The transfer of tin-glazed faience technology by Hutterite Anabaptists to East-Central Europe in the Late Medieval and Post Medieval Period

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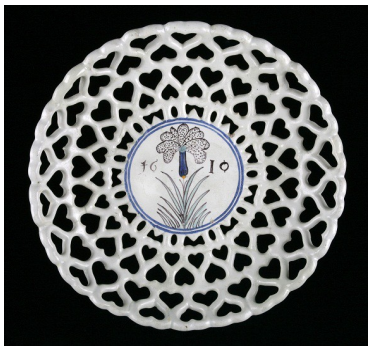
Anabaptist potter
Old Transilvanian Costumes
Codex from 17th century
British Library, London

Anabaptists

Production of tin-glazed earthenware, faience in East-Central Europe was disseminated by German speaking Hutterite Anabaptist potters, New Christians or Habans as they were called. (Though majolica had already been produced in the last quarter of 15th century in Hungary in the court of King Matthias.) Anabaptists were representatives of the third branch of the Reformation, first communities were formed in Swiss cantons around 1524. In the 16th century Anabaptists had to move to Netherland, Moravia, Austria and Hungary and in the 17th century to Transylvania and further. They lived in communities of shared property.



Mould for the perforated ware
with heart pattern
From the excavation of J. Pajer
in Vacenovice

Perforated tazza from Vacenovice, Moravia
Hungarian National Museum

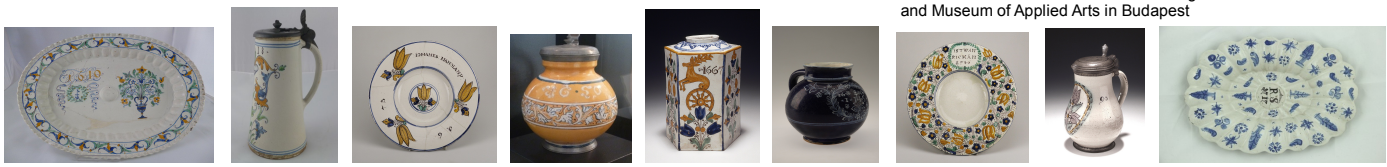
Faience made by Anabaptists inspired by „bianchi di Faenza"

The results of the North Italian majolica influenced all European countries in the 16th century, Anabaptists - emigrating from Switzerland, South Germany and Italy due to religious repression – could draw also from here, influenced by the art of „bianchi di Faenza". They started making faience ware in the late 16th century, mostly white-glazed vessels decorated with flower stems and meandering foliages in a reduced colour palette – yellow, blue, green, violet-brown-black. They produced blue- and yellow-glazed pieces too. They often applied the name and the court of arms of the costumer and the year of the manufacture. In the 17th century they prepared their luxury wares principally for high noble families. In the second half of the 17th century the use of Haban pots spread among wealthier lesser nobles, burghers and town bodies.

Forms, decorations, style, influences

The New Christian ceramic art was formed from particular elements of form, decoration and style of various origin – primarily Italian, German, Eastern Persian-Turkish and later Dutch. Form was strictly tradition-bearing, preserving ceramic types of the Italian and Northern Renaissance reconceptualised in the unique order of Hutterite-Haban pottery. In their decorative work the ornamentation of the Italian Renaissance and the Persian-Turkish treasure of plant motifs dominate – tulips, carnations, pomegranates and rose motives. The eastern impact upon contemporary art may have been direct, through Turkish applied art, but it also reached indirectly via western and especially Italian material culture. In the second half of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th century Hutterite-Haban potters had inspiration from the blue-white delftware.

Faiences from the collections of the Hungarian National Museum and Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest



Fragments from the excavation of the Sárospatak castle

Archeometric research

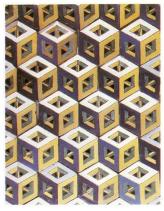
Notable settlement of Hutterites in Hungary occurred after 1620. In 1645 one of their groups moved to Sárospatak (NE-Hungary).The studied Hutterite faience fragments from the excavation of the Sárospatak castle were produced with lots of similarities to the Italian majolica.

Calcareous clay (14 to wt% CaO) was used for the yellowish brown ceramic body. Up to about 400 µm thick white (and blue) tin-opacified lead-alkali glaze was applied on the biscuit-fired body, the glaze suspension contained sand admixture and significant amount of common salt and was not fritted before application. Decorations are coloured glazes comparable in thickness with the opaque glaze and not covered by an outer transparent glaze. Colorants used were lead antimonate for yellow, cobalt pigment with arsenic, nickel and iron for blue, copper pigment for green and manganese pigment for black. Decoration were applied on the unfired opaque glaze and maturing of glazes occurred during second firing. The main difference compared to the „bianchi di Faenza" is the higher tin content (16 to 20 wt% SnO_2) of the white glaze of the studied Hutterite faience together with 17 to 26 wt% PbO content. The elevated tin oxide content is similar to the typical tin oxide contents of the glazes (mainly white glazes) of della Robbia sculptural ceramics. High-quality white tin glaze seems to have been produced deliberate use of high amount of tin oxide instead of increasing the glaze thickness as in the case of the „bianchi di Faenza".

The secret of the tiles – Finds from Farkashida

In 1909 a special group of high quality floor tiles was found in an underground, crashed-in depository in the historical territory of Hungary, at Farkashida (now Vlčkovce or Farkašin, Slovakia). The hexagonal tiles are decorated by perspective expressions of cubes with perforated sides. They were prepared to cover the floor of an unknown, ornate building, but they were never built in. Hutterites lived in the neighborhood in the 17th century. By near in Kosolna (now Košolna, Slovakia) during the excavation of the Hutterite-Haban settlement waste tiles were found. That is why these pieces were identified as the works of Hutterite-Haban potters (H. Landsfeld, 1950). The prototype of this geometric, stereoscopic pattern is rooted in the studies about the perspective of the Florentine Renaissance, in the studies about geometry of platonic origin (Csenkey, 1991). A drawing in an Oxford collection from the circle of Leonardo da Vinci is supposed to be the prefiguration of this pattern. The floor tiles were bought by the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, now there are 528 pieces saved in the Ceramic Collection, 472 hexagonal and 56 triangular ones. Some pieces remained on the site, now they can be found in the public and private collections in Slovakia, Czech and Austria. The ceramic body of the tiles was made from the same clay material. They are decorated with tin glaze. But two different glazing technologies were applied. Most of the tiles were produced by cuenca technique. Some pieces are painted on flat surface. Several pieces have marks similar to Italian ones on the verso. A German inscription related to the glazing test can be read on the back side of one cuenca tile: *Das ist ein Nr. 8. Gelb Glas.* Éva Csenkey (1991) raised the possibility to date the tiles to the beginning of the 16th century with the perhaps later supplements (around 1663, the pieces painted on flat surface).

Floor tiles from Farkashida finds
Museum of Applied Arts
L: 20.5-21.3 cm
W: 18-18.5 cm
T: 1.5-2.5 cm



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In: Új Művészet. 1991/2. 13-15, 71.

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