

## Embroidered Mamluk Tikka ( tie belt )

circa 1250-1517

Baroness Rainillt de Bello Marisco

**Materials:** 32 count tea over-dyed linen, Silk floss

**Stitches:** Pattern darning, Outline/Stem stitch, Cross stitch

### Background:

The tie belt is a re-working of an extant piece that from the Newberry Collection at the Ashmolean museum (No. 1984.243 ) and is featured in “Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt “ by Marianne Ellis.



Only the embroidery was left intact but the curators have classed it as a girdle or tie end based on an example at the Victoria and Albert Museum that is still threaded through a pair of child’s trousers. (No # 763-1898) ( 1 )

The extant piece is linen, which was the predominant fiber used in Egypt ( 3 ) , dimensions 23.5 cm x 6.5 cm with a thread count of 12/12 which translates to approx 30 count evenweave linen in modern terms. The embroidery is described as being:

*“with its three bands, all with intricate little borders and line of cross stitch worked in between using blue, crimson and green silk. The edges have been hemmed and then decorated with blue spaced cross stitches and lines of outline stitch.” ( 1 )*

Many of the pieces from the collection were bits that were cut off the original items, preserving the embroidery only. There is very little proof as to how many were actually used. Where they cut down from other garments? Were these the original pieces with just the embroidery preserved? In this case I suspect that this may have been a wider band that had been trimmed down then attached to a longer sash in order to reuse the embroidery, mainly because the design goes almost underneath the hem embellishments.

Color was very important in the Islamic culture. The colors they chose in their textiles, carpets, household items through to architecture reflected basic symbolism which was part of their basic beliefs. They had four basic colors which were associated with nature: red, blue, yellow and green. One source, writing on Persian architecture discusses one variation of the meanings of the colors in Islamic culture:

*“green is hope, fertility and eternity with its two inherent dimensions of past (blue) and future (yellow), and its opposite, the present, seen as red” (2)*

The brightness of the silks for the floss was some of the most sophisticated of the time. They produced colors very complex and vibrant. The pinks and reds were produced by Lac gum, Indigo made the blues and greens. Yellows and oranges were made from the Safflower as was pomegranate skins and lemon juice made light yellows. The skins of walnuts produced black, while madder, bole Japan wood and Brazil wood made browns. (4)

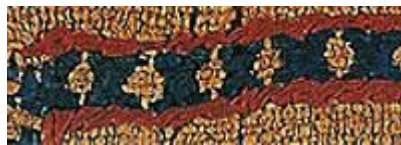
### **Design and Execution:**

The first step to re-working the extant piece was finding both the linen and the silk floss. The decision was made to use over-dyed linen in order to give it more of an aged effect. While the piece works out to a 30 count even weave, the commercially available linens in this weave seemed very coarse and I could not get proper duplication of the pattern so I opted to use a slightly higher count with a finer weave. I also chose to only use the width of the linen fabric available. An original sash would have most likely been much longer in order to wrap around the body more, but since this is not going to be used as garb, I did not make the piece longer and thus avoided seaming the article. The finished embroidery ended up measuring approx 6 cm x 140cm.

I also opted to use only two colors for the bands, wanting to keep the piece a bit simpler as well as I liked the symmetry and the symbolism of the colors once I laid them out, using the red for the present and the blue for the past. Most of the other girdle ends were done in two colors (1), so I felt this was an acceptable variation.

The silk is Splendor Brand silk floss, and while not as fine as what may have been used for the original piece it is a nice working silk, does not have a tendency to knot as easily as some of the stranded silk flosses available and it is easier to do the pattern darning with. The patterns were charted out by counting threads and stitches on the original piece and by experimenting to get the right count with the right number of strands of floss. Three strands of floss were finally used in order to get the coverage of the ground fabric in the pattern darning that is seen in the original piece.

This was a very small and not as intricate piece in comparison to many of the fragments featured in the Ellis book. but it still took about 4 test patterns till I felt I had the pattern correct. Additionally, upon closer look at that image of the extant piece, what was described as cross stitch along the edges I actually see as further pattern darning as you can see multi rows of threads as opposed to the diagonal of the crossed stitches on the accent rows.



As a result I opted to pattern darn the hem edge as well. This actually proved to be very difficult. As it meant that I needed to go through 3 layers of the linen as a rolled hem and it was very hard to match up the rows on both the front and the back and keep the count correct as well as it meant the linen had to be perfectly straight along one of the warp threads.

### **Conclusion:**

Working on the sash gave me huge insight as to the incredible scope of the pattern darned Islamic and Mamluk textiles. I thought of just how much time would have been dedicated to making such an item, whether it had been cut down and reused from larger embroidery or made for just this use. Would they have made it for every day use or was this for a garment for special or religious occasions. The skill level of the embroiderers was incredible as was the quality of the silks they had to work with.

If I was to do this piece again, I would make it full size to wrap around the body properly and have enough to have longer ends to hang. I would also work it in finer silk floss, less twisted, to better mimic what seemed to be used on the original piece.

## **Bibliography for Embroidered Mamluk Tikka**

1. Ellis, Marianne. "Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt", Ashmolean Museum Oxford 2001, Curious Works Press, Greenville, SC. Pg 28
2. <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1993/1/93.01.04.x.html>  
Colors, Shapes, and Spaces in the Most Important Places by Christine A. Elmore  
  
Who references : Ardalan, Nader & Bakhtiar, Laleh. "The Sense of Unity": The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973. pg 50.
3. <http://www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk/ash/exhibitions/exh027.html>  
A Stitch in Time: Medieval Islamic Embroideries from Egypt. Exhibit description.
- 4: <http://www.roxanefarabi.com> Article on Naqshe-e ( Persian Embroidery ) who references :  
  
Koekboya: Natural Dyes and Textiles, a Colored Journey from Turkey to India and Beyond, Harold Böhmer, 2002