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The Blazon – Western Influences on Mamluk Art after the Crusades

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In Mamluk art, we often see rounded or oval shaped *rank/ runûk* (emblems, blazons or coats-of-arms), which are decorated with different kinds of heraldic symbols. They were used by Mamluk amirs to identify the possessors and their status in the structure of Mamluk government. Although many important studies have been conducted on this subject,[1] historical documents do not give much information about the origin of Mamluk emblems. There existed many kinds of emblems that indicated occupations including *saqi* (cup bearer) with the cup (Fig. 1); *dawadar* (inkwell holder = the secretary or officer) with the pen box (Fig. 2); and *djamdar* (master of the robe = keeper of clothes) with the shape of napkin, *barîd*[2] (postman, courier) with straight lines, *jukandar*[3] (çevgandar = holder of polo stick) with a ball and polo stick, and *silahdar* (sword bearer) was symbolized with the sword (Fig. 3).

The Ayyubid Sultan, Melikü's-Salih Najim al-Din Ayyub (r. 1240-1249) bestowed the emblem of a small dining table, called *Honca / Hançe,*[4] on an amir who was appointed to the position of *jashnkir*. *Jashnkir* was the taster of the Sultan's food and drink. Mamluk Sultan Aybak (r. 1250-1257) was the *jashnkir* of Sultan Salih Najim al-Din Ayyub. This emblem continued to be used by his mamluks (slaves) in the Mamluk Dynasty.[5] Though we do not know which kind of emblem the *Honca /Hançe* used, we can understand that

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1 See: L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, (Oxford, 1933) and Michael Meinecke, "zur Mamlukischen heraldik", *Sonderdurnck aus den Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* Band 28, 2, (Mainz, 1972).

2 Altan Çetin, *Memluk Devletinde Askerî Teşkilatî* (Istanbul: Eren, 2007), 186-189; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks, The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74; Ramazan Şeşen, *Sultan Baybars ve Devri (1260-1277)*, (Istanbul: İSAR, 2009), 232-233.

3 Erdoğan Merçil, *Selçuklular'da Saraylar ve Saray Teşkilatı* (Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2011), 242-245.

4 Uzunçarşılı 1988, 340.

5 *Ibid.*, 340.

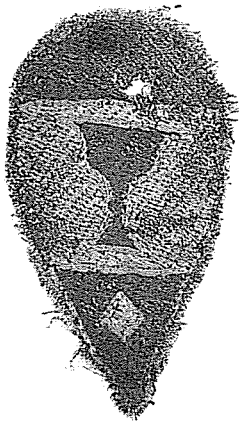

Fig. 1: dawadar
(inkwell holder= The secretary or officer)

Fig. 2: djamdar
(master of the robe=keeper of clothes)

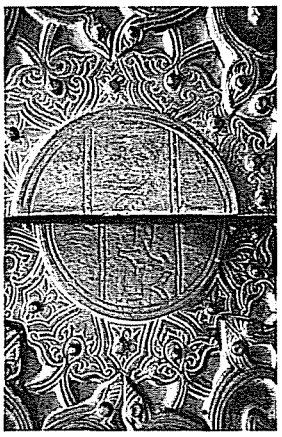

Fig. 3: djamdar
(master of the robe=keeper of clothes)

the emblems of the various official posts began to be employed in the Ayyubid period. The word "*rank*" was in common use in the Fatimid Dynasty, and this practice may have been inherited from earlier Islamic rulers,[6] though there are no depictions of emblems themselves except in historic or geographic documents.

Turkic people used a *tamgha / damga* (stamp or seal) to express the emblem of a particular *boy* (clan) or family. The *tamgha* was common among all Turkic peoples. After the Mongol advance into Central Asia, the Kipchaks and the other Turkic tribes began to take refuge in the lands of the Seljuks and of the Mamluk Sultanate. The Kipchaks, who inaugurated the Bahri Mamluk State in 1250, brought their own language and culture, customs and traditions with them when they came to Syria and Egypt, and continued to follow them.[7] It is possible to believe that the Kipchaks had a similar concept of *tamgha*. However, when we see the *tamgha* of the *Oghuz* and *Uk-Ok* from *Divan-ı Lügat-it Türk* of Kaşgarlı Mahmud and from *Jami al-Tawarikh* of the Persian historian Rashiduddin,[8] we do not see any similarity between Mamluk emblems and Turkic *tamghas*.

The early Mamluk emblems were circular shields containing a simple

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6 *EI²*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), vol. VIII., 431-433: 431.

7 Abdülkadir İnan, "XIII. -XV. yüzyıllarda Mısır'da Oğuz-Türkmen ve Kıpçak Lehçeleri ve 'Halis Türkçe'", *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten*, (Ankara 1953), 53-71, 54-56.

8 See: the list of tamga of Reşideddin and of Kaşgarlı Mahmud: Faruk Sümer, *Oğuzlar (Türkmenler) Tarihleri-Boy Teşkilatı-Destanları* (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1999), 229-231; Fazlullah Rashiduddin, *Jami'u't Tawarikh, Compendium of Chronicles, A History of the Mongols*, Part I, II, III, (Harvard University 1998).

symbol. Later, these emblems became more complex, and the design was divided into three fields with a variety of symbols used to denote different offices. Mamluks used these emblems on façades of architectural works and on objects of art such as arms, flags, banners[9] and swords, as well as on items such as lamps (Fig. 4), glass, ceramics, textiles (Fig. 5) garments and carpets[10] (Fig. 6). Everyone who saw the emblem understood its meaning and knew to whom it belonged.

Fig. 4

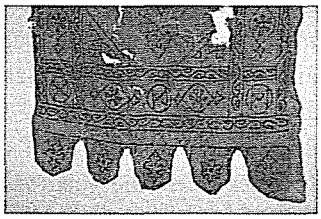

Fig. 5

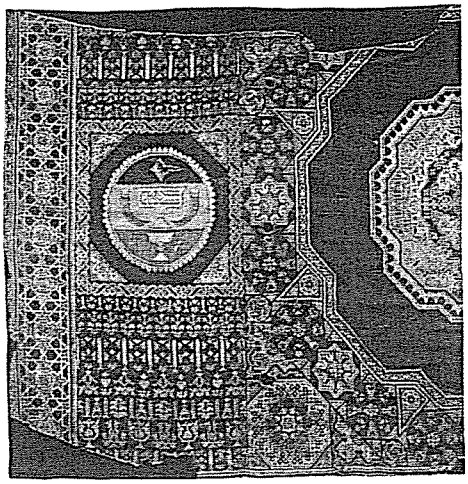

Fig. 6

In the Mamluk State there were many important offices in the court organization and the government hierarchy. According to Kalkasandi, there were 25 amirs who served in different kinds of offices under the Sultan: *naib* (deputy of the Sultan), *atabak al-'asâkir (Amîr Kabîr), ra's nawba* (head of the the royal guard), *amîr majlis, amîr silah, amîr akhur, dawadar, hajib al-hujjab* (grand chamberlain), *jandâr* (armour bearers), *ustadar, jashnkir, khaznadar, shadd al-sharabkhana* (superintendent of the buttery), *ustadar sohbe, muqaddam al-mamalik* (commander of the Sultan's mamluks), *zimamiyyat al-durus al-sultaniyya* (chief eunuch), *mihmandar, shadd al-dawawin* (superintendent of bureaus), *amîr tabr* (amir of the halberdiers), *amîr alem, amir shikar* (amir of the hunt), *hirasat al-tayr* (falconer), *shadd al-'ama'ir* (superintendent of constructions) and provincial authorities.[11] In

9 See: Hülya Tezcan, Turgay Tezcan, *Türk Sancak Alemleri*, (Ankara 1992).

10 See: Sumiyo Okumura, *The Influence of Turkic Culture on Mamluk Carpets* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2007).

11 İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatına Medhal*, (Ankara 1988), 334.

each office there were a number of members under the chief; for example, there were a number of *dawadars* under the *Grand Dawadar*. It is possible to separate Mamluk amirs into two sections: the governmental offices and in and out of courts, but their different ranks and positions makes it difficult.[12] For example, in the late Mamluk period, in addition to the position of *dawadar*, Amir Yashbak also held the position of *amir silah*, *wazir*, *ustadar*, *kashif al-kushshaf*, *mudabbir al-mamlaka*, and *ra's al-maysára*.[13] It is not known whether all of these positions had their own symbols and colors, but this information explains why different kinds of emblems are placed in one blazon. The Mamluks derived these positions and offices from the court organization and the structure of government from the Great Seljuks through the Ayyubids, and enriched them after their relations with the Mongols.[14] The rigin of some of the important offices, such as *ustadar* and *dawadar*, can be traced back to the Abbasid Dynasty.[15] Not only the Mamluks, but Turkic dynasties, including Kara Koyunlu, Ak Koyunlu, Ghaznavids and Anatolian Seljuks continued to follow the traditional conventions and regulations.[16]

As in the Seljuks' court structure, the *ustadar* was the amir who took care of the Sultan's private properties, and collected and managed their incomes.[17] In the Mamluk court, the *ustadar* controlled the amirs who supervised the court kitchens, *jashnkir*, *shadd al-sharabkhana* in sarabhâne (keeper of the wine cellars),[18] the court *gılman* (pages) and other servants. The position of *ustadar* became even more elevated by the end of the 14th century. Under the supervision of the *ustadar sohbe* the *saqi* served liqueurs and drinks to the Sultan and his guests after the meal. He also had the duty of preparing the dining table. *Saqi*s were appointed by the Sultan himself from among his private mamluks *khassaki*, who served the Sultan personally and took care of the Sultan's private matters, including preparing the Sultan for wars and expeditions.[19] The position of *saqi* became one of the most important posts in

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12 Ibid.

13 *EI²*, vol. II, p. 172.

14 Ali Sevim, Erdoğan Merçil, *Selçuklu Devletleri Tarihi, Siyaset, teşkilat ve Kültür*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), 505-506; Uzunçarşılı 1988, 292.

15 Fatih Yahya Ayaz, *Türk Memluk Döneminde Saray Ağalığı Üstadârlık (1250-1382)*, (Istanbul 2008), 41; it is known that under the Abbasids, the emblem of office of the *wazir* (*dawadar*) was an inkwell: *EI²*, vol. II, p. 172.

16 Çetin, 2007, p. 51.

17 Uzunçarşılı, 1988, p. 338.

18 Uzunçarşılı, 1988, pp. 341-342; Ayaz 2008, p. 214.

19 Uzunçarşılı 1988, 347; Şeşen 2009, 221; Çetin 2007, 109; Besides mamluks and *Khassaki* mamluks,

the structure of Mamluk government. The reason why the position of *saqi* had such a high rank is because it must have contained original Turkic symbols such as the cup, which signifies royalty or sovereignty.[20] In historical texts, the cup ritual was called "*andgarmak*" among the Turks as well as in works of art. The depiction of the Turkic cup ritual appears to bear the imprint of several convergent traditions, mainly from the ancestral Asian nomadic world, like India, China, and Central Asia, under the influence of Shamanism.[21] We see balbal statues holding a drinking cup in their hands in every region of Central Asia and Eastern Europe where Turkic tribes settled. The cup ritual originated around the 7th century B. C. E., and spread throughout Central Asia and China.[22] In these rites, wine or *kımız* was drunk with the same cup and it symbolized vassals' loyalty to the rulers.[23] In the Ilkhanid period, "ayak" means cup, and the person who serve the cup was called "ayakçı" (= *sâqi*).[24] Not only the cup, but the jug was also used.[25] Just as the ritual was practiced among the Turks, it was also practiced among the Mongols, with the first cup being offered to the ruler, then to persons of rank, starting with the queen.[26] We see the cup in many Turkic and Mongol miniatures. It seems that this tradition still continued as a relic of various Turkic cultural traditions. There are many varieties of blazons with a cup.

The post of *dawadar*, originally in Turkish *devât-dâr*,[27] was one of the seven most important offices in the structure of Mamluk government. The *dawadars* were the bearers and keepers of the royal inkwell and served as secretaries of the Sultan. In Baybars' period, this position had already gained in importance and its holder exercised a certain supervisory function over the *barid* and chancery.[28] In the late Mamluk period, they decided which of the members

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the offices of chief of the corps of cup bearers and the chief of the master of the robe were alternately occupied by eunuchs: David Ayalon, "The Eunuchs in the Mamluk Sultanate", *The Mamluk Military Society, Collected Studies*, (London 1979), 267-295: 269.

20 Okumura 2007, 38-43.

21 Emel Esin, "The Cup Rites in Inner Asian and Turkish Art", *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens*, (Istanbul 1969), 224-261; Faruk Sümer, *Oğuzlar (Türkmenler) Tarihleri – Boy Teşkilatı Destanları*, (İstanbul 1999), 225.

22 Sümer 1999, 226.

23 Berthold Spuler, *İran Moğolları-Siyaset, İdare ve Kültür, İlhanlı Devri*, translated by Cemal Köprülü, (Ankara 1957), 480; Esin 1969, 244.

24 Uzunçarşılı 1988, 189.

25 Esin 1969, 250.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Ayaz 2008, 216.

28 Amitai-Press 2004, 141.

of the *halqa*[29] were eligible to join in military expeditions; the *dawadar*s also collected taxes and gathered in the crops from Upper Egypt and other regions. Appointment to this position began in the reign of Sultan Baybars (r. 1250-1277). Under the Burci Mamluk the position of *dawadar* became one of the highest amirs of the Mamluk Sultanate with the title of *Dawadar Kabir.*[30] Some *dawadar*s, like Tumanbay (r. 1501) became Sultans.

Though we don't know whether there were any depictions or emblems for other important positions, including the *khaznadar,* the Mamluks used emblems and symbols, which they presented not only to each other but also to Christians and other Islamic countries during warfare. How did these emblems appear in late Ayyubid and Mamluk art and where did they come from? We must first consider the historical background of the Mediterranean world at that time.

In the 11th century, the Mediterranean world was divided between the Islamic World, Western Christendom, and the Eastern Byzantine Empire. Cairo, with more than 200, 000 inhabitants, was the most prosperous metropolis in the Islamic world.[31] To rescue the Holy Land from the Islamic world and secure safe access to Jerusalem Pope Urban II. called for the First Crusade in 1095. Altogether, eight Crusades were inaugurated between 1095 and 1291. The First Crusade into the Levant opened up a new world for the West. In the name of pilgrimage, vast numbers of people, more than 10,000-14,000, including French, English, Italians, South Germans and Western Germans, settled and flourished in the Holy Land, mainly in Syria and Palestine. After the start of the Crusades, the art of warfare became the domain of specialists, and from it, the ideology of chivalry arose during the years of the Frankish Crusades.

The Europeans began using coats-of-arms in German provinces in the first half of the 11th century. The first known depiction of arms is to be found on the graves of German nobles.[32] We can see pre-heraldic expressions on shields in the Bayeux Tapestry, which was created in an Anglo Saxon workshop in the 11th century.[33] (Fig. 7) The origin of the blazon, which was the "mark and pioneer of the blazon", dates back to the Romans, Greeks, and to even earlier

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29 Non-mamluk cavalry and one of the most important formations in Mamluk Army, see: Çetin 2007, 118.

30 Uzunçarşılı 1988, 356-358.

31 Andre Raymond, "Cairo's Area and Population in the Early Fifteenth Century", *Mukarnas*, 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 21-31.

32 Mamoru Mori, *Europe no Monsho*, (Tokyo: Sansei-do, 1979), 15.

33 See: *La Tapisserie de Bayeux*, Ville de Bayeux, 2008.

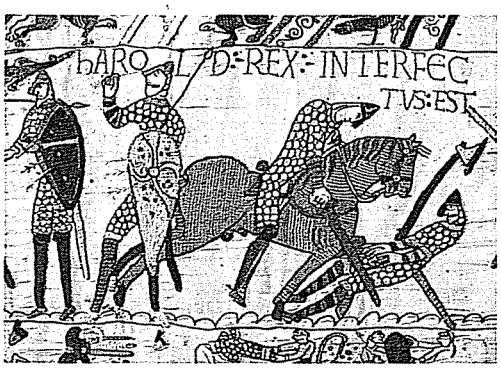

Fig. 7

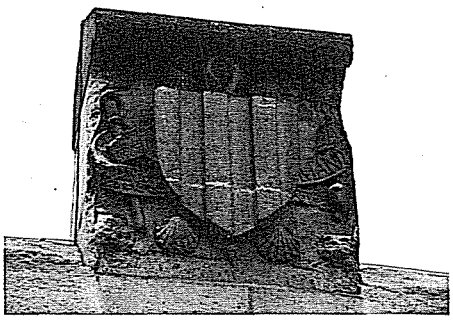

Fig. 8

cultures, but the origin of the word "blazon" came from the German *blasen*, "playing horn" at the start of a lance tournament.[34] As participants in the tourmanent all wore similar iron armor they originally designed their blazons to distinguish themselves. Before starting a combat a herald announced the name and status of each knight to the audience, showing their blazon. At first, the blazon was inscribed in the center of the shield, and the shield itself was considered to be the blazon. Around the 12th century, the concept of the blazon had spread from Germany to France and England, and all over Europe.[35] European knights started to incorporate their blazons into their surcoats or caparisons.

In time, the blazon became a symbol identifying the individual, and it was subsequently employed as a family crest. It is known that William Longspée (1176-1226), the illegitimate son of Henry II of England, was the first person in England to possess a coat-of-arms. He inherited the blazon, which was decorated with six lions, from his grandfather Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou in France (1113-1151).[36] Coats-of-arms were decorated with many characters and indicated the possessor's position and status by their shape and color (Fig. 8). Western coats-of-arms are deeply interrelated with flags, but we will not cover this aspect in this short paper. With an increase in the utilization of coats-of-arms, the Crest Academy was founded in England, France and the Holy Roman Empire and officers of arms began to regulate their use (Fig. 9). During the peak of feudalism, heraldry became a highly developed discipline and became more and more complex. In Europe, not only coats-of-arms of

34 Mori 1979, 15; idem, *The Dictionary of Heraldry*, (Tokyo: Taisyu-kan, 1998), vi.

35 Takashi Hamamoto, *Monsyo ga Kataru Europe-shi*, (Tokyo: Hakusui-sha, 2005), 21.

36 Mori 1979, 19.

Fig. 9

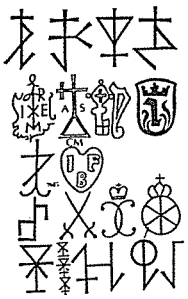

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

aristocrats and knights, but also those of artisans and other people used a house mark symbol to indicate their family and possessions (Fig. 10). Eventually, these house mark symbols became integrated into a coat-of-arms. The coat-of-arms became a visual symbol indicating the owner's position and was also used as a symbol for nations, cities, churches and guilds (Fig. 11).

Before the Crusades, there was a trade relationship between Venice, Genoa, Pisa and the Muslims in the Mediterranean world. Under the Crusaders' domnion this relationship developed further, and European, especially Venetian merchants, settled in Eastern cities such as Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, and Antioch which had prospered through the Silk Road.[37] The Franks who lived in the Levant coexisted with Muslims in the Mediterranean world. Franks were probably surprised by the advanced culture of the East and adopted many aspects of Muslim culture, including the customs relating to food, clothes and lifestyle which suited their own lives. We see several examples of arts and crafts produced by Muslim artisans for the Levantine market and presumably aimed at a Christian clientele, whether Crusaders, Italian merchants, Frankish settlers or Eastern Christians of one denomination or another.[38] (Fig. 12) From these works we know that the Crusaders continued to use their own blazons in the East in addition to the symbol of the Cross. These luxury artworks, such as metal or glass works bearing arms of kings or the owners, were probably

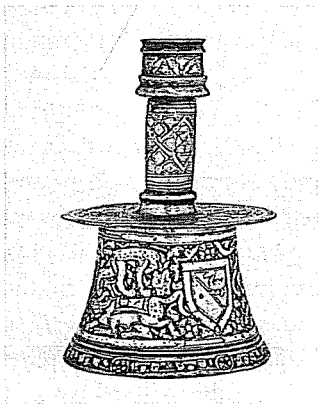

Fig. 12

37 See: J. Michael Rogers, "To and Fro Aspects of Mediterranean Trade and Consumption in the 15th and 16th Centuries", *Rêve du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée, v. 55 (1990), p. 57-74.*

38 Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, from the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre*, 1187-1291, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 473.

Fig. 13

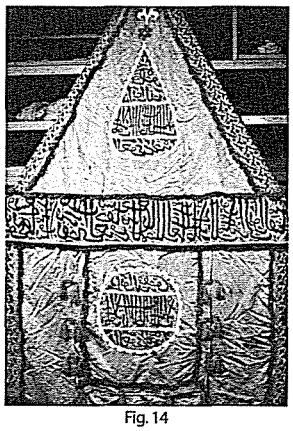

Fig. 14

commissioned by Frankish lords or given to them as gifts. They show the cultural interaction between East and West during and after the Crusades.

When we compare Mamluk blazons with European coats-of-arms, we notice that the Mamluk blazon is rounded in shape. Mamluk shields were made of wood, iron and leather. In addition to "*kalkan*", there were various names for shields, such as *basîra, cunne, ceneviyye, torlamak, cevb, hacfe, durka, zu'l-bakar, et-tevârik, 'anbar, fard, kurrâ, kafe', kenîf, lây, mecn, muhbâ, micneb, mucûl, mitrak,* and *yalab.*[39] We can assume that the shape of the Mamluk blazons was derived from the rounded shape of the Mamluk shields. (Fig. 13) Turkic Mamluks, who were the first to have the concept of seals (*tamgha*), saw no incongruity in adopting the concept of blazons, and adapted emblems, such as the cup and the pen box, which idicate the owner`s status or position, into their own style.

After the victory of the battle of Ayn Calut (1260) and the capture of Acre (1291), the Mamluks recovered Palestine and Syria from the Franks, and re-united Egypt and Syria, which had been separated after the death of the Ayyubid sultan, al-Malik al-Salih Najim al-Din Ayyub. In addition to Egypt and Syria, the Mamluk Empire also included Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan, Libya, the Hidjaz, Yemen, and Anatolia up to the Euphrates River. Cyprus and Tunisia recognized the Mamluk state, continuing to follow the Sunni policy of the Ayyubids. Thus the Mamluks, in addition to becoming the protectors of the Islamic world, increased their political power in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean. At the same time, there was a development in the agricultural and international trade that spread from China to Spain.[40] Cairo, the capital

39 Çetin 2007, 228.

40 On this, see; Robert G. Irwin, "Egypt, Syria and Their Trading Partners 1450-1550", *OCTS* II, (London 1986), 73-82.

of the Mamluks, became a new scientific and cultural centre. Islamic scientists, craftsmen and merchants, who had fled from the Mongol conquest and settled in Cairo and Damascus, made these cities cultural centres with their production under the protection and with the support of the Mamluk sultans.

Mamluk trade with both Eastern and Western countries not only enriched their own country, but also increased cultural interaction. All kinds of Ayubbid art, which had developed in Syria, continued to be made in Cairo under the Mamluk dynasty. In this way, Mamluk art reached its first golden age in the period under Qalawun (r. 1279-1290) and his successors and also under al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-1294, 1299-1309, 1309-1341). The appearance of heraldic devices and militarized inscriptions in all Mamluk art in the 14th century was the result of increased patronage within an empowered Amir class during the al-Nasir Muhammad sultanate.[41] After the end of the 15th century, blazons which contain only inscriptions began to be used instead of heraldic emblems (Fig. 14). One of the most important reasons for this must have been the highly schematized and theoretical nature of Islamic law and constitution. Mamluk blazons were no longer used after the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt in 1517.

Images:

1. Blazons (coats of arms), Ashmolean Museum.
2. Detail from the Kaba curtain, 16th century, Bursa Ulu Mosque.
3. Detail from the door of Madrasa Inal al-Yusufi, 1392, Cairo.
4. Detail from the lamp, mid-14th century, Egypt or Syria, William Randolph Hearst Collection, Los Angeles Country Museum of Art.
5. A detail from a cushion cover, 14-15th century, Egypt, The Textile Museum, Washington D. C.
6. Mamluk carpet fragment, end of the 15th century, Cairo, The Textile Museum, Washington D. C.
7. Detail from the Bayeux tapestry, 11th century. (From *La Tapisserie de Bayeux*, Ville de Bayeux, 2008, no. 57).
8. Musee de Cluny, Paris.
9. Detail from the Dering Roll, 1270-1280, The British Library.
10. Marks of artisans. (from Takashi Hamamoto, *Monsyo ga Kataru Europe-shi*, Tokyo: Hakusui-sha, 2005, p. 140, fig. 92)
11. Coats-of-arms of guilds. (from HAMAMOTO 2005, p. 143, fig. 94)
12. Candlestick with the arms of the Boldu family of Venice, ca. 1400, Damascus, Syria, the British Museum, London. (from Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza, Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 141, fig. 149)
13. Mamluk knight (Furusiyya), 15th century, Egypt, Bibliothè
14. que Nationale de France, Paris. (from *Ibn Khaldun The Mediterranean in the 14th century Rise and Fall of Empires*, Seville: Foundation Jose Manuel Lara and Foundation El Legano Andalusi, 2006, p. 91)
15. Detail from the Mahmil tent of al-Ašraf Qānsūh al- Gauri, 16th century, Egypt, Topkapi Sarayi Museum.

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41 Bethany J. Walker, "Rethinking Mamluk Textiles", *Mamluk Studies Review*, v. 4, (Chicago: the University of Chicago, 2000), 193, footnote 112.