

Fatimid Wood and Ivory Carving

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ABSTRACT

The *Fatimid*, who had often considered themselves to be completely descendants of the Prophet, became prominent, and they made a claim to the prophet's succession. Within this, by leading this political and religious sense of mission, they tried to predominate over the whole Islamic world, despite the political tensions between Berber tribes in North Africa, the caliphs of *Bagdad*, *Byzantium*, and the later crusaders too.

But the most remarkable achievement of this period is probably the art of engraving on wood and ivory. Ivory carvings from Fatimid Egypt often display the lively figural scenes, including animals such as hares, birds, or deer, or more complicated compositions such as hunting or courtly scenes. Many of these Fatimid carved wood panels are in public collections, such as the Islamic art museum in Cairo, Islamic art museum in Berlin, national art museum of Florence, Louvre museum in Paris, Metropolitan museum of art in New York and David's collection in Denmark. This paper will focus on the carved wooden panels and ivory carvings of the Fatimid era that make it possible to classify these panels for various applications. Moreover, their patterns can be classified in inscription, herbal, human, and animal designs, and in some instances, a combination of the mentioned patterns. It should be noted that Ivory carvings are technically similar to wooden engravings. The aims of this study are introducing of wood and ivory carving of the Fatimid period, and searching for designs that used these traces of the carved wooden panels and ivory carvings of this period.

In each of these specific patterns, various meanings are searching for that give information about the religious concepts of the inscriptions, the metaphoric images to abstract herbal designs extracted from nature, and human life depicting the social lives of people.

Keywords

The Fatimid; Ivory Cravings; Wood Cravings; Motifs; Etymology and Meaningfulness

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Introduction

The Eastern part of the Islamic World is including a large area, from Egypt (east) to the Atlantic Ocean (west), from the Mediterranean Sea (north) to the Sahara Desert (south) (Naseri Taheri, 2003). There was therefore an appropriate continuous support for the *Shi'ah Abid-Allah*, known as Al-Mahdi (the Rightly Guided), who, claiming descent from the Prophet's daughter Fatimah, set up an Islamic caliphate across North Africa in 296/909 (before Abd-al-Rahman in Spain). The establishment of the Fatimid reign was one of the most successful achievements of the *Shi'ah Ismail's* of the time (Bosworth, 1996).

The ideology of Shi'i Ismaili Muslims, which, was the main source of opportunities for the Fatimid was initially a philosophical and ideological movement, not a religion for the masses who follow the spirituality within an organized religion; this may be the reason for the

efficiency and the longevity of the survival of the Fatimid, mainly for its tolerance regarding religious issues and their view towards minor religions. Christians and Jews were relatively safe except during the reign of the sixth caliph, "*Al Hakem*" however, he showed more tolerance towards the minor religions at the end of his reign (Luis and Hamdani, 1940).

The Fatimid era is often very valuable from an art-historical point of view, due both in terms of geography and chronology, for the art of this dynasty forms a bridge between time and space, east and west in the Muslim world. They made a connection between the pervasive influence of the first *Umayyad* and the *Abbasid* art and the rather different art of the eastern Islamic world, which developed in the wake of the Seljuq invasions of the fifth/eleventh century. It was *Fatimid's* who dominated the southern Mediterranean world, with its millennial heritage of Hellenism and whose contact with the Christian powers to the

north brought fresh ideas into Islamic art (Hillenbrand, 1999).

This topic paper describes some main designs of carvings and wood works and ivory of the Fatimid period that have new and elegant designs. Using inscriptions animal designs, including, birds, deer, rabbits and ..., human, rulers and servant's designs, hunter that hunting, players, dancers and so on.

Historical Background of the *Fatimid* Dynasty

In the ninth and tenth centuries, North Africa and Egypt were largely ruled by three dynasties descended from governors installed by the Abbasids, who had obtained real independence: The Aghlabid's, the *Tulunid's* and the *Ikhshidid's*. *Aghlabid Ifriqiya* fell to the Fatimid in 296/909 (Brand, 1991).

This dynasty lived for 270 years (297-567/909-1171). It was grounded in the complex ideological and social movement by the name of Ismailia, which was a part of the overall *Shi'ah* movement (Luis and Hamdani, 1940).

Abid Allah became the first Caliph to put an end to the *Aghlabiyan* sovereignty in Tunisia in 296/909 AD. He then further enhanced his power in Maghreb and chose Mahdieh, near Tunisia, as his centre of control in 308/ 920 AD. Fatimid endeavoured to invade Egypt during the reign of the fourth Caliph, *Al Maghz-al Din Allah* to strengthen their government in Maghreb (Zaki, 2004).

The *Fatimid* Caliphate, not only spanned a large area of North African and Sicilian, Egyptian, and Arabian; but it is also Mediterranean and Pan-Islamic (Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987).

The caliphs of the Fatimid dynasty believed that the defeat of the Abbasids was the eventual outcome of their aim in conquering Egypt. So, the *Fatimids* set their sights on the ultimate goal, movement eastwards, and in 358/969, when the *Fatimids* conquered Egypt and created a new city as a royal enclosure for the Caliph, established a new city just north of *Fustat* on August 8, 969, naming it *Al Qahira* (Cairo). For two hundred years, this was the seat of a dynasty line, which, combined with its religious intensity, emphasizes the art-patronage (Shayestehfar, 2007).

The Fatimid Carved Ivory to Carved Wood

In the eastern Mediterranean, Although the *Fatimids* and the Byzantine Empire were relatively friendly, they were rivals for the throne of Egypt. Though they were able to take the control of Syria in the late tenth century; they were not incorporated in the position to displace the Abbasids. Furthermore, they suffered losses in the west, where Sicily was captured by the Normans in 484/1091. To the people, it had been proven that even the *Fatimids* were by no means invincible if strongly attacked, which led to a falling away from popular support for them, and they were therefore defeated by *Salah-al-Din* (Saladin) in 567/1171 (Brand, 1991).

The Fatimid dynasty is of the high and singular importance as the era in which Egypt had reached its outstanding position in the Muslim world, not only as the focal point of vast trading activities, extending as far as Spain in the west and India in the east (and outside the Islamic regions as well), but also as was a great manufacturing centre for artistic products. The arts and crafts were so highly specialized that it was not possible to establish no fewer than 210 different categories of artisans (Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987).

In the Egyptian workshops, some unique pieces of Islamic art and craft such as metalwork, pottery, fabric weaving, and glass vessel can be recognized. The architectural heritage of the Fatimid era can be still traced in North Africa and Egypt (Bosworth, 1996).

The location of the Fatimid workshops was of enormous importance in applied art production: Constantinople was undoubtedly the main centre of production in the sixth century, and again during the Macedonian dynasty, in late Antiquity, there were other centres in Alexandria – due to its location on the ivory route – Syria, Sicily, and Italy (Diodato, 2012).

One of the characteristic features of this period was making great use of carved ornament, both in in the architecture and the decoration of objects. In Egypt, this burgeoning of the art can be traced in the epigraphy inscriptions in the buildings, as well as the tombstones, which have survived in considerable numbers. The letters first develop serifs and then flourish, which are described as foliation, or very exuberant (Brand, 1991).

Small scale production of the traditional arts and crafts were no less important than the

developments in architecture: excellent carvings in ivory and wood and fine metal-works were also produced (Talbot Rice, 1975).

During the *Fatimid* period, engraved wood played an important role in the furnishing and decorating of the churches and structures. Wood was used in ceilings, doors, altars, benches, and historical inscriptions. It was also applied in the inner surface of the dome to add stability and also functioned as a connector between columns and pillars (Zaki, 2004).

In Cairo workshops, expensive materials such as rock crystal and ivory were used. Ivory and bone are generally two materials that have been used since antiquity to produce both every day and artistic objects. They are similar in their organic nature and spongy consistency, which means that similar techniques must be used, and sometimes to be done concomitantly. The main difference between them is the indisputable superiority of ivory which was widely and constantly available and stronger and more significantly expensive than bone, and it obtained from hunted animals after they were killed for their meat and skin.¹

Wood was used as a material to create excellent skill and inventiveness. Ornamental carved panels and shutters belonging to the *Tūlūnid* period refer to the *Beveled* style of *Samarra*, but they try to include birds among its abstract motifs. The delicately carved teak timber and a *Maqsūrah* of *Al Qirawan* pay homage to the decoration of the *Mihrab* (Brand, 1991). Among the other arts, the most important distinctive was probably that of ivory carving (Talbot Rice, 1975).

Also, ivory was a favored material. "Some boxes are rectangular and others spherical. They are often inscribed in foliated Kufic, and covered with a luscious but controlled scrolling in which the vine-leaf seems to be on the point of becoming

¹- Contrary to the ubiquity of bone, ivory came to the Mediterranean rejoin from Africa, in particular from Ethiopia by way of Egypt, as well as from India. There is no way knowing the exact origin of the material with the exception of the large plaques such as the diameter of Asian elephant tusks never exceeded centimeters. The lower panel of the Barberini Ivory, where- among the conquered peoples paying tribute -a man beside an elephant advances holding a tusk, bears witness to the supplying of the empire with Asian ivory. The carving of ivory did not require sophisticated infrastructure and the small size of the plaques meant that the execution of the decoration was an individual task. Nothing is known about the ivory carvers' precise working conditions (Prohaska, 2004).

acanthus. The decorative work is sometimes inhabited by confronted birds or animals, or it may yield to lobed cartouches which contain enthroned monarchs, minstrels and riders. The plump-faced figured tend to have dour expressions and to be bare-headed, which may indicate a western or Byzantine connection. In Egypt, ivory was used for plaques which were probably intended for furniture. These are carved with vibrantly lively figured which reflect in a small scale those of the palace beams. Ivory was also used as an inlay for wood. Different in character, but again from Egypt, are a number of small figures made in bone; they resemble 'clothes-peg' dolls marked with tattoos, and may have been playthings or have had more arcane purposes" (Brand, 1991).

Analysing Patterns of Wooden and Ivory Items

In this section, according to the geographical situation of the dominated region of the *Fatimid's* in Egypt, North Africa and Sicily under the reign of the *Fatimid's* for a short period of time, approximately the number of 23 pieces of wooden and ivory are selected and analyzed from museums worldwide, including the museum of Islamic Art at The Pergamonmuseum houses in Berlin, Museum of Islamic Art Cairo, Metropolitan museum of art in New York, Louvre museum in Paris, National museums of Scotland (Royal Museum) in Edinburgh, Municipal museum in *Auch* (in France), National museum Florence and David's Collection.

Among them are pieces of entrance doorways of mosques, wooden panels, *Mihrabs*, wooden pen-holders and ivory items such as boxes, frames and ivory trumpets. The items are categorized according to the patterns and ornamentation applied in five groups: inscription, herbal, figural, animal forms or combinations of these decorations.

First Category: Inscription Patterns

As it was previously mentioned, in order to create *Mihrabs* and wooden podiums in accordance with styles of artistes in Samara, the artists began to use the application of wood. Their work was overloaded with embellishment, which has displayed in David's Collection in Denmark (Fig. 1). In this figure, the little wooden *Mihrab* has a

Kufic inscription in relief on the rim that includes blessings on the Prophet, his daughter *Fatima*, and 12 *Shi'ah Imams*.² The text in the central panel refers only to the last of the 12 *Imams*, *al Mahdi*, who is said to have been hidden by *Allah*, but upon whose return the world will be saved.³ Other items have been discovered among *Fatimid* wooden works that are embellished with the *Kufic* script.⁴



Figure 1. *Mihrab* with ornated *Kufic* script, a prayer in respect to the Prophet and the twelve *Imams*, Metropolitan museum of art, New York.

²-These are the opinions of the managers at the David's collection. The inscriptions of this work is to some extent unreadable and only the word "*Mustafa*" in the upper part of the exterior inscription and the name "*Allah*" in the central part is distinguishable. Hence, asserting to the assumption that this work is a praise of the twelve *Imams* is weak since the *Fatimid's* were Seventh *Imami* followers. however, more information is received regarding the exact place of excavation and the method of producing the work, more exact claims can be made.

³- The David Collection is housed in the building once occupied by the museum's founder, Christian Ludvig David, and in a neighboring property that was acquired later. Both date to the beginning of the 19th century. They underwent comprehensive renovation between 2005 and 2009 and today provide the setting for a fully modern museum that respects its historical heritage. In 1945, C. L. David – a prominent lawyer – decided to preserve his collections for posterity in the form of a museum open to the public, owned and administered by the C. L. David Foundation and Collection. Since David's death in 1960, the museum's holdings have, however, increased significantly (The David Collection, 2011).

⁴ -The simple *Kufic* script was a reflection of the social environment and the harsh culture in which it developed. From the early eighth/ second century, ornated *Kufic* became an essential element in Islamic art particularly in decorating the margins of the *Quran* and the inscriptions in the coin. The delicacy and beauty of ornated *Kufic* in its primary usages can be seen in the inscriptions of *Qeervan* and other places. They are in contrast with the rich inscriptions of the *Fatimid*, *Seljuh* and *Qaznavi* dynasties. During the reign of the *Abbasids*, the Muslim artists of *Egypt* and *Syria* used many elements of ornated *Kufic* on metal, glass and fabrics (Yasin, 2003).

In the same instances of this item, Fragment (from a wooden frieze) in *Kufic* script, late 3rd–5th / 9th–11th centuries, *Tulunid* or *Fatimid*, preserved in the National Museums of Scotland (Royal Museum)⁵. However, the little that is being survived of *Fatimid* wood carving is characterized by its intricate high relief technique and the vibrancy of its epigraphic or figurative decoration. Occasionally the final panels, which were meant to grace contemporary interiors, were painted, varnished and treated to be fire retardant (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. A wooden panel with *Kufic* script, 9th-11th century; Scotland National museum.

Another wooden panel embellished with the *Kufic* script is preserved at Louver museum that dates back to tenth/forth century. The famous verse of the holy *Quran*, *Ayat-al- Korsi* or other verses are engraved on this item (Fig. 3).

⁵- The Royal Museum is the old name for part of the National Museum of Scotland. This Museum began in the 19th century and was added to in the 1990s when a new building known as The Museum of Scotland was added on. Both names became defunct in 2007 when they were merged into The National Museum of Scotland. As with many museums and art galleries in the United Kingdom, admission, other than for special temporary exhibitions, is free (The Royal Museum, 2010).



Figure 3. A wooden panel with Kufic script, 10th century; Louvre museum, Paris.

The difference between these two pieces, which are probably part of a larger unknown inscription are among the types of ornamentation applied. In the second piece, the surface of the inscription has suffered from erosion and has caused floppiness among the embossed words. However, in the third piece, the covering surface is very smooth and flat with ornaments such as simple multi-petal flowers within *Kufic* inscriptions, which is a basic indicator of the start of the usage of ornamented *Kufic* in Islamic art.

There are no engraved examples of ivory in which the verses of the *Quran* have been carved. The most common ornamented patterns among them include herbal designs, human figures, and animal pictures; also, scenes of court life and hunting are seen.

Second Category: Herbal Patterns

Among the applied decorations on wooden items, arabesque herbal patterns and spiral leaves are widely used.⁶ Examples of such ornamentation date back to the twelfth/sixth era that are preserved in the Islamic art museum in Berlin (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. A wooden panel with arabesque designs, 12th /6th century; Islamic art museum of Berlin

⁶- The arabesque is a form of artistic decoration consisting of surface decorations based on rhythmic linear patterns of scrolling and interweaving leaves, vines or plain lines, often combined with other elements. The leaves, foliage and stems are easily abstracted and are combined and intertwined in a complex manner (Pakbaz, 2000).

Islamic art is excellent in the ornamental designs, often called arabesques. This is a superb example of a composition of *Fatimid* Egypt. It shows a geometrical star pattern surrounding stylized palmate leaves in the center enclosed by symmetrical undulating vine scrolls ending in grapes or vine leaves.

In this panel, central arabesque patterns are beautifully fixed within the ten-sided⁷ star. Another example of this wooden panel is seen at the Islamic art museum in Cairo. This panel is different regarding the previous example, since the motion arabesque patterns occupy one quarter and is repeated throughout the panel (Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1987).

Herbal patterns can be applied either the same to the inscription ornamentations or in combination with other patterns. Towards the end of the *Fatimid* era, a new technique in regards to decoration became fashionable. Star shaped figures each with six sides combined with herbal elements became popular (Aalam, 2004).

In *Fatimid* decorations, delicate ornamented bands are applied along with multi-sided patterns that are a combination of herbal designs. This decoration consists of two separate elements and allows us to follow the specific development of each element after centuries. The first element is a spiral band that beholds all the connections and associates and can cover all the surfaces independently. The other elements of decoration are flat and wide shapes that fill in the vacant spaces and add beauty to the unoccupied networks. Features that are combined to make these natural patterns are foliage in general, palm trees, and flowers with intertwined roots (Albohseni, 2009).

A *Mihrab* that is located in a tomb of *Banoo Nafiseh* in the Islamic art museum in Cairo, the borders are ornamented with the mentioned ornamentations. In this *Mihrab* the oldest varieties of wood are applied and this has created an innovative component of decoration. A rectangular border is portrayed around and behind this *Mihrab* that is embellished with patterns of

⁷- The ten sided star is a symbolic geometrical design in Islamic art. The number 10 is respected among Sufism and shows the ten stages of reaching theosophy (Bakhtiar, 1960). In this regard, *Khaje Abd-allah Ansari* found a verse from the Holy Quran for each of the ten stages that verifies this claim (*Ansari- al- Haravi*, 1960).

leaves and bunches of grapes ⁸ that have erected from a vase. The depth of this engraving varies throughout the surface of the work (Aalam, 2004).

Third Category: Figural Patterns

Gradually the Fatimid wood art developed by increasing the usage of figural and animal motifs and patterns on wooden panels that depicted images such as palace life and parts of the social life of ordinary people.⁹ Among the best examples are five wooden panels which were initially used to embellish a palace. Their main themes concentrated around royal ceremonies with dancing and music and also on hunting scenes and the daily life of the people. This should be mentioned that before the *Fatimid's* arrived in Egypt, they had applied figural and human subjects in their art and without doubt this was taken from *Sassanid* art which had influenced the *Abbasid* era in both *Persia* and *Iraq*.¹⁰

Two instances of this wooden panel (eleventh/fifth century) can be seen in the Islamic art museum in Cairo. They illustrate scenes of ceremonies and joyous events (Fig. 5-6).



Figure 5. A wooden panel depicting the daily life and customs of people, 11th/5th century, Islamic art museum of Cairo.



Figure 6. A wooden panel decorated with human figures, 11th-12th century; Islamic art museum of Cairo.

Scenes of joy, music, hunt, travel and war are seen that also have images of amazing birds. The main themes of these decorations are the lives of the rulers that were mostly passed in mirth and pleasure. Other scenes indicate of a hunt and kings holding goblets are common and close to the *Sassanid* era (Zaki, 2004).

In Another panel from Cairo museum, The animals and human figures are organized in elongated lozenges of varying lengths alternating with forms in which four carved lobes are separated by four pointed ones,¹¹ all carved against a background of formalized vine scrolls in lower relief. The rich repertory of subjects includes many that are also found on luster painted ceramics.¹² In keeping with the new taste for scenes from everybody life,¹³ a woman peers

⁸-Grapes or vines are famous fruits and in many historical records vines are often mentioned with the plane tree. The twisted and spiral vines are a symbol of duration and governing with the power of blood (Yahaghi, 2008).

⁹-New movements occurred during the end of the eleventh/fifth century regarding Fatimid ornamentation designs. Among them was a strong incline towards reflecting the human body in their work and this was an imitation of the Mediterranean heritage of Egypt which was seen here in large quantities than other Islamic countries (Ettinghausen and Graber, 1987).

¹⁰- In the midst of the eleventh-tenth/ fifth-fourth centuries, a large part of Iran and to some extent Iraq-the *Abbasid* regime-was under the power of the *Shi'ah Buyid* dynasty. Their art was under the influence of ancient Persia especially the *Sassanid* dynasty. Because of the closeness that was felt between *Shi'ah* Iranians and Egyptians, a close tie was created between the *Buyids* and the *Fatimids*. Many Persian artistic designs were incorporated to Egypt and Syria and the three nations enjoyed artistic interchange (Wilson, 2002).

¹¹- The numbers and shapes hidden within geometrical designs enclose meanings and codes which are used to reach higher degrees of theosophy . According to this, four-sided shapes display two theological conditions of behavior, in other words presence and absence. In this case the followers of "Heraf" believe that vertical lines symbolize the blessings of God and the horizontal lines symbolize the justice of God and equality among the creatures (Bakhtiar, 1960).

¹²-In the human sphere, the earlier rudimentary musicians with staring eyes may take on a more decorous life as Coptic priests- an indication of one particular area of patronage. Other treatments of the human figure on some of the loveliest Fatimid dishes are thought to be datable to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By contrast, the other mode uses a ground of luster, often with scrolls upon it, and maintains most of its figures in reserve (Brand, 1991).

¹³- This collection of topics is related to images of everyday life, drinking, music, dance, hunt, travel, amusement and festivity. The rulers are occupied in such scenes and these images can easily reflect the court life of western rulers that have entered Islamic palaces. There is no doubt that many of these shapes and images have roots in Persian and Iraqi paintings. The animal images in particular are related to

out through the open curtains of a palanquin on the back of a camel, which is escorted by a man in another compartment a drinking party is in progress (Ettinghausen and Graber, 1987; Connel, 1990). From these works we can relate to the truth behind the social and everyday lives of people in the *Fatimid* dynasty.

This style was used to illustrate social life on the surface of ivory item; examples of this kind can be found in Louvre, Berlin and Florence museums. Because of their highly developed style, the Berlin ivories and comparable pieces in the Louvre have been dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.

Even more advanced is the carving on a series of six similar plaques in the Museo Nazionale, Florence. In one of the items of Florence museum, (Fig 7) A laborer carries a pannier full of grapes of his back; above him a hunter spears a lion.¹⁴ Again the bodies are delicately rounded, and there is a subtle interplay between the two levels of relief.



Figure 7. Ivory panel with human figures, 11th-12th century, National museum of Florence.

A second plaque from this group repeats one of the most familiar themes in the decorative arts of later *Fatimid* times: the scarf dancer, skipping, her draperies swirling about her twisted body, her arms gesturing sinuously (Ettinghausen and Graber, 1987).

Asian kinds especially the wild animals that have hunted other creatures (Albohseni, 2009).

¹⁴- Many illustrations have remained from the *Fatimid* era in regard to hunting. This is not surprising since the theme of hunting was quite popular among the midst of these ages; therefore, scenes of hunting occur in large amounts in Islamic art (Zaki, 2004).

Dancing is not new in Islamic Art. Pharaohs, Greeks, and Persians were familiar with these scenes long before Muslims illustrated them in the palaces of *Omara* and *Samera*. Dancing was not only for females and males also participated especially in the forms of sword dancing (Zaki, 2004).



Figure 8. Ivory panel with human figures, 11th-12th century, National museum of Florence.

In figure 8, there is dancing lady statue. Design on clothing is applied very delicate and prolific and dancer wearing a scarf on her head maybe the point of dancers of completely covered clothing and scarf, are showing devote beliefs of *Fatimid*. There is a shawl in the hands of the dancer. The statue is in good congruence and kept her scarf, with illustrated tapes or scarf fitting. Illustrations have a simple and good background and just have filled with capillary designs similar with designs or dancer's clothing. Deflexion and rounding of statue on ivory with different depths, are carved very professional for showing position of black pencil. Ivory is more tenacious and desirable than wood. And also, existing of this primer material in Africa continent is reason that used by *Fatimid's* artist from this material.

Fourth Category: Animal Patterns

Other instances of *Fatimid* wooden work in Egypt. The highly esteemed sport of hunting is often depicted in Islamic art. The theme of a hound chasing a hare has also been found in tenth-century art from *Samarra*, Iraq, and it was still being used in Egypt in the *Fatimid* period (969-

1167). The technique, in the Coptic tradition, separates the volumes from the background.

An *Ikshidid* Or early *Fatimid* carved wooden panel, Egypt, 10th century, that rectangular form, the face deeply carved with scrolling designs which combine to give the impression of a bird, in plain border,¹⁵ cut down at one end, later keyhole inserted. A well-known wooden panel in the Louvre, Paris, appears to depict a bird with wonderful flowing lines (Bernus and Jail, 2001). Attributed to 9th /3rd or early 10th /4th century Egypt, a close examination shows that any attempt to rationalize the complete bird from the design is a total failure. The head is very clear, but the remainder dissolves into abstract scrollwork. The present carved panel shares this element of *Trompe-d'oeuil*. The viewer thinks they see a bird's wing, and the tail appears to be clear, but in fact the two are unconnected, just nestling in to each other (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. A wooden panel with bird patterns. 10th century.

In this wooden frame a bird figure with spiral patterns similar to herbal arabesque is carried out. The creativity of the artist is visible in this item.

In a similar example of ivory engravings, an ivory panel with a running deer, *Fatimid* Egypt, 6th /12th Century, of roughly rectangular shape with pointed end, the running deer with short on a ground of finely carved foliate scrolls, the tendrils issuing a variety of fleshy palmettos', hair cracks drilled, minor area of restoration (Fig. 10).

¹⁵- Among the famous themes depicted on wood is the scenery of small birds such as hawks and geese (Zaki, 2004: 232).



Figure 10. Ivory panel with an image of a running gazelle; 12th /6th century.

Fifth Category: Combined Patterns

In most artistic fields, the artists use more than one design to illuminate his work. By combining the designs, he achieves a splendid outcome. The main reason for this amount of pattern is that the artists abhors any left out and empty spacing. This feature can be seen in *Fatimid* wood and ivory carvings.

The patterns used in *Fatimid* wood carvings and ivory reveal the use of combined herbal designs with other patterns. The spiral leaves and stems are mostly visible in the background of the work beautifully carved and shaped in a sense that takes the viewer to a natural setting.¹⁶

The patterns applied on the engravings can be classified into four types, herbal- inscriptional, human- herbal, herbal- animal and animal-human. However, it should be mentioned that some of the instances are fragments of larger pieces. That have been destroyed to other locations by archeologists or preserved in museums. Therefore, there many have been other patterns applied that we are not aware of.

Among other wooden items of the age are wooden door ways which were generally used in mosques. The most significant among them is the wooden door of the mosque of *Al-Azhar*, that now in the museum of Islamic Art, was presented by *al-Hakim*, the sixth *Fatimid* Caliph, in 388/1010, and shows something of the same rather rounded manner as the stuccos (Talbot Rice, 1975).

¹⁶- One of the most beautiful symbols that resemble the delicacy of Quran in Islamic art is the gardens of paradise. In the Quran, paradise is described in four ways: self, soul, heart, and essence. These gardens are described in four levels in mystical ways in which the person will escape to an inner journey via these ways (Memarzade, 2008).

This feather is more pronounced on the panels of a wooden door dated 1010, also inscribed to al-Hakim and now in the museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, where the individual beveled patterns stand out clearly from a dark background. The major design elements are themselves decorated with small-scale surface patterns- another feature foreshadowed in the tenth century (Ettinghausen and Graber, 1987) (Fig. 11-12).



Figure 11. One pair of a wooden door ornamented with Kufic and herbal-geometrical patterns.

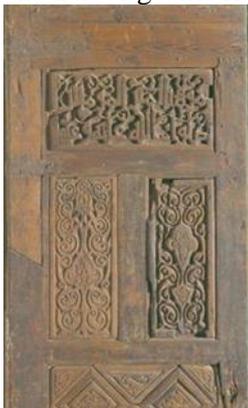


Figure 12. One pair of a wooden door ornamented with Kufic and herbal-geometrical patterns.

Decorations in this work are in five parts: geometrical patterns in lozenge located in the center, arabesque patterns besides geometrical designs and Kufic inscriptions above and below the door.¹⁷

Another example of the combination between spiral arabesque and human figures is seen in the

¹⁷-Inscriptions engraved on the doors

Left door border:

Right door border:

Our Mola, Amir-al Momenin (Leader of the pious)

The leader that will rule with justice

God's peace may be upon him

His sons are pure and innocent.

This engraving implies that when the Caliph was rebuilding the *Jami Al-zahr* in 400/1010 AD this door existed.

David's Collection (Fig 13). The wooden panels are decorated with tendrils, but also with a man seated with a glass and decanter, a seated flute-player, and a peacock.

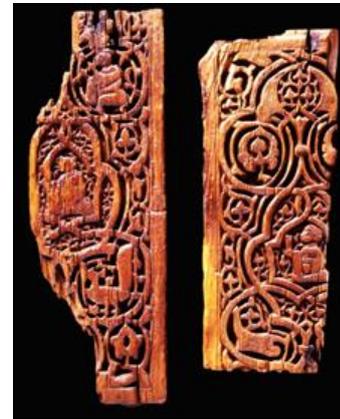


Figure 13. Wooden boards with herbal designs and human figures. 11th century; David's collection, Denmark.



Figure 14. A section of an ivory chest with herbal designs and human figures. 11th /5th century, National museum of Florence.

There had entertainment such, hunting, dancing, and joviality, courts, and servers a struggling designs of animals that have carved on wood works and ivory. We can see two sides' statues. The left statue got a small circle in hand and beating on it. The circle is a staving tool and similar to a tambourine, that was a favorite tool for Arabs. The right statue is drinking wine from cup and with the other hand; getting the vine urn in the slant position. Both of statues wear Arabs sashes and full designs clothing with numeral designs. The artist can show the nicety of faces. Background of designs and vine scrolling and grapefruit had nominated.

Fatimid artist did not tend to use the techniques for curving applied by *Abbasid* artists in *Samera* instead with attentive focus they applied herbal designs which an example of this is seen on a peripheral setting of a wooden door. In the decoration of this door, herbal designs along with

two heads of horses which palm fans¹⁸ come out of their mouths. All these decorations are seen as actual and deep carvings (Aalam, 2004) (Fig 15).



Figure 15. A wooden panel with a head of a horse, 11th 5th century; Islamic art museum of Cairo.

According to the historical symbolism of the palm tree in Egypt and its symbol of blessing among Muslims. We can realize the practice of this element in *Fatimid* art. In this panel, there is a pleasant combination between the spiral patterns and the carvings of the horse's head. This panel, probably form a wooden door, is deeply carved with two horse heads in relief. Attention to detail is evident in the beaded bands and bridles amid arabesques. The piece was carved to different depths to produce a pleasing chiaroscuro effect, a technique mastered by *Fatimid* wood workers. A companion piece, almost certainly from the same door, is in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.

Another example of the combination between spiral arabesque and human figures is seen in Louvre Museum. (Fig 16) Discovered during work on the site of the *Fatimid* Western Palace in Cairo in 1874,¹⁹ this half-panel (the right – hand

¹⁸- According to meaning “*Nakhl*” can be defined as the date tree or palm tree. Palm trees can symbol of various features for the masses; among them the following can be mentioned: life and reproduction, eternity, power and resistance (*Dehkhoda*, 1995). Also, palm trees and dates are an indicator of fertile land in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

¹⁹- Discovered in 1874 in the course of demolition work in the Maristan of Sultan *Qalau'un*, where it had been re-employed. The panel originally adorned a *Fatimid* building which had earlier occupied the same site. The western Palace constructed by the caliph *al-Aziz* (975-996) and continually embellished by later rulers of the same Shiite dynasty. The worsening shortage of wood in Egypt made this kind of recycling common. Many other examples of wood paneling from the eleventh and twelfth centuries were discovered in the course of work. All featured figurative

border is modern) is part of series of carved wooden panels re-used towards the end of the thirteenth century in the architectural complex of *Sultan Qalau'un*.²⁰



Figure 16. A wooden panel with combination of herbal patterns and animal figures; 10th /4th century, Louvre Museum, Paris.

The varied figurative motifs- musician, peasant, ibex- and the high standard of execution are an eloquent testimony to the qualities of *Fatimid* art. This fragmentary panel (the right – hand side and upper left quarter are missing) was this fragment is part of a door-panel similar to those in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art, whose central axis would have been occupied by a large, curvilinear cartouche set between two smaller ones outlined by bands of decoration carved with a wavy tendril pattern. On either side of the central axis, two pairs of circular medallions edged with a narrow beaded border featured human or animal figures. The figure playing the rabab was probably the pendant to another musician on the missing right-hand side, while the ibex facing right might have had a counterpart facing left. The themes of princely pleasures (in this case, music) and rustic life, represented by a peasant with a hoe on his shoulder leading an animal (no missing) on the end of a rope, are typical of the iconography of the period (*Zaki*, 2004).

decoration; the present fragment probably comes from a door similar to those in the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art.

²⁰- The *Qalawun* Complex is a massive complex that includes a madrasa, a hospital and a mausoleum built by the Sultan *Al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun*, a small man of ruthless courage whose reign marked a high point in *Mamluk* culture: some thirty surviving mosques were built during his time.

Among the ivory souvenirs that relate to the *Fatimid* era are ivory horns and rectangular boxes that are ornamented with birds, animals and human figures. These works have been attributed to southern Italy that was under the influence of Sicilian art (Aalam, 2004).

The island of Sicily was invaded by the Normans and the *Fatimid's* lost power in the region. However, *Fatimid* art was still practiced in the region (Connel, 1990).

The ivory items were liked by the west and several of the mentioned items are preserved in museums worldwide. Among the remaining ivory horns and ornamented chests, a collection of item that are related to *Fatimid* period is seen in museums worldwide that are decorated with patterns such as circles that bear animals within them and sconces of fishing, spiral leaves and herbal patterns.

In one of these items which endure a combination of herbal and animal designs, each furnished with birds, quadrupeds and fantastical animals inserted in the sinews of a leafy stalk; a small cross of Malta appears in a circle.

The pavilion, which becomes circular again, is underlined by two rings decorated with a vegetal festoon. It is surrounded by a large frieze made up of animals inserted in rings. In a briefer sequence, this band reappears at the mouthpiece as well as the two accompanying rings (Fig 17). This item is currently preserved at the Municipal Museum, in Auch, France.



Figure 17. Ivory horn with herbal and animal designs, 11th-12th /5th- 6th centuries; Auch Museum.

The pavilion, which becomes circular again, is underlined by two rings decorated with a vegetal festoon. It is surrounded by a large frieze made up of animals inserted in rings. In a briefer sequence, this band reappears at the mouthpiece as well as the two accompanying rings (Fig 17). This item is currently preserved at the Municipal Museum, in Auch, France.

Two similar examples one in Berlin museum and the other in the National Art Museum in Florence can be mentioned (Figs. 18- 19).



Figure 18. Ivory horn with herbal and animal designs, 11th-12th century; Islamic art museum of Cairo.



Figure 19. Ivory horn with herbal and animal designs, 11th-12th /5th-6th century; National museum of Florence.

The ivory borders depict scenes from joyous ceremonies of the rulers or hunting scenes. Inlaid with spiral leaves these scenes can be related to the scenes worked on *Fatimid* wooden panels. In the carving techniques of these works, human figures are latticed, it is also assumed that this item is a part of a boy or safe. Six panels are at Florence museum two are at Louver another two are at Berlin and the next are at Vienna museum (Aalam, 2004).

This picture in the Louver museum, (Fig. 20), is part of one knucklebone of ivory. In this picture, we show picture of one bird, a bear fighting in air. The outlining of bird designs is very beautiful. Mixing of bird and bear in circle knucklebone, making of circle of Slimy gripes plant. In another item from this museum a combination of human and animal patterns are seen that are fighting. A

figure is riding a horse and the other is beheading a beast. (Fig. 21).



Figure 20. Ivory horn with human and animal designs, 11th-12th / 5th-6th century; Louvre Museum, Paris.



Figure 21. Ivory horn with human and animal designs, 11th-12th / 5th-6th century; Louvre Museum, Paris.

decoration related to the 11th-12th/ 5th-6th centuries which is preserved at Berlin museum (Fig 22). Hunting bear by means of lion is delicious. Lion in historic art period is the main factor. Hunting scenes in circle mixing make in vine bobbins, infusing the struggling of animals in mind.



Figure 22. A section of an ivory frame with animal and human designs, 11th-12th / 5th-6th centuries; Islamic art museum of Cairo.

In picture, we can see scrolling of vine tree and grape fruit in background of work and the main design, is statue that sitting and shedding vine from cup to other dish, the statue has Arabic sash on his head and simple hood and without any design that has determined with lines of pleat of stuff, and but shirt, that used underwear, has capillary design. The face has the art of Fatimid.

This Panel, Egypt, 12 centuries, one of a group in the museum fur Islamische Kunst, Berlin, that apparently once faced a casket or other small object (Ettinghausen and Graber, 1987). Although the theme is obviously princely pleasures the figures show the same marked degree of realism apparent in pottery painting, and are portrayed with a humor and sympathy animal for formal court art (Tames, 1974).

The other party and happy of courtier, two statues are playing music, they are set in a background of vine scrolling. Suiting of these two statues, having numeral and Islamic designs and an Arabic sash. The lines of face, due to abrasion are not obvious, but rounding of face and wool crimp by ear and sturdy eye are obvious. Upper statues, getting reversion of musical tool in hand with completely skill and down statue are bopping in straw (blowing tool). In carvings art, on the ivory of Fatimid period, cannot see any symbolic and abstract factors, rather, this art combines with realistic life of that day.

The fact consists of mores and entertaining of courtier life and interests of them in hunting and majestic pleasure, dancing, music... There are not any sign of myth athletics and animates (Fig 23).



Figure 23. A section of an ivory frame with animal and human designs, 11th-12th centuries; Islamic art museum of Cairo.

The same attitudes that we can see in painting art of *Fatimid* period. This box, known as the "Morgan casket," is one of the most accomplished Islamic works of art in ivory with combination human- animal in the metropolitan museum. Even though it was probably produced in southern Italy, the animals enclosed in the interlacing vine are similar in style and iconography to contemporaneous *Fatimid* art from Egypt. Sicily was under Muslim rule for almost three centuries, which explains the Islamic influence on the works produced there in medieval times (Fig 24).



Figure 24. An ivory chest with animal and human designs, 11th-12th /5th-6th centuries; Islamic art museum of Cairo.

The surface of this box similar to the ivory horns is covered with circular designs with human and animal design. There is a thin border with spiral leaves. A similar example is seen in Berlin museum. The one at the metropolitan museum is ornamented with legs with human images. According to the examples available, it is apparent that combinations of human and animal patterns were more applied on ivory items.

In all we can conclude that according to the analyzed items, departing the palpable nature and accomplishing a world beyond it with symbolic geometrical, arabesque, foliage and intertwined features is reachable. The existence of mythical creatures and birds adds to the supernatural conditions of these works. Such ornamentations add light volume and a spiritual atmosphere to Islamic art (Madadpour, 2006).

Conclusion

Towards the end of the ninth/third century, a group of settlers who considered themselves followers of the *Ismailia* belief resided in parts of North Africa and later on in Egypt. They believed they are decedents of Islam and the holy family and entitled themselves *Fatimid's*. They succeeded to reign in parts of northern Africa, Egypt and parts of southern Italy especially Sicily. The *Fatimid's* accomplished many successes particularly in the realm of art and culture. Among their specific art works are wood engraving and ivory carvings. The techniques and methods applied were not only influenced from previous works of art but also had a strong impact on the art of neighboring nations such as Spain.

The most significant patterns and ornamentations used are human images, hunting scenes, joyous ceremonies with musicians, animal designs such as hares, gazelles, lions and also herbal patterns. Items related to the *Fatimid* era with wooden and ivory engravings are entrance doors used for mosques, panels and frames, *Mihrabs* and podiums, and boxes and chests that are either decorated with inscriptional, animal, human, or herbal patterns or combinations of these.

By analyzing the works, we can conclude that among the patterns, inscriptional ornamentation and Kufic script applied on wooden doors especially on *Mihrabs* and podiums is used more often, its context reflects verses from the *Qur'an* among them *Ayat-al Korsi* and praises in the favor of the Prophet of Islam. Likewise, herbal and spiral leaf designs are usually seen supplemented with other decorative motifs rather by being used unaccompanied. These patterns stem from natural vegetation which are abstracted and simplified in Islamic art and theological matters can be visualized among them. Among the herbal designs, the vine tree is a symbol of royal duration and palm trees are symbols of eternity and

infinity. The items that are decorated with human figures clearly depict the everyday life of the people and their customs by exemplifying their ceremonies and blissful events. Hunting scenes and other rituals of everyday life can be depicted.

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