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SOME REFLEXIONS  
ON MAMLUK SILKS

BY  
CLAIRE CECILE LOUCA

JANUARY 1989





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JANUARY 1989

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This Thesis for the Masrer of Arts Degree

By

Claire Cecile Louca

has been approved

January 1989

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Thesis

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Creswell

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## INTRODUCTION

### The role and importance of textiles in the late Middle Ages.

Perhaps the first phenomenon to understand in a late medieval context is the important role played by in 13th-15th textiles century society. The numerous functions attributed to at least the more luxurious portion of textile production are attested by a substantial number of medieval Arabic and Western sources.

At the Mamluk court, the more or less elaborate robes of investiture ( khila' ) distributed by the Sultan certainly transcended their utility as luxurious garments as they materially represented the rank, function, special mission, or acknowledgment granted by the sovereign to the recipients of these solemn gifts. This is well illustrated in a passage by Makrizi ( ' ) : "On the fifth day of the month of dhou'lkadah [678/1279], the sultan [Qala'un] sent to Mansur, prince of Hama, a certificate of investiture ( taglid ) granting him the sovereignty of this town. He sent him at the same time some flags, four chests of gold and silver, four chests filled with garments made of Alexandrian and 'attabi stuffs, as well as many horses. He had him and all his suite dressed in robes of



honour. "

More than two centuries later, on the eve of the sixteenth century, we find a similar scene described by Ibn Iyas <sup>(2)</sup> : "The Sultan [az-Zahir Qansuh] received him [the emir Tumanbay] at the Citadel and gave him a magnificent robe of honour: it was made of blue silk, faced with green silk, with broad sleeve-bands after Ylbugha's fashion <sup>(3)</sup> ; it was three cubits long and two and a half cubits wide, decorated with pure Venetian gold; it was even said to contain as much as 800 mithqals of gold". Similar passages are found frequently in Mamluk sources.

On the other hand, we find texts describing a code of dress that clearly marks hierarchy as well as functions. In a short chapter on the Sultan's attendants dress, ad-Dahiri <sup>(4)</sup> noted that every person within the various groups which made up the Mamluk court wore a costume ( qumash ) that changed according to function, protocol, particular occasions (office, travel, hunting, etc.) and seasons. The 'ulema' also had their own code of dress, depending on which school of law they belonged to <sup>(5)</sup> . The Caliph's black khil'a and turban became the sultanate's insignia as the sultans wore a black robe of religious character during the investiture ceremony, no doubt to emphasize the fact that power was conferred on them by the highest religious authority.



Rich silks also fulfilled a particular function in a somewhat different sphere of religious power. The institution of the mahmal (palanquin) was adopted by sultan Baybars in 1266 as the symbol of the politics of power <sup>(4)</sup>. The mahmal was created as the centre of the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan; it was covered by a sumptuous piece of silk, usually embroidered with gold, and each year, before being sent to the Hejaz, it was shown in one or more processions to the people of Cairo. This new tradition, which was to continue for the next six and a half centuries, was initiated by Baybars with the clear intention of exerting his suzerainty over the Holy Places. In 1282, the same policy was taken a step further by sultan Qala'un who signed a treaty with the sharif of Mecca: each year, the kiswa (hanging) covering the Ka'ba would be sent from Egypt (and nowhere else) and duly hung on the Ka'ba. The kiswa was also shown during the Cairene processions and, together with the mahmal, it became an exterior emblem of politico-religious power.

Rich textiles also played a part in the diplomatic transactions conducted by the Mamluk court, in that they were usually presented as gifts to the ambassadors and emissaries of other rulers. Ibn Taghri Birdi <sup>(7)</sup> reports that in 1440: "Khawaja Kalal, the Ambassador of Shah Rukh, was invested with a robe of departure to which there had been devoted a care the like of which has not been devoted with respect to any ambassadors in this time of ours; it was of silk-velvet with



two surfaces, red and green, with sleeve bands of brocade in which were 500 mithqals of gold; he was mounted on a horse with gilt saddle and embroidered housing in each of the two of which were 500 dinars. With him was sent a gift including Alexandrian silk goods, a saddle and housing of gold...". Interestingly, housings for horses or other riding animals were very often included in gifts and might have been considered as indispensable accessories to dress. Felix Fabri, a Christian born in Zurich, briefly mentions in his "Travels of 1483" (8) that the Consul of Venice in Alexandria "wore a long red tunic and rode a mule covered with a silk housing".

Textile production and trade were also taken into account in diplomatic negotiations. Pero Tafur, a native of Cordoba, who travelled in Egypt sometime between 1435-1439, was commissioned by the King of Cyprus to be his emissary at the Mamluk court. He wrote (9) : "the King had sent me [Pero Tafur] to beg that the Sultan would not send the Mamelukes each year, as he was wont to do, to collect the tribute, since they caused the King great expense, but that the King would send the tribute in four months, and further that the Sultan would accept the tribute in camlets [woolen stuffs], at the price they were worth in Babylonia [Cairo]...That day the Sultan gave me a robe which he was accustomed to give, as an emblem of vassalage to the King of Cyprus, which was of olive green and red, worked with gold and lined with ermine".



Among the numerous commercial transactions which took place between Venice and the Mamluk empire, the following episode is significant in assessing the importance of textiles in the international trade of that period. In a letter sent by sultan Qaitbay to the Doge of Venice '10', the sultan complains that the coloured velvet exported to Egypt by the Venetian merchants was falsified, i.e. instead of being worked with gold threads, copper threads were used in its manufacture. The sultan further deplores that the standard size of woolen cloths, 55 cubits, had come down to barely 30 cubits; furthermore, these pieces were sometimes cut in the middle.

The above passages clearly show the important role of textiles in the later Middle Ages. Such demand encouraged production and commerce on an international level. The Mamluk empire was ideally placed to play a major role in these exchanges. Having first held a predominant position in the world of textiles until the end of the 14th century, it lost it to the European and more particularly to the Italian production, which outpaced it both in terms of technical advances and quality. The latter phenomenon was but one of the consequences of the economic decline affecting the Mamluk empire from the end of the 14th century onwards.



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## CHAPTER I

### Brief historical background.

Egypt and Syria enjoyed varying degrees of prosperity over the two and a half centuries of Mamluk rule. The first Mamluks emerged in 1250 from the Turkish soldiery of the last great Ayyubid sultan, Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub. In spite of the somewhat artificial distinction drawn between the two successive lines of the Bahri (1250-1382) and Circassian (1382-1517) Mamluks, the power established by the former was founded on political, social and administrative structures that were to remain practically unchanged until the overthrow of the Circassian Mamluks by the Ottomans in 1517.

The first part of the Bahri period saw the consolidation of the Mamluk empire and its emergence as the leading power in the Near East. The Mamluks became the champions of Sunni Islam, after successfully fighting off both the pagan Mongols and the Crusaders. Bagdad, sacked by the Mongols, never recovered its status as the capital of the Islamic world, whereas Cairo took on a new importance as the residence of the Caliphs.



The first half of the 14th century was a prosperous period which gave rise to outstanding economic, military and cultural achievements. The sultan and his court, as well as the rich elite and the merchant class were active patrons of both the arts and architecture. A new diplomatic step undertaken by sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad resulted in increasing the revenues from trade: in 1323 he signed a peace treaty with the Il-Khanid ruler Abu Said, thus cutting short the series of wars which had been waged against the Mongols. Both the Mamluks and the Mongols benefited from the overland trade in luxury goods from farther East. The Mamluks also controlled the other route taken by the East-West commerce, the Red Sea. They derived great wealth from the flow of transit merchandise, in particular from the "Indian spice" trade.

During the 14th century, the spice trade was mostly in the hands of the so-called karimi merchants; they originated in the Yemen <sup>(1)</sup> and formed a powerful corporation, part of which established itself in Egypt. They had outposts and dépôts in Alexandria, Cairo, Djedda, Aden, Hormuz and in places as far off as Calicut. The spice trade was the most lucrative of their activities, however, their dealings included all kinds of luxury goods, such as precious woods, pearls, amber, dyes, incense, etc.. Textiles figured prominently in this trade. The karimi managed to accumulate such wealth that they were sometimes called onto the political scene: on several occasions they lent money to the ruling Mamluk sultans <sup>(2)</sup>,



more particularly to help finance military expeditions <sup>(3)</sup> .

The goods from India, China and the Far East first reached Mamluk territory and were then re-directed towards European markets, mainly through the port of Alexandria. Most European trading centres (Venice, Genoa, Florence, Ragusa, Marseilles, Narbonne, Barcelona, etc.) had commercial links with Egypt and Syria and sent their ships to Near Eastern ports. In Alexandria, foreign merchants stayed in funduqs specially designated for them. Venice maintained a regular galley service with Alexandria from the year 1346 onwards <sup>(4)</sup> . The decline of the karimi towards the end of the 14th century created a vacuum which the Venetian merchants were quick to fill, thus enabling the Republic to win a near monopoly in the Near Eastern trade.

The karimi 's fortunes were seriously threatened when sultan Barsbay attempted to impose a state monopoly on the spice trade in 1432. This measure was not entirely successful, but it undermined the privileges hitherto enjoyed by the karimi , as well as their profits. They were replaced by agents acting specifically on behalf of the sultan, called tujjar al-sultan .

• However, prior to the final setbacks suffered by the commerce of the karimi , the prosperity of the Mamluk empire had been shaken by various factors from the mid-14th century.



Several devastating plague epidemics took a heavy toll in Mamluk territories: the worst attack of the Black Death started in Egypt in 1347 and spread to Syria (5). Contemporary sources (6) mention that one third of the population of Egypt died during the 1347-1348 epidemic. The latter sources might have exaggerated the actual proportion of the death toll, however, there is no doubt that the population of both Egypt and Syria seriously diminished at the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. In the Circassian period, there were also numerous attacks of pestilence as well as instances of famine (7). A passage in Makrizi (8) even mentions several quarters of Cairo which had been either deserted or had fallen in ruins by the beginning of the 15th century.

Such a decrease in the population had severe repercussions on agriculture which, in its turn, suffered a decline. At the same time, the economy was weakened by various inadequate measures undertaken by the Mamluk authorities. To meet increasing military expenditures and replenish the state treasury, the government introduced draconian measures such as the confiscation of goods or money. This encouraged rich merchants and state functionaries to amass or freeze large sums to avoid eventual confiscations and fines imposed by the government.

Furthermore, commerce suffered from uncanonical taxes



( mukus ) and from the institution of state monopolies such as that imposed on sugar production in 1423 '9'. The state also forced merchants to buy and sell their goods at set prices ( tarh ). In the same period, inflation set in and the currency was devalued.

Power was very often achieved through intrigue or violence. Strife within the Mamluk ruling class was all too common: on several occasions, rival Mamluk factions created a situation verging on civil war and spurred on riots in Cairo '10'. The Mamluks also had to withstand attacks directed against their empire: in 1365 Peter of Lusignan, King of Cyprus, took and plundered Alexandria; several parts of the city were put on fire. Peace was only restored in 1370. Three decades later, Timur's armies marched on Syria and devastated Aleppo and Damascus. It is only in the mid-15th century that Aleppo recovered some of its prosperity and acted, in particular, as an exchange platform in the Perso-Venetian silk trade.

These more or less permanent losses adversely affected all the Mamluk industries. This significant decline dates from the beginning of the 15th century. Both output and quality decreased. The textile industry in particular suffered from a shortage of skilled workers; these latter consequently demanded higher wages '11'. Therefore, the prices of the loom production became too high for an impoverished population. The



latter turned to imported European goods, which were of better value and quality. This led to what has been called a "dumping" of European merchandise on Egyptian and Syrian markets <sup>(12)</sup>.

There is a clear distinction between the textile production of the Bahri period and that of the Circassian era. A well known passage of Makrizi <sup>(13)</sup> reports that 800 working looms were counted in Alexandria in 1434, whereas their number had reached 14000 in the mid 1390's. These figures might not be very precise, however, they still show a serious fall in the textile production. The same author <sup>(14)</sup> attributes this phenomenon to the greed and tyranny of the government's tax collectors. We also know that in the early 14th century, the area around Bab al-Nasr in Cairo was crowded with shops and workshops which specialized in the manufacture of all kinds of textiles and dress: a large number of stuff-merchants, weavers, dyers, tailors and bleachers worked there. Later on, in the 15th century, Makrizi <sup>(15)</sup> notes that many such shops and markets had been closed down altogether.

It seems that at least one of the reasons for this deterioration was a technological stagnation in the industries, brought about by the inadequate economic policies of the Mamluks. The establishment of state factories which benefited from cheaper raw materials discouraged any serious competition on the part of the private industry. The small workshops which did manage to survive could not afford to invest in



technological innovations, nor did the state factories have any incentive to improve their production. Moreover, the latter were often mismanaged by the officials in charge of them.

The Syrian textile production lived up to its great fame until the end of the 14th century: Damascene silks, brocades, cottons, embroidered robes, horse housings and trappings found markets in Cairo as well as outside the Mamluk territories, more particularly in Venice. The Syrian manufactures benefited perhaps even more than their Egyptian counterparts from the technical skill and expertise of the immigrants fleeing from Iraq, Anatolia and Northern Syria under the pressure of the Mongol invasions. This phenomenon was crucial for the establishment of a brilliant Syrian metalwork industry and it also contributed to the improvement of the textile production <sup>(14)</sup>. However, the second Mongol invasion was to deprive Damascus of a number of its skilled artisans: in 1400, Timur deported glass-makers and metal workers as well as weavers to his central Asian capital, Samarqand. The decline of the Syrian textile industry was ushered in by the same factors which affected the Egyptian production.

The economic crisis which reached its peak in the first two decades of the 15th century resulted in a drastic rise in the prices of all goods and commodities. Studies on the evolution of the prices of textiles and garments in Egypt and Syria <sup>(15)</sup> again show a clear difference between the Bahri and



Circassian periods: during the first era, the sultans, emirs, rich merchants and bourgeoisie, as well as the 'ulema' could afford luxurious dress, the manufacture of which included a fair amount of silk. Every stratum of the population was affected by inflation, thus most people had to be contented with wearing woolen clothes. This must have indeed been a serious blow to a society in which the possession of sumptuous textiles was a sign of wealth and status.

It appears that the prices of garments rose by up to 20% at the beginning of the Circassian period (18) : raw linen became 50% more expensive and spun linen doubled in price; both raw and spun cotton were dearer than in the 14th century. Lists of trousseaux found in the Fustat Geniza documents also show that women's clothes, including headress, increased in price (19) .

Interestingly, the price of silks remained stable and even decreased slightly in the first half of the 15th century (20) ; the same phenomenon also applied to furs: for both luxury goods, demand had diminished in such a way as to keep prices at almost the same level for at least half a century. In this light, it is significant that sultan Barquq (1382-1399) issued a decree forbidding the amirs and mamluks to wear silken garments, as had been the custom previously (21) . In all layers of society, most people resorted to wearing wool, more precisely djukh , ie. woolen cloths imported from



Europe (22) . From the second half of the 14th century onwards, the price of the various kinds of woolen cloths which reached the Mamluk markets from Catalonia, Languedoc, Reims, Flanders, Lombardy and Italy (those of Florence were the finest) steadily decreased (23) . All the more reason for an impoverished population to turn to these cheaper goods and discard local products.

By the mid-15th century, the European manufactures were technically more advanced and more competitive than their Near-Eastern counterparts : the automatic water-mill was used in the European textile industry from the 13th century onwards as well as the spinning wheel (24) . Water-mills were not unknown in the Middle East , but there is no evidence that they were used in the textile manufactures. Moreover, the European industries relied on good quality raw materials, such as English wool (25) . Dyes were also easily accessible, as their cultivation had been introduced in Spain and Italy two or three centuries earlier and had been considerably improved .

Cotton, unlike other raw materials, was imported from the Near East. A phenomenon which developed in Mamluk Syria was the expanding cultivation of cotton. Because of the diminution of the population, there was less demand for grain and more agricultural land could therefore be allotted to cotton farming (26) . This also coincided with a diminution of the Egyptian linen production. Contrary to most other products, raw



and spun cotton remained major export products throughout the Mamluk period. Venice shipped large quantities of Syrian cotton to Europe (27) .

In the Near East, however, the technical gap was not remedied nor was it limited to the textile industry: by the end of the Circassian period, the famous Mamluk glassware, metalwork and textile industries had all almost totally collapsed. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the Venetians had, in the meantime, learnt how to manufacture glass and inlaid metal vessels; they were also able to imitate the celebrated Syrian silk brocades. Historical sources report that sultan Qaitbay (1468-1496) ordered glassware from Murano (28) .

The general evolution of the Mamluk textile industry shows that this branch of manufacture was still flourishing under Bahri rule and slowly declined under the Circassian sultans. On the other hand, the progress of the European industry took a reverse course and improved spectacularly during the same period. This resulted in a fundamental change on the international textile scene: during and just after the Fatimid period, Europe relied heavily on imports of Near Eastern luxury fabrics; but by the end of the 15th century, the situation had reversed: the declining quality of Mamluk production could no longer compete with the advanced and flourishing Flemish and Italian industries.



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## Chapter II.

### The tiraz factories in the Mamluk period.

Tracing the number of active tiraz factories in the medieval Islamic world is a reliable gauge of the prosperity achieved by the textile industry. Etymologically, the word tiraz, of Persian origin, strictly meant and still means "embroidery". In early Islamic times, it was used to designate sumptuous garments decorated with embroideries and more particularly with embroidered inscription bands. By extension, it has also been given the more general definition of "inscription band", and is not only restricted to the textile medium, but is used in particular for lapidary and some architectural inscriptions.

The phrase dar al-tiraz, literally "the house of the tiraz", designates a textile factory, atelier or workshop. There were two types of tiraz factories: the tiraz khassa and the tiraz 'amma. The former ateliers seem to have belonged to the sultan and were directly supervised by state officials, while the tiraz 'amma probably were public workshops and constituted the private textile industry. However, the distinction between the tiraz khassa and 'amma is not clear-cut, nor can it be well established from the examination of the primary sources. It would appear at least



that the various kinds of fabrics destined for the ruler's use and his court were woven in the tiraz khassa. The quantity of stuffs which had to be manufactured for court consumption alone must have been large indeed, if we remember that each state official received a robe of investiture when promoted or assigned to office. In addition, the ruler's entourage as well as government functionaries and their families were given new clothes twice yearly (1). The robes of honour offered by the sultans to other rulers and kings, or bestowed upon worthy ambassadors and visitors were also woven in the tiraz khassa; so were the kiswa and the rich silks covering the mahmal.

As regards the mamluks themselves, they did not receive ready made garments, but were regularly allotted a certain sum of money to spend on their dress (2). Throughout the Mamluk period, this stipend was on several occasions increased to meet the higher prices of clothing. However, the sources do not mention that the mamluks depended on the tiraz khassa production for their dress. They most probably bought their clothes from the city markets.

The tiraz institution constituted a state department in itself and accordingly employed numerous officials. Each textile producing area in the empire was supervised by a sahib al-tiraz or nazir al-tiraz. The latter was usually chosen from among the high ranking personalities of the court or the state administration. His duty was to control the loom production, the workers' salaries



and the upkeep of the machinery used in the factories (3). His direct subordinate was the 'amil, responsible for the general work of a particular atelier. The shahid was concerned with the financial side of the administration. The musharif looked after the technical aspect of the production and directly supervised the quality of the weaving, more particularly the woven and embroidered inscriptions. When the name of a sultan was embroidered or woven into a piece of textile, his titles and laqabs were duly mentioned. The tiraz khassa were therefore strictly supervised, as they constituted the only body authorized to manufacture fabrics displaying the ruler's name.

These state workshops could obtain their supplies in raw materials only from equally authorized sources (4), e.g., the threads or raw fibres they received were weighed and stamped by another branch of the tiraz institution before they could be worked into fabrics. Every stage of the production process was controlled. Once the finished pieces were taken off the looms, they were folded, tied and wrapped up by employees of the tiraz specially designated for this task. The fabrics were then sold through dealers directly appointed by the state (5). When special orders came from the palace, particularly if they included clothes worked with gold threads, the tiraz factory received a certain amount of money from the treasury as well as the quantity of gold thread deemed necessary for the manufacture of these pieces. This was to avoid any tampering of the gold ratio contained in the threads. The latter procedure is documented for the Fatimid period



(\*) , but it was probably still in force under the Mamluks. With regard to the tiraz institution itself, it seems that the Ayyubids and then the Mamluks simply took it over from their predecessors without significantly altering this already sophisticated and efficient branch of the state administration.

Yet another department of the same institution controlled the tiraz 'amma , its prime function being to levy a tax on their production. Since pre-Fatimid times, the state derived considerable revenues from such taxes and this was perhaps the main reason for maintaining as heavy an apparatus as the latter institution.

The description given above only illustrates the general organization of the tiraz institution up to the end of the 14th century. After this period, both the Mamluk economy and industry went into decline. Consequently, the strict regulations which controlled the entire administrative machine started to disintegrate. This is well illustrated by the fact that, in 1340, the royal tiraz of Alexandria was entrusted to the city governor and not, as it should have been, to a sahib al-tiraz appointed by the Diwan in Cairo. The latter position became redundant under sultan Barsbay (1422-1437), when the factory was closed down (\*). A similar fate awaited the royal tiraz of Cairo; at that time, both the ruler and the court turned to the private industry for their supplies of clothing and furnishings. To this end, the suq al-sharabishiyin in Cairo, where private textile workers were established, was in effect taken over by the court. Furthermore, all individual



purchases from its stands and dépôts were forbidden by royal decree (2) .

To number and locate the weaving centres active during the Mamluk period implies an examination of both the contemporary chronicles and the extant textile fragments which have come down to us. The sources essentially mention place names related to the production of a particular type of fabrics. For instance, Alexandria was renowned for its fine linens ( sharb ), Bahnasa for its wollen cloths, Ba'albek for its cottons, etc. The texts rarely provide more than stereotyped phrases such as: "[Emir] Julban... sent his gift to the Sultan; it comprised...50 cloaks of red, green and blue Aleppan velvet; ...500 cloaks of Ba'labakk cotton (3) . Such passages recur endlessly in Mamluk chronicles. When tiraz factories are located, it nonetheless often remains unclear whether they were khassa or 'amma .

On the other hand, extant fabrics should ideally provide tangible evidence or clues as to their provenance. In pre-Mamluk times, when the inscription on a textile piece was complete, it could supply the following data:

- 1) The basmala.
- 2) The full name and titles of the ruler, followed and/or preceded by a eulogizing formula and/or a blessing.
- 3) The name of the official in charge of the finance department, or that of the sahib al-tiraz , or one of his subordinates responsible for the supervision of the atelier



where the piece was woven.

4) The name of the tiraz factory.

5) The date of manufacture.

6) In some instances, another name occurs at the end of the inscription; it has been argued that this name could be that of the weaver '10' .

Needless to say, pieces displaying inscriptions which provide such thorough information are extremely rare; in fact, none has so far been found (or at least published) for the Mamluk period. Extant Mamluk textile fragments usually exhibit inscriptions with eulogizing formulae and blessings upon their owner. A few fragments display a ruler's name. Instances of exact dates are practically non-existent. However, there is at least one published example which bears the name of a tiraz factory. It is a silk winding sheet decorated with horizontal bands, which was excavated at Djabal 'Adda in Nubia . A standard blessing formula ( al-'izz wa'l-nasr wa'l-baqa , "glory and victory and long life") is repeatedly woven on the wider horizontal bands. The word al-asyuti is stamped in black ink on one of the edges, and most probably designates the atelier where this piece was manufactured '11' .

A substantial number of so-called "Fatimid tiraz " has come down to us and provides invaluable information on the Fatimid textile industry. In comparison, the number of Mamluk specimens which display historical inscriptions seems curiously meagre. This phenomenon is probably due to various factors,



some of which are totally unrelated to the medieval production, whether Fatimid or Mamluk. Museums and private collectors have somehow always shown more interest in the perhaps more spectacular Fatimid textiles, hence a possible orientation of the published works and articles towards the 9th-12th century rather than the 13th-15th century Egyptian textiles. There is also the tormenting question of how representative the surviving pieces are.

Another reason for the smaller number of Mamluk pieces bearing elaborate inscriptions might simply be attributed to a change of taste as to the decoration displayed on fabrics. In the Fatimid era, the decorative elements were mainly arranged in bands, which were ideally suited to the insertion of writing. In the Mamluk period, the motifs developed towards more integrated designs and, even if fabrics with horizontal bands were still popular, they were not the only variety by far. Motifs arranged in semis became common, more particularly on embroidered pieces. On the other hand, larger designs, even if still symmetrically placed, favoured more flowing lines which were part of an overall pattern. The latter two categories did not lend themselves so easily to the exhibition of long and wordy inscriptions. On the other hand, fabrics woven on drawlooms using repeat units could not accommodate long inscriptions. Such examples do not usually bear more than a few words such as : al-sultan al-malik (the sultan the king) <sup>(12)</sup> or 'izz li-mawlana-l-sultan (glory to our master the sultan) <sup>(13)</sup>.



Literary sources have yielded more information (even if sometimes fragmentary) about the Mamluk tiraz factories. As in the Fatimid era, Egyptian textile centres were mainly concentrated in the Delta. The small towns of Abyar and Damanhur in the Western Delta (see map 1) were known to produce respectively high quality abyari fabrics, mainly of silk and linen <sup>(14)</sup> and the celebrated damanhuri stuffs <sup>(15)</sup>. Ibn Duqmaq says of the town of Abyar that: "in it are made the abyari fabrics and silks which surpass those made in Alexandria; fine linen cloaks are made there, which are sold for more than a hundred dirhams apiece." <sup>(16)</sup>. Nahrariya in the same region was renowned for its weaving industry <sup>(17)</sup>.

In the 14th century, Alexandrine textiles were sought as luxury goods and were exported not only to other parts of the Mamluk empire, but also further East to India <sup>(18)</sup> and West to North Africa and Europe. The skill of Alexandria's weavers must have indeed been highly rated: al-Khazradji reports that, in 1386, a group of Alexandria silk workers were dispatched, along with other presents, to the Rasulid sultan of Yemen <sup>(19)</sup>. The products of Alexandria's royal tiraz seem to have been superior to those of Cairo's state factory: a close examination of the sources reveals numerous references to the former tiraz, whereas that of Cairo is hardly ever mentioned <sup>(20)</sup>. Alexandrine stuffs were very often included in



royal gifts throughout the Mamluk period: e.g., in 1279, sultan al-Malik al-Nasir invested the prince of Hama and sent him, among other presents, four chests filled with clothes made of Alexandrine fabrics <sup>(21)</sup>. More than 150 years later, in 1438, Ibn Taghri Birdi relates that: "...the Sultan [Jaqmaq] also invested with robe Murad, ambassador of Emir Hamza Bak ibn Qara Yuluk...and sent with him...a horse with gold housing and a very large gift including Alexandrine cloth, arms, etc." <sup>(22)</sup>. The latter "Alexandrine cloth" was probably manufactured in a private atelier, as the royal tiraz of Alexandria was closed down sometime during the reign of sultan Barsbay (1422-1437) <sup>(23)</sup>.

In the Fatimid period, the major textile manufacturing centres were located in the Eastern Delta. Ibn al-Bawqal <sup>(24)</sup> gives the following list: Tinnis, Damietta, Shata, Dabiq, Dumaira and Tuna. Many of these towns had been either destroyed or were deserted by Mamluk times. Of Tinnis, Ibn Duqmaq wrote: "it is now a ruined [city] which has fallen into oblivion.....in it were [once] woven fine fabrics, some of which were exported far and wide." <sup>(25)</sup>. The same author further adds that: "fine textiles were [once] made in Shata, Dabiq, Dumaira and Tuna " <sup>(26)</sup>; their revenues brought considerable sums into the Fatimid treasury. As for Tinnis "it was still inhabited until sultan al-Malik al-Kamil Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Ayyub destroyed it in shawwal of the year 624 [1227] for fear that the Franks might get possession of it" <sup>(27)</sup>.



Western Delta (Nahrariya, Abyar and Damanhur). Thus, from the 13th century onwards, the major loci of the textile industry in the Delta were situated on the Rosetta branch of the Nile, whereas in Fatimid times they were concentrated on the Damietta branch. (see map 1).

This movement in space only took place in Lower Egypt. The factories of Upper Egypt were established in Sohag, Ichnasa, al-Qais, Minya, Ashmunain, Asyut <sup>(33)</sup> and probably Ghimim. In other words, the Upper Egyptian textile tradition, going back to Fatimid and pre-Islamic times was perpetuated in the Mamluk period. Ibn Battuta also mentions Bush and Dalas as linen manufacturing centres <sup>(34)</sup>. In Cairo, there were both private ateliers and a royal tiraz, at least until the latter was closed down in the first half of the 15th century <sup>(35)</sup>.

The Syrian factories were relatively numerous and produced mostly cotton and silk fabrics. Textiles were manufactured in Antioch, Aleppo, Sarmin, Rusafa, Homs, Hama, Tripoli, Tyre, Ba'albak, Tiberias, Hebron, Manbij and Damascus <sup>(36)</sup>. The Jewish traveler Isaac Chelo, who was in Palestine in 1334, saw cotton factories in Ramla <sup>(37)</sup>. (see map 2). However, the main centre of cotton weaving in Syria, if not in the whole Mamluk empire, was Ba'albak. Its fabrics are mentioned on numerous occasions in contemporary sources and were certainly highly rated, as they were often included in important gifts. This is well illustrated by the following



isode found in Ibn Taghri Birdi: "Thursday, last day of Shawwal [1444], Ibn Hijji presented to the Sultan a huge gift consisting of 45 porters' crates of garments of [cotton of] Ba'alabakk, all kinds of fur, bows and other articles" (38). In fact, the emergence of Ba'albak as a cotton weaving centre is a Mamluk phenomenon; the town is not mentioned by earlier sources, at least not in relation to the textile industry. In this respect, it followed the same development as the eastern Delta towns of Damanhur, Abyar and Nahrariya.

The fame of cities such as Antioch, Tripoli and Tyre went back to pre-Islamic times when the Byzantine emperors depended on the silks woven on their looms and on the imperial purple produced in Tyre. Upon their conquest of Syria, the Mamluks found a flourishing textile industry: Maqrizi reports that 4000 working looms were counted in the city of Tripoli after its conquest by sultan Qala'un (1280-1290) (39).

The fame Damascus enjoyed as a textile manufacturing centre was certainly not based on mere rumours. Throughout the Mamluk period, the city manufactured fine fabrics in both its royal tiraz and its private workshops. The products of the Damascene looms figured prominently among Syrian exports to Cairo. The contemporary Syrian author al-Badri (born in 1443) gives the following enumeration of the merchandise sent to the Cilician markets: "and of the attractions of Damascus which are brought to the land of Egypt...are: gold brocades (qasab



hahab ), felt caps ( guba' ), paper, bows... .hemp  
ganab )" (40) . The same author gives further information on  
the textiles produced in Damascus: "and from (among) the  
beauties of Damascus is what is made there of cloth ( gumash )  
and woven fabrics ( nasij ), especially that their ornaments,  
ports and patterns are numerous. There is the manufacture of  
satin ( atlas ) in all its kinds and varieties. There is the  
manufacture of hirmizi (41) cloth in its different forms and  
the variation of its weaves ( awsal ) . There is the  
manufacture of white cotton with images, destined for those who  
live in palaces and for the dead in the tombs. And there is  
also the manufacture of saburi material (42) with all its  
varieties and the beauty of its shine... And there is also the  
making of silk by spinning ( fatl ) and on looms  
( dawalib )...And there is the manufacture of muwasha  
[many-coloured or embroidered] stuffs and block-printed (?)  
( madhun ) fabrics" (43) . This is one of the rare passages in  
which details (even if somewhat obscure at times) are given  
concerning the names of certain types of textiles and the  
techniques they display.

Of all the Mamluk tiraz factories mentioned  
above, we know that there were at least three royal ateliers in  
the empire, located in Cairo, Alexandria and Damascus. This is  
stated very clearly in the following passage from Maqrizi who  
mentions a robe of honour given to one of the great emirs in  
the reign of sultan Nasir Muhammad (1299-1340): "...a kind



called tardwahsh '44', made in the dar al-tiraz which was in Alexandria, Cairo and Damascus. It was embroidered with bands which were inscribed with the titles of the sultan. It had bands of tardwahsh and bands of different colours intermingled with gold-spangled linen, these bands being separated by embroideries in colour and a tiraz border. This was made of linen, but sometimes an important personage would have a tiraz border embroidered with gold, with squirrel and beaver fur upon it" '45'. No evidence has emerged so far as to the existence of other tiraz khassa in the Mamluk period. The other ateliers most probably belonged to the private sector. However, this by no means implies that their production was in any way inferior to that of the tiraz khassa. The distinction between the two types of factories lies mainly in the fact that they were owned and run by different people and institutions. Furthermore, it seems that towards the end of the Mamluk period, the bulk of the textile production, in both Egypt and Syria, was mostly manufactured in private workshops.

The prosperity of the textile industry largely depended on both the price and quality of the raw materials: raw or spun fibres, dyes and mordants. In the Mamluk period linen was still grown in Egypt, but in smaller quantities than in the Fatimid era. Significantly Mamluk Syria never manufactured linen fabrics, which most probably implies that the Egyptian production could barely supply the workshops of the Delta and the Nile valley. Under the Circassians, the



ing of European woolen stuffs dealt a death blow to the Eastern wool industry.

However, cotton planting was greatly developed in Syria in the second half of the 14th century <sup>(44)</sup>. Prior to this upsurge, cotton was imported mostly from India where it had been grown since antiquity. From the mid-14th century onwards, Syrian cotton, mainly grown around the city of Aleppo <sup>(45)</sup>, supplied the weaving industries of both Syria and Egypt. Sericulture was introduced in Northern Syria under the Byzantine emperor Justinian. In the early Islamic period, it was further developed in the southern part of the country <sup>(46)</sup>. This industry was still flourishing in Mamluk times. The Egyptian workshops probably depended on Syrian raw silk <sup>(47)</sup>.

Indigo was grown in Palestine, more precisely in the Jordan valley <sup>(48)</sup> and also, to a lesser extent in the oases of Egypt. This important dye is one of the few colours which does not require the addition of a mordant and is particularly well accepted by cotton and linen fibres. In pre-Mamluk times, saffron and saffron were mainly imported from Armenia and Central Asia. However, when these regions fell under Mongol rule, the supplies became scarce. Saffron was then imported to the Near East from Italy and Spain. The decline of the Ashmunain dye industry, renowned for its production of red, saffron-derived fabrics, has even been attributed to the shortage of this dye subsequent to the Mongol invasion of



entral Asia and Iran <sup>(51)</sup> . Madder, Brazil wood and cinnabar (vermillion) were also used to obtain various shades of reds and purple shells might still have been collected on the Mediterranean shores at Tyre. According to studies on the evolution of prices in the Near East, dyes and colours did not significantly increase in price after the Fatimid period. This might imply a decrease in the demand of such products in Mamluk times <sup>(52)</sup> .

The major mordant used at that time was alum. This double sulphate of aluminium and potassium is astringent and fixes colours by its causticity <sup>(53)</sup> ; it has the great advantage of not altering the shade of the dye used. In Mamluk times, it was produced in the Egyptian oases and had also been imported from the Yemen since the 11th century <sup>(54)</sup> . Natron, a hydrated form of sodium carbonate, was used in the process of bleaching fibres; it was mined in Egypt, in the so-called Wadi Natrun and constituted a state monopoly <sup>(55)</sup> . Last but not least, the quality of the water in which dyed fabrics were washed also played a part in the quality of the end product. It is not by sheer coincidence that most textile manufacturing centres were located in areas where water was abundant. The Nile Delta, with its high degree of humidity allowing the fibres and threads to remain flexible, offered an additional attraction to the textile industry.

Compared to other arts and crafts such as



lass-making, pottery and metalwork, the textile industry as a whole employed relatively large numbers of people: apart from the personnel working in the ateliers proper, several other trades were directly related to that of weaving. First and foremost among these professions were those concerned with supplying and processing both the colours and the mordants. Then the dyers who, in the medieval Islamic world, traditionally belonged to Jewish communities (54). The task of spinning was probably mostly in the hands of women who spun at home. This constituted a cottage industry closely dependant on the weaving centres. It has even been argued that a fair amount of fine fabrics were entirely woven and embroidered by women in their homes and then marketed (57). Lastly, a certain number of children were employed in the workshops as drawboys.

Yet, Mamluk sources hardly ever mention textile workers. One of the rare references is to be found in the following passage of al-Nuwayri: "I asked the sheikh Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Baghdadi, the master ( mu'allim ) of the dar al-tiraz in Alexandria whether he had seen the place at Ctesiphon. He said he had. I asked him how far it lay from Bagdad. He said...it was situated at a distance of one day and one night [from Bagdad]" (58). Then follows a description of the Sassanian monument. This Iraqi worker employed in the royal factory of Alexandria was certainly an immigrant. In the same time, there were probably Syrian textile workers established in Cairo. All this presumed movement of artisans



cross the dar al-islam parallels that of potters and metalworkers (59). Such human movement and migration resulted in the spread of both techniques and fashion. Far from being monolithic and closed to external influences, the Mamluk world was on the contrary receptive to international trends, whether eastern (Indian, Central Asian, Chinese) or European.



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1) Serjeant, R.B., "Material for a History of Islamic Textiles to the Mongol Conquest", Ars Islamica, XV, p.102.

2) For instance, in the 13th and 14th century, the kiswa was often manufactured in the royal tiraz of Alexandria.

3) Maqrizi, trad. Quatremère, Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks.

4) Ibn Taghri Birdi, op. cit., part V, Popper, v.XIX, p.7.

5) Darrag, op. cit., p. 69. From then on, we know that the kiswa was woven in the mausoleum of al-Hussein in Cairo, see ibid..

6) Mentioned by Lombard, op. cit., p. 174.

7) Ibn Duqmaq, op. cit., p. 78.

8) Ibid., p. 79.

9) Ibid., p. 79.

10) Ibid., p. 81.

11) Ibid., p. 82.

12) Wiet, G., "Dabik", EI II.

13) Quoted by Ashtor, E., A social and economic history of the Near East in the Middle Ages, (Berkeley, 1976), p. 246.

14) Ibid., p. 246.

15) Darrag, op. cit., p. 70.

16) Ibn Battuta, Travels of Ibn Battuta, trans. H.A.R. Gibb, (Cambr. Univ. Press, 1958-61). Both towns are situated near Beni Suef, see Dictionnaire géographique de l'Egypte, compiled by Cabinet Bey.

17) Darrag, op. cit., p. 69.

18) Ziadeh, N., Urban Life in Syria under the Early Mamluks, (Beirut, 1953).

19) Quoted by Serjeant, op. cit., VII, p. 143.



- 38) Ibn Taghri Birdi, op. cit., part V, Popper, v.XIX, p.92.
- 39) Maqrizi, mentioned in Heyd, Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Age, 2è ed., (Leipzig, 1936).
- 40) Al-Badri, 'Abd Allah, Nuzhat al-Anam fi Mahasin ash-Sham, (Cairo, ed. Misr, 1341H.), p. 364.
- 41) Hirmizi: the meaning of this word is unclear. Could it be an earlier reference to the crimson colour, khirmiz, attested for Ottoman and Spanish textiles?
- 42) The same word is also used in Ibn Taghri Birdi, op. cit. Popper, v.XIX, p. 91.
- 43) Al-Badri, op. cit., pp. 362-3
- 44) Tardwahsh: for its meaning see Serjeant, op. cit., VII, p. 142.
- 45) Ibid., VII, p. 142, mentioning Maqrizi, Khitat.
- 46) Ashtor, E., "The Venetian cotton trade in Syria in the Later Middle Ages", Studi Medievali, XVII, (Spoleto, 1976), pp. 675-715.
- 47) Ibid.
- 48) Lombard, op. cit.
- 49) Ibid.
- 50) Heyd, op. cit.
- 51) Ashtor, A social and economic history..., p. 308.
- 52) Idem, Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'Orient médiéval, (Paris, 1969), p. 343.
- 53) Lombard, op. cit.
- 54) Baldry, J., "Textiles in Yemen, Historical references to trade and commerce in textiles in Yemen from antiquity to Modern times", British Museum Occasional Paper N.27, (London, 1982), p. 13.
- 55) Lapidus, I., Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, (Cambridge, Harvard, 1967).
- 56) Serjeant, R.B., "Material for a History of Islamic Textiles up to the Mongol Conquest", Ars Islamica, VII, p. 143.



) ibid. , XVII, p. 64.

) Al-Nuwayry, op. cit. , p. 83. This author reports events which took place in the second half of the 14th century. His use of the word mu'allim has led one scholar to conclude that there was a weaver's guild in Alexandria in Mamluk times (see Herzouk, M.A., History of textile industry in Alexandria , Alexandria, Univ. Press, 1955), p. 81.). The term mu'allim is certainly used in the context of Muslim guilds, but not exclusively. This hint, which consists of one word, should perhaps be examined with more caution. A Sufi brotherhood of silk workers existed in Damascus. However, the latter did not actually act as a guild, but were mostly a "craft-based religious fraternity" (see Lapidus, op. cit. , pp. 102-3). Aside from this fragmented information, it is still difficult to trace a more general picture of the organization of the work force in the Mamluk textile industry.

) Some early Mamluk metal pieces are signed by artists called Mawsili who might originally have come from Mosul (see Atil, Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks , (Washington, 1981), pp. 57-8.). Similarly, some signatures found on Mamluk pottery fragments such as al-Hormuzi (from Hormuz) point to the same phenomenon (see, ibid. , p. 150.)



### CHAPTER III.

#### Some technical remarks on the manufacture of Mamluk silks.

The building up of a flourishing and effective textile industry is a lengthy process which can take generations before it reaches its full development. Provided the raw materials (fibres, colours, mordants) are at hand, the weaving implements, whether technically sophisticated or not, constitute an essential element in the production of textiles. The skill and expertise of a qualified main d'oeuvre to operate these tools is also indispensable. In the early and late Middle Ages when trades and métiers were traditionally passed on from one generation to the next, the degree of perfection attained by any given group of artisans was often the fruit of a long maturation. Lastly, only an effective coordination and supervision of these various specialized activities could ensure a consistently high quality production.

As mentioned above (see chapter I), the last pre-requisite was not successfully implemented in the Circassian period, which led to the general decline of the Mamluk textile industry. However, prior to this deterioration, Mamluk production displayed both quality and high standards.



Indeed, both the areas which concern us here, Egypt and Syria, were the true heirs of secular textile traditions going back on the one hand, to Dynastic Egypt, and on the other hand to the first centuries of the Christian era, when Dura-Europos was one of the most prominent weaving centres in the late antique world.

In the first centuries A.D., before the introduction of sericulture in Mesopotamia and Syria, imported Chinese silk yarn was woven into fabrics in Palmyra, Dura-Europos, Antioch, Tyre and Alexandria. From China, silk-worm rearing reached the Central Asian oases by the 4th century AD. Two centuries later, under the Byzantine emperor Justinian, Syrian monks visiting Nestorian communities in Central Asia, smuggled back to Syria a small quantity of silk-worm eggs, which they hid within the reeds they used as walking sticks. This is the anecdote linked with the introduction of sericulture in the Eastern Mediterranean world. From then on, the Near East produced its own silk and no longer depended on Chinese imports of raw yarn, nor on the Persian middlemen trading in this most precious commodity. This led to an increased demand in fine silken fabrics in the Byzantine empire.

The Bombyx mori is the most important species of silk-worms as it produces an extremely fine and shiny fibre; it lives and feeds on the leaves of the white mulberry tree. Sericulture could therefore only be implanted where the



climatic conditions allowed the cultivation of the white mulberry tree. Egypt never produced its own silk, simply because the latter tree, on Egyptian soil, could not survive the spring ablation of its leaves (2) .

In the early Islamic period, Northern Syria was the main silk producing area in the Near East. Some accounts of the sericulture process are given by contemporary Arabic sources: "It takes place...at the beginning of Spring, when the mulberry leaf appears, they take the eggs and tie them in a rag, then the women place this under their breasts so that the heat of the body may affect them for a week, then they are spread on the mulberry leaves shredded with the scissors. The thing moves and eats some of this leaf... After that a great deal of fodder is allowed to it so that it may eat largely and begin to form the cocoon...When the worm has completed the formation of the cocoon it is exposed to the sun so that the worm may die in it, and the ibrishm -silk [raw silk] be taken from the cocoon. Some of the cocoons however are left for the worm to pierce and come forth to lay eggs." (3)

The cocoon surrounding the silkworm consists of the secretion produced by the worm: a very long silk fibre, composed of two parallel strands glued together in one thread by the sericin, a substance secreted by the worm. The gum sericin forms about 25% of the volume of each cocoon (4) . The worm has to be killed before it breaks the cocoon and damages



the silk thread; it is therefore either exposed to great heat or plunged into boiling water. Only then can the end of the thread be found and the cocoon unwound. The thread contained in every cocoon produced by a bombyx mori is several hundred metres long (3). The strand of each cocoon is usually joined to those of another cocoon (or more) and simultaneously wound off or reeled. The thread resulting from this operation is called grege: it has no torsion and is still saturated with gum sericin. It can either be woven as such, or dyed without degumming. Alternatively, the grege can be degummed by washing and then thrown into a thread, i.e. given a torsion. The latter degummed and twisted thread formed by the strands of two or more cocoons is called a "grenadine" (4); it can then be dyed and woven.

The Chinese must have used a device such as a rotating reel to wind off the cocoons. This reeling implement was sufficient to combine the strands of two or more cocoons and to give them simultaneously a very slight twist which kept them together. These threads were then woven without further torsion (7). However, prior to the introduction of silk into their own spheres, both the Sassanian and Byzantine worlds (including Egypt) had a tradition of processing short fibres such as wool and linen, which needed to be tightly spun, i.e. given a considerable torsion before they could be woven into fabrics. Therefore, when confronted with the new fibre, silk,



the Persian and Near Eastern artisans simply applied their own traditional methods and "spun" (or threw) the silk filaments. Evidence shows that silk throwing was initiated either in the Byzantine or in the Sassanian empire, combining devices such as rotating reels and spindles into reeling-spinning wheels <sup>(8)</sup>. The latter silk throwing technique was used in the early Islamic period: a text by Miskawayhi, dating from the turn of the 11th century, gives a short description of the process <sup>(9)</sup>. In the late 12th century, this technique reached Sicily whence it was introduced into Italy <sup>(10)</sup>.

Horizontal looms were in use in Egypt and the Near East at least by the mid-3rd century AD., when they slowly replaced the native vertical looms. Of Chinese origin (dating back to c. 2000 BC. <sup>(11)</sup>), these weaving implements were brought to the Hellenistic world where they were adopted to produce fabrics in the traditional local fibres, mainly wool and linen. The existence of draw looms at Dura-Europos has been attested by the excavations conducted there. This brings the terminus ante quem for the use of this device to the year 256 AD., when the latter city was ruined and abandoned <sup>(12)</sup>. Therefore, when silk was introduced in that part of the world three centuries later, no major technological change was necessary in order to apply the existing weaving techniques to the new fibre.



The draw-loom allows the weaving of sophisticated patterns which can be mechanically repeated. The basic mechanism permits the selection and successive picking and lowering of the warp threads necessary for each pattern unit, so that the shuttle carrying the weft thread can be thrown between the picked and lowered warp threads. Early Chinese draw-loom also had a system of treadles which further facilitated the selection of warp threads. The use of a similar device is attested in Persia during the Sassanian period (13). Such drawlooms with treadles had to be operated by at least two workers (sometimes more). The weaver, seated in front of the loom, stepped on the treadles to command a selection of warp threads and threw the shuttles to form the basic binding. The draw-boy was placed either on the side or aloft at the back of the loom. He worked a more or less complex system of cords to which were attached either a single or a group of warp threads. The warp threads could therefore be selected by two independent systems, respectively operated by the weaver and draw-boy, simultaneously or successively, according to the weave and the pattern intended for the fabric (14). The pulley-cords worked by the draw-boy were arranged vertically. Each pulley-cord was further attached to a certain number of secondary necking-cords. The number of necking-cords was determined by that of the comb units, i.e. the lateral repetitions of the pattern. The main task of the draw-boy could therefore be roughly described as commanding the selection of the warp



threads to be picked at each shot of the shuttle.

One of the major advantages of such technology was the possibility of weaving simultaneously the same motif several times across the width of the loom and also of repeating the motif any number of times in the length of the piece. The fact that both the warp and the finished fabric could be wound around their respective beams allowed the manufacture of fairly long pieces.

The draw-loom figure harness is the system which controls the repetition of pattern units. Through this device "all the mutually corresponding warp ends [threads] in the entire loom width are simultaneously raised or lowered in order to open the shed for a pick [shot of the shuttle] (15). The motifs which could be executed and repeated through the mechanism of a draw-loom figure harness could be asymmetrical, using a straight repeat. Alternatively, the patterns produced could be symmetrical with a vertical axis. In that case a point repeat was used: the pattern unit was formed by one half of the motif and then turned around the vertical axis, i.e. it was simply reversed to produce the second half of the design. Motifs arranged in a mirror-like effect are obtained through the same process. Another technical development was the use of a scale-harness which resulted in the diminution of the number of necking-cords to be drawn for the execution of a pattern unit.



Instead of each necking-cord commanding the movement of one single warp thread in a simple harness system, a double or a treble scale harness attached respectively two or three warp threads to each necking-cord. This method notably permitted doubling or trebling the size of any given pattern unit without increasing the number of necking-cords used in the process (14).

By the mid-13th century, at the beginning of the Mamluk period, very similar basic technical implements were equally available to Chinese, Near Eastern and European weavers. This implies that the technical differences between fabrics manufactured in these respective areas between the 13th and 15th century are more difficult to discern. In other words, with the additional tendency toward the internationalization of fashion which prevailed in the 14th and 15th century, it becomes more difficult to distinguish pieces woven in Central Asia from fabrics produced in the Near East. Similarly, some Italian 15th century silks closely resemble Mamluk specimens.

In the Fatimid period, silk was mostly used for tapestry woven or embroidered bands, which were inserted into larger (often linen) fabrics. Both techniques, tapestry weaving and embroidery are produced totally independently from any mechanical patterning device. Curiously, the Fatimid textile



production in general does not display examples of the use of mechanical patterning techniques. It has been argued that the latter techniques, after flourishing in Egypt and Syria between the 5th and 8th century, were somehow lost from the 9th to the 12th century, only to be re-introduced in the 13th century<sup>17</sup>. In the Mamluk period, elaborate mechanical patterning implements were used, as is attested by the fragments which have come down to us.

There is also a passage in al-Nuwayri describing draw-ooms in the royal tiraz of Alexandria. The text hints at the use of a mechanized selection of warp threads operated by draw-boys. The latter chronicler relates a visit paid to Alexandria by sultan Ashraf Sha'ban in 1368: "His wazir, Saif al-Din al-Akiz...accompanied him [the sultan] to the dar al-tiraz ... [the sultan] went up the stairs and arrived where the looms ( anwal ) and the stores were. He saw every worker weaving at his loom various fine fabrics, as well as folded up garments of different colours destined for the sultan's harem...He went around the looms, examined them, put his head below them to see their underneath parts. He observed how the workers wove and threw their shuttles ( makkuk ) to and fro. He raised his head to see, at the top of the looms, the draw-boys raising and lowering the warp threads ( masadi ). He observed how the woven birds, the dalat [geometric motifs recalling the shape of the Arabic letter dal ], the borders and other



patterns were produced by these raising and lowering threads, until each bird or other pattern was completed...Then the sultan looked at what was in the dar al-tiraz of Alexandria in the way of brocaded ( zarakish ) and striped ( ruqum ) pieces as well as finished silk garments [worked] with gold." (18)

From this somewhat summary description, it can at least be concluded that Mamluk textiles displayed a variety of patterns, colours and techniques. However, as is the rule in medieval Arabic chronicles, which constitute a literary genre in themselves, the author reports facts, events and observations relating to extremely different spheres of the life in his day. In other words, al-Nuwayri (and all the other medieval chroniclers/historians whose works form the bulk of the "literary sources") is not a textile specialist giving a precise account of weaving techniques and implements. He can only transmit his own exterior vision of textile manufacture. No weaver's description of his own work has come down to us. The same remark applies to the other arts and crafts (metalwork, glass, pottery, etc.), with the notable exception of Abul-Qasim's text (written in Persian) on the making of glazed ceramics. The latter gives a potter's technical "recipes" and insight on his own work (19). Nevertheless, short of exceptionally instructive textual evidence, the examination of the extant body of textile fragments can offer



tangible clues.

In Mamluk times, all four main fibres were woven into fabrics: wool, cotton, linen and silk. The techniques displayed in these stuffs are varied: embroidery <sup>(20)</sup>, tapestry (although much less frequent than in the Fatimid period <sup>(21)</sup>), printing (on cotton and linen <sup>(22)</sup>), and appliqué (a technique which emerged in the Mamluk period and is still used nowadays <sup>(23)</sup>). However, it is in silk fabrics that the greatest variety of weaving techniques are to be found. Silks form a totally distinct category in the production of textiles. They were destined for the consumption of a rich elite and were mostly intended to be shown off and seen as status symbols. In effect, they constituted the "cream" of the textile industry output. This is precisely why they should be compared to equally exclusive products of that period, such as Chinese and Italian silks, rather than to other local goods manufactured with different fibres. Comparison on an international level is all the more important, as Chinese (including Central Asian), Italian and Mamluk silks were in fierce competition to win the international markets of that time. These considerations explain why the technical achievements displayed in the silk production of these three different worlds (China, the Near East and Italy) are relatively similar.

It appears that the only technical clue which can be



examined to differentiate Mamluk from Chinese and Central Asian silks is the type of gold threads used in the pieces produced in these respective regions. In both China and Central Asia, textiles were enriched with flat strips of gilt parchment. Alternatively, the gilt parchment could also be wound around a core (generally silk) to form a thread (24). Further West, in the Near East and in Europe, gold threads were made of gilt animal membrane (gut) wound around a core of silk, linen or hemp (25). There are also instances of silvered membrane, particularly in Italian fabrics (26).

Mamluk silks display a variety of weaves, all of which were produced with mechanical patterning devices. Samples of both simple and compound weaves have come down to us. A simple weave uses one set of warp and one of weft threads. A compound weave combines more than one set of warps and wefts. One of the most remarkable simple weaves found in Mamluk silks is the so-called damask (27). It can be described as a monochrome self-patterned weave and is ideally suited for shiny fibres such as silk. The pattern reveals itself mainly through the angle of vision and the play of light, which together accentuate the contrast between the more or less glossy areas of the design. Two basic bindings are used to produce damasks: twill (see fig.3), where diagonal "ribs" are obtained by moving the binding points of one step at each throw of the shuttle; and satin weave (see fig.4) which tends to



over up the binding points, so as to constitute a plain and shiny surface where the floats are most apparent (28). Each of these two weaves can be either weft-faced, if the weft predominates, or warp-faced when the warp is dominant. Damasks are therefore produced by reversing the binding (twill or satin) in order to obtain a contrast between the weft-faced and warp-faced areas of the fabric.

Mamluk damasks constitute the first occurrence of damasks in Islamic textiles (29). Their fabrication might have been prompted by the appearance of Chinese specimens (the first examples of which date from about the same time (30)) on Mamluk markets. It is only later, towards the end of the 14th century, that the latter weave was introduced in Europe (31).

Brocading techniques were also frequently used in the manufacture of Mamluk silks. Certain patterns were formed by a supplementary weft, added only to produce these motifs; in other words, the use of the supplementary weft was limited to the width of the brocaded motifs. The brocaded areas could be worked with silk (32), silver or gold threads (33).

Compound weaves combine two or more sets of warps and wefts, which facilitate polychrome effects. Each pick selects a given set of warp ends, while the other sets form the reverse of the fabric. This allows the simultaneous weaving of



both ground and pattern across the width of the piece. The ground and pattern can also display different bindings, as is exemplified in a piece in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (34), where the ground uses a satin weave and the pattern a twill.

Examples of Mamluk silks displaying double or triple cloth weaves have also come down to us (35). They consist of fabrics of "two [or three] separately woven layers which can be of different binding systems" (36). These layers are woven simultaneously and often change their respective positions, in a way determined by the pattern intended for the fabric. Therefore, portions of each layer alternately appear on the face of the piece, while the others are kept on the reverse (37).

This summary presentation of the major weaves found in Mamluk silks points to the sophistication and variety attained by both the Egyptian and Syrian manufactures in the 14th and 15th century. A closer examination of the iconography exhibited on some surviving Mamluk silks will reveal an equally varied range of motifs and patterns.



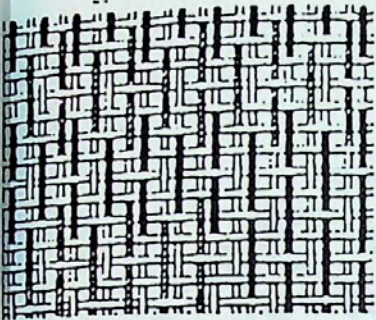


Fig 1

(A. A history of textile art)  
p 8

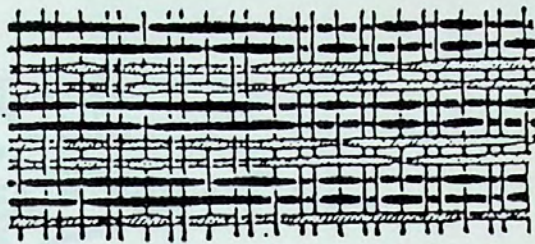


Fig 2

(Geijer, A history of textile art)  
p 59

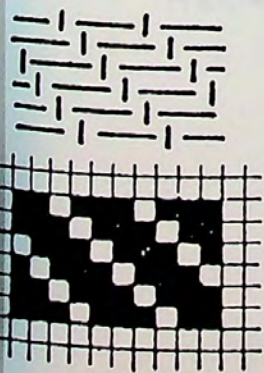


Fig 3

(A history of textile art)  
p 42

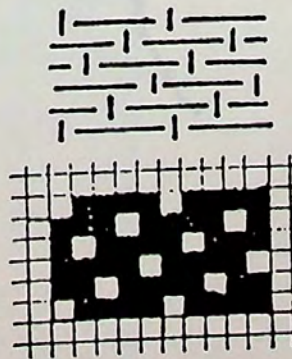


Fig 4

(Geijer, A history of textile art)  
p 43





Flap 1





Map 2

Lapidus I. Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, (Cambr. 1967)



Notes and bibliography.

- 1) Geijer, A., "Technical viewpoints on textile design during the first millesium A.D.", Settimano di studio del centro italiano de studi sull'alto medioevo , 18, (Spoleto, 1971).
- 2) Lombard, M., Les textiles dans le monde musulman , (Paris, 1978), p. 94.
- 3) Serjeant, R.B., "Material for a history of Islamic Textiles up to the Mongol Conquest", Ars Islamica , XVII, p. 62, quoting Kazwini.
- 4) Dessain et Tolra. Encyclopédie contemporaine des métiers d'art - Le tissage. , (Paris, 1977), p. 190.
- 5) Geijer, A., A History of Textile Art . (London, 1979), p.5.
- 6) Ibid. , p.5.
- 7) Bellinger, L., "Textile Fibers and Near East Designs", Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel , (Berlin, 1959), p. 120.
- 8) Lombard. op. cit. , p. 228.
- 9) Ibid. , p. 227 and Serjeant, op. cit. , XVII, p. 62.
- 10) Lombard, op. cit. , p. 229.
- 11) Geijer, op. cit.
- 12) Lombard. op. cit. , p. 230 n.2
- 13) Geijer, op. cit. . p. 76.
- 14) Tuchscherer et Vial, Le Musée historique des tissus de Lyon , (Lyon, 1977), p. 46.
- 15) Geijer, op. cit. , p. 96. The shed is the interval between the two series of warp-threads, see Dessain et Tolra, op. cit. , p. 178.
- 16) Flanagan, J.F., "Early Figured Silks. The effect of the use of Scale Harness on Early Islamic Silks", Burlington Magazine , LXVIII, (1936), pp. 145-6.
- 17) Geijer. op. cit. , p. 76.
- 18) Lombard. op. cit. ., p. 95.



Ibid. , p. 230 and n.4.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas 11, 44 n.21.

al-Nuwairi, Muhammad ibn Qasim, Kitabu'l Ilmam , ed. A.S. Iyya, (Hyderabad, 1968-73), pp. 4-5 and 9-10.

"Abul Qasim's treatise on pottery", trans. J. Allen, Iran

Example in Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam- Art of the Mamluks , (Washington DC, 1981), p. 240.

Example in Breck, J., "Enamels and a Textile: a recent find", Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art , XXIV, 29), p. 43.

Example in Atil, op. cit. , pp. 237 and 239.

Example in Ibid. , p. 241.

Mackie, op. cit. , p.146 notes 73 and 75.

Geijer, op. cit. , p. 12.

Ibid. , p. 12.

Example in Mackie, op. cit. , p. 130 plate 5 and p. 137 plate 17.

Dessain et Tolra, op. cit. , p. 187.

Mackie, op. cit. , p. 144 n.22..

The so-called "Han damasks" do not strictly fall within the category of "true" damasks, see Geijer, op. cit. , p. 56.

Mackie, op. cit. , p. 144 n. 22., and Lemberg, M., wedding, B., Abegg-Stiftung Bern, in Riggisberg , 11 tillen, (Bern. 1973). T. 28.

Example in Mackie, op. cit. , p. 138 plate 19.

Example in Islamic Art in Egypt Catalogue of an exhibition at the Semiramis Hotel on the occasion of the biennial of Cairo, (Cairo, 1969), plate 45.



- 7) Mackie. op. cit. , p. 129 plate 1.
- 8) ibid. , p. 128.
- 9) Geijer, op. cit. , p. 60.
- 10) Dessain et Tolra, op. cit. , p. 184.



blue silk damask (photo 1).

useum number: 817- 1898.

: 36.5 cm.

31 cm.

ed by the Museum in 1898. This piece is believed to come  
al-A'zam, in Upper Egypt.

are another two fragments of the same fabric in the  
gewerbemuseum, Berlin (nbs. 98.297 and 99.107) ' ' .

shed in:

ick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the  
val period , (London, 1924), p. 42 n.963 and pl.XI.  
dt. H.J., "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica 1.  
, fig.2.

se. B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei der  
Jahrhunderts , (Bern, 1967), Abb. 49 p. 61.  
le, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National  
International Considerations", Mugarnas 11, p. 130 pl.5.

This blue silk damask displays an overall pattern  
sisting of vertical bands composed of alternating quatrefoil  
lfs and eight-lobed medallions. Each quatrefoil is occupied  
a central rosette and four lotus flowers. The eight-lobed  
allions are filled with a chequer pattern. The interstices



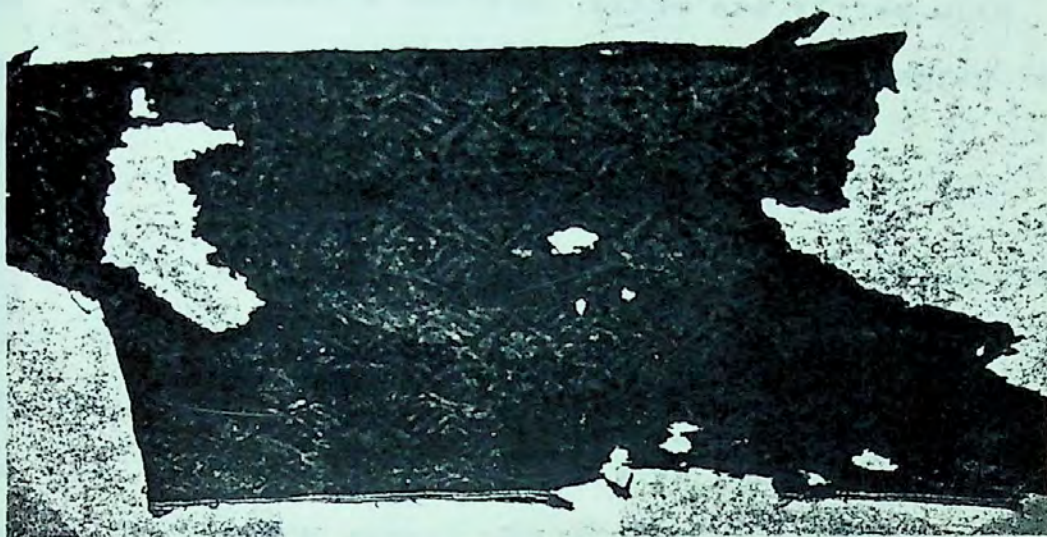


Photo 1

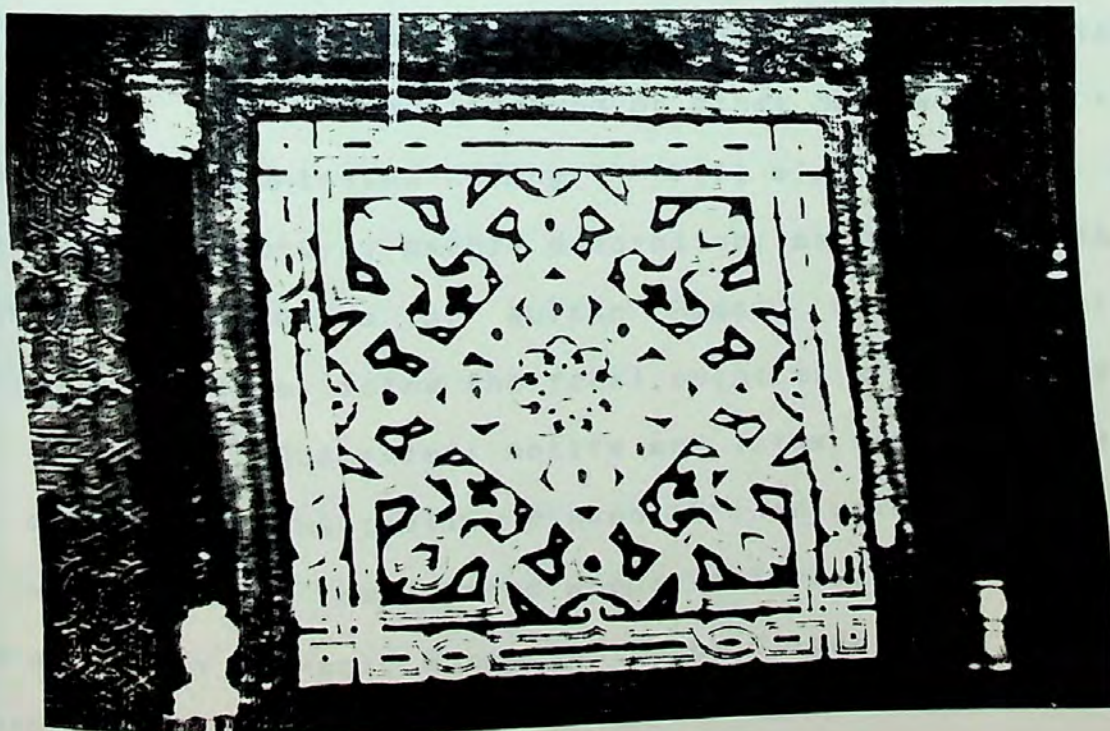


Photo 2



between the successive vertical bands are filled with naskhi script, repeating the same words in an ascending zig-zag pattern.

This piece falls within the first iconographical category of Mamluk silks defined by L. Mackie: this "group has mathematical division of the space...; however, the layout, sign and color interact visually so that no single element predominates" (2). The damask weave used in this fragment still accentuates the latter characteristic, as we have here a monochrome "self-patterned" fabric.

Each of the various elements forming this pattern are found frequently in Mamluk art. For example, the eight-lobed medallion or rosette is displayed on other Mamluk silks (3) and on Mamluk illuminated Korans (4). It also appears in the context of architectural marble decoration, as in the vestibule of the mosque-madrassa of sultan Hasan, where a central eight-lobed rosette forms the focal point of a mural marble panel (photo 2). Quatrefoil motifs and lotus flowers are also found on other Mamluk textile pieces (5) as well as in Koran illuminations (6). The painted wooden coffered ceiling of the mosque of sultan al-Nasir Muhammad in the Citadel also displays quatrefoils (photo 2b).

Similar types of overall patterns were also successful outside the Mamluk sphere. One of the most important

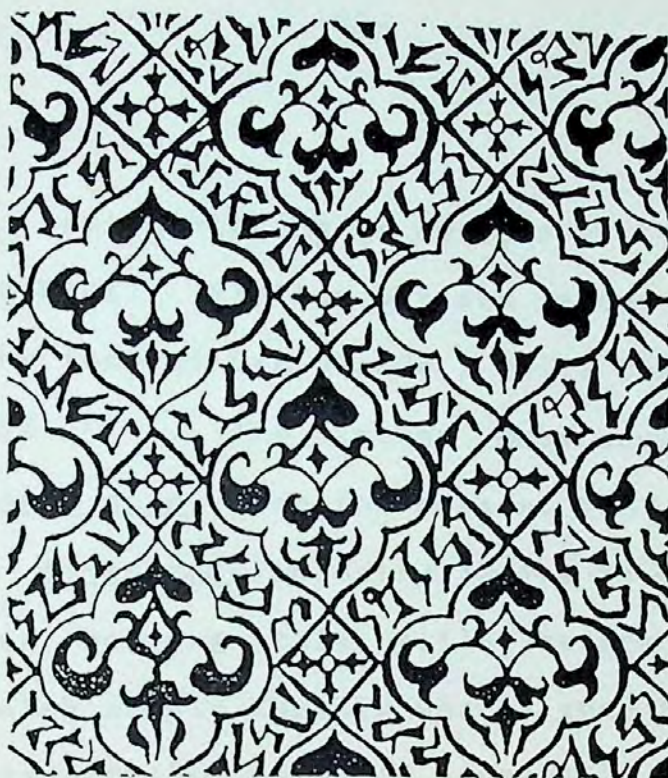


repertory of 14th century textile patterns is to be found in Italian paintings of the trecento. A catalogue of some 500 textile patterns occurring in 14th century Italian paintings has been compiled by B. Klesse (7). In the latter work, the present V&A piece is compared to a similar pattern displayed on the mantle worn by St Catherine in a painting by Allegretto Luzi (dated 1369) (8). The same catalogue provides two additional examples of related patterns with pseudo-arabic script (figs 1, 2). This clearly points to the influence of Mamluk fabric designs on contemporary Italian textile production.

As to the question of dating, these 14th century Italian paintings can, at the most, give termini ante quem. Actually, as has already been pointed out (9), very similar silk patterns occur repeatedly in the works of either single painters or schools which borrowed from earlier paintings. This should therefore dictate caution when discussing dating.

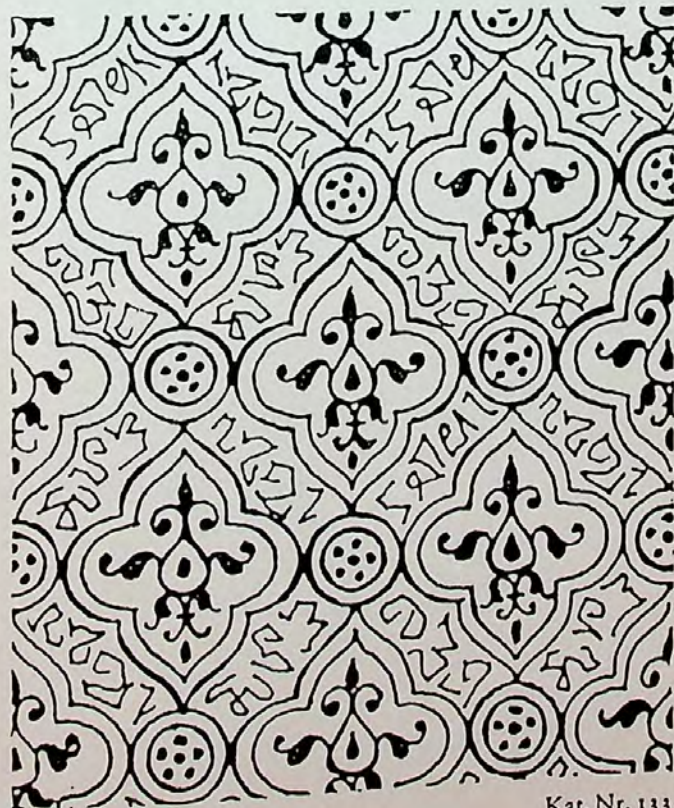
Turning back to internal evidence, the inscription on the present fragment does not provide convincing clues as to dating. It reads: الاشرف al-ashraf al-a  
his could refer, on the one hand, to one of the nine sultans entitled al-ashraf (10). Alternatively, this vocable might not be so specific and only constitute a word of eulogy ("the most noble") destined for the owner of the fabric. However, L. Mackie proposes an early dating for this piece, before 1300,





Kat. Nr. 132

Fig. 1. Klesse  
Master of  
Fabriano's Altar  
and Allegretto Nuzi  
Enthroned Madonna  
with Angels and  
Saints. Dated: 1354.



Kat. Nr. 133

Fig. 2. Klesse  
Spinello Aretino  
Saint Nemexius  
and Saint Johan.  
Dated: 1384-5.



based on a representation on metalwork (11). On the other hand, a strikingly similar pattern layout occurs on a silk found in the tomb of Can Grande I della Scala in Verona who died in 1329 (12). The latter date could be used as a terminus ante quem for the present V&A fragment. If the inscription al-ashraf actually refers to a sultan, the only Mamluk ruler bearing this title before 1329 was sultan al-Ashraf Salah ad-Din Khalil, who reigned from 1290 to 1294. This tentative attribution would support L. Mackie's suggestion of a late 13th century dating for this silk.



Notes and bibliography.

- ) Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei der 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), p. 51 n.1.
- ) Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas II, p. 31.
- ) See Schmidt, H.J., Alte Seidenstoffe, (Braunschweig, 1958) p. 137 nbs.128 and 129.
- ) See Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam- Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), pp. 45 and 47.
- ) See Breck, J., "Enamels and a Textile: a recent gift", Bulletin of the Metr. Mus. of Art, XXIV (1929), p. 43. and Mackie, op. cit., p.130 pl.4.
- ) See Atil, op. cit., p. 48.
- ) Klesse, op. cit.
- ) Ibid., p. 61.
- ) Wardwell, A.E., "The Stylistic Development of 14th-and 15th-century Italian Silk Design", Aachener Kunstblätter, 47, (1976-77), pp. 177-226.
- 0) Mackie, op. cit., p. 145 n.28.
- 1) Ibid., p. 131 and n.28.
- 2) Santangelo, A., Art Italien - Le tissu du XII au XVIII siècle, (Milan, 1959), pl. 21.



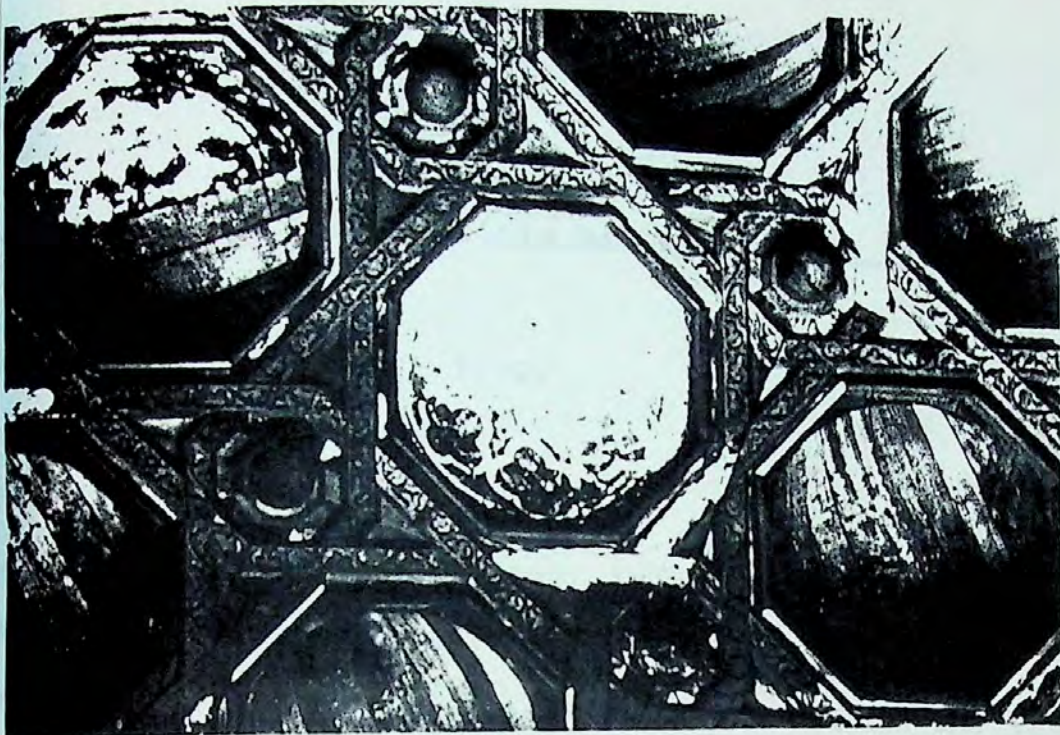


Photo 2b

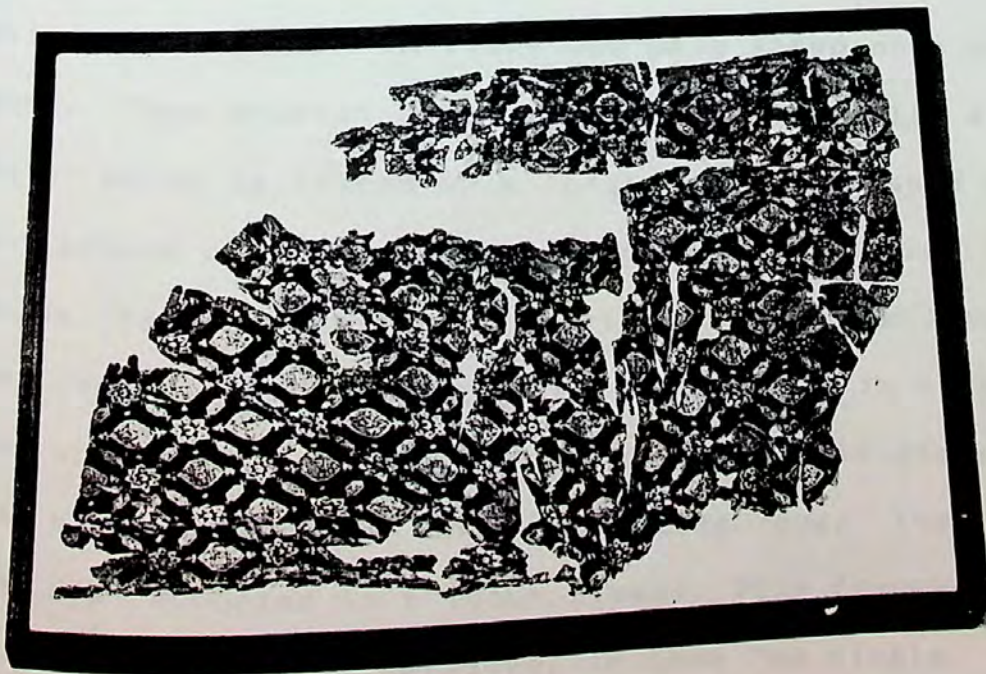


Photo 3



Silk with overall geometric pattern (photo 3).

A Museum number: 962 - 1892.

Length: 26 cm.

Width: 17.5 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1892. This piece is believed to come from Edfu, in Upper Egypt.

There is a second fragment of the same piece in the V&A Museum (photo 4), smaller and more damaged.

Published in:

Adcock, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan Textiles of the Medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 41 and pl. XII,

This silk presents an overall lattice-work pattern. The motifs are executed in ivory and pale green on a dark blue background. They consist of staggered rows of small diamonds, one of which is framed by a larger diamond-shaped outline. The four apices of these diamond-shaped outlines are occupied by rosettes. The four sides of the diamond outlines linking the rosettes consist of small elongated cartouches. In every other row, some unfortunately illegible naskhi script is displayed in the central lozenges. In the alternating rows, the central lozenges are occupied by a lotus flower. This fragment falls within L. Mackie's first category, in that "no single element dominates" the design.





Photo 4

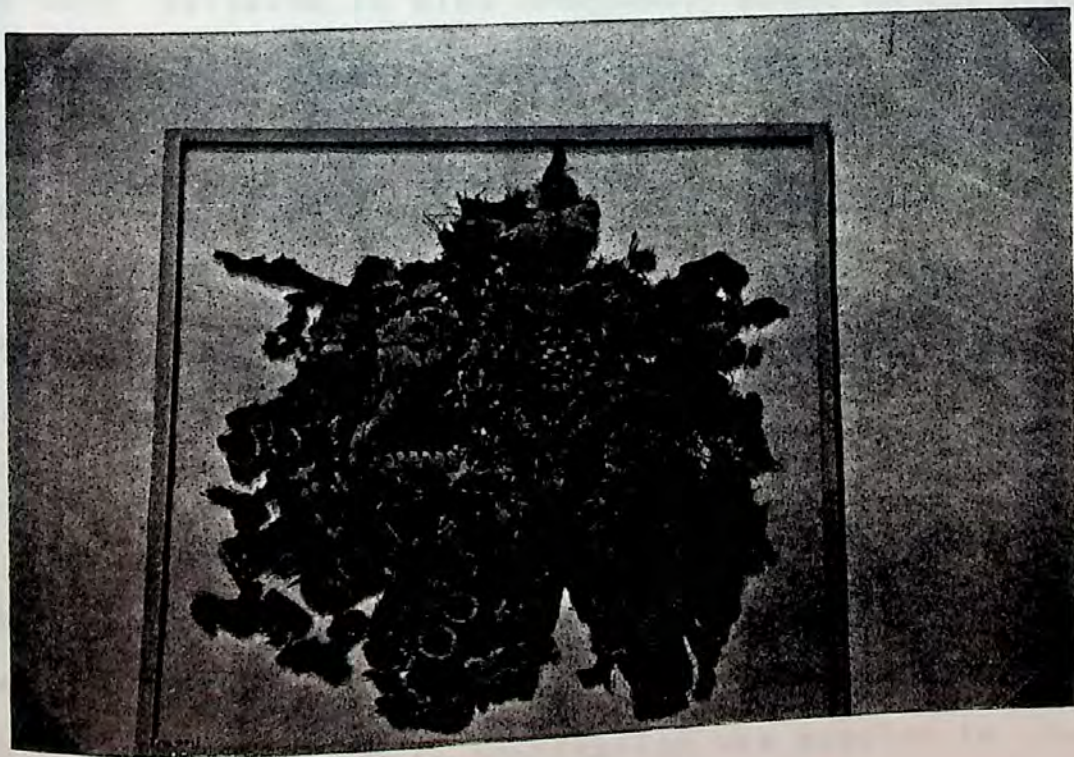


Photo 5



Each one of the single elements in this pattern (diamonds, rosettes, cartouches, lotus flowers) is common in the Mamluk iconographical vocabulary and can be found in metalwork, glass, ceramics, Koran illuminations and architectural decoration. However, in the present silk, the combination of these various elements into an overall lattice pattern does not really have close parallels in other media, mainly because such arrangements constitute almost obvious derivatives of the weaving technique <sup>(2)</sup>. In other words, the technique "states", or at least facilitates the execution of such patterns.

The same mathematical division of space into regular lattice-work patterns is also frequently found in the textiles represented in 14th century Italian paintings <sup>(3)</sup>. Even if the latter patterns are formed by extremely varied single elements, such as flowers, birds, cranes and other abstract motifs, they all convey a very similar visual impression. Indeed, such patterns, and the Mamluks exploited a whole range of them (see below), typically belong to the textile medium.

On the other hand, the choice of colours displayed in this piece, ivory and blue, is also characteristic of Mamluk silks and tiles. We find the same range in other silks <sup>(4)</sup> and painted cottons <sup>(5)</sup>. This combination was popular in Mamluk art in general, more specifically in ceramics <sup>(6)</sup> and Koran illuminations <sup>(7)</sup>.



Notes and bibliography.

- 1) Mackie, L., "Toward and Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas 11, p. 131.
- 2) Ibid. , p. 128.
- 3) See ex. in Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei der 14. Jahrhunderts , (Bern, 1967), pp. 171, 312, 313.
- 4) See below and ex. in Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks , (Washington DC, 1981), pp. 229, 230, 236.
- 5) Ibid. , p. 238.
- 6) Ibid. , pp. 153-182.
- 7) Ibid. , pp. 33, 34.



Silk fragment of a flattened cap (photo 5).

A Museum number: 298- 1891

Length: 24 cm.

Width: 20 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in the last decade of the 19th century.

Published.

This fragment is composed of five identical pieces, sewn up together. Each piece has the shape of a melon slice; once assembled to the other pieces, they form the round and curved outline of a cap. Such headgear constituted an important item of both everyday and ceremonial dress (1). Several other examples of caps have come down to us (see below silk 4), at least four of which have been published; they are all made of silk and three of them bear naskhi inscriptions: one is quilted (2) and another has been dated to the reign of sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (3). In the latter published examples (4), the melon-slice-shaped pieces seem to have been cut out from larger fabrics and assembled in a more or less haphazard manner. On the contrary, in the present fragment, the individual pieces have been cut very carefully, so as to form a coherent pattern when sewn up together.

The pattern is composed of a central five-pointed star motif, occupied, in its middle, by five small eight-pointed



tars. There is a fleur de lys at the tip of each of the five points of the central star, flanked on either side by a bird head. A motif of large serrated leaves occupies the area forming an intermediary outer circle. The external circle is composed of eight-petal rosettes, the cores of which are occupied by smaller rosettes. The pattern is executed in a ivory colour on a dark blue background. In this respect, it follows a typical Mamluk combination of colours and is in the same vein as silk 2.

The individual motifs composing this pattern are also in line with Mamluk art in general: stars, rosettes, fleurs de lys (5) and birds. The latter mainly appear in textiles (see below) and ceramics (4) as well as in metalwork (7).



Notes and bibliography.

Mayer, L.A., Mamluk Costume, A Survey, (Geneva, 1952).

Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, Washington DC, 1981), p. 234.

Lamm, C.J., "Dated or datable Tiraz in Sweden", Le Monde Oriental, XXXII, (1938), pl. XI. Other two ex. in Schmidt, H., "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica, I (1934), fig. 2 and in Mackie, "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas, II, pl. 3, p. 135.

Except for ex. in Mackie, op. cit., pl. 13, p. 135.

Found in other textiles - see below - and in architectural decoration, ex. the mihrab in the madrassa of sultan Barquq Bayn al-Qasrayn.

Ex. in Atil, op. cit., pp. 173 and 175.

Ex. in Ibid., p. 67.



4. Silk fragment of a cap with birds (photo 6). .

M&A Museum number: 1159 - 1900.

Length: 26 cm.

Width: 26 cm.

Acquired by the Museum at the turn of this century.

Unpublished.

This fragment consists of three pieces of the same material sewn up together. Two pieces have a melon-slice shape to form the curved part of a cap. The third piece is attached to the others so as to constitute a lower border to the cap. However, curiously enough, the pattern would have been viewed upside down. The bi-chrome design is executed in a light green colour on a dark blue background, which makes it a typical example of the Mamluk palette.

The pattern consists of the repeat of one motif: a pair of confronted birds flanking a central vegetal element. In the world of textiles, this pattern of the tree of life flanked by two birds is a classic one and goes back at least to Byzantine and Sasanian silks. However, in the 14th century, the rendering of this theme is fairly different. In the present fragment, these relatively long-legged birds have very long tail feathers. They might represent peacocks or parrots.





Photo 6

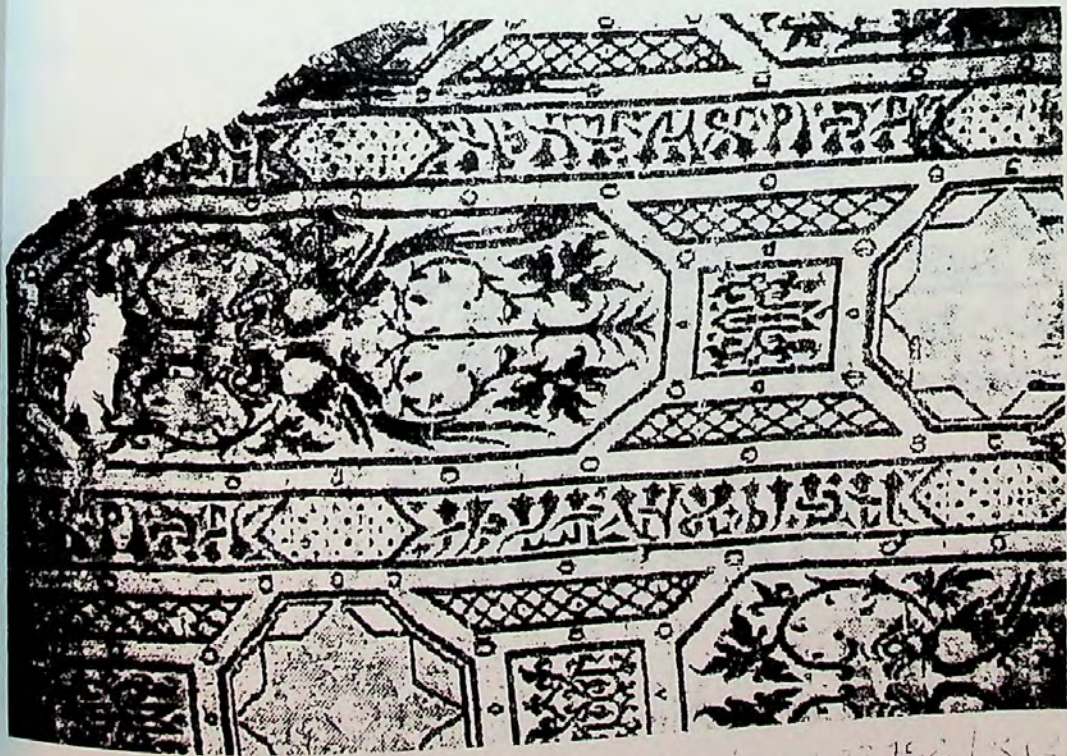


Photo 7 Musée Historique des Tissus / inv. 622792 / 15126





Kat. Nr. 234

Fig. 3. Klesse  
Spinello Aretino  
Enthroned Madonna  
with Saints.  
Dated: 1393.



Fig. 4. Geijer  
A History of Textile Art.  
p. 145. Chinese silk  
from about 1300.



This naturalistic fashion for the rendering of animals was triggered off by Chinese silks which reached the Western markets of that period. In Italy, this trend initiated a very rich and varied generation of designs using "exotic" animals, such as dragons, phoenixes, cranes and fanciful birds<sup>(2)</sup>. Numerous examples of variations on these birds have come down to us, either in the form of actual silk fragments (see photos 7 and 8), or as representations on 14th century Italian paintings (see fig.3).

In the Mamluk world, the same fashion was also adopted. However, the borrowing was mainly restricted to a few kinds of birds, to the exclusion of other animals inspired by the Far East, such as the tortoise which enjoyed great popularity in Italy<sup>(3)</sup>. Among the surviving Mamluk ceramics, we find examples of long feather-tailed birds<sup>(4)</sup> and phoenix-like birds<sup>(5)</sup>. Flying cranes also appear<sup>(6)</sup> and the parallels in ceramics<sup>(7)</sup>. The present fragment is a perfect example of a Mamluk adaptation to the international fashion trend of that period.



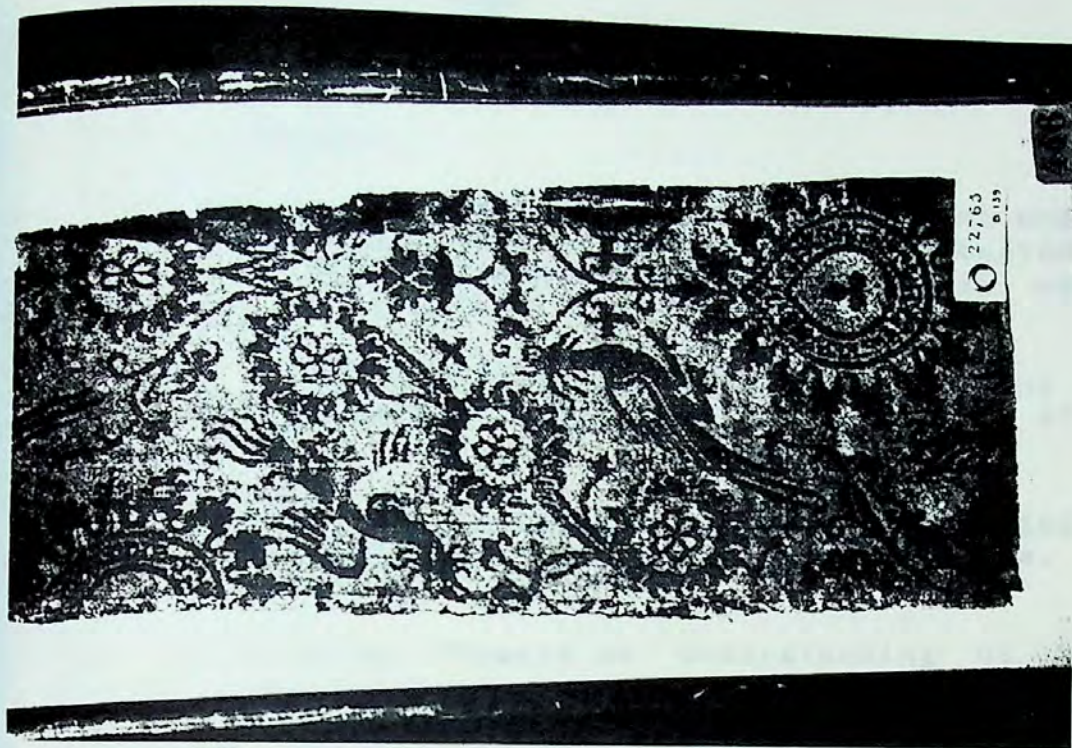


Photo 3 D.H.T., Laysan (22763 / B 1345)

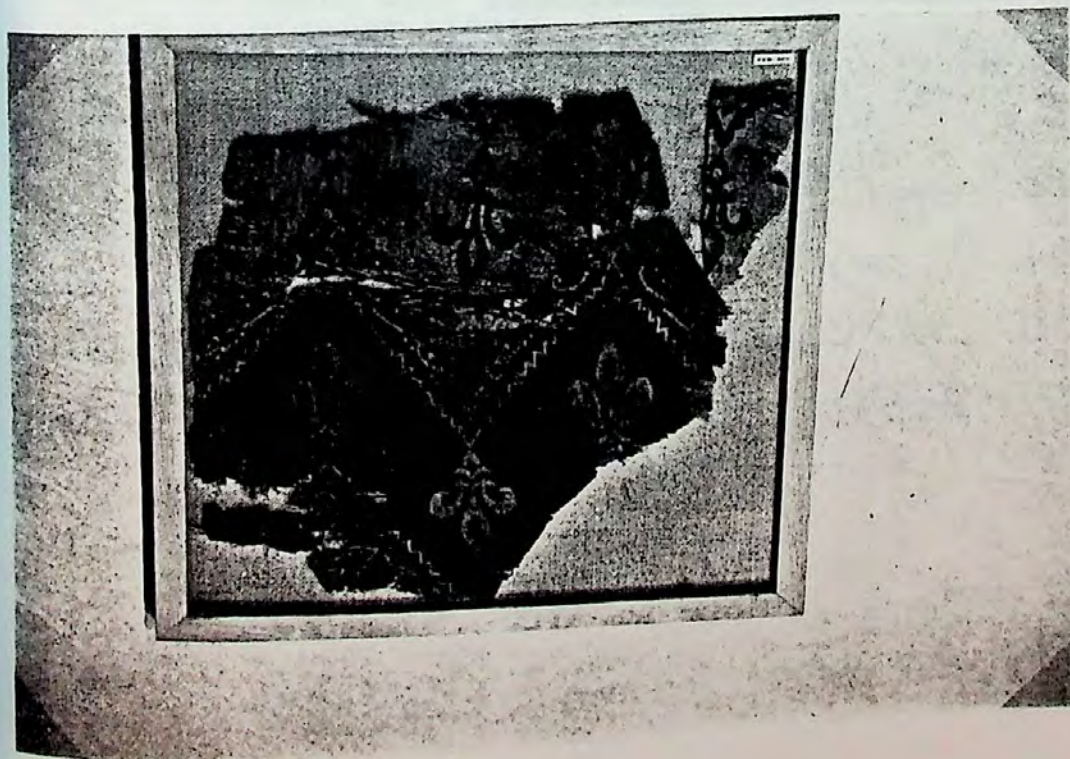


Photo 4



Notes and bibliography.

From the shape of the pieces forming this fragment and the way they are fitted together, it is difficult to imagine the exact function of this fragment, apart from the most obvious suggestion that it was originally part of a cap.

Wardwell, A.E., "The Stylistic Development of 14th- and 15th-century Italian Silk Design", Aachener Kunstblätter, 47, pp. 1-5.

See ex. in Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Weberei der 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), Kat. nrs. 246, 272, 273.

See ex. in Mackie, "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Textiles: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, pl. 4, p. 130 and in Lafontaine-Dosogne, J., Textiles islamiques - 2 proche-orient et méditerranée, guide du visiteur, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, (Bruxelles, 1983), p. 3.

See ex. in Mackie, op. cit., pl. 13, p. 135.

See ex. in Ibid., pl. 12, p. 135.

See ex. in Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), p. 175.



Silk fragment with chevron pattern (photo 9).

A Museum number: 1100 - 1904.

Length: 20 cm.

Width: 21 cm.

Acquired by the Museum at the turn of this century.

Not published.

There is another fragment of the same silk in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Museum number: 509). The latter piece is published in: Lafontaine-Dosogne, Textiles islamiques 2. Proche orient et méditerranée, Guide du visiteur, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles, 1983), pl.5. This fragment, along with the majority of other Islamic textiles, entered the Musées Royaux's collection as part of Isabel Errera's legacy to the said institution. This piece had been published by the famous collector in : Errera, I., Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, 3ème éd., (Bruxelles, 1927) n. 62 a. and in: Cox, Les soieries d'art, (Paris, 1914), pl. 46, fig.IV. There is a third fragment of the same fabric in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (no. 40.53), published in Coulin-Weibel, A., Two thousand Years of Textiles, (New York, 1952), p. 126, pl.160 and in Bunt, C.G.E., Sicilian and Lucchese fabrics, (Leigh-on-Sea, 1961), fig.2.



The present fragment displays a double cloth weave (1). The two layers, one in light tan, the other in dark blue, were woven simultaneously and changed their respective positions, according to the pattern. In other words, this piece is reversible, i.e. when a motif appears in light tan on a dark blue background on the face of the fabric, it appears in dark blue on a light tan background on the reverse. Moreover, the pattern displays a mirror-like effect, due to the use of a pattern repeat device. Here the repeat unit consists of one ascending segment of the chevron.

The two colours chosen for the execution of this fabric, light tan and dark blue, are perfectly in line with Mamluk tradition (see silks 1-4). The contrast between a light and a dark colour as well as the general outline of the pattern displayed on this piece are very reminiscent of the ablaq technique widely used in Mamluk architecture. The overall chevron pattern alternates lines of dark blue and light tan zig-zags. There is a fleur de lys at each point of the chevrons, placed alternatively upright and upside down.

A continuous naskhi inscription follows the chevron outline and is framed on both sides by a small zig-zag which complements the general chevron layout. This inscription consists of one word, repeated in a mirror-like fashion. It reads: Bu'ayzaq(?) (2), a proper name of Turkish resonance. As an additional title is mentioned, the identity of this



personage cannot be ascertained. The only indication which can be drawn, is that this person enjoyed sufficient means or social standing to have his name woven into a fabric. Naskhi inscriptions executed in a mirror-like fashion frequently occur on Mamluk textiles (see below). This is due to the use of pattern-repeat devices and explains why it hardly ever occurs in other media.

The general arrangement of the present pattern immediately calls to mind the decoration displayed on Mamluk mihrabs. Similar ablaq chevron patterns appear in the hoods of 14th and 15th century mihrabs <sup>(3)</sup>. On the other hand, the combination of a chevron layout and fleurs de lys placed alternatively upright and upside down and executed in contrasting white and dark grey marble occurs in the mihrab of the madrasa of sultan Barquq in Bayn al-Qasrayn (1386) (see photo 10).

This V&A fragment uses a purely Mamluk iconographical vocabulary which is very reminiscent of that displayed in contemporary architectural decoration. However, it exploits two techniques which are characteristic of the textile medium: a bi-chrome double cloth weave, resulting in a reversible fabric and a mirror-like effect, due to the use of a point-repeat device.

In Coulin-Weibel's catalogue, the fragment in the



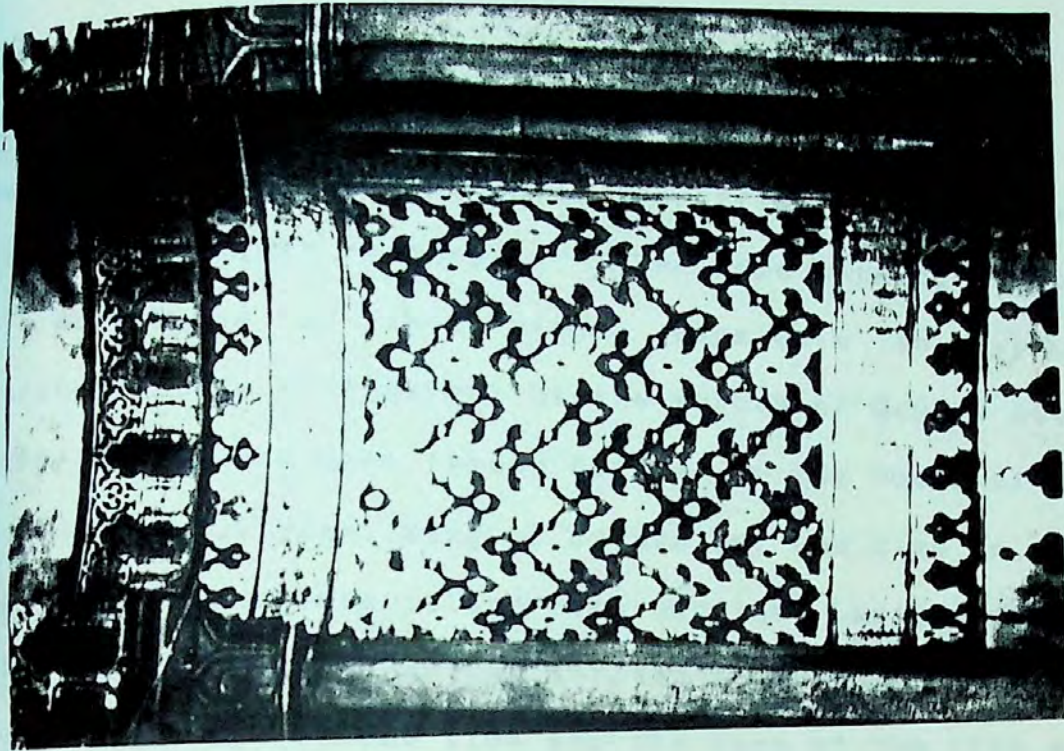


Fig. 10

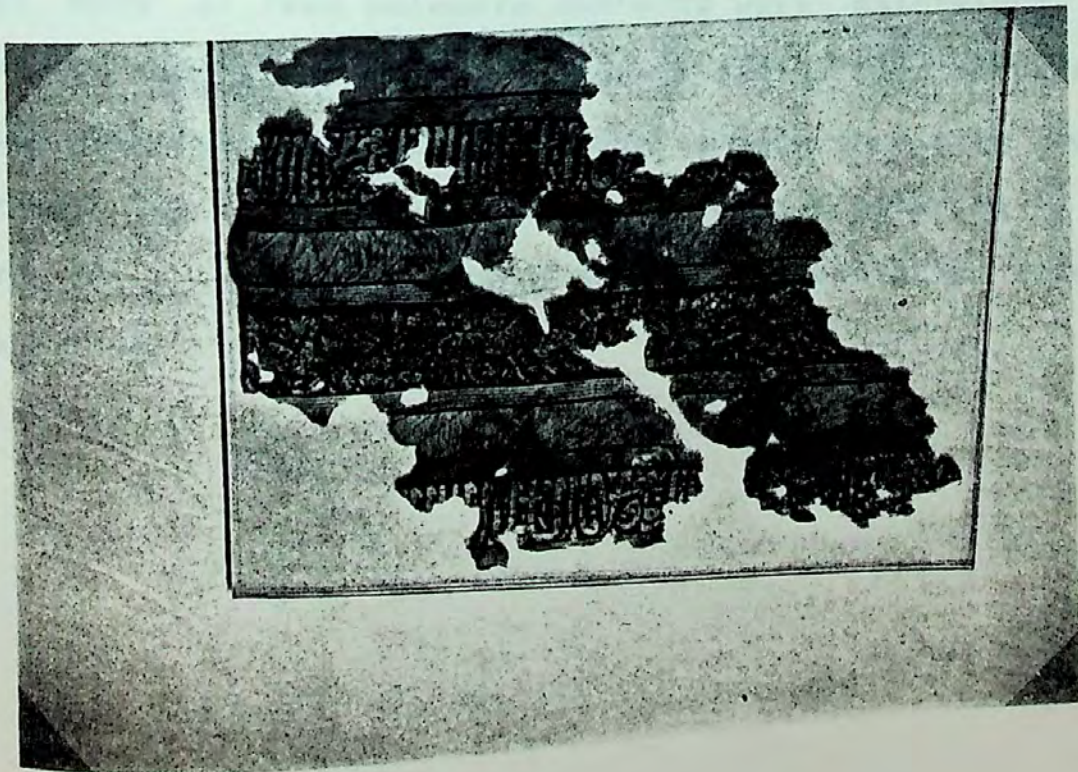


Fig. 11



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is identified as Palermitan and dated to the 12th century (4). The same catalogue specifies the provenance of this piece, Famagusta in Cyprus, and describes it as a "fragment of the shroud of Guy de Lusignan". Indeed, one of the most famous figures in the House of Lusignan was Guy de Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, who died in 1194 as King of Cyprus. This island remained the Lusignans' kingdom until 1426 when the Mamluks imposed their suzerainty on king Janus. However, between 1194 and the turn of the 15th century, at least another four members of the House of Lusignan were called Guy, three of whom lived between the 1260's and the beginning of the 15th century (5). Throughout the Mamluk period, more or less amicable contacts were maintained with Cyprus (6) and it would not be surprising to find members of the Lusignan family shrouded in fabrics made on Mamluk looms. Therefore, the Boston fragment most probably belonged to the shroud of one of the three Guys de Lusignan who lived between 1260 and 1400.



Notes and bibliography.

- 1) Weave identified in Lafontaine-Dosogne, J., Textiles islamiques. 2. Proche orient et méditerranée, guide du visiteur, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, (Bruxelles, 1983), pl. 5.
- 2) The vowelling could be different. I chose a semi-arabized version using the diminutive form to determine the tashkil of the beginning of the name. However, the ending of this name cannot be related to any arabic word pattern. The same word occurs on both the Brussels and Boston fragments.
- 3) Ex. the mihrabs in the mausoleum of sultan Hasan (1356), in the mausoleum of sultan Barquq in Bayn al-Qasrayn (1386), in the mosque of sultan Ashraf Barsbay in the Northern Cemetery (1432).
- 4) Coulin-Weibel, A., Two thousand years of textiles, (New York, 1952), p.126, pl.160. The use of a fully developed naskhi script on this piece (and not pseudo-naskhi, as A. Coulin describes it) immediately rules out a 12th century dating. Dated 12th century Palermitan fabrics exclusively display kufic script, see ex. in Santangelo, A., Art Italien, Le tissu du XIème au XVIIIème siècle, (Milan, 1959), pl.1.
- 5) D'Eschavannes, E., Notice historique sur la maison de Lusignan, (Paris, 1853).
- 6) See introduction and chapter 1.



6. Silk with horizontal bands (photo 11).

MA Museum number: T122 - 1921.

Length: 23 cm.

Width: 28 cm.

Donated to the Museum by Colonel Gayer-Anderson in 1921 ('').

Published in:

Guest, A.R., "Further Arabic Inscriptions on Textiles", JRAS, 1923, pl.V.

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), pl. X.

The Arts of Islam, Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, (London, 1976), pl. 16.

Another fragment of the same fabric was donated to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo by Colonel Gayer-Anderson in 1921 (mus. nb: 5872).

Published in:

Wiet, G., Album du Musée Arabe du Caire, (Le Caire, IFAO, 1930), p. 86.

Ross, E.D., ed. The Art of Egypt Through the Ages, (London, Studio Ltd, 1931), p. 327, fig.2.

Zaki, M.H., Funun al-Islam, (Cairo, 1948), p. 366, fig. 296.

Idem, Atlas al-funun al-zukhrufiya wa'l-tasawir al-islamiya, (Cairo, Univ. Press, 1956), n. 607 and fig. 607.



Mostafa, M., The Museum of Islamic Art, A Short Guide, (Cairo, Publication of the Museum of Islamic Art, 1961), p.33.

Islamic Art in Egypt: 969-1517, Catalogue of an exhibition at the Semiramis Hotel, (Cairo, 1969), n. 257.

Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), p229.

It seems that there is a third fragment of the same fabric in the Benaki Museum in Athens (2) .

This silk displays a double cloth weave (see chap.3) with two sets of warp and weft threads (3) and gilt membrane thread (4) . The combination of colours on this fragment is in accordance with classical Mamluk taste: dark and medium blue, light tan and light green.

In the present piece, the space is divided into horizontal bands; such banded layouts frequently occur in Mamluk fabrics (5) and could be seen as a survival of the Fatimid textile tradition. The tapestry woven decorative bands of the Fatimid period, inserted into plainer fabrics, are perfect examples of a weave entirely based on the weft.

The decoration on this fragment consists of three bands, executed in light tan and medium blue on a dark blue background. The two outer bands are identical and contain a naskhi inscription. The middle band is formed by the same repeated motif: a cheetah attacking a gazelle, flanked on



either side by a vegetal element.

A similar rendering of a leopard pursuing a deer appears on the famous Louvre basin (4) and the same type of gazelle is depicted on another silk (7). This theme of the royal hunt, going back to ancient Persia, had been popular in Islamic art since the Umayyad period. Here it further emphasizes the royal connotation of the inscription. The inscription reads (8) :

عز لمولانا السلطان الملك الناصر

'izz li-mawlana al-sultan al-malik al-nasir].

Glory to our master the sultan al-malik al-nasir].

It might refer to sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Qala'un (1294-1340) (9). At least another nine silks bearing the same name and titles have been published (10).

In the Mamluk period, the popularity of banded layouts was not only restricted to fabrics. It is by far the most frequent arrangement found in both metalwork and glass. The contemporary architecture also displays horizontal tiraz bands and decorative friezes which break up the surface of façades and interior walls.

This division of space into horizontal bands was very successfully exploited by Mamluk artists and artisans, so much so that it influenced textile decoration both East and West.



The Chinese weavers were quick to adapt banded arrangements in order to capture the lucrative Middle Eastern markets <sup>(11)</sup> . In Italy, silks combining horizontal bands, pseudo-arabic script and Chinese phoenixes or other birds and animals were designed in the 14th and at the beginning of the 15th century <sup>(12)</sup> . On the other hand, a group of silks produced in Nasrid Spain also display banded decoration with naskhi inscriptions (see photo 12) <sup>(13)</sup> .



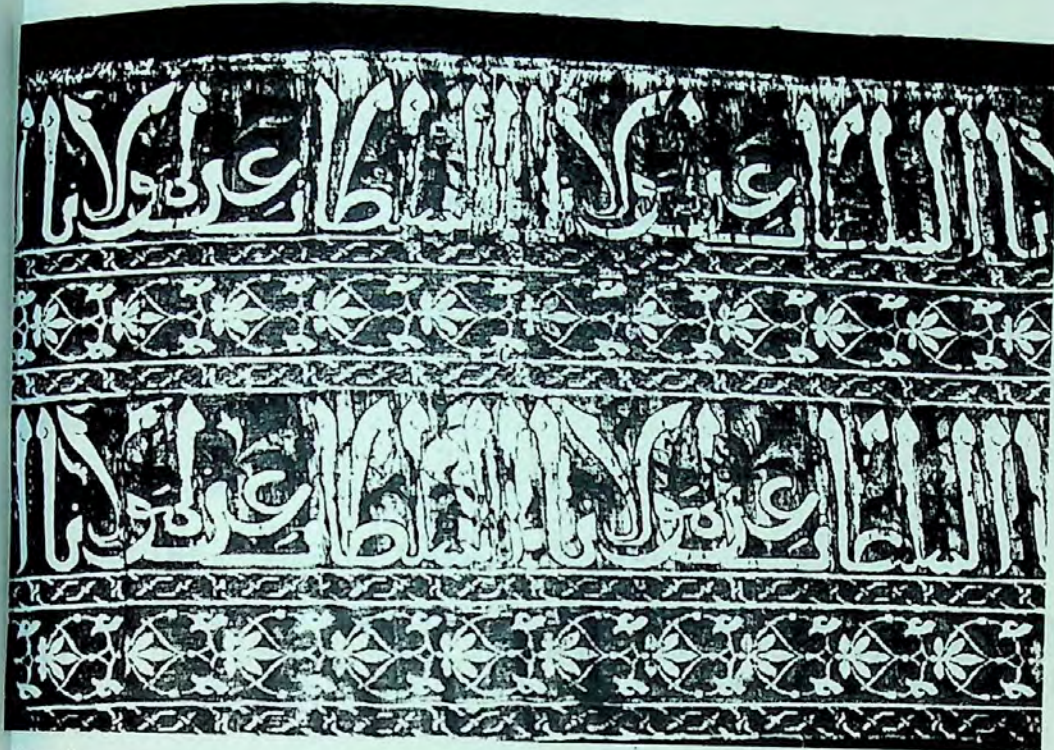


Photo 12



Photo 13



Notes and bibliography.

- 1) Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 40.
- 2) Spuhler, F., The Arts of Islam, Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, (London, 1976), p.80 and Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), p. 230.
- 3) Atil, op. cit., p. 230.
- 4) Spuhler, op. cit., p. 80.
- 5) See ex. in Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas 11, pl. 6, 9, 10 and fall within category two of her classification, see p. 131.
- 6) Atil, op. cit., p.76.
- 7) Mackie, op. cit., pl.11.
- 8) The fragment in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo provides a more complete reading which has also been used here.
- 9) Atil, op. cit., p.230 and Kendrick, op. cit., p.41.
- 10) Mackie, op. cit., pl. 9, 21 and figs 1,2,3, Schmidt,H., "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica, 1, (1934), fig.12, Lamm, C.J., "Dated of datable Tiraz in Sweden", Le Monde Oriental, XXXII, (1938), nbrs 31,32 and pl.XI, XII, Spuhler, op. cit., p.80, pl.15.
- 11) A similar fragment is published in Spuhler, op. cit., p. 81, pl.17.
- 12) Wardwell, A.E., 'The Stylistic Development of 14th and 15th-Century Italian Silk Design', Aachener Kunstblätter 47 (1976-77), figs. 10 and 31.



Silk fragment with ogival lattice pattern (photo 13).

A Museum number: 960 1896.

Length: 33 cm.

Width: 27,5 cm.

This fragment was acquired by the Museum in 1896 and is believed to come from Akhmim, in Upper Egypt (1).

Published in:

Hendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan Textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p.41 and pl.XI.

No other fragments of the same fabric are known: one is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (no. 46.15617) and is published in:

Jackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, pl.15.

The other piece is in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, (inv.Tx. 395) and has been published twice in:

Errera, I., Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, 3<sup>e</sup> ed., Bruxelles, 1927), p.46, no.26.

Fontaine-Dosogne, J., Textiles islamiques -2 Proche orient et méditerranée, Guide du visiteur, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, (Bruxelles, 1983), pl. 4.

The present fragment displays a compound weave, combining several sets of warp and weft threads (2). The





Kat. Nr. 489

Fig. 5. Klesse  
Maestro del Bambino Vispo  
Madonna with Saints.  
Date: 3rd-4th decade of the  
15th century.

Fig. 6. Klesse  
Abb. 82.  
Spanish silk.









architecture. Here again, we have a pattern specifically designed for the textile medium, as it is determined by a point-repeat. Accordingly, the inscription is executed in a mirror-like fashion. It reads:

السلطان الملك

al-[sulttan al-malik.

the [sulttan the king '7' .

On the other hand, this layout finds echoes in Chinese/Central Asian, Italian and Spanish silk fabrics. In other words, it belongs to a group of textile designs which enjoyed international appeal at that time. However, at this point, it is still unclear whether such patterns were initiated in the Chinese or in the Mamluk sphere '8' .



Notes and bibliography.

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p.41.

Lafontaine-Dosogne, J., Textiles islamiques - 2 Proche Orient et méditerranée, (Bruxelles, 1983), pl.4.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, p. 1.

Other ex. in Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienschenerei des 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), Abb, 75, 77, 162.

Schmidt, H., Alte Seidenstoffe, (Braunschweig, 1958), p.139, pl.107.

In Wiet, G., Album du Musée Arabe du Caire, (Cairo, 1930), p. 35, Mostafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, t. 1955, p.21., von Falke, O., Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei, (Berlin, 1913), Abb. 367., Schmidt, H., "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica, 1, fig.11, Atil, E., renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1931), pp. 231, 235.

In Mamluk textile renditions of the word sultan, the letter sin is often omitted. Other ex. in Mackie, op. cit., fig.1, Schmidt, "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica, 1, fig.11, Martin, F.R., A history of oriental carpets before 1800, (Vienna, 1908), fig.55.

Mackie, op. cit., pp.134-5.



8. Green silk with tear-shaped medallions and lotus flowers  
(photo 14).

V&A Museum number: 753 - 1904.

Length: 113 cm.

Width: 19,5 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1904.

Published in:

von Falke, O., Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei, (Berlin, 1913), Abb. 368.

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p.46, pl.XV.

Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), p.84, Abb.88.

The Arts of Islam, Catalogue of an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, (London, 1976), p.81, pl. 19.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas 11, p.137, pl.16.

The survival of this silk is probably due to the fact that it was used as the orphrey of a religious vestment. Since the early Middle Ages, Near and Middle Eastern silks had enjoyed great reverence in Christian Europe and were often used as ecclesiastical vestments or to cover relics. The fact that some of these fabrics bore Arabic inscriptions, sometimes mentioning Muslim rulers (as is the case here) did not seem to



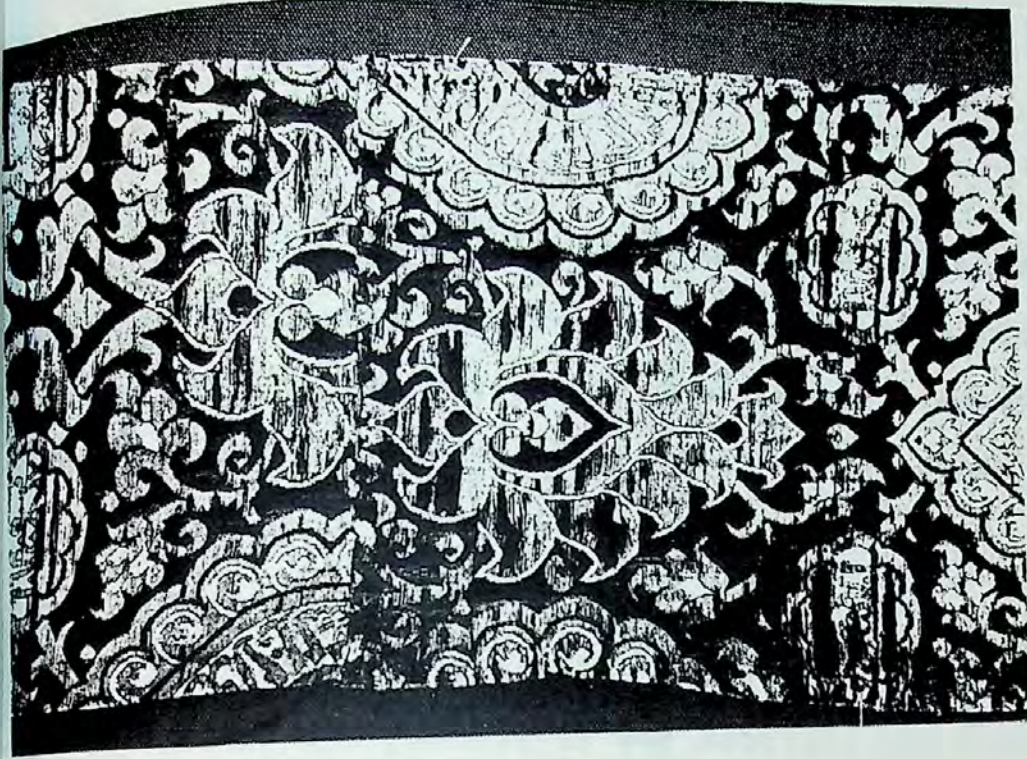


Photo 14



Photo 15



diminish their popularity. On the contrary, stuffs inscribed with Arabic letters were seen as status symbols and were therefore much sought after. The present orphrey might have been sewn on to a church vestment in Spain, where this practice was widespread in the later Middle Ages (1) .

This V&A fragment displays a compound weave (see photo 15 for the reverse of the fabric): the green ground uses a satin weave and the pattern a weft-faced tabby (2) . The gold thread enhancing the silk weft consists of wrapped gilt membrane (3) . The colours contrast effectively: a green background with a pattern executed in gold and ivory, which succeed in conveying a rich, almost monumental visual impression.

The pattern consists of large lotus blossoms alternating with tear-shaped medallions bearing a naskhi inscription. These two motifs face opposite directions. The ground is filled with vegetal elements combining smaller lotus blossoms and buds as well as eight-lobed medallions inscribed with the word الأشرف al-ashraf.

A point-repeat was used to execute this pattern and the inscription is accordingly reversed on every other medallion. The naskhi decorating the tear-shaped motifs also displays a mirror-like effect. It reads:

عز مولانا لسلطان ملك

'izz li-mawlana l-sultan l-malik.



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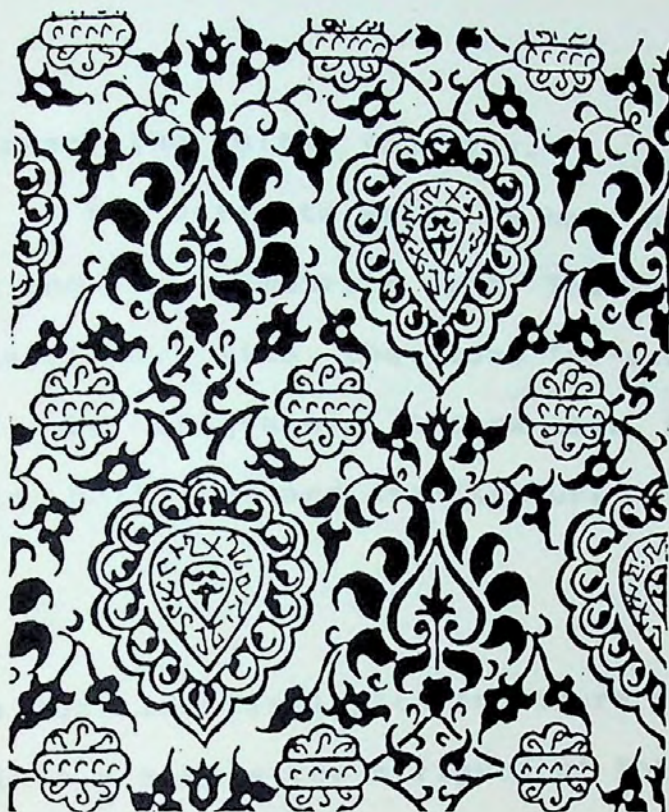
This V&A fragment displays a compound weave (see photo 15 for the reverse of the fabric): the green ground uses a satin weave and the pattern a weft-faced tabby (2). The gold thread enhancing the silk weft consists of wrapped gilt membrane (3). The colours contrast effectively: a green background with a pattern executed in gold and ivory, which succeed in conveying a rich, almost monumental visual impression.

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عز مولانا لسلطان ملك  
'izz li-mawlana l-sultan l-malik.





Kat. Nr. 226

Fig. 7. Klesse  
 Maestro del Bambino Vispo  
 Enthroned Madonna with  
 Saints.  
 Date: c. 1430.



Fig. 8.



ory to our master, the sultan the king.  
two alifs of the definite articles have been omitted both  
gain space and for symmetry's sake. The small eight-lobed  
dallions inscribed with the word 'al-ashraf' are very  
miniscent of the epigraphic tri-partite Mamluk blazons,  
dely used in both art and architecture from the 1320's  
wards (4) .

An almost identical pattern occurs on another Mamluk  
ilk sewn up into a mantle for a figure of the Virgin (5) and  
an Italian painting, dated c. 1438 (see fig.7). Mamluk silks  
displaying patterns related to this type (4) must have  
constituted a substantial group. At least this is suggested by  
several surviving pieces (see silk 9 (7) ).

No less than nine Mamluk sultans bore the title  
'al-ashraf'. The present silk has been attributed to sultan  
al-Ashraf Qaitbay (1468-1496) (8) . However, if the  
representation on an Italian painting dated c. 1430 (see fig.7)  
can be considered a terminus ante quem, sultan al-Ashraf  
arsbay (1422-1437) seems a more likely candidate for the  
tribution of this silk.



Notes and bibliography.

Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, Washington DC, 1981), p.233.

Spuhler, F., The Arts of Islam, Catalogue of an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, (London, 1976), p. 81.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, p.137.

Atil, op. cit., p. 21 and Mayer, L.A., Saracenic Heraldry, (Oxford, 1933).

Atil, op. cit., pp.232-233.

Possibly inspired by Yuan silks, see Mackie, op. cit., p. 134-5.

Several other ex. are mentioned in Atil, op. cit., p.233.

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 46.



9. Silk damask with tear-shaped medallions and lotus flowers  
(photo 16).

V&A Museum number: 8614 - 1863.

Length: 43.5 cm.

Width: 39.5 cm.

Acquired by the Museum with the Bock collection in 1863 ' ' ' .

Published in:

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the  
medieval period , (London, 1924), p.46, pl.XIV.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National  
and International Considerations", Mugarnas , 11, p.  
137, pl.17.

There is another fragment of the same fabric in the Musée  
Historique des Tissus, Lyon (no: 22681 B55 - dimensions: 35 cm  
x 39.5 cm.), also acquired from the Bock collection in 1875.

Published in:

Cox, R., Les soieries d'art , (Paris, 1914), pl. 66 III.

Bernus-Taylor, Devoti and Vial, Etoffes merveilleuses du Musée  
historique des tissus, Lyon , (Paris, Gakken, 1976), pl.35.

The present fabric probably reached Europe shortly  
after its manufacture, when it was made into a vestment. This  
is suggested by the fact that a contemporary European orphrey  
was sewn up to this Mamluk silk (2) . The fragment under  
discussion shares most of the characteristics displayed by silk



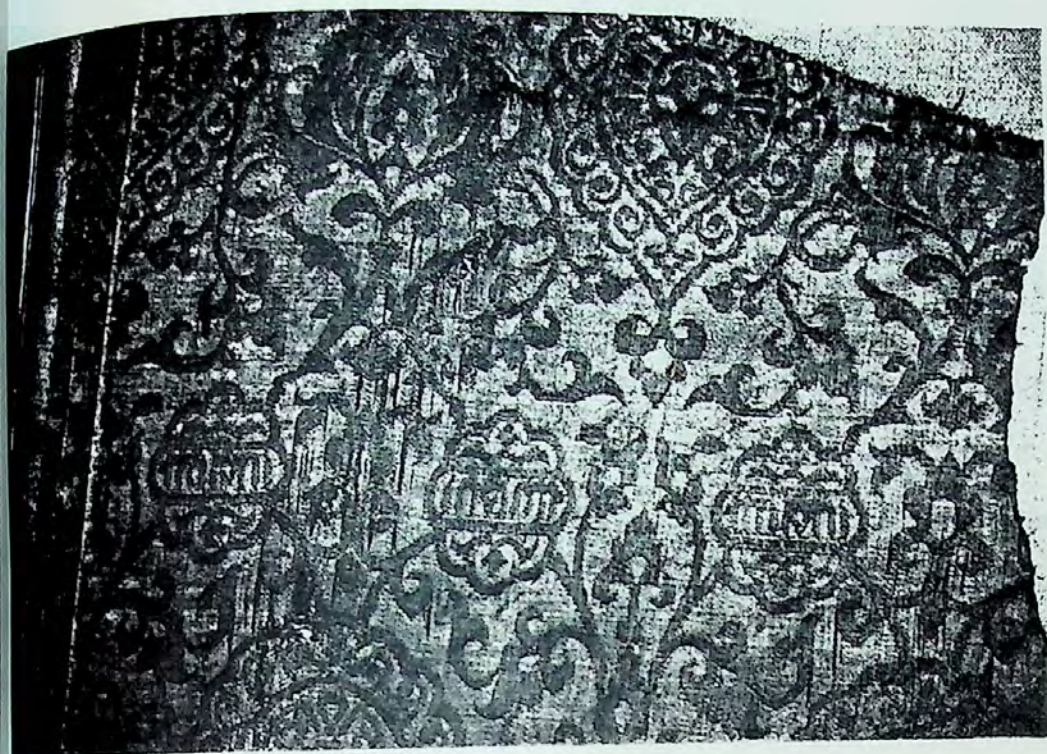


Photo 16



Photo 17, H. H. T. (22, 34)



a survival in Europe due to a similar function and a strikingly related pattern (3).

Here however, the weave is different. It is based on monochrome effect, where a tan coloured pattern is executed on a tan background. In the present damask, the contrast is obtained by the two faces of a satin binding: the background uses a warp-faced and the pattern a weft-faced satin. The maskhi inscription displayed on the tear-shaped medallions is arranged in a mirror-like fashion. It reads:

عز لهولانا السلطان  
izz li-mawlana al-ltan.

Glory to our master the [sultan (4)].

The inscription decorating the smaller eight-lobed medallions is reversed on every other medallion, as in silk 8. It reads:

السلطان الملك  
al-lta al-malik.

The [sul]ta[n] the king (5).

Damask effects were also used in Spanish and Italian silks of the late 14th century. Two examples in the Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon (see photos 17 and 18) betray a Mamluk influence in their damask background motifs. They display pseudo-arabic script, variations on the lotus blossom as well as lobed medallions.



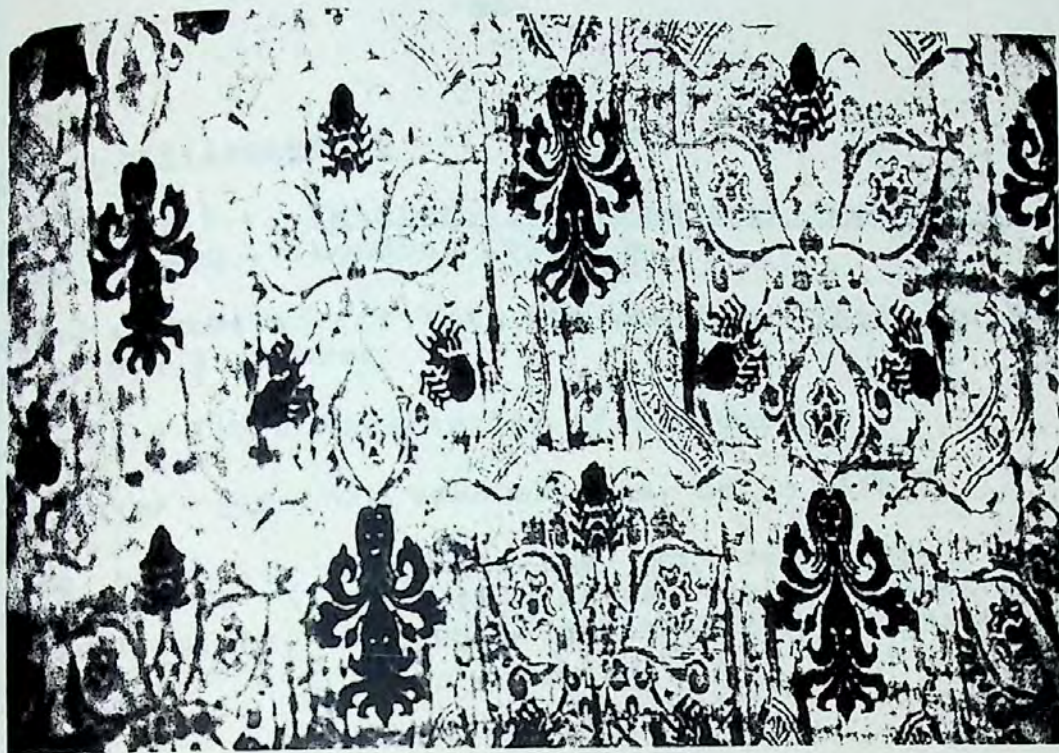


Photo 12 H.H.T. Lym (25436)

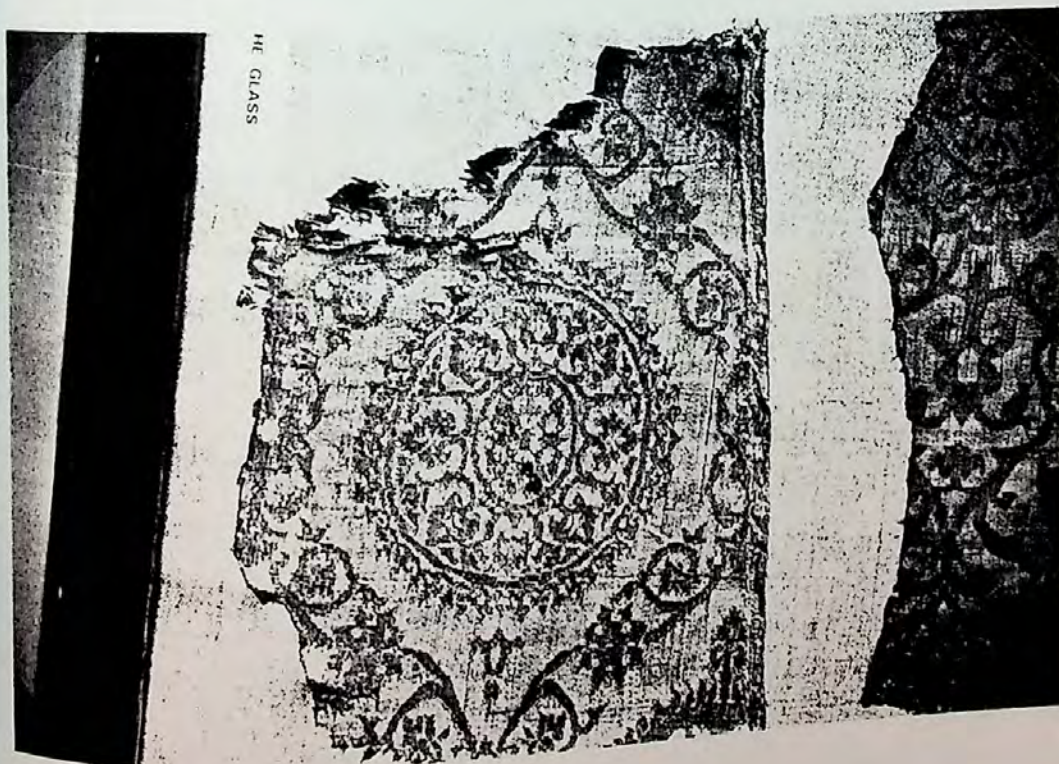


Photo 13



Notes and bibliography.

1) Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 46.

2) This is attested for both the V&A (see ibid. p. 46) and the Lyon, M.H.T. pieces.

3) See silk 8 for a description of the pattern.

4) The letter sin has been omitted, as in silk 7.

5) Here both the sin and the nun of sultan have been omitted, so as to gain space as well as for symmetry's sake: the visual effect is based on the vertical shafts of the letters.



10. Light blue silk damask with ogival lattice pattern  
(photo 19).

Museum number: 8640 - 1863.

Length: 23 cm.

Width: 31 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1863.

Published.

This monochrome light blue fragment displays the same weave as silk 9: a satin damask contrasting the two faces of the binding. The background uses a warp-faced and the pattern a weft-faced satin. The overall pattern consists of an ogival lattice enclosing round medallions. The lattice is formed by scrolling lotus blossoms and buds. The centre of the medallions is occupied by a lotus blossom framed by a circle. The space between this inner circle and an outer one is filled with a wreath composed of lotus blossoms and buds. The outer circle is framed by a smaller wreath combining similar lotus flowers and buds. This pattern is entirely based on variations of the lotus element, executed in different scales: the "flattened" round blossom, the five-petaled flower and the trefoil bud.

Another Mamluk polychrome silk displays a very similar arrangement: an ogival lattice enclosing central round elements; the latter are framed by a wreath combining trefoil



s flowers and buds <sup>(1)</sup> . Here again, we have a general  
ut characteristic of the textile medium <sup>(2)</sup> and therefore  
closely echoed in the other arts and crafts of the  
od <sup>(3)</sup> .

es and bibliography.

Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks ,  
hington DC, 1981), p. 231.

This fragment falls within category two of L. Mackie's  
elification, see Mackie, "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk  
s: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas ,  
p. 131.

he remarks concerning the general pattern layout as well as  
comparisons made for silk 2 and especially for silk 7 also  
y for the piece under discussion.



Silk with overall circle pattern and gazelles (photo 20).

Museum number: Ts 56 - 1898.

th: 60 cm.

h: 28 cm.

ired by the Museum in 1898.

ublished.

This bi-chrome silk displays an overall pattern based on a circle unit (1). The design is executed in light blue on an ivory coloured background. The circles are joined together by small triangles filled with spiky-petaled flowers. Each of the triangles is occupied by a flattened rosette (2). The centre of the roundels, outlined by the latter triangles and triangles, is filled with two gazelles placed back to back. The two quadrupeds are framed by an intermediary round border consisting of a repeated trefoil heart-shape.

The rendering of the gazelles finds close parallels in silk 6 as well as on a metalwork representation (3). The trefoil heart-shape border is echoed in architectural decoration, on a stone carving dated to the early 14th century (4). A very similar motif also occurs on the marble portal of a window in the mosque of Qijmas al-Ishaqi (1481) (see photo 21).



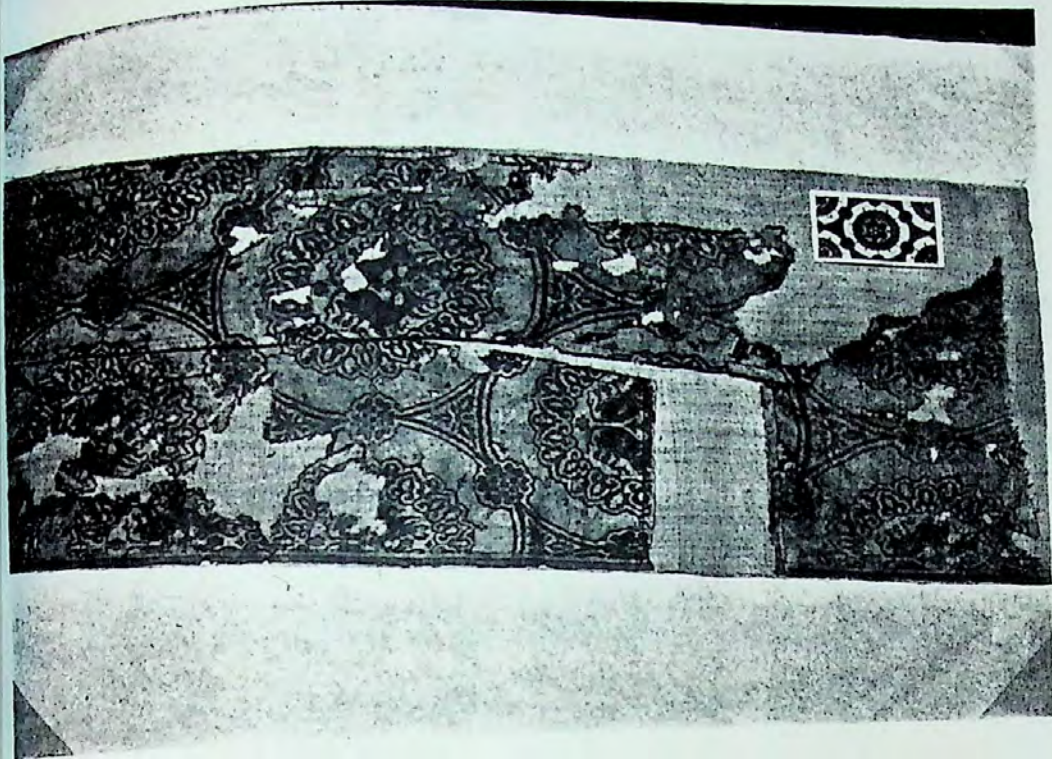


Photo 20

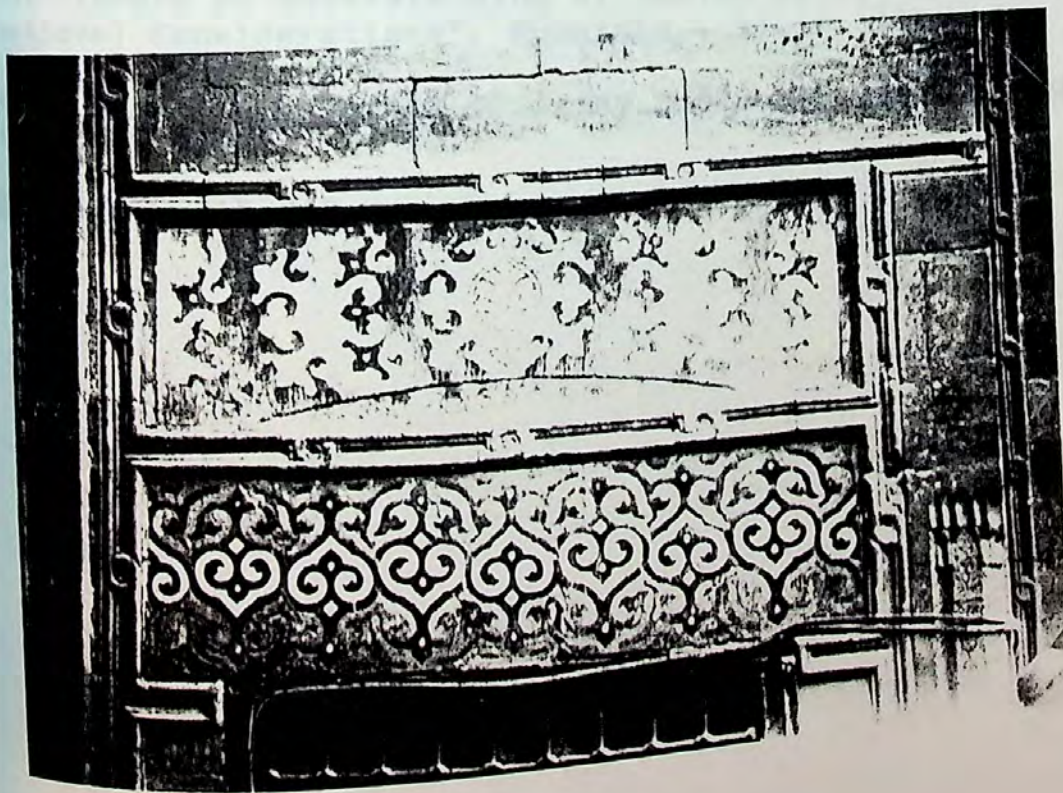


Photo 21



Both the individual components of this pattern and colour scheme are in line with Mamluk art in general. On the other hand, the mathematically divided layout follows the practice of the period (see silks 1,2,7,10).

References and bibliography.

It falls within category two of L. Mackie's classification, in her "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas, 11, p. 131.

Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, Washington DC, 1981), p. 76.

Ibid., pp. 215-216.



12. Silk fragment with lotus design (photo 22).

V&A Museum number: T 68 - 1958.

Length: 8 cm.

Width: 9 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1898. This piece is believed to come from the village of Trunka, near Assiut in Upper Egypt.

Unpublished.

This small fragment displays only a portion of the pattern. However, it is enough to reveal a design based on a lotus flower motif (see fig. 8 for an attempted reconstitution of part of the pattern (1)). The present variation on the lotus is characterized by lobed-and-spiky petals. Similar renditions of lotus petals occur on other Mamluk silks (see silks 7,9,13). The pattern is executed in light tan and medium blue on a dark blue background (2).

The centre of the lotus motif is occupied by a naskhi

inscription. It reads:

نصره

nasruhu

his victory

This word was probably preceded by the verb 'azza and thus expressed a very common eulogy formula: may his <sup>كز</sup> victory be glorious. The latter phrase was usually associated with the





Photo 22



Photo 23



mention of a ruler's name, or simply with the word sultan. The same wording occurs on two other Mamluk silks (3). The present V&A fragment is consistent with Mamluk textile production on account of its colour scheme, pattern and epigraphy.

#### Notes and bibliography.

- 1) This mechanically patterned silk uses a point-repeat which, in principle, allows a symmetrical reconstitution of any given portion of the design.
- 2) For other examples, see silks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13 and Atil, E. Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), pp. 230, 231, 236 and Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, pl. 11, 12, 13.
- 3) Mackie, op. cit., pl. 1, 9. This formula was used throughout the Mamluk period and on objects executed in various media: metalwork (ex., see Atil, op. cit. pp. 80, 84, 89, 101), glass (ex., see ibid., p. 131), stone carving (ex. see ibid., p. 217) and ceramics (ex. see ibid., p. 185; here the formula eulogizes an amir).



13. Silk with lotus scroll motif (photo 23).

V&A Museum number: 54 - 1892.

Length: 16 cm.

Width: 23.5 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1892.

Unpublished.

There is another fragment of the same fabric in the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin (no. 97.224.). The latter is published in: Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, II, p. 139, pl. 20.

The present piece uses an incomplete triple-cloth weave (1). The pattern is based on a lotus scroll motif executed in medium blue and outlined in white, the whole on a dark blue background. This V&A fragment is large enough to display a whole repeat unit. Like all the silks discussed so far (see silks 1-12 (2)), the present fabric uses a point-repeat. In other words, the pattern unit is composed of two identical half-units symmetrically executed on either side of a vertical axis (3). Here we have two ascending lotus scrolls juxtaposed in a mirror-like fashion (4).

The present lotus scroll motif was certainly inspired





Kat. Nr. 441

Fig. 9. Klesse  
Francesco Traini.  
St Dominikus and  
scenes of his life.  
Date: 1344-5.



Kat. Nr. 442

Fig. 10. Klesse  
Niccolo di Semitecolo?  
Crowning of Mary  
Date: 1355.



Chinese blue and white porcelains of the late Yüan period (13th-14th century). One of the most prominent motifs displayed on the latter ceramics is the lotus scroll (3). The Chinese patterning of this motif is characteristically free-flowing, whereas on the present silk it is executed in a more strictly ordered and symmetrical fashion. This was to satisfy the demands of both the medium (using a mechanical patterning device) and the Chinese taste for symmetry. Even the colour scheme chosen here resembles that of blue and white porcelains.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, related scroll patterns were also popular. This can be seen in a whole group of silks represented on Italian paintings of the 14th century. The motifs are based on scrolling stems enclosing various kinds of flowers or leaves (see figs 9 and 10 (4)). Interestingly, most of the silks in this group display an ordered and symmetrical layout. This is not really surprising, given the greater readiness of 14th century Italian designers to adopt motifs and patterns originating in the Far East. On the contrary, in the Islamic sphere, decorative arrangements were based on a mathematical division of space and the concept of symmetry was only reluctantly accepted.



Notes and bibliography.

- 1) Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, p. 139. See chapter III for a summary description of this weave.
- 2) Except for silk 6 which uses a straight repeat.
- 3) See chapter III for a summary description of this technical process.
- 4) On the fragment published by L. Mackie ( op. cit. ), the pattern is fragmented in such a way that the point-repeat unit cannot be distinguished. This is probably why she described the layout as asymmetrical (see ibid. p. 131).
- 5) See ex. in KrahI, R., Chinese ceramics in the Topkapi Saray museum, Istanbul, ed. J. Ayers, (London, 1986), p. 494 pl.565,566,567, p.495 pl.568,569.
- 6) Other ex. in Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), pp. 435, 436, 437, 438, all dated between 1344 and 1420.



4. Silk with overall diamond pattern (photo 24).

Museum number: 319 - 1907.

Length: 23 cm.

Width: 20 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1907.

Published.

There is another fragment of the same fabric in the *Musées  
royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*, Brussels, published in Errera, I.,  
Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, 3<sup>e</sup> éd.,  
Bruxelles, 1927), no 21a p. 42.

This bi-chrome silk combines a dark red colour with a light tan, creating an effective contrast. The fabric's surface is divided into successive rows of identically sized diamonds. In every other row, the centre of the lozenges is occupied by a small dark red rosette outlined on a light tan diamond of intermediary size. The alternating rows of lozenges are filled with an overall combination of small triangles executed in dark red and light tan. This pattern, entirely based on the diamond shape (triangles are a sub-division of lozenges), fully exploits the purity of a simple geometric form. The same quality of design can be seen in silk 5. Such patterns can be related to the marble floors and panellings decorating the interior of Mamluk buildings. Some of the most striking examples can be found in the mausoleum of sultan Qala'un in





Fig. 11. Kham  
 Shigap, 25th cent.  
 Del. P. A. G. G.  
 Journal of S. G. G.  
 1923.

to 24



Photo 25



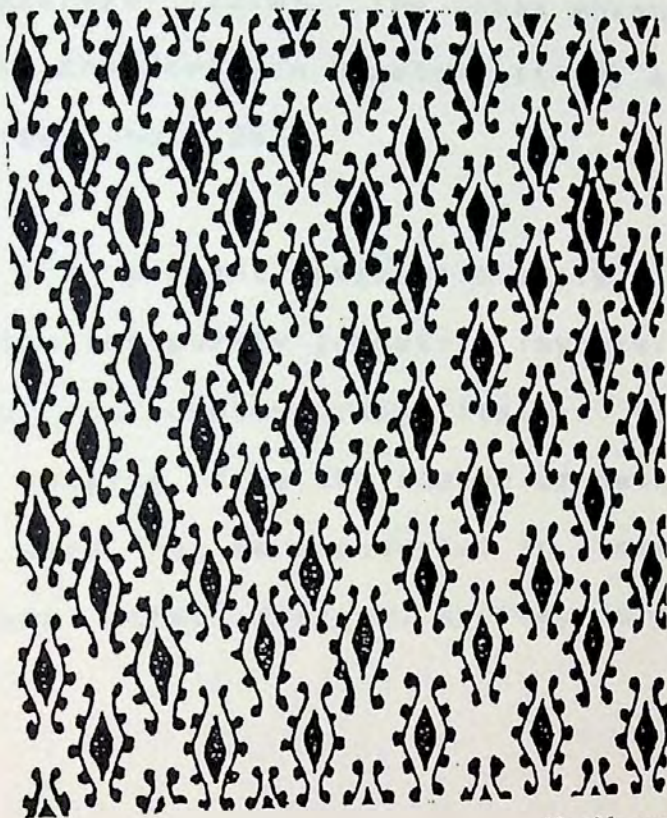


Fig. 11. Klesse,  
Jacopo Di Mino  
Del Pellicciaio  
Crowning of St Catherine  
with Saints.  
Date: 1363.

Kat. Nr. 139

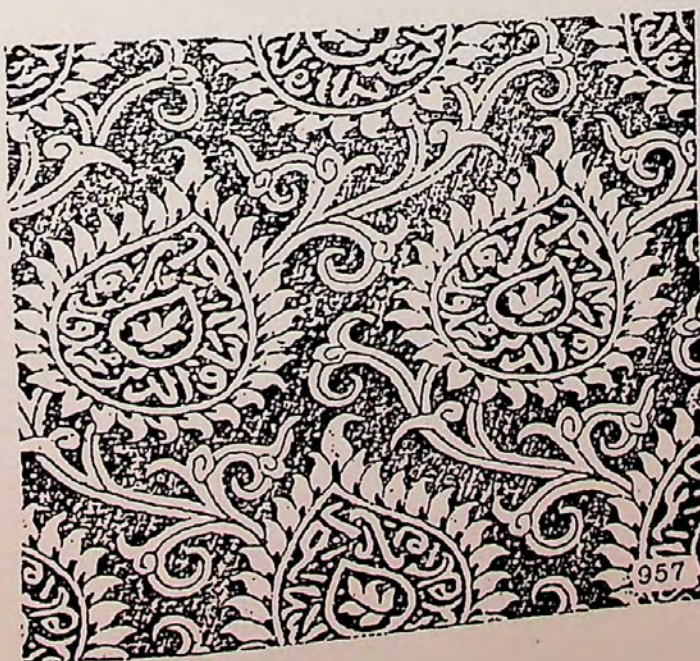


Fig. 12. Kendrick,  
Plate XII.

957



ayn al-Qasrayn (1279). The later mosque of sultan Ashraf  
arsbay in the Northern Cemetery (1432) also offers some fine  
examples (see photo 25).

The present fragment clearly illustrates the Mamluk  
predilection for purely geometric layouts. Related arrangements  
also occur on contemporary Italian silks (see fig. 11).  
However, judging from the number of catalogued pieces, such  
patterns were not as successful in Italy as ogival, animal,  
vegetal and other designs, as they form a less substantial  
group.



5. Chinese green silk damask (photo 26).

A Museum number: 769 - 1898.

Length: 27 cm.

Width: 27 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1898. This piece is believed to come from al-A'zam in Upper Egypt (1).

Published in:

Hendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 39, pl. XII.

Schmidt, H.J., Alte Seidenstoffe, (Braunschweig, 1958), p. 31, Abb. 131.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas, 11, p. 140, pl. 21.

There is another fragment of the same fabric in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (no. 2226), published in Mostafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, 15 (oct. 1955), p. 4.

This green silk damask contrasts the two faces of a satin weave (2). The pattern (seen more clearly on photo 27 and fig. 12) consists of slightly asymmetrical ogival lotus palmettes placed in an ascending fashion on undulating stems. The clearly asymmetrical arrangement of this design, quite atypical of Mamluk production, has led L. Mackie to identify



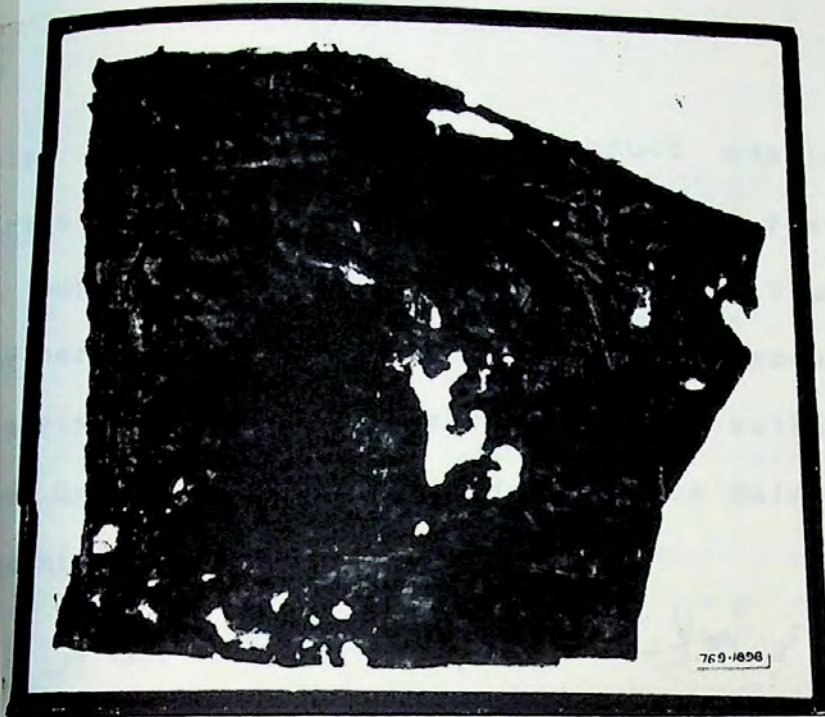


Photo 26

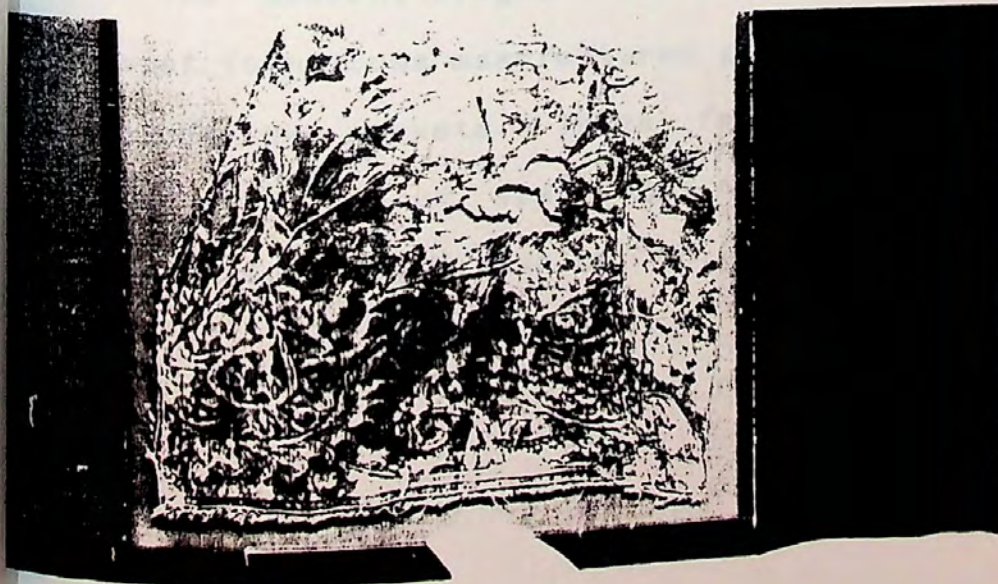


Photo 27



is silk as a Chinese product adapted for the Mamluk market (3). The present layout closely resembles designs found purely Yüan silks such as the one illustrated on fig. 13. Furthermore, this V&A fragment, manufactured on Yüan looms, clearly designates its recipient as sultan al-Nasir Muhammad in Qala'un (1293-1341). Every lotus palmette bears one of two skhi inscriptions (4) :

عز لولانا السلطان الملك الناصر

zz li-mawlana al-sultan al-malik al-nasir

ory to our master the sultan al-Malik al-Nasir

ناصر الدنيا والدين محمد [بن] قلاؤن

sir al-dunya wal-din Muhammad [ibn] Qala'un

otector of the world and the religion Muhammad [ibn] Qala'un.

The present fragment provides tangible evidence that number of Yüan looms manufactured goods exclusively destined for the Mamluk markets. These fabrics, in their turn, influenced some Mamluk specimens, although the latter were executed in a more rigid fashion (5).



tes and bibliography.

Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 39.

Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, 11, 21, p. 140.

Ibid., p. 140. This piece falls within category 4 of classification in which: "the layout is asymmetrical, med with free-flowing elements"(p. 131).

The legibility is better on the fragment published in Stafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, 15 (oct. 5), p.24.

See ex. in Mackie, op. cit., p. 140, fig.3 and p. 132.



Notes and bibliography.

1) Kendrick, A.F., Catalogue of Muhammadan textiles of the medieval period, (London, 1924), p. 39.

2) Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Mugarnas, 11, 1.21, p. 140.

3) Ibid., p. 140. This piece falls within category 4 of the classification in which: "the layout is asymmetrical, formed with free-flowing elements" (p. 131).

4) The legibility is better on the fragment published in Mostafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, 15 (oct. 1955), p.24.

5) See ex. in Mackie, op. cit., p. 140, fig.3 and p. 132.



16. Chinese damask with cloud motif (photo 28).

V&A Museum number: 753 - 1898.

Length: 32 cm.

Width: 24 cm.

Acquired by the Museum in 1898.

Published in:

Howell-Smith, A.D., Brief Guide to the Chinese Woven Fabrics  
(V&A Museum, Department of textiles), (London, 1925), pl.1.

Braun-Ronsdorf, "Les damas de soie", Les Cahiers Ciba, 64,  
(Bâle, 1956), p. 11.

Soame Jenyns, R., Arts de la Chine, (Fribourg, 1965), p. 71,  
pl.28.

Other fragments of the same fabric are:

In the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, published  
in Errera, I., Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, 3<sup>e</sup>  
éd., (Bruxelles, 1927), p. 89 no.72 '' .

In the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (no 2225), published in  
Mostafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, 15  
(Oct. 1955), p. 25. and in Feddersen, M., Chinesisches  
Kunstgewerbe, (Braunschweig, 1958), p. 231 Abb. 213.

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund  
(1946), published in Simmons, P., "Crosscurrents in Chinese Silk  
History", The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, IX, (nov.  
1950), p. 93. and in Sherman E. Lee, Wai-Kam Ho, Chinese Art  
under the Mongols: the Yüan Dynasty (1279-1368), (Cleveland





Photo 28



um of Art, 1968), n. 300.

the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (no 979.196), published in  
lmer, Keall, Nogai-Berthrong, Silk roads - China ships,  
yal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 1983), p. 196.

of these fragments is also published in Schrader,  
Les soieries anciennes d'Asie, (Braunschweig, 1962),  
31 (2) .

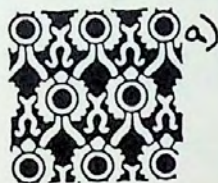
The present V&A fragment is believed to come from a  
mb in al-A'zam, near Asiut in Upper Egypt (3) . It displays a  
ill damask which contrasts two hues of blue threads (4) . As  
th the previous specimen silk 15, this fabric belongs to a  
ategory of Yuan silks especially manufactured for export to  
e Mamluk markets. The layout is characteristically  
ymmetrical, combining palmette-derived motifs on undulating  
ems. The outline of the palmettes is formed by a Chinese  
loud design framing a central roundel. The latter is occupied  
y a Chinese rendering of a square kufic inscription, which can  
e interpreted as the first part of the shahada ( la ilah  
ill-allah ) (5) . Each palmette is tipped by a small roundel  
earing the Chinese character shou (6) which means  
longevity". The latter word could be regarded as a translation  
f the Arabic vocable al-baqa', "long life". This word ranks  
among the dozen most common eulogy formulae encountered in  
mamluk secular art (7) .

Another yellow silk damask, supposedly found in





Fig. 13. Geijer,  
A History of Textile Art,  
p. 145. Chinese silk  
from about 1300.



b) Fig. 14. Schrader,  
Les Soieries anciennes d'Asie,  
p. 30. China 14th century.  
b): Detail of a)



Fig. 15. Geijer, p. 186.  
Chinese silk.



Fustat (a) displays a strikingly similar pattern using the same cloud-palmettes framing a shahada in square kufic as well as the shou character, the only differing element being that the stems are arranged in a lattice fashion (see fig.14). A layout closely related to that of the present V&A fabric occurs on yet another Yüan silk damask of the same group (see fig.15) (a). In the present V&A fragment, both the use of square kufic letters and of a Chinese character echoing the Arabic notion of long life clearly illustrate the efforts of the Yüan weavers to please their Mamluk clientèle.

#### Notes and bibliography.

- 1) This piece was donated to the Musées Royaux by I. Errera, see her Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, (Bruxelles, 1927), p. 89.
- 2) This author does not specify which museum the pieces he illustrates belong to.
- 3) Howell-Smith, A.D., Brief Guide to the Chinese Woven Fabrics, (V&A Museum, Dpt of Textiles), (London, 1925).
- 4) Soame Jenyns, R., Arts de la Chine, (Fribourg, 1965), p. 71.
- 5) Fine examples of Mamluk square kufic are to be found in the mausoleum of sultan Qala'un in Bayn al-Qasrayn (1279).
- 6) Soame Jenyns, op. cit., p. 71.
- 7) The word al-baqa' occurs on two pieces of metalwork, see Atil, E., Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), pp. 57, 58 and 64, both dated to the last third of the 13th century.
- 8) Found in a tomb in Upper Egypt, see Geijer, A., History of Textile Art, (London, 1979), p. 186.



## CHAPTER V.

### Concluding remarks.

All of the sixteen silk fragments discussed above found their way into the V&A Museum collection in the last years of the 19th century or in the first decade of this century. The ultimate provenance of most of these fabrics is Egypt. The successive channels of transmission which brought these stuffs out of the Egyptian sands and into the store-rooms of the V&A Museum are not well documented (1). Furthermore, most of these fragments are the result of "uncontrolled" excavations (2). In other words, in the absence of any archeological context, the question of dating becomes somewhat more problematic.

The samples of Mamluk fabrics in the V&A Museum show that the same type of textiles were used for various functions. Similar kinds of silks were equally intended for various items of clothing such as skull-caps (3), robes (4), sandals (5) and even shrouds (6). The same remark applies to silk furnishings. The fashion and technical trends of the period



inated the totality of the textile output. This can be seen in the weaves, colour schemes, motifs and inscriptions played on Mamluk silks, all of which share the same basic characteristics (7). The major variations are to be found in more or less "rich" quality of the silks: the finer specimens are thicker and heavier and make lavish use of gold and silver threads (8). Contrary to other media such as glass and metalwork, no portion of the textile production was intended for religious usage (9). This industry, like that of ceramics, was essentially secular.

An iconographical analysis of the fourteen Mamluk silk fragments in the V&A Museum suggests at least three distinct groups within this corpus. The division proposed here is based on the pattern layouts:

1) The first group clearly forms the overwhelming majority. It displays overall (clear or implied) lattice arrangements. Four pieces show an ogival lattice (see silks 7,8,9,10 (10)). Two fragments have a lozenge lattice (see silks 1,2). One fabric displays a lattice formed by juxtaposed roundels (see silk 1).

2) The second group is illustrated by three silks. Here the general arrangements are based on purely geometric outlines. Horizontal bands (see silk 6), a chevron (see silk 5), lozenges and triangles (see silk 14) respectively determine the space division of these three fragments.

3) The third group is represented by one piece (see silk 13)



which presents a pattern based on the lotus scroll motif, probably inspired by Yuan blue and white. Future research and excavations might uncover other Mamluk fabrics directly influenced by 14th century Chinese blue and white (11).

However, the individual decorative elements forming these various pattern layouts are indifferently found in all three groups. The lotus flower and the rosette are equally used as decorative units on silks which belong to group 1 (12), 2 (13) and 3 (14). The most common colour scheme found on Mamluk silks (ivory, dark and medium blue) also occurs in all the groups. Furthermore, both the epigraphy and the content/wording of the inscriptions are consistent throughout groups 1 and 2. All these shared characteristics confer on Mamluk silks a unity which is easily perceivable.

Judging from the number of surviving Mamluk silks, it would seem that the two most successful arrangements were banded layouts (15) and ogival lattices (16). Striped and banded arrangements conform to earlier Islamic textile traditions (Abbasid and Yemeni striped cloths and Fatimid banded fabrics). However, Mamluk textiles are the earliest Islamic fabrics displaying ogival lattices. This is partly explained by the fact that such arrangements depended on mechanical patterning devices (17). Both types of layout were part of the international textile fashion of the period and



also produced in China, Central Asia, Spain and Italy. In the sphere of Islamic textiles, offshoots of these layouts were in favour much later. This can be seen in North African and striped silks of the 16th to 18th century (19) as well as in the celebrated 15th and 16th century Bursa silks and tiles which display ogival lattices (20). The latter, in turn, influenced some 15th century Italian tiles (21).

An examination of the iconography displayed on Mamluk vessels invariably excites the question of external influences. Between the 13th and 15th century, textiles were the major channel for the transmission of aesthetic ideas between East and West. In the Islamic sphere, the Chinese lotus flower was first used as a decorative theme on Sultanabad ware. This new element was directly inspired from Chinese export silks of the Sung and early Yüan period. Throughout the Mongol period, artistic as well as technical innovations circulated both ways between the Chinese and Islamic worlds. Under the Yüan dynasty, Chinese exports to the Middle East reached bulk proportions. Ceramics held the second place after silks in this trade (22). On the other hand, the major Islamic exports to China were textiles and metalwork. The latter medium had a crucial influence on the development of the decoration of Yüan blue and white (23). This ware was expressly produced for the Islamic markets, where it was conveyed by the powerful Persian and Arab merchant communities based in the Chinese ports (24). The



revolutionary introduction of cobalt blue in Chinese porcelain place in the second and third decades of the 14th century. new pigment was introduced from the Middle East, possibly through members of the Arab and Persian population established in China (25).

Unfortunately, Yuan silk production and trade is not well documented. There are reports of the Mongols settling Muslim craftsmen in China (26). Could it be that the artisans included weavers and silk workers? Textiles were more easily transported than ceramics, the major part of which reached Mamluk territory by the sea route, via the Red sea ports. A portion of the Chinese textiles exported to Mamluk markets must have been conveyed by the same maritime route. However, an important part of the silk trade used the land route across Central Asia. The fabrics transported along the caravan route also included specimens of Central Asian production. This is attested by the often quoted passage in al-Feda. In his Mukhtasar, this author describes the presents brought by the envoys of the Mongol ruler Abu Said to Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad in 724 A.H. (1324 A.D.). Among other gifts, the Mamluk sultan was presented with seven hundred pieces of fabrics inscribed with his titles (27).

The existence of an important influx of Chinese textiles into the Mamluk sphere is also attested by a group of Chinese silks uncovered in Egypt (see silks 15, 16).



istically, these fabrics are clearly Chinese in their use of asymmetry and cloud motifs. However, they betray a marked willingness to adopt an Islamic overtone in displaying Arabic script. Other Yüan silks survived in European church treasures. They consist of two major groups which are stylistically unrelated. One is formed by a number of fabrics exclusively for the Islamic markets. Their pattern layouts are distinctly derived from Mamluk designs: horizontal bands of strictly geometric outlines determine the space division. Khlī inscriptions as well as moon crescents occur on these silks. The Chinese influence appears in the form of single motifs such as dragons (28), tortoises (29), fantastic creatures and ducks (30).

The second group shows no Islamic feature and was probably intended for European export. Both symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangements occur, as well as a whole range of Chinese motifs based on lotus flowers, dragons, khilins, cranes and phoenixes (31). The fourth and last group of surviving Yüan silks is in Japan, where these fabrics were used to cover tea-ceremony objects (32). The Japanese tradition of importing Chinese silks began in the 7th century (33) and continued uninterrupted until the 17th century (34). The Yüan silks preserved in Japan were probably intended for export to this specific market, as they show patterns which differ greatly from those displayed in the previous three groups. These fabrics mainly use designs with "semi-conventionalized animals



cartouche "frames" of clouds or foliage which are arranged horizontal rows against a geometric-patterned ground of monochrome damask weave" (33).

Therefore, it would seem that a substantial proportion of the Yüan textile production was exported. The Islamic world, Europe and Japan constituted the three major markets, each of which had its specific demands. The Chinese weavers showed themselves particularly able to adapt their products to these respective clientèles. However, there is one major lacuna as regards the study of the textiles of that period: practically no example of Yüan silks has yet been found in China itself (34). Until further research is conducted in that field, no general picture of the Chinese home consumption of silk during the 13th-14th century can be traced.

On the other hand, this lack of material in China would point to a typically Yüan phenomenon. Studies on Yüan blue and white have shown that these ceramics were first and foremost an export ware which "developed as the result of inspiration from Islam and for the Islamic market" (35). Very few examples of Yüan blue and white were found in China, the main collections being abroad, in the Topkapı Museum and in the Ardebil Shrine Collection (now in Teheran). Under the Mongol dynasty, Chinese imperial court taste no longer dictated the artistic trends and the Yüan rulers kept the traditional ruling classes out of the reaches of power. Moreover, the latter lost



their economic strength. The Mongols were also determined to derive a maximum profit from commerce and therefore encouraged export industries (38). It could consequently be argued that looms mainly worked for export and less for home consumption, in the same way as Yüan kilns produced ceramics in bulk quantities for the Middle East and only a small proportion for the local markets. Furthermore their products were not congenial to Chinese native taste. This "Yüan phenomenon" would also explain the great readiness of the Chinese weavers to adopt Islamic layouts and motifs. However, these suggestions will remain tentative until more light is shed on the problem of Yüan silks in China.

Following the ruin of Mongol rule in China in 1368, there was a breach of Chinese trade with the Middle East at the beginning of the Ming period. This more or less coincided with Timur's devastating campaigns in Iran and Central Asia. It is only at the beginning of the 15th century that commerce between China and the Islamic world was resumed on a large scale. For the first time important maritime expeditions were sponsored by the Chinese emperors (39). However, most of the sea-borne commerce was then shifted to the Persian Gulf and Hormuz, whereas in the 14th century it was directed to the Red Sea ports. The latter destinations lost their pre-eminence in favour of the Persian ports. The increasing prosperity of the Timurids offered more lucrative prospects than the, by then, declining wealth of the Mamluks. An important land traffic was



so resumed between the Ming and Timurid rulers (40).

The better part of early Ming export production therefore reached Iran rather than Egypt and Syria. The quantity of Ming porcelains uncovered in Fustat and Damascus is very small compared to the numerous specimens of 14th century Chinese blue and white (41). The same is true of textiles: no specimen of Ming fabrics has yet been reported or excavated in Egypt or Syria. This is why the impact of Chinese aesthetics on Mamluk art has to be traced back to Yüan ceramics and textiles. The influence of early Ming art was minimal in 15th century Egypt and Syria.

Interestingly, the same phenomenon took place in Italy. The pax mongolica favoured direct contacts between China and Italy. Silks were by far the most important merchandise brought from the Far East (42). Yüan fabrics such as the famous silks found in the tomb of Can Grande della Scala in Verona (43) had a crucial influence on the development of Italian silk design. The Lucchese, Venetian and Florentine silk industries were then at the beginning of a spectacular expansion and were still permeable to exterior influences. In the late 14th and early 15th century trade with the Far East was almost exclusively in the hands of Middle Eastern merchants and Chinese silks reached exorbitant prices (44). At the same time, in Italy, the demand for rich fabrics increased. The response of the local ateliers was not so much to imitate



ese designs, but to integrate both Chinese and Islamic  
nts into an original style. The latter products supplanted  
ntal specimens because they were more appealing to the  
elling Gothic taste in Europe (45). The Italian silk  
gners therefore successfully absorbed two waves of  
icism and found ready markets for their products both at  
and in Northern Europe (46). Contrary to woolen cloths,  
vidence has emerged so far proving that 13th and 14th  
ury Italian silks were exported to the Near East.

The mutual influences of the three main silk  
ducing areas, China, the Mamluk Near East and Italy, were  
only exerted in the late 13th century and early 14th  
tury (47). This took place when the textile industries of  
se respective regions were particularly open to both  
chnical and aesthetic innovations. The Yuan industry was then  
er to adapt to the demands of markets abroad and the Italian  
llers were experimenting with a whole range of new ideas.  
Mamluks were perhaps less receptive: their introduction of  
hese elements was very selective. If the lotus flower motif  
adopted with enthusiasm, other Chinese designs of dragons,  
lins phoenixes and the notion of asymmetry were not as  
ccessful (48). On the other hand, the Mamluks do not seem to  
ve borrowed much from the inventive Italian designers.  
however, their own assertive style showed its impact both East  
nd West.



The problem of dating Mamluk fabrics with any precision within the period extending from 1250 to 1517 remains acute. Of the sixteen V&A fragments discussed above, only one piece can be dated with any certainty from internal evidence. It is the Yuan specimen silk 15 which bears an inscription explicitly mentioning sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad Qala'un (1294-1340). The precision of this dating is relative, as it could place this silk any time in the 46 years of sultan Muhammad ibn Qala'un (with two interruptions). However, this fragment is a Yuan product and can therefore not be used as an absolute landmark in the dating of Mamluk silks. Silks 1, 6, 8 have tentatively been attributed respectively to sultans Ashraf Khalil (1290-1294), Nasir al-Din Muhammad (1294-1340) and Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1437). Again, these attributions are based on the inscriptions displayed on these fragments.

Any other attempt at dating more pieces within the present corpus would have to rely entirely on external evidence. The latter process implies a stylistic comparison with dated objects in other media. For example, an ogival lattice arrangement occurs on an Ayyubid brass ewer dated 629 A.H. (1232 A.D.) (49). However, it would seem rash to propose an early Mamluk date for silk pieces displaying ogival lattices such as silk 7. Even if such silks are placed within the first century of Mamluk art (say before 1350), then the comparison with closely related Italian silks represented on



paintings would cause even more confusion, as these paintings are dated to the 15th century (see figs. 5,7). On the other hand, silk 8, tentatively attributed to sultan Ashraf Barsbay (1422-1437), also displays an implied ogival layout (50). In other words, comparison with other media cannot be effectively considered in an attempt to date Mamluk silks with great precision. At the most, this comparative material shows that Mamluk silks are consistent with the art of that period.



Notes and bibliography.

The only two exceptions being the mention of one donator (Jayer-Anderson for silk 6) and one collector (silk 9 was acquired with the Bock collection). The fabrics most probably passed through the hands of dealers in Cairo and were then bought by art-dealers in various parts of Europe. This is attested by what can be concluded from the examination of I. Errera's Catalogue d'étoffes anciennes et modernes, (Bruxelles, 1927). The famous collector mentions the art-dealers from whom she bought her pieces. For the Islamic textiles in her collection, antique-dealers in Paris and Florence are often mentioned. On the other hand, it must have been common practice to cut textile fragments into several smaller pieces, no doubt to increase the profits made in retailing. This is why fragments of the same fabric are often scattered in various museums (see silks 5,6,7,9,13,14,16). These retailing practices were not limited to Islamic textiles; they are also attested for medieval European fabrics.

) Except for silks 8,9 which probably reached Europe in the late Middle Ages.

) See silks 3,4.

) Schmidt, H., "Damaste der Mamlukenzeit", Ars Islamica, I (1934), fig. 10.

) Spuhler, F., Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection, (London, 1978), p. 162 no. 91

) Mackie, L., "Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations", Muqarnas, II, p. 132, pl. 7.

) The type of naskhi script used on Mamluk silks is very consistent within the whole group as well as the content and wording of these inscriptions.

) Ex. silk 8.

) With the exception of the veils made to cover the ka'ba.

) Implied in silks 8,9.

) Perhaps another candidate for this group is a silk damask in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin, published in Schmidt, op. cit., fig. 9.

) Silks 2,11 display rosettes and silks 1,7,8,9,10 lotus



flowers.

- 3) Silk 14 has small rosettes and silk 6 bears a variation in the lotus bud.
- 4) Silk 13 displays small rosettes as well as lotus flowers.
- 5) See silk 6, Mackie, op. cit., pls.6,7,9,10,11, Atil, E. Renaissance of Islam - Art of the Mamluks, (Washington DC, 1981), pp. 234,236, Schmidt, op. cit., fig.12.
- 6) See silks 7,8,9,10, Atil, op. cit., pp.231,232,235, Schmidt, op. cit., fig.11 Mostafa, M., "Mamluk Brocades", Egypt Travel Magazine, 15 (oct. 1955), p. 21, fig.2, von Falke, O., Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei, (Berlin, 1913), Abb. 367.
- 7) See chap. 3.
- 8) Ex. in Lafontaine-Dosogne, J., Textiles islamiques, 2 Proche-Orient et Méditerranée, (Bruxelles, 1983), pls. 15,16.
- 9) Ex. in ibid., pls. 19,21b,24,25,26. Another group of 17th and 18th century Ottoman silks favours chevron arrangements (ibid., pls.28,29) which could be traced back to Mamluk pieces such as silk 5.
- 20) See ex. in Lemberg, M., Schmedding, B., Abegg-Stiftung Bern. in Riggisberg, 11 Textilien, (Bern, 1973), pls. 32,33,34.
- 21) Medley, M., Yüan Porcelain and Stoneware, (London, 1974), p. 31.
- 22) Idem, "Chinese ceramics and Islamic design", The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts from the 14th to 18th century ed. W. Watson, Colloquies on Art and Archeology in Asia, n.3, (London, 1972), p.3.
- 23) Idem, Yüan Porcelain and Stoneware, pp. 4-6.
- 24) ibid., pp. 30-40.
- 25) Krah, R., Chinese ceramics in the Topkapi Saray museum, Istanbul, ed. J. Ayers, (London, 1986), p. 481, n.1
- 26) The Arabic text specifies that these textiles were made in Central Asia, see Abul Feda, 'Imad al-Din Ismail, Prince of Hama, al-mukhtasar fi akhbar al-bashar, (ed. Misr), vol.4, p. 93.



- 17) Mackie, op. cit., p.142, pl.23.
- 18) von Falke, op. cit., Abb. 341.
- 19) Geijer, A., A History of Textile Art, (London, 1979), pl. 2a.
- 20) Ex. see in Klesse, B., Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei der 14. Jahrhunderts, (Bern, 1967), Abb. 70, 75, 77, 86, Geijer, op. cit., pl.29b and p. 145, figs 2, 3, 4, 5, Schrader, W., Les soieries anciennes d'Asie, (Braunschweig, 1962), p.28, figs.3,4,5 and p.35.
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- 24) Ibid., p. 37 and pls. 3a,b,c,d.
- 25) Sherman and Ho, op. cit., p. 72.
- 26) Medley, M., "Chinese ceramics and Islamic design", op. cit., p.3.
- 27) Idem, Yüan Porcelain and Stoneware.
- 28) Especially between 1405 and 1433, see Pope, A., Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine, (Washington DC, 1956), p.24. Previous to that period, maritime commercial operations were in the hands of Arab and Persian merchants.
- 29) There are reports of exchanges of embassies between the two countries as well as numerous missions sent both ways. The envoys to China were mostly interested in bringing back silks and porcelains, see Ibid., pp.20-23.
- 30) Medley, "Chinese ceramics and Islamic design", pp. 5-6.
- 31) The increasingly rich Italian patrician classes do not seem to have been interested in ceramics.
- 32) Santangelo, A., Art Italien. Le tissu du XII au XVIII siècle, (Milan, 1959), pls. 21-23.



43) Olschki, L., "Asiatic exoticism in Italian Art of the early Renaissance", The Art Bulletin, 26, (1944), p. 102.

44) Ibid., p. 103.

45) For ex. of silks with integrated Mamluk or Chinese motifs, see Wardwell, A., "The stylistic development of 14th and 15th century Italian silk design", Aachener Kunstblätter, 47, figs. 10, 30, 31, 33.

46) By the early 15th century, the Chinese impact had shifted to Iran and Ottoman Turkey. On the other hand, Europe had entered the Gothic period and was therefore less permeable to Oriental influences. Mamluk art was then well past its formative period and in the 15th century, it continued to develop, but without major external influences.

47) One Mamluk silk displays an asymmetrical arrangement. However, it is executed in a much more rigid fashion than the Yuan examples it was inspired from, see Mackie, op. cit., p. 140, fig. 3.

48) Atil, E., Chase, W., Jett, P., Islamic metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art, (Washington DC, 1985), p. 117 no. 16.

49) Similarly, the pattern on silk 5 has been compared to architectural marble decoration occurring on monuments dated between 1356 and 1432. Some elements in the pattern of silk 11 are echoed in architectural decoration found equally in the early 14th century and as late as 1481.



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