WANDERING ROSETTES: QATNA’S KEY TO A MISUNDERSTOOD MOTIF

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ABSTRACT
A golden inlaid rosette found in the royal tomb of Qatna and dated to the fifteenth to fourteenth century BCE sheds light on the evolution of the Egyptian rosette during the 18th Dynasty and on patterns of artistic exchanges between Near Eastern and Egyptian artists. Since cloisonné technique is uncommon in second millennium BCE pieces of jewelry from Western Asia, the question of the manufacture of the Qatna rosette is reevaluated and a more distant origin proposed on the basis of written documents found in Qatna.

The golden floral jewel found in 2002 in Qatna’s (Tell Mistaře) royal tomb central chamber (Damascus National Museum MSHO2G-i1150), inlaid with carnelian and lapis lazuli, and dated to the fifteenth to fourteenth century BCE, has a stunningly three-dimensional quality for an almost flat piece of jewelry (the underside is slightly convex). The 6.9 cm diameter rosette has a dotted and ringed center, and all its 26 so-called petals are divided into eight crescentiform cells fitted with alternating red and blue stones, ending on the outer edge with an elliptic cell filled with carnelian, making an original total of 234 inlaid pieces of stone (Figure 1). The unusual and striking effect of the composition is of tubular convex “petals” emerging from the inner circle of the receptacle, the round heart of the rosette seemingly set in the depth of the raised corolla. Except for the technique of inlays, the piece has apparently no formal connection with Egyptian rosettes and is “a product of Syrian craftsmanship,” as Pfälzer noted in his presentation of the jewel.

I believe the Qatna piece may shed light on a misunderstood stage in the evolution of the generic rosette in Egyptian iconography and on the reciprocal influence of Near Eastern and Egyptian artists.

Classical Egyptian rosettes are of two main patterns: the geometric, wheel-structured or abstract rosettes, and the floral types, the latter further subdivided into a nymphaea-type with pointed tips and a daisy-type with rounded tips (Figure 2). The daisy motif might have been based on an actual specimen of the Compositae (Asteraceae) family, either the common chamomile (Anthemis pseudocutula Boiss.) attested in Egyptian archaeological context since the 3rd Dynasty or the later attested crown daisy (Chrysanthemum coronarium L.), from the 18th Dynasty on, in the Theban area.

Figure 1: Damascus National Museum MSHO2G-i1150, courtesy of Peter Pfälzer and Qatna Project, University of Tübingen

The corolla of both species is actually made of small ray florets possessing flat rays in lengthwise relief, sometimes slightly curved. This sharply contrasts with our Qatna design and its tubular rays (Figure 3), a peculiarity attested in several species in nature, e.g. dahlia (a native to the American continent), but also osteospumums (the “African daisy,” also known in the southwestern Arabian Peninsula), spoon mums (Chrysanthemum morifolium), and even ox-eye daisies (Leucanthemum Miller), all of them belonging to the Asteraceae family. Many species with tubular ray florets are known in the Levant.

Looking more closely at the Egyptian rosettes, we see an interesting evolution that takes place during the 18th Dynasty, with the appearance of daisy-types with florets possessing more
than eight rays variously colored in concentric patterns and tipped with a rounded, sometimes dotted, end. Kantor notes the occurrence of this specific pattern, but she does not reach any significant conclusion. When applied on a flat or slightly curved surface by the Egyptian artists, the motif does not have the tridimensional quality of the Qatna item, but all its elements faithfully appear: see, e.g., from Thutmose III’s reign, an inlaid medallion from the tomb of Merytra Hatshepsut (KV 42); from Amenhotep III’s reign, part of the floral motif of the king’s throne in a mural of Anen’s tomb (TT 120) and on several lids of the wooden model vases from the tomb of Yuya and Tuya (Figure 5c). A very similar dotted-tipped floral design appears on the lid of a faience beaker from Lachish (Tell Duweir), probably to be dated of the same period (Figures 4 and 5b).

Figure 4: IAA 1934-7696, courtesy of Osnat Misch Brandel and Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

From Tutankhamun’s reign, the gold inlaid medallions on the body of the golden chariot Cairo JE 61989 are described by Carter as composed of a golden center pin surrounded by silver, reddish calcite, blue and green glass inlays in matching circular sets with almost round tips of calcite (Figure 5d). In all these pieces, the rays are thus marked by elliptic lines (forming the borders of the cells in the case of inlaid pieces) emphasizing their tubular form; still, the effect is much “flatter” than in the case of our Qatna jewel.

Figure 5: (a) Qatna and (b) Lachish rosettes; (c) Cairo CG 51082 (after Theodore M. Davis, The Tomb of Iusiya and Touiyou [London: Archibald Constable, 1907], pl. 43); (d) Cairo JE 61989 (copyright © Robert Harding).

A much more telling representation of the same motif appears on supposedly metal vessels depicted in various contexts since the reign of Thutmose III. Here the floral motif is frequently appended to the vessel’s belly, in convex gadroons with a dotted polylobed edge. Gadrooned vessels, often crateriform (called in Egyptian didi) may be of Syrian origin. They may have been brought back from the Levant by Thutmose III and by Syrian merchants; they are also represented as tribute in Asian delegation scenes in the tombs of the nobles during the same reign, e.g. in the tombs of Menkheperreseneb (TT 86; even in the hand of the Hittite prince); and Amenmose (TT 89), and
Rekhmira (TT 100). Some of the vessels are depicted with dotted gadroons (Figure 6a).

In some tombs similarly shaped vessels are carried by envoys from the Aegean, but the floral gadroons are apparently rare on actual Aegean vessels, and this may be a case of transfer of Syriac material culture to the Aegean domain by the Egyptian artists. At the time of Amenhotep II’s reign, the gadroons of a vessel represented in the tomb of Mery (TT 95) are emphasized by curved or V-like striations, a device used in the depiction to accent the impression of a curved shape in relief (Figure 6b). Note that here the dot is located between the tips of the rays, a probable misreading of the motif.

![Figure 6: (a) From Menkhepereseneb TT 86 (after Wilhelm Max Müller, Egyptological Researches: Results of a Journey in 1906 2, Carnegie Institution of Washington 53/2, 1910, pl. 3); (b) from Mery TT 95 (after Emile Prisse d’Avennes, Histoire de l’art égyptien d’après les monuments: Atlas II, Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1878, V.7); (c) from Nebamun/Imiseb TT 65 (after Ippolito Rosellini, L’Egitto e della Nubia: Monumenti civili II, Niccolo Capurro, 1834, pl. 62).](image)

Many more examples of these ribbed or fluted vessels occur in later 18th Dynasty tombs. The clearest representation of tubular rays is from the tomb of Nebamun (TT 65), belonging to the reign of Hatshepsut but usurped and redecorated for Imiseba during the 20th Dynasty (reign of Ramesses IX). The fluted vessel has crescent-shaped markings on each gadroon tipped by a blue or red roundel with a white center suggesting a tubular opening (Figure 6c). There is no more ambiguity concerning the relation between this design and our Qatna motif.

On a Theban mural of the 19th Dynasty (reign of Ramesses II?), an intriguing depiction of flowers called “papyrus” by Wilkinson and Hill shows evident tubular ray florets with red dotted tips and blue V-shaped striations, a pattern reminiscent of palmettes from the later (nineteenth century BCE) northwest palace at Nimrud (see also the rosettes motif in the ‘upper chambers’ of the central palace), but without dotted tips. One may ask if these inflorescences are not a further avatar of our mysterious Compositae.

From the reign of Thutmose III, representations of Egyptian goldsmiths at work may show metal crateriform vessels similar to those brought into Egypt as foreign tribute but here produced by local artisans (see, e.g., in Menkhepereseneb’s tomb, TT 86). In the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181), from the reign of Amenhotep III, a vessel depicted in the goldsmiths’ scene has dotted gadroons. The Egyptians are copying Syrian prototypes. Unfortunately, no such metal vessel with dotted gadroons has been discovered in Egypt or in the Levant.

But was the motif of certain Syrian origin, and was the Qatna jewel of Syrian manufacture? The Qatna excavations have perhaps revealed a vital piece of information concerning the jewel’s source: inventory tablets of precious artifacts from the palace (fifteenth-fourteenth century BCE), list “a necklace including a golden rosette, inlaid with lazuli, rock crystal, (and) carnelian; Tukrish work” (tablet I, line 55). Borotéo has suggested that the Tukrish mention may refer to an Iranian Luristan manufacture, but for Mooney it refers more probably to Kurdistan or Azerbaijan work; he proposes that what qualifies for “Tukrish style (or technique)” may be “the combination of gold and multi-coloured cloisonné technique” which is uncommon in second millennium BCE pieces of jewelry from Western Asia. Our rosette may be part of such a necklace, since it was found among beads and its thirteen underside loops could be meant to fasten stringed beads (e.g. six rows and one single bead as pendant), or it may just be another example of Tukrish rosette. Tukrish was also known as a source of precious metals and lapis lazuli.

A jewel similar to Qatna’s precious floral ornament has yet to be found in Iran to confirm such origin, though the dotted rosette design is attested later in the region: an engraved, dotted, flat rosette on the underside of a copper vessel said to have been found in the Bakhtaran province, near Kermanshah, has been tentatively dated to 1200–1000 BCE (Figure 7). The Iranian motif may have found its way to Egypt by wandering through the Levant.

![Figure 7: BM 123062 (copyright © Trustees of the British Museum).](image)
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Notes


6 See e.g. faience rosette from Deir el-Bahari, 18th Dynasty, MMA 05.4.43, http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/560663?rpp=20&pg=1 &ao=on&ft=05.4.43&pos=1.


8 See e.g. on the outside of a faience bowl from Deir el-Bahari, MAA 22.3.73, http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/547570?rpp=20 &pg=1&ao=on&ft=22.3.73&img=1.


13 I thank Jotham Ziffer Berger (Hebrew University Herborn) for this precision.

14 For examples of dotted ray florets in the Aegean, Greek, and Near Eastern worlds, see Ayako Imai, Some Aspects of "Phoenician bowls" with Special Reference to the Proteocyptis Class and the Cypro-Phoenician Class (PhD dissertation, Columbia University; Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1977), 123 fig. C and 15–160, although no examples of tubular ray florets are presented.


18 Cairo CG 51056, 51059–51061, 51069, 51077, 51082 in James E. Quibell, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire Nos. 51001–51191: Tomb of Yusa and Thot (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1908), pl. 21; Theodore M. Davis, The Tomb of Iouya and Touyou (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), pl. 43.


20 Howard Carter Archives (Griffith Institute), card n.120-5, http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gr/carter/12 0-c120-5.html.


22 But there are also rhytons, nhem-jugs, lothiform chalices, globular footed vessels. Jean Vercoutter, L’Egypte et le monde égéen phrénolitique: Etude critique des sources égyptiennes (du début de la XVIIIe à la fin de la XIXe

23 Kurt Sethe, Urkunden der 18. Dynastie, Abteilung IV, Band III, Heft 5–12; Historisch-biographische Urkunden (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1907), 631 n. 17 (golden ddt-vase from Thutmose III’s list of gifts to Amun in the Annals chamber, Karnak). The lexeme has existed in Egypt since the Old Kingdom (Vercouter, 346–7), apparently referring to a globular vessel classified with the m5-icon [W24 in Gardiner’s sign list: Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 547] in Karl Lepsius, Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien II (Berlin, 1846–1859, 28) without the floral adornment.

24 Actually the treasure shelves represented in Karnak include vessels of the same general shape but not gadrooned, see Walter Wreszinski, Atlas zur alägyptischen Kulturgeschichte II (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1923), 331.

25 For Syrian merchants bringing this type of vessels for trade in Egypt, see e.g. Kenanum’s tomb (TT 162) from Amenhetep III’s reign in Norman de G. Davies and Raymond O. Faulkner, “A Syrian Trading Venture to Egypt,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 33 (1947): pls 7–8.


31 An Egyptianizing feature for Laboury, 105–106.


35 Ippolito Rosellini, I monumenti dell’Egitto e della Nubia: Monumenti civili II (Pisa: Niccolo Capurro, 1834), pl. 62; Prise d’Avennes, V.24; Prise d’Avennes et al., 159.


39 Davies and Davies 1933, pl. 12.


textes cunéiformes 3 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1980), 239.


49 For other possible uses of the rosette, see Pfälzner 2011, 156.
