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TWO FRAGMENTS
OF EGYPTIAN LUSTRE PAINTED CERAMICS
FROM THE MAMLOUK PERIOD⁽¹⁾

(with 10 plates)

BY

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His Excellency Kamel Osman Ghaleb Pasha, Cairo, possesses a very important collection of ceramic and enamelled pottery-fragments of the Moslem period. He has endeavoured to collect specimens of the various heraldic patterns in use between the xiith and xvth centuries. He has also taken an interest in reassembling fragments of ceramics bearing the signatures of potters. His collection is well known, some of its pieces having been published in several scientific works. I am very grateful to his Excellency for having given me the opportunity of studying his collection and granting me permission to publish what I consider of interest to my studies regarding Moslem ceramic art in Egypt.

In this collection I have found two fragments of Egyptian lustre painted ceramics decorated with heraldic and decorative designs of the Mamlouk period. They represent the only two pieces of the kind so far known.

The first fragment (Pl. I) bears the blason of a cup in a triangle painted in olive brown lustre on a light bluish white background, on each side scrolls of pine leaves and large fruits.

The representation of the cup, as seen on our fragment, is not unusual. It is to be seen used by the Egyptian potters as a decorative motive among the various ornaments besides being, obviously, a heraldic design. This

⁽¹⁾ Communication présentée en séance du 23 avril 1949.

piece (Pl. V, fig. 6) of Egyptian Mamlouk ceramics is decorated with a cup flanked by two birds and floral patterns in blue and black on a bluish white background.

The scrolls of pine leaves were among the patterns popular in Egypt during the xivth century. They are to be seen here (Pl. V, fig. 7) on a piece of Egyptian Mamlouk ceramics decorated in blue and black on a bluish white background.

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The second fragment (Pl. II) is decorated with a circle of olive brown lustre on which is reserved in light bluish white a flower of eight petals, pointed at each end, lying centrally on a regular angular figure, with one petal-point crossing each indentation, so as to appear as a flower lying on an octagonal star.

The Arab Art Museum owns a fragment of the Mamlouk ceramics of Egypt (Pl. III), decorated with a similar design where the outlines of the star are in blue and the petals are painted alternately in reddish-brown and green. Considering that the colours in popular use in the ceramics of Egypt during the Mamlouk period were blue and black and occasionally green,—those which we also see on this fragment—, the reddish-brown tend to indicate that the potter was using it, intentionally, in a particular sense. In my opinion, he aimed at a coat-of-arms in its proper colours.

This opinion is also confirmed by the fact that two pieces of Egyptian Mamlouk ceramics in the Arab Art Museum are painted in a similar reddish-brown colour for the same reason.

The first (Pl. IV, fig. 4) has a heraldic pattern divided into three parts, the central one of which illustrates a saddled horse remaining bluish white on a reddish-brown background. The two other parts have a bluish white background.

The second piece (Pl. IV, fig. 5) bears a coat in three parts. The upper and lower portions are in dark olive green,—which is again a colour intentionally used for this blason. The central part has a bluish-white penbox, reserved on a reddish-brown background.

The same idea of ornament, using the flower lying on a star, is repre-

sented on an enamelled pottery fragment from the Mamlouk period (Pl. VI, fig. 8), where a coat-of-arms consists of a rosette of six petals lying on an hexagonal star, the petals overlapping the re-entrant angles as before.

Such a flower of eight petals on a star with eight sides—similar to that of our fragment—is not to be seen among the motives decorating the ceramics of countries other than Egypt of the same or of previous dates.

Nevertheless it has been used in Spanish lustre painted pottery of the xvth century, as illustrated by the fragment (Pl. VI, fig. 9) from the collection of His Excellency Kamel Osman Ghaleb Pasha.

Several pieces of Spanish ceramics with lustre paint, exhibited in the Arab Art Museum (Pl. VI, fig. 10), bear heraldic patterns similar to those of the Mamlouk period in Egypt. These specimens lead us to believe that the blason of the eight-petalled flower lying on an octagonal star was among those which Spain copied from Egypt.



The two fragments, the object of the present study, are manufactured from soft Egyptian clay of a buff colour, and coated with a white slip under a transparent light bluish white glaze.

The glaze on the outside surface (Pl. I, fig. 1 *b*; Pl. II, fig. 2 *b*) of the two fragments ends near the foot. In some places it had melted, during the fixing in the kiln, and run down in large drops to the edges. This is also frequently noticed on the Egyptian ceramics.

The underneath of the foot of both of our two fragments is also partly coated with a thin glaze. On this glazed part of the bottom the Egyptian potters used to paint their names or their special marks.

Externally vertical lines painted in lustre run down to an horizontal one running round the foot on both fragments. The spaces between these vertical lines on the second fragment include short dashes symbolizing floral stalks. This external decoration also was much in vogue in Egypt during the xivth century.

The lustre paint of the two fragments is olive brown, yet the metallic

reflection is quite dim, except on the second fragment where the external vertical lines show a slight metallic reflection. This fact is rather an indication of the lack of skill and craftsmanship for which the lustre painted ceramics produced in Egypt during the Fatimid period were very famous.

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Now, what is the date of these two fragments?

The Arab Art Museum has discovered in Fostat, in the environs of Cairo, a large quantity of porcelains and celadons of different dates imported from China. The ornaments of certain Egyptian ceramics have been directly influenced by the Chinese decorative elements. The so-called blue and black underglaze painted Mamlouk ceramics are an outstanding example imitated by the Egyptian potters in colour and decoration from the Chinese ceramics.

Moreover two principal different ornamental styles are to be distinguished in these Mamlouk products, and it is my opinion that they belong to two different periods, though I am yet reluctant to be positive as to which preceded the other.

One of these styles shows the tendency of the Egyptian potters minutely to imitate the Chinese elements, endeavouring to produce naturalistic designs in different shades of blue and delimited by darker lines. The foot is completely glazed and has inside it the name of the potter painted in blue according to Chinese custom. This is illustrated in the painted gazelle decorating (Pl. VII, fig. 11) produced by the famous Egyptian potter "Ghaibi", and in these—in perfect imitation—Chinese lotus flowers (Pl. VII, fig. 12) made by the potter "Qutaita".

The decoration in the other style—which interests us for the dating of our two lustre painted fragments—was influenced by the Chinese ceramics only to a certain extent. The black colour is much used with the blue, and the external glaze ends partly near the foot and partly overflows down to the edge. Only a small part of the bottom—and not the whole of it, as in the preceding style,—is coated with glaze. Occasionally we see on these glazed portions of the bottom marks or names of potters painted in black instead of blue as in the former style.

On the external surface, vertical lines terminate in an horizontal one. Here is an example (Pl. VIII, fig. 13). The attitude of the bird on this piece is apparently rigid and stylised, in spite of the position of its head, to which the artist tried to give a naturalistic expression. We notice that only a part of the bottom is glazed and bears a mark formed by three short black lines. Similarly here is this piece (Pl. VIII, fig. 14), with an octagonal geometrical figure. We also notice that the name of the potter "Barir" is inscribed in black on a glazed portion of the bottom. On the external surface are the same vertical lines ending at an horizontal one.

The date of this last mentioned style can be precisely fixed through two fragments preserved in the Arab Art Museum : one (Pl. IX, fig. 15) of geometric design with the inscription "made in the year 745" enclosed in two contiguous segments,—the other (Pl. IX, fig. 16) decorated with three figures of fish in a round pool surrounded by the inscription "made in the year seven hundred and forty...". Some other pieces of the same style are dated "made in the year 44" or "in the year 45" or also "in the year 46" (Pl. X, fig. 17) skipping the seven hundreds. This is in addition to the other characteristics of this style comprising the external vertical lines and the coating of only a portion of the bottom.

The fragments of this style—including all the pieces mentioned above for comparison—bear a close resemblance to our two lustre painted ceramics as regards the glazing, the foot, the bottom and the verticals ending at an horizontal line on the external surface.

These are considerations which imply the attribution of these two lustre painted fragments to the first half of the xivth century.

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These facts enable us to follow the evolution of manufacture of the lustre painted ceramics in Egypt. This art flourished during the Fatimid period, when two principal schools are distinguishable. The first led by the artist "Moslem ibn ed-Dahhan" in the first half of the xith century, the second by "Sa'd" during the xith. Yet it is to be understood that such craftsmanship did not disappear with the burning of Fostat, in 1168,

as is supposed. The fragments discovered and preserved in the Arab Art Museum, discredit this opinion and indicate only a degeneration and a scarcity during the Ayyubid period, which did not prevent it from surviving into the Mamlouk period. The two fragments we now have are the proof.

This claim is also sustained by the discovery made at Fostat by M. H. Rached of a fragment (Pl. X, fig. 18) of Mamlouk red clay pottery which I can definitely date from the beginning of the xivth century. The whole inside surface is painted with metallic lustre and decorated with incised geometric designs. This fragment represents an evident proof of the use of lustre painting in the decoration of ceramics and pottery in Egypt during the Mamlouk period.

The discovery of these fragments is not to be considered an extraordinary event as the xivth century was a period of artistic renaissance in Egypt. The Sultan en-Naser Mohammad ibn Qalawon, his successors and emirs encouraged craftsmen to revive the artistic standards and lift them to a degree of perfection never before attained since the Fatimid period.

It is of the greatest importance to draw attention to the ceramic collections owned by the Arab Art Museum, Cairo. Its valuable and diverse collection of specimens will undoubtedly be of great assistance to develop new approaches to the correct study of the ceramic art in Egypt during the Moslem era.



Fig. 1 *a.*—Collection of H. E. K. O. Ghaleb Pasha, n^o 418.



Fig. 1 *b.*—Collection of H. E. K. O. Ghaleb Pasha, n^o 418.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 2 *a.*—Collection of H. E. K. O. Ghaleb Pasha, n° 419.

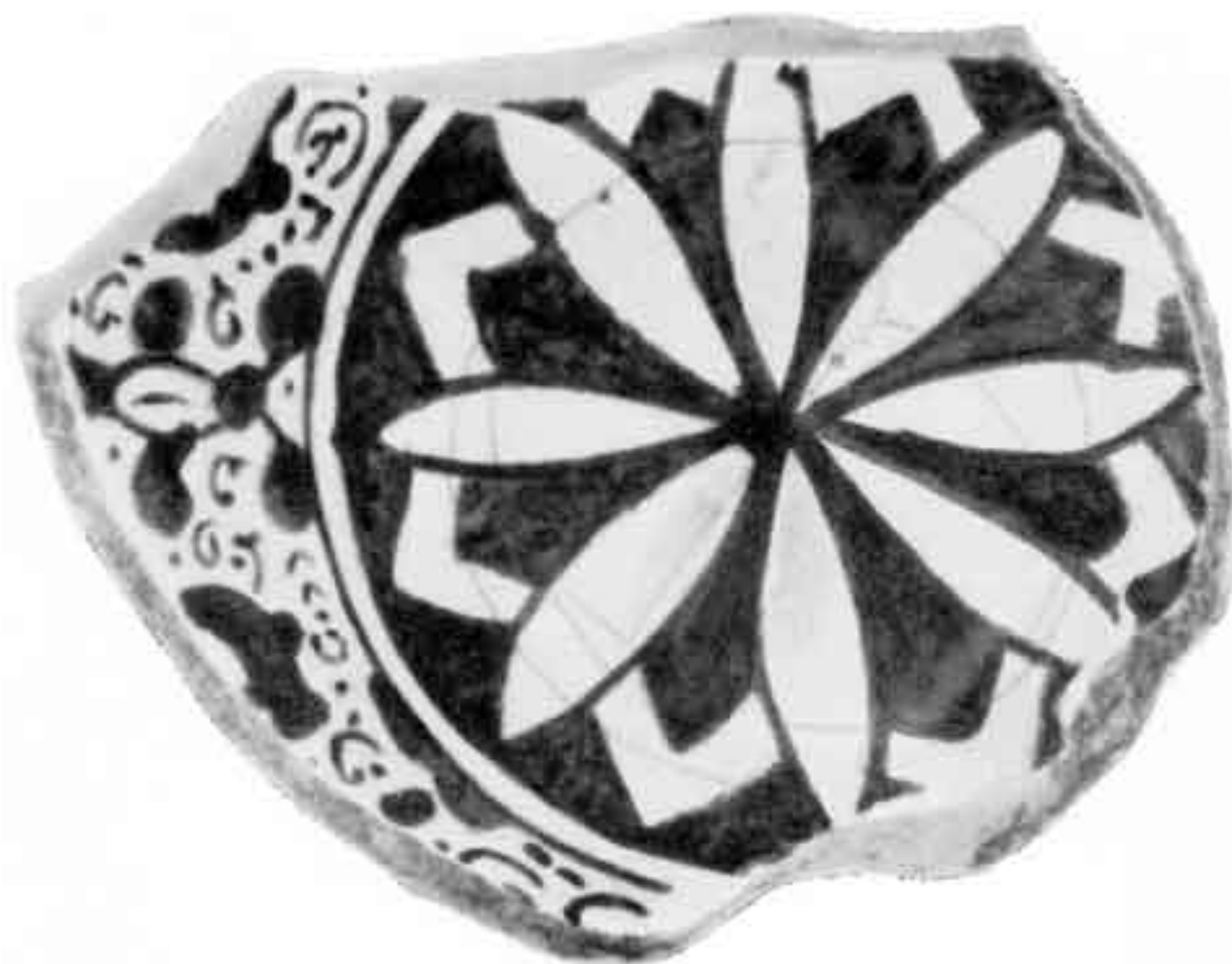


Fig. 2 *b.*—Collection of H. E. K. O. Ghaleb Pasha, n° 419.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 3.—Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 4.—Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 5.—Arab Art Museum.

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Fig. 6.—Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 7.—Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 8. — Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 9. — Collection of H. E. K. O. Ghaleb Pasha, n° 420.



Fig. 10. — Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 11.—Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 12.—Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 13.—Arab Art Museum.

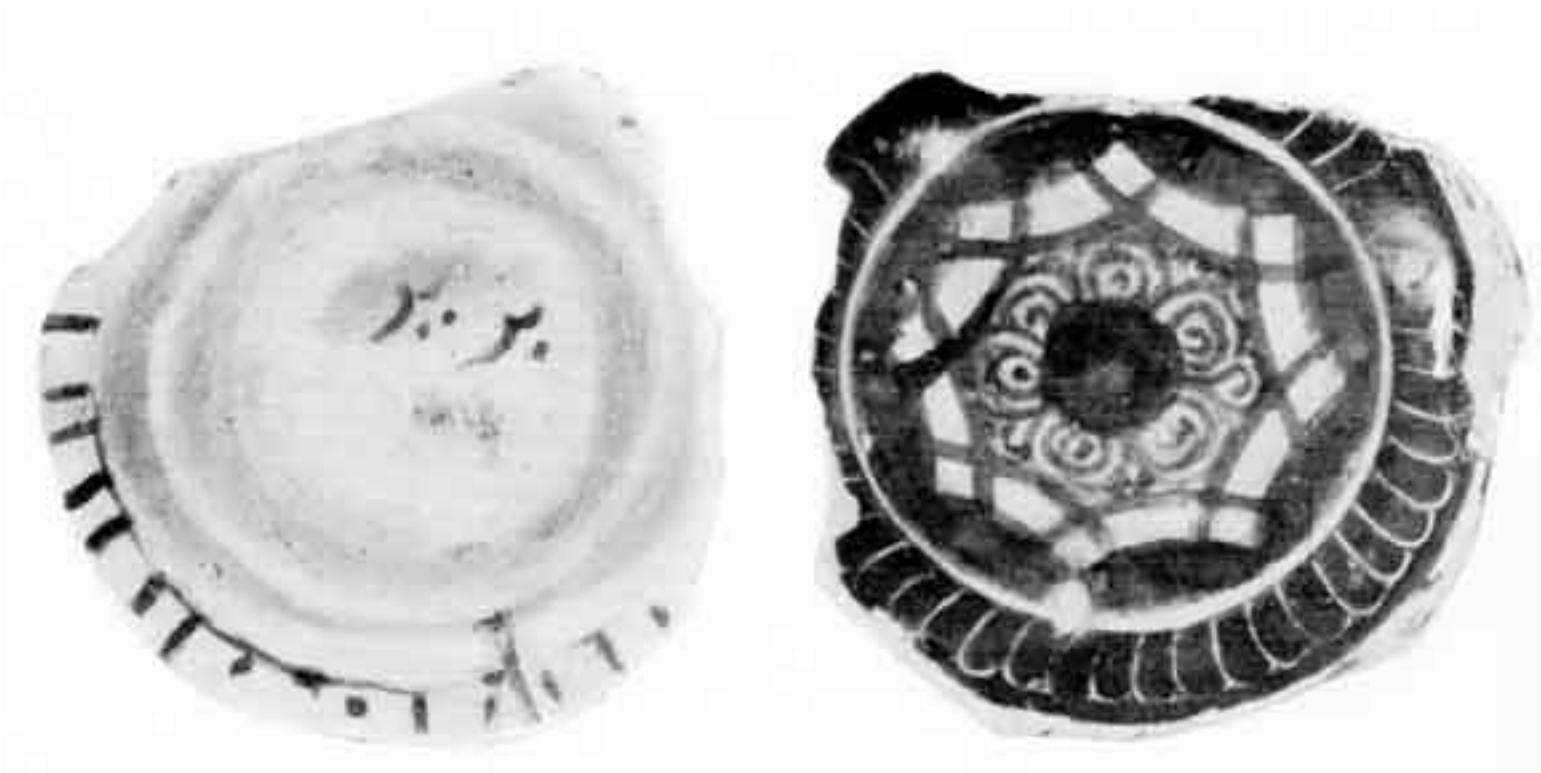


Fig. 14.—Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*



Fig. 13. — Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 16. — Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*

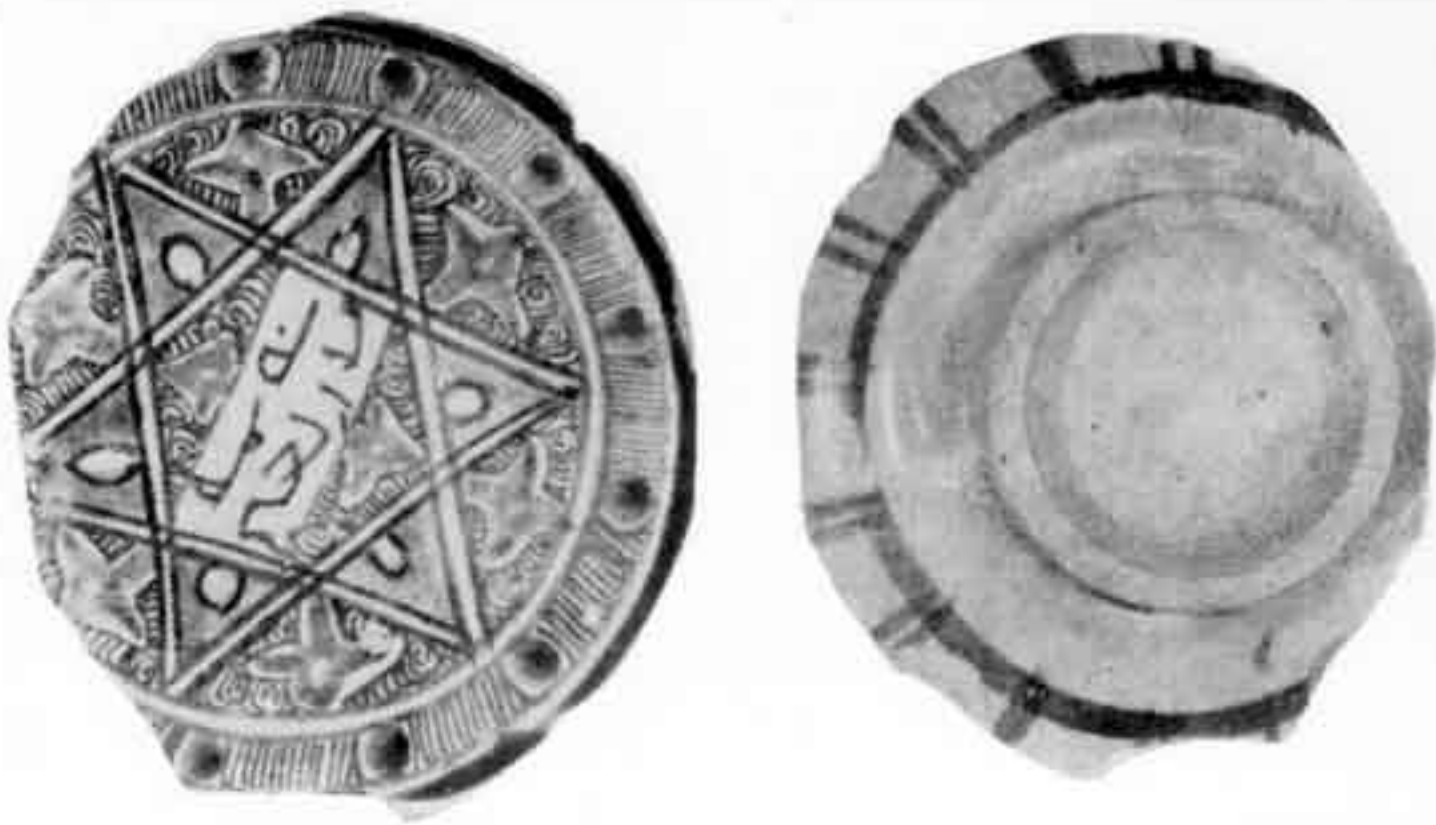


Fig. 17.—Arab Art Museum.



Fig. 18.—Arab Art Museum.

DR. MOHAMED MOSTAFA, *Two fragments of Egyptian lustre.*