

BETHANY J. WALKER
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Rethinking Mamluk Textiles*

With the emergence of Mamluk studies as a distinct area of specialization within Islamic studies, an evaluation of the current "state-of-the-field" of Mamluk art and architecture is required.¹ Although textiles are included in most discussions of Mamluk art, a full-length review of the literature, goals, and methods of this field has not yet appeared. The following article is a contribution to this end.

The literature on Mamluk textiles is vast and varied. Because of the centrality of textiles in medieval culture, textile analysis has been of interest to scholars from a variety of disciplines.² Art historians, more traditional historians, and archaeologists have all written on the subject; sometimes, but not always, their work is done in consultation with textile specialists, who have contributed their own body of scholarly literature.³ Archaeologists, for example, have taken a special interest in Mamluk textiles, because of their superior preservation in excavations. More complete pieces have been preserved from the Mamluk period than from

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¹Donald Whitcomb, "Mamluk Archaeological Studies: A Review," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 97-106; Jonathan M. Bloom, "Mamluk Art and Architectural History: A Review Article," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 (1999): 31-58; Bethany J. Walker, "The Later Islamic Periods: Militarization and Nomadization," *Near Eastern Archaeology* ("Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine" series) 62 (1999), in progress.

²Lisa Golombek has written eloquently about the "textile mentality" of medieval Islamic society in her "The Draped Universe of Islam," in Priscilla P. Soucek, ed., *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World* (University Park, PA, 1988), 25-38.

³In archaeological reports, textile analysis is generally contained in a separate chapter and is written by a textile consultant. Two of the more notable, and successful, joint efforts by art historians and textile specialists are Ernst Kühnel and Louisa Bellinger, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics: Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid*, The Textile Museum (Washington, D.C., 1952) and Lisa Golombek and Veronika Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum," in Veronika Gervers, ed., *Studies in Textile History in Memory of Harold B. Burnham*, Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto, 1977), 82-125.



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any other time.⁴ For economic historians, textile analysis is particularly significant. Textiles were the “most important form of bourgeois wealth” and appear regularly in medieval texts as a commodity of import and export.⁵ Moreover, the textile industry has been described as a mainstay of the Mamluk economy, and, along with metalwork, Mamluk fabrics were the largest exports to the Far East in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries.⁶

Scholars of social and political history have emphasized the politicization of textile production by the Mamluks. The manipulation of costume by the ruling establishment for state functions, such as pageants, banquets, and processions, is a familiar phenomenon for medieval Europe, as well as the Islamic world.⁷ As Bierman and Sanders have illustrated, the Fatimids appreciated the political potential of textiles and used them, along with the architectural backdrop of the city of Cairo, to punctuate their official ceremonies.⁸ The Mamluks, even more than the Fatimids, made expensive fabrics, particularly inscribed silks (*tirāz*, *zarkash*), tools of state by incorporating certain kinds of dress and the change of dress into their court rituals. The elaboration of official ceremonial by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the codification by rank of dress which went along with it are important phenomena to consider in this regard.⁹ Most of what has been written on Mamluk ceremonial in recent years has made reference to dress.¹⁰ Similarly, there has been

⁴*Tissus d'Égypte: Témoins du monde Arabe, VIIIe-XVe siècles (Collection Bouvier)*, Musée d'art et d'histoire (Geneva, 1993), 28. For an excellent example of costume preservation in an archaeological context, one should see Elisabeth Crowfoot, “The Clothing of a Fourteenth-Century Nubian Bishop,” in *Studies in Textile History*, 43-51.

⁵Ira M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 31.

⁶Louise W. Mackie, “Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 127, 140, and Bloom, “Mamluk Art and Architectural History,” 48.

⁷An excellent source on European pageantry is Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650* (Suffolk, 1984).

⁸Irene Bierman, “Art and Politics: The Impact of Fatimid Uses of Tiraz Fabrics” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1980) and idem, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley, 1998). Paula Sanders’ *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Egypt* (Albany, NY, 1994) is a broader investigation of Fatimid processions.

⁹This is the central theme of L. A. Mayer, *Mamluk Costume* (Geneva, 1952). The effects that development in ceremonial had on Mamluk art of the fourteenth century are examined in Bethany J. Walker, “The Ceramic Correlates of Decline in the Mamluk Sultanate: An Analysis of Late Medieval Sgraffito Wares” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1998).

¹⁰Karl Stowasser, “Manner and Customs at the Mamluk Court,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 13-20; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial,” *Annales Islamologiques* 24 (1988): 25-79; Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (New York, 1993); and Nasser O. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture*



an interest in textiles used by the contemporary Mongol courts, as exemplified by the work of Allsen and Wardwell.¹¹

The purpose of this article is to reevaluate the contributions of these disciplines in light of the results of recent scholarship in Mamluk studies. Specifically, the coexistence of two distinct groups of patrons (military and civilian) is considered for its impact on the production, consumption, and artistic development of textiles in Mamluk Cairo.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MAMLUK TEXTILE PRODUCTION

Two themes dominate discussion of the Mamluks' textile industry: the increasing privatization of production throughout the fourteenth century and the decline of this industry in the fifteenth. There has been a heavy reliance on Maqrīzī's *Khīṭaṭ* for information on the operation and ownership of *ṭirāz* factories in the Mamluk period.¹² According to this historian, robes of honor (*khila'*)—a broad category of official garments, including textiles we traditionally call *ṭirāz*, and ensembles of clothing, equipment, and accessories—were manufactured in the state-run *dār al-ṭirāz* well into the fourteenth century. Ibn Khaldūn, furthermore, situates the *dār al-ṭirāz* of his day in Cairo's marketplace rather than the palace, as was the case in the Fatimid period.¹³ The date 1340-41 is recognized as a turning point in the textile industry in Egypt, because in that year the administration of the royal workshop in Alexandria was delegated to an appointee of a local government official. Alexandria's *dār al-ṭirāz* closed soon afterwards.¹⁴ Whether seen as a growing disinterest in textile manufacture by the central authority or as a step towards directing Egypt's best textile production and sales to Cairo, this action was only one example of the ways in which the industry was transformed. Production was increasingly privatized with the expanding influence of the amirs. Lapidus

(Leiden, 1995).

¹¹Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge, 1997); Anne Wardwell, "Flight of the Phoenix: Crosscurrents in late Thirteenth to Fourteenth Century Silk Patterns and Motifs," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 74, no. 1 (Jan. 1987): 1-35; idem, "Panni Tartarici: Eastern Islamic Silks Woven with Gold and Silver (13th and 14th Centuries)," *Islamic Art* 3 (1989): 95-173; idem, "Two Silk and Gold Textiles of the Early Mongol Period," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79, no. 10 (Dec. 1992): 354-78; and James Watt and Anne Wardwell, *When Silk was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*, exhibition catalogue, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and Cleveland Museum of Art (New York, 1997). While Allsen relies on textual sources, Wardwell's work is more technically based.

¹²For a definition of the term *ṭirāz*, see discussion below and Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum."

¹³Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 33.

¹⁴Patricia L. Baker, *Islamic Textiles* (London, 1995), 78.



mentions several instances of amirs in Damascus transferring silk and cloth markets to their own *qayṣarīyahs*, in at least one case in violation of an endowment benefiting the Umayyad Mosque.¹⁵

Contemporary sources leave no doubt that the manufacture and sale of expensive fabrics and costumes were lucrative. Surprisingly, there was no consistent policy towards this industry in the Mamluk period. Maqrīzī explains that after a period of private manufacture and sale, the market, in his day, had been taken over once again by the sultan. In his description of the *Sūq al-Sharābīshīyīn* (a specialized cap market) he writes:

And the people greatly benefited from this, and they amassed an immense fortune through the regulation of business in this industry. For this reason no one could sell [robes of honor] except to the sultan. The sultan appointed the *nāzīr al-khāṣṣ* to buy all he needed. If anyone other than the sultan's agents tried to buy from this market, he would be punished accordingly.¹⁶

The "owners" of these businesses, while they were still independently run, were probably both amirs and civilian merchants. Privatization of this level of the textile industry may have also contributed to a change of fashion among non-Mamluks, as the most prestigious garments were now available, at a price, to wealthier civilians.¹⁷ The result of the sultan's renewed monopoly over *khila'* would have been not only a concentration of resources but also restricted access to the most valuable fabrics and costumes, reinforcing the hierarchy of dress codes which reached its full development under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

The introduction of chinoiserie was one of the most significant developments in textile production. While oriental motifs begin to appear in Mamluk art of the late thirteenth century, their powerful presence in the mature Baḥrī style of the fourteenth may be related to the success of the Yüan silk export market. The well-known reference by Abū al-Fidā to the gift of 700 silks from the Il Khan Abū Sa'īd to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, in celebration of the 1323 peace treaty, is usually cited as evidence for the large-scale import of Mongol silks.¹⁸ The impact of Yüan silks on the Mamluk textile industry, if not the other way around, not to

¹⁵Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 60.

¹⁶Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār*, ed. Muḥammad Zaynahum and Madīḥah al-Sharqāwī (Cairo, 1998), 2:591. See also Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 63.

¹⁷Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310-1341)* (Leiden, 1995), 113.

¹⁸Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 72; Mackie, "Toward an Understanding," 132.



mention the differentiation of Mongol (Yüan or Il Khanid) from Mamluk silks, are still matters of debate.¹⁹

Scholars are increasingly emphasizing the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad as a watershed in textile development. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's elaboration of official ceremonial was complemented, and in fact buttressed, by the beautification of official apparel and the institution of a strict hierarchy of dress according to rank.²⁰ Mayer's *Mamluk Costume* is to this day the single most important reference for information on official costumes and their codification. Mayer was able to attribute many textile innovations to this period, such as gold *tirāz*, gold brocade, and gold belts. Fashions for the military changed under his rule, with the introduction of the "Sallārī" and "Tartar" coats and the *aqbiyah maftūḥah*.²¹ The art historical record confirms the picture the Arabic sources paint of this sultan. The majority of historically inscribed silks (both Mamluk and Yüan) name him, and some of the highest quality damasks can be dated to his third reign on a stylistic basis.²²

The art historical literature suggests that while the Mamluk textile industry fully blossomed in the fourteenth century, the fifteenth century witnessed its decline. The oft-quoted reference to the reduction in the number of Alexandria's silk looms (from 14,000 in 1394 to a mere 800 in 1434) illustrates vividly the extent to which textile production suffered at the turn of the century.²³ Prices for textiles, in some cases, doubled and even tripled, as price lists provided by Ashtor indicate.²⁴ Ashtor further argues that the high price of domestic textiles led to a change of dress in the fifteenth century, as a cheaper European woolen fabric (*jūkh*) became fashionable.²⁵

Three factors are supposed to have contributed to this state of affairs: the Black Death of 1348, the return to royal monopolies over textile production, and the flooding of Mamluk markets with high-quality, less expensive fabrics from

¹⁹Wardwell's work, as above; see also discussion on "silk" below.

²⁰Walker, "Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 269 ff.

²¹Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 21 ff. He describes the *Sallārī* coat as a long coat, often richly decorated with pearls and stones, and with short, wide sleeves. The Tartar coat is so called for the diagonal hem across the chest (from left to right), which was typical of Mongol dress. It was striped and had narrow sleeves.

²²Mackie, "Toward an Understanding," 128 ff and 139, fig. 2.

²³Eliyahu Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (London, 1976), 306; Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 78; Bloom, "Mamluk Art," 48 and 73; Mackie, "Toward an Understanding," 127.

²⁴Eliyahu Ashtor, "L'Evolution des Prix," reprinted in *The Medieval Near East: Social and Economic History*, Variorum Reprints (London, 1978), 35 ff.

²⁵Ashtor, "Levantine Sugar Industry in the Later Middle Ages, an Example of Technological Decline," *Israel Oriental Studies* 7 (1977): 263.



Europe.²⁶ Mackie has observed that "the textile industry was a vital force in the prosperity and subsequent decline of the Mamluk economy."²⁷ It is impossible to determine the percentage of Cairo's population in the fifteenth century that was occupied with the production, finishing, and sale of textiles, but by the eighteenth century, we are told, one-fifth of the city's artists continued to specialize in the manufacture of textiles and one-quarter of its merchants sold them.²⁸

PROBLEMS OF MAMLUK TEXTILES

The main characteristic of textiles which makes their study problematic is their fragility. Mamluk fabrics are woven from linen (from native flax fibers), cotton, wool, and silk. Plant and animal fibers, such as these, are vulnerable to attack from insects and are easily broken down by humidity, mildew, and the acidity of human sweat. In fact, the structure of a fabric begins to weaken the moment it is first worn; the normal wear-and-tear of wearing and laundering clothing is a constant factor in the eventual destruction of the garment. It is nothing short of miraculous that textiles as much as 700 years old survive at all. The fact that Mamluk textiles have been preserved in greater numbers and more completely than from any other period in medieval Islamic history is due to the special conditions of Egypt's physical environment. Egypt's air is dry and the soil relatively low in acidity. Perishable materials, such as textiles, basketry, paper and parchment, and even hair, skin, and foodstuffs, have survived when buried, to the delight of archaeologists.

One characteristic of Mamluk silks that has mitigated against their preservation is the inclusion of metal threads. *Nasīj al-dhahab al-ḥarīr* (*nasīj* for short and also known as *zarkash* in Mamluk sources) was a gold brocade, or a silk woven with supplementary wefts of gold "threads" for decoration.²⁹ It became very popular as a fabric for official dress (and for robes of honor) in the fourteenth century. In Mamluk *nasīj* gold filaments were twisted around silk threads and then wrapped around a substrate of animal gut or leather.³⁰ While pure gold is not corrosive, other metals are. Copper filaments have been woven into the fabric of the Ottoman towel illustrated in Fig. 1. Two roundels containing four lines of embroidered

²⁶For a complete discussion of these factors, one should consult Michael W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1977); Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, NY, 1994); Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History*; and idem, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983).

²⁷Mackie, "Toward an Understanding," 127.

²⁸Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 14.

²⁹Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 2.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 97.



greetings and well-wishes are punctuated with dots or bosses in copper-wound threads. The copper has eaten holes into the surrounding linen.

Ironically, the antiquities market has further contributed to the destruction of Mamluk textiles. The cutting up of textiles into smaller pieces by collectors and dealers increases their financial return while destroying their integrity as complete garments. Inscribed pieces have been particularly vulnerable to this kind of dissection, as borders containing Arabic inscriptions were torn from the surrounding fabric and sold separately. This probably accounts for the high proportion of *ṭirāz* in museum collections.³¹ Some of the finest fragments of brocade were cut up into smaller pieces and sewn into medieval church vestments. This practice has, on the other hand, preserved many Mamluk silks.

At the same time, textile fragments in collections are often sewn together, in an attempt to reconstruct the larger piece and to prepare specimens for display. While the intent is conservation, the result for analysis is that the form of the original costume is lost and the overall pattern becomes more difficult to make out (Fig. 2).

Preservation is only one factor that makes the study of Mamluk textiles problematic. The interest in Mamluk textiles by specialists from different disciplines, most of whom work and write independently of one another, exacerbates preexisting methodological problems while introducing new ones. Art historians have traditionally focused on textile decoration. While their literature is almost dominated by what one may call the "*ṭirāz* obsession," important contributions have been made towards determining dates and provenances for groups of objects on the basis of decorative motifs and overall design.³² Decorative parallels from historically inscribed textiles, as well as examples from other media which have been confidently dated, provide a range of dates to which similarly decorated fragments could belong. In addition, defining the Mamluk style has been an overriding concern for art historians. There has been a lively debate on how to differentiate Egyptian (Mamluk) silks from Il Khanid and Yüan weaves, what characterizes Egyptian rugs from those produced in Spain and Anatolia in the fifteenth century, and how to distinguish locally manufactured block prints from those imported from India. Moreover, there is still some question about distinguishing Mamluk from Ayyubid

³¹This is certainly true for Mamluk earthenware ceramics with incised inscriptions ("sgraffito"). The dominance of inscribed and heraldic bowl rims and wells in museum can be attributed to the same pattern of retrieval and collection (Walker, "Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 223 ff).

³²Some important work has been done recently on the social and political implications of *ṭirāz*: Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs; Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberg, 1997); and Carol Fisher, *Brocade of the Pen, the Art of Islamic Writing*, exhibition catalogue, Kresge Art Museum (East Lansing, 1991).



textiles. Stylistic analysis, without the aid of other methodological approaches, is limited by the kinds of questions it asks and can answer.

Fortunately, there has been a growing number of joint contributions by art historians and textile specialists. In addition, most museum catalogues and textile analyses in archaeological reports are written by textile specialists.³³ These specialists are generally interested in a different set of questions than art historians or archaeologists; stated another way, they look for information about similar issues in very different ways. Textile specialists focus on the technical aspects of the textiles: their structure, fabric composition, method of coloring, methods of decoration, how hems and edges are finished, how the garment was prepared for wearing. Groups of textiles, for the purpose of dating and determining provenance, are established on the basis of these characteristics. Textile experts have been the most successful in defining Egyptian production and explaining changes in weaving and decorating techniques in this period. Important in these respects are their emphasis on the introduction of the drawloom, the shift to Z-spinning, and the appearance of new embroidery stitches, all of which are attributed to the Mamluks.

The contributions of historians, in addition to studies by art historians and textile specialists, have expanded our present understanding of the political and social contexts of Mamluk textiles. In their scholarship the objects themselves fade into the background, as textual sources are spotlighted and scrutinized. Historians' interest in textiles has been, by and large, limited to three areas: identifying costume, defining terminology, and describing the use of textiles in ceremonial.³⁴

In spite of the central role played by textiles in medieval society, we have only a vague notion of what the garments worn by the Mamluks, and their civilian compatriots, looked like. Illustrations of costume from other media are very rare, and when textiles are depicted they are rendered in short-hand form. Miniature paintings, for example, do not do justice to the variation in cut, fabric, type, and decoration of Mamluk-period textiles. The illustrators of the *Maqāmāt*, *Kalīlah wa-Dimnah*, and the automata and *furūsīyah* texts showed little interest in what the characters in their tales wore outside of long, flowing gowns, decorated with

³³A comprehensive list of specialized studies is beyond the scope of this article. However, some of the most useful archaeological reports are Louise Mackie, "Textiles," in Wladislaw Kubiak and George T. Scanlon, eds., *Fustat Expedition Final Report*, vol. 2, *Fustat-C*, (Winona Lake, IN, 1989), 81-97; Gillian Eastwood, "A medieval Face-veil from Egypt," *Costume* 17 (1983): 33-38; idem, "Textiles, 1978 Season," in Donald S. Whitcomb and Janet H. Johnson, eds., *Quseir al-Qadim 1980* (Malibu, FL, 1982), 285-326; Elisabeth Crowfoot, "The Clothing of a Fourteenth-Century Nubian Bishop," 43-51.

³⁴The term "costume," as opposed to "textile," which is simply a woven fabric, refers to an entire way of dressing, designating complete garments along with accessories.



an overall, almost water-marked patterning, and turbans with *ṭirāz* bands. One noticeable exception is the frontispiece of the Vienna Ḥarīrī, which is quite precise in its detailing of surface decoration and differentiation of native Egyptian from imported Mongol dress.³⁵ In contemporary metalwork, an inlaid bowl and basin signed by one Ibn al-Zayn (the so-called "Vasselot bowl" and "St. Louis' basin"), dated to around 1290-1310, present in thought-provoking detail the headgear, coats, pants, boots, weapons, and accessories of the *khāṣṣakīyah* at the turn of the fourteenth century.³⁶

Contemporary European depictions of Mamluk dress are more informative than Egyptian or Syrian illustrations. Mayer has brought attention to a series of line drawings done by European pilgrims to Mamluk lands during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including those of Bernhard von Breydenbach and Arnold von Harff.³⁷ Renaissance Italian paintings are quite lively for the color, variations, and luxuriance with which they bring to life patterned silks worn at the Mamluk court. Among the most notable of this group are *The Embassy of Domenico Trevisano to Cairo in 1512, Reception of an Ambassador in Damascus* by the Bellini school (1490s), the St. George cycle by Carpaccio (sixteenth century), and the *Episodes in the Life of St. Mark* of Mansueti (1499).³⁸

Because detailed miniatures of costume are few, historians have tried to reconstruct the appearance of Mamluk textiles, and how they were worn, draped, or tied on or wound around the body as garments, from textual accounts. There were several early attempts to collect and decode all the technical terms for textiles (garment types, fabrics, colors, types of weave, etc.) that are found in contemporary Arabic sources. The first serious attempt to collect vocabulary pertaining to dress appeared in Quatremère's edition and notes to Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*.³⁹ Soon to follow was Dozy's dictionary of

³⁵Clearly, a specific kind of dress is intended in this illustration. The bowl-shaped hats and an outer coat with a diagonal cut are probably Mongol, although Mayer suggested that the coat better fit textual descriptions of the "Sallārī coat" (Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 24).

³⁶For illustrations and discussions of both vessels see Esin Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (Washington, DC, 1981), 74-79, cat. #20-21; D. S. Rice, *The Baptistère de Saint Louis*, (Paris, 1953); idem, "The Blazons of the 'Baptistère de Saint Louis,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950): 367-80; and Walker, "Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 292 ff.

³⁷Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, Introduction.

³⁸Hermann Goetz, "Oriental Types and Scenes in Renaissance and Baroque Painting - I," *Burlington Magazine* 73 (1938): 50-62, Pl. A; Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode* (London, 1982); Vittorio Sgarbi *Carpaccio* (Milan, 1994); and Michelangelo Muraro, *I Disegni di Vittore Carpaccio* (Florence, 1977), Pl. 14.

³⁹M. E. Quatremère, *Histoire des sultans Mamlouks de l'Égypte* (Paris, 1837-45). See also Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, Introduction.



textile terminology, an encyclopedic effort which has not been repeated on such a scale since.⁴⁰ The most useful reference on Mamluk dress by a historian, however, has been Mayer's *Mamluk Costume*. While this work is not a comprehensive study, by any means, and does not take into account the contributions of art historians or archaeologists (and for this it has been criticized), *Mamluk Costume* is a good place to find rich descriptions of a wide variety of clothing worn by the Mamluk elite. Some of the most important references are borrowed from Ibn Khaldūn (on the organization of *tirāz* factories), Abū al-Fidā, Maqrīzī, and Ibn Faḍl Allāh (for a detailed classification of robes of honor). For information on fabric types and production centers, Serjeant's *Islamic Textiles* is a good initial reference. However, it only covers sources up to the Mongol invasions.

The collection of Arabic terminology is, unfortunately, as far as most historically-based studies of textiles have gone. There have been some notable exceptions, studies concerned with specific textile categories and their social context.⁴¹ These in addition to critiques of textiles and ceremonial, as noted earlier, are the historians' greatest contributions. Most studies, however, fall short of their potential because they are done without the collaboration of art historians, textile specialists, or archaeologists. One senses that lexicography has taken precedence over the material culture, which is, of course, the primary object of study.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MAMLUK TEXTILES

Textiles from the Mamluk period are usually grouped into one of five categories, each characterized by its method of decoration, ground fabric, and repertoire of decorative motifs. Each textile type seems to have served a special purpose, to which the technique of manufacture and decoration was best suited. These categories form the basis of organization for Baker's monograph on Islamic textiles, as well as Atıl's section on the same in her survey of Mamluk art.⁴² For further reading on

⁴⁰Reinhard Pieter Anne Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les arabes* (Amsterdam, 1845). A revised edition of Dozy's dictionary was being prepared by Yedida Stillman at the time of her death. Norman Stillman is completing her work.

⁴¹M.A. Marzouk, "The Tiraz Institutions in Mediaeval Egypt," in C. L. Geddes, ed., *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honour of Professor K. A. C. Creswell* (Cairo, 1965), 157-62; L. A. Mayer, "Some Remarks on the Dress of the 'Abbasid Caliphs in Egypt," *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943): 36-38; idem, "Costumes of Mamluk Women," *Islamic Culture* 17 (1943): 298-303; Franz Rosenthal, "A Note on the *Mandil*," in his *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam* (Leiden, 1971), 63-99; Yedida Stillman, "Female Attire of Medieval Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972); S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton, 1973); and Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*.

⁴²Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, and Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, 223-48. See also Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800* (reprint, New Haven, 1995), 108-9, 113.



any subject discussed herein, one might refer to the textile bibliography which came out in print by the Textile Museum last year.⁴³

SILKS

Mamluk silks are generally woven on drawlooms. The drawloom, introduced into Egypt sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century, facilitated the production (and reproduction) of complex designs, repeat patterns, and double- and triple-cloth. Threads are predominately Z-spun, and much use is made of gold and silver filament-wound threads in the most expensive fabrics. In terms of color, blue, brown, and ivory dominate. The most common patterns tend to be stripes (vertical and horizontal), ogival lattices, and undulating vines and large blossoms. Silk was the favored fabric for robes of honor.

CARPETS

S-spun, asymmetrically knotted, wool pile rugs appear suddenly in Egypt sometime in the fifteenth century. They generally adhere to a three-color scheme (deep reds, greens, and blues), with occasional highlights in lighter shades of pink, yellow, and white. The layout of design adheres to what has been called the "international style" of carpets for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: radiating patterns of geometric elements (stars, rosettes, hexagons) with repeat patterns and lattices and cartouche bands.

APPLIQUÉ

"Appliqué" refers to the technique of sewing onto a ground fabric another fabric pattern. In Mamluk appliqué the ground fabric is usually a tabby of cotton, linen, or wool, and the applied ornament a tabby of similar fabrics (colored or plain), rolled over and lightly "hemmed" onto the backing fabric with basting. What is significant about this technique is its association with "military surplus": emblazoned saddlebags, caps, horse and camel gear, and the like. The most common ornament is the amiral blazon. Appliqué blazons are easily removed, thereby simplifying the transfer of "army issue" equipment from one amir to another. *Ṭirāz* bands are occasionally applied to garments in this manner.

PRINTS

Because linen (a native Egyptian fabric) does not take inking well, Mamluk prints are usually made of Z-spun cotton. They are block-printed, more often with indigo than any other colorant, probably under the influence of imported Indian block

⁴³*Islamic Textile Arts: Working Bibliographies*, The Textile Museum (Washington, DC, 1998).



prints. They share the same patterns as silks and embroideries. Printed fabrics are one of the most inexpensive decorative textiles used by the Mamluks.

EMBROIDERY

Although traditionally viewed by art historians as a “plebeian” form of decoration produced by women at home, there is textual evidence for the use of embroidered fabrics in all segments of Egyptian society and for a variety of purposes (see below). The art of embroidery experienced a revival under the Mamluks, as their numbers in collections of Mamluk textiles indicate. The majority of Mamluk embroideries are created with dyed floss silk (indigo, brown, or red) on Z-spun, undyed linen or cotton tabby. A wide range of new stitches appeared with the Mamluks, some, it would seem, to accommodate the reproduction of popular patterns used in figured silks.

Mamluk Textiles: The Issues

SILKS

It is difficult to differentiate Mamluk figured silks from those manufactured in China, Italy, and Spain in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. This was a period of active international exchange of top quality textiles, including silks and rugs, which resulted in the development of what could be called an “international style.” Moreover, European silks imitated Oriental silks, while weavers in China produced Islamic designs for the Mamluk market. The characterization, then, of Egyptian or Syrian products on the basis on decoration alone is misleading. Wardwell has suggested that Mamluk and Yüan silks can be differentiated from each other by a single structural detail: the gold and silver brocades in Egypt and Syria were accomplished by wrapping the metal threads around a silk core, while those in China were either wrapped around a cotton core or animal substrate or were replaced by gilded strips of mulberry paper.⁴⁴

Dating Mamluk silks is equally problematic. As is the case generally with Egyptian art of the thirteenth century, it is not clear what the characteristics of early Mamluk silks are as opposed to late Ayyubid (Figs. 2 and 3). Earlier this century, striped silks were identified as Ayyubid because of the absence of figural decoration.⁴⁵ Not until excavated contexts ascertained the continuity of these designs into the fourteenth century could art historians be sure that they did not belong to an earlier period.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 70; Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 97; Wardwell, “Panni Tartarici”; idem, “Flight of the Phoenix”; and idem, “Two Silk and Gold Textiles.”

⁴⁵Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 70.

⁴⁶For fragments excavated at Jebel Adda, see *Islamic Art in Egypt: 969-1517* (Cairo, 1969), cat.



Within the Mamluk period, there is very little precision in dating individual pieces. Historically inscribed silks, all Baḥrī Mamluk, which name an identifiable personality (a sultan), have been used to classify and date silks through related designs.⁴⁷ These designs fall into one of four categories: stripes (Fig. 4), chinoiserie, ogival patterns, and geometric latticework.⁴⁸ Vertical and horizontal stripes, inscriptional registers, or friezes with running animals and floral designs are considered the earliest because of their similarity to Ayyubid decoration. Moreover, there was an indigenous tradition of horizontal banding in Egyptian tapestry weaving, which was apparently adapted to drawloom weaving with the change in looms.⁴⁹ The introduction of Chinese motifs (such as the peony, lotus, clouds, phoenix, and fluid floral designs) is often attributed to Kitbughā, although chinoiserie became more common with the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. The use of repeat patterns of ogival or tear-drop medallions in lampas weave is quite characteristic of Mamluk silk production, but it has not been properly dated. Their depiction in mid-fourteenth- to mid-fifteenth-century Italian paintings has provided a convenient range of dates for the “Burjī Mamluk” style of diamond and square-shaped lattices, which appear as yellow or green on an indigo-colored tabby or twill ground.⁵⁰

Much has been made about the introduction of the drawloom at the beginning of the Mamluk period and the new predominance of Z-spun fabrics. The shift from tapestry to drawloom weave was a very significant one that revolutionized the Mamluks’ textile industry, transforming costume and making possible the mass-production of what we would call “robes of honor.” The drawloom is a horizontal loom that allows complex patterns to be “tied into” the warp, facilitating the reproduction of large figures, repeat patterns and mirror-images (Fig. 5), and elaborate, long inscriptions.⁵¹ Fabrics also became more complicated, as colorful double-, fancy double-, incomplete double-, and triple-cloths became more common. It has been suggested that the drawloom was brought to Egypt in the thirteenth century by weavers fleeing the Mongol advances. They could have come from Iraq, Iran, or even Spain, where the technology already existed.⁵²

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⁴⁷Mackie, “Toward an Understanding,” reviews Mamluk silks which have been securely dated in this manner. See also Atil, *Renaissance of Islam*, 224-25.

⁴⁸Atil, *Renaissance of Islam*, 225; Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 73.

⁴⁹Mackie, “Toward an Understanding,” 136.

⁵⁰Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 73.

⁵¹For a clearly written and simply illustrated introduction to drawloom technology, see Katherine Koob, “How the Drawloom Works,” in Irene Emery and Patricia Fiske, eds., *Irene Emery Roundtable on Museum Textiles, 1977 Proceedings: Looms and Their Products*, The Textile Museum (Washington, DC, 1979), 231-41.

⁵²Blair and Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800*, 108; Mackie, “Toward an



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One of the best explanations for technical peculiarities in Mamluk weaving and embroidery was provided by Louisa Bellinger in a larger catalogue of *tirāz* fabrics.⁵³ Silk, she argues, was an imported fabric in a country where linen ruled supreme. The tapestry loom, used since pre-Islamic times for weaving wool, was adapted to weaving silk with *tirāz* inscriptions in the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods (Fig. 3). Drawloom weaving replaced tapestry weaving in the Mamluk period, as more complicated fabrics and designs for more elaborate forms of costume were required by the court. Both the fashions and the technology to produce them were imported from the east. At the same time, the Z-spinning of Iraq and Iran more or less replaced the Egyptian tradition of S-spinning. Z-spinning was not regularly used with linen until the Mamluk period. This technology was an imported one, "a habit caught from people used to other fibres without a natural spinning direction, such as wool and cotton."⁵⁴ The abandonment of the tapestry loom and the adoption of Z-spinning were ways of adapting to the demands of a more silk-dominated textile industry.

How were the Mamluk silks on display in museums used? Are we justified in calling these "*khila*"? Atıl claims we have no extant examples of the "robes of honor" (*khila'*) which appear regularly in Mamluk-period texts.⁵⁵ Contemporary sources describe *khila'* as textile ensembles that included silks (fur-lined for the highest grades) and, particularly, gold brocades. Children's tunics, shoes, caps, and a few silk robes are among the complete garments retrieved from archaeological excavations. If anything in our collections comes close to qualifying as *khila'* it would be the silk robes, but most of these are fragmentary and are not sturdy enough to have been used on any regular basis or as an outer robe. Furthermore, there is no evidence of their having been lined or trimmed with fur.⁵⁶ If we associate *khila'* with *tirāz* fabrics, we have a comparable dilemma. Most of the *tirāz* bands, which number into the thousands, belong to turbans, thin outfits (perhaps summer apparel), and household items such as towels, sashes, and handkerchiefs.⁵⁷ Moreover, these textiles are made of linen and cotton. It is quite possible that what was meant by the terms *khila'* and *tirāz* must have included a much wider range of materials and costumes than have survived.

Understanding," 128.

⁵³Louisa Bellinger, "Technical Analysis," in *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics*, 101-9.

⁵⁴Crowfoot, "The Clothing of a Fourteenth-Century Nubian Bishop," 50.

⁵⁵Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, 223.

⁵⁶Granted, fur is usually devoured by insects. However, there is no evidence that these thin robes were ever lined with any material.

⁵⁷Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum," 85. Franz Rosenthal groups together smaller inscribed items like the handkerchief and towel in his "A Note on the *Mandīl*," 63-99.



Ṭirāz is borrowed from the Persian term for embroidery. It appears that the original sense of *ṭirāz* was of an elaborately embroidered band on a textile. In an art historical sense it denotes any decorative band on textiles, specifically one carrying an Arabic inscription. This meaning has been extended to all media, incorporating registers of writing, borders or braids, and decorative strips of a variety of forms.⁵⁸ A more precise technical definition, one based on the kinds of textile fragments normally identified as *ṭirāz* in museums, has been provided by Golombek and Gervers: "those fabrics of linen, cotton, or *mulḥam* upon which the decoration is executed in a technique differing from that of the ground weave."⁵⁹

One could, alternatively, define *ṭirāz* fabrics as those textiles which were produced in the royal factory, or *dār al-ṭirāz*. Two kinds of *ṭirāz* factories, *khāṣṣah* (royal) and *‘āmmah* (public), produced textiles for two different markets. In the Umayyad and Abbasid periods the *dār al-ṭirāz* was located in the ruler's palace. According to Ibn Khaldūn, under the Mamluks the workshops were found in the public *sūq*, at times under direct control of the sultan and his amirs and at other times run independently of the state.⁶⁰ Approximately 50% of all extant Mamluk silks contain inscriptions.⁶¹ The most common formula of the period, *‘izz li-mawlānā al-sulṭān . . . ‘azza naṣruhu*, replaces the Fatimid pattern of well-wishing while transforming the formulae used to name the ruler and list his titles. With the exception of customs stamps, the place of manufacture or point of transfer is not named on Mamluk textiles.⁶² It has been argued that the heraldic arrangement of short, dedicatory *ṭirāz* paved the way for the development of the military inscriptions of the fourteenth century.⁶³

Garments with *ṭirāz* borders bestowed upon officials or given as diplomatic gifts came to be known as "robes of honor" or *khilā‘* (singular *khil‘ah*). The term *khil‘ah* comes from the Arabic verb for "to take off" and refers to the taking off of one's garment and giving it to another as a sign of personal protection. It was first used in an official sense in the Abbasid period.⁶⁴ The term practically supersedes *ṭirāz* in Mamluk sources and, in fact, may have meant the same thing. The matter

⁵⁸A. Grohmann, "Ṭirāz," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., 8: 785-93.

⁵⁹Golombek and Gervers, "Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum," 85.

⁶⁰Ibn Khaldūn in Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 33. The *kiswah*, on the other hand, was made in the Mashhad al-Ḥusayn during the Mamluk period, according to al-Qalqashandī (Grohmann, "Ṭirāz," 788).

⁶¹Mackie, "Toward an Understanding," 130.

⁶²One example is a striped silk in the Islamic Museum in Cairo, stamped with the place name "Asyūt" (Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 71).

⁶³L. A. Mayer, "Das Schriftwappen der Mamlukensultane," *Jahrbuch des Asiatischen Kunst* 2, no. 2 (1925): 183-87; Grohmann, "Ṭirāz," 788.

⁶⁴N. A. Stillman, "Khil‘a," *EI*², 5:6.



of terminology is further complicated by Ibn Khaldūn's association of *zarkash* (gold brocade) with *ṭirāz*; he states that textiles with the name of the sultan or an amir are called *zarkash*, the same material which was formerly referred to as *ṭirāz*.⁶⁵

Medieval Egyptians may have understood terms like *ṭirāz* and *khil'ah* on different levels, different circumstances evoking different meanings. In the Mamluk period *ṭirāz* in its most basic sense probably referred to a textile inscription, regardless of how it was executed or in what material. Garments with official inscriptions naming the sultan or an amir and executed in gold embroidery or woven in gold brocade were referred to as *zarkash*, the term acting as much as an adjective as a noun. "*Zarkash*" described the decorative quality of the garment. In discussing an account by Abū al-Fidā, for example, Mayer describes contemporary *ṭirāz* bands in the following fashion:

[he] distinguishes between the brocaded band (*ṭirāz zarkash*) on the upper coat (*fauqānī*) and the gilt bands (*ṭuruz mudhhaba*) on the under-tunic (*thaub*). Since the top coat . . . was gorgeous enough . . ., whereas the under-tunic . . . was hardly visible, the difference between the two kinds of *ṭirāz* is obviously one of importance as well as of form.⁶⁶

In this case, the inscription on the under-tunic may have been stamped in gold, while the one on the outer garment was embroidered or woven in gold thread. The term *zarkash*, then, would have both qualitative and technical connotations.

A *khil'ah*, in the Mamluk sense, was an ensemble of clothing and equipment that included a *zarkash* robe (with cut and fabric suitable for the recipient's rank), bestowed in an official manner. The inclusion of *khila'* distributions during a variety of elaborate Mamluk ceremonies, while it had precedent in Egyptian (Fatimid) court protocol, may have been directly influenced in the fourteenth century by Il Khanid practice. The Mongols did the most to politicize silk through their reliance on silk and gold in their banquets, drinking parties, and other state celebrations. In ceremonies that strongly resemble Mamluk practice in the fourteenth century, we know from travelers' accounts and official court records that the Great Khans of the thirteenth century distributed gold silks and gold belts studded with precious stones and pearls at nearly every important occasion at court.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibn Khaldūn in Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 33.

⁶⁶Ibid., 34, note 1.

⁶⁷Walker, "Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 290 ff; Aldo Ricci, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London, 1950), 131 ff; Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York, 1973), 135 ff; Peter Jackson, *The*



Allsen's groundbreaking work on the Mongol textile industry has proven the existence of colonies of West Asian silk weavers in the east, some working under forced labor, others as more or less independent tradesmen.⁶⁸ They produced *nasīj*, a gold brocade, for the Mongol court. These textiles were distributed as *khilā'* in the Mamluk court.

The relationship between Il Khanid and Yüan and Mamluk silks, either in the historical sources or as extant fragments in collections, is far from clear. *Ṭirāz* (an official textile inscription), *zarkash* (gold embroidered or woven *ṭirāz*), *nasīj* (gold brocade), and *khil'ah* (an assortment of officially distributed gifts including *nasīj* or *zarkash* textiles) were clearly important terms within the vocabulary of Mamluk silk-weaving, but they are extremely ambiguous. We still do not know how surviving Mamluk silks relate to these textile categories or how silk functioned outside the ceremonial apparatus of the Mamluk state.

RUGS

There has been quite a lot written about Mamluk rugs. A good part of the literature describes the red wool rugs we normally associate with Mamluk Egypt as part of an "international style" of pile rug production which was fashionable from Spain to eastern Anatolia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁹ In spite of the quantity of studies which have been done on the topic, however, we still cannot say for certain when the tradition began, how it came to Egypt, where in Egypt these rugs were manufactured, and to whom they were sold. Scholars writing on the subject have generally agreed, however, that their production in Egypt can be dated from 1470 to 1550, that the style was introduced sometime after 1467 with the migration

Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253-1255 (London, 1990); and J. A. Boyle, *Genghis Khan: History of the World Conqueror* (Manchester, 1997).

⁶⁸Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 38. For material correlates see references to Wardwell's work in note 11.

⁶⁹On the characteristics of this style see Louise Mackie, "Woven Status: Mamluk Silks and Carpets," *Muslim World* 73 (1983): 253-61; R. Pinner and W. Denny, eds., *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies, II: Carpets of the Mediterranean Countries 1400-1600*, (London, 1961); Ernst Kühnel, *Cairene Rugs and Others Technically Related, 15th-17th Century*, The Textile Museum (Washington, DC, 1957); Donald King and David Sylvester, *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 17th Century* (London, 1983); Charles Grant Ellis, "Gifts from Kashan to Cairo," *Textile Museum Journal* 1, no. 1 (1962): 33-46; idem, "A Soumak-Woven Rug in a 15th-Century International Style," *Textile Museum Journal* 1, no. 1 (1962): 4-20; idem, "Mysteries of the Misplaced Mamluks," *Textile Museum Journal* 2, no. 2 (1967): 2-20; and idem, "Is the Mamluk Carpet a Mandala?," *Textile Museum Journal* 4, no. 1 (1974): 30-50. *Hah* 4, no. 1 (1981) and *The Muslim World* 73, no. 3 and 73, no. 4 (1983) are special issues highlighting Mamluk rugs.



of rug weavers from the fallen Karakoyunlu Turkmen state, and that they were manufactured in Cairo for mosque and palace interiors.⁷⁰

Carlo Suriano has challenged this interpretation in an article on Mamluk blazon carpets published in a recent issue of *Hali*.⁷¹ He argues that the geometric patterns and overall layout adhere to an international style that characterized not only Turkmen but also Ottoman, Safavid, and Nasrid production. While the form of the composite blazon dates the three carpets between 1468 and 1516, Suriano cites fragments of pile carpets, claimed to have been excavated at Fustāṭ and structurally related to the emblazoned examples, as possible evidence of Cairene production in an earlier period.⁷² Donald Little, in response to Suriano's article, emphasizes references to Cairene carpets (*min 'amal al-sharīf bi-Miṣr*)⁷³ by Ibn Taghrībirdī and Maqrīzī for the fourteenth century.⁷⁴ The origin of Mamluk carpets, therefore, remains an open issue.

The colors of Mamluk rugs have attracted a lot of attention and debate. The deep reds, blues, and greens of these rugs have been compared to stained glass windows⁷⁵ and jewels.⁷⁶ Moreover, there was a long tradition in Egypt (from pre-Islamic to Fatimid times) of weaving wool in these very same colors.⁷⁷ In her analyses of Mamluk and Anatolian rugs, Louise Mackie has suggested that the silk industry had a significant impact on not only the color scheme of Mamluk rugs, but also their decorative patterning.⁷⁸ She claims that each of the three colors was integral to the overall design, just as in incomplete silk triplecloth. Small motif compositions and repeat patterns are characteristic of both Mamluk silks and rugs.⁷⁹

⁷⁰Louise Mackie, "Woven Status," 256-57; Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, 226-27; Kurt Erdmann, "Neuere Untersuchungen zur Frage der Kairener Teppiche," *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961): 65-105; and Belkis Acar, "New Light on the Problem of Turkmen-Timurid and Mamluk Rugs," *Ars Turcica* 2 (1987): 393-402.

⁷¹Carlo Maria Suriano, "Mamluk Blazon Carpets," *Hali* 97 (Mar. 1998): 72-81.

⁷²Ibid, 81.

⁷³Parallels in ceramics and metalworking suggest that this is an artist's signature. "*Al-sharīf*" may be a technical term for the head of a workshop.

⁷⁴Donald Little, "In Search of Mamluk Carpets," *Hali* 101 (Nov. 1998): 68-69. Both accounts describe the looting of Amir Qawsūn's house in 1341.

⁷⁵Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, 227.

⁷⁶Mackie, personal communication.

⁷⁷Mackie, "Woven Status," 260.

⁷⁸Mackie, "Woven Status"; idem, "Rugs and Textiles," in *Turkish Art*, ed. Esin Atıl (Washington, DC, 1980), 301-43.

⁷⁹See also Ellis, "Gifts from Kashan to Cairo," 39.



The rug industry was thriving, however, at a time when the other textile industries in Egypt were in decline. Because of the technical differences in Mamluk weaving and rug-making (threads spun in different directions, use of different looms), it is unlikely that one industry simply replaced the other. Woven stuffs and rugs appear to have served different purposes and were, perhaps, made for different markets. Until the sources are combed for relevant data, nothing conclusive can be said about the marketing of Mamluk rugs. We do know, however, that this was no passing "fad." Mamluk rugs continued to be produced in Cairo until approximately the middle of the sixteenth century, when the local workshops began to manufacture floral and prayer rugs for the Ottoman courts. The workshops continued to operate until well into the eighteenth century.⁸⁰

APPLIQUÉ

While woven silks and pile rugs adhere to an international style, appliqué is, by contrast, characteristically Mamluk. Amiral blazons are the most common form of applied decoration. It is significant that amiral blazons, while they proliferate in almost all media are, with the exception of appliqué fabrics, rare in textiles.⁸¹ The appearance in silks of the sultanic cartouche and inscriptions dedicated to the sultan may indicate that silks and appliqué fabrics were put to different uses. Silk production was, at times, monopolized or regulated by the sultan. Furthermore, inscribed silks were distributed as *khila'* by the sultan and worn during public processions as a sign of fidelity to the ruler.⁸² On the other hand, the regular association of appliqué ornaments with amiral heraldry suggests that these fabrics were "army issue": when equipment passed to another amir, the blazon could be changed accordingly.

Fig. 6 is an interesting exception. This fragment boldly proclaims the sovereignty of the sultan with the phrase "‘izz li-mawlānā al-sultān," a dedication more appropriate to woven silks than to a coarse cotton tabby. The *ṭirāz* appliqué in this instance reflects function, as the durability of the fabric would make it suitable for a saddlebag or flag. Another fragment from the Royal Ontario Museum is illustrated in Fig. 7. It has been tentatively dated to the Mamluk period, because of the characteristic zigzag pattern and a stylistic similarity with Mamluk appliqué. The piece in question achieves an appliqué effect through laid-and-couched work in undyed linen, which secures the underlying blue linen threads. As the blue threads

⁸⁰Mackie, "Rugs and Textiles," 320 ff.

⁸¹For emblazoned rugs see Ellis, "Mysteries of the Misplaced Mamluks" (Figs. 3-9 include blazons in appliqué, embroidery, and block printing, as well) and Carlo Maria Suriano, "Mamluk Blazon Carpets," 73-81 and 107-8. Carl Johan Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," *Ars Islamica* 4 (1937): 66-67, Fig. 2.

⁸²For an exposition of this idea, see Walker, "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 269 ff.



are completely covered by the linen embroidery and were, apparently, never intended to be seen, they may have been yarn left-over from another embroidery. I know of no other examples of imitations of appliqué in other techniques. However, it would not be surprising if they did exist. The Mamluk elite were fashion-setters, and Cairo's civilian population was quick to imitate the dress, tastes, and mannerisms of the amiral class.

BLOCK PRINTS

The type of Mamluk textile most often retrieved from archaeological excavations is the block print.⁸³ First identified during the excavations of Fuṣṭāṭ, they were initially attributed to India, because of the superficial resemblance of their patterns to Gujarati architectural decoration.⁸⁴ This idea has been recently challenged by Barnes, who has cited parallels for Z-spun cotton and block printing with indigo in Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.⁸⁵ While many printed textiles found on excavations were imported, most were probably produced in Egypt. Indigo, the primary colorant for Mamluk block prints, was cultivated and processed locally and was relatively inexpensive.⁸⁶ Moreover, Z-spinning was known in Mamluk Egypt, used primarily in woven silks and alternately with S-spinning in woven cottons and linens.⁸⁷

The designs on block prints are largely derivative. Inscriptional registers on a densely scrolled ground and bands with cartouches are borrowed from contemporary metalworking.⁸⁸ Repeat patterns of whirling rosettes, geometric shapes, and medallions replicate the patterns of woven silks. While prints are monochrome, the colors of choice are reminiscent of silks: blue, ivory, and brown.

Mamluk prints are usually made of lightweight, but quality, cotton. It is the most sensible fabric for the warmest months in Egypt and makes comfortable

⁸³See especially the chapter on printed fabrics in Carl Johan Lamm, *Cotton in Medieval Textiles of the Near East* (Paris, 1937); *Tissus d'Égypte (Collection Bouvier)*; and Georgette Cornu, *Tissus Islamiques de la Collection Pfister* (Rome, 1992) for excellent catalogue entries.

⁸⁴Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 76; R. Pfister, "Tissue imprimées de l'Inde médiévale," *Revue des Arts Asiatiques* 10 (1936): 161-64; and idem, *Les Toiles imprimées de Fostat et l'Hindoustan* (Paris, 1938).

⁸⁵Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 76; Ruth Barnes, "Indian Trade Cloth in Egypt: the Newberry Collection," in *Textiles in Trade: Proceedings of the Textile Society of America Biennial Symposium* (Washington, DC, 1990), 178-91; and idem, *Indian Block Printed Cotton Fragments in the Kelsey Museum of the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 1993).

⁸⁶R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles; Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut, 1972), 164.

⁸⁷Eastwood, "Textiles," 286 and 292. At Quseir al-Qadim, as at many archaeological sites in Egypt, one cannot generalize about the direction of spinning.

⁸⁸For good illustrations of these, see Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. #120-22.



daily wear. Prints imitating silk patterns no doubt constituted clothing, but one wonders about those fragments that bear metalwork designs. In his thought-provoking essay on the *mandīl*, Rosenthal has described a variety of ways in which smaller pieces of decorated textiles were used.⁸⁹ Many covered serving vessels during banquets. Such prints could have been used in this fashion.

EMBROIDERIES⁹⁰

Embroidery is a decorative needlework in fancy thread. In the case of Mamluk embroidery, the needlework was usually done in floss silk on an uncolored, tabby cotton or linen background. The needlework alone enlivened what was an otherwise plain textile. As the most common way of trimming the edges of everyday clothing, it could be a simple, often inexpensive, and readily available way of making textiles of any form beautiful.

Embroidery, as opposed to weaving, was a cottage industry. While some needlework was produced by professionals in the public marketplace, most was made at home by women (Fig. 8).⁹¹ Embroideries were an important component of the bridal trousseau during the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, as we know from the Geniza documents.⁹² The average person in medieval Cairo, for instance, was well-informed about embroideries and had a sophisticated sense of what was of high quality and aesthetically pleasing. One Ja‘far ibn ‘Alī al-Dimāshqī, writing shortly before 1175, stated:

People’s tastes vary in regard to the *ṭirāz* borders and the ornamented embroideries . . . , but they are agreed in the preference of that

⁸⁹Rosenthal, “A Note on the *Mandīl*.”

⁹⁰The textile fragments illustrated in this study belong to the Abemayor Collection in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. The Abemayor family business was in Cairo, and it was in this city that the collection was built up. The collection contains some 114 items which have been identified as Mamluk, in addition to a considerable number of early Islamic *ṭirāz* bands and tunics from various periods. Most of the Mamluk samples are embroideries, none of which had been the focus of extended analysis until now.

⁹¹S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Los Angeles, 1967), 1:128 ff. It would seem that embroidery was not so strictly regulated in the marketplace in the fourteenth century; see Ibn al-Ukhūwah’s [d. 1329] entries on embroidery (*raqqām*) and needlework (*naqshīyah*) (Ibn al-Ukhūwah, *Kitāb Ma‘ālim al-Qurbah fī Aḥkām al-Ḥisbah* (Cairo, 1976), 221 and 328. For an interesting comparative study of domestic embroidery in modern Morocco, see Louise Mackie, “Embroidery in the Everyday Life of Artisans, Merchants, and Consumers in Fez, Morocco, in the 1980’s,” in *Textile Society of America Proceedings 1992* (1993), 10-20.

⁹²Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 3:342.



which is of the finest thread and closest of weave, of the purest white, of the best workmanship, red and golden . . .⁹³

Embroidery experienced a revival in the Mamluk period. With a rise in quality came a rise in prices. Maqrīzī describes finely embroidered goods that could be worth a small fortune:

Among the stuffs woven in Alexandria is this linen cloth which is called *sharb*, one drachm of which is worth a dirham of silver, and those kinds of embroideries which are sold for several times their weight in silver.⁹⁴

Most museum and private collections of Mamluk textiles consist in large part of embroidered fragments. In spite of this, they have not been the object of focused investigation. There are no monographs on the subject and, outside of entries in exhibition catalogues and archaeological reports, very few studies.⁹⁵ To this day, Kühnel's classification of excavated fragments is used to assign relative dates to embroideries.⁹⁶ These categories heavily emphasize stylistic attributes with little consideration of independent criteria for dating. Most embroideries can be dated no more precisely than by a century or two.

There has been a passing interest, however, in medieval Islamic embroidery by scholars of European needlework. The work of the late Veronika Gervers, a former curator of textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum, represents this trend. The original accession catalogue in the museum's files makes frequent comparisons between fragments in the medieval Egyptian collection and Renaissance needlework. More convincing arguments are made in two posthumous works, which look for the origins of some Hungarian embroidery patterns in Ottoman work.⁹⁷ There is no such direct correlation between Mamluk and this kind of

⁹³Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 140.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 148.

⁹⁵Two very old but useful articles are Carl Johan Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figs. 1-22, and Essie Newbury, "Embroideries from Egypt," *Embroidery* 8, no. 1 (1940): 11-18.

⁹⁶Ernst Kühnel, *Islamische Stoffe aus aegyptischen Gräbern in der islamischen Kunstabteilung und in der Stoffsammlung des Schlossmuseums* (Berlin, 1927).

⁹⁷Veronika Gervers-(Molnár), *The Influence of Ottoman Turkish Textiles and Costume in Eastern Europe*, Royal Ontario Museum History, Technology, and Art Monograph, no. 4 (Toronto, 1982) and *idem*, *Ipolyi Arnold hímzés-gyűjteménye az esztergomi keresztény múzeumban* (Arnold Ipolyi Collection of Embroideries in the Christian Museum of Esztergom, also known as *Hungarian Domestic Embroidery from the 16th to the 19th Centuries*) (Budapest, 1983).



European needlework. The Mamluk penchant for rigid geometry contrasts markedly with Ottoman floral designs.

One of the best interpretations of Mamluk embroidery is Louisa Bellinger's technical analysis of *ṭirāz* fabrics cited earlier.⁹⁸ She reviews the long and very complex history of embroidery in medieval Egypt and comes to some interesting conclusions. First, embroidery was a foreign technique, brought to Egypt from the Far East as an easier and cheaper method of making silk patterns. Second, the development of Egyptian embroidery is intimately tied up with producing inscriptions in textiles. Embroidery began to replace tapestry weaving for colored and inscriptional designs by the end of the Fatimid period and was more or less completed with the Mamluks. The kinds of stitches used in Egypt relied rather heavily on tapestry technology.

What is most useful about Bellinger's arguments are the functional and etymological connections she makes between the *ṭirāz* industry and Egyptian embroidery and the reasons she gives for idiosyncrasies in the Mamluk craft. One of the most characteristic innovations of Mamluk embroidery, for example, was the preference for counted stitches (Figs. 9 and 10). This Bellinger relates to the way linen in Egypt was prepared for embroidery; the practice of counting stitches from a base thread, she claims, was borrowed from the design of inscriptions in tapestry weaving.⁹⁹ I have argued elsewhere that new embroidery stitches appeared in the fourteenth century to respond to changes in silk production, which were generated by heightened demand and the expansion of ceremonial.¹⁰⁰ In both its origin and later development, Mamluk embroidery was indebted to local traditions of silk weaving.

The kinds of stitches used by Mamluk embroiders were uniquely suited to producing inscriptions and repeat patterns and creating the surface appearance of woven silk. The crewel or stem stitch, known from well before the Mamluk period, outlined patterns and produced inscriptions. The fluid chain stitch, also familiar from early Islamic needlework, was used for *naskhī* inscriptions and chinoiserie (Fig. 11). The most characteristic stitch used by Mamluk embroidery was the "Holbein," or square, stitch, a sturdy, reversible counted stitch that is most often associated with repeat patterns in blue (Figs. 12 and 13). Several stitches also appeared which intentionally reproduced the effect of silk, such as the weaving and satin stitches (Fig. 14).

⁹⁸Louisa Bellinger, "Technical Analysis."

⁹⁹Ibid., 104 ff.

¹⁰⁰Bethany Walker, "Material Correlates of Decline in Mamluk Egypt: Ceramics and Textiles," paper given at MESA Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL, December 4, 1998.



Mamluk embroideries are very broadly dated according to Kühnel's stylistic groups of the 1920s.¹⁰¹ To the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries are attributed various abstract geometric motifs, including hooked-X's, the checkerboard pattern, the omnipresent trellis of lozenges or hexagonal cartouches (Fig. 15), rosettes (Fig. 16), and triangular-shaped pseudo-epigraphic motifs (Figs. 12 and 15). Most of what we normally identify as Mamluk dates to the fourteenth century and includes embroideries with blue-dyed silk or linen (Figs. 12 and 13), the Holbein stitch (Figs. 12 and 13), historical inscriptions (Fig. 14), blazons, an "impressionistic and nervous style,"¹⁰² double-ended arrows, zigzags (Fig. 13), and teardrop-shaped medallions (often surrounded by barbs, or "hooks" [Fig. 17]). In the later Mamluk period can be placed the common angular S-shaped motif (Figs. 9 and 10), hooked triangles, angular motifs on a ground of interlacing bands, and a preference for a marine blue-brown dye.

Embroidered bands generally decorated the edges of garments and accented sleeve openings and collars. Embroidered *ṭirāz* encircled the upper arm and wound around turbans. However, most of the fragments illustrated in this article probably did not belong to clothing. One piece is reversible, which would indicate it was used as a towel (Fig. 13). The first of two inscribed examples, while preserved only in part, is long enough to have been a "tablecloth" or light cover of some sort (Fig. 11). The layout of its decoration, with inscriptions legible from opposite ends of the fabric, strengthens this attribution. Fig. 14, a formally inscribed piece, could have served the same purpose or formed part of a banner or panel of an 'abā' cloak.¹⁰³ Fig. 18 belongs to a group of finely worked panels called "laps," which were hung off of poles as flags or banners. Many smaller embroidered pieces probably belonged to the multi-purpose category of "*manādīl*," items used as handkerchiefs, napkins, cloth envelopes, or head or face coverings.¹⁰⁴

The written sources are ambiguous in their descriptions of embroideries and the kinds of textiles which they embellished. The word "*ṭirāz*" comes originally from the Persian "*tarāzīdan*," which means "to embroider."¹⁰⁵ In modern Arabic, "*taṭrīz*" is the term generally employed for "embroidery." It means, alternatively, "embellishment" or "garnish." "*Tanmīq*" (ornamentation) and "*tawshiyah*" (ornamentation with color), although not as common, may also imply an embroidered

¹⁰¹The following is a collation of Kühnel, *Islamische Stoffe*; Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries"; *Tissus d'Égypte*; and conclusions based on my study of the ROM collection.

¹⁰²Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," 66.

¹⁰³It is too wide to have been a belt or turban, and without intact hems we do not know enough about its original length to say for certain how it was used.

¹⁰⁴Rosenthal, "A Note on the *Mandīl*."

¹⁰⁵A. Grohman, "Ṭirāz," 785.



ornament. In a similar fashion, medieval Arabic sources do not always differentiate between "embroidery" and "decoration"; in fact, there may not have been a technical term for this kind of needlework. Ibn al-Ukhūwah does differentiate between regular needlework (*naqshīyah*) and what we may call embroidery (*raqqām*), but most sources do not.¹⁰⁶ Any embellishment of a textile, whether sewn or painted on, woven into, or stamped upon, could be called "ṭirāz," for instance.¹⁰⁷ It seems not to have been the technique of application but the visual effect which was important. Mamluk sources use many terms which, in one way or another, make reference to the appearance of embroidered designs: *mushaḥḥar* or *marqūm* (striped), *muzarkash* (a brocade, embroidered with silver and gold thread), *ṭirāz* (an embroidered inscription), and *manqūsh* (colored/striped or inscribed).¹⁰⁸

While most everyday embroidery was produced at home by women, there existed at the same time a market industry which catered to the court. Embroidered fabrics, second only to brocades, were the most decorative and sought-after textiles in Mamluk Egypt. Embroidered garments were not only worn at home by most people; they also made up the textile ensembles known as *khila'*. Serjeant reproduces the following description, related by Maqrīzī, of robes of honor given by the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad to his most important amirs:

[They consisted of] a kind of cloth called ṭardwaḥsh made in the ṭirāz factory which was in Alexandria, Miṣr (Cairo) and Damascus. It was embroidered with bands (*mudjawwakha djākhāt*) which were inscribed with the titles of the sultan. It had bands (*djākhāt*) of ṭardwaḥsh, and bands of different colors intermingled with gold-spangled linen (*ḳaṣab mudhahhab*), these bands being separated by embroideries in color (*nuḳūsh*), and a ṭirāz border. This was made of ḳaṣab [linen], but sometimes an important personage (among the officials) would have a ṭirāz border embroidered with gold (*muzarkasha bi-dhahab*) with a squirrel . . . and beaver . . . fur upon it. . . .¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶See note 89. The term *raqqām* would seem to be related to the more common "*marqūm*," which denotes a striped (embroidery) in most Mamluk sources. "*Raqqām*" may also be connected to the use of counted stitches.

¹⁰⁷*Ṭirāz* generally means "embroidery" in the Geniza documents, where invoices for textile orders are calculated. For example, we read of bleaching, pounding, cleaning, scraping, mending, and "embroidery" (*ṭirāz*) of an ordered garment and the individual prices of each (Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 275, no. 3).

¹⁰⁸Most of the references to these terms can be found in Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, and Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*.

¹⁰⁹Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 150.



Once again, the terminology is confusing. What Serjeant defines as “embroidery” may be any one of several techniques. For instance, “*zarkash*” may designate true brocade, in this case a woven silk with supplementary weft threads in gold or silver thread. “*Zarkash*” could, alternatively, also be a decorative band embroidered (as opposed to woven) in a baser fabric in gold or silver thread. “Stripes” and “bands” could be painted on the fabric, woven into it, or embroidered. In other words, the medieval Arabic terms describe the decorative function of the colored threads, not how they were structurally related to the ground fabric.

It is likely, however, that in this passage several techniques are implied and that embroidery was simply one of many ways to embellish a textile. We tend to think in terms of a hierarchy of textile techniques (woven designs are much better than printed designs, for example). The medieval textile connoisseur, on the other hand, discriminated on the basis of fabric and color. A beautifully executed silk embroidery (on linen) may have been in as much demand as equally colorful decoration woven into the fabric. It would appear that the finest embroideries decorated robes of honor, that the court special-ordered embroidered fabrics, and that some embroideries were quite expensive and cherished by their owners.

These passages, of course, only refer to the highest quality embroideries which were manufactured in the *sūq* and destined for the court. There was a second and larger market, for civilian Cairenes. These were made at home by women. What the domestic style looked like may be reconstructed from surviving pieces. Angular and geometric patterns may be related to what we can call the “folk art” of the period, while designs imitating silks patterns would belong to a more official strain of Mamluk art. The differentiation of domestic from Mamluk textiles requires further study.

CONCLUSIONS

What kinds of questions should we be asking about Mamluk textiles? It is easy to become preoccupied with the minutia of stitch and thread counts, extensive motif descriptions, and terminology. While such details are useful starting points, it is crucial that we conceptualize the broader social issues. What were these fragments used for, why were they decorated the way they were, who owned them, what did they mean to their owners? In short, in what ways were textiles socially significant?

The significance of the “militarization” of Mamluk art has been often discussed by art historians.¹¹⁰ Whelan relates the widespread use of military imagery, amiral

¹¹⁰Most sources on Mamluk art make this point, but see especially Nasser Rabbat, “The ‘Militarization’ of Architectural Expression in the Medieval Middle East (11th-14th Century): An Outline,” *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭá* 6, no. 1 (1994): 4-6; Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*; and Estelle Whelan, “Representations of the *Khāṣṣikīyah* and the Origins of Mamluk Emblems,” in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, 219-43. For studies on heraldry in Islamic art, consult the bibliography in



blazons, and specialized inscriptions of dedication (which contain the owner's military titles) throughout the Islamic world in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries to the development of *khāṣṣakīyah* imagery.¹¹¹ I have suggested that the appearance of heraldic devices and militarized inscriptions in all media in the fourteenth century was the result of increased patronage within an empowered amiral class during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's sultanate.¹¹² The correlation between the rise of a military class and the popularization of such imagery is a phenomenon paralleled in contemporary Cyprus (where Crusader coats-of-arms and court scenes are omnipresent in arts sponsored by all classes),¹¹³ in contemporary France (where the tastes of the *parvenus*—professional soldiers—affected the growth of knightly art and culture),¹¹⁴ and in Byzantium (where in the twelfth century the military aristocracy sponsored a militarization of culture which affected official imagery, poetry, leisure activities, and official ceremonial).¹¹⁵

Official ceremonial was one area which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad cultivated to consolidate his power vis-à-vis his amirs. If the popularization of amiral symbols in public art was evidence of the growing power of the amiral class, the elaboration and regularity of "state ceremonies" could be seen as the sultan's response to its challenge. The daily repetition of rituals designed to demonstrate the exalted status of the sultan over the mamluks reinforced the Mamluk hierarchy while emphasizing his sovereignty.¹¹⁶ Participation in these ceremonies by both the military elite and the civilian population, however obligatory, was a physical symbol of loyalty to the sultan, and in this sense can be compared to the recitation of his name in the *khutbah* every week or the pledge of allegiance upon his investiture.¹¹⁷

A greater part of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's building projects were focused on the Citadel, to accommodate the expansion of these official ceremonies.¹¹⁸ In addition to banquets (*asmiṭah*), royal audiences, and investitures, military officers were required to participate in drinking parties (where *qumiz*—a fermented mare's

Walker, "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline," Ch. 5.

¹¹¹Whelan, "Representations of the *Khāṣṣikīyah*."

¹¹²This is a theme which runs throughout Walker, "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline."

¹¹³The bibliography on Crusader art in Cyprus is extensive and can be found in *ibid.*, Ch. 4.

¹¹⁴Georges Duby, *Foundations of a New Humanism 1280-1440* (Geneva, 1966).

¹¹⁵Alexander P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 104 ff.

¹¹⁶Walker, "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 284.

¹¹⁷A similar argument has been made for Renaissance festivals in France and Italy. See Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*, 15.

¹¹⁸Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo*, 193; Behrens-Abouseif, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial"; and Stowasser, "Manner and Customs at the Mamluk Court."



milk—was consumed in large quantities), bi-weekly polo games, formal hunting excursions, and processions.¹¹⁹

Processions, like banquets, were held at most important state occasions and during religious festivals; they marked investitures, military victories, hunting excursions, the return of a sultan or an important amir from abroad, the two *ʿĪds*, the plenitude ceremony, and the *maḥmal* procession.¹²⁰ As at banquets, strict rules were observed regarding the order of the participants (or their seating arrangements), the color and material of costume, and protocols of address and behavior.

The visual effect of these ceremonies must have been impressive. This was, of course, the intention. Large, elaborate, colorful parades and banquets, in particular, were meant to have an impact on both the Mamluk participants and the civilian spectators of Cairo. The material expressions of these events—costumes, objects of office, and serving vessels—were created by local artisans to meet the ceremonial requirements of the state.

Like Mamluk art in general, the textile industry was “militarized” in the fourteenth century to respond to demands by the elite for appropriate garments to be used in processions and other ceremonies of state. Mamluk costume had changed and began to adopt the cut of Mongol and Chinese court dress.¹²¹ In terms of decoration, the Mamluks had developed a taste for combining military designs (such as blazons and inscriptions) with fluid chinoiserie. Weavers responded to these demands by making use of the drawloom, which aided in production of triple cloth. With this technology, complicated designs and, particularly repeat patterns could be produced, and reproduced, fairly quickly.

Civilian Cairo quickly developed a taste for silk brocade (*ṭardwaḥsh, nasīj*). Public processions were draped in expensive textiles, from the participants’ costumes to the mounts’ saddles and covers, the banners used in the parades and those hung over the city gates through which the procession progressed, the “brocades” which were out along the parade route, the decorations of shops along the way, and temporary pavilions which were set up to distribute refreshments. In a society that was already “textile conscious,” this regular and dramatic display of fine textiles rapidly induced a hunger for silk among the non-elite. Moreover silk was woven in the public *sūq*. With the closure of the royal textile workshops in 1341, brocades were not only produced but sold openly in the marketplace. It did not take long

¹¹⁹Walker, “The Ceramic Correlates of Decline,” 283.

¹²⁰Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, and Stowasser, “Manner and Customs at the Mamluk Court,” 18.

¹²¹Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, and Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, cite contemporary sources on this subject.



for civilian Cairenes to begin dressing, shopping, and otherwise behaving like the Mamluk elite did just a few years before.¹²²

Embroidered work was yet another industry that underwent considerable expansion in the fourteenth century. Mamluk embroidery to a large degree imitated the patterns and surface effects of woven silk, although it gradually developed its own distinctive decorative repertoire. The craft must have specialized, to some degree, since the late Fatimid period. The many Arabic terms used to designate embroidered work in contemporary sources (*marqūm*, *zarkash*, *ṭirāz*, *nuqūsh*) reflect a variety of materials, patterns, and functions. Embroidery was also used for the ceremonial garments of the elite and in the robes of honor distributed by the sultan.

We can differentiate between two distinct styles of embroidery during the fourteenth century. Geometric designs seem to have catered to civilians and may have been produced at home. This domestic, or “folk,” art contrasts with the inscriptional and flowing compositions that still retained a visual affiliation with silk designs. These fabrics served a different purpose than the geometric embroideries and may have been destined for a more elite clientele.

Technological changes in embroidery in the fourteenth century kept pace with developments in ceremonial and the market demands of the amiral elite, as well as the urban bourgeoisie who imitated them. Types of stitches which had been known before, such as the chain and crewel stitches, were now used to produce inscriptions and the fluid designs of Chinese silks. New stitches (the Holbein and a group of techniques known as the “weaving stitch”) were developed to recreate repeat patterns and the sheen of woven silk.

Technical developments in many media (textiles, ceramics, metalworking, architecture) can be explained to a large degree by the elaboration of official ceremonial. How textiles were socially significant on an unofficial level, what the mechanisms were for private production and sale, and to what extent we can differentiate between civilian and Mamluk styles of decoration are promising areas of future research.

¹²²Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History*, 113.



APPENDIX: CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED PIECES

Figure 1. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.117

Towel fragment

Egypt, Ottoman

yellow, green, pink, and white cotton embroidery on white linen; copper threads

H: 19 cm, W: 37 cm

Technical analysis: 2/2 twill and looped weave, embroidery in double-running stitch and satin stitch couching

For further reading: Maçide Gönül, "Some Turkish Embroideries in the Collection of the Topkapi Sarayi Museum in Istanbul," *Kunst des Orients* 6, no. 1 (1969): 43-76.

Figure 2. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.802

Fragment sewn together from three pieces

Egypt, late Ayyubid-early Mamluk

red and blue silk embroidery on undyed linen

H: 82.5 cm, W: 23 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in chain stitch

Inscription: "Everlasting glory and prosperity . . . to its owner" (in *naskhī*)

Figure 3. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.574

"*Tirāz*" fragment

Egypt, Ayyubid or early Mamluk

red and yellow silk, blue linen

L: 4.6 cm, W: 4 cm

Technical analysis: tabby with tapestry-woven inscriptional register (yellow on red)

Parallels: Cornu, *Tissus Islamiques*, BAV 6797 (p. 575) and 6928 (p. 576)

Figure 4. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #981.207

Silk fragment, *khil'ah*?

Egypt, Mamluk (14th century)

dark blue, light blue, and ivory silk

L: 37.5 cm, W: 25 cm

Technical analysis: weft-faced compound tabby with warp-faced tabby stripes, triple-cloth

Inscription: "Sulṭā[n]"

Parallels: Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. #119 (p. 236)—nearly identical



Figure 5. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #970.364.4

Silk fragment, *khil'ah?*

Egypt, early Mamluk

dark and light brown silk

H: 19 cm, W: 23 cm

Technical analysis: lampas weave—satin ground and tabby pattern

Inscription: "al-Sulṭān al-Malik . . ." (in register, in *thuluth*), pseudo-epigraphy in crescent (related to "al-‘ālim" or "al-‘ālī"?)

Figure 6. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.291

Appliquéd "*tirāz*" fragment

Egypt, Mamluk (14th century)

undyed, red, and blue cotton

L: 21 cm, W: 25 cm

Technical analysis: coarse tabbies, Z-spun threads

Inscription: "Glory to our Lord the Sultan . . ." (in *thuluth*)

Figure 7. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.1110

Fragmentary band of couched work

Egypt, Mamluk

undyed and blue linen

Technical analysis: tabby ground (two layers), embroidery in satin stitch

couching (border registers) and laid and couched work (main design)

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figure 3

Figure 8. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.799

Embroidery fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

red and blue linen embroidery on undyed linen

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in chain and stem stitches

Inscription: illegible

Parallels: For an illustrated embroidery sampler see Baker, *Islamic Textiles*, 75 (right)

Figure 9. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.1148

Embroidery fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

brown silk embroidery on undyed linen

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in satin stitch and some laid and couched work; double cloth

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figure 5 (for stippling)

Figure 10. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.1148

Figure 11. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.348

Large embroidered fragments, repaired

Egypt, probably Ayyubid

blue, green, and black silk embroidery on undyed linen

H: 35 cm, W: 28 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in chained feather stitch

Inscription: difficult to read, possibly "Everlasting glory, blessings, and happiness to its owner" (in floriated *naskhī*)

Parallels: Cornu, *Tissus Islamiques*, BAV 6929 (Pl. VIII and p. 581)

Figure 12. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.292

Embroidered "ṭirāz" fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

blue silk embroidery on undyed linen

L: 12 cm, W: 56 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in Holbein and counted zigzag stitches

Inscription: pseudo-epigraphy in diamonds (related to "al-‘ālim" or "al-‘ālī"?)

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figures 2 and 3

Figure 13. ROM, Abemayor cat. #978.76.178

Towel fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

blue linen embroidery on undyed linen

L: 20 cm, W: 17 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in Holbein and counted zigzag stitches

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figure 3; Gönül, "Some Turkish Embroideries," 50



Figure 14. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.442

Large "*tirāz*" fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

blue and yellow silk embroidery on undyed linen

L: 30 cm, W: 70 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground in Z-spun yarn, embroidery in satin stitch

Inscription: "Honor and long life and glory and []"

Figure 15. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.272

Embroidery fragment, pocket?

Egypt, Mamluk

brown, red, white, and blue silk embroidery on undyed linen

L: 18 cm, W: 15 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground (two layers sewn together on all sides with darning stitch), embroidery in satin and chained feather stitch

Inscription: pseudo-epigraphy in the dodecahedral cartouches

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figure 14

Figure 16. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.921

Embroidery fragment

Egypt, early Mamluk

red and blue silk embroidery on undyed linen

H: 9.5 cm, W: 8 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in couching stitch

Figure 17. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.1098

Embroidery fragment

Egypt, Mamluk

red, black, and blue linen embroidery on undyed linen

L: 4.5 cm, W: 13.5 cm

Technical analysis: tabby ground, embroidery in chain stitch

Figure 18. ROM, Abemayor, cat. #978.76.532

Embroidered panel

Egypt, Mamluk

blue, yellow, and brown silk embroidery on undyed linen

Technical analysis: tabby ground; embroidery in satin, darning, stem, and double running stitches with drawn thread work

Parallels: Lamm, "Some Mamluk Embroideries," Figures 16-19



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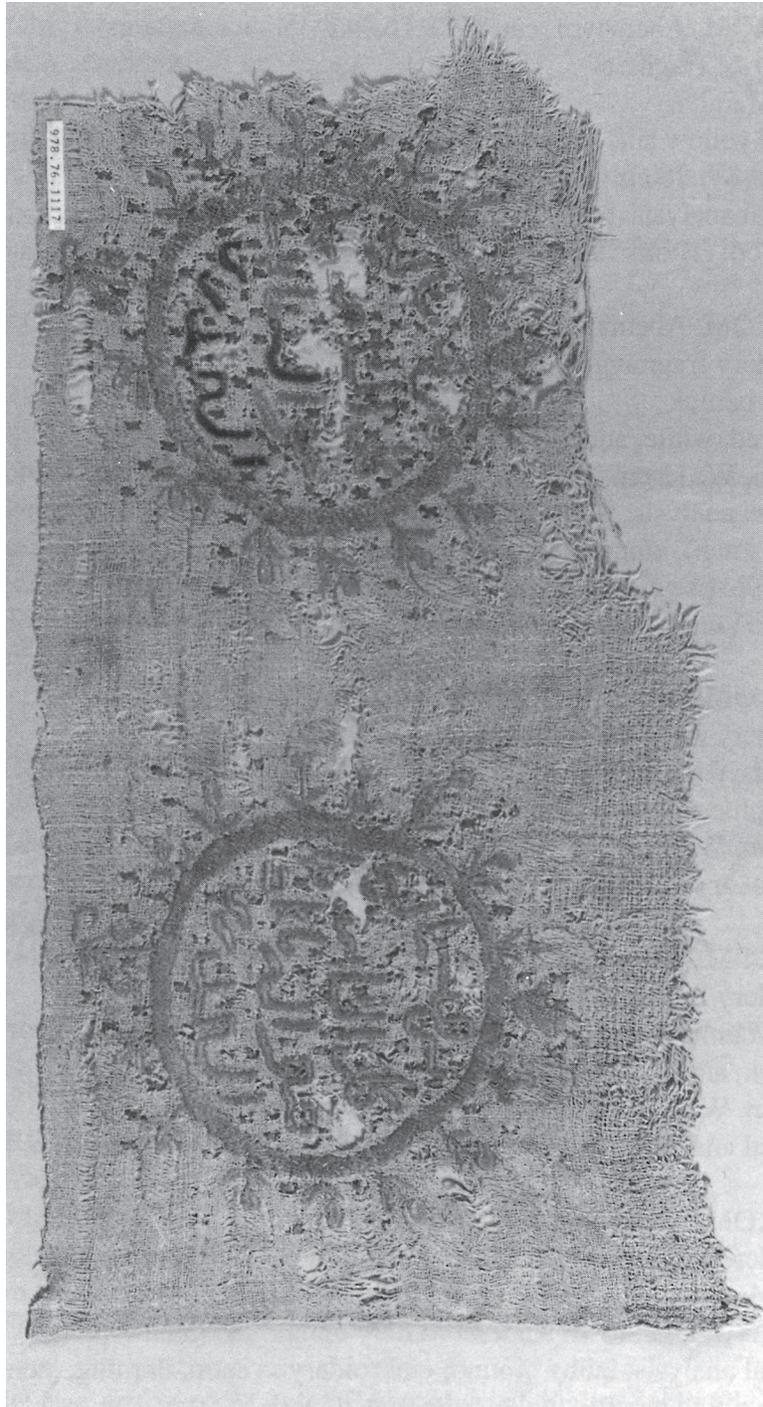


Figure 1. Ottoman towel with copper threads



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Figure 2. Poorly preserved embroidery



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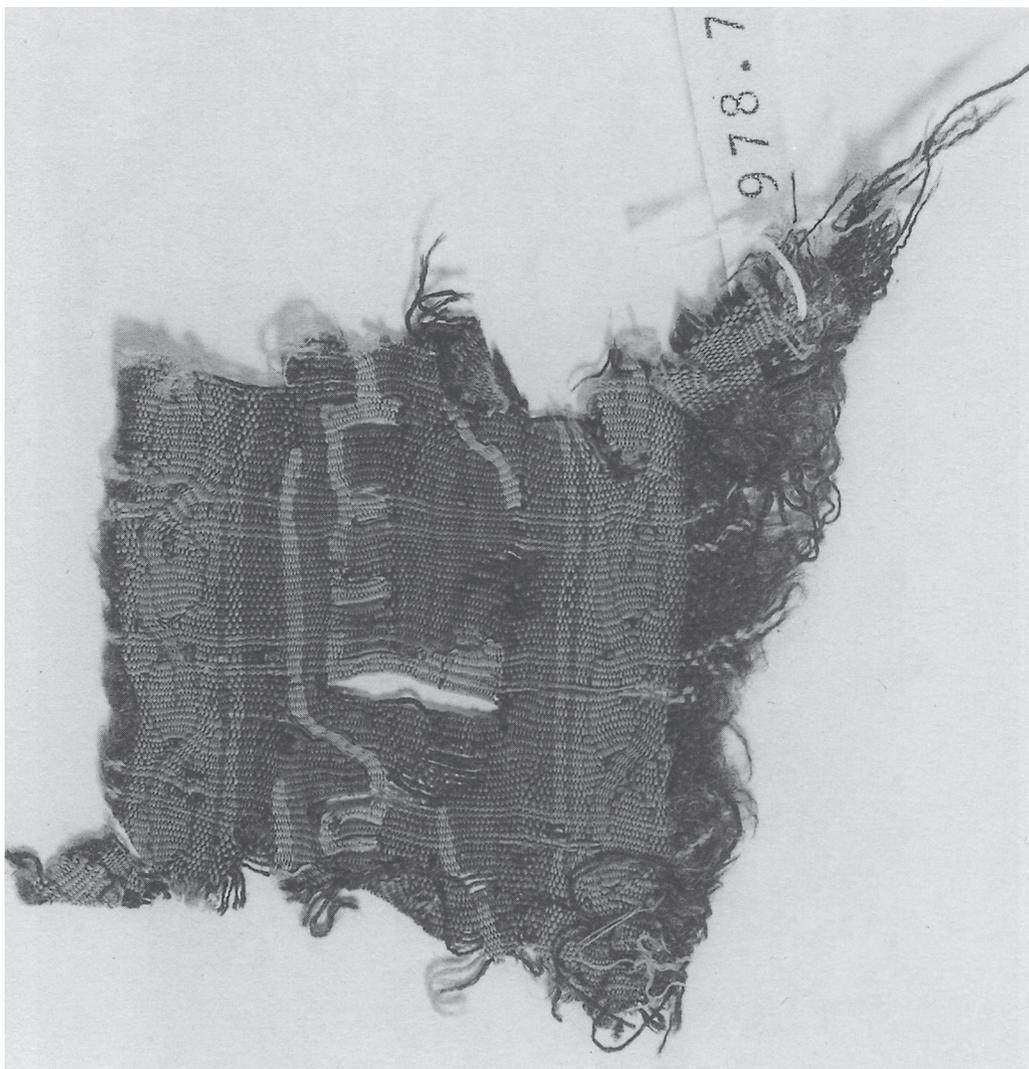


Figure 3. Ayyubid or Mamluk tapestry



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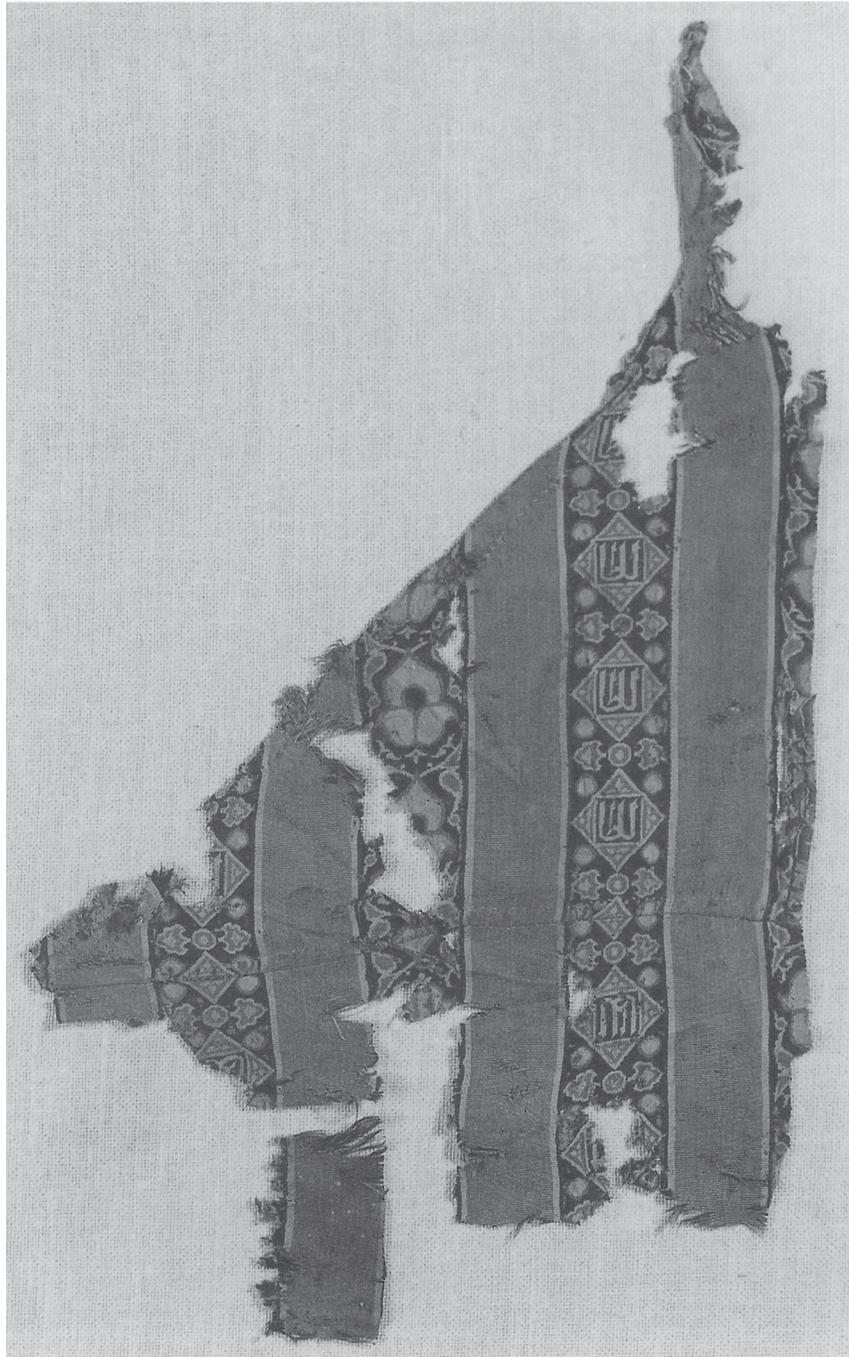


Figure 4. Mamluk striped silk in triple cloth



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Figure 5. Mamluk silk lampas with mirror image repeat



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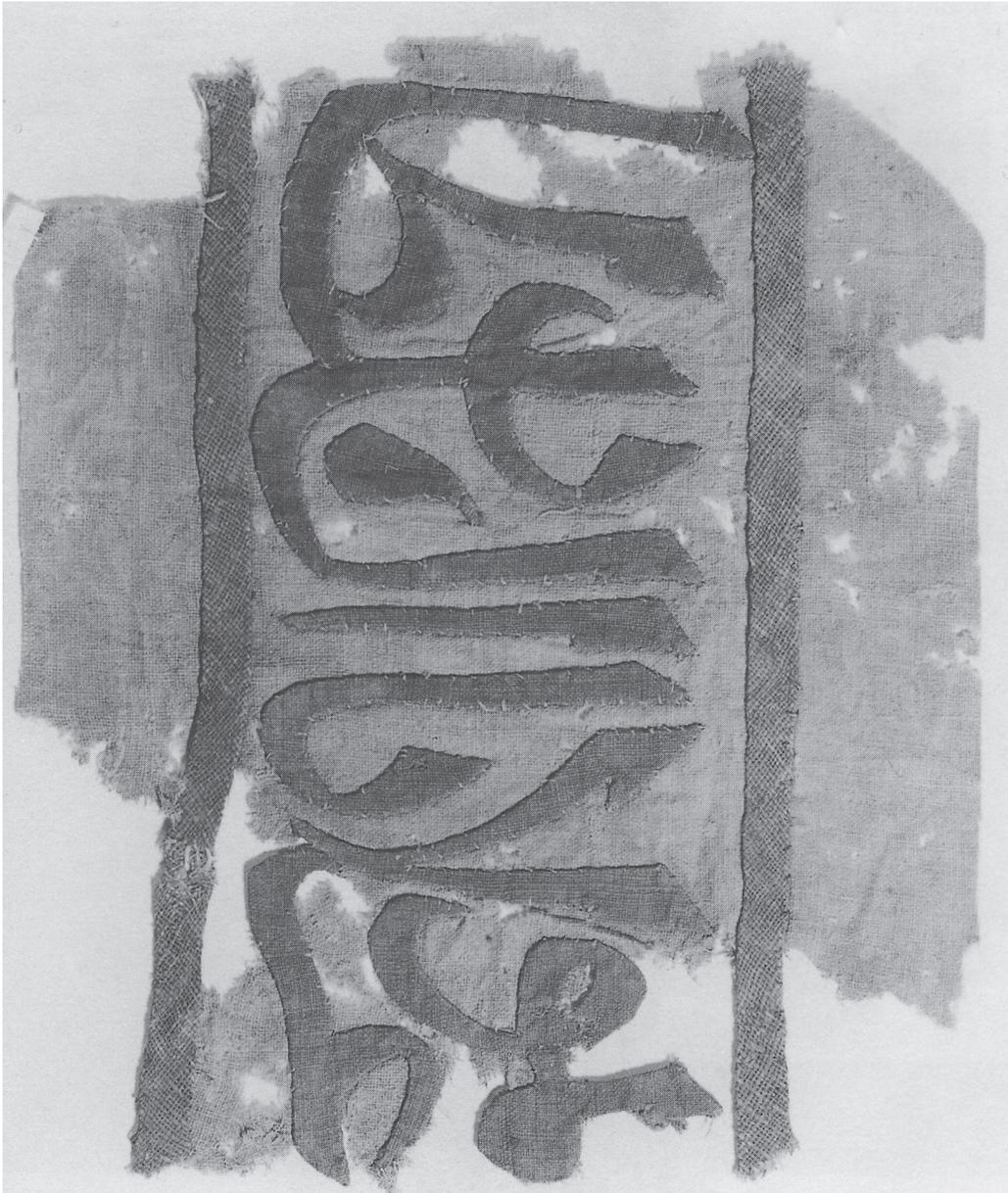


Figure 6. Mamluk appliqué



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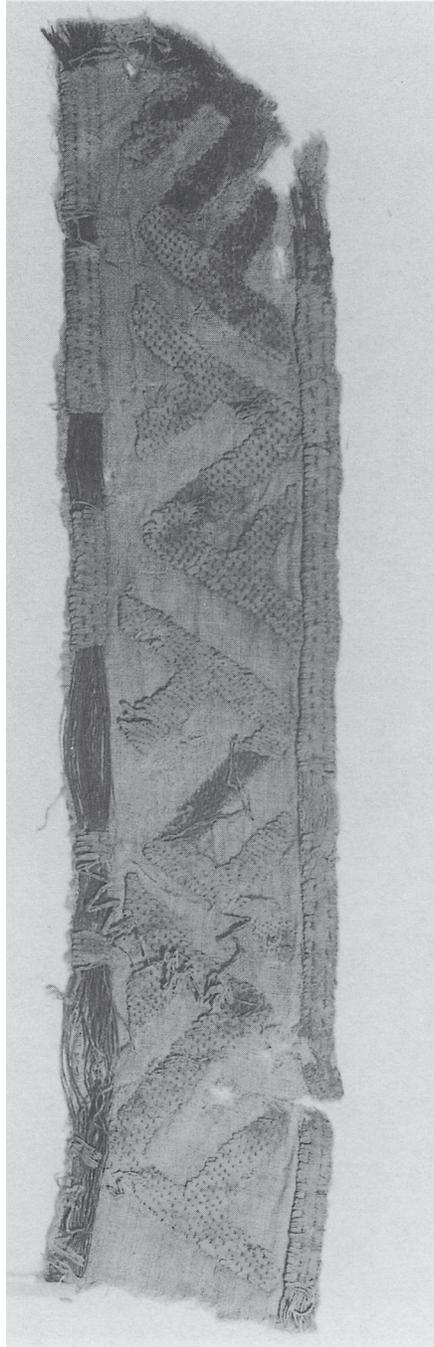


Figure 7. Faux appliqué



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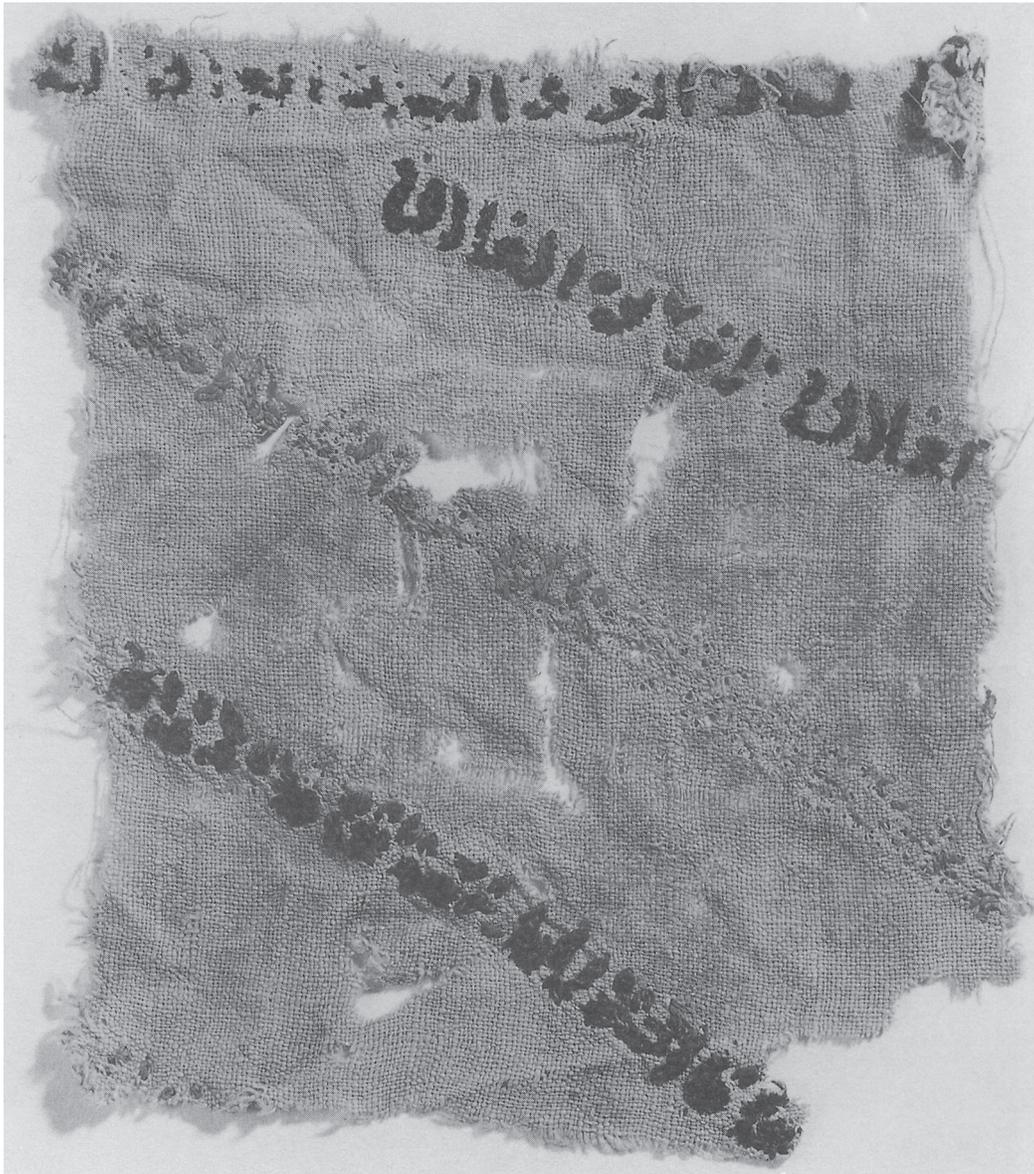


Figure 8. Practice piece or embroidery sampler



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Figure 9. Mamluk counted stitch



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Figure 10. Detail of Mamluk counted stitch



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Figure 11. Embroidered inscription in mirror image



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Figure 12. Pseudo-epigraphy and repeat patterns in the Holbein stitch



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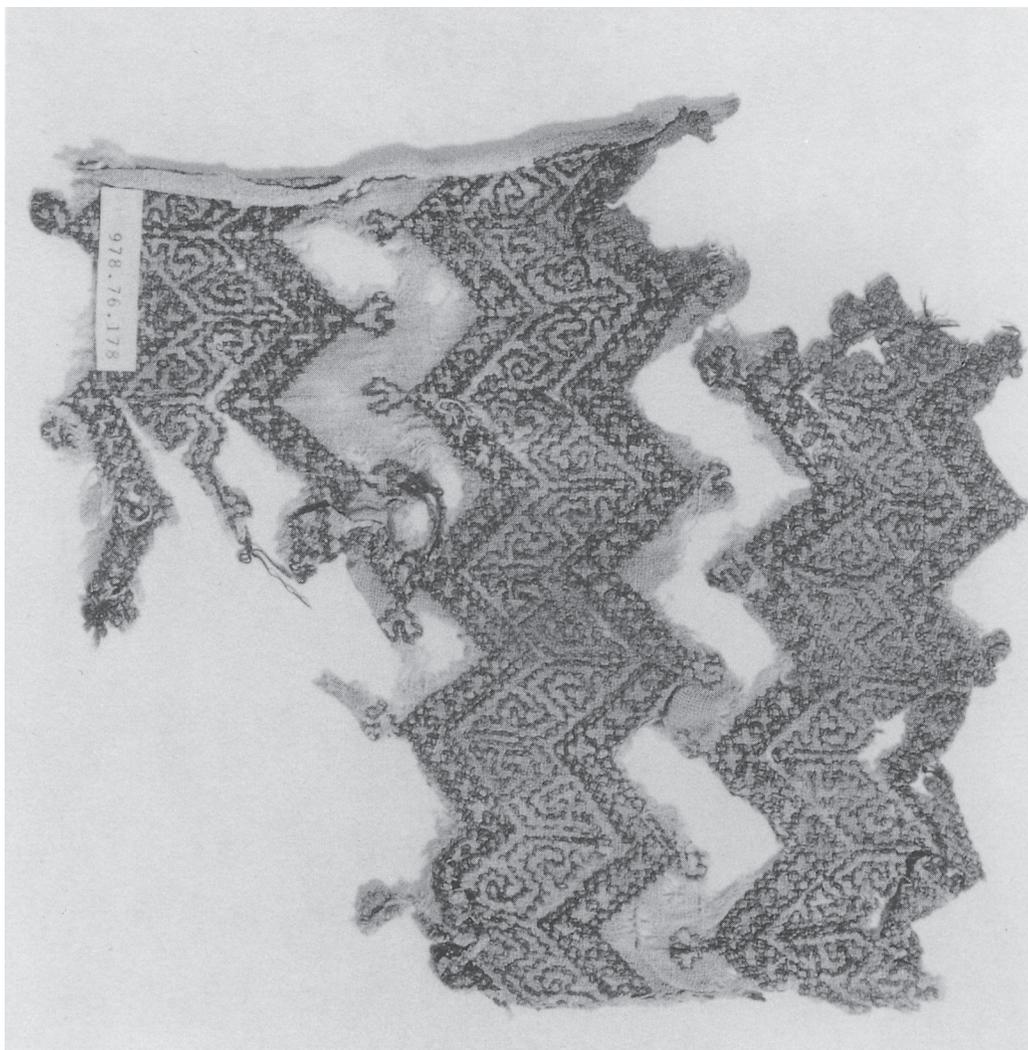


Figure 13. Geometric designs and repeat patterns in the Holbein stitch



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Figure 14. Ceremonial embroidery



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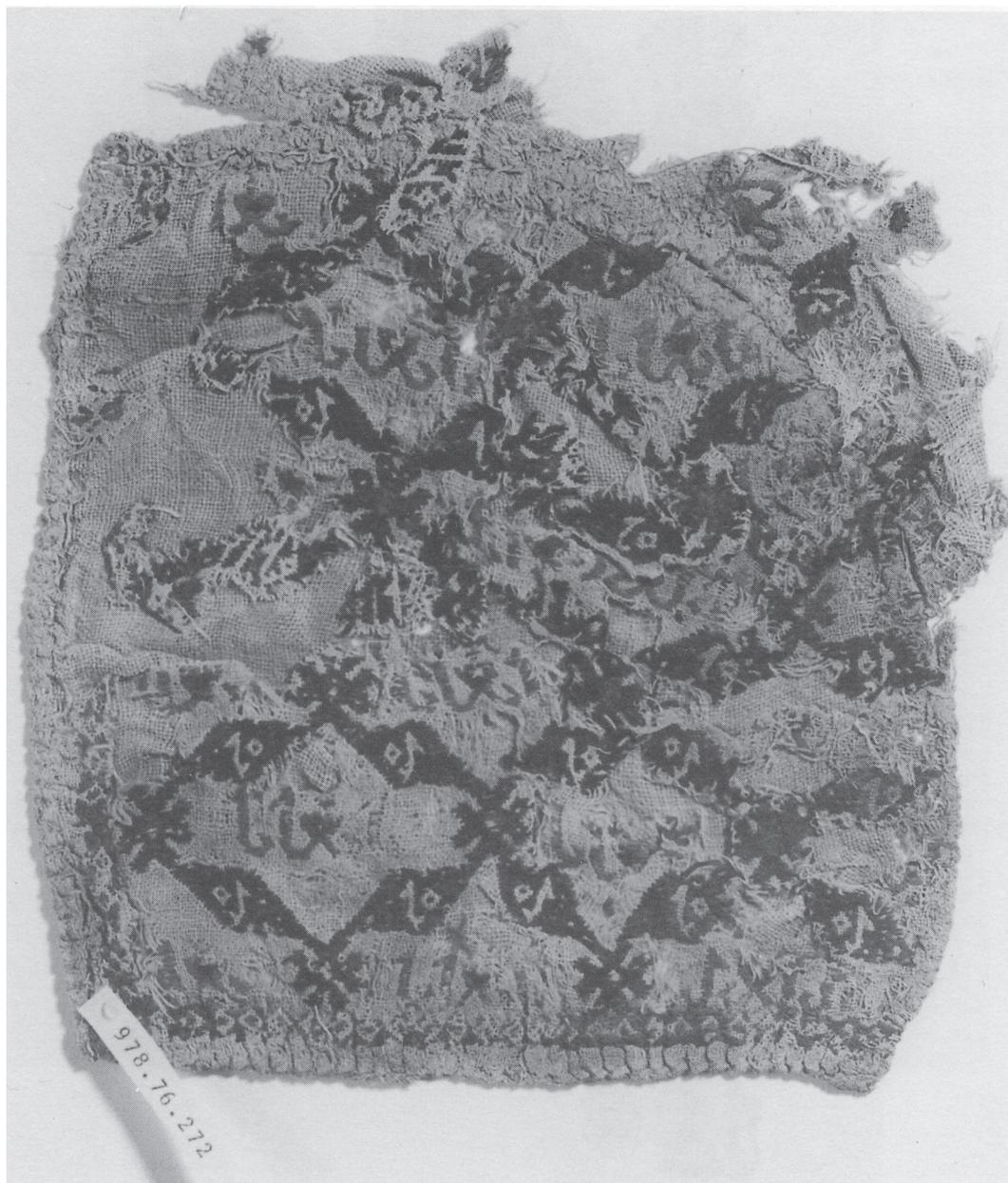


Figure 15. Embroidery with hexagonal trellis pattern



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Figure 16. Emblazoned embroidery



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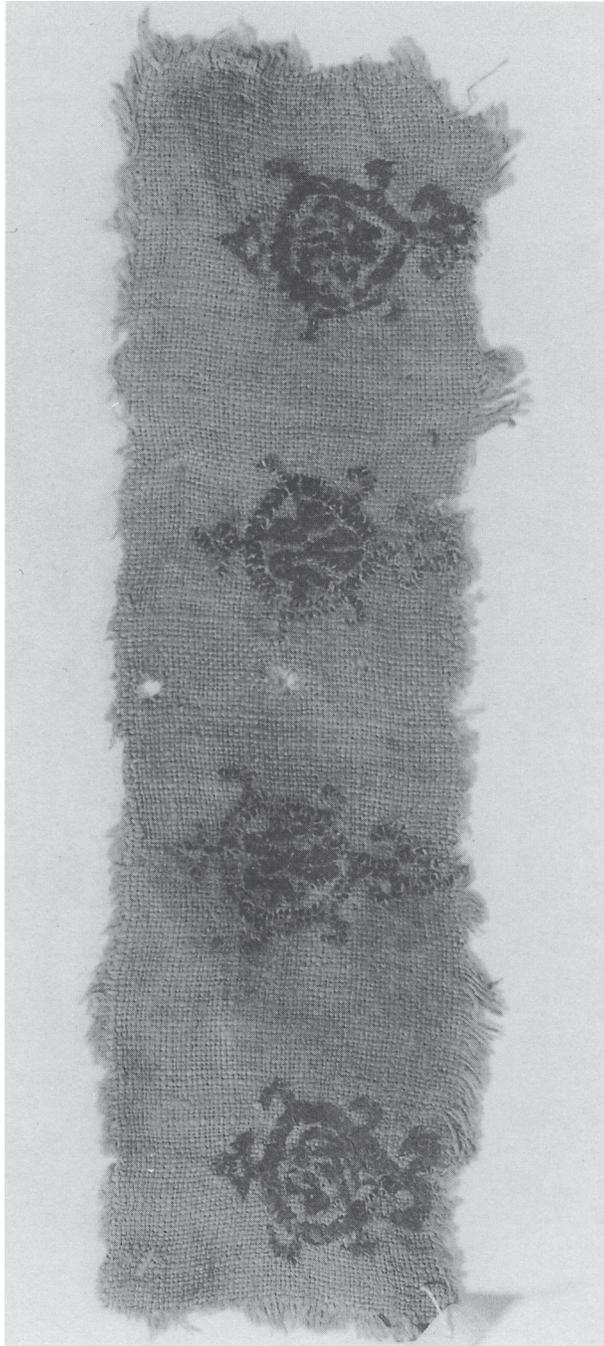


Figure 17. The barbed medallion motif



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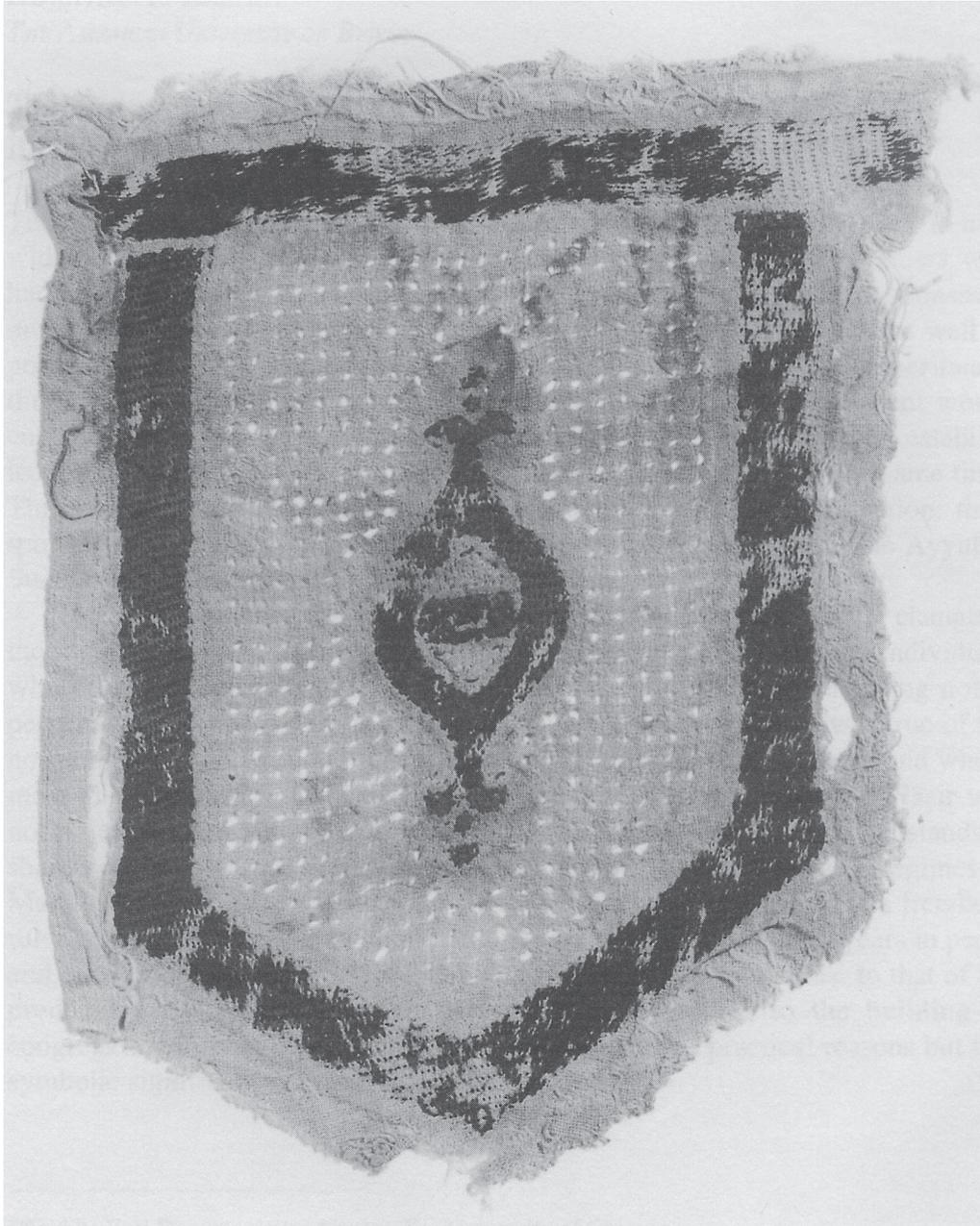


Figure 18. Mamluk "lap"



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