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From the Prophet to the Mongols

*Edited by*

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## Patronage and the Idea of an Urban Bourgeoisie

Anna Contadini

Given the complex and highly charged political and cultural meanings associated with it, especially in Marxist thought, the term “bourgeoisie” needs to be used with a degree of caution. Nevertheless, the concept of an emergent bourgeoisie in the Middle East, with wealth acquired through mercantile activity, is one that has been repeatedly invoked since the nineteenth century. It was mentioned by von Kremer (1875–1877: vol. 2, 273, 288–293), followed by Mez (1922: 442; 1937: 470), who, possibly reacting to Weber’s opposition of Western cities (with their emergent bourgeois communities) and “Asiatic” ones (Weber 1921: 81), considered that by the tenth century merchants had actually become the bearers of Islamic civilization.

Goitein (1966: 219) made even more ambitious claims, attributing to the bourgeoisie the development of the Muslim religious sciences, and going so far as to suggest that “the full-fledged religion of Islam, as it appears to us through the writings of the third and fourth centuries of the Muslim era, is pervaded by the spirit and ideas of the rising merchant class.”

However, defining the nature and cultural purchase of the middling class, over and above the central fact of its generation of disposable income, is no easy matter. Goitein conceded that “the history of the Muslim middle class ... has not yet been sufficiently studied” (Goitein 1967–1993: vol. 2, 2–3) and made the important point that in the period in question (*c.* 950–1250) it is difficult to find evidence of a centralized state controlling the various aspects of society, by which one may understand an imposed set of constraints and obligations within and against which a particular class consciousness might develop. Much, he infers, was left to the internal cohesiveness of groups defined by religious affiliation and enjoying juridical autonomy, while at the same time he tends to discuss the

Christians and Jews mentioned in his sources in the context of a middle class incorporating the medical profession, government officials, and skilled artisans as well as merchants.

More recently, Shoshan (1991: 76–77) has in large part followed Goitein's analysis that sets forth the concept of a tenth-century Middle Eastern "rising bourgeoisie" (Goitein 1966). While raising further pertinent questions regarding the cultural contribution of the bourgeoisie and how it might be considered original, he argued that Mez exaggerated the cultural role of merchants at the expense not only of rulers but also and especially of scholars.

Among art historians, Ettinghausen (1943: 207) had already anticipated Goitein, talking of a "*nouveau riche*" class and of a "rising merchant" class, albeit in relation to the twelfth century rather than Goitein's tenth. Ettinghausen then (1955) tackled the problem of the extent to which the art of the bourgeoisie was influenced by courtly art and, conversely, how much courtly art might be influenced by the arts of non-aristocratic classes. Expanding on Ettinghausen's ideas, Grabar (1970) published a study of the illustrations in the manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* (Assemblies) that proliferated in Iraq and Syria during the thirteenth century, illustrations that he directly linked to "the bourgeoisie and the arts." Emphasizing the increase in figural representations – also occurring in other media – this "revolution" in the visual vocabulary should be linked, according to Grabar, to an "opening" of the arts to an appreciative bourgeois class, resulting in the inclusion of representations of a range of buildings and human functions with which merchant patrons would be familiar.

At the same time Grabar recognized the difficulty of encapsulating bourgeois taste. Yet it is on the basis of a presumed contrast between court taste and that of other segments of society that art historians had earlier introduced the vexed concept of "realism." Kühnel's (1929: 407) notion of a "realistic" style in relation to tenth- to twelfth-century Fatimid art was echoed by Ettinghausen (1942: 122), who speaks of both "realistic" and "popular" styles of painting, including depictions on Fatimid ceramics. In explanation, Kühnel had referred to a Shi'ite tolerance of representation, thereby divorcing what he deemed realistic from any specific social locus, while Ettinghausen (1956: 271), in a later study on realism in Islamic art, cautiously postponed consideration of this argument. He chose, rather, to stress a contrast between the "realistic," "popular" elements of Fatimid art and the more formal and abstract earlier style of the Abbasids, associating the "realistic" style with the choice of scenes that represented, for him, everyday life.

The association is, though, rather problematic, for some of these scenes derive from a long iconographical tradition that can be traced back to Hellenistic and late classical times, thereby calling into question the notion of newly injected "everyday life." It needs to be emphasized that the notion of "realism" and what is "popular" is the construction of the scholar: there are no textual sources to support it, so that the implied divorce between courtly aesthetics (more refined) and non-courtly aesthetics (more earthy) is ultimately an interpretative assumption.

It should be added, however, that Ettinghausen (1956: 251) does not refer to a specifically bourgeois dimension: it would be left to Grabar to argue for this particular association. In any event, we have a clear recognition among art historians of the ability of an increasing spectrum of the urban population to acquire a range of artifacts that in terms of design cannot simply be regarded as derivative of court models.

A glimpse into the range of valuables (including mules and women, here treated as objects) held by the urban well-to-do is afforded by the hitherto unpublished account that Safi al-Din al-Urmawi (d. 1294) related to the historian Hasan al-Irbili of events in Baghdad after the Mongol conquest of the city in 1258 (al-'Umari 1988: 309–313). Himself no aristocrat, but a calligrapher, the master, indeed, of the celebrated Iraqi calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi, and a renowned court musician (Neubauer 1995), al-Urmawi represented his quarter in its desperate dealings with the particular Mongol general to whom it had been allotted. Inevitably, safety, indeed life itself, had to be bought dearly, and he speaks of some 50 wealthy individuals in the quarter who contributed their possessions. On the first day al-Urmawi was himself host to the general, spreading for him sumptuous carpets given to him by the caliph and ornately decorated brocade curtains, and, after a rich meal, serving him wine in gilded Aleppan glass and in silver vessels, followed by musical entertainment. Finally, he presented the general and his companions with choice gold and silver vessels, money, gold, and a considerable amount of splendid fabrics. Largely derived from caliphal largesse, al-Urmawi's own possessions may have been atypical, but when the other wealthy inhabitants were pressed to make similar contributions on the following days, they produced items to the value of 50 000 dinars, including gold items, splendid fabrics, and weaponry, thereby enabling al-Urmawi to make gifts on the second day of treasures (*dhakha'ir*), gold and money, and on the third day of choice pearls, precious jewels, a mule with caliphal trappings, and a fine garment. Al-Urmawi was then summoned to meet the Mongol ruler Hulegu himself, and presented him with further splendid vessels of gold and decorated silver. The range of artifacts mentioned – jewelry, pearls, gold, silver, metalwork, a variety of fabrics, and the specific reference to gilded glass from Aleppo – is striking, and the absence of ivory or ceramics may be no more than chance, as al-Urmawi's account was a dramatic narrative rather than a comprehensive catalogue. It provides a vivid demonstration of material prosperity to add to the more exhaustive evidence of mercantile wealth analyzed by Goitein and undermines the assumption that, in the absence of supporting evidence, luxury objects should be more or less automatically associated with princely commissions and royal ateliers. Indeed, surviving artifacts clearly demonstrate the ability of persons outside the court to acquire, and in some cases commission, luxury objects. Thus alongside those identified with caliphs, kings, or high court officials, such as the D'Arenberg basin – a silver-inlaid brass basin produced in Egypt or Syria around 1240, which bears the name of Sultan al-Malik al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (Atıl 1975: 65–68, cat. 27) – there

are others where the inscription is either anonymous or mentions the name of a merchant or scholar. An anonymous example is an equally luxurious late thirteenth-century Syrian or Egyptian brass basin inlaid with silver (Gabrieli and Scerrato 1979: pls. 206–208), with imagery combining astrology with courtly pursuits and inscriptions expressing good wishes to an unnamed owner.

There are parallel examples of metalwork with names (see also Allan and Kanaan, CHAPTER 18). One is an early thirteenth-century metal bowl in the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. no. 634-1872) from Khurasan, with two inlaid inscriptions. High on the main body of the bowl, running all around it below the rim, the larger inscription is in a rather splendid *naskh* and consists of good wishes. The other, divided into four sections separated by inlaid floral medallions set at regular intervals, is in a beautiful, floriated angular script and reads “divine grace to its owner/Yusuf ibn Ahmad/the Tabrizi merchant/may his fate remain auspicious.” Melikian-Chirvani (1982: 126–127, no. 55) has suggested that the inscription might have been added at the specific request of the patron. But it does not follow that it must have been inscribed later: integral to the whole decorative scheme, the inscription is better read as part of the original plan as commissioned by or for Yusuf ibn Ahmad than as an insert on an off-the-peg object.

Another example is a pear-shaped ewer with a lamp-shaped spout in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (probably Khurasan, late twelfth century, Figure 17.1). In addition to bands of inlaid inscriptions with good wishes, it is inscribed “owned by the doctor in religious law (*al shaykh al-faqih*) Muhammad/ibn ‘Ali al-Sijzi; made by Payadar” (Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 74–75, figs. 43–44). In two sections, one on each side of a central decorative medallion, the inscription is in an undecorated angular script, which suggests that it could well have been added later, when Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sijzi took possession of it. That the name of an owner could be a later addition is confirmed by the presence on this ewer of a further inscription, in cursive *naskh* script, identifying a subsequent owner, one Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-[I]sfahani. To these metalwork examples may be added a ceramic plate painted in luster, *c.* twelfth century, with the name ‘Umar ibn Ahmad al-Tusi, a member of a bourgeois family in Tus (Stern and Walzer 1963; Watson 1985: 52).

It is difficult to determine the social milieu of the many anonymous artifacts that have inscriptions of a generally benedictory nature, even if they are of equivalent (or in some cases even higher) quality to those known to have been made for princes. Inscriptions with the formula “blessing on the owner” (*baraka li-sahibih*), simple or expanded, are particularly common on metalwork, but they also appear on other media such as woodwork, as on a ninth-century Egyptian, Tulinid panel (*baraka wa-yumn wa-sa‘ada li-sa[h]ibih*) (Hayward Gallery 1976: 282, no. 435. Figure 17.2); ceramics, as on an early thirteenth-century Iranian vase (Fehérvári 2000: 124, no. 152); glass, as on a ninth–tenth-century cup from Egypt, Syria, or Iraq (Jenkins 1986: 20, no. 17); and rock crystal, as on a *c.* first half of the eleventh century Fatimid Egyptian fragmentary flask (Contadini 1998: 37, pl. 5).



FIGURE 17.1 Silver-inlaid, pear-shaped, metal ewer with a lamp-shaped spout, with inscriptions including one identifying the owner as a “doctor in religious law.” Probably Khurasan, late twelfth century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 54.64. Source: Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



FIGURE 17.2 Wood panel with an inscription of best wishes to its owner. Egypt, Tulunid period, ninth century. Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art, no. 3498. Source: Hayward 1976: 282, no. 435. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

There is no single, obvious interpretation for such anonymity. Some metalwork and rock crystal items might be conceived of as individually commissioned gifts, possibly diplomatic. On the other hand, the many ceramic objects with generic blessings suggest, instead of a commission, a form of industrial production tied to retail outlets, and the same can be said for artifacts on which we have names stamped or painted, such as the ninth- to tenth-century Iraqi or Iranian stamped glass objects with the name Husayn M[uhammad], as on a bottle and fragments of stamps in the Corning Museum of Glass (inv. no. 59.1.571; and inv. nos. 59.1.516, 59.1.517, 59.1.518). Other examples are Fatimid, late tenth- or early eleventh-century luster painted objects, both ceramic and glass, with the name Sa'd (Contadini 1998: chapter 3, pls. 34b, 36a–c for ceramics and fig. 33 for a glass example). Whether interpreted as individual (Jenkins 1988) or brand names, they point to a particular source almost certainly producing for a well-to-do urban market.

Also, inscriptions containing formulaic blessings for a sultan may be found on objects presumably not made for a sultan. This is the case, for example, with two gilded and enameled glass beakers now in Baltimore (Atıl 1981: 126–127; Carswell 1998, Figure 17.3), attributed to Syria, and datable to the first half of the thirteenth century. Both the *naskh/thuluth* script and the content, “glory to our lord the sultan, the royal, the diligent, the wise, etc.,” are often encountered on Ayyubid and Mamluk material from Syria and Egypt, but the iconographical themes and the style of clothing of the figures painted on the beakers clearly associate them with a Christian environment. In particular, we find stylized but easily recognizable representations of the Holy Sepulchre, a figure possibly of Christ riding a donkey, priests/monks, and at the same time city landmarks such as the Dome of the Rock and, as identified by Carswell (1998: 62), a minaret with parapet and dome on the north side of the Haram enclosure in Jerusalem. Fragments with similar iconography have been excavated at Hama (Riis 1957: 93, nos. 286–288), suggesting Syria as a production center. Because of the explicitly Christian connections of their iconography the beakers might have served as “souvenirs,” but not so much



FIGURE 17.3 Two glass beakers with enameled and gilded painted decoration showing Christian scenes, possibly made for local Christian markets. Attributed to Syria, datable to the first half of the thirteenth century. Source: Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, 47.17 and 47.18. Reproduced with permission.

for European pilgrims as for the local Christian elites, especially considering the mixture of Christian and Muslim symbols on the same object, and the typical Arabic inscriptions (Atıl 1981: 126). The quality of the glass and the use of expensive enamels and gold in the decoration demonstrate that they were intended for a completely different market from pilgrim flasks in plain undecorated glass. The importance of the latter, emphasized by their being transported in cases especially made for them (Shalem 1998: esp. figs. 16.1, 16.2), resided wholly in their contents, probably the balsam that is one of the principal ingredients of chrism (Milwright 2003: 207).

For the textiles with inscription bands, generically termed *tiraz*, we can now say with some confidence that an industrial system was in place, producing goods for different markets (see also Sokoly, CHAPTER 11). The sources talk endlessly about rich textiles made for varied sections of society, from princes to merchants, from intellectuals to singers, and there would have been variations in quality geared to differences in disposable income. The association of the term *tiraz* with the court and the ruler, attributable to its early use to designate a richly embroidered garment, is thus misleading. More typically, we may speak of garments and textiles with *tiraz* bands dating from the eighth to twelfth centuries, produced on an industrial scale during the Fatimid period by workshops in the Nile delta supplying both the court and the general market: the distinction between “royal/private and public *tiraz*”

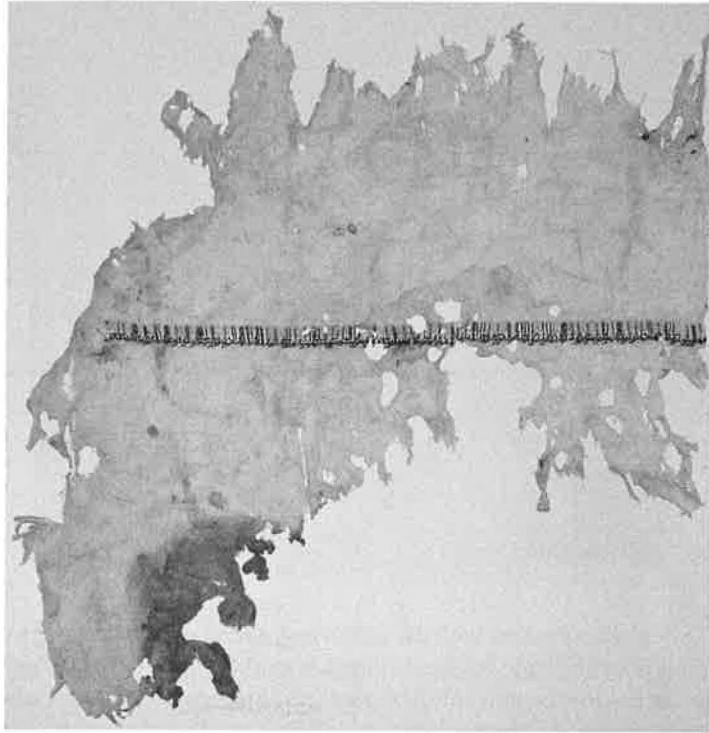


FIGURE 17.4 *Tiraz* textile with an inscription referring to production for a general market (*tiraz al-'amma*). Tuna (Egypt), 388 (998). Athens, Benaki Museum, 15006. Source: Benaki Museum. Reproduced with permission.

(*tiraz al-khassa* and *al-'amma*) relates less to workshops than to clientele, with court consumption financed by the “royal/private diwan” (*diwan al-khass*) while *tiraz al-'amma* production was intended for the general market (Figure 17.4) (Sokoly 1997; Contadini 1998: 43–54. For the example in the Benaki Museum, no. 15006, see Combe 1935: no. 8).

The evidence for royal workshops is in any case largely circumstantial. For example, the presence of inscriptions on tenth-century carved ivories from the Madinat al-Zahra' Palace in al-Andalus identifying them with individuals at the court has been accepted as pointing to the existence of a royal workshop (Holod 1992: 190–191). In consequence, contemporary ivory boxes with inscriptions of the generic good wishes type (which are not necessarily of inferior quality, as has been argued), such as the casket in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, dated 355 (966) and attributed to Madinat al-Zahra', have been considered products of a separate commercial enterprise (Hayward Gallery 1976: 152, no. 147). Yet a single workshop or a group of carvers working on commission could readily cater for different clientele, and we encounter the same range of motifs and carving techniques whether these objects mention princely figures or not.

For an example of a luxury artifact representative of the cultural and social ambitions of a wealthy merchant we may turn to the inlaid cast metal vessel known as the Bobrinsky bucket (Ivanov 1990: 16–17, no. 30, 56–57 and previous literature. Figure 17.5). Dated by an inscription on the handle top to Muharram 559 (December 1163), the piece itself is a striking example of calligraphy allied to iconography representing such standard courtly themes as hunting and musical entertainment. Although the inscription on the rim ends in high-flown Arabic, it begins, unusually, in Persian, telling us that the bucket was “ordered” (*farmudan*) by a certain 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abdallah al-Rashidi as a gift to the merchant in question, Khuja Rukn al-Din Rashid al-Din 'Azizi ibn Abu-l-Husayn al-Zanjani. In addition to naming and praising the recipient, it is of interest in that the inscription indicates the division of labor between the caster Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid and the decorator Hajib Mas'ud ibn Ahmad. It also identifies the place of production, Herat, noted by al-Qazwini (d. 1283) as a center for inlaid brass, the finest examples of which were exported (al-Qazwini 1848–1849, vol. 2, 323).

Ettinghausen distinguished three classes of metalwork: pieces for the general market with inscriptions of good wishes; those with the name of the buyer discreetly inserted; and high quality commissioned pieces with a name included in the inscription. Predictably, he assigned the bucket to the second, and concluded (1943: 199–203) from the comparatively inferior quality of the cursive *naskh* of the inscription naming the merchant that it might well be a later addition, one that linked the bucket to “the *nouveau riche* of the rising merchant class of the XII century which accumulated wealth, titles, and art in a somewhat indiscriminate manner.” For all Ettinghausen’s acuity, one might wonder here whether “indiscriminate” is any more than an instinctive expression of prejudice, implying that rulers displayed discrimination and the lower orders not. Further, the fact that titles are imitated (rather than accumulated) points not to the acquisition of power but to a desire within the merchant class to emulate certain aspects of court life. These may well have included the aesthetic domain, including the institution of *khil'a*, the gifting by rulers of garments embroidered with their names (Gordon 2001). The Geniza letters, the trove of medieval documents found in the synagogue of Fustat, indicate that in addition to government officials such robes of honor could be given to doctors, musicians, and merchants (Goitein 1967–1993: vol. 2, 604, note 28) and Goitein notes, in consequence, that “the custom of giving clothing embroidered with names and blessings spread among them” as well (Goitein 1967–1993: vol. 4, 184; also vol. 2, 351). As a result, we have extensive production of textiles and *tiraz*, initially stored in warehouses. The interpretation of the names of the buyer and the merchant on the Bobrinsky bucket as later insertions points to a similar scenario. Thus as well as commissioning artifacts, wealthy merchants and others could be important consumers of ready-made artifacts available from workshops producing objects of great value (as well as, presumably, other more everyday wares) for buyers-to-be, and not only in response to specific commissions (Kana'an 2009: 200–201).



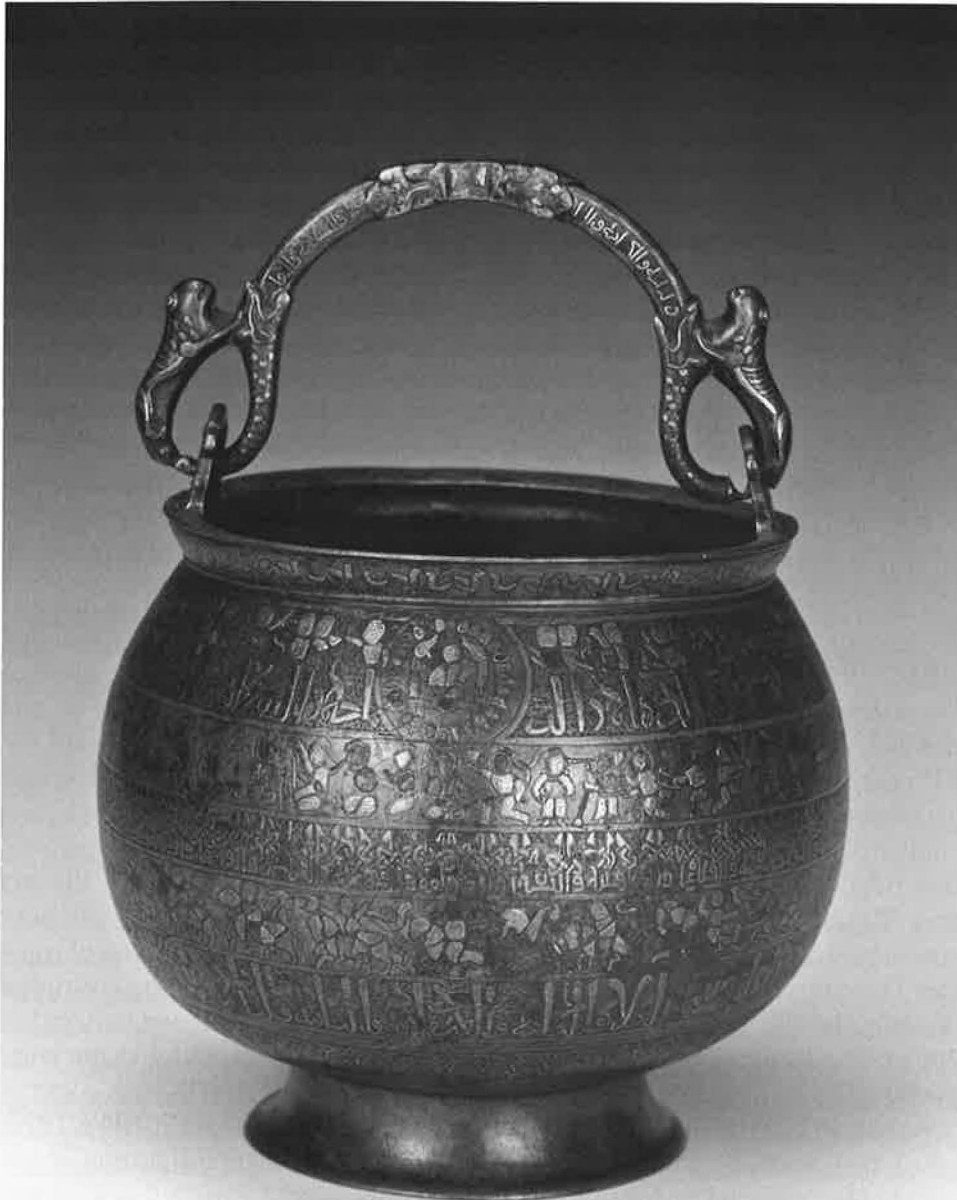


FIGURE 17.5 Bobrinsky bucket. Herat, dated Muharram 559 (December 1163). Brass, silver, and copper; cast, forged, and decorated with inlay. Height 18.5 cm. Inv. no. IR 2268. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Source: © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Vladimir Terebenin.

In addition, their economic resources would doubtless have been used to acquire valuable objects without inscriptions, most obviously jewelry. From the reports of travelers and historians we learn of the crafting of beautiful rock crystal and metalwork objects in the Cairo bazaar and, during the later Mamluk period, of beautiful gilded and enameled glass being produced in commercial areas of Aleppo and Damascus (Nasir-i Khusraw 1986: 53–54 for Cairo; for the glass in Aleppo al-Qazwini 1848–1849: vol. 2, 123; and for Mamluk glass Lamm 1929–1930: vol. 1, 65). Bourgeois spending power would presumably also have extended to other fields of artistic production, such as illustrated manuscripts, although little evidence survives from before the thirteenth century, when we begin to encounter examples of illustrated texts that are usually defined as scientific (covering astronomy, botany, zoology, and medicine), with Cairo, Damascus, Mosul, and Baghdad as principal centers of production.

Market mechanisms are, though, difficult to define: during this later period, although possibly also before, scribes, like artists, moved around, working for different patrons and in different media (Blair 1985), and even showed entrepreneurial flair by themselves hiring painters and binders (Contadini 2012: 162). Given the diverse subject matter of these manuscripts, we may speak of a patronage base allying the intelligentsia to the merchant class within a more broadly conceived bourgeoisie, one whose interests and aesthetic preferences, as compared with those of the court, might be productively investigated through such illustrated manuscripts. For example, it has been suggested, given its subject matter, that the anonymous romance *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* (The Story of Bayad and Riyad) is a likely example of a text favored by a non-aristocratic audience. It survives in an illustrated manuscript in the Maghribi script (D’Ottone 2013), which places it in the western Islamic lands, most probably Spain, while its paintings suggest on stylistic grounds a dating to the thirteenth century. In its current condition, the manuscript offers no specific clue to patronage, but the narrative (the male protagonist of which is a merchant) may be considered a guide to courtly behavior for a bourgeois readership with aspiration to gentility (Robinson 2005: 97–98). For Ettinghausen (1943: 207), similarly, two of the illustrated manuscripts of Hariri’s picaresque and linguistically virtuosic *Maqamat* exhibit “a style truly reflecting the life of the middle classes in the cities of the Seljuk period.” One was probably produced in Baghdad in 1237 (Paris, BnF, ms. arabe 5847) and the other, *c.* 1225, is also attributable to Baghdad (St Petersburg, Academy of Sciences, Ms. S 23. Petrosyan 1995: 144–155, cat. 18; James 2013). Although representations of different classes and ethnic groups are encountered earlier, for example, in ivory carvings of the Fatimid period (Contadini 2005), the wealth of visual information concerning aspects of life and human functions found in the 1237 *Maqamat* manuscript is unprecedented (see also, Tabaa, CHAPTER 12).

The question, then, is how to interpret this abundance. It is certainly plausible to suggest that it may reflect an interest, whether confined to the bourgeoisie or not, in urban life and mercantile activity. Following Ettinghausen, Grabar’s



conclusion, based upon the variety of scenes and personages depicted, and in particular those associated with mercantile activity in markets and caravanserais, is that the manuscripts could have been made for bourgeois patrons. Nevertheless, however persuasive and insightful the discussion, the fact remains that it is less a case of objects known to be bourgeois commissions, thereby allowing conclusions to be drawn about bourgeois taste, than of *a priori* assumptions about bourgeois concerns (as distinct from courtly ones) leading to the conclusion that such manuscripts were tailored to a bourgeois clientele.

They are nevertheless informative, through their depictions of various “types,” with regard to social functions and strata. In the 1237 *Maqamat*, for example, the “men of the sword” and the bureaucratic state officials are clearly differentiated from the rest of the population. The latter includes the “men of the pen” (scribes, physicians, judges) as well as women, merchants, musicians, servants, and slaves. Women often have henna markings on their hands and light, see-through veils partially covering their faces, but they are not represented often enough for significant distinctions to be detected. Not so with men, who are clearly differentiated through vestimentary codes: officials wear *sharbush* (a particular headgear made up of fur and metal plaques), coat and boots, and often hold a spear, while judges, literary figures, musicians and merchants wear turbans, tunic and baggy trousers, and low, black shoes. Servants and slaves have a different type of clothing altogether, and are further distinguished by skin color: slaves are more scantily dressed (often having a nude torso) and although white slaves are represented, the majority have a range of darker skin colors, presumably distinguishing between those of African and Indian origin. Skin color, though, is semiologically complex, for a dark hue can also be a marker of distinction and/or non-Arab origin, being used for Indian judges, wealthy non-Arabs, and, in other manuscripts, for ancient sages such as Aristotle (Contadini 2012: 76).

There is, however, no certainty with regard to the social standing of the patron or dedicatee of the 1237 copy: the colophon gives only the name of the scribe and illuminator, Yahya al-Wasiti, and the date of completion, 634 (1237). Its imposing size (the pages measure 37 × 28 cm), large number of illustrations, and especially its outstanding quality with regard to paper, ink, calligraphy, and painting (even though many of the paintings have been retouched in subsequent periods), make it the kind of luxury object normally thought of as a princely commission, and we do indeed find, inserted within the inscription of the frieze of a mosque depicted on fol. 164v, the name of al-Mustansir (r. 1227–1242), the Abbasid caliph reigning in Baghdad when the manuscript was made. Similarly, the name of his son and successor, al-Musta‘sim (r. 1242–1258) is found in the Süleymaniye Library copy of the same text, on the frieze of the mosque illustrated on fol. 204r (Grabar 1963: 135 and fig. 40). However, although the inscriptions provide evidence of production in or near Baghdad (Contadini 2012: 155), they are too inconspicuous to be taken as evidence of a caliphal commission. Hence the princely figure in the 1237 double frontispiece may be explained as a form of homage or, more

simply, as a conventional pictorial device conferring status (Contadini 2012: 158 and col. pl. 10; Hillenbrand 2010).

Whatever the interest and patronage of merchants in this particular area of manuscript production may have been, the existence of a lively book trade for a bourgeois clientele is indisputable, with scholars and physicians as major consumers. Among the collections of books recorded in the Geniza documents the most valuable and sought after were those left by physicians. In relation to one particular library Goitein calculated, on the basis of the sale price of the items, that it may have held a thousand manuscripts (Goitein 1967–1993: vol. 4, 311). Scholars probably had a bigger role than hitherto recognized as patrons of book production, as witnessed most spectacularly by the Pseudo-Galen *Kitab al-Diryaq* (Book of Antidotes) dated 595 (1199) and most probably produced in Mosul (BnF arabe 2964. Farès 1953; Kerner 2010; Pancaroğlu 2001). It was copied by Muhammad Abu ‘l-Fath ‘Abd al-Wahid in an accomplished hand, whether in *naskh* or employing a striking and decorative form of what Déroche (1992: 132–183) has termed “New Style script” in place of the former “Eastern Kufic.” Blair (2006: 151–160, fig. 6.4) calls it “broken cursive,” one that would have appealed to a highly cultured audience. Furthermore, this manuscript has sumptuous illustrations with a lavish use of gold, all confirming a luxury commission, one fit for a prince; yet it was made for Abu ‘l-Fath Mahmud, “the knowledgeable imam, king of scholars (*malik al-‘ulama*)” (fol. 38r, Farès 1953: 8–9, Pl. V). The scribe, who also has the title of imam, was most probably of the same intellectual circle. It is notable that the double frontispiece represents not a prince but cosmological themes (Caiozzo 2010), including snakes that may be related to the content of the manuscript. We then have three pages in which the nine intellectual sources (or “authors”) of the text are represented and identified by inscriptions. The paintings within the manuscript are varied in nature, ranging from depictions of snakes and medicinal plants to various sages discovering the effect of an antidote to scenes in which the antidotes are given to someone suffering from snakebite.

The text also gives a prompt for the depiction of “everyday activities of the peasants” (Ettinghausen 1955: 124), with workers digging up earth, in poor clothes hitched up to make their job easier, the tunic tucked into the belt, revealing legs and, occasionally, private parts. This has been taken as a democratization of imagery, the beginning of showing everyday life, and consequently to be attached to the idea of an emerging bourgeoisie. However, apart from the improbability of well-to-do city dwellers being particularly interested in rural life in the raw, the conclusion is again undermined by its failure to take account of an iconographical theme that is found elsewhere and with different meanings. A closely similar scene is represented, for example, in a Syriac manuscript (Leroy 1964: pl. 126, 3) where two men with their tunics tucked into their belts are digging in search of the True Cross, and in the 621 (1224) dispersed Dioscorides (Contadini 2012: 58 and note 12), where two figures are digging *terra sigillata*, a precious curative clay found on the island of Lemnos (Touwaide 1992–1993: vol. 4, 72–73, pl. 33).

The digging motif also appears in Western European depictions of Adam after his expulsion with Eve from the Garden of Eden, as in *The Hunterian Psalter*, England, c. 1170 (Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 229 (U.3.2), fol. 8r). What I call “the digging scene” thus forms part of an iconography belonging to a tradition that is found not only in Syriac and Arabic painting but also in Western European painting, and cannot in itself demonstrate a contemporary interest in rural life.

Similarly, although Ettinghausen argued that Fatimid imagery represented real life, some of that imagery, too, as in the case of wrestling, comes from a long iconographical tradition, in this particular case from late antiquity (Grube 1984, 1985). Hence, it does not necessarily reflect the particular interests of the bourgeoisie: the painter would respond to the text by calling upon a stock of inherited iconographical topoi, irrespective of the identity of the commissioner.

However, the fact that the paintings may not reveal bourgeois taste in any direct way does not imply a lack of significant bourgeois involvement in the acquisition and, probably, the commissioning of illustrated manuscripts. For a more reliable index of their interests we may turn to the nature of the texts illustrated. One representative example is the Munich *‘Aja’ib al-Makbluqat* (Wonders of Creation), dated 678 (1280) (Berlekamp 2011; Von Bothmer 1971), copied by Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Dimashqi, the doctor (*al-mutatabbib*) while resident in the Iraqi city of Wasit (fol. 212v), possibly for the author himself, the intellectual and polymath Zakariyya Muhammad al-Qazwini. Another example is the c. 1225 Ibn Bakhtishu’ *Kitab Na’t al-Hayawan* (Book on the Characteristics of Animals) (British Library, Or. 2784. Contadini 2012), a wonderful illustrated manuscript produced for a scholar/physician, probably, in this case, within the thriving intellectual environment of Baghdad under the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir (Figure 17.6). One of its frontispieces contains clearly Christian iconographical elements, and among the Christian community of Iraq and Syria, including doctors and more generally monasteries, we encounter ample evidence for the patronage and production of metalwork, ceramics, and gilded and enameled glass as well as manuscripts. Monastic scriptoria in Mesopotamia produced not only Syriac but also Arabic manuscripts, and it has even been suggested recently that two important illustrated lectionaries – one in the Vatican Syr. 559, the other in the British Library, Add 7170 – may have been produced commercially in Mosul (Smine 2009).

However, as might be expected, most of the illustrated manuscripts of this period that lack colophons identifying patrons reveal no such connections. They cover a thematic range that may be broadly described as scientific, and demonstrate not only a concern with topics of professional relevance such as botany or pharmacology but also a lively interest in astronomy and the physical world, including flora and fauna as well as marvels. Typical examples are the 621 (1224) Dioscorides and the c. 1225 Ibn al-Sufi, *Risalat al-Sufi fi al-kawakib* (The Epistle of al-Sufi on the Stars) in the Riza-yi ‘Abbasi Museum in Tehran (Contadini 2006), in all probability illustrated within the same artistic circle



FIGURE 17.6 Frontispiece with a sage holding a *flabellum*. Ibn Bakhtishu’, *Kitab Na’t al-Hayawan*, probably produced in Baghdad, c. 1225. London, British Library, Or. 2784, fol. 3r. Source: The British Library. Reproduced with permission.

as the *Kitab Na't al-Hayawan* mentioned above (Contadini 2012: 130–131). It may be assumed that the market for such manuscripts, whether produced commercially or commissioned, was primarily located among the scientifically inclined intelligentsia. For the wider intelligentsia, scholars of law, Qur'anic sciences, language, and letters, it is rather a question – one which lies beyond the confines of the present chapter – of identifying the (non-illustrated) manuscripts produced not for but by them, whether copies or original works. Thereby, with the help of biographical sources, one might attempt to gain insights into their background, social position, and possibly tastes (George 2012; Hirschler 2012: esp. chapter 4).

We may assume, on the basis of the evidence we have for Baghdad and Wasit (for Baghdad, Ibn al-Athir 1851–1876: vol. 12, under al-Nasir; and for Wasit, Al-Ma'adidi 1983: esp. 110–111) that most cities around the Middle East contained a commercial area, the *suq al-warraqin*, containing paper makers, polishers, copyists, and booksellers (Bloom 2001). An illuminated copy of the *Kitab khalq al-nabi wa khulqih* (On the Characteristics of the Prophet) by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was commissioned for the library of the Ghaznavid amir 'Abd al-Rashid, in Ghazni, around 441–444 (1050–1053) and copied by a certain Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Rafi' al-Warraq. His *nisba* al-Warraq suggests that he was a professional copyist and bookseller, probably working in the *suq al-warraqin* and very likely producing, alongside commissions, copies for the retail market (Contadini 2012: 160; Stern 1969).

Production could involve a complex division of labor. A scribal note on a c. 1200 Syriac lectionary not only tells us that the manuscript was a multiple commission but also that the scribe was in charge of the project, and that he called upon the expertise of different artists in different locations (Leroy 1964: no. XVI, especially 272–273, pls. 67–69; Snelders 2010: 175). In middle-Byzantine manuscript production, too, we may find parallels to this entrepreneurial scribe-scholar commissioning artists to work ad hoc for a specific project (Lowden 2009: chapter 3; Weyl Carr 1985: 6–7). Similarly, in Western Europe, before the rise of commercial production stimulated by the founding of universities, book production was dominated by monastic scriptoria that sometimes had laymen working for them. At the beginning of the fifteenth century we come across the case of a clerk and translator who wrote the first copy of a text, invented the visual cycle for it, coordinated the work with scribes and illuminators, and checked the copies, destined for scholars as well as royal patrons (Hedeman 2008: 23–127).

Such parallels are informative, but it has to be conceded that the economic structure of the Middle East book trade and its related modes of production are not wholly clear. We may suppose, nevertheless, that the vitality implied by the earlier evidence of the famous Baghdadi bibliophile and bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim (d. 995 or 998) in his *Fihrist* (Ibn al-Nadim 1970) remained undimmed. The more expensive products of the market were not just for court consumption but also found customers among the bourgeoisie. More specifically, we can

identify a market among well-to-do intellectuals for illustrated scientific literature, and here we may speak of bourgeois interests having a direct impact upon artistic production, just as bourgeois purchasing power must have stimulated the bazaar trade in precious objects.

In all these areas, the model of an isolated royal atelier as the specialized producer of luxury goods is difficult to sustain for the pre-Mongol period. A more realistic model is that of expert artisans having the competence and equipment to produce across the quality range, and the confidence in the market to anticipate demand, so as not to have to rely solely on commissions. Confidence in the market is shown, likewise, by the mobility of craftsmen: some were, of course, coerced by rulers to collaborate on major projects, but others moved freely. Generations of Mosul metalworkers, for example, found work in other cities (Raby 2012). Similarly, the marble and stone-carvers of Ghazni and western India, who worked for both royal and bourgeois patrons, seem to have been relatively mobile (Flood 2009: 189–226; Giunta 2003).

We thus end with an image both clear and blurred. There has been a presumption among scholars that bourgeois taste – assuming that we can speak of such a thing – was derived essentially from court models. Seen most obviously perhaps in such media as fabrics and metalwork, it resulted from an attempt to emulate, as means allowed, the known or half glimpsed models that the refinements of court luxury provided. Equally, there is an assumption that bourgeois taste was also in some way a product of the types of social interactions peculiar to urban society, and that it was reflected in a widening iconographical range sometimes inspired by the types of text that were in vogue. The first supposition is, on the face of it, reasonable, although given the poor survival rate of artifacts from the tenth and earlier centuries it is difficult to demonstrate that mercantile patronage began significantly later than that of the court. The ninth- to tenth-century ceramic finds excavated at Basra in southern Iraq, for example, already bear witness to extensive trade and, presumably, associated wealth (Fehérvári 2000: 38; Hallett 2010: 79). Further, even if we retain the paradigm of court circles determining aesthetic standards that the *nouveaux riches* would subsequently adopt, it should be recognized that this is a rather incomplete model, leaving no room for the creative role of craftsmen and artists in determining the parameters of taste. Once they are taken account of, the notion of an aesthetic divide between court circles and others begins to lose substance. As has been noted above, visual motifs may be tenacious, artists being influenced far more by their teachers than by their patrons, so that the painterly representation of a scene might tell us much more about the iconographical tradition to which it belongs than about the manner in which it was appreciated: whether at court or among the bourgeoisie, reception histories are difficult to establish.

What is clear, though, is that by spending disposable income on luxury goods it encouraged production, even from far beyond the world of Islam.

Examples of Chinese pottery (dating from the eight to c. fourteenth century) have been excavated at Fustat in Egypt, and the vast trading networks traced by Goitein through the Cairo Geniza documents bear ample witness to entrepreneurial activity, as do the problems of provenance posed by the myriad scattered artifacts found far from wherever they were produced. As far as acquisition is concerned, it is no doubt the case that fewer objects are inscribed with names linking them to persons outside the court than to persons within it, but this should not be interpreted as indicating that patronage was concentrated there. It is by no means the case that all the most luxurious extant items were commissioned by or for rulers, and, as the evidence of al-Urmawi quoted above underlines, the potent impulses of acquisitiveness and ostentation meant that much must have accumulated in the houses of the urban rich.

What we are left with, however, is ultimately not a problem of relative amounts. Rather, it is a case, as the title of this chapter suggests, of a degree of hesitation as to whether the idea of a bourgeoisie understood as a reasonably clearly demarcated social group with shared habits, attitudes, and aspirations should be given unquestioning assent. As the material discussed might suggest, we should instead be thinking of a number of educated urban micro societies, composed of merchants, doctors, pharmacists, judges, and so forth, with overlapping but also separate interests, and each with its own potential for patronage or consumption in specific areas and media.

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