

# PART ONE

## OBJECTS



# Chapter I

## Two Pieces of Metalwork at the University of Michigan\*<sup>1</sup>

In 1955 the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan acquired two pieces of metalwork formerly belonging to M. Sobernheim. One is a brass basin of the Ayyubid period, the other a small Mamluk box. From both objects the silver and gold inlay is almost entirely gone and, as a result, these pieces are not as striking or attractive as a number of well-known thirteenth- and fourteenth-century basins, ewers, boxes, trays, plates and candlesticks. However, the inscriptions and the decorative themes which can be reconstructed are of some interest for the historian of the period.

### I. The Ayyubid Basin (Figs A, 1–4)

Both in size (46 cm in diameter and 20 cm in height) and in shape (bowl-like with curved-in rims and a rounded bottom) (Fig. 1), this object belongs to a common enough type in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.<sup>2</sup> Its surface is only partially decorated. On the outside a wide band, which has lost all its inlay and parts of which have been rubbed beyond recognition, decorates the upper part of the basin. It is divided into four superposed registers of unequal width. Starting at the top there is first a narrow band consisting of three braided lines. In the intervals there occur vegetal motifs and, at times, whole animals or parts of animals, mostly heads. At times one of the lines widens to the shape of an animal. It is practically impossible to distinguish the exact varieties of animals represented, but there are birds, a number of horned beasts, and, probably,

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\* First published in *Ars Orientalis*, 4 (1961), pp. 360–68.

<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Professor E. E. Petersen, Director of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, for putting at my disposal the facilities of his museum and for providing me with photographs.

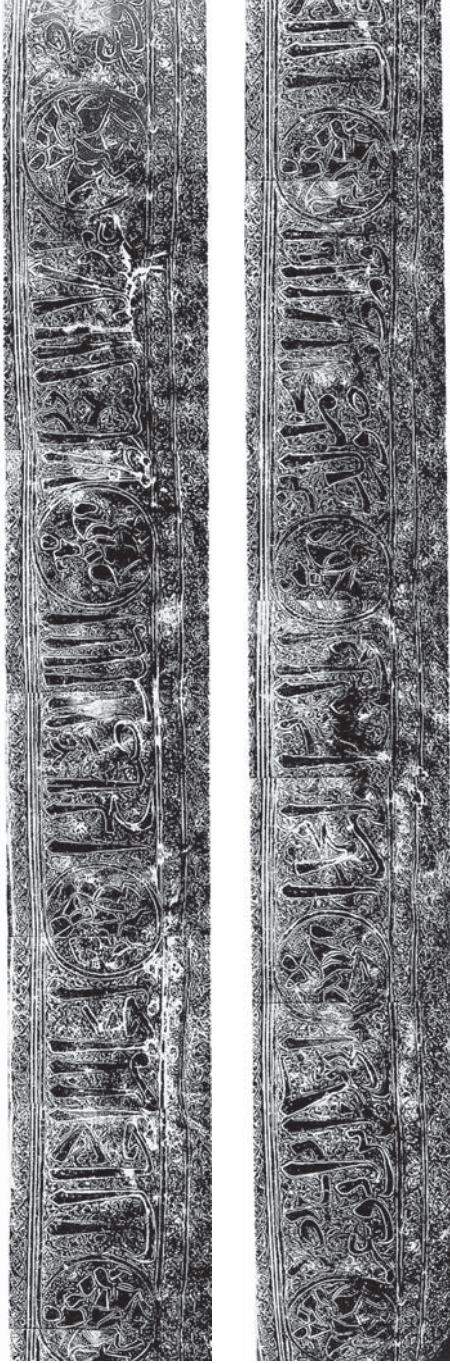
<sup>2</sup> Examples can easily be multiplied; cf. D. S. Rice, “Brasses of Ahmad al-Daki al-Mawsili,” *Ars Orientalis*, 2 (1957), pp. 301 ff.; and the same author, “Studies in Islamic Metalwork I,” *BSOAS*, 15 (1952), pp. 565 ff., for Mamluk examples.



1 The Ayyubid basin

a few female-headed monsters. Below this motif appears a wide band with an [361] inscription. This band is divided into six parts by six medallions. The subject matter of the medallions, largely distinguishable (Fig. 2) in spite of the loss of inlay, belongs to the common iconography of the hunting prince: a rider, accompanied by a dog, about to take his sword out of the sheath; a rider attacking an unidentifiable beast with his sword, while another beast is artfully fitted into the limited area of the medallion behind the rider; a rider attacking an animal behind him; a rider about to strike an animal going in an opposite direction to his; a rider with a dog (or prey?) between the front legs of his horse shooting from a bow; a rider being attacked from the back. The first three scenes appear to be like a “comic strip” of the same event, while the last three illustrate other possible hunting adventures. The figures are set over a geometric spiral pattern probably derived from similar vegetal motifs, but here almost entirely

<sup>3</sup> For another example of this special motif see the Fano cup in the Bibliothèque Nationale, D. S. Rice, *The Wade Cup* (Paris, 1955), pl. 15; compare with fig. 37, p. 313, in Rice, “Brasses”.



2 The Ayyubid  
basin

devoid of any vegetal character, except in a few cases where a flower or a leafy motif is apparent in the center of the spiral.<sup>3</sup> The scenes themselves are represented quite conventionally. The inscription, which is partly vocalized, is in excellent Ayyubid cursive, and is set over an arabesque motif which, in most places, develops independently from the inscription and not only in the spaces between the letters. Here the arabesque has a much more definitely vegetal character.

Below the inscription is another narrow band, a scroll pattern within which appear animals. These are practically indistinguishable, but most seem to be winged and horned quadrupeds. The last part of the decoration is unframed and consists of an arabesque design comprising interlacing scroll patterns repeating themselves around two axes.<sup>4</sup> One terminates with three leaves, the other with what may be a horned animal head. The rest of the design is much too damaged to permit more than a very schematic interpretation; it may be that there were animals set amidst the scrolls.

The inscription on the basin reads as follows:

Glory to our lord this sultan al-Malik al-Salih, the wise, the just, the assisted, the victorious, the defeater, Najm al-Din abu al-Fath Ayyub ibn Muhammad ibn abi Bakr ibn Ayyub, may his victory be glorious.

This personage was the last Ayyubid prince to maintain a semblance of control over the vast territory ruled by the Kurdish princes and their vassals. A poor general, but an adept manoeuvrer in the complex feudal diplomacy of the time, he is perhaps best known as the husband of Shajar al-Durr, that most extraordinary woman who was, so to speak, the transition between Ayyubid and Mamluk rule. His career carried him all over the Ayyubid realm. From 629/1232 to 635/1238, he was in Diyarbakır and the northern fringes of the Diyar Mudar. In 636/1239 he went to Damascus and the following year to Egypt, where he ruled until his death in 647/1249, trying, generally successfully, to control Palestine and most of southern Syria, and having, through his son and successor, Turanshah, some control [362] over Ayyubid possessions in the Jazirah.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his reign he was an active builder, and inscriptions commemorating his construction have come to light in Amida-Diyarbakır as well as in Cairo.<sup>6</sup> Three other pieces of metalwork are known to have been made for him. One is the very well-

<sup>4</sup> The structure of the design is comparable to that of the ewer in the Türk ve Islam Müzesi in Istanbul, Rice, "Studies, III," fig. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See article "(al-Malik) al-Sâlih Najm al-Din Aiyub," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, by M. Sobornheim; G. Wiet, *L'Égypte Arabe*, in G. Hanotaux, *Histoire de la nation égyptienne*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1937); and G. Wiet, "Les Biographies des Manhal Safi," in *Mémoires présentés à l'Institut d'Égypte*, vol. XIX (Cairo, 1932), No. 627, with full bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> E. Combe, J. Sauvaget, G. Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, vol. II (Cairo, 1942), Nos 4136–4137, 4217–4220, 4223, 4278, 4298–4301.



3 The Ayyubid basin

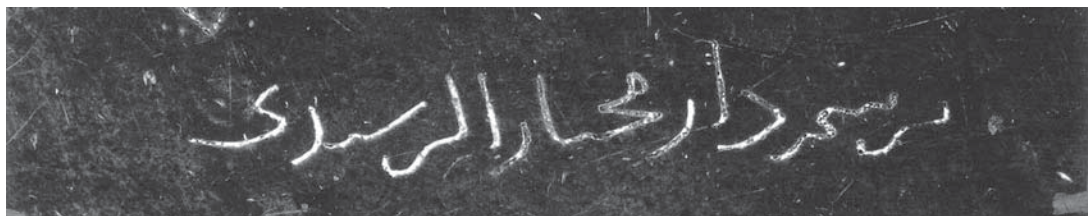
known d'Arenberg basin, now in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, which has never been properly published. The other one is an unpublished basin formerly in the Harari collection. The third one, recently published by Gaston Wiet, is now in the Louvre.<sup>7</sup>

On the outside of our basin are also four graffiti of later owners or users, which may tell us something of the further history of the basin. Two of these inscriptions are perfectly clear:

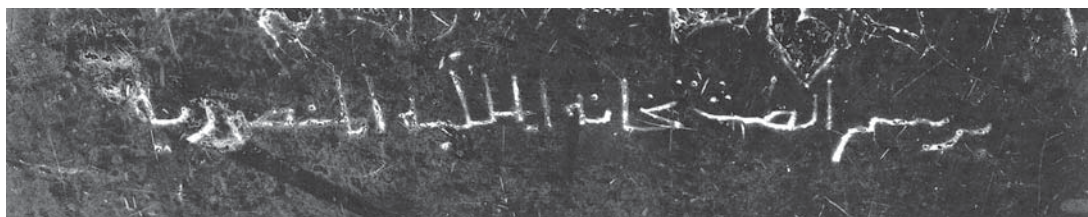
- a (Fig. 4a) For the house of Mukhtar al-Rashidi  
 b (Fig. 4b) For the *tishtkhanah* of Malik Mansur

The *tishtkhanah* is defined by Quatremère as “un lieu où l'on gardait les étoffes destinées pour l'habillement du sultan, les différentes espèces de pierreries, les cachets, les épées, et autres objets du même genre, et où on

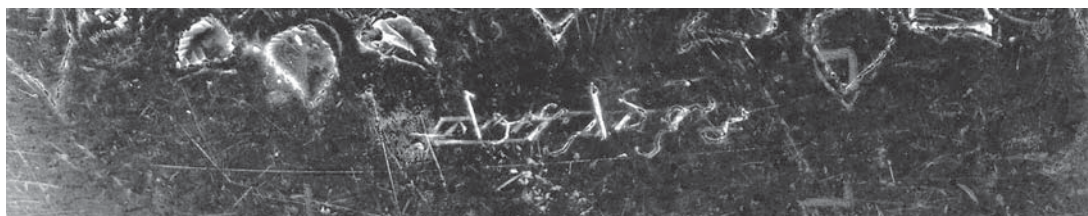
<sup>7</sup> Both in *Répertoire*, Nos 4302–4303; Rice, “Brasses,” p. 311. The Louvre piece, published by G. Wiet, “Inscriptions Mobilières de l’Égypte Musulmane,” *Journal Antique*, 246 (1958), pp. 239 ff.



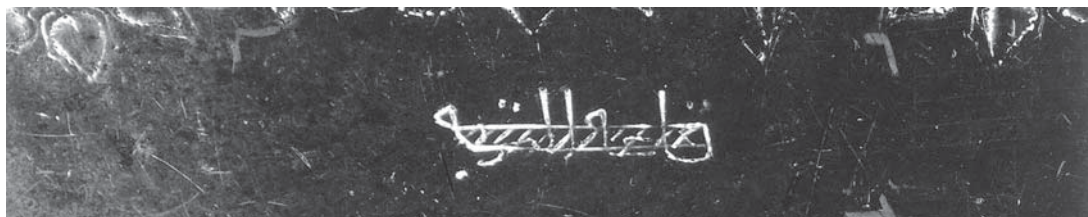
4a The  
Ayyubid basin



4b The  
Ayyubid basin



4c The  
Ayyubid basin



4d The  
Ayyubid basin



lavait les habits.”<sup>8</sup> It was, in other words, a vestiary or wardrobe. As to Malik Mansur, he could have been any one of a large number of Ayyubid, Rasulid, or Mamluk princes of that name,<sup>9</sup> including such important figures as Qalawun and Lajin.

The last two inscriptions (Fig. 4 c–d) have been obliterated through the engraving of two horizontal lines and several oblique ones over the original graffito. The first one begins with “for the house.” The last word seems to contain the letters “*ainwan*,” which could be read as *’unwan*. The *dar ’unwan* may have been the office in which titles were made for official documents, an office of considerable importance in the Mamluk chancery.<sup>10</sup> But, in that case, one would expect the article in front of *’unwan*, and it is perhaps more likely that we deal simply with a proper name (’Imran?). The second obliterated inscription has defied my attempts at interpretation. The last word seems to be *al-turbah*. The first one may be *qa’ah*. This might possibly mean a specific “hall or pavilion of the grave” if the inscription refers to a locale in a Mamluk or Ayyubid palace, or else the name of some shop. But the reading here is very doubtful and the interpretations of the last two inscriptions cannot be more than suggestions so long as such graffiti are not gathered and studied as a body instead of individually. The only safe conclusion we can draw from the graffiti of the University of Michigan basin is that, at least for a while, this basin was kept in one and perhaps even two “offices” of the Ayyubid and, more likely, Mamluk administration. At some [363] date it passed into the possession of some individual by the name of Mukhtar al-Rashidi.<sup>11</sup>

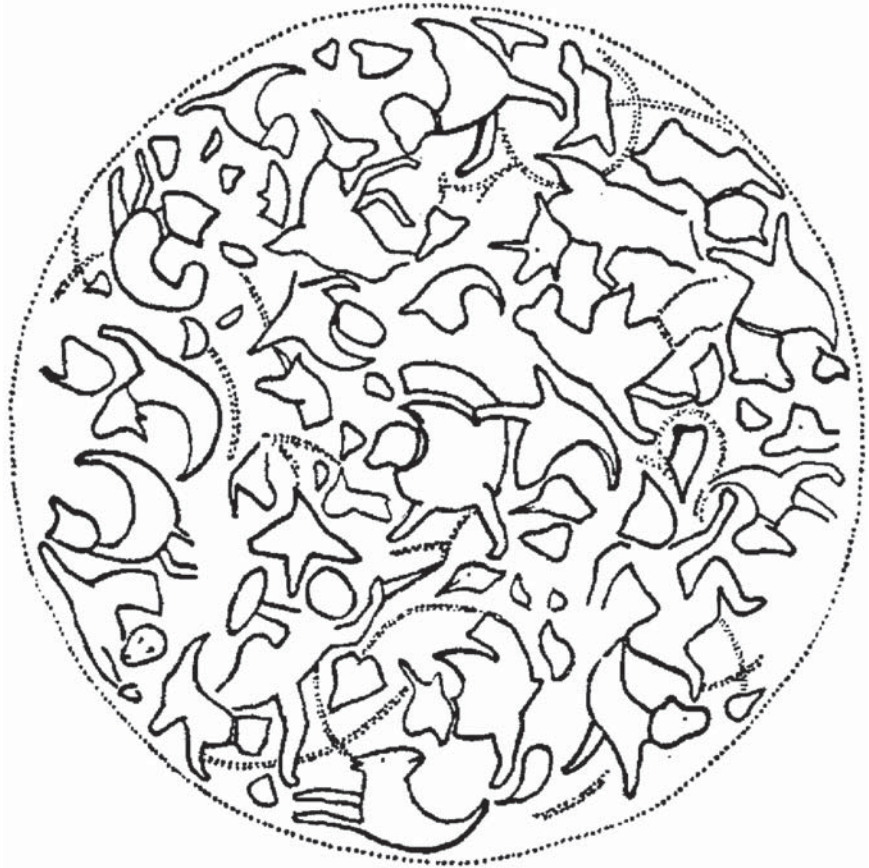
The inside of this basin is much barer than the outside. It is only at the bottom that a very complex design appears (Fig. 3). Its complexity is further heightened by the complete loss of inlay. The main part of the decoration consists of a wide medallion. It is surrounded by an unframed arabesque motif, quite similar to, and simpler and clearer than, the one on the outer part of the basin. The intersections of the scrolls are held together by alternating rings and heads. It is the central motif which is the most original feature of the basin and it is most unfortunate that it has been so badly damaged, since it was probably a most striking design. The drawing, Figure A, is an attempt to suggest the main lines of the organization of the decoration. The only addition made is that of facial features in order to emphasize the position of the motifs. There is some justification for this addition, beyond

<sup>8</sup> M. Quatremère, *Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks*, I (Paris, 1857), p. 162, n. 40; one may note that the word derives from *tasht* which means “basin,” probably of the type here described.

<sup>9</sup> See G. Wiet, *Biographies sub Malik Mansur*.

<sup>10</sup> W. Björkman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten* (Hamburg, 1928); see *’unwan* in index.

<sup>11</sup> There were many individuals of the name of Mukhtar in Mamluk times (cf. G. Wiet, *Biographies*), but none is mentioned with the surname al-Rashidi.

A The Ayyubid  
basin

the desire for clarity, since complete surviving examples of comparable types clearly show that eyes, nose and mouth were generally indicated.

It has proved impossible to define a logical system in the web of stems, here and there punctuated by leaves, which occur between the main elements of decoration. It would rather seem that there was no clear independent pattern of scrolls or arabesques, but that scrolls and stems were used as simple fill-ins. In this the system of decoration inside the bowl is less advanced than the pattern found on the outside. The disparity indicates that the object should be considered as a transitional one between the group of metalwork with arabesques as fill-ins and the group with independent arabesques.<sup>12</sup>

The subject matter of the medallion is a group of animals and human beings, with animals largely predominating. The center of the composition is occupied by a type of bird-headed(?) monster with two paws and a long tail curving upward, a motif going back to the Sasanian *senmurv*. Roughly

<sup>12</sup> See the rough scheme of development of backgrounds suggested by Rice, "Seasons and Labors of the Months," *Ars Orientalis*, 1 (1954), pp. 25–6.

two rows of figures surround it. These rows are not clearly separated from each other and many a figure serves rather as a transition from one area to the other. The first row, nearer to the central beast, and the narrower one of the two, consists essentially of animal heads, among which one can distinguish a bird, a unicorn, a horse, a rabbit, and one or two bovines or mountain goats. One full animal, probably a variety of the female-headed monster, occurs there too. Most of these figures show stems originating from their necks or mouths, but not leading anywhere. The second and wider row also contains animal heads, but they are used more sparsely, generally simply as fill-ins between [364] more complete figures. These seem to have been used in two ways: the majority of the figures along the edge of the design are parallel to the edge, while the ones farther from the edge are larger and more or less perpendicular to it. Insofar as they can be made out, these figures, five of which are fairly well outlined, were variations on the *karkadann*-unicorn motif<sup>13</sup> and two of them are images of human beings. One shows a running man with a knife in one hand and a shield in the other, a fairly common hunting posture.<sup>14</sup> The other personage is seated with out-stretched knees and appears to be gesticulating. While the first figure seems to be bare-headed, the second may have worn a cap or a crown, since one end of the top of his head is slightly pointed. I cannot determine the exact type of activity in which he was involved. As to the figures on the near edge of the design, insofar as their outline can be clearly ascertained, they seem to consist almost exclusively of variations on the theme of the walking or lying griffin or of winged bovines.

This design in the center of the basin shows several characteristics which are common enough in Islamic decoration of the period, but which are rarely combined into one pattern. The circular organization of a pattern in the center of an object occurs throughout the Islamic world of the thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The use of human and animal forms – either complete or partial – in a decorative way and without prejudice as to possible symbolism (outside of the well-known examples of “animated” writing) occurs, long before Islam, in the Pazyryk finds<sup>16</sup> and, in medieval times, from Khorasan to the Mediterranean, in works made both for Muslims and for Christians.<sup>17</sup> The

<sup>13</sup> R. Ettinghausen, *The unicorn* (Washington, 1950), pls 1–6, especially canteen 41.10 in the Freer Gallery, where very similar motifs occur.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the personages in the “animated” script of the Fano cup, Rice, *Wade Cup*, fig. 28; or of the Wade Cup, *ibid.*, fig. 19 (esp. upper image, extreme left). Also Rice, “Studies, III,” pl. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Rice, “Studies, III,” pp. 235 ff.; *Wade Cup*, pp. 12 ff.; see also R. Ettinghausen’s comments, “The Wade Cup,” *Ars Orientalis*, 2 (1957), pp. 341 ff., where many additional examples are brought up.

<sup>16</sup> S. I. Rudenko, *Kultura Naseleniia Gornovo Altaia* (Moscow, 1953), fig. 60 ff.

<sup>17</sup> A few Islamic examples bearing directly on our basin: D’Arenberg basin, *Ausstellung von Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst in München*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1912), pl. 147; there mythical animals like those of our plate occur on the narrow friezes, while

specific animals found on our pattern are also quite common.<sup>18</sup> Where [365] the motif of the Kelsey Museum basin differs from most known examples is in the apparent lack of symmetry, axiality and repetition of the units of decoration (which is quite different from what appears either on the arabesque design around the medallion or on the outside of the basin) and in the apparent lack of relation between the animals and the vegetal arabesque. The absence of symmetry is pointed up by comparison with the somewhat later Rasulid tray in the Metropolitan Museum which uses quite similar animals. In the relationship of the animals to the arabesque, our motif differs from the d'Arenberg basin made for the same prince and from the usual "animated" arabesque. The only work to show a very similar design, although smaller in size and in a less central position, is the "canteen" with Christian subjects in the Freer Gallery of Art; there we meet with the same animals, real and fantastic, the same general organization without symmetry or repetition and without a coherent web of stems.<sup>19</sup>

We can see then that with its "animated" arabesque on the outside and with its medallion inside, the basin in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, although severely mutilated, is of considerable interest. The question arises

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patterns with stems and animal or human heads appear on medallions; a Rasulid tray in the Metropolitan Museum, M. S. Dimand, "Unpublished metalwork of the Rasulid Sultans," *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, 3 (1931), pp. 231 ff., fig. 3; drawing by Rice in "Brasses," p. 292, which shows the same animals, but arranged very symmetrically and in more logical relation to the arabesque design; E. Kühnel, "Zwei Mosulbronzen," *Jahrbuch des preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 60 (1939), fig. 10; A. U. Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art* (New York, 1939), pl. 1331, which shows also a very large medallion with a motif made up of animals and human beings; little symmetry is shown and there is no coherent arabesque system, but the individual elements are of a very small size and the "whorl" effect is striking. For Christian examples, see especially Armenian works: G. Goian, *2,000 let armianskovo teatra*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1952), figs 23, 66–7, color pl. 2; S. Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 1945), pls 24–5; J. Strzygowski and M. von Berchem, *Amida*, Heidelberg, 1910, fig. 313. It is interesting to note that the closest parallel to our motif is found on three medallions of the Eumorfopoulos "canteen," now in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, M. S. Dimand, "A silver inlaid bronze canteen," *Ars Islamica*, 1 (1934), p. 171, since, just as the d'Arenberg basin, the canteen shows Christian subjects.

<sup>18</sup> Most of them will be found in the objects mentioned above. Since al-Malik al-Salih had governed at Amida, it may be worthwhile mentioning that winged monsters and bovines of all types are quite common among the sculptures of Amida and northern Mesopotamia in general. See Strzygowski and van Berchem, *Amida*, figs 31, 38, 42, and 300 ff., for stucco fragments in Istanbul said to have come from Amida; A. Gabriel, *Voyages archéologiques dans la Turquie Orientale* (Paris, 1940), pls 68 and 68 bis; Rice, "Studies, V," pp. 210–11. Other unpublished fragments remain in the Diyarbakır Museum and in a room of the *madrassa* of Sultan 'Isa in Mardin. Some very close monumental motifs appear also farther north, at Sivas, and should perhaps be connected with contemporary or earlier Armenian and Georgian examples; see, for instance, A. Gabriel, *Monuments turcs d'Anatolie*, II (Paris, 1934), pl. 58.

<sup>19</sup> The Louvre piece does not seem to use animal motifs for decorative purposes, and its splendid central design is much more symmetrical than ours, although not perfectly so. I should like to thank Prof. G. Wiet and M. Jean David-Weil for providing me with photographs of the object.

whether it is possible to assign it to a specific area and to date it. In the case of Najm al-Din Ayyub, localization and dating are connected questions, since he ruled first in northern Mesopotamia and then in Syria and Egypt. If by comparison with other objects of his time one can establish a coherent stylistic sequence, the earlier objects may be attributed to Diyarbakır and the northern part of the Diyar Mudar. If, on the other hand, certain objects of his time show affinities with the art of northern Jazirah, then they might be considered as early in his reign.

The formulary of the inscription on the basin does not help, since all the known inscriptions of Ayyub bear the titles and epithets found on our object. One point, however, is borne out by a comparison of inscriptions: that the d'Arenberg basin belongs to the last years of Ayyub's reign, since the basin and late Cairene inscriptions give the Ayyubid the title of *khalil amir al-mu'minin*, while the other and earlier inscriptions have other titles in *amir al-mu'minin*. But since our basin does not have any caliphal title, this particular point cannot lead to dating it securely and one would need a complete publication of the Harari, Louvre and d'Arenberg brasses and a comparison with the undated Freer "canteen" in order to suggest a stylistic development within which the Kelsey Museum basin can be fitted. This is a task which is beyond the scope of the present publication. The following remarks, however, might be made. The shape of our basin is, as we mentioned, typical of Ayyubid and early Mamluk works. The organization of the decoration, with only an inscription on the outside and a complex design in a limited area inside, is also more typical of early Mamluk works<sup>20</sup> than of the usual piece of metalwork, especially of the so-called Mosul group, in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The Freer "canteen" has been generally attributed to a Syrian workshop. If one adds to [366] these points that the subsequent history of the basin seems to have been Egyptian, it could be suggested that the Syro-Egyptian area was the place of manufacture of the object and that it should be dated late rather than early during the rule of Najm al-Din Ayyub.

On the other hand, the specific elements of the decoration show very clearly the impact of northern Mesopotamia and of the so-called Mosul school. This in itself would not be an argument for assigning the object to that area, as D. S. Rice has pointed out in a recent contribution,<sup>22</sup> inasmuch as our closest parallels have been works which are generally claimed to have been made under the influence of the "Mosul" school, but not in Mosul itself. Some of the animal motifs on the basin could perhaps be related to

<sup>20</sup> Rice, "Studies, I," pls 6–8; Wiet, *Cuivres*, pls 37, 42, 45, etc.

<sup>21</sup> There are, of course, exceptions, as Rice, "Studies, III," but the Türk ve İslam Müzezi ewer dated in 627/1229 is of an "ordinary," not royal, type (p. 232), while the Bologna brass bowl was made for a simple officer, not for a ruling prince, and is out of the ordinary in many respects.

<sup>22</sup> "Brasses," in *Ars Orientalis*, 2, pp. 319 ff.

the region of Diyarbakır. Relationship with Christian subjects need not always point to Syria and Mosul, but may also be the result of contacts made farther north along the Tigris and the Euphrates. Furthermore, the roughness and vigor of the central pattern differentiates it sharply from the organized sophistication of works such as the d'Arenberg basin, other Syro-Egyptian objects, and the later Rasulid plate in the Metropolitan Museum. The basin could be attributed to a provincial center influenced by Mesopotamia and in contact with Christian currents. The region of Amida could well be such a center.

Allowance must be made, however, for the fact that in as complex a period as the first half of the thirteenth century it may be adventurous even to try to establish a proper sequence of styles. The movements of princes and of artisans from one place to the other could easily have led to the simultaneous existence of several different styles in the same area, while the *nouveau riche* culture of many a Kurdish or Turkish prince could well have resulted in the revival of older styles and ideas – a revival which is evidenced in other media – or in the experimentation with new motifs or with themes developed outside of the normal metalwork tradition. If at all possible, a more definitive localization and date should await the publication of the d'Arenberg basin and a fuller understanding of the origins of Ayyubid decorative motifs.

## II. The Mamluk Box (Figs 5–6)

The second object acquired by the Kelsey Museum is a rectangular brass box with curved edges, 27 cm in length, 7.5 cm in width and 6 cm in height. The silver inlay has completely disappeared from the top of the box (Fig. 5), where the decoration consisted of a simple narrow scroll pattern along the edge and of an inscription in two parts set between three medallions in the middle. The two side medallions have empty centers – probably a space set aside for a blazon – and a motif of flying birds over an arabesque design around them. The central medallion is similarly organized but bears a decoration of flowers instead of birds. Both birds and flowers were common in the Mamluk period.<sup>23</sup> More inlay has remained on the decoration around the body of the box. There we have another inscription divided by eight medallions. The medallions have a common six-armed swastika in the middle<sup>24</sup> and alternating bird and flower patterns around the swastika. Some of the swastikas seem to have been inlaid with gold instead of silver. A third inscription is found in a cartouche inside the box. Its inlay has remained almost entirely. [367]

<sup>23</sup> Wiet, *Cuivres*, pls 4, 6, 15, 37, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Rice, "Studies, I," p. 565, pl. 8.



## (a) Inscription around the box:

The noble and high Excellency (*maqarr*) our Lord, the Great Amir, the Ghazi, the Warrior for the Faith, the Defender of the Frontiers, the Warden of the Marches, the Helper, the Treasure, the Shelter, the Administrator, the Royal, the Amir Sharaf al-Din, the Chamberlain, (the former slave) of al-Malik al-Nasir.

5 The Mamluk  
box

## (b) Inscription on top of the box:

The high Excellency (*maqarr*) our Lord the Amir Sharaf al-Din Musa, the Chamberlain, of al-Nasir.

## (c) Inscription inside the cover:

The high Excellency (*janab*), our Lord, the Great Amir, the Ghazi, the Warrior for the Faith, the Defender of the Frontiers, Sharaf al-Din, the Amir Chamberlain, of al-Malik al-Nasir.

The person for whom this box was made can be identified as Sharaf al-Din Musa ibn al-Azkashi.<sup>25</sup> The text of the *Manhal* has this to say about him:

Musa ibn al-Azkashi, the amir Sharaf al-Din, was one of the captives of Sultan Hasan.<sup>26</sup> His whole life was spent as an *amir*. He fulfilled a number of official functions, among which were that of chamberlain (*bajib*) in Egypt and that of *ustadar*. He also ruled over a large number of districts. Then he was appointed counsellor of state (*mushir al-dawlah*). He was exalted in offices of state. He used to ride in great majesty and with his household. When he rode, one of his *mamluks* used to carry behind him an ink-bottle and a sand box. After the death of al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'ban, his power declined a little and he became one of the group of *amirs* of the *tablkhanat* (of the drums) until his death in his house at al-Husayniyah on the 16th of *dhu al-qai'dah* in 780. He had been respectable, pious, temperate, noble, kindly to the learned and to the righteous. May God have mercy upon him.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Wiet, *Biographies*, p. 384, No. 2551. Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-Zahirah*, ed. W. Popper, V (Berkeley, 1933–36), p. 337.

<sup>26</sup> His full name was Malik Nasir abu al-Ma'ali Hasan ibn Muhammad; hence the *maliki Nasiri* of our inscription.

<sup>27</sup> Since I did not have at my disposal a manuscript of the *Manhal*, I used a copy made by Sobernheim of the text of fols 372 a–b of vol. 3 of the Cairo manuscript, inasmuch as the Paris manuscript is incomplete and, in particular, has no reference to our man.



6 The Mamluk box

Little else is known about his life, except that he was involved a number of times in palace intrigues.<sup>28</sup> It is not possible to give a precise date to the object under discussion. It must have been made before the death of [368] Sha‘ban in 778/1377, since after that Musa was in partial disgrace. He appears already as *ustadar* and *hajib* in 762,<sup>29</sup> although he seems to have lost the former office, at least for a short while, in 763. It would be to a period when Musa was only *hajib* that we would have to attribute the box, but the texts are insufficient to determine the date. All one can say is that it was made during a period extending from some time before 762 to 778. It is a period from which a great number of objects have remained<sup>30</sup> and the box described here is quite typical of the time. Its main interest is in reviving the memory of one of the thousands of *amirs* who were at the same time the main support and the source of decay of the Mamluk state, whose individual historical importance was secondary, but whose processions through the streets of Cairo preceded by drummers and followed by slaves (future *amirs*) carrying symbols of office, such as perhaps this box, were an everyday occurrence and, next to mosques and mausoleums, one of the most characteristic forms of “conspicuous consumption” in their fast and often precarious lives.

<sup>28</sup> *Nujum*, pp. 156–7, 160, 177; Maqrizi, *Khitat*, Bulaq, 1270, II, pp. 317–18.

<sup>29</sup> Maqrizi, *Khitat*, calls him *amir hajib*, while Taghribirdi uses the title of *ustadar*.

<sup>30</sup> Wiet, *Cuivres*, pp. 195 ff., lists over 150 pieces of metalwork datable between 730 and 780; see also Rice, “Studies, I” and “Studies, IV.”