



## A Mamluk Basin for a Sicilian Queen<sup>1</sup>

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There has been a fourteenth-century engraved basin with characteristics of both Islamic and western traditions in the Rijksmuseum since the end of the nineteenth century (figs. 1-4).<sup>2</sup> The basin, raised from a brass plate, has straight sides that initially narrow slightly at the top and then flare out to form a rim. The almost flat base and the inside and outside walls have incised

*Detail of fig. 2*

*Fig. 1*

*Basin of Elizabeth of Carinthia, Egypt or Syria, 1323-50. Brass, h. 19.6 cm, diam. 46.8 cm. (rim), 35 cm (base). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, BK-NM-7474.*

and engraved decorations. There is a huge contrast between the lavishly decorated interior and the far plainer exterior. The interior is largely decorated with motifs in the Arab-Islamic tradition and has an inscription in Arabic. By contrast, the exterior looks more western and has an inscription in Latin, interrupted by four identical coats of arms that are the key to the





Fig. 2  
Inside fig. 1.

date the piece was made and the identity of the person who commissioned it (fig. 4). The coat of arms is that of Elizabeth of Carinthia (c. 1300-c. 1350), who married Peter II of Aragon in 1323. A year earlier, Peter had been crowned king of Sicily by his father Frederick III. Since it is the combined coats of arms of Aragon-Sicily (I) and Carinthia (II), it could not have been used until after Elizabeth and Peter's marriage in 1323.<sup>3</sup> This means that the basin must have been made between 1323 and 1350, the year Elizabeth died.

We shall begin by examining the basin in the context of fourteenth-century Egyptian and Syrian Mamluk metalwork, before placing it in the broader context of the growing trade and the artistic interaction in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance between the Islamic and the Christian countries bordering the Mediterranean. We conclude by investigating the basin's function against the background of fourteenth-century Sicily and what significance it may have had for Elizabeth of Carinthia, Queen of

Sicily, with particular reference to the meaning and the possible function of the Latin inscription.

### A Mamluk Water Basin

The interior of the basin is decorated with a wide band of script with Arabic inscriptions against a background of scrolls, divided into six parts by medallions. A translation of the partly deciphered inscription reads, 'Glory and victory permanence (?) for the noble, the good, the / ... and splendour and fortune and / excellency ... l-maliki al-mal / lik the authority al ...' Three of the medallions are embellished with a seated, crowned ruler with a halo, holding a goblet in the right hand. The other three contain a European coat of arms. There are pointed leaf shapes along the bottom edge of the inscription-band, while the rim of the basin is decorated with ducks in flight interspersed with floral motifs and rosettes. The base is decorated with a medallion with fish in four concentric circles.



Fig. 3  
Detail (inside) of  
fig. 1.

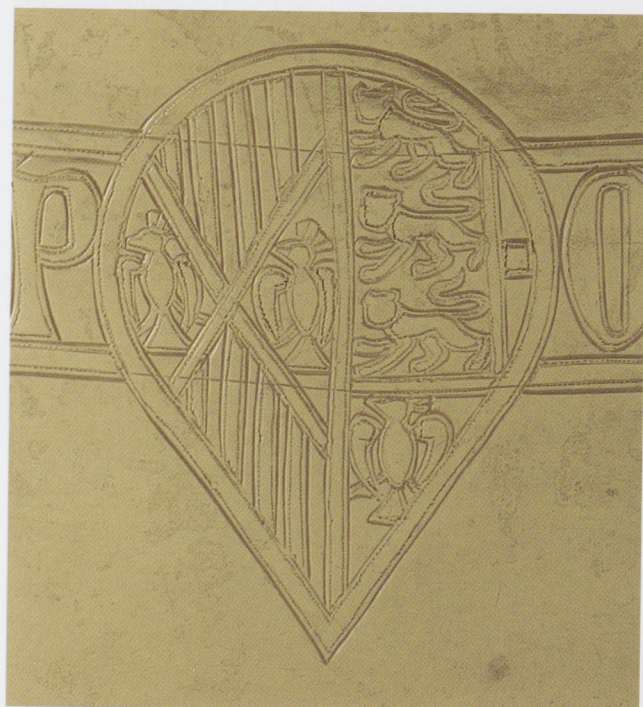


Fig. 4  
Detail (outside) of  
fig. 1.

In shape and interior decoration, the basin in the Rijksmuseum resembles metalwork from the Mamluk period. It bears great similarity to a group of fourteenth-century basins that were in all probability used for ablutions: water poured over the hands from an accompanying ewer would be collected in the basin. These basins, given their titular inscriptions, were all intended for the Mamluk elite; one such is the basin for Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad in the British Museum (fig 5).<sup>4</sup> The Mamluks were a military

slave dynasty that ruled Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Israel from Cairo between 1250 and 1517. They encouraged the arts through important commissions, mainly for religious buildings. Their patronage also provided a significant boost to metalworking. Monumental brass-plated wooden doors were fitted to mosques and *madrasas*, and the interiors were decorated with magnificent metal lamps and candlesticks. The Mamluk elite also awarded important secular commissions, for example for expensive inlaid metal dishes, often as part of a dowry.

Cairo and Damascus were the two major centres of Mamluk metalworking.<sup>5</sup> The inlaid work from Damascus, renowned for its high quality, was particularly sought-after and was also in great demand far beyond Syria. The door inlaid with gold and silver, specially made in Damascus in 1360 for the *madrasa* of Sultan Hasan in Cairo, is a good example.<sup>6</sup> Medieval travellers from the West also wrote about

the high standard of Damascene inlaid work: during his stay in Damascus in 1384, the Italian traveller Simone Sigoli was amazed by the huge numbers of basins and ewers that appeared to be made of gold and which were intricately inlaid with silver.<sup>7</sup> He added that the metalworkers owed their craftsmanship to the skills handed down from father to son.

As we see, fourteenth-century Mamluk basins were usually inlaid with gold, silver or copper, but the basin in the Rijksmuseum is different; it has only an engraved decoration. Tiny engraved dotted lines and somewhat deeper undercut details, which in the Mamluk period were made to accommodate the silver inlay, suggest that the basin was prepared for inlay work (fig. 6). Technical research using an x-ray fluorescence spectrometer (XRF) has, however, revealed that there are no traces of any inlay.<sup>8</sup> The basin therefore appears to be a half-finished product, which is fairly rare.

Fig. 5  
Basin of Sultan  
al-Nasir Muhammad,  
Cairo or Damascus,  
1320-41.  
Brass inlaid with silver  
and gold, h. 22.7 cm,  
diam. 54 cm.  
London, British  
Museum, ME QA 1851,  
1-4.1 © Trustees of  
the British Museum.





Fig. 6  
Detail of fig. 1 (taken  
with microscope).

Perhaps it was to be inlaid later, but why this never happened remains a mystery.

On closer examination there are other elements that are not entirely in keeping with Mamluk traditions. The Arabic text, a combination of anonymous titles, blessings and pseudo inscriptions, is unusual. In this period the clients' titles, sometimes combined with a verse from the Koran, were far more customary.<sup>9</sup> The medallions with seated rulers also seem rather anachronistic. Decorations on thirteenth-century metalwork that included Arabic inscriptions combined with scenes borrowed from hunting, music or astrology were very common. But from the reign of Sultan Nasir al-Din Muhammad (1293-1341 with interruptions) onwards, figurative medallions like these were increasingly giving way to medallions with floral patterns, inscriptions or a blazon. The rulers featured on the Rijksmuseum basin wear crowns, headwear that was associated with Christian monarchs, as Mamluk rulers did not wear crowns

(fig. 3). The three western coats of arms are also, of course, anomalous.

However, the most unusual thing about it is the exterior decoration. Even aside from the Latin text and the western coats of arms, this type of narrow band of script against an undecorated background is very unusual in the Mamluk tradition, which typically has a *horror vacui* (or *amor plenis*).<sup>10</sup> We know of only a handful of Mamluk basins decorated with an inscription band against an otherwise undecorated exterior. The basin in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha is one of the most interesting of these, not just because this basin is also dated around 1350, but because the decoration on the inside is strikingly similar to that on the Rijksmuseum basin (fig. 7).<sup>11</sup> Further parallels should rather be sought in the bands of script on medieval European metal objects like holy water ewers, water butts and bells.<sup>12</sup>

The most obvious conclusion is that the basin was made in the Middle East as a half-finished product and was then exported to the West where the Latin

text and the coats of arms were added later. However, technical examination reveals that the Latin inscription and the coats of arms on the exterior and the Islamic decorations on the interior are by the same hand and must be dated to the same time. Furthermore the three western coats of arms on the interior really are an integral part of the Mamluk decoration: they cannot be later additions. This means that what we have here is a product for export that had to meet specific requirements. The western client supplied a text and coats of arms, which a Mamluk workshop in Damascus or Cairo then incorporated into the design.<sup>13</sup> The other variations, such as the rulers' Christian crowns and the somewhat confused Arabic inscription may also be explained by a commission from a European client. After all, the meaning of the inscription was not that important to a western client, who was more concerned with the aesthetic appeal of the Arabic calligraphy.

### Trade and Artistic Exchange

In all probability the basin in the Rijksmuseum is an example of an object ordered by a western client in the Arabic world. But how unusual was this? How close were relations between the Islamic and Christian worlds bordering the Mediterranean, and how did these relationships translate into artistic contacts?

Trade between the Christians and Muslims recovered slowly in the eleventh century.<sup>14</sup> The Latin peoples, particularly the Italians, reclaimed their old role in international trade.<sup>15</sup> Political stability and prosperity in the West increased and fuelled the demand for luxury articles. Goods were produced in the Islamic world that were far superior in terms of the quality of the workmanship, the technical expertise and the artistic skills to anything being made in Europe at the time. New commercial centres such as Barcelona, Pisa, Genoa and Venice responded shrewdly to the need for

Fig. 7  
Basin, probably made for an officer of al-Malik al-Nasir Hasan, Egypt or Syria, c. 1350.  
Brass inlaid with silver and a black compound, h. 17.9 cm, diam. 43.9 cm.  
Doha, Museum of Islamic Art.



spices and luxury items, and equipped powerful merchant fleets to sail the Mediterranean. The Crusades likewise brought about more extensive contacts with the Muslims. The Crusaders became acquainted with Islamic culture and established trade contacts. They returned to Europe with examples of oriental arts and crafts in their baggage and introduced them to their compatriots, creating demand for these luxury goods. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Crusader states like Acre acted as important links on the trade routes between East and West. After the fall of Acre in 1291 their role was taken over in part by Cyprus, where the last Crusaders had settled.

The Italian merchant fleets did not confine themselves to the Crusader ports; they also sought more direct trade relations with cities like Tunis, Alexandria, Damascus and Aleppo. From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, merchants from Genoa, Pisa and Venice obtained permission from the Islamic authorities to set up in business in special districts and buildings (*funduq/fundacio*) in these cities, where they were allowed to trade under strict conditions.

The embargo on trade with the Mamluks proclaimed by Pope Nicholas IV after the fall of Acre in 1291 did not mean that trade suddenly stopped; it was more an indication that the Pope was afraid of the huge expansion in East-West trade that had taken place. Initially cities like Venice quite openly flouted the ban until the embargo was tightened in 1326 on pain of excommunication.<sup>16</sup> Officially the Doge's city did then have to conform, but individual traders continued to evade the ban or tried to circumvent it by using transit ports on Cyprus and Crete. Furthermore, the *Pax Mongolia*, the result of the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, provided a temporary alternative northern trade route to the East and Far East by way of the Black Sea ports. The papal

embargo was lifted in 1344, whereupon the Italian cities immediately resumed direct trading with the Mamluks.

It is only in the last few years that more attention has been paid to the close commercial ties and the resultant artistic relations between the Islamic and Christian countries bordering the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.<sup>17</sup> Recent studies have consistently shown how intensive this interaction was and prove that there are few branches of Southern European decorative arts that were not influenced by Islamic art.<sup>18</sup>

From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century a huge and steady stream of Islamic decorative art flowed to the ports in Italy, Southern France and Spain. These products were very popular with the secular and ecclesiastical elite, who delighted in showing them off. The western market was an important outlet for Islamic artisans and artists and little by little they developed products specifically intended for export and adapted to western tastes. At the same time western artisans adopted oriental techniques and decorative motifs and made products that were sometimes almost indistinguishable from their originals. As time went by these exotic motifs were imitated less slavishly and incorporated into western traditions in more original ways. There was an active artistic cross-fertilization between the Islamic and the Christian world as western motifs had also been adopted in the East. Western decorative art rapidly made up the lost ground, and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries western fabrics, ceramics and glass were sought-after imports in the Islamic ports. At the end of the fifteenth century, something akin to a community of taste began to develop among the Mediterranean elite as a result of the intensive trade in luxury goods and the accompanying reciprocal artistic influences – a shared taste



Fig. 8  
 Fragment of the  
 'Shroud of Guy of  
 Lusignan', Syria or  
 Egypt, c. 1175-c. 1225.  
 Silk, 26 x 25 cm.  
 Amsterdam, Rijks-  
 museum, purchased  
 with the support  
 of the Vereniging  
 Rembrandt,  
 BK-NM-12113.

for luxury arts and crafts that transcended the boundaries between the Islamic and Christian worlds.<sup>19</sup>

This artistic influence was not equally strong in all branches of the decorative arts, it did not always happen in the same period and it took many and varied forms. Here we shall touch on just a few examples of textiles and ceramics, in part based on objects in the Rijksmuseum's collection, before concentrating on the metalwork.

Textiles were among the earliest products of the Islamic world that found a ready market in the West, as we see, for example, from the many pieces of Islamic textiles that have been found used as packaging for Christian relics in medieval church treasures. The fact that Egyptian and Syrian weavers had responded to the demands of the western market and incorporated western motifs in their designs quite early on is revealed by a fragment of fabric in



the Rijksmuseum, which according to tradition came from the shroud of Guy of Lusignan (c. 1150-1194, fig. 8). This French nobleman was the last King of Jerusalem and eventually had to look on as his city was conquered by Saladin in 1187. Lusignan was forced to flee Palestine and died in 1194 as King of Cyprus, where he was buried in the Templars' church in Nicosia. The piece of cloth in the Rijksmuseum is one of several fragments that are to be found in western museums.<sup>20</sup> It bears stylistic similarities to fabrics from thirteenth-century Egypt or Syria. The combination of Islamic and Christian elements is striking: the Arabic text appears in conjunction with a western fleur-de-lys. The fleur-de-lys was also occasionally found in Islamic iconography from the end of the twelfth century, probably as a result of contact with the Crusaders. This has also led to the suggestion that the fragment need not have come from Guy of Lusignan or his entourage, but may have belonged to a member of the Syrian or Egyptian elite at the start of the thirteenth century.

As early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries fabrics that borrowed heavily from the designs of examples from the Islamic world were being woven in Italy itself; these Islamic textiles were freely available thanks to the increase in trade. The products of weavers from Lucca can still be almost indistinguishable from their Islamic examples. In the past the origins of a silk fabric in the Rijksmuseum collection were sought in Egypt and Syria, but now it is generally regarded as a product of the textile industry in Lucca or Spain in the thirteenth or fourteenth century (fig. 9).<sup>21</sup> Evidence of



Fig. 9  
Fragment with  
Birds and Pairs of  
Mythical Animals,  
Lucca or Spain,

c. 1200-c. 1300.  
Silk, 67 x 41.8 cm. 24,15  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
BK-NM-12111.



Fig. 10  
Fragment with  
*Pairs of Hares*,  
Iran, c. 1300-c. 1400.

Silk, 28.2 x 13.5 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
BK-NM-11764.

oriental inspiration is revealed by such things as the paired eagles and dragons with dog's heads, interspersed with palmettes. Conversely, the Rijksmuseum also has a fragment with pairs of hares contained in a geometric pattern of stylized plant motifs, which is now attributed to an Iranian workshop but was taken in the past to be a product from the Near East or Italy (fig. 10).<sup>22</sup> This confirms that there really was an 'international' style in textiles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Almost identical patterns were used in fabrics from Spain, Italy, Egypt, Syria and Iran and it is remarkable how quickly new patterns were distributed.

Ceramics from the Islamic world also gained early popularity in Italy. Huge quantities were imported from the eleventh century onwards, as is revealed, for example, by the astonishing numbers of *bacini* that were found in Pisa. These little dishes were used as decorations on the walls of churches: the glazed surfaces must have created a magnificent effect in the bright sunlight and at the same time were far cheaper than marble. These Islamic *bacini* had a significant influence on local ceramic production in cities like Pisa and Orvieto in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nevertheless for a long time the Italian elite continued to be dependent on potters from the Islamic world for high-quality artistic pottery. From the late fourteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century, Italian merchants imported great quantities of ceramics from Syria and Spain. Syrian and Spanish pieces are consequently found in abundance in the inventories of the most important Italian families in this period.<sup>23</sup> Some of these products even bore the arms of Italian cities or families, like an *albarello* in the Louvre (fig. 11).<sup>24</sup> This early fifteenth-century drug jar was made in Syria. The shield with the Florentine lily is evidence that it was a western order.<sup>25</sup> It was not until later in

the century that an Italian ceramics industry that could compete with the Islamic products in technique and artistic quality began to develop. But even then Islamic motifs were still being used alongside figurative and antique decorations. The dish in the Rijksmuseum collection, which was probably made in Siena around 1525, shows that by this time Italian potters were able to handle Islamic patterns with great freedom (fig. 12). Prints of Islamic knot designs from the circle of Leonardo da Vinci, later copied in woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer (fig. 13), may have been the inspiration for this dish, but it is also possible that the Sienese potter found his example

Fig. 11  
Albarello with  
Fleur-de-lys  
Decoration,  
Damascus, 1400-50.  
Siliceous ceramic, slip  
painted decoration  
under a transparent  
glaze, h. 20.5 cm.  
Paris, Musée du  
Louvre, 42888 © RMN/  
Jean-Gilles Berizzi.





Fig. 12  
 Plate with Poly-  
 chrome, Geometric  
 Line Pattern,  
 Siena, c. 1525.  
 Majolica,  
 diam. c. 26 cm.  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 BK-NM-13136.

in the Islamic metalwork that was being imported in quantity by Venetian merchants around 1500.<sup>26</sup>

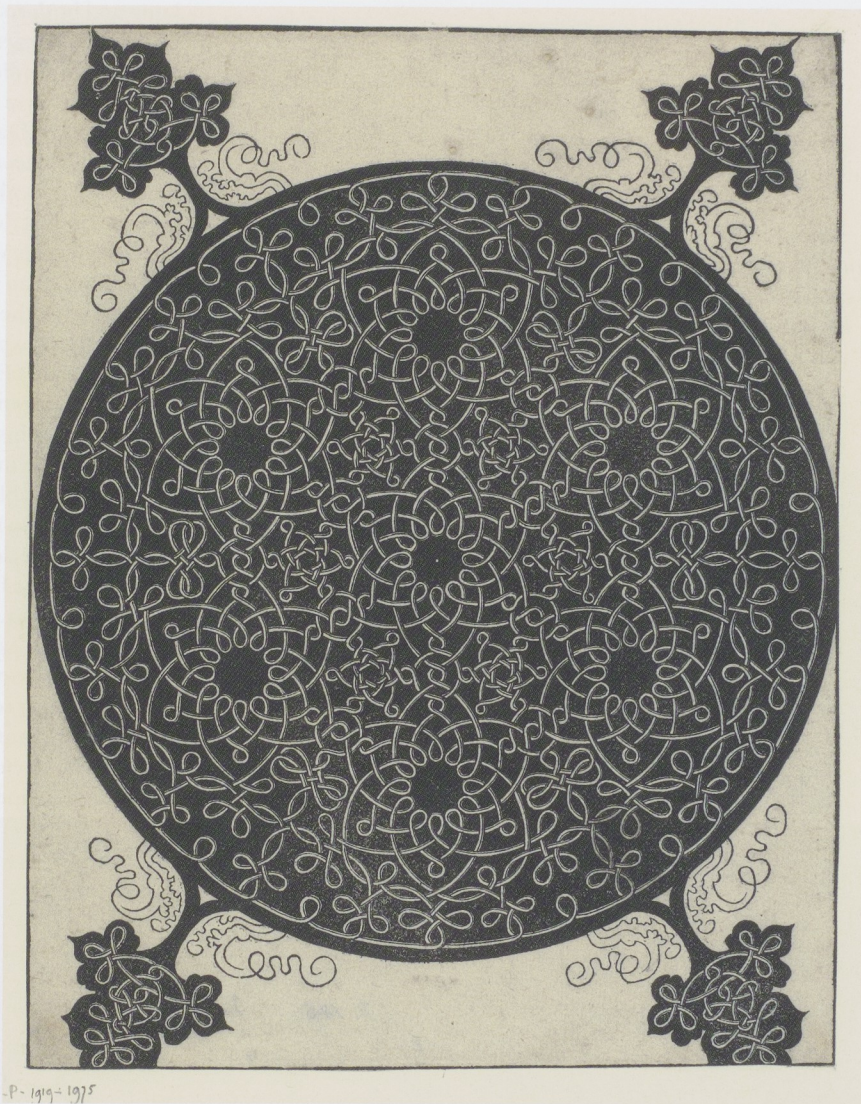
### Metalwork

Confirmation that Islamic metalwork was being exported to Italy with some regularity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, despite the papal ban on the trade in Islamic luxury goods, comes from a totally unexpected source. In Italian altarpieces by Duccio, Giotto and their

followers, we find saints and angels with halos bearing pseudo-Arabic inscriptions (fig. 14).<sup>27</sup> They were probably painted after the example of contemporary Mamluk dishes made of inlaid metal with similar inscriptions in a concentric composition. Evidently the general public had no problem with this, any more than they objected to the Islamic dress with (pseudo) Arabic texts in which many of the saints were depicted. Like their contemporaries, the painters must have

Fig. 13

ALBRECHT DÜRER,  
*Sheet with Seven  
 Star-shaped Motifs,  
 Surrounded by a  
 Braided Edge*, 1507-21.  
 Woodcut,  
 270 x 209 mm.  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 RP-P-1919-1975.



P-1919-1975

been fascinated by the beauty of the Islamic metalwork, and the association of things eastern with the Bible may also have played a role in the choice of these striking halos.

In the time of Duccio and Giotto – around 1300 – the Mamluk metal industry was thriving, but this was about to change. In the second half of the fourteenth century, domestic demand all but dried up.<sup>28</sup> Between around 1375 and 1475 we know of hardly any examples of inlaid brass-

Fig. 14  
 Detail of GIOTTO,  
*Baroncelli Polyptych,  
 The Coronation  
 of the Virgin*, c. 1334.  
 Tempera on wood.  
 Florence, Baroncelli  
 Chapel, Santa Croce.





Fig. 15  
Candlestick, Egypt or  
Syria, c. 1400-c. 1500.  
Brass, h. 13 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
BK-NM-11879.

were ordered by the Mamluk elite. This was entirely caused by the devastating plague epidemics and the economic, social and political unrest at the end of the fourteenth century and start of the fifteenth. The wealth of the elite declined dramatically and there was a shortage of copper, silver and gold too. Nevertheless the production of high-quality metal utensils did not cease completely as the Mamluk artisans found a new market – Europe.<sup>29</sup> Western traders took advantage of the economic crisis in the East and the favourable exchange rates and imported vast quantities of metalwork, such as boxes, bowls, incense burners, trays and candlesticks. A Florentine inventory of 1390 includes ‘Damascene’ candlesticks and a large bowl, and Piero de Medici’s inventory of 1463 lists thirty-six imports including basins, ewers, pitchers, candlesticks, a

lamp and both a standing and a spherical incense burner. In 1492 his son, Lorenzo de Medici, owned no fewer than seventy-five objects described as *domaschini* (Damascene) and fifty labelled *alla domaschina*.<sup>30</sup> Islamic metalwork was also frequently depicted in interiors in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venetian paintings.<sup>31</sup>

The European traders eventually left their mark on the design and decoration of these export products. New shapes that met European needs were introduced, for instance smaller bowls with flat bases instead of round ones, which could be more easily placed on European tables. The decorative motifs were also tailored to European tastes: intricate designs of animals, birds and exotic foliage were particularly popular. In fact these motifs belonged to an earlier style phase in Mamluk metalwork, but were now evidently being repeated and adapted for the new clientele. From the end of the fourteenth century onwards, more and more European coats of arms also appeared on these objects – later the escutcheons were often left empty. Apparently the demand in Europe was so great that dealers had these items made for the open market: the buyer could add his own coat of arms later. Until the 1970s it was assumed that this large group of metal objects was made by Islamic metalworkers in Venice, and consequently they were labelled Veneto-Saracenic. This opinion has now been revised: these metal objects were produced in the Near East itself for a western clientele. It was not until around 1500 that Italian metalworkers in Venice, for example, began to imitate the oriental designs and techniques themselves.<sup>32</sup>

A small candlestick in the Rijksmuseum is just such an example of these metal objects manufactured for the overseas market (fig. 15).<sup>33</sup> The bell-shaped, flared foot, the flat protruding drip catcher and the cylindrical neck screwed into the base are typical.

Candlesticks like these, which were made predominantly for the Italian market, are much smaller (this one is 13 cm tall) than examples made for a Mamluk clientele, which can be two to three times as large. The figurative decoration with depictions of a harpy and a griffon also appealed specifically to western taste. The two blank escutcheons on the base, one in the typical European shape, flat at the top and tapering at the bottom, indicate that it is an anonymous piece to which the family coat of arms could be added if the owner wished.

Fig. 16  
Basin of Hugh IV  
of Lusignan, Egypt  
or Syria, 1324-59.  
Copper alloy, inlaid  
with silver and organic  
material, h. 39 cm,  
diam. 57 cm.  
Paris, Musée  
du Louvre,  
MAO 101 © RMN/  
Hervé Lwandowski.

Elizabeth of Carinthia's water basin was one of the earliest pieces in what would become a tradition of Mamluk export metalwork. This was not an object for an anonymous market; it was a royal commission for a specific piece. In that respect it can be compared to some other very unusual metal objects from the same period:

a basin, tray and bowl with the coat of arms of the Lusignan family.<sup>34</sup> The basin was made for Hugh IV of Lusignan, King of Cyprus from 1324 to 1359 and a direct descendant of Guy of Lusignan, the last King of Jerusalem. It bears an Arabic inscription with the titles of Hugh of Lusignan on the outside and a French inscription inside (fig. 16).<sup>35</sup> This basin is similar to Elizabeth's in many ways. The two objects are the same shape, have inscriptions in two languages and are decorated with western coats of arms. There are also figurative depictions on Hugh of Lusignan's basin, this time in the form of astrological scenes on the base, once again an example of the continuing use of figures on metalwork destined for overseas clients.<sup>36</sup> However the two basins differ significantly in the arrangement of the decorative field, the choice of motifs and in particular their concentration. There is not an undecorated spot on Hugh's basin.







Fig. 17  
Straight-sided Tray  
with the Coat of  
Arms of the Cyprian  
Lusignan Dynasty,  
Egypt or Syria,  
1325-75.  
Copper alloy, inlaid  
with silver and  
organic material,  
diam. 40.5 cm.  
Paris, Musée  
du Louvre,  
MAO 1227 © RMN/  
René-Gabriel Ojéda.

The Arabic inscriptions on it (in the monumental *thulth* script and in a radial composition of the *naskh* script) are prominent on the front and the interior. The texts are meaningful and refer to the royal client, unlike those on the Rijksmuseum basin. The French inscription, which names Hugh as king of both Jerusalem and Cyprus, is contained in a narrow band on the rim. The French inscription and the small coats of arms in some of the medallions which interrupt the band of script differ in technical execution from the rest of the basin.<sup>37</sup> They were probably added later by a metalworker (possibly Cypriot) who had not been trained in the Mamluk tradition.

In terms of decorative motifs, the tray with the coat of arms of the Lusig-

nan family has much more in common with the Rijksmuseum basin (fig. 17). On both the tray and the basin we find similar anonymous titles and well-wishes in the decorative band with Arabic inscriptions. On both, the text is interrupted by medallions portraying a crowned monarch with halo, holding a goblet. These similarities suggest that the two may have come from the same workshop.

### Sicily

The water basin is thus part of a wider pattern of recovering trade and an ever closer artistic interaction between the Southern European countries, in particular the Italian city states, and the Islamic world in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. But it is also

useful to take a closer look at the more specific cultural and political context of the commission. After all the basin was not intended for some random Italian client somewhere in Italy; the commission for this basin came from the Sicilian royal house.

It is interesting and revealing to note that Elizabeth of Carinthia's basin and Hugh de Lusignan's metal objects are not only stylistically similar, but on closer examination the people who commissioned them are strikingly similar too. They were both royalty, they both once ruled over islands in the Mediterranean which for a long time acted as 'border states' between the Islamic and the Christian worlds. Cyprus was the last crusader state in an otherwise Islamic environment. After the crusaders had been forced out of Palestine, Cyprus functioned as the most important western trading post on the border of the Islamic world for several centuries, playing a pivotal role in the economic and cultural relations between East and West.

Sicily was in a similar position. This island had a special relationship with the Islamic world too. After all, like a number of areas in Southern Italy and large parts of Spain, Sicily had been governed by Islamic rulers for many hundreds of years. An Islamic invasion fleet from Tunisia landed on the west coast of Sicily in 827. Syracuse, the Byzantine capital, was captured some fifty years later, and the whole of the island then fell into the hands of the Muslims. Sicily flourished; it was a border territory and succeeded in profiting from its position to the full. The island became an important link in international trade and the Muslims and non-Muslims (Christians and Jews) lived side by side in relative harmony. In the eleventh century the capital, Palermo, had a population of 350,000 and was the largest city in Europe after Cordoba. It developed into an international centre of culture and learning.

The Norman invasion in 1061 brought an end to the Islamic dominance of Sicily. However, this change of power did not immediately signal the end of Islamic culture on the island. The new rulers initially continued to make use of the old bureaucracy and Arabic remained the language of officialdom. Under the Norman kings a unique fusion of western, Byzantine and Islamic elements occurred in culture and the arts. The Arabic influence certainly remained very evident at court. People surrounded themselves with luxury articles and precious objects from the Islamic world and the influence of Islamic decorative art remained strong in the royal workshops. The magnificent coronation robe of Roger II (1133-34) with an embroidered palm tree and lions attacking camels is entirely in keeping with the tradition of opulent Islamic fabric. It was also decorated with an Arabic text in Kufic script, which reveals that this robe was made in the royal workshops in Palermo (fig. 18). This typically Sicilian blend of styles incorporating western, Byzantine and Islamic elements actually became the trademark of the Norman kings: a deliberate cultural policy and a form of self-representation.<sup>38</sup> Under the Hohenstaufens (1194-1266/68), this royal *varietas* remained an important part of the court style. Although Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) banished the last Muslims from Sicily to Lucerna in Southern Italy in 1223, he nonetheless remained attached to the Arab culture. Frederick spoke Arabic, and Islamic scholars and artists remained welcome at his court.

In the second half of the thirteenth century there was a period of great political instability. In 1282 the French House of Anjou, which had assumed power from the Hohenstaufens in 1266, had in turn to give way to the Spanish House of Aragon. During the fourteenth century the Anjous made several attempts to reconquer Sicily by force, but ultimately without success.



At the same time the might of the royal House of Aragon was also being undermined by the feudal barons, who had acquired more and more powers in exchange for their loyalty. The island was torn apart by an internal struggle between various noble families and ravaged by an unremitting economic crisis. To make matters worse, midway through the century the country was very badly affected by a plague epidemic that was to recur on several occasions.

In this chaotic period the (artistic) influence of the Islamic world did indeed decrease, but it did not disappear. The Sicilians were constantly reminded of their Islamic heritage by the architecture and the decorative art from the Islamic and Norman past. But in the fourteenth century there were also direct contacts with the Islamic world and there are indications that more recent Islamic decorative art and architecture continued to inspire Sicilian artists. One example of this is the Palazzo Steri in Palermo, the home of the powerful Chiaramonte family begun around 1310. In this palace there is a lavishly decorated ceiling (1377-80) on which Arabic decorative motifs can also be identified (fig. 19).<sup>39</sup> Contact

with the Islamic world was further stimulated by the close ties with Spain through the House of Aragon. Catalan traders profited from the new opportunities that Sicily offered to expand their trade to the eastern Mediterranean. Sicily consequently remained an important link in the economic and artistic relationships between the Islamic and the Christian worlds in the fourteenth century.

The Islamic water basin commissioned by a Sicilian queen therefore forms part of a far longer Sicilian history of economic and cultural exchange with the Islamic countries. Further research may reveal whether the fourteenth-century Sicilian court still consciously aspired to a blend of artistic styles in order to demonstrate and legitimize its power, as its Norman and Hohenstaufen predecessors had done. But even if this proves not to be the case, this basin certainly fits in with a long tradition in which Islamic decorative art had a place at the Sicilian court as a matter of course. If you can expect to find a royal commission to an Islamic artist anywhere in Italy around 1350, then it would most likely be in Sicily.

Fig. 18  
Coronation Robe  
of Roger II, Palermo,  
court workshop,  
1133-34.  
Silk, gold stitching,  
gold filigree, enamel,  
precious stones,  
pearls, h. 164 cm,  
l. 345 cm.  
Vienna, Kunst-  
historisches Museum,  
Schatzkammer, XIII 14.

Fig. 19  
Ceiling of the Palazzo  
Steri, Palermo,  
1377-80 © akg-images/  
Andrea Jemolo.



### The Latin Inscription: St Agatha's Epitaph

This leaves us with the question of how to interpret the Latin inscription on the water basin. It reads 'MENTEM : SCA : SPONTANIE : ONOREM : DEI : PATREM : LIBERACIONIS'. Earlier authors have correctly linked it to the epitaph of St Agatha – '*Mentem sanctam spontaneam honorem Deo et patriae liberationem*'.<sup>40</sup> What was the significance of St Agatha in the fourteenth century, particularly to the Sicilians, and how should we interpret her epitaph?

Agatha was a martyr who died during the great Christian persecutions under Emperor Decius in 251. She came from a wealthy and prominent Christian family from the town of Catania in Sicily. The Roman prefect Quintianus fell in love with the beautiful Agatha, but she rejected him and refused to renounce her faith. Quintianus then had her horribly tortured: first both of her breasts were cut off and later she was hauled over a bed of shards of glass and hot coals. At that moment, however, Catania was struck by an

earthquake and Quintianus sent Agatha back to her prison, where she ultimately died of her wounds. When her mortal remains were placed in a sarcophagus by fellow Christians, an unknown man appeared, accompanied by more than a hundred handsome youths in white robes, and placed a marble inscription with the words '*Mentem sanctam spontaneam honorem Deo et patriae liberationem*' in her coffin. Exactly one year after Agatha's death the nearby volcano, Mount Etna, erupted and the lava threatened to engulf the town. Some of the inhabitants fled to Agatha's tomb where they seized her shroud. When they held the garment up in front of the lava flow it miraculously stopped; the town was saved.

Within a year of her death Pope Cornelius declared Agatha a saint. This made her one of the earliest saints and we also find her among the seven primary saints who were mentioned in the first Roman canon. Pope Symmachus had a church built for her in Rome around 500. Nevertheless Sicily remained the oldest centre of devotion to Agatha. Both her birthplace of Catania and Palermo had important relics of the saint. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the cult surrounding Agatha gained huge popularity. This may have had to do with the return of her relics from Istanbul to Catania in 1126. Every year they were carried round the town in a huge procession to beg for the protection of its inhabitants. By then more and more churches were being dedicated to her both in Italy and elsewhere in Europe.

Agatha was the patron saint of the town of Catania and her protection was invoked against eruptions from nearby Mount Etna. In a more general sense she was also a saint who offered protection against everything that had to do with fire and natural disasters. She likewise owed her patronage of metalworkers and bell-founders to her connection with fire. She was also wor-

shipped as the protector of women and children because of her steadfastness in the preservation of her chastity, and the nature of her martyrdom.

In art, Agatha is often identified by a dish with two breasts on it or by the tongs with which she was tortured, together with the martyr's palm. Her epitaph is another regular attribute. The precise meaning of this inscription remains rather vague, however, and there are various translations of it. This is the variation which Jacobus de Voragine gives in his *Golden Legend*, 'She had a holy and generous soul, gave honour to God, and accomplished the liberation of her country.'<sup>41</sup> This hagiography, which dated from the end of the thirteenth century, was still very popular and extraordinarily influential in the fourteenth century.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century Agatha's epitaph was frequently placed on church bells in Sicily and as far afield as Spain, France, Germany and England.<sup>42</sup> Agatha was, after all, the patron saint of bell-founders, but the inscription also served to combat evil, especially as protection against natural disasters, and more generally as a benediction. Inscriptions to ward off evil and benedictions are not unusual on bells in view of their function as a means of warning of danger and a call to prayer. This use as a benediction is confirmed by the *Agathazettel* which started to appear in Germany in the sixteenth century, if not before. On the saint's day these little pieces of paper were hung in the house or thrown on the fire. Alongside the familiar epitaph, people would often write specific pleas for protection against fire or thunderstorms or more general blessings (fig. 20).

From the fourteenth century onwards we occasionally also find the epitaph on other objects, such as the reliquary acquired by the British Museum in 1983 and attributed to an anonymous silversmith in the Rhineland in the second quarter of

Fig. 20  
 Agathazettel,  
 Germany,  
 c. 1700-c. 1800.  
 Beromünster,  
 Haus zum Dolder,  
 Sammlung  
 Dr Edmund Müller.



the fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> In Catania the epitaph adorns the facades and walls of several churches and chapels; sometimes in full but often in the form of the abbreviation M.S.S.H.D.E.P.L.<sup>44</sup> And on the reliquary in the cathedral of Catania, a work by the Sienese goldsmith Giovanni di Bartolo dated 1376, Agatha holds a marble stone with the Latin inscription in her right hand (fig. 21).

Although we have established that Agatha's epitaph was used remarkably often as an inscription on widely differing objects in the Middle Ages and certainly in the fourteenth century, the relationship between this inscription and Elizabeth of Carinthia's water basin has not yet been explained.

#### Interpretations

Little is known about Elizabeth of Carinthia (c. 1300-c. 1350). She lived in a very turbulent period in Sicilian history. In the first decades of the fourteenth century Robert of Anjou made several attempts to reconquer Sicily. His great rival, Frederick III of Aragon (1272-1337), King of Sicily, narrowly succeeded in repelling the attacks from Naples – he had to employ all of his military and diplomatic skills to achieve it. In the hope of safeguarding the continuity of the House of Aragon, Frederick had already made his seventeen-year-old son Peter II (1305-1342)

joint king in 1322. Despite this move, Peter was faced with a public rebellion after the death of his father. His short reign (1337-42) was one of chaos and instability. Elizabeth, probably born in Klagenfurt, married Peter in 1323, a year after he was crowned joint king. The reasons behind the marriage – Frederick III must undoubtedly have seen political advantages in this union – remain unclear. During the reign of Peter II, when the country was in fact embroiled in a civil war, Elizabeth appears to have had a great influence on the political course taken by her husband, who went down in history as a weak and indecisive monarch. She actively involved herself in the political struggle among the various competing noble families and even after the death of her husband in 1342, Elizabeth remained an important player in Sicilian politics.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth must have had something specific in mind when she ordered a water basin with Agatha's epitaph on it – after all the text is in a highly prominent place on the basin and it would have been very expensive and involved a good deal of effort to have this line engraved by a Mamluk artist – but her exact intentions are difficult to discover.

In general terms, the Latin inscription on the exterior is in keeping



Fig. 21

GIOVANNI

DI BAROLO

*Reliquary Bust of  
Saint Agatha, 1376.  
Catania, Cathedral  
of Saint Agatha.*

with the Arabic on the interior of the basin: both texts can act as all-purpose benedictions. What's more Agatha's text was associated with protection against fire, and was thus appropriate for a water basin. In Sicily Agatha was specifically invoked against eruptions from Mount Etna. There were violent and threatening eruptions in the four-

teenth century – including in 1350 and 1381.<sup>46</sup> However we have not been able to find convincing evidence of a direct connection with the eruption in 1350, for instance.

Agatha was, of course, a Sicilian saint, whose most important cult centres and relics were to be found on the island itself: in Palermo, but more

particularly in Catania, of which she was the patron saint. The Sicilian kings of the House of Aragon also had a special connection with this town. They made Catania the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily (Regno di Trinacria) and the major seat of the royal court. The water basin very probably functioned in the royal court in Catania and this makes the combination of Elizabeth's coat of arms and Agatha's epitaph fully understandable.

The question remains as to whether Elizabeth of Carinthia also wanted to be associated with Agatha's epitaph on a more political level. After all, the famous last words of Agatha's epitaph were '*Patriae Liberationem*' (on the basin: '*Patrem Liberationis*'), usually translated as 'liberator of the fatherland'. Older commentators have interpreted it literally – she saved the town in which she was born from the lava flowing from Mount Etna – as well as more metaphorically – she protected her country against the threat of lust and greed.<sup>47</sup> But would a political and military reading not also be possible and would that not be appropriate for Elizabeth of Carinthia, given that Sicily in the fourteenth century was constantly threatened by foreign invasions and a civil war? Elizabeth did not remain on the sidelines; she immersed herself in politics. Might this self-assured and politically-active queen have wanted to mirror Agatha as a 'liberator of the fatherland'?

Agatha was able to fulfil a political role for the inhabitants of Catania in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As the town's patron saint, her initial adorned the town's coat of arms and featured on all manner of municipal flags and seals.<sup>48</sup> And when it came to it, Agatha did not flinch from upholding the independence of her town and its inhabitants with force or the threat of it. In 1231, when Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen came to Sicily, Catania was one of the towns that rebelled against him. The

emperor was determined to punish the inhabitants for it by having their town sacked. However when he attended Mass in Catania's cathedral, a sentence miraculously appeared in his breviary, warning him to cause no harm to Agatha's town because she would avenge this injustice ('*Noli offendere patriam Agathae, quia ultrix iniuriarum est*'). The emperor took the warning to heart and abandoned his planned vengeance. More than a century later, in 1356, Catania was again threatened, this time by the Kingdom of Naples and its allies. Admiral Artale Alagona finally succeeded in defeating the enemy fleet in the Bay of Catania. His troops followed their commander crying '*Alagona e Santa Agata*'.<sup>49</sup> The inhabitants of Catania believed that they were directly indebted to the saintly martyr for this major military victory. The fourteenth-century chronicler Michele da Piazza also wrote of '*S. Agata liberatrice e vendicatrice*'<sup>50</sup> and in his book the saint speaks to the personification of the town of Catania, glorifying Artale as an angel of God, ever prepared to defend the town with his own blood.<sup>51</sup> In short, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the '*Patriae Liberationem*' in Agatha's epitaph was certainly not interpreted solely in a religious or symbolic way: the martyr also defended her town with fire and the sword. And this makes it all the more likely that Elizabeth of Carinthia, Queen of Sicily, wanted to make a political statement with the inscription on the basin: like Agatha I appoint myself liberator and protector of the nation now that it is in danger.<sup>52</sup>

This makes her water basin even more fascinating. Not only is it a unique example of artistic interaction between the Christian and the Islamic worlds, it also has a very specific local Sicilian context and meaning.



## NOTES

- 1 With thanks to Kees Veelenturf and Christian Klamt.
- 2 J. Kalf, 'Korte Mededeelingen. Aantekeningen', *Bulletin uitgegeven door den Nederlandschen Oudheidkundigen Bond* 3 (1901-02), pp. 300-4; Onno ter Kuile, *Koper & Brons*, The Hague 1986, pp. 356-57.
- 3 See A. van der Put, *The Aragonese Double-Crown and the Borja or Borgia Device*, London 1910, Appendix VI for the identification of the coat of arms as well as that of Elizabeth of Carinthia. With thanks to Giovanni Travagliato, Archivio Storico Diocesano di Palermo, who recently confirmed this identification.
- 4 For other examples from this group, see Umberto Scerrato, *Metalli islamici*, Milan 1966, pp. 128-29 (no. 56); Rachel Ward, *Islamic Metalwork*, London 1993, p. 111 (no. 88); James W. Allan, *Metalwork Treasures from the Islamic Courts*, Doha/London 2002, pp. 64-69 (nos. 18-19); Bernard O'Kane (ed.), *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo*, Cairo/New York 2006, pp. 108-9 (no. 93), 117 (no. 103).
- 5 For example, this is revealed by the signatures on Mamluk metalwork. For a chronological overview of Islamic metal manufacturers and possible centres of production, see L.A. Mayer, *Islamic Metalworkers and their Works*, Geneva 1959, pp. 101-5.
- 6 Luitgard E.M. Mols, *Mamluk Metalwork Fittings in their Artistic and Architectural Context*, Delft 2006, pp. 221-26.
- 7 Sigoli in Fr. Theophilus Bellorini and Fr. Eugene Hoade (trans.), *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Sryia in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli*, Jerusalem 1948, p. 182.
- 8 This research was carried out by Joosje van Bennekom and Sara Creange of the Rijksmuseum metal conservation department, at the end of 2009.
- 9 A basin in the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. 740-1898) made around 1300, which contains both blessings and anonymous titles, is an exception. However they are in separate bands of script. Esin Atil, *Renaissance of Islam. Art of the Mamluks*, Washington 1981, pp. 68-71.
- 10 There are two exceptions: the fourteenth-century basin in the Keir Collection with an undecorated exterior and a partly decorated interior, and a fourteenth-century basin partly decorated on the interior and the exterior in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (inv. no. 24085). See Géza Fehérvári, *Islamic Art of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, London 1976, p. 125 (no. 153) pl. 52a and Atil, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 94-95.
- 11 James Allan, *Metalwork Treasures from the Islamic Courts*, Doha/London 2002, p. 68-69.
- 12 Ter Kuile, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 181, 223; Anna-Elisabeth Theuerkauff-Liederwald, *Mittelalterliche Bronze- und Messinggefäße. Eimer – Kannen – Lavabokessel*, Berlin 1988, pp. 122 (nos. 6, 7), 124 (no. 10), 423 (no. 488).
- 13 In theory, we obviously cannot rule out the possibility that the object was made in Sicily by a Mamluk artist, but that seems highly unlikely as there is no evidence of a fourteenth-century Islamic workshop on the island that could have produced such quality. Furthermore, the last Muslims had been driven out of Sicily a hundred years earlier.
- 14 For trade relations between the Islamic and Christian worlds in the Middle Ages, see David Abulafia, 'The Role of Trade in Muslim-Christian Contact during the Middle Ages', in Dionisius Agius, Richard Hitchcock (eds.), *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe*, Reading 1994, pp. 1-24.
- 15 Close trade relations had previously existed between the Islamic world and the Vikings. No fewer than 52,000 Islamic coins and fragments dating from the eighth century to the early eleventh century have been found in Northwest Europe. Thirty-two thousand coins from Eastern Iran and Central Asia have been found on the island of Gotland alone. Richard Ettinghausen, 'Der Einfluss der angewandten Künste und der Malerei des Islams auf die Künste Europas', in *Europa und der Orient, 800-1900*, (cat. Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin), Berlin 1989, pp. 165-201, p. 166.
- 16 Deborah Howard, 'Venice and the Mamluks', in Stefano Carboni (ed.), *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, exh. cat. New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art), 2007. On the impact of the embargo on Venetian trade with the Mamluks and the lifting of the embargo, see Gherardo Ortalli, 'Venice and Papal Bans on Trade with the Levant: The Role of the Jurist', in Benjamin Ardel (ed.), *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, London 1996, pp. 242-58.
- 17 For an overview of the extensive recent literature on the relationship between

- Renaissance Italy and the Islamic world, see the review article by Francesca Trivellato, 'Renaissance Italy and the Muslim Mediterranean in Recent Historical Work', *The Journal of Modern History* 82 (March 2010), pp. 127-55.
- 18 See, for example, the reviews by Rosamund E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600*, London 2000; exh. cat. New York, op. cit. (note 16).
- 19 Mack, op. cit. (note 18), p. 22.
- 20 These include Musée de Cluny in Paris, the Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis in Brussels and the Musée des Tissus in Lyon. For a full description of the fragment in Lyon, [www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show\\_document.php?do\\_id=1378&lang=eng](http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=1378&lang=eng)
- 21 The Musée des Tissus in Lyon also has a fragment with an identical pattern; see *Europa und der Orient*, op. cit. (note 15), p. 567.
- 22 There is also a fragment with an identical pattern in the Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis in Brussels. See Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Islamitisch Textiel, Iran en Centraal-Azië*, Brussels 1981, pp. 6, 15.
- 23 For examples see Mack, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 97-98.
- 24 For other examples see Mack, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 97-101.
- 25 Three *albarelli* from Damascus are also mentioned in Cosimo de Medici's inventory for 1456.
- 26 Mack, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 103-4, and *Europa und der Orient*, op. cit. (note 15), p. 612.
- 27 For examples see Mack, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 63-71. As well as the halos by Duccio, Giotto and Bernardino Daddi, Mack adds later examples by Gentile da Fabriano, Massaccio and Mantegna.
- 28 Sylvia Auld, *Renaissance Venice, Islam and Mahmud the Kurd. A Metalworking Enigma*, London 2004, pp. 56-66; James W. Allan, 'Sha'ban, Barquq, and the Decline of the Mamluk Metalworking Industry', *Muqarnas* 2, pp. 85-94; Rachel Ward, 'Plugging the Gap: Mamluk Export Metalwork 1375-1475', in Annette Hagedorn and Avinoam Shalem, *Facts and Artefacts. Art in the Islamic World*, Leiden/Boston 2007, pp. 263-84.
- 29 For an overview of the influence of Islamic metalwork on Medieval Europe, see James W. Allan, 'The Influence of the Metalwork of the Arab Mediterranean on that of Medieval Europe', in Dionisius A. Agius and Richard Hitchcock, *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe*, Reading 1994, pp. 44-62. For the influence of European artisans on the Mamluk arts, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'European Arts and Crafts at the Mamluk Courts', *Muqarnas* 21 (2004), pp. 45-54.
- 30 Mack, op. cit. (note 18), pp. 140, 144. That the fine metalwork was also popular with Venetians who lived in Damascus in the fifteenth century is revealed from inventories that were compiled after their deaths. They included such things as knives, candleholders, jewel boxes, pen boxes, inkwells, scent boxes and a deep bowl: Deborah Howard, 'Death in Damascus: Venetians in Syria in the Mid-Fifteenth Century', *Muqarnas* 20 (2003), pp. 143-57, esp. pp. 145, 151.
- 31 For example in paintings by (or attributed to) Vittore Carpaccio. See Sylvia Auld, 'Master Mahmud and Inlaid Metalwork in the 15th Century' in exh. cat. New York, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 212-25, esp. p. 216.
- 32 Mack, op. cit. (note 18), p. 147.
- 33 Ter Kuile, op. cit. (note 2), p. 358.
- 34 Both the basin and the tray are in the Louvre, inv. nos. MAO 101 and MAO 1227 respectively; the present whereabouts of the bowl, which was sold by Christie's in 1950, are unknown.
- 35 Henry-René D'Allemagne, 'Notice sur un basin en cuivre execute pour Hugues IV de Lusignan Roi de Chyphre (1324-61)', in C. Enlart, *L'Art gothique et la renaissance en Chyphre* 11, Paris 1899, pp. 743-56; D. Rice, 'Arabic Inscriptions on a Brass Basin Made for Hugh IV de Lusignan', *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida* 11, Rome 1956, pp. 390-402; Annemarie Weyl Carr, 'Art in the Court of the Lusignan Kings', in A.W. Carr, *Cyprus and the Devotional Arts of Byzantium in the Era of the Crusades*, Burlington 2005, pp. 239-73.
- 36 Rachel Ward, 'Brass, Gold and Silver from Mamluk Egypt: Metal Vessels made for Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad. A Memorial Lecture for Mark Zebrowski', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (2004), no. 141, pp. 59-73, esp. p. 61. It was long thought that another basin, the 'Baptistère de Saint Louis', Louvre inv. no. L.P.16, entirely decorated with figurative depictions, was made for a Mamluk leader, but according to the metal specialist Rachel Ward this was also made for a European client. See Rachel Ward, 'The Baptistère de Saint Louis - A Mamluk Basin made for Export to Europe', in Charles Burnett and Anna Contadini (eds.), *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, London 1999, pp. 113-32.
- 37 See Rice, op. cit. (note 35), p. 402.
- 38 Gerhard Wolf and Henrike Haug, 'Lu mari

- è amaru. Sizilien im Mittelalter', in *Sizilien. Von Odysseus bis Garibaldi*, cat. Bonn (Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), 2008, pp. 87-103, esp. pp. 90-97.
- 39 Wolf and Haug, op. cit. (note 38), p. 101.
- 40 Kalf, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 300-4.
- 41 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* (William Granger Ryan, trans.), Princeton 1993, vol. 1, p. 39.
- 42 Robert Favreau, 'Mentem sanctam, spontaneam, honorem Deo et patriae liberationem. Epigraphie et mentalités', in Rita Lejeune and Joseph Deckers (eds.), *Clio et son regard. Mélanges d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie offerts à Jacques Stiennon*, Liège 1982, pp. 235-44.
- 43 For the medieval tiles from Little Malvern, see 'Parishes: Little Malvern', *A History of Worcester*, 3 (1913), pp. 449-53. The reliquary is in the British Museum in London: Silver reliquary (Rhineland, 1325-50), diam. 56 mm, depth 10 mm, British Museum, inv. no. 1983, 1002.1
- 44 Agitino Reitano, 'Sant'Agata: il mistero della sacra tavola', *Catania Politica*, 21 February 2010.
- 45 For Elizabeth of Carinthia, see the only recent biographical article about her by C.M. Rugolo, 'Elisabetta di Carinzia' in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Rome 1993, vol. 42, pp. 484-86.
- 46 For the historical eruptions of Mount Etna, see the Smithsonian's Global Volcanism Program's website: [www.volcano.si.edu](http://www.volcano.si.edu).
- 47 We find this metaphorical, symbolic interpretation, for example, in a 13th-century sermon by Odo de Châteauroux, Cardinal-Bishop of Tusculum, (1254-69). Favreau, op. cit. (note 42), p. 238.
- 48 Matteo Gaudio, 'Lo stemma di Catania (il simbolo A)', *Rivista del comune di Catania*, January 1929.
- 49 Francesco Ferrara, *Storia di Catania sino alla fine del secolo XVIII*, Catania 1829, p. 94.
- 50 Gaudio, op. cit. (note 48), p. 4.
- 51 Christopher Kleinhenz, *Medieval Italy: an Encyclopedia*, New York 2004, vol. 2, p. 707
- 52 However this does not mean to say that Elizabeth would have had the same political outlook as the inhabitants, or in any case as the most powerful families of Catania. On the contrary, Elizabeth appears to have belonged to the other camp. She supported the side that had earlier made overtures to France and the House of Anjou. Rugolo, op. cit. (note 45), pp. 484-86.

