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MAMLUK JEWELRY: INFLUENCES AND ECHOES

Until recently, with the exception of a few bracelets,\(^1\) no item of jewelry had been identified as Mamluk,\(^2\) nor has Mamluk jewelry ever been defined. The group of objects to be isolated and discussed here will therefore fill an important gap in our knowledge of Islamic goldsmith work, constituting as it does a completely new chapter in the history of the jewelry of the Muslim world.

The precursors of this group were crafted in Syria and Egypt during the Fatimid period. Fortunately, we stand on very firm ground when speaking of this earlier jewelry since numerous examples of one of its three sub-types formed part of a datable hoard found in present-day Tunisia. Because this hoard included coins struck between 1003-4 and 1044-45, the French scholars who published this material felt that it must have been buried at the end of the Muslim year 436 or during the first few months of the year 437 which began on July 19, 1045.\(^3\)

Approximately three hundred years after the Fatimid hoard was laid by, i.e., sometime after ca. 1350, another treasure comprised of three hundred and twenty-eight items was buried near Simferopol in the Crimea.\(^4\) This large cache included a number of coins—dinars of the Indian sultans struck at Delhi at the end of the thirteenth century and during the first half of the fourteenth—which provide us with a \textit{terminus post quem} for the Crimean hoard.

In addition to these coins, there were also numerous pieces of gold jewelry. Many of these can be added to the small group that I have previously shown to be Mamluk,\(^5\) while the \textit{terminus post quem} provided by the coins and the location of the find itself serve to support and confirm my earlier hypothesis.

The presence of Mamluk objects in the Crimea is easily explained. The Mongols of the Golden Horde with their capital first at Old Serai and later at Serai Berke, both on the Volga, supplied Cairo with the young boys who would one day become mamluks. In return the Mongols received artisans and theologians as well as numerous gifts from the Mamluk sultans ruling from Cairo (in fact jewelry was among the gifts sent to the Golden Horde in 1293).\(^6\) The trade routes of the Golden Horde passed through the Crimean peninsula thus linking the Tatar dynasty with Egypt as well as with Asia Minor and Western Europe. We are told that the route from Cairo to Serai in 1306-7 was the following: one sailed from Egypt to Istanbul, a trip which took one month, and from there one could go by boat to the Crimea or through Asia Minor by land until one reached Samsun and from there one sailed across the Black Sea and hence to the capital of the Golden Horde. The round trip took a minimum of nine months.\(^7\)

The principal constructional characteristics of a group of Mamluk jewelry objects are illustrated here by means of the most spectacular of all such jewelry, a pendant in the National Museum, Damascus (figs. 1a-c), as well as two other pieces, one formerly in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 2) and one from the so-called Simferopol Treasure (fig. 3). (1) Many pieces of Mamluk gold jewelry are characterized by an openwork surface. The totally filigree-constructed elements of each piece are supported by means of an arrangement of flat wires laid parallel to each other on the back of the open-work area. Alternatively, the surface may be constructed of sheet with the decoration executed in wire or repoussé. (2) They are also characterized by a box-like construction in which the two elements of identical configuration are connected to each other as well as separated from each other by a reciprocal design. (3) Flattened twisted or flattened plain wires laid on edge are used to execute the designs. (4) Some of the pieces of jewelry incorporate set stones in their decoration.\(^8\)

Geometric interlace designs, calligraphy,\(^9\) and vegetal motifs including the lotus flower—all executed in flattened plain wire laid on edge—are commonly found decorating this jewelry. The most prevalent secondary designs are the comma-shaped flattened twisted wires which are laid contiguously to form a feathery background decoration, guilloche borders, and borders consisting of S-shapes alternating with
