

Water | Water Usage: Drinking and Washing

'Water is scarce in desert regions, and thus valuable.'

Because water is scarce in desert regions, and thus valuable, the implements with which people drink and wash are often ornately decorated. In wealthy households – such as that of a Mamluk governor of Qus in Upper Egypt – water would have been poured over guest's hands from inlaid metal ewers and into basins for washing before and after meals. Often, Mamluk inlaid-metal basins are decorated with a whorl of fish on the inside base so that when the basin is filled with water, the fish appear to be swimming. Likewise, fish are among the motifs found in Mamluk green-glazed pottery which imitates Chinese celadon wares.



Name:
Goblet

Dynasty:
Hegira, second half of the 4th–first half of the 5th centuries / AD 10th–11th centuries Fatimid–Zirid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
Glass-making technology, inherited ultimately from the Romans, was strong in the Mediterranean during the 4th and 5th / 10th and 11th centuries. Glass was used for drinking vessels and many other domestic items.



Name:
Ewer

Dynasty:
Hegira 709–41 / AD 1309–40 Mamluk

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
A brass ewer and basin inlaid with silver and copper and decorated with the blazon of Emir Tabtaq, governor of Qus in Upper Egypt from 708–40 / 1309–40.



Name:
Basin

Dynasty:
Hegira 8th century / AD 14th century Mamluk

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
A brass ewer and basin inlaid with silver and copper and decorated with the blazon of Emir Tabtaq, governor of Qus in Upper Egypt from 708–40 / 1309–40.



Name:
Wash basin and jug

Dynasty:
Hegira second half of 7th century / AD second half of 13th century Post-Zangid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:
A brass ewer-and-basin set that is inlaid with gold and silver. A complex design of hunting and banqueting scenes together with zodiacal signs, all within medallions, are linked together by calligraphic blessings aimed at the user.



Name:
Ewer

Dynasty:
Hegira 7th century / AD 13th century Ayyubid

Details:
Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:
A 7th- / 13th-century Syrian glazed-ceramic ewer that would have been used for drinking-water.
