

An Invitation to a Wedding Ceremony on a Piece of Silk in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, Published for the First Time (An Artistic and Cultural Study)

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Abstract:

The applied arts are closely related to the daily life of the human; they are mainly made to meet many of his diverse needs and therefore studying its products helps to extrapolate and understand many cultural and historical aspects, textiles are one of the most important examples of this. Textiles industry has developed in Egypt, through the different ages, there were important contributions to this industry development in the age of the Alawite dynasty, in general, and in the era of the Khedive Ismail, in particular, and many textile products have reached us from that period, such as outfits, flags, etc. This study deals with a piece of silk, preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, this piece is published for the first time, and dated back to (1291 AH / 1874 AC). This piece includes an invitation from someone called (Matteo Isma'loul) to the Khedive Ismail to attend a wedding ceremony of his daughter. The inscriptions of this invitation included poetic verses; praise the Khedive Ismail, and end with inviting him to this ceremony, and documentary writings; indicate time, place of the ceremony, and the date of editing this invitation, and end with the name of the sender. The study clarified the artistic aspects of this piece, explained its inscriptions, regarding its shape and content, and discussed some cultural and historical aspects of the era of the Khedive Ismail, in light of this piece. This study found that the sender of this invitation was one of the rich Jewish traders in Alexandria, and there were political relationships, and economic deals between him and the khedive Ismail. The main topic that clarifies the importance of this study is the possibility of using the applied arts to highlight some aspects of social, political and economic life, in the age of the Alawite dynasty in Egypt, especially in the era of the Khedive Ismail.

Keywords:

Invitation; Textile; Silk; Inscriptions; The Khedive Ismail.

Summary

The Khedive Ismail era had significant contributions in the history of textile and weaving industry. Many textile products have reached us from that period, such as outfits, flags, curtains, vestures for shrines, etc.

The Research Problem:

This search paper answers an important question which is how products of applied arts can clarify many of the various life aspects; political, economic, social, etc.

The Research Goal:

The paper aims at publishing for the first time a piece of silk, preserved in the Museum of Islamic art in Cairo, and clarification of the artistic characteristics of it, discussion and highlight of some cultural and historical aspects at the time of its manufacture (the Khedive Ismail era) in the light of its artistic characteristics.

The Research Importance:

What emphasizes the paper significance is that it employs applied arts and its features and characteristics in shedding light over some of the aspects of social, political and economic life in the age of Muhammad Ali dynasty especially the Khedive Ismail era, which confirms the close relation among applied products and various life activities.

The Research Methodology:

The paper includes an inclusive descriptive study that includes: mentioning of the basic data of the piece of silk (the main subject of the study), description of its components, parts, and variable decorations. Then, an analytical study for each of manufacture methods, decoration methods, decorations, explanation of the inscriptions on this piece, regarding its shape and content, with a comparison for clarification of the artistic characteristics of the piece. Some cultural and historical sides, of the period of the piece manufacture, were discussed in the light of the inscriptions of this piece.

Introduction:

The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo preserves a piece of silk, recorded with number 9712 and belongs to the Khedive Ismail age, this piece is being published for the first time, and is dated, as its inscriptions point, to the year 1874 AD, 1290 AH.

The piece includes an invitation for the Khedive Ismail to attend a wedding ceremony of a daughter of one of the rich traders at his age in Alexandria, which will be clarified through studying this piece of silk.

The Descriptive Study:

First: Main Data: The main data of the piece (the main subject of the study) is the following:

- 1- Material: Silk.
- 2- Usage: Invitation for a wedding Ceremony.
- 3- Location of preservation: The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.
- 4- Register No.: 9712.
- 5- Dimensions: length (height) 50 cm. width: 36 cm.
- 6- History: 1290 AH/1874 AD.
- 7- Place of manufacture: Alexandria.
- 8- The decorative method: Printing using a mold, and writing with the brush.
- 9- Pieces' condition: very good.
- 10- References: This piece is being studied and published for the first time

Second: Description:

This piece is rectangular in shape, has creamy white color, its motifs were done in two colors; black for the decorations and crimson red for the inscriptions. The decorations of this piece include a decorative frame surrounds the rest of motifs, it is a rectangular frame, the vertical sides are longer than the horizontal ones, this frame includes floral elements, include branches, half palmate fans, and parts of pointed floral leaves. There is a crescent shape with pentagram next to it from the exterior, in the middle of both the right and the left sides of this frame. In the upper part inside the frame there are motifs in the shape of a crescent that has a pentagram inside of it with two floral branches beside of them, that intersect in the two bottom parts of them and are connected with wavy tape that includes what looks like a bow and ends with two wavy, thin parts that looks like the pointed parts of a scissor. Beneath those shapes there are inscriptions that are divided into two groups: the first group: are poetic writings that include 11 verses of poetry while the second group: is beneath the poem in two lines and includes documentary type of writing.

The Analytical Study:**First: Material and Methods of Industry and Decorations:****1- Material of Industry and Decorations:**

Silk was used in making the piece (the main subject of the study), may be the manufacture of that piece of textile which the invitation was engraved on for the Khedive Ismail to attend a wedding ceremony- to be made of silk- matches the purpose from two aspects, first: the invitation was for the highest personality in Egypt at this time who was the Khedive Ismail who was known by being luxurious, elegant and sophisticated, so showing respect, the invitation specialized for him was written on a material considered of the most expensive and finest textile materials which is silk, as it is characterized by its softness, flexibility, and brightness. The second: it is an invitation to attend a wedding ceremony of a daughter of one of the richest men, being made of silk matches the high social rank of its sender and the huge occasion.

The use of silk was spread in the industry of many applied products in the age of the Khedive Ismail such as: cloth, covering of holly Kaaba, covering of royal rides, and mattresses. Such variable usages that are related to some of religious, political, and social aspects with high status and value, show the elegance and status of silk in the age of Muhammad Ali dynasty, also it points at a reasons for the choice of silk to be the material of this piece.

Dyes were used, in the execution of the decorations and inscriptions on this piece of silk, in two colors; black for the decorations and crimson red for the inscriptions.

2- Method of Industry and Decoration:

Many of various preparation processes for silk were executed to make the piece. The decorative frame, floral and geometric ornaments within this frame were executed by printing using the template, and the Inscriptions were executed by brush.

Second: Decorations:

1- The Rectangular Frame: it was used to limit the message and add an aesthetical value to it, a decorative frame normally used in buildings or applied masterpieces, whether it is an independent element or surrounded by other types of decorations or inscriptions. We can say

that the executed frame on the piece (the main subject of the study) fulfilled two purposes: the first: limitation of the rest of elements and the inscriptions inside of it, the second: adding a decorative form that then realizing an aesthetical value on that piece of silk which is evidenced by the clear care about the decorative richness of this frame, it is also clear the influence of baroque style and rococo, as the motifs of this frame has many curves and meanders of floral branches and the large size of the leaves in addition to them wrapping around each other which are considered of the main characteristics of those two styles that the frame is influenced by.

2- Crescent and Pentagram: These two elements were executed in more than one position on this piece of silk; in large size above the poetic writings and in small size in both the right and the left sides of the decorative frame on the piece, execution of crescent and pentagram gives it a formal style, sign of the king's badges, loyalty and belonging for its ruler (the khedive Ismail).

3- The Two Floral Branches (Olive Branches) That Are Connected from Beneath with a Tape: They were executed around the crescent and pentagram from beneath and from the sides, the two olive branches either on their own or with the tape that connects them both are considered of the elements present on applied antiques or buildings in the age of Muhammad Ali dynasty. This tape, rolled up around the olive branches from beneath and has what looks like a bow shape, and split in a shape that looks like a scissors, it is considered of the European influences in the renaissance age which affected buildings and antiques in the age of Muhammad Ali dynasty including the khedive Ismail era.

We can say that those decorative elements represented in the shapes of crescent, pentagram, and the two olive branches connected from beneath with a tape that has what looks like a bow, have performed two functions: the first: giving an official form and belonging to Egypt and its ruler (the khedive Ismail), the second: a beautification function; to give an aesthetical value for this invitation.

Third: Inscriptions: These inscriptions will be studied regarding form and content:

1- Form: Nastaliq font was used in executing the inscriptions on the piece of silk (the main subject of the study), may be due that type of font being commonly used in the age of Muhammad Ali dynasty on applied arts, tombstones and buildings, give an explanation to the use of it for executing the inscriptions on this piece of silk.

Looking at the inscriptions on the piece of silk written in Nastaliq regarding the accuracy and neatness, we will notice that the letters lack the beauty of drawing, accuracy and balance of letters, the calligraphy also considered less accurate and aesthetic than many other models of Nastaliq writing on buildings, tombstones and applied arts in the contemporary period, may be it was due to what is related to the level of skill of the artist, or the method of writing on silk by brush, which needs great accuracy, helped for this to happen, and perhaps for these two reasons together; yet the artist could coordinate the poetic verses and documentary writings, in a beautiful form.

2- Content: Generally, the Inscriptions on the piece of silk are divided regarding its content into two types, the first one is poetic writings and the second is documentary writings.

- Poetic Writings: this section includes poetic writing consists of 11 verses of poetic sentences, they start by mentioning the overwhelming happiness that the owner of the invitation feels about

having the khedive and that his attendance to the place or any other place can transform it into paradise or green oasis, and their joy will only be completed with the presence of the khedive, and whoever be under his care will enjoy a high level of greatness and honor, and Egypt during his ruling time has achieved a great status that no other country has been to, even Rome emperors as the success that Egypt has realized on the hand of the khedive is really great, that its name has reached the sky and above the stars. He also kept on praying for the khedive for his almighty would last, and his age to be like the sun and the moon in lighting up the universe. He also talked about the days as they are living under the khedive ruling, describing them as the best days of their lives, as they are days of glory, giving, elevation, notability and generosity, that every human wishes for and be proud of. He also mentions that one of the best things about these days that he lives during the khedive ruling, is that his daughter is getting married which is good luck and great fortune. He kept begging the khedive to accept the invitation and honor them with his visit that will turn the wedding into huge pride that he will brag about in front of people. He ended the verses by saying that he isn't worthy of writing this invitation and he is satisfied by just being one of the citizens of the khedive and he is honored by being ruled by him.

The 6th verse included the title "the khedive" which means khedive Ismail, also this verse included his nickname "Abo Al-Fida", and the study highlighted these title and nickname for their archeological, cultural and historical significances.

From the literary point of view, those poetic verses on this piece of silk belong in their characteristics to the Arabic poetry in the 19th century, specifically the second half of it.

- Documentary Writings: The content of this section is: "on Thursday the 18th of June in 1874, the ceremony will be on the afternoon - written at the 11th day of it in Alexandria - Matteo Isma'loul". This section explains significant information related to what was mentioned in the poetic writings in particularly the last 2 verses (the tenth and the eleventh) which include the invitation for the khedive Ismail to attend the wedding of someone's daughter, that section shows the details of this occasion, that the invitation was for, regarding its date, place, and the person who invited him; the date of the wedding that the khedive was invited to was on Thursday, the 18th of June in 1874 AD, 1291 AH, in the afternoon, in Alexandria, and the inviter is Matteo Isma'loul. This section also mentioned that issuing this invitation was at the 11th of June of the same year, in Alexandria.

In this section, there are three important topics, which are:

- Using the Gregorian Calendar for Dating: Gregorian calendar is related to the birth of the Christ, and the khedive Ismail was the first to order its use to be generalized in the official divans on the first of September in 1875.

- Using the Arabic Numbers for Dating: What was common and usual, in Muhammad Ali dynasty, in recording history in inscriptions, whether Hegira or Gregorian calendar, is using Arabic numbers.

- Type of the History Data: The invitation was dated by the day and its date, month and year in addition to the accurate timing of the day "afternoon" which is considered an important thing for the purpose of the invitation, which required clear and accurate data, each data has its own significance, which seemed to be a tradition in invitations especially for social occasions, such as wedding, as all data related to the occasion is clarified.

Matteo Isma'loul: He is the man who invited the khedive Ismail to attend his daughter's wedding through the invitation on this piece of silk. By looking for that name during the two periods earlier and contemporary to the date of the invitation; 11th of June in 1874 AD, Matteo Isma'loul was mentioned at many historical events directly and indirectly in the historical sources. There is some information about his commercial activities, his influence on the Egyptian economy, and financial deals with the khedive Ismail, which were highlighted.

Through explanation, analysis and comparison of those historical signs, it was found that Matteo Isma'loul was one of the rich traders, who had deep impact on the Egyptian economy in the Khedive Ismail era, he belonged to the Jewish community in Alexandria, particularly, the Israeli community, and there were strong political, economic and social relationships between him and the khedive Ismail, which matches the inscriptions on the piece of silk (the subject of the study).

The Most Important Results:

- The study has proven that there is a type of textile products, used in the invitations to attend social events, such as: wedding ceremonies, which the textile piece (the subject of the study) was used for.
- Making the piece (the subject of the study), which was used for the Invitation to a Wedding Ceremony, of silk, with the value and elegance, that matches its job; for the rank of the person that the invitation was sent to, the social status of who sent it and the type of the occasion.
- The study has proved that this piece of silk was used in inviting the Khedive Ismail to attend the wedding ceremony of a daughter of someone, was called "Matteo Isma'loul", one of the biggest Jewish merchants in Alexandria, which had a close relationship to the khedive Ismail; politically, economic and socially.
- The study confirms through the invitation on this piece of silk, the historical fact that mentions the influence of the Jewish and their major role in the political, economic and social life in Egypt particularly, Alexandria in the khedive Ismail era.
- The study has proven through the invitation on this piece of silk, the accuracy of the historical information that mentions the relation based on forgiveness and benefit between the khedive Ismail and the Jewish in Egypt generally and in Alexandria particularly.

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