FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Iznik Pottery
John Carswell
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The phenomenon of multiculturalism is often depicted as an outgrowth of the high-tech age, in which the Internet, global market economy, and air travel have radically changed the movement of art, knowledge, and news. Yet one of history's greatest episodes of multicultural transformations unfolded during the six-centuries-long reign of the Ottoman Empire. In the late thirteenth century, Ottoman Turks emerged from nomadic tribes in northwest Anatolia—and by the sixteenth century, Ottoman reach extended into the Near East, southern Russia, eastern Europe, and North Africa.

In this volume, the author depicts how diverse cultural ingredients found expression in the dramatic beauty of Turkish ceramic art. Drawing upon "an extraordinary combination of external influences" from China, Central Asia, and Europe, Iznik craftsmanship culminated in pottery so vibrant and innovative that even today, its visual impact remains "as striking and fresh as when it was first produced."

Carswell previously served as Director of the Islamic Department at Sotheby's, Professor of Fine Arts at the American University in Beirut, and Director of the Smart Museum and Curator of the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago. Due to bequeathed private collections, the British Museum holds one of the world's finest, most extensive collections of Iznik pottery. Carswell's illustrated volume reads like a personally escorted tour through a select gallery, with meticulous scrutiny of the designs that characterize Iznik ceramics, including tiles for mosques and hammam (communal baths), hanging ornaments (to decorate places of worship), lamps, jugs, footed bowls, and dishes.

Prior to the multicultural influx of the Ottoman Empire, Anatolian Turkey already possessed an ancient history of fired earthenware and decorative crafts. Excavations have revealed fired clay pottery and expressive figurines as early as the seventh millennium B.C.E. Indigenous tradition was invigorated by new human resources during the Ottoman period; craftsmen were among "the spoils of war" and "particularly potters … could be transferred from one end of the empire to another."

Iznik pottery became heralded in part for the virtuosity of its surface decoration. It was painted with tight labyrinths of arabesques; spiraling wreaths and medallions, with interlaced flowers, leaves, birds, pomegranates, or breaking waves; and encircled by inscriptions. The result was a design intricacy that "would have been more suitable for manuscript decoration than for pottery."

Carswell also depicts the evolution of Iznik glazes, which blossomed from an early simplicity of monochrome cobalt pieces into a lush palate of turquoise and teal blues, jade and olive greens—and finally, orange, reds, and manganese purple. The brilliance of Iznik pottery follows the trajectory of the Empire itself, peaking in the sixteenth century with "a whole galaxy of subtle colors and a loosening of style."

Carswell's authoritative book will appeal not just to art historians, students, and collectors of ceramics, but also to all readers who are susceptible to wonder and curiosity for this remarkable period of cross-germination between cultures.

Melanie Drane