

A Descriptive and Analytical study for Fāṭimid jug filters collection in Ismailia Museum (Unpublished)

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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This study comprised six unpublished jug filters from Ismailia Museum reserve, I examined, studied, and photographed them after obtaining the needed approvals from the administration of Ismailia Museum and the Egyptian ministry of Antiques. The jug filters represent one of the common social folk arts, the witnessed the accuracy, imagination, innovation, and high taste of the Muslim artist, and proves that the artist was working only for the purpose of art. It is a small round disk, fitted into the neck's juncture of unglazed clay water jugs to protect the contents from insects and pollution. They were generally unglazed and undecorated as other pottery utensils; the designs were etched into the damp clay before the jug was heated. Their decorative patterns comprised zoomorphic, vegetal, and epigraphic motifs of Short benedictory words written in polished foliated or plain Kufic script, and they were frequently well-crafted. Many of these filters were discovered during the archaeological excavations carried out at al-Fuṣṭāṭ site. The first Islamic capital of Egypt, founded by 'Amr bin al- 'Ase.

1. Introduction

Pottery industry was one of the oldest crafts, Egyptians were among the first peoples to be foresight in this industry since pre-dynastic times, they used the pottery vessels in different aspects of their daily life's, the Nile mud-clay was a very important source for enhancing the Egyptian pottery making specially in upper Egyptian towns like Qena.¹ In Cairo Al-Fuṣṭāṭ city in was the major center of pottery industry especially in the Fatimid dynasty.²

These filters were initially fitted into the neck juncture of unglazed clay water jugs to protect the contents from insects and pollution during the Fāṭimid dynasty in Egypt. They were generally unglazed and undecorated as ordinary utensils, the designs were etched into the damp clay before the jug was heated. The decorating patterns comprised zoomorphic, vegetal, and epigraphic motifs³ of Short benedictory words written in polished foliated or plain Kufic script, the industry of jugs and jug filters was frequently well-crafted. Many of these filters were discovered during Egyptian archaeological excavations at al-Fuṣṭāṭ site. Egypt's former capital, most of which are now on display in the Museum of Islamic Art and Gayer Anderson Museum in Cairo.⁴



Fig.1: Map of al-Fuṣṭāṭ archeological site in Egypt⁵

2. Study objectives:

- The research will state the forms and types of Arabic calligraphy and decorations used in jug filters in the Fāṭimid dynasty
- Highlighting the originality of jug filters, explain the most prominent artistic values and structural systems of the linear forms and decorations of the jug filters in the Fāṭimid dynasty,
- Highlight the value and importance of Arabic calligraphy in the Islamic heritage; provide researchers with the aesthetic and artistic values resulting from the decoration of the jag filters in the Fāṭimid dynasty.
- Preserve the national identity of the Islamic heritage of artifacts; study and analyze the Islamic heritage of decorations and scripts represented in the Fāṭimid jug filters.

3. The Jugs “*al-Qulal*”:

The jug is a slightly puffy hull pottery vessel, with a base, and a long or medium length neck, at the point of contact of the body with the neck, we find a round piece of nets known as jug filters, most of the jugs were generally unglazed, and characterized by their clay color, which ranges between light yellowish crem and shades of light grey. Jugs were used to preserve and cool drinking water in eastern countries, especially Egypt. On rare occasions, the few were covered with a glass glaze to preserve the water's natural temperature, and this type was used for drinking in the winter.⁶ Jug vessels were formed from earthenware, which was usually shaped on the wheel then

fired in special ovens. The good quality types of jugs are fairly thin, finely levigated and well-fired.⁷

The jugs found in the collections of the museums are rarely in their entire body, we usually find the jug filters attached to the nick of the jug, while the rest of it missing. Perhaps this is because the water jug was one of the most regularly excavated items of home ware in the Middle East, and early archaeologists saw little use in attempting to restore and preserve the jug in its entirety.⁸

4. The Jug filters “*Šhabābīk al-Qulal*”:

These filters or colanders were placed at the juncture of the nick and shoulder of the pottery jars, functioning as a lid to control the flow of water and save its contents from insects, flies and dust, these filters appear to be in more abundance in Egypt than anywhere else in the Islamic world. It features a wide range of detailed designs, depicted in open work that looks like a lace, including short Arabic scripts, birds, fish, and animals, as well as human and mathematical designs, although the water pot's outer surface remained unadorned and unglazed.⁹

Jug body and filter were unglazed to allow the water inside the porous body to evaporate a little to keep the stored liquid, which was mostly water, cool.¹⁰ It was usually made of a white earthenware containing a percentage of limestone particles, its diameter usually measures between 2 cm to 12 cm.¹¹

All the jugs did not have any inscription or mention of its date of manufacturing, Pierre Olmer who was concerned with studying the jug filters, tried to classify their date of manufacturing according to the decorative subjects accuracy of drawing, and he saw that simple and unregulate jug filters should be attributed to the Tulunid dynasty,¹² while the Fāṭimid dynasty is characterized by drawings of animals and birds, in addition to calligraphic scripts especially if they are not written in naskh script and the mamluk ones known by the drawings of the familiar emblems of Mamluk antiquities.¹³

5. Jug filters decoration in the Fāṭimid dynasty:

Although Jug filters were widely used before the Fāṭimid dynasty, but they were simply pierced without any decorations, only in the Fāṭimid dynasty this type of art was improved, and the jug filters were refined to include different ornamental motifs, this was due to the promotion of art and architecture in the Fāṭimid dynasty. it was only during the Fatimid dynasty in which the filters in the jugs were polished to include fine decorative patterns. This was mainly due to the promotion of art and architecture during the Fatimid dynasty as well as the Caliphate's wealth, which enabled al- Fustāṭ to become a major commercial centre, due to the variety of styles of the discovered households.¹⁴

The decoration of the jug filter is based on the contrast between the holes and other parts, among which it resembles the openwork, which is used in the lace. The parts that are drilled or pierced so that water can pass through them, and the remaining parts are the ones that decorative pattern.¹⁵ Although these round pottery filters are not visible, the Muslim artist was keen to decorate them and made them extract the admiration of everyone who saw them. This decorations were carried out using pointed metal tools,

or seals, where the pottery craftsmen brings a piece of wet clay, then paste it on the plaster disc, where the decorations are applied to it.¹⁶

The filters depict any number of themes, executed with exceptional refinement, with epigraphic motifs of in *Kufic* script which was characterized by its geometrical shapes and decoration on the ends of the elongated parts of the words, Calligraphy was not the only decorative device used to embellish such vessels: animals, geometric patterning and floral designs were also employed.¹⁷

6. The Descriptive study

6.1 First jug filter, Plate 1

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum¹⁸

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2317

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 5.5 cm, diameter of the jug filter 3.5 cm

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāt, Egypt

Description: a light cream jug shred, with a filter lattice decorated by a vegetal ornament, the basic unit of the pattern is a seven peated flower in the center, with a frame incised and pierced with concentric circles, gives figure of eight motifs.

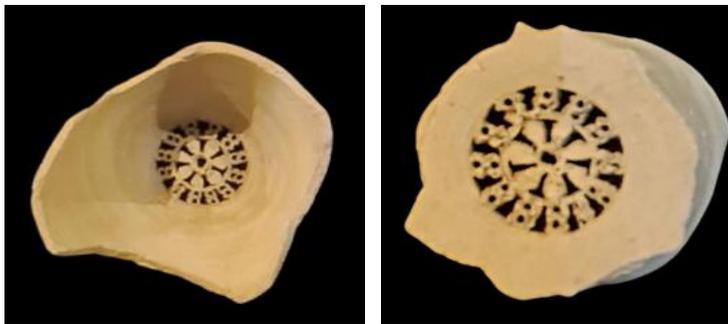


Plate 1: Obverse and reverse of a Fāṭimid water jug filter
(Captured by the researcher)

6.2 Second jug filter, Plate 2:

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2313

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 5.5 cm, diameter of the jug filter 5cm.

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāt, Egypt

Description: A reddish grey earthenware jug shred, with a slightly convex jug filter, the pattern has a geometrical decoration of five bands radiating from the centre to the inner body of the jag, dividing the filter in to six triangular spaces, the bands were

incised by zigzag lines (The zigzag line is a characteristic element of Fāṭimid jug filters decoration), the triangular space between them is filled with two small triangles topped by lozenge depicted in open work, This delicately elegant composition, which shows a firm hand, is reminiscent of a filter the design at The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Inv. no. 8577/49), Museum of the Faculty of Archeology and Tourism in the University of Jordan (Inv. no. UM 952), Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah in Kuwait (Inv. no. LN433c, LN435) , the style of decoration was also found on many pottery plates dating to the Fāṭimid dynasty.

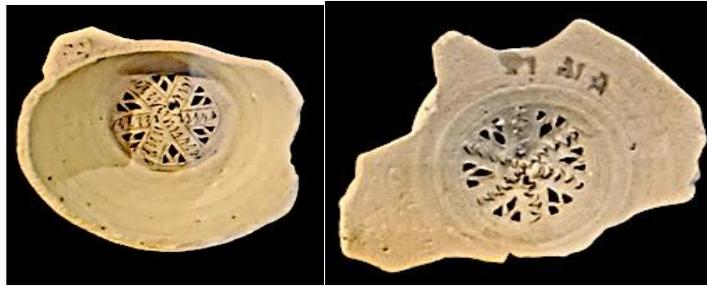


Plate 2: Obverse and reverse of a Fāṭimid water jug filter
(Captured by the researcher)

6.3 Third jug filter, Plate 3:

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2458

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 5.5 cm, diameter of the filter 4.5 cm

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Egypt

Description: a jug shred with burned parts; might be due to the great burning of al-Fuṣṭāṭ 1168 AD, the incised calligraphy that pierces right through the base of the filter consisted of three words reading “*Mn hafṭaf*” “من خف طف” meaning “Light thing float”. They were written here in elongated simple *kufic*¹⁹ script, on a lace background, similar filters bearing the same script were found Museum of Islamic ceramics in Egypt and that of the library of Alexandria (Hall of Islamic Antiquities, showcase 32).

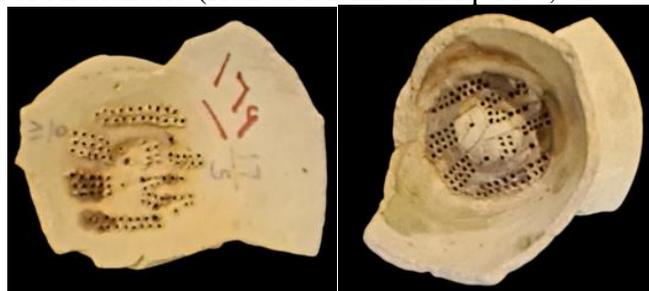


Plate 3: Obverse and reverse of a Fāṭimid water jug filter
(Captured by the researcher)

6.4 Fourth jug filter, Plate 4:

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2320

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 5 cm, diameter of the jug 4 cm.

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Egypt

Description: A light cream filter set in neck of jug sherd fitted with a small side handle that extends from the top of the body to the rim. Made of unglazed pottery (earthenware), buff slip, the main pattern is a vegetal ornament of a six petaled flower flanked by another pointed six vegetal leaves between them six triangular open spaces, depicted in open work.

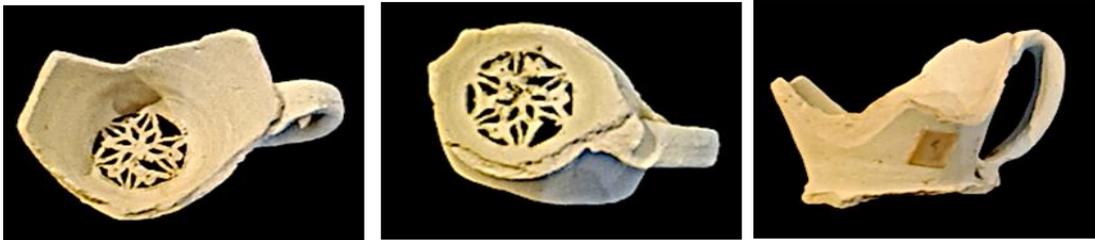


Plate.4. Obverse, reverse and side of a Fāṭimid water jug filter
(Captured by the researcher)

6.5 Fifth jug filter, plate 5:

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2319

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 5.5 cm, diameter of the jug filter 4.5 cm

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Egypt

Description: a reddish beige buff earthenware jug sherd, the main decoration pattern is a geometrical ornament of a multi-sided Steller plate design, starting at the center and radiating to the edges of the filter, in an openwork lace.

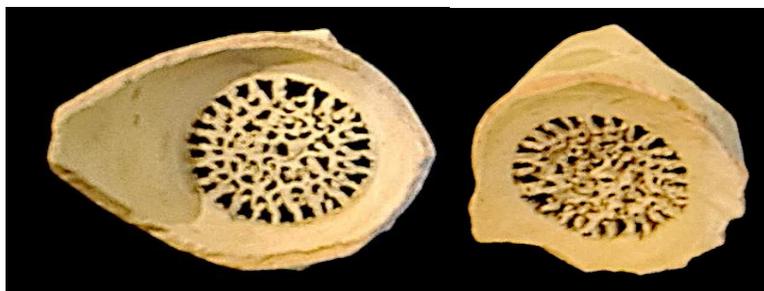


Plate 5: Obverse and reverse of a Fāṭimid water jug filter (Captured by the researcher)

6.6 Sixth jug filter, plate 6:

Location of preservation: Ismailia, Egypt

Holding Museum: Ismailia Museum

Date of Object: 4th–5th century AH/ 10th–11th century AD, Fāṭimid dynasty

Museum Inventory Number: 2314

Material(s) / Technique(s): buff slip earthenware, incised openwork ornamentation

Dimensions: Diameter of the rim 6.5 cm, diameter of the jug filter 5.5 cm

Provenance: al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Egypt

Description: A reddish-beige earthenware buff jug shred, the main pattern is a geometrical ornament of a band incised by zigzag line forming a triangle, surrounds the openwork at the centre, and framed by tiny, holed circlets, repeated on the three sides of the triangle, the geometrical pattern of a triangle inside a circle was widely found in the jug filters, Jug filters bearing the same decorations are displayed in the Museum of Islamic Art (Inv. no. 3856/20), Museum of the Faculty of Archeology and Tourism in the University of Jordan (Inv. no. UM 948), Los Anglos Country Museum of Art (Inv. no. M.80.202.227) , Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.



Plate 6: Obverse and reverse of a Fāṭimid water jug filter
(Captured by the researcher)

7. The Analytical study:

7.1 Calligraphic ornaments:

Arabic calligraphy, one of the most widely used artistic forms characterizing the Islamic civilization. It was extensively used in the Fāṭimid dynasty and elaborated along all the Islamic dynasties,²⁰ Calligraphy has significant spiritual connotations and is revered as a symbol of beauty and mystery because the Arabic language is linked with the revelation of Islam.²¹ There are many different forms of Arabic calligraphy,²² each type has its own characteristics depending on the dynasty, location, and context.²³ Like the kufic which was common in the Fāṭimid dynasty in addition to other types like: diwani, farsi, Maghribi, Andalusī, *rayhani*, *ruq'a*, *ta'liq*, *thuluth*, *muhaqqaq* and *naskhi*.²⁴

The Fāṭimid dynasty jug filters were characterized by their calligraphic inscriptions that was usually bear a *doua'a* or an Arabic common saying like the one in this collection bearing the *kufic* script “من خفّ طف” “Light thing float”, this saying was commonly used on jug filters in addition to other sayings like “من صبر قدر” “the one

who is patient is empowered”, "من اتقى فاز" "the one who is pious, wins", "دمت سعيداً بهم", "may you remain happy with them" and "ابقع تعز" "be content so that you be protected or strong".²⁵

7.2 Vegetal ornaments:

The vegetal ornamental motifs of jug filters were usually abstracted and accompanied by different geometrical units, especially in the multi-petalled floral shapes and line.²⁶ The studied pieces bore different types of multi petalled floral shapes which had round like (plate 1) or pointed edges (plate 4) and flanked by incised geometrical units of bands, radiating lines or circles.²⁷

7.3 Geometrical ornaments:

The geometrical designs of the jug filters put together simple geometrical shapes such as circles, squares or triangles (plates 2,3 and 6), with the repetition of these elements and their rearrangement in new patterns, a common and widely used feature of Fāṭimid jug filters. Geometrical compositions are dominant among the filters designs of this dynasty.

This collection comprised many geometrical motifs like the triangle inside circle and the triangles in forming zigzag bands which was favorable in the Fāṭimid art, and the composite Steller patterns.²⁸

Conclusion

- The study proved the prosperity of the Fāṭimid dynasty in the formation and decoration of jug filters.
- The study demonstrates the creativity and ingenuity of craftsmen in the Fāṭimid dynasty, in decorating the jug filters, regardless of its small size, forming a unique and attractive ornamental pattern.
- The Fāṭimid dynasty honored itself from other dynasties in the pottery industry, especially the jug filters
- The study pointed out the importance of inscriptions on the Fāṭimid jug filters, through which we learned a lot of Arabic sayings in this dynasty.

8. End Note:

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² Ali, Wijdan, The Arab Contribution To Islamic Art From the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries, AUC Press, 1999, p. 149.

³ Durant W, Aried, The Story of Civilization. Vol. VIII, the age of Louis XIV, New York: Simon and Schuster; 1983;

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⁴ عبد الرازق، احمد، الفنون الإسلامية حتى نهاية العصر الفاطمي، دار الحريري، ٢٠٠١، ص ١٥٥.

⁵[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332835950 Applying the Cultural District Concept as an Approach for Boosting Future Development of Cairo City](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332835950_Applying_the_Cultural_District_Concept_as_an_Approach_for_Boosting_Future_Development_of_Cairo_City) Untitled/figures?lo=1, 22 January 2021.

7 زكى حسن، شبابيك القل، مجلة الثقافة، مج ٣، ع ١١٢، القاهرة، ١٩٤١م، ص ١.
8 سعاد ماهر، الخزف التركي، القاهرة، ١٩٧٧م، ص ص ٩-٨.

9 عبد الرازق، شبابيك القل، ص ٣٢.

⁹ Wittkowski, G., "Arabic Filters from the Collection of the Cracow Archaeological Museum", *Materialy Archeologiczne* XXX, 1997, 41-55.

¹⁰ حسن، زكي محمد. فنون الإسلام. القاهرة، مكتبة نهضة مصر، 1948.

¹¹ Scanlon, G. T., *Fusāt Expedition Final Report. Vol. 1: Catalogue of Filters*, Winona Lake, 1986; Cromer J. History theory and practice of Art Education, National Art Education. USA: Reston Virginia; 1990.

¹² Keblow, (A.M.), *Early Islamic Pottery, Materials and Techniques*, Archetype Books, 2003, p. 54.

¹³ Olmer, P., *Catalogue Général du Musée Arabe du Caire: Les Filtres de Gargouettes*, Cairo, 1932;

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¹⁴ O'Kane, Bernard, *The Illustrated Guide to the museum of Islamic Art In Cairo*, AUC Press. 2012, p. 326.

¹⁵ Grube, E., *Islamic Pottery of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the*, London, 1976, pp. 123-125; see also for a bibliography on filters).

¹⁶ Pezard (M.), *La Ceramique Archaïque de l'Islam et ses Origines*, Ernest Leroux Publisher, 1920, pl. CXXXV;

الشاروني، صبحي، الفنون التشكيلية، القاهرة، ١٩٨١؛ ص ١١٠.

¹⁷ صابر، محمود، صناعة وفن وتاريخ الخزف، ط ٢، القاهرة، ١٩٥٠.

¹⁸ Ismailia Museum is one of the oldest museums in Egypt. It was built by engineers working for the Suez Canal International Maritime Company (now the Suez Canal Authority). The museum takes the form of a temple edifice and is characterized by displaying a variety of unique artifacts that were discovered in the Suez Canal and Sinai region. The museum was officially opened in 1934 AD to preserve the artifacts that were found during the excavation of the Suez canal.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjdp9joxN72AhVJTBoKHe_tCq8QFnoECAgQAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.antiquities.gov.eg%2FdefaultAr%2FMuseum%2FPages%2FMuseumDetails.aspx%3FMusCode%3D18&usq=AOvVaw1v0X3gELriUAw-jXSnKjsG, 3 January 2021.

¹⁹ Kufic: a style named after the city of *Kufa* in Iraq.

²⁰ أبو النور، ايمان احمد، جماليات النقوش الكتابية على شبابيك القل في العصر الفاطمي، اخصائية فنون تشكيلية، وزارة الثقافة، مركز الجزيرة للفنون، ٢٠١٤، ص ٧.

²¹ Golvin, L., *Recherches archéologiques à la Qalā des Baû Hammād*, Paris : G.P Maisonneuve et Larose, 1965, pl. LXXI.

²² رزق، عاصم محمد، الفنون العربية الإسلامية في مصر، مكتبة مدبولي، القاهرة، ٢٠٠٧، ص ٣٤.

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- ²⁶ إبراهيم، هاني فاروق، شبابيك القلل الإسلامية كمصدر لاثراء الاشكال الخزفية، رسالة ماجستير، كلية التربية الفنية، جامعة حلوان، ٢٠٠٠.
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دراسة وصفية تحليلية لمجموعة شبابيك القلل بمتحف الإسماعيلية (غير منشورة)

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المخلص	معلومات المقالة
اشتملت هذه الدراسة على ستة من شبابيك القلل، غير المنشورة المحفوظة بمتحف الإسماعيلية، قمت بفحصها ودراستها وتصويرها بعد الحصول على الموافقات اللازمة من إدارة متحف الإسماعيلية ووزارة الآثار المصرية. تمثل شبابيك القلل أحد فنون الشعبية الاجتماعية في العصر الفاطمي، وهي شاهدا على الدقة والخيال والابتكار والذوق الرفيع للفنان المسلم، وتثبت أن الفنان كان يعمل لغرض الفن فقط لما بها من تفاصيل دقيقة غير ظاهرة لراي القلة من الخارج. شبابيك القلل عبارة عن أقراص مستديرة صغيرة، مثبتة في أعناق أبريق الماء الفخارية لحماية محتوياتها من الحشرات والتلوث. كانت بشكل عام غير مطلية وغير مزخرفة كغيرها من الاواني الفخارية، تنوعت زخارف شبابيك القلل من زخارف حيوانية ونباتية وكتابتية شملت عبارات دعائية او مقولات عربية قصيرة، كتبت بخط كوفي بسيط مصقول أو مورق. تم اكتشاف العديد من شبابيك القلل خلال الحفريات الأثرية المصرية في موقع الفسطاط (عاصمة مصر السابقة) ويضم متحف الفن الإسلامي ومتحف جاير أندرسون في القاهرة حاليًا مجموعة كبيرة من هذه الشبابيك.	الكلمات المفتاحية شبابيك القلل؛ العصر الفاطمي؛ الفسطاط؛ متحف الإسماعيلية.
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