

## STUDY OF A RARE MAMLUK METAL BUCKET IN THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART IN CAIRO

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is a new study of a metal bucket made of brass, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. This bucket is published for the first time. The artistic characteristics of this bucket indicate that it belongs to the Mamluk period (648-923 AH / 1250-1517 AD). Although it contains an inscription that could be related, in terms of content, to the inscriptions of Shiite origin, this is uncommon; among Mamluk objects, which raises many arguments about this object and its importance. Firstly, the study aimed to date this bucket and determine its provenance; by analyzing its artistic stylistic features, primarily, the decorations and the type of script used for the inscription. It has been proved that this bucket was made during the Mamluk period (the first half of the 8th AH / 14th AD century) in the Levant. Then, the study discussed the content of the inscription on the bucket and explained the reason for not recording the part which contains explicit Shiite expressions; through analysis and induction of historical sources; to find out about contemporary events. The study showed the extent of the impact of those events on the content of the inscription on this bucket.

### KEYWORDS

Metalwork; Decorations; Inscriptions; Mamluk; Shiites.

### المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دلوا معدنيا، مصنوعا من النحاس الأصفر، وهو محفوظ بمتحف الفن الإسلامي بالقاهرة، هذا الدلو ينشر لأول مرة، وتشير الخصائص الفنية لهذا الدلو إلى أنه يعود إلى العصر المملوكي (٦٤٨ - ٩٢٣ هـ / ١٢٥٠ - ١٥١٧ م)؛ رغم اشتماله على نقش كتابي يندرج ضمن الكتابات المذهبية ذات الأصل الشيعي، وهو أمر غير مألوف في الفنون المملوكية، ولم يشتمل نص هذا النقش الكتابي على العبارات التي تتضمن انتماءً واضحا للمذهب الشيعي؛ مما يدعو إلى تفسير هذا الأمر، وهو -بدوره- ما يعطي هذه الدراسة أهمية خاصة، وقد قامت الدراسة -أولا- بتاريخ هذا الدلو، وتحديد مكان صنعته؛ وذلك من خلال مقارنة الخصائص الفنية له، خاصة الزخارف، ونوع الخط المستخدم في تنفيذ الكتابات؛ وبناء على ذلك، تم ترجيح نسبة هذا الدلو إلى صناعة العصر المملوكي، وتحديدًا، في النصف الأول من القرن (٨ هـ / ١٤ م)، ببلاد الشام، ثم قامت الدراسة بتحليل مضمون النقش الكتابي المسجل على هذا الدلو، وتفسير سبب عدم تسجيل الجزء الأخير منه، المشتمل على العبارات الشيعية الصريحة؛ وذلك من خلال تحليل، واستقراء المصادر التاريخية؛ للوقوف على الأحداث المعاصرة، وقد بينت الدراسة مدى تأثير تلك الأحداث على مضمون النقش الكتابي المنفذ على هذا الدلو.

### الكلمات الدالة

أشغال المعادن؛ زخارف؛ كتابات؛ مملوكي؛ شيعة.

## INTRODUCTION:

Metalwork flourished in the Mamluk period (648-923 AH / 1250-1517 AD); there were many forms, uses and characteristics; therefore, the Mamluk period, in Egypt and the Levant, is one of the golden ages for metalwork. Some factors helped in this, the most important of which are the care and concern of the sultans and princes, who were keen on acquiring every precious thing, as well as economic prosperity; as a result of the passage of trade between the East and West, through the Egyptian lands. In addition to the political stability of a strong rule, they also succeeded in repelling the Mongols' attacks and expelling the Crusaders from the Levant. (Dimand 1982, 155-157); ('ilīwa 1970, 377-384); (Miṣilḥī 1983, B); ('abd Al- Rāziq 2009, 125-164)

It is known that the inscriptions belonging to a specific era on applied arts, architecture, tombstones, and coinages, are usually compatible with the official religious doctrine adopted by the ruling authority in that era. This was the case in the Mamluk period; in particular, the inscriptions on applied arts (Miṣilḥī 1983, 290-318) agreed with the *Sunni* doctrine, the official religious doctrine in that period. ('āšūr 1992, 170); (Māgid 1979, 91)

But it was possible, in very few cases, that some Mamluk applied arts included *Shiite* inscriptions, which was what happened. The study of Rice D. S., about two unusual Mamluk metalworks, dealt with two examples of Mamluk metalwork with *Shiite* inscriptions. He dated them back to Mamluk period (the first half or the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> AD century) in the Levant. (Rice 1957, 487-500)

The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo preserved a metallic bucket made of brass. Its artistic characteristics, decorations, type of calligraphy, and development indicate that this bucket belongs to the Mamluk period. However, it includes an inscription that is classified, in terms of content, among the inscriptions with *Shiite* origin. Strikingly, the artist was limited to engraving only one part of the text, but not the other part, which explicitly includes material belonging to the *Shiite* doctrine, so what are the reasons for that? The study of this bucket will explain this.

## MAIN DATA

**Object Type:** Bucket. **Usage:** Getting water from wells, and transferring it. **Location of preservation:** Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. **Register No.:** 15218. **Obtaining way:** Buying (it was previously in the Ralph Harari collection, No. 384). **Material:** Brass. **Technique:** Hammering (for shaping), relief cut, and incision (for decoration). **Piece's condition:** Good, but some parts are missing. **Dimensions:** Height: 15 cm, body height: 11 cm, nozzle diameter: 11 cm, handle ring height: 2 cm. **Period & Date:** The Mamluk period (the first half of the 8th AH / 14th AD century). **Provenance:** The Levant. **References:** This object has been published for the first time.

## DESCRIPTION:

This bucket consists of a body, a nozzle, and a handle, which is currently missing. The bottom of the bucket is round and free of decoration. The body is wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. The body's lower part is devoid of ornamentation except for some circular medallions, which include multi-petaled flowers. In the middle of the body is a decorative band divided by six medallions (*Bukhariyat*) into six sections. Three sections include floral decorations (arabesque), alternating with the other three containing an inscription written in the *Thuluth* script. This inscription is read as follows:

In the first section: "*O you who drink water*".

"يا شارب الماء [كذا]".

In the second: "*Fresh (water), you must say this*".

"الزلال عليك هذا".

In the third: "*(Must say this) Drink and say*".

"القول حتما اشرب وقل".

So, the full text is: "*O you who drink fresh water, you must say this drink and say*".

"يا شارب الماء [كذا] الزلال عليك هذا القول حتما اشرب وقل".

The medallions (*Bukhariyat*), which separate these sections, take an oval shape and end, at the top and bottom, with a triple leaf. The oval shape is decorated with floral decoration, a wavy plant branch ends with some leaves and tendrils. In the middle of the oval shape is a circle with a fleur-de-lis inside. The upper part of this bucket body is devoid of decoration, except for some circular medallions. The nozzle of this bucket protrudes outward. The handle is lost, and its two rings connect to the nozzle. The bucket is entirely devoid of any decoration on the inside. (Pls. 1, 2)



Pl. 1: A brass bucket, from the Levant, in Mamluk period (the first half of the 8th AH / 14th AD century), the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, register No. 15218 (The author, 2018).



Pl. 2: The brass bucket, the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, another view (The author, 2018).

## GENERAL FORM

This bucket is characterized by a round base, wider than the body, which takes a piriform shape; it expands from the bottom and narrows towards the top. In terms of the suitability of form to function, this bucket includes many functional values in each part. The broad base dramatically helps to balance the bucket. The wide body at the bottom helps increase the bucket's capacity for the liquid. The narrow part of the body, which is the upper part, fits the narrow nozzle of the bucket, which helps to control the liquid by regulating its exiting from the bucket. The two rings are where the handle attaches, used for carrying the bucket. A rope may be attached to it when the bucket is used to get water from wells. This design of bucket was not widespread in Egypt or the Levant before the Mamluk period; there were other design (Fehérvári 1976, pls.8A No.24, 8B No.25, 8C No.26) (pl. 3), and I studied and published some of these buckets (from the Fatimid period), in a previous study. (Edris 2021, 417-424)

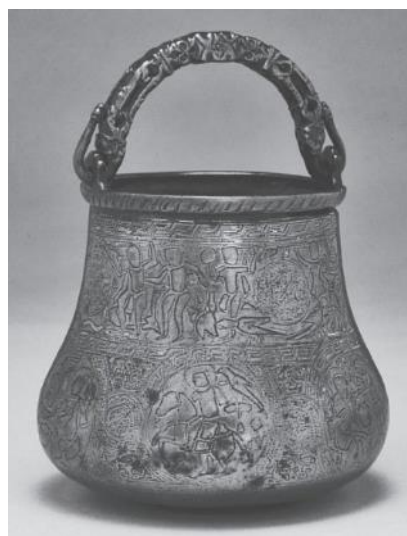
There is a bucket similar in general form to the bucket being studied. That bucket is brass, was made in Mosul in (1225-1235 AD) and is preserved in the British Museum in London (No. 1948 5-83). (Raby 2012, 56) (pl. 4). It is possible that this form of the bucket (the object of the study) came to the Mamluk period as one of the influences from the Mosulian craftsmen, who migrated to escape the Mongol invasion, and settled in the Levant and Egypt. (‘abd al-Rāziq 2006, 152); (Mişilḥī 1983, 38-39)

This form of metal buckets was spread in the Mamluk period. An example is a bucket made in Syria during the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century, preserved in the Ashmolean Museum (No. EA1963.17). This bucket appears somewhat more developed in design than the bucket, which is the subject of the study.

(<http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/921/object/10902> 28-6-2022)



Pl. 3: A bronze bucket, from Egypt, in Fatimid period (4- 5th AH / 10- 11th AD century), the Keir Collection (Fehérvári 1976, pl. 8c).



Pl. 4: A bronze bucket, from Al-Mousel (622- 632 AH / 1225- 1235 AD), the British Museum in London, No. 1948 5-83 (Raby 2012, 56, Fig.1.26).

## DECORATIONS:

### *Decorative Design:*

The decorative design on the bucket (the subject of the study) consists of a main band divided, by six medallions (*Bukhariyat*), into six rectangular areas, three of which include floral decorations, while the other three areas include an inscription. At the top and bottom, there are small circles that have floral decorations. (Pls. 1-2, 5).

One of the oldest examples of this decorative design includes, among its decorations, an inscription band that wraps around the bucket circularly, interrupted by medallions with human motifs, on some spirals, with round areas, each containing seven small circles, on a copper vessel inlaid with silver, made in the Levant, about the 7<sup>th</sup> AH/ 13<sup>th</sup> AD century, preserved in the Museum of the Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University. (Ḥasan n.d., fig.497) This decorative design, or something very similar, was found on many examples of Mamluk applied arts, especially metalwork. One of the most similar examples to it is on a copper basin, for the Prince *Tankiz*, from the Levant, in the Mamluk period (740 AH / 1340 AD), preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Pls. 9: A, B). This design includes a main decorative band, divided, by medallions, into



several rectangular areas, some of which include geometric motifs, and others include inscriptions. (Wiet 1932, 133-134, pl. XL) Some decorative designs on other Mamluk applied arts, such as trays (Ḥasan n.d., figs.527-529), vases (Ḥasan n.d., figs.528), etc. are also similar to the decorative design, on the bucket that is the subject of the study. Those examples of metalwork, and others, in the Mamluk period, especially in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century, which include similar decorative designs, in one way or another, to the decorative design on the bucket (the subject of the study), indicate that this bucket belongs to that period.

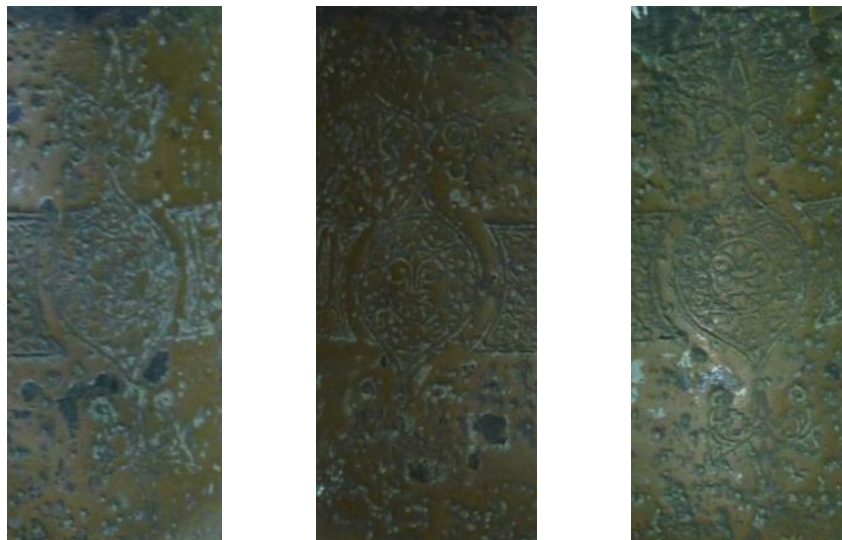


Pl. 5: The General Decorative Design of the brass bucket.

The decorative design on this bucket included a variety of decorations. Perhaps explaining and analyzing these decorations will help confirm this bucket's history. In the following sections, we will discuss this subject.

### ***Decorative Elements:***

**I. Medallions (*Bukhariyat*):** Some Medallions divide the main band, on the bucket (the subject of the study). (Pls. 6: A, B, C)



A

B

C

Pls. 6 (A, B, C): The Medallions (*Bukhariyat*), on the brass bucket.

Medallions are an Islamic decorative motif that takes a round or oval shape. Two similar ornamental elements connect to it from above and below as three-petaled leaves. It may be occupied with various decorations. (AL-Bāšā 1999, vol.2, 98); (Rizq 2000, 33)

This motif is a purely Islamic feature; it did not appear, in the same shape, in other ancient or contemporary arts (‘imāra 1981, 220).

Some opinions indicate that the first features of the Medallions began in the Fatimid period, especially at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> AH / 11<sup>th</sup> AD century, on the rectangular panels of the wooden doors, there are harmonic areas with symmetrical sides, which resemble a cartouche or a shield. (Šāfi‘ī 1954, 69) An example of them is on the door of the Caliph Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah, who ordered it for *Al-Azhar* Mosque in Cairo. (AL-Bāšā 1970, 514-520, fig.121) This element appeared after that, in various forms, on many decorated wooden panels, until the end of the Fatimid period. (Šāfi‘ī 1954, 82-83); (Ḥasan n.d., figs.341, 347, 352); (‘imāra 1981, 220)

Some elements that closely resemble the shape of the Medallions were found on some Ayyubid ceramic bowls. (Al-šīḥa 2006, 630)

In the Mamluk period, medallions took their perfect form, either in a circular or oval shape, and decorated many examples of applied arts, that include metalwork. We see medallions on a vase of brass inlaid with silver, made in Egypt in the 8-9<sup>th</sup> centuries AH/ 14-15<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, preserved in the Museum of the Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University. (Ḥasan n.d., fig.528) Another example is medallions used to decorate a tinned-brass lunch box made in Damascus in the 9<sup>th</sup> AH / 15<sup>th</sup> AD century, preserved in the British Museum in London. (Ward 1998, 135)

Medallions spread in the decoration of wooden armored doors in the Mamluk period. We see it in the middle of all the doors overlooking the courtyard of the Sultan *Hassan* School (757- 764 AH / 1356- 1362). This is the first example that appears on the armored doors in Cairo. It continued in decorating the doors in the Mamluk period (‘imāra 1981, 220), for example, the door of one of the schools overlooking the courtyard in the Sultan *Barquq* School (786-788 AH/ 1384-1386 AD), on *Al-Muizz Li-Din Allah* Street (Yeomans 2006, 178-179), and the door of the main entrance of *Al-Ashraf Birsbay* School (826-827 AH / 1423-1424 AD), on the same street. (Allan 1984, 88, pl.8)

Medallions were also widely spread on Mamluk Bookbindings, especially the *Qur’an*. (Al-Wakīl 2004, 240) It became the main element in the decoration of these bookbindings during the 9<sup>th</sup> AH / 15<sup>th</sup> AD century, after which this element replaced the geometric decorations of star patterns. (Sarre 1923, 12, fig.2, pls.2-3); (AL-Bāšā 1973, 460); (‘imāra 1981, 220)

In the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, there are some marble slabs, from the Prince *Sarghatmash* School, in Cairo, it is likely that they were transferred to it from the house of the Minister *Alam al-Din*, who died in 754 AH / 1353 AD, and these slabs contain, in the middle, the Medallions. (AL-Bāšā 1990, 37); (Yūsif 1970, 299-300, 306); (‘imāra 1981, 221)

**II. Wavy Plant Branches with Stems and Tendrils Emerge:** The oval part of each Medallion on the bucket (the subject of the study) included a wavy plant branch with small plant stems and tendrils coming out from it. (Pls. 7: A, B, C)



A B C  
Pls. 7 (A, B, C): Wavy plant branches and fleur-de-lis, on the brass bucket.

We can see the same elements on a brass basin, for the prince *Tankiz*, from the Levant, in the Mamluk period (740 AH / 1340 AD), preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. (Wiet 1932, 133-134, pl.XL) (Pls. 9: A, B)

**III. Fleur-de-lis:** There is a fleur-de-lis, in the central part, of each of the Medallions that decorate the bucket (the subject of the study). (Pls. 7: A, B, C)

Opinions differed regarding the type of this flower, whether it is a lotus or a fleur-de-lis; some called it the “Lotus” (Hasan 1948, 136); (AL-Bāšā 1966, 1044), and there are those who called it “fleur-de-lis” (Taymūr 1942, 231); (Al-‘iš 1961, 177), while some scholars see that this flower is the ancient Egyptian lotus, which was subjected, during the Eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom to some modification and abstraction, which gave it its current form and made it closer to the lily than to the lotus. (Yūsif, ḥafāgī n.d., 162)

Fleur-de-lis appeared in various forms; in terms of composition, the shape of leaves, and upper and lower ends. (‘abd Al-Rāziq 2001, 87) *Nur al-Din Mahmoud bin Zanki* used it as his emblem on the mihrab of his school in Damascus (549- 569 AH / 1154- 1173 AD), and on two columns in the mosque of Hims. These examples are among the oldest using the fleur-de-lis in the Islamic era. (Taymūr 1942, 231); (‘abd Al-Rāziq 2001, 87)

The Fleur-de-lis played an important role, as one of the decorative elements, in the applied arts of the Mamluk period, whether it is singular or combined with other symbols (‘abd Al-Rāziq 2001, 87-89), we see it on metalwork, porcelain, sgraffiato, glass, marble, textiles, and wood. (Taymūr 1942, 172); (Sārī 1979, 67); (Sayūr 2006, 89); (Al-šīḥa 2002, 381)

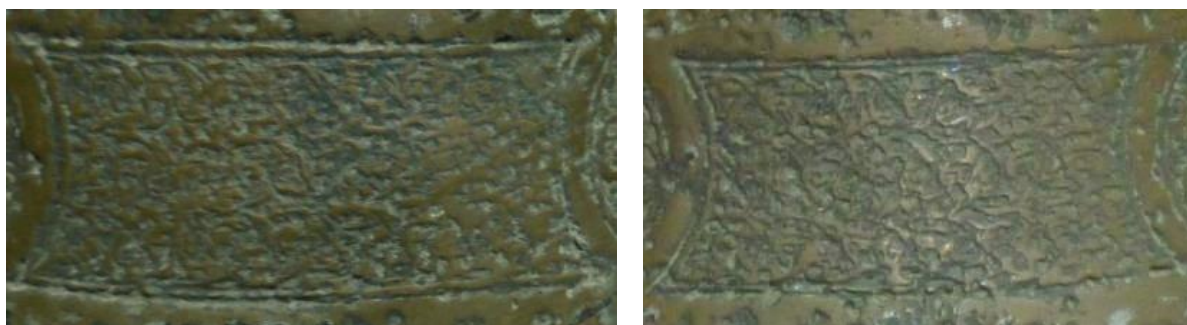
There are three fleurs-de-lis on a pot made of underglaze ceramic, in Syria, for the *Maristan al-Nuri*, in the Mamluk period (7-8<sup>th</sup> AH / 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries AD), preserved in a private collection in Kuwait. (Al-šīḥa 2002, 381,467-468) The fleur-de-lis also decorates a piece of sgraffiato from the Mamluk period, the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. (Taymūr 1942, 172) We can also see fleur-de-lis on a comb; for hairdressing, made of wood, dated back to the Mamluk period (the 9<sup>th</sup> AH / 15<sup>th</sup> AD century), preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. (Sayūr 2006, 89, 213, pl.74)

The fleur-de-lis was often inscribed on the Ayyubid and Mamluk coinages. (Taymūr 1942, 231) The first appearance of this flower on coins is on the *Dirhams*; copper coins of *al-Malik Al-Zahir Ghiath Al-Din Ghazi*, son of *Al-Malik Al-Nasir Yusuf Al-Ayyubi*, including a copper penny, missing the date and place of minting. Then, this flower became very common on the coins of the Ayyubids, which they struck in the Levant and continued until the Mamluk period. Some of the Mamluk sultans took it as an especial

rank, as *Al-Nasir Muhammad bin Qalawun*, this flower was in the center of the back of some pennies. (‘abd Al-‘azīm 2009, 418)

Some scholars suggest that fleur-de-lis was not a *rank* but a decorative drawing (Ḥasan 1948, 326), while others suggest that this flower was an abstract personal emblem. It didn't mean or symbolize a specific thing; it was taken by sultans and princes alike. (‘abd Al-Rāziq 2001, 89)

**IV. The arabesque:** The arabesque decorations occupy three sections alternate with the other sections of the inscription, on the bucket (the subject of the study). (pls. 8: A, B)



A

B

Pls. 8 (A, B): The arabesque decorations, on the brass bucket.

The arabesque was found in Samarra, and from there it moved to Egypt in the Tulunid period and continued its path towards development in the Fatimid period. It flourished in the Ayyubid period, and reached its peak of maturity in the Mamluk period. (Ḥasan 1948, 250); (Yāsīn 2002, 375-376)

By making a comparison between the arabesque decorations on the bucket (the subject of the study), and various models of arabesque decorations on examples of applied arts from the ages: the Fatimid, (Ḥasan n.d., figs.345, 348, 349, 353, 358, 363, 364, 367, 368, 369, 370); (Al-‘imarī 1965, 44, 56); (Yāsīn 2002, 557-558); (Yeomans 2006, 53-54, 69) the Ayyubid, (Ḥasan n.d., figs.327-376); (Carboni 2001, 247-249, 254-256, Nos.123, 126); (Yeomans 2006, 180) and the Mamluk; (Wiet 1932, 90-91, pl.XLIX); (Ḥasan n.d., figs.407-408, 527, 529, 532, 534); (Yeomans 2006, 176, 179) in terms of development and perfection, it is clear that the arabesque decorations on this bucket are close and similar to their counterparts from the Mamluk period, especially, in terms of the subtlety of the plant branches. This is another piece of evidence that supports the dating of this bucket to the Mamluk period.

## INSCRIPTIONS:

### *In terms of form:*

The inscriptions on the bucket (the subject of the study) were executed in *Thuluth* script. (Pls. 10: A, B, C, Figs. 1: A, B, C)

The *Thuluth* script, on this bucket, in terms of development and perfection, belongs to the Mamluk period. If we compared the script to some models of the *Thuluth* script that were executed on applied arts in the Ayyubid period (‘abd al-Rāziq 2006, 21, 22, 24, 25, 54, 59); (Sālim 1999, 34); (Yāsīn 2002, 96, 126) as well as with some examples from the Mamluk period, (Ward 2004, 59-73); (Ḥasan n.d., figs.189-195, 749-759); (‘ilīwa 1983-1984, 226); (‘abd al-Rāziq 2006, pls.35, 69-72, 78-80, 170-172, 218-220);



(Ramaḍān 2008, 176-177), we will notice the similarity of these inscriptions with those from the Mamluk period.

These inscriptions, in the *Thuluth* script, were executed on a floor of scrolls and spiral plant branches. This pattern spread on applied arts in the Mamluk period, especially in the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century. We can see that clearly on a basin made of brass, for the Prince *Tankiz*, from the Levant, in the Mamluk period (740 AH / 1340 AD) (Pls. 9: A, B) in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. (Wiet 1932, 133-134, pl.XL) Also, we see that on a bronze bowl, in the name of sultan *al-Nasir Muhammad Bin Qalawun*, from the Levant, (709-741 AH / 1310-1341 AD), preserved in the same museum. (Wiet 1932, pl.XLII); (Miṣilḥī 1983, 65-67, pl.14) This gives us additional evidence for dating the bucket (the subject of the study) back to the Mamluk period, specifically the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century.



A



B

Pls. 9 (A, B).

A: A copper basin, for the Prince Tankiz, the Levant, the Mamluk period (740 AH / 1340 AD), the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, register No. 7852 (Wiet 1932, pl.XL).

B: Decorations and an inscription, on this copper basin (Wiet 1932, pl.XL).

### ***In terms of content:***

The bucket (the subject of the study) included an inscription is read as follows:

***“O you who drink fresh water, you must say this drink and say”.***

(Pls. 10: A, B, C, Figs. 1: A, B, C). "يا شارب الماء [كذا] الزلال عليك هذا القول حتما اشرب وقل".

يا شارب الماء  
لا تغفل  
عن قول  
الاستبرار

1-A



10-A

يا شارب الماء  
لا تغفل  
عن قول  
الاستبرار

1-B



10-B

يا شارب الماء  
لا تغفل  
عن قول  
الاستبرار

1-C



10-C

Figs. 1 (A, B, C): The inscriptions, on the brass bucket (the author). Pls. 10 (A, B, C): The inscriptions, on the brass bucket.

The content of this text includes a call to the person who drinks the calm water from this bucket, telling him that he has to say something; he asked him to drink, then to say this thing, although he did not say here what the drinker should say.

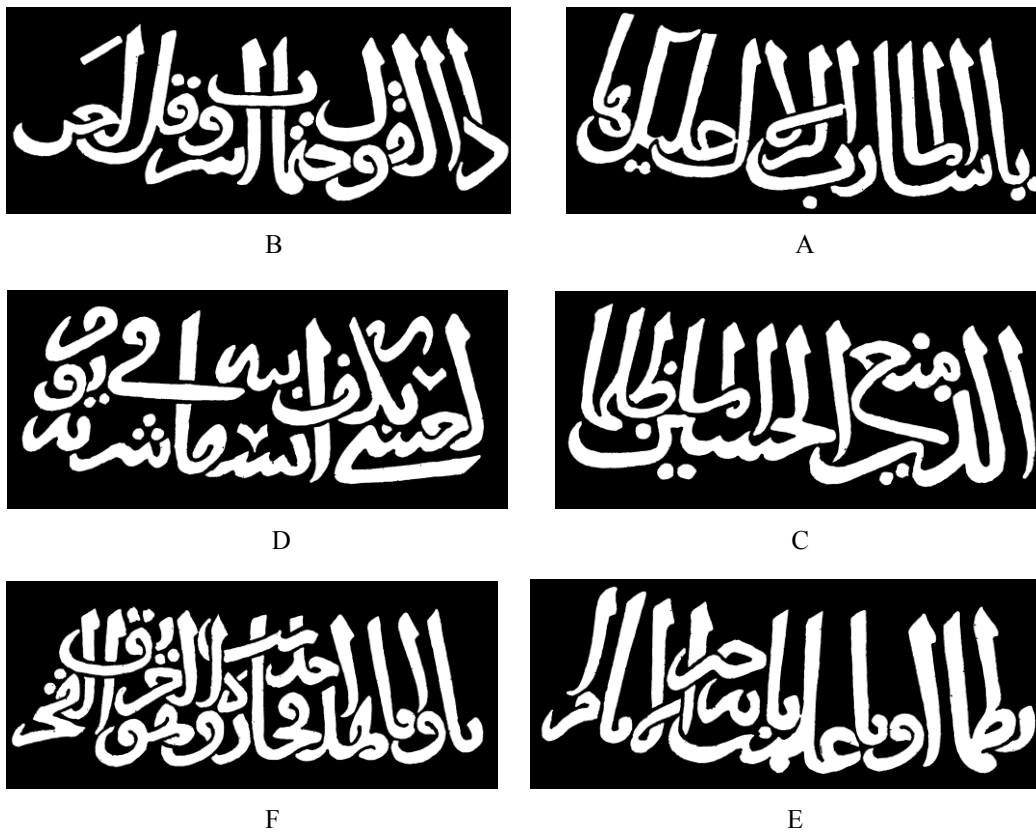
The text of this inscription is considered one of the rare inscriptions that are not widespread. In light of what I was able to reach and read of the inscriptions which are executed on applied arts, buildings, and coinages in Egypt, during the period from the beginning of the Islamic age until the end of the Ottoman period, I did not find any example that includes this text; in the same form. There are two examples of applied arts with similar text, they were made in the Levant and dated to the Mamluk period. One of them is a medium-sized bowl, dated to the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> AD century, and preserved in the Civico Museum in Turin, the text of its inscription is read as follows:

***“O you who drink fresh water, you must say this, drink and say accursed is he who unjustly prevented al-Husayn from water, may by his father's palm you will watered a drink in a day when you will get thirsty, did you not know that he is the best of people; father and mother, this is the talking of his pride, and he is the rooter of the pride”.***

“يا شارب الماء [كذا] الزلال عليك ها - ذا [كذا] القول حتما اشرب وقل لعن - الذي منع الحسين الماء [كذا] ظلما - لعسى بكف أبيه تسقا [كذا] شربة في يوم - نظما أو ما علمت بأنه خير الأنام أ - با وأما هذا حديث فخاره وهو العريق الفخر”. (Pl. 11, Figs. 2: A, B, C, D, E, F).



Pl. 11: A bowl, the Mamluk period (the first half of the 14th AD century), the Civico Museum in Turin, (Rice 1957, pl.1).



Figs. 2 (A, B, C, D, E, F): The inscriptions on the bowl in the Civico Museum in Turin, (Rice 1957, fig.4).

Rice mentioned that this vessel is unique in its kind, an example of Mamluk metalwork, and he suggests that it may have been made in Syria for someone in the *Shiite* community. (Rice 1957, 495)

The other vessel, an ewer, was also dated to the Mamluk period (the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> AD century). Rice mentioned that they only discovered an illustration of some of its

decorations, including the inscription. A signature on the lower left part of it is read as follows: Alb. Schindler fc. 1830, the text of its inscription is read as follows:

**“O you who drink fresh water, you must say this, drink and say accursed is he who prevented al-Husayn from water, by order of Ismail bin Ahmed Al-Wasiti”.**

"يا شارب الماء [كذا] الزلال عليك هذا القول حتما - اشرب وقل لعن الذي منع الحسين الماء [كذا] ظلما - برسم إسماعيل بن أحمد الواسطي". (Rice 1957, 495-496)

From the content of these two inscriptions, once we read them, it is clear that they belong, beyond any doubt, to the *Shiite* doctrine.

As for the inscription on the bucket (the subject of the study), it is noted that its text differs from the other two texts, on the Civico bowl and the ewer, in terms of the part it ends with, here it ends with the phrase: "**drink and say**", "اشرب وقل". It was supposed to complete the text of this inscription, to complete the meaning; what must the one who drinks from this bucket say?

It is also noted that the style of the text of the inscription on this bucket is distributed regularly and symmetrically, from beginning to end, between its three parts. The artist did not have to reduce the letters in the last words of this inscription. From the beginning, if the artist had wanted to add other phrases to this text, it would not have been difficult for him to achieve. There were many ways for this, such as reducing the letters of words or enlarging the space of the inscription in one way or another, such as making the inscription occupy most of the space, as in the vessel of the Civico Museum in Turin, (Rice 1957, pl.1). It was, also, possible to make the decorative design limited, from the beginning to the inscription without the floral motifs alternating with it. Accordingly, it is inappropriate to say that the inscription text was incomplete because the artist misjudged the available space for that text. The fact is that the artist actually intended to record only this part of the text on the bucket.

It is evident that the inscription of the bucket (the subject of the study) does not include that part of the text expressly related to *the Shiite* doctrine, which is read as follows:

**“Accursed is he who unjustly prevented al-Husayn from water, may by his father's palm you will watered a drink in a day when you will get thirsty, did you not know that he is the best of people; father and mother, this is the talking of his pride, and he is the rooter of the pride”.**

"لعن الذي منع الحسين الماء ظلما لعسى بكف أبيه تسقى شربة في يوم تظمأ أو ما علمت بأنه خير الأنام أبا وأما هذا حديث فخاره وهو العريق الفخر".

But this inscription is read as follows:

**“O you who drink fresh water, you must say this drink and say”.**

"يا شارب الماء [كذا] الزلال عليك ها - ذا [كذا] القول حتما اشرب وقل". (Pls. 10: A, B, C, Figs. 1: A, B, C)

does not explicitly indicate, at first sight, its association with *Shiite* doctrine; even someone who reads this inscription without prior knowledge may not attribute it to a particular doctrine, especially *the Shiite* doctrine, because there is no explicit reference to it.

Based on this, it can be said that the artist deliberately intended, in this inscription on the bucket (the subject of the study), to record the part of text which does not express *Shiite* thought and not to record the last part of the text, which explicitly includes phrases that express a direct relation with *the Shiite* doctrine.

We will try to explain this puzzle, asking why the recording of the explicitly *Shiite* part of the inscription text was cancelled, on this bucket. In order to answer this and for the picture to become clear, it is necessary to review the historical events in the Mamluk



period (648-923 AH / 1250-1517 AD), especially those about the relationship between *Sunnis* and *Shiites*.

The *Sunni* doctrine existed in the Mamluk state, and the *Sunni* legislation was also crucial in deriving rules and supporting the authority of the state, which in its' character became *Sunni*. (Māgid 1979, 91) The predominant component of society in the Mamluk period was the *Sunnah*, while the *Shiites* were a minority.

In Egypt, the *Shiites*, in the Mamluk period, existed in a few places, such as; Cairo, Alexandria, and some areas of Upper Egypt. Their numbers were few, and their effect was marginal (ʿibn Ḥagar 1972, vol.2, 415, vol.3, 130); (Al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol.1, 522-523); (ʿāšūr 1992, 170-171); (ʿāšūr 1996, 319) However, the *Shiite's* presence, in the Levant, was more than what it was in Egypt. The *Shiites* existed in some mountainous and coastal areas, and among them were the *Kesrouanis*; the people of Mount *Kesrouan*, they were from the *Nusayris*, the *Alawites*, and the *Mutawila*. The *Kesrouanis* took a hostile stance towards the Mamluks, especially during the conflict between the Mamluks and the Crusaders, and the *Tanukhites*, who converted the *Durzi* and spread through the separate parts of Lebanon. Their relationship with the Mamluks was usually tense. The *Mutawila* were a group of extremist *Shiites* in Lebanon's northern regions. The Mamluks were angry with them because of their sectarian anomalies; this caused them to be subjected to some persecution at that time. The *Nusayris*, or the *Alawites*, lived in semi-isolation, in the northern part of Mount Lebanon, under the leadership of their *sheikhs*, the *Ismailis*; they were known as *Al-Batiniyah*. They had many castles as *Masyaf* and *al-kahf*. Still, the Mamluks were not satisfied with them because of their doctrinal anomalies, on the one hand, and their bad attitude between the Crusaders and the Mamluks, on the other hand. (ʿāšūr 1976, 215-219)

The relationship between the Mamluks and the *Shiites* was habitually hostile, and the fight against the Shiite doctrine characterized the Mamluk period to a great extent. This fight was by various methods and means to achieve Eliminate Shiite doctrine. The Mamluk sultans followed a firm policy to eliminate those Shiite effects left over from the Fatimid period, so that by the end of the Mamluk period, the impact of *Shiism* had subsided or almost disappeared from the country. (ʿāšūr 1996, 319)

During the Mamluk period, Egypt witnessed political and religious activity to spread the *Sunni* doctrine and fight the *Shiite* doctrine. (ʿāšūr 1992, 170); (Subaytī 2007, 44) The Mamluk sultans fought *Shiism* indirectly (ʿāšūr 1976, 349); where the Sultan *al-Zahir Baybars*, in the year (665 AH / 1267 AD), ordered the following of the four *Sunni* doctrines of thought and the prohibition of any *other* doctrine. He, also, ordered that no one be appointed as a judge, accept anyone's testimony, nor be nominated for one of the positions of public speaking, *imam*, or teaching unless he converted to one of these *Sunni* doctrines. (Al-Maqrīzī 1998, 167); (ʿUṭmān 1994, 109); (Makī 2006, 217) One of the reasons for building schools during the Mamluk period was to use them in the fight against the *Shiite* doctrine. (ʿāšūr 1992, 159) Those schools were limited to teaching religious sciences on the four *Sunni* doctrines. (Subaytī 2007, 44) Some opinions mentioned that one of the reasons for the revival of the Abbasid *Caliphate* in Egypt, in addition to the formation of a spiritual authority to which the sultans could attribute their authority, is also the resistance of *Shiism* in Egypt. (ʿāšūr 1992, 172)

The Mamluk sultans sometimes resorted to using violence to suppress the *Shiites* (ʿāšūr 1976, 349); even if people in that period wanted to plot against someone, they would send to him those who accused him of *Shiism*, so his property would be confiscated, punishments and insults would be inflicted on him until he showed repentance from the *Shiism*. (ʿibn Ḥagar 1972, vol.2, 46); (ʿUṭmān 1994, 109); (Makī 2006, 217)

Quarrels continued between *Sunnis* and *Shiites* throughout the Mamluk period, and this was illustrated in some poems of that period. The documents and arguments of the Mamluk period are overflowing with news of the blatant war between *Shiites* and *Sunnis* in Egypt. (‘āšūr 1992, 171-172)

The hostile spirit on the part of the Mamluk sultans and their jurists against the *Shiite* doctrine also appears in the *fatwa* issued by *Ibn Taymiyyah*, one of the scholars of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century, in which he described the *Shiites* as worse in disbelief than the Jews and Christians. He issued a *fatwa* to fight and eliminate them. (‘āšūr 1992, 171)

*The Shiites* in the Levant, during the Mamluk period, were subjected to many calamities and massacres, and many of them were killed (‘Uṭmān 1994, 109-110) as happened in the massacres, which are known in history as (the Kesrouan campaigns).

There were three Mamluk campaigns headed to *Kesrouan*; the first one was during the reign of *Al-Ashraf Khalil bin Qalawun*, in (691 AH / 1292 AD), and it ended with the defeat of the Mamluks. The second and third campaigns were during the reign of *Al-Nasir Muhammad bin Qalawun*. The second one was in (699 AH / 1300 AD), and it ended with the victory of the Mamluks. The third campaign was in (705 AH / 1305 AD), which was the most severe and dangerous. Some attempts at reconciliation between the Mamluks and the *Kesrouanis* preceded this campaign, the last of them was headed by *Sheikh Ibn Taymiyyah*, but none of those attempts succeeded, and *Ibn Taymiyyah* issued his *fatwa* to fight them. This great campaign attacked *Kesrouan*, and the fighting was very violent; it lasted for days and ended with a crushing victory for the Mamluks over the *Kesrouanis*, many of whom were killed and captured. Their homes and crops were destroyed, and the Mamluks looted much of their money. The Mamluks gave *Kesrouan*, as fiefs, to some princes, and *the Shiites’* hands were lifted from them. (Al-Nuwayrī 2002, Vol.31, 240-241); (Al-Maqrīzī 1997, Vol.2, 234, 331, 384-385, 389); (Bin Yahia 1927, 30-33); (Ḥafīt 2002, 251-263); (Makī 2006, 218-229)

The Mamluk revenge against *Kesrouan* was violent and bloody, so that Sultan *Al-Nasir Muhammad bin Qalawun* asked for a justification for this massacre, and *Sheikh Ibn Taymiyyah* explained this matter. (Makī 2006, 230)

After the Mamluk campaigns against *Kesrouan*, the surviving inhabitants (the *Shiites*) migrated to various places in the Levant to be far from the reach of the authority. (Ḥafīt 2002, 252) Among these places are *Gabal Amel*; many of its cities became important religious and scientific centers for *Shiites*, such as; *Jezzine, Ainata, Karak, Mays, Jubaa*, and *Mashghara*. (Ḥafīt 2002, 262); (Al-Muhagir 2005, 121- 124,147-252) Some of them migrated to the *Beqaa*, in addition to those stationed on the coasts and the *Denniyeh* Mountains. (Ḥafīt 2002, 262); (Makī 2006, 226-230, 253), although these places were subject to one of the Mamluk administrative divisions; Tripoli, Damascus, and Safad. (Makī 2006, 235); (Subaytī 2007, 105).

Those massacres tore the *Shiites* apart and prompted many of them to adopt *Taqiyya*; it means that a person conceals the truth of his belief and appears contrary to what is concealed to avoid the evil of his enemies who oppose him and threaten him with harm or danger to his life or body if they learn about the truth of his belief. *Taqiyya* is one of the beliefs of the *Shiites*. The *Shiites Imāms* were famous for their practice in front of their opponents. As they were subject to persecution, harm, and persecution, they resorted to *Taqiyya* to keep their lives and continue their *da’wah*. (Subaytī 2007, 142)

The *Shiites* pretend to embrace the doctrines of the *Sunnis*, especially the *Shafi’i* doctrine, in order to keep their blood throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century. As for those who remained on their ideology, they were prevented from practicing their religious rites and dispersed in the country, here and there. (‘Uṭmān 1994, 113); (Makī 2006, 230, 253) The *Shiites* who declared their affiliation to the *Sunni* doctrine on the

coasts were described with the title “*Ahl al-Sawhil al-Mutasninin*” (The People of the Coasts who being *Sunnis*). (Makī 2006, 254)

By reviewing the historical events related to the relationship between the *Sunnis* and *Shiites*, in Egypt and the Levant, during the Mamluk period, it is clear that the *Shiites* were subjected to a fierce war from the *Sunnis*, which led to a decline of their power, forcing them to resort to *Taqiyya* and cover-up by embracing the doctrines of the *Sunnah*, especially during the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century. Perhaps this largely explains the reason for not recording the part that explicitly includes belonging to *Shiite* thought on the bucket (the subject of the study), which says:

“*Accursed is he who unjustly prevented al-Husayn from water...*”.

”لعن الذي منع الحسين الماء ظلماً...”.

Especially since this part expresses exaggeration in adopting the *Shiite* doctrine; it includes an explicit curse for some *Sunnis*.

These events and matters also suggest dating this bucket back to the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14 AD century and determining its provenance in the Levant, specifically in one of the regions where the *Shiites* were, as *Gabal Amel*, *Beqaa*, the coasts or the *Denniyeh* mountains. Many of these regions are characterized by the abundance of wells in them; (Al-Faqīh 1986, 30) which is commensurate with the function of the bucket (the subject of the study) in getting water from these wells and transferring it. This is consistent with what was suggested by this bucket's artistic characteristics: the decorations and the script.

## CONCLUSION

This study dealt with a metal bucket made of brass, the artistic characteristics of which indicate its belonging to the Mamluk period, although it includes an inscription with a *Shiite* origin, executed in the *Thuluth* script, but only the part that does not contain any *Shiite* connotation, has been recorded, on this bucket. The study proved, through various evidence, that this bucket belonged to the Mamluk period (the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> AH / 14<sup>th</sup> AD century). It also suggested that it was made in the Levant, specifically in one of the regions where the *Shiites* were lived: *Gabal Amel*, *Beqaa*, the coasts or the *Denniyeh* mountains. The study explained the inclusion of a part of the inscription that does not include a clear affiliation to the *Shiite* doctrine, and the absence of the other part of this inscription which does. This was done by clarifying and explaining some historical and cultural aspects, especially those related to the relationship between *Sunnis* and *Shiites*. It was found that the fighting and persecution from the Mamluks against the *Shiites*, and their resorting to concealment by embracing *Sunni* doctrines, were the reasons for the absence of part of the inscription which contains the *Shiite* connotation. The study cleared the extent to which applied arts, in general, and their inscriptions, in particular, have been affected by political, religious, and social events of the society in which it is made.

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