

"Mamluk Cartouches and Blazons Displayed in the Museum of Islamic Arts, Doha; an Art Historic Study"

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Introduction

The Mamluk state in Egypt and Syria ruled from the overthrow of the Ayyubid dynasty in 1250 until the Ottoman conquest in 1517. The sultanate's ruling caste developed heraldic pictorial blazons representing particular sultans and inscribed cartouches bearing the sultan's name, mottos, epithets and blessings on him. In addition, the Mamluk sultanate initiated and developed blazons for prominent emirs, mostly circular and decorated with heraldic devices reflecting the official post overtaken by the relevant emir. The Emir depicts his emblem in architecture and on every possible product dedicated to him. The early Mamluk blazons started simple and characterized with its circular undivided shield occupied by a device symbolizing the relevant emir post such as the pen-box representing the post of the sultan's executive secretary (*dawādār*) and the two polo sticks representing the polo master (*jukandār*). In a later period the blazon was divided into three fields (bars), occupied in the middle field by the heraldic emblem of the emir, then developed in the Late (*Burjī*) Mamluk period to become a composite blazon occupied by various devices showing the former posts of the relevant emir, starting with the emblem of the earliest post in the lower field (bar) and ending with the emblem of the most recent one.

The museum of Islamic Art, Doha is displaying a number of metal, glass and wooden Mamluk objects decorated with patterns of sultan cartouches and three shielded blazons of high ranking officials who served in the early period of the Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria (1250-1517 AD).

This paper aims to highlight and classify the different types of the sultan cartouches and heraldic blazons on Mamluk objects in the museum, examining and dating them in their historic, art historic and hierarchal contexts during the Mamluk period.

Pictorial Blazons of Mamluk Sultans

The Museum of Islamic art displays three Mamluk objects with heraldic pictorial image of the panther in the act of walking; three panthers are depicted on gilded and enameled glass bucket (GL.516.2009, fig. 1 left), two confronted panthers on a wooden window grill surmounting a wooden door (WW.33.1999, fig 1 right) and two panthers on a gilded and enameled drinking glass.

The panther is the emblem of the Mamluk sultan al-Zāhir Baybars al-Bunduqdārī (676-658 AH/1260-1277 AD). They symbolize his courage and power in his wars against the Mongols and Crusades. According to the chronicle IbnIyās, Baybars attained the panther (*sab'*) as an emblem representing his equestrian and extreme power (IbnIyās 341). The panther of Baybars does appear in a series of buildings in Egypt and Syria (Meinecke1973). He also depicted the panther on gold coins (Balog 163, No. 206). Two panthers, most probably of Baybars are also decorating a fragment of a ceramic bowl in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Sadeq 2012).



Fig. 1

The two-headed eagle of the Mamluk sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā'ūn in a conical shield decorates a brass candlestick with silver inlay (MW.647.2012, fig. 2). In worldwide objects, the sultan's eagle appears in two varieties, the one-headed and the two-headed. It also appears both on one or two-fielded shields, and at times without a shield.

Sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā'ūn used to depict his eagle on architecture, objects and on his own coins (Balog 163, No. 206; Abdul-Raziq 3). In our example the eagle is standing on a cup, the heraldic device of the cup-bearer (*sāqī*).



Fig. 2

This combination is most likely a sign of the emir's loyalty to his lord, the sultan. The displaying blazons of sultans appear sometimes side by side with emir blazons. This is observed on several objects in the Royal Ontario Museum (Sadeq 2012). We see, for instance, the three fielded cartouche of the sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq is flanked by two identical blazons of the emir Yūnus al-Nawrūzī, the executive secretary (*dawādār*) of the sultan al-Ẓāhir) and the founder of a caravanserai on the sultan way "*al-darb al-sulṭānī*" in the center of the present day city of Khan Yunis, approximately 23 km south of the city of Gaza (fig. 3).

Hence we suggest that the candlestick is attributed most likely to a Mamluk emir, a cup bearer (*sāqī*), who depicts the blazon of sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā'ūn as a sign of loyalty to his lord.



Fig.3

The cup bearer is generally among the high ranking positions in sultan court. This is, according to Mayer, due to the fact that the number of blazons of the cup-bearers is greater than any other blazon groups in the worldwide collections, and the cup is the most frequently occurring heraldic device (Mayer 29). A large number of cup-bearers served members of the sultan family and state elites. It is also attested that the sons of cup-bearers inherited the emblems of their fathers after death even if sons were not appointed as cup-bearers. The cup as a heraldic device appear in various forms and sizes.

Mamluk inscribed Cartouches

The early Mamluk cartouches were simple and characterized with a single inscription bearing the sultan's name in the middle of a three-fielded shield. They developed it in the beginning of the Late Mamluk (Circassian mamluks; *Burjī mamluks*) period in the way that all fields became occupied by the sultan's name, mottos, epithets and blessings. Examples of the developed cartouches are depicted on two vitreous glass oil lamps (enameled and gilded) in the museum of Islamic art, Doha. They are attributed to the Mamluksultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq.

His cartouche is circular and divided into three stripes or fields displaying blessing on the sultan in the middle, his name in the upper field and blessings in the lower one. The cartouche is repeated on both, the upper and lower parts of the lamp body (GL.52.2002, fig.4).



Fig.4

In addition, the museum is also displaying two glass oil lamps (vitreous, enameled and gilded) bearing the name of the sultan al-Ẓāhir Barqūq and blessing to him, nevertheless the cartouche is replaced by a circular shield occupied by polychrome floral decoration resembling the fleur de lei (GL.296.1997, fig.5). This lamp type is most likely attributed to a Mamluk sultan due to its large size, high quality and the circular shield resembling those inscribed shields of the Mamluk sultans.



Fig.5

The Heraldic Fleur-De-Lis

The museum of Islamic art is also displaying a fritware apothecary jar with polychrome glaze and luster painting (PO.40.1999, fig.6 left). It's dated to the period between late 13th and 14th century. According to the calligraphy on the jar shoulder it was made for "*Al-māristān al-Nūrī*", which was founded in Damascus in 12th century by Nūr ad-Dīn Maḥmūd Ibn Zingī. The jar was used as a container for the *nawfar*, a medical preparation made from water lilies. The name "*nawfar*" is repeated four times on the jar shoulder alternated with the fleur-de-lis, which was, first, the personal emblem of Nūr ad-Dīn and then one of the emblems of the Qalā'ūn family.

The fleur-de-lis as a heraldic emblem is also decorating a pair of ceramic apothecary jars (frit ware with underglaze painting) in the museum. They originated from Syria and dated to the 15th century (PO.297.2006 and PO.308.2006, fig.6 right). A very similar one is displayed today in the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. The fleur de lei on all these apothecary jars might not be the blazon of sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā'ūn but rather depicted on jars containing apothecary liquids to city of Florence as the shield shape is not resembling any of the Mamluk shields but rather similar to the arms of Florence. A similar frit ware jars that reached western Europe is depicted in "the three Marys at the Tomb" painted by Jan van Eyck (1430-35) and is displayed today in the museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam. Eight similar, but shorter, apothecary jars *originating* from Syria in the 14th/15th century were also found in an excavated waste pit in Fenchurch Street in London. One of them is very like Van Eyck's version and the Syrian ones.



Fig.6

Circular shields blessing Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans decorate a number of brass objects in the museum of Islamic Art. One of them is a circular tray stand with gold and silver inlay originating from Egypt or Syria (MW. 478.2007, fig.7). The horizontal inscription band in the circular shield depicts the motto: al-Malik al-Šāliḥ الملك الصالح (fig.7 right). He is the sultan ‘Imād ad-Dīn al-Malik al-ŠāliḥIsmā‘īl bin Sayf ad-DīnAḥmad, who is known “al-ŠāliḥIsmā‘īl” and reigned in Damascus twice, once in 1237 and then again from 1239-45. The tray stand is also mentioned in the proceeding Mamluk literature and called *Khanja* (table). Ibn Baṭṭuta (1304–1368 or 1369) says that they (the elites in Cairo) use a small copper table called *khanja* خونجة, as a stand for a brass plate (i.e. brass tray) (*tabaḡnuḥās*) called as “*ṭālam*”. He says:

“مائدة من النحاس يسمونها خونجة ويجعل عليها طبق نحاس يسمونه الطالم” (Ibn Battuta 4: 69). The stand name is also attested by the Mamluk chronicler al-Maqrīzī (1364 – 1442) (Maqrīzī. 1: 444).The plate (i.e. tray) itself is the blazon of the food-taster (*jāshngīr*) and appears in the blazon with or without the stand.



Fig.7

A similar heraldic shield bearing a horizontal inscription band decorates, for instance, a brass incense burner with gold, silver and black compound inlay from Egypt or Syria (MW.467.2007, fig. 8 left and middle). The inscription says: “glory for our master, the sultan” عز لمولانا السلطان. The shield is surrounded by a text mentioning the name of the Mamluksultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā’ūn and blessings on him. This style of a single horizontal inscription in a circular shield for the same sultan is decorating a brass candlestick with gold and silver inlay dated to 1342 – 1354 AD (MW.647.2012, fig.8 right).



Fig.8

Blazons of Mamluk Emirs

The museum of Islamic Art, Doha is also displaying two glass oil lamps (vitreous enamel and gilding) attributed to Mamluk emirs based on their blazons (GL.139.2003, fig.9 right). One of them has a circular three fielded blazon of the armor-bearer (*silāhdār*) occupied in the middle field (or bar) by a single sword with a knot while the upper and lower bars are left blank. The armor-bearer post is sometimes represented by two swords or a sword associated with a horse shoe. Both of them appear in emblems decorating Mamluk ceramic fragments in the Royal Ontario Museum. In further cases the literature the post of the armor-bearer is represented by a scimitar, dagger or fight axe while the bow is the device of the Bowman (*al-bunduqdār*), who was of the same rank as the armor-bearer (Sadeq 2012).

The second lamp is decorated by the blazon of the dispatch-rider (*barīdī*) showing a brownish fess (fesse or fascia) in the middle field symbolizing a stripe of cloth that used to be wrapped around the arm of the dispatch-rider (GL.138.2003, fig.9 left). This emblem was called “*ablaq*” (piebald) by Al-Maqrīzī (Maqrīzī: 2:74; Mayer 1925: 27-33), most likely because the middle field is occupied by a dark fess between white upper and lower fields recalling “*ablaq*” construction technique in which the white and black courses are built alternately.

In some cases the horse is also depicted as a single pictorial emblem for the post-dispatcher (Mustafa 1958). One of them decorates a ceramic fragment of a bowl in the Royal Ontario museum, Toronto (Sadeq 2012).



Fig. 9

Conclusion

This paper discussed a number of cartouches and blazons decorating Mamluk objects displayed in the museum of Islamic Art, Doha. Four groups of sultan heraldic blazons have been discussed. The first one is characterized by pictorial blazons and represented by the panther of the Mamluk sultan al- Zāhir Baybars al-Buduqdār on two glass objects and a window grill. The eagle of the sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalāʾūnis depicted on a brass candlestick, but combined here with the blazon of the cup bearer (*sāqī*). This combination may attribute the blazon to a cup bearer depicting the eagle of his master as a sign of loyalty.

The second group is characterized by three-fielded inscribed cartouches documenting the sultan name in the upper field, mottos and blessings on him in the middle and lower fields. This cartouche type appears in two glass oil lamps (vitreous, enameled and gilded) of the museum.

The cartouche of the third group is a three fielded circular shield. The middle field is inscribed by the sultan mottos while the upper and lower fields are left blank. This group is represented in this paper by three brass objects; a candlestick with gold and silver inlay and an incense burner with gold, silver and black compound inlay. The sultan name along with his epithets are documented either in a calligraphic text running around the shield such as in the incense burner or around the object body such as in the candlestick.

The fourth group of the heraldic blazons of the Mamluk sultans is characterized by a merely circular shield occupied by floral decoration (fleur de lei).

This type is represented in the museum by glass mosque lamps (enameled and gilded). Despite neither the sultan name nor his cartouche appearing on these lamps, we may attribute them to sultans not to emirs.

This is due to the large size and high quality of the lamps compared to those used to be ordered by emirs. The circular shields of these lamps resembling the size and circular shape of the inscribed cartouches of the Mamluk sultans.

The museum of Islamic Art, Doha, is also displaying a frit ware apothecary jar with polychrome glaze and luster painting dedicated according to its calligraphy to the hospital of Nūr ad-Dīn Maḥmūd Ibn Zingī ‘*Al-māristān al-Nūri*’ (built in Damascus in 12th century) and made by the order of sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā’ūn as a container for the *nawfar*, a medical preparation made from water lilies. The jar shoulder is decorated by a fleur-de-lis which was, first, the personal emblem of Nūr al-Dīn and then became one of the emblems of Qalā’ūn family.

Fleur de lie is also decorating a pair of frit ware and underglaze painted jars in the museum of Islamic Art, Doha. They were made in Syria in the 15th century and designed to hold apothecaries, ointments and dry drugs. The fleur de lei on both jars might be not the blazon of sultan Muḥammad Ibn Qalā’ūn but rather the arms of Florence. Syria used to export apothecary products to Western Europe during the Mamluk period. As discussed in the paper, similar jars have been excavated in London and others are depicted on paintings.

In addition to the sultans’ pictorial blazons and inscribed cartouches, the paper discussed two blazons of high ranking Mamluk emirs on service decorating two glass lamps, namely the armor-bearer (*silāhdār*) represented by a single sword with a knot in the blazon’s middle field and the dispatch-rider (*barīdī*) represented by a brownish fess (fesse or fascia), symbolizing a stripe of cloth used to be wrapped around the arm of the dispatch-rider during the Mamluk period. The identified cartouches and emirs’ blazons in the museums of Islamic Art, Doha, alongside with their associated calligraphies are primary data for further studies on the Mamluk history, art history and hierarchical structure.

Notes

Photos by Moain Sadeq.

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