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All the goods of the earth: making and marketing in the pre-Mongol marketplace

Introduction

Goods of the Earth: making and marketing in the pre-Mongol marketplace scrutinises the genre of *ḥisba*-manuals. These are Islamic legal sources that contain the rules compiled by the *muḥtasib* or market inspector. The most recent and extensive work on *ḥisba*-manuals presented the information in an accessible way but the author has decided not to engage with relevant artefacts when considering the impact of the manuals on the visual arts and crafts in medieval Islam knowledge (Ghabin 2009).

By investigating the *Kitāb fi ādāb al-ḥisba* (dated to approximately 1100 CE) of al-Saqāṭī, who was the market inspector of Málaga, this project will demonstrate that his warnings contain detailed information about the quality of craft objects as well as their production. It will also show that this genre of legal texts reflects the marketplace, its products, and its artisan-craftsmen (Colin and Lévi-Provençal 1931). The project will explore three aspects of the *ḥisba*-manuals which are of particular interest.

The transfer of weaving technology

The first aim is to discuss how weaving knowledge of lampas, a complex binding technique, was transferred between Baghdad and Spain during the 11th century CE. The lampas technique developed at the end of the 11th century in Iraq, probably in Baghdad, the Abbasid capital at the time (Von Wilckens 1991, 66–68; Schorta 2001, 50). This technique dominated the global production of luxurious silks (closely followed by techniques for weaving velvets) until the middle of the 19th century. The project will scrutinise if and how this weaving knowledge was communicated through patterns and their notation. No material

illustrating notation systems for woven patterns containing technical information has yet come to light. These were the mechanisms through which the person who set up the loom would have understood how to do so on the drawloom. Translating a pattern from a two-dimensional surface such as paper to a notation system representing the three-dimensional structure of a drawloom requires mathematical knowledge. This poses questions about the intellectual and social status of the weaver as well as other textile makers within premodern Islamic society.

The intellectual and social role of the weaver

Intriguingly, not only in the *ḥisba*-manuals but also in other legal and theological writings, the profession of the weaver is charged with values (negative as well as positive). It is not clear why stigma was attached to weavers. It adds to the complexity of the topic that some of the early legal theorists were involved in the production of textiles or in related trades. Approximately 22% of religious Muslim scholars of the classical period of Islam were employed in the textile industry (Cohen 1970, 26–28). Furthermore, weaving a lampas woven silk with its complex drawloom and notation system also requires mathematical knowledge. The project's aim is to achieve a more differentiated perception of the weaver and his work as well as the organisation and division of labour within textile production.

Objects making objects

The *ḥisba*-manuals provide evidence of artefacts other than textiles and their making processes in the pre-Mongol marketplace. Objects for everyday life have not attracted much scholarly attention within the field



Fig. 1: Thimble, cast and engraved bronze; height 4.4 cm; diameter (at widest point) 2.4 cm, from Spain, Andalusia; tenth to 11th century CE, David Collection, Copenhagen, inventory number 40/2000 (Image: Pernille Klemp)

of art history. Bread seals, for example, are mentioned in the *ḥisba* of al-Saqaṭī. These fascinating objects have a wide range of patterns and suggest the variety of products that were produced for the medieval marketplace which will be investigated by *Goods of the earth*. Another group of objects of interest are textile tools. These are often single items such as a bronze thimble produced in Spain during the tenth or 11th century, which is preserved at the David Collection in Copenhagen, Denmark (fig. 1). On the lower part of the thimble an Arabic inscription in Kufic script is engraved: “Lasting ... and complete blessings to his owner”. The owner of this thimble was probably a saddle maker or a cobbler working in one of the marketplaces of medieval Spain. It is a good example

of an object which played a role in making other objects.

Exploring the pre-Mongol marketplaces through the *ḥisba* of al-Saqaṭī as well as the writings of other *muḥtasibs*, their products, and artisan-craftsmen will gather new information concerning the transfer of craft knowledge within the premodern Islamic world and will enable a new discussion of art and craft in the field of art history, Islamic art history, the history of science, and the history of textile arts. This project will also demonstrate the importance of the applied arts for the field of art history.

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