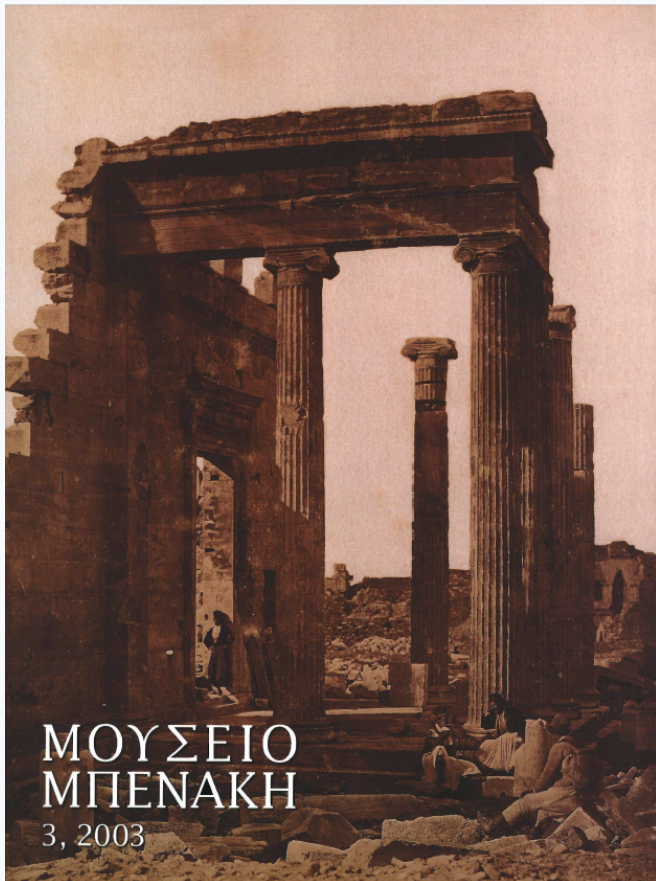


Μουσείο Μπενάκη

Τόμ. 3 (2003)



Ύστερη μαμελουκική μεταλλοτεχνία στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη

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doi: [10.12681/benaki.18243](https://doi.org/10.12681/benaki.18243)

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Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Sardi, M. (2018). Ύστερη μαμελουκική μεταλλοτεχνία στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη. *Μουσείο Μπενάκη*, 3, 157–176. <https://doi.org/10.12681/benaki.18243>

Late Mamluk metalwork in the Benaki Museum

WITH THE NEW MUSEUM of Islamic Art opening in Athens shortly, this seems an appropriate occasion to present a study of a group of late 15th-century metal objects which have until now been housed in the Benaki Museum's Islamic collection, and are being published here for the first time.¹

The group consists of a number of tinned copper vessels which had a utilitarian function. The materials used, the style and decoration, as well as the content of the inscriptions,² all point to a dating in the Late Mamluk period (late 15th - early 16th century).

Most of these vessels are variously-sized dishes which formed part of the household effects of the Amirs or of the Sultan himself. Their function cannot be determined with certainty as they are not depicted in the contemporary manuscript illustrations which represent the basic source of information on everyday life in mediaeval times, but they were probably used to serve fruit and other dry foods.³ The meticulously executed decoration and the high quality of the engraving suggests that they could also have been used as serving trays during great feasts and celebrations.

Dishes

One of the most elaborate items in the group is a dish (fig. 1) whose impressive size –56.5 cm in diameter and 7 cm high– and the contrasting minute engraving makes it a particularly noteworthy piece. The slightly convex body of the vessel stands on a low foot, while its circumference is given emphasis by a cusped rim decorated with an engraved braid of overlapping lines

and a wider band of geometric patterns broken by 16 small roundels.

The cavetto is lavishly adorned with a wide band filled with eight roundel medallions of geometric patterns. Each medallion terminates on either side of its vertical axis in a trefoil finial, while, in the interstices between the medallions, four Arabic inscriptions in *naskhi* script alternate with compartments of geometric patterns. Two of the four inscriptions contain a laudatory poem which can be deciphered as follows:

بلغت من العلياء أعلا المراتب
وقارتك التوفيق من كل جانب
ولا زلت مرغوبا اليك وباسطا
بيمينك في الدنيا بنيل مطالب

“You have reached the highest rank as regards greatness, and good fortune

has associated with you on every side; may you not cease to be in demand and

to stretch forth your right hand in the world by obtaining your wishes.”⁴

The base of the tray is dominated by a central medallion which encloses a Mamluk blazon (fig. 2). The upper field of this tripartite emblem bears a napkin while a cup charged with a pen box flanked by two powder horns is found in the central bar. The lower field contains a smaller high-stemmed cup. This emblem is of the composite type,⁵ namely a blazon filled with the signs of more than one official. This combination of insignia indicates that the blazon cannot be attributed to a specific Amir at the Mamluk court. Instead, as the sources confirm, it was used by the entire body of high



Fig. 1-2. Tinned copper dish and detail showing the tripartite blazon of Qāyrbāy and his successors. Diam.: 0.565 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13107 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

officials in the service of Sultan al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy (r. 1468-1496) and his successors.⁶

An inscription running around the central medallion reads:

الملولوى المخدمى السيفى قانيباى مولانا ملك الأمراء عز نصره
مما عمل برسم المقر الأشرف العالى

*“This is what was made for His Most Noble and High
Excellency, our Lord,
the Well-Served, Saif ad-din Qānibāy, our Lord the
Governor, may his victory
be glorious”*





Fig. 3. Tinned copper dish with an inscribed rim. Diam.: 0.412 m.
Athens, Benaki Museum 13109 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

On the reverse side of the tray an Arabic inscription reads:

برسم المقر الاشرف السيفي أقبای ملك الامراء بالشرقيه

“For his Most Noble Excellency Sayfī ad-dīn Āqbay, General Governor of the Sharqiyya [region in Egypt]”.⁷

According to Mayer this dish cannot be dated later than 888H (December 1483), since it was in this year that Sayfī ad-dīn Aqbay was transferred from Sharqiyya to Gaza.⁸

Equally large and impressive is another dish (fig. 3)⁹ which, despite similarities in shape and material with the first vessel, is one of the few surviving examples with an inscribed rim.¹⁰ The inscription, repeated eight times on the rim, reads:

المالكي العالی

*“The Royal, the Excellency”*¹¹

The curved sides of the vessel are adorned with three bands of decoration: two narrow zones of scrollwork and a wider band filled alternately with knotted Kufic script, lavishly made arabesques and eight interlaced medallions bearing in their centre a rosette. Unlike the previous example, this dish lacks a central blazon, and its core is occupied by a small medallion filled with a rosette. Around this medallion a number of superimposed and interlaced geometric patterns give the overall impression of the open petals of a flower. The rest of the base is adorned with meticulously executed unrolling tendrils.



Fig. 4. Tinned copper dish. Diam.: 0.275 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13108 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

On the undecorated reverse side of the tray can be read:

صاحب الحاج محمد الحاج بن محمد

“Property of al-Haj Muhammad al-Haj bin Muhammad”

and another Ottoman inscription which states:

حزیدی همایون وکیلی اغا حضرتلری ۲۵۳

“Property of Huzeydi Humāynn Vekili Ağa Hezretleri (1) 253 (H)”.¹²

The absence of any Mamluk blazon, the extremely miniaturized decoration, the knotted patterns which surprisingly appear not only in the Kufic script but also in the floral devices as well as the differences in general decoration between this tray and the other dishes of this

type, suggests an attribution to the late Mamluk era (early sixteenth century) or even to early post-Mamluk times.

The dish fig. 4 has its base also decorated with meticulously executed unrolling tendrils (fig. 4).¹³ Its core is occupied by a central medallion filled with ‘Y’-fret patterns while a band of scrollwork entoures the base’s decoration. The Arabic inscription around the medallion found on a hatched ground, compares the owner of the object to the “shining and dazzling moon” – a parallel highly appropriate in an object whose silver colour and circular shape were deliberately chosen to provide such an association.

The inscription around the central medallion and the cavetto read:

طلعة القمر المنير الزاهر / قامة الغصن الرطيب الناصر



Fig. 5-6. Tinned copper dish and detail showing the blazon of the royal secretary (*dawādār*), schematic depiction of an open penbox. Diam.: 0.335 m. Athens, Benaki Museum, 13106 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

“(His/Her) face is like the brilliant shining moon, the posture like a tender blooming sprout”.

A reference to the “*bright moon*” and to the “*twig-like figure*” of the beloved can also be found on another dish in the Benaki collection (fig. 5).¹⁴

The similarities between the two dishes are not limited to the content of the inscriptions but extend to their virtually identical decoration. Both have a base adorned with floral motifs and a cavetto engraved with medallions ending in protruding finials, which alternate with panels of Kufic and illegible Arabic script and arabesques of split leaves. However, the medallion found on the core of the tray is in this case (fig. 6) filled with the schematic rendering of an open penbox. This symbol was associated in Mamluk hierarchy with the rank of the *dawādār*, the royal secretary.¹⁵

On the plain outside of the dish one can read:

برسم عمر ابن عقده

“For ‘Umar ibn ‘aqdah”

In the centre it is written

٢١٨٠١

which must be the number that the piece was holding among the various pieces in the collection of a later owner. The style of the writing, the less extensive decoration and the similarities between the two dishes and an early 16th-century piece in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo¹⁶ suggest that the two objects in the Benaki collection can be dated to the last two decades of the Mamluk regime (early 16th century).

The next dish to be discussed here (fig. 7)¹⁷ shares many decorative features with those applied on the base of the vessel shown in fig. 4. However, the inscription encircling its central medallion has a disparate content and the decoration engraved on its cavetto is in a totally different style. The inscription in the centre repeats the poem quoted above,¹⁸ while omitting its last verse for lack of space.

The convex sides of the vessel are entirely covered with a variety of elaborately executed motifs. Two borders, formed by plain bands and filled with engraved scrollwork, interlace to create circular medallions filled with ‘Y’-fret patterns. The interstices bear tight arabesques of intertwining scrolls with trefoil finials which give an overall impression of a spiral motif.

The undecorated reverse side of the vessel bears two Arabic inscriptions placed almost opposite each other.



Fig. 7. Tinned copper dish. Diam.: 0.412 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13110 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

The first one reads:

الحاج محمد كتورى شوق الجيل معلم

“*al- Hajj Muḥammad Katwarī (?) Sawf al- Khayl Mu‘allim*”

and the second one:

محمدى

“*Muḥammadī*”

The decorative motifs applied on the cavetto of this dish are only found on one other tinned copper tray, inscribed with the name of Sultan Khansuh al-Ghūrī (1516).¹⁹ On the basis of this unexpected similarity the Benaki tray should also be attributed to the beginning of the 16th century.

The next three dishes may be taken as forming a

separate sub-group of copperware objects in view of the naturalistic blossoms which decorate the surface of the base.

The first dish (fig. 8)²⁰ has a base adorned with several superimposed geometric patterns creating lozenges and triangles around a central tripartite blazon.²¹ These lozenges are filled with lotus blossoms which alternate with ‘Y’-fret patterns filling the triangular interstices. The Arabic inscription found around the core of the dish is benedictory, in which the dish itself, as a speaking object, seems to address “*good wishes to its owner*”. The decoration of the cavetto consists of interlacing roundels filled with geometric patterns alternating with panels of floral arabesques and decorative knotted Kufic inscriptions.



Fig. 8. Tinned copper dish decorated with lotus flowers. Diam.: 0.385 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13103 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

On the reverse side of the dish an Arabic inscription reads:

شاهين من طبقه الرفرف

“*Shahin from Corps of Rafraf*”

This is not the first time that the *Corps of Rafraf* is mentioned on an item of 15th century copperware.²² However the written sources do not help us to identify with precision either the role or the composition of this corps. The only thing that can safely be said is that the name *Rafraf* is known to have been given to a superimposed structure which formed part of the royal buildings in the Citadel of Cairo.²³ The Citadel was originally designed as the residence of the Mamluk sultans and their high officials and it remained the seat of government

until 1874. Presumably the corps mentioned in these dishes must have some connection with this particular building and it possibly had its headquarters there.

The existence of a copper tray in Ledoux collection bearing almost identical decoration with that of the Benaki dish suggests that this copper vessel should also be attributed to the years 1500-1516.²⁴

With identical decoration on its curved sides, the second dish (fig. 9)²⁵ strongly resembles the first piece. However, small variations can be noticed in the depiction of the lotus flowers which occupy the geometric patterns created around the core of the dish (fig. 10). The inscription around the central medallion also has a different content, repeating the laudatory poem previ-



Fig. 9. Tinned copper dish. Diam.: 0.39 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13105 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

Fig. 10. Detail of the bottom of dish fig. 9.

ously deciphered,²⁶ while the back of the vessel (fig. 10) bears the following inscription:

الحاج محمد افندی

“*el-Haj Mehmed Efendi*”

The Ottoman titles mentioned in the inscription suggest that the name belongs to a later owner of the vessel. The clear resemblances between this dish and the vessel shown in fig. 6 indicate a similar date of production.

The last copperware dish in the Benaki collection, whose base is decorated with engraved floral blossoms slightly different depicted among geometric patterns, is shown at fig. 11.²⁷ This item bears on its base the same devices as the two dishes just described,²⁸ but its cavetto is decorated in a totally different manner. Instead of the usual interlacing medallions, found in several of the dishes discussed above, the cavetto here is ornamented with two narrow decorative bands filled with strapwork and a wider one bearing medallions filled alternately with tripartite blazons and geometric patterns.²⁹ The interstices between the medallions form oval compartments filled with knotted Kufic script and floral motifs.

A close stylistic connection between this dish and another one in Washington, dating from the late 15th - early 16th century, suggests the attribution of the Benaki dish to the same period.³⁰

The last tray to be presented here displays a significant variation in shape. Unlike the majority of the copper dishes under discussion, this object (fig. 12) lacks the standard cusped rim with the engraved hatched area on each cusp.³¹ Instead, a flat circular rim engraved with two plain bands and a thin string of overlapping lines runs round the circumference. The decoration has no unusual features. The motifs engraved on the cavetto repeat the standard knotted Kufic inscriptions alternating with vegetal arabesques, while the ornamentation of the base reproduces the common device of unrolling tendrils surrounding frequently repeated laudatory poem.³²

What is of particular interest is the fact that the medallion found on the core of this dish, engraved with the emblem of the *dawādār*, is cusped and filled with floral decoration, a rather unusual feature in Mamluk emblems. Moreover, the schematic rendering of the pen case here finds no exact parallel among the several variations of the same emblem presented in Mayer’s list.³³ All this suggests that the *dawādār* blazon could have been used here not as a real Mamluk emblem but rather as a



Fig. 11. Tinned copper dish bearing the tripartite blazon of Qāyṭbāy on its cavetto. Diam.: 0.375 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13102 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).



Fig. 12. Tinned copper dish with a flat circular rim. Diam.: 0.465 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13104 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

decorative motif. The ornamental use of this emblem, in combination with the absence of the typical cusped rim, indicates that the tray dates from the very last years of the Mamluk dynasty.

The outside of the tray bears two Arabic inscriptions. The first states:

صاحب حاجی حسین حوریجی حمل سنه ۱۱۱۷

“Property of *Hajī Huseyn Hurjī Jamal* (or *Hamal*) year 117”,

which must refer to the year (1) 117 (1705/1706 AD)

The second inscription reads:

مما عمل برسم علی بای خازندار المقام الشریف

“This was made for *Alī Bāy*, the treasurer of his Royal Majesty”³⁴

Lunch Boxes

The next sub-group of metalwork in the Benaki collection consists of two tinned copper boxes. The terms used by scholars to describe these vessels vary. G. Wiet calls them “*cantines à repas*”,³⁵ and Ruthven “*canteens*”,³⁶ while Allan, following Mayer’s suggestion, has published them under the term “*lunch boxes*”.³⁷

As clearly emerges from the Arabic terms for these boxes, they were designed to carry the food supplies required for a journey. The difference in their sizes indicates that some could contain food for more than one person, while the small ones hold a day’s rations for just one traveller. However, the lack of any drawing or miniature showing these boxes in use makes it difficult to establish their function with certainty.

These containers were normally stacked on top of each other in units of two or three, to form a single vessel with a lid. They were made in such a way that the base of each unit was a perfect fit with the vessel below, for which it served as a lid. The upper box was the only one covered with a separate lid.

A feature of these boxes is that they all seem to have the same cup-like handle on the top of their lids. The unusual shape of these handles suggests that these lids, when reversed, might have been used as plates with a base.³⁸ This additional function would have made vessels of this type even more practical.

The ornamentation found on these boxes is always engraved, but the decorative vocabulary applied on them is

fairly wide. From this point of view they can be roughly divided into two types: those whose surface is totally decorated and those which have decorative motifs standing out boldly on a plain ground. Both the lunch boxes of the Benaki collection belong to the first group, since they are fully covered with rich ornamentation.

The lunch box shown at fig. 13 consists of one near-octagonal basin unit and lid.³⁹ The lid has on its top a cup-like handle placed in the centre of an oval panel filled with spiral scrolls. The front and the back of the lid's tapering sides are adorned with a wide band consisting of eight roundels filled with 'Y'-fret patterns. The medallions alternate with arabesques of split leaves and two panels engraved with Arabic inscriptions.

The decoration on the main body includes identical medallions alternating with arabesques, knotted Kufic inscriptions and Arabic inscriptions on a hatched ground. The overall decoration is united by plain interlacing borders. Above and below this decorative band two narrow zones of strapwork are broken by six petalled rosettes.

The single line Arabic inscriptions on the sides of the lid can be deciphered as follows; on the back:

مما عمل يرسم الجناح العالی المو

"This is one of the objects made for his High Excellency"

and on the front:

المولوی الامیری الکبیری

"Our Lord, the Amir, the Great"⁴⁰

The double line inscriptions found on the main body of the vessel are illegible.

The contents of the canteen were kept secure by the use of a metal catch and hinges, though to judge from their crude fixing, both must be a later addition.

What makes this particular lunch box a rare piece are its large size and its irregular shape, which have no parallel among the surviving examples of this group of objects.⁴¹ In terms of decoration however, another lunch box, now in Jerusalem,⁴² dated to the early 16th century, bears very similar ornamental devices on its body. In view of the similarities between the two boxes and the devices engraved on them I would attribute the Benaki piece to the same period.

The second lunch box of the collection (fig. 14)⁴³ is smaller and has less impressive decoration. It has an oval shape and a single unit basin with a cup-like handle roughly hammered on to the top of its lid. Unlike the pre-

viously described box this one does not have a clasp-lock.

The decoration engraved on the lid and the body is almost identical. Plain bands interlace to create medallions filled with geometrical patterns. The interstices are alternately filled with Arabic inscriptions on a cross hatched ground and stylized floral decoration. The inscription on the lid reads:

"You have reached the highest rank as regards greatness, and good fortune has associated with you on every side; may you not cease to be in demand"⁴⁴

The decoration on the top of the lid consists of an oval panel which has on either side two ovoid medallions with a trefoil finial. On the lateral sides of the trefoils, two six-petalled blossoms are engraved.

The decorative devices applied on this lunch box, which are found in several items of copperware in this group, indicate that it can be dated to the late 15th - early 16th century.

Bowls

The final group of late Mamluk copperware owned by the Museum consists of two small bowls with meticulously engraved decoration.

The first of these (fig. 15) is a wide bowl with a low foot.⁴⁵ The interior is totally plain, while the external surface is fully covered with minute decorative devices. The ornamentation is roughly divided into three decorative bands. The wide zone under the rim consists of six medallions, half of which are filled with 'Y'-fret patterns, while the rest bear the tripartite blazon discussed above,⁴⁶ surrounded by a band of scrollwork (fig. 16). The interstices between the medallions are filled with three cartouches of double line Arabic inscriptions alternating with stylized floral motives. The inscriptions among the blazons read:

المعلم علاء الدین حسین ابن معلم ملک الأمراء قانصوه الیحیاوی
مما عمل برسم

"This is what was made for the lord 'Alā' ad-dīn Husain, son of the Master of the General Governor Qānṣūh al-Yahyāwī".

Just below this band is an unexpected short Arabic inscription, crudely engraved. This inscription is partially decipherable as follows:

وقف الحاج مصطفى دس وزیت عن طرئی السادا... .

"Vakf al-Hajj Mustafa ... (?)"

The middle and widest zone contains four rows of



Fig. 13. Tinned copper lunch box with octagonal shape. L.: 0.34 m.
Athens, Benaki Museum 13078 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).



Fig. 14. Tinned copper lunch box with oval shape. L.: 0.263 m.
Athens, Benaki Museum 33701 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).



Fig. 15. Tinned copper bowl bearing the tripartite blazon of Qāyrbāy. Diam.: 0.215 m.
Athens, Benaki Museum 13118 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

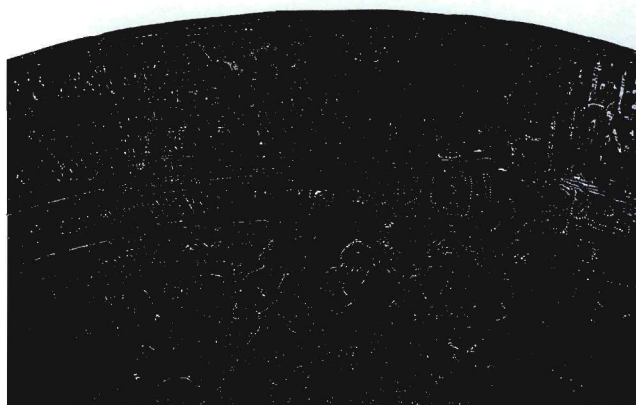


Fig. 16. Detail of the blazon on the bowl at fig. 15.



Fig. 17. Tinned copper bowl. Berlin, Staatliche Museen
I 3675 (photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).

inversely intertwined trefoils,⁴⁷ while the third and narrowest band is filled with elaborate arabesques.

The otherwise undecorated surface of the interior of the bowl bears two inscriptions, one reading:

“*al-Hajj Zeyn*”

and the other:

“*al-Fakir Bakri*”⁴⁸

The roughly engraved inscription on the outside of the bowl as well as the two in the interior must belong to later owners of the vessel.

According to Mayer, who first published this object, the terminus *ante quem* for this bowl must be 1497 AD, the year in which Qānṣūh al-Yahyāwī died.⁴⁹ The blazon engraved on the Benaki bowl, different to that of Qānṣūh al-Yahyāwī which is known from various sources,⁵⁰ is attributable to his son Husain who obviously bore the title of Emir. Despite its unusual shape and decoration, a parallel piece to this bowl can be found in Berlin (fig. 17).⁵¹ The decoration of the two vessels is very similar and leaves no doubt of their close chronological connection.

The second bowl in the Benaki collection (fig. 18),⁵² with its hemispherical body and straight rim, represents one of the characteristic shapes of metalwork during the last decades of the Mamluk Empire. The decoration of this vessel is limited to two horizontal decorative zones. The upper one consists of six cusped medallions bearing the blazon of the *dawādār* encircled by a band of scrollwork. The medallions are placed among oval compartments alternately filled with Arabic inscriptions on a cross-hatched ground and finely executed arabesques of split leaves. A continuous plain band encircles the registers and loops around the ovals and the medallions.

The inscription running around the rim refers to the wine drinking.⁵³ The second band is filled with engraved strapwork interrupted by small medallions filled with rosettes. Just below the medallions of the main band is a series of six triangular cartouches filled with ‘Y’-patterns. Each cartouche has a trefoil finial while two split palmettes extend from its lateral sides. Alternating with these cartouches are six cusped medallions, possibly engraved with the name of the owner.

The last vessel to be described in this article (fig. 19)⁵⁴ is of unusual shape and size. It consists of a basin with an al-



Fig. 18. Tinned copper bowl bearing the blazon of the royal secretary. Diam.: 0.133 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 13089 (photo: Sp. Delivorrias).

most flat base, slightly tapering sides and a faintly inverted rim opening to a curved tapering spout. The narrow rim bears a band of scrollwork, which ends at the point where the spout starts. The spout is decorated on both its lateral sides with herringbone patterns on a ground of engraved hatching. However, the most prominent part of the decoration is found at the area just below the spout where a medallion bears the tripartite blazon described above, executed on a ground of floral arabesques. On its vertical axis the roundel of the blazon terminates in lavishly executed cartouches filled with minute floral scrolls.

The body of the vessel is more heavily adorned with three bands of decoration. The upper and lower zones bear arabesques of split leaves while the middle band is totally covered with double line Arabic inscriptions on a hatched ground.⁵⁵

The function of this particular vessel cannot be easily determined, since the majority of surviving spouted vessels are much smaller in size and have a different shape.⁵⁶ However a spouted vessel, now in Jerusalem,⁵⁷ which has been published as a “*spouted basin for the bath*”, represents a very close parallel, and this suggests that both were intended for pouring water during the bathing. Moreover, the decorative similarities between the two basins suggest a dating of the Benaki Museum piece to the 16th century.

Conclusion

The collection of Late Mamluk copperware held by



Fig. 19. Copper basin with a spout bearing the composite blazon of Qāyrbāy and his successors. L.: 0.263 m. Athens, Benaki Museum 33701 (photo: Sp. Samios).

the Benaki Museum gives a clear picture of the artistic taste of the time; it cannot however claim to display the full range of contemporary metalcraft, as a mere glance at the precious metal objects inlaid with black bitumen (fig. 19) and, more rarely, gold and silver,⁵⁸ made for Sultan Qāyrbāy and members of his family, is enough to demonstrate.⁵⁹

What emerges from the copperware in this collection and in other museums is an artistic taste which is far removed from the traditional form of metalwork developed during the era of the Bahri Mamluks, but which appears to coexist with the more conservative school of inlaid brasses made for Qāyrbāy. It is apparent, therefore, that in the Late Mamluk period two very different styles dominated the metalwork output of Egypt.

Typical of the first of these are the brass pieces made for the Mamluk Sultan⁶⁰ which represent the more traditional movement of the period. The term 'traditional' refers to the fact that in terms of shape, decoration and material, these pieces, although full of innovative elements, are closer to their Bahri prototypes. The main characteristics of this school are inlaid decoration,

highly naturalistic execution of the floral patterns and the large *thuluth* script with flame-like shafts on a floral ground (fig. 20).

The copperware discussed in this article belongs to the second movement, which consists of items with engraved decoration. It is characterised by a linear quality, a *horror vacui*, miniaturisation of the motifs, and a geometrically arranged layout which is always divided into horizontal or concentric bands. This new style seems to make its first appearance on certain pieces made for the Amirs of Qāyrbāy in the second half of the 15th century, and it continues throughout the 16th century, being found even on objects made for the Sultan himself.⁶¹

The existence of this new artistic school, to which the majority of surviving objects belongs, demonstrates that even though by the time of the two last important Mamluk Sultans, al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy (1468-1496) and Qānsūh al-Ghawrī (1501-1516) the shortage of precious metals was not so marked as in the first half of the 15th-century, the preference for copper objects was particularly striking.

What was the reason for the popularity of these copper artifacts in the late Mamluk period? Does it



Fig. 20. Brass candlestick inlaid with black bitumen inscribed with the name of Sultan Qāyṭbāy. It was made as a donation of the Sultan to the Mosque of Medina. Athens, Benaki Museum 13040 (photo: Sp. Samios).

Fig. 21. Brass bucket with engraved decoration. Berne, Historisches Museum (after: A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World: 8-18th centuries* [London 1982] 237 fig. 61).

represent a change in artistic taste or is it a reflection of contemporary socio-cultural developments, yet another indication of the dependence of art on social conditions? The answer seems to lie somewhere between the two. Basically, one must remember that all but one of the simple copper objects were commissioned by the Mamluk Amir class,⁶² while inlaid brass was primarily intended for the Sultan himself and his family.

This distinction is no accident: history confirms that in the second half of the 15th century the ruling Amir class was in a difficult position economically. The natural disasters and plagues which had struck Egypt in recent decades had inflicted severe damage on the farming population and reduced agricultural output; this in its turn resulted in a significant diminution of the income of the Mamluk Amirs,⁶³ which was chiefly derived from a poll tax on farmers.

The result was that the Amirs, who had in the past been great patrons of the arts and commissioned artifacts no less costly than those belonging to the Sultan, could no longer afford the expense of having their crest inlaid with precious metals.⁶⁴ It was only natural that they should turn their attention to objects made of cheaper materials but at the same time decorated in a manner aimed at producing an equally impressive effect.

It was doubtless this double need which made the metalworkers of the period, accustomed to produce brass objects with inlaid decoration, look for alternative techniques of ornamentation and new sources of inspiration in order to satisfy their exacting clientele by creating objects of high aesthetic value at a lower cost.

For these, tinned copper made a suitable choice, as plating gave to the otherwise dull metal the sparkle of silver—a metal difficult to obtain at the time—and thus satisfied the ever-present desire of the Mamluks to possess objects which recalled the brightness of the sun and the moon.

As regards ornamentation, the inlay technique was replaced by detailed miniature engraving, which could be adapted to objects of any shape or size. It seems that the inspiration for this came from the arts of Iran. Iranian craftsmen were already familiar with the ornamentation of copper tinned vessels with engraved motifs and they presented an obvious and readily available source of models.

This turn towards Iranian art should cause no surprise as cultural exchanges between the two regions had always

existed. At this particular period it was also favoured by political factors. The conquest of Syria by Tamerlane in the early 15th century and the establishment of the Timurid dynasty, which survived until the early 16th century, had forced many intellectuals, artists and craftsmen to take refuge in Cairo and, naturally, they brought their cultural baggage with them.⁶⁵ Moreover according to the sources, under the Sultan al-Ghāwri an Iranian atmosphere could be felt inside the palace as well. The Sultan's entourage consisted of "a'jām", his preference for the Iranian literature and the religious buildings with Iranian elements commissioned by him, demonstrates that Sultan al-Ghawri was a devotee of Iranian art.⁶⁶

A comprehensive study of the decorative motifs on Timurid 15th-century metalwork⁶⁷ confirms that they bear a great similarity to those found on the copper of the group examined in this article. The objects themselves also support this view. The striking resemblance between the bowl (fig. 15) and a brass bucket, now

in Berne (fig. 21),⁶⁸ which is attributed to an Iranian workshop, leaves no doubt as to the close connection between the arts of Iran and those of the Circassian Mamluks.

All these observations point to the conclusion that the two separate artistic trends which appear to coexist in Late Mamluk metalwork do not necessarily originate from the presence of two separate workshops, one central and one provincial.⁶⁹ In my opinion they derive from other factors: the new political conditions which developed in the reign of Qāyrbāy and his successors, the changes in the economic position of the ruling officials and, finally, the Iranian influences, due both to the refugees and to the artistic taste of Sultan al-Ghawri, on the art of late 15th and early 16th-century Egypt.

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NOTES

1. An earlier version of this article formed part of my MA thesis, M. Sardi, *Late Mamluk Metalwork in the Benaki Museum* (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 2002). For access to the archives of the museum and permission to publish the artifacts I am deeply indebted to the Director of the Benaki Museum Prof. A. Delivorrias and the Curators of the Islamic Department Dr. A. Ballian and M. Moraitou.

2. Both the reading and English translation of the Arabic inscriptions published in this article have been made by S. Mohammad T. Shariat-Panahi.

3. See J. Allan, *Later Mamluk Metalwork: A series of dishes*, *Oriental Art* 15,1 (1969) 40.

4. The English translation follows that published by Allan (*op. cit.*) 39. The French translation of the same text can be found in L. Massignon, *Six Plats de Bronze de Style Mamelouk*, *BIFAO* 10 (1912) 87-88.

5. For further information about composite blazons, see L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry* (Oxford 1938) 31.

6. For the names of the Amirs bearing this blazon see *ibid.* 34.

7. The translation of both the inscriptions follows that in Mayer (n. 5) 175-76. However, according to another reading the same inscription can be deciphered as "...the Well-Served,

Saif ad-din Qāyrbāy...". In this case, which is not at all impossible, the name inscribed on the dish is that of Sultan Qāyrbāy himself. What may also support this second reading is the fact that in G. Wiet, *Catalogue general du musée Arabe du Caire. Objets en cuivre* (Cairo 1932) 237 no. 364 of the list headed "*Objets Mobiliers en Cuivre et en Bronze*" records a "...plateau au nom de Qaitbay", belonging to the Benaki Collection. However, the archives of the museum contain no record of such a tray. The dish mentioned by Wiet could therefore be the same as that attributed by Mayer to Amir Qanibay.

8. Mayer (n. 5) 176.

9. Inv. no. 13109. Dimensions: diam. 41.2 cm, h. 4.5 cm.

10. The only three tinned copper dishes with an inscribed rim which have come to my attention are the following: a) a tray in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo bearing the name of Amir Nawruz. Published in Wiet (n. 7) 136-37 no. 8234 pl. LIV; b) a tray in the Massignon Collection, made for an Emir called Shihāb al-Dīn, sīdī Ahmad Ibn al Maghrabī, published in Massignon (n. 4) 87-88 pl. IV; c) a tray dedicated to Sultan Barsbay al-Muhammedi (r. 1422-1438), now in Çinili Kösk Müzesi, Istanbul (inv. no. 24). Published in P. Ruthven, *Two metalworks of the Mamluk Period*, *Arts Islamica* 1 (1934) 230 fig. 1.

11. Some of these repeated inscriptions contain orthographi-

cal mistakes, possibly arising from the lack of space.

12. I am not able to identify whether one of the two inscribed owners was the original patron of the vessel; however the Ottoman titles which accompany the name of the second inscription reveals that this owner must be a later one. The number inscribed is that of the date 1837/1838 AD.

13. Inv. no. 13108: Dimensions: diam. 27.5, h. 3.5 cm.

14. Inv. no. 13106: Dimensions: diam. 33.5 cm, h. 4.7 cm. The inscription found on this dish is identical with that on the dish fig. 4. They both follow the translation found in S. Carboni, *Glass of the Sultans* (New York 2002) 241.

15. For the name of the Circassian Mamluks bearing this blazon see L. A. Mayer, À propos du blason sous les Mamluks Circassiens, *Syria* 18 (1937) 392-93.

16. Copper tray with the name of Emir Khushkaldi-al-Khazindar, no. 8256, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. Published in Wiet (n. 7) 138 pl. LV.

17. Inv. no. 13110. Dimensions: diam. 41.2 cm, h. 4.5 cm.

18. The poem inscribed on this dish is identical with that on the dish 13107, excluding the phrase "...and to stretch forth your right hand in the world by obtaining your wishes".

19. Copper dish made for Sultan Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī, No 3169. Published in Wiet (no. 7) 76-7 pl. LVI.

20. Inv. no. 13103: Dimensions: diam. 38.5 cm, h. 4.5 cm.

21. The blazon on this tray is identical with that on the dish fig. 1.

22. A copper tray in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo states that the piece was made for "... the Emir Saif al-din Kanibay of the Corps of Rafrāf...". Published in Wiet (n. 7) 131 no. 7593 pl. LII. Another dish inscribed with the phrase "...for the Doorkeeper, of the Rafrāf-Barracks..." is published in Mayer (n. 5) 176. However, it is possible that the two dishes mentioned by Mayer and Wiet are in fact the same object. The lack of the inventory number of the dish in Mayer's publication could easily lead to a misunderstanding.

23. See N. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A new Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden 1995) 154.

24. Published by Massignon (n. 5) 79 pl. 1.

25. Inv. no. 13105: Dimensions: diam. 39 cm, h. 5.5 cm.

26. The poem inscribed on dish fig. 9 is identical with that found on dishes fig. 1 and fig. 7. However, due to lack of space the phrase "...by obtaining your wishes" has been omitted on the dish fig. 9.

27. Inv. no. 13102. Dimensions: diam. 37.5 cm, h. 5.5 cm.

28. The inscription engraved around the central medallion is identical with that found on dish fig. 9. However the laudatory poem here is found in its complete form, as it appears at the bottom of the dish (fig. 1).

29. The tripartite blazons on the cavetto of this tray are identical to that engraved on dish fig. 1.

30. Tray no. 15944, Washington DC, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Published in E. Atil, *Renaissance of Islam. The art of the Mamluks* (Washington 1987) 108 pl. 39.

31. Inv. no. 13104: Dimensions: diam. 46.5 cm, h. 6 cm.

32. The poem inscribed on this dish is identical with that on dish no. 13110 (fig. 5).

33. See Mayer (n. 5) 17.

34. The name included in the first inscription must be that of a later owner of the tray, while that in the second inscription could be that of the original patron. Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify either of the two names.

35. Wiet (n. 7) 86-87, 163-269.

36. Ruthven (n. 10) 230-34.

37. J. W. Allan, Later Mamluk Metalwork II: A series of lunch boxes, *Oriental Art* 17,2 (1971) 156-64.

38. Allan (*op. cit.*) 160.

39. Inv. no. 13078: Dimensions: l. 34 cm, h. 16,5 cm, w. 20 cm.

40. The name of the Amir for whom the object was made is not mentioned.

41. The most common shape for these lunch boxes is elliptic, although a few circular exceptions do exist. See R. Ward, *Islamic Metalwork* (London 1993) 118 pl. 95 and Z. Irit, *Islamic Metalwork* (Tel Aviv 1996) 94 pl. 76. However, my research has discovered no lunch boxes of a polyhedral shape.

42. See Irit (*op.cit.*) 94 pl. 76, inv. no. 759.69.

43. Inv. no. 33701. Dimensions: l. 26. 3 cm., h. 15.5 cm, w. 17 cm.

44. The same benedictory poem, commonly found on the series of dishes presented here, can also be found on another tinned copper lunch box in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv. no. M53-1954. Published in Allan (n. 37) 157 pl. 1.

45. Inv. no. 13118: Dimensions: diam. of the rim 21.5 cm, h. 10.1 cm.

46. See again fig. 1.

47. The same motif can be found on a tinned copper dish in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. See tray no. 4456 made for the Mamluk Emir Saif al-din Khudābirdi (d. 1516), published in Wiet (n. 7) 122 pl. LVII, LVIII.

48. The reading and translation of the inscriptions on this bowl follow those made by L. A. Mayer, Huit Objets Inédits à Blazons Mamluks en Grèce et en Turquie, *Mélanges Maspero* 3 (Cairo 1940) 102.

49. Mayer (*op. cit.*) 97-104.

50. The blazon of Qānṣūh al- Yahyāwī is described by L. Mayer as follows: “On the upper field a napkin, on the middle field a cup between a pen box placed vertically and a horn(?), on the lower field a cup” in Mayer (n. 5) 180-81. The same blazon is also reproduced in K. A. C. Creswell, *Two Khāns at Khān Tūmān, Syria* 4 (1923) 137 pl. XXVIIA.

51. Stem bowl dated to 1460. Published in *Islamische Kunst* (Berlin 1987) 108 pl. 178.

52. Inv. no 13089; Dimensions: diam. of the rim 13.3 cm, h. 6 cm.

53. Prof. D. Behrens-Abouseif advised me on the general content of the inscriptions. I am most grateful to her.

54. Inv. no 13079; Dimensions: diam. 28.5 cm, h. 13.5 cm, l. 38.3 cm.

55. Due to the poor condition of the vessel’s surface the inscriptions are only partly legible; however according to the Museum’s archives, in addition to a series of goodwill formulas they also include Koranic verses.

56. See J. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork in the Nuhad es-Said Collection* (London 1982) 100.

57. Spouted basin for the bath, Inv. no. 85.58.60, Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Published in *Irit* (n. 41) 94 fig. 76.

58. See a brass bowl in Turkey, inv. no. 2959 in *Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art* (Istanbul 2002) 192.

59. For the list of objects bearing the name of Sultan Qāytbāy, see Wiet (n. 7) 35. For some additional entries and detailed descriptions, see A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Cuivres inédits de l’Époque de Qāytbāy, Kunst des Orients* 6,2 (1969) 99-133.

60. A few brass pieces made for the high Amirs of Qāytbāy do exist but their decoration is not inlaid but engraved. See Melikian-Chirvani (*op. cit.*) 99-119.

61. See n. 19.

62. In the case of the lunch boxes Allan states that the own-

ers of the vessels included not only Amirs and Mamluks but also members of the indigenous official class. See Allan (n. 36) 161.

63. The main source of income for the Mamluks Amirs during the 15th century was the levy of the *iqṭāʿ* (= *appointment*), which was a revocable allotment of revenue yield from a tract of agrarian land to provide an officer with resources to support his troop contingent and personal expenses (the definition-translation of the term *iqṭāʿ* follows the glossary of C. F. Petry [ed.], *The Cambridge History of Egypt* 1 [Cambridge 1998] 529).

64. J. C. Garcin explains the change in the financial among the sultan and the emirs during the 15th century as following: “If we can accept that, in spite of the epidemics, the figure for the population of the capital remained relatively stable over a long period, it is likely, on the other hand, that the population of some 2,500 localities in Egypt decreased considerably. The yield of agrarians land, and so of the *iqṭāʿ*’s, had fallen, which explains the growing imbalance between the sultan’s resources and those of the amirs”, J. C. Garcin, *The Regime of the Circassian Mamluks, The Cambridge History of Egypt* (n. 63) 314.

65. J. P. Berkey states that “... *The dislocations associated with the Timurid invasions provoked a westward migration parallel to that which had occurred a century and a half earlier under the Mongols, and again in the fifteenth century Egypt became a place of refuge for scholars, artists, and craftsmen from places further east.*”, Berkey, *Culture and Society during the late Middle Ages, The Cambridge History of Egypt* (n. 63) 394.

66. See D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts, Mamluk Studies Review* 6 (2002) 71-94.

67. See L. Komaroff, *The Golden disc of Heaven, Metalwork of Timurid Iran* (Costa Mesa-California-New York 1992) 60.

68. Published in A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World from 8th-18th centuries* (London 1982) 237 pl. 61.

69. See Allan (n. 37) 164.

ΜΑΡΙΑ ΣΑΡΔΗ

Ύστερη μαμελουκική μεταλλοτεχνία στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη

Η μεταλλοτεχνία υπήρξε στο παρελθόν και συνεχίζει να είναι μία από τις πιο δημοφιλείς τέχνες του ισλαμικού κόσμου. Το παρόν άρθρο εξετάζει μία σειρά μεταλλικών αντικειμένων της Ισλαμικής Συλλογής του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, τα οποία αποδίδονται στην καλλιτεχνική παραγωγή της Αιγύπτου των τελών του 15ου και των

αρχών του 16ου αιώνα, στην επονομαζόμενη ύστερη περίοδο της ηγεμονίας των Μαμελούκων Σουλτάνων.

Οι Μαμελούκοι, στρατιωτικό σώμα αποτελούμενο από σκλάβους τουρκικής καταγωγής, διαδέχθηκαν τους Αγιουβίδες στην ηγεσία της Αιγύπτου, της Συρίας και των ιερών τόπων του Ισλάμ από τα μέσα του 13ου αιώ-

να, αναδεικνύοντας τη νέα πρωτεύουσα της χώρας, το Κάιρο, σε μητρόπολη των τεχνών. Η εποχή των Μαμελούκων διακρίνεται σε δύο φάσεις. Η πρώτη είναι γνωστή ως η περίοδος των Μπάχι Μαμελούκων (1250-1382) και συχνά ταυτίζεται με το απόγειο της δύναμης τους· ενώ η δεύτερη, στην οποία κυριαρχούν οι Κιρκάσιοι ή Μπούρτζι Μαμελούκοι, καλύπτει τα έτη από το 1382 έως το 1517.

Οι Μαμελούκοι χάρη στις στρατιωτικές τους ικανότητες υπήρξαν οι μόνοι ηγέτες του ισλαμικού κόσμου που κατάφεραν να αναχαιτίσουν την επέλαση των Μογγόλων σε ολόκληρη την Εγγύς Ανατολή. Παράλληλα, ανέπτυξαν ευρείες εμπορικές επαφές και αποκόμισαν μεγάλα κέρδη από τη φορολόγηση των μπαχαρικών που από την Ινδία έφταναν στη Μεσόγειο. Η ανακάλυψη όμως από τον Πορτογάλο Βάσκο ντα Γκάμα νέων θαλάσσιων οδών προς την Ινδία (1499) αποστέρησε την Αίγυπτο από το μονοπώλιο των μπαχαρικών, μειώνοντας σημαντικά τα εισοδήματα του κράτους. Εξάλλου, τα υπέρογκα ποσά που δαπανούνταν για την αντιμετώπιση των συνεχών πολεμικών πιέσεων από τους Οθωμανούς, σε συνδυασμό με τους καταστροφικούς λοιμούς που έπληξαν την Αίγυπτο τον 15ο αιώνα, οδήγησαν το Μαμελούκικο καθεστώς σε αναπόφευκτη οικονομική κρίση και τελικά στην προσάρτηση της χώρας τους από τους Οθωμανούς Τούρκους (1516).

Κατά συνέπεια, οι Κιρκάσιοι Μαμελούκοι, οι οποίοι είχαν τη διακυβέρνηση της Αιγύπτου στα δύσκολα χρόνια του 15ου αιώνα, μας έχουν κληροδοτήσει λιγότερο εντυπωσιακά και λαμπερά καλλιτεχνήματα από ό,τι οι προκάτοχοί τους. Η οικονομική δυσπραγία, κυρίως στο α΄ μισό του αιώνα, κατέστησε σχεδόν απαγορευτική τη χρήση πολύτιμων μετάλλων στην ένθεση των αντικειμένων, με αποτέλεσμα τα καλλιτεχνικά προϊόντα της ύστερης μαμελούκικης περιόδου να φαίνονται λιγότερο αξιόλογα στα μάτια πολλών μελετητών, που έως πρόσφατα αντιμετώπιζαν την όψιμη αυτή περίοδο ως φάση καλλιτεχνικής παρακμής. Την άποψη αυτή ενίσχυε και το γεγονός ότι από αυτήν την περίοδο λίγα μόνο αντικείμενα έχουν γίνει γνωστά και έχουν μελετηθεί διεξοδικά, με αποτέλεσμα η όποια αξιολόγηση της περιόδου να είναι ελλιπής.

Η παρουσίαση της συλλογής του Μουσείου Μπενάκη είναι ιδιαίτερα σημαντική, γιατί φέρνει στην επιφάνεια αντικείμενα υψηλής καλλιτεχνικής αξίας από μία εποχή της ισλαμικής τέχνης που στερείται προβολής.

Ταυτόχρονα, πολλά από αυτά τα αντικείμενα, που έχουν κατασκευαστεί στο μεταίχμιο δύο μεγάλων δυνασθειών –της Μαμελουκικής και της Οθωμανικής–, παρέχουν πολύτιμες πληροφορίες για την εξέλιξη της ισλαμικής τέχνης μετά την κατάκτηση της Αιγύπτου από τους Οθωμανούς.

Τα αντικείμενα αυτού του άρθρου συγκροτούν μία ομάδα χάλκινων επικασσιτερωμένων σκευών, την πλειονότητα των οποίων απαρτίζουν 10 δίσκοι ποικίλων διαστάσεων που αποτελούσαν τμήμα της οικοσκευής των Μαμελούκων εμίρηδων ή ακόμα και του ίδιου του σουλτάνου. Η χρήση τους δεν μπορεί να καθοριστεί με ακρίβεια καθώς ανάλογη απεικόνισή τους σε μεσαιωνικά χειρόγραφα –που αποτελούν τις κύριες πηγές πληροφόρησης για την καθημερινή ζωή της εποχής–, δεν είναι διαθέσιμη. Ωστόσο, το πιθανότερο είναι ότι χρησιμοποιούνταν για τη μεταφορά φρούτων και ξηράς τροφής, ενώ ο ιδιαίτερα προσεγμένος διάκοσμος δεν αποκλείει τη χρήση τους ως δίσκους σερβιρίσματος σε μεγάλες γιορτές και εξέχουσες εκδηλώσεις. Οι διαστάσεις τους, άλλωστε, ξεπερνώντας συχνά σε διάμετρο το 0,50 μ., συγκλίνουν προς αυτήν την κατεύθυνση. Η διακόσμησή τους, πάντοτε εγγάρκτη, έχει εκτελεστεί με απaráμιλλη ακρίβεια και έμφαση στη λεπτομέρεια. Τα μοτίβα που χρησιμοποιούνται είναι χαρακτηριστικά της μαμελουκικής τέχνης της ύστερης περιόδου και συχνά επαναλαμβάνονται σε διαφορετικούς συνδυασμούς. Ο πυθμένας και τα τοιχώματα των δίσκων φέρουν γεωμετρικά και φυτικά κοσμήματα τοποθετημένα σε ομόκεντρους κύκλους και διαπλεκόμενα διάχωρα. Τρία από τα εν λόγω σκεύη φέρουν το οικόσημο του σουλτάνου Καϊτμπί, ενώ άλλα δύο κοσμούνται με το οικόσημο του υψηλού γραμματέα του Παλατιού.

Οι αραβικές επιγραφές στο εσωτερικό των δίσκων περιέχουν ευχές προς τον ιδιοκτήτη για καλοτυχία και υψηλά αξιώματα, ενώ τα αναγραφόμενα στην εξωτερική επιφάνεια ονόματα παρέχουν πληροφορίες για τους αρχικούς αλλά και τους μεταγενέστερους –Οθωμανούς στη πλειονότητα τους– κατόχους των σκευών.

Στην ίδια συλλογή ανήκουν δύο ακόμα εγγάρκτα επικασσιτερωμένα σκεύη. Πρόκειται για χάλκινα κιβωτίδια γνωστά στον ελληνικό χώρο με τον τουρκικό όρο *σεφερτάσια*. Τα σκεύη αυτά, κατασκευασμένα για τους υψηλούς αξιωματούχους της Μαμελουκικής αυλής, χρησιμοποιούνταν για τη μεταφορά τροφής ενός ή περισσότερων ατόμων κατά τη διάρκεια ταξιδιών στην έ-

ρημο ή του προσκυνήματος στη Μέκκα. Το κυλινδρικό σχήμα τους με την ελαφρά στενότερη βάση βοηθούσε στην επάλληλη τοποθέτησή τους σε κάθετη διάταξη. Το κάλυμμα του σκεύους που βρισκόταν στην κορυφή έφερε στο κέντρο μία πεπλατυσμένη λαβή ιδιόμορφου σχήματος, η οποία χρησίμευε ως βάση, όταν το πώμα ανεστραμμένο λειτουργούσε ως σκεύος φαγητού. Τα κιβωτίδια αυτά ενισχύθηκαν αργότερα με μεταλλικές κλειδαριές προκειμένου να διασφαλίζεται το περιεχόμενό τους σε μια εποχή που η δηλητηρίαση αποτελούσε συνήθη πρακτική εξόντωσης πολιτικών αντιπάλων. Η διακόσμηση των κιβωτιδίων αυτών σε ό,τι αφορά τη διάταξη και τη θεματική καθώς και στο περιεχόμενο των εγχάρων επιγραφών είναι πανομοιότυπη με εκείνη των προαναφερθέντων δίσκων.

Τα μεγαλύτερο από τα δύο σεφερτάσια της συλλογής του Μουσείου Μπενάκη κατασκευάστηκε, όπως μαρτυρά ο έξοχος διάκοσμος και οι εγχάρων επιγραφές του, για κάποιον άγνωστο Μαμελούκο εμίρη. Αυτό όμως που καθιστά το εν λόγω σκεύος ιδιαίτερα σημαντικό είναι το εξαιρετικά μεγάλο μέγεθος και το πολυεδρικό του σχήμα, το οποίο δεν απαντά σε κανένα άλλο σωζόμενο αντικείμενο του είδους.

Το δεύτερο και μικρότερο κιβωτίδιο της συλλογής, το οποίο βρέθηκε σε χριστιανική εκκλησία της Άγκυρας—όπου χρησίμευε ως αρτοφόριο— φέρει λιγότερο επιμελημένη διακόσμηση και αραβικές επιγραφές ευχετικού περιεχομένου.

Στην κατηγορία των σκευών φαγητού ανήκουν επίσης δύο χάλκινες κούπες της ίδιας συλλογής. Η πρώτη, σε σχήμα κυάθου, κοσμεύεται με φυτικά μοτίβα, αραβικές επιγραφές μαζί με τον τίτλο και το όνομα του αξιωματούχου ιδιοκτήτη, καθώς και το τριμερές έμβλημα του σουλτάνου Καϊμπέι. Ένα μόνο αντίστοιχο κομμάτι, ανάλογο σε σχήμα και διάκοσμο, βρίσκεται σήμερα στο Μουσείο του Βερολίνου.

Η δεύτερη κούπα με το ευρύ χείλος και τη σχεδόν επίπεδη βάση κοσμεύεται με αραβικές επιγραφές που προδίδουν τη χρήση της ως ποτήρι κρασιού. Τη διακόσμηση της συμπληρώνουν διάχωρα με αραβουργήματα καθώς και μικρά μετάλλια με το όνομα του ιδιοκτήτη υπό μορφή σφραγίδας.

Τελευταίο περιγράφεται ένα από τα σπανιότερα σκεύη της συλλογής, το μοναδικό αντίστοιχο του οποίου φιλοξενείται σήμερα στο Μουσείο του Ισραήλ, στην Ιερουσαλήμ. Η σπανιότητά του συνίσταται στο ιδιόμορφο σχήμα και στο υπερβολικά μεγάλο για το είδος του μέγεθος. Πρόκειται για μία χάλκινη λεκάνη με μεγάλη προχολή που προοριζόταν για μεταφορά ύδατος, πιθανόν σε χαμάμ. Η πυκνή διακόσμησή του φέρει αραβικές επιγραφές με ευχετικό περιεχόμενο καθώς και στίχους του Κορανίου, ενώ στο σημείο γένεσης της προχολής εγχάρωνεται το σύνθετο οικόσημο του σουλτάνου Καϊμπέι. Το είδος του διακόσμου και της γραφής εντάσσουν το σκεύος αυτό την καλλιτεχνική παραγωγή της Αιγύπτου των τελών του 15ου αιώνα.