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## Mamluks, Mongols, and Crusaders: Visual Strategies for Representing the Enemy

### Introduction

The Mamluk dynasty came to power in a time of great political turmoil in the Islamic world. This regime seized and consolidated power on the basis of military prowess and dedication to jihad against the unbelievers who surrounded its territory. In the early years of their rule, the Mamluks embarked upon a two-front war against non-Muslims: the Western European Crusaders and the Ilkhanid Mongol Empire. The struggle against these two adversaries was expressed in ideological terms, with textual sources referring to both enemies as infidels and exhorting Mamluk troops to engage in a holy war to conquer (or regain) territory in the name of Islam. Political realities were far more nuanced, however, and Mamluk rulers entered into political and commercial agreements with both Western Europeans and Mongols. The visual manifestations of these relationships likewise reflected the complex political situation of the Mamluks, characterized by military aggression on the one hand and pragmatism and accommodation on the other. The representational strategies employed by Mamluk patrons to depict the enemy were equally multifaceted, consisting of architectural *spolia*, victory inscriptions and monuments, and artistic appropriations that expressed both military triumphalism and cultural appreciation.<sup>1</sup> The visual references to Crusaders and Mongols in Mamluk architecture are usually treated separately in the scholarly literature but this article will argue that they formed part of a unified strategy on the part of Mamluk rulers as they faced both enemies simultaneously in the early years of their empire. The results the Mamluks achieved in visualizing their relationship with the Ilkhan Mongols and Crusader warriors in the Levant varied greatly, however, highlighting the disparate nature of each foe, the complex and fluid nature of their interaction, as well as the distinctive artistic heritage of the cultures the Mamluks encountered in Syria and the Levant in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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<sup>1</sup>Nasser Rabbat, "In Search of a Triumphant Image: The Experimental Quality of Early Mamluk Art," in *The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria: Evolution and Impact*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Göttingen, 2012), 21–35, notes the syncretic, vibrant, and fluid repertoire of visual forms that characterized early Mamluk art.



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## Political Encounters and Economic Interaction between Mamluks and Crusaders

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Mamluks were confronted with enemies from both the east and west. Once they had stopped the Mongol advance westward at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260, they turned their attention to the Crusader strongholds in the Levant. This approach established a pattern seen in the campaigns of both Baybars and Qalāwūn, where the thwarting of a Mongol advance from the east was followed by aggressive strikes against Crusader towns and fortresses. Baybars attacked Nazareth and Mount Tabor in 1263 and then proceeded to conquer Caesarea and Safad.<sup>2</sup> In 1268 he captured Antioch, a city that had been in Frankish hands since 1097. The surrender of Jaffa followed and key castles of the military orders fell in 1271. Qalāwūn achieved a significant victory against the Mongols at Homs in 1281, then undertook a series of campaigns against Crusader possessions in 1285, taking the castle at Margat and towns like Tripoli before turning his attention to the important city of Acre.<sup>3</sup> Qalāwūn began preparations for this campaign but it was his son, al-Ashraf Khalīl, who realized it, capturing the city in 1291. After the fall of Acre, the few remaining Crusader strongholds surrendered, effectively eliminating their presence in the Levant.

These insistent and aggressive attacks on the Crusaders served a number of strategic purposes for the Mamluks. From a military perspective, it gave the Egyptian armies one less enemy to fight, averting a potential two-front war. There also existed the real possibility of an alliance between the Mongols and the Franks, creating a joint force that would have constituted a formidable challenge to the young Mamluk state.<sup>4</sup> The Mamluks were faced with a number of Christian adversaries: a potentially hostile Christian population in their own empire, Latin Crusaders in the Levant, and European territories that looked upon the Mamluks with fear and animosity. An alliance between the Mongols and any one of these

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Jotischky, *Crusading and the Crusader States* (Oxfordshire, 2014), 239–40; Thomas Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD, 2014), 167–68; Stephen Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks, and the Latin East in the Thirteenth Century,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 12; Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (New York, 2000), 227; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Carbondale, IL, 1986), 47, 56–57.

<sup>3</sup>Jotischky, *Crusading and the Crusader States*, 241–42; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 174–75; Niall Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity's Wars in the Middle East, 1095–1382, from the Islamic Sources* (London, 2014), 102, 108.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow, 2005), 165–95; Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks,” 10, 16; P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), 12; Reuven Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout, 2013), 16; Kate Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses in the Levant: Between Crusaders and Mongols* (London, 2011), 110.



Christian groups could involve the Mamluks in a multi-front war that would put a significant strain on their resources and personnel. With or without this alliance, crusading zeal continued unabated in Western Europe, and the likelihood of new expeditions remained high; the lack of a naval presence made the Mamluks particularly vulnerable to these maritime offensives.<sup>5</sup> Mamluk campaigns also had economic motivations, as the Crusaders possessed fertile agricultural lands and their ports controlled access to trade with Western Europe. As it was likely that the Italians and Catalans in particular would trade with anyone who possessed the ports, the Mamluks could secure access to strategic materials (wood, iron, pitch) and personnel (slaves) to ensure the prosperity of their empire.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these military and economic considerations, defeat of the Crusaders also possessed a religious and ideological dimension. The Mamluks' greatest adversaries, Mongols and Franks, were non-Muslims and prosecuting war against them was a religious duty, constituting a jihad. Jihad provided a broad conceptual umbrella that was flexible enough to encompass the multiple and varied motivations for military action against both adversaries.<sup>7</sup> As *mujāhidūn*, Mamluk rulers could highlight their legitimacy through military conquest. The Mamluk system of rulership was inherently unstable, with no *de facto* line of succession from one sultan to the next. Military victories and territorial conquest provided a consolidating force in the empire, emphasizing the talents of the Mamluks as a warriors, enhancing their prestige in the eyes of the local population, and uniting rulers and the people they ruled in a struggle against a common enemy.<sup>8</sup> Jihad contained within it the idea of purification as well, cleansing the land defiled by non-believers, and the Mamluks' religious mandate to defend Islam justified the utter annihilation of Crusaders in Palestine and Syria.

Mamluk rulers enhanced their prestige and legitimacy through military victories against foreign enemies and the ruler who established this highly effective political strategy was al-Zāhir Baybars. Baybars was a *mujāhid*, or leader of jihad,

<sup>5</sup>For the possibility of new crusade campaigns, see Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 96; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 244; Humphreys, "Ayyubids, Mamluks," 5. See Ann Zimo, "Baybars, Naval Power and Mamlūk Psychological Warfare against the Franks," *Al-Masāq* 30, no. 3 (2018): 304–16, for a recent discussion of attempts to form a Mamluk navy, and Albrecht Fuess, "Rotting Ships and Razed Harbors: The Naval Policy of the Mamluks," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 45–71.

<sup>6</sup>Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 100–2; Jonathan Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 10; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 109. For strategic materials, see David Jacoby, "The Supply of War Materials to Egypt in the Crusader Period," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 102–32.

<sup>7</sup>Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," 9–10; Humphreys, "Ayyubids, Mamluks," 4.

<sup>8</sup>Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 226–27, 230, 244; Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," 10.



par excellence, as he led the Mamluk army in the defeat of the Mongols at ‘Ayn Jālūt and engaged in numerous successful military campaigns against Crusader strongholds and cities.<sup>9</sup> Mamluk authors noted Sultan Baybars’ military prowess and couched his victories against both Crusaders and Mongols in ideological terms, with religion as a significant marker of difference. Contemporary texts highlighted Baybars’ zeal in prosecuting jihad, waging war against the Christian “infidels” until “no more Franks remained on the face of the earth.”<sup>10</sup> Honorific inscriptions on public monuments throughout the empire echo this theme and underline the sultan’s commitment to jihad. One text lauds Baybars as: “Lord of kings and sultans, conqueror of great cities, exterminator of Franks and Tatars [and] extirpator of citadels from the infidels...,” while another celebrates his success in exchanging “unbelief for faith, church bell for call to prayer, and the Gospel for the Qur’an.”<sup>11</sup> Baybars’ legitimacy as a ruler was based in part on his success in campaigns against the Franks; as such these religiously-motivated campaigns were significant elements in the political identity formation of this dynasty.

### Visual References to Crusaders in Mamluk Architecture

A visual manifestation of this jihad mentality can be seen in the earliest extant royal mosque of the Mamluk period, the Mosque of al-Zāhir Baybars located on the outskirts of the city of Cairo. Built between 1266 and 1269, Baybars’ mosque is the first Mamluk monument to employ Crusader *spolia*, or appropriated Chris-

<sup>9</sup>Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge, 2008), 30–32; Denise Aigle, “Legitimizing a Low-Born, Regicide Monarch: The Case of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars and the Ilkhans in the Thirteenth Century,” *HAL archives-ouvertes.fr*, 2006, 3, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00383336/document>.

<sup>10</sup>P. M. Holt, “Three Biographies of al-Zahir Baybars,” in *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. David Morgan (London, 1982), 19–29; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 167–68; Berkey, “Mamluk Religious Policy,” 9–10; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 232–37; Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Berkeley, 1969), 307–12.

<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Bloom, “The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 74, 76; Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 167–68; Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 230–31. Hanna Taragan in particular has addressed the propagandistic nature of Baybars’ monumental epigraphy; see Hanna Taragan, “Doors that Open Meanings: Baybars’s Red Mosque at Safed,” in *Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden, 2004), 3–20, and idem, “Sign of the Times: Reusing the Past in Baybars’s Architecture in Palestine,” in *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in Honour of Michael Winter*, ed. David Wasserstein and Ami Ayalon (London, 2006), 54–66. For the transcriptions of the inscriptions, see Étienne Combe et al., *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe*, vol. 12 (Cairo, 1943) [hereafter *RCEA*], nos. 4556 and 4557, 104–6, nos. 4588 and 4589, 123–26, no. 4612, 141–43.



tian architectural elements.<sup>12</sup> Though little remains of this building today, textual sources provide information about the structure's appearance and indicate its significance in light of military conflict with the Crusaders. According to al-Maqrīzī, building materials for the mosque were taken from Crusader structures in Jaffa, a city conquered by the Mamluks in 1268. The Mamluks systematically plundered the captured town for building materials and Baybars ordered that wood from the conquered city be used to construct the *maqṣūrah*, or dome, of the mosque and appropriated marble was to adorn the mihrab or prayer niche.<sup>13</sup> In this early Mamluk religious structure, spoils of war from a Christian citadel were reemployed in the most symbolic areas of the structure, the dome and the mihrab, sending a strong triumphalist message through the appropriation of Crusader building materials. Like the transfer of ownership of important fortresses and the substitution of the call to prayer for the church bell, building materials were reanimated and redefined in their secondary context on a Muslim religious structure.<sup>14</sup> These spoils were thus victory trophies underlining the overwhelming and irrevocable nature of the Mamluks' triumph over the Christians, visualizing the defeat of unbelievers by the defenders of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>For recent discussions of Baybars' mosque, see Bernard O'Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt* (Cairo, 2016), 57–59; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (London, 2007), 119–26; Hanna Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage and Crusader Memories," *Assaph Studies in Art History* 10–11 (2005–2006): 226–27; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Between Quarry and Magic: The Selective Approach to Spolia in the Islamic Monuments of Egypt," in *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*, ed. Alina Payne (Leiden, 2014), 415–16. Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī," provides a monographic study of Baybars' mosque.

<sup>13</sup>Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa-al-i'tibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār, al-ma'rūf bi-al-khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah, ta'lif Taqī al-Dīn Abī al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī* (Baghdad, 1970), 2:300. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 121; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 57; Taragan, "Sign of the Times," 62; Behrens-Abouseif, "Between Quarry and Magic," 415–16; Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī," 73.

<sup>14</sup>The use of *spolia* in the architecture of the Mediterranean and the Near East is a topic with a vast bibliography. Some representative publications that address the triumphal, pragmatic, and aesthetic motivations for such reuse include: Karen Rose Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce, and an Aesthetic of Appropriation in the Italian Maritime Cities, 1000–1150* (Leiden, 2018); Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, eds., *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham, 2011); Henry Maguire and Robert Nelson, eds., *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice* (Washington, DC, 2011); Michael Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden, 2009); Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 126; idem, "Mamluk Perceptions of Foreign Arts," in *The Arts of the Mamluks*, ed. Behrens-Abouseif, 310; Karen Rose Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders: Architectural Appropriation and Cultural Encounters in Mamluk Monuments," in *Languages*



Like Baybars, Qalāwūn was also a zealous holy warrior, leading numerous campaigns against Crusader cities and garnering titles and accolades for his piety and zeal in prosecuting jihad.<sup>16</sup> One of his most important military expeditions against the Crusaders was the assault on the city of Acre, an offensive planned by Qalāwūn but completed by his son al-Ashraf Khalil. The Mamluk victory against the Crusader city in 1291 dealt the death blow to the Frankish presence in the Levant.<sup>17</sup> Qalāwūn was a highly effective and feared holy warrior but he also signed treaties with Christian rulers and territories in order to facilitate trade while dividing Christian domains and exploiting factionalism among them.<sup>18</sup> The sultan thus had a nuanced understanding of the Christians he encountered in the Levant, differentiating between economic partners and military adversaries. These relations changed over time as well and allies transformed into enemies and vice-versa in this fluid environment. Qalāwūn combined military aggression with pragmatism towards Christians and this flexible and accommodating approach also characterized the use of Christian *spolia* and pseudo-*spolia* on his impressive and highly visible funerary complex on Bayn al-Qaṣrayn.<sup>19</sup>

This monumental architectural commission, built in 1284–85 and consisting of a madrasah, mausoleum, and *bīmāristān* (hospital), occupied a position of great

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*of Love and Hate: Conflict, Communication, and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Sarah Lambert and Helen Nicholson (Turnhout, 2012), 183, for this idea of a trophy culture; and Taragan, “Sign of the Times,” 55, 57–58, for Baybars’ victory monuments in Cairo and Palestine.

<sup>16</sup>Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 38; Hillenbrand, *Crusades, Islamic Perspectives*, 230, n. 114, refers to an inscription associated with Qalāwūn whose text is strongly reminiscent of one of Baybars’ epigraphs.

<sup>17</sup>See Donald Little, “The Fall of ‘Akkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of David Ayalon*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden, 1986), 159–82, for a discussion of Muslim sources for this battle; see also Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 241; Muslim historians noted that “the whole of Syria and the coastal zones were purified of the Franks;” see Gabrieli, *Arab Historians*, 346. Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Mansur Qalawun and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart, 1998), 156, adds that Muslim writers invested the fall of Acre with religious significance, as nothing less than the triumph of Islam over Christianity.

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, who lists eight treaties between Qalāwūn and various Christian rulers and three treaties between the Franks and al-Zāhir Baybars. See also Madden, *Concise History of the Crusades*, 173; Humphreys, “Ayyubids, Mamluks,” 3, 9.

<sup>19</sup>See most recently Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun (1284–1285): Between Text and Architecture,” in *Tomb-Memory-Space: Concepts of Representation in Pre-modern Christian and Islamic Art*, ed. Francine Giese, Anna Pawlak, and Markus Thome (Berlin, 2018), 114–33. General discussions of the building complex can also be found in Michael Meinel, *Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648/1250 bis 923/1517)* (Glückstadt, 1992), 1:44–46, 2:61; O’Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 61–65; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 132–42; Taragan, “Mamluk Patronage,” 227–28.



visibility along the main thoroughfare of medieval Cairo with an extended and elaborate façade facing the street (Fig. 1). Qalāwūn employed an eclectic array of *spolia* in this complex, with a prominent example on the monumental entrance portal.<sup>20</sup> Clearly visible from the street, the window above the doorway displays an iron grille consisting of spiral forms (Fig. 2). Creswell has argued that this window grille was a Crusader spoil that must have been taken as loot during Qalāwūn's Syrian military campaigns.<sup>21</sup> Qalāwūn's use of Crusader *spolia* is thus the earliest visually identifiable case of such appropriation, as we only have textual sources attesting to the use of spoils in al-Zāhir Baybars' mosque.

The sultan also displayed a predilection for Crusader-style decoration, employing a particular window type on the façade of his mausoleum complex that is reminiscent of Gothic architecture (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> The window consists of two lancets surmounted by a bull's eye within an arch, a form characteristic of thirteenth-century French architecture in general and Crusader structures in the Levant in particular.<sup>23</sup> Prominently displayed across the entirety of the street façade, the Gothic window form constituted the visual focus for the complex (Fig. 1). This visual reference had no overtones of war and conquest and likely formed part

<sup>20</sup>For the use of *spolia* in Qalāwūn's complex in general, see Iman Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot: An Examination of the Rich Diversity of Material Reuse in the Complex of Qalāwūn in Cairo," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 20 (2017): 93–132.

<sup>21</sup>K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, second edition (New York, 1978), 2:191. Creswell also notes that this window grille resembles the iron screen that surrounded the Dome of the Rock when it was transformed into the Christian *Templum Domini* by the Templars in the twelfth century. See also Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 106–7; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 64; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "European Arts and Crafts at the Mamluk Court," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 45; Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, "Spolien in der mittelalterlichen Architektur von Kairo," in *Ägypten, Dauer und Wandel: Symposium anlässlich des 75 jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo* (Mainz, 1985), 133, n. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, "Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun," 125–26. This form not only appears on Qalāwūn's funerary complex but also on other monuments commissioned by him (the mausoleum of his wife Umm al-Šāliḥ and his son al-Ashraf Khalil) as well as other Mamluk sultans and amirs. In his discussion of the Tomb of Umm al-Šāliḥ, Creswell (*Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:182, n. 3) mentions five other buildings that employ this form: the Mausoleum of al-Ashraf Khalil (1288), the *mīda'ah* in the *ṣaḥn* of Ibn Tūlūn (1296), the Mausoleum of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1303–4), the Mausoleum of Sunqur Sa'dī (1315–21), and the Mosque of Ulmās (1329–1330). See also Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 106; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 135; Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders," 185–88.

<sup>23</sup>Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:200, mentions the loggia at the fortress of Crac des Chevaliers as one of several possible prototypes. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 138; Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 227. The church of Crac des Chevaliers was converted to a mosque when Baybars' son, al-Malik al-Sa'id, seized the fortress from the Hospitallers; therefore, the window form might have been familiar to the Mamluks because they actually possessed the fortress as of 1271.



of the decorative ensemble because of its beauty. Qalāwūn's approach to Christian visual culture thus emulated his political engagement with Christian polities in the Levant. In the time period when Qalāwūn was building this complex, 1284–85, he was not conducting military campaigns against Crusaders but had established truces consistent with his political strategy of extended periods of treaties and alliances punctuated by jihad-inspired attacks.<sup>24</sup> The visual elements of his funerary complex followed the same rhythm, with street front decoration of Gothic architectural forms broken up by an emphatic, triumphal spoil over the main portal. The aesthetic appreciation of the Gothic predominated in Qalāwūn's complex, however, reflecting the political détente that characterized Mamluk-Crusader relations until the push for the conquest of Acre began at the end of the 1280s.

The use of Crusader *spolia* on the madrasah associated with the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is a bit more nuanced than that seen in the previous examples, as he did not participate in campaigns against Crusader armies and was not the person responsible for procuring the plunder in the first place. By the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1293–94, 1299–1309) and especially during his third tenure in office (1310–41), military objectives had shifted from the Levant to the Mongol threat in the east. The madrasah completed in 1304 by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad along Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, however, features a Gothic church portal from the city of Acre reused as the entranceway into the sultan's religious school (Fig. 4).<sup>25</sup> The portal was taken as plunder from the campaign led by his half-brother al-Ashraf Khalīl and it passed through a number of hands before it came to grace al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's religious building; in essence, the sultan inherited the portal from his half-brother and appropriated it from his predecessor, Kitbughā.<sup>26</sup> The madrasah, with its distinctive Gothic portal, was located next to Qalāwūn's complex on Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, affording al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's appropriated trophy of war

<sup>24</sup>Hillenbrand, *Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 250; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 108. See also Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses*, 100, and Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, for this period of truce between Mamluks and Christians in the Levant.

<sup>25</sup>Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's madrasah and its Crusader spoil are mentioned frequently in the art historical literature on Mamluk architecture; see O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 67–68; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 152–54; Wolfgang Mayer, "The Madrasa of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad: The Portal," in *A Future for the Past: Restorations in Islamic Cairo 1973–2004*, ed. Wolfgang Mayer and Philipp Speiser (Mainz, 2007), 95–105; Mathews, "Mamluks and Crusaders," 191–95.

<sup>26</sup>For the complicated history of this portal's procurement and use, see Abdulfattah, "Theft, Plunder, and Loot," 95; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 67; Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 228–30; Jo van Steenberg, "Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo: The Bayna l-Qaṣrayn as a Dynamic 'Lieu de Memoire', 1250–1382," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria Parani (Leiden, 2013), 255–56.





maximum visibility in the city. Though he could not claim any great crusading victories of his own, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad adopted the visual trappings associated with warfare against the Franks that Baybars and Qalāwūn proudly displayed on their Cairene monuments. This Crusader spoil has been interpreted as a victory trophy in a religious and military sense, signaling the Mamluks' resounding conquest of Christian territories and, by association, the triumph of Islam.<sup>27</sup>

Not only did al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and his father Qalāwūn use Christian materials and styles in their architectural structures, they employed actual Christians to construct the buildings in the Mamluk capital.<sup>28</sup> Three hundred prisoners of war worked on Qalāwūn's complex and the amir overseeing the construction even enlisted passersby to carry stones for the buildings. Textual sources indicate that the prisoners were Mongols, captured during Qalāwūn's victory at Homs in 1281, but Christians fought alongside Mongols in that battle and likely formed part of the *corvée*. Continuing his father's practices, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad settled Christian prisoners in Cairo and employed them in his construction works.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of whether these prisoners actually had any artistic expertise, their forced labor served an important ideological purpose: it demonstrated their status as subjugated enemies compelled to construct a victory monument that celebrated their defeat. Qalāwūn's funerary complex and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's madrasah thus conveyed a message of triumph, proclaiming Mamluk military supremacy over the Franks of the Levant through the use of Christian *spolia* on the entrance portals of these buildings.<sup>30</sup>

Such a purely triumphalist interpretation, however, is especially problematic in the historical context of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign, when the Crusaders had long ceased to be a military threat. Though a sense of religious superiority is indicated by the reuse of a church portal for a Muslim religious school, there is also a high level of aesthetic appreciation associated with this appropriated doorway, emulating Qalāwūn's multifaceted approach to Christians and their visual culture. In the early fifteenth century, al-Maqrīzī wrote that this was the most beautiful portal in all of Cairo, striking in the high quality of its workmanship and

<sup>27</sup>Taragan, "Mamluk Patronage," 229–30; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 153; Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, "Die Verwendung von Spolien in der mamlukischen Architektur von Kairo," in *XX. Deutscher Orientalistentag: Vorträge*, ed. Wolfgang Voigt (Wiesbaden, 1980), 532.

<sup>28</sup>Julien Loiseau, "Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo," *Al-Masāq* 23, no. 1 (2011): 39; Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2:205; Meinecke, *Mamlukische Architektur*, 1:44, 2:61.

<sup>29</sup>Christian prisoners of war continued to be a fixture in Cairo well into the fourteenth century and may have played a significant role in the transmission of European artistic vocabulary to their Mamluk counterparts; see Loiseau, "Frankish Captives," 41, 45–48; Behrens-Abouseif, "Mamluk Perceptions of Foreign Arts," 309–12; idem, "Funerary Complex of Sultan Qalawun," 130–31.

<sup>30</sup>Van Steenbergen, "Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo," 253–56.



materials.<sup>31</sup> Already by the early fourteenth century and certainly by the time of al-Maqrīzī, Crusader artworks were most likely items of fashion, exotica that evoked a distant foreign culture that was no longer a hostile neighbor.<sup>32</sup> An appreciation of Crusader *spolia* devoid of any triumphalist associations can be seen in a number of Mamluk monuments dating to the fourteenth century. Several architectural structures employ slender Crusader columns and floriated capitals in their decoration, or feature copies of these Crusader building elements (Fig. 5).<sup>33</sup> Crusader *spolia* in the century after the fall of Acre no longer alluded to military victory but rather referenced the cultural sophistication of the patron, admiration for the artistry and skill of Christian craftspeople, and Mamluk inclusion in a pan-Mediterranean visual culture. Divorced from any religious significance, these objects circulated in economic and cultural realms as luxury commodities and symbols of Mamluk-European interchange at a time when Mamluk interaction with Mediterranean territories was developing at a rapid pace.<sup>34</sup>

The early decades of the Mamluk Empire were ones where Crusaders constituted a convenient adversary. In their battles against the Christian armies, rulers like Baybars and Qalāwūn could style themselves as defenders of Islam, protecting the faith from infidels and polytheists. Military campaigns galvanized public support and forged a bond between the Mamluk rulers and the people they governed. The expansion of the empire also increased the legitimacy of the sultans, who only a few decades earlier had usurped power from the leaders they served. The Mamluks put their superior military power and dedication to jihad on display while accumulating plunder and glory in their offensives against the Crusaders. The Crusader states, then, appear to have served a significant political purpose for the newly-formed Mamluk dynasty. Their possession of fortified castles and limited landholdings along the eastern Mediterranean coast provided no serious military threat or challenge to the stability of the Mamluk political system; nevertheless, the Mamluk armies waged aggressive, offensive campaigns against Crusader positions because of the military glory and political legitimacy victory over non-believers would confer upon them. The Western Christians, thus, were

<sup>31</sup> Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma‘rifat duwal al-mulūk, li-Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1934–58) 1:3:951; Behrens-Abouseif, “Mamluk Perceptions,” 310; idem, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Behrens-Abouseif, “Mamluk Perceptions,” 310.

<sup>33</sup> Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, “Die Spolien,” in *Die Restaurierung der Madrasa des Amīrs Sabīq ad-Dīn Miṭqāl al-Ānūkī und die Sanierung des Darb Qirmiz in Kairo*, ed. Michael Meinecke (Mainz, 1980), 51–52, for the reuse of Crusader columns and capitals.

<sup>34</sup> Behrens-Abouseif, “Between Quarry and Magic,” 418–21; Mathews, “Mamluks and Crusaders,” 197–99.



an effective foil for the Mamluks, presenting a troublesome but not insurmountable obstacle to the expansion of their empire in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup>

In the built environment of their capital, the Mamluks devised an effective and evocative visual formula for commemorating their victories in the use of Crusader *spolia*. The physical possession of plunder concretized political power by creating permanent memorials to the subjugation of an enemy. This aesthetic played an important role in this dynasty's identity formation at a time when it was being challenged by various political adversaries. The Mamluks used Christian *spolia* in royal architectural commissions to define themselves in reference to a threatening Western military presence. The Mamluks constructed Europeans as a formidable enemy, emphasizing the qualities that made them the most problematic from a religious and political standpoint: their Christian beliefs and military prowess. The *spolia* the Mamluks appropriated from the Crusaders came from religious structures and military fortresses, the buildings that symbolized the strength of these Christian warriors. However, by the early fourteenth century, when the Christian military threat in the Holy Land was a thing of the past, the symbolic charge of Christian spoils of war diminished and these appropriated materials accumulated new, less bellicose significations.

The configuration of a Christian enemy, on the battlefield and in the visual culture of Cairene architecture, presented a satisfying picture of domination and superiority for the Mamluks. The advanced artistic achievements of European Christians, particularly the instantly recognizable visual vocabulary of the Gothic, were easily appropriated and weaponized to depict Mamluk supremacy to an appreciative audience in the capital.<sup>36</sup> The use of Crusader *spolia* allowed Mamluk rulers to make aesthetic and political statements in their architectural commissions, increasing the beauty of their monuments while proclaiming victory for Islam. The Christians, however, were always infidels but not always enemies. The Mamluks fought some Europeans while making treaties and conducting commerce with others. The multivalence of *spolia* could address the visual culture of this heterogeneous group of people from a variety of perspectives simultaneously, increasing the interpretive complexity of European art forms, materials, and techniques.<sup>37</sup> Using a visual tradition that had a long pedigree in Europe, the Mamluks employed appropriated materials to express their ascendant role in Mediterranean politics and culture in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

<sup>35</sup>Christie, *Muslims and Christians*, 110.

<sup>36</sup>For a related example concerning the adoption of the basilica plan in Mamluk architecture, see Rabbat, "In Search of a Triumphant Image," 26–27.

<sup>37</sup>Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce*, 4–23.



## Political Encounters and Cultural Interaction between Mamluks and Mongols

If the Christian Crusaders constituted the most immediate threat to Mamluk territories in terms of their proximity, the Mongols were undeniably more formidable in their military might and political ideology. The Mongols, and more specifically the Ilkhans of Iran, had earned a reputation of great military prowess and ruthlessness, pushing westward as they fulfilled a divine mandate for world domination.<sup>38</sup> Their destruction of the city of Baghdad and assassination of the Abbasid caliph in 1258 was an act that shocked and outraged Muslims throughout the Middle East. Unlike the Crusaders who merely defended the territories in their possession, the Mongols were aggressive and continually on the offensive, threatening the Mamluks' Syrian border at regular intervals with the goal of conquering Egypt and Syria.<sup>39</sup> The Mamluks scored a stunning victory at 'Ayn Jalūt in 1260, with the sultan Baybars playing a leading role in the campaign. Regardless of this resounding defeat, Ilkhanid forces continued to launch raids into Mamluk territories in Syria. Thus, from the 1260s to the signing of a Mamluk-Mongol peace treaty in 1323, hostilities between these two powers persisted, as the Mongols attacked and the Mamluks tirelessly defended their borders. The adversaries exchanged embassies and insults, carrying out a war of words through diplomatic missives. The Mamluks denigrated the Ilkhans as infidels, non-believers who, like the Christians, needed to be eradicated, while styling themselves as defenders of Islam, protecting the faith with their military might.<sup>40</sup> A final factor that contributed to the antagonism between the two powers was the real threat of a Mongol-Christian alliance. The Mongols actively pursued collaboration with European powers, sending missives and envoys to various courts in hopes of encouraging cooperation against a common enemy.

<sup>38</sup>For the Mongol ideology of world domination and its impact on the West, see Reuven Amitai, "Mongol Imperial Ideology and the Ilkhanid War against the Mamluks," in *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate*, ed. Reuven Amitai (London, 2007), 57–72; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 45–47.

<sup>39</sup>For a general overview of the Mamluk-Mongol war, see Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, and idem, "The Resolution of the Mamluk-Mongol War," in Amitai, *Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, 359–90; see also Kelly De Vries, "Meet the Mongols: Dealing with Mamluk Victory and Mongol Defeat in the Middle East in 1260," in *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages: Realities and Representations*, ed. Simon John and Nicholas Morton (Burlington, VT, 2014), 210, 219.

<sup>40</sup>See particularly Anne Broadbridge, "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 94–95, 105, 111, who notes the importance of religion for Mamluk legitimacy. See also Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 56, and Denise Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden, 2014), 226.



The totalizing conception of the Mongols as an intractable enemy of the Mamluk Empire was complicated, however, by a number of factors, the most decisive of which was the conversion of the Ilkhan elite to Islam. Tegüder Aḥmad (r. 1282–84) was the first Ilkhan ruler to convert, but his short reign did not allow the Mamluks to address this change in a concerted manner. Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam in 1295, however, required a response as the Mongols were transformed from infidels to co-religionists and the Mamluks were faced with the stigma of perpetuating war between Muslims. The Mamluks declared their superiority in the Islamic faith by noting their longer-standing adherence to the faith, questioning the sincerity of the Ilkhans' conversion, and critiquing their connection to dubious religious practices.<sup>41</sup> By cloaking themselves in the mantle of Islamic orthodoxy, the Mamluks attempted to distance themselves from the Mongols, though they too were quite recent converts. The conversion of the Ilkhan rulers, then, negated the Mamluk ideology of war against the infidel and the premises of the ongoing hostilities between the two powers needed to be recalibrated to address new religious realities.

As was the case with the Christians in the Levant, the Mamluks recognized that they could not totalize the Mongols as a monolithic enemy. Mamluk political and military strength was enhanced by a close alliance with other Mongols, the rulers of the Golden Horde, with whom they established a relationship of cooperation and mutual benefit against a shared enemy—the Ilkhans. Both allies wished to check Ilkhan aggression and territorial expansion and used their Muslim faith to establish common ground.<sup>42</sup> Their collaboration was essential for the perpetuation of the Mamluk system, as it was the lands of the Golden Horde that supplied the recruits needed to maintain the empire's army.<sup>43</sup> The ambiguity in defining a Mongol enemy was further complicated by the fact that the Ilkhans and Mamluks were essentially the same people. They both originated in Central Asia and were related ethnically and linguistically. They exchanged embassies and conducted trade with one another; Mongols formed part of the Mamluk army and refugees from Mongol lands took up residence in Cairo.<sup>44</sup> Through intermarriage and cul-

<sup>41</sup>Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven, 2017), 377–78; Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 73; idem, “The Conversion of Tegüder Ahmad to Islam,” in Amitai, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands*, 20–22; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 115.

<sup>42</sup>Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 96, 98, 105; idem, *Kingship and Ideology*, 39–42.

<sup>43</sup>Jackson, *Mongols and the Islamic World*, 213; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 103; Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders*, 109.

<sup>44</sup>Nasser Rabbat, “The Changing Concept of Mamluk in the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria,” in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study*, ed. Miura Toru and John Edward Philips (London, 2000), 92 (now in Nasser Rabbat, *Mamluk History Through Architecture: Monuments, Culture and Politics in Medieval Egypt and Syria* [London, 2010], 3–11); Jackson, *Mon-*



tural assimilation, Mongols had integrated themselves into the fabric of Mamluk society, playing a role that was cooperative and mutually beneficial rather than merely antagonistic. So, like the Christians, Mongols could be allies *and* enemies, and the visualization of the Mongols needed to manifest a similar multivalence and flexibility in order to represent effectively the complex relationship between the Mamluks and their neighbors to the east.

### Visual References to the Mongols in Mamluk Architecture

The Mamluk visual strategy for representing the enemy, established in the early years of the sultanate, was a powerful propagandistic tool for rulers whose identity centered on military prowess. It was a malleable instrument that could be applied to the Mongols as well. Mamluk rulers combined displays of belligerence and triumphalism with manifestations of cultural appreciation in public artworks that referenced the Mongols, employing the same visual tools as the ones used to represent the Crusaders. Victorious Mamluk sultans took building materials as spoils of war and erected triumphal monuments adorned with inscriptions that celebrated the defeat of Mongol foes. They also demonstrated an affinity towards the cultural products of the Persians, incorporating forms, techniques, and styles from Mongol-controlled lands into their public monuments in Cairo.<sup>45</sup>

In their triumphal mode, the Mamluks seized architectural plunder from the Mongols, displayed propagandistic victory inscriptions through their empire, and created monuments celebrating military conquests. Sultan Baybars engaged in an act of architectural appropriation when he recaptured the city of Aleppo from the Mongols. According to textual sources, Baybars took iron and nails from the Bāb Qinnasrīn and sent them to Damascus and Cairo.<sup>46</sup> No information exists about what happened to these appropriated building materials or whether they were used in another structure. So, unlike the prominent reuse of Gothic architectural elements in the Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad or the Complex of Qalāwūn, the metal objects from Aleppo were not installed in a secondary context as part of a Mamluk victory display. The plundered materials from the Mongols were admittedly more generic than the architectural elements taken from Crusader structures and perhaps did not have the symbolic resonance that would have made them central visual elements in a triumphal monument.

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*gols and the Islamic World*, 150, 220, 393, 395–96; Broadbridge, “Mamluk Legitimacy,” 93; Amitai, “Resolution of the Mamluk-Mongol War,” 366, 369–70.

<sup>45</sup>This would be an excellent example of what Rabbat, “In Search of a Triumphant Image,” 23, refers to as the “diverse ... cultural and artistic traditions” that the Mamluks brought together to forge a distinctive style.

<sup>46</sup>See Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī,” 73; Taragan, “Doors That Open Meanings,” 12.



Mongol *spolia* may not have played a significant role in Mamluk architecture, but triumphal inscriptions did, and these celebratory texts decorated buildings throughout the empire as reminders of great battles against non-Muslim adversaries. As was the case with Christian foes, the Mamluks used public inscriptions to proclaim their hostility towards the Mongols, highlighting the role of the sultan in prosecuting jihad. The Mamluk rulers who identified themselves most frequently as *mujāhidūn*—Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad—all ornamented their public monuments with laudatory, triumphal epigraphs. Baybars identified himself as a fighter against and slayer of infidels and polytheists on monuments in Syria and Palestine.<sup>47</sup> In an inscription on the Maqām Nabī Mūsá (Tomb of Moses), the sultan bears the specific title of “exterminator of Franks and Tatars.” Qalāwūn’s honorifics closely followed those of Baybars; in the foundation text of his funerary complex in Cairo, he too was celebrated as a “slayer of infidels and polytheists.”<sup>48</sup> His son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad used the same titulature multiple times on a Cairene gate, Bāb al-Mudarraǰ, emphasizing his participation in jihad against infidels.<sup>49</sup> All these texts lauded Mamluk rulers as defenders of Muslims and Islam, highlighted their sanction from God, and differentiated them from the infidels and polytheists against whom they fought so valiantly. Though belligerent and propagandistic, these texts were repetitive in form and formulaic in content. Only one inscription refers specifically to the Mongols as “Tatars” while the others employ the generic terms “infidel” and “polytheist,” labels that could refer to both Christians and Mongols simultaneously. After the conversion of Ghazan Khan to Islam in 1295, neither epithet accurately described the Mamluks’ most trenchant adversary. Honorific titles that were appropriate for Baybars and Qalāwūn, then, no longer applied to the political situation of the second and third reigns of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, when the greatest military challenge to the Mamluk empire was posed by the recently-converted Ilkhans.

Mamluk rulers also built victory monuments on or near the sites of great battles to commemorate their triumphs over the Mongols. A year after the Mamluk victory at ‘Ayn Jālūt in 1260, the sultan al-Zāhir Baybars erected a monument (a *mashhad* or *qubbat al-naṣr*) to celebrate the defeat of the Mongol enemy. Located in the vicinity of the battlefield, the building was constructed to thank God for a

<sup>47</sup>RCEA 12:123–26, #4588 (Ramleh) and #4589 (Safed); 141–43, #4612 (Maqām Nabī Mūsá); 104–6, #4556 and 128–30, #4593 (Homs). See also Taragan, “Doors That Open Meanings,” 6; Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī,” 75; Reuven Amitai, “Some Remarks on the Inscription of Baybars at Maqām Nabī Musa,” in *Mamluks and Ottomans*, ed. Wasserstein and Ayalon, 47–48, 50.

<sup>48</sup>The Monumental Inscriptions of Historic Cairo [<https://islamicinscriptions.cultnat.org>], 43.8; Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum* (Paris, 1894–1903), 1:126–28; RCEA 13:35–37, #4852.

<sup>49</sup>Monumental Inscriptions 556.4, 556.5, and 556.12; van Berchem, *Matériaux*, 1:87; RCEA 14:75; Taragan, “Mamluk Patronage,” 228.



victory against unbelievers, according to Baybars' biographer Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir.<sup>50</sup> The location of the building also recalled the biblical narrative of David's improbable victory over Goliath (Jālūt), connecting Baybars to great holy warriors of the past.<sup>51</sup> No physical trace of the monument exists and it is attested to in only one documentary source. The memory of the Mamluks' great victory lived on but it was not effectively embodied by this commemorative structure.

Another victory monument potentially associated with a Mamluk victory over the Mongols is the Qubbat al-ʿAṣāfir, located along the road between Damascus and Homs.<sup>52</sup> Built or rebuilt in 1341 by the amir Tankiz, governor of Syria and second in command to the sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, this structure commemorated the victory of the sultan's armies over the Mongols at Marj al-Ṣaffar in 1303 (Fig. 6). The building was a small, square structure with a dome, bearing an inscription that indicated its function as a victory monument.<sup>53</sup> This victory over the Mongols was significant for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as it ended Mongol incursions into Mamluk territories and paved the way for the peace treaty signed between the two parties in 1323. It was equally important for Tankiz; he served as a combatant in the battle and by commissioning this monument he could flatter the sultan while recalling his own role in the Mongols' defeat.<sup>54</sup> The battle of Marj al-Ṣaffar, however, took place thirty-eight years before the monument was built, calling into question the effectiveness of this commemorative structure. Like Baybars' *mashhad al-naṣr* at 'Ayn Jālūt, this structure lacked strong symbolic resonance and fell into oblivion as its original commemorative function faded with time. The ambiguous form of Mamluk victory monuments and their lack of

<sup>50</sup>Thomas Leisten, "Mashhad al-Nasr: Monuments of War and Victory in Medieval Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 19–20; Taragan, "Reusing the Past," 57. See Syedah Fatima Sadeque, *Baybars I of Egypt* (Dacca, 1980), 115–16, for the English translation of Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's text, and 28–29 for the Arabic transcription.

<sup>51</sup>Taragan, "Reusing the Past," 57; Aigle, "Legitimizing a Low-born, Regicide Monarch," 5, 12.

<sup>52</sup>Ellen Kenney, *Power and Patronage in Medieval Syria: The Architecture and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nāṣirī* (Chicago, 2009), 193–95; Leisten, "Mashhad al-Nasr," 20–21. Jean-Michel Mouton and Bassam Dayoub ("Les Qubbat al-Naṣr de Damas et de ses environs à l'époque Mamlouke," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras, VII*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen, Kristof D'Hulster, and Jo van Steenberghe [Leuven, 2013], 508, 513, 517) argue that this structure was erected to commemorate a victory of an amir over the governor of Syria in 1341.

<sup>53</sup>The inscription is reproduced in English in Kenney, *Power and Patronage*, 193, and in Arabic in *RCEA* 15:203–4, #5929.

<sup>54</sup>For the import of this victory, see Amitai, "Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War," 361; see Kenney, *Power and Patronage*, 195, for Tankiz's motivations in constructing the monument.





textual and figural detail meant that they soon lost any connection to the event they were meant to memorialize.<sup>55</sup>

So, though the Mamluks employed the same visual tools to proclaim triumph over the Mongols, they were not successful in formulating an effective, specific, and memorable set of forms to represent their victories.<sup>56</sup> Triumphant *spolia* played no role in visualizing defeated Mongol armies. Victory inscriptions employed the vocabulary of holy war, but the general terms “infidel” and “polytheist” described both Franks and Mongols equally well. Like the formulaic epigraphs, monuments erected to celebrate Mamluk victories over the Mongols were generic in nature with no distinctive visual forms to differentiate them from other, more common commemorative structures like tombs. Their location in the hinterland of Syria also deprived them of visibility and propagandistic force, though victory monuments did not enjoy much popularity in Mamluk Cairo either. In either textual or visual modes, statements of triumph over the Mongols remained ambiguous and ineffective.

Thus, a compelling and emphatic visualization of victory over Mongol adversaries eluded Mamluk rulers. This lack of a recognizable visual vocabulary could be explained in part by the nature of the military conflict between Mamluks and Mongols, one that differed from that of the campaigns against the Crusaders. The Mamluks fought an offensive war against the Latin Christians with the intent of conquering territories and eliminating the Crusader presence in the Levant. The taking of architectural trophies amounted to a symbolic appropriation of the land, marked by the seizure of territory and structures from the enemy. The Mamluk war with the Mongols, in contrast, was a defensive one in which the central concern was the protection and consolidation of the empire’s borders, not the annexation of Mongol lands.<sup>57</sup> The Mamluks were simply safeguarding what they already possessed and did not have as their primary aim an aggressive advance into Mongol territory to seize citadels and strongholds. Symbols of conquered territory therefore did not accurately visualize the nature of the conflict.

In representing Mamluk triumph over the Mongols, textual sources spoke more eloquently than visual materials. Monumental inscriptions, documentary sources, biographies, and historical chronicles all addressed the defeat of the Ilkhans in strident, propagandistic terms, noting the formidable nature of the enemy and the historical importance of stopping the Mongol westward advance. The written

<sup>55</sup> See Leisten, “Mashhad al-Nasr,” 22–23, for a discussion of why these victory monuments did not stand the test of time. See also Mouton and Dayoub, “Les Qubbat al-Nasr,” 515–20; van Steenbergen, “Ritual, Politics, and the City in Mamluk Cairo,” 257.

<sup>56</sup> Rabbat, “In Search of a Triumphant Image,” 23, notes how some Mamluk visual experiments were less effective than others and were quickly discarded.

<sup>57</sup> Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement*, 26.



word effectively conveyed Mamluk attitudes toward their enemy, commemorating victories while emphasizing the significance of jihad. The Mamluks possessed a sophisticated textual vocabulary of military triumph and religious difference but they did not devise an analogous set of visual tools to represent their Mongol adversaries.

In contrast to these limited references to the Mongols as enemies and infidels, the majority of cultural borrowings from Ilkhan lands displayed an appreciation of Persian culture. Appropriated Persian styles, forms, and techniques, combined with the use of craftspeople and materials from Mongol-controlled Persia, argue for an admiration of Persian aesthetics. This positive attitude towards Persian visual culture manifested itself from the beginning of the fourteenth century and persisted regardless of the political situation. So, whether there was active war or détente between the Mamluks and Mongols, the cultural influence of Persia pervaded the Mamluk visual arts. The Qalāwūnid dynasty in particular employed borrowed artistic styles from Mongol lands, perhaps due to the family's close personal ties to the Mongols. The Qalāwūnids had intermarried extensively with the Mongols and some of the rulers' most trusted amirs were of Mongol origin.<sup>58</sup> The ruling family's avid artistic patronage combined with its cultural affinity toward the Mongols made fourteenth-century Cairo a propitious environment for Ilkhan Persian culture to flourish. Al-Maqrīzī mentioned a workshop from Tabriz brought to Cairo to decorate the religious structures commissioned by sultans and amirs.<sup>59</sup> This group of artisans is believed to have been involved in the creation of the distinctive spiral minarets on the mosque of Qawṣūn; it has also been credited with the Iranian-style tilework that adorns a number of monuments in Cairo: the Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the Mosque of al-Māridānī, and the Khānqāh of Baybars, to name a few (Figs. 7 and 8).<sup>60</sup> The green faience dome on the Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, for example, resembles Persian dome decoration in its color, profile, and use of ceramic tiles (Fig. 9). Tile decoration did not form part of a standard Mamluk ornamental repertoire, so artists and patrons

<sup>58</sup>Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 4; Reuven Amitai, "Mamluks of Mongol Origin and Their Role in Early Mamluk Political Life," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 135, 137.

<sup>59</sup>Diana Bakhom, "The Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop in Cairo: A Case Study of Its Influence on the Mosque of Emir Altunbugha al-Maridani," *Muqarnas* 33, no. 1 (2016): 17–18; Chahinda Karim, "The Mosque of Amir Qawsun in Cairo (730/1330)," in *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlon*, ed. Jill Edwards (Cairo, 2002), 31; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 172.

<sup>60</sup>Michael Meinecke, "Die Mamlukischen Fayencemosaikdekoration: Eine Werkstätte aus Tabriz in Kairo (1330–1350)," *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976–77): 86–87, provides a list of monuments with this type of decoration. See also Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 90, 164, 177; O'Kane, *Mosques of Egypt*, 87, 97. Bakhom, "Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop," 18–22, addresses the mosaic tile decoration on the Mosque of al-Māridānī, while Karim, "Mosque of Qawsun," 43–44, notes Persian influences in the mosque of the influential amir Qawṣūn.



made a conscious choice to employ materials and motifs that were recognizably foreign and specifically associated with Iran.<sup>61</sup> Other examples of borrowings from Persian lands can be seen in the façade of the Madrasah of Sultan Ḥasan that resembles Seljuq monuments in Anatolia and the stucco decoration on the mihrab of the Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad that emulates ornamental styles from the city of Tabrīz (Fig. 10).

The Mamluks thus approached Persian culture in a similar way to that of the Europeans they encountered, enthusiastically incorporating Persian materials, styles, and techniques into the decoration of their public monuments. They brought Persian craftspeople to the Mamluk capital to ornament the most prestigious buildings in the city. Like the distinctive Gothic forms used in a number of Mamluk structures, these Persian borrowings were recognizable and easily distinguished from local ornamental styles. The foreign beauty of cultural appropriations served as a marker of distinction, enhancing the monument while demonstrating the sophistication of the patron. European Gothic and Persian art expanded the visual vocabulary and enlivened the often somber appearance of Mamluk architecture. In the case of both cultures, aesthetic appreciation far outweighed and outlived any associations with military conflict and triumph.

In attempting to assess the significance of cultural imports from Mongol lands, a distinction must be made then between Ilkhanid (i.e., Mongol) and Persian culture. Were the Mamluks influenced by artworks from Ilkhanid Persia because they were Mongol or because they were Persian? In the case of the mosaic tilework and stucco decoration, it appears that these media were borrowed because they came from Persia, a land and culture with longstanding artistic traditions admired across the Islamic world for their quality and beauty. There was nothing particularly Mongol about them; in fact, both Mongols and Mamluks availed themselves of the rich visual repertoire developed by Persian artists over centuries. If these borrowings were more cultural than political, referencing the quality and longevity of Persian culture rather than Mongol military aggression, then why did the Mamluks not create any distinctive visual forms with which to represent the Mongol enemy on their architectural monuments? This absence might be explained in part by the eclectic and syncretic nature of Mongol architecture itself. On the one hand, it tended to emulate local styles and decorative traditions, while on the other its popularity paled in comparison to that of small-scale, portable artworks preferred by this predominantly nomadic people. Identifying specifically Mongol architectural forms that could be appropriated presented a formidable challenge for Mamluk builders. The Mongols were syncretic in their artistic influences, incorporating aspects of East Asian and Western European artworks while emphasizing the artistic legacy of Persia. This was particularly

<sup>61</sup>Bakhoum, "Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop," 19.



true for the Ilkhans, who attempted to demonstrate their legitimacy through associations with illustrious Persian rulers from the past.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the Mongols could not be considered innovators in the artistic realm but excelled rather at fusing indigenous traditions into a new synthesis. The amorphous nature of Mongol artistic traditions impeded the development of a distinctive visual branding like the Gothic for Western Europe.

The most compelling explanation for the lack of appropriation of Mongol artistic forms in Mamluk architecture, however, might be that both Mongols and Mamluks drew inspiration from the same source: the rich visual culture of Persia. Mamluks and Mongols thus employed similar Persian forms and style in their artworks. In their approach to artistic production, then, the Mongols and Mamluks greatly resembled one another. Without strong artistic traditions of their own, the Mamluks avidly borrowed cultural references from the rich visual repertoire of the ancient and medieval Mediterranean and Near East. The Mamluks, however, appropriated actual objects—building materials and spoils of war—and reused them in their artistic commissions, while the Mongols employed artistic styles and motifs in their artworks, a type of borrowing that is more subtle and difficult to define. Both empires were ruled by outsiders who were foreign to the people and traditions in their domains and eager to integrate themselves into the dominant culture. As a result, both synthesized multiple artistic trends from the territories they now controlled while aligning themselves with the political and cultural traditions of Persia. Visually, the Mongols had little to offer that the Mamluks had not already appropriated themselves.

## Conclusion

In confrontations with Crusaders and Mongols in the early decades of their rule, the Mamluks pursued similar political and visual strategies. They waged jihad against non-believers while following a more accommodating approach of diplomatic and economic cooperation. The Mamluks incorporated references to these two adversaries into their visual culture, representing military triumph but also admiration for the artistic traditions of their enemies. Against the Crusaders, the Mamluks waged an aggressive, offensive jihad aimed at eliminating Christian strongholds in the Levant. While they were campaigning against the Mongols, however, the Mamluks were willing to enter into diplomatic truces and commercial agreements with Christian territories. In comparison to the Mongols, the Crusaders were of secondary importance, threatening because of their potential alliance with the Ilkhans and the use of their ports as a landing point for new

<sup>62</sup>Charles Melville, “The Mongols in Iran,” in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*, ed. Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (New Haven, 2002), 54–55.



waves of Christian warriors. Mamluk rulers could gain legitimacy as *mujāhidūn* against the Crusaders without confronting a truly formidable adversary. In their visualization of the Christian enemy, the Mamluks employed the readily recognizable vocabulary of the Gothic to express military triumph and aesthetic appreciation. Gothic architectural forms could serve as spoils of war or manifestations of the beauty and refinement of European art and architecture. The Mongols, however, were a different type of enemy, powerful and aggressive in their attacks on the Mamluks' Syrian borders. As was the case with the Crusaders, the Mamluks pursued a two-pronged strategy against the Mongols, allying with the Golden Horde to thwart the Ilkhans while keeping commercial routes open to ensure the availability of slaves for the Mamluk army. The iconography of victory devised to represent Ilkhan enemies consisted of victory monuments and inscriptions, but this visual branding was ineffectual and ephemeral. The Mamluks' use of Persian forms, materials, and techniques, in contrast, had a long-lasting legacy in Mamluk art and architecture, displaying a common Mamluk and Mongol appreciation for the visual culture of Persia.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mamluks devised an iconography of triumph with which to visualize their relationship with Mongols and Crusaders. Mamluk rulers formulated an effective visual vocabulary for the Christians in the Levant but their time as a significant adversary of the Mamluks was short-lived. The Mongols remained a threat for far longer, but the Mamluks never succeeded in formulating a distinctive symbolism of triumph to characterize them. A more lasting artistic achievement in Mamluk architecture was the incorporation of foreign styles, materials, and influences, as well as the contribution of foreign craftspeople. Early in their reign, the Mamluks devised an aesthetic of cultural inclusion that borrowed freely from the many cultures they encountered through trade, war, and diplomacy. They employed appropriations from adversaries to define a distinct and eclectic visual culture that differentiated them from other polities and conferred legitimacy on a Mamluk state in formation.



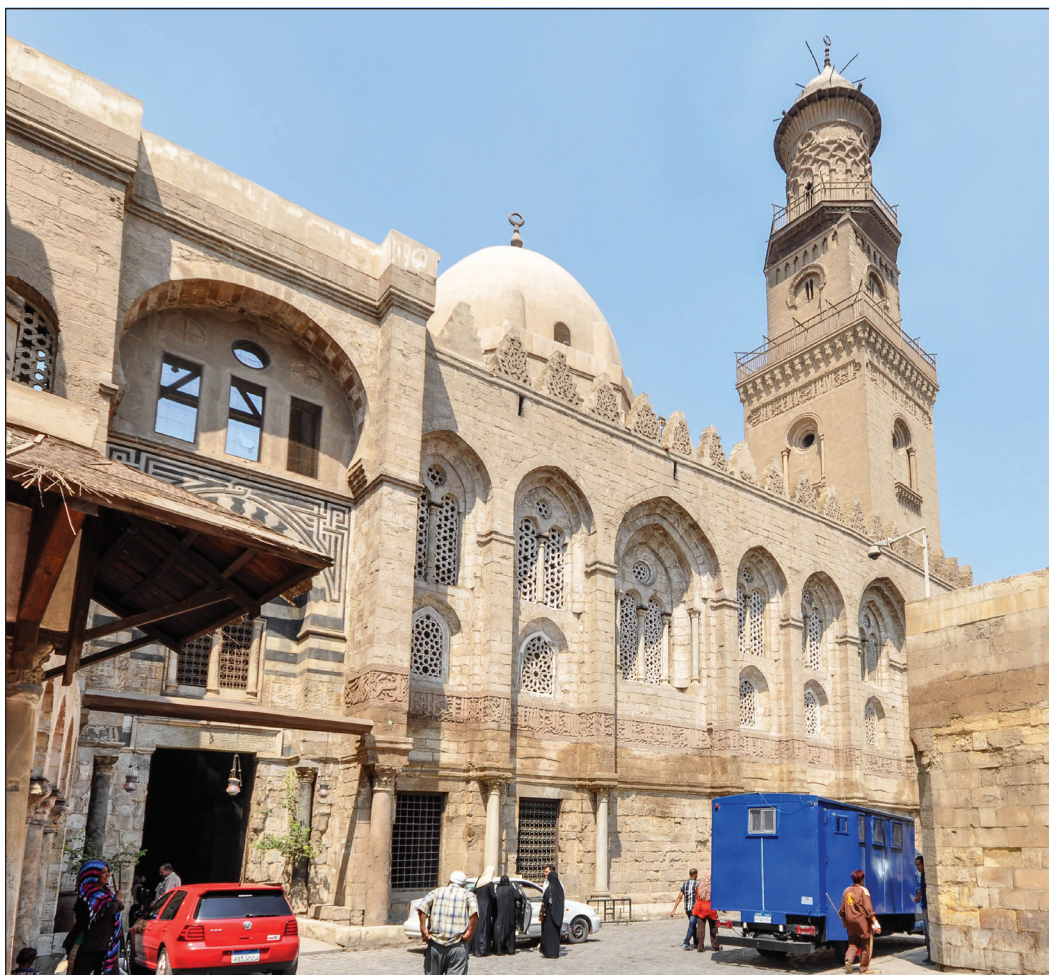


Figure 1. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, exterior street façade. (Photo by Jorge Lás-car)



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Figure 2. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, window grille on façade. (Photo by Mariam Mohamed Kamal)



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Figure 3. Cairo, Qalāwūn Complex, detail of window form. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 4. Cairo, Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, entrance portal. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 5. Cairo, Madrasah of Sultan Ḥasan, Crusader columns flanking the mihrab. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 6. Qubbat al-ʿAṣāfir. (Photo by Bassam Dayoub)



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Figure 7. Cairo, Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, tile decoration on minaret. (Photo by Sailko)



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Figure 8. Cairo, Mosque of al-Māridānī, tile decoration on portal. (Photo by Bernard O’Kane)



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Figure 9. Cairo, Citadel Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, green tile dome. (Photo by Ahmed Younis Sif Saad)



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Figure 10. Cairo, Madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, stucco decoration on mihrab. (Photo by Ahmed al-Badawy)



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