recorded signature and his pride in himself and his ceramic productions, which must have brought him great fame and a prominent position among his fellow potters at the time. He emphasized this with his clear signature in the center of the two bowls starting from the right-hand side of the first bowl and from the center of the second bowl towards the left-hand edge of the bowl, with no decorations or inscriptions interfering with the signature. By comparing the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*”, figs. (3-a & b), on the two bowls mentioned with inscriptions dated to the 3rd century AH/9AD such as two tombstones engraved in Kufic script, the first dated to (213 AH)^(c)[12], figs. (3-c & d), the second dated to (236 AH)^(d)[12], figs. (3-e & f). This comparison shows that the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” corresponds to the inscriptions on the two tombstones mentioned. This correspondence can be seen in the style of the Kufic letters, especially the letters (ي, هـ, س, ل, ع, ا). The number of letters used in the potter’s signature is (9) letters; eight of them matched the letters of the two tombstones, which means that the match rate reaches (89%), confirming that the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” worked in the field of ceramic production between the period (213: 236 AH), or we can suggest the first half of the century (3 AH/9 AD). In tab. (2), the shapes of the letters in the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” on the two bowls mentioned above are compared with the shapes of the same letters in the inscriptions on the two tombstones mentioned above, which are dated to 213 AH, and 236 AH.



Figure (3) **a.** detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl*” “مما عمل سهيل”, from fig. (2-a), **b.** detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl*” “مما عمل سهيل”, from fig. (2-b), **c.** a tombstone dated to the year 213 AH, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, with registration number (3003) [12], **d.** an alphabet extracted from the inscription dated 213 AH, No. (3003) in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo [12], **e.** a tombstone dated to the year 236 AH preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo with registration number (3087) [12], **f.** an alphabet extracted from the inscription dated 236 AH, No. (3087) in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo [12].

Table (2) comparative study between the shapes of the letters in the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” on the two bowls with the shapes of the same letters in the inscriptions on the two tombstones, which are dated to 213 AH, and 236 AH.

Letter	Details on the letters of the tombstone inscriptions, 213 AH. [12]	Details on the letters of the tombstone inscriptions, 236 AH. [12]	Excerpt from the letters of the inscriptions of the potter “ <i>Suhayl</i> ” “سهيل” on the bowl (1, 2) which is the subject of the study (researcher’s work)	
			Bowl (2)	Bowl (1)
ا				
س				
ع				
ل				
م				
هـ				
ي				

By comparing the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” with other inscriptions found on ceramic dishes of the same type on which his signature “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” was recorded, we suggest that the bowl of this pottery is attributed to the potter *Suhayl*, on which he noted an inscription in Kufic script reading “*Mimmā 'Amala 'Amala*” “مما عمل عمل”, figs. (4-a & b) [13], where the letter “م” beginning with the word (*Mimmā*) “مما” was written in the same style used by “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” in his signature- the subject of the study- and it also matches the signature of other potters, who wrote their names on their ceramic works of the same type in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Yumn*” “مما عمل أبو اليمن”, figs. (4-c & d), “*Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Toqa*” “مما عمل أبو التقي”, figs. (4-c & d), “*Mimmā 'Amala Badr*” [11] “مما عمل بدر”, figs. (4-e & f), and “*Mimmā 'Amala 'Abawayh*” “مما عمل عبيوه” has his signature on a bowl of the same type in the form “*Barakatun we yumnun/ lisāhibi'l-Tabaq/ Mimmā 'Amala 'Abawayh/sāni' A/mirAl-Mu'minin*” [11] “بركة ويمن/لصاحب الطبق/مما عمل عبيوه/صانع/أمير المؤمنين”, figs. (4-g & h). On the other hand, examples of craftsmen’s signatures were found in which the letter (هـ) was written in the same form as it appears in the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل”, including a potter whose name was recorded in the form “*Amala Burhan*” “عمل برهان”, figs. (4-i & j)^(c)[14,15], figs. (4-k & l)^(d)[15], as well as the potter “*Abawayh*” “عبيوه” recorded in the center of the bowl as, “*kul Haniyyan Mariy (yaan)*” [11] “كل هنيا مريا”, figs. (4-g & m), and a third wrote his name in the form “*Barakatun Bihā/Lisāhibihā/Amalu Ahmed*” [11] “بركة بها/لصاحبها/عمل أحمد”, figs. (4-n & o), and wrote the letter “هـ” in the name of the potter “*Burhan*” “برهان”, the letter “هـ” in the word “*Haniyyan*” “هنيا”, in the center of the bowl of the potter “*Abawayh*” “عبيوه”, and the letter “هـ” in the words “*Barakatun Bihā/Lisāhibihā*” “بركة بها/لصاحبها”, in the signature of potter “*Ahmed*” “أحمد” in the same style as in the signature of potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل”. We also believe that another bowl of the same type of ceramic is attributed to the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” or his contemporary potters, fig. (4-p), It was decorated with a Kufic inscription as “*Kul Haniyyan*” “كل هنيا” in which the letter “هـ” in the word “*Haniyyan*” “هنيا” was written in the same style in which his signature was recorded on the two bowls -object of the study, fig. (4-q), is also consistent with the writing of the letter “هـ” in the signature of the potters “*Abawayh*, *Burhan*, *Ahmed*” “عبيوه, برهان, أحمد” mentioned previously, figs. (4-a:o). From the foregoing, we can assume that the potters “*Suhayl*” “سهيل”,

“*Abu Al-Yumn*” “أبو اليمن”/“*Abu Al-Toqa*” “أبو التقى”, “*Badr*” “بدر”, “*Burhan*” “برهان”, “*Abawayh*” “عوييه” and “*Ahmed*” “أحمد” were working at the same period during the first half of the 3rd century AH. 9 AD, and perhaps one of them was a teacher of the other or they learnt under a supervisor or potter who is not yet known, and whose name may be revealed in the future. As for the industrial center where the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” worked, most of the vessels of this ceramic were attributed to either to the city of Basra^(g) [10,16] or to the city of Samarra. Due to the similarity between the letter style of the signature of the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” and the letters of the inscriptions of the two tombstones mentioned, the first is dated to 213 AH/828 AD, i.e., before the founding of the city of Samarra (221 AH/836 AD), and the second is dated to 236 AH/851 AD, i.e., fifteen years after the founding of the city. It is very likely that this potter was already active in his craft before the founding of the city of Samarra (221-279 AH/836- 892 AD), as the city of Basra was one of the most important centres of this industry. The potter *Suhayl* “سهيل” may have practiced his craft in the city of al-Basra before moving^(h) [16] to the city of Samarra.

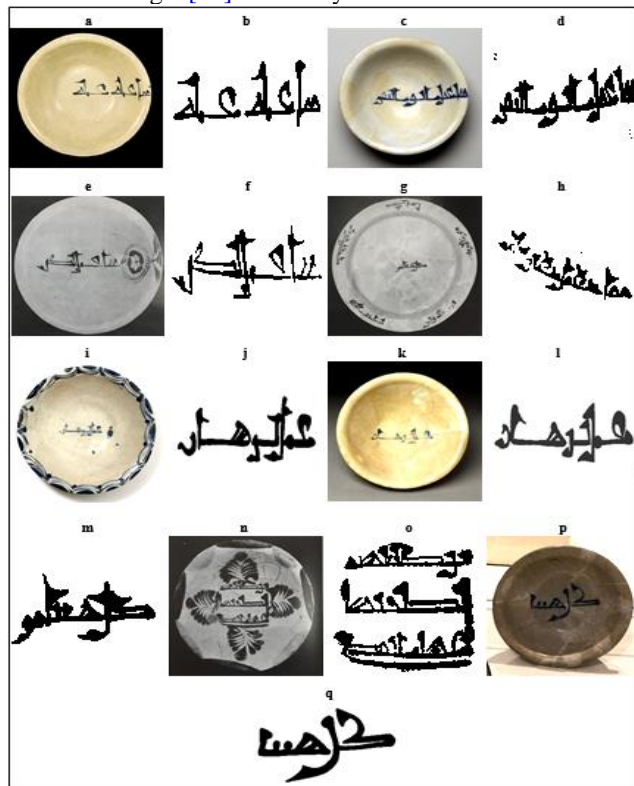


Figure (4) a. a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, preserved in the (Harvey B. Plotnik collection, courtesy of the art Institute of Chicago), decorated with Kufic inscriptions reading “*Mimmā 'Amala 'Amala*” “مما عمل عمل”, (After: <https://archive.artic.edu/plotnick/overview.html>, 1-25-2024), b. detail of an inscription in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala 'Amala*” “مما عمل عمل”, c. Abbasid glazed ceramic bowl, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, preserved in the Brooklyn Museum, dimensions (6.4×21.9 cm), museum record number (86.227.14), decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script with the formula “*Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Yumn/Mimmā 'amala Abu Al-Toqa*” “مما عمل أبو اليمن/مما عمل أبو التقى”, (After: <http://brooklynmuseum.org/>, 1-28-2024), d. a

detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Yumn/Mimmā 'Amala Abu Al-Toqa*” “مما عمل أبو اليمن/مما عمل أبو التقى”, e. a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, 3-4 century AH/9-10 AD, decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script with the formula “*Mimmā 'Amala Badr*” “مما عمل بدر” [11], f. a detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Badr*” “مما عمل بدر”, g. a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, 3rd-4th century AH/9th-10th century AD. It is decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script on the edge of the bowl with the formula “*Barakatun we yumnun/lisāhibi'l-Tabaq/ Mimmā 'Amala 'Abawayh /sāni' A/mir Al-Mu'minin*” “بركة ويمن/لصاحب الطبق/مما عمل عوييه/صانع أمير المؤمنين”, and in the center of the bowl is an inscription reading “*kul Haniyyan*” “كل هنيا” [11], h. a detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala 'Abawayh*” “مما عمل عوييه”, i. Abbasid glazed ceramic bowl, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, preserved in the Al-Khalili Collection in London under registration number (889), dimensions (6.4×22.4 cm), decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Amala Burhan*” “عمل برهان” (After: <http://khalilicol-lections.org/>, 1-30-2024), j. detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form of “*Amala Burhan*” “عمل برهان”, k. a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, Iraq, 3rd century AH/9th century AD, decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form “*Amala Burhan*” “عمل برهان”, preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, under registration number (EA 1978.2138), dimensions (5.8×20.2 cm), (After: <http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/>, 30-1-2024), l. detail of the potter’s signature in Kufic script in the form of “*Amala Burhan*” “عمل برهان”, m. detail of an inscription in Kufic script in the form “*Kul Haniyyan Mariy (yan)*” “كل هنيا مريا”, n. a bowl of glazed Abbasid ceramics, 3-4 century AH/9-10 AD, decorated with the potter’s signature in Kufic script with the formula “*Barakatun Biha/Lisāhibiha/Amala Ahmed*” “بركة بها/لصاحبها/عمل أحمد” [11], o. a detail of the potter’s writing and signature in Kufic script in the form “*Barakatun Biha/Lisāhibiha/Amala Ahmed*” “بركة بها/لصاحبها/عمل أحمد”, p. a bowl made of glazed Abbasid ceramics, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Hall 1, Museum Registry No. (13197), diameter 25.5 cm, dated 3rd century AH/9th century AD, made in Iraq, purchased from Monsieur Ashirof, decorated with a phrase in Kufic script in the form “*kul Haniyyan*” “كل هنيا”, published for the first time, q. detail of an inscription in Kufic script in the form “*Kul Haniyyan*” “كل هنيا”.

4. Results

In examining the topic “The potter *Suhayl*, an artistic archaeological study in light of a signature published for the first time,” we come to the following results:

- *) The study focused on a new potter, “*Suhayl*,” “سهيل” within the sect of Islamic potters in general and Abbasid potters in particular, who worked in this field in Iraq during the 3rd century AH/9th AD.
- *) The paper proved that the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” worked in the field of making and decorating ceramics in the cities of Basra and Samarra in the first half of the 3rd century AH/9th AD.
- *) It could be proven that “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” used the same industrial and decorative methods as his fellow potters of the Abbasid era, as well as the method of writing his signature in Kufic script, in blue and on the inside of the vessels.
- *) The paper hesitated that the potter used his personal name “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” to record his signatures on his ceramic vessels such as the potters “*Saleh, Khalid, Badr, 'Abawayh, Burhan, and Ahmed*” “صالح, خالد, بدر, عوييه,”

”برهان وأحمد“, He did not use a nickname such as the nicknames of the potters *Abu Al-Yumn/Abu Al-Toqa*, “أبو أبو” and *Abu al-‘Awn* “أبو العون” and *Abu Ishaq* “أبو إسحاق”, or the lineage like “*Ibn Kheldan*”, “ابن خلدان”, and others.

- *) It is also believed that the potter “*Suhayl*” “سهيل” was a contemporary of each of the potters “*Abu Al-Yumn/Abu Al-Toqa*, ‘*Abawayh*, *Badr*, *Burhan*, and *Ahmed*” “أبو اليمن/ أبو اليمن/ بدر، برهان وأحمد”.

5. Discussion

In this work, the author published two new bowls of glazed Abbasid ceramics, which are kept in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo under the registration numbers (16005), (13197). This type of ceramic is generally dated by scholars to the 2nd-3rd century AH/8-9. In addition to the numerous decorations, it was decorated with the signatures of many potters. The two bowls examined are decorated with inscriptions in Kufic script, one of which contains the potter’s signature in the form “*Mimmā 'Amala Suhayl*” “مما عمل سهيل”, and the second with the expression “*Kul-Haniyyan*” “كل هنيا”, in blue script on a cream-colored background. The style of the writing on the two bowls makes it clear that they are very similar. The shape of the letters used in the inscriptions on the two bowls also matched the inscriptions on two stone tombstones dated to 213 and 236 AH., suggesting that the potter “*Suhayl*” was active in the production and decoration of pottery in Iraq between the cities of Basra and Samarra in the first half of the 3rd century AH/9th century AD. The study also suggested dating a number of potters to the same period in which the potter “*Suhayl*” worked, as well as some ceramic vessels that do not contain signatures of their craftsmen, we can attribute to the same period based on the form of the writing style used in the signature of “*Suhayl*” and his contemporary potters.

6. Conclusion

The present study is an art archaeological study of a potter's signature on a glazed ceramic bowl preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo and dated to the Abbasid period in the centuries 2-3 AH/8-9 AD. The descriptive and analytical study focused on the description of the decoration of the bowl, which is represented by the potter's signature in Kufic script. A comparison with another signature he recorded on another bowl of the same ceramic type, held in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, revealed that the two signatures are identical. Comparisons have also been made with inscriptions on two tombstones from the same period, dated to 213 AH and 236 AH., which revealed a close match in style. The script used in the potter's signature matches the script used for the inscriptions on the two tombstones, suggesting that the potter “Suhayl” “سهيل” was active in the first half of the 3rd AH/9th AD.

Endnotes

- (a) The potter’s signature was read in this form by Dr. Zaki Muhammad Hassan [8].
 (b) The potter’s signature was read in this form by Dr. Abd Allah Quchani [9].
 (c) This gravestone is preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, registration number (3003) [12].
 (d) This gravestone is preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, registration number (3087) [12].

- (e) This bowl is preserved in the Khalili Collection in London under registration number (889) [14].
 (f) This bowl is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, within the collection of the Yousef Jameel Center for Islamic and Asian art under registration number (EA 1978.2138) [15].
 (g) The city of Basra was one of the cities that had a famous reputation for ceramic industries in the first Abbasid era. What confirms this status is that the archaeological excavations conducted at the site of the ancient city of Basra revealed many ceramic kilns dating back to the early Abbasid era. In addition, the excavations of the city of Raqqa were found. A pot of bluish-green glazed ceramic dating back to the beginning of the Abbasid era. Its upper part has an inscription band executed in relief. At the end it says: “*Amila Belbasratu Min 'Amal Hassan khasan Bisahib Al-Hiyratu...*” “عمل بالبصرة من عمل حسان خاصص” “بصاحب الحيرة” It is believed that Hassan is the name of the maker, but as for the owner of Al-Hirah what is meant is the governor who was in confusion at that time [16].
 (h) It is noteworthy that when the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mu'tasim Billah (218-227 AH/833-842 AD) built the city of Samarra, he transferred to it a number of craftsmen and industries from various Islamic cities, and among them was a large number of ceramic makers from the city of Basra [16].

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