

NOTE ON A GLAZED BOWL WITH A MEDALLION OF A FELINE FROM KHIRBAT BURIN

LEV KAPITAIKIN

A fragment from a large bowl (diam. 42.5 cm) of a well-known class of Mamluk glazed ware with molded relief decoration (Fig. 1 = Fig. 21:9 in Kletter and Stern, this volume) was found in L119 at Kh. Burin.¹ Sherds of other vessels of the same ware were found in the Kh. Burin excavations as well (see, e.g., Kletter and Stern, this volume: Fig. 21:10).

The piece under discussion is made of brown clay, fired at times gray, with a few white grits. It is covered with a brilliant glaze applied on a white slip, ranging in color from dark to pale green on the inside and extending some 5 cm on the outside of the rim; the rest of the exterior glaze is yellowish.

The bas-relief decoration, restricted to the exterior of the bowl, is divided into three registers of unequal width. The wider (11.5 cm) upper register is occupied by a *naskh* inscription,

which is interrupted by a medallion (max. diam. 9.5 cm) enclosing a figure of a large feline.² The two lower narrower registers are decorated with simple geometric motifs: a lattice pattern and a fluted pattern respectively (for similar patterns see Smith 1973: Pls. 72.807; 93; Bagatti 1984: Fig. 68:1; Wightman 1989: Pl. 64:9, 12, 13, Fig. 220).

The heraldic feline is enclosed in a double-lined medallion. Its features are rendered in an extremely schematic manner. It has a round head with what appears to be a collar around the neck.³ A thin forked tail⁴ curling above the animal's back seems out of proportion with its large stout body and short legs. The feline is represented *passant* to the right, with one of his forelegs raised in the air, while the other rests on the register line. Its hind legs did not survive.

The letters of the *naskh* inscription are carefully executed in a way that is reminiscent of monumental Mamluk inscriptions.⁵ The lower letters run parallel to the register line while the letters in the upper part are fitted into the remaining space. From the lower letters, *ṣād*, *'ayn*, and possibly *nūn* can be identified. These might have formed part of the word: *ṣan'a[t]* or *ṣana'a[hu]* = 'the product of' or 'made by.' The upper letters do not constitute a complete word, and are therefore difficult to read. It is possible to identify (from right to left): *rā'* or *zāī*, *bā'* or *nūn*, a finial *kāf*, *wāu* and a finial *yā'*.

The class of molded relief ware to which this fragment belongs has usually been dated to the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries CE, appearing perhaps already in the late thirteenth century. This ware has a wide distribution,



Fig. 1. The bowl from Kh. Burin.

with fragments reported from many sites in the southern Levant.⁶ Yet, in most excavations these vessels are usually represented by only a few fragments (Avissar 1996:102, Fig. XIII.43, Type 55). Based on the finds at a kiln site in the Jewish Quarter excavations (Avigad 1983:255, Fig. 302: two bowls on the front left), Avissar had suggested that this ware was produced in Jerusalem (Avissar 1996:102). However, a subsequent petrographic analysis of specimens found at Karak indicates that the production of the molded relief ware was not restricted to a single center in the Levant (Mason and Milwright 1998:184, 188, Fig. 3:13–15).

The decoration of the molded relief ware consists mainly of vegetal and geometric motifs and/or bold *naskh* inscriptions. Until now, no vessel decorated with a feline medallion has been published.⁷ However, lions do feature among the designs of a late-thirteenth to fourteenth-century workshop in Damascus that specialized in the manufacture of relief-molded canteens (see Milwright 2003:98). Large felines also appear on Egyptian Mamluk *sgraffito* ware (Bahgat and Gabriel 1921: Pl. 32: left; Bahgat and Massoul 1930: Pl. 49:5; Mayer 1933: Pl. I:1–3; Meinecke 1972: Pl. 52: d–f; Abd al-Raziq 1988:4–5, Pl. 4:a), although the feline medallions in that ware are found on the inside, not the outside of the vessel, and the animals are executed in a rather different style, with strong emphasis on movement.

In the past, it was customary to attribute every Mamluk representation of a feline to either Baybars I of Egypt (1260–1277) or to his son and successor Baraka Khān (1277–1280) (Lane-Poole 1879:140–145, Pl. VI:473, 482, 486; Mayer 1933:7–9, Pl. I; Creswell 1959: 150–151; Meinecke 1972:217–219, Pl. 52; Thorau 1992:30 n. 3; Atil 1981:128, n. 46).⁸ This attribution is especially significant for the Burin piece because the site is specifically mentioned in the historical sources in connection with Baybars' activities.⁹ Several studies, however, have challenged this view. Paul Balog, in a numismatic study, has demonstrated that the heraldic feline (or lion) emblem is not exclusive

to Baybars I and Baraka Khān, but appears also on the copper coinage of many other Mamluk sultans from the middle of the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries, namely: al-Manṣūr Muḥammad (1361–1363), al-Ashraf Sha'bān II (1363–1367), al-Manṣūr 'Alī (1377–1381), al-Zāhir Barqūq (1382–1399), al-Nāṣir Faraj (1406–1412), al-Muzaffar Aḥmad (1421), al-Ashraf Barsbāy (1422–1438), al-Ashraf Ināl (1453–1461), al-Ashraf Qā'itbāy (1468–1496), and Al-Zāhir Qānṣūh (1498–1500) (Balog 1964:20, 21, 24–38, Nos. 28–103, 108–110, 392, 463, 464, 480, 505, 595, 597, 602, 607, 656, 664, 668, 669, 699, 731, 777, 843, 844, 864). The numismatic evidence prompted James Allan to suggest that the feline should not be regarded as a specific heraldic emblem at all, but rather be interpreted as a general symbol of royal authority that any sultan might use (Allan 1970:104, 106–108).

A detailed comparison of the felines appearing on Mamluk copper coinage with the feline on the Kh. Burin fragment is called for in the light of Balog's and Allan's studies. The felines on the coins of Baybars I and Baraka Khān (Fig. 2) all have slim, slender bodies with carefully drawn ears and legs. In many cases their bodies—and especially the heads—are adorned with ornamental patterns. The felines on the fourteenth to fifteenth-century coins, on the other hand, commonly possess stout, schematically-rendered, unadorned bodies, as is also the case in the Burin fragment. Moreover, the felines on

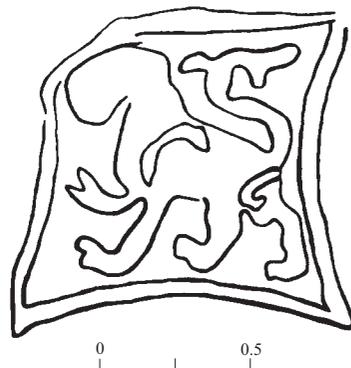


Fig. 2. Coin of Baybars I; drawing by the author after Balog 1964: No. 100.

Baybars' and Baraka Khān's coinage are shown in a sinuous energetic movement that resembles the feline representations on Egyptian *sgraffito* ware, mentioned above. The felines on the fourteenth–fifteenth century coins (Fig. 3), and on the Burin fragment (see Fig. 1), are shown by contrast *passant*, and their representation almost totally lacks movement. The features of the feline in the Burin fragment are best paralleled on a coin of al-Nāṣir Faraj (1406–1412) where the feline has also a forked tail (Balog 1964:669b; see Fig. 3). Therefore, the Burin fragment might be dated to the second half of the fourteenth century until the end of the fifteenth century CE.

It seems that Allan's conclusions as to the symbolism of the feline on Mamluk coins are premature. A more detailed study of this and other symbols appearing on Mamluk coinage is required. To our mind, it is impossible at this stage to establish why this design appears on the Burin fragment and what its meaning is—if it is indeed meaningful—in this particular context. However, it is noteworthy that most

of the fourteenth–fifteenth-century Mamluk coins with felines originate from Syrian mints—namely Hamah, Tripoli, and Aleppo. It is probable that the Burin bowl of molded Mamluk Glazed Relief Ware with a feline decoration was also produced in greater Syria.

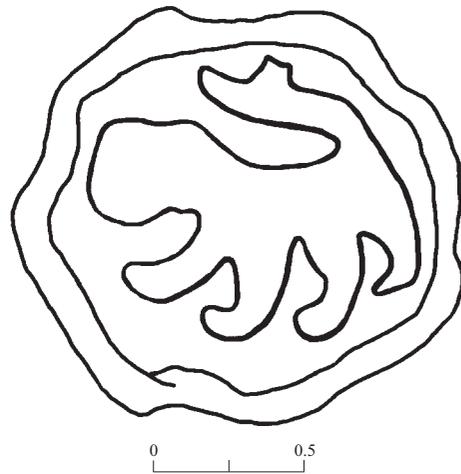


Fig. 3. Coin of al-Nāṣir Faraj (1406–1412); drawing by the author after Balog 1964:669b.

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank Raz Kletter, who suggested that I study the Burin fragment (Basket No. 1062), and Edna J. Stern who made valuable comments and supplied me with important references concerning Mamluk glazed relief ware.

² The term “feline” is used throughout the article because the schematic character of the representation does not allow for a more accurate zoological identification of the animal. The heraldic animal identified with Baybars I (1260–1277) of Egypt has been interpreted as ‘panther’, ‘leopard’ and ‘lion’. All large felines were considered symbols of courage and royal power in contemporary Mamluk sources. For Baybars’ ‘lion’ or ‘panther’ see Mayer 1933:7–9; Creswell 1959:150–151 and notes; Thorau 1992:30, n. 3.

³ A similar detail appears on the bridge at Mezerib attributed to Baybars I, see Creswell 1959: Fig. 82.

⁴ For a depiction of a feline with a forked tail see a glass vessel fragment at the Berlin Museum (Mayer

1933: Pl. I:6), two bronze vases found at Qūṣ (El-Emary 1967:130–132, Fig. 8, Pl. 28) and the discussion below.

⁵ See, as an example, a monumental inscription from Jerusalem dated 1263/4 (Burgoyne and Abu al-Hajj 1979:25–27, n.15, Pl. 18b).

⁶ Hamah (Riis and Poulsen 1957:130, 290, Fig. 398), Nazareth (Bagatti 1984:194–196, Fig. 68, Pl. 78), Nablus (Kurūm ‘Āshūr (Y. Magen, Pers. comm.), Samaria (Crowfoot et al. 1957: Figs. 23: 1; 84a:10), Pella (Smith 1973: Pls. 72.807; 93), Bet She’an (Zori 1966: Pl. 10E), Heshbon (Sauer 1973:52, Fig 4:138–140), Tell Abū Qa’dān (Franken and Kalsbeek 1975: Fig. 38:31–33), Khirbat Fāris (Johns and McQuitty 1989: Fig. 27:59), Karak (Mason and Milwright 1998: 184, 188, Fig. 3:13–15; Maxwell-Miller 1991:236, 278, Nos. 452–457), Jerusalem—Damascus Gate (Wightman 1989:76–77, Pls. 64:9–13; 65:1, 2; Figs. 220–222), Jerusalem—Armenian Garden (Tushingam 1985:148, Figs. 39:12; 41:31,

36, 41; 44:13, 15), Giv'at Dani in the Ayyalon Valley (Lazar 1999:128*–129*, Fig 2:9), northern Sinai (Cytryn-Silverman 1996:125, Fig. 23:1). Complete vessels are also found in museums and collections, such as the Keir Collection (Grube 1976:155–157, n.102) and the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art (Atil 1981:183, n. 93). The present study of the Burin fragment was completed before the publication of Marcus Milwright's (2003) preliminary study of the class of relief-molded lead-glazed pottery to which the Burin fragment belongs. See there for a more comprehensive list of sites in the Levant reporting examples of this pottery.

⁷ More recently, a glazed relief bowl depicting a feline has been reported from Bet She'an (Avshalom-Gorni, in prep.). Only the hind part of its body survived. The spots on the body may indicate a leopard.

⁸ Another representation of a leopard appears on a plaque, now in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. It most probably served as part of an architectural decoration (Atil 1981: 215, n. 108). More recently, an architectural relief with a 'leopard' was uncovered at Qal'at Nimrud, that has now been shown to have been founded by Baybars I (Hartal 2001:100, Fig. 186).

⁹ Būrīn appears in the list of villages whose lands and territory were given over by Baybars I to the amīrs Jamāl al-Dīn Aqūsh al-Muḥammadī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Tunba al-Ḥīmṣī after the successful campaign of March-April 1265 against the Crusaders (Abel 1939:38, 40–41; Ibn Abī al-Faḍā'il 1919–1928:479–486).

REFERENCES

- 'Abd al-Raziq A. 1988. Le *sgraffito* de l'Égypte mamluke dans la collection de al-Sabah. *Annales Islamologiques* 24:1–23.
- Abel F.M. 1939. La liste des donations de Baibars en Palestine d'après la charte de 663 H. (1265). *JPOS* 19:38–44.
- Allan J.W. 1970. Mamluk Sultanid Heraldry and the Numismatic Evidence: A Reinterpretation. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1:99–112.
- Atil E. 1981. *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks*. Washington D.C.
- Avigad N. 1983. *Discovering Jerusalem*. Nashville.
- Avissar M. 1996. The Medieval Pottery. In A. Ben Tor, M. Avissar and Y. Portugali. *Yoqne'am I: The Late Periods* (Qedem Reports 3). Jerusalem. Pp. 75–172.
- Avshalom-Gorni D. In Preparation. Bet She'an: Archaeological Remains on the Plateau South of Naḥal 'Amal. *'Atiqot*.
- Bagatti B. 1984. *Gli scavi di Nazaret II: Dal secolo XII ad oggi*. Jerusalem.
- Bahgat A.B. and Gabriel A. 1921. *Fouilles d'Al-Foustat*. Paris.
- Bahgat A.B. and Massoul F. 1930. *Céramique musulmane de l'Égypte*. Cairo.
- Balog P. 1964. *The Coinage of the Mamluk Sultans of Egypt and Syria*. New York.
- Burgoyne M.H. and Abul-Hajj A. 1979. Twenty-Four Mediaeval Arabic Inscriptions from Jerusalem. *Levant* 11:112–137.
- Creswell K.A.C. 1959. *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* VI, 2. Oxford.
- Crowfoot J.W. et al. 1957. *The Objects from Samaria*. London.
- Cytrin-Silverman K. 1996. *The Islamic Period in North Sinai: The Pottery Evidence*. M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University. Jerusalem.
- Grube E.J. 1976. *Islamic Pottery of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*. London.
- El-Emary A.A. 1967. Studies in Some Islamic Objects Newly Discovered at Qūṣ. *Annales Islamologiques* 7:121–138.
- Franken H.J. and Kalsbeek J. 1975. *Potters of a Medieval Village in the Jordan Valley* (North Holland Ceramic Studies in Archaeology 3). Amsterdam and Oxford.
- Hartal M. 2001. *The Al-Ṣubayba (Nimrod) Fortress: Towers II and G* (IAA Reports 11). Jerusalem.
- Ibn Abī al-Faḍā'il al-Mufaḍḍal. 1919-28. *Histoire des sultans mamlouks (Al-Nahj al-Shadīd)=Patrologia Orientalis VI*. 12/3, E. Blochet ed. and French transl. Paris.
- Johns J. and McQuitty A.M. 1989. The Fāris Project: Preliminary Report upon the 1986 and 1988 Seasons. *Levant* 21:63–95.
- Kletter R. and Stern E.J. This volume. A Mamluk-Period Site at Khirbat Burin in the Eastern Sharon.
- Lane-Poole S. 1879. *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum* IV. London.

- Lazar D. 1999. A Mamluk and Ottoman Settlement at Giv'at Dani in the Ayalon Valley. *'Atiqot* 38: 127*–136* (Hebrew; English summary, pp. 231–232).
- Mason R.B. and Milwright M. 1998. Petrography of Middle Islamic Pottery from Karak. *Levant* 30:175–190.
- Maxwell-Miller J. 1991. *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau*. Atlanta, Georgia.
- Mayer L.A. 1933. *Saracenic Heraldry*. Oxford.
- Meinecke M. 1972. Zür mamlukischer Heraldik. *Mitteilungen des deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 28:213–288.
- Milwright M. 2003. Modest Luxuries: Decorated Lead-glazed Pottery in the South of Bilād al-Sha'm (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries). *Muqarnas* 20:91–111.
- Riis P.J. and Poulsen V. 1957. *Hama, fouilles et recherches 1931–1938 IV, 2: Les verreries et poteries médiévales*. Copenhagen.
- Sauer J.A. 1973. *Heshbon Pottery 1971*. Berrien Springs, Michigan.
- Smith R.H. 1973. *Pella of the Decapolis I: The 1967 Season of the Wooster Expedition to Pella*. London and Wooster.
- Thorau P. 1992. (P.M. Holt transl.). *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century*. London and New York.
- Tushingam A.D. 1985. *Excavations at Jerusalem 1961–1967 I*. Toronto.
- Wightman G.J. 1989. *The Damascus Gate, Jerusalem* (BAR Int. S. 519). Oxford.
- Zori N. 1966. The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shean. *IEJ* 16:123–134.