

Painting Techniques of Ottoman Interiors: reconstructing decorative panels from a Damascus Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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This interior dates to 1707 and functioned as a reception chamber, or *qa'a*, in the house of an affluent family in Damascus, Syria. Poplar wall paneling and ceilings are decorated with layers of gesso with raised relief designs, known as *'ajami*, metal leafing, colored glazes, and bright paint colors.

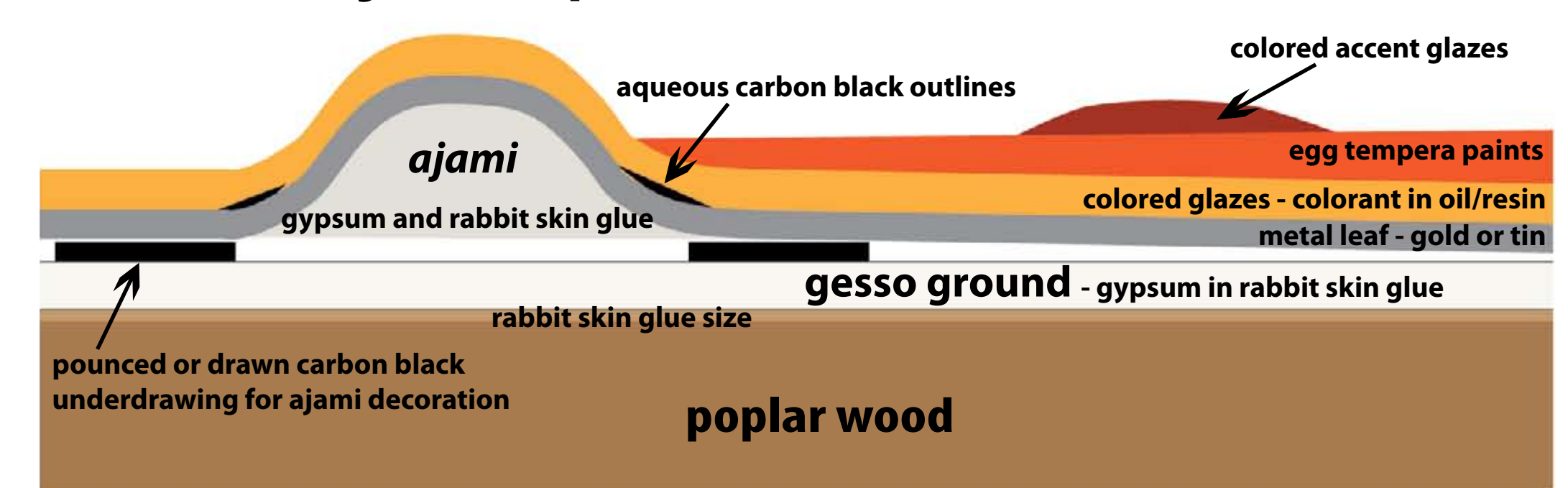
The current appearance exhibits multi-layered, darkened restoration varnishes that obscure the once-vibrant colors and interplay of light between reflective and matte surfaces. Small blue backgrounds of calligraphy panels, once a brilliant blue, are now so darkened they appear to be black.

The project purpose is to illustrate the intended appearance of the room, and to better understand the original techniques and materials. Images of the reconstructed panels will be part of the didactic materials

available to museum visitors on a computer kiosk at the room's entrance.

Analysis of the original pigments and media, supplemented by recipes and techniques from historic treatises and current research, guided the selection of materials for the reconstruction [1, 2]. Identified paint pigments include minium, vermilion, basic verdigris, smalt, carbon black, and lead white; glaze colorants include aloe (orange), verdigris (green), and cochineal (red).

General layer sequence



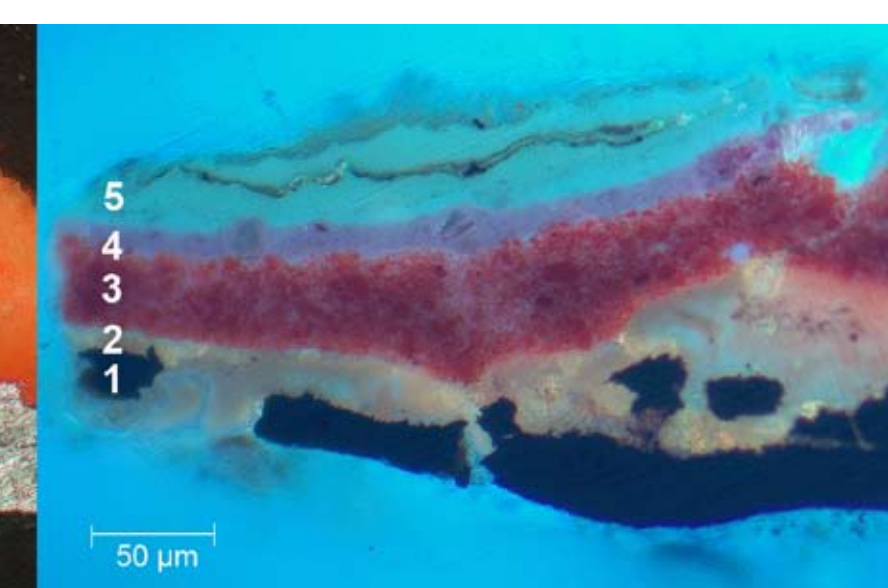
The calligraphy panel is integrated in the wall paneling and is the second of 27 panels with Arabic poetry in *thuluth jali* script. This panel reads: "(May) feasts of rejoicing remain with you eternally."



Reconstructed calligraphy panel reflects sequence of steps involved in construction.



Visible light



UV light

Sample taken from red flower on border

5. Restoration varnish layers, dirt between layers
4. Cochineal red glaze
3. Minium/vermillion flower
2. Aloe orange glaze
1. Tin leaf



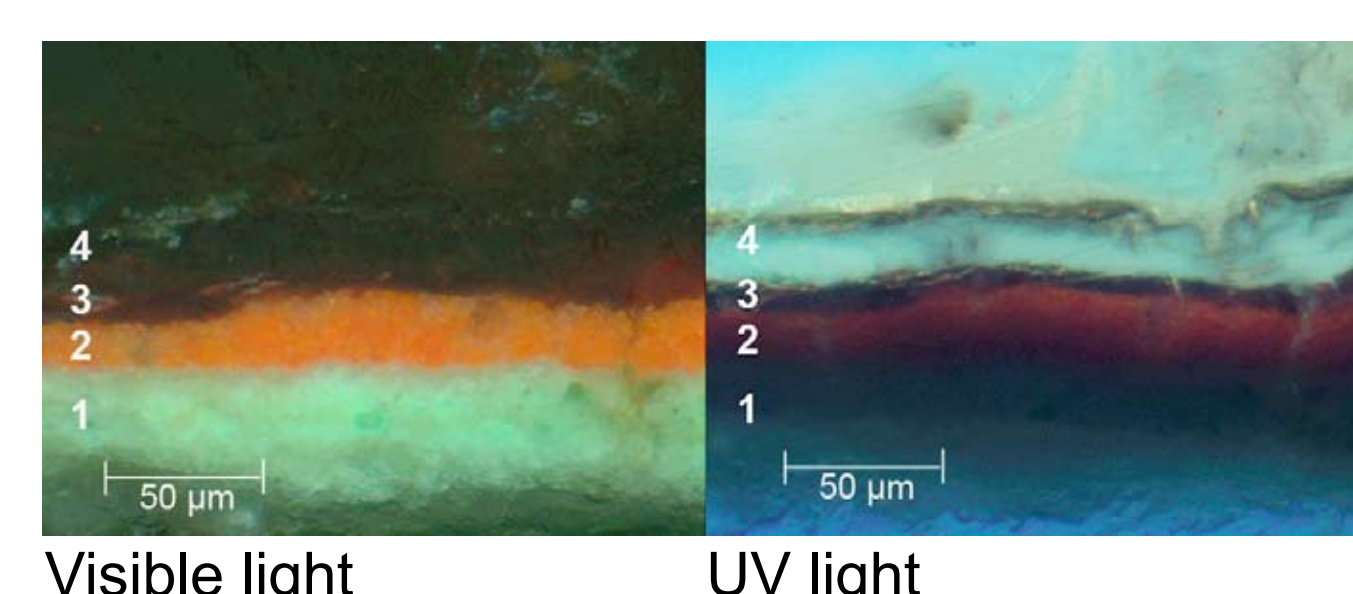
Calligrapher Elinor Holland, executing underdrawing for 'ajami' script with a reed pen.



aloe colophony orange glaze

Orange glaze colorant on tin leaf outer border is aloe in drying oil-*Pinaceae* resin. For replication, aloe was cooked with mixture of colophony and linseed oil in a ratio of 4:2:1 (oil/resin/aloe) [3].

The door panel and frame are from the upper section of one set of cupboard doors on the south wall.



- Visible light UV light
- Sample taken from red flower on border**
4. Restoration varnish layers, dirt between layers
 3. Cochineal red glaze
 2. Minium/vermillion flower
 1. Lead white/verdigris background



Commercially-available neutral verdigris does not produce a desirable shade of green for the background paint when bound in egg. Following historic recipes, saffron ground with water was added to verdigris, lead white, and egg binder to obtain the appropriate color effect.

