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DORIS DUKE AND THE CRAFTS OF ISLAMIC SYRIA

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ABSTRACT
This essay presents a preliminary assessment of the Syrian portable artifacts in the collection of the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (DDFIA). The first part deals with pieces dating between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries and provides observations relating to provenance, physical condition, and epigraphic content. The second part is concerned with objects of more recent date (mainly nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). This second group comprises glass vessels, inlaid woodwork, and an elaborate tent, and illustrates Doris Duke’s interest in the living craft traditions of Syria. Further evidence for the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century craft production is sought in a text entitled Qāmūs al-ṣinā‘āt al-Shāmiyya (Dictionary of Damascene Crafts). In the conclusion, it is argued that early twentieth-century artisans in Damascus, and elsewhere in Syria, adapted their working practices to the new tastes of local and western consumers. These adaptations are well represented in the DDFIA collection.

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During her lifetime, Doris Duke (d. 1993) assembled an impressive collection of Syrian artifacts dating between the early Islamic period and the twentieth century. Some of these items were acquired and commissioned during two major trips to the Middle East (1938 and early 1950s), but at other times she bought objects through dealers and at auction. Her house at Shangri La is justly famous for its two Ottoman period (1516–1918) Syrian domestic interiors, but her collection also boasts a rich assemblage of portable artifacts ranging from glass and ceramics to pieces of furniture.

This essay presents a preliminary assessment of the Syrian portable arts in the DDFIA collection. The first section provides a brief summary of the ceramics and glass of the Early Islamic (seventh to eleventh centuries) and Middle Islamic (twelfth to sixteenth centuries) periods that can probably be associated with the region of Syria. This is not certain in all cases, and future research may well expand or contract the list of Syrian antiquities in the DDFIA collection. The main section of the essay deals with the more substantial corpus of Syrian, largely Damascene, artifacts dating from the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In this part of the essay, I combine observations about the objects themselves with data drawn from a broadly contemporary Arabic source written in Damascus. This text is entitled the Qāmūs al-ṣīnāʾīt al-Shāmīyya (Dictionary of Damascene Crafts, and from now on referred to as the Qāmūs) and was compiled between ca. 1890 and 1905–1908 by three authors, Muhammad Saʿīd al-Qasimi (d. 1900), Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (d. 1914), and Khalil al-ʿAzm (d. 1926).

This work documents some 435 “crafts” (the Arabic terms used by the authors are ḥirfa and ṣīnāʾa) operating in the Syrian capital during the last decades of Ottoman rule.

Author’s note: This essay was researched and written during a residency at Shangri La in April–May 2012. I would like to thank Deborah Pope and the staff of Shangri La for helping to make my stay so enjoyable and productive. My thanks to Dawn Sueoka for locating numerous documents within the archives. I am particularly grateful to Keelan Overton for her assistance and advice on many aspects of the collection.


2 Syria in this context refers to the larger geographical area known as Greater Syria, or in Arabic as Bilād al-Shām. This comprises the modern polities of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestine Authority, as well as part of southeastern Turkey.


4 While ḥirfa and ṣīnāʾa can be translated simply as “craft,” the English term does not capture the semantic range of the Arabic ones. The Qāmūs contains not merely those activities that might be normally associated with the concept of “craft”—pottery, woodwork, textiles, glassmaking, and

A SURVEY OF DUKE’S SYRIAN ANTIQUITIES

There was a considerable vogue in the early twentieth century for glazed pottery from Raqqa, and collectors sometimes paid considerable sums for complete pieces of underglaze-painted and luster-painted stonepaste wares (often believing them to date to the Abbasid period). By the time Duke visited Syria in 1938, the craze for “Raqqa ware” had died down, and this is perhaps one reason why Syrian decorated glazed wares are not well represented at Shangri La.5 There is one luster-painted bowl in the collection that manifests the dark, copper-colored luster pigment and broad painting style associated with Raqqa in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (fig. 1). The central roundel carries a boldly painted pseudo-epigraphic design, while the cavetto has a band of cursive inscriptions. The sketchy decoration repeated around the flange rim is consistent with the luster wares of Raqqa. The bowl itself is clearly a composite, however. Much of the cavetto is made up of plaster, painted with brown pigment to imitate the original luster, and I was unable to find any point where the glazed ceramic of the upper part of the cavetto and the flange rim joined onto the central foot ring. In other words, one can have only limited confidence that these two components actually came from the same bowl. The missing section runs across the cursive inscription band, rendering it impossible to read (if it was ever a legible script). Also from this phase, and probably from Raqqa or one of the other Syrian sites along the Euphrates River, is a small, manganese-glazed stonepaste jug with black underglaze painting (fig. 2). This combination of a dark brownish-purple glaze with black underpainting is a feature of northern Syrian stonepaste pottery.6 The handle on this vessel is a modern replacement.

Fig. 1: Interior of stonepaste bowl with luster painting. Syria (probably Raqqa), late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 48.117. (Photo: David Franzen, 2012.)

so on—but also mercantile and agricultural activities, forms of entertainment, and professional skills.


The Abbasid phase at Raqqa produced less technologically refined glazed ceramics; a common type recovered from excavations in the city is turquoise glazed over a pale-colored earthenware body. The living room at Shangri La includes several turquoise-glazed storage jars and jugs of various sizes. While it seems likely that most of these were produced in Iran, it is possible that some originally came from Raqqa, or other sites in northern Mesopotamia. One object in this group that shares close affinities with glazed and unglazed wares from Raqqa is a straight-sided pot with cut and incised decoration, probably dating from the ninth to eleventh centuries (fig. 3). The frieze around the outside of the vessel is decorated with a repeated design made up of straight and curvilinear incisions with bevel-cut shapes. The visual effect is somewhat reminiscent of the famous “beveled”-style stucco decoration that appears at Samarra and other sites of the ninth to eleventh centuries. The beveled style also appears in the architectural details of the Great Mosque of Rafiqa (i.e., within the modern city of Raqqa) and some wood panels now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Raqqa.

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7. This incised and carved style of decoration is found on fragments of large vessels (most unglazed, but some covered with green or turquoise glazes) excavated from the site of “Tal Fukhkar” in Raqqa. The excavation is directed by Professor Julian Henderson of Nottingham University, and the author is currently working on a catalog of the ceramic finds. Shards from a large, unglazed storage jar carrying this type of decoration were recovered during excavations of the palaces. See Verena Daiber and Andrea Becker, eds., *Baudenkmäler und Paläste I*, Raqqa 3 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp Von Zabern, 2004), taf. 83.e–h.

The DDFIA possesses one Syrian stonepaste bowl of the Mamluk period, 1250–1517 (in Syria: 1260–1516). This small, flange-rim bowl is glazed on the interior and exterior with a transparent glaze possessing a slightly greenish tint (fig. 4). The broadly applied underglaze painting is laid out in black pigment, with additional sections of turquoise. The turquoise (copper-based) pigment was perhaps a cheaper alternative to the cobalt blue that is more usually found on Syrian and Egyptian “panel style” underglaze-painted wares. Archaeological and art historical data indicate that the turquoise and black style of underglaze painting can be dated to the fourteenth century, and probably ceased in the third quarter of that century. Stylistic affinities with stonepaste wares found in southern Mesopotamia are perhaps an indication that the Syrian wares were produced by a workshop of craftsmen who came originally from Iraq or southwestern Iran.⁹

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The DDFIA collection includes some fine examples of early Islamic glass. As with the ceramics, establishing their provenance remains problematic, but it seems likely that they are from several locations in the Middle East, including Syria. Two are worthy of comment in this section. The first is a very well-preserved, small container blown in a slightly greenish, transparent glass (fig. 5).° The vessel is decorated with trails of glass that loop elegantly from the outer rim and connect with the shoulder. This style of ornament is associated with Syria in the seventh and eighth centuries, though similar wares were produced also in the Islamic East. Dating to a later period is a small container with a squat profile leading to a slightly flared rim (fig. 6). The surface is much abraded, but it is still possible to make out elements of the original enameled decoration. Also notable is the gilded inscription written in a flowing cursive script. This reads, al-sulta\n al-m\l\lik al- [?] wa qawwim al-dunya\n wa\’l-d\\nit q\\til al-kafara wa\’l-mushrik\n in al-sulta\n al- [?] (the sultan, the possessor,… guardian of the world and the religion, slayer of infidels and polytheists, the sultan, the [?]), indicating an abbreviated rendering of a fairly standard form of Mamluk titulature of the fourteenth century.\n
Fig. 5: Blown glass vessel with trailed glass additions around rim and shoulder. Syria, seventh–ninth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai\’i, 47.117. (Photo: David Franzen, 2010)

° The same looping trails of glass can be seen on other vessels and figurines attributed to Syria and Egypt. For example, see Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse, Glass of the Sultans (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 110–14, cat. nos. 27–30, 32; on the principal changes in glass decoration in early Islamic Syria, see Alan Walmsley, Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment, Duckworth Debates in Archaeology (London: Duckworth, 2007), 65–66.

11 This reading was made by Wheeler Thackston for the DDFIA. Metalwork is a good source for honorific formula of this nature. See Esin Atil, Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 68–69 (cat. 18), 80–81 (cat. 22), 84–85 (cat. 24), 88–91 (cat. 26), 98–99 (cat. 31). Comparable inscriptions appear on the two “Mamluk Revival” kurs\r\nis in the DDFIA collection (54.136.1–2). These have been read by Wheeler Thackston; see Wheeler Thackston, “Shangri La Highlights in Translation,” Shangri La Working Papers in Islamic Art, no. 1 (February 2012), 11 (no. 4). Also see the author’s forthcoming “Scholar Favorites” film clip concerning the two kurs\r\nis, soon to be available on www.shangrilahawaii.org.
DUKE AND THE CRAFTS OF NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY SYRIA

This section of the essay reviews representative examples of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Syrian portable objects in the DDFIA collection, including those in Shangri La and those now on display in the Islamic gallery of the Honolulu Museum of Art. Excluded from consideration is the metalwork of this period because it is not yet possible to distinguish with certainty the provenance of inlaid metalwork of the “Mamluk Revival” style. In addition, I do not deal here with items of clothing in the collection.

Doris Duke purchased several pieces of glass of types that would have been found in Syrian domestic interiors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included the types of elaborate colored and carved crystal glass vessels and candlesticks that are commonly associated with the factories of Bohemia, though they were also exported from production centers in other parts of Europe (fig. 7). Known in Arabic as ballūr (the same term that is used in earlier written sources to describe rock crystal), this type of crystal glass was much prized in Syria. In the same period, European producers were also creating fine glass specifically for the Persian market, and fine Qajar period examples are to be found in the DDFIA collection. High quality European glass was being transported to the ports of Sidon, Haifa, and Beirut in considerable quantities in the late nineteenth century, and much of this was destined for Damascus. The Qāmūs includes a chapter on the mukharris, an artisan who specialized in mending vessels in

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12 I will discuss Doris Duke’s collection of “Mamluk Revival” metalwork in a future article.
13 Consider, for example, 47.8 and 47.9 (Qajar rosewater sprinklers) and 47.37.1–3 (group of three small, red European decanters with portraits of Qajar rulers); on the portable arts of the Qajar period, see Stephen Vernoit, Occidentalism: Islamic Art in the 19th Century, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art 23 (London: Azimuth and Oxford University Press, 1997), 95–121.
three media: the aforementioned ballūr, šīnī, and māliqī. The second of these (šīnī) refers both to Chinese porcelain and the high-quality glazed wares being imported from places such as the Meissen factory in Dresden, the faïence workshops around Marseilles, and the Staffordshire potteries (fine Syrian or Persian pottery, known in Arabic as qashānī or qishānī, is not mentioned in connection with the activities of the mukharris). Māliqī literally translates as “shining things,” but its precise meaning in this context is unclear. The mukharris would repair these vessels with wire and rivets. In a telling passage, the authors of the Qāmūs note that this craft was in decline, and that few were practicing it. The reason was economic: the scale of the imports from Europe had lowered the unit price of glass and porcelain vessels to the extent that it was no longer worthwhile to pay the mukharris to mend them.

It was in this challenging environment that native Damascene glassworkers (sing. zajjāj) had to operate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter on the zajjāj in the Qāmūs states that they were located in the district (maḥalla) of Shaghur, southeast of the walled city outside Bab Saghir and southeast of the Bab Saghir cemetery (interestingly, no mention is made of Bab Sharqi, the area commonly associated with glassmaking). These men made a range of objects, including lamps (sing. qandāl),

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flasks, bottles, and larger storage jars with lids. The chapter then gives interesting details concerning the manufacture of frit (the preliminary stage in glassmaking) and the glass itself in different types of ovens (sing. *tannūr*). Notably, the authors are aware of the fact that Damascene glass, with its greenish tint, cannot achieve the qualities of the “pure white” (*abyad naqī*, i.e., colorless) *ballūr* from Europe. This competition had evidently weakened the craft, though the authors of the *Qāmūs* conclude that Damascene glass remained in demand and brought forth plentiful profits.

Five glass objects in the DDFIA can be attributed to Syria in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The first is a green glass lamp with a spherical body rising to a flaring neck (fig. 8). The base is concave, and around the shoulder are three applied loop handles. The basic form is obviously that of the famous glass lamps of the Mamluk period, though the DDFIA example is notable for the absence of surface decoration.

Fig. 8: Green glass lamp, blown with attached glass handles. Possibly Syria (Damascus), nineteenth or early twentieth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 47.130. (Photo: David Franzen, 2012.)

Damascene glassworkers of the later Ottoman period were, however, evidently capable of more sophisticated work. An additional three lamps in the collection are blown in colorless glass, with most of the outer surface then covered in acid-etched designs (fig. 9). The surface also has gilding and the application of an unidentified black compound. The decoration comprises vegetal, geometric, and epigraphic components arranged into bands and wider friezes around the body and neck. The inscriptions appear to be made up of repeated letter forms (particularly *lāms* and *lām-alifs*) that do not form coherent words.

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18 Also see 47.58.1–2, both on view at the Honolulu Museum of Art.
19 One of the lamps, fig. 9 here, was also recently illustrated in Sabiha al-Khemir, *Beauty and Belief: Crossing Bridges with the Arts of Islamic Culture* (Provo: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 2012), 235 (lower right).
The last piece is a bottle blown in a dark brown, semitransparent glass (fig. 10). The vessel itself has trailed glass decoration around the neck, with the remaining ornamentation acid-etched into the body. This etched component is dominated by an Arabic inscription written in two registers of thulūth script imitating the style of Mamluk glass and metalwork. While the inscription makes use of a wider range of letter forms than the three lamps mentioned above, there seems to be no sign that the complete text is legible.
One of the strongest components of the DDFIA’s Syrian collection is the inlaid woodwork.\textsuperscript{20} The practice of inlaying wood—usually walnut (jawz) or willow (şafşāf)—with small sections of mother-of-pearl (şadaf) had become a specialty of Damascus during the later Ottoman period, and this craft was much in demand both locally and among European and North American tourists. Furniture was commonly ornamented with mother-of-pearl, with each piece of inlay outlined by thin filaments of tin. The practice was also employed for clogs, and the DDFIA possesses three of these pieces of elaborate footwear (a pair and a single clog), which date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The pair of clogs (sing. qabqāb) have delicate inlaid decoration on the upper section and the two vertical supports.\textsuperscript{21} Curiously, both clogs lack the leather footstraps, while the absence of rivet or nail marks in the relevant sections of the clogs (the undecorated parts of the two sides of the upper wooden section) suggest that these were never used. The single clog is composed of three wooden sections, each carrying extensive inlay (fig. 11). Across the top section is a wide strap made of three layers: red leather below, some velvet padding in the middle, and a thin sheet of silver above carrying elegant repoussé designs of flowers, leaves, and tendrils.

\textit{Fig. 11: Overall and detail, wooden clog inlaid with mother-of-pearl and strips of tin, also with a strap made from leather, velvet, silver, and brass rivets. Syria (Damascus), nineteenth or early twentieth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 67.25. (Photo: David Franzen, 2008.)}

To judge by the quality of the materials and the amount of wood covered with inlay, these were relatively expensive pieces of footwear. If we turn to our Arabic source, the \textit{Qāmūs}, we can reconstruct a good deal about the context of manufacture and use of such clogs in late nineteenth-century Damascus. It is apparent that several specialized crafts or trades contributed to the process of making clogs, though it was the qabqābī (clog maker) who was responsible for the form of the finished item.\textsuperscript{22} First, all of the raw

\textsuperscript{20} On Damascene inlay, see Johannes Kalter, Margareta Pavaloi, and Maria Zernnickel, \textit{The Arts and Crafts of Syria: Collection Antoine Touma and Linden-Museum Stuttgart} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 72–74; see also Marcus Milwright, ‘Wood and Woodworking in Late Ottoman Damascus: An Analysis of the \textit{Qāmūs al-Šīnā āt al-Shāmiyya},’ \textit{Bulletin d’Études Orientales} (forthcoming 2012).

\textsuperscript{21} 67.24.a–b, on display in the Honolulu Museum of Art.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Qāmūs}, 348–49 (chapter 281).
materials were bought from dealers. The Qāmūs does not state explicitly who provided the wood or the tin; for the former, it may have been the ḥawāṣilī (wood supplier). A photograph of the qabāqībī in the Matson collection in the Library of Congress shows the craftsman cutting the sections of the clog from thick branches (fig. 12), so it may be that he was able to obtain supplies directly from woodcutters (sing. kassār or kissār). The specialist in tinning copper vessels was the samkarī, and he is a possible source for the metal required for inlay work. The silver sheet could have come from, and been ornamented by, the șāʿīgh (jeweller). More certain are the other two types of craftsmen who supplied the qabāqībī. These were the seller of mother-of-pearl (ṣādaṭījī) and the maker of the leather straps (ṣuyūrī). While the former clearly sold his product to several craftsmen, the suyūrī worked only with the maker of clogs.23

![Fig. 12: Photograph of the shop of an inlaid clog maker in Damascus, ca.1900–1920. (Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-M32-553].)](image)

The Qāmūs gives a relatively detailed account of the qabāqībī. This man was responsible for a range of different clogs, some with a raised heel of up to 3 qirāṭ (2.5 inches). Others, like the DDFIA example (see fig. 11), were raised at both ends and helped the wearer to negotiate muddy streets in winter. Clogs were also employed in bathhouses and in the home. The chapter devoted to this craft gives the names of different types of clogs—shibrawī, nuṣf kūrsī, kundura, and muḥājirūn—though without, unfortunately, furnishing the reader with detailed descriptions of the forms of each. The last of these names, muḥājirūn (literally meaning those who undertook the hijra, or emigration, to Medina with the Prophet Muhammad), is interesting because it can probably be identified with a northern district of Damascus just beneath the Kassioun Mountain. This was a predominantly Circassian area of the city. The qabāqībī also had their own market (ṣūq) located in the area adjoining the Umayyad Mosque, as well as many shops in the streets of the Syrian capital. Generating “middling profits,” the craft was much in demand among the inhabitants of Damascus and the surrounding villages. Although the photograph in the Matson collection (see fig. 12) shows many ready-made

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23 Qāmūs, 116–17 (chapter 79: ḥawāṣilī); 239 (chapter 162: samkarī); 242 (chapter 167: suyūrī); 264–65 (chapter 188: șāʿīgh); 275 (chapter 194: șādaṭījī); and 386–87 (chapter 312: kassār).
clogs, it was evidently common practice to have them shaped to order. The *Qāmūs* reports that the outlines of the buyer’s feet would be inscribed onto the wooden blanks before being given to a master (ṣāḥīb) of the craft to be carved into shape. In addition to mother-of-pearl, clogs might also be inlaid with ornamental stones (sing. *faṣṣ*).

The cradle (*sarīr*) in the DDFIA collection is another example of the high-quality inlaid woodwork being produced in Syria, and particularly in the city of Damascus, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (fig. 13). The main body of the cradle is supported at either end by vertical sections that are semicircular at the base, allowing the cradle to be rocked from side to side. Across the top is a thick bar of wood that has been faceted and turned into shape before being inlaid. The surface ornamentation is provided by inlay made of up filaments of tin and small sections of mother-of-pearl. The decoration is largely geometric, though the sides of the cradle have simplified cypress trees defined entirely with lines of metal.

![Fig. 13: Wooden cradle inlaid with mother-of-pearl and strips of tin. Syria (Damascus), nineteenth or early twentieth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 65.64. (Photo: Keelan Overton, 2012.)](image)

The entry in the *Qāmūs* devoted to the maker of cradles (*sayāyīrī*) notes that the craft was a very old one in Syria.\(^{24}\) The cradles themselves ranged from simple, undecorated items that were bought by villagers and the urban poor to more elaborate ones with painting or inlay. Another more modern innovation was the manufacture of cradles from iron (*ḥadīd*) that were made by ironworkers in the city, particularly the lockmakers (sing. *qaṭīlātī*). These had a different design comprising two vertical columns (sing. *ʿamīd*) on which the cradle would swing, and could be found in shops on the main street of al-Darwishiyya in the Syrian capital. Simple and inexpensive white wooden cradles were sold in the market of the *qabāqībīs* (see above). Returning to the cradle in the collection, it becomes apparent that it must have been the work of different specialists: the cradle maker, the inlayer, and the woodturner (*kharrāt*).\(^{25}\) While the *kharrāt* is not specifically mentioned in this context, the authors of the *Qāmūs* do record that the mother-of-pearl inlay was usually added to cradles by the *ṣanādīqī* (maker of chests and cabinets, see below).

Inlay might be added to small boxes (this was the domain of the *ʿulābi*\(^ {26}\)), but it was more common on chests and other substantial pieces of furniture. It was the *ṣanādīqī*

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\(^{24}\) *Qāmūs*, 181–82 (chapter 136).

\(^{25}\) *Qāmūs*, 122 (chapter 86).

\(^{26}\) *Qāmūs*, 319 (chapter 238).
who was responsible for this work. This artisan was also reliant upon the ṣadaḫjī and other specialists for the supply of materials needed for these elaborately decorated items. Walnut appears to have been the preferred wood, and the principal products at the time of the writing of the Qāmūs included large boxes/chests (ṣundūq, pl. ṣanādīq), wardrobes, mirror frames, sofas, and chairs. The initial construction of the artifact was done by a carpenter (najjār) and then was handed to the inlayer. The latter carved out the spaces with a point (rīsha) and a rasp (mibrad) before gluing the mother-of-pearl into place. The area would then be planed flat before the application of varnish (curiously, the Qāmūs does not mention the use of metal filaments to create the linear dimension of the decoration).

The craft of the ṣanādīqī was evidently much in demand, and inlaid furniture was popular among Syrians as a wedding gift. The chapter in the Qāmūs concludes that this “beautiful” craft generates good profits for its practitioners. The authors are aware of the fact that a significant part of the market in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century consisted of European and North American (the term used is al-ifranj, or “Franks”) tourists and art dealers. Doris Duke was an enthusiastic collector of inlaid furniture, and the DDFIA collection possesses some important examples of traditional chests, dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (fig. 14). Some were likely bought during her 1938 trip, though she also purchased others at auction (including a pair that had formed part of the collection of William Randolph Hearst, d. 195128). These handsome chests are ornamented with the array of geometric designs, floral compositions, and stylized cypress trees that are typical of Syrian decorative art of the later Ottoman period.

![Fig. 14: Wooden chest inlaid with mother-of-pearl and strips of tin. Syria (Damascus), eighteenth or nineteenth century. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 65.63. (Photo: David Franzen, 2011.)(Photo: David Franzen, 2011.)](image)

Doris Duke herself can be seen in a photograph, perhaps taken by James Cromwell (d. 1990) during the 1938 trip, inspecting inlaid furniture displayed in the courtyard of a later Ottoman period Damascene home recently identified as the so-called “House of the Spanish Crown” (fig. 15).29 George Asfar – a partner in the antiquities firm

27 Qāmūs, 271–72 (chapter 197).
28 65.4 and 65.50.
Asfar & Sarkis – can be seen on the left side of the photograph, and his brother Charles stands to the right of Duke. Receipts given by Asfar & Sarkis document the sale of such furniture to Duke. Perhaps the most important issues to highlight from the photograph are the changes to the type of furniture (these are western-style bureaus) and the adaptation of the inlay technique itself. The new decorative style can be best appreciated by looking at an example from Shangri La (fig. 16). Gone from the front faces of these items are the vegetal features and geometric designs of the traditional style of inlay; this has been replaced by a repetitive arrangement of abutting triangles that completely cover the wooden surface and give the pieces a striking, pale appearance. The only wood to remain visible on the front is along the bands that demarcate the drawers and the upper edge of the bureau (the tops were painted white, while the side panels carried more traditional inlay designs such as sprays of flowers). The visual impact of the front surface brings to mind other styles of the period, such as the vogue for encasing furniture in mirror glass (something also seen in the furnishings of Shangri La). It would seem, therefore, that inlay workers and cabinet makers were adapting their techniques to suit the tastes of the European and North American market in the 1930s (presumably this aesthetic was also appreciated by Syrian clients). The chapter on the ṣanāḏiqī in the Qāmūs had reflected upon the buying of inlaid items by westerners, but the authors did not foresee the logical extension of this process: inlay workers would make radical changes to their working practices as a means to prosper in this new market.

Fig. 15: Doris Duke inspecting inlaid bureaus in the courtyard of the “House of the Spanish Crown,” 1938. (Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Historical Archives Photograph Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, PH.SL047. Photo perhaps taken by James Cromwell, 1938.)
The bureaus were products of their time, perhaps reflecting an art deco sensibility. By contrast, Duke’s two major Syrian commissions—a fountain and a tent—are less easy to categorize. In 1938, she spent the considerable sum of $7,000 commissioning a glass mosaic fountain from Asfar & Sarkis. This extraordinary piece, which was originally intended for Shangri La but subsequently installed at Duke Farms in New Jersey, has designs that imitate the buildings and trees depicted in the famous “Barada panel” in the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (the mosaic panel itself had only been revealed from under layers of whitewash in 1929).

The second substantial commission undertaken by Asfar & Sarkis was a canvas and leather tent, which seems to have been ordered for an outdoor space at Shangri La. In its present form, the tent is composed of the following: the principal panel, which makes up the roof and measures approximately 24 x 12 feet (figs. 17 and 18); six wooden poles, each covered with decorated leather (fig. 19); and six canvas side panels. The roof panel is the most elaborately decorated component, though much of the leather’s original patina and color has been lost through exposure to sunlight and precipitation. It seems likely that the color of the leather on this main panel originally corresponded to the deep bottle green, dark crimson, and ivory color scheme of the leather on the poles. The ivory-colored skin is considerably thinner and has the tactile and visual qualities of parchment. The three types of leather on both the poles and the principal panel are woven into one another to create a simple geometric pattern. The eight large roundels on the principal panel carry more ambitious designs of camels with riders, which have been created by cutting and stitching leather sections of different colors (see fig. 19).
Fig. 17: Roof panel of a tent custom-made for the Cromwells and ordered from Asfar & Sarkis. Canvas with colored leather and parchment. Syria, 1938. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 73.22.a–j. (Photo: David Franzen, 2012.)

Fig. 18: Decorative leather roundel from the tent’s roof panel. Syria, 1938. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 73.22.a–j. (Photo: David Franzen, 2011.)

Fig. 19: Overall and detail, leather-covered wooden tent poles with “Made in Syria” sticker. Syria, 1938. Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 73.22.a–j. (Photo: David Franzen, 2012.)
While the tent is known to have been bought from Asfar & Sarkis, it is not yet clear where in Syria it was made. James Cromwell’s 1938 film footage from Syria is dominated by a day of camel racing in the vicinity of Palmyra, and it would seem that he and his bride were considerably enamored by this desert spectacle (fig. 20). The correspondence between the couple and the firm of Asfar & Sarkis makes clear that a tent at the camel race was the inspiration for the tent at Shangri La. While the possibility of manufacture in Palmyra should not be dismissed, the usual form of Bedouin tent was a bayt sha’r woven from sheep, goat, and camel wool. For the provenance of the DDFIA’s leather and canvas example, we may therefore turn to the Syrian capital. At the time the Qāmūs was written, the tentmakers (sing. khaymī) of Damascus made most of their money supplying their wares to Muslim pilgrims making the arduous trek to Mecca for the hajj. These tents varied in complexity from the qubba (i.e., domed structure), which was erected with a central pole (darīk) and held in place with ropes and tent pegs. Hajjis commonly bought another type called a taẓlaqā (the form of which is not described), while the leader of the Syrian caravan, the amīr al-hāji, was provided with a grander structure known as the šīwāna (marquee). In addition to fabric made of stripes of different colors, tents were also ornamented with naqsh. This could be read literally as painting, though the word probably refers to types of applied decoration, such as embroidery or, conceivably, leatherwork of the type seen on Doris Duke’s tent. Decorative leather was a specialty of the saddlemakers (sing. sarūjī). These artisans worked not merely on various types of saddles, but also on diverse items including book covers and cases for guns (sing. bundīq). The leather of the saddles and other items might be ornamented with markings and embroidery in silk (ḥarīr) and silver thread.

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**Fig. 20:** Still from film footage of a camel race in Palmyra, Syria during the Cromwells’ 1938 trip. Pictured are James Cromwell, Ruth Selwyn, Marian Paschal, and Doris Duke. (Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Historical Archives Photograph Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.)

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32 “Mrs. Cromwell asked for a tent similar to the one used in the reception at ‘Palmyra.’ I am making one which will be finished within a month [sic] time.” Letter from Georges Asfar to James Cromwell, June 7, 1938, DDCFHA.
33 Qāmūs, 129–30 (chapter 96).
34 Qāmūs, 180–81 (chapter 135).
CONCLUSION

One of the chapters in the Qāmūs is devoted to the activities of the Damascene dealers in antiquities and objets d’art (fig. 20). The term used to describe these men is antakjī, a combination of a European root and an Arabized Turkish suffix (-çu, the seller of a given product). The antakjī must have been a relatively recent “craft” within the Syrian capital, and the authors of the Qāmūs attribute the rise of these men to the influx of “Frankish” (ifranj) tourists to Syria. Entranced by the beauties of ancient monuments like Palmyra and Baʿalbak, these wealthy travelers were seeking out antiquities from dealers in Damascus, Beirut, Jerusalem, and elsewhere in the Middle East. The authors of the Qāmūs lament the fact that towns and cities were being denuded of their ancient past because of this trade. They also note the growth of an industry in Syria creating imitations (sing. taqlīd) of older artifacts. Some of this might simply be to cater to those tourists (or local buyers) who were not overly concerned about whether a given piece of metalwork, woodwork, or pottery was ancient or modern. What mattered was simply to acquire an item that had the general look of an earlier prototype. This would certainly explain the bulk of the so-called “Mamluk Revival” metalwork produced at the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, careful examination of these revival wares, examples of which are preserved in the DDFIA collection, usually reveals inaccuracies in the ornamentation and the epigraphic content, with the latter sometimes being made up of more or less random arrangements of words or letter forms. The Qāmūs does, however, imply that a proportion of this production of imitations was made up of fakes meant to deceive unwary buyers.

Fig. 20: Photograph of the shop of a dealer in art and antiquities, Damascus, ca.1900–1920. (Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-M32-428].)


Doris Duke had extensive contact with two such dealers in antiquities in Damascus, the aforementioned Georges Asfar and Jean Sarkis, partners in the firm Asfar & Sarkis. The business had doubtless adapted since the writing of the Qāmūs, with the tastes of foreign buyers changing as different sources of Islamic and more ancient material became available (notably the entry on the antakji seems to have been written before the beginning of the craze for Raqqa pottery in the first decade of the twentieth century). In some respects, Duke’s pattern of purchasing Syrian artifacts fits into a well-established pattern for wealthy travelers to the region. Through Asfar & Sarkis, as well as other dealers and auction houses in the Middle East and North America, she bought the very things one might expect: a “Raqqa” bowl, early Islamic turquoise-glazed storage jars, early Islamic and medieval Islamic glass, Mamluk metalwork, and Ottoman period glazed tiles. It is not always possible to establish the provenance of these artifacts, though a good proportion are likely to be Syrian. Even Duke’s decision to acquire late Ottoman period Damascene interiors constitutes part of a larger twentieth-century phenomenon. Equivalent “Damascus” or “Syrian” rooms can be seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as other collections in the United States, Germany, and Malaysia.\(^37\)

What sets Doris Duke apart from many of her contemporary collectors of Islamic art, however, is the deep interest she evidently had in the living craft traditions of the places where she traveled. Her record as an active patron of contemporary Islamic art encompasses tile commissions in Iran, painted woodwork in Morocco, and carved marble screens in India.\(^38\) In Syria, the firm of Asfar & Sarkis arranged for the manufacture of a substantial tent, copying an example she had seen near Palmyra, and a fountain inspired by designs found on the mosaic panels of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Also significant is that her acquisition of Syrian inlay work reveals a willingness to embrace new decorative trends—particularly the overall coverage of mother-of-pearl to create a paler aesthetic—as well as more established modes associated with earlier decades and centuries. The academic study of “Islamic art” has been beset during the twentieth century by problems of definition to the point where many doubt the usefulness of the term itself. Scholars have asked why surveys of Islamic art conventionally end around

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37 For the most recent publications of these rooms, see the various essays in Christina Rozeik, Ashok Roy, and David Saunders, eds., Conservation and the Eastern Mediterranean: Contribution to the Istanbul Congress, 20–24 September 2010 (London: The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2010); for the Metropolitan’s Damascus Room, see Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, eds., Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), no. 238, 333–337 (presentations from the Metropolitan’s April 2012 conference panel devoted to its Damascus Room can also be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9-2QteooMY>); for the DDFIA’s two Syrian rooms, see the recent June 2012 colloquium celebrating the opening of Shangri La’s Damascus Room, <http://www.shangrilahawaii.org/Cultural-Programs/Symposia/Damascus-Rm-Colloquium/>.  

38 For an overview of these three major commissions, see Keelan Overton, “Commissioning on the Move: The Cromwells’ Travels and Patronage of ‘Living Traditions’ in India, Morocco, and Iran,” in Doris Duke’s Shangri La, A House in Paradise: Architecture, Landscape and Islamic Art, eds. Thomas Mellins and Donald Albrecht (New York: Skira Rizzoli, forthcoming 2012).
1800, and whether one can talk about “Islamic art” in a modern or postmodern context. Furthermore, what sort of Islamic visual and material culture belongs in the rarified environment of art museums and what should be placed in collections of archaeology or ethnography? For Doris Duke, the collector, such questions might well have been immaterial; it is one of the strengths (and delights) of Shangri La that old and new, innovative and revivalist, are juxtaposed in an undogmatic manner. These unexpected relationships, in turn, promote questions about the nature and relative importance of “originality” in the visual traditions of the Islamic world from the seventh century to the present day.

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39 For a recent discussion of the problematic definition of Islamic art, see Finbarr B. Flood, “From the Prophet to Postmodernism: New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art,” in Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 31–53.