Religious architecture constitutes the largest group of buildings surviving from the Mamluk period, but an unusually good idea of domestic architecture can also be gleaned from the remarkably large number of surviving buildings, descriptions, and endowment deeds. While none of the royal palaces remains, several residences of the amirs have survived from the late fourteenth century. These are often rambling structures of many stories, as earlier buildings were frequently incorporated by successive owners. They often had shops along the street and stable and service areas on the ground floor. The main reception areas were elevated and surmounted by living quarters which had mashrabiyya screens to provide privacy, light, and ventilation. The best preserved is the palace of Yashbak min Mahdi (d. 1482), located to the west of the complex of Hasan. It was once a princely residence erected for Qawson, cup-bearer and son-in-law of al-Nasir Muhammad. It eventually passed to Yashbak, the powerful amir who was first secretary, regent of the realm, and commander-in-chief under his cousin Qutayba. No Mamluk before him had amassed so many positions simultaneously. A magnificent portal [122], surmounted by that of the mosque of Hasan [107], opens to the north-east. A deep porch crowned with an extraordinary muqarnas hood supporting a gabled dome was added by Yashbak to the front of Qawson’s already elaborate entrance. The earlier entrance had an arched portal worked in black and white marble and crowned with a muqarnas hood leading to a square domed vestibule with muqarnas hoods on the axis. The massive vaulted halls on the ground floor served as stables and storerooms and supported the sumptuous reception halls above. It followed the typical form of a large roofed court (Arab. ṣan‘a‘), measuring approximately twelve meters on a side, with broad iwan on the longitudinal axis and recesses on the transverse axis. Despite its ruined condition, the importance of this residence can be determined from the quality and size of the pointed horseshoe arches worked in ashlar masonry that define its major lines. One has to imagine the splendid marble pavements, carved, painted, and gilded wooden ceilings, central fountain, stained glass windows, and turned wooden grilles which once adorned the interior.

Most of the middle-class population of Cairo lived in more modest multi-unit buildings, where living quarters rented by the month were arranged above commercial structures, such as caravanserais and shops. In general, each apartment was a duplex; the lower floor had a latrine, niche for water jugs, and reception hall, while the upper floor included the sleeping areas. Usually there was no kitchen for food was bought already prepared. A good example is the urban caravanserais (Arab. ṣan‘a‘) and tawqim (Arab. rab‘) of the sultan Qansuq al-Ghawri (d. 1101–1107) near al-Azhar. It was an income-producing property for his funerary complex (1503–4), whose two buildings were erected on either side of the qaṣba nearby. A monumental entrance on the north leads to a rectangular court [123], with two stories of storerooms for merchandise behind an arcade. A separate entrance from the street leads to the three stories of triple apartments above. Similar tenements are known from Cairo, Aleppo, and Damascus, but in general the Cairo examples are higher in proportion to their area, and the street façades have windows in their upper stories. These urban caravanserais were normally organized according to trade and nationality.

While Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz were under the direct control of the Mamluks, most of the Yemen was governed by the Rasulid dynasty (1299–1454), who descended from an ambassador (Arab. ʿaṣr) sent by the Abbasid caliph in the twelfth century. The close relations that the Rasulids maintained with Mamluk Egypt can be seen in their architecture as well as the other arts (see Chapter 8). Sultans and their families, officials, scholars, and mystics commissioned mosques, madrasas, fountain houses, hospices, palaces, and pavilions in Ta‘izz, the capital and primary residence of the court, as well as Zabid, Hays, Jibla, Ibb, and other centers. The three buildings to survive from the Rasulid period in Ta‘izz were all madrasas, although the Muzaffariyya complex (1249–93) has lost its teaching rooms and appears to be a mosque. The Mu‘tahiyas (1302), founded by the wife and mother of sultans, preserves exquisite painted decoration on the interior, but the largest and most complex is the Ashrafiyya (1307–1401). It is a large square (147 by 137 meters) with projecting portals on three sides leading to an open-roofed loggia which runs around three sides of an inner square [124]. The inner square, measuring twenty-seven meters to a side, is divided into three zones. The southern one contains two multistoried minarets flanking a domed vestibule and rooms for teaching. In the center is a small square courtyard (ten by eleven meters) flanked by rectangular vaulted halls. One serves as a tomb chamber, and three other tombs covered with lobed domes have been added in the court itself. To the north lies the prayer hall, which, like a typical Rasulid mosque, consists of a large domed bay flanked by two pairs of smaller domed units. The exterior of the qibla wall, which faces the town, is enriched with superimposed blind arcades and cresting, and much of the interior is sumptuously decorated with carved and painted stucco. The large dome over the prayer hall [125] is supported on muqarnas squinches and a sixteen-sided zone in which eight scalloped niches alternate with eight windows. The cupola itself is decorated with magnificent calligraphic fringes in white and gold around the base and a white calligraphic rosette in the center. The two zones of calligraphy are linked by an exquisite floral arabesque in dark blue, gold, brown, and white. The tomb chambers, although
The Arts in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluks

Architecture was the preeminent art of the Mamluk period and the Mamluks' patronage of architecture defined many of the other arts, which produced fittings and furnishings for their charitable foundations. Such diverse objects as glass lamps, brass candlesticks, paper Koran manuscripts, and wooden minbars can all be understood within the continuous traditions of individual media as well as patronage by an individual or the furnishing of a particular building. Except for manuscripts of the Koran, luxury books were not as important as in the Iranian world, and, other than manuals of horsemanship, illustrated books were rarely enjoyed by members of the court, probably because the Mamluks were of Turkish origin and did not grow up in the Arabic literary culture. Without the model provided by the ruling class, the production of illustrated books never enjoyed widespread commercial popularity, although large numbers of unillustrated histories and chronicles were commissioned. As self-made men, the Mamluks were extremely conscious of their status: elaborate ceremonial punctuated their daily life, and an individual’s rank was immediately visible in his dress. Many of the wares produced for the Mamluks therefore were marked with prominent emblems of ownership.

The two greatest periods of Mamluk art coincide with the reigns of al-Nasir Muhammad (1294–1340, with interruptions) and al-Ashraf Qal‘ubay (1468–90), when a variety of crafts was patronized by the sultans and their entourage. The period between the two is often considered one of decline, attributable to the ravages of the Black Death and subsequent plagues, mismanagement of the agricultural and commercial sectors, and the growth of European mercantilism. While it was undeniably a period of depopulation and economic upheaval, luxury goods continued to be produced, albeit on a more limited scale as the cost of labor and materials increased. The price of an astrolabe, for example, doubled following the Black Death. Indeed, the most luxurious manuscripts of the Koran and the most sumptuous silk textiles belong to this intermediate period.

Individual media varied in importance over time. Enamelled glassware, for example, was produced in the first half of the period, but the industry seems to have died out in the fifteenth century. All known examples of Mamluk carpets, in contrast, are attributed to the very end of the period. Despite the grand tradition of ceramic production in Egypt, ceramics played a relatively minor role, probably because fine Chinese porcelains were easily available. The preeminent medium throughout the period was metalwork. Unlike the Iranian world, where royal patrons had silver and gold plate which was later melted down in times of financial crisis, Mamluk patrons had inlaid brasses and bronze, and large numbers of these pieces have survived. Metal utensils, such as ewers, basins, and candlesticks, played an important role in court ceremonial, and Koran stands and boxes were endowed to charitable foundations. The extraordinary inlaid brasses of the first half of the period generally gave way in the later years to simpler engraved pieces. Throughout the period the designs and motifs developed on metalwares were copied in the other arts. The typical layout of bands of alternating cartouches and roundels, for example, was copied on glass lamps and later used for carpet borders.

Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo, the principal cities of the Mamluk realm, were important centers for trade between the Mediterranean world and the East. The prosperous cities of southern Europe had an apparently insatiable demand for the textiles, spices (particularly pepper and ginger), and drugs available in Mamluk bazaars; these goods were traded for wood, metals (particularly silver and copper), woolens, and eventually glass and paper. The Mediterranean trade is particularly well documented in European archives, but maritime and overland trade with Iran, India, and China was even more extensive. The prosperous dwellers in Mamluk cities were not only merchants but also consumers, who showed a decided taste for oriental fabrics and ceramics. The designs and motifs of which were often incorporated into the local vocabulary. Thus by the middle of the fourteenth century such Chinese motifs as chrysanthemum, peony, and lona flowers were used to decorate architecture and most of the portable arts.

EARLY PERIOD

The earliest dated example of metalwork produced under Mamluk rule in Egypt is a brass candlestick made by Muhammad b. Hasan al-Mawsili (from Mosul) at Cairo in 1296–70 [1296]. It has the typical form of a truncated conical base supporting a cylindrical neck and truncated conical socket, but its profile is distinctively squat. The surface, once impeccably inlaid in silver and gold, is divided into horizontal bands. The largest have rows of containers containing arabesque friezes all around a geometric interlace alternating with concave-enclosed cartouches containing knotted pseudo-Kufic inscriptions. Above and below are friezes of running animals. The neck is covered with latticework interrupted by five quatrefoils with figures holding tambourines, lutes, and cymbals. These figured compositions are executed with extremely fine detail. The organization of the decoration in horizontal bands of roundels and cartouches, the superb craftsmanship, and the figurative compositions follow the earlier style of metalwork made in Mosul and Damascus. This is not surprising since Muhammad b. Hasan identifies himself as al-mawsili, “from Mosul,” in the inscription on the shoulder.

A great many candlesticks survive from the Mamluk period, and their importance is clear from the descriptions of Mamluk ceremonies preserved by the historian al-Maqrizi. On 7 Jamada I 735/14 January 1334 the sultan al-Nasir Muhammad sat at the palace gate while his ants approached him according to rank, presenting 3050 candles weighing 3060 qintars (hundredweights) in elaborately decorated candlesticks. The finest were those of Sanjar al-Jawl, the foundations for the imperial styles of the period after 1500, Mamluk architecture had a restricted impact outside of Cairo, where traditional formulas were repeated in an uneasy balance with new Ottoman ones (see Chapter 17). Only in the nineteenth century, when the wonders of Mamluk architecture were rediscovered, did it become a source for a new orientalist style, one that was accepted even in the Ottoman capital itself [1390].
who had had them made in Damascus. Seven months later on the eve of the marriage of al-Nasir’s favourite son Anuq, the amirs again presented candles throughout the night; in the morning the amirs’ wives presented their gifts and dancers while musicians beat their tambourines. With its decoration of musicians, the candlestick by Muhammad b. Hasan could well have been made for a similar occasion during the reign of Baybars I. This. Mamlik candlestick differs from earlier examples in the importance of the inscription band over the figural panels. With a few notable exceptions, this epigraphic style would come to characterize Mamlik metalwork for the next two and a half centuries.

The most notable exception and the most famous example of Mamlik metalwork is a large inlaid basin known as the "Baptistère de Saint-Louis" [127, 128]. The basin is totally spurious; the basin can have no connection with Louis IX of France, who died well before it was made, and its first recorded use for baptism dates from the fourteenth century. In shape it belongs to a well-known type of basin with incurving sides and flaring rim, such as the D’Arenberg Basin in Washington made for the last Ayyubid sultan. Such basins were used for the ceremonial washing of hands and were usually made in sets with matching ewers. The organization of the decoration on the Baptistère follows the Ayyubid precedent of horizontal registers with roundels alternating with cartouches. It diverges from the candlestick and most other pieces of Mamlik metalwork in the absence of epigraphic bands and the total reliance on the extraordinarily detailed and superbly executed figural compositions that cover most of the exterior and interior surfaces. On the exterior, the central band is framed by frises of varied running animals interrupted by roundels, now filled with fleur-de-lys. The four cartouches of the main band alternate with four roundels depicting mounted figures. Two wear hats and cloaks and bear a dagon or a spear, while the two in the alternating roundels wear turbans, robes, and boots. One attacks a lion with a sword; the other carries a pole staff. Twenty other figures are depicted in the rectangular panels. They can be similarly divided into two groups on the basis of their dress and facial features: huntsmen or servants, and sword-bearing figures with Mongolian features. The former wear hats and are armed; the latter wear turbans and carry swords. The hair of the former hangs free, while that of the latter is tied.

The interior of the basin has a similarly arranged alternating roundels and panels between animal frises. Two of the roundels have been covered with painted escutcheons, while the other two depict enthroned figures, each flanked by a sword-bearer and secretary. The panels show two hunting scenes and two battle scenes, in which figures wear a third type of headgear. The distinctive physiognomy and dress distinguish three types of figures: indigenous servants and hunters, Mamlik amirs, and Mongol enemies. The base is covered with fantastic animals inhabited by crabs, eels, tortoises, frogs, a lizard, wild duck, pelican, crocodile, and two harpies. The superb craftsmanship, precision of detail, and specificity of figural type make this the masterpiece of all Mamlik and perhaps all Islamic metalwork. The maker was justly proud of his work, for the master (Arab. wa’il am) Muhammad b. al-Zayn signed it in six different places: one formal signature under the rim and five more informal signatures on representations of metal objects and thrones within the scenes.

The basin bears no date or identification of a specific patron, yet the brilliance of the conception, quality of the execution, and specificity of the decoration make it impossible to believe that it was made to be sold on the open market. The specificity of the representations led D. S. Rice to identify the bearded figure wearing a short-sleeved tunic and carrying a mace as the amir Salar (d. 1310; see Chapter 6). His boots, unlike those of all the other figures, are decorated with a trapezoidal circular shield, which corresponds exactly to the Salar’s emblem: a three-fielded shield of which the central field is black and the other two white. Salar was somewhat of a dandy, and favored a distinctive short-sleeved or sleeveless tunic which was named after him (Arab. qab’i salar). This identification has led to the conventional dating of the basin (1290–1310). Although it is unlikely that Salar was the intended recipient of the basin, for he would then have been the focus of the decoration, his role as one of the attendant amirs makes it plausible that Salar commissioned it as a gift for the sultan. The specificity of the representations has also led scholars to suggest that the scenes depict actual events and have narrative content, as do works from the contemporary Persian world. It is far more likely, however, that the images substitute for the laudatory inscriptions that give the names, titles, and attributes of the patron normally found on contemporary Mamlik metalwork. An unique basin made for al-Nasir Muhammad [129], for example, has much the same arrangement of panels interrupted by roundels as on Ibn al-Zayn’s basin. The roundels, however, bear the sultan’s epigraphic inscriptions and the panels bear the dedicatory inscription: “Glory to our master the sultan, al-Malik al-Nasir, the devout, the warrior, the defender of the faith, nasser al-dunya wa-l-din, Muhammad b. Qala’un.” Such formal inscriptions, which invoke glory and prosperity on the owner, are exactly paralleled by the representations on Ibn al-Zayn’s basin, which depict the good Mamlik life. The medallions of enthroned figures are understandable as rulers’ emblems; so too must be the hunters and riders. Everything and everybody in Mamlik society was identified by signs and emblems: buildings, metalwork, glassware, ceramics, animals, and people were marked with signs of ownership.

Although the patron of the Baptistère cannot be identified, other work of Ibn al-Zayn can. The Yasouk bowl, a small bowl (diameter 17.2 cm) with figurative decoration is signed by him on a taaza carried by a seated amir, just like the informal signatures on the Baptistère. A stunning mirror with personifications of signs of the zodiac is signed “the work of the master Muhammad.” (Arab. amal al-mu’allim muhammad), using the same formula as the formal signature on the Baptistère. A magnificent brass basin prepared for silver and gold inlay with figural scenes and animal bands is a virtual twin to the Baptistère and must also be the work of Ibn al-Zayn. The style of Muhammad b. al-Zayn on these pieces is characterized by witty and ingenious figural compositions, fluid draughtsmanship, and impeccable execution, with particular emphasis on facial expressions and details of...
In addition to objects for court ceremonial, elaborate metal furnishings were also commissioned for Mamluk charitable foundations. These include splendid doors, window-grilles, chandeliers, and boxes for multi-part manuscripts of the Koran. Two such boxes in Cairo and one in Berlin can be dated to the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad, when Koran manuscripts in thirty volumes were first introduced into Egypt. They are square wooden boxes on four short legs, covered with plates of brass, inlaid with silver and gold, bound with bands, and attached to the wooden core with studs, they all measure over forty centimeters to a side and nearly thirty centimeters high. An angular lid is attached with hinges and fastens in front with a hasp. The interior is divided into two compartments, each partitioned to hold fifteen small, slender volumes. All three boxes are decorated with large floral inscriptions on the body and stylized Kufic inscriptions on the lid against a ground of floral arabesques. Other decorative motifs include rosettes, lotus and peony flowers and, singularly, branches of grapes on the lid of the example in the Cairo Museum. The artists’ signatures are modestly placed under the clasp so that they are invisible when the box is closed. The main inscription on the box from al-Azhar [1322] asks God to prolong the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad; the other two are inscribed with well-known Koranic verses. Although the hasp has been replaced on the box in the Cairo Museum, the al-Azhar box was signed by Ahmad b. Bara al-Mawsili (from Mosul) in 1322–3, and the one in Berlin was made by Muhammad b. Sunqur and inlaid by Haiji Yusuf al-Ghawabi. Five years later Muhammad b. Sunqur also made a large hexagonal box. All these pieces represent the finest of Mamluk metalwork, with the harmonious combination of epigraphic and vegetal motifs highlighted by the contrasting colors of the metals.

Thirty-part manuscripts of the Koran were made in the 1320s for public readings in the khanqahs patronized by the Mamluk elite. The Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, who visited Cairo in 1352, attended a Sufi ritual in a khanqah and described how copies of Korans in thirty volumes were brought out so that each Sufi could read a section. Perhaps the most remarkable example of a multi-volume manuscript of the Koran commissioned by a Mamluk for his khanqah is that made for the khanqah of Baybars al-Jasharangi in 1304–6. The manuscript is unusually large (45 by 32 cm) and comprises seven volumes, each with 155 folios, a unique format for Mamluk Koran manuscripts. Such a grand format, totaling well over one thousand folios, was remarkable in its time, and this very manuscript is mentioned in the endowment deed of the khanqah of Baybars (see Chapter 6), where “a reader of the main Koran [is] in charge of reading from the special Koran consisting of seven parts written in gold and made nafq by the founder.” The Mamluk historian Ibn Iyas (1448–ca. 1524) also preserves an unusually complete account of this manuscript. In 750 [1350–6] the atabeg Baybars al-Jasharangi began to build his khanqah: “It is said that when the building was completed, shaykh Sharaf al-Din b. al-Wahhid wrote a copy of the Koran in seven parts for the atabeg Baybars. It was written on Baghdad paper in naskh script. It is said that Baybars spent 16,000 dinars on these volumes so that they could be written in gold. It was placed in the khanqah and is one of the beauties of the age.” A project of this scale had to have been a collaborative effort, and it is no surprise that a team of artists was assembled. The team was headed by the calligrapher Sharaf al-Din Muhammad b. Sharaf b. Yusuf al-Kahib al-Zar’i al-Misi, known as Ibn al-Wahhid, one of the outstanding practitioners of the art in the early fourteenth century. Born in Damascus in 1240, he trained in Baghdad under Yaqut al-Musta’Simi (see Chapter 3) and others, before removing to Cairo, where he died in 1311. Ibn al-Wahhid was assisted by three illuminators, the two masters Abu Bâqar (known as Sandal) and Muhammad b. Mubâdir, and their assistant, Aydughli b. ‘Abdallah al-Hadri. The overall design of each volume is the same, showing that the project had a single director. Each volume opens with a double frontispiece [351], containing the number of the volume within an elaborate trellis pattern. The six lines of script on the text pages are written in gold shakhlak and outlined with a black hair-like line that gives the script its name (ash‘ar, or “hairs”). Chapter headings are written in red, and marginal markers indicate groups of five and ten verses. The opening pages of each volume are distinguished by four lines of a slightly larger script surrounded by reserve panels on a ground drawn finely in red, arabesques in the case of Sandal and geometric patterns in the case of Ibn Mubâdir. The design of the colophon pages in Ibn Mubâdir’s volumes repeats the opening folios, while those of Sandal differ. The signatures in the colophons allow the work of Sandal and Ibn Mubâdir to be distinguished, but it is...
unclear what the contribution of Aydughli was. He is said to have "illuminated" (Arab. zannama) all the volumes, which was mean that he painted in the gold or polychrome.

Although it stands at the head of a tradition, the Baybars Koran manuscript differs in size, format, and script from all the others produced in the first decades of the fourteenth century. 26 Ten other dated manuscripts, some of which are connected directly with important Mamluk or their intimates, make it possible to delineate the style with precision and examine the individual contributions of calligraphers and illuminators. 27 The likes of the Baybars Koran were not seen for another fifty years, although Sandal and his associates illuminated at least ten other manuscripts of the Koran in the first three decades of the fourteenth century in Cairo. They share many of the decorative motifs found in the Baybars Koran, but they are all single volumes and much smaller in size, averaging some 35 by 26 centimeters, and, with one exception, are written in a robust small or medium naskh (cursive) script.

Such features of the Baybars Koran as the unusually large size, rectangular blocks of repeat patterns, the prominence of hexagons and octagons, the borders surrounding each half of a double frontispiece, and the exploding compositions of leafy show the impact of manuscripts made in the Ilkhanid domains, particularly those by Yaqut al-Musta’simini and his circle in Baghdad. The impact of Islamic models on Mamluk manuscripts of the Koran has long been recognized, but it was usually attributed to the impact of a single Iranian manuscript, a thirty-part manuscript of the Koran copied at Hamadan in 1313, which was endowed by an amir of al-Nasir Muhammad to the amir’s mausoleum at Cairo in 1326. 28 The investigation of these early Mamluk manuscripts of the Koran shows that calligraphers and illuminators trained in the Baghdad tradition, like other artists, had already migrated to Cairo at the beginning of the fourteenth century. There they worked for wealthy patrons, particularly those Mamluks who were establishing large charitable foundations of the type discussed in Chapter 6. This school of manuscript production appears to have ceased production about 1330, and the following twenty-five years is an obscure period in the production of Koran manuscripts in Cairo, although the followers of Yaqut continued to produce large, multi-volumed, and magnificently illuminated manuscripts of the Koran in such cities of the Islamic world as Baghdad, Shiraz, and possibly Tabriz.

In contrast to the contemporary Islamic world (see Chapter 3), the illustrated book played a minor role in the Mamluk domain, and only about sixty illustrated manuscripts can be ascribed to the period as a whole. Most of them were produced in the late thirteenth century and first half of the fourteenth, although a few point to a revival of illustrated manuscripts at the very end of the Mamluk period. 29 The same types of scientific treatises and works of belles-lettres popular in earlier periods, such as al-Jazari’s Zuyarnuma, al-Hariri’s Maqamah (“Assayiflites”), and the animal fables Kalila and Dimna, continued to be popular, and the illustra-

ations to these texts similarly followed traditional models of composition and execution. Illustrations from a dispersed al-Jazari manuscript copied in 1315, for example, are schematic representations of ingenious machines for the amusement of the court. 30 The Hand-making Machine 1321 shows a domed pavilion over a figure holding a ewer and tower. As the bird on the dome sings, water pours from the spout of the ewer over the washer’s hands and collects in a basin. The water drains from the basin into a tank; when the tank is full, the figure offers a towel. In general, these manuscripts are small, averaging 30 by 22 centimeters, and many are distinctly squarish in format.

Although contemporary Iranian manuscripts show an increasing specialization of labor between scribe and illustrator, the manuscripts produced in the Mamluk domains apparently continue the traditional practice of single-handed production, seen in the great Maqamah copied and illustrated by Yahya b. Mahmud al-Wasiti in 1337. 31 The Esorial Maqamah al-husayn was compiled by one man, as was the British Library Maqamah and probably even the Vienna Maqamah as well. 32 This lack of specialization is revealed in the conservatism of the images. Drapery folds have lost any semblance of naturalness to become abstract patterns, aptly described by Ettlinghausen as "ripply wrinkles." 33 The Vienna Maqamah, however, is distinguished by a high level of finish, with rich gold grounds and carefully applied thick pigments. The text has illuminated chapter headings and intricate arabesque borders around the frontispiece 1339, which are reminiscent of contemporary Koran illumination, although they are not as fine. The frontispiece, the most elaborate image in the manuscript, shows a seated dignitary holding a cup and a handkerchief; he is surrounded by two winged genies, musicians, and an acrobat. The image, undoubtedly only the left half of the original two-page composition, belongs to a well-known type of formal frontispiece, such as that of a multi-volume copy of the Esrail al-ayn (“Book of songs”) made ca. 1218-19 for Badr al-Din Lu’lu’; the viceroy and future atabeg (regent) of Mosul, but the figures are even more static and rigid than their predecessors. 34}

313. Frontispiece to al-Hariri, Maqamah, Egypt or Syria, 1339. 27.0 × 24.5 cm. Vienna, Niederösterreich, A. F. G.

MIDDLE PERIOD

Despite the ravages of the Black Death, luxury goods continued to be produced in the second half of the fourteenth century. Large-format manuscripts of the Koran began to be made, reaching their greatest splendor in two groups of manuscripts associated with Hasan’s wife Kwanid Baraka and her son, the sultan al-Ashraf Shihab II (r. 1363–76), for most of them were given to their charitable foundations, the Ulmu al-Sultan (Mother of the Sultan) and the Ashrafyya madrasas in Cairo. 35 The fine quality and immense scale of the manuscripts suggest that they might have been conceived for Hasan’s colonial complex in Cairo, but his untimely death and the abandonment of the project may...
have led other patrons to take over the original commissions. These manuscripts are all large (ca. 70 by 50 cm) single volumes mostly written in majuscule naskh script, in which all semicircular descenders are flattened out [134]. The most spectacular of the group are three manuscripts with opening pages of illumination based on star-polygons. The best-known is the manuscript commissioned by Arghun Shah al-Ashti, an amir of Sultan Sha‘ban, who was executed in 1376 [135]. Although the frontispieces share the same basic format as those of Sandal, the composition is much more complex and the arabesques more detailed. The borders are full of such chinoiserie elements as peony and lotus flowers. The replacement of the rectangular central field with a square one bordered by two rectangular panels allowed the creation of a more regular and more intricate interlace of radiating lines. The rectangular panels are filled with polylobed cartouches inscribed with an attenuated and stylized Kufic script. The palette is refined, with blue and gold predominating. These splendid manuscripts were signed either by their calligraphers nor by their illuminators, but it has been argued that they were produced in Damascus, on the basis of comparable illumination in a manuscript of the Four Gospels made for a Damascene cleric. In contrast, the other group of Koran manuscripts produced during the period 1363–76 is associated with the illuminator Ibrahim al-Amidi (from Amid/Diyabakk). They are in an entirely different and distinctive style, with allover repeat patterns as the central motifs, more mechanical arabesques, and an expanded and vibrant palette often set against a black ground. These manuscripts of the Koran are the finest copies produced under Mamulak patronage and show that despite the havoc wrought by the plague and economic decline, talent and money were still available to produce goods of the highest quality.

A similarly high level of production can be seen in the metalwork of the second half of the fourteenth century, for despite economic distress there was no decline in the quality of metalwork produced, although it declined in quantity. The Mamulaks themselves commissioned pieces, and Egyptian metalwork was so appreciated that foreign patrons commissioned pieces for export to East and West. A ewer in Florence [136], for example, was made for al-Malik al-Afdal Din al-Din al-Abbas, Rashid sultan of the Yemen from 1363 to 1377. It is one of a series of inlaid brasses made in Cairo for the Rashids, beginning with a ewer made there in 1275 by ‘Ali b. Husayn b. Muhammad al-Mawali. The Burghello ewer, which must have had an accompanying basin, stands fifty-three centimeters tall. The overall shape, an inverted pear with cylindrical neck, straight narrow spout, and curving handle, follows Ayyubid models of the thirteenth century, but the heavy mouth and bold rings on the neck, handle, and socket are typical Mamulak innovations, found already on ewers produced in the early fourteenth century for amirs of al-Nasir Muhammad. Similarly, the decoration in horizontal bands of cartouches and roundels with bold inscriptions repeats earlier decorative formulas. The ewer shows that, despite the fine technique in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, traditional designs were maintained and there was little formal innovation.

Egypt had ceased to be a major center for the production of luxury ceramics in the twelfth century, and despite the wealth of Mamulak patrons, the city never regained its former position, primarily because Chinese ceramics were held in high esteem and were easily available. Nevertheless, ceramics were still produced in large quantities, with varied shapes and decoration. Some are imitations of Chinese wares, particularly Yuan celadons and blue-and-white ceramics, while others, with sprigged and slip-painted decoration, follow local traditions and bear emblems showing that they were made for the households of Mamulak amirs. Finer ceramics were made in Syria in the fourteenth century, where luster-painted “Raqqas” wares had been produced in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The most impressive pieces are large jars, and alabarelli, which are attributed to Damascus because of the inscription on a luster-painted jar [137] stating that it was “made for Asad al-Ishkanizani by Yusuf in Damascus.” These containers were used for shipping such luxuries as oils, unguents, spices, and drugs to Europe and many have been found there. Damascus wares were famous in Europe during the period, and many were listed in apothecaries’ inventories. The pieces are notable for their dark blue underglaze color and brilliant gold luster decoration in horizontal registers of