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Mamluk Revivalism – Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian Metalwares From the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw

As of the 1980s, historians of Muslim art, museum curators, and collectors have been displaying a marked interest in artistic handicraft items produced in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, i.e., at the time of the Arabic awakening referred to as *nahda*. The handicraft items produced at this time – primarily of metal and glass – are characterized by exceptional aesthetic qualities and have become foundation elements of many museum displays. In terms of their forms and, even more importantly, their decorations, they reference the stylistics of items produced for everyday use between 1250 and 1517 in Egypt and across the Middle East under Mamluk rule. On the wave of rising interest in such wares observed as of the 1980s, this artistic phenomenon came to be referred to as Mamluk revivalism, or simply as the *nahda* style. Metalwares in this style can be found at the National Museum in Warsaw as well as other museums and church collections in Poland.[1]

The modernistic *nahda* movement traces its beginnings to the second half of the 19th century. Spreading out from what is now Lebanon and Syria, it soon (between approximately 1870 and 1920) established itself in Palestine, Egypt, in the Maghreb and in Iraq as well as, to a lesser extent, Arabia.[2] Before this time, from the 16th century onwards most of the Arabic lands were subjugated by Ottoman Turkey and were administered on its behalf as *wilaya* within the Ottoman state. As a corollary, the architecture and art of these regions were affected by significant Turkish influences, with all the stylistic differences from Arab art that this entailed. In the second half of the 19th century, almost all the Arab countries were controlled in one way or another by the European colonial powers, England and France, which imposed their own policies also as regards artistic culture, archaeological excavations, and protection of historic mosques. The European influence also made itself felt in urban planning; the chaotic outskirts of cities built up in medieval times were demolished to make room for European-style buildings arranged along newly mapped out streets and squares. The dominance of the European

[1] Including the National Museum in Krakow, in Wrocław, and in Kielce, the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw and in Krakow, the Polish Army Museum, Royal Castle in Warsaw, the Castle Museum in Łańcut, and the Treasury of the Church of Corpus Christi in Krakow.

[2] For a general cultural description of the *nahda*, see Józef Bielawski, Krystyna Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, Jolanta Jasińska, *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska XIX i XX wieku* (Warsaw, 1978), pp. 29–137; Józef Bielawski et al., *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska XIX i XX wieku. Literatura arabskiego Maghrebu* (Warsaw, 1989), pp. 66–88.

style was particularly pronounced in architectural details – especially so in Cairo, which was often referred to as the Paris of the South.

The ideological premises of the *nahda* were formulated as the Arab elite's answer to the political policies imposed by the British and French colonialists. The underlying idea of this revival comprised deliberate drawing by Arab intellectuals and artists upon the proud traditions of Muslim civilization as well as to the ancient heritage of the given region while, at the same time, utilizing the administrative and organizational solutions implemented in the realm of culture by the colonial powers[3]. Towards this end, from the mid-19th century onwards, cultural and educational institutions, including scientific societies and schools based on European models, began to emerge in the Islamic world. The printing of periodicals and books was arranged for, and European textbooks and scientific treatises were translated into the Arabic.[4] Trained archaeologists and eager amateurs unearthed ancient and early medieval edifices scattered around the Syrian Desert, Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, and the Sahara. Perhaps ironically, the publicity surrounding discoveries of this sort and the excitement which they aroused among Europeans contributed significantly to the Arab peoples' new appreciation of their own past. Among the amateur archaeologists accounting for the momentum of this phenomenon, a Polish accent is provided by Count Michał Tyszkiewicz (also a noted hunter), who sojourned in Egypt in 1861–1862 and described his time there in a diary.[5]

This cultural rebirth manifested itself most strongly in Egypt. Its initial stirrings concerned the relics of art from the time of the pharaohs (the *misriyya*[6] current) and, subsequently, blossomed into renewed pride and interest in the history and achievements of Arabic civilization (the *arabiyya* current). Literary works written during the *nahda* period are rife with references to the Arabic past. One propagator of tapping the rich Muslim past in Egyptian epic literature was Djurdji Zaydan (1861–1914), the author of numerous historical novels (himself a Christian) who thus described his views on the matter: "Let us concentrate on presenting the history of Islam! The readers are not accustomed to this. The Muslims look to their past as a point of pride, but non-Muslims know nothing of Islam other than what derives from the times of ill-defined disputes."[7] History-themed books with plots set during the dawn of Islamic civilization became all the rage. The Mamluk period, meanwhile, was a decidedly less popular setting for literary works, although *Sirat al-Zahir Baybars* [Life of Baybars the Conqueror] – an age-old anonymous folk epic which frequently touches upon historical facts – enjoyed undiminished standing. This lukewarm interest in Mamluk themes in literature may have been rooted in the perception that all things Mamluk belong to the very recent past and, as such, are not worth

[3] The authors who have analyzed this issue include Timothy Mitchell, *Egipt na wystawie świata* (Warsaw, 2001).

[4] Barbara Stępniewska-Holzer, *Życie codzienne na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX wieku* (Warsaw, 2002), pp. 89–98.

[5] *Egipt zapomniany, czyli Michała hr. Tyszkiewicza dziennik podróży do Egiptu i Nubii (1861–62)*, ed. and introduction by Andrzej Niwiński (Warsaw, 1994). On other Poles travelling in Egypt at the time, see Józef Kościelski, *Szkice egipskie. Wrażenia z podróży. Studia i materiały*, ed., introduction and commentary by Hieronim Kaczmarek (Poznań, 2007); Hieronim Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Egipcie do 1914 roku* (Szczecin, 2008); Józef Hussarzewski, *Wspomnienia z naszej podróży na Wschodzie, 1871–1872*, ed. and introduction by Hieronim Kaczmarek (Krakow, 2009); *Tadeusz Smoleński, 1884–1909. Pisma naukowe i publicystyczne* (Krakow, 2010), pp. 299–336; *Kto nie widział Kairu, nie widział piękności świata. Egipt w relacjach prasowych polskich podróżników drugiej połowy XIX wieku*, ed. and introduction by Leszek Zinkow (Krakow, 2011); Joachim Śliwa, *Badacze, kolekcjonerzy, podróżnicy* (Krakow, 2012); Leszek Zinkow, *Egipt circa 1850* (Krakow, 2014).

[6] *Misr* is the Arabic for Egypt.

[7] Hamdi Alkhayat, *Ğurği Zaidān – Leben und Werk* (Köln, 1973), p. 56.

dwelling over. After the fall of the Mamluks in 1517 and the establishment of Ottoman rule in Egypt, day-to-day policing of the new Turkish province was entrusted to military units referred to as Mamluks and manned by descendants of the sultans, emirs, and courtiers who had Turkish lineage. These forces continued to operate until the early 19th century, and the memories of their activities in the collective Egyptian mind tended to be dark ones.

In 1869, Cairo witnessed two seminal cultural events. Construction of the mosque of Shaykh Al-Rifa'i, designed in the Mamluk revivalist style, commenced, and the Opera Theatre was launched with the world premiere of *Aida* by Giuseppe Verdi[8] timed to coincide with the opening of the Suez Canal.[9] The Shaykh Al-Rifa'i mosque was completed only in 1912, and the inspiration for its interior was derived from the decorations preserved at Mamluk mosques and mausoleums which continued to be a noticeable feature of various Cairo neighborhoods.[10] As for the Suez Canal, the opening of a waterway connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea was bound to exert a great financial impact on a global scale, but Egypt itself was not to partake of the profits thus generated for a long time to come on account of its debt burden. The Opera Theatre, meanwhile, did much to foster the development of Egyptian drama, also as regards inspiration for drama writing – a pursuit hereto unknown in the Arab world. Worth noting in this context are the works of Ahmad Shawqi, the Prince of Poets (1869–1932), the stage productions of which served a propaganda role and strengthened the national pride of Egyptians.[11] The need to come up with appropriate set designs and props for such theatrical pieces provided further incentive for study of Old Arabic art.

This renewed care for Arabic art history was also translated into tangible measures geared at safeguarding the material heritage of times gone by. Successive Arab capitals established various storage facilities for keeping ancient and Islamic artefacts from the given region;[12] efforts of this sort benefitted from support by the Europeans. The year 1884 witnessed the founding of the Museum of Arabic Art, housed in a hastily erected building in the courtyard of the ruined Fatimid mosque of Al-Hakim, which opened the first display of preserved artistic handicraft specimens. In 1902, upon construction of a new building (significantly enough, in the Mamluk revivalism style), the Museum of Islamic Art combined with the National Library was opened.[13] The museum wing of this new institution displayed a cross-section of valuable wares and objects transferred from neglected, crumbling mosques and mausoleums, among them brass Mamluk wares beautifully decorated with elaborate figural, calligraphic, geometric, and plant designs. At that time, these objects would have been approximately 500 years old; many of them were executed as *waaf*, i.e., as donations for religious institutions, and thus had been kept over the centuries with the appropriate care. The 14th-century brass stand for supporting a tray or bowl now at the Collection of

[8] The libretto was edited by Antonio Ghislanzoni on the basis of a sketch by the archaeologist August Mariette, who also collaborated on staging of the production. Mariette also provided the organizational impetus behind the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo opened in 1858.

[9] An interesting account of these events is provided by Desider Galský, *Wielka gra Ferdynanda Lessepsa* (Katowice, 1977).

[10] The mosque of Shaykh Al-Rifa'i, built in accordance with a design by Mustafa Fahmi.

[11] Shawqi Dayf, *Shawqi. Sha'ir al- asr al-hadis* (Cairo, 1977), p. 40.

[12] Various Islamic artworks and artefacts were initially gathered in the exposed parts of Cairo's ruined Fatimid mosque of Al-Hakim (built in the early 11th century).

[13] The building was designed by the Italian architect Alfonso Manescalo.

Oriental Art of the National Museum in Warsaw (**fig. 1**), is one such example.[14] Its bottom bears the engraved names of the former owners – two men, Ahmad Ibn Yahya and Abduh Badr Muhammad, and a woman, Huriyya Bint Al-Hasan Ibn Hamid Al-Din. The lettering of the individual names differs in its formal aspects, which may be taken as suggesting that the successive owners of this item lived in different periods.

The stand was made in Egypt. Its decoration was never completed; at the stage at which further work was abandoned, it displays the outlines of inscriptions and arabesque motifs as well as delicate engravings which, upon further tooling, were to accommodate silver inlays. The Arabic calligraphy in the *sulus* script upon the upper and lower ring praise the sultan with the panegyric *Enlightened, agile, ruler over the nation, victorious, great lord of Egypt, good king*. The tondi are filled out with lotus flowers, a motif characteristic of this period originally derived from Chinese art, and with the epithet "al-Malik as-Salih," i.e., good king – some of the Mamluk sultans of the 14th century were entitled to use this appellation.[15]

During the Mamluk period, production of brass furnishings and items for day-to-day use was an esteemed artistic endeavor, as was production of enameled glass olive lamps[16] and other glassware. Deep brass basins and matching pitchers used in ablutions, stackable food containers, rose water sprayers, stoves, candle holders, lamps, incense burners, trays, plates, vases, *ibriq* pitchers, goblets and bowls for serving food, inkwells, pen cases, and boxes for holding books or jewelry – all such items were painstakingly inlaid with silver plaques and with silver, copper, and even gold wire. Foreigners visiting Egypt during the 19th century eagerly purchased such items; those which were not shipped off to Europe or to America eventually found their way to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, which now has one of the finest modern-day collections of this sort.[17] One distinguishing trait of Mamluk brassware lay in the inclusion among the decorative motifs of the coats-of-arms of sultans and emirs; this, in itself, testifies to the extent the Mamluk elites cherished such objects.[18] The 250 years of Mamluk rule witnessed an evolution in the decoration of metalwares. The penchant for imitating Umayyad art from the 7th and 8th centuries, for example, was very much in evidence in architectural and handicraft ornamentation during the reign of sultan Qalawun and his sons (from approximately 1275 to the first half of the 14th century). In the second half of the 15th century, meanwhile, sultan Qayt Bay encouraged his craftsmen to use less expensive materials, especially zinc-plated copper; wares from simpler materials, however, were still decorated with engraved and etching arabesques and inscriptions. Art of the *nahda* encompassed both these styles concurrently.

[14] Inv. no. SKAZsz 1296.

[15] For similar stands, see Gaston Wiet, *Objets en cuivre. Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire* (Le Caire, 1932), pp. 160–61, pl. LXXIV; Prapataditya Pal, *Islamic Art. The Nasli M. Heeramaneck Collection*, exh. cat., County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1973, cat. no. 306, p. 167; Géza Fehérvári, *Islamic Metalwork of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection* (London, 1976), pp. 126–27, pl. 53, no. 155; James W. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork. The Nuhad Es-Said Collection* (London, 1982), pp. 96–97.

[16] As far as Polish collections are concerned, a glass Mamluk lamp may be found at the Czartoryski Princes Museum in Krakow.

[17] Including *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Cairo–New York, 2006).

[18] On Mamluk heraldry as a branch of Arabic studies, see Leo A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry. A Survey* (Oxford, 1933); Michael Meinecke, "Zur mamlukischen Heraldik," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*, Bd. 28/2 (1972), p. 213–87, pl. LII-LXVIII; id., "Die Bedeutung der mamlukischen Heraldik für die Kunstgeschichte" in *XVIII. Deutcher Orientalistentag* (Lubeck, Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 213–40. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Supplement 2.

If the *misriyya* current was propagated during the *nahda* period by way of the monumental work *Description de l'Egypte*, the collective fruit of the labors of over 160 academics and 2000 illustrators published in twelve volumes between 1809 and 1822,[19] the *arabiyya* current was spread largely thanks to illustrated books about artistic handicrafts published in the second half of the 19th century. The year 1877, for instance, brought the publication of an album with 200 color drawings by the archaeologist and architect Émile Prisse d'Avennes entitled *L'art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire*[20]. Then came *The Art of the Saracens in Egypt*[21] by Stanley Lane-Poole of the Egyptian Committee for Preservation of Arabic Art Artefacts, illustrated with 108 engravings, published in 1886. The third publication presenting fundamental knowledge about Arabic artistic handicrafts was the catalogue of the holding of the Museum of Arabic Art compiled by the Hungarian architect Max Herz, *Catalogue sommaire des monuments exposés dans le Musée national de l'art arabe*, with its first edition in 1895. There is ample evidence indicating that craftsmen and decorators copied illustrations from these books as models for their own work.

Large-scale copying of original items did much to popularize Mamluk revivalism in Arab metalworking of the *nahda* period. In 1892, the Egyptian artist Ali Al-Shushi completed his replica of the metal doors of the Sultan Hasan mosque in Cairo erected between 1356 and 1361. This replica was displayed one year later at the World Fair in Chicago, subject to one modification – the name of sultan Hasan (1347–51; second reign: 1354–61) seen in the original was replaced by that of Egypt's current ruler, Abbas Hilmi II (1892–1914).

In the early 20th century, the metalworking studio established in Cairo by the Italian Giuseppe Parvis (1832–1901) and subsequently managed by his son Pompeo developed a specialization in copying historic items of Arabic art. Around 1916, the Parvis studio produced an almost perfect copy of a *sunduq* box with thirty partitions on the inside for storing thirty *juz'*, or parts, of the Qur'an. The original *sunduq* had been made in around 1330[22] and is mentioned in inventory records of the medrese of sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri from the early 16th century. In the 1880s, the *sunduq* found its way to the Museum of Islamic Art, a destination for many artists and craftsmen searching for inspiration. In their recreation of the original box, the specialists associated with the Parvis studio lavished great care not only on faithfully replicating its structure and ornamentation, but also the empty places from which the original silver inlays had been lost. The only departure from the original is comprised in the grapevine leaves on the lid and the floral Kashmir motifs. The original Parvis box is now at Christ Church College in Oxford;[23] other studios, now hard to identify, also produced replicas of the Mamluk original.

[19] For biographies of some of the artists, see Robert Solé, *Uczeni Bonapartego* (Warsaw, 2001).

[20] The newest edition of this album: Émile Prisse d'Avennes, *Arab Art. The complete plates from* L'art arabe *and the* Oriental Album */ Arabische Kunst. Sämtliche Tafeln aus* L'Art arabe *und* Oriental Album */ L'Art arabe. Toutes les planches de* L'Art arabe *et de l'*Oriental Album, essay by / Essay von / essai par Sheila Blair & Jonathan Bloom, with a selection of original texts by / mit einer Auswabl der Originaltexte von / avec une sélection de textes originaux de Émile Prisse d'Avennes & James Augustus St. John (Köln, 2010).

[21] Reprints of this work continue to be published.

[22] *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo...*, cat. no. 89, pp. 102–03. The dating of the Cairo *sunduk* refers to an analogous box signed by Muhammad Ibn Sunkur of Baghdad and annotated with the date of completion (now at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin, inv. no. I.886).

[23] Barbara Schmitz, "The Mamluk Revival: Metalwork for Religious and Domestic Use," *Oriental Art*, vol. 28/2 (Summer) (1982), pp. 191–92.

The Oriental art collections of the National Museum in Warsaw include a box which, while modelled after the Cairene *sunduq*, is smaller (**fig. 2**).[24] Much like the original, it has an underlying structure of wood, faced on the outside with brass plates with silver inlay. As opposed to the original box, the inside is not subdivided; the inner walls are lined with marquetry arranged into geometric compositions and patterns. The box is prolifically inscribed with Qur'anic texts in the *sulus* and *kufi* scripts, and the backgrounds of all the decorations are filled in by punching. The decoration of the lid refers to the Mamluk original as well as to its replica by Giuseppe Parvis. In its center is a multi-foliate medallion with the ornamentally arranged words *There is God, the One and the Only!*[25] This medallion is surrounded by symmetrically deployed grape bunches, palmettes, and lotus flowers, the latter motif transplanted to Old Mamluk art from the Chinese decorative repertory. As on the Mamluk box, the dominant inscription girding the sides of the *sunduq* is verse 255 of the Qur'an, The Throne – *Ayat al-kursi*, from the second sura – "The Cow" - Al-Baqara: "God! There is no god / But He – the Living, / The Self-subsisting, Eternal. / No slumber can seize Him / Nor sleep. His are all things / In the heavens and on earth. / Who is there can intercede / In His presence except / As He permitteth? He Knoweth / What (appeareth to His creatures / As) Before or After / Or behind them. / Nor shall they compass / Aught of His knowledge / Except as He willeth. / His Throne doth extend / Over the heavens / And the earth, and He feeleth / No fatigue in guarding / And preserving them / For He is the Most High, / The Supreme (in glory)." This Verse of the Throne is an especially important one in Islam, and the Muslim faithful hold it in their hearts as the most holy; it is the profession of Muslim monotheism and touches upon all the elements of the Muslim concept of God.

This box was most probably used to store appositely exalted objects which would not detract from its essential *sacrum*. Egyptian society at the time being deeply religious, these could have been mementoes from a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina[26] or religious texts.

Misbah lamps also had religious significance. They are often mentioned in the Qur'an; verse five of sura 67, for instance, includes the following words of God: "And We have, / (From of old), / Adorned the lowest heaven / With Lamps, and We / Have made such (Lamps) / (As) missiles to drive / Away the Evil Ones [...]."[27] Thus, it is also for symbolic reasons that masterfully decorated *misbah* have, for centuries, been a mainstay of mosque interiors. In private homes, *misbah* lamps are lighted on religious holidays, especially on the Prophet's birthday and during the nighttime feasts of Ramadan. A special trait of such a lamp, with its decoratively perforated body, is comprised in its decorative versatility. Apart from being a fine object in and of itself, a *misbah*, when lit, projects its illuminated pattern onto the walls and ceiling.

The Oriental collections of the National Museum in Warsaw include three lamps of Egyptian or Middle Eastern origin from the *nahda* period. The characteristic trait of these three specimens is presented in close imitation of the shape of the Mamluk *misbah* coupled with a simplified, slightly schematic decoration.

[24] Inv. no. SKAZsz 3366.

[25] *The Glorious Kur'an*, translation and commentary by Abdallah Yousuf Ali (Libyan Arab Republic, 1973), pp. 102–03.

[26] Popular mementoes from journeys to the holy places of Islam include soil in a round metal box, water from the Zamzam well in a glass flask, and a swatch of the *kiswa*, the fabric shrouding the Kaaba in Mecca (which is replaced every year). As far as books are concerned, there were beautifully illustrated guides to Mecca and Medina.

[27] Ali, op. cit., p. 680.

One of these lamps is of the *suraya* type, suspended by three chains, with a plate-like bottom part and a spherical dome topped with a conical decoration and a latticework palmette (**fig. 3**).[28] Mounted at the base are seven hoops for holding cylindrical glass containers for water and olive oil.[29] Whether these containers could in fact be used as designed depended on their correct execution by the glassblowers as well as on filling them with a combination of oil and water concocted in the right proportions. While the glass container was being blown, a fairly tall stalk was formed at the center of its inside, intended as a tank for holding water and the olive oil floating on top. A wick – a simple straw wrapped in a rag – was inserted into this stalk, and the container was filled with water around the stalk so as to avoid overheating of the entire system. This *suraya* is made of forged brass sheets, with a decoration of ornamental rings with bows filled out with geometric, vegetal, and arabesque patterns as well as inscriptions in the *naskhi* script incised into the dome.[30]

The second lamp, also of the *suraya* type, generally resembles the one just described in terms of its shape and the materials and techniques used in its production (**fig. 4**).[31] The main point of difference concerns its ornamentation; the dome-like lid of this specimen is decorated with eight-pointed stars separated with lattice-work arabesques and with inscriptions in cartouches deployed at the base of the lamp and at its top.

The third lamp, meanwhile, is of the pitcher-shaped variety of which the earliest known examples date back to the 10th century (**fig. 5**).[32] In Islamic art, this shape was adopted as a medium for the Muslim symbolism of light. Images of pitcher-shaped *misbah* lamps appear in the architectural details of mosques and mausoleums as well as upon grave steles and prayer rugs. The lamp has a bulging body made of forged copper sheets and a slightly everted neck, and it is suspended from three chains. Its entire surface is covered with lattice-work arabesques; on the neck, these interweave with an inscription in the *sulus* script. The lattice-work compositions are accented with incised lines which shape their outlines.

While it was the metalwork shops of Cairo which perfected the replication of historical Mamluk wares, Damascus also came into its own as a bourgeoning center for production of various items in the Mamluk revivalist style. Estelle Whelan argues that Syrian craftsmen were impeded by limited access to original Mamluk objects until the opening of the National Museum in Damascus with its Islamic art collection in 1919.[33] This lack of original models, however, may have been something of a blessing in disguise for the Damascene craftsmen as they were effectively left to their own resources as regards Mamluk revivalism, which led them to formulate some innovative offerings all their own. The distinctive lamp, somewhat

[28] Inv. no. SKAZsz 48.

[29] The containers shown in this photo are modern ones, purchased in Syria in 2005. In earlier times, they were blown from transparent glass, and the outer surfaces were sometimes decorated with ornaments and calligraphy applied in enamel.

[30] For similar Mamluk lamps, see Wiet, op. cit., pl. IX, X, XI, XVIII, XXII, XXIV, XLII; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Mamluk and Post-Mamluk Lamps* (Le Caire, 1995), pl. 52–57 (what are known as post-Mamluk lamps from the Ottoman era), pl. 67 (a lamp from the *nahda* period).

[31] Inv. no. SKAZsz 1303.

[32] Inv. no. SKAZsz 1439. See Kjeld von Folsach, *Islamic Art. The David Collection* (Copenhagen, 1990), cat. no. 303; Behrens-Abouseif, op. cit., pl. 11–18, 20–24.

[33] The opinions of E. Whelan cited after Schmitz, op. cit., p. 191. Whelan was a co-organizer of a small display of metal wares from Egypt and the Middle East executed in the Mamluk revivalist style arranged at The Jewish Museum in New York in 1981.

evocative of a ballerina's dress, now hanging under the Dome of Eagle at the Grand Umayyad Mosque in Damascus is one such example.

In the early 20th century, Syrian workshops became renowned for their artfully inlaid and engraved *siniyya* – round trays for carrying dishes of food. Such trays would be placed upon wooden tables, *kursi*. Trays produced in Syria and Palestine featured distinctive decorations of small arabesques and prominent inscriptions within square or rhomboid fields. The inscriptions and calligraphic motifs employed various styles of Arabic characters and were either inlaid or incised. At the time, it was common practice to import the metal sheets and prefabricated elements used in production of such wares from Birmingham, England.[34] Damascene craftsmen also perfected their own stylistic touch – inlays of mother-of-pearl.

This Syrian *siniyya* tray from the Islamic Art Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw is made of cast iron, coated with black bitumen, and inlaid with silver and copper wire (**fig. 6**).[35] The inlaid motifs combine into a composition characteristic of Damascene wares – a square field with an octagon and a palmette within and, at the sides, cartouches with Kufi-like inscriptions. Apart from this dominant square, there are also various arabesque and geometric patterns symmetrically arranged around the outer rim which, in its turn, features inscriptions in the *naskhi* script and interweaving elements with leaves.

The other *siniyya* at the National Museum in Warsaw is accompanied by a dedicated wooden base with which it combines into a *kursi* table set (**figs 7–8**).[36] When unfolded, the wooden base becomes a hexagonal structure upon which the tray can be placed. The central area of the *siniyya* is decorated with an engraved composition dominated by a triangle (or triskelion) with a six-pointed star within; the star, in its turn, encloses a four-pointed rosette. Each of these figures is filled out with arabesques. The flattened, slightly elevated rim is decorated with an ornamental ring with small leaves and rays. The various geometric figures combining within the central composition have symbolic import – they amount to a benediction that the user of the *siniyya* may follow the true path of the faith, as pointed out by the Prophet, and be duly rewarded.

Another interesting item in the revivalist style is presented in the *tabaq* plate with a serrated edge forged from copper sheet and decorated with engraved arabesques with leaf motifs evocative of Qalawunid ornamentation, particularly as seen upon the facade of the mausoleum of sultan Qalawun in Cairo from the turn of 1284 and 1285 (**fig. 9**).[37] The word *sultan* may be deciphered among the inscriptions. The serrated edge, choice of material (copper), and engraved decorations of this *tabaq* associate it with late Mamluk wares from the 15th century.[38]

No enumeration of the Arab cities with a long tradition of metalworking in the Mamluk revivalist style could be complete without mentioning Jerusalem – the city of three religions

[34] Stephen Vernoit, *Occidentalism. Islamic Art in the 19th Century, The Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art,* vol. 23 (Oxford, 1997), p. 238.

[35] Inv. no. SKAZsz 1306.

[36] Inv. no. SKAZsz 3413/a–b.

[37] Inv. no. SKAZsz 44. See Sheila S. Blair, Jonathan M. Bloom, *Sztuka i architektura islamu, 1250–1800* (Warsaw, 2012), p. 77.

[38] A Mamluk plate of this type is preserved at the National Museum in Krakow – see Beata Biedrońska-Słota et al., *Cuda Orientu*, exh. cat., National Museum in Gdańsk (Gdańsk, 2006), p. 130, cat. 104 (the Mamluk armorial device in the center indicates that the emir to whom this plate once belonged served as the court secretary (outline of the compartments of a pen case), cup-bearer (goblet), huntsman (hunting horns), and wardrobe attendant (rhombus shape referring to a napkin over a goblet).

and, for long centuries, a destination for throngs of pilgrims, many of whom wanted to buy something to remember their journey by. In 1906, experienced masters from Damascus opened in Jerusalem the School of Fine Arts and Crafts. They adopted an ecumenical approach to designing their catalogue of wares – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim buyers could all find something of relevance to their own Jerusalem experience. When juxtaposed with wares from Cairo or from Damascus, items from Jerusalem were more likely to bear figural images, for example of biblical heroes.[39] A survey of the inscriptions upon wares from these three artistic centers, meanwhile, yields the conclusion that Arabic inscriptions predominated in each one; Hebrew inscriptions are also encountered from time to time, and those in Latin or Greek seem to be the rarest. In the workshops of Cairo, the inlay decorations were produced by men in Damascus and in Jerusalem, such tasks were also entrusted to women.[40] A typical metalware studio would be housed in the back of a shop which sold its output (**fig. 10**).

The selection of items from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine described here exemplifies certain distinctive traits – some of them constitute a deliberate reference to Mamluk stylistics while others are original.

The main aspect of traditionalism is comprised in the use of brass and copper to cast the wares and in their decoration with inlays, engraving, etching, and lattice-work incisions. Brass was formulated by Egyptian metalsmiths in the 12th century, and its color made it a treasured stand-in for gold, which was frowned upon by Islamic religious authorities, mindful of the Qur'anic prohibition on using and hoarding items from precious metals. This religious stricture notwithstanding, however, a shiny surface is a very sought-after effect in the Muslim aesthetic, so brass was embraced as a simulacrum for gold which did not run afoul of the religious laws.

When compared with the Mamluk models, the decorative work on the revivalist wares is characterized by distinct differences. The silver or copper inlays on wares from the late 19th and early 20th century are executed in thick wire, a far cry from the finesse of Mamluk decorations. In this context, however, it should be borne in mind that the Mamluk wares were intended for the court – they were made to a ruler's order, they passed through the hands of successive masters in various techniques, and cost was not an issue. Their revivalist imitations, meanwhile, were more of a mass product attuned to the tastes and means of a contemporary demographic, first of all the Egyptian, Syrian, and Palestinian bourgeoisie and travelers from Europe and America. Be that as it may, the rather straightforward execution of the revivalist inlays – particularly in silver – embodies another aesthetic trait of Islamic art from centuries past, namely use of color contrasts. Apart from the classic materials, craftsmen of the *nahda* period also used niello, mother of pearl, and enamel. The open-work perforated decorations, which were especially popular at the time, made for a chiaroscuro effect.

Such revivalist inlay work is characterized by certain stylistic innovations. The first of these concerns use of clear lettering. At their textual level, the inscriptions convey a certain message; at their visual level, the contrast between the golden-hued brass background and the silver or oxidized black inscription makes for a decorative effect in its own right. Inscriptions upon metalwares from the *nahda* period sometimes copied those deciphered upon original Mamluk wares, many of which sung the praises of the ruler. More often than not, however, they

[39] Blair, Bloom, *Sztuka i architektura islamu, 1250–1800*..., op. cit., fig. 395, p. 313.

[40] Vernoit, op. cit., p. 238.

drew upon generic benedictions and adages exhorting believers to do good. Souvenir-level wares produced sometimes feature inscriptions which are incomplete or tainted by errors, or simply pseudo-inscriptions which have no meaning, but look the part.

A certain push and pull between tradition and innovation is also in evidence in that all-important realm of Islamic art – ornamentation. Upon the Old Mamluk metalwares, we can admire figural motifs, the insignia of Mamluk nobility, a wealth of geometric patterns, and vegetal motifs – naturalistic as well as abstract. During the *nahda* period, meanwhile, images of humans or animals appear but rarely – and, when they do, usually upon wares produced in Jerusalem. The revivalist wares do not feature insignia of Mamluk rulers – either as a result of deliberate omission, or simply because, after some 400 years, these devices became incomprehensible even in the Arab world. In fact, outside a narrow circle of Arab historians, the ability to "read" such coats-of-arms was lost.

The ornamentation used in the revivalist style, as compared with variants of the same motifs repeated over the centuries, tended to be more boldly rendered; punching or stamping of the surface also became more common. The lotus flower was not used as a leading motif, but various star designs remained popular. The ornamental bands with interweaving geometric motifs quite common during the *nahda* period refer to plate decorations used in the 15th century, during the reign of sultan Qayt Bay.[41] In their revivalist renditions, the arabesques so typical of Islamic art are either highly abstract or constitute variations of Turkish ornaments.

The references to the tradition of Turkish Islamic art and to its ornamental forms as developed, in particular, during the 17th and 18th centuries may readily be explained given how Turkish art, arriving as it did on the heels of Ottoman political and military subjugation, predominated in the Arabic lands of the Mediterranean basis for several hundred years. At the same time, however, Ottoman art would not have evolved as it did were it not for the Arab art of the Mamluks. In the early 16th century, after the downfall of the Mamluks, the Ottoman sultans seized upon the opportunity to transfer to Istanbul many artists and craftsmen from their newly conquered domains. These new arrivals from Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem included calligraphers, weavers, and master craftsmen specializing in metals and ceramics. These craftsmen initially continued to create in the Mamluk style but gradually adjusted their artistic means of expression so as to accommodate the aesthetic preferences of their Turkish masters. In comparison to Arab art, Turkish art cultivated larger ornamental forms and worked with a wider palette of colors. By the 19th century, Turkish handicrafts had become significantly suffused with European influences.

The shapes of the revivalist metalwares were closely aligned with the intended function of the given object, and they encompassed a broad range of forms different from Mamluk ones. The distinctive Mamluk candle holders supported upon truncated cones, for example, were replaced by slender cylindrical stands for kerosene lamps.[42] *Kursi* cabinets with surfaces decorated with brass plates disappeared, yielding to wooden tables and, in general, furniture made of wood. Boxes for writing instruments, with their array of compartments for ink, sand, and reed pens, were replaced with slender cases after the Turkish fashion, designed to be carried behind the belt. *Nahda*-style vases were supported by broad ring foots or conical foots with fluting, as opposed to the tall, conical stands characteristic of Mamluk receptacles made

[41] See footnote 32.

[42] Stands of this type are preserved at Łańcut Castle – please see Elżbieta Baniukiewicz, Zofia Wiśniewska, *Zamek w Łańcucie* (Warsaw 1980, photo 21).

from metal or ceramics. *Nahda* bowls had rounded bottoms and taller walls, and this trend towards higher sides of the dish eventually led to the appearance of wares resembling buckets or kettles. Some revivalist wares received decorations of a decidedly European character; the shapes of trays, plates, and boxes, meanwhile, hewed closely to the Mamluk originals.

While craftsmen of the *nahda* period also produced items in the Mamluk revivalist style in materials other than metal, they are very rare in Polish collections.

Particularly noteworthy are the glass objects decorated with Mamluk-style patterns applied in varicolored enamels; the few examples in Poland include a glass cup at the National Museum in Krakow.[43] Likewise interesting are the textile curtains and tent flaps decorated with appliqué patterns imitating the colored stone mosaics familiar from Mamluk architecture or the wooden mosaics from interiors, mosque furnishings, and doors. Many of these mosaics incorporated diverse star designs as their dominant motif. A curtain of this style is owned by a private collector in Poland.[44]

Wares in the Mamluk revivalist style did not account for the entirety of the output of Arab craftsmen during the *nahda* period; production of objects in the Turkish (Ottoman) style was also kept up, especially of furniture, textiles, and carpets. Such Ottoman style wares, also those preserved in Polish collections, merit discussion as a distinct category.

Translated by Bartek Świetlik

[43] Inv. no. MNK-IV-SZ-249.

[44] Ryszard Z. Janiak, Ryszard de Latour, Anna Kwaśnik Gliwińska, *Pasja zbierania. Kolekcja Ryszarda Z. Janiaka. Katalog wystawy*, exh. cat., Royal Castle in Warsaw; National Museum in Kielce, 2007 (Warsaw, 2007), p. 363, cat. no. II/35.