

ISLAMIC WATER FILTER JUG FOUND IN THE ROMSTORFER COLLECTION IN SUCEAVA

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Abstract: *This article analyzes a special piece from the Romstorfer collection in Suceava History Museum: a water filter jug made of fine white-cream clay, well-fired, not enameled and without exterior decoration, that can be dated to the 15th-17th centuries A.D.*

Keywords: *jug, water filter, Romstorfer Collection, Ottoman pottery*

Cuvinte cheie: *cană, filtru de apă, Colecția Romstorfer, ceramică otomană*

Founded in the last year of 19th century, Suceava History Museum is repository of rich and varied patrimony resulted from archaeological investigations and fortuitous discoveries for over a century. Amongst the museum's collections, Romstorfer Collection, named after architect Karl Anton Romstorfer who represented Duchy of Bukovina in *K.K. Central Kommission für Kunst und Historische Denkmale*, has a special place. In 1895-1904, Romstorfer conducted the works to clear the earth and dirt deposited in time on Suceava fortress walls. With few exceptions, the Romstorfer Collection is made up of objects discovered at Suceava Fortress (Royal Fortress) and *Câmpul Șanțurilor* (Field of Trenches), a large plateau near the fortress.

Because the excavations were supervised by amateurs without any specialization, the scientific results of the investigations were compromised: the place and conditions of the finds were not written down; the system for collecting materials was defective, given the absence of unique selection criteria and that the choice of objects was decided by whoever supervised the excavations in that respective day. Under these circumstances, the finds can be dated only based on analogies with similar objects or to a larger period of time, from the end of the 14th century (date of construction) to 1675 (when the fortress was destroyed by Ottoman order).

One of these finds is a buff ware jug that is analyzed in this paper. It is a fragment of a water filter jug. As its place of discovery and context aren't known, it is very difficult to date it precisely.

Water filter jugs' main characteristic is the colour of the clay, which ranges from light yellowish grey to very light grey or greenish/grey. The jugs are of good quality and relatively thin, finely levigated and well-fired.

The origin of water filter jugs lies somewhere in the Sasanian Empire. Such vessels appeared in the East in the 7th century A.D., but in most Middle Eastern sites they appeared in the second half of the 8th century A.D., following the Abbasid expansion, and became one of the most popular unglazed types¹. Although in some sites they appeared earlier in the 8th century A.D. (Umayyad), it seems that the rapid spread occurred some time in the second half of the 8th century A.D. This type became very popular and well distributed all the way to Syria², in Transjordan, Palestine, Egypt³, Mesopotamia and Iran⁴.

¹ Arnon 2007, 38-99.

² Rousset 1996, 300-305.

³ Scanlon 1970, 37-64.

⁴ Arnon 2007, 38-99.

Porous water jugs were designed to keep water cool as it evaporated. The filters, which kept out insects, were perforated with a variety of fragile designs made up of ornamental, calligraphic, figurative and animal motifs. The range of designs is considerable and the degree of finesse and imagination displayed in these modest household vessels is extraordinary. Many of the designs are purely abstract, revealing fine filigree of star formations, strapwork, knots, loops and interlacing⁵. Many filters were found in Egypt and Pierre Olmer established eight types of filters according to the design⁶.

The fragment found at Suceava has two fleurons bordered by striated zigzag, on a lozenge with the same border pattern, three holes (one at the interstices) and the entire composition also bordered with striated zigzag (Pl. 1, 2). The shape is not fully round, it is a little oblate and its dimensions are 4.3×4.5 cm. Perhaps it was a small water filter jug from a late period, because the earliest type has almost 7 cm in diameter. This kind of pottery much resembles the style of Olmer's chronology for water filters found in Fustat. These finds are dated to the 13th century in Fatimid Age⁷. Another fragment with same design of filter is in Islamic Collection of Los Angeles County Museum and places this type in Western or Central Asia but without chronology and place of discovery⁸.

Considering that this is a singular piece on the Romanian territory and we have few details about the conditions of discovery, we could date it some time between the 15th to the 17th century. The fragment belongs to Ottoman pottery, considering it is very difficult under these circumstances to link it to other Islamic culture (Fatimid or Mamluk).

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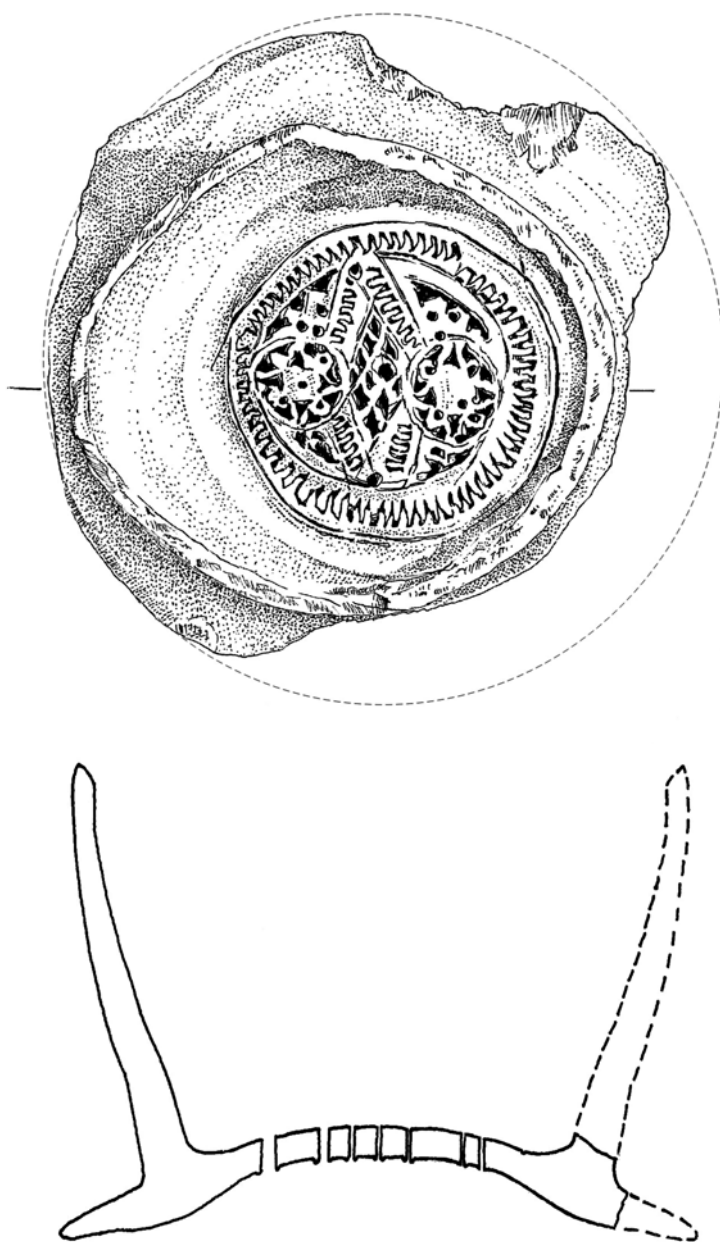
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⁵ Yeomans 2006, 70-89.

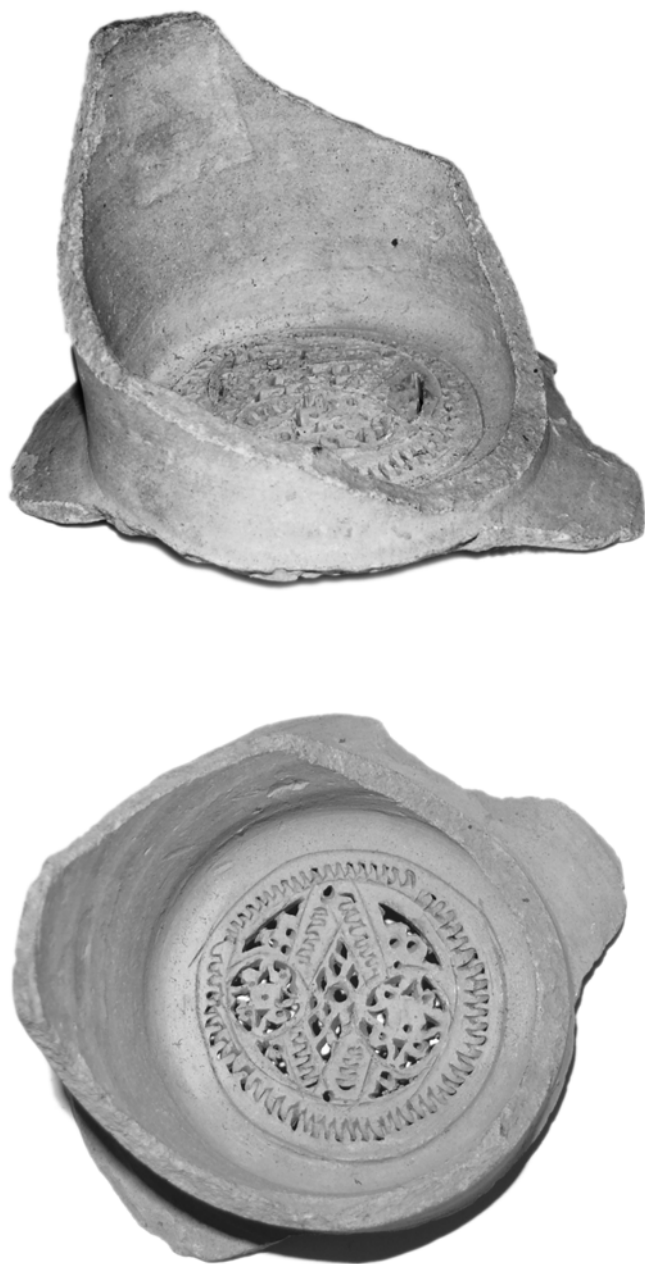
⁶ Olmer 1932.

⁷ Scanlon 1970, 42-50.

⁸ Los Angeles County Museum, Islamic Art Collection, M. 80.202.228.



Pl. 1. Ottoman filter jug discovered at Suceava (Romstorfer Collection).



Pl. 2. Ottoman filter jug discovered at Suceava (Romstorfer Collection).