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The Journal of Dar al-Atahr al-Islamiyyah
Issue 20

On the cover: detail of LNS 10 L Bookbinding in leather and paper. 36.5 cm h, 24.9 cm w. Iranian world. Safavid, mid 16th century AD.

The Journal Hadeeth ad-Dar of Dar al-Atahr al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is intended to share the wealth and beauty of Islamic culture contained within the extensive and comprehensive al-Sabah Collection of Islamic art and the variety of scholarly and artistic activities associated with the collection. The collection itself, ranging from early Islam to the 18th century, is organized according to both historical period and geographical region. The reference library and the publications of DAI are closely related to the collection.

DAI has sponsored archaeological excavations in Bannasa, Upper Egypt that date to the Fatimid period. Before the invasion of 1991, the school of art associated with the DAI promoted skills in the study of the varied artistic genres that are represented in the collection. At present, our annual lecture series has been revived and is a local point for historians and other specialists in the field. It features talks by prominent international scholars on various topics of Islamic art, history, archaeology and architecture.
Islamic art is an important and large field of study. Carpets are among the foremost Islamic works of art, and one of the most important possessions of all Muslims, whether settled or nomadic. The glamour of carpets is also universal and even if their origin is still mysterious we can at least be sure about one fact, that they were used to cover a sacred space. They served to distinguish between religious and secular spaces. In Central Asia carpets were probably employed by shamans to perform their rituals. Much later in Islamic times, the floors of prayer halls in mosques were covered with carpets, and so the carpet retained part of its original function. Until today, Heads of State and VIPs are received on a carpet, (usually red and albeit not a treasured piece). When he appears at a Vatican window the Pope hangs a cloth (but it could easily be a carpet) from the particular window. It is not only used to identify the window where he will appear, but is also as a distinctive mark of his presence. The West, where a different economic and social climate prevented many Oriental handicrafts from being imitated (even if some attempts were probably made) has always loved carpets. Since at least the Middle Ages carpets have served as wonderful ambassadors of outstanding Oriental aesthetic qualities throughout the Western world.

Historically Italy has always been an important land. Its geographical position in the middle of the Mediterranean makes it a bridge between northern Europe and the many countries that surround it. This bridge has served as a conduit for trade in many directions.

By the Medieval period and later in the Renaissance, many Italian towns had close economic and political contact with the Islamic world. Although this activity was mostly concentrated in the great port cities of Genoa and Venice, Florence, despite being land-locked, started to trade with the East after its acquisition of Pisa and Leghorn. These contacts and ties are faithfully reflected in Italian art, beginning in Medieval times. This trend was not confined to Sicily, which had been happily Muslim for almost a century, but was reflected everywhere. One of the greatest artists, Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337 AD), who worked in Assisi, Florence and Padua, not only painted Islamic elements such as pseudo inscriptions in the halos of the Virgin and Saints, but also depicted fabrics, tapestries and even possibly carpets; carpets being not always easily recognizable at this time.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Islamic elements, and particularly carpets, are depicted in Italian paintings, not only as a sort of exotic detail, but as undisputed protagonists in the compositions. For example, in the magnificent Madonna and Child (Florence, Uffizi, mid-fifteenth century AD), Domenico Ghirlandaio shows a carpet lying beneath the Madonna’s feet. It is an Anatolian typology; we must wait until the beginning of the seventeenth century to find examples of Persian carpets in European paintings, especially northern European ones. In his painting of c.1470, “The Virgin enthroned with Duke Federico da Montefeltro” (Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera) one of Italy’s most famous painters, Piero della Francesca (1416-1492 AD), depicts a carpet with a geometric design under the Madonna’s feet. One fact to remember is that during this time, paintings contained many symbolic meanings and the flourishing of carpets in works of famous painters cannot be simply dismissed as a splash of colour. This important point will be discussed further below.

Venice, the Most Serene Republic, had a special role to play: the city occupied a crucial trading position with the two main Islamic powers, the Mamluk and Ottoman (frequently with both at the same time). In published academic studies it has already been documented and demonstrated that the Venetian trade in carpets was in

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Jewish hands. The three Jewish communities in Venice were restricted to working in two areas: lending money in banks (banchi) and selling second-hand items, mostly clothes (strazzaria). Carpets are mentioned in the book of rules (mariegoria) that governed the Jewish population.

Venice exerted a form of monopoly in the trading of carpets. The city still owns an important piece: the large Mamluk carpet in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (9.60m. x 3.75 m.), which was found and "re-discovered" by the present writer twenty years ago. The relevant documents state that it was bought in 1541 AD. One of the most powerful men of the period, the Englishman Cardinal Wolsey (c.1473-1530), Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII, opened negotiations with the Venetian ambassadors (based on privileges in the importation of wine to London), with the request for a present of 100 or 80 or 60 Oriental carpets! The negotiations lasted two years (1518-20 AD), and he did get the carpets. Among the curiosities relating to this story is the supplica (petition) made by Ambassador Giustiniani to the Serenissima to keep the golden chain given to him by the king at the end of his service in London. The Venetian Senate decided instead to sell it to raise money to buy the carpets. It is therefore not surprising to find several carpets depicted in the Venetian school at this time.

We begin with one of the most interesting artists, Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556 AD), who also gave his name to a typology of carpets with his famous painting 'The Alms of St Anthony' (Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, 1542 AD) in which two carpets are depicted. It is interesting to confirm from his private papers that Lotto had in his possession two carpets. He was not a rich man but rugs were an important accessory for his job. Gentile Bellini who lived in Constantinople for two years also depicts a carpet beneath his Virgin. Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506 AD) has a carpet (a so called small Holbein pattern) in his polyptych in St. Zeno, Verona (1457-9). In the mid-sixteenth century, Jacopo Bassano (c.1515-1592) repeatedly used carpets in his paintings. Bonifazio Veronese's (1487-1557 AD) painting, significantly entitled 'The Rich Epulone', has an interesting carpet. We will return later to this subject.

Of a rather different and unusual concern are the carpets and other possibly Islamic objects painted by...
Vecellio Tiziano (1480 – 1576 AD), detail of The Entombment, c. 1570 AD. Oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

Carpaccio at the turn of the fifteenth century in his Cycle of St. Ursula (Venice, Accademia). The exact prototypes for these carpets have never been found and scholars have long believed he ‘imagined’ such carpets, inspired by original Anatolian rugs. However this is unlikely. For a long time the analogies between Turkish and Spanish carpets have been highlighted by scholars in this field. We know that the Jews were expelled by the Catholic Kings of Spain in 1492, and that they roamed the world, starting in northern Europe (Antwerp, for instance), passing through Venice to reach their final destination in Istanbul, where they were protected by the Ottoman Sultans. With this in mind, Carpaccio’s dates (1472-1526 AD) become very interesting. He painted his Cycle in circa 1495 making it possible, if hard to prove, that his models were not carpets from the East - which is the general assumption - but from the West - somewhat more unexpected.

The discussion now turns to other noteworthy Oriental details in Venetian paintings. St. Mark, the Venetian patron Saint, was martyred in Alexandria. The cycles of paintings by Giovanni Mansueti and others that illustrate this story, in the Accademia in Venice are full of Oriental references, mainly Mamluk, as has been already noted in a brilliant study by Julian Raby. Islamic elements - notably inscriptions or pseudo inscriptions, probably inspired by contemporary metalwork or textiles - were very popular at that time. Other examples include the ‘Workshop’ of Bellini (New York, Metropolitan Museum and London, National Gallery), Mantegna’s ‘Judith and Olophernes’ (National Museum, Cracow) and an interesting painting by Boccaccio Boccaccino, (1493-1524/5 AD) in Venice, all of which contain pseudo inscriptions on the clothes of a Madonna; in the case of Boccaccino, a tiraz is clearly intended. Cima da Corelliano (1459-1518 AD) is another important artist in this context, as is one of the most celebrated masters of Italian painting: Vecellio Tiziano (1490-1576 AD), popularly known as Titian. It is important to remember that these artists’ paintings were a sort of public “advertisement”, which were immediately intelligible to ordinary people as well as satisfying to the learned requirements of the clients. In Titian’s ‘The Deposition’ or ‘Pieta’ (Madrid, Prado; mid sixteenth century AD), we see a personage dressed in an imperial Ottoman cotton. Why? We do not yet know exactly but one thing is certain: its presence is not by mistake or chance.

Returning to our discussion of carpets, at least two further paintings must be considered. Giovanni di Paolo’s (1403-1483 AD) ‘St. Catherine appearing before the Pope’ at Avignon in 1460 (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) and Paris Bordone’s (1500-1571 AD) ‘The Presentation of the Ring to the Doge’ circa 1534 (Venice, Accademia). In both paintings a carpet is laid beneath the Pope and the Doge, in the same way as it honoured the Madonna in other works. Scholars believe this was used to show the sacred value of carpets; the carpet is a key to understanding the glorification of people. Carpets maintained their symbolic meaning throughout the centuries as a means to define a sacred space. Power is invested in the Pope and the Doge by God: this is testified by the presence of the carpet and its position under the throne. From this it follows that wealth (or importance) are part of God’s blessing and not merely a status symbol. This maybe one reason why carpets were included in paintings of important personages in the sixteenth century AD.
Andalusian Biographies

Abridged from a lecture by Mohamed Bencharifa*

The legacy of biography in Islam is a huge and rich one, unsurpassed by any other culture. The Andalusians contributed greatly to it, during the eight centuries of the Andalusian history. Early Andalusian biographers emulated scholars of the East such as ibn Hanbal, al-Bukhari and others. They encountered many scholars during their travels to the East and returned to spread their knowledge in Andalusian cities.

The first to do so was Abd al-Malik ibn Habib (d. 238 AH), known as Fagih al-Andalus (the scholar of Andalusia), who followed the classification of the biographer Mohammed ibn Omar al-Waqidi and his scribe Mohammed ibn Sa'ad. Ibn Habib's biography Kitab al-Tarikh (The Book of History) contains sections on the Prophet's life, the history of the orthodox Caliphs, the history of the Umayyads and Abdessad, and the history of Andalusia. He also wrote about the various groups of scholars among the Prophet's Companions and their Followers throughout the Islamic World up to his own time.

Abd al-Malik ibn Habib devised two classifications of Companions, three of Followers and concluded with the Andalusian group to which he attributed great merit. This set a trend in Andalusian writing that became increasingly popular. He described fourteen men who were sheikhs of their age in name only, where he listed the attributes and some biographical details about the members of the class of Companions and Followers. The book was re-published in Spain and Beirut.

Books of chronicles and biography began at the beginning of the third century in connection with the science of Hadith as it predominated in the East. Since the al-Muwatta of Imam Malik was the first book to enter Andalusia, it became urgent to introduce the men it discussed and explain the idea of Hadith and Fiqh. The focus given to the men depicted in al-Muwatta and Kitab al-Tarikh (The Book of History) by al-Bukhari grew to accommodate the needs of Hadith scholars.

Some of these books have survived, such as those of ibn al-Hatha' al-Qurtubi and ibn Taher al-Dani, and an example from Morocco is Kitab fi RIjal al-Hadith (On Men of Hadith) by ibn al-Fakhkhar al-Qurtubi (d. 330 AH) which consists of 85 parts and which was referred to by ibn Hazm al-Andalusi.

Many of them were as accomplished as the Eastern biographers. One of which was Maslama ibn al-Qasim al-Qurtubi (d. 352 AH) who wrote the al-Sila fi al-Rijal (On the Biographies of Scholars). This book also serves as an appendix to al-Bukhari's book in that it contains what was omitted by him. However the largest Moroccan contribution to this field is al-Ist'ab fi Mar' rifat al-Ashab (On the Biographies of the Companions of the Prophet) by Abu Omar Yusuf ibn Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH). All of the above were part of the Andalusian contribution to writing about Islamic culture, which the Andalusians believed was a culture shared between East and West.

After the establishment of Andalusia and its unification during the age of Caliph Abd al-Rahman al-Nasser, the greatest of the Andalusian Umayyads and longest lasting Caliph who ruled for fifty years, Andalusian writers began writing about their own men as a way of defining Andalusian identity. Culture reached a high level under the Caliph and his son both because of

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LNS 3 MS. "Dalail al-Khairat" manuscript made of European laid paper, gold, colours and leather. Date: ca 16th century AD, 10th century AH from North Africa.
their patronage of scholars, the migration of many Eastern scholars to Andalusia, and the spread of education. As a result, there was a need for biographies about the great men of Andalusia from the beginning of its history in the fourth century AH through the subsequent three centuries. Such a work was undertaken by three historians. The first is Abū al-Rayḥān al-Būrī (d. 344 AH) who wrote books of history, ancestry, biography and geography, the most famous of which is al-Isāb (The Assimilation) divided into five large volumes, unfortunately received but trivial attention. The second historian is Abū al-Rahmān al-Hakim (d. 341 AH) who remained anonymous until 1985 when the lecturer published his academic research in Rabat and Madrid. Al-Hakim's book discusses Caliphs, important Arab figures who visited Andalusia, and leading men among the Berber tribes. The third is Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Mohammed ibn Abī al-Rab (d. 338 AH) who wrote various histories of scholars and judges, a book that proved to be a bad omen after they were commissioned by Abū al-Malik ibn Abī al-Rahmān al-Nāṣir who was killed along with the writer when he rose against his father. Ibn Abī al-Rab's book was a source for various subsequent books: Ibn al-Farādī's history, Ibn Ḥayyān's al-Muqtabas (The Citation), al-Qādī ʿAyyād's Tarīkh al-Muḥadit (Orders of Knowledge), and Abū al-Qasīm Khalīl ibn Saʿd al-Qurtubī's (d. 358 AH) lost book, though al-Khāshnī cited large sections of it, from a reserved copy in Morocco, in his own book Akhbar al-Fuqaha' wa al-Hadith (Chronicles of Scholars and Hadith), which was published in Spain containing Khalīl ibn Saʿd's book.

Among those commissioned by Abū al-Ḥakam al-Mustansīr to write Andalusian biographies was Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū al-Malik known as Abū al-Mas'ūd al-Qurtubī (d. 380 AH), Ishaq ibn Maslama al-Qayni al-Malāqī who ibn al-Fardī described as "the Keeper of Andalusia's news", and Abū al-Qasīm Khalīl ibn Saʿd al-Qurtubī who wrote al-Aniq (The grateful), who was close to al-Mustansīr and also a speaker at the mosque.

The Caliph also commissioned city scholars to write biographies of their fellow scholars. This was the basis for Qasīm ibn Saʿd's (d. 347 AH) books Fuqaha' al-Riyā (Scholars of Riyā), Riyā being the old name of the city of Mālaqā, and Fuqaha' al-Birā (Scholars of al-Birā's) a city preceding Granada, as well as Ahl Bāja (People of Bāja) and Ahl Istīja (People of Istīja) both of which are lost.

The history of Andalusian cities was later addressed as one theme. The Spaniards inherited the tradition which started with the Caliph al-Mustansīr. The purpose of these biographies was to chronicle the history of Andalusia as an exercise in asserting Andalusian identity and their existence in the Iberian semi-continent.

This tradition continued with the Imam ibn Hazm in his treatise Faḍl al-Andalus (The Grace of Andalusia) which was published both separately and in Nafr al-Tīb
(The Scent of Perfume) and other books. This was followed by Ibn Sa’d al-‘Ansi al-Margibi (d. 685 AH). All of these historical records continued to circulate up to the eighth century when they were lost. All that remains of them are a few book and some references in later books such as the History of ibn al-Fardi.

There are also books about poets and writers such as those written by Ibn ‘Asim, Muhammed ibn Harith al-Khassani and Abu al-Waleed Abdullah ibn Muhammed ibn Yusuf (Ibn al-Fardi), but these are also sadly lost. The history of the scholars by ibn al-Fardi is considered the first link in a chain of Andalusian biographies that continued from the fourth to the ninth century.

Ibn al-Khatib called this chain kutub al-silat (Books of Connections) as each book is linked to its predecessor. Starting with Ibn al-Fardi’s history which is a well-known, printed book organized alphabetically and containing 1650 biographies, it is followed by the later historian Ibn Bashkawal’s al-Sila il Tarikh ibn al-Fardi (The Continuation of ibn al-Fardi’s Book). Ibn Bashkawal lived at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century AH. His work continues to be printed today. Next is the scholar al-Balansi ibn al-Abbar’s Kitab al-Takmil il Kitab al-Sila (Continuation of the Continuation) picking up where Ibn Bashkawal concluded and dated to the beginning of the seventh century. Ibn al-Abbar was also the author of Tuhfat al-Qadim (The Gift of the Future) that contained biographies of contemporary writers and poets. He was witness to the fall of Balansi in 636 AH, and fled to Tunisia where he worked as a writer for the Caliph al-Muntasir al-Hafsi who later executed him for mentioning historical events that did not please the Caliph, by burning him, as historians say, with his books. However his work has somehow survived.

Next follows Ibn al-Zubayr, a major Granadian biographer and annotator whose work Silat al-Sila (Connection of the Connection) began where Ibn al-Abbar ended. This printed book was followed by the work of Ibn Abd al-Malik al-Marrakishi whose book al-Dhivy al-Takmil il Kitab al-Mawsul wa al-Sila (The Appendix and Continuation of The two books the Connected and the Connection). It included those who had been forgotten or neglected by the previous writers. This is the most important biography in Andalusia, and considered as a historical and literary treasure that influenced many later works. After all of these came a great encyclopedic scholar who aimed at compiling the preceding works in Andalusia or the Kingdom of Granada. He was ibn al-Khatib the author of ‘Aid al-Sila (Retriever of Connections). This book is lost and known only through quotations in ibn al-Khatib's printed book al-Heita il Al'am Garata (On Celebrities of Granada). The last link in this chain was al-Rawd al-‘Alih il A’lam al-Kitsba wa al-Qaridh by Ibn al-Khatib the Second, Abu Yihya Ibn ‘Asim who was also a man of letters at the court of Banu al-Ahmarr. Only a few pages have survived in the Escorial library near Madrid.

Ironically, those who evicted the Andalusians from their land, destroyed their culture and ignored their history have returned after four centuries to rediscover their Islamic past in an attempt to understand their history and to try and gather these manuscripts, in particular those belonging to what they have termed the Andalusian library. Two major Spanish orientalists, Francisco Guidera and Julian Rebera began this task. From 1883 to 1895 AD the library published its finds in ten volumes. As a result, Julian Rebera was able to publish significant research on important figures from Andalusian history and a new field of cultural studies grew up around the subject. It was soon apparent that these biographies were indispensable to political, economic and sociological studies of this time. A new generation returns to this library a century after this cultural movement began, equipped with new and improved approaches.

But how did these Moroccan manuscripts reach Spain to later become the foundation of the famous Escorial Library? After the fall of Andalusia at the end of the ninth century AH in the age of Abu Abdullah ibn al-Ahmarr, the tribe of Banu al-Ahmarr poured into Fez towards the end of the Marran period, bringing their heritage with them. When the state of Sa’adians was established, Ahmed al-Mansur became king and formed a large library. Princes and ministers competed to collect books about different sciences, especially Zaydan Ibn al-Mansur. After al-Mansur’s death a disagreement ensued among his sons including Abdullah Zaydan who defeated his brother but feared for his library in Marrakesh, the capital of Sa’adians. He ordered its removal to Asfa near the port of Marakesh. From there the library was loaded onto a ship charted from a Frenchman to transport the library to a secure place in Aghadir’s port. The Frenchman of the ship Juan Philippe preferred to take it to France. On his way he was intercepted by a Spanish pirate called Louine Fagardo who stole the library of 3975 books and took it to Madrid. The King of Spain, Philippe II, had just built the monastery of Escorial Saint Lonzo in which he wanted to be buried, and where he wanted to create a valuable library. And so the gift was placed here. Most of the books were lost in a fire in 1671AD; what remains is still kept in the Escorial library bearing the seal of its original owner ‘of what is the property of Zaydan al-Sadi’. ❁
From Bazaar to Piazza
Italian Responses to Islamic Art Objects
during the Renaissance

Abridged from a lecture by Rosamond Mack

The great age of Italian artistic development, from about 1300 to 1600, coincided with the peak of Italian trade with Islamic lands stretching from Andalusia across North Africa to Syria, Anatolia, Persia and the vast Mongol empire in Asia. It is well known that Italy's trade in spices, raw materials, agricultural products and manufactured goods produced the wealth that led to artistic patronage. However, there has been little recognition of the fact that the luxury manufactured goods imported in huge quantities, both for local consumption and re-export to the rest of Europe, made a profound impression on Italian taste and inspired development and diversity in Italy's own artistic production.

The Crusades, and other military expeditions in Islamic Sicily, Andalusia and the Maghreb, opened European eyes to the rich material culture of the Muslim urban elite, in which articles of daily use were crafted as works of art. The silks used for clothing and furnishings, the ceramics and glass used for food and drink, and the brassware used for water, lights and incense were all immensely superior in materials, techniques and artistry to what was then produced in Europe. European demand for these luxury goods rose steadily during the Crusades and Italian ships and merchants became the chief suppliers in the Mediterranean and to continental Europe. Italians gradually acquired advantageous trading privileges in the Byzantine Empire, the Crusader-occupied ports of Antioch, Tripoli, Tyre, Acre and in Muslim-ruled Alexandria and Tunis. Italian galleys brought Islamic goods to the ports of France and Christian Spain as well as to Italy; Italian merchants also sent them over the Alps. About 1300 AD, the Italian shippers, merchants and bankers involved in this international trade began to realize that they could make even more money, as well as employ the growing population in the city states which they governed, by producing and marketing competitive equivalents of the imports. Over the course of the three following centuries, objects from different parts of the Islamic world became the models for Italy's decorative arts, inspiring tremendous technical and artistic improvements in textiles, ceramics and glass, as well as entirely new productions of inlaid brass and gold-tooled leather. The variety of the imports that the Italians admired, learned from and competed with, during this long period of development, contributed to the diversity of the types of objects produced in Italy and to the diversity of their decorative styles.

The role of Islamic imports in Italian artistic development has been underestimated in Western scholarship for two reasons. Firstly, since 1568 AD, when Giorgio Vasari's 'Lives of the Most Celebrated Painters, Sculptors and Architects' was published in Florence, the critical evaluation of Renaissance art has focused on painting, sculpture and architecture. Vasari, himself a painter and architect, attributed Italy's tremendous progress in what he called the major arts to native Italian artistic genius, a return to nature and a revival of the classical tradition inherited from ancient Rome. Though

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Vasari was aware of developments in what he called the minor arts, which today are referred to as the decorative arts or material culture, he misinterpreted or disregarded them. For example, he sincerely admired Islamic brassware inlaid with silver and decorated with arabesques. Vasari justly credited these imports for inspiring recent improvements in Italian metalwork, exemplified in a mid-sixteenth-century Venetian brass tray, which is inlaid with Europeanised versions of Islamic ornament. Citing puffing up and incorrect evidence, Vasari insisted, however, that the ancient Romans invented the technique, undoubtedly because the influence of such foreign, Islamic models was inconsistent with his theory about the local and Greco-Roman sources of Renaissance art.

Secondly, the role of trade has not been clearly explored, since developments in Italy’s various decorative arts have rarely been viewed collectively. Specialists have identified numerous instances of Islamic or Asian influence on individual arts and crafts, but they have not studied this influence in a way that measures its full extent and significance.

A broader view emerges when examining developments in Italy’s various decorative arts, together with paintings, drawings and prints that show how Italians used the imports and how they perceived the Islamic world. Such assessment will also demonstrate that the artistic impact of the Islamic world on Italy during the Renaissance period was not only significant, but also extremely rich.

Textiles

Luxury silks were the staples of the international luxury trade during the Middle Ages, so universally in demand among the rich and the powerful that they served as a common currency in trade. For this reason, Italy’s textile industry was the first to blossom. The models for development reflect changes in the main foreign production centres and the international trade routes. The high esteem in Italy for Islamic silks that spurred the northern Italian textile industry to compete with them is visible in the frescoes executed in about 1300 at the church of San Francesco in Assisi. The stories of St. Francis are filled with textiles with patterns of intricate geometric interlace, imitating thirteenth-century Andalusian silks. One episode is set in the lavishly furnished bedchamber of a pope. A series of popes commissioned the construction and decoration of the church and donated textiles to furnish it. Dozens of Andalusian silks with banded patterns are listed in an
inventory of the papal treasury in Rome taken in 1295.

Other Andalusian silks with rows of gazelles and eagles alternating with stylized trees inspired the first Italian silks to aspire to Islamic imports in quality. Both the design and the technique, including the gold-brocaded accents on the heads, hooves and wings of the animals, have been closely imitated. The Italian versions were produced during the first half of the fourteenth century, chiefly in Lucca, a small city that received considerable support from Genoa. Genoese merchants probably invested in the start-up costs and certainly supplied the raw silk from the East and marketed the finished fabrics in France. The Andalusian models had probably arrived via Genoese trade with Spain. Most of the textiles surviving from this era come from European churches, where they were used in garments for priests, altar-covers and hangings, or from tombs of European rulers and church hierarchy.

Meanwhile, silks made in Mongol-controlled Persia and Central Asia were pouring into Italy from Black Sea ports and the network of caravan routes now known as the Silk Road, to which European merchants, such as the Polo family, had direct access from the late thirteenth to the mid fourteenth centuries. In fact, from 1291 AD - when the Pope prohibited all Christian trade with Mamluk-ruled Egypt and Syria, in retaliation for the expulsion of the Crusaders from Palestine and Syria - until the 1340s AD, Italy's eastern trade was focused on the regions accessible from the Black Sea and the Silk Road. The silks then produced in Persia and Central Asia, which Italians called Tartar cloths, blended Islamic and Chinese designs and techniques. The variety of their patterns and their lavish use of gold-wrapped threads were unprecedented. Although dozens of Tartar cloths were listed in the papal inventory of 1295 AD, it took Italian silkweavers several decades to understand them. In the decades following 1330 AD, Italian development surged as the new designs and techniques were imitated. For example, the pattern of one Central Asian silk piece is woven entirely in gold-wrapped threads. Fantastic flying beasts energetically confront each other amidst lotus blossoms, mythical Chinese phoenixes with lavish
tails swooping down, and weird humped creatures soaring up. A mid-fourteenth century Italian silk imitates a more restrained version of the pattern, in which flying phoenixes with slightly different tails face each other in a gracefully aligned composition that has closer links to the Chinese rather than the Central Asian tradition. This pattern featuring confronted animals was very popular in Italy throughout the fourteenth century AD.

Another Central Asian silk, in European church garments (Figure 2) from has both Asian motifs, such as the palmettes and traditional Islamic tiraz inscriptions, in Arabic, honouring Muslim royalty. Both the banded design and the honorific titles used, ‘The Sultan, the King’ are derived from Egyptian textiles made for the Mamluk sultans in Cairo. Obviously, the Europeans who made such garments and the priests who wore them could not read the inscriptions but they did admire the artistry of the calligraphy. During the Middle-Ages, Europeans commonly used tiraz textiles in their churches and tombs. Europeans knew that such textiles and the writing itself had a very high status in the Islamic world. However, they did not fully understand the tiraz tradition, or the history of Arabic. For example, in fourteenth and fifteenth century Italian religious paintings, such as that of Gentile da Fabriano’s in 1422 AD, sacred persons are often represented wearing garments with imitation Arabic inscriptions, which are totally illegible, and sometimes their halos are also decorated with the same pseudo-Arabic. This practice, together with other evidence, suggests that, at that time, Italians mistook contemporary Arabic for writing used in Palestine when Jesus was alive. Virtually nothing was known about Aramaic; Arabic was sometimes confused with Syriac and the term Chaldean was variously used. Such misunderstanding of Middle Eastern history and culture also helps to explain why Europeans mistakenly believed that some Islamic objects decorated with Arabic inscriptions were sacred relics of the early Christian era.

In an Italian version of the Asian banded silks (Figure 1) made in the second half of the fourteenth century, the palmettes are flanked by lively renditions of Islamic paired animals – birds and Persian cheetahs wearing collars. The Arabic inscriptions, in medallions which derive from emblems on contemporary Mamluk silks, play a reduced role in the exotic mix of motifs. Trade between Italy and the Mamluk empire had resumed during the 1340s AD, when Venice persuaded the Pope to lift the embargo in order to offset declining trade with the rapidly crumbling Mongol empire.

The great textiles of the Italian Renaissance reinterpret two of the fourteenth-century AD Asian patterns on a dramatically expanded scale. One, exemplified in a church garment made from a Central Asian silk, has naturalistic lotus and peony blossoms swinging in opposite directions from undulating vines. In an early fifteenth-century Italian silk, the Asian plant motifs are simplified and stylised, and we can see a new boldness and energy in the twisting diagonals. Asian ogival patterns, formed by a lattice work of vines enclosing palmettes, were similarly enlarged and simplified.

In the mature late fifteenth-century versions, vines sprout or enclose stylised pomegranates that are the hallmarks of Renaissance textiles, while contrasts in texture and lustre made possible by new Italian velvet-weaving techniques are exploited. The luxurious combinations of cut silk pile and gold-wrapped threads, both smoothly woven and looped, are far more elaborate than in Persian velvets of the Mongol period.

By 1500, Italian designs and techniques were inspiring the rising Ottoman textile industry, which soon challenged the Italian production in the luxury trade of the Mediterranean area. During the sixteenth century, fierce competition between the Italian and Ottoman industries led to extensive copying and reciprocal exchange. Particularly in some of the internationally popular velvets with ogival patterns, Italian pomegranate designs are so completely merged with Ottoman floral and leaf motifs, that attribution is a problem.

**Pottery**

Although Islamic imports inspired some improvements in Italian ceramics and glass during the fourteenth century AD, the Italian production remained inferior both technically and artistically until the late
fifteenth century AD. Earthenware jars which Italian apothecaries used for storing and distributing drugs and aromatics promoted a taste for more artistic ceramics during the early 1400s AD. Jars as well as drugs had long been imported from Syria, but the ceramics industry there declined following the destructive invasion of Tamerlane’s army in 1400 and 1401 AD. Valencia, in Christian Spain, became the leading production centre in the Mediterranean area, exporting to the Mamluk Empire as well as to Europe. The Valencian ceramics (Figure 3), which were made by Moorish potters in an Andalusian style closely linked to the Syrian tradition, inspired Florentine drug jars produced by the hundreds for local hospitals during the first half of the fifteenth century (Figure 4).

The pace of Italian development quickened during the second half of the fifteenth century, spurred on by a new fashion for luxurious household furnishings. For several decades however, wealthy Italians continued to prefer the superior Valencian imports. Paintings of that era represent them displayed on shelves in upper class Italian bedrooms. Through Italian agents in Valencia, prominent families ordered individual pieces, and even whole sets of tableware, bearing their personal insignia. A large vase, dateable to about 1465 - 1475 AD, British Museum, London, has an emblem of the Medici family on one side and their coat of arms on the other. The rest of the decoration, in blue and a shiny metallic paint, is in pure Andalusian style. The technique of decorating ceramics with metallic luster, that creates a fascinating shifting reflection of light, was unknown outside the Islamic world.

A Florentine imitation, Detroit Institute of Arts, bears combined arms, signifying the joining of two families. It was probably made for the wedding of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Clarice Orsini in 1470 AD. Since the Italian potter did not know how to make metallic paint, orange is substituted for golden lustre. The floral decoration in blue closely imitates the delicate Valencian byzantion pattern. Such Andalusian - style plant ornament is very common on Italian ceramics throughout the fifteenth century. When Italian potters did finally learn the lustre technique in the early sixteenth century, they used it on large dishes to be hung on walls, echoing the Valencian display pieces. Although Italian-style figural decoration predominated in sixteenth-century Italian ceramics, various Islamic motifs continued to be used as framing and filling ornament, as on the rim of such a dish.

Islamic geometric strap work was used as the principal decoration as well as framing ornament. The main source was the inlaid brassware imported in large quantities from Syria during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries AD, such as exotic incense burners. The tops and bottoms of these objects were decorated with circular compositions of strap work. These designs fascinated Italians, such as Leonardo da Vinci, who were passionate about geometry. His drawings of such circular endless knots were engraved by his pupils and the German artist Albrecht Dürer.

Although Renaissance ceramics had great success in Italy and the rest of Europe, they were technically inferior to Chinese porcelain and the Ottoman ceramics produced in Iznik, both of which were avidly collected by Italians. Chinese porcelain, which was imported via Egypt and Venice, inspired various types of decoration in blue on white, all of which Italians called ‘alla porcellana’. For example, a Venetian plate of 1510 AD, combines Chinese-style blue floral scrolls with a multi-coloured coat of arms in a manner very reminiscent of the Valencia wares.

Some of the most original decoration on Ottoman ceramics was closely copied in Italy, particularly the
bouquets of exotic flowers, sometimes with a distinctively Ottoman stylised saz leaf inserted into the otherwise naturalistic bouquet. These imitations, made in Padua, lacked the deep red colour, as well as the superior fine clay and brilliant glaze of the Ottoman originals.

Glass

By the early fourteenth century, Venetian glassmakers had learned how to blow nearly colourless glass and decorate it with enamel colours and gold, probably by acquiring knowledge of contemporary Syrian techniques in addition to older, less sophisticated Byzantine ones. Venice imported the soda ashes necessary for making this glass from Syria, even requiring their use to maintain the quality of their production. During the Crusades, Venice had also imported raw and broken glass from Syria, to be reheated and blown, and Venetian merchants had been very active in Tyre, one of the principal glassmaking centres in Syria and Palestine. However little painted glassware other than drinking glasses seems to have been made in Venice during the fourteenth century. The enamelling on these glasses is technically inferior to that on high quality Syrian glass brought to Europe during the Crusades. Syrian production, already in decline by 1401 AD, when Tamurlane burned the glass furnaces in Damascus, ended in the following decades.

Documents indicate that Venetian glassmakers improved the quality of the glass itself during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries but did not develop it artistically until the 1460s AD, precisely when Italian demand for luxury domestic furnishings was on the rise. Although at that time the Venetian glassmakers specializing in luxurious objects had little foreign competition, for nearly a century Islamic influence was strong. Improved enamelled and gilt decoration was applied to both colourless and to deeply coloured glass, as it had been in thirteenth-century AD Egyptian and Syrian glass. Islamic ornament—dots and scales-and-dots—increased on Venetian objects otherwise shaped and decorated in a European style.

The popular Venetian glass bottle, called a pilgrim flask, which has two flat sides and tiny handles, originated as an exotic display piece. Many are decorated with Islamic-style medallions and bands imitating leather straps on canteens. In concept, they resemble larger Syrian glass canteens made as luxury display objects, as well as tiny clay or glass vials that had long been made in Syria, Palestine and Egypt for pilgrims to bring home sanctified earth or oil from religious shrines. However, the Italian shape is new.

Earlier Syrian and Egyptian glass bottles that had become rare collectors’ items in Europe probably inspired the general style. Small dotted rosettes are common in Islamic decoration, though those on some fourteenth-century example are actually emblems of the sultans of Yemen.

The characteristic Islamic bottle shape with its tall neck, ring and sloping sides was closely imitated in some late fifteenth-century marbleised glass, which imitates semi-precious stone. It is made of marbleised glass, imitating semi-precious stone. Antique Persian and old Islamic vessels carved from semi-precious stone were highly prized by the richest Italian collectors. The new Venetian glass versions in traditional Islamic shapes enabled middle-class Europeans to copy the artistic taste of the very rich. The new Venetian technique may have been inspired by twelfth and thirteenth-century AD Islamic marvered glass, made by pressing strands or blobs of one or more colours into a body of a different colour.

Venetian craftsmen also revived several ancient glassmaking techniques, which had disappeared in Europe but survived in Sassanian Persia and the Islamic world. Again, old imported glass objects in church treasures and private collections probably inspired the Venetian experiments. For example, the hot glass was blown into curved moulds, creating surface decoration in relief. As several drinking glasses of the same type were found buried in a cemetery in Damascus, it has often been assumed that Venetian glassware in this style—with a mould-blown diamond pattern and delicate enamelled dots—were made for export to the Islamic East. The huge number of pieces in various shapes which have survived in the West, however, indicates that there was a strong European demand for them.

The upside-down, sloppy pseudo-Arabic inscription on a unique vase of about 1500 AD, Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf, which has blown ribs added to a modified Islamic lamp shape, suggests that it was ordered by a European with exotic taste and little knowledge of Arabic, rather than made for export to the Islamic world. Another lamp in the traditional Syrian shape, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, was made for export, but probably in Barcelona rather than in Venice. The Arabic inscription, which is awkward but legible, includes the name of the Mamluk Sultan Qaytbay. During the Renaissance period, the taste of Italian and other European art collectors was far more cosmopolitan than is traditionally believed.

Metalwork

Additional proof is found in the two other crafts inspired by Islamic imports, in which complex Islamic techniques and motifs were mastered for discriminating Italian patrons: metalwork and leatherwork. Although some mid-sixteenth century Venetian candlesticks have Italian turned shapes and Renaissance ornamental motifs, the Syrian aesthetic of all-over, low relief decoration, in bands complementing the form of the object, still survives.

Opinion differs on where the brassware inlaid with fine silver wire, in a style that originated in Persia, was made and on the ethnicity of the craftsmen who signed many high-quality pieces. The issue is complex because,
at that time, Persian ornament was influencing artisans in Mamluk Egypt and Ottoman Turkey. Also, some metalworkers signed pieces decorated in both the Persian and Syrian styles.

There are many Renaissance European metal objects that closely resemble this Islamic metalwork. But illegible pseudo Arabic inscriptions and awkward shapes in the inlay indicate that it is not Islamic. The existence of such near counterfeits proves that the Islamic models were highly admired in Europe and that metalworkers outside the Islamic world had acquired competitive skills.

**Leatherwork**

Italian artistic leatherwork was derived from Islamic bookbindings. During the second quarter of the fifteenth century, a few of the Italian scholars and scribes involved in recovering ancient literature ordered binders in Florence, then the centre of manuscript preparation, to imitate contemporary Egyptian and Syrian bindings for their most important new texts. At that time, book covers of fine tanned leather, stamped and gilt with metal tools bearing carved designs, were made only in the Islamic world. The Italian scholars and scribes intended to mark their work and draw more attention to it with comparably elegant bookbindings. The Islamic geometric ornament on the first Florentine bindings were tooled without gliding. There is little variation in these designs, which indicates that few models were then available in Italy. Gold toothing, in which gold leaf is pressed into the leather with heated metal tools, developed rapidly during the 1450s and 1470s AD in Padua, Bologna and Venice. The Venetian cover of about 1477 in Figure 5 combines gold toothing with the even more luxurious and exacting Islamic filigree technique, exemplified in a doublure -the lining inside the cover -on a binding made in 1473 AD for Gaylt Bay, the Mamluk sultan in Cairo (Figure 6). Small areas of the leather are cut. Although the shapes and connections in the Italian arabesques are rather awkward, the technique is so accomplished through the sixteenth century AD.

The doublure inside this same Mamluk cover is executed in an even more luxurious and exacting filigree technique, which is imitated in the Italian centre and corner pieces. Small areas of the leather are cut away around the gold tooled arabesques, revealing a blue-painted background. Although the shapes and connections in Feliciano’s arabesques are rather awkward, his technique is so accomplished that this binding was long attributed to Persian or Arab immigrants working in Venice. After the 1490s AD, the gold tooled decoration on most Italian bindings was in a classicising Renaissance style but in Venice, Islamic bindings were expertly imitated through the sixteenth century AD.

**Figure 5. Gratian, Decretum, printed on parchment, Venice, Nicholas Jenson, 1477 AD, front cover, leather with blind and gilt toothing and filigree over blue painted ground, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek, Gotha (Mon. typ.1477, 212)**

Some Venetian bindings are in pure Ottoman style, differing only in tiny details. For example, a group of doublures exhibit filigree over blue and turquoise painted backgrounds. This group was executed by a small number of specialized craftsmen, probably clustered in a few workshops, who mastered complex Ottoman arabesques years before the first European pattern books of Islamic ornament were published in Venice and France about 1530. These illustrated printed books, intended primarily for embroidery, enabled arabesque motifs to spread across Europe during the following decades.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Venetians acquired the Ottoman technique of painting and varnishing leather, at first on bookbindings, then for other objects including wall-coverings. Many lavish Ottoman-style bindings were commissioned and paid for by the officials themselves. These sumptuous objects were intended to display their personal, social and political status, as well as their sophisticated artistic taste.
Carpets

During the Renaissance period, Italian craftsmen learned to compete with Islamic silk textiles, ceramics, glassware, bookbindings and inlaid brassware, but did not try to compete with the carpets imported in huge quantities from the Islamic world. They were the most highly esteemed and costly of the Islamic manufactured goods and the demand for them greatly exceeded the supply. Yet there is no evidence of a serious effort to establish a carpet industry in the great Italian commercial and manufacturing centres such as Venice and Florence. Paintings in which imported carpets are represented suggest some answers. The high quality Anatolian carpets which began to arrive about 1450 AD, just when Italian demand for luxurious household furnishings soared, had geometric patterns which truly fascinated Italian collectors, patrons and artists alike. Painters rarely represented them on the floor, except beneath the heavenly throne of a sacred figure, or the seat of a secular ruler (q.v. page 4). Instead, they are displayed above ground as works of art, laid out on tables or benches, or hanging from windows and balconies. Indeed, household inventories indicate that rich Italians kept their fine carpets in chests, taking them out only for special occasions. To please their patrons, who owned or admired such carpets, as well as to demonstrate their descriptive skills, painters represented their intricate patterns and the variations in the patterns on individual carpets with amazing accuracy.

The possession and display of the imported carpets soon became a status symbol. Men, women and even whole families had themselves portrayed with their prized carpets, as a sign of their wealth, elite social status and high taste. The remarkable quantity of such painted representations, their fidelity to the originals and the artists' obvious relish for details and variations, prove that the Italian fascination was profound and enduring. The sustained quality and increasing variety of the Near Eastern production sustained demand and undoubtedly discouraged competition. In addition, Oriental carpets had acquired such an honoured place in the material culture of Italy's artistically sophisticated elite that a new industry's inevitable imperfections would just not have been tolerated.
Aleppo Ramparts and Gates
An example of fortification defences in Arabian Islamic Cities in the Middle Era

Abridged from a lecture By Abd al-Hadi Nassri*

As the French archaeologist Jean Sauvaget pointed out, 'Aleppo's rampart wall is of great importance in that it is unique in the Islamic East'. The ramparts and gates of Aleppo reveal to us both the architectural development during the 'Abbasid and Umayyad periods, especially those made under Hamdanid, Zengid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk rule, and the strategic considerations given to the city’s defence.

The importance of the gates and ramparts of Aleppo, still preserved as an important part of the city's fabric, is due to several reasons. The fortifications give a stable structure to the city plan that allowed a unity of design throughout the Islamic period. They are linked with the existing rampart wall of the city which, in turn, derives from the classical Roman, Greek and Byzantine periods. They have been a source of study by succeeding generations of architects and engineers. The ramparts and gates of Aleppo serve as a record of architectural development through 2,000 years, standing as a model for researchers in the fields of both civil and military architecture.

Aleppo’s military fortifications in the Umayyad period

The fortifications consist of three elements: the ramparts, the gates, and the citadel. There are no historical references to Umayyad renovation or development of the fortifications or architectural defences, despite Umayyad construction of other projects in Aleppo during the reign of the caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 65-86 AH/685-705 AD) and the renovation of the Hawlan-Aleppo aqueduct, as well as building the Great Mosque in the middle of the city, during the reign of the caliph Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 96-99 AH/715-717 AD).

Al-Gazzi mentions, in an obscure phrase, that the Umayyads renewed several towers in Aleppo without indicating their locations or names. He writes that the modifications made by the Muslims until the time of Sayf al-Dawlah were not exceptional ‘...and the ramparts remained as they were until the Moslems took them over, then Umayyad sons and Bani Salih renewed several towers...’. During the Abbasid period the city did not witness any significant development due to anarchy and the general weakness of the state.

Aleppo’s ramparts in the time of the Hamdanid Emirate

The Hamdanid were the descendent of the Arab leader Hamdan ibn Hamdoun from Taghleb, an Arab tribe. One of their descendants, Ali ibn Abdullah, known as Sayf al-Dawlah (r. 333-356 AH/944-967 AD) became the Emir of Aleppo and of the northern area of Syria after

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he seizing it from the Ikshidid of Egypt, and defeating the army of Kafur ibn Abdullah al-Ikshid (r. 355-357 AH/966-968 AD). Sayf al-Dawlah made Aleppo the capital of his state, which was also the capital of the state during the Ayyubid period of Yamin, some 200 years before Christ.

The reign of Sayf al-Dawlah was marked by several important events, namely his wars with the Byzantines, the protection of the northern Islamic gate, with the decline and disintegration of the Abbasid's power, and rekindling patriotism and jihad against the Romans. Intellectual activity and literature were actively encouraged in his court in Aleppo.

Sayf al-Dawlah also reformed the ramparts and fortifications of Aleppo. It is probable that the two lion blazons found on the Great Tower extending between the Antakya Gate and Paradise Gate, are from his reign.

The main renovations of Sayf al-Dawlah began in 351 AH/963 AD after the Roman Byzantines, in the time of Nicophor Phocas, had occupied the city during her prince's absence, and destroyed part of the ramparts; Sayf al-Dawlah returned to rebuild the citadel.

The Wall of Nur al-Din

Nur al-Din built an additional wall surrounding the city known as al-Fasli, as a preliminary defense line, after the city was hit by several earthquakes from 552 AH/1157 A.D, causing much damage to Hama and Shayzar. The worst of which was the earthquake of 565 AH/1170 AD. It hit many cities in Syria and Iraq, and lead to the destruction of the walls and the citadel. In his book al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, Ibn al-Athir mentions that Nur al-Din, after renovating the walls and the citadel of Baalbak ... came to Aleppo to find that it was devastated by the earthquake more than the other regions. He remained outside the city and supervised the reconstructions, and continued to do so until he fortified its walls and rebuilt its mosques... and the additional wall.

The Ayyubid military fortifications at the time of al-Zahir Ghazy

Al-Zahir Ghazy, son of Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub, became the ruler of Aleppo’s sultanate in 579 AH/1183, during which time it became a powerful and successful kingdom in a number of fields including culture, politics, economics and construction. Al-Zahir Ghazy’s constructions were not limited to defensive fortifications and ramparts; they included many other projects. Sauvage maintained that his work in Aleppo greatly exceeded that of the Ayyubid period.

The additions included: the wall of the al-Faraj Gate, the Eastern wall, the trench of the Romans, al-Nasr Gate, al-Mostaqim Gate, al-Jinan Gate, Antakya Gate, Qinnasrin Gate, al-Sa‘ada Gate, Dar al-‘Adel Gates and the Eastern Wall Gates.
The military fortifications in Aleppo
The Mamluk period (661-923 AH / 1261-1517 AD)

The Mamluks inherited an advanced architectural style from the Ayyubids who had continued the policy of Zengid in giving special importance to the architectural design of defence fortifications. The Mamluks did the same and continued to employ Ayyubid architectural methods in their fortifications. Although they did not develop new structural, functional or defence works, they made aesthetic modifications, achieving a formal harmony between their own style and that of the more extravagant Mamluk architecture.

Mamluk architecture was powerful, awe inspiring and grand. The well-preserved state of the work continues to allow this majesty to be experienced. The simplicity and harmony of their style, influenced by the rising power of Sufism, was a magnificent response to the circumstances and challenges of the time. It expressed the great luxury enjoyed by the sultan and his men. It influenced the great Islamic cities such as those of Cairo, Damascus, al-Quds (Jerusalem), and Aleppo.

The repair and reconstruction of the fortifications during the Mamluk period can be divided into two phases; each phase follows the complete destruction of the city and its military fortifications. The first stage, relates to the defence fortifications that followed the destruction of Aleppo at the hand of the Tartars in the second half of the thirteenth century AD until the end of the fourteenth century AD. The second stage, begins in the fifteenth century AD after the Mogul destruction of the city ramparts and fortress and fortifications under the leadership of Tamerlane, and continues until the Ottoman occupation and the end of Mamluk rule. The accomplishments of the Mamluks in rebuilding the fortifications can be divided into two headings: the ramparts and the gates.

The First Stage

After their destruction by the Tartars, the city ramparts were neglected for about 130 years. Aleppo at that time lacked military might, despite continuing attacks on the city and the region by the Tartars until the end of the thirteenth century AD. However, not all the ramparts were destroyed and some limited renovation was undertaken during that period.

There was a critical need to fortify Aleppo to withstand the repeated attacks. At the time of al-Zahir Sayf al-Din Barquq (784-791 AH/1382-1389 AD) the city prospered in the hands of Aleppo’s prince, Sayf al-Din Kamashbagha al-Hamawi. Despite the short period of his reign, only one and a half years, the redevelopment and repair of the ramparts was undertaken. He left a noble inheritance and after his death, work continued under the leadership of Sayf al-Din Barquq.

Aleppo's ramparts were replaced and the gates re-built. Archaeological studies of the ramparts and towers show that the ramparts and defence systems were not completely renewed, but followed the foundations of the Ayyubid ramparts which appear in the form of the huge stones in the bottom layer, and above them, layers of smaller stones which go back to the Mamluk period.

The Second Stage:
Aleppo and the disasters of Mongols

The history of Aleppo is a series of disasters and challenges. In the year 658 AH/1260 AD, the city fell into the hands of Holagu, the Tartar leader, and 140 years later, it faced similar destruction at the hands of armed forces coming from central Asia. The Khan of the Mongol, Tamerlane had established a great Asian empire during the second half of the fourteenth and beginning of
Antakya gate, indicating that the work had been commissioned by al-Malik al-Ashraf abi al-Nasr Qayit Bay; carried out by Kari Bay the vice-Emir of the Aleppo citadel. Also, Bab al-Faraj gate was renovated during his reign as noted by the commemorative text along with the three circular Mamluk blazons on the gate's tower, dating the work to the year 873 AH/1469 AD, reading the following as narrated by al-Ghazzī:

Glory to our Lord the Sultan al-Ashraf abi al-Nasr Qayit Bay may God glorify his conquest

It is probable that Qayit Bay's improvements reached all the way to the al-Jinan Gate as this was constructed in the same way as the al-Faraj Gate. The historian Kamel Al-Ghazzi proposes that Qayit Bay, and after him his son, Muhammad Abu al-Se'adat, renewed and repaired the eastern wall in 1497 AD, under the supervision of the prince of Aleppo, Janbalat. This is supported by the commemorative text visible on the exterior of the wall and flanked by two Mamluk blazons.

Qansuwah al-Ghawri:
The End 906-922 AH/1501-1516 AD

With the rise of Ottoman power, the struggle with the Mamluks increased in Egypt, and when Sultan Tuman Bay was killed in year 906 AH/1501 AD, the new Sultan of the Mamluks' Shārkās state, Qansuwah al-Ghawri, stipulated to his companions that there was no need to kill him as he was prepared to resign if they wished. The Sultan's life eventually ended at the hands of his enemies the Ottomans, and not those of his companions.

Al-Ghawri was 60 years old when he became Sultan. He had previous administrative and military experience, and was the deputy of the al-Bahriyah state in Egypt. He then became the Emir, Hajjaj al-Hajib, of Aleppo and suppressed a rebellion during his rule. He is remembered as being greedy and despotic, and his love of gold led him to impose taxes on all people even those
who collected animal dung for a living. He covered the walls and the rooftops of his palace with gold leaf and hid his fortune in its fortress. Aleppo's fortress was also partly filled with his vast fortune.

Sultan Qansuwwah al-Ghawri anticipated conflict with the Ottomans from the first days of his rule. He concentrated on strengthening the northern defences of the state. Most of his work concentrated on fortifying of the gates, the fortress and the wall, in accordance with the contemporary developments in weaponry, such as firearms and cannons.

The conflict between the Mamluks and the Ottomans and the usage of modern mortars, hastened the Mamluks to modify ramparts and towers to withstand the cannon and allow firing guns and mortars through the firing slits, which were used in the past to pass arrows. Several engineering missions were dispatched to fulfill this task.

These necessary modifications had been needed since the fifteenth century, but the Mamluk state was still using traditional military tactics and weapons and the chivalry system was delaying the spread of new weaponry. However the Mamluks did begin to develop weapons and fortifications from the middle of the sixteenth century. Qansuwwan asked a number of his deputies in Aleppo including his delegate in the fortress, al-Maqar al-Sayfi Abrak and the prince al-Ashrafi Barsabay, to make architectural modifications and repairs to the gates. The Qinnisin Gate was renovated and artillery bases were erected in front of archery slits, as indicated by an engraved text above the gate, dating to the year 709AH/1502 AD, and two blazons with the name of Qansuwwah al-Gawri. The commemoration greatly overstates and misleadingly claims that:

"أمَّر عمارة مولانا أبي النصر نارسوب الفغاري"

of what was built by the order of our Lord...

Abi al-Nasr Qansuwwah al-Gawri ...

although the architectural undertaking here was merely renovation rather than a new construction. The gate still retains its Ayyubid facade and only the outer gate was slightly modified by the Mamluks.

The Sultan commissioned repairs to the al-Hadid Gate in 915AH/1509 AD, to accommodate modern artillery. Similar commemorative inscriptions are repeated on other Aleppo gates, such as al-Jinan Gate 917 AH/1512 AD and al-Ahimar Gate 919 AH/1514 AD. The Sultan Qansuwwah al-Gawri also improved the towers and gates in the city wall to adapt to the development in the use of artillery. Similar work was carried on the towers of the citadel. He improved the artillery slits and left inscriptions on the north tower 915 AH/1509 AD, the south tower 1914 AH/1508 AD, and the facade tower of the citadel which dates back to the time of the Ayyubids. All these modifications survived to the present time.
Excavations on the citadel of Aleppo
Recent Discoveries

Abridged from a lecture By Julia Gonnella*

The citadel of Aleppo is one of the most important and most impressive examples of Medieval military architecture. Built on the summit of an approximately forty metre, roughly ovoid outcrop, it lies east of the river Quwaqiq with a far-reaching view over the surrounding countryside. Both this river and the outcrop have provided Aleppo with the major prerequisites for a town to survive: supply of water and protection from hostile incursions. And indeed Aleppo's history is known to be one of great age. Ancient texts prove the existence of the city since the middle of the third millennium B.C.

Remains of this ancient history have now been discovered on the hill of the citadel. The hill is really a man-made "tell" with a natural rock at its core. In some areas the cultural debris can reach a thickness of more than fourteen metres as measured in several subterranean rooms. This combination of a natural-cum-artificial mound is very common in Northern Syria; other examples can be seen in Hama and Homs. In all these examples, the mound became a suitable base for a Medieval castle. However in terms of size, history, architecture and political importance, Aleppo surpasses all others.

The Excavations on the Citadel

In 1996, a Syrian-German mission started excavating the top of the citadel under the direction of Wahid Khayyata, then director of the National Museum of Aleppo and Kay Kohlmeyer, from the Fachhochschule für Wirtschaft und Technik, Berlin. From 2003, the Syrian team was headed by Husain Zain ad-Din From Suwaida. The main excavation site is situated in the centre of the citadel being delimited on the west by the main tourist path leading up to the Ottoman garrison, and on the east by the modern theatre; the old trench of the former antiquities director in Aleppo, George Ploix de Rotrou, who had been working here between the years 1929-31 during the French mandate period, and who was the first to discover Ancient Near Eastern traces on the citadel hill. This former French trench was the starting point of the present excavations. It was cleared in 1996 and has been systematically enlarged to the east, north and south since 1997. In all, the Syrian-German team has worked ten seasons on the citadel.

The primary interest of this excavation lies in the Bronze and Iron Age temple of the weather god Haddad which was one of the largest cultic places of the Middle East. Three major building periods of this enormous temple have been identified. Visually speaking, the most spectacular building period is the one of the early 1st Millennium BC when the size of the temple was reduced and the interior furnished with a 24.25 m dado of high quality basaltic reliefs depicting gods and mythical creatures. This temple burned down before it was finished and was never used again. It is covered with up...
to two meters of debris from the Seleucids who exploited the temple for building material - probably to create their own cultic place but in another location.

The Islamic Layers

Even though the Islamic layers do not represent the mission's main objective, they provide extremely valuable information for the Medieval history of Northern Syria. The excavations have also produced one of the very few comprehensive stratigraphies for that region, yielding finds from the early Umayyad to the late Ottoman period.

It is possible to discern five main building periods relevant to Islamic archaeology:

Building Period 5 has produced architecture of the Byzantine-Umayyad period. Building Period 4 revealed parts of a major building complex with walls constructed of mixed stone and brick layers, as well as a section of a large and well-built canal which was covered with reused spolia from a church. This use of the Christian church inventory led the team to date this level to the Mirdasid period; the Mirdasids being a local nomad dynasty of the eleventh century who, according to textual evidence, built rather splendid palaces on the citadel and converted the two churches into mosques. Building Period 3 has been heavily destroyed. Since no pottery dating later than the thirteenth century was found, we assume this period to be Ayyubid having been destroyed by the Mongols. Building Periods 2 and 1 are Mamluk and Ottoman respectively. They include the remains of houses with iwans and high quality Chinese porcelain and celadon finds from the earlier period. In some areas, Timur's destruction of the citadel in beginning of the 15th century AD obviously put an end to these houses. In other areas, houses continued to be used in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. In the Ottoman period, the citadel became a garrison and soldiers came to live here with their families. The excavations yielded several, mainly seventeenth century, Ottoman courtyard houses with tiled stone floors, elaborated 'atabas and built-in cupboards. Remains of Ottoman dwellings appear practically everywhere on the citadel just beneath the
Fragments of an Ayyubid underglaze painted ware which was probably produced on the citadel.

Fragments of an underglaze painted dish with a bird, 14th century, from the "rubbish bin" of the royal palace.

Surface and the Syrian Antiquity Service has uncovered an entire residential district with roads, various kinds of courtyard houses and a canal system.

The Finds

As to be expected, the Islamic material from the citadel excavation is abundant and probably covers every period. It includes both objects of high artistic value appropriate for a royal residence, and simple pieces for every-day use.

Pottery

The largest group of objects found is pottery which is being studied with the help of a number of colleagues. Robert Mason from the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto carried out a number of petroglyphic analyses and is currently studying the 10th-11th century glazed and incised wares some with splashes. John Carswell is cataloguing the Chinese imports of which there are an abundance. They include particularly attractive fourteenth century Yuan blue-and-white porcelains, as well as other Chinese porcelains and a large variety of celadon wares. Verena Dalber -now at the German Institute of Archaeology in Damascus- has finished a master's thesis on twelfth to fourteenth century sgraffiato pottery. Apart from various imports from the Crusader and the northern Seljuk region she was able to identify a number of different local sgraffiato-types from Northern Syria. Very intriguing is a large bowl showing two squatting men with a chalice and parts of a griffon with birds' claws. Similar vessels are known from al-Mina, Hama and Tortosa and are dated to the thirteenth century.
A golden earring with a turquoise, 14th century from the "rubbish bin" of the royal palace

Tell Minis ware was also found along with varieties of twelfth to thirteenth century Raqqa-style fritware. It was possible to reconstruct two bowls with lustre decoration from fragments: an early bowl with a typical late twelfth century convex shape was found in one of the pits, a second thirteenth century bowl appeared in building period 3. Its decoration is well preserved with stylized palmettes in the centre, surrounded by geometric and pseudo-epigraphic bands.

There were particularly rich finds from the early fourteenth century this season when an area which is considered to be the rubbish heap of the Ayyubid palace nearby was excavated. The team assume that the palace was cleared again for reuse possibly after Timur’s destruction of the citadel and that all the broken pieces were discarded here. The finds include not only exquisite Chinese porcelain and celadon fragments but also shards of a large number of first class early Mamluk, underglaze, blue-and-white dishes, such as one with an unusual architectural decoration, one with a bird and one with a radiating motive. Some of the foot-rings of these vessels have little holes which is why the team believes that they were meant to be hung on the wall. Another dish shows a Mamluk coat of arms painted on the back of the foot-ring; two polo-sticks with what may be a napkin. It is assumed that this coat of arms was a property signature of one of the amirs residing on the citadel, unfortunately he has not been so far identified.

Glass

There are large quantities of glass finds from the excavation. Particularly attractive are the painted enamelled and gilded shards from the Ayyubid and mainly Mamluk period with floral and epigraphic decorations. They will be studied by Rachel Ward (London). In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, Aleppo was famous for its glass production and the rulers residing in the citadel were important patrons as is well illustrated by the enamelled wine decanter in the Islamic Museum in Cairo mentioning the last Ayyubid ruler al-Nasir Yusuf (r. 1236-60). Shards also included fragments with relief decoration and marbled glass. Some examples of glass jewellery were also found, in particular glass bracelets in different colours. They are difficult to date with the same shape being used for centuries. As the discovery of several raw glass bars revealed, some glass was apparently also produced on the citadel itself.

Metal

The team excavated a lot of small objects made of sheet metal, copper, bronze and a little silver very similar to the assemblage found in the Danish excavations in Hama. They include every day objects such as bronze needles, a belt fitting, the quill of a writing utensil, the handle of a pair of coal tongs, and occasional pieces of jewellery such as a pretty silver ring with a rectangular shield dating either to the Ayyubid or Mamluk period. In 1998, a golden Mamluk earring was found with a turquoise stone on one side and a carnelian on the other.

The Mamluk Hoard Find

One of the more intriguing discoveries, a hoard of Mamluk bronze objects, appeared in 1998, together with some pottery, glass and 48 coins, in the remains of a Medieval cellar room south of the main site which was excavated in order to follow up the western temple wall.
The hoard includes a heavy octagonal mortar with a single handle, a bowl, a dish with a shallow vertical rim, parts of a lamp and a candlestick, and other minor objects. All the pieces were brought to Berlin, where x-ray photographs were taken of the various vessels revealing the filigree decoration on some of the pieces. Meanwhile all the objects have been restored and it is now possible to see the original decoration of the objects more clearly.

The dish and the candlestick for example were engraved and tin-plated. Analysis has shown that some unspecified organic material - probably bitumen - had been rubbed into the grooves to produce a polychrome effect. Silver inlay, on the other hand is found on the rather unusual upper part of a vessel with a sieve (h: 13cm, max d: 12.7 cm) which might have been used for burning incense, and on the fragment of a large copper lantern (h: 21.5 cm, max d: 12.2 cm).

All the objects are certainly not examples of the grand art of Mamluk metalwork but nevertheless good average work made for the household of one of the amirs who resided on the citadel - the inscriptions in general giving standard amir titles. The copper lantern also includes a typical fourteenth century three-field coat of arms with a chalice between two bars, signifying the Mamluk position of the cupbearer (Arabic: al-saqi). According to Mayer and Meinecke there are three fourteenth century amirs of Aleppo who are known to have used this very blazon: Sayf al-Din Yalbuga (d.748AH/1347AD), Iqdimar al-Mardani, and Ayadmur al-Ashrafi (d.773AH/1374AD) who was governor of Aleppo in 1371 AD.

The hoard also includes an undecorated but complete hemispherical copper bowl (h: 8 cm, d: 19.8 cm) and an octagonal 5 kg mortar (h: 12.8 cm, b: 18.5 cm, d: 13.4 cm) with a single handle. In addition, more than 211 beaten and chased fragments of bronze sheets were excavated with interlaced bands enclosing floral decoration reminiscent of textile patterns. These pieces were probably used as mounts on small wooden objects such as boxes.

Forty-four of the Forty-eight coins discovered with the hoard can be dated either to the second rule of Sultan al-Zahir Sayf al-Din Barquq (r. 784-801 AH/1382-99 AD) or the first period of Sultan al-Nasir Faraj (r. 801-809 AH/1399-1407 AD); no later coins appear. It is, therefore, quite evident that this find is connected with Timur's conquest of the citadel and it seems that the Medieval cellar room collapsed, probably when Timur's troops destroyed the citadel. The question remains why all these comparatively poorly preserved objects were kept in this room in the first place: with the exception of the complete vessels, everything else was found in fragments while the bronze sheets were apparently cut and not broken. An explanation may be found with a contemporary shipwreck discovered off the coast of Palestine which contained similar bronze artefacts (including many octagonal mortars with one handle), most of them in fragments as well as coins from the same period. It is conjectured that the ship's cargo represents the tax paid by a province to the government in Cairo. At the end of the thirteenth century inflation was particularly high and the metal objects would have had the same value as coins. One can also speculate that the material found on the citadel was specifically collected for recycling, either to be sent to the Mamluk capital or simply to be used in the mint in Aleppo which in the Mamluk period was situated in the so-called "Hammam Nur al-Din" on the citadel - right next to the place where our hoard was found.

All the metal objects were returned to Syria and are now in the storerooms of the National Museum in Aleppo. It is very much hoped that they will eventually be exhibited in the new museum on the citadel which will be opened in the near future.

Arabic Calligraphy
A new Reading of the Past
and Views of the Future

Abridged from a lecture By Samir al-Sayegh*

There is a growing need to re-evaluate Arabic Calligraphy, which has been on the decline both on a professional and creative level for over a century. Islamic art is currently facing many challenges, including critical questions about its future and its status among other art forms in other progressive cultures. The scarcity of historical, documentary and analytical research, combined with a lack of critical studies compound the need to re-evaluate this rich and extensive heritage of more than 1000 years.

A distinction has to be made from the very beginning between calligraphy and mere writing. While writing is a means of linguistic communication, calligraphy is an end in itself, an art which combines both communication and aesthetic expression. This study of calligraphy as an art, takes as its beginning early Qur'anic manuscripts. This is not because writing was so rare in the early Islamic period that none of the later flowering could be predicted, but rather because calligraphy was at that time linked to the oral character of the Arabic language more than the written. This enabled greater concentration on the aesthetic feature of writing. This study recommends that calligraphy be regarded as one of the revelations of Islamic art, and as such, a major element in the various applications of this art including architecture, ceramics, textiles and jewellery. And one that always maintains the same aesthetic value in its representation.

Early examples of Arabic calligraphy in Qur'anic manuscripts present the earliest vision of Islamic art in its unity and diversity, highlighting its unique and distinctive character. During the first three centuries of Islam, Kufic script was used for Qur'anic manuscripts. In its employment of completely new geometrical forms, capable of expression and communication, it had a remarkable capacity for development. Individual letters display much variety in form, the relationship between vertical and horizontal lines, and between what is joined and what is separate. There is also great variety in word spacing both in extended and condensed forms, and in line spacing. Through a process of thousands of pages and hundreds of years, new letter forms have developed, in response to the need to shift the equilibrium and maintain a dialogue. In their turn created revolutions in the art of calligraphy and design. In this respect Kufic displays great mastery.

Detail from a Qur'an folio, LNS 65 MS, The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah - Kuwait National Museum

By not aiming at a unified or fixed technique, its diversity led to a high degree of creativity. Calligraphers did not follow a single technique; instead their goal was simply to achieve a sense of proportion and balance.

Any analysis of Kufic Inscription would be incomplete without taking two major features into consideration, namely, geometry and arabesque. As the ornaments of arabesque gradually developed they became an inseparable part of Kufic.

Geometry stands as another major element from which Kufic originated. Square Kufic and geometric Kufic developments were a great achievement not only in the field of calligraphy but also to world art.

The age of Ibn Muqta (4 century AH/10 century AD), represents a major turning point in the history of calligraphy. It is considered to be the age of originality, coinciding as it did with a flourishing civilization. It witnessed the birth of cursive script in its variable forms: Naskhi, Muhaqqaq, Thuluth and Rihani. Kufic dismissed, in

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favour of Muhaqiq and Naskhi. Naskhi was designated
the official form of writing.

The calligrapher ibn Muqia laid the foundations for
what was later to become known as ‘calligraphy’. He was
expert in the proportions and balance of calligraphic
patterns, and the distinction between the various styles.
He exploited the ‘dot’ as a standard, and began a
mastership that was to grow for centuries. The
relationship between the still dot and the mobile dot
forms the basis of calligraphy. In its stillness, the dot is
able to define the thickness and breadth of a letter and
therefore the space devoted to it, whereas the movement
of the dot determines the height or vertical extension of
a letter.

Here lies the genius of ibn Muqia; transforming letters
into shapes rather than mere symbols or images. In this
context, language was able, on the one hand, to
crystallise meaning, and on the other, express deep
human feelings and hopes. He reduces the letters to
their primary shapes. In his famous treatise on the art of
calligraphy, he explains how he enriched this emerging
language of figures. Here we mark the beginning of a
new art, i.e. the art of calligraphy.

In early Qur’anic manuscripts, it is essential to
distinguish between writing and the art of calligraphy, in
order to be able to appreciate the subtleties of this art.
However, with ibn Muqia’s new rhythms it is important to
view writing and calligraphy as an organic whole to fully
appreciate the new styles and the duality of function by
which both linguistic and aesthetic communication are
enhanced.

Such is the creative balance between word and
image, between the subjective and objective, between
art and craftsmanship and between the abstract and the
material object. Each pole is seeking its counterpart and
the calligrapher’s role is to bridge the gap between these
two poles, i.e. between what’s read (comprehended) and
what’s seen (the aesthetic).

In addition to ibn Muqia’s work there is a treatise by
ibn al-Bawab. Together, these works outline the basis of
calligraphy. Geometry and the world of shapes, and the
beauty of harmony in the human body and in nature are
the sources of this art. Indeed, the same may be said of
all arts. In the words of ibn al-Bawab: “blooming flowers,
shining lights, harmony between the centre and the ends
between what’s explicit and what’s implicit”.

There are other aspects indirectly related to the art of
calligraphy, such as the cultural milieu in which
calligraphers lived, upholding certain traditions to
organize artistic production. One such issue is the
patronage of caliphs, princes, sultans and ministers and
even ordinary individuals. Later on it was exclusively
practiced by the ruling class. However, the relationship
between calligraphers and rulers was never overbearing.
In many cases, individuals from the ruling class, whether
princes or sultans became the disciples of great
calligraphers and later on they themselves ended up as
great masters of calligraphy.

Another aspect is that of calligraphy workshops.
These began as school workshops, and developed
during periods of prosperity into professional and
commercial workshops, qualified to join the guilds of
various professions, crafts and industries. We hear of
workshops situated in the palace courts. Topkapı palace,
the residence of the Ottoman Sultans, was also a centre
for artists, calligraphers and painters.

In recent times in countries familiar with the art of
calligraphy, the image of the calligrapher and his art have
become rather ambiguous. There is some confusion over
his proper rank in the artistic hierarchy that has prevailed
since the Modern art revolution. Questions arise over
where and how to display calligraphy, be it among
portraits and other works of art in museums and
galleries, or a wall in a house or the pages of a book.
Since the beginning of the 20th century, the artist in the
East has been confronted by difficult questions, none
more so than the calligrapher whose art has suffered a
considerable decline.

The space devoted to calligraphy is becoming
increasingly narrow in all fields, from architecture to the
art of the book, and marks a decline in the art of
Calligraphy.

It is probably the arrival of printing to the East that
started the decline. However, if we consider Islamic art as
a whole with a single aesthetic vision, the decline began as
this unified vision began to disintegrate. One needs
only to look at the architectural design of modern
mosques, bazaars and houses, and even the design of
books and garments, to conclude that Islamic art, and
including calligraphy, is in decline. And this decline is
manifest not only in the work but also in the
infrastructure. The old system of workshops and the
disciples following a master calligrapher until he himself
became one, no longer exists. Consequently there has
also been a collapse in the system of patronage.

A further decline that can be observed is the absence
of the appreciative viewer capable of deciphering the
world of shapes. This is probably an inevitable result of
the decline in the range and scope of calligraphy and the
disruption to its artistic scheme. This constitutes a
serious problem since the viewer in Islamic art is an
inseparable part of the creative process.

An examination of the development of calligraphy
during the last 100 years, a development full of
comprehensive transformation, points to a conflict in
which calligraphy is reduced to the defensive. A position
which has dictated the relinquishing of many inherent
characteristics of this art.

The calligrapher is forced to unwillingly tolerate the
loss of range of work, infrastructure and appreciative
viewers, while holding on to the basic rules and criteria
prescribed for practicing calligraphy first as a profession
and secondly as an art.

A critical review of the work of master calligraphers
and the workbooks of specialized schools, the books and
papers in this field dating to this period, would highlight
important consequences. All these works derive their
basic rules from the heritage of the late era of the
Ottoman Empire, described as the age of exaggerated
bloom. In other words, it is the age when spontaneity
was conquered by over-excessive technique, when
content was captivated by form and creativity was
suppressed by rules. It was a time of the supremacy of
the rules of calligraphy over the spirit of the art...
Library Gifts

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has benefited from a seasonal deluge of gifts - in the form of books for the library. Our many friends across the world have made these thoughtful gestures, which are truly appreciated. Their kind consideration for the restoration and improvement of the library will be of benefit to many scholars, now and in the years to come.

Raficq Abdulla

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The Military Fortifications
During the Reign of al-Mu‘ayyad Sheikh

The historian ibn al-Khatib al-Nasiriyya writes in his book al-Dur al-Muntakhab fi Tākimat Tarīkh Hālab (The selected Pearls in the supplement to the history of Aleppo), who was contemporaneous with the events of Tamerlane occupation of Aleppo after its destruction by the Mongol, that the wall remained in ruins until al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad Sheikh became the Sultan (815-824 AH/1412-1421 AD). In the year 820 AH/1417 AD he visited the city for the third time and decided to re-fortify once more. His work, during 820-824 AH/1417-1421 AD, was very important to the re-organisation of the defences of Aleppo.

Al-Mu‘ayyad Sheikh knew Aleppo better than most other rulers. Before becoming sultan, he was its Prince for two years (813-815 AH/1410-1412 AD). He understood the importance of fortifying the northern Mamluk front to withstand the threat of Mongols and rising Ottoman forces. This large undertaking was achieved through a precise programme. Many were involved and funded by endowment funds, al-Mu‘ayyad proceeded with the project himself, inspired by the action of his predecessor al-Zahir Ghazi. He used to tour the walls and observe the progress as described by ibn al-Khatib al-Nasiriyya who accompanied him in his entourage.

Sultan Birsabay (r. 825-841 AH/1422-1438 AD) continued al-Mu‘ayyad’s work beginning in 831 AH/1428 AD. His importance was two-fold: he completed the defence system that al-Mu‘ayyad had started, and undertook some basic modifications to the ramparts, returning it to the square shape design of the Hellenistic period.

The military fortifications in the time of
Sultan Qayit Bay, 872-901 AH/1468-1496 AD

Qayit Bay was originally a slave who was freed by Sultan Birsabay. He was from the Burjiya Mamluks and became Atabak in 871 AH/1467 AD, leaving a legacy of many architectural achievements during his reign, the struggle between the Mamluks and Ottomans intensified. The Ottomans supported the insurrection of Ali Dawlat against the Mamluks. During Qayit Bay’s reign, the Mamluk Sultan prepared a campaign against him and was victorious. The struggle ended in 895 AH/1490 AD when a peace treaty was signed between them.

In the time of Qayit Bay many defence fortifications were created. In 873 AH/1469 AD he gave the order to repair the collapsed part of the city wall, the west wall, and the towers, and repaired al-Makam Gate, as

The Military Fortifications
From the 15th Century til the Rule of the Ottomans

Aleppo was faced with numerous challenges at the beginning of the fifteenth century. While it was just beginning to heal the deep wounds caused by the occupation of Timur, it was hit by a large earthquake (806 AH/1403 AD) which destroyed the majority of buildings and mosques in the city. Also, the Turkmen Emir Faris ibn Sahib, who conquered several regions of country and defeated the Emir of Aleppo Dimirdash al-Khassaki, attacked the city several times, until he was finally repelled by the newly appointed Emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Din Hakam al-Zahiri in the year 811 AH/1407 AD.