

# Islamic Arts - Examples

## Mamluk Candlestick 14C



Candlestick base  
Tanzim, 14th century (18th)

This Mamluk Candlestick is from the C14 Century. In the 12th Century the leader of the Ayyubids, Saladin, took power in Egypt. Like most Islamic leaders, part of his army consisted of Mamluks, a caste of slave troops (Mainly bought as boys from Turkey) who achieved their freedom on completion of their military service and religious training.

In 1250, the Mamluks took control of Egypt. They encouraged trade and were great patrons of the arts and were particularly keen on metalworking which became very important. Bronze was a favored metal. European traders would commission pieces for specific families in Europe. The Mamluks ruled until 1517, when they were finally ousted by the Ottomans.

The body of this candlestick is dominated by a central band of 'Naskhi' style arabic script and Mamluk heraldic emblems that describe (including the rank), the patron who commissioned it. The script contains things like “the great, the mighty, the lofty...” – these refer to the Sultan and higher officials (Islamic names have meanings and using the name associated his allegiance to that person, like being a jacobite or a stuart), so the man who commissioned the candlestick was from a lower rank. The fine floral background is inlaid with silver and niello. Niello is a technique of decorating an incised design with black inlay (from the Latin nigellus = 'black'). The grooves of an engraved design are filled with powdered copper, silver, lead and sulphur with the addition of flux. When heated the alloy melts, runs and becomes fused in the grooves.

Many such candlesticks were often presented to a mosque – used in pairs on either side of the mirab, or four would be used on each corner of a shrine, or they might be given to the religious schools.