
The Arts and Crafts of Syria and Egypt from the Ayyubids to World War I. Collected Essays, by Marcus Milwright. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgia Press, 2018, 379pp., \$97.20. ISBN-13: 9781463239008

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This book is the republication, in an updated form, of a set of Milwright's articles and book chapters dealing with the arts and crafts of Egypt and Greater Syria and edited between 1999 and 2014, except for Chapter 11, which represents an unpublished study. On the occasion, the author has added new illustrations to the original publications, replaced some maps and cut few photographs which was difficult to reproduce again (because of lack of permissions). The main objective of this collection, which gains data from different sources (archaeological evidence, museum collections, photographs, written documents), is to reconstruct the social, cultural, and economic history of the Middle East. The geographical focus is centered on Egypt and Bilad al-Sham and the chronological horizon covers up the period comprised between the 12th and the early 20th century.

In his introduction, the author provides a precise explanation of the focus of his works through the years, which has been primarily the study of objects within their social, historical and economical context. He also provides an exhaustive explanation of the sources used: archaeological data and textual documents, which he critically combines and compares, taking into account their limits. He frequently uses for his research on the history of traditional manufacturing practices, the *Qamus al-Sina'at al-Shamiyya (Dictionary of Damascene Crafts)*, composed by Muhammad Sa'īd al-Qamisi (d. 1900), Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (d. 1910) and Khalil al-'Azm (d. 1926), and first published in Arabic in 1960. Milwright discusses the genealogy of the book as well as the biography and cultural profile of the authors, and examines its role in the understanding of economic and technical aspect of artisans' life of 19th- and early 20th-century Damascus.

In Chapter 1 the author discusses the evidence of ceramics in written sources of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, conscious that pottery was seldom, if ever, the primary concern of the cited authors. He presents his discussion on this topic following the division between “locally produced ceramics” and “ceramics imported into the Ayyubid and Mamluk empires”. References attested in written sources (from Arab and European authors) are compared to available archaeological evidence. Through the analysis of written evidence, he aims at shedding light “on the structure, regulation, ownership and taxation of the ceramic industry in the Ayyubid-Mamluk period.” It emerges that, even if ceramics can provide important data on the social and economic context of the region, they were not a highly valued item if compared to luxury objects such as inlaid metalwork, silk textiles, ornamented leather.

Chapter 2 presents an inscribed relief-moulded glazed bowl of the Mamluk period, which has not been preserved and is only recorded in the photographic archive of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The importance of this object lies in the presence of a complete Arabic inscription, rarely attested on glazed earthenware of the Mamluk period. Although the analy-

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sis has been made exclusively on photographs and data from archives, the author provides useful information of the technical features of this bowl thanks to his knowledge of ceramic productions of the Islamic period and to comparison with other similar artefacts. Milwright inscribes this bowl within a wider chronological and historical discussion, and provides strong arguments regarding the role played by its place of provenance (as mentioned in the archives), Damiya, in the connection between central Palestine and the Jordan Valley.

In Chapter 3 the author describes and contextualizes a precise ceramic production (i.e. turquoise and black underglaze-painted stonepaste ware) by starting from a selection of sherds that he has studied in detail (some ceramic fragments from Karak excavations, Jordan). He presents this group by analyzing the decorative repertoire, the area of distribution and the chronological parameters of its diffusion, suggesting that the ware was produced in the mid or late 14th century, allegedly in a single workshop. The author proposes that the movement of potters from Eastern regions of the Islamic world towards West, mainly because of political instability, could have determine the transfer of techniques (such as incisions into black painting, known in the Iranian region) and the use of turquoise color (less expensive copper compounds) instead of the more common blue (cobalt).

In Chapter 4 the author explores Ottoman written sources discussing ceramics, in order to provide complementary evidence to the picture issued from the archaeological data. The main focuses of the article are: 1) centers of ceramic production in Bilad al-Sham and 2) glazed ware imports. The main sources he employed are cadastral records (*daftars*) and records of the Shari'a court (*sijill*), but also Western documents mentioning diplomatic and commercial relations with the Eastern Mediterranean, producing a rich picture of ceramics produced, traded and employed in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham, and showing the strong impact on local manufacture and economy that contacts with Europe and the Far East introduced.

The focus on Ottoman Bilad al-Sham continues also in Chapter 5, where the author creates a dialogue between written sources and archaeological evidence, providing a preliminary picture of the history of ceramics imports in the late Ottoman period. The author discusses the ceramic types imported into Bilad al-Sham (from China, Europe and Turkey) and the impact they had on local ceramic production. He starts approaching imports from the late Mamluk/early Ottoman period (period 1), then focusing, more in particular, on textual and archaeological sources of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries (period 2).

Chapter 6 assesses forms of economic activities associated with the hajj in Syria. The article is divided in two parts: the first one is centered on the period prior to the 19th century, while the second one is focused on 19th and early 20th centuries. In Greater Syria, the "hajj economy" promoted the expansion and diversification of local crafts, especially in Damascus. This economy suffered a devastating change with the completion of the Hijaz railway, which caused the decline of many of the local traditional industries

From Chapter 7 to Chapter 11, the author analyses crafts of Late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham (19th–early 20th centuries) in order to understand their broader social and economic context at the eve of industrialization, when they began their decline. He does this by applying a regular methodology consisting in the study of the material evidence available and the information of the *Qamus*: Chapter 7 reinterprets Paul Kahles' Egyptian collection of shadow puppets, for which the author suggests a later date, most probably the 17th or 18th century, rather than a Mamluk date; Chapter 8 aims at contributing to the knowledge of woodworking in late

Ottoman Damascus; Chapter 9 discusses glassworking production, providing comparisons with 19th-century Syrian glasses from the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (Hawaii); Chapter 10 examines the important role of the diversified metalworking Syrian industry; Chapter 11 provides data on the widespread industry of leather-work, focusing more specifically on urban contexts.

We consider a particularly important contribution to the contemporary discussion on heritage in Chapter 12, where the author not only tries to reconstruct the path of some of the objects which reached European and North American collections in late 19th–early 20th centuries, but more specifically discusses how Arab scholars reacted to the spoiling and redistribution of their heritage. In the period of Arab nationalism, this nourished a desire of independence from foreign political powers occupying the region.

In the final Chapter 13, the author provides a discussion on the revival of medieval styles and techniques during the Late Ottoman period, focusing in particular on Mamluk revival in metalwork production in Damascus. By analyzing a specific artifact, an inlaid pyxis from the collection of Mr. Murray Webb in Victoria, British Columbia (Canada) and exploiting the *Qamus*, the author reconstructs the broader context of production of this type of vessels in the Middle East and Europe.

Milwright's trademark throughout his work can be considered the dialogue between archaeological and written sources. Not only does he reconstruct the history of local crafts from the Ayyubid to the Late Ottoman period in the region, but, more importantly, he provides a critic discussion of the social, cultural and economic context. The reader would find a detailed and fascinating representation especially of local crafts of 19th–early 20th cent. Bilad al-Sham, discovering—also through pictures—objects, spaces and characters of this past.