The supposed dissipation of figural imagery in Mamluk art: a study of Mamluk iconography

Jennifer Peruski

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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The Supposed Dissipation of Figural Imagery in Mamluk Art: A Study of Mamluk Iconography

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

by

Jennifer Peruski

Under the supervision of Dr. Bernard O’Kane

05/2104
Dedication

To Mom and Dad,

You helped me discover my love of museums and traveling.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the Arab and Islamic Civilizations Department at the American University in Cairo for their encouragement and support throughout my degree. Both the professors and secretaries have made it possible to me to continue my studies and pursue my interest in Islamic art. Dr. Bernard O’Kane was a fantastic professor and advisor for my thesis, without whom I would not have learned nearly so much. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Ellen Kenney for her help and support over the course of my degree as well as her input and advice on my thesis. Dr. Chahinda Karim, as well, was a fountain of knowledge throughout my time at the American University, and I thank her so much for her guidance.

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Chapter 1

The Problem of Mamluk Iconography and its Historical Context

Introduction

The arts of the Mamluks are considered a particularly rich field of study stretching over a nearly three hundred-year period. Diverse in their make-up, the progression and development of this art began with strong Ayyubid and Jaziran influences that quickly evolved into a style that was uniquely Mamluk. Key in these developments were significant victories against the Crusaders in the Levant and the Ilkhanids in greater Iran. These victories resulted in the physical and visual spoliation of monuments and iconography from the defeated realms. Moreover, our knowledge of these events is further aided by particularly prominent Mamluk historians, in addition to legal documents such as waqfiyyas. Yet, for all of the available material on the subject, there still remain significant lapses in our understanding of the Mamluk period, namely the extent to which figural imagery factored into the production of its art.

Scholars of Islamic art have long held that figural imagery all but disappeared in later progressions of Mamluk art, most notably following the reign of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1309-1341). However, the reality is much more complex. Indeed, the lack of conclusively dated materials from these later periods, not to mention the dramatic decline of metal and glass production from the end of the fourteenth century to the mid-to late-fifteenth century has made these claims very difficult to refute. This problem has been exacerbated by poor definitions of the term ‘Mamluk art,’ which tend to emphasize
court art and ignore other forms of production such as ceramics, manuscripts, objects for export, and Christian art.

In addition to problems of attribution and of definition, a major issue in the field is the manner in which these materials are presented. A lack of figural imagery, should such a lack be found to be significant, is often presented as a pious and iconoclastic campaign against the representation of living forms, whereas a similar absence of figural imagery in mid- to late-fifteenth century Venetian metalwares is discussed as a change of taste. Certainly, figural imagery is met with mixed feelings in the Islamic world, where numerous Prophetic hadith and religious doctrines condemn the manufacture and possession of figural representations. However, in spite of this reality, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery have played an important, albeit frequently secondary, role in Islamic art since the advent of the religion. As such, a sidelining of figural imagery can hardly be discussed as an iconoclastic campaign unless it is also paired with other factors, the most important among them being the destruction of existing figural images. Indeed, no such campaign existed during the Mamluk period, at least not on any formal level. The continued use of figural imagery paired with the lack of other indicators of iconoclasm demonstrates that anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms were relegated to subsidiary design motifs as expressions of authority became more prominent around the 1320s.

The Nature of the Mamluk System

Definitions of the term Mamluk and the governing structure of this system have been provided in numerous historical and art historical studies of this period and it is
unnecessary at this point to reiterate such topics in this paper. Rather, it is important to emphasize a particular aspect of this dynasty, namely the degree to which power was sought and how such claims to positions and titles were achieved. It would be quite difficult to over-emphasize the brutal nature of the Mamluk system with regards to power struggles and shifts in authority. The very origins of this dynasty were dependent on military training and prowess, a system that was largely given free reign towards the end of Ayyubid rule, much to the detriment of that dynasty.

In 1249, the death of Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (r. 1240-1249) left a temporary vacuum of authority that was quickly, though only briefly, filled by his son, Turan Shah (r. 1249-1250). In his short reign, Turan Shah became deeply unpopular amongst his father’s Bahri mamluks whom he had sidelined in favor of his own, many of whom originated from sub-Saharan Africa. This was perceived as a severe slight by the predominantly Turkish amirs previously in place. This promotion of Turan Shah’s personal retinue did not last long as he was hunted down and killed in May of 1250 by Faris al-Din Aqtay al-Jamdar. The contemporary accounts of this act are graphic. Irwin notes that in the Lord of Joinville’s chronicle, “Faris al-Din Aqtay cut out Turan Shah’s heart and took it along to show the captive French King.”  

The successive ten years following Turan Shah’s death mark a tumultuous period in Mamluk rule with the sultanate trading hands no less than five times. This was not uncommon in the Mamluk period where sultans and amirs rose to and successively lost power in very short spans of time. Maqrizi notes repeated transfers of amiral ranks in 1303, following the rise in status of certain amirs and the sudden deaths of others. At this time several amirs were maneuvered into different positions as the result of the deaths of

amirs Malik Adil-Kitbugha and Sayf al-Din Albeiki, governors of Schaubak and Homs respectively. Although not specifically discussing the manner in which these two amirs died, the implication might be one of forceful removal from their posts particularly considering the fact that both amirs held prominent ranks and died in such quick succession of one another. Even had they died of natural causes the listing of successive shifts in ranks highlights the value of positions of authority for the Mamluk elite.

Under no sultan is this brutal drive for power more apparent than that of al-Nasir Muhammad, whose successive reigns began and ended with heavy-handed attempts at manipulation and control. This is no surprise given that when he first succeeded as sultan he was only eight years old. At this point, following the assassination of Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil (r. 1290-1293), a power struggle ensued from which Amir Baydara initially arose as sultan. His reign only lasted a few days before, “Emir Baktimur al-Silahdar cut Baydara’s liver out and ate it raw.” Lajin, a fellow amir competing for the sultanate, quickly fled Cairo and eight-year-old al-Nasir Muhammad rose to the throne. His first reign lasted only a short time as he was deposed in 1294 by Kitbugha who was in turn dethroned by Lajin in 1296. Lajin’s death in 1298 resulted in the reinstallation of al-Nasir Muhammad as sultan the following year. But again, this was not to last. Amirs Baybars al-Jashankir and Salar fought amongst themselves until Baybars managed to wrest control over Salar and the sultanate in 1309. Al-Nasir Muhammad quickly returned in 1310, putting to death both Baybars and Salar in the process.

While al-Nasir Muhammad’s third reign was significantly more stable than his prior two rules, his advancing age also brought paranoia. Towards the end of his reign al-

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4 Ibid., 85-86.
Nasir Muhammad became increasingly suspicious of his *mamluks* and amirs, frequently imprisoning and eliminating some of his highest-ranking officials. Tankiz al-Nasiri is just such an example of this, where his more than twenty years of service to al-Nasir Muhammad as *naïb* or governor of Syria ended in his imprisonment and execution in 1340.\(^5\)

These trends continued throughout the Mamluk period. Ibn Taghri Birdi describes a series of revolts against Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaikh (r. 1412-1421) that broke out in Damascus, Gaza, Hama, and Tripoli in 1415. Al-Mu’ayyad’s response was swift, moving into the *Bilad al-Sham* with a retinue of *mamluks* and amirs. He reestablished Mamluk authority in these cities and put to death the four primary offenders, parading their heads on lances back to Cairo before hanging them from Bab Zuwayla.\(^6\)

These struggles of the Mamluk dynasty and particularly of al-Nasir Muhammad manifested in the development of an artistic repertoire that heavily emphasized power and rank, particularly that of the sultan. Epigraphy and heraldry emerged as the main decorative motifs on both architectural and portable arts. Radial inscriptions, epigraphic blazons, and a clearer codification of amiral emblems all factored into this newly emerging system that appears to have been intended as much for internal status markers as it was to assert authority to the public. Indeed, status symbols regularly made available to the public seem to have been less concerned with specific ranks and more pre-occupied with general markers of authority. On numismatics, for instance, it appears as though emblems could be used interchangeably, regardless of the position of the Mamluk

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\(^5\) Kenney, *Power and Patronage in Medieval Syria*, 12.
patron. In contrast, objects for private or court use all maintained the use of prescribed titles and symbols.

Keeping in mind the historical context from which these iconographic shifts occurred, it is now possible to delve into some of the complexities facing this field, namely how Mamluk art should be defined.

**Defining Mamluk Art**

Thus returning to the topic of the arts, there are striking gaps in our knowledge of Mamluk portable art despite the degree to which it is discussed in countless studies. While we certainly know a lot about the technique of inlaid metal, enameled glass, and ceramics, unless the object has an inscription indicating the patron, then its date, provenance, and audience are often categorized as unknown or else estimated on false assumptions about style and iconography at the time. This confusion surrounding date and patron has frequently blurred the line between Mamluk art and its Ayyubid predecessors, resulting in a large body of material being attributed to one period or another without thorough investigation.

This matter of date and attribution has become so problematic that the assigned date and dynasty of a given object might be at odds with each other. For instance, an incense burner at the British Museum has been assigned to approximately 1250 to 1300.

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7 Allan notes that despite a change in governors of Damascus between 1379 and 1382, the coin design remained constant. Neither governor had the same blazon, nor did either governor’s blazon represent the blazon marked on the coin. Allan, “Mamluk Sultanic Heraldry,” 102.
8 British Museum, Acc. No. 1878,1230.679
a time period unequivocally belonging to Mamluk rule in Egypt and *Bilad al-Sham*. However, the assigned dynasty is not Mamluk as one would presume, but Ayyubid.9

Certainly, production practices can extend well beyond the length of a dynasty’s rule, greatly influencing future styles and iconographies. However, determining dynastic influence can be quite difficult when dates for so many objects are only approximate. Further, the first really dramatic shift in styles of portable arts did not occur until the third reign of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad when chinoiserie motifs and status symbols began emerging en masse. Should the prior seventy years of Mamluk art then be categorized as the remnants of the Ayyubid period? There might be an argument for this with regards to ceramics, where royal commissions and influence played only a small role in the industry.10 However, with inlaid metalware and enameled glass, the primary patrons would have been the wealthy aristocracy and ruling elite. In cases such as these, the shift in patronage from an Ayyubid monarchy to Mamluk rulers would have put Mamluks in charge of maintaining or breaking with prior aesthetic traditions. As such, even early iterations of Mamluk inlaid metalware and enameled glass should be categorized as Mamluk and not Ayyubid.

This issue of defining Mamluk art applies not only to its origins, but also to inclusive materials. When statements are made about the iconography of Mamluk art, inlaid metalwork and enameled glasswares for Mamluk consumption are the most frequently cited objects.11 It is no surprise that these media are the focus of so many

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9 See the British Museum website listing for this object.
10 Milwright, “Pottery in the Written Sources,” 504.
11 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Oleg Grabar, and Rachel Ward (among others) all partake in this to an extent. Perhaps Rachel Ward is the most problematic in this sense as she gives the illusion of having considered manuscripts, ceramics, or Christian objects. However, she has clearly overlooked certain finds that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.
studies as the number of objects that survive far outnumber those of other mediums. However, inlaid metal in particular had a diverse clientele that included Mamluk amirs and sultans, in addition to Christian, Rasulid, and European patrons. The styles and imagery of each of these categories were largely dependent on each other, borrowing and re-inventing motifs as was necessary to decorate an object. To segregate European from Mamluk objects ignores the breadth of the inlay metal tradition. Indeed, the tray\(^{12}\) and basin\(^{13}\) for Lusignan de Chypre produced sometime between 1324 and 1359 do not introduce any new iconographic forms that were previously unknown to Mamluk art. The overall shape of the tray appears to be the only unique development of these two objects; the standard tray shape for Mamluk patrons would have been shallower.

The same can be said of Christian objects produced in Mamluk lands, where they are frequently indistinguishable from their royal or Muslim counterparts. This is also true of Rasulid objects. All three of these export types use fairly extensive figural scenes, reiterating existing trends of style and iconography. This being the case, how are we then to divorce these ‘non-Mamluk’ objects from the larger tradition in which they existed? It would be a difficult task indeed and prior attempts by Rachel Ward to categorize enameled glass with figural imagery as European export objects have not been altogether successful.\(^{14}\) This paper will not attempt to separate the traditions apart from noting who commissioned the object when such information is available.

Additionally, while glasswares and metalwork exist in profusion, manuscripts and ceramics also make up an important body of work from this time. Local ceramics were primarily used by the middle and lower classes during the Mamluk period as the upper

\(^{12}\) The Louvre Museum, Acc. No. MAO 1227
\(^{13}\) The Louvre Museum, Acc. No. MAO 101
\(^{14}\) See Ward, “Brass and Glass” and “Mosque Lamps.”
classes preferred metal, glass, and imported Chinese porcelain over locally manufactured ceramics. This provides us some limited information about the iconography employed in non-sultanic or amiral works. Additionally, tile was occasionally employed on Mamluk monuments, which provides us insight into the aesthetic preferences of the Mamluk elite with regards to ceramics.

Finally, frequently overlooked, illustrated manuscripts further aid our understanding of Mamluk iconography with nearly thirty extant manuscripts from the period. Most likely these manuscripts, practical manuals and literary works alike, were produced for the Mamluk elite or literate aristocracy. Although Rachel Ward has largely dismissed these works as practical manuals of instruction not worthy of significant commentary,\footnote{Rachel Ward, “Metal Vessels for Al-Nasir Muhammad,” 62.} she has been far too quick in making this judgment. Should we accept the premise that manuals do not significantly factor into contemporary iconography, this still overlooks the eleven literary texts with their accompanying illustrations.

These four mediums make up the bulk of the surviving material from the Mamluk period and should all be considered when discussing Mamluk imagery and its development over the course of the nearly three centuries of Mamluk rule. Textiles are also relevant, although are not particularly well-survived or dated\footnote{Certainly numerous silk and linen fragments do exist that contain figural imagery. Object numbers 113 and 120 in Esin Atil’s \textit{Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks} show two beautiful examples of textiles with quadruped friezes or zoomorphic interlace. However, the dating of most objects of these types is fairly uncertain, and in most cases far too general to include in the present study.} except for a series that emerged in the late fifteenth century that was primarily non-figurative.\footnote{See Thompson, “Late Mamluk Carpets: Some New Observations.”} If we consider the totality of Mamluk art (inclusive of early works, ceramics, manuscripts, etc.) the degree to which anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery dissipated has been
significantly over-emphasized. The subsequent chapters will show in greater detail the
effect to which past literature has confused the matter of chronology in Mamluk art, thus
resulting in the current misunderstandings surrounding the iconography of the period.

Thus, with the aid of several recently released studies, most notable among them
being Rachel Ward’s article on the re-dating of Medieval Syrian and Egyptian glass, this
paper will take a closer look at the iconography of the Mamluk period through a careful
reexamination of the portable arts produced during this time. It will then become clear
that the production and use of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery was by no
means halted during the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad, but rather was relegated to a
subsidiary design motif and to objects that did not bear the official court titulature of
amirs and sultans. In this sense, figural imagery played an important, though subsidiary,
role in the visual expressions of the Mamluk ruling elite.
Chapter 2
Past Literature and Issues of Understanding

Initial Scholarship

As represented in literature as it is in museums, Mamluk portable art has held an important position in the study of Islamic art history. From the outset, some of this field’s earliest scholars have published numerous studies assessing the value and meaning of the monumental epigraphy and blazons which have made Mamluk art so distinct from its predecessors. Indeed, L. A. Mayer produced one of the earliest discussions of this impressive corpus of objects in his book, *Saracenic Heraldry*. This early publication quickly established the value of the strictly implemented heraldic system under the Mamluks enforced by a series of blazons, which denoted a *mamluk’s* position within the *khassakiyya*, or elite corpus of *mamluks*. While many of the claims made by Mayer were later refuted or adjusted in a successive study by Estelle Whelan, his text set the tone for the next several decades of scholarship on the topic of Mamluk art.

In fact, the approach and format of his study, which addressed Mamluk heraldry as a concept independent of the individual objects and monuments on which the emblems appeared, would become a fairly consistent theme of initial discussions of Mamluk art. Oleg Grabar’s 1984 publication offers just such an example of this. While certainly a publication that reflects on Mamluk art as a whole would make more of an attempt at

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18 Although a full discussion of Mamluk emblems and heraldry will not be discussed here, L. A. Mayer’s text is a useful starting point when considering Mamluk art and iconography.
19 Estelle Whelan’s, “Representations of the *Khassakiyyah* and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems,” is another necessity when approaching Mamluk emblems. While not containing the rather extensive catalogue that does Mayer’s text, her discussion includes a much more nuanced consideration of the material at hand.
broad analysis rather than limit itself to a well-tuned discussion of just a few objects and monuments, the overall conclusions of this article further enforce the notion that there is little innate iconographic value in any individual work of art from the Mamluk period. Instead, they should be discussed only as part of a larger body of works that all perpetuate the same idea. While the casual viewer can clearly observe a relative uniformity in style and format of Mamluk court art, both the style and format unequivocally progress over time. Some of these changes can be difficult decipher as our knowledge and understanding of Mamluk metalwork patronage is severely clouded by poor understanding of dating and provenance, a topic to which we will return at length later in this chapter. Beyond this, however, even if it were to become clear that metalwork styles remained relatively consistent, it must be emphasized that Mamluk artistic patronage extended well beyond inlaid and inscribed metal vessels for use at court. As mentioned in the introduction, artistic production during this period included works produced for local Christian audiences, European and Rasulid patrons, and ceramics, glass, and manuscripts for private use.

D. S. Rice wrote several articles that offer an alternate viewpoint to this notion of uniformity, including his “Studies in Islamic Metal Work” and “The Blazons of the ‘Baptistère de Saint Louis.’” In each of these articles, Rice delves into the specific imagery of un-provenanced and undated inlaid metal wares. Focusing on the basin of amir Sunqur al-A‘sar in the former and the Baptistère de Saint Louis in that latter, Rice considers epigraphic, heraldic, and iconographic evidence in order to deduce the origins and intentions behind the creation of such works. However, for all his attention to the individuality of objects, his analyses cannot withstand significant scholarly scrutiny.

Many of his assertions seem to be based upon preconceived notions of Islamic art and patronage that now have been widely disproved. For instance, the attribution of the basin discussed in “Studies of Islamic Metalwork,” to amir Sunqur al-A’sar presumes that female patronage of the arts in the Mamluk period was relatively insignificant, ignoring perhaps that Shajar al-Durr was the first Mamluk sultan and commissioned at least one and likely two noteworthy monuments. Moreover, his discussions of the Baptistère de Saint Louis (as well as the basin of amir Sunqur al-A’sar) are predicated on false assumptions about representations of the Mamluk heraldic system. Not infrequently, blazons were omitted from objects produced specifically for private use such as the mirror referred to in his analysis of the Baptistère (Fig. 1). Here, Rice claims that Mehmet Aga-Oglu’s assertions regarding the patronage of the mirror held at the Topkapi Saray (Fig. 2) are likely unfounded due to a lack of blazons to indicate ownership. However, given the function of such an object as a tool for private use, there would have been no necessity for heraldry, whose primary purpose would have been to establish authority. Indeed, Aga-Oglu seems to have offered one of the best early comparative studies with regards to dating the Baptistère, where Rice’s arguments, by contrast, are merely coincidental musings without much basis in fact.

While his claims regarding the Baptistère are more developed than those of Rice, Aga-Oglu belongs to a similar line of thought as his contemporary. His article, “About a Type of Islamic Incense Burner,” surveys twelfth through fourteenth century incense

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21 Rice identifies a graffito on the basin indicating that the owner was the daughter of Amir Sunqur al-A’sar. However, Rice, seemingly arbitrarily, identifies the basin’s true patron as none other than Amir Sunqur al-A’sar himself.

22 Here, I am referring to her patronage of her tomb near the site of the Fatimid shrines of Sayyida Ruqayya, Sayyida ‘Atika, and Muhammad al-Ga’fari, as well as her likely patronage of the tomb of her husband Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, attached to his madrasa on Bayn al-Qasrayn.

burners from across Egypt, Syria, the Jazira, and Iran. This paper was particularly useful in assessing the regional differences of inlaid metalwork across the Islamic world. Although, while a focus on a particular type of object from the ‘Islamic’ world had its advantages in limiting the scope of the study, a three-century, cross-regional analysis is far too great an undertaking for such a short paper. Not to mention the fact that the metalworking practices employed in the incense burners cannot be limited to these objects alone, but must also include a discussion of comparability to other inlaid metal objects, a topic that is sorely lacking here. These issues are highlighted by several problematic arguments made in the article, which are most effectively addressed in a recent publication by Julian Raby. In his article, Raby asserts that “none of [Aga-Oglu’s] assumptions are proven… and several illustrate a tendency to retroject onto the thirteenth century ‘evidence’ from the fourteenth; this is a particular problem given that Aga-Oglu tends to assume a static view of Mosul metalwork of the thirteenth century.” Thus, while Aga-Oglu was able to keenly observe regional stylistic differences in inlaid metal, his grasp on chronological development was somewhat stilted.

These observations, however, contrast as high praise when reflected against Raby’s assessment of Rice’s scholarship. Raby is incredibly critical of his predecessor’s work, and rightfully so, given that so many of Rice’s publications have dominated the study of Atabek, Ayyubid, and Mamluk metalwork to this day. Had the conclusions of

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24 The application of the term “Islamic” here is problematic as several of the incense burners to which Aga-Oglu refers were made for Christian audiences. However, a discussion of terminology for Islamic art goes well beyond the aims of the present study. For those interested, Oleg Grabar’s, The Formation of Islamic Art and Bas Snelders’, Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction: Medieval Art of the Syrian Orthodox in the Mosul Area might be good starting points.
26 Ibid., 15.
his findings proven to be anything more than theoretical musings, the fact that they have had such long-term appeal for art historians would be less of an issue. However, his assessments of provenance and dating for Arab and Jaziran inlaid metalwork are wholly unfounded. For instance, Raby notes that “for no given reason, then, [a] change in technique was a question of time, [a] change in style a question of location,”27 according to Rice. This makes clear that these assertions lack the necessary comparative analysis of conclusively dated and located materials, and it is from this point that we begin our discussion of previous literature specifically on the topic of Mamluk iconography.

Continuing Trends

For all the issues that can be found in these early studies perhaps the most problematic is the establishment of such misleading trends with regards to Mamluk art and iconography. The emphasis of all of these early studies has been on the unity of Mamluk inlaid metalware, largely divorcing any perceived aberrant work from its context. D. S. Rice’s early assessment of the Baptistère dismissed Aga-Oglu’s comparative analysis in favor of a discussion of the still-visible original blazons on the basin. However, his findings were inconclusive at best and wildly misleading at worst. Rather than question the foundation by which Mayer had established emblems, namely whether or not a lion or any animal for that matter should rightfully be considered an heraldic blazon, he instead engaged on a pages long discussion that offered no concrete conclusions on the dating of the vessel. Admittedly, “until we are able to ascribe [the two] emblems… to definite persons, it will be impossible to suggest more than an approximate date for the Louvre basin, which is not likely to be later than the first quarter

27 Ibid., 17.
of the XIVth century. From where did this potential date arise, and why is so much emphasis being placed on blazons that can in all probability never be properly attributed? Based on Rice’s discussions the only terminus ante quem that should be accepted is approximately the second half of the fourteenth century at which point the buying power of the ruling elite slowing diminished and recurring shortages of precious metals made such commissions impractical.

Aga-Oglu’s discussion of the Baptistère is much more appealing, though much less widely accepted. Subsequent studies have been content to follow the lead taken by Rice in attributing this magnificent vessel to the early period of Mamluk art. Doris Behrens-Abouseif has headed this charge, suggesting that it was commissioned by Sultan Baybars I (r. 1260-1277), and it would seem that any contrary evidence was willfully ignored as it might contradict her avid assertions regarding the disappearance of figural imagery from Mamluk art.

Rachel Ward offers a more thorough study and appropriate dating, proposing that it was produced between approximately 1325 and 1360. However, her arguments regarding patronage seem to fall flat, attributing it to European owners simply due to the lack of evidence for a specific owner from Mamluk lands. Indeed this lack of an owner’s mark is not to be ignored, nor the fact that the shield-shaped blazons holding European coat-of-arms appear to fit well within the decorative campaign of the basin. However, these facts alone do not prove European patronage. The use of a shield-shaped blazon at this time could also be attributed to al-Nasir Muhammad’s experimentation with

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30 See Behrens-Abouseif, “Baptistère de St. Louis.”
31 See Ward, “Baptistère de Saint Louis.”
emblems and epigraphy. A mosque lamp at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 3), bearing the name of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1310-1341) shows a rather unusual reverse teardrop blazon, which might have fit well within the confines of the now European coat-of-arms. Moreover, the subject matter does not seem to fit within the typical scenes depicted in metal and glass known to have been commissioned by European patrons. One might argue similarly for objects commissioned by the Mamluk court, however, precedence can be found in a basin commissioned by the Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (r. 1240-1249) held in the Freer and Sackler Gallery or the numerous manuals on horsemanship and war that were produced under the Mamluks. The latter is an especially appealing argument when one considers the interplay between manuscript illustration and illumination and metalwork decoration.

Regardless, barring some exceptional new discovery on Mamluk metalwork patronage and iconography, the provenance and date of the Baptistère will likely never be known conclusively. This is not the problem. The issue is that the Baptistère is frequently referenced in timelines of Mamluk art when such an inclusion clouds the matter of iconography and dating. The Baptistère is not alone in this problem; the Freer Canteen, another famous inlaid metal object, is also frequently cited in Ayyubid and Mamluk art catalogues. However, the dating of both of these objects has varied so significantly from study to study as to make any claims regarding a chronology of medieval Syro-Egyptian iconography based on these objects highly problematic and ultimately irrelevant.

32 Freer and Sackler, Acc. No. F1955.10
33 This is discussed throughout Bas Snelders’ text, *Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction*. 
Referencing the Baptistère as an early Mamluk object, Grabar claims that, “the later the object, the less likely it is to have [figural] representations.”\textsuperscript{34} It was this very claim that was then re-asserted by Behrens-Abouseif in her edited volume, \textit{The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria}. In both her introduction and her concluding chapter, Behrens-Abouseif holds that there was a “consistent abstinence of the sultans from the patronage of illustrated manuscripts… [and that] figural representations on artifacts diminished gradually from the late thirteenth century onwards.”\textsuperscript{35}

Both Grabar’s and Behrens-Abouseif’s arguments are problematic for numerous reasons. Clearly these statements ignore Mamluk manuscript commissions, among which are five illustrated copies of al-Hariri’s \textit{Maqamat} or the six copies of al-Jazari’s \textit{Automata}, among others. This is not to say that these were entirely exceptional works of art, but rather that manuscripts and their accompanying illustrations had value for the Mamluk elite. What’s more, they ignore several glassware and metalwork commissions from the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that all feature figural emblems and/or scenes. Finally, to reiterate from the introduction, they also ignore pieces produced for export, those commissioned by the Christian populations, and ceramic finds. Thus on every level these statements falter. They fail to fully address royal commissions and completely ignore those objects that do not fall under the more traditional label of Mamluk court art.

But lest we be too critical of these two art historians, they find themselves in the company of Rachel Ward, who has arguably produced some of the most thought-provoking studies on Mamluk art and iconography. In contrast to these previous scholars’

\textsuperscript{34} Grabar, “Mamluk Art,” 7.

\textsuperscript{35} Behrens-Abouseif, \textit{Arts of the Mamluks}, 14.
thought, Ward’s statements are paired with an extensive analysis of the datable materials, though demonstrably not extensive enough. Both her counts of objects with anthropomorphic and those with zoomorphic imagery lack several notable vessels. She cites only two objects with anthropomorphic motifs (an ewer in the Metropolitan Museum and a fragmentary penbox in the al-Sabah Collection), to which she adds only four objects with zoomorphic imagery. To this I can definitely argue against. The other four objects she notes to be two bowls (of unmentioned collections?), another penbox in the al-Sabah Museum, and a tray held at the Islamic Museum in Doha. Presumably she is including bird imagery in her discussion of zoomorphic motifs, as she notes that three of the four objects, “have animal or bird combat scenes in roundels.”36 Thus, the absence of such metal objects as a tray with figural roundels at the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo,37 an incense burner in the Nuhad es-Said Collection, an additional ewer38 and candlestick39 held at the Metropolitan Museum, and a basin at the British Museum40 is rather striking. This increases the total number of figural scenes in al-Nasir Muhammad’s commissions to eleven, and this is at just a superficial survey of museums whose collections are readily available online or in print. It seems likely, though not certain, that more objects would surface if more museum catalogues were readily accessible.

To Ward’s credit, she notes that this “iconoclastic aesthetic was limited to the Mamluk court. Contemporary vessels made for non-Mamluk patrons such as the Rasulid Sultans of the Yemen and Europeans continued to be decorated with figures.”41 However,
while she acknowledges the other realms of Mamluk art outside of court commissions, her terminology with regards to changing aesthetics is problematic in and of itself. Certainly, there was a strong preference for monumental epigraphy and heraldic emblems during this period. As much as this paper will attempt to show that anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery had an important, albeit secondary, place among the Mamluk elite, it was epigraphy and blazons that took center stage in practically every area of art, be it portable or architectural. However, this is not to say that there was any iconoclastic agenda taking place. It seems arbitrary indeed that Ward has attributed the development of what are now commonly known as Veneto-Saracenic wares to a change in aesthetic preferences in Italy, while a similar move toward non-figural representation in Syria and Egypt is automatically argued to be iconoclastic. This may simply have been the result of careless wording on the part of Ward, however the overarching concept emphasized by her is that animals were actively omitted from Mamluk court objects and these empty spaces were then filled with epigraphy and heraldry by default. However, given the nature of the Mamluk system as brutally competitive, it seems much more likely that figural imagery became a secondary motif as heraldry and epigraphy emerged en masse.

**New Trends and Discoveries**

Within recent years discussions of Mamluk art have become increasingly object-based, much to the benefit of the materials being discussed. Taking the lead in this new wave a publications have been Bas Snelders, Rachel Ward, and Julian Raby, among others.

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Bas Snelders has headed the charge with a thorough investigation of artistic output in Syria and the Jazira in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While the aim of his study is more concerned with an earlier period than the study at hand, the discussions and conclusions found in his publication are invaluable in understanding the framework with which to gauge later artistic output. Most important among Snelders’ observations is the incredible amount of interaction that existed between Christian and Muslim artists and patrons. For, “whatever the exact meanings attached to this class of objects, the important observation to be made here is that the presence of Christian symbols and subjects on a work of art does not necessarily reflect the religious identity of its owner.”\(^{43}\) This is a key point to acknowledge, as objects produced for Christian audiences are often sidelined in discussions of Mamluk art. However, the reality is that these objects come from a common heritage of production and patronage. To divorce Christian objects from their Muslim counterparts would be to rob this tradition of inlaid metal of its full due.

Another important point in Snelders’ text is that the majority of objects lack identifying inscriptions, making their proposed dates questionable.\(^ {44}\) Much like the Freer Canteen or the Baptistère de Saint Louis, a large part of these objects lack inscriptions or references in contemporary sources that would allow for easier dating and provenance. Thus, including such objects in timelines of Ayyubid or Mamluk art can cause significant issues.

Ward has argued that the absence of inscriptions on objects bearing figural imagery during the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad and beyond is indicative of

\(^{43}\) Snelders, *Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction*, 89.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 87.
anthropomorphic imagery falling out of favor for courtly commissions. While this explanation may be acceptable in part, it also seems apparent that many objects with such scenes did not use inscriptions even prior to the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad, particularly those objects with Christian imagery.

Returning briefly to the topic of the Freer Canteen (Fig. 4), much like the Baptistère, it has faced significant difficulties with regards to determining provenance and date. Snelders does not dwell long on the topic of this particular object, but makes an important point in asserting that it cannot be properly provenanced between Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, thus potentially opening up the dating of the object to a much later terminus ante quem than has previously been proposed. This is such a significant finding because the Syrian inlaid metal industry likely did not develop much prior to 1240 and continued in prominence well into the fourteenth century, a fact to which Julian Raby adamantly attests. In contrast, however, while Snelders certainly favors a Syrian provenance for the Canteen, a recent publication by Heather Ecker and Teresa Fitzherbert has argued for a Mosul origin. Again, these questions will likely never be answered with certainty, though the degree to which this is debated demonstrates the incredible amount of continuity of style and iconography both regionally and chronologically. Though most scholars can agree that this piece was not produced later than the thirteenth century, the fact that two of the most elaborate works of anthropomorphic Arab inlaid metalwork are both potentially coming from the Mamluk, rather than Ayyubid, period

46 Snelders, Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction, 117.
47 Raby, “Mosul School of Metalwork,” 39.
48 See, Ecker, “Freer Canteen.”
leads one to question the initial premise of whether or not figural imagery was featured prominently in the Mamluk court.

This aside, we turn to a category of objects that we have not yet discussed in detail, specifically enameled glass. Rachel Ward has recently published an exceptional study on this topic, which offers a much more conclusive dating of Syro-Egyptian glass. In this article she rejects the more traditional, style-based chronology established by C. J. Lamm in *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten* in favor of one dependent solely on objects whose dates can be conclusively determined, namely mosque lamps. In this study Ward divided the objects into different decades of production all the while making observations on commonalities with regards to size, technique, and materials. Her overall conclusions determined that the progressive development of mosque lamps, and the glass industry as a whole, peaked in the middle of the fourteenth century and did not truly decline until the last decade of the same century. The development of enameled glass was accompanied by a gradual increase in the size of objects, more confidence and skill with handling enameled decoration, the development of high-lead colors painted inside of the vessels, and the creation of small channels of gold that were resistant to enamels, thus acting as barricades between different colors. The last of these was quite a late innovation, introduced around the 1380s just prior to the decline of the industry.\(^{49}\)

These discoveries offer valuable insight into the production of glass objects that do not bear inscriptions, re-dating many large vessels to the later period of enameled glass, or approximately the mid-fourteenth century onward. As such, some of the most celebrated works of medieval glass, much of which features extensive anthropomorphic

\(^{49}\) See Ward, “Mosque Lamps,” for a thorough analysis of enameled glass.
and zoomorphic imagery, should be re-assigned to the mid- to late-fourteenth century rather than their original attribution in the thirteenth century.50 While these conclusions are extremely appealing, Ward looses her readers when returning to the topic of European export objects. Although the matter is confused by the lack of inscriptive evidence, Ward’s consistent reiteration that vessels with extensive figural imagery were produced for export to European buyers is unconvincing. Seemingly every object with an extensive anthropomorphic campaign is designated as a European commission. Where is the evidence for such claims with regards to these glass objects?

To answer this question, the reader must look to an earlier publication entitled, “Glass and Brass: Parallels and Puzzles.” In it Ward argues that objects produced for the Mamluk court are almost never inscribed with anonymous titles or else left uninscribed.51 How these claims could be definitely proven is unclear, though it seems incredibly unlikely that such a statement is true. A mosque lamp housed at the Metropolitan Museum52 offers a relatively conclusive example of an object made for local consumption using anonymous titles. It would represent a remarkable anomaly if such a specifically religious object was produced for a European patron, and yet the mosque lamp lacks the name of an amir or sultan. Additionally, the emblem featured on the vessel does not belong to those readily identified by Mayer or Whelan. Are we then to regard this mosque lamp as a European commission? Another example can be found in the David Collection, where a lidded box features imagery rather typical of Mamluk art and iconography with inscriptions referencing an anonymous patron.53 However, there seems

52 Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 91.1.1539
53 David Collection, Acc. No. 41/2005
to be no implication on the part of Ward, that such an object would have been produced for export.

Objects without inscriptions are much more difficult to categorize as either European or Mamluk commissions, though stylistic devices and vessel forms seem to fill in the gaps that the absence of epigraphy leaves. In her later article, Ward specifically referenced an undated bottle held at the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 5). Though problematic to attribute objects based on iconography, it shares many typically Mamluk elements so common in Syro-Egyptian glass. The emphasis on horizontal bands of decoration and the carefully depicted chinoiserie phoenix are both elements that feature prominently in Mamluk glass. The extent to which these same features might have been valued in export glass is unclear, though the phoenix in particular is a repeated motif on objects for local consumption throughout the fourteenth century. Further, this long-necked bottle form seems to have been relatively popular among the Mamluk elite. A similar bottle can be found at the Victoria and Albert Museum, whose inscriptions identify it as belonging to Mamluk Amir Sayf al-Din Jurji (r. 1347-1350). Two other bottles that are similar in style, though notably both have a pronounced foot, can be found at the Metropolitan Museum and Victoria and Albert. Admittedly, these arguments are tentative at best, though a lack of records indicating a significant European presence in Egypt and Syria during the fourteenth century would seem to support the notion that large quantities of such high-quality enameled glass could not have been exported at this time. Ward refutes this last assertion to an extent, arguing that there were numerous glass vessels collected in European inventories. However, a thorough investigation by J. M.

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54 Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 223-1879
Rogers notes that few of these objects are described as being enameled and it was rock crystal above all else that was the most prized item collected by Europeans.\(^5\)

Beyond metalwork and glassware, ceramics also represent an important field of study for Mamluk art and iconography. Rosalind Haddon’s recently published article in Behrens-Abouseif’s edited volume on the *Arts of the Mamluks* is an important tool when consulting these vessels. While little discussion is necessary to confirm the presence of figural imagery in Mamluk ceramics, just a quick aside on the subject will serve to confirm this concept. Haddon specifically notes that many Mamluk and Mongol objects feature, “princely pursuits with animals, hunting birds, Mongol figures on some Ilkhanid pieces, and a richly caparisoned horse on many Mamluk ones.”\(^6\) Roland Pierre-Gayraud confirms such assertions by demonstrating that animals featured prominently on fritwares from both Cairo and Damascus throughout the Mamluk period.\(^7\) Little other confirmation should be necessary to demonstrate the presence of animals and occasionally humans on Mamluk pottery.

Bearing all this in mind, scholarship on Mamluk art and iconography seems woefully uneven, bouncing back and forth between extremes of arbitrarily attributing objects based on inconclusive stylistic frameworks and arguing that it is next to impossible to effectively date un-inscribed vessels. However, taking a step back from the complexity of dealing with undated wares and dealing solely with those objects whose origins are certain, it is possible to establish a clearer picture. While early art historians such as Rice and Grabar have struggled with the dating of Mamluk objects, be they

\(^5\) Rogers, “European Inventories,” 69.
\(^6\) Haddon, “Mamluk Ceramics,” 106.
\(^7\) Pierre-Gayraud, “Ceramics in the Mamluk Empire,” 87.
metal, glass, or ceramic, later scholars have made significant headway in that department. Upon refocusing efforts on those objects whose dates are certain, the question of figural imagery and its presence in Mamluk court art becomes easier to address. Knowing this, we can take a page from Rachel Ward and establish a timeline of Mamluk iconography solely based on those objects whose dates are relatively certain, but first we will turn to a primary source review that will address appropriate uses of figural imagery during this period.
Chapter 3
Primary Sources and Issues of Understanding

Figural Imagery and Primary Sources

While objects abound during this period, their discussion by contemporary chroniclers and the literati is relatively limited. Few sources offer any helpful commentary on the production of art by the Mamluks. However, the majority of works are functional in nature affording us important clues as to their use and value for the Mamluk elite. The monumental inscriptions, heraldic blazons, and emblems of power further aid our understanding of the material at hand. Fortunately, most major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum have the bulk of their collections catalogued online with relatively high-resolution photographs accompanying an object description. Moreover, published catalogues and museum highlights such as James Allan’s *Islamic Metalwork: the Nuhad es-Said Collection* and Bernard O’Kane’s *The Illustrated Guide to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo* can supplement material from collections that do not yet have an online database. Pairing these materials with the written sources can add to the overall understanding of these objects.

Inevitably, it is the objects themselves that will be the most important primary sources when discussing Mamluk iconography, particularly those objects that are dated and provenanced. It is worth noting that while there exist only a limited number of dated objects, those that are conclusively provenanced are even fewer. Julian Raby has dealt with this issue in detail with regards to Mosul productions, effectively attributing nearly
twenty objects to being produced in Mosul. Related studies focused on Damascus and Cairo should yield similarly helpful results. While this is no doubt an important line of inquiry, the topic will have to be returned to in a later study as it is beyond the scope of the present paper. Instead, we will have to be satisfied with studying those objects generally believed to have been produced within Mamluk lands.

Certainly such an assessment should not be dealt with lightly, as the degree to which Mamluk vessels were traded and subsequently imitated abroad is quite significant. A porcelain tray stand at the British Museum produced in a prototypically Mamluk style (Fig. 6) certainly demonstrates the incredible reach of Mamluk arts, extending from southern Europe through to the Ming dynasty in China. A further indication of the difficulties faced with provenance is a potentially fourteenth century Mamluk ivory frame (Fig. 7), which might also be a product of twelfth century Almoravid Spain. The geographical and chronological span of this object is very wide, hinting at the significant difficulties with attributing any uninscribed object.

At the outset, then, we are already faced with two major issues in understanding Mamluk art and iconography, namely when and where an object was made. Primary written sources offer little in the way of clarifying these problems. Metal and glass sold at market is mentioned countless times throughout Maqrizi’s chronicles up to the end of the fourteenth century, at which point such lavish expenditures were difficult to accommodate by a government stressed by the devastation of the black plague, shortages in precious metals, and invasions by the Timurids. In fact, the last of these is generally believed to be the main reason for the downfall of the Mamluk glass industry, though
likely the loss of royal commissions due to the decreased buying power of the court played a significant role as well.\textsuperscript{58}

Waqf documents and chronicles written by the ulema offer various written accounts of Mamluk architecture. However, these sources are generally concerned with the structure and layout of a monument rather than its specific iconographic intentions. Regardless, the majority of Mamluk architectural patronage was focused on religious monuments from which figural representation was widely discouraged. This, however, was not a specific mandate of the Mamluk rulers, but an ideal that seems to have emerged around 700 CE and has remained fairly consistent throughout Islamic lands and periods.\textsuperscript{59}

The stance of figural imagery in secular settings is less clear. While hadiths generally condemn sculptural imagery as idolatrous, religious scholars’ opinions differ on other forms of figural representation. Rachel Ward notes that Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (d. 1329) is critical of figural representation, citing a particular passage where he forbids the use of “pictures” inside of a bathhouse (\textit{hammam}).\textsuperscript{60} Forgetting the ambiguity of the terminology where pictures could easily reference any form of representation either living or inanimate, it is imperative to consider the context in which these statements appear. In the same paragraph, the recitation of the Qur’an and speaking to other individuals in the bathhouse were both banned, and the time at which one entered the structure was carefully regulated. It seems as though \textit{hammams} were viewed as places of temptation where anthropomorphic imagery or conversations with fellow bath-goers might lead the mind astray. Supporting this notion is the discussion of appropriate times

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\textsuperscript{58} Ward, “Mosque Lamps,” 71.
\textsuperscript{59} Referenced in Flood’s lecture, “From Gilding to Whitewash: Ornament and Distraction in the Medieval Mosque,” given in Cairo on 17 March, 2014.
\textsuperscript{60} Ward, “Metal Vessels for Al-Nasir Muhammad,” 62.
to enter the *hammam*, which disapproves of the use of the facilities in the evening and night as these are the times “when demons are abroad.” Thus, it was necessary to proscribe modes of conduct in order to prevent debauchery or sexual promiscuity in such settings.

Should this prove to be a broader interdiction against anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representation, still there was a clear divide between mandate and practice. Although Ibn al-Ukhuwwa condemns the use of “pictures” and “figures” in certain settings, this clearly was not regularly enforced by the ruling elite. Apart from images in *hammams*, Ukhuwwa also condemned the painting of figures, a practice in which the Mamluk elite clearly partook. Though the commissions do not belong to a particularly high caliber of art, nearly thirty illustrated manuscripts have survived from the Mamluk period. More importantly, one of the few manuscripts with a known patron, Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, is dated to relatively late in his reign, the year 1337 CE. Even more impressively, this is not a manual of instruction which Ward dismissed for unknown reasons, but a *Maqamat* with 42 miniatures accompanying the text. Should al-Nasir Muhammad have been so insistent on piety and iconoclasm, such a project would never have been undertaken.

Furthermore, Rachel Ward seems to have over-emphasized Ukhuwwa’s stance on representational toys. There is no cause to state that he “railed against the toy animals hung outside shops,” when his commentary on the subject was more moderate than this.

In fact, Ibn al-Ukhuwwa sanctioned toy markets, so long as their products had additional

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62 Ibid., 51.
63 Bodleian Library, Acc. No. Marsh 458
64 Ward, “Metal Vessels for Al-Nasir Muhammad,” 62.
65 Ibid., 63.
functional purpose beyond their use for play or perhaps even idolatry. Uses could range from medicinal to teaching young girls how to rear children. However, clay figurines sold at festivals without any further functional value were considered unlawful. What’s more, figural imagery was considered permissible on cloths, trays, and curtains, whose functional role likely influenced this judgment. In this sense, even if we take Ibn al-Ukhuwwa as the standard by which to judge figural representation in the Mamluk period, there is still little consensus on the permissibility of this type of imagery. Though it was considered unlawful in certain circumstances, these proscriptions were never strictly enforced.

Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) is another oft-cited scholar who offers some limited commentary on anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery. Though chronologically and geographically separated from the Mamluk period, al-Ghazali was a particularly influential scholar whose works still resonate in the Muslim world to this day. Interestingly, in the more than a thousand pages of text from the first four volumes of his Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din, there exist only seven references to any form of figural representation, most of which are little more than a brief mention. The most valuable of these assertions confirms that which was discussed by Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, namely, “toy idols of animals… [and] clothes on which there are animal pictures are not lawful for sale.”

His commentary on “pictures” and “images” is otherwise generally confined to their appearance in religious contexts. Clouding our understanding of the topic, however, is the ambiguity of terminology, which just as easily could reference any form of ornament as representational art. For instance, when commenting on piety and the ease

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66 Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, Ma’alim al-qurba, 19, 56.
with which one’s mind can be lead astray, al-Ghazali states that it is necessary “to pray in a dark room, not to keep anything in front which may attract attention and not to pray in a decorated place or on a decorated and painted cloth.”\(^{68}\) Here, painting and decoration are general terms that dually function as reference to ornament or to anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery. While figural imagery was all but absent from religious settings,\(^ {69}\) aniconic decoration existed in profusion.

Thus, we have very little useful commentary for the objects at hand. The only statements directly applicable to the materials discussed thus far are the permissibility of figural imagery on cloths, trays, and curtains, and the unlawfulness of painting. We’ve already addressed the latter as a mandate that was not regularly enforced. This is evidenced by the production of illustrated manuscripts throughout the Mamluk period as well as frescoes found in the palatial constructions of Sultan Baybars I (r. 1260-1277) and al-Ashraf Khalil (r. 1290-1293) on the Citadel.\(^ {70}\) Additionally, the former statement would seem to confirm the notion that figural imagery was acceptable in secular contexts. Indeed, there is nothing altogether exceptional about debates surrounding figural imagery at this time and one has to wonder how the notion of an iconoclastic movement ever began.

One potential bit of evidence for an iconoclastic campaign is mentioned by Rachel Ward where she states that al-Nasir Muhammad effaced the lion emblems of Sultan Baybars I from public monuments around Cairo.\(^ {71}\) Unfortunately, no source is

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\(^{68}\) Ibid., vol. 1, 143.
\(^{69}\) Occasionally, mosque furniture such as enameled mosque lamps or kursis from the fourteenth century feature bird motifs in their decoration. The bird scroll in the mosque lamps of Amir Qawsun is an example of this practice.
\(^{71}\) Ward, “Metal Vessels for Al-Nasir Muhammad,” 63.
given for this claim and independent research has not provided any new information on this topic. However, there is a distinct lack of systematic iconoclasm that one would expect to find should such a campaign have existed. Moreover, the destruction of these emblems appears to have been limited to specific monuments in the capital city and did not include Baybars’ monuments elsewhere in the empire, most notably those in Jerusalem as well as his bridge north of Cairo and on two of the windows of his madrasa on al-Mu’izz street. Indeed, the destruction of this emblem was by no means systematic. Finally, his continued patronage of figural imagery in objects for court and for private consumption raises further concerns about this notion of iconoclasm during the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad.

Thus, looking at the material as a whole there is virtually no conclusive proof for an iconoclastic campaign when consulting primary source materials. The best evidence for this agenda comes from Ward, whose commentary overlooks the limited scope of al-Nasir Muhammad’s aims with destroying Baybars’ lion emblem. What’s more, the lack of a regulated program for the destruction of images seems to argue against any notion of iconoclasm. Previous instances of this practice have generally been paired with a systematic destruction of all figural representations. Such is the case with the Byzantine iconoclastic movement of the eighth and then ninth centuries or the Almoravid disdain for over-opulence in religious and palatial constructions. Adding to our understanding of these movements are contemporary sources that confirm these practices, an aspect that is lacking in the case of the Mamluks.
Commentary on Power

In contrast, we do have a significant amount of primary source material that demonstrates a particular interest in depicting and conveying power and status. In addition to the typically discussed royal titles and emblems, Mamluk written sources offer valuable commentary on the architectural constructions of the period, particularly under the Bahri Mamluks. In fact, depending on the building and its patron, historians sometimes “exaggerate [monuments’] numbers, costs, and sizes. At other times, they emphasize their grandeur and rhetorically compare them with paradigmatic monuments known from literature or from the past.”

This particular focus on architecture and its value and expense was specific to the Mamluk period. In contrast to their predecessors, Mamluk historians’ “references were more numerous, comprehensive, and detailed,” thus drawing attention to the architectural patronage of the ruling class.

It is further worth noting the amount of control that the Mamluks had over the literature produced about them at the time. The ulema were in a position where they could affect public opinion of the Mamluks through their writings. The sultan and his amirs were therefore beholden to these historians in some capacity. However, the ulema were not given free reign, but were carefully monitored at the threat of confiscation of property and “exceedingly brutal punishment.”

Discussions of power and ways of representing it were not limited to architecture. Ibn Taghibirdi offers a significant body of material on the topic, stating emblems of sultanic and amiral sovereignty. In addition to the inscription as a symbol of power,

72 Rabbat, “Perception of Architecture,” 156.
73 Ibid., 158.
74 Rabbat, “Representing the Mamluks,” 15.
caliphal robes, the throne, the prayer enclosure, singers and chanter, as well as specific imagery dealing with horses all factored into how the sultan’s authority was displayed to his constituents. Furthermore, there was a careful ranking system of amirs in which the first class was entitled more *mamluks* than amirs of the second, third, or fourth classes. All of this was carefully regulated by the court and the sultan, creating a system where status and the depiction of one’s status were of paramount importance. Given this, it is no wonder that blatant status symbols were used in such profusion, thus sidelining other forms of decoration such as figural imagery.

Ultimately, the primary source material offers little by way of confirming an iconoclastic campaign, and what evidence does exist is inconclusive. If we look at what was emphasized both in literature and material culture at the time, however, a much more appealing conclusion emerges. Epigraphy and heraldry were not filling in gaps left by the elimination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic design, but instead figural imagery was made secondary to a much more important visual campaign that reinforced the brutally competitive nature of the Mamluk system.
Chapter 4

A New Chronology of Mamluk Iconography

Having established that significant gaps exist in the secondary source material on Mamluk iconography, we can now move forward and discuss the material at hand and posit a new chronology independent of these early notions of art of the period. Although previous studies have developed approaches largely centered on the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad, the realities of this system do not necessarily fit with the practicalities of the materials that exist. Indeed, this approach tends to over-emphasize the early period of Mamluk rule, much to the detriment of the later fourteenth century. Instead, we will be dividing this assessment based on media, namely metalwork, glassware, manuscripts, and ceramics, as discussed in the introduction. Following this, it is then possible to make some general assertions regarding Mamluk iconography as a whole.

Inevitably, the best way of establishing a chronology must be to create a physical timeline of materials. Unfortunately, there are numerous ways to approach such a timeline. To begin, one could be drafted dependent on the dates supplied by museums and prior historians. For obvious reasons, this approach would not do justice to the objects produced during the Mamluk period as many of the dates have been estimated using problematic information. In contrast, we could eliminate all those objects whose dates are questionable or contested and focus solely on those whose dates can be deduced with certainty, namely objects that contain dates on the vessels themselves or else whose patrons are known. While avoiding some level of error, this approach ignores objects whose dates can be determined with relative accuracy, but are not known conclusively,
thus diminishing the pool from which we can develop a timeline. How then should these materials be discussed? The solution seems to be a careful balance between the two. Those whose dates are known or can be safely estimated will be included in the timeline (Appendix A).^75

**Metalware**^76

Inlaid metalware is one of the canonical media in which Mamluk art was produced. Indeed, of the one hundred and nine objects listed in appendix A, fifty-five of them are created of brass inlaid with silver and gold. Apart from nine objects that were produced in the fifteenth century, two of which were made during the reign of Sultan Qaitbay (r. 1468-1496), the entirety of these objects was produced between the mid-thirteenth century and approximately the third quarter of the fourteenth century. The inlaid brass industry likely continued well beyond this date, as is evidenced by the rather exceptional pieces produced under the patronage of Sultan Qaitbay and his family and amirs. However, within a few decades of this date the Mamluk economy greatly declined, making royal commissions increasingly difficult. The impact of the invading Timurids on both the metal and glass industries of Damascus at the turn of the fifteenth century should also be noted.

^75 You will note the inclusion of the Baptistère de St. Louis in this timeline. This is not an oversight, but rather that recent studies by Rachel Ward and Sophie Makariou dating the vessel to the mid-fourteenth century offer convincing evidence for such a date. Additionally, this object will not serve as the focus of this study, but rather act as one element of supporting evidence for a timeline that very much demonstrates that figural imagery was used well past the thirteenth century and even beyond the reign of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad. Should we accept this idea that the Baptistère originates from the mid-fourteenth century, between 1330 and 1360, this would then re-date several other objects similarly signed by Muhammad ibn al-Zayn.

^76 It should be noted here that there exist a fair number of objects including polo scenes that will not be discussed in detail in this study, due to a lack of available material on the topic. However a recent thesis coming out of Ain Shams University might prove enlightening on the topic.
However, even with these occurrences, the metal industry survived largely as an export business. The sale of inlaid metalware to Europeans both local and abroad is thoroughly detailed in a study by none other than Rachel Ward, discussing several inlaid brass trays held in European collections. Ward references these works as the precursors to the Veneto-Saracenic wares so common of the later half of the fifteenth century as they created an avid interest by European patrons in the arts of the orient. Indeed, apart from the two inlaid vessels from the second half of the fifteenth century produced for the wife of Sultan Qaitbay, the other seven inlaid metalwares noted in appendix A from the fifteenth century were almost certainly produced for export.

In addition to this large body of inlaid material are a four other metal objects with figural imagery. The first is the metalwork fittings of a door originally leading to the palace of Amir Sunqur al-Tawil, the second is a caste brass door knocker that lead to the mosque of Amir Qijmas al-Ishaqi, third is a magic/medicinal bowl made of an inscribed copper alloy, and lastly a basin made of chased brass. While the door fittings and medicinal bowl were unequivocally made for local use, the basin was likely intended as an export object for European buyers, but lack of inscriptions on these later vessels clouds the matter of attribution. This is a particularly important point to consider when discussing Veneto-Saracenic wares. To my knowledge, none of these fifteenth century

77 Ward, “Mamluk Export Metalwork.”
78 Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Acc. No. 2389
79 From a recent visit to the site, it is clear that the door knockers have been removed, though their present location is not noted in Mols’ *Islamic Metalwork Fittings*.
80 There are six of these recorded in Annette Ittig’s 1982 publication, but none had a date associated with them except for the bowl held in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Acc. No. 3862)
81 Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 1826-1888
vessels bear inscriptions indicating the patron,\textsuperscript{82} thus raising the question of whether the taste for such objects was entirely foreign.\textsuperscript{83}

Regardless, altogether these objects are fairly representative of the production practices of the Mamluk period. A significant number of metal objects were being produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and particularly the early to mid-fourteenth century sees a flourishing of the inlaid metal industry. We then see a drop in production of such objects in the mid- to late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with minor exceptions for metal produced for export or during the reign of Sultan Qaitbay. Consulting any survey of Mamluk metalwork would confirm such production highs and lows\textsuperscript{84} as would contemporary sources such as Maqrizi who mentions the availability of inlaid metalware for purchase in markets up until the end of the fourteenth century. The statements are little more than short references to the abundance of copper and gold in markets, but confirm a decline in the industry beginning in the late fourteenth century. In fact, James Allan notes that, “a study of Mamluk metalwork in the period between about 1360 and the accession of Barquq in 1382 suggests that the metalworking industry suffered decline.”\textsuperscript{85} Interestingly enough, these dates directly comply with the disappearance of dated objects with figural imagery, suggesting a strong link between the decline of the industry and the use of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic design.

\textsuperscript{82} However, numerous brass objects contain inscriptions indicating the artisan. Mahmud the Kurd and Zayn al-Din are two particularly well known metalworkers of this type with a nice study of Mahmud the Kurd available in Sylvia Auld’s, \textit{Renaissance Venice, Islam and Mahmud the Kurd: a Metalworking Enigma}.

\textsuperscript{83} Certainly, the impetus and demand for these vessels was primarily European, though it would be interesting to discover if a local market existed for the sale of these objects. A bowl held at the Victoria and Albert Museum with a reverse teardrop emblem might indicate that such a market did exist, though perhaps this was merely part of the repertoire of European coat-of-arms at the time. Acc. No. 841&a-1891

\textsuperscript{84} For instance James Allan’s, “Sha’ban, Barquq, and the Decline of the Mamluk Metalworking Industry.”

\textsuperscript{85} Allan, “Mamluk Metalworking Industry,” 85.
So what of the objects that have figural imagery? From the thirteenth century there are thirteen to seventeen metalware objects\textsuperscript{86} with some range of figural forms. Figural emblems are fairly rare with only one object employing the use of such imagery, the incense burner of Amir Baysari. This object depicts the bicephalic eagle emblem of Baysari five times each on both the upper and lower halves of the incense burner, but employs no other anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms (Fig. 8).

The bird or duck motif is not uncommon, appearing on four of the vessels, though only one of these is conclusively dated before the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{87} The other three objects are among those that straddle the border between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in their potential dates. When this imagery appears, it is generally the only form of zoomorphic design that is utilized, with three of the four objects employing only the bird form. The fourth object, a penbox in the British Museum, is a rather exceptional piece that uses extensive zoomorphic and anthropomorphic imagery in its design (Fig. 9). The unusual formation of zoomorphic interlace specifically emphasizes the animals depicted within it, where most other scrolls of this type tend to carefully conceal the animal forms within the framework of the design.\textsuperscript{88} This emphasis on representation in a typically aniconic design is only paralleled by the candlestick of Amir Kitbugha whose prominent use of figural calligraphy defines the upper portion of the object (Fig. 10).

\textsuperscript{86} Four objects such as a tray at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Acc. No. 91.1.602) and penbox at the Victoria and Albert (Acc. No. 370-1897) made for Rasulid Sultan Da’ud were made for patrons whose reigns straddle the divide between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, thus crossing over two centuries in their potential dates.

\textsuperscript{87} In this example, the style and form of the bird is markedly different than later iterations, potentially suggesting fourteenth century dates for the other three objects with the bird motif.

\textsuperscript{88} For a full break down of the imagery contained within this penbox see Esin Atil’s, \textit{Renaissance of Islamic: Art of the Mamluks}, 61.
Among those objects employing extensive zoomorphic interlace is the rather extraordinary door of Amir Sunqur al-Tawil which originally led to his palace built near the citadel (Fig. 11). Its initial location has long since merged into the palace (and stables) of Amir Qawsun around 1337 which survives to this day. The doors, however, were relocated to the entrance of the mosque of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay in al-Khanqah around 1437.\(^89\) This particular relocation is worth discussing a little further. Where previously these doors containing figural imagery had been installed in a secular setting, they were then relocated in the fifteenth century to a religious institution. As mentioned in chapter two, the use of figural imagery in a religious context is incredibly rare in Islam, and its occurrence in this instance is rather striking. However, it should be mentioned that the figural interlace is not readily apparent at first site and might not have been noticed by the casual viewer. Perhaps these doors were reused by Barsbay not knowing the content of their design.

This explanation may suffice for these doors, however it certainly does not apply to the door-knockers at the entrance to the mosque of Amir Qijmas al-Ishaqi dated between 1479-1481 (Fig. 12). They are most commonly referenced for the representation of dragons on the interlace hangers. Rachel Ward loosely mentions them when discussing the appearance of animals in later iterations of Mamluk art, arguing that the ‘non-living’ or mythical status of animals such as dragons or phoenixes might have made them more palatable to their patrons.\(^90\) This is a very hypothetical argument, but if it could be proven, it certainly would not include the feline shaped suspension hoops from which the hangers are supported. In fact, the feline suspension hoops are much more easily

\(^{90}\) Ward, “Metal Vessels for Al-Nasir Muhammad,” 63.
identified than are the dragons that seemingly disappear into the design of the hangers. The feline heads however, protrude from the mosque doors, distinct from their surroundings. Indeed, it is most improbable that any significant iconoclastic campaign could have been in place at this time if figural imagery (reused or otherwise) was finding its way into mosques.\textsuperscript{91}

Returning to our survey, the application of concentric friezes of running quadrupeds is also a fairly common decorative element, appearing on four vessels from the thirteenth century. However, far and away the most common decorative element is human figural scenes sectioned off into roundels. A total of nine objects contain such imagery, much of which emphasizes royal pursuits such as enthronements or equestrian scenes, though scenes of the zodiac feature prominently as well.

Little changes from the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century where figural scenes and friezes of running quadrupeds remain fairly common. However, slowly preferences shift as the fourteenth century progresses. Figural imagery becomes relegated to a subsidiary motif en lieu of monumental inscriptions and heraldic emblems. Of the numerous objects from this period, the bird motif becomes increasingly popular appearing on no less than fourteen of the thirty to thirty-four vessels from this century. Its small size and easily manipulated form lent it to use in those places not occupied by large power symbols. However, larger scenes found their way into the decorative repertoire of this period as well, and figural imagery consistently made its way into royal commissions, even if on a smaller scale than previously witnessed. In a period nearly

\textsuperscript{91} One might also consider the humanoid form in a medallion of the mihrab of Amir Qijmas’s Mosque, comprised of the inscription of the calligrapher Abd al-Qadir. Though not definitively human, the shape of the mirrored calligraphy certainly hints in that direction.
equivalent to that represented in the thirteenth century,\textsuperscript{92} we have approximately double the number of objects employing figural imagery. And while there are certainly changes in the iconographic repertoire at this time, the extent to which this is emphasized in past literature certainly ignores the reality of the iconography of fourteenth century Mamluk objects.

Returning to the bird motif, its application and form are quite diverse. The most common representation of this image is what is known as the bird “emblem,” where two confronted birds are located within a roundel (Fig. 13),\textsuperscript{93} though it is frequently used in other capacities as well. Another application is the repeated depiction of the bird in a concentric circle surrounding a central medallion or emblem (Fig. 14). But by far the most interesting use of the bird motif is in the background scroll behind the calligraphy on the basin of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad in the British Museum collection (Fig. 15 & 16). This is a feature that has never previously been noted of this basin, perhaps because it does not fall into the category of the more elaborate zoomorphic scrolls seen in the aforementioned penbox and door. However, the intentional inclusion of this imagery on an object clearly intended for displays of power and status reiterates the idea that figural imagery and Mamluk art were not so at odds with each other.

Most other thirteenth century forms continued to be used to a greater or lesser extent, such as the friezes of running quadrupeds or the anthropomorphic figures in

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\textsuperscript{92} Our last metal object with figural imagery from the fourteenth century was made around 1363. Thus the thirteenth and fourteenth century periods of metal production are roughly equivalent.

\textsuperscript{93} The extent to which this ever was used as an emblem has never been convincingly proven. Certainly, it appears frequently on objects made by the Qala’unid family line, though it is also regularly employed on amiral objects as well. I know of no instances where a sultanic emblem was then reused by a sultan’s amir and moreover the hereditary reuse of sovereign emblems is a topic about which we know very little. The best study on the topic of emblems and their reuse can be found in Estelle Whelan’s, “Representations of the Khassakiyah and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems.”
roundels. The friezes of running quadrupeds appear on eight of the inlaid metal vessels from this period, while anthropomorphic scenes adorn nine of the objects. Over the course of the fourteenth century the objects with figural scenes tend to move away from the confinement of roundels and medallions and instead favor friezes of figures, though this development is not absolute as a mid-fourteenth century mirror still divides its figures by roundels.

The fishbowl motif emerges during this century as a fairly common element of zoomorphic design. It appears on five of the objects in appendix A, although this number is not representative of its frequency of use. However, the number of dated vessels of this type are fairly limited. The composition of this motif can be quite diverse, and in several instances is not limited simply to fish. As it appears on the Baptistère de St. Louis, for instance, it contains eels, turtles, crabs, frogs, ducks, and human-headed birds in addition to the plethora of fish (Fig. 17). However, simpler versions of this style, like those found in the other four examples of fishbowl motifs in the appendix, solely include fish.94

Finally, zoomorphic interlace figures prominently in two rather exquisite penboxes, the first from around 1330 and the later from the early 1360s. The first, referencing Amir Abu’l Fida as its patron, employs a delicate interlace of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms behind the inscription on the lid (Fig. 18). The second penbox, inscribed with the name of the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Mansur (r. 1361-1363) contains two small medallions with a wonderfully detailed zoomorphic scroll (Fig. 19). This later object is the last datable vessel from the fourteenth century, thus marking the initial decline of inlaid metal in Mamluk lands.

94 A nice study of the fishbowl motif in both the Persian and Mamluk traditions can be found in Eva Baer’s, “‘Fish-Pond’ Ornaments on Persian and Mamluk Metal Vessels.”
We witness small surges of inlaid metalwork in the fifteenth century as the export of metalware reaches its zenith and the patronage of Sultan Qaitbay reinvigorates an industry that had long been running on the fumes of the fourteenth century. Indeed, of the seven inlaid metalwork objects from the first half of the fifteenth century, none introduce motifs that are altogether new to Mamluk art either in iconography or interpretation. The phoenix may be the newest of the motifs as it was rarely used on metal objects prior to the fifteenth century, although it was certainly extensively used in enameled glass, as we will discuss later in the chapter.

Stylistically, these series of objects feature images that are rather static and lack the ingenuity and life of their predecessors. Comparing the phoenix on a tray from the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 20) with the phoenix on the mid-fourteenth century glass tray stand in the al-Sabah Collection (Fig. 21) demonstrates the incredible shifts in stylistic preferences between the two centuries. The earlier example is lively and organic, while the later is rather geometric and lifeless.

The character of the objects produced for Fatima, the wife of Sultan Qaitbay, in the second half of the fifteenth century show more ingenuity in design, although they still lack the vibrancy of their predecessors. Somewhat unique, however, is the depiction of realism in the scenes. The ewer held at the Victoria and Albert depicts animals in a forest setting with trees or shrubbery surrounding them (Fig. 22). A precedent for the imagery of trees can be found in a ewer at the Museum of Islamic art in Cairo (Fig. 23). Here, though lacking the animals of the later examples, tree branches and leaves are carefully

95 Only one to my count – a tray inscribed with the name of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad held at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha.
articulated in contrast to the stylized scroll and *thuluth* inscriptions on other parts of the object.

Thus, looked at as a whole, inlaid metalware from the Mamluk period does not conform to the previously held notions that figural imagery was absent from the iconographic repertoire. Much to the contrary, during the heyday of inlaid metalwork there seems to have been a consistent effort to incorporate figural imagery into these objects. While the use of such designs became more limited as the century progressed and blatant power symbols emerged en masse, the fact that they continued to be incorporated is indicative of their value for the ruling elite.

**Enameled Glass**

Enameled glass owes much to inlaid metal in form and iconography, and shows similar trends to this medium in its development of figural imagery. Unfortunately, due to the fragility of this medium, less has survived than that of its counterpart. Moreover, the tradition of enameled and gilded glass did not last nearly as long as did the inlaid metal industry. Where inlaid metal in the Western Islamic world commenced around the turn of the thirteenth century, the origins of enameled and gilded glass indicate a late thirteenth century beginning. Ultimately, this means that while the inlaid metal industry had more than one hundred and fifty years to develop before its late fourteenth century decline, the glass industry only had roughly a century before economic crisis and invasions interfered in its artistic production. Combining these two facts, we have significantly less surviving enameled glass vessels than inlaid metal, and largely those that do survive are religious in

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nature, meaning that figural imagery was discouraged from their decoration. However, some dated examples do survive and combined with Rachel Ward’s newly released study that allows us to approximately date un-attributed objects, we can create a clearer picture of the decorative palette of enameled and gilded glass.

Of the pieces of glass that survive, there are nineteen dated or approximately dated objects with figural imagery. Only one glass object with figural imagery survives from the thirteenth century, a vase inscribed with the name of Rasulid Sultan ‘Umar II (r. 1295-1296). The decoration is fairly simple, adhering to Rachel Ward’s chronology of Mamluk glass. A narrow band of inscription framed in blue runs just below the widest part of the vessel. Above this, three sirens alternate with a geometric pattern in roundels. Finally, the color palette is fairly limited, using only blue, red, white, and black.

The remaining eighteen objects can be dated to the fourteenth century. Interestingly enough, these objects happen to include two mosque lamps. The earlier of these lamps (Fig. 24) takes on a rather unusual shape with a small bulbous body and an elongated, narrow foot and neck. Its decoration, too, is entirely unfamiliar to the more canonical style of mosque lamp. Instead of the traditional epithets and Ayat al-Nur there is a small band of red scroll at the rim of the neck and foot as well as a repeat equestrian figure on the body. Should this have been commissioned for a religious institution, it would have been a remarkable anomaly. It is highly unlikely that this was the case, and much more likely that this was a private commission. Whether its patron was foreign or local is unclear, though I imagine that Ward would favor a European attribution.

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98 My expertise on this subject is still fairly limited and thus my dating of objects had to be confined to those vessels that easily adhered to Rachel Ward’s commentary. Several other published objects with figural imagery exist which likely date from the fourteenth century, though specifics of the dating are beyond me to ascribe.

99 Louvre Museum, Acc. No. OA 7448
The figural imagery on the second mosque lamp is much more subtle and would likely not have been noticed by the attendees of the mosque which it adorned. The figural decoration exists solely as a sgraffito scroll of birds on two narrow registers of the neck (Fig. 25 & 26). The choice of this decorative motif is rather unusual and one must imagine that it was specifically commissioned by Amir Qawsun as this was far from the normal practice of mosque lamp decoration.

Apart from these objects, the range of vessels appear to be largely secular, including bowls, vases, bottles, a tray stand, and a beaker. Figural emblems were much more common in enameled glass than they were in inlaid metal. Including the thirteenth century vase, more than one quarter of the vessels employ figural emblems.

The phoenix, which was rare in inlaid metal, is used on no less than seven objects, all dating from roughly 1340 onwards. Typically, this phoenix was highly stylized and frequently brightly colored, contained within a band at the top of the vessel or within roundels on a frieze somewhere on the body (Fig. 27 & 28). A rather unusual representation of the phoenix occurs on a blue glass vase held at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (Fig. 29). In this iteration of the phoenix, the shape is much more angular and static, similar to those found on the fifteenth century metal vessels for export to Europe. Whether or not this object was intended for a European audience is unclear, though the shape and iconography would seem to suggest that it was. Regardless, the style certainly confirms a date no earlier than the second half of the fourteenth century and potentially as late as the first half of the fifteenth century. Perhaps this was among those objects commissioned by European traders in Damascus during the time that they
were supporting the inlaid metal industry, a possibility that is not necessarily negated by the use of “our Lord the Sultan, the ruler”\textsuperscript{100} in the inscriptions around the neck.

The friezes of running quadrupeds so typical of inlaid metalware are also present in enameled and gilded glass, though not to the same effect. Six objects use such imagery, but none of them demonstrate the diversity of form found on some of the metalwork objects. Compared to a 1269 candlestick in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo,\textsuperscript{101} which incorporates rhinos, elephants, a sphinx, etc., a similar frieze on a Victoria and Albert Museum bottle from approximately 1350\textsuperscript{102} includes rabbits, dogs, and leopards.\textsuperscript{103} Zoomorphic interlace is uncommon, appearing on only three objects, the mosque lamp discussed above, in gilding on a flask from around 1330 held in the British Museum,\textsuperscript{104} and a long-necked bottle at the Metropolitan Museum of Art dated to the first half of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{105}

Finally, anthropomorphic forms are not particularly common, though when they do appear they show a careful attention to articulation and detail. Human figures are employed on four of the eighteen objects, none of which are more worthy of attention than a mid-fourteenth century bottle held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, it seems that the Metropolitan Museum has been unwilling to re-date this object to the fourteenth century, where it most probably belongs. The spectacular use of color and shape across this frieze indicate a careful consideration of both the

\textsuperscript{100} Qatar Museums Authority, \textit{Museum of Islamic Art}, 136.
\textsuperscript{101} Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Acc. No. 1567
\textsuperscript{102} Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 223-1879
\textsuperscript{103} Though the simplification of figural motifs during the second quarter of the fourteenth century might also be a factor here.
\textsuperscript{104} British Museum, Acc. No. 1869,0120.3
\textsuperscript{105} Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 36.33
anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms and was most likely a special commission by a wealthy amir or sultan or else a European.

Together, these objects show an incredible amount of affinity to their inlaid metal counterparts, though the overlap is not absolute. While shapes of metal objects were translated to blown glass, original forms also existed. Additionally, the iconographic repertoire appears to have been similar across both media, though enameled glass favored emblems and the phoenix as opposed to the bird motif or zoomorphic interlace more commonly found in inlaid metal. There appears to be equal representation of figural imagery across the fourteenth century, with a particular emphasis on the phoenix from the 1340s onward. As noted in our discussion of the door-knockers of Amir Qijmas al-Ishaqi, Ward explains that this might have resulted from the permissibility of mythological figures at this time, though this notion seems tentative at best. Regardless, figural imagery certainly found its place is enameled glass and was not limited to representations of the mythical, but included ‘living’ animals and humans alike.

Illustrated Manuscripts

Illustrated manuscripts belong to a separate tradition from inlaid metal and enameled glass, though certainly there is some cross over between the two. However, the quality of illustrated manuscripts never reached that of the other two media. Indeed, they were never intended as power symbols in the way that enameled and gilded glass and inlaid metal were. What’s more, many of the Mamluk ruling elite were not learned in Arabic, and it seems unlikely that they would have commissioned such texts if there was no opportunity to read them. However, many amirs and sultans were capable of

106 Rabbat, “Representing the Mamluks,” 17.
reading these texts, most notably al-Nasir Muhammad who is frequently commended for
his Arabic language skills. In fact, he is the patron of one of only three manuscripts for
which we have an owner’s inscription, as mentioned in chapter two. The other two
manuscripts for which we have patrons names are an Iskandarnama ascribed to Amir
Kushqadam ibn ‘Abdallah and a Turkish translation of the Shahnama made for Sultan
Qansuh al-Ghuri. Of the remaining twenty-five manuscripts we have no patrons listed.
Likely these objects were not of royal caliber and thus would not have necessitated the
inclusion the owner’s name in the colophon.¹⁰⁷

For the thirteenth century, we have no dated manuscripts, though Duncan Haldane
attributes two to this early period, both of which are Maqamats. Each includes a fair
number of illustrations, seventy-nine to the earlier and eighty-three to the later.

Again, the fourteenth century appears to be the peak period of artistic production,
with seventeen manuscripts assigned to this century. Eleven of the manuscripts are dated
in the colophon, while the remaining six are offered approximate dates. There is an
incredible amount of variation in the number of miniatures, ranging from twelve to two
hundred and twenty-seven. This last manuscript is not the commonly thought of manual
of horsemanship or warfare, but an additional Maqamat.¹⁰⁸ In fact, there are five
Maqamat manuscripts from the Mamluk period, the last of which was produced in 1337
for al-Nasir Muhammad. However, these were not the only ‘literary’ illustrated
manuscripts from this time. There exist, also, four illustrated copies of Kalila wa Dimna,
all from the fourteenth century, as well as the previously mentioned Iskandarnama and

¹⁰⁷ My information regarding the catalogue of manuscripts has primarily come from Duncan
Haldane’s Mamluk Painting. Although his analysis could use some revision, the catalogue
provided in this text has proven to be an invaluable tool.
¹⁰⁸ British Library, Acc. No. 7293
*Shahnama* from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively. The last literary manuscript from the fourteenth century, dated to 1388 production, is the least accomplished manuscript of the group, though it contains one hundred and twenty miniatures. Clearly, illustrations were valued additions to texts even if relatively primitive in form (Fig. 30).

Of the nine manuscripts dated or assigned to the fifteenth century, none are of a particularly high quality and only one falls into the category of non-practical texts. It appears that in the financial crisis that arose in the late fourteenth century, the expense of illustrating literary works was not deemed worthwhile, though manuals were still commissioned.

Finally, we have only two manuscripts from the sixteenth century. One is an approximately dated *Furusiyya*, or Manual of Horsemanship, while the other is the rather impressive *Shahnama* of al-Ghuri. Notably, al-Ghuri is the first and only Mamluk sultan to have developed an imperial painting atelier.\(^\text{109}\) There are significant Anatolian influences in the style of these illustrations, a connection that is further reinforced by the Turkish language in which the text is written. Indeed, it has been suggested by both Duncan Haldane and Esin Atil that Turkish manuscript painters were likely brought in to work alongside Mamluk painters in al-Ghuri’s manuscript atelier.

It is worth mentioning that manuscripts are the only consistently dated materials from the Mamluk period and demonstrate the same trends in figural imagery emphasized in the earlier two sections: the thirteenth century shows some limited production (more for inlaid metalwork), which then greatly increases in the fourteenth century, but significantly diminishes by the fifteenth and sixteenth. This is not only reflected in the

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\(^{109}\) Atil, “Late Mamluk Painting,” 169.
number of objects produced, but the quality of them. Across the board, the care taken with inlaid metal, enameled glass, and illustrated manuscripts greatly declines in the last century of Mamluk rule.

**Ceramics**

There are virtually no conclusively dated ceramics from the Mamluk period, as is to be expected. Few ceramics are inscribed with dates or patron names in the Islamic world, although many exceptions exist from Iran. We have fairly accurate dating for ceramics supplied by archaeologists such as Rosalind Haddon, though the dating is far too general for this particular survey, referencing centuries rather than decades or years. The only pieces we have with figural imagery that can be ascribed to a more specific date are two hexagonal tiles with a central stork, originally attached to the mosque and mausoleum of Amir Ghars al-Din Khalil al-Tawrizi in Damascus (Fig. 31 & 32).\(^\text{110}\) One can presume that these were not the only tiles of their type and that many more existed as part of a repeated pattern adorning the monument. Additionally, once again we see a break with tradition, where figural imagery is applied to religious monuments.\(^\text{111}\) It is not noted whether these particular tiles were found on the mausoleum, which would have been more appropriate, or the mosque. However, if they were found on the latter, the use of such a tile would have been quite unusual, though not unprecedented given the use of bird imagery in mosque furniture that occurred in the fourteenth century.

Interestingly enough, the foundation of the mosque-mausoleum structure occurred only a few decades prior to the whitewashing of the mosaics at the Great Mosque of

\(^{110}\) Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 419-1898 & 468-1897

\(^{111}\) This too can be seen in Iranian religious architecture, though is markedly less common in the Western Islamic world.
Damascus, which likely occurred some time in the third quarter of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{112} This aniconic act seems them to have been a singular action rather than something that reflected a wider campaign against mosque ornament or figural imagery. Indeed, the whitewashing of the mosaics at the Dome of the Rock likely took place under the Ottomans rather than under the Mamluks, sometime between 1500 and 1634.\textsuperscript{113}

Putting ceramics aside, as there is not enough material evidence to argue for a figural agenda one way or another (though the discussion from chapter two supplied by Rosalind Haddon and Roland Pierre-Gayraud certainly confirms that figural imagery, both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic, was present in Mamluk ceramics), we see a very consistent effort to incorporate figural imagery into the larger iconographic campaign of Mamluk art. While it was certainly not as common as royal titles and blazons, which existed in profusion on countless objects, special commissions regularly included scenes with animals and humans. Indeed, the majority of exceptional works from the Mamluk period include figural imagery of some form, at least up until the end of the fourteenth century. The vast majority of aniconic objects were either commissioned for religious institutions or else reflect a poorer quality of art. Certainly exceptions to this rule exist, notably a candlestick made for an officer of Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir\textsuperscript{114} or many of the inlaid metal objects made for Sultan Qaitbay. However, looked at as a whole there is not

\textsuperscript{112} This date is supplied from a lecture given by Finbarr Flood entitled, “From Gilding to Whitewash: Ornament and Distraction in the Medieval Mosque,” given in Cairo on 17 March, 2014. Flood notes that the mosaics are discussed in prior sources through the first half of the fifteenth century, but a 1479 commentary on the damage caused to the mosque by fire neglects to mention the mosaics and future texts about the monument all repeat previous records rather than make new observations.

\textsuperscript{113} Also noted in Flood’s above-mentioned lecture.

\textsuperscript{114} Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Acc. No. 15080.
enough consistency in the decline of figural imagery to call for an iconoclastic campaign
or else a complete absence of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms.
Chapter 5
Conclusions

Final Considerations

For fear of over-stating the presence of figural imagery in Mamluk art, let me reiterate that it was aniconic power symbols (i.e. inscriptions and emblems) that formed the primary decorative motifs of the period. The emphasis on visual expressions of authority far outstrips any other mode of representation. This campaign of sovereign imagery seen in the portable arts is complimented by the architectural campaigns of the Mamluk elite, which focused on the construction of public institutions at a rate unprecedented in Egypt’s history. Primary sources too, regularly remark on symbols of authority either by elaborating on the building of certain monuments or else listing the items and symbols that express an amir’s or sultan’s authority.

While all of this is true, figural imagery also played an important role in the visual expressions of the ruling elite. In fact, until 1388 we see regular attempts to commission figural imagery in metalwork, glass, and manuscripts. Manuscripts, as one of the few consistently dated materials from the Mamluk period, are particularly strong indicators of the continued trends of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic design in Mamluk portable arts. In contrast to religious scholarship, which widely condemned the painting of living beings, both manuscripts and occasionally wall paintings were seen throughout Mamluk rule.

115 Unfortunately, as mentioned in previous chapters, little is known about the patronage of these manuscripts. We have only one manuscript with a known patron, al-Nasir Muhammad, which might indicate royal commissioning of these objects, however one name is not enough to determine the practices of an entire group of objects.
Lingering on the topics of frescos, some scholars, most notably Behrens-Abouseif, frequently comment on the absence of wall painting in later Mamluk palaces, using this once again as evidence for a lack figural imagery in later Mamluk art. And truthfully, palatial frescos were probably not made after the thirteenth century, as there is no primary source material to indicate their presence and few palaces now survive. However, they were not particularly common even in the thirteenth century. Of the more than ten sultans that reigned in the first fifty years of Mamluk rule only two, Baybars I and al-Ashraf Khalil, commissioned frescos for their palaces. Moreover, another wall painting was commissioned in 1351 by Amir Manjak al-Yusufi, although it was not one of the palatial scenes noted above. Instead, it was a series of images of executed women raised on the walls of Cairo.\textsuperscript{116}

How then are we to conclude that figural imagery disappeared in the later Mamluk period from this information? There were no consistent trends of palatial frescos prior to the fourteenth century and even in the fourteenth century we have evidence of the commissioning of a wall painting, specifically for the public. Art historians simply do not have the support necessary to make such avid and consistent assertions on the topic. It appears as though pertinent material is frequently overlooked in order to fit into these pre-conceived notions of art from this time. Stepping back, however, the picture of figural imagery is not one of iconoclasm, but one of sublimation.

The portable arts of the time confirm such notions with no less than one hundred and six datable objects employing some type of figural imagery, be it anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, emblem or scene. When consulting the entire corpus of surviving works of Mamluk art, one hundred and six is not a particularly large collection of objects.

However, one must keep in mind that these are simply those pieces that can be dated relatively securely from museums whose catalogues are easily accessible via online databases or print sources. Of those objects for which we have no conclusive date to offer, there number some additional one hundred, to which we might add numerous other examples with the publication of more collections.

**Mamluk Figural Imagery**

Moving away from comments that deconstruct past arguments, let us now posit a new chronology of Mamluk iconography that is more readily supported by historical narratives and primary source commentaries. Discussed briefly in preceding chapters, the present section will now combine these previous statements into a cohesive argument regarding the development and function of Mamluk iconography and the extent to which figural imagery factored.

Figural imagery was a primary decorative motif in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, represented in many different fashions. Zoomorphic interlace, friezes of running quadrupeds, animal and human fight scenes, and depictions of sovereign enthronement among others were all regularly included in the decorative repertoire of portable objects. The primary media for works of art produced in this early period were metalwares with manuscripts and the introduction of enameled glass complimenting these notions of early Mamluk iconography. Non-representational design was also present on numerous objects from this time. Ultimately, the iconographic repertoire as a whole was largely dependent on trends initiated under the Ayyubids. These slowly adjusted to include forms more representative of the Mamluk system, such
as figural and non-figural emblems. However, at this time these ‘Mamluk’ elements were largely secondary to the figural scenes. In a dynasty preoccupied with defending its borders and expelling the Crusaders in the West and the Ilkhanids in the East, it does not seem as though any particular attention was paid to initiating a new iconography. Some new elements slowly filtered in at this time, such as the ‘Qalawunid’ windows (Fig. 33) derivative of European Gothic architecture or the spoliated portal leading to the complex of al-Ashraf Khalil, now the madrasa of al-Nasir Muhammad. However, the context of these subtle stylistic shifts was largely architectural and impacted portable arts very minimally.

It was not until the third reign of al-Nasir Muhammad that any tangible shift in stylistic preferences could be felt. It was at this point that chinoiserie elements began appearing in the form of the lotus, the phoenix, and to a lesser extent the dragon. Further, the division between sultan and amirs was highlighted by the introduction of two new sovereign symbols, the epigraphic sundisk and the tripartite epigraphic emblem. It was the introduction of these motifs that reinforced Mamluk norms of rank and power and sublimated the use of figural imagery, but did not cause figural imagery to disappear in its entirety.

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic design elements continued to be used regularly for another fifty years after the introduction of these sovereign symbols. The figural motifs were used more discreetly on these later objects than in their predecessors. They functioned as subordinate elements to the larger campaign of authoritative imagery that reinforced the Mamluk pecking order.
More objects in this period were aniconic than figurative in contrast to the emphasis on figural design in the first seven decades of Mamluk rule. However, many more objects were produced in this later period than previously had been. Indeed, a number of pieces were pre-fabricated with anonymous titles and roundels left blank to insert the buyer’s blazon. These would have been more affordable to amirs and members of the upper class with modest incomes, where the cost of commissioning specialized objects with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery would have inhibited all but the sultan and very wealthy amirs from their purchase. This rule is certainly not absolute.

There are numerous commissioned objects that do not contain any figural imagery, but such objects also exist in the pre-al-Nasir Muhammad period.

Figural imagery only truly begins to disappear around the end of the fourteenth century into the fifteenth century. Having asserted the figural imagery was primarily attached to costly commissions, I posit the reason for this absence resulted from the decline in the Mamluk economy and not, as previously asserted, from any continued iconoclastic campaign. Anthropomorphic elements continue to surface in numerous different media throughout the fifteenth century, though certainly not on the scale that they had previously been used. Instead, they appear to once again be the work of specialty objects such as a Veneto-Saracenic basin held at the Victoria and Albert Museum117 or the hexagonal tiles from the funerary mosque of Amir Ghars al-Din Tawrizi in Damascus. There also exists the possibility that these objects reflect anomalies in a larger iconoclastic campaign, but primary sources do not offer any support for such a claim. In contrast, historical and economic shifts, as well as contemporary historians, all

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117 Victoria and Albert Museum, Acc. No. 1826-1888
appear to conform to this idea that the call for figural imagery was very much tied to availability of funds.

Consequently, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic design played an important role in the Mamluk period as a decorative element that was frequently reserved for only the most costly of objects. This conclusion indicates that previous scholarship has largely been misguided on the topic of Mamluk iconoclasm. Much to the contrary, figural imagery had value for the ruling elite where it frequently adorned those objects that were specially commissioned by wealthy sultans and amirs.
# Appendix A: Chronology of Figural Imagery in Mamluk Art

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<td>01603 297461</td>
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<td>Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Acc. No. 1547</td>
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Figure 7: Ivory Frame, British Museum, Acc. No. 1874,0302.7

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Figure 33: Window from the Complex of Sultan Qalawun
Bibliography


Tanindi, Zeren. “Two Bibliophile Mamluk Emirs: Qansuh the Master of the Stables and Yashbak the Secretary,” in *The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria –*


