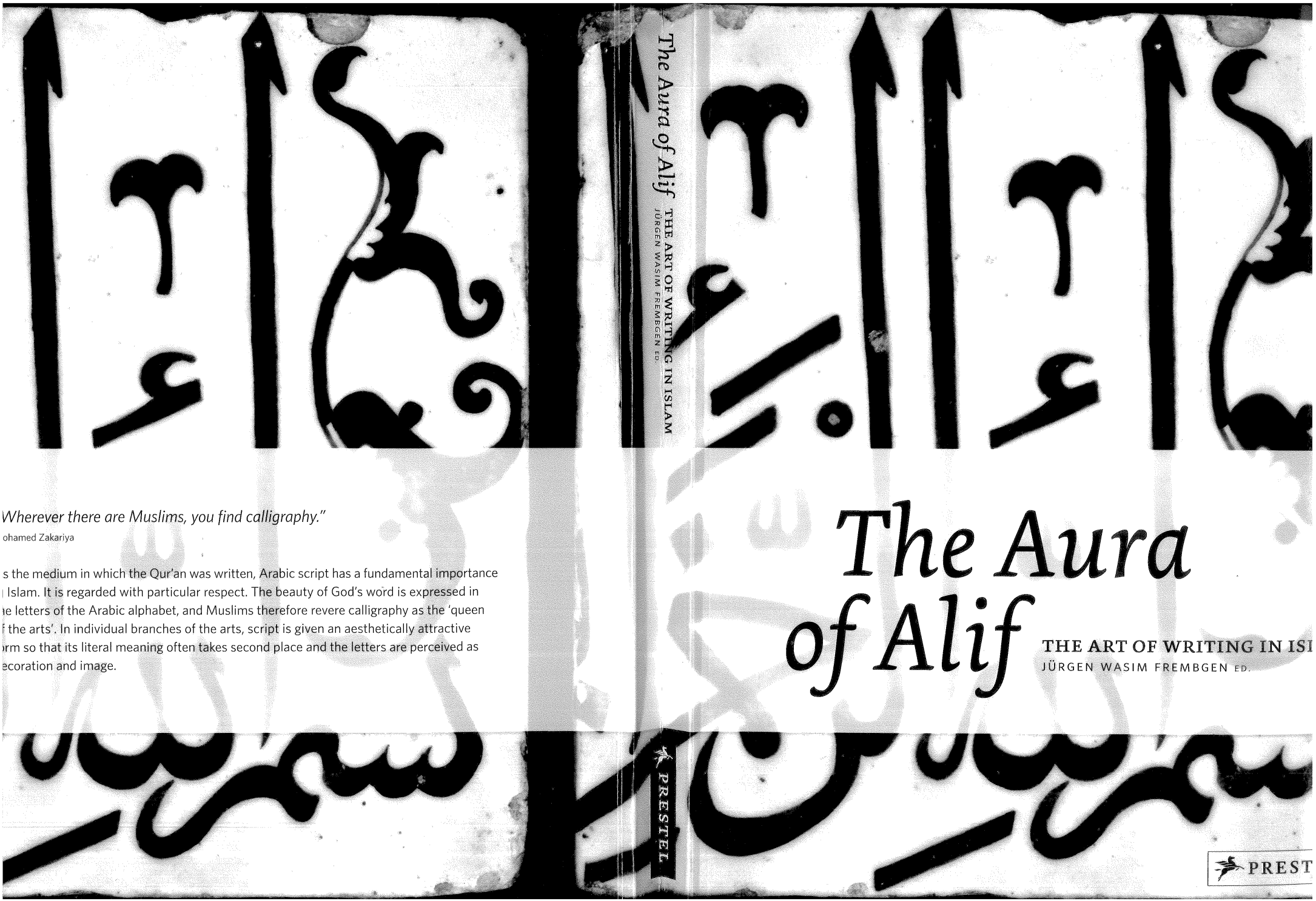

Wherever there are Muslims, you find calligraphy."

ohamed Zakariya

s the medium in which the Qur'an was written, Arabic script has a fundamental importance
Islam. It is regarded with particular respect. The beauty of God's word is expressed in
ıe letters of the Arabic alphabet, and Muslims therefore revere calligraphy as the 'queen
f the arts'. In individual branches of the arts, script is given an aesthetically attractive
ırm so that its literal meaning often takes second place and the letters are perceived as
ecoration and image.

The Aura of Alif THE ART OF WRITING IN ISLAM JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN ED.

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The Aura of Alif

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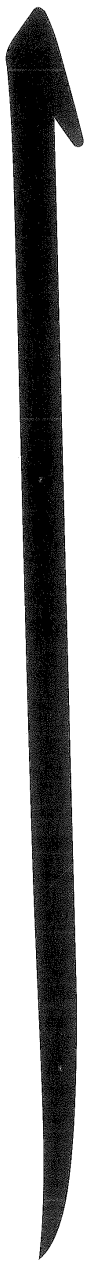

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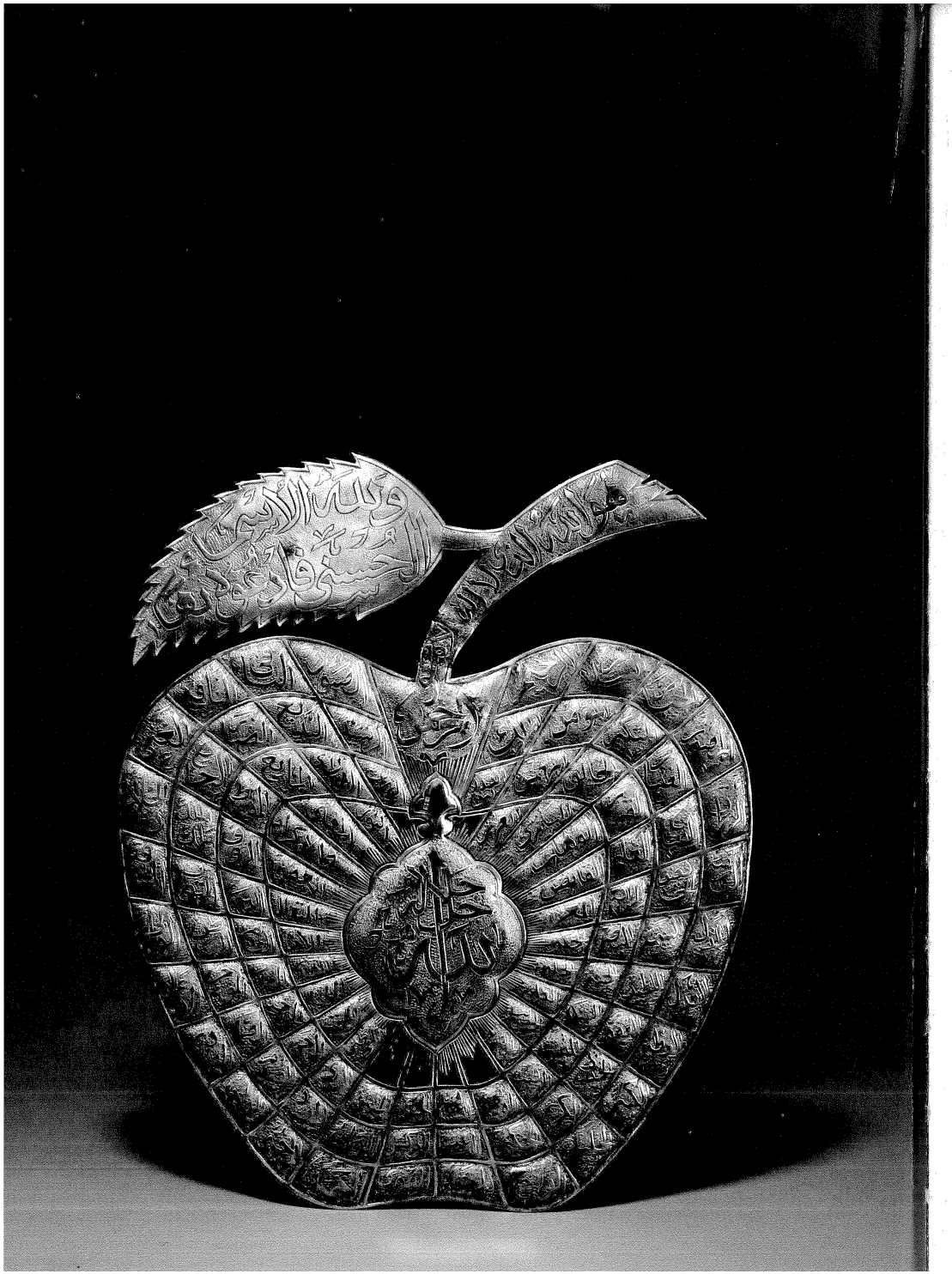


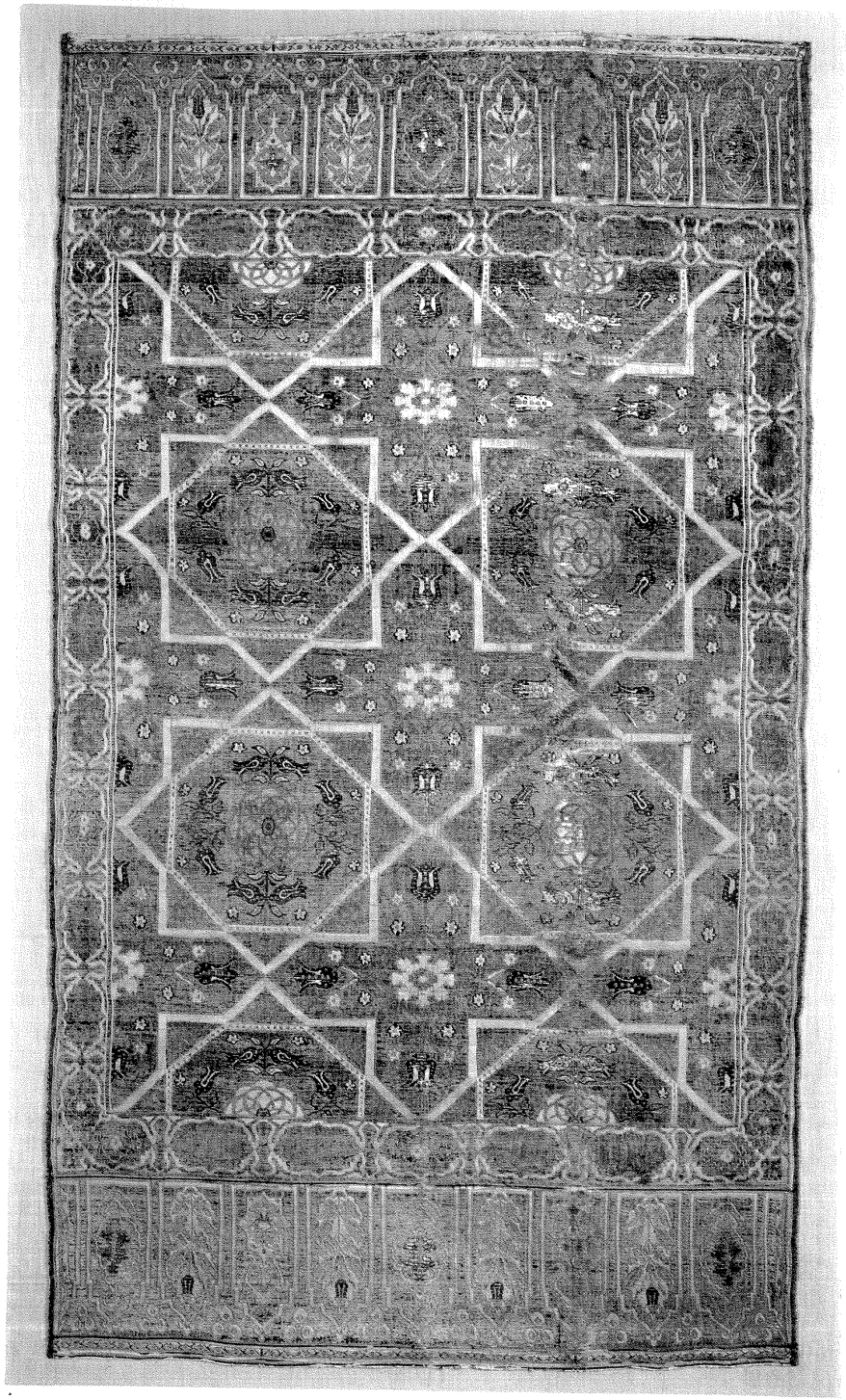
The Aura of Alif

THE ART OF WRITING IN ISLAM

EDITED BY JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

PRESTEL
Munich · Berlin · London · New York

Contents



Foreword

1910 was the year in which the exhibition entitled *Masterpieces of Muhammedan Art* was shown in Munich – at that time the most outstanding exhibition of its kind worldwide. It could not be foreseen that, one hundred years later, this event would not have lost any of its historic significance. With its accompanying catalogues, this exhibition is considered the beginning of Europe's scholarly discussion of Islamic art and to this day it has remained a point of reference for countless exhibitions. The current exhibition at the Museum of Ethnology in Munich *The Aura of Alif*, is one such case; it takes up the subject of calligraphy in Islam in all its diversity which a century ago was scarcely known in Europe and if known was not perceived as an art. Our aim now is to give this complex topic the space it deserves and thus provide a more in-depth perspective through the presentation of outstanding examples.

In selecting this subject which is one of a series of exhibitions and events in the Munich Islam Year 2010, Jürgen Wasim Frembgen has directed our Western view to the central, original meaning of the 'aura' in the sense of a hint of something and of an effect. The diversity of the artefacts exhibited – from household objects and tombstones to veritable works of art – reflects the broad spectrum of calligraphy in Islam from the early ninth to the early twenty-first century and ranges from simple notes to magical effects, from religious cult to the art of poetry. The museum's own holdings, important loans from other museums and private lenders make it not only tangible for visitors but 'legible' in the literal sense of the word. In the catalogue, a distinguished group of experts has dealt with the varied facets of the Islamic art of writing and in many cases read inscriptions – particularly on works of art belonging to the museum in Munich – for the first time, thus making their meaning and significance accessible.

An ethnographic museum is an ideal venue for an exhibition of this kind. After all, the purpose of this institution is to present culture in its totality. This is accomplished through the meaningful interaction of the various artefacts and documents and through its creative aesthetics which point the way to beauty for which we must first develop an eye. It is our good fortune to be able to hold this exhibition in the Museum of Ethnology in Munich, not least as it enables us to recall the prominent role played by Lucian Scherman, director of the museum from 1907 to 1933, who here – also under the impression of the Islam Exhibition in Munich in 1910 – implemented this basic conception of a comprehensive presentation of culture in all its diversity.

CLAUDIUS MÜLLER
Director
Museum of Ethnology, Munich

SILK BROCADE PANEL (*YASTIK*) WITH INSCRIPTIONS
Bursa or Istanbul/Turkey; 16th century

This fine Ottoman silk brocade panel was already displayed in 1910 in Munich in the world-renowned exhibition "Masterpieces of Muhammedan Art". Its pattern develops from overlaid, diagonal lines which alternate, forming the starting points for the crosses and octagons inscribed in the squares. Each of their centres is formed from a rosette from which tulip petals emanate in horizontal-vertical or circular arrangements in the Ottoman court style. The rosettes in the middle of the three crosses are derived from the tradition of Central Asian Turkic peoples. The border consists of cartouches strung together and filled with barely legible script. In the niche-like borders on both narrow sides there are alternatingly different floral motifs. The spaces between the gables, reminiscent of the Central Asian *saf* form, are decorated with small *cintamani* motifs made of three balls. The latter originate in a Chinese symbol for power and good fortune in Buddhist times.

Some remarks on the transcription and publishing of this catalogue, which accompanies the special exhibition of the Museum of Ethnology, Munich (Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München, abbreviated SMV) of the same name:

Since the technical terms used in the essays come from a wide variety of Oriental languages – and regional languages – a simplified system was selected on the basis of English in the interest of standardization and better legibility for a broad circle of readers. Diacritical remarks have been omitted with the exception of the lengths of vowels and the *'ayn* (as in *riq'a*) and *hamza* (as in *qur'ān*). Technical terms appear in italics and are for the most part not capitalized.

Captions by J. W. Frembgen in collaboration with the authors

English translation of the German essays by Müller, Haase, Schlamminger, Korn, Rahim and Frembgen as well as the captions by Jane Ripken. The English translations of poetic verses in the captions to figs. 21, 23 and 26–30 are by Hugh van Skyhawk.

FRONT COVER

TILE WITH THREE ALIFS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BASMALA

Syria; 16th – 17th century

This wall tile from an inscription panel contains in *thuluth* script the first part of the *basmala* formula: *bismillāhi r-rahmāni r-rahīm* – "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate". Every Qur'an sura (except sura 9) is introduced by this invocation. According to tradition, the Prophet promises that the calligrapher of a beautiful *basmala* will enter paradise. Particularly striking in the design of this tile are the extended verticals of the three *alifs* (representing the long vowel *ā*). The blank spaces are filled with an arabesque at the beginning and diacritical marks for balance.

FRONTISPIECE

99 MOST BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF GOD

Iran; early 20th century

The 99 Most Beautiful Names of Allah (*asmā' al-husnā*) along with sura 7, verse 180 from the Qur'an (serrated leaf) and praise of God (stem and central cartouche) are inscribed in the decorative form of an 'Apple of Wish Fulfilment'.

RIGHT

DETAIL FROM FIG. 27:

QUR'AN CITATION AND ADAGE BY 'ALI IBN ABI TALIB

Mughal period, India, dat. 1034H/1625 CE, on a page from an 18th century album

"The purity of script is the purity of the soul."
old Arabic adage

"If I had known there was such a thing as Islamic calligraphy, I would never have started to paint."
Pablo Picasso

"Where there are Muslims, there is calligraphy."
Mohamed Zakariya

"Whether someone can read or not, he will take pleasure in seeing a beautiful script."
Qadi Ahmad, sixteenth century

Introduction

JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

According to Islamic tradition, when the Prophet Muhammad encountered the Archangel Gabriel he heard the word *iqraʾ* – "read", "recite." This command is the beginning of the revelation, but it also gave the Arabic script which had developed in the first centuries CE critical impetus for further use and elaboration. As the new religion spread, Arabic letters were used for the language of the Islamized peoples. The Arabic script thus virtually became a symbol of Islam. In Muslim cultures, script which serves to give language a permanent, visible form is therefore sacred because of its reference to the divine revelation. Qurʾanic script is an expression of the beauty of the word of God.[1] After the Prophet's companions memorized and then wrote down these words of God in pure Arabic, a unique visual system[2] arose in the Muslim world in the seventh century which, with calligraphy and ornaments, gave expression to the identity of the new religion. Embedded in monotheistic Islam, Arabic calligraphy became the 'Queen of the Arts', simultaneously embodying form and content. Like music, it is usually cultivated in the Muslim world to a high quality.

From childhood on, Muslims therefore have a special familiarity with the Arabic script. Written from right to left, it forms part of daily life and provides a sense of orientation in life.[3] Although the written word plays an important role, particularly in the everyday practice of literate classes of Muslim societies (for example among religious scholars whose life is dominated by texts), the recognition of calligraphic shapes has a distinct emotional value for popular oral cultures far removed from theology. Instead of reading, for 'oral people' seeing and feeling the script and reciting the sacred words constitute particular ritual forms of veneration which convey *baraka* (healing and blessing power).[4] Pious Muslims touch and kiss the holy book of the Qurʾan with great reverence. Accordingly, the word of God may only be written by calligraphers who are in a state of ritual purity.[5] Sacred letters painted on walls, embroidered in textiles, modelled in clay or printed on posters and placards[6] are manifestations of this concrete popular Muslim faith. Veneration of the script is also shown in 'proofs of God' found in nature: for example, in a cactus which has grown in the form of the word *Allāh*, the pattern of a stone read as *Muhammad*, the name of a Sufi saint detected in the mottled outline on a cow hide, or in the veins of leaves which are read as letters.[7]

The Arabic script and the art of writing (Persian/Urdu *khattāti*) from which it developed are of central significance in Islam. The reasons given for this are the widespread 'absence of pictures' based on pronouncements in the *hadīth* (oral traditions relating to the Prophet) which rejected images, as well as the industrial manufacture of paper which was adopted from China in the ninth century. The high esteem which calligraphy enjoys and its special promotion by Muslim rulers was, however, determined first and foremost by its religious character, "... because calligraphy, through its artificially achieved rhythm also induces profound religious emotions in the Muslim observer," as Alexandra Raeuber writes (1979: 11). Among other things, Islam's system of meanings and orientation is a 'semantic culture' which revolves around words and their interpretation.[8] Calligraphers (*khattāt*) have always been accorded more prestige than miniaturists. Nevertheless, this pre-eminent significance of calligraphy in our times among reformist and fundamentalist groups of Sunni Islam has grown into an exaggerated veneration of non-pictorial characters – as if script must literally overcome illustration. Examples in this context include the questionable official preference given to calligraphy over pictorial arts under the dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq (1977–88) in Pakistan, and also under the Shi'ite Islamists in Iran. Arabic script has thus been misused to construct an Islamized cultural identity. Elsewhere script and illustrations exist in harmony in Muslim cultures.

Islamic inscriptions have been used from early Islamic times up to the twenty-first century in all artistic techniques and genres and appear in a wide variety of Muslim languages (for instance in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu).[9] Alongside parchment, papyrus and then paper as the main vehicles for literary documents, there are inscribed objects made of clay, metal, stone, wood, varnish, leather, ivory, glass, textile fabric and other material (FIGS. 1–15). Inscriptions can be monumental in size as in Kufic panels in architecture or minuscule, from 3 mm to 1.3 mm, as in the peculiar *ghubārī* ('dust', 'powder') script which calligraphers initially used for messages transmitted by carrier pigeons and with which they later inscribed miniature Qurʾans and amulets (FIGS. 25, 36). Depending on the function – of which there are many – script may be undecorated and purely utilitarian or – as is the case with sumptuous early Qurʾan manuscripts – penned in gold on parchment and ornamented with fine embellishments. Script can stand by itself – as in books and individual inscribed sheets – or exist in hybrid forms in which text and illustration are united – as in the miniature paintings of the Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans and in Sufi art and popular Shi'ite 'letter pictures'.

The present companion volume to the exhibition of the same name offers a comprehensive, yet not exhaustive selection of important topics related to the art of writing in Islam: from the development of Arabic calligraphy and the art of the book with its various scripts (Haase) to inscriptions in architecture (Korn) and finally to portable objects which appear to speak through their inscriptions (Shalem). These more detailed contributions to Muslim 'high art' are supplemented and enlarged upon by shorter commentaries on aspects of late Ottoman calligraphy influenced by Sufis (Frembgen) and the sensuality of beautiful writing (Schlamminger) as well as on certain groups of objects (Rahim on tombstones, Heidemann on coins) and interesting individual objects (Behrens-Abouseif on a late Mamluk lidded vessel, Ekhtiar on an inscribed carpet from Anatolia). Short textual inserts dealing with inscriptions on an early Islamic *tirāz* fabric (Helmecke, pp. 39) and a saint's shrine in Afghanistan (Schadl, pp. 125) highlight further important aspects of the beauty of Islamic writing. However, epigraphy and calligraphy are not restricted to works of elite art, but are ubiquitous in everyday life, from folk art (jewellery, amulets, Shi'ite prayer seals, reverse painting on glass, papercuts) to various modern media of popular artistic expression (colour prints, stamps, graffiti, billboards, internet websites). From such ethnographic contexts, examples such as silver amulets with inscriptions (Porter/Frembgen), truck calligraphy (Elias) and calligraphy at shrines of Sufi saints (Frembgen) are presented here in greater detail.

Writing functions primarily as a medium for conveying information: in Muslim cultures, the contents of texts often refer to historic events (in art, for example, inscriptions on buildings, consecrations and signatures) or are used for administrative purposes (chancery script) and in the sciences, but their character is mainly religious. Most of the inscriptions discussed here are quotations of verses from the Qurʾan, excerpts from the *hadīth*, Islamic prayers, invocations of praise, formulas ensuring protection and magic incantations. In contrast to texts with purely religious contents there are lyrics of worldly love and heroism – for example on Persian metal works, textiles and in precious ceramics – which reflect the popular taste of their time, and contain – mainly on ceramics – good wishes rich in blessings, moral aphorisms and proverbs (FIGS. 2, 6, 19, 20). Persian wine cups are not infrequently decorated with toasts and verses about love's anguish.[10] However, along with its significance in terms of content, in its various styles writing in Islam provides aesthetic satisfaction and reflects status and wealth. For the Western observer this means that he must put aside his rational desire for clear legibility of everything written and his orientation toward the practical use of script in favour of a sensitive approach which requires a 'longer look'. Only then do the decorative elements of a highly sophisticated work of art consisting of horizontal and vertical lines emerge. Friedrich Spuhler once expressed this idea most aptly: "The content of the words of a piece of calligraphy cannot be its main concern, otherwise how could the calligraphic decoration of mosques be accepted and marvelled at by so many illiterate Muslims. The word is a picture, its contents so unshakeable that it need not be read at all. It is internalised as a picture" (1989). The calligraphy of the Qurʾan thus brings to mind the divine message in an aesthetically attractive form, lets God appear in a beautifully written word, allows the sight of Allah. In the same way some calligraphic meditations – such as the *hilyat-e nabī* – evoke the presence of the Prophet. In Sufi art, calligrams reflect the forms of humans, animals and objects in a fascinating manner (FIGS. 39–45). Calligraphy thus creates visual encounters with spiritual reality. In this sense the art of calligraphy becomes a primary means of expression of sacralization and a delight to the eye of every artistically sensitive observer. True calligraphy aims to achieve its effect by equilibrium of form, decoration, ornament, abstraction and colouring. It is an *aistheton* which is perceived by the senses. "Script is not only elegant; it can convey a breath, a cadence, a movement. The text already contains music before it is even read," emphasizes Brahim Alaoui (2004: 46). Along with its visuality and legibility (which sometimes morphs into pseudo-script in highly abstracted script compositions), calligraphy has its own haptic presence, for example when it is executed in relief on tiles and metal and can therefore be 'grasped' in the literal sense of the word.

The title *The Aura of Alif*, which the editor owes to the friendly advice of Claudia Ott, first evokes the permanent, auratic character of script in Islam, indicates its presence in works of art and its reflections of meanings and associations. However, it must be conceded that commercial calligraphers today sometimes are quite negligent in their work. Will this, combined with the rapid developments of the computer age, one day lead to a loss of this aura? At any rate, *alif*, the first of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet (which also serves calligraphers as a unit of measure for the size and proportions of the script) – pronounced as a long *ā* –, has a special mystical depth because it is considered a symbol representing Allah (see cover illustration). It is associated with His breath before he created

FIG. 1
QUR'AN COVER WITH SCRIPT
Iran; second half of 16th century

The leather cover is embossed with magnificent gold decoration of the finest quality. The middle with the central Safavid medallion is decorated with a fine network of arabesques. The virtues of reading the Qur'an are praised in the encircling border with *naskh* script embellished with elements of *riq'a*.

the world. In the shape of a slim upright stroke which stands for the straight, correct path, *alif* has a numerical value of one and is thus a fitting symbol for the unity and uniqueness of God.[11] According to mystical understanding, the other letters developed from *alif* just as all people are descendants of Adam.[12] Sufis and dervishes have therefore often meditated on this letter, which for them represents access to God. Sultan Bahu (d. 1691) stated: "Those who find the divine Beloved in the letter *alif* do not need to open the Qur'an to read it."[13] Bullhe Shah (1680–1752), another ecstatic seeker of God from Punjab, begins one of his poems with the verse: *'ilmon bas kareñ o yār, ikko alif tere darkār* – "Enough of your erudition, oh Friend. Only one *alif* is required for salvation."[14] This means that all other knowledge distracts from God. And the refrain of another mystical song from his pen is: *ik alif parho chutkāra ae* – "Read the first letter and be free!"[15] Inspired by the same philosophical spirit, his contemporary Shah 'Abdul Latif (1686–1753), the great Sufi poet of Sindh, wrote in *Sur Eman* (chapter 5, verse 29):

> *Read the letter alif, forget all other pages,*
> *Purify your heart, how long can you continue reading page for page?*

What he meant to say is that even a simple peasant who could not read or write and therefore had not studied any theological treatises could achieve perfection. The poetry of the Punjabi mystic Khwaja Ghulam Farid (1841–1901) also revolves around the mystical quality of *alif*. The first verse of one of his songs in Siraiki, in which he consults his theological teacher, says: *alif hiko ham bas veh miyāñ jī* – "An *alif* alone is enough for me, oh honoured one!"[16] The Turkish mystic Yunus Emre (d. 1320/21) finally sums up: *dört kitabān manası bir aliftedir* – "The meaning of the four holy books lies in a single *alif*."[17] In Islam, the *alif* is thus the specially respected letter of divine wisdom.

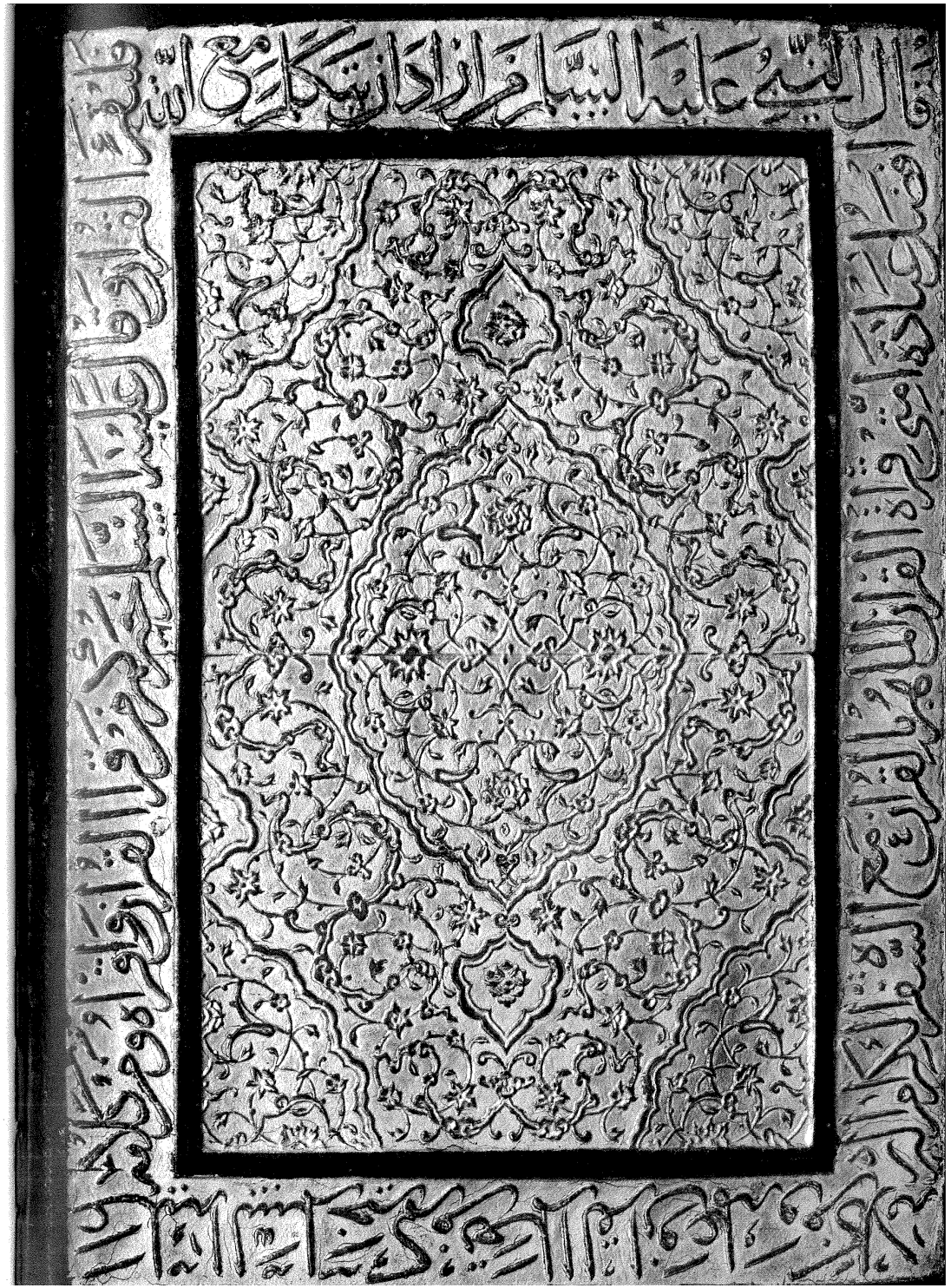


FIG. 2 (below)

BOWL WITH KUFIC INSCRIPTION

Afrasiyab/Transoxania or Nishapur/North-east Iran; 10th or early 11th century

Distinctly set off from the dotted olive-green braid of the conical wall in a different colour is the word *'id* (celebration) on the bottom of the bowl. If all the dessert contained in the bowl is eaten, for example as part of the rite when breaking the fast at the end of the month of Ramadan, this calligraphy becomes visible when the last bite is eaten – an aesthetic experience which may well have enhanced the pleasure of the festivities.

FIG. 3 (right)

ROSE WATER BOTTLE WITH KUFIC INSCRIPTION

Ray/Iran; 13th century

According to Annemarie Schimmel, Kufic is "the liturgical script par excellence." The spherical body of the narrow-necked bottle shown here is decorated with an Arabic inscription in playful Kufic in slight relief: *baraka min Allāh kafāla min Allāh kafāla* – "God guarantees the blessing." Unusual here is the use of the word *kafāla* ("guarantee") which otherwise appears only in legal texts.

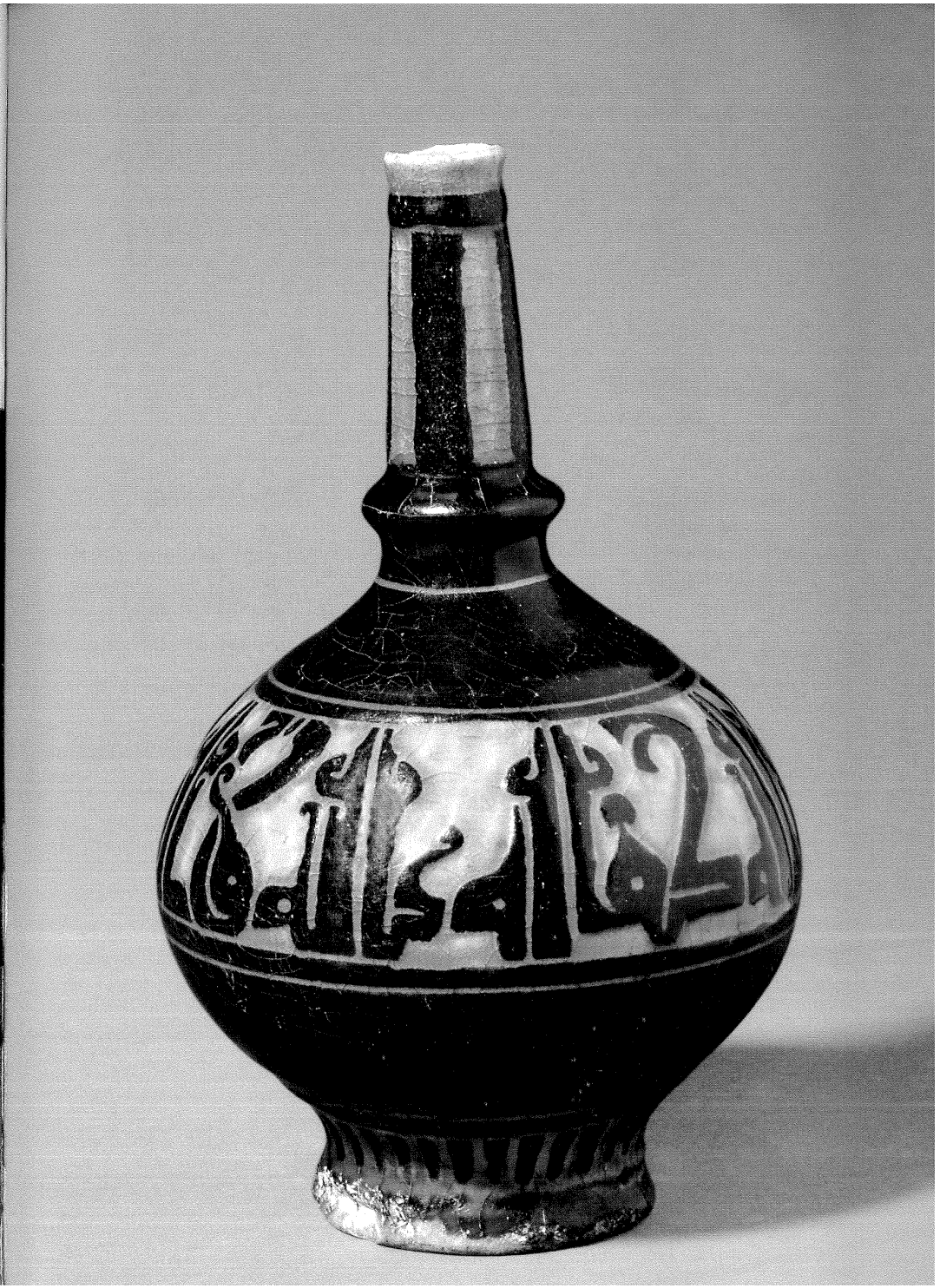


FIG. 4 (above)
VESSEL FRAGMENT WITH MAMLUK INSCRIPTION
al-Fustat/Egypt; 14th/15th century

The band of writing along with the goblet motif – the typical emblem of a lord chamberlain – begins in the hybrid Mamluk script (a combination of Kufic, *riq'a* and *naskh*) with the word *ilāh*; the rest is barely legible.

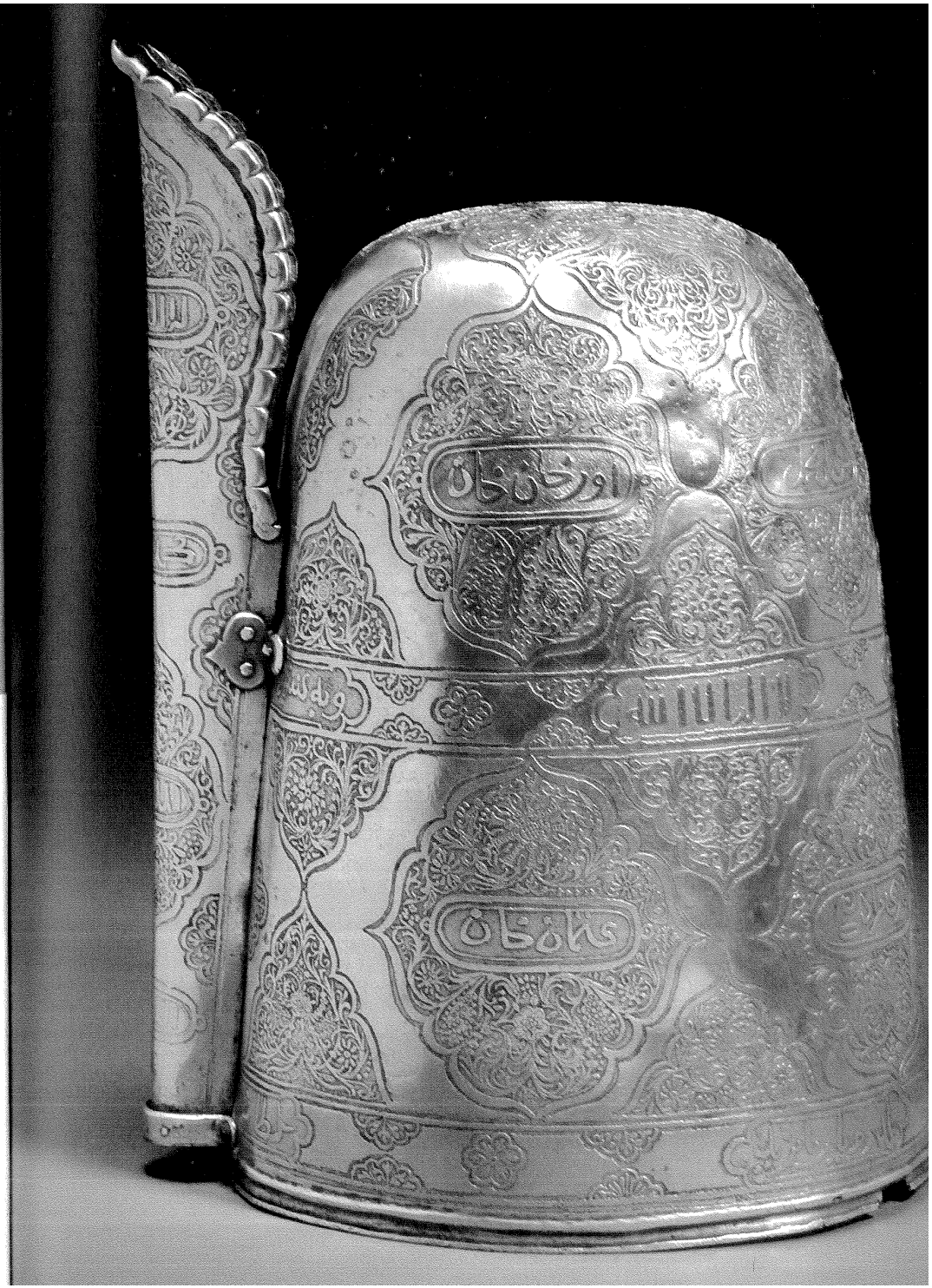
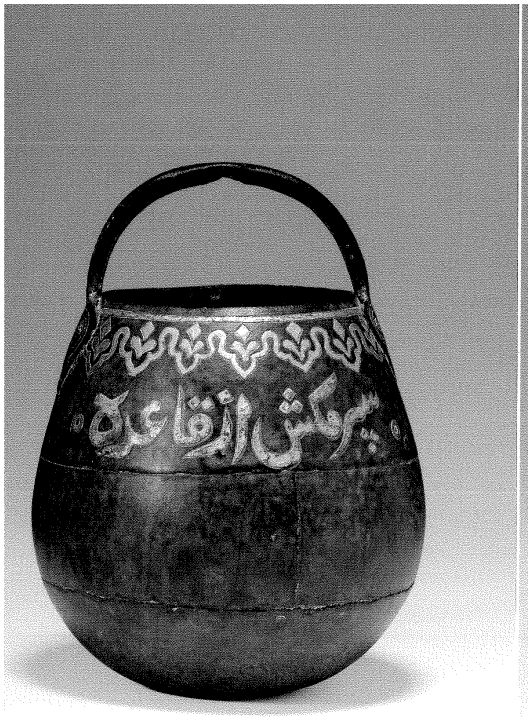


FIG. 5 (right)
GILDED HELMET OF AN OTTOMAN POST RUNNER
Turkey; 2nd half of 16th century

The tall cylindrical helmet (*peyk*) etched with rich decorations contains a number of inscriptions in the middle of medallions. These cite the Islamic profession of faith (on the case for the plumage attached on the side). Other religious formulas and invocations as well as the names of the first Ottoman sultans up to Suleyman the Magnificent (d. 1566) are shown.



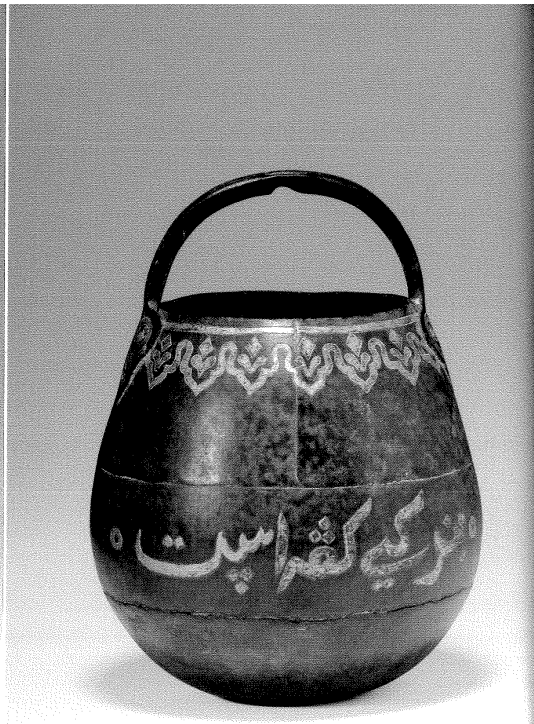


FIG. 6 A–B

VESSEL WITH PERSIAN APHORISMS

Central Asia; 17th/18th century

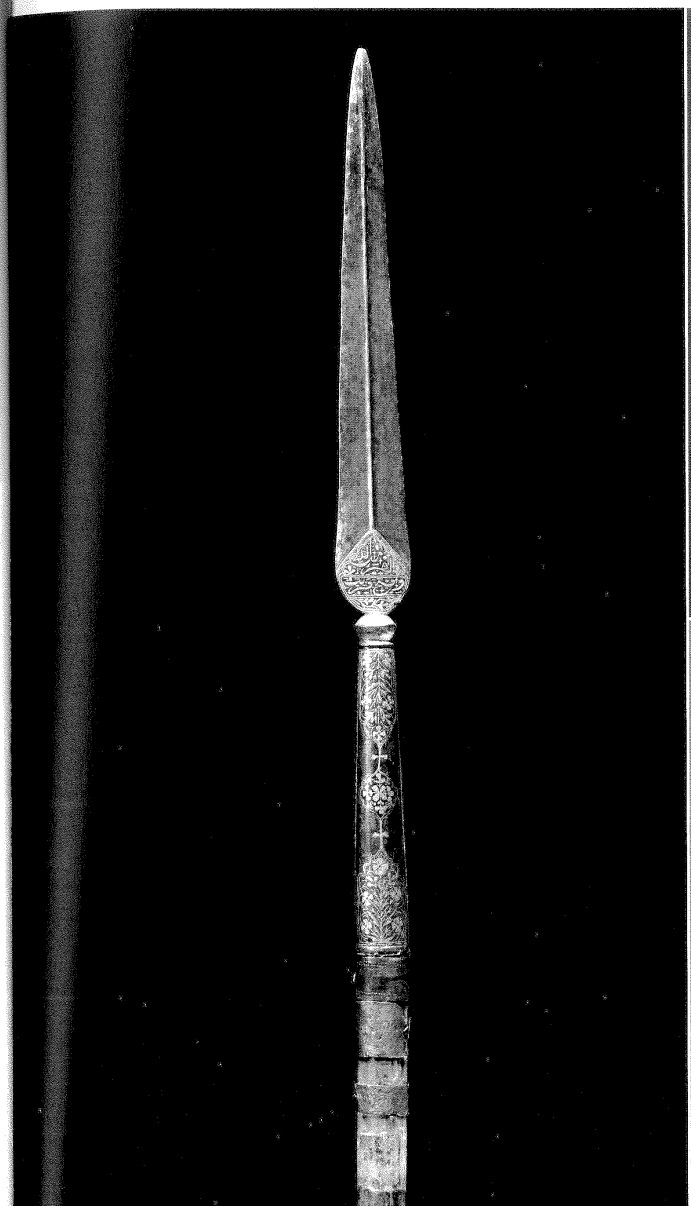
The gilded words written in *naskh* style on this iron pail read: *sipar makesh az qā'idah*, freely translated "Remain true to your rules!", "Pay attention to what you do!", and *bandagī kufr ast* – "Slavery is unbelief (sin)!" The last admonition is especially popular with Sufis who do not wish to bind themselves to this world. This vessel may have been used on pilgrimages for holy water.

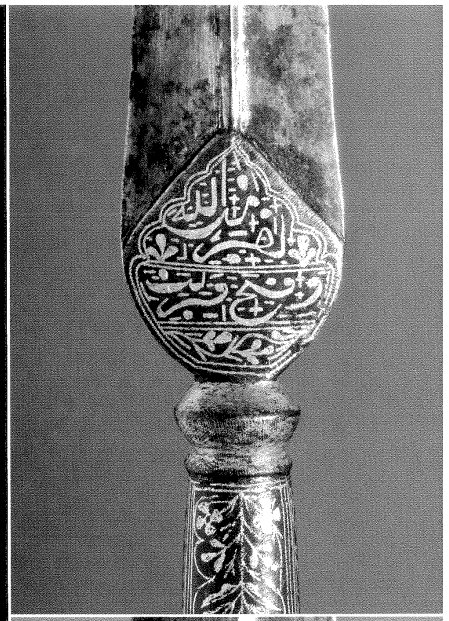
FIG. 7 A–C

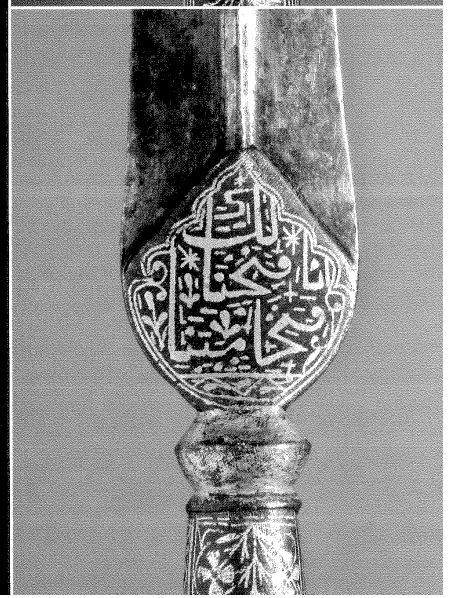
LANCE TIP WITH QURANIC FORMULAS

Yemen; 17th/18th century

The gold-inlaid lance tip was intended to protect the warrior using it through two verses from the Qur'an. On one side (fig. 7 b) is written *nasrun min Allāh wa fathun qarīb* – "Help from God and an early victory" (61:13) and on the other (fig. 7 c) *annā fatahnā leke fatahan mubīnan* – "Truly, we have given you an obvious victory" (48:1).







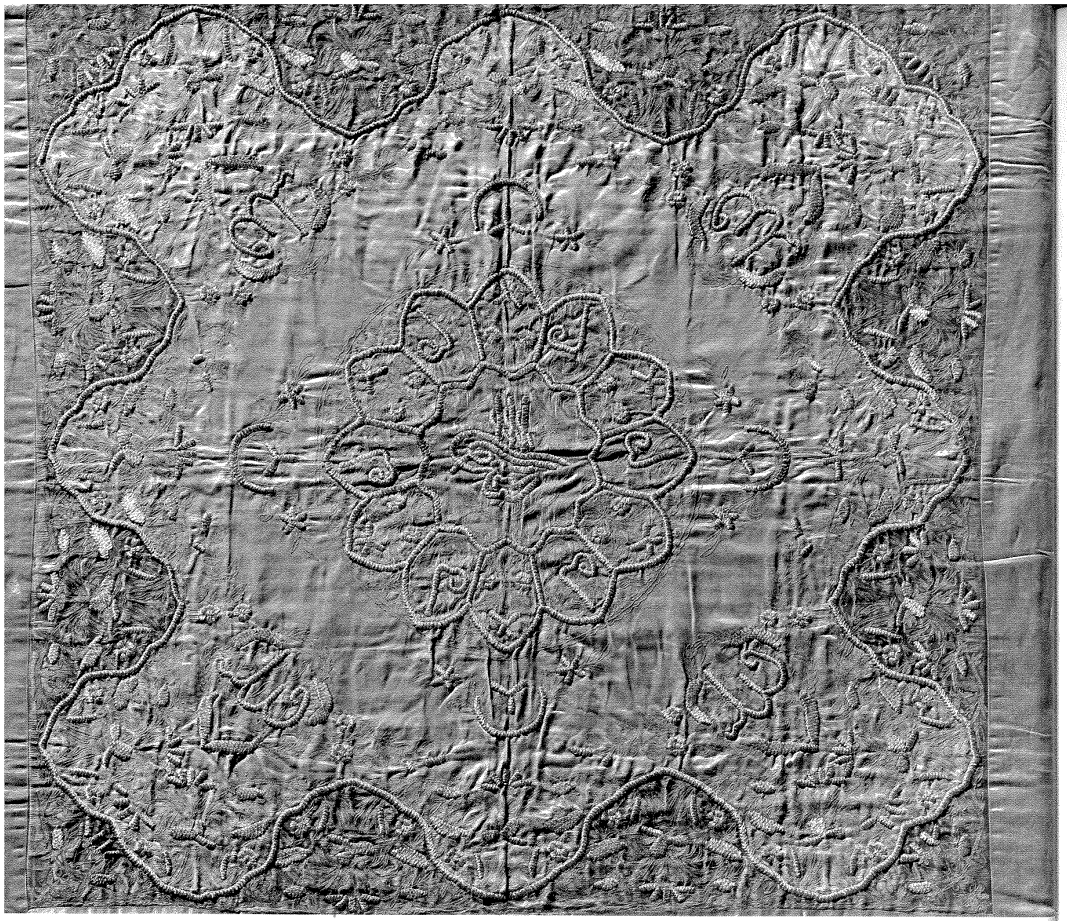


FIG. 8 (above)
CALLIGRAPHIC TABLEAU
Turkey; early 19th century

In its central rosette, this late Ottoman embroidery shows a very simplified and therefore not exactly identifiable sultan's seal or signature (*tughrā*). In the four corners of the inner field, whose form is reminiscent of the skin of earlier animal carpets, is the name of God, *Allāh*. This pompous tableau whose colours are influenced by European Rococo might have been a gift for diplomats or deserving dignitaries.

FIG. 9 (right)
ASHURA BANNER
Iran; 2nd half of 19th century

Each of the two pennants, still uncut, show the Persian lion-sun motif and numerous Persian inscriptions with religious content in the cartouches in the border. Inscribed in the lion's body is the well-known Shi'ite prayer in Arabic, "Call 'Ali, who manifests wonders ..." Such large-format coloured banners were used at religious rites of mourning (*'āshūrā'*) in the first ten days of the month of Muharram by Twelver Shi'ites in Iran.

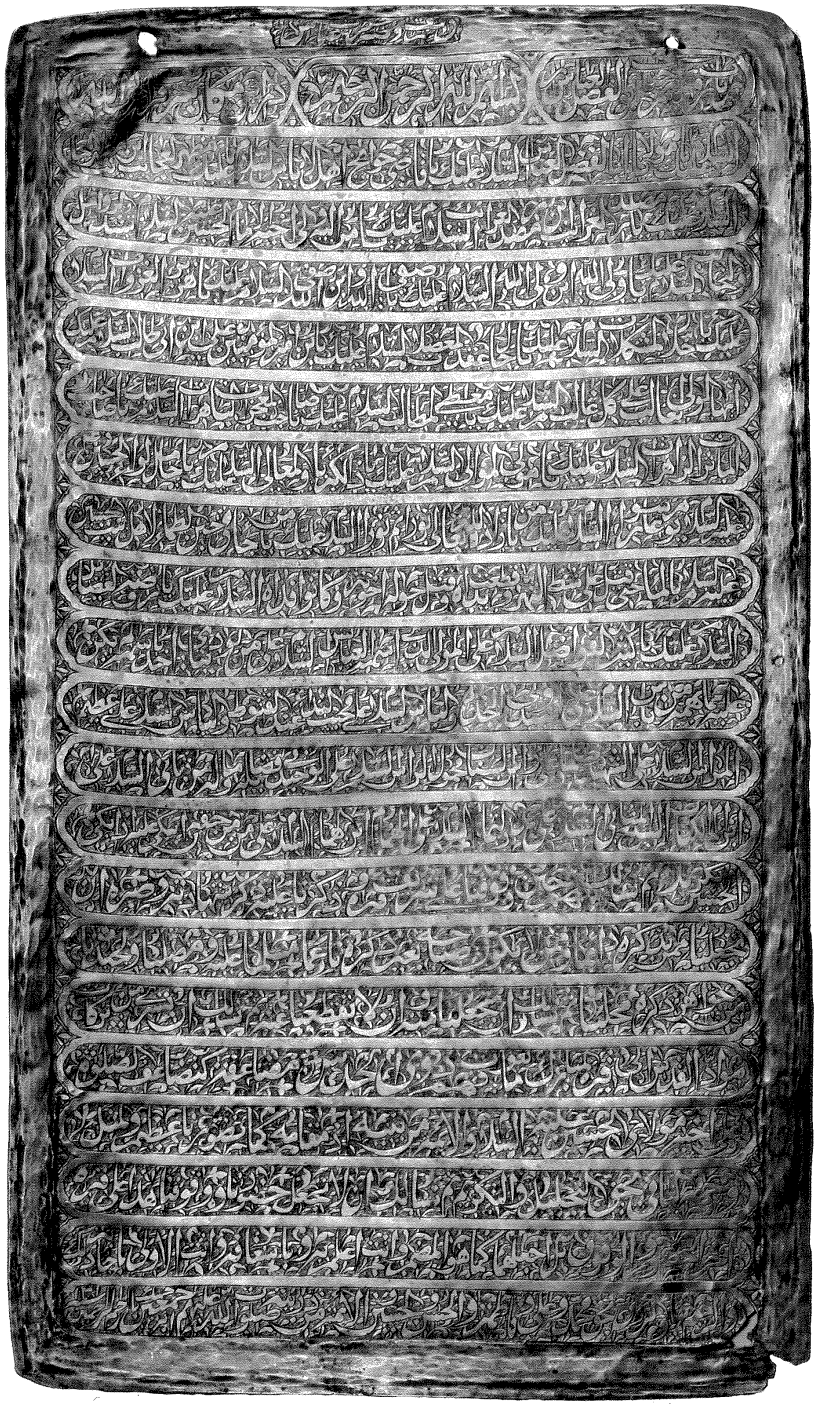


FIG. 10 (left)
SHI'ITE INSCRIPTION BOARD
North India; dated 1301 H/1883–84 CE

This board was donated to a shrine dedicated to the Shi'ite martyr-saint Abo'l-Fazl 'Abbas – a half-brother of Imam Husain. The Arabic text with a short introductory formula in Persian is a *ziyāratnāma*, i.e. a prayer with litany-like invocations which is recited by pilgrims in honour of 'Abbas, pleading for his protection and blessing. The calligraphic style is *naskhī* combined with *riq'a*.

FIG. 11 (above)
MAGIC BOWL
Iran; 19th century

Copper or brass bowls engraved with Arabic inscriptions containing verses from the Qur'an, prayers and magic invocations, are filled with clear water – as a healing drink for the sick. Healing bowls from which the drinker imbibes the 'power of the letters' can also serve divination purposes. To this end, 40 small keys or – as in the present case – abstractly formed fish made of metal are sometimes attached to the vessel. On one side of them the *basmala* formula is inscribed and on the other sura 48, verse 1.

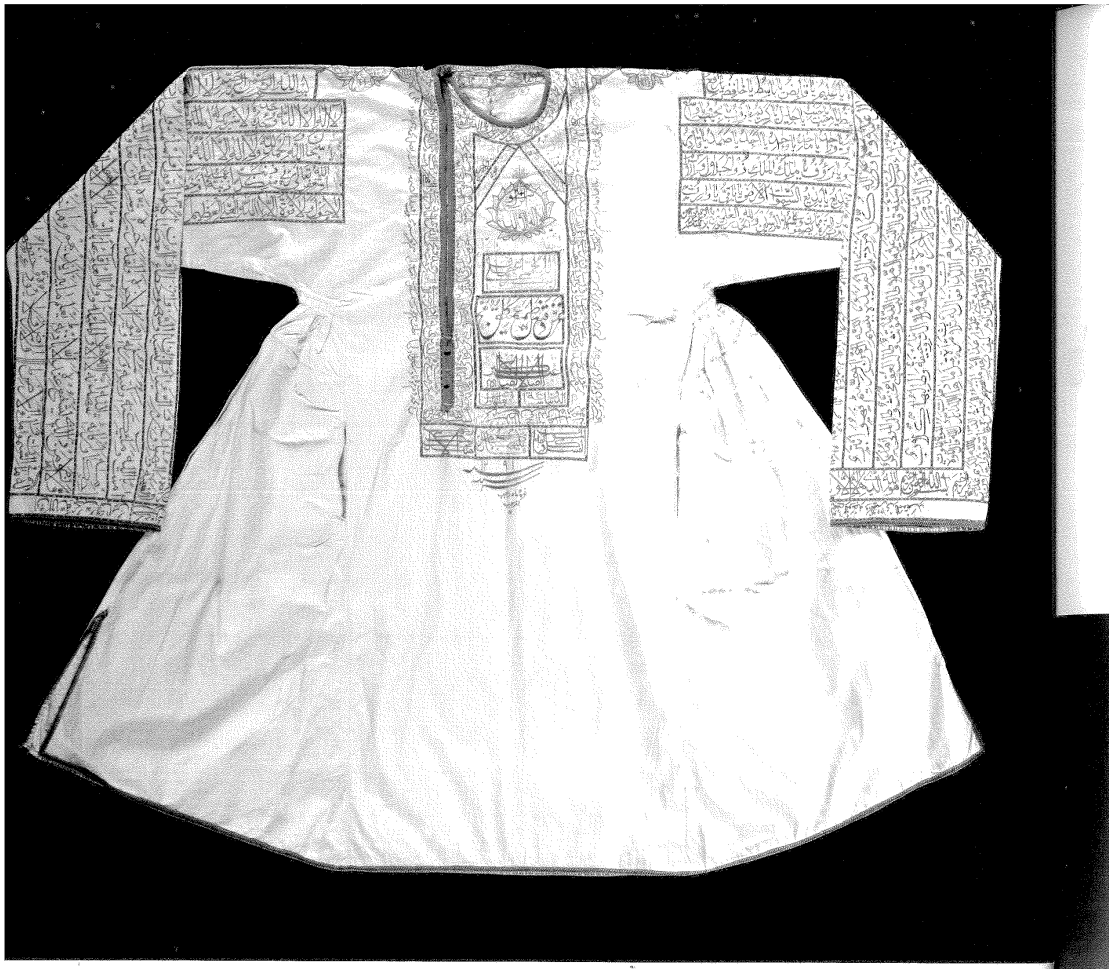


FIG. 12

SUFI ROBE WITH RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

Afghanistan or Pakistan; dated 1291 H/1874 CE

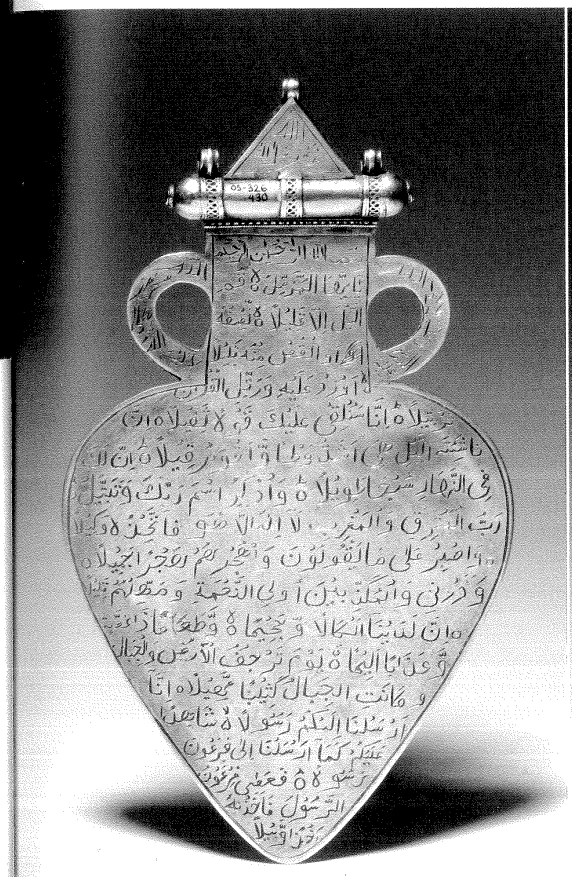
The richly embroidered dress probably belongs to an Islamic mystic of the Qadiriyya order. On the front along with the creed and the names of the four rightly-guided Sunni caliphs are Sufi aphorisms, verses from the Qur'an and invocations to 'Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder of the largest dervish brotherhood in the Muslim world. On the back are Persian verses by the famous poet Sana'i (d. 1131 CE) of Ghazna, in which reference is made to death and the vanity of this earthly life.

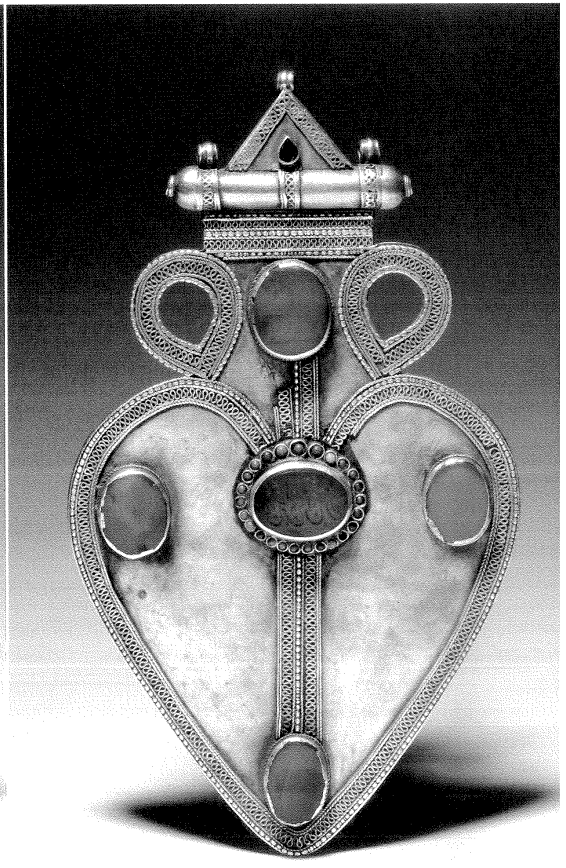
FIG. 13 A–B

LARGE PENDANT WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Sarik-Turkmen/Central Asia; end of 19th century

This heart-shaped back decoration of a Turkmen woman is studded on the front with five agates. The central stone is negatively engraved with an invocation in Arabic in which God is invoked as guarantor and with the date 1310 H/1892–93 CE. To give the wearer additional protection, the back of the plate was apparently inscribed later (perhaps mid-20th century) with sura 73, verses 1–15 and names of saints.





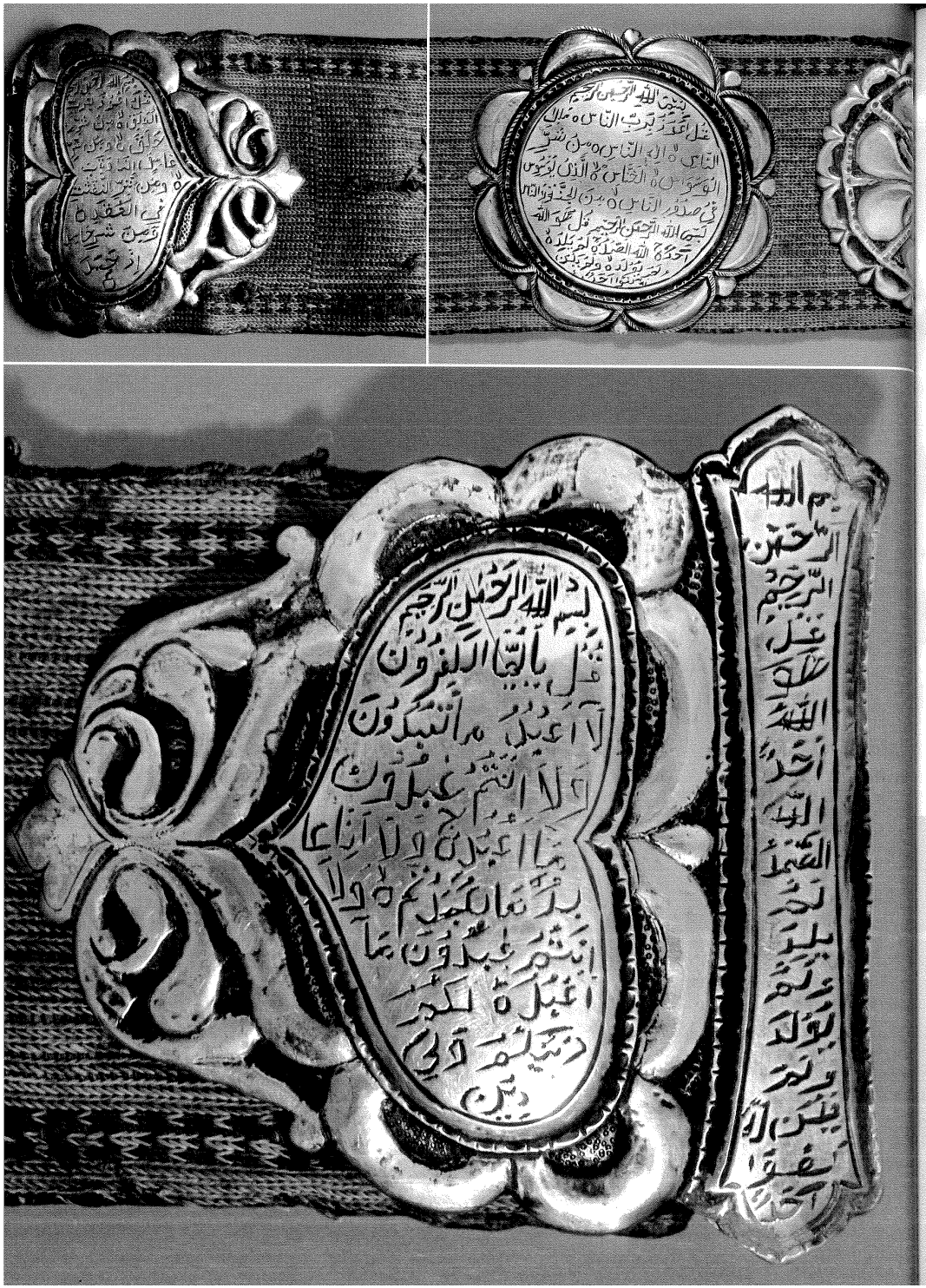


FIG. 14 A–C (left)

BELT CLASP AND DISC WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Uzbekistan; 1st half of 20th century

Verses from the Qur'an on both parts of a clasp and on the rosette-shaped disc of a man's belt from Central Asia are intended to protect the wearer from misfortune. The suras written here are sura 113 "Daybreak" (a), sura 114 "Mankind" (b) and sura 112 "Sincerity" (c, right) and sura 109 "The Unbelievers" (c, left).

FIG. 15 A–B (below)

PUMPKIN WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Yemen; 1970s

In a coffeehouse in a village near the town of Taizz where this puzzling pumpkin was located, some of the visitors scratched their names in Arabic – as if in a guestbook – in the dried body of the pumpkin. Apparently on a whim, this pumpkin became a *forme trouvée*. What conversations did the visitors hold while they carved? Or did they just pursue their own thoughts and pass the time by carving their names?

Arabic Calligraphy

CLAUS-PETER HAASE

Reading and writing have traditionally been accessible to all social strata in the Islamic world, but for many the Arabic script to this day has more of a sacred character than profane usefulness. As calligraphy, it ranks highest among the arts and elicits the greatest emotional attention. In historical times, the degree of literacy was altogether – in West and East alike – not very high and in some Islamic regions still lags behind, but basically all efforts to learn were encouraged. One the one hand, Arabic, as the language and script of the revelation of the Qur'an, is sacred and widespread, and on the other the profane texts which have come down to us are extremely varied and informative. They concern life at court, in bazaars, mosques, and madrasas, and also include poetry and literature, private studies, diaries and notes, archives and documentation of events and individuals, even of the lowest classes. Writing systems always record both what is true and what is false, the artificial and the unassuming, and preserve all of this for a long period of time, with texts' preservation or destruction depending on chance.

Pious Muslims consider the script of Qur'anic revelation as sacred in itself and as incomparable. This even includes the material of the Qur'an manuscript – parchment, paper, ink, the pen and utensils to manufacture paper. In so-called popular and Sufi Islam, Qur'ans are used as talismans and for magical practices such as fortune-telling and countering diseases. Although they are less appreciated by orthodox scholars, prayers and manuals about the concrete use of recitations are sometimes added to Qur'anic manuscripts.

The ancient conception of the sacredness of the script in which the revelation is preserved and 'secret' knowledge is stored also applies to individual letters. As in some other Semitic alphabets, each of the Arabic characters has an equivalent numerical value which, among other things, has led to mystical interpretations of names and concepts and a cosmological frame of reference which is broadly interpreted by some Sufis. The widespread belief that 'Ali ibn abi Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, a saint revered by the Shi'ites and many Sufi

orders, shaped the Arabic script is an aspect of this pious reverence.

The art of the book reflects aesthetic styles and the taste of various periods and all regions. It often influences style and helps the observer recognize the creative intention and the quality not only of calligraphy and illumination but also the transfer of patterns from paper and parchment to a wide variety of materials and objects. Calligraphers therefore played and still play a special role in the history of Islamic art. Of all artists they are the first who wrote personal memoirs and became the subject of biographical records.

Like monuments, inscriptions on buildings serve to remind and caution us, and with blessings and quotations from the Qur'an promote our awareness of the values of the dominant social and religious order of a given time. They also preserve private memoirs in foundations in the way tombstones preserve the memory of individuals. On utilitarian objects, the owners and users are frequently addressed directly, or a discreet reference to the function of the receptacle or tool is written on the objects themselves. Like deciphering complex stylistic or abstract ornaments, deciphering the entwined letters is a puzzle and a pastime – alone, with another person or for enjoyment in a group. If the script were readily legible it would even be disappointing, and no alphabet has shown such flexibility as Arabic, even to the extent of adjusting to the requirements of present-day computers.

History of Research

Western art history has increasingly and with delight seized upon the study of Islamic art, albeit not truly to the extent a culture spanning several continents actually merits. Among the different types of Islamic art, calligraphy has been dealt with much less and by no means exhaustively. However, new artistic achievements and studies in Islamic countries themselves particularly in this field have begun to bear fruit.[1] Less demanding older research concerned itself with calligraphy, including Adam Olearius' large Iran Encyclopaedia (1656), J. G. Christian Adler's deciphering of Kufic inscriptions (1780–92) and the work in numismatics by Olaf G. Tychsen (1794–96).[2] Only in the nineteenth century did fascination with the topic combine with a serious research intention. One driving factor here was historicist and orientalizing printing such as, for example, the Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall had the court printers in Vienna use for some of his editions and publications "in the Islamic style." It continued to influence Western book art and arts in general up to the time of the Art Nouveau movement.[3] One of the first large-scale presentations of the Islamic art of the book as well as many other types of art was the Munich Exhibition in 1910. Among the objects displayed on this occasion were not only illuminated manuscripts but also valuable holdings of the Bavarian State Library displayed in the library's Fürstensaal and a similarly surprisingly comprehensive exhibition of manuscripts, most of which were privately owned in Berlin.[4] The exhibition was preceded by auctions and purchases of precious manuscripts, miniatures and single sheets of calligraphy which had been commercially available since the London World Exhibition in 1855. Earlier manuscripts had been purchased more for their content than for their artistic aspects. Libraries and collectors began to buy up the most beautiful manuscripts from the Orient, usually in the art market centres of London and Paris, with India as a British colony playing an important role.

Development of Arabic Calligraphy and Formation of Schools

None of the numerous newly invented scripts in the first centuries CE developed an elegance comparable to Arabic. The alphabets of the Orthodox churches, which differed according to religious and linguistic communities, continued to cling to the basic character of Greek; Latin scripts differed according to official, religious and private use (capitalis, [half]uncial, minuscule, cursive) and are characterized by separate individual letters and cursive for faster writing. Several distinctive features served as regional identity markers with political and religious significance. The art of the book around the Mediterranean was so sophisticated and aesthetically appealing that it assumed an almost competitive character.

To this circle belongs classical Syriac, which developed from Aramaic-Hebrew and was used in various forms by Oriental Christian communities except for the Copts. In monasteries it also developed early into a cursive script with numerous ligatures and was refined in book art and epigraphy where calligraphic forms were used. On the basis of Aramaic, scripts mainly used for books were developed for Middle Persian in Mesopotamia and Iran. As Hellenism developed, both the Greek and the Aramaic alphabets spread, usually in cursive form, all the way to Central Asia and India.

To this day Zoroastrianism in Iran, India and in the Diaspora has preserved a special script for sacred texts known as Avestan. To some extent this probably also applies to Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Torah in Judaism. Mani, an Iranian religious founder (third century CE), is said to have displayed especially fine aesthetic talent in book design and painting, for which he is proverbially known in Islamic literature. Apparently his works were models for a combination of Eastern and Western script and stylistic elements. Unfortunately, after his followers were persecuted by Christians and Muslims, little remains of subsequent workshops in Manichaean communities in Egypt and in the oases of Chinese Turkestan (Sinkiang) of the sixth to eighth centuries.

In the art of the book, writings of revelation were rarely as richly decorated as illustrated manuscripts or official documents of late Antiquity. Luxurious manuscripts tended to be reserved for literary texts. Inscriptions on official buildings and writing on objects intended as gifts or with a sacred nature had an especially ceremonial character. Books in Late Antiquity were firm, heavy, upright rectangular volumes. However, ancient book rolls, written in different directions – vertically in strips or horizontally in columns next to each other – remained in use, especially for documents.

For the various forms of spoken Arabic since the thirteenth century BCE, the alphabet of South Arabian in Yemen and – according to recent views – the first, equally early prototypes of several alphabets were used for North Arabian dialects known today as Lihyanic, Dedanic and Thamudic after early Arabic names of tribes and now found almost exclusively in inscriptions on stone and rock graffiti in Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The most frequent graffiti from the Hellenistic-Roman period found in large parts of southern Syria, Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia is called 'Safaitic' after the south Syrian region of Safa. In addition, inscriptions of the Nabataeans are written in an Aramaic dialect. However, the names are in Arabic and the writing in some forms is a prototype of later Arabic, dating back as far as the fourth century CE.[5] As of recently, the oldest evidence of Arabic is believed to be three rock inscriptions from the late third or early second century BCE in Qaryat al-Fau in southern Saudi Arabia, while the dating of graffiti in the region of Sinai is disputed.[6]

These languages were used in the Hellenistic provinces and later the oriental provinces of the Roman Empire alongside Aramaic-Syrian, Greek and Latin. They represented to some extent the continuous Semitic substrata parallel with or below the ruling Hellenistic and Roman civilizations. Even deep in Saudi Arabia, in the oasis Madain Salih, a French-Saudi Arabian team of archaeologists found a Latin inscription by a local Roman legion from around 175 CE together with the local Thamudic, Lihyanic and Nabataean North Arabian and South Arabian inscriptions. In their monumental elegance and balance, some early South Arabian inscriptions resemble the block-like letters of certain official Classical Greek and Hellenistic inscriptions. Long inscriptions on wood which were discovered around 1970, however, revealed for the first time a South Arabian cursive script which also reflects certain tendencies of early Arabic writing.[7] Surprisingly, the South Arabian alphabet was also used in rare instances for texts in a preliminary form of Classical Arabic. This represents early evidence of the flexible transfer of script to other languages and, with its dating around 200 BCE, constituting the earliest Arabic inscriptions we have at the present time.[8]

The Arabic epitaph of the King of the Arabs, Imra' al-Qais from Nemara, dated 328 CE, in the Nabataean alphabet has been known for a long time. Other pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions were found in Syria, including one old Syriac cursive which closely resembles early Islamic Arabic. One example is the inscription incised in stone on a building by one Sharahil from 568 in Harran in southern Syria.[9] If we consider that in addition numerous cursive texts written on perishable materials have certainly been lost, it is clear that script and writing were common among the Arabian tribes of the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods and the rise of Arabic along with Islamization by no means came out of thin air.

However, apart from widespread Aramaic, these pre-Islamic Semitic languages and scripts were for the most part regional. Since the codification of the Qur'an, which following initially unsystematic notations is traditionally dated back to the Caliphate of Uthman (644–56), and with its expansion in the rapidly growing Islamic world empire, the character of Arabic script acquired a completely new importance.[10] While the numerous copies of the Qur'an are particularly helpful in tracing the development of Arabic script, the script is by no means limited to religious texts. From the beginning, important documents, letters, bills, and gradually scholarly works, literature and private notes, were written in Arabic[11], thus undoubtedly perpetuating pre-Islamic customs.

More effectively than Aramaic and Greek, the script served not only to propagate Arabic as the language of the holy Qur'an

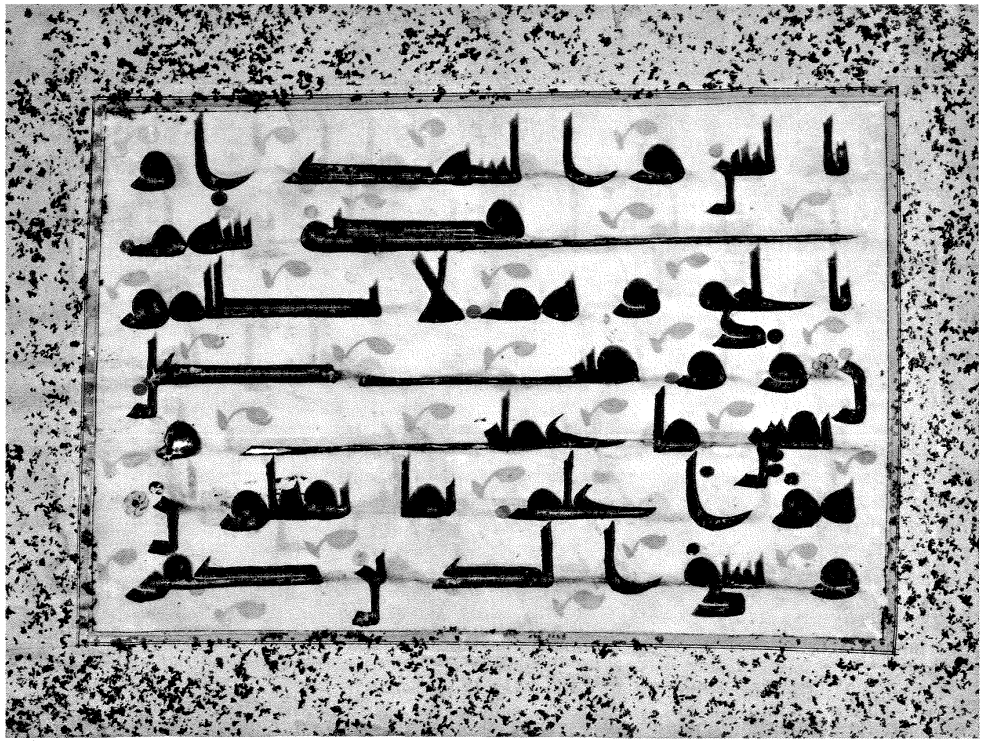


FIG. 16
QUR'AN FOLIO WRITTEN IN KUFIC SCRIPT
North Africa or Near East; 9th/10th century

The Qur'an verse (39:69–70) with black and red dots on the inner sheet of parchment reads: "The Prophets and the witnesses are brought, and it is judged between them with truth, and they are not wronged. And each soul is paid in full for what it did. And He is best aware of what they do. And those who disbelieve are driven unto Hell."

The gold frame and the mottled paper are secondary and date from the late Ottoman period (18th century). This page from the Qur'an in Kufic was apparently highly esteemed for its 'iconic' quality and served as a religious wall decoration in a dervish lodge (probably in Istanbul).

FIG. 17 (following double page)
ALPHABET IN THULUTH SCRIPT
Tabriz/Iran; 16th century

This huge page served as a model for writing exercises. It is – judging by the note in the margin of another page with similar calligraphy from the same album (see fig. 21) – probably by the calligrapher 'Abdulbaqi Tabrizi.

and the power of the caliphate, but it was easily transferred to Persian and its offshoots in Afghanistan and Tajikistan from the eighth century, somewhat more circuitously to various Turkic languages of Central Asia from the eleventh century, and from the fourteenth century to Ottoman, up to the language and script reform of the Turkish Republic in 1928. To this were later added the vernacular and literary language of Muslim Indians and Pakistanis, Urdu, as well as Malayan and Bahasa Indonesian.

Soon, however, not only Muslims but also Arab Christians, Zoroastrians or Parsis as well as some Gnostic religions began to employ the Arabic alphabet for daily use, with the Christians using it increasingly for their religious texts as well. Only the Gnostic community of the Mandaeans in Iraq retained its script borrowed from Aramaic, and the Jews used the Hebrew-Aramaic script even for their special Persian and Arabic dialects. Some Oriental Christians initially used Syriac script for Arabic texts (*karshuni*). However, none of the non-Muslim communities have produced great works of art or found general recognition in the development of Arabic calligraphy.

In the beginning, codification of the Qur'an in precious parchment volumes in an upright format was still clearly dependent on Syriac codices of the gospels and the Bible. The lines of letters, leaning slightly to the right, not entirely even and hardly well-balanced, of an earlier script (*mā'il*, meaning 'the leaning one' according to the sources or *hijāzī* after the region where Islam was proclaimed) are almost completely undecorated. Only the holy word draws attention to itself. These documents are manuscripts intended for preservation of the text of the revelation, which is memorized anyway and not intended to be read aloud fluently.

Already this first script contains the significant element of Arabic script, which like most Semitic alphabets is written from right to left: most characters are linked to each other and have special forms at the beginning and end of a word. Only six of them are not connected to the left, so a break sometimes occurs even within a single word. While this also applies to most of the later Arabic scripts, these early scripts have only thirteen or seventeen letter forms, which only over the course of time were differentiated by dots to represent the 28 Arabic consonants. Problems in reading undoubtedly produced slight variations in the text of the Qur'an, some of which have been handed down by theologians of different schools.

Obviously, something had to be done to avoid further confusion – on the one hand, the Qur'an was standardized under the caliph Uthman around 650 – and on the other, the secular chanceries shifted completely to Arabic after Syrian and Greek scribes under the caliph 'Abdalmalik around 697. Both measures required the establishment of scriptories (*maktab* under the caliph or one of the councils, later the viziers in the *dīvān*) and rules of calligraphy. The schools – and also the scripts – were named after urban centres: the Hijaz region comprising the cities of Mecca and Medina stands for the origin of the revelation, Basra and Kufa in Iraq for various traditions and Damascus for secular tasks. The variants did not lead to great dogmatic differences, but older versions that have been discovered on individual pages of the Qur'an and in manuscripts recently found in Sanaa in Yemen were effaced from the parchment leaves and replaced by generally valid ones (known in codicology as palimpsests). Their significance has not yet been fully assessed, so it cannot be decided whether they are more important in terms of contents and whether they date from the time prior to editing the Qur'an under the caliph Uthman.[12]

Equally difficult to read is a rounder script which spread rapidly at the time of the first Umayyad caliphate (661–750), starting perhaps from Damascus. The manuscripts tend to be square and some are already transverse rectangular. The script appears depressed but displays a greater sense of evenness and equal spacing between the letters. There are no spaces between words – only a very even distribution of letters in one line.[13] The intention of creating an aesthetic appearance over the entire page, with exact lines and letter sizes, is readily apparent. The letters form even blocks in rows, with the effect achieved by having some of them elongated (*mashq*), to avoid crowding the verticals above and below the base line. The black or dark brown letters contrast well with the whitish parchment background – already preparing for classic rules of calligraphy as formulated in the tenth century (FIG. 16). In inscriptions in stone, on buildings and on implements, the script appears more angular; the most famous monumental form can be seen in the mosaic Qur'an inscription inside the Dome of the Rock dating back to 692 (cf. essay by Korn in this book).[14]

It is usually classified with the script known as *kūfī*, named after the city of Kufa in early sources, but this is not certain because today this designation covers a wide variety of scripts from North Africa and Andalusia all the way to eastern Iran. They date from the second century after the *hijra* (ninth century CE) to the fifth

FIG. 18

CLOTH FRAGMENT WITH INSCRIBED BAND

Egypt; 11th century

Textile messages – inscriptions on an early Islamic *tirāz* fabric

The fragment with an inscription to the caliph al-Mustansir Billah (427–87 H/1036–94 CE) is part of a fine batiste-like linen cloth which was decorated at both ends with two narrow bands. The patterned band is worked in tapestry technique, which has been practiced in Egypt for centuries, using the finest silk threads in bright colours. Dark blue cartouches with white script are shown on a green background with little white volutes. These inscriptions repeat the formula *nasr min Allāh* ("Success from God"), separated in two cartouches, and the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir Billah, also separately in two cartouches. Typical of this particularly beautiful type of Kufic are the tails of some letters which are delicately drawn upward and the flat elongation of others, while small additional ornaments round off the picture.

Tapestry technique and the fine material permit a clear reproduction of the finest details in a minimum of space. Veritable textile masterpieces were created in Egypt, following the models of excellent calligraphers. Compared with the huge amounts of textiles which we know about from written sources, only a few examples have come down to us. Like this one, nearly all come from an Egyptian tomb, since only in Egypt was the ground dry enough to allow preservation of organic material.

Since the caliph al-Mustansir Billah ruled for 60 years, an especially large number of textile fragments from his time (*turuz*) have been preserved which come both from the *tirāz* workshops working directly for him and from general workshops. Of these, just over 100 are known which bear inscriptions with his name or other references to him.

Gisela Helmecke

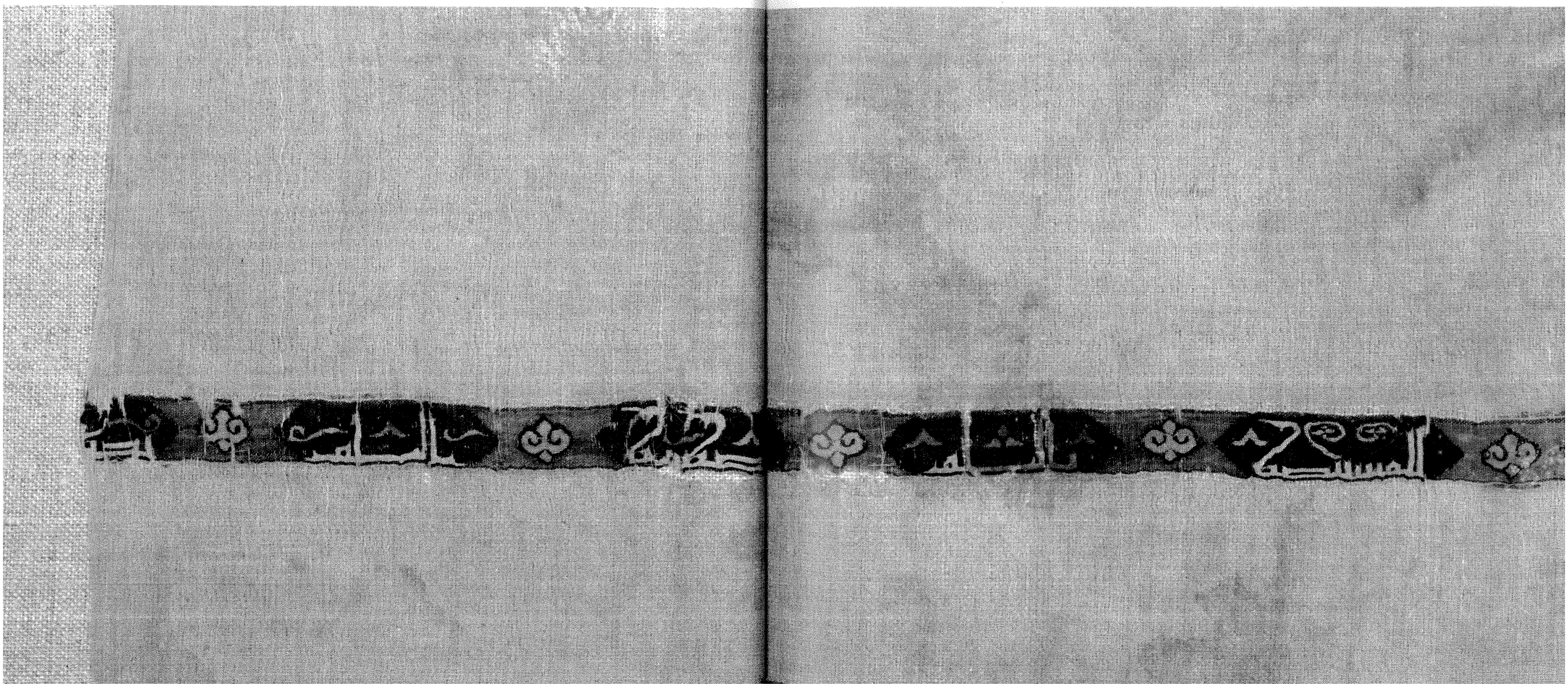


FIG. 19

PLATE WITH INSCRIPTION IN SAMANID KUFIC

Nishapur/North-east Iran; 2nd half of 10th century

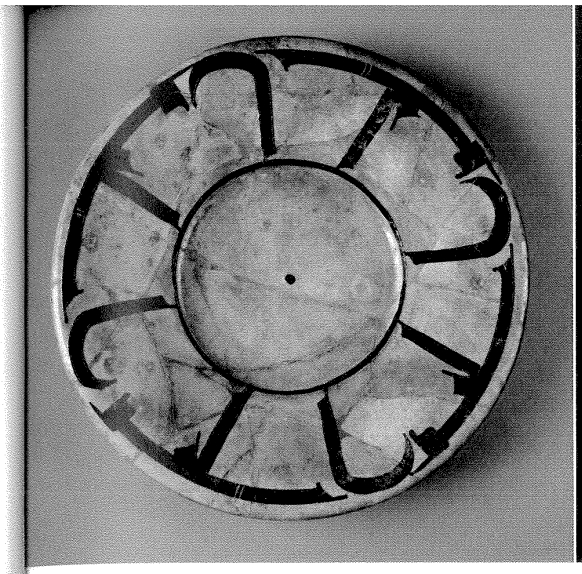
The large plate from Nishapur is a fine example of the decorative pottery formerly known as Samanid ware, which offers some of the most beautiful specimens of Islamic ceramics. The vessel is impressive for the strong wheel- or sunbeam-shaped style of its calligraphy which consists of the Arabic word *al-hurru* repeated four times and refers to the beginning of the well-known aphorism – "The free-born is free even if misfortune strikes him." Unusual is the circle between the script and the inner mirror; also characteristic for Samanid ceramics is the dot in the centre of the plate.

FIG. 20

DRINKING BOWL WITH KUFIC SCRIPT

Nishapur/North-east Iran; 10th century

The interior wall of this conical black-on-white ware bowl from the Samanid capital in Khorasan is embellished in brown-black in a particularly decorative manner with fine, swooping letters already far removed from the angular forms of monumental Kufic. Written twice is the Arabic maxim "The free-born is benevolent." The centre of the base of the bowl is marked with a black manganese dot.



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20

century H/eleventh century CE, or in the Maghreb even later (CF. FIG. 151). They vary the imaginative arrangement of the letters in tight or loose lines and almost always achieve an aesthetic perfection which delights the eye even of those who cannot read the script. However, the types of scripts subsumed under the designation 'Kufic' differ distinctly from each other, perhaps not alone by region but by certain studio traditions.

Certain types of script used in early manuals for scribes and in large Arabic encyclopaedias of the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries bear over 80 designations. So far it has proved impossible to attribute them precisely to the original pages. The descriptions are not exact enough and there are scarcely any colophons specifying the scribes and their origins at the end in this early period. Alphabets and clear designations of scripts are only available from the fifteenth century (FIGS. 17, 34-35). However, researchers are beginning to analyze large manuscript collections more precisely and systematically distinguish between characteristic differences.

As in most north Semitic book scripts, the basic forms of the letters have additional diacritical marks, as shown by evidence from the first decades. Traditionally, their introduction is associated with the governor of Iraq al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (d. 714). Despite some assertions to the contrary, the use of colour – red, green or gold – is irregular. Various systems of dots have been used since the eighth century and presumably also entered subsequently in older manuscripts. At that time too, the short vowels missing in most Semitic scripts are indicated by dots, both initially unsystematically. An early system is attributed to the grammarian and poet Abu Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 688). In the tenth century, a regular system appears to have established itself which was then adopted by other scripts up to the present. Dots are used to distinguish letters, and small strokes and commas are used to replace vowels.

Almost all Qur'ans from the eighth to the eleventh century are bound horizontally, with the size and proportion of the pages from the very beginning also being critical for the size of the calligraphy. Later the paper and size of the script were apparently named and standardized in a hierarchical order which we know so far not for Qur'ans, but for 'worldly' scripts: for example *tumar* for documents signed by rulers, *nisf* ("half") and *thulth* respectively *thuluth* ("a third") for letters to persons of high rank, etc. This may have happened already in the eighth or ninth century at the height of the court scriptoriums in the Abbasid caliphate, as suggested by the records of later calligraphers.[15] The pages of the Qur'an are decorated with verse separators, sura headings, and here and there additional ornaments, at times also full-page decorations at the beginning or the end of a volume. They provide important information for a general chronological order.[16] At the same time, however, calligraphers also developed variants and additions to the shapes of the letters which they gradually filtered from the celebratory and hieratic mode and made into a more pleasing decorative script for different purposes – the floral, knotted and 'enlivened' Kufic which provides delightful variety with plant and floral ornaments and even animal and human heads in manuscripts and in decorations on objects (FIGS. 18-20).

From the beginning of Islam, in parallel with the sacred scripts and some other texts on parchment in the different Kufic styles, there were other media, of which fewer have been handed down because of their perishability and neglect. Exceptions are the innumerable papyri from Egypt, particularly letters, official documents and bills. They were inscribed with a round script which was better suited to the rough material, with unmistakeable similarities with Kufic, which were later called *naskh* or *naskhī* and distinguished according to several sub-groups. In rare cases, official documents were also written on fine textiles like silk, and more often epigraphical texts were embroidered on linen.[17]

Paper was in use centuries before Islam in China; its manufacture spread after the first Islamic-Chinese battle on the Talas in Kazakhstan in 751. Paper mills were first documented in Samarkand and then in Baghdad in 794, in Egypt, North Africa and the Byzantine Empire in the 10th century, and in Sicily and Spain, from where the invention reached the rest of Europe, in the eleventh century. Initially its introduction had no influence on scripts, but more fluid styles must have become more common as materials became increasingly refined – both the composition of the paper and the preparation of writing by smoothing played an important role in the development of schools of the art of the book, as numerous technical descriptions suggest.

One of the best-known developers of the round scripts was the scribe and vizier Ibn Muqla (d. 940), historically documented as a calligrapher. But even for his systematization of the round script in six forms (*qalam*, plural *aqlām*) we still lack precise allocations to authentic originals. Ibn Muqla formulated the rules for well-balanced script (*al-khatt al-mansūb*), based on mathematics, whereby size is measured by clusters of five to seven rhomboid dots. The names of the styles are also recorded differently – usually as *thuluth*, *naskh*, *tauqī'*, *rayhānī*, *muhaqqaq* und *riq'a*, but they are described differently and only over time have they developed distinctly different forms. Ibn Muqla, from whom no authentically signed manuscript has been preserved[18], is the last of a series of legendary early calligraphers. The first is supposed to have been the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law and successor (caliph), 'Ali ibn abi Talib, as his secretary. Several other companions of the Prophet and theologians are unjustifiably celebrated as originators of the script – instead of the few signatories of earlier manuscripts which have been preserved. Tradition also distinguishes between the calligraphers who established certain styles and those who were merely skilled in writing.

Ibn Muqla's famous successor, Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022), is known to us from at least one Qur'an manuscript signed and dated 1001 in a fascinating dynamic *naskh* script with rich illumination. This is the earliest dated Qur'an we have in a round script; three other signed copies are preserved in libraries in Turkey. *Naskh* has become the preferred script for easily legible texts to this day for Qur'ans and prayer books, but also for carefully copied works of every discipline. The script of Ibn al-Bawwab does not appear, as feared, merely more mathematically precise; it is exuberant and vibrant, so it is believed that he relaxed the strict rules of Ibn Muqla somewhat. As more and more schools were formed, this inventiveness was gradually lost, particularly in the late Ottoman Empire.

Ibn al-Bawwab and his pupils were famous not only for their *naskh*, but also for the ornamental, bold *thuluth* which is suited to book headings and decoratively written formulas (FIGS. 17, 21). Two hundred years later, the last Abbasid calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi (d. 1298) ended this series of famous founders of calligraphy. Using *thuluth*, he created a school for the strikingly

بانت سعاد فقلبي اليوم متبول متيم اثرها لم

وما سعاد غداة البين اذ رحلوا الا اغن

elegant script used to this day for inscriptions on buildings and for decorating objects. Gradually it superseded Kufic in the art of the book. Some manuscripts are signed by Yaqut; his works were collected, also in small fragments, thus giving rise to doubts about their correct attribution (FIG. 22).

The few extant manuscripts from the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad and other centres make us painfully aware of the loss of the great art of the book in this period.[19] Undoubtedly artistic development profited from the large number of small courts, such as that of Mosul, which promoted it. It is almost impossible to attribute other scripts to manuscripts, for example the large chancery script known as *tauqīʿ* for official documents. Easier to recognize is *rayhānī* which is attributed to the calligrapher ʿAli ibn Ubaidallah al-Rayhani (d. 834) for particularly fine, zestful manuscripts and Qurʾans as well. The larger *muhaqqaq* became characteristic for monumental Qurʾans at Mongolian courts in Iran and the Mamluk courts in Egypt (FIG. 23-24). It is most easily recognized by the vowel markings drawn with a different, finer reed pen – which now at any rate are always found in Qurʾan manuscripts. *Rayhānī* plays a special role in the formation of schools of calligraphy since the masters tended to use it for their signature or comments and assessments of work submitted by pupils. This explains the derivation of the Ottoman term *ijāza* for it, "permission" (to copy certain texts and masterpieces) (CF. FIG. 27). However, we only know these scripts from later examples starting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. So far we do not know whether they too were as strongly modified by major calligraphers as *riqʿa*, which changed from an elegant, round script to a typically slurred scholarly, rapidly written script. Finally, it spread over the entire Ottoman Empire and evolved into the rather pointed script still used today in nearly all Arab countries except for North Africa.

A small script known as *ghubārī* is usually mentioned outside the 'Six Pens' (FIG. 25, 36). It seems to have developed in early Abbasid times as a chancery script, but later, in keeping with its name ('dust script') was only used for microscopically small manuscripts, especially miniature Qurʾans. *Tumar*, mentioned early, seems to have changed since the late Abbasid period from a consistently very large, round and flexible script, if one may believe the drawings in Qalqashandi's encyclopaedia known only from copies of manuscripts.

The Maghribi script in North Africa and at times also in Islamic Andalusia is a special case (CF. FIG. 151). It is sometimes said that copies of the Qurʾan were written over much longer periods – therefore 'conservatively' – in the same script. Actually, this is not true. Certain, usually newly created styles were not used for them but the classical styles were continually varied. In North Africa, however, various influential patrons and the entire culture of writing from the twelfth century almost to this day have kept to a practically unvaried round script. Qurʾans were still written there on parchment up to the fourteenth or fifteenth century.[20] Diacritical marks in Maghribi script deviate from standard use and some loops under the base line are written with greater flourish, sometimes in a semi-circle.

Few examples of this simplifying distinction between scripts are found in manuscripts. Much more often, the scripts are complex hybrids which are difficult to distinguish. Consequently in the different schools of calligraphy, supplementary designations have become customary which, however, only help to exaggerate the discrepancy between cautious or ingenious inventions and 'academic' imitations. The latest manual by Francois Déroche logically recommends retaining the generic term naskh for Arabic round scripts.[21] At any rate, anachronistic designations of styles in several new popular presentations of Islamic calligraphy do not make things clearer.

Iran, Central Asia and Mughal India

In the Mongol period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, calligraphy and the art of the book experienced a tremendous upswing in the eastern Islamic world – both in the religious and the secular spheres, which began increasingly to separate from each other. Main areas of application were recorded already for the 'old' scripts. To this were now added critical innovations for literature, the art of the book at court and individual pages of calligraphy – Qurʾans and theological works in general were only seldom written in the new styles. The most common style for 'secular' works, such as the Persian epic *Shāh-nāma* and poets' anthologies in Central Asia and Iran in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is a steep, but dynamic variant of *naskh*, which tends toward *thuluth* and is sometimes called early *taʿlīq* because of its fluctuating base line.[22] A further development of this is the most momentous script innovation, *nastaʿlīq* (from *naskh* and the heretofore scarcely developed and known *taʿlīq*). It is attributed to the calligrapher Mir ʿAli Tabrizi (d. 1416) in Iran in Timur's time and his creative successor, and is

FIG. 21 (previous double page)
DECORATIVE PAGE WITH A POEM WRITTEN IN THULUTH SCRIPT
Iran; 16th century

The two lines of the poem, attributed to the Persian calligrapher 'Abdulbaqi Tabrizi, contain the beginning of the famous Arabic 'Poem of the Cloak' to the Prophet Muhammad by Ka'b b. Zuhair, in Friedrich Rückert's translation:

Soad fled, while my heart clove to her footprints in unbreakable bonds of love and pain.
What was Soad when charged with that untimely departure? A tender doe (that gazed sweetly through coal-black eyes).

FIG. 22 (following double page)
DECORATIVE PAGE IN THULUTH SCRIPT WITH A SAYING BY THE PROPHET IN ARABIC

The following praise of the Prophet in *raihānī* script is written diagonally in the same script as the authorship of the famous calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi, according to the copy of the signature of Mohammad al-Fakhkhar on the border. However, the authorship could also refer to the Arabic verse written below in *naskhī* script:

It is no exaggeration that calligraphy makes me happy; and there is no rhetoric in the poetry of Hatim at-Ta'yi.

used for poetry in the eastern Islamic world. Its primary characteristic is the greater flexibility of the base line which even within a single word can appear to descend or 'hang' (*taʿlīq*). Some letters can then be thickened and elongated with great verve (FIGS. 34-35). To ensure legibility, the smaller individual forms are written very exactly, as in *naskh* (FIG. 26). Some special features of certain letters such as ha` are considered typical for Iran. However, the style is not only used for Persian but also for Eastern Turkic (Chagatay) and Urdu and was elaborated upon by several famous artists.

Nastaʿlīq was particularly successful in monumental form on buildings, on tile panels and large boards, but also in stone and in numerous Persian verse inscriptions on tiles and small objects. Arabic texts are clearly distinguished and tend to be written in *thuluth* or *naskh* (FIG. 23).

Regional derivatives of this style developed, for example *bihārī* with its thick horizontal lines and special coloured characters in India in the fourteenth to the early fifteenth centuries. In China there arose a curved, lambent script (*sīnī*) which was probably usually painted with a brush.

In the Timurid Empire, calligraphers are noted for outstanding achievements in creating new calligraphic styles and formulas. They too worked outside the capital of Herat for royal patrons at smaller courts such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Mashhad and in the religious centre in Qom.[23] One of their innovations was a combination of different styles on a single page ordered according to aesthetic criteria – an odd number of lines, sequences of large and small scripts, diagonal lines and later lateral fields for coloured illumination which were done by the same master or an additional artist (FIGS. 27-30). For the first time, biographical details of several masters of this and following periods were collected in a treatise by the statesman and author Qadi Ahmad Qumi (d. after 1606) about Timurid and Safavid calligraphers and artists in which he also comments on their respective qualities. Since originals of some of the masters described have only recently become known, and an illustrated edition is now impatiently awaited.[24] The point of such works seems to be to weigh masters of this art as models and – for collectors – measure them against each other on the basis of different qualifications.

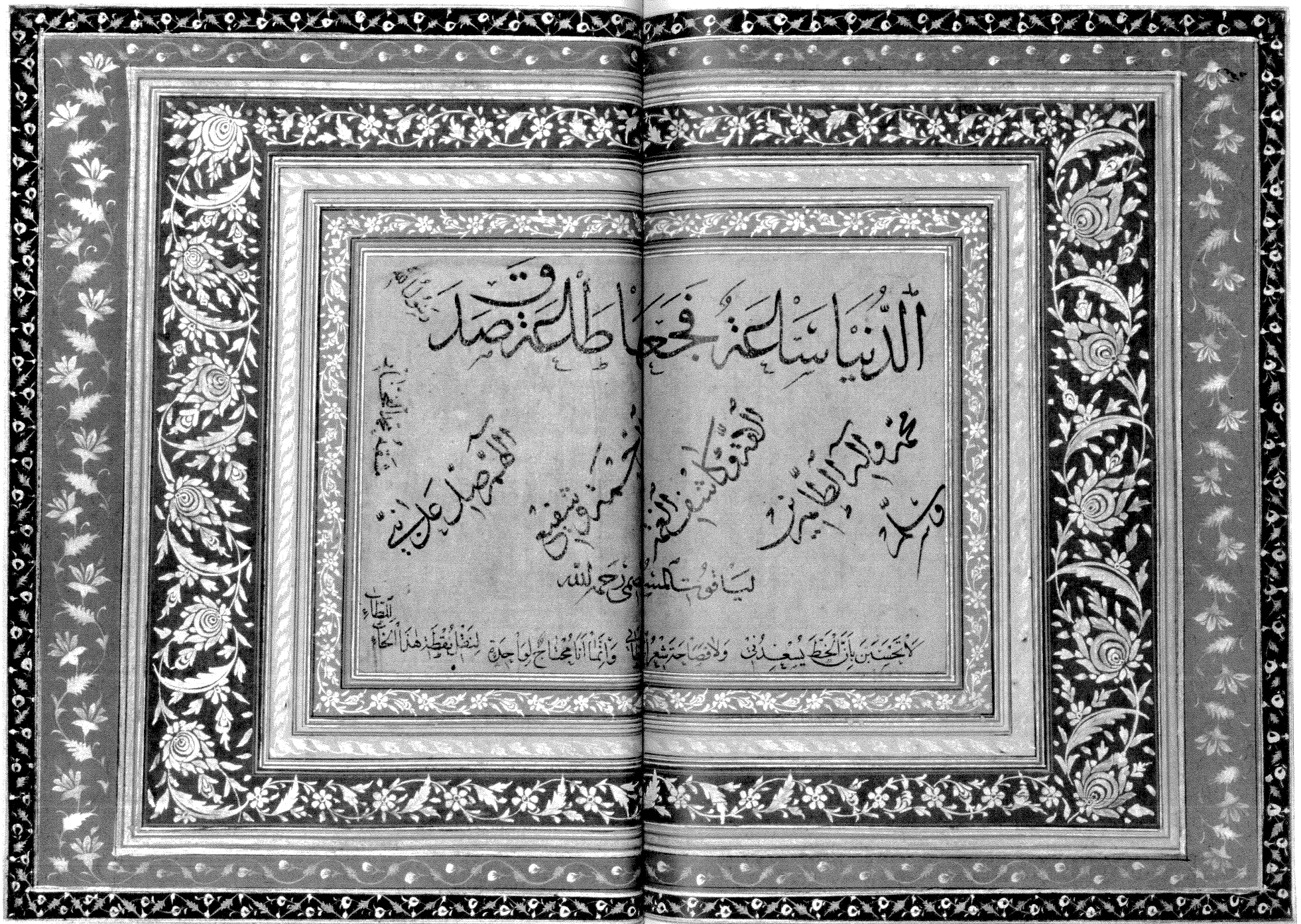


FIG. 23

FRAGMENT OF A SHROUD WITH PRAISE OF THE PROPHET

Bursa (?)/Turkey; 17th/18th century

Shrouds like this one probably woven in Bursa made of dark green silk – the holy colour of Islam – served to cover the Prophet's grave in Medina and the cenotaphs of his companions. They belong to the tradition of Mecca coverings (*kiswa*), which were taken by pilgrims annually to cover the Kaaba. The Arabic inscriptions, like comparable specimens written in zig-zag lines and emphasized in white, are penned in ornamentally varied *thuluth* script which is difficult to distinguish from *muhaqqaq*. All invocations and prayer texts are repeated. They read:

Allah is my Lord and none is equal to Him; Muhammad is the Beloved of God.
God bless the most noble of all the Prophets and Emissaries of God and grant Him salvation.
God bless You, o Emissary of God, and Thy family!
May God, the Exalted, be pleased with Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, 'Ali, and all the Companions of the Prophet.
Allah is my Lord and none is equal to Him; Muhammad is the Beloved of God.
God bless the most noble of all the Prophets and Emissaries of God and grant Him salvation.
God bless You, o Emissary of God, and Thy family!

Sultan Ali Mashhadi (d. 1520) is considered the most famous successor of Khoja Mir 'Ali from Tabriz; his rhymed treatise on implements and the art of calligraphy is included by Qadi Ahmad in his work. He describes the various techniques, from cutting the nib to mixing various kinds of oak apple ink, the types of paper and finally the qualities of a good calligrapher.[25] Some of his pupils had to emigrate – for political but probably also for economic reasons: Mir 'Ali Harawi (d. around 1550) had to leave Herat after the fall of the Timurid Empire with the conqueror Ubaidallah Khan Uzbek in the direction of Bukhara. Other masters such as Mir Khalil Allah and Maqsud-i Tabrizi moved already in the sixteenth century to Mughal India, probably for higher wages. Mir Imaduddin, described by others as particularly brilliant, was a contemporary of Qadi Ahmad and is only modestly praised by him – he is said to have been killed for artistic arrogance by order of the great Shah 'Abbas in 1616. His style can be admired in a magnificent album[26] and numerous individual pages and manuscripts. His *nasta'līq* exercises contain daring breaches of rules and dramatic overlapping of letters. In particular those exercise pages were kept on which he repeated letters and word groups until their embellishments pleased him and he copied them in the original manuscript. Today they are highly prized as modern calligraphic paintings.

Numerous pupils in Iran, India and in the Ottoman Empire can be traced back to these and other masters. Their works in the form of manuscripts and individual pages are increasingly being acknowledged (FIG. 31). In particular in India it became customary to name works in the style of masters after these masters or even to assume their names completely. This did little to increase the awareness of stylistic developments, so much critical detailed work is necessary to differentiate works bearing the same name.

The most successful innovation before modern times was the development in the sixteenth century of the Iranian script known as *shikasta* ('broken') which serves to this day as a personal kind of stenography which is very difficult to read. It originated from *nasta'līq* with even greater swoops and less clear small letters as

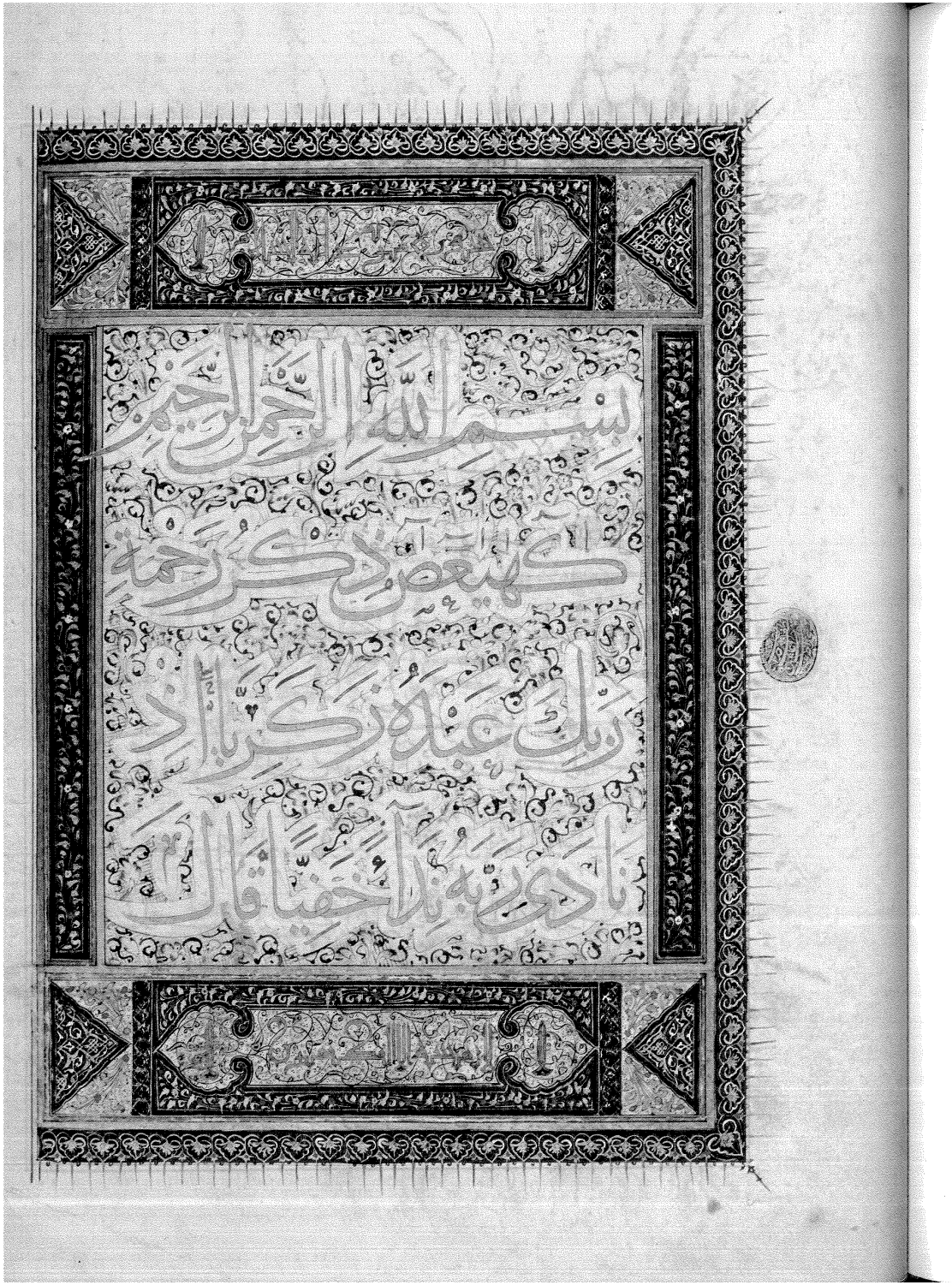


FIG. 24

TIMURID ROYAL QUR'AN

Iran/Afghanistan, probably Herat; around 1395–1435

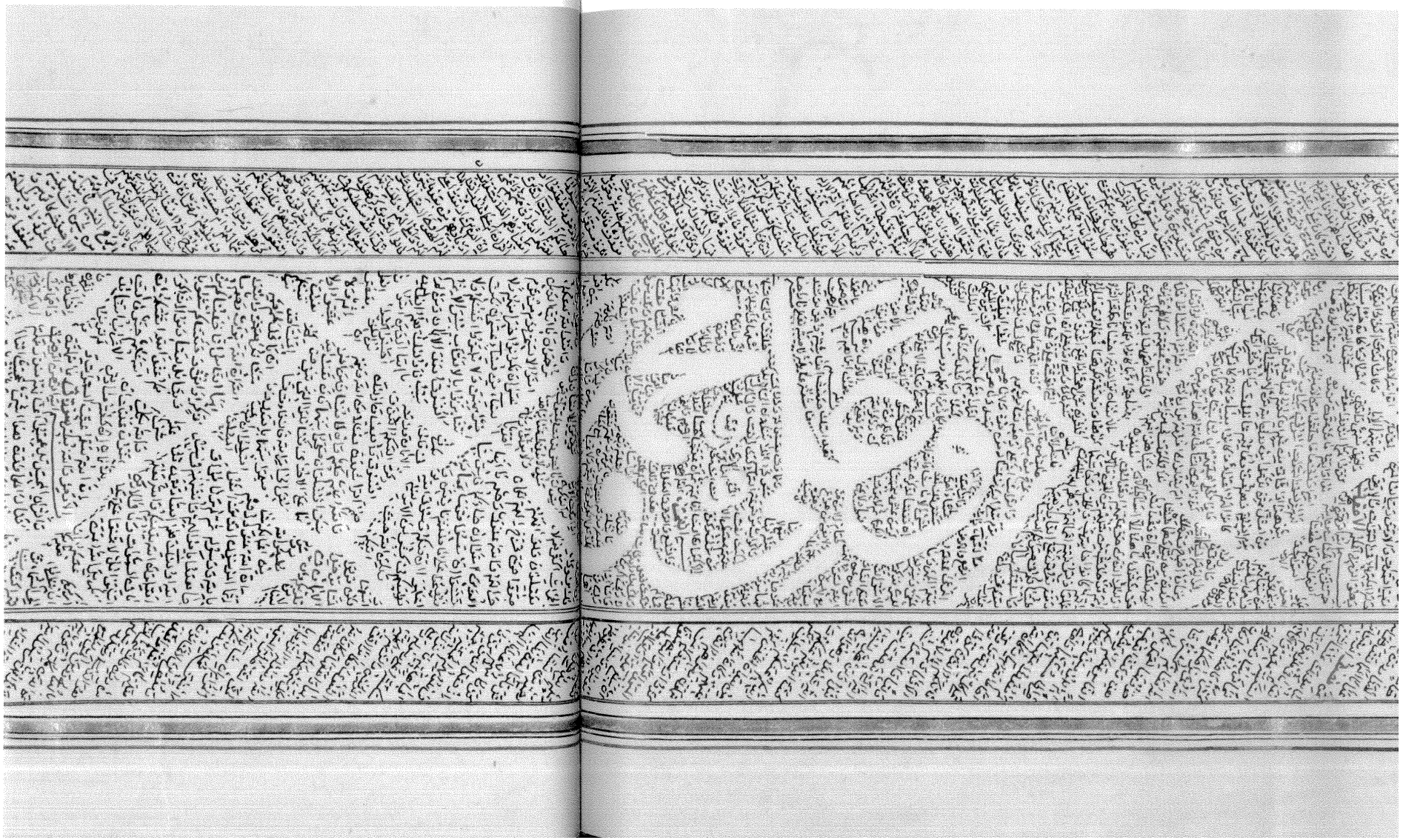
The middle field of this illuminated decorative page from a splendid Qur'an shows four lines of text in monumental gold *muhaqqaq* script, finely outlined in black. The heading in both cartouches is in decorative Kufic. The text is the sura 19 Maryam, named after Mary, which was revealed to the Prophet in Mecca. The ornamentation, mostly in lapis-lazuli blue and gold, corresponds to the style of the court book-making workshop of the Timurid prince Baysonghur in Herat.

FIG. 25

AMULET SCROLL WITH QUR'AN

Iran or North India (Lucknow); 18th – 19th century

This paper roll contains all 114 suras of the Qur'an in miniscule *ghubārī* script. The parts of the text without writing produce additional fields in which Shi'ite saints are praised. 'Ali and the Prophet Muhammad are invoked on the text page shown.



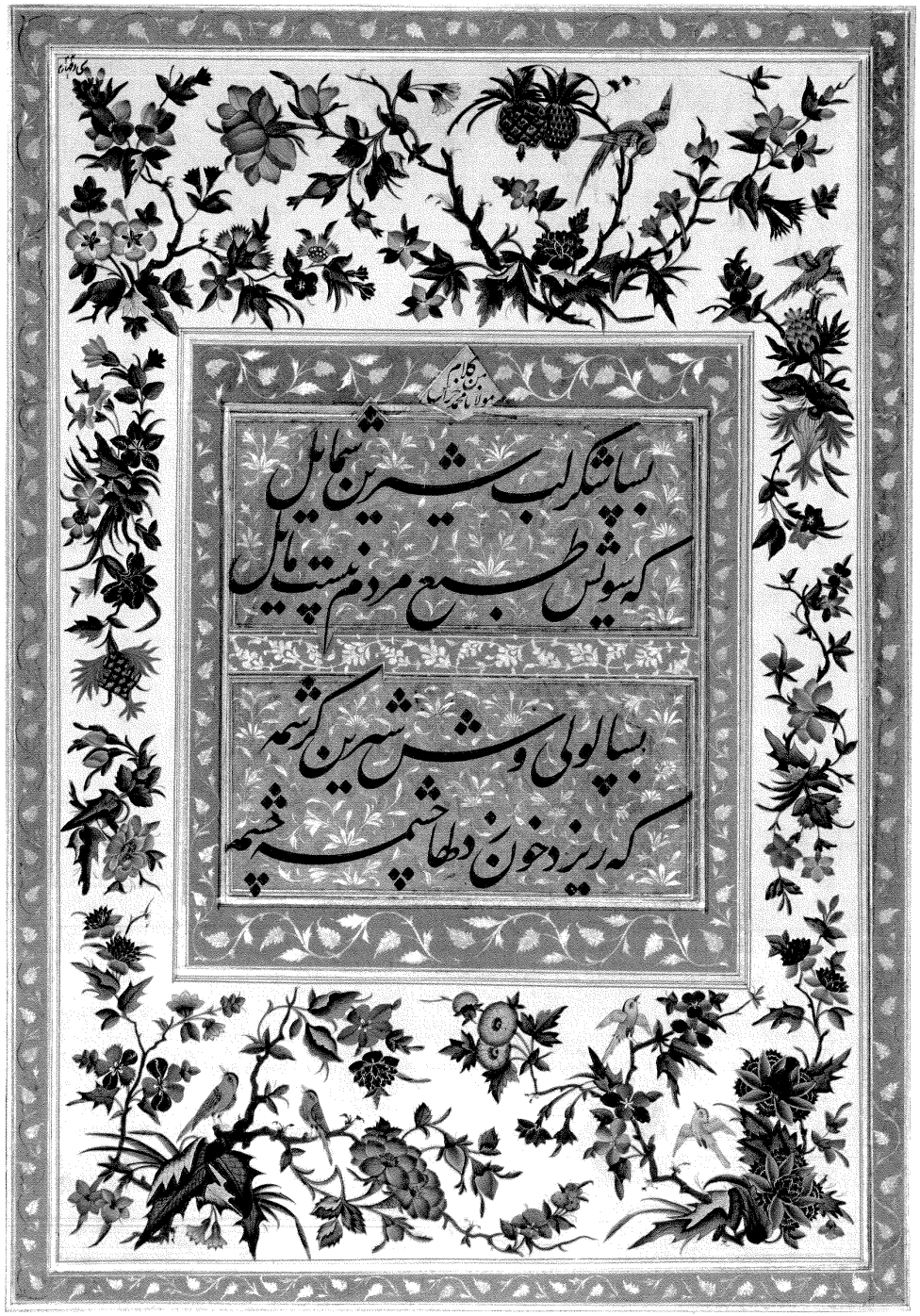


FIG. 26

CALLIGRAPHIC PAGE WITH VERSES OF LOVE

Iran; 1st half 17th century

The two Persian double verses by the poet Mawlana Mohammad Kharras are written in large *nasta'liq* script, which was called "the bride among the styles of calligraphy":

How many Sugar-Lipped and Sweetly-Formed are there
Who indeed lack manly affection?
How many Sweet-Eyed are there
for whose sake hearts blossom like gushing springs, like gushing springs?

FIG. 27 (following double page)

QUR'AN CITATION AND ADAGE BY 'ALI IBN ABI TALIB

Mughal period, India, dat. 1034 H/1625 CE, on a page from an 18th century album

Clearly by a pupil of Hajji Maqsud al-Tabrizi or another famous Iranian calligrapher, Darwish Haidar 'Ali, son of the reformer of the Naqshbandiyya order, Mohammad Murad, the lines are written alternately in *thuluth* and *naskh* script, the signature and dating in *raihānī* script diagonally on the side. Qur'an sura 14, verse 47, "So think not that Allah will fail to keep His promise to His messengers," is supplemented by the praise "because they deserve the House of Honour [paradise]" and 'Ali's adage: "People told me that aspiration to profit would be shameful indeed – whereupon I answered: Is not the question in itself shameful?"

فلا تحسبنّ الله مخلف وعده بأن لهم دار الكرام

والشكر لله

قال علي عليه السلام الناس الى في الكتب عادة

عليهم سلام الله في كل ليلة يقبل زوار الى مطلع الفجر

نقلت العبارة في ذلك التاريخ ... شهر شعبان ... ١٠٣٤

كتبه العبد المذنب ... حيدر علي بن محمد ... حامداً لله تعالى

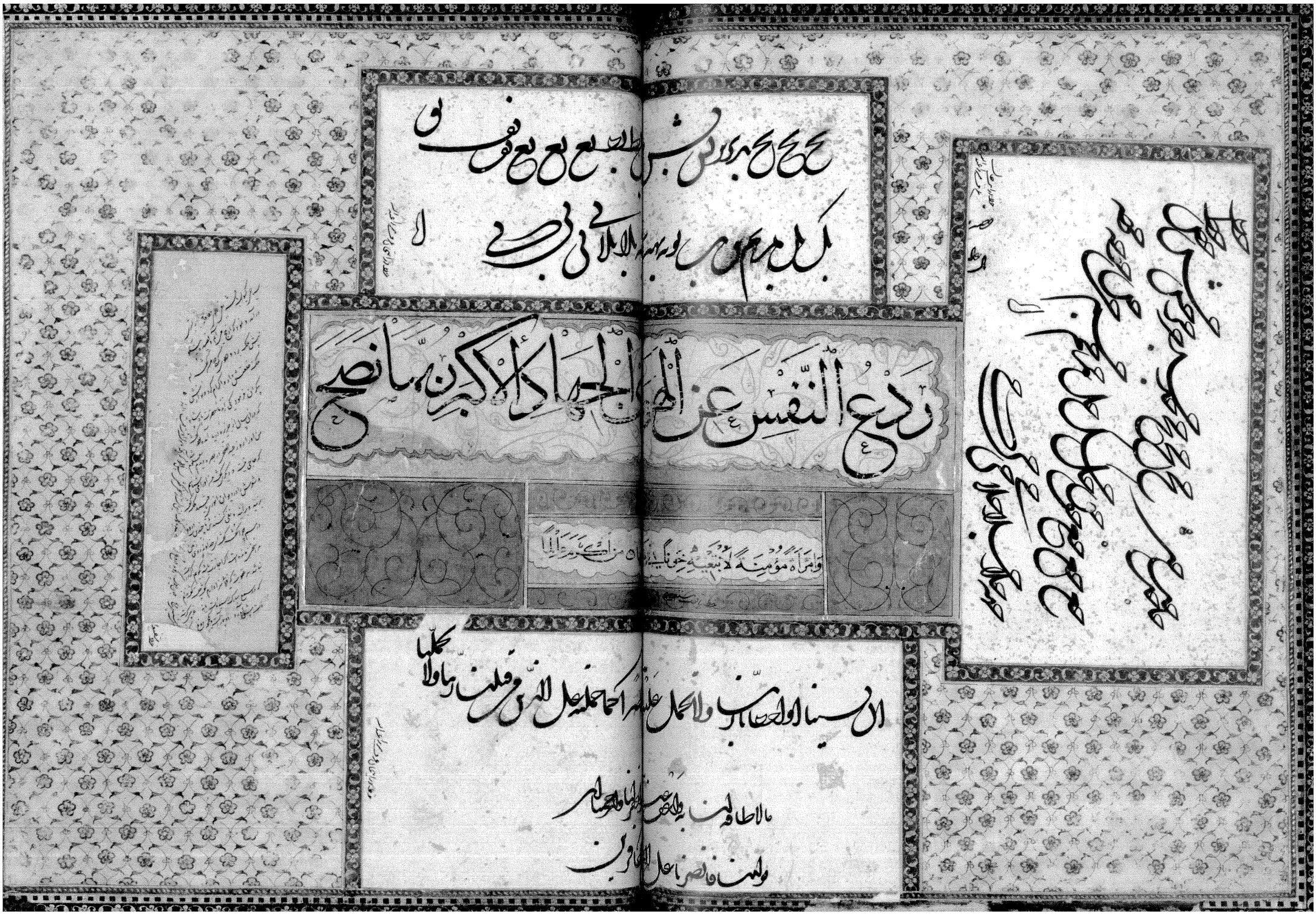


FIG. 28 (previous double page)

ALBUM PAGE WITH EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT STYLES OF CALLIGRAPHY

Mughal period, India; early 17th century

Three Persian calligraphies (above, below and right) are written in *ta'līq* script and are attributed to the style of Mirza 'Abdullah (d. 1616 in Delhi). On the left is a text in the finest *nasta'līq* in 'dust script' (*ghubārī*) size. The fragment of an Arabic decorative page in the middle, ascribed to Yaqut al-Musta'simi (see fig.22), containing a line in *thuluth* and a smaller one in *naskhī* reads:

The great *jihād* (Holy Struggle) consists of keeping passion away from the soul.

FIG. 29

DECORATIVE PAGE OF CALLIGRAPHY WITH POETIC VERSES

Iran; 2nd half of 16th century

The three texts on this album page written in the elegant *nasta'līq* script are two anonymous love poems (in the middle and in the pale green fields along the four sides) and a fragment from Saadi's *Gulistan* ("Rose Garden"). The four-line poem in the middle, for example, reads:

O! More beautiful than the moon have you become,
Lily-Faced and Silver-Skinned,
Hold a mirror to your face
That you may see: You have become an object of admiration for other eyes.

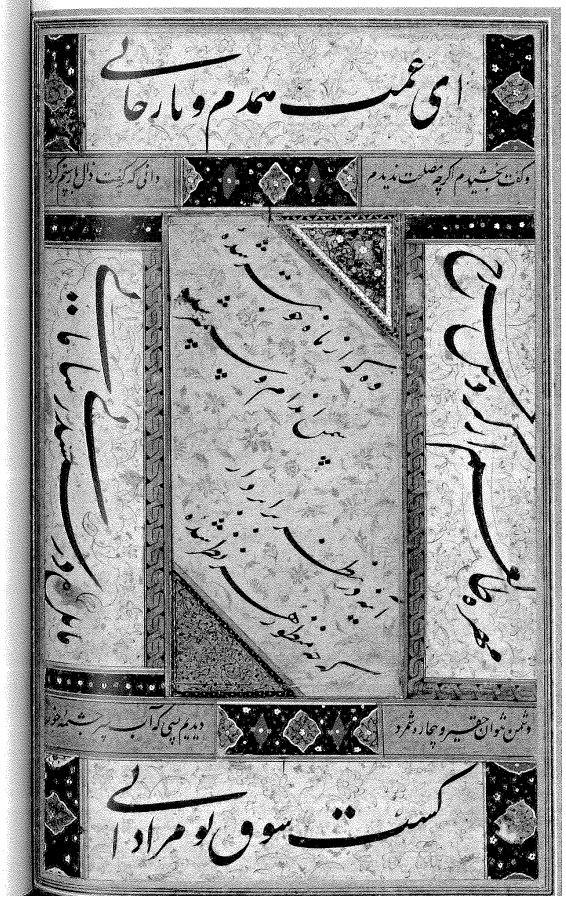
FIG. 30

ALBUM PAGE WITH DIFFERENT FORMS OF *NASTA'LĪQ* SCRIPT

Iran; 2nd half of 16th century

This page contains Persian verses and prose in three different sizes of script. The verses in the four-line middle field read:

Like the sun be one who walks alone,
Lest you – like the moon – become a hostage of the sun (= love).
Her dagger (literally: eyelash) is only sharpened against us,
Her lock has become a spiller of much blood.



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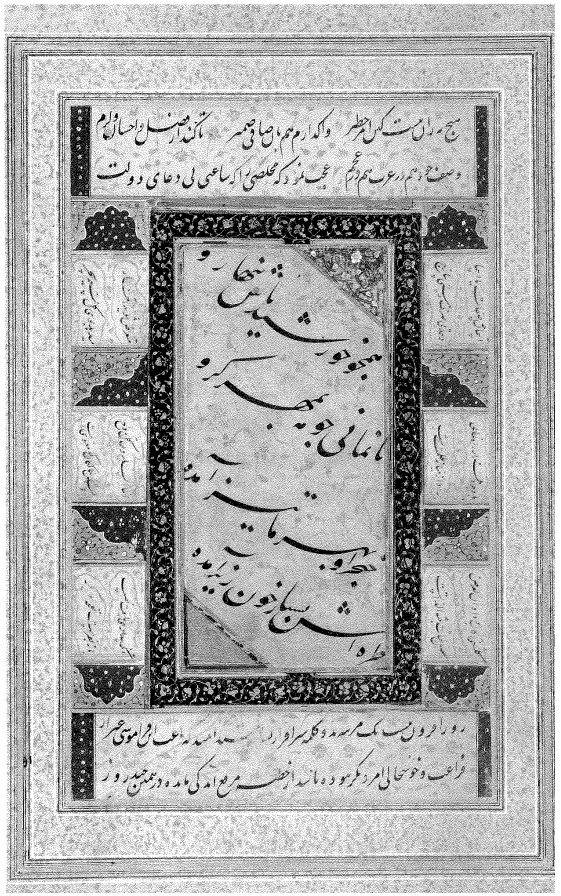

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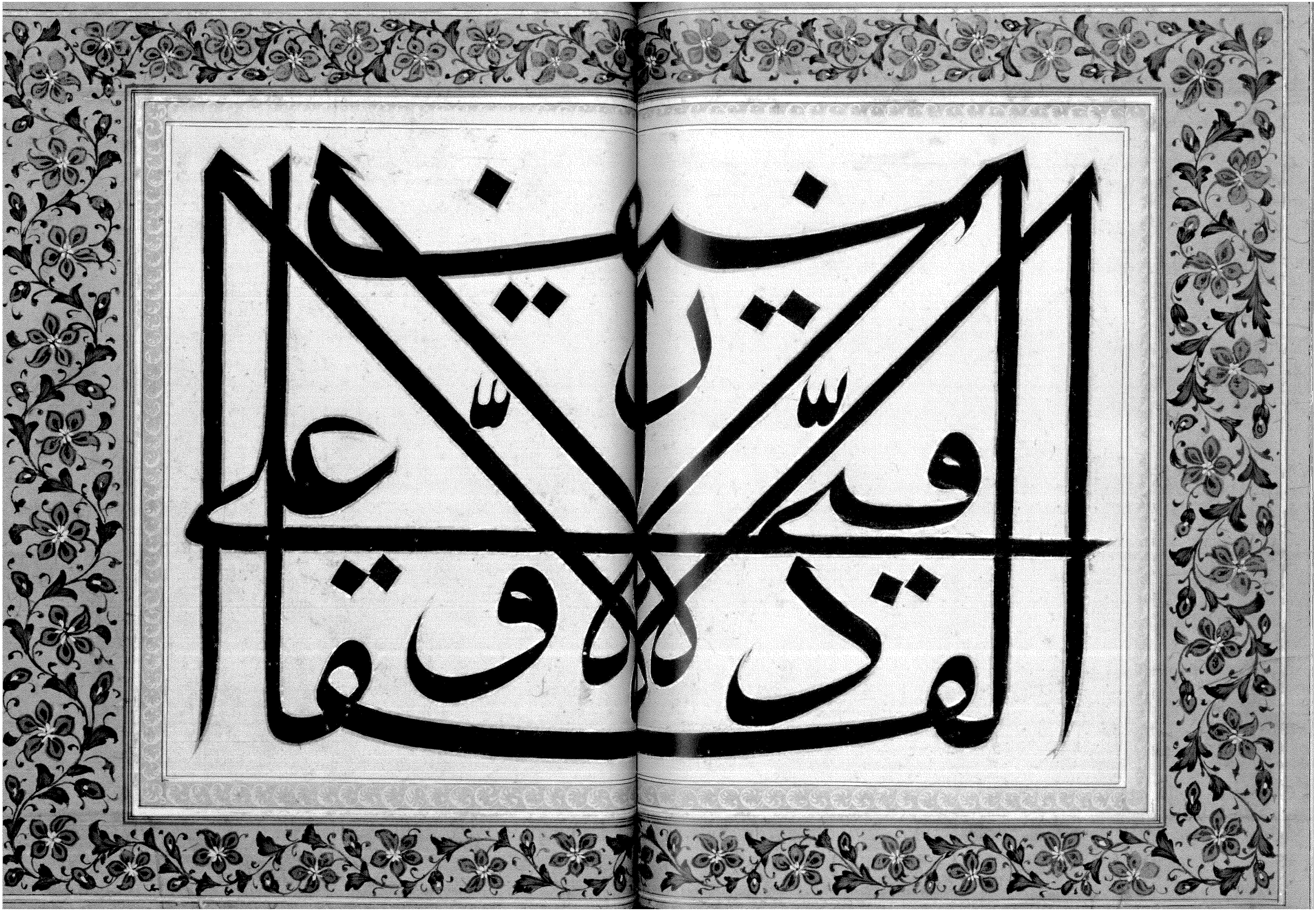


FIG. 31 (previous double page)

DECORATIVE PAGE WITH SHI'ITE INVOCATION

Iran or India; 17th/18th century

The Arabic inscription in ornamental *thuluth* praises the first Shi'ite imam with the well-known religious formula: "There is no hero apart from 'Ali and no sword apart from [his] *dhū'l-fiqār.*"

FIG. 32

DECORATIVE PAGE WITH PERSIAN VERSES AND MAXIMS

Iran; 17th – early 18th century

This almost square decorative page, signed by Fazl Allah contains calligraphies in the usually complicated and difficult-to-read *shikasta* script which was then and is still frequently used for personal letters.

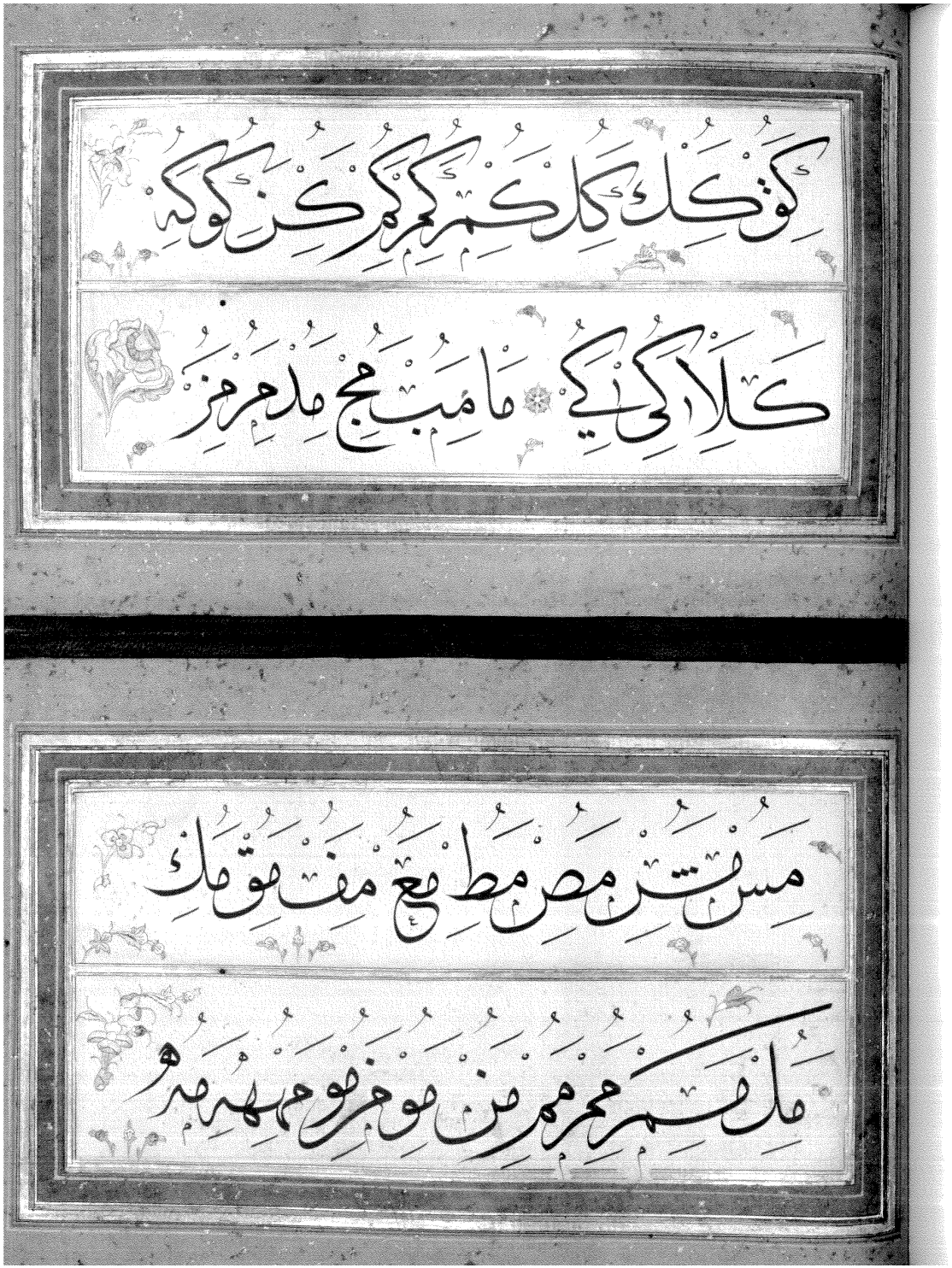


FIG. 33

SMALL ALBUM WITH CALLIGRAPHIC EXERCISES

Ottoman Empire; 18th century

These two two-line pages from a *thuluth* alphabet show the connections (*murakkabat*) between the letters 'K' and 'M'. They belong to a calligraphy album (*murakka*). They served primarily for practice in writing poetic or religious verses.

FIG. 34

ALBUM PAGE WITH PART OF A CALLIGRAPHED *NASTA'LĪQ* ALPHABET

Mughal period, India; 18th century

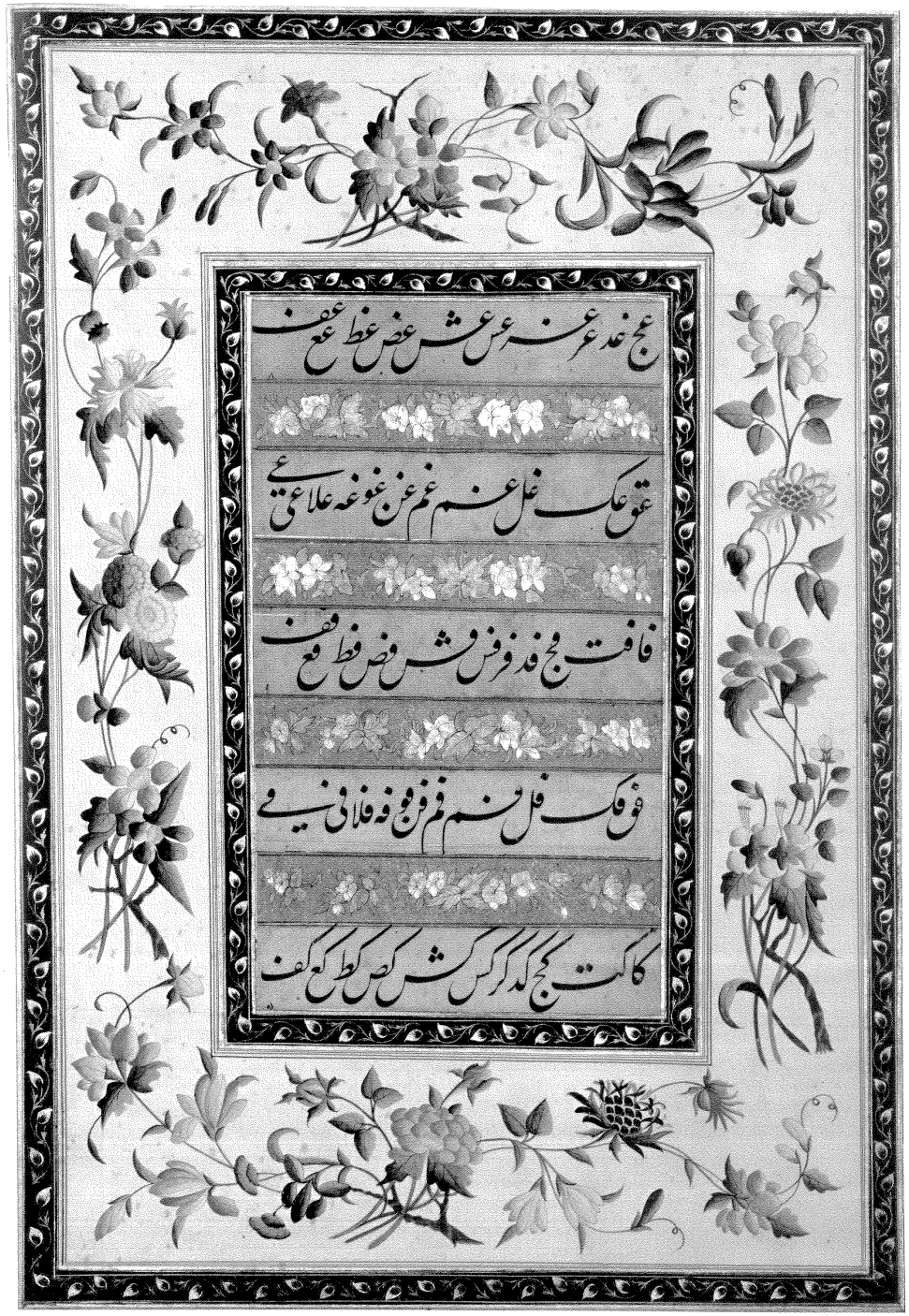


FIG. 35

FROM THE SAME ALPHABET IN *NASTA'LĪQ* SCRIPT

This last page in a series of five with very elegant double combinations of letters in alphabetical order (*murakkabat*) also bears the pasted-on signature of 'Ali al-Katib, probably the famous Mir 'Ali al-katib al-Harawi (d. 1544), but referring to "individual forms" of the letters (*mufradāt*).

FIG. 36

TALISMAN IMAGE DEPICTING A SAINT

India; dated 1917

Both in Muslim South Asia and in Iran, the almost transparent skin of gazelles was used as suitable material on which to write magical texts. The tiny script is arranged so artistically here as to create the idealized image of a bearded saint with a halo and hands outstretched in a gesture of supplication. The frame contains repetitions of God's names, the names of the Prophet and angels and other verses suitable for amulets.

well as numerous, otherwise unaccepted ligatures. *Shikasta* texts are written ornamentally almost like a dust script on single pages for poetry and letters (FIGS. 28 BELOW, 32). It is sometimes confused, in more recent publications as well, with *ta'līq* which was revived in the eighteenth century and is heavier, larger and in some instances more markedly slurred (FIG. 28 TOP, LEFT AND RIGHT).

The Ottoman Empire

The Iranian development of the 'literary' styles was taken over particularly in the Ottoman Empire with great enthusiasm and further developed in works of outstanding aesthetic quality. The designation *ta'līq* for Iranian *nasta'līq* remained customary here for quite some time.

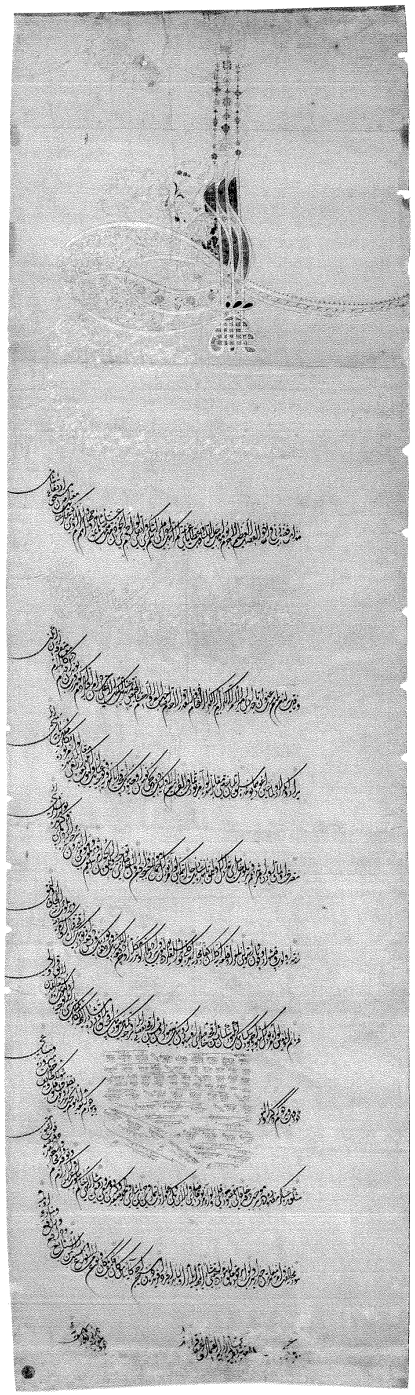
To this day Ottoman schools of calligraphy have significantly influenced the appearance of the Arabic alphabet, particularly in religion[27] as well as in diplomacy and in chancery documents. Various authors have passed on a frequently quoted saying – "The Qur'an was revealed in Arabia, recited in Egypt and calligraphed in the Ottoman Empire." As in Iran, individual great masters were extolled and described in biographies. Moreover, typically for the Ottoman administrative system, regulations for the schools apparently became increasingly strict. Since the sixteenth century we hear of entrance procedures and examinations for the most skilled, the permission to copy calligraphic texts is taken over from the science of dogmatic text transmission and the pupils' works are countersigned by the masters. Copying masterpieces remained customary, as in Iran and India, but starting in the seventeenth century more precise references to the teacher and pupil become mandatory in the Ottoman Empire. The concentration of schools in the largest centres is striking – for the Turkish world almost only in Istanbul. The old Arab centres continued as Ottoman provincial towns with their own schools, but without much impetus.

Information in Ottoman biographies is concerned more with the formal traditional aspect than the aesthetic achievement; artistic statements are limited to a few criteria which to date have hardly been deciphered. Descriptions of the characteristics are extremely brief and in need of illustrations. Only recently have more Arab and Turkish research studies and overviews been produced. Some outstanding old masters are now emerging from the artistic darkness in a series of major reformers of Arabic script. Sheikh Hamdullah Amasi (from Amasya, 1429–1520) is considered the former of an 'Ottoman' style in *naskhī* and *thuluth* (Turkish *sülüs*) as a successor of Yaqut al-Musta'simi and as the head of a school of calligraphy at court. He copied the Qur'an 47 times and also designed Qur'an inscriptions for mosques under Sultan Bayezid II.[28] His pupil Ahmed Karahisari (d. 1556) succeeded him as head of the court studio – from this studio and his assistants and pupils we have the first Ottoman archive documents. His manner of writing in the same styles gradually became liberated from some of Yaqut's rules and at times led in monumental *thuluth* (*sülüs celi*) to extravagant inventions such as letters successively linked to each other and words in very sweeping lines.[29] To illuminate the texts, he judiciously selected artists for a uniform, colourful, flowery style. The third grand master of the Ottoman Empire is Hafiz Osman (d. 1698).[30] His numerous extant works reveal very measured 'individual' forms in selected places which by their very rarity emphasize certain features all the more. Numerous individual folios and pious descriptions of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad assembled in leporello albums introduced this genre as a main field of practice of Ottoman calligraphy (FIG. 33).

Ornamented Script

In Timurid times in the fifteenth century, the spread of individual folios of calligraphy seems to have increased. Preparations were made for this since in manuscripts, also Qur'an manuscripts, on one page the type of script and the size of the letters were exchanged irrespective of the contents in certain lines – usually the uppermost, the middle one and the lowest line were written larger and in a different script from *naskh*, usually *thuluth* or later *muhaqqaq*. This was primarily for ornamentation's sake, but may also have served to make the text more legible for long recitations. The custom of writing lines in a large type with others smaller or written diagonally appears in the fifteenth century, first with Iranian court calligraphers. From time to time and later regularly, the margins next to the small lines were decorated with ornaments or additional inscriptions. The texts are not only religious; Arabic, Persian and Ottoman poetry is combined with different quotations in this manner. Usually the leaves are bound together in groups and sometimes subsequently have decorative margins pasted around them, are strung in leporello form or are pasted on cardboard in albums. A distinction is made between standardized albums (*mufradāt*), which contain for example *nasta'līq* or another alphabet, then double combinations of individual letters, and finally examples of verses in the large script described (FIGS. 34–35).

37 A



37 B

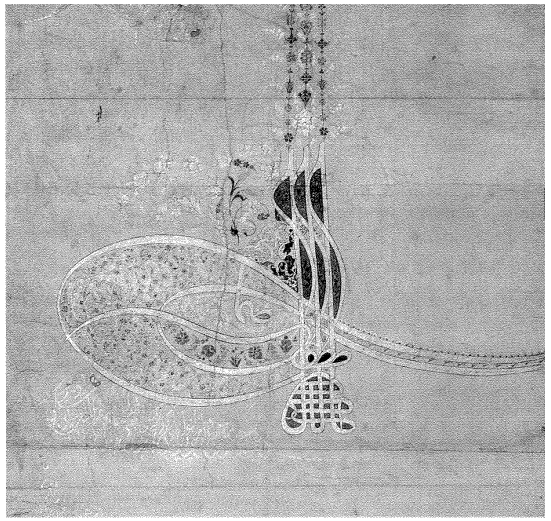


FIG. 37 A-B

OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT WITH THE NAME SULTAN MEHMED III (1595–1603)

Ottoman Empire; dated 1601 CE

The text of this official document (*berāt*), written in the chancery script *divānī*, concerns the transfer of a fief as a reward for brave service in war. The artistic calligraphy of the name (*tughrā*) of the sultan, like the illumination, is predominately in gold. Its serpentine text reads: "Mehmed Shah, Son of Murad Khan, always victorious."

Persian and Turkish, more seldom Arabic verses, usually double verses, are written diagonally slanting upwards to the left and decorated with ornaments in triangles in the corners and in the middle. Albums of these verses, also combined with miniatures and other pages of calligraphy, are called *muraqqa'*. Among other things, they serve as collections of famous old examples of calligraphy or copies in their style and were initially apparently combined arbitrarily and pasted like the western quodlibet pictures and *pasticcios* on cardboard. This is attested by the famous Saray albums in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum and in the State Library in Berlin from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which originally came from Timurid courts and early Safavid holdings.[31] They demonstrate the regional mobility of the collections, partly as booty in the course of Ottoman conquests in Iran and partly as gifts or tribute. Corresponding examples from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries come primarily from Mughal India – impressive albums, some of which contain works centuries old and in new borders. Western libraries in London, Berlin, St. Petersburg and the private Khalili Collection contain outstanding examples of these court albums.[32] These albums may have served didactic purposes – perhaps they contributed outside the courts to a more marked development of schools of calligraphy. In the Ottoman Empire the number of teacher-pupil circles apparently increased considerably; even civil servants found enough time for an exchange in circles, as some private anthologies and poetry booklets attest.

Among the religious texts are a particularly large number of Sufi poems, teachings and stories. The strong promotion of ornamental and illustrative motifs in some Sufi circles also enriched calligraphy. The pictorial reshaping of letters and names or words into 'letter pictures' is probably a Sufi invention. They became known for the first time in Europe through the title vignette of an Arabic invocation in the shape of a bird in Adam Olearius' travelogue about Safavid Iran dated 1647[33]. The birds and animals depicted are special ones which attained popular fame from edifying stories.[34] Calligraphers of the Mevleviye order (whirling dervishes) in the Ottoman Empire invented particularly imaginative, primarily mirror-symmetrical let-

ter pictures with symbolic forms such as dervish caps and the 'ideal face' (cf. following essay by Frembgen in this book).[35] In Iran as well, the calligraphy inspired by Sufis enjoyed a new upswing in the nineteenth century and led to novel pictorial inventions by some masters which are still reflected in contemporary art (FIG. 36).

Collecting pious and not-so-pious epigrams and poems provided distraction and entertainment for educated circles throughout the Islamic world. This explains why they are also popular as ornaments on implements and in architecture. The same trend toward compositions of different scripts for different kinds of messages is found on objects, with the often highly ornate Kufic for religious formulas, while Arabic texts are usually written in *naskh* or *thuluth* and Persian or Turkish is written in the new styles and transferred to different materials.[36] Apparently the models are derived from paper drafts; in some cases the quotations and words do not fit completely in the cartouches and medallions provided. The selection of texts certainly corresponds to a predominant style in certain areas and in certain circles of connoisseurs. The number of pious and Sufi formulas in proportion to general good wishes and verses indicates the taste and spiritual attitude of the buyers and owners. Increasingly, however, the characteristic tenor of the inscriptions on objects is lost and since the nineteenth century particularly in the Ottoman Empire has yielded to stereotypical words and illegible series of letters, surely under the influence of exports for Western markets and tourism.

A special development of Ottoman scriptoriums must be emphasized because it is characteristic of the official government style and the innovative spirit of this empire. The Ottomans created a new form of chancery document by placing the 'emblem' of the sultan as *tughrā* under the invocation and over time ornamenting it in great detail (FIG. 37). The zestful design, always in the same shape, was slightly varied by specially trained scribes for each new ruler and later richly illuminated. These documents are splendid works of the court studio, and a special script was developed for them in the early sixteenth century, the *dīvānī* ("used in the Divan, the vizier's council"), in a simple and a monumental variant (*celī dīvānī*). The strokes developed from the *ta'līq* are almost impossible to forge because any alteration of the entwined lines would be noticeable, at the end of a line, the last stroke is extended to the margin. For less important government offices, especially those concerned with finance, scriptoriums had invented another kind of secret script, the *siyaqat* style, which in its square, distinctive style and constant use of abbreviations more closely resembles stenography. Its origin is uncertain; it may date back to Byzantine models.

With the abolition of the Arabic script in the Republic of Turkey in 1928, the great cohesion of Islamic countries in this medium was lost. Initial attempts to adopt Roman script for religious documents and the Qur'an failed due to fierce resistance from religious forces. Translations were always considered inadequate and were never allowed to replace the Arabic text. Today Arabic is again being taught in Turkey as a form of calligraphic exercise. To facilitate communication with Arabs and Iranians, modern Turkish, written in Arabic, would no longer be suitable. Many Arabic and Persian terms which made Ottoman Turkish one of the most difficult languages, are now turkified. Thus it would be better from the start for all to learn Arabic, a fascinating, flexible academic language which uses of one of the most elegant scripts and one highly suitable for its grammatical system.

Harmony of Lines. Islamic Calligraphy from Ottoman Dervish Lodges

JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

Alongside the art of the book, which was promoted by rulers at their courts and by religious scholars in mosques and Qur'an schools, Arabic calligraphy was also cultivated in the context of everyday religious practice. The popular calligraphy of Sufis and dervishes is an example of artistic expression which reflects piety and spirituality to a particular extent.[1] Characterized by the harmony of their lines and the magic of their beauty, many of these works exhibit a special aura: decorating the walls of aesthetically designed rooms in dervish lodges (*khānqah, tekke*), they create not only an important visual dimension in veneration and contemplation of God or charismatic Sufi saints, but also in concrete practices of ritual recollection of God. They are calligraphic devotional and protective images with blessing power and at the same time express religious affiliation to a mystical order. In dervish lodges and at saints' shrines they are frequently presented as a picture gallery or part of holy assemblages.[2] Their imagery, symbolism and contents evoke vital dynamic forces and create an atmosphere conducive to individual or collective forms of devotion.

In the Muslim world many calligraphers felt drawn to the esoteric teachings of mystics and were themselves often members of Sufi orders.[3] In this way calligraphy developed into the epitome of Sufi art. It is, in fact, an important spiritual exercise on the mystical path in which the musical rhythm of the elegant sweeps of the letters while writing do reflect the process of transformation of the inner self. Saying his prayers the mystic stands straight like an *alif* in front of God, and equally straight is the path of the soul towards the Almighty.

In Turkey under the Ottomans, the spiritual aspects of the art of writing were emphasized not only by the Mevlevis and Bektashis but also by other orders.[4] Most of the often symmetrically composed calligraphic images for dervish lodges (*tekke levha*) were delicate works of art, sometimes illuminated, which were applied on paper, wood or glass with a pen. Artistic expression also took the form of reverse glass pictures (*camaltı*), fretsaw and straw work, paper cutting and embroidery. In many of these panels, we see the difficult mirror writing (*müsenna, aynalı*) known since the

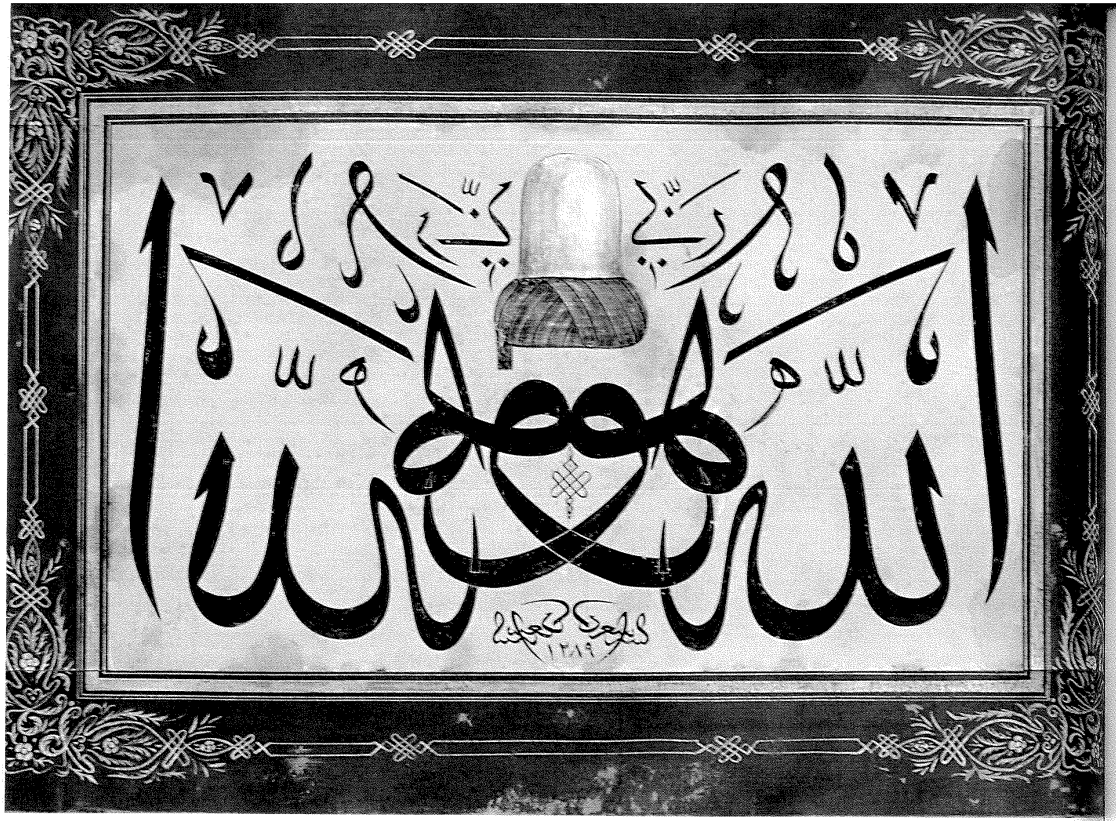


FIG. 38
CALLIGRAPHIC TABLEAU WITH MIRROR SCRIPT
Bursa?/Turkey; dated 1289 H/1872–73 CE
On the right side below the dervish cap of the Mevlevi order stands a religious invocation which is mirrored on the left side. The Mevlevis cultivate poetry and other arts in addition to calligraphy.

seventeenth century and particularly appreciated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other works show figural compositions. Although sharply criticized by orthodox theologians, the artists created calligraphic tableaux presenting animals (lions, falcons, storks, fish) formed from letters, buildings (mosques), trees, boats, objects (dervish caps, water jugs, fruit) and human faces. The contents here are sacred formulas, invocations and names. Margareta Pavaloi commented as follows on this type of religious art: "Using script to form figures is, however, not an Ottoman invention. This art form has famous models in pre-Ottoman times since the creative and artistic possibilities of the script in the truest sense of the word have always appealed to many calligraphers in the Islamic world." (Pavaloi 2003: 161). Very similar calligraphy is thus also widespread in the Iranian world and among Muslims in South Asia.

In the small selection of Ottoman *tekke levha* shown here, most of the artworks are from the collection of Friedrich Spuhler[5]; two other figural pictures in the Bektashi tradition are from the Museum of Ethnology in Munich:

1. (FIG. 38):
This very balanced tableau in mirror writing shows the invocation *huwa llāh* ("He is God") – a religious formula recited by the dervishes. The typical peaked dervish cap (*sikke*) worn by the Mevlevis is situated prominently in the upper middle above the letters.

2. (FIG. 39):
The characteristic form of the Mevlevi *sikke* is formed on this reverse glass painting by Arabic letters of the invocation *yā Hazret-i Mevlānā*.[6] The first and the last letters, *yā* and *nā*, form the brim of the hat. In the upper part of the hat we read *qaddas Allāhu sirrahu aʾlā* – "God blesses his exalted secret".

3. (FIG. 40):
A calligraphic composition in *thuluth* is printed on marbled paper (*ebru*) showing in compact form the outlines of the *sikke* of the Bektashis order known as the *Hüseyini tac* ("Husain's crown"). The extended verticals forming the folds of the cap are striking.

4. (FIG. 41):
Another example of the pictorial art of the Bektashis is a reverse glass image with a mirrored writing composition (*ʿAlī wa huwā*), in whose centre a mosque with a green dome and two flanking minarets shaped like pencils is depicted.[7] Next to a large round medallion with the name of God placed above the dome are four smaller medallions on the sides of the picture in which Muhammad (bottom right, on a red background) and ʿAli (bottom left, on green background) are invoked and the Prophet's grandson Hasan (bottom right, on green background) and Husain (bottom left, on red background) are named. This emphasizes the Shi'ite relationship to the Bektashi order.

5. (FIG. 42):
A work of consummate harmony signed by the dervish Haqqi describes the form of a 'tree of life' or a blossom.[8] The text is an invocation to the "Seven Sleepers" (*ashāb al-kahf*), mentioned in sura 18, verses 9–26 of the Qurʾan.

6. (FIG. 43):
The hunting falcon is an important symbol in Sufi art: in mysticism it is regarded as a soul bird and model for the pupil's strict education by the master.[9] In the eastern Muslim world the well-known Shi'ite protective prayer *nādi ʿAlīyyan* ("Call on ʿAli, who works miracles ...") is written in the form of a falcon whose head is turned to the right.[10] On the reverse glass image shown here, however, the text contains the well-known *basmala* (Turkish: *besmele*) "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." This formula is frequently found on devotional pictures which are hung not only in dervish lodges but also in mosques or homes.

7. (FIG. 44):
This tableau from a Bektashi lodge shows the typical cap of the order, the name ʿAli (with the last letter extended in the form of double-edged sabre)[11] and the figure of a lion at rest. The lion (Persian: *haidar*) is a common symbol for the strength and greatness of ʿAli, the fourth of the rightly guided caliphs and the first imam of the Shia who plays an outstanding role in Sufi tradition and is praised as the "Lion of God." In the animal's body is written the Turkish double verse: "As a necklace you put on the chain of your locks. Pray tell, lion mine, are you of the People of Haidar?"[12]

8. (FIG. 45):
The dramatic picture of a lion attacking a snake dragon also comes from a Bektashi lodge. Both animal figures are artistically formed by letters formulating a double verse in Persian by Farid ud-Din ʿAttar: "Destruction of evil desire is everyone's ideal. I killed the snake, it is in Haidar's claws." This depiction thus reflects the core idea of Sufism, namely that the lower animal soul (*nāfs*) embodied by the dragon, i.e. the ego of the mystic, is annihilated.

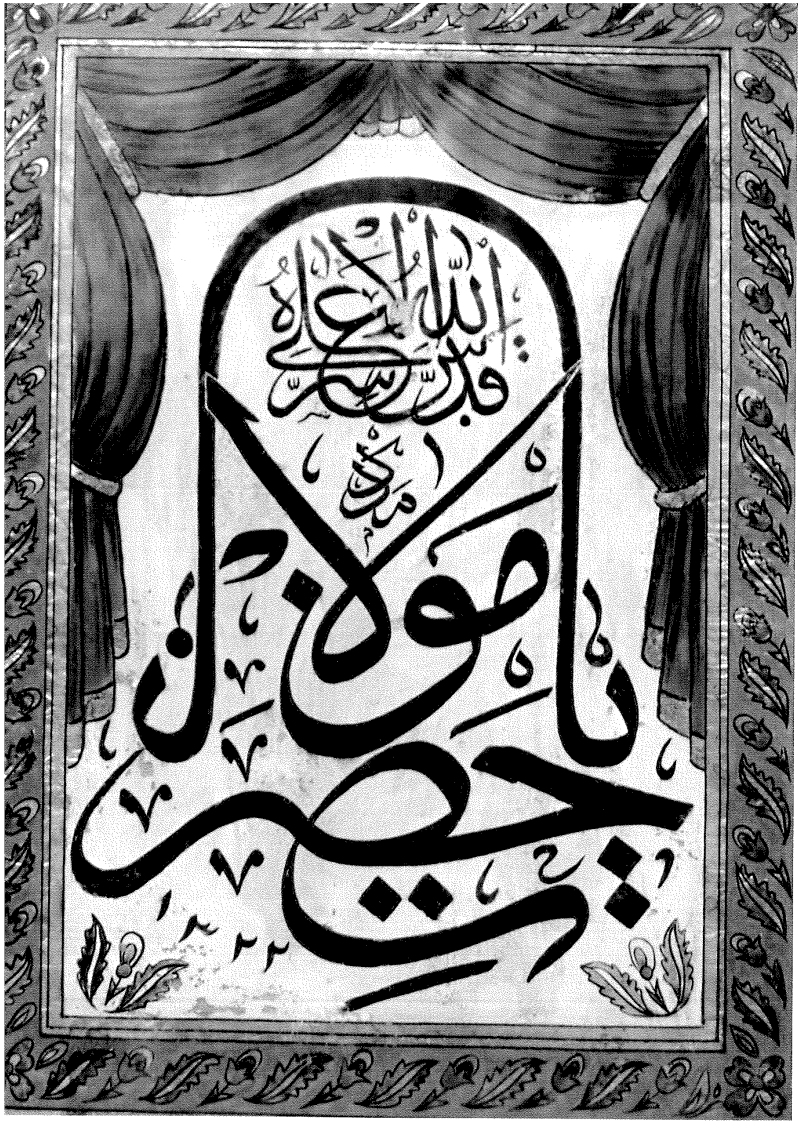


FIG. 39

CALLIGRAPHIC PICTURE OF A MEVLEVI DERVISH CAP

Turkey; dated 1322 H/1904–05 CE

The tall cap of the Mevlevi mystics is formed here by the letters of the invocation to Mevlana (Mawlana) Jalal ud-Din Rumi (d. 1273) who founded this order of 'dancing dervishes'. The Mevlevis' centre is the city of Konya in Anatolia.

FIG. 40

CALLIGRAPHIC PICTURE OF A BEKTASHI DERVISH CAP

Turkey; 19th century

This printed composition with an invocation to the saint Haci Bektaş is designed in the typical Ottoman manner in which the letters are shaped in 'layered' calligraphy (*istif*). The vertical letters are drawn upward and form the segments of the cap.

FIG. 41

MIRROR COMPOSITION IN THE SHAPE OF A MOSQUE

Turkey; 1st third of 20th century

The composition dedicated to praising 'Ali is a popular theme in the pictorial art of the Bektashi dervishes whose traditional Sufi order established itself in Anatolia in the 14th–15th centuries and spread from there to the Balkans, Egypt and Iran.

FIG. 42

CALLIGRAPHIC PICTURE IN THE SHAPE OF A 'TREE OF LIFE'

Turkey; dated 1315 H/1897–98 CE

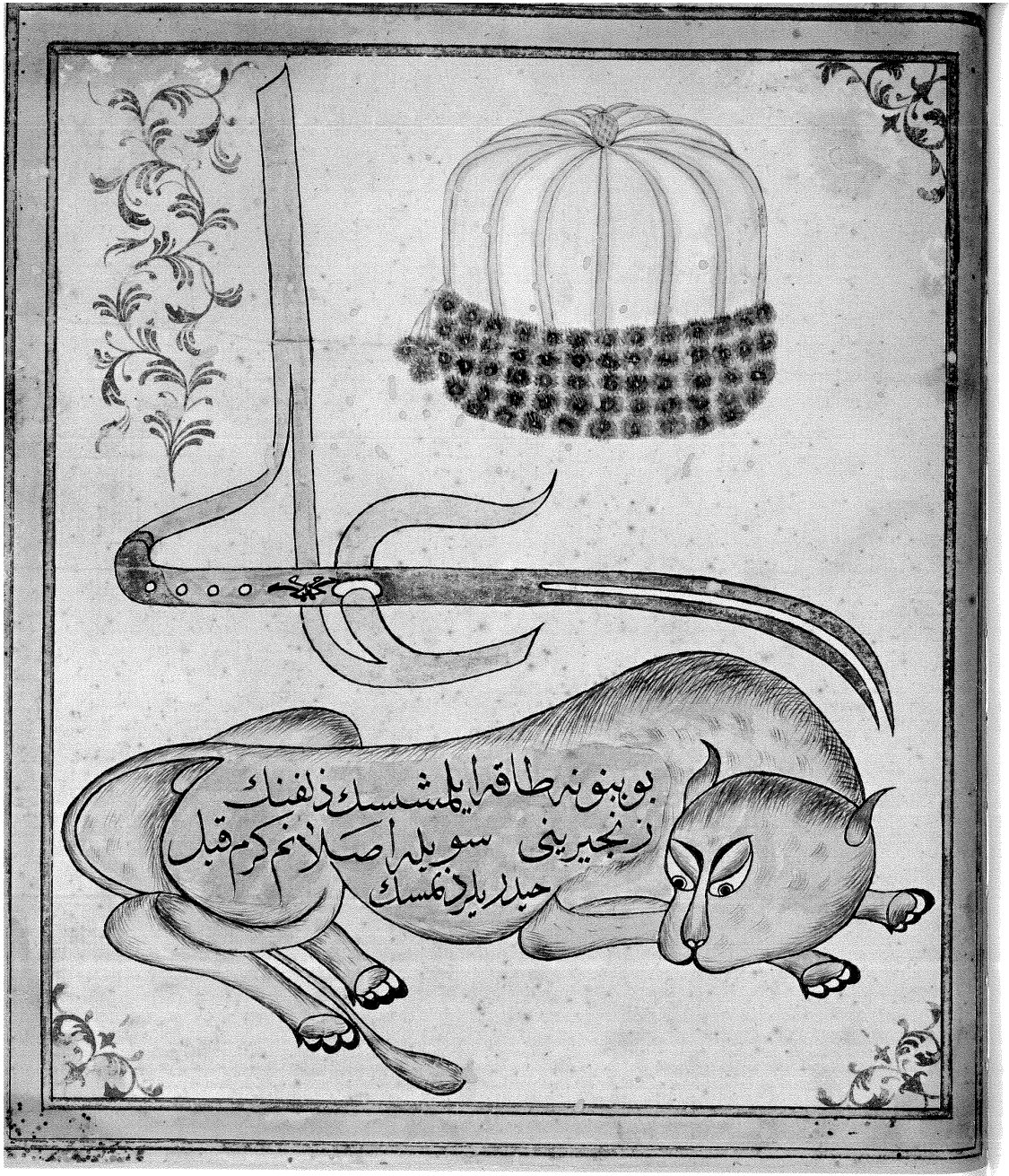
The text in this picture, harmoniously composed in mirror script, contains a pious invocation to the 'Seven Sleepers'. The legend, of which there are numerous versions and which is also mentioned in the Qur'an, tells of several young men and a dog who God causes to fall asleep in a cave. They awaken only after 309 years.

FIG. 43

BASMALA IN THE SHAPE OF A FALCON

Turkey; dated 1310 H/1892–93 CE

The popular invocation to God, the Merciful, is written here in the shape of a falcon which plays a special role as a soul bird in Islamic mysticism. Special blessing power is attributed to the *basmala* formula everywhere in the Muslim world.



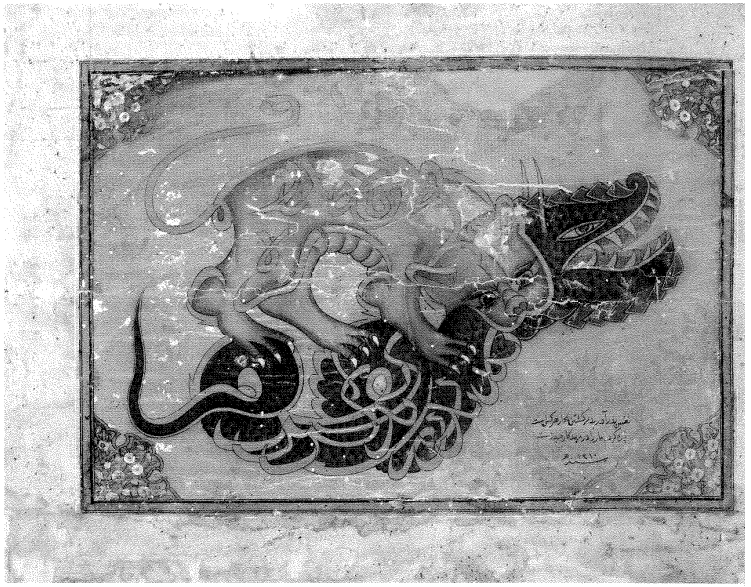


FIG. 44 (left)
TABLEAU WITH EMBLEMS OF THE BEKTASHI SUFI ORDER
Turkey; before 1826

This picture unites three important Bektashi symbols: the dervish cap made of bright felt, the name 'Ali and the lion (with an enscripted double verse in Turkish), which also represents the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law.

FIG. 45 (above)
CALLIGRAPHIC TABLEAU WITH LION AND DRAGON
Turkey; dated 1210 H/1795–96 CE

Since the 17th century, particularly in Sufi art, figural presentations made of letters with mystical content (in which the ban on figural representations in normative Islam is cleverly circumvented) play an important role particularly in Sufi art. In the tableau here, which comes from a Turkish Bektashi-dervish lodge, a Persian couplet by the poet Farid ud-Din 'Attar (d. 1220) has been calligraphed into the figure of a lion who kills the lower self in the form of a dragon.

The Fine Scratching of the Reed Pen and the Mason's Script. On Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture

KARL SCHLAMMINGER

When I was finishing my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, the past master Johannes Itten held a series of lectures at a summer academy in the course of which just one of his questions triggered a rethinking on my part: "What can a pencil do?" Fundamental insights about drawing can, I believe, also be applied to the craft of writing, where the audible become visible. Antiqua script, for example, could only have developed from working with stone and chisel. Anyone who has worked with both is familiar with the chipping at the ends of the notches. There is much reason to believe that the stone masons of antiquity added flared projections at the tops and bottoms of letters known as serifs (from the Arabic *serīf* – "fine"). I consider these lines not only a purely technical device but also a subtle refinement of the Antiqua script which has been retained to this day. Although the Romans were familiar with the metal nib, the *Fraktur* (a type of blackletter script) and cursive scripts only developed in the Middle Ages when a goose quill was used for writing – an original and simple writing tool whose very characteristics inevitably led to a rapid script with marked thick lines and hairlines.

Lines of Arabic script, however, differed. This resulted from the particular qualities of the implement used for writing: a dry, obliquely cut and split reed pen (Arabic *qalam*, in Persian *ghalam*, which also means "chisel") (FIG. 46). Since it is inflexible, the script had to develop from the wrist. The thick and thin writing in calligraphy requires continual adjustment of the direction of the pen and the hand – a synchronized interplay of movements demanding extraordinary sensitivity and dexterity. The wrist, led by the hand which can rotate in all directions, transfers its energy to the fingers which can only raise or lower themselves. However, when the calligrapher applies the pen with three fingers, he can reduce the 'gear ratio' of the circular movement.

The writing instrument and the precise utilization of the circular movements of the hand are the prerequisites for the physical-spatial character of the cursive script used in everyday life, which finds its supreme expression in the Arabic art of writing known as calligraphy. The movements of the hand flow into the script, thus

FIG. 46 A

CALLIGRAPHERS' UTENSILS

Ottoman Empire; 18th/19th century

The four finely ornamented ivory plates called *makta* in Turkish serve to position the reed pens, which are placed in the tray and fixed for sharpening. Next to three reed pens (Turkish *kalem*, Persian *ghalam*) and a small knife (*kalemtraş*) to cut the reeds of the pens. The paper scissors, partly gilded, have a typical elongated form; the brass handle of the middle specimen is formed in mirror script as the name of God *al-fattāh* ("The Opener") and thus suggests the function of the scissors.

lending it corporeality. Obviously, the appeal lies in combining the letters to form a whole, like a naturally meandering river.

What the calligrapher produces can also be seen as a woven fabric consisting of horizontals and verticals, weft and warp. While the warp gives the fabric tension and form and remains unchanged, the weft thread is the element which changes and becomes something different. Each of the two directions divides to the same extent as it unifies. With reference to Arabic script, the horizontal line performs the 'becoming', the 'expanding' element, offsetting the coalescence of the letters. In contrast, the vertical element in the script is the unifying core gathering the emerging variety of horizontals.

Every style of writing has its own laws about the proportion of the width and size of the script as well as about the surface and its apportionment. The binding unit of measure here is the dot. Depending on the style of writing, the first letter of the alphabet, *alif*, can consist of several rhomboid dots, placed obliquely above each other. The remaining letters are also measured in dots in the same manner (FIG. 47). For all these steps in writing, the calligrapher needs the appropriate tools, but obtaining information about them is difficult, as each one assembles his own set of instruments (FIG. 46). Calligraphers tend to guard their secret recipes, especially those for making ink. How smooth, rough or absorbent must or may the paper be? How fluid must the ink be? What shape must the inkwell, the pen or the knife have? Should the calligrapher write on his right knee or on a flat pad?

Normally, calligraphers do not divulge the secret of their ink. However, my friend Reza Mafi, a brilliant calligrapher, showed me how he composes his. From a receptacle he took a heaped teaspoon of soot made from burnt lamb bones. He mixed the greasy black powder in a small cast-iron pan which stood ready over charcoal embers, with about four teaspoons of hot water and vinegar and a spoonful of oxen bile to remove the grease from the soot. Constantly stirred, the mixture became a smooth mass to which, after cooling, a teaspoon of gum arabic was added to ensure a smooth flow as well as a good dose of powdered saffron to tint the ink jet black. Finally, the fluid was tested for consistency, colouring, fluidity, adhesiveness and smear-resistance, and poured into the inkwell. In the inkwell lay a strange utensil, a small tuft of silk threads called *līgh*. It serves to wipe the tip of the pen and symbolizes what the master accords the pupil as the amount of knowledge imparted to the pupil by the master.

In addition to receiving instruction from the teacher, the pupil takes his teacher altogether as an example. He strives to emulate and imitate him. Within this master-pupil relationship, imitation has nothing suspicious about it, but rather forms part of the artistic path which stands for modesty and reduction of one's self as an individual.

From the above, it follows that a calligrapher can only understand the execution of his art as a ritual. In the Orient he is held in high esteem, practises daily and purifies himself through fasting, praying and meditating. He tunes his breath and begins by first writing all over the remaining strips of paper. His breathing is 'transported' by the hand into the script just as, when a reed flute is played, the tone is transported directly by the breath. The reed pen is called *ghalamney* in Persian and the reed flute *ney*.

The exercise sheets for calligraphy (*siyāh mashq*) are considered precious by experts – presumably from the understanding that here in the temporariness, incompleteness and sketchiness the complex transfer of the idea to the execution, from head to hand, to the fingers, thus to the work of the hands is apparent (FIG. 48). Until 'agreement' is reached between what the head demands and the hand replies, one can only learn from the fingers what is concealed and what only they can reveal. In reference to Arabic calligraphy, these interrelationships could be described with the words of the Shi'ite scholar Haydar Amuli (d. after 1385):

> *Letters written with ink do not really exist as letters. Letters are only different shapes to which conventions have ascribed certain meanings. What really and concretely exists is nothing but the ink. The existence of the letters is actually nothing but the existence of the ink which is the sole reality expressed in many forms of self-modification. The observer must first develop an eye for seeing the same reality of the ink in all letters, and then recognize the letters as just so many modifications of the ink.*[1]

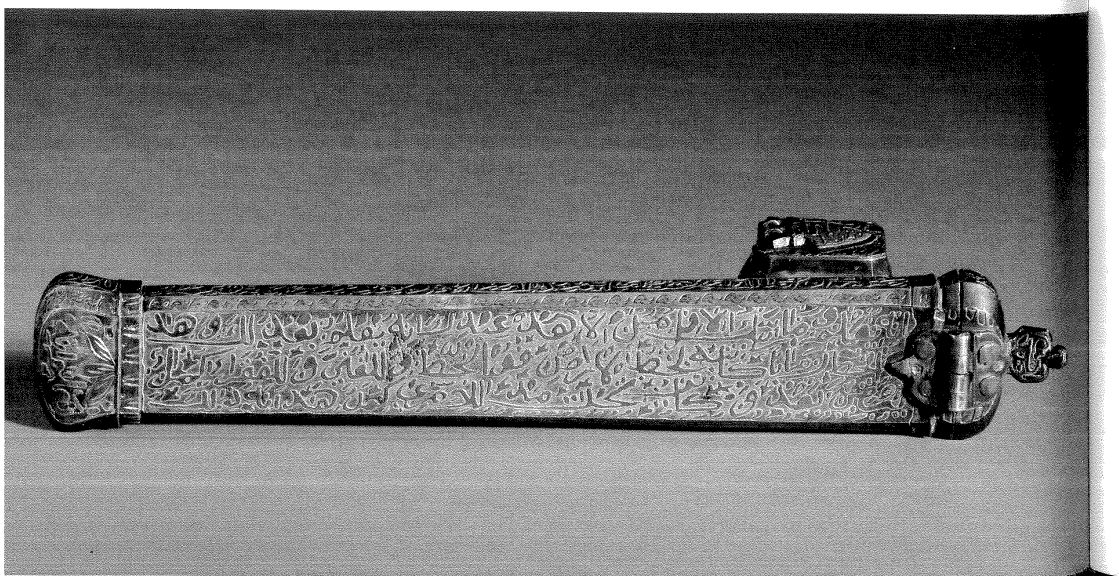
In contrast to our manner of writing, in which the pen draws the ink after it from left to right, Arabic script pushes the ink from right to left. Because it only suffices for a limited number of letters, particularly because of the width of the letters, the pen must be dipped frequently in the inkwell. I have always felt it was a special occasion when I was allowed to watch and listen to a calligrapher at work.

The formation of the black characters is accompanied by noises as if the pen were talking to itself. Certain letters audibly accompany the act with a fine scratching, as if their emergence was fraught with pain. Combined with the humming of the calligrapher, withdrawn into himself, it is a decidedly bizarre listening experience.

When applying the pen, at the moment when the heavy ink is transferred to the page, absorbed by it and has penetrated it, the deep black colour of the ink appears in full strength. In the process of writing, its intensity is dissipated, and now and then breaks off or peters out as if in sand, in an extremely fine glaze. This dark-light shading enlivens the appearance of the script; it embodies those places at which the pen 'catches its breath', because the calligrapher and the pen – just like the singer – must 'pause for breath' after a phrase.

In connection with these practical observations about the implements for writing and the execution of calligraphy, a fable by the Persian mystic and theologian al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) is particularly illuminating:

An enlightened man discovered a paper covered with black ink and asked it: "How can you, whose surface was just dazzlingly white, now be covered with black letters?" "You are unfair to me," replied the paper, "because I did not blacken my surface myself. But ask the ink, which left the inkwell for no reason and spread itself over me." The man then questioned the ink in the hope of an explanation, but the ink referred him to the pen which had torn it from its peaceful home and forced it onto the paper. The pen, questioned in turn, referred him to the hand which had dipped the pen into the ink after having cut it to size and cruelly split the nib in two parts. The hand, which asserted that it was nothing but flesh and pitiful bones, told him to ask the ability that had moved it, the ability referred him to his will, and the will referred him to his knowledge and reason, until the enlightened man, proceeding from reference to reference, finally reached the impenetrable veil of the highest Omnipotence, where a terrible voice called out: "No one demands that God explains what he does, so why are you asking?"[2]



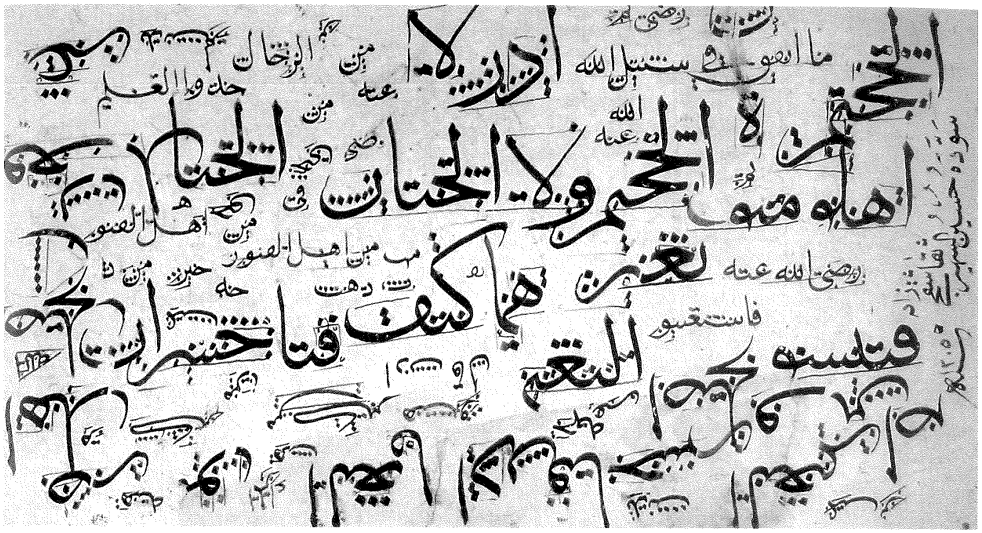


FIG. 46 B (left)
PEN CASE WITH INK WELL
Ottoman Empire; 19th century

This typical late Ottoman writing utensils for a belt with an elongated container for the pens and attached inkwell is completely covered with Arabic inscriptions worked with the technique of 'positive' metal-cutting.

FIG. 47 (above)
CALLIGRAPHIC EXERCISE PAGE
Turkey; dated 1205 H/1790–91 CE

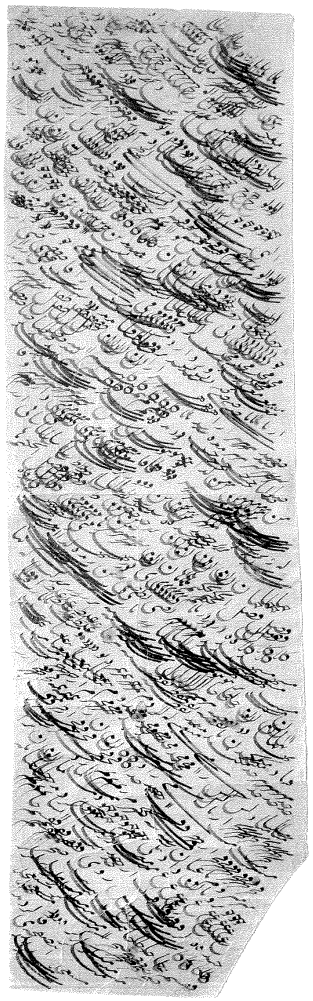
The page shows Arabic words, letter combinations and individual letters in Arabic with the respective dot proportions in *nasta'liq* cursive script. According to the caption, this exercise or practice page (*noktali meşk*) is by Hüseyin eşehir bi Qasıqcızade ("Husain known as the son of the spoon-maker"). The calligraphy sample framed in marbled paper probably hung originally in a dervish lodge.

FIG. 48

CALLIGRAPHIC EXERCISE PAGE

Tabriz/Iran; c 1890

The *shikasta* cursive script ('broken'), which is difficult, to read developed from the end of the 17th century in Iran. It was often combined with very free, unauthorized curves to form a unique, graphically impressive script with a very personal character Such *mashq* (literally 'practice', 'exercise') calligraphies appear visually almost like 'trance studies' in Arabic calligraphy, like a musical or dance rhythm transferred onto paper. Repetitions of letters and changing directions of the script create a rhythm similar to that of the ritual remembrance of God (*dhikr*) in the composition of the narrow page depicted.



Leaving aside the theological background of the fable here, we see for our practical observations that questioning the paper produced no answer. The question as to who moves the writer's hand to actually write, or according to which principles the transition from the possible to the real occurs remains unanswered.

From these considerations as well, it is unlikely that calligraphy is engendered simply by the application of rules. What is called for here is not only the written word: in fact what must be dealt with is the surface itself, in other words the empty spaces, masses, agglomerations, as well as superimpositions, rhythmic resolutions and penetrations, be it on parchment, ceramic tiles, on vessels, as panels, friezes, on a wall, or even on an entire building.

The possibilities mentioned here for utilizing calligraphy have one feature in common: the letters are applied to a substratum. Particularly in Egypt, Syria and Turkey, one finds examples of calligraphy hewn in stone which are so closely linked to the building as to form part of the stone architecture. Closer yet to the origin of the material is the *khatt-e bannā'ī* – the 'stone-mason's script' which is found primarily in sacred buildings (FIGS. 49-51). It utilizes bricks as structural elements and units of measure. When the building blocks are not laid flush, the appearance of the script is enhanced by shadows, yet the script remains legible also as a flushly laid wall.

At the end of the 1960s in north-western Iran, I made an astounding observation in a small village near Urumiye Lake: on a hill at a slight distance from the settlement, a few men were squatting in front of air-dried mud bricks which had been embedded upright in the ground. I remained standing at an appropriate distance and had the impression that something like a labyrinth was appearing. When the men were finished with their work, they signalled to me that I should come closer. As far as I understood, they were arranging the burial site of a relative and the ostensibly labyrinthine arrangement of the bricks turned out to be angular letters forming the word *bismillāh* – "In the name of Allah" – in the stone-mason's script. Here was a line of writing made of earth and below it a corpse which would become earth. In the slanted rays of the afternoon sunshine, the script cast long shadows which would lean in the opposite direction in the morning light. Exposed to the vicissitudes of the four seasons, the quadrangular plot would be demolished by wind and rain in the foreseeable future, the script would no longer cast shadows and slowly disintegrate until the original form of this plot of earth would reveal itself again.

As the "Religion of the Script and the Book" it stands to reason that the word of the Qur'an is the very foundation of sacred Islamic buildings. From their inception, inscriptions were a component of this architecture, in interior and exterior areas as well as on minarets. Before a glaze was applied, this script was created from the same natural-coloured bricks as the building itself, hence the term *khatt-e bannā'ī*. Considering that this script was both the supporting masonry and at the same time the transmitter of the message, one can say that the script constructs the building or the building in itself is the word. This script, known as Kufic, is considered the oldest type of script.

On the 'Ali-Minaret in Isfahan (*c.* 1300), erected in the Mongolian era, the call of the muezzin is contained in a large Kufic band of script with blue ceramic tiles mounted in the naturally-coloured brickwork (FIG. 49). It is here that the direct relationship between the word and the structure is most graphically expressed. At the same time, attention is called to the recitation, which is an indispensable feature of Islamic ritual. It represents the unity of the written word, the tone of voice and the recited word. As if to protect the edifice from its base upward, the words "God Himself is witness that there is no one but Him" are written in Kufic script at the foot of this minaret.

In mosques, religious texts – both in Persian and in Arabic – are incorporated in the architecture along with geometric and floral motifs. Words are always linked harmoniously with the architecture or even become architectural elements themselves, as for example in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan in the Safavid façade of the western *īwān*, which is a vaulted hall, open on its narrow side (CF. FIG. 58). It can be seen clearly on the portal of this *īwān* that apart from the panels, the calligraphy on the façade is a reflection along the vertical axis. In fact, the left side is illegible and thus we must speak of a borderline area where script and ornament meet and merge.

Through inversion, rotation, overlapping and penetration as well as by the omission of diacritical marks, calligraphy can so strongly distort individual letters that the origin of the texts frequently can no longer be recognized. The individual word becomes 'dépaysé', in other words it is removed from its original 'landscape' and acquires a different significance in its new environment. In deciphering such spiritual labyrinths, even initiates can only venture educated guesses. I have concluded that such patterns of words were not created to be read. Rather, they transcend the word of the Qur'an at a higher level of perception in which the pluralism of a message is

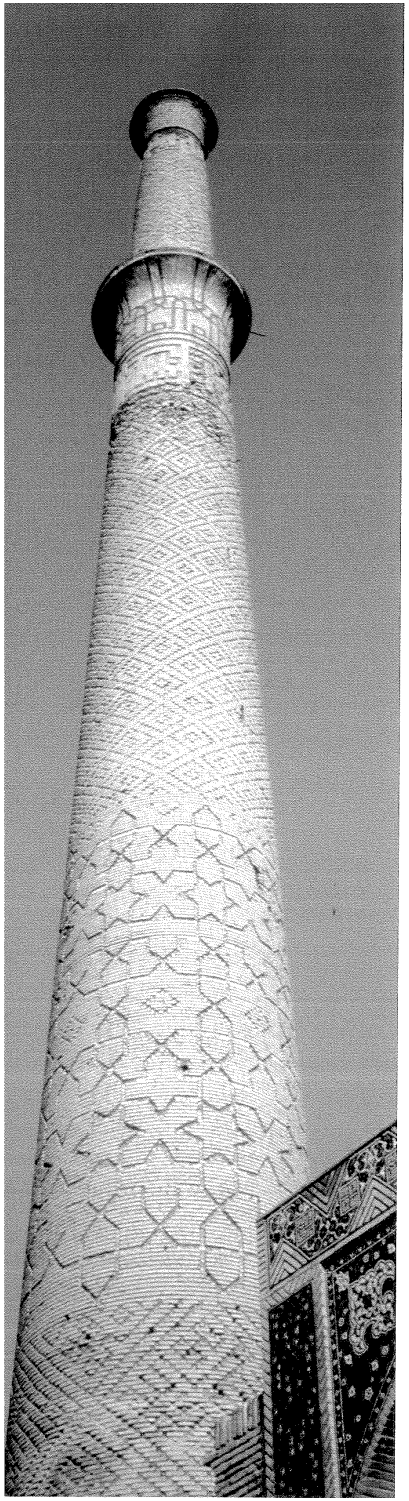


FIG. 49 (left)
'ALI MINARET WITH BANDS OF SCRIPT IN ISFAHAN (11TH CENTURY)
The minaret, 52 m high, in the old quarter of the city has five Kufic inscriptions in two bands which encircle the minaret and three zones with abstract geometrical patterns.

FIG. 50 (above)
CALLIGRAPHY ON THE FRIDAY MOSQUE OF TORBAT-E HAIDARIYEH (KHORASAN/IRAN; AROUND 17TH CENTURY)
The glazed turquoise band of inscription on the minaret on the right-hand side of the two which flank the entrance to the mosque contains the creed in angular Kufic.

FIG. 51
THE 'STONEMASONS' SCRIPT' ON THE FRIDAY MOSQUE OF GUNABAD (KHORASAN/IRAN; AROUND 1200)

The inscription panel consists of Kufic letters set into relief and put together from small blocks carved in stone. The image detail shows the beginning of the creed.

compressed as if in a seal. On this subject, the author and philosopher of religion Navid Kermani wrote to me:

> *With calligraphy, the musical principle which is negated by the inscription of the original recitation returns to the Qurʾan. When the text is recited, the Qurʾan communicates its messages not only as discourse, but as a sound, a rhythm, a melody. When the Qurʾan is treated as a written text, it loses fundamental qualities. As a presentation, it becomes a document, a score becomes something definite. But of all things, in the extreme case of inscribing, in calligraphy, the message emerges again in naked form. It is of no importance that the text of a calligraphy be readily legible, that the meaning be immediately apparent. The form itself is the meaning!*

To the extent that the message of calligraphy finds expression in the form itself, a high-quality alloy emerges in the physical merging of script and ornamentation. These images of script and geometric structures justify the fundamental decision in favour of non-figurative depiction in Islamic art. The result is a veritably dematerialized, transparent union of calligraphy and ornamentation. The façades, open spaces and domes create the appearance of an integrated whole through the overall 'covering' with faience. The sunlight reflects and dematerializes, it makes them weightless and unreal.

In the autumn of 1977 I stood early one morning with the philosopher Henry Corbin in front of the west *īwān* of Masjid-e Shah (built from 1612 to 1638) in Isfahan. The sun shone with all its force, transforming the building into a glowing edifice. We both stood there, speechless until Corbin finally said: "This is the state of mind which Suhravardi, the master of light, called *na-kojā-abād* – the Land of Nowhere."[3]

Religious Inscriptions in Islamic Architecture

LORENZ KORN

In the first room of the permanent exhibition, visitors to the Islamic Department of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich immediately encounter an impressive sight: an entire wall is occupied by the tiled façade of a mid-seventeenth-century mosque from the city of Multan in what is today Pakistan (FIG. 52).[1] Along with the colour contrast and the elaborately shaped arches, what most strikes the eye are the inscriptions on this portal wall. The calligraphy contributes in large measure to the decorative appearance of the ensemble. However, the texts found here are by no means unknown:

"Therefore remember Me, I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and reject not Me!" is written in the panel above the left door in a quotation from the Qur'an (2:152).[2] The tondi to the right and left of the panel also cite the Qur'an: "Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begets not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him" (sura 112) – a sentence which may be considered the core of the uncompromisingly monotheistic Muslim creed.

Above the door on the right-hand side is a maxim in similarly sweeping calligraphy which is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "The believer in the mosque is like a fish in water. The hypocrite in the mosque is like a bird in a cage!" The tondo to the right shows *Allāh* repeated four times, on the tondo to the left *Muhammad* is written four times. Inscribed on the moulding of the façade are the words "O Muhammad!" and above them "O God!"

The panel above the middle door contains a maxim which does not appear in this form in the Qur'an: "The best remembrance is: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God – God bless him and give him salvation."

The Muslim declaration of faith (the *shahāda;* occasionally also *kalima*) is thus emphasized by the preceding eulogy. The surrounding band again cites the Qur'an:

> *Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. Unto Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedes with Him save by His leave? He knows that which is in front*

FIG. 52

MOSQUE FAÇADE WITH INSCRIPTIONS IN THULUTH SCRIPT

Multan/Pakistan; mid-17th century

Many renowned calligraphers endeavoured to obtain commissions to design the inscriptions on the building. The frieze with Arabic letters on the mosque shown here contains the creed in a large, animated *thuluth* script (rectangular panel in the middle), the 'throne verse' (frieze above the main entrance), quotations from the Qur'an (left panel), sayings by the Prophet (right panel) and invocations to God and Muhammad (crenellated border). This tiled façade is part of the permanent Islam exhibition of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich.

> *of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His Chair includes the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.* (sura 2:255)

This 'throne verse' which describes the omnipotence of God is one of the most frequently quoted passages from the Qur'an in the form of inscriptions.

What do these inscriptions mean here? Is a devout Muslim not very well acquainted with the Qur'an and the principles of the faith? Why, then, are certain parts of the text presented here? Is the believer to be 'led' in prayer? Perhaps this is too directly formulated. Surely the spoken prayers of the believer were at all times of far greater significance than inscriptions of formulas on the mosque itself. Still, the inscriptions have one advantage over the spoken word: they are durable, albeit not entirely everlasting. Under these circumstances, the repetition of well-known texts on a building could be interpreted as performing the same function as the display of familiar pictures. If we compare the façade of the mosque with similar structures in Occidental art, do quotations from the Qur'an perhaps perform the same function as biblical scenes depicted in and around sacred buildings? Such statements are naturally exaggerated and do not do full justice to the subject matter. Nevertheless, after such considerations it seems too simplistic to disregard these texts as nothing but appropriate decoration for a mosque.

At any rate, inscriptions with religious content abound on buildings in the Islamic world. If we take all the mosques and minarets, madrasas and convents, as well as the fortifications and private residences between Morocco and India, between the Aral Sea and Yemen, in which religious texts have been inscribed since the seventh century CE, usually in Arabic, they would no doubt constitute the largest collection of inscriptions any civilization has ever produced.[3]

Inception in the Dome of the Rock

The oldest monumental inscription in Islamic art history is preserved in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (FIG. 53). Its content is religious, so the text provides information about the articles of faith of early Islam. The inscription is one of the few text sources from the first century of Islamic history. Only one hundred years after its construction, chronicle sources report on the Umayyad period in which the Dome of the Rock was built. The Dome of the Rock inscription is also of immeasurable importance for the history of the Qur'an text. It contains some passages which also appear in the Qur'an, whereas so far no Qur'an manuscripts have been located which could definitively be dated to the first Islamic century. Moreover, the inscription is important for the history of Arabic script since it already contains diacritical marks for vocalizing the text.[4] In translation, the beginning of the inscription reads:

> *In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! There is no God but God alone, there is none comparable unto him. His is the rule and to him is the praise. He gives life and He causes to die, He has power over everything. Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger. God and His angels pronounce blessings upon the Prophet. O you, who believe, pronounce blessings upon him and the salutation of peace. O people of the book, do not go beyond bounds in your religion, and do not utter anything concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only the messenger of God, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three"; cease! It will be better for you; God is only one – far is he removed from having a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. God is sufficient as a protector.*[5]

In the context of the Holy City of Jerusalem, which was conquered by the Muslims in the years 636-37, this text expresses a special concern. It makes a clear distinction between the newly founded sanctuary of the Dome of the Rock on the former Temple Mount and the Christian sanctuaries of the city – in particular of course the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which lost its significance as a religious centre under the new rulers. The rejection of the Christian Trinitarian belief illustrates the Muslim viewpoint on the relationship between God and the world and the understanding of Jesus as a prophet.[6]

The key formula of the inscription specifies the years 691/92 CE (the year 72 according to the Islamic or *hijra* lunar calendar/H) and the builder of the Dome of the Rock (the name of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, which was written here, was replaced 120 years later by that of the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmun). Thus the inscription not only signals 'timeless' values and beliefs, but places them in a historical context. The restoration of the unity of the empire under

FIG. 53

INSCRIPTION IN THE DOME OF THE ROCK/JERUSALEM

This religious text above the octagonal arcade (dated 72 H/691–92 CE) of the ambulatory is one part of the oldest extant monumental inscription of Islamic art history whose length measures altogether 240 metres (cf. fig. 61). Except for the name of the builder, its character is purely religious and consists primarily of quotations from the Qur'an.

'Abd al-Malik after the bloody conflicts of the Second Civil War in the Islamic empire was surely a suitable occasion to construct the Dome of the Rock as a monument for the reign of Islam and simultaneously to reinstate the old Temple Mount in its role as the prime sanctuary of Jerusalem.[7]

In the context of the structure of the Dome of the Rock, the inscription is especially significant for the formation of Islamic art. In terms of technique and motifs, the decoration on the building is in keeping with the tradition of Byzantine Syria. The marble columns and gilt capitals covered with gold-leaf, the marble-faced piers and walls, and the glass mosaics on the wall above the cornice were part of the repertoire of late Classical art in the eastern Mediterranean world. In the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock, however, non-figurative motifs have taken the place of biblical scenes and images of saints: acanthus tendrils, grapevines and palm trees as well as crowns and garlands of jewellery.[8] The inscription on the octagonal ambulatory completes the decoration as an encircling band. Thus Arabic script already embellishes Islam's first extant architectural monuments, even though initially it does not figure very prominently.

In the early centuries of Islamic history, Arabic inscriptions on buildings were relatively sparse. In the Great Mosque of Cairouan (now Tunisia), the prayer niche (*mihrāb*) was covered with marble panels decorated with reliefs (presumably during construction under Emir Ziyadat Allah in 836 or in course of expansion under Abu Ibrahim Ahmad in 862).[9] Halfway up, the ornamentation is divided by a band of script containing the core of the Islamic creed:

> *Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begets not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him (sura 112). Muhammad is the Messenger of God – God bless him and give him salvation.*

The inscription is so small as to be barely visible in the overall picture of the *mihrāb* or even the *qibla* wall. Apparently, those inscriptions in which the builder immortalized himself, in other

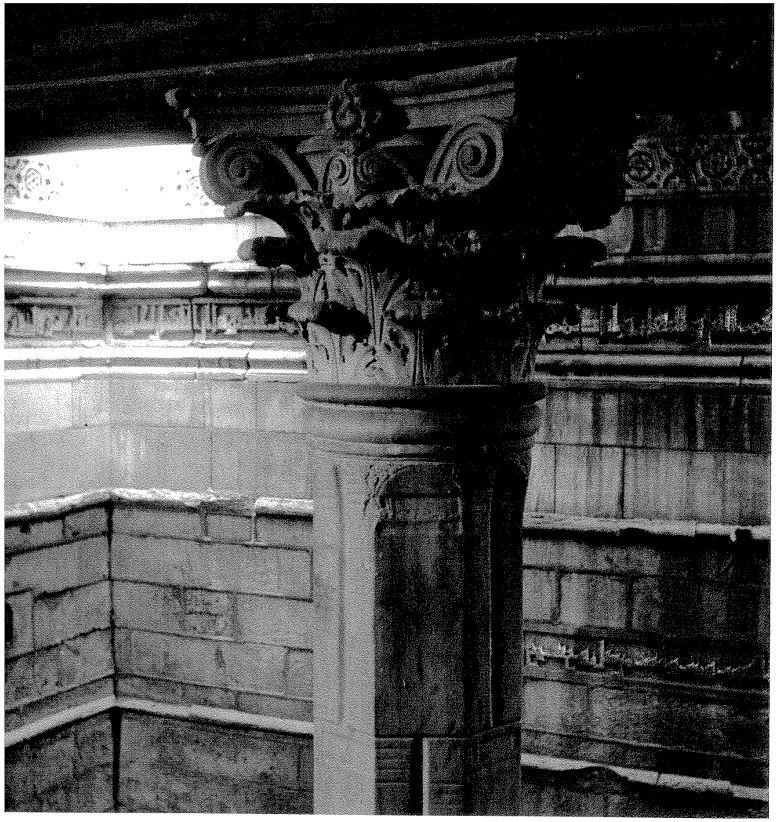


FIG. 54
NILOMETER IN CAIRO

At the southern tip of the island ar-Rauda stands the most important nilometer of the Islamic period, which was used to measure the level of the Nile every year. The photo shows the well with the measuring column and the notches on it as well as inscriptions on the walls (247 H/861 CE).

FIG. 55
PORTAL NICHE OF THE AL-AQMAR MOSQUE IN CAIRO (519 H/1125 CE)

A detail of the façade of this Fatimid building shows a late Antique Coptic mussel motif in whose middle the names *Muhammad* and *'Alī* are written inside an ornamental medallion.

words those without religious content, are generally larger. This was customary on secular edifices such as an indoor market built around 738 in Baisan in Palestine (today Bet Shean, Israel) under the Umayyad caliph Hisham.[10] The mosaic inscriptions which decorated the façade contain the name of the caliph. To these were added the quotation from the Qur'an 9:33:

> *He it is who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion, however much the idolaters may be averse.*

Dimensions of Religious Inscriptions

Combining Qur'an quotations and 'historical' information on the date of construction and the builder subsequently became widespread. When the nilometer in Cairo was rebuilt in 861, written order came from the caliphal court in Baghdad on how the inscriptions should read on this construction, which indicated the level of the Nile (FIG. 54). Apart from the name of the caliph al-Mutawakkil as the patron, the name of the architect and the date of construction, verses from the Qur'an particularly suited to the nilometer are quoted, highlighting the significance of water for life in Egypt, the grain harvest, and thus for the functioning of the entire Egyptian society:

> *And We send down from the sky blessed water whereby We give growth unto gardens and the grain of crops (50:9).*
> *Do you not see how Allah sends down water from the sky and then the earth becomes green upon the morrow? (22:63).*[11]

As with the Dome of the Rock, an inscription with religious content is located in the Great Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo (completed in 265 H/879 CE) as a final frieze above the arcades in the prayer hall. It contains several lengthy passages from the Qur'an. Unlike in Jerusalem, however, the inscription is carved in wood. As it appears today, it is barely legible for ordinary observers, although the total length of the frieze measures several hundred metres. Even if one assumes that the frame was originally coloured, as a narrow band high under the ceiling of the prayer hall, it did not appear in a prominent position.[12]

It seems as if the potential of monumental religious inscriptions on buildings was only exploited over the course of time. This was due in part to the political-religious disputes in which the caliphate of the Abbasids was contested by rival dynasties. Inscriptions on the façades of Fatimid buildings in Cairo were integrated into the three-dimensional decorations where they assumed a central position. The names *Muhammad* and *'Alī* in the centre of the medallion decorating the portal niche of the al-Aqmar Mosque (1125) reveal that the Fatimids held the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet in equal esteem as the Prophet Muhammad himself and ranked them equally as political figures (FIG. 55).[13] When the signs of Fatimid power were obliterated under the new ruler Saladin, the façade of the al-Aqmar Mosque was spared. However, a chronicler reported that the silver fittings were removed from the *mihrāb* at the Friday Mosque on which the names of the Fatimid caliphs were inscribed.[14] The political character is demonstrated both in the use of certain formulas and in the removal of inscriptions as *damnatio memoriae;* in connection with changes in trends in religious policy, these examples show that where inscriptions are concerned, there are no clear boundaries between the secular and the religious.

While the Fatimids already made use of inscriptions in public space, the visual presence of religious inscriptions continued to grow in the period thereafter. In the thirteenth century, inscriptions were used for the first time as the dominant element in decorating façades. The madrasa established by the caliph al-Mustansir in Baghdad (completed in 1233) was embellished with a monumental band of writing on the side facing the Tigris. The inscription was not incorporated into a scheme of decoration but dominates the entire appearance of the façade.[15]

Monumental bands of inscription extending over the entire façade became customary in subsequent years. In Syria the earliest examples are found in Aleppo at the tomb of al-Afdal 'Ali (before 1224) and on the al-Firdaus madrasa (begun in 1235). Slightly later, this trend appeared in Egypt, as can be seen on the monumental buildings whose façades line the broad avenue through the former palace quarter. The large madrasa of Sultan Najm ad-Din Ayyub in Cairo (begun in 1242) still does not use this type of decoration. Only with the construction of the madrasa of Sultan az-Zahir Baibars (1262) and the tomb madrasa of al-Mansur Qalawun (1284) did large-scale bands of inscriptions become common here as well. The largest complex of buildings in Cairo dating from the Mamluk era, the mosque-madrasa of Sultan an-Nasir Hassan (1356), displays a particularly interesting ensemble of inscriptions (FIG. 56):[16] while 'historical' inscriptions are written in cursive script in a relatively small format above the doors to the courtyard, a stucco band

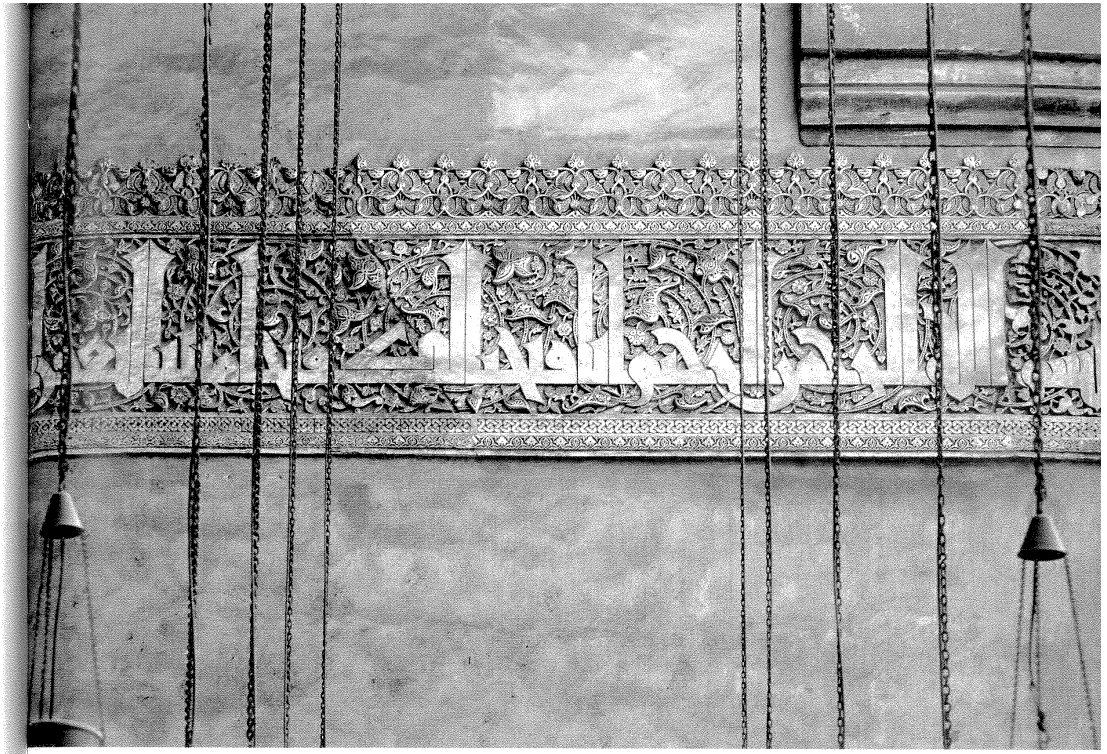


FIG. 56
CALLIGRAPHY ON THE MOSQUE-MADRASA OF SULTAN AN-NASIR HASAN IN CAIRO
The Kufic inscription on the main *īwān* of this large building complex from the Mamluk period quotes the first verses of sura 48 ('The Victory') of the Qur'an.

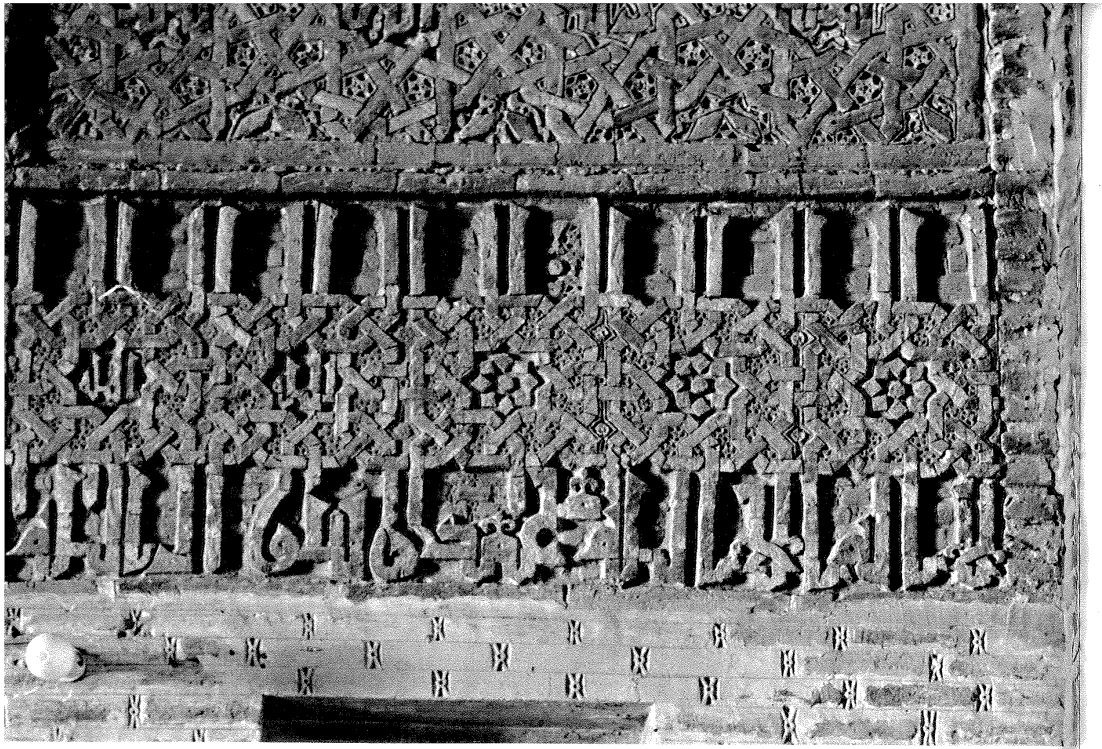


FIG. 57
PANEL INSCRIBED WITH THE CREED IN THE GRAND MOSQUE OF GOLPAYEGAN, IRAN

This inscription dating from the early 12th century consists of interwoven Kufic letters which form striking band of knots. With such forms of 'braided Kufic' legibility is less important than the ornamental construction with its aesthetic effect.

of inscriptions running around the side of the *īwān* facing the *qibla* marks the base of the vault as an especially prominent element of decoration. The sharply contoured Kufic letters are offset by a richly detailed background of tendrils. The inscription is emphasized over other elements of design, both by the wealth of forms and its large dimensions. The Qur'an quotation (48:1-6) underscores the omnipotence of God over sinful human beings to whom the joys of paradise have been promised and the tortures of Hell have been threatened. The contrast between the 'secular' and the 'religious' inscriptions in the courtyard of the madrasas, emphasized by their execution and style, could be interpreted to mean that the temporal nature of the royal commission to build – however elegantly and permanently the cursive script in inlaid marble may be executed – stands opposed to the eternal word of God.

Yet a further increase in dimensions can be seen in the inscriptions which decorate the façades of Timurid edifices in Iran and Central Asia. The smooth surfaces of the walls are covered with glazed bricks bearing highly stylized inscriptions, most of which are short religious formulas such as *Allāhu akbar*. The strictly geometricized letters, all of which are rectangular and are placed within a square block, result from fitting the script into the texture of the brickwork. Thus the Persian designation for this script is *khatt-i bannā'ī* ('stone-mason's script') while it is frequently referred to as 'square Kufic' in the literature. The earliest examples are found in structures of the Seljuk period such as the dome chamber in the Great Mosque of Golpayegan (1114–15) (FIG. 57, CF. 49) or on the minaret of Mas'ud III in Ghazni (Afghanistan).[17] At this time, it was still deemed sufficient to delineate the letters by letting them stand out in relief against the wall or arranging the interstices accordingly. Execution in glazed bricks only became widespread under the Mongol rulers when for the first time entire façades were ornamented with square Kufic. One example is the façade of the Do Minar Dardasht complex in Isfahan (1330), in which diagonally twisted bands of inscription cover both the wall next to the portal and the shafts of the minaret.[18] On the buildings erected under the Timurid dynasty in Samarkand, the surface effect of square Kufic is exploited yet further: on Timur's tomb (built in 1404), diagonally interlocking fields with the words *Allāh* and *Muhammad* cover the cylindrical drum of the dome, while the cylindrical tambour is decorated with a cursive inscription; the entire lateral façades of the madrasa of Ulugh Beg on Registan Square are covered with the words *al-hamdulillāh* – "Praise be to God."[19] From the perspective of the observer today, these brightly coloured, strictly geometrical façades almost resemble contemporary billboards. Not only do they illustrate the religious function of the buildings on which they appear, but they highlight the importance of the script, although the readability of the formulas is reduced by the geometric stylization. The significance of the script from the perspective of Muslim observers is also apparent in unexpected places. Ottoman authors even believed they detected the word *Allāh* in the silhouette of the Rumeli Hisar fortress built in 1452 by Mehmed II on the Bosporus with its walls and towers of different sizes.[20] This perception of a structure whose form is only geared to military purposes and above all resulted from the topography proves one thing in particular – that lines of script with short religious formulas are excellently suited as symbols for the presence of Islamic religion and rule.

Legibility and Symbolic Content of the Script

In the overall appearance of monumental Arabic inscriptions, the ornamental reshaping of the letters is so exaggerated in some places that the letters have become very difficult to read. The decorative effect is paramount here. One example is the interlacing of upper lengths, seen for the first time in the tenth century.[21] The geometric types of script known as Kufic are apparently particularly well suited for combination with ornaments. But in cursively written texts with letters layered over each other and decorative grouping, legibility takes second place to the general aesthetic effect. Richard Ettinghausen has remarked with regard to such inscriptions that the contrast between the 'information' content and the 'symbolic affirmation' through ornamentation cannot be decided in favour of one side.[22] Ultimately, it is difficult to say which associations were or are aroused in an observer by an inscription so interlaced as to be illegible or executed in square Kufic. Taking for example a line of script in the dome chamber of the Golpayegan Friday Mosque in central Iran (built in 1114–15), it is clear that the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahāda*) was converted into an ornament in itself.[23] The upper lengths are knotted in pairs and form a dense network of stars and octagons. Above, elongated vertical stems fill the upper zone, which can still be recognized as parts of letters by themselves.

It must be emphasized that the content of inscriptions whose decorative effect takes precedence over legibility is almost always of a religious nature. It could be concluded that their purpose is permanent praise of God. They speak directly to heaven, without

being read or understood by humans. This would correspond to the eternal character of the Qur'an, as Dodd and Khairallah suggest: "A verse from the Koran does not have to be read in order for it to have meaning. It exists eternally, of and for and by itself." (1981, I: 25)

On the other hand, it should be noted that the calligraphy of inscriptions related to a specific time and containing 'information' was often highly sophisticated and is by no means always easy to read. This is true for inscriptions on buildings which mention the patron of the building and the date of construction; other beautiful examples include the magnificent endowment inscriptions and those in which the rulers had their decrees immortalized in mosques or on the portals of mosques – in other words texts which document legal matters. Here too it was not merely a question of placing a text as visibly as possible. The appearance of the script was designed to be aesthetically pleasing, and many of these inscriptions are prominently located so that their beauty contributes significantly to the appearance of the building.

The 'symbolic affirmation' in religious inscriptions whose artistic design makes them particularly difficult to read is exemplified by inscriptions in square Kufic. As already mentioned, this monumental script is first documented in the early twelfth century in Iran and its environs and can be followed up to the impressive large-surface decorations of the Ilkhanid and Timurid period. Later as well, square Kufic elements are repeatedly used to decorate buildings in various parts of the Islamic world. More spectacular examples for the use of this particular script include the large stucco panels of the Sufi mausoleum of Pir-i Bakran near Isfahan (shortly after 1303), in which the imams of the Twelver Shia are listed, and the Safavid decorations in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan (sixteenth century).[24] In Mamluk Egypt, panels with square Kufic inscriptions inlaid in marble were integrated in the sumptuous interior decoration of mausoleums and mosques. In all cases, the inscriptions are of a religious nature, with short formulas such as *Allāhu akbar* – "God is great" – predominating. Easy legibility was not the main criterion for these inscriptions because the look of the script, once recognized, could be memorized and recognized again. The constant repetition, as the walls of Timurid and Shaibanid buildings in Central Asia demonstrate, is well-suited to litany-like usage. One is inclined to recognize an element of 'eternal adoration' for which no reader is required: "It follows, too, that even if inscriptions are visible they do not need to be legible" (Hillenbrand 1986: 178).

However, caution is advised with such interpretations. Some distinctly longer texts are inscribed in square Kufic which do indeed invite deciphering by the reader. They include not only the stucco inscriptions of Pir-i Bakran, which clearly stem from a Sufi context, but also the medallions with inscriptions in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan, which can be attributed to the redecoration of the buildings under the Safavids. Here, the text is not immediately readable; rather, the observer must immerse himself in the shape of the letters in order to approach the text (FIG. 58).

Whether in this way a kind of mystical experience was intended is a question which cannot be answered at present. The same applies to the inscriptions written in large letters on the pillars in the Ulu Cami in Bursa in the late Ottoman period.[25] The prominent *huwa* ("He" meaning God) can stand for a permanent *dhikr*, the continually repeated uttering of the name of God, as was practiced by Islamic mystics.

The painted inscriptions in Bursa prove that religious texts in Arabic script existed not only in stone, brick or tile decoration but often in more perishable material, which might include wood or stucco, murals, banners or posters. The dimensions here could always vary. The plaque in the shape of a ship with numerous religious inscriptions on the hull, sails and flags which hangs in the portal of a saint's shrine in Bukhara is a contemporary example of a tradition which has continued uninterrupted and remains alive to the present day.[26]

The Aim of Religious Inscriptions

A kind of canon apparently evolved very early for religious texts on Islamic edifices. Already in the ninth century, formulas had established themselves which appear repeatedly in subsequent centuries. They were as widespread in the centre of the Islamic world as in distant provinces. A particularly revealing example is the painted interior of a cave in Şuayp Şehir in what is today south-eastern Turkey; presumably it was used as a mosque. The *basmala* and die *shahāda* can be found here together with the saying "There is no power nor strength but in God, the exalted, the mighty; what God wills, will be" (FIG. 59).[27]

In many instances the selection of quotations from the Qur'an can be understood programmatically. Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah have called attention to a veritable 'iconography' of inscriptions which can serve as evidence for the interpretation of a building.[28] It seems logical that a conscious selection was made when it came to placing texts on buildings which had been so meticulously

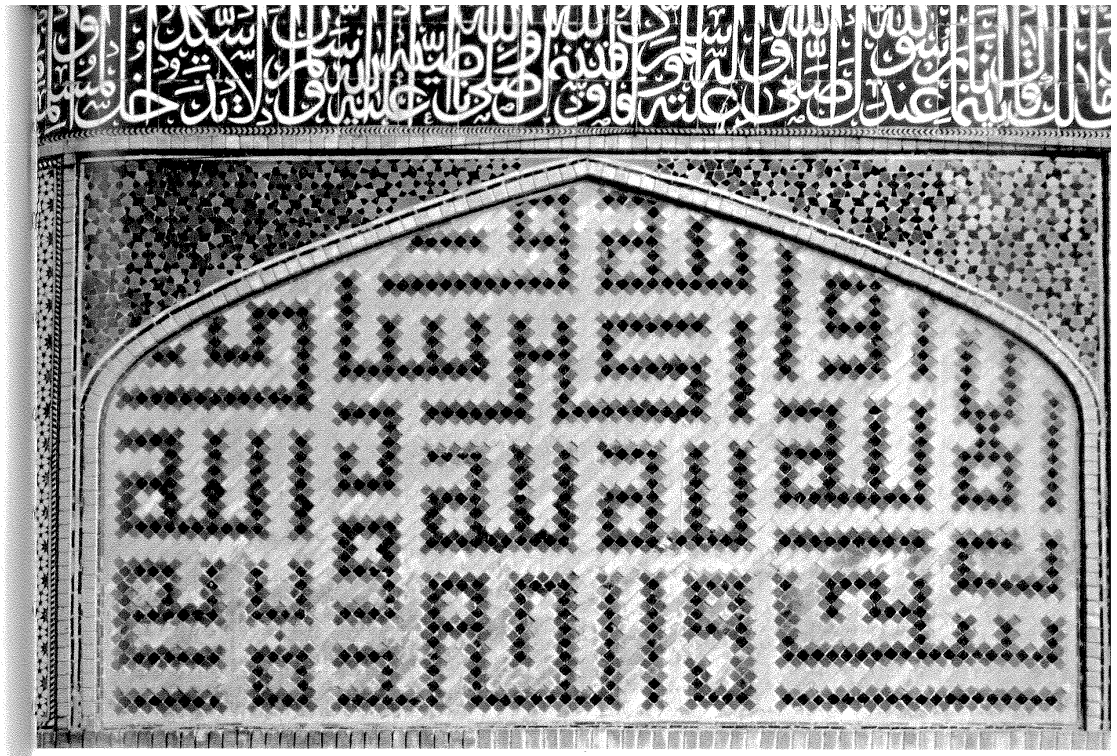


FIG. 58

RECTANGULAR KUFIC INSCRIPTIONS IN THE FRIDAY MOSQUE IN ISFAHAN

Like with braided Kufic, the ornamental aesthetic effect of the script dominates in rectangular Kufic which was frequently used in Islamic architecture in medieval Iran. The calligraphic tableau shown here is located in the west *īwān* of the mosque which is also called *īwān* of the *shāgird* ('pupil').

FIG. 59 (left)
CREED IN A CAVE MOSQUE (297 H/909–910 CE) IN ŞUAYP ŞEHIR, SOUTH-EASTERN TURKEY

The inscription painted on the wall with the simplest technique nevertheless shows calligraphic design. No doubt it dates back to more artistic models such as those for example in the neighbouring town of Harran which was important at the time.

FIG. 60 (below)
INSCRIPTION WITH THE NAMES OF THE PROPHET'S COMPANIONS IN THE GRAND MOSQUE OF GOLPAYEGAN, IRAN

The inscription embedded in the geometric design on the south-eastern wall of the interior of the dome gives the names ['Abd ar-Rahman ibn] 'Auf and Abu 'Ubaida ibn al-Jarrah in the first two rows in the section shown here.

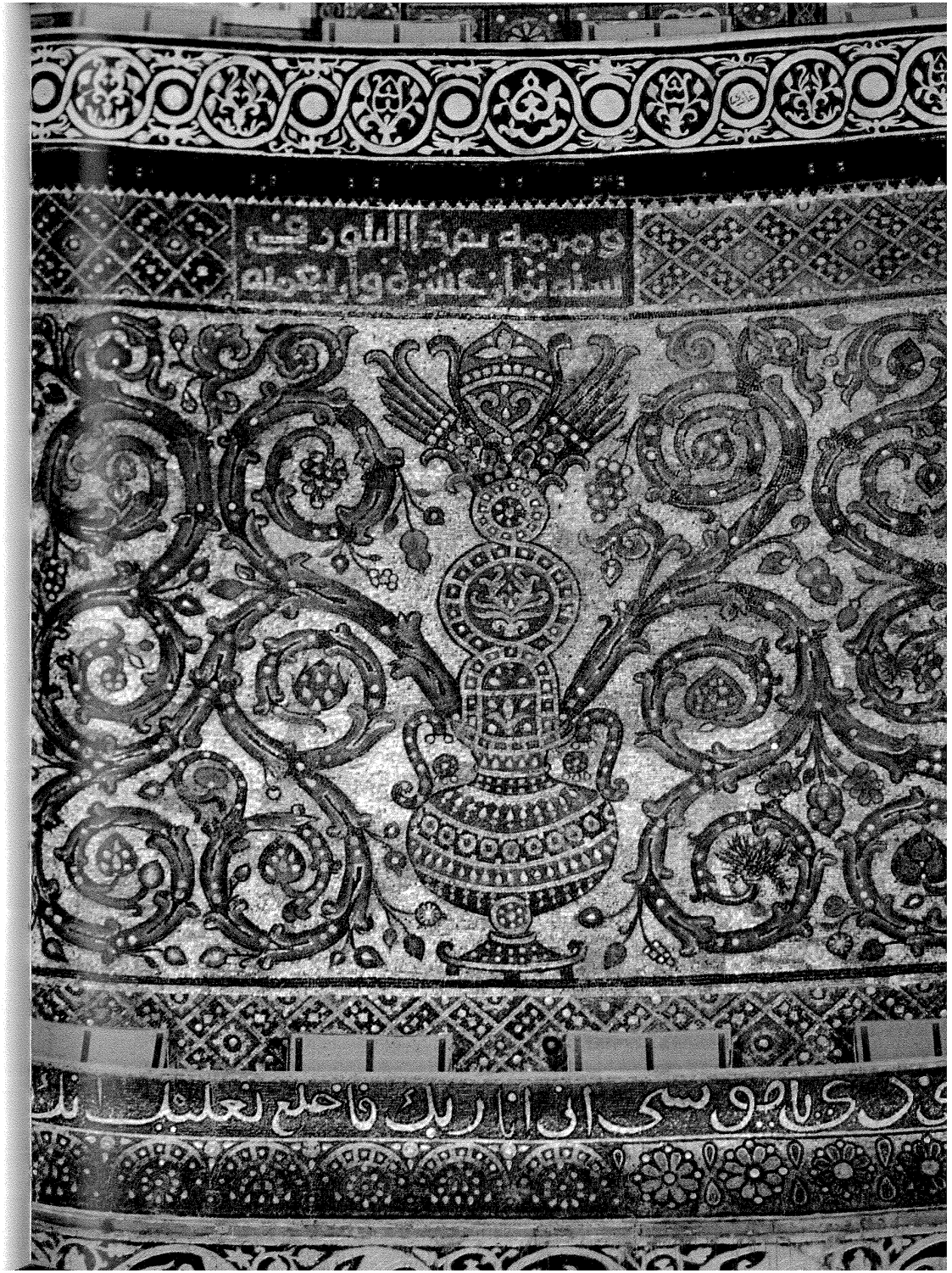
designed. Popular 'standard quotations' can be seen on many buildings, and of these texts in turn it is often certain ones which are inscribed on prominent places on the building, such as over the portal or on the *mihrāb*.

The above-mentioned *shahāda* inscription from the Golpayegan Mosque uses a very conventional text. It could be written anywhere, but at the same time, it is not out of place in a mosque. In this case, the question is why the decorative inscription was located at this particular spot while the other pillars and walls – with the exception of the *qibla* wall – remained empty. Originally, an important element of the building which no longer exists today may have been located under the inscription. A door may have existed there leading to the minaret. Today the minaret is only a stump and below the inscription there is a blind niche in the wall. A fundamental but unspecific religious text, decoratively executed, marks this location.

Conversely, rare, unusual quotations suggest certain intentions. At times veritable 'messages' can even be found. The boundaries between religious content and political propaganda can be blurred here – the example of Fatimid edifices in Cairo has already been mentioned. One example which is less legible is a wall in the Great Mosque of Golpayegan that runs from the left side of the *qibla* wall around the corner, extending above the *shahāda* inscription. At first glance, the inscription is not distinguishable as such because it is embedded in the geometric decoration. The interlaced pattern forms stars in which the letters have been inserted. However, the words are distributed over several stars. The text specifies the *'ashara al-mubashshara*, ten companions of the Prophet Muhammad, to whom he had promised paradise (FIG. 60).[29] However, the striking placement of the panel raises the question as to why this part of the building was distinguished with this text instead of others. Surely the selection of the text can be explained by the religious situation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The sultans of the Saljuq dynasty attempted to suppress Shi'ite tendencies. Mention of the *'ashara al-mubashshara* stood in contrast to the names of 'Ali's descendents who were used by the Shi'ites to position themselves vis-à-vis the Sunnis. To this day, it is interpreted in some circles as

FIG. 61
MOSAIC INSCRIPTION IN THE ROTUNDA OF THE DOME OF THE ROCK, JERUSALEM (AFTER 583 H/1187 CE)

The first verses of sura 20 of the Qur'an cite Moses, who experienced divine presence in the desert in the form of a burning bush. Similarly, the Dome of the Rock represents a place from which creation began and is specially linked to divine presence on earth.



a Sunni statement. In Saljuq Iran, it expressed acknowledgement of the state's religious policy. This interpretation is also supported by short sentences which appear further above in the dome: "Whoever defames the Siddiq, is a heretic"[30] refers, for example, to the caliph Abu Bakr ibn as-Siddiq, and the practice common under the Shi'ites of condemning the caliphs before 'Ali.

Thus the selection and placement of religious inscriptions could be linked to distinct icons which contemporaries indeed saw as referring to their situation. In many cases, the current reference of the texts would have to be determined by the reader, for example in quotations from the Qur'an. In this respect, Robert Hillenbrand noted that an "iconography of inscriptions" involves problems because the text from the Qur'an often appears unspecific.[31] Just how a quotation should be interpreted cannot always be established. In addition, the particularly frequent use of certain verses from the Qur'an as 'standard quotations' makes specific interpretations difficult.

The inscription on the mausoleum in Damascus from the thirteenth century, for example, begins with the following words:[32]

> *Every soul will taste of death. And you will be paid on the Day of Resurrection only that which you have fairly earned. Who is removed from the Fire and is made to enter Paradise, he indeed is triumphant. The life of this world is but comfort of illusion (Q 3:185).*

The text points to coming events in which the deceased will be made to answer for his deeds on earth. It is certain that everyone will be called to account. The outcome of the judgement, however, is anything but certain. With the tenor of *memento mori* and the added sentence about the vanity of this world, the text admonishes the living to conduct themselves irreproachably. The quotation is ideally suited for a mausoleum. Whether the admonitions refer in particular to the biography of the deceased cannot be definitively established from what we know today – it seems rather unlikely. The first words *kullu nafsin dhā'iqat ul-maut* are part of a standard formula which was used on tombstones throughout the Islamic world. Moreover, the entire verse cited is found on numerous tombstones from the ninth to the seventeenth century.[33]

Of interest are the unusual quotations from the Qur'an which at first glance do not appear suited to the edifice on which they are inscribed. The rotunda of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem contains a mosaic inscription which, judging by the style of writing, must date from a period after the recapture of the city by Saladin (FIG. 61).[34] The sultan had wrested the city from the crusaders in 1187. The inscription – executed in gold mosaic at an expense which was commensurate with the significance of the building – quotes the first verses of sura Taha (20:1–21). The verses describe how Moses on the way through the desert was spoken to by God for the first time next to the burning bush. The quotation ends with God's command to Moses to throw down his staff, whereupon it turns into a snake.

The citation from the Qur'an raises questions in many aspects, for example the reference to Moses in a location where according to tradition many prophets had dwelt – but not in particular Moses. The selection of the verse is probably best explained by the parallels to the sacred spot at which the presence of God was revealed. This is true for the burning bush, but also for the Dome of the Rock: as the place from which creation began, the rock is venerated in Jewish tradition; it is also here that the Jewish temple was located.[35] These ideas were transferred from the Jewish to the Muslim tradition. Along with the "dwelling of God", other points can be found which link the text of the inscription to the role of the shrine in Saladin's time and give it current significance. However, these aspects are not explicit in the inscription which is restricted to the pure citation.

Religious Inscriptions on Secular Edifices

As a result of the penetration of religious and state authority through the many centuries of Islamic history, the two spheres could not always be strictly separated in inscriptions either. Nasir ad-Din Mahmud, the Artuqid ruler of Amid (today Diyarbakır in southeastern Turkey), who expanded the citadel of the city of Amid into a fortified residence around 1205/06, had the interior door leading to the residential quarters inscribed with the words *al-mulk li-llāhi wahduhu* – "Rule belongs to God alone". Even if humility before God may have induced him to decorate the portal to his residence with this formula, Nasir ad-Din was nevertheless proud enough to have this disclaimer mounted only in a very small size – especially if the script is compared with the large-scale band of script directly next to it, which is offset from the wall in bright limestone and along with the date of construction gives the name and title of the ruler in large cursive letters.

Religious formulas probably served at all times to legitimize

FIG. 62
WALL DECORATION WITH INSCRIPTION IN THE ALHAMBRA IN GRANADA (14TH CENTURY)
The motto of the Nasrid dynasty, "There is no victor apart from God", could point to the finiteness of worldly power or be intended to emphasize moral support against the advancing Christian empires on the Iberian peninsula.

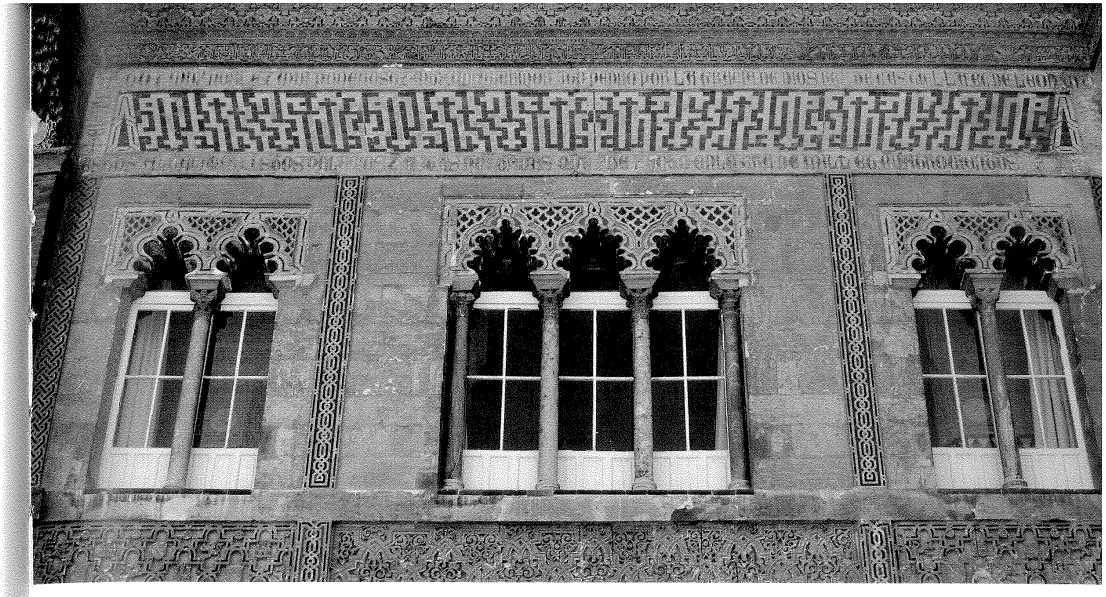


FIG. 63
FAÇADE OF THE ALCÁZAR IN SEVILLE WITH CONCEALED INSCRIPTION (1362–69 CE)
The motto of the Nasrid dynasty is concealed in the decorative blue and white band above the windows.

secular rule. This use of religious texts in inscriptions can be observed in many palaces and public buildings in cities in which the rulers resided. An extreme escalation of this practice of underscoring the legitimacy of one's own rule through essentially religious inscriptions is found in the Alhambra in Granada.[36] The motto of the emirs of the Nasrid dynasty, *wa-lā ghāliba illā-llāh* – "There is no victor but God" – is ubiquitous in the Alhambra; it appears prominently on shields with bend, or almost hidden in the dense relief tendrils of the wall decoration (FIG. 62). In this way the rulers over the emirate could continually warn that their power was finite – or was the motto rather comforting support in view of the steadily growing strength of the Christian kingdoms on the peninsula?

The reference to God's ultimate victory, which in Arabic script could almost be considered as the motto for the situation of Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, was also acceptable for the Christian side. This is attested by the façade of the Alcázar of Seville. The part of the palace to which it belongs was built for the Castilian King Pedro el Cruel between 1362 and 1369, in part with the assistance of Muslim master builders from Granada. The decorative band running above the windows on the top floor over the width of the façade appears at first glance to be a geometric pattern. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the right part contains the motto of the Nasrids of Granada (FIG. 63). The upper lengths continue in a pattern with angles and crosses. In the left half, the inscriptions appear mirrored so that the Kufic script is dispersed in the overall appearance. It can, however, be assumed that the owner of the house was indeed aware what was concealed behind the pattern on the façade and concurred with the spirit of the inscription.

Inscriptions with religious content were by no means rare in secular contexts. However, material from the first centuries of the Islamic period is sparse. In contrast, many examples from later centuries, such as from the Mamluk era in Egypt and Syria (1250–1517) are still extant. One of them is the elegant private home in Homs (Syria) which today bears the name Mufid al-Amin. In its reception room, displayed at the base of the vault in stucco relief, are the Qur'anic words *nasrun min Allāh wa-fathun qarīb* – "Help from God, and present victory" (sura 61:13).

A valuable store of inscriptions has survived on the doors of stately homes in the oases of Oman. The door panels with several lines of script contain not only 'historical' data but also verses from the Qur'an. The Bait Aulad Barakat, constructed in 1762 in Ibra, still has its original entrance door. The inscription on the two upper door panels begins with the words: "Lo! We have given you a signal victory. That Allah may forgive you of your sin that which is past and that which is to come, and may perfect His favour unto you, and may guide you on a right path" (48:1–2). These words are followed by the name of the master builder, the home owner and the date of construction. Apparently, the owner had selected a popular Qur'an text to decorate his home.[37] Another elegant house in the same quarter bears a less familiar quotation: on the Bait al-Mujaddara built in 1768–69 the inscription begins with the words (FIG. 64): "Say: Lo! My prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds. He has no partner. This am I commanded, and I am the first Muslim" (6:162–163). There is nothing else to indicate why the builder of this house chose this quotation. Perhaps, for reasons which we can no longer understand today, it had become a kind of motto for him. Then it could be considered a personal hallmark which also suitably embellished his private residence. In any case, the door was the point at which the house most strongly communicated with the outside world and thus an appropriate location for a message which expressed the builder's personal religious belief as well as his membership in the Muslim community.

Regardless of whether on or in mosques, shrines (CF. FIGS. 65–66), palaces, private residences or utilitarian buildings – inscriptions are there to be read and interpreted. Their religious content reveals certain intentions and emphasizes that they are part of a civilization influenced by Islam. Their Arabic letters are a component of the artistically designed appearance and the aesthetics of these buildings, and they visibly proclaim their 'Islamic' identity.

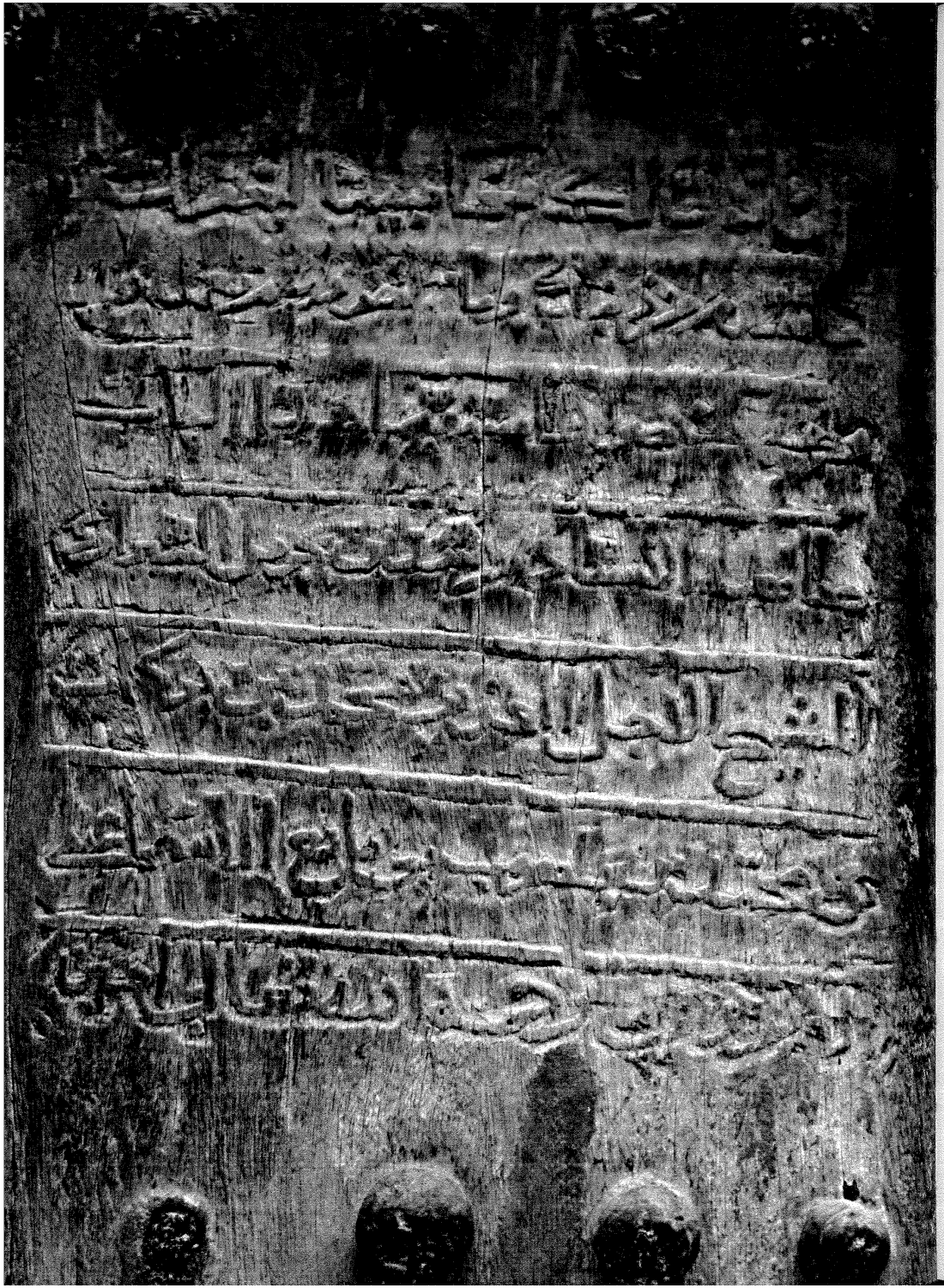


FIG. 64

INSCRIPTION ON A WOODEN DOOR IN IBRA, OMAN (1182 H/1768–69 CE)

In traditional architecture in the Muslim world, doors and portals are frequently provided with religious inscriptions. The photo shows a door of the Bait al-Mujaddara with a carved quotation from the Qur'an (sura 6, verses 162–163).

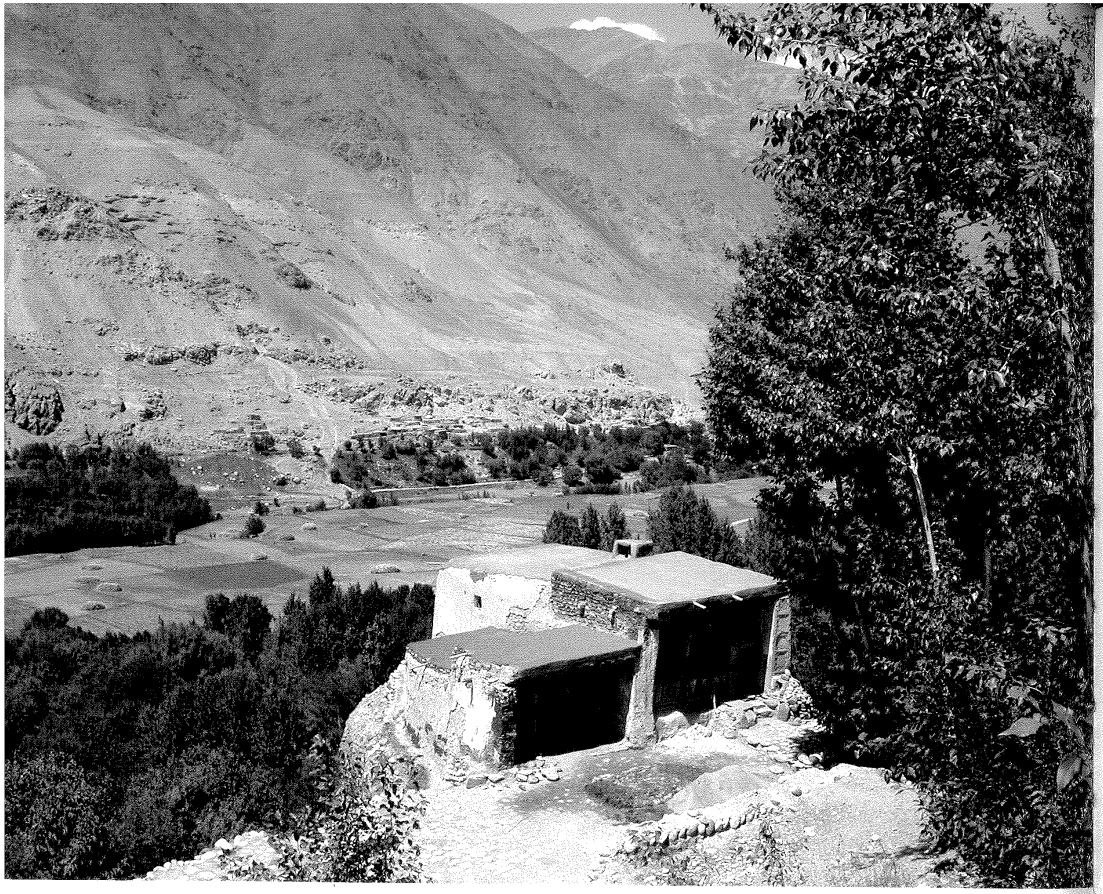


FIG. 65 (above)
SHRINE OF THE ISMAILI SAINT NASIR KHUSRAW IN YUMGAN/BADAKHSHAN

View from the south-east. The mausoleum stands on a promontory above the village of Hazrat Sayyid in the Jurm Valley. The small complex consists of the tomb chamber, a *khānqah* room for prayer and, in front, two porticoes.

FIG. 66 (right)
INSCRIPTIONS ON THE CEILING OF THE SHRINE OF NASIR KHUSRAW

Calligraphy decorates all visible sides of the ceiling girders and all the lower side of the ceiling beams. It consists, along with the Most Beautiful Names of Allah and two dedications, mainly quotations from the Qur'an. The selection of suras suggests the cult of a Sufi brotherhood.

Inscriptions at the shrine of the saint Nasir Khusraw in north-eastern Afghanistan

The shrine of Nasir Khusraw was reconstructed in 1109 H/1697 CE. Earlier construction phases, one of them presumably around 1200 CE, a second in 1367 CE, have been proven. In September 2004, the site was inspected and photographic documentation was made.

The shrine has an extensive inscription programme. Above the entrance to the tomb chamber is a wooden board with a dedication and the date (769 H/1367 CE). Carved on a wooden column in the portico of the southern *khānqah* mosque on the one side are the names of the patrons and building workers for the renovation in 1109 H/1697 CE. On the second side is a poem of dedication.

In the large northern portico leading to the actual tomb chamber (*mazār*) are the remains of Persian inscriptions on the wall. They probably date from the 18th century. The few extant sentence fragments suggest that they are passages from Nasir Khusraw's book of travels (*Safarnāma*).

The tomb has the most (extant) inscriptions. They are in extraordinarily good condition thanks to the dry high mountain climate. The inscriptions, in black *nasta'līq* calligraphy, are located on all visible sides of the ceiling girders and over the whole area of the ceiling beams. Two lines attest that the ceiling calligraphy was added at the same time (1109 H/1697 CE) as the extension when the two pillared halls in front were built. The text consists of a selection of Qur'an suras, for example: 1:48, 62:11, 110, 2:285–86, 36, 78, 97 and 53.

Marcus Schadl

If Objects Could Speak

AVINOAM SHALEM

I

The enchanting story of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp in the monumental opus of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (*The Arabian Nights*) tells us how Aladdin, while rubbing his lamp and uttering some magic words, succeeded to persuade the hidden *jinn* (spirit, demon) to come out of the magic lamp. Beside the supernatural aspect of performing magic – or making wishes come true – while using the power of hidden spirits, which is clearly expressed in this story, this tale might embody a further idea, namely the phenomenal concept that objects, like living creatures, possess souls or spirits. For the existence of a *jinn* within an object of daily life like Aladdin's oil lamp suggests that it is possible that a spirit might exist in each object and that this hidden spirit can be awakened via tactile contact as soon as the magic code of the object is revealed.

Of course this notion of bringing objects to life by freeing the spirits enclosed within them belongs to man's vast desire to grasp the wonders of the world around him. By the same token, the aspiration of man to decode the language of animals and especially of birds expresses the same aspiration. It is our, the human being's, desire to communicate with the universe because we hope, so it seems, that other living creatures and even things might reveal to us the hidden secret of creation and provide us with a better understanding of the cosmos or help us control it. Orpheus – so tells us Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* – knew the language of animals and objects, and was able to charm with his magical voice and the sound of his lute not only mankind, animals and plants but also the entirety of nature and its powers. It is related that, when he sung, trees and rocks were forced to follow him. According to medieval traditions, King Solomon likewise spoke the secret language of animals and also was able to communicate with good and evil spirits. The anecdote of the encounter of Alexander the Great with a marvellous talking tree – the so-called *waq waq* Tree – is perhaps the best example illustrating both the human desire to discover the wonders of nature and the specific wish of communicating with flora. For it is related that, during his legendary expedition to

the Land of Darkness, namely the very end of the inhabited world, he came upon a tree, the branches of which ended with heads of different animals and human beings. The tree warned Alexander of the futility of invading India and also predicted his near end. This anecdote demonstrates, then, the ability of plants to foretell the future and to inform us of things or events beyond human comprehension.

And yet, in comparison to living creatures and even plants, objects might tell us not only stories involving the present in which we encounter them, but also share stories from distant geographical regions and eras. They may have been made long before we were born and can survive centuries after our death. In other words, unlike animals and plants, which, generally speaking, have a tempo of life similar to ours – they are first born, then grow, and like us die – objects, like any other works made by mankind – be that painting, sculpture or architecture – have their own rhythm. On the one hand, they are made everlasting, if possible, and, on the other hand, always retain and mainly manifest the specific moment in which they were 'born', namely the moment of their creation. As far as time and memory are concerned, objects tell us stories – that is, they convey history.

The inclination to 'animate' objects or to relate to them as if they bear feelings or characteristics like those of a human being, namely the process of anthropomorphism, might be uncovered in the specific language we use to describe artefacts. Most artefacts' terms refer to specific parts of the human body. We speak about the feet of a table, the arms of a candelabrum, the head, neck, shoulders, belly and foot of a bottle, the lips of a bowl, and the mouth of a ewer's spout. Of course this inclination might also derive from the indisputable and formal relationship which exists between our body and objects. In comparison to the less direct correlation of our body to architecture, painting, and to some extent to sculpture, objects are designed to be used, held or worn by us, and their proportions should therefore correspond to the weight, size and dimensions of our body and its limbs. However, as far as objects are concerned, the extensive use of body terminology to describe them also hints at the symbolic parallels we would like to draw between them and us.

Interesting as this above-mentioned question seems to be,[1] this short study is a preliminary observation on this enchanting issue. It mainly gathers medieval literary sources of metaphorical and mainly poetical nature, all of which demonstrate the wish of the artists to give artefacts voices. In the first section, literary sources are selected, all of which suggest that a particular aesthetic attitude towards the art of the object existed in the medieval Islamic world. In the second part, the visual material evidence is presented aiming at showing the varied and widespread aspects and notions of the Muslim artistic desire to animate objects. The select examples are presented here as 'living creatures' and the inscriptions they bear on their bodies will be particularly placed into focus.

II

Medieval literary sources of the Islamic world clearly demonstrate the great esteem in which art works were held. The *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (*Kitāb al-hadāyā wa at-tuhaf*), a late eleventh-century treatise ascribed to the Ibn al-Zubayr, is a treasure house of information about the material culture of the Arabs from the period immediately preceding Islam to the Fatimid era. This manuscript is a unique piece of literature. It is an amazing source on the biographies of famous artefacts kept in different treasuries of Muslim rulers. The author presents the objects in this book as individuals – they sometimes even bear personal names – and also tries to trace the adventurous story of their lives. So we hear, for example, how specific objects, which were sacked by the Arabs from the treasuries of the Sasanian kings, reached the royal court of the Umayyads and later on fell into the hands of the Abbasids. Or, we hear, for example, how objects moved from one court to another and what meaning and importance they gained or lost over the centuries. Even the classification of famous objects in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities* into groups according to their courtly functions or fates clearly emphasizes the author's notion of considering the object as a storyteller. Thus, the history of Muslim communities is told through artefacts' accounts.[2]

When compared to similar accounts of treasuries of the medieval Latin West, one is struck by the significant difference in approaching the same matter. Objects are usually listed; their material, if known, is given; and in several cases their function in the treasury is mentioned. It should be noted, however, that one piece of Western medieval writing is not in conformity with the commonly used inventory listing. This is the unique and informative twelfth-century book of Abbot Suger, *de Administratione*. This book is however only one of its kind.[3]

Ibn al-Zubayr's book is certainly a lively compilation. It is anecdotal and narrative, and written in such a specific way that the whole stretch of history is brought to life. Although the book does not mention 'speaking objects', the idea of recording history by gathering reports and eye witness accounts via objects is present nonetheless, for it seems as if history is told from the artefacts' perspective.

Another example of this approach is to be found in the writing of the famous eleventh-century scholar al-Biruni. In his famous book on the *Comprehensive Knowledge on Precious Stones* (*Kitāb al-jamāhir fī ma'rifat al-jawāhir*), which was written between 1041 and 1049 CE, al-Biruni provides us with a remarkable introduction, in which he admits that he decided to include in his book also stories associated with specific jewels.[4] He says: "I shall also try to include everything that I have learnt from the jewellers, although the so-called famous stories of the jewellers are tinged with the fiction of the storytellers and the gossip of the bazaar. This falsehood is of such magnitude as to stun heaven and earth."[5] Thus, in each chapter on each different precious stone, a specific section is devoted to stories associated with the relevant stone; this complements typical information concerning the stone's natural history. These stories set the jewels in their social context and provide us with marvellous biographies of famous precious stones from Antiquity and the medieval world. We are acquainted with the biographies of the famous ruby called *al-jabal* (the mountain), the splendid pearl called *al-yatīm* (the orphan),[6] another pearl called *al-'azīm* (the firm or solid), a huge emerald called *al-bahr* (the sea) on account of its colour, or even of the so-called Table of Solomon,[7] the Golden Date Tree of the Sasanians, and other fabulous objects.[8]

Reading other medieval Arab sources, one is amazed by the wide interest in objects and the high aesthetic consciousness of the medieval beholder of artefacts.[9] For example, the following account suggests how sensitive man was to the meanings of the materials that objects were made of. It is related that once a rock-crystal inkwell inlaid with corals was given as a present to the vizier Ibn Hubayra from Baghdad, known as 'Auwn al-Din (1117–74). According to Ibn Khallikan (1211–82) – best known as the author of the monumental Biographical Dictionary *Wafāyāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' al-zamān* – some poets who were present at this occasion were asked by Ibn Hubayra to compose on the spot a piece of poetry on this object. One of them recited the following lines:

> *Your inkstand was made of your two days, and these have been mistaken for crystal and for coral. One is your day of peace, which is white and pours forth abundance; The other is your day of war which is red, like red blood.*[10]

The ability to read materials and colours as meaningful, or as having a specific meaning, suggests that the specific field which we today call iconography was not only limited in medieval Islam to the meaning of images, but also included the material and colour of objects.[11] For example, Mas'udi (d. 956) in his famous book *Meadows of Gold* tells us about a ceremony in the royal Abbasid court, in which a necklace was regarded on the account of the colour of its pearls as a symbol for the transfer of power and responsibility. He states:

> *On the following day (this took place probably on the 12th of Muharram 251 H, in 865 CE), the new caliph (i.e. al-Mu'tazz) made his way in a great procession to the Audience Hall, where he received the people's oath of allegiance. He dressed his brother Mu'ayyad in a robe of honour and placed about his neck a necklace of black pearls and one of white, the first signifying that he was heir presumptive and the second that he was governor of the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina.*[12]

But also the tension or rather excitement between form and function, which is perhaps the most important factor contributing to the aesthetic attraction of any artefact, seems to be apparent in medieval Islam, at least in the writings of al-Biruni. In his famous book on mineralogy, he says:

> *An object that really affords pleasure is that which, despite constant use, still keeps its user avid for obtaining more of it. Such are the pleasures dictated by the senses that, whenever they come across a new object, the senses impinge upon it with delight.*

And he even adds:

> *But (a constant habituation to pleasure) is likely to render the animating spirit dull and, once the senses become disturbed, the animating spirit, being worn out, cannot derive pleasure from (these objects).*[13]

The following verses were inscribed on a ewer dated 1181–82 CE, which is now held in the National Museum of Arts of Georgia in Tbilisi. They illustrate the joy of looking at the beauty of an object and, more importantly, the above-mentioned aspect concerning the complete aesthetic experience achieved as soon as form and function are conjoined. The verses read:

> *My beautiful ewer, pleasant and elegant,*
> *in the world of today who can find the like?*
> *Everyone who sees it says "It is very beautiful".*
> *No-one has found its twin because there are no others like it.*
> *Glance at the ewer, a spirit comes to life out of it,*
> *and this is living water that flows from it.*
> *Each stream which flows from it into the hand*
> *gives each hour new pleasure.*
> *Glance at the ewer, which everyone praises;*
> *it is worthy to be of service to such an honoured person as you.*
> *Everyone seeing how moisture flows from it*
> *is able to say nothing which is not appropriate to it.*[14]

The specific verse "Glance at the ewer, a spirit comes to life out of it" suggests that the beholder understands that, like any other quotidian artefact, the entire aesthetic conception of the ewer is accomplished – in other words its beauty is discerned – at the very moment that it fulfils its function: in this case, as water flows out of its spout. The beholder is invited to look at the ewer as water flows because "a spirit comes to life out of it." It is true that the use of the word "spirit" clearly relates to water. But it also suggests that the spirit of an object could be revealed as soon as form and function are combined.

A similar concept is to be found in a wine poem, taken from the *Dīvān* of Abu Nuwas (757–815), in which a wine vessel is compared to a body, its opening to a wound, and the wine within it to blood. Moreover, as far as the spirits or the souls of objects are concerned, Abu Nuwas describes the empty wine flask as a body without spirit:

> *Gently, incessantly I extract the 'spirit' from the amphora;*
> *from the wounded hollow I draw its blood;*
> *until I double up: two spirits in one body,*
> *and the amphora is left lying there – a body without spirit.*[15]

As far as caskets are concerned, apart from the usual tension between decoration and form, caskets display a particular aesthetic experience. This involves the beholder's wish to discover their inner parts and contents. Locked caskets appear as silent containers keeping secrets within, much like Pandora's Box. The aesthetic experience in front of a casket is therefore mingled with excitement and curiosity, namely our strong wish to open it in the hope of finding the secrets or treasures held within.

Al-Biruni cites a man called Ismail ibn 'Ali, who was clearly aware of this aspect of curiosity involving caskets. Ismail ibn 'Ali said:

> *... (like) the sides of the chests which were decorated with variegated patterns. He who fell in love with those patterns thought the chest would contain all kinds of jewels. But only the emergence of air (greeted) the opener after the lock had been prised open.*[16]

The chest with its locked lid captivated Ismail ibn 'Ali's mind. It activated his imagination. He was fascinated by the different decorative patterns of this chest. But as a matter of fact the lavish decoration on the chest's walls instigated other thoughts in his mind: the hope to find expensive and costly items inside the chest. Thus Ismail ibn 'Ali's main interest went through the typical aesthetic experience of locked and closed containers. His joy at looking at the casket's outer decorated walls was concomitantly mingled with his desire to open it.

It is quite possible that the sensitivity and competence of medieval Muslims to consider objects as if they were individuals has its roots in *wasf* literature (literally meaning 'description'), especially in *wasf* literature of the ninth century.[17] In this century, during the Abbasid period, a new sort of poetry of 'describing' one object as the sole or central subject of a poem started to develop. The most famous Arabic poet, who attributed human characteristics to objects, is al-Ma'muni (935–93). In his richly metaphorical poems he compared, for example, a pair of scissors to two inseparable spouses or a basket to a devout servant.[18]

Likewise the tenth-century poet Abu al-Fath Mahmud (b. Mohammad) b. al-Husayn b. Shahak, known as al-Kushajim, who was born in Ramla in Palestine and spent his life in Mosul and Aleppo, was in the habit of comparing artefacts to human beings and vice versa. In one of his poems he says: "And it seems as if (the inkwell) is a king on his throne or perhaps a sleepy young girl on an elevated place."[19]

Another poem, cited by the tenth-century author Ibn al-Marzuban in his book on presents, was composed on the occasion of the presenting of an ebony inkwell decorated with gold. A letter attached to the present contained the following lines:

> *We send you the mother of fates and gifts; she is of a black origin.*
> *She is decorated in yellow, for it is known that yellow clothes fit black people.*
> *In her belly stand, without any struggle, some lances; they are sharper than the weapons that one unsheathes in battle.*[20]

In several cases, objects seem to speak and even to fight with each other. An interesting example is to be found in the *Fox Fables* (*Mishle Shu'alim*) of Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Nakdan (born, most probably in Burgundy). His book, which was probably written around the end of the twelfth century, or in the first half of the thirteenth century, is clearly based on the famous medieval Arabic version of the animals' fables, the *Kalīla wa Dimna*.[21]

Berechiah ha-Nakdan tells us:

> *Two pots, one of copper and one of earthenware, looked upon one another as they floated on the water. The clay pot envied the copper, for it was clothed in scarlet, and said to her: "How canst thou be proud in thy much praise, for that thou art styled polished brass? Though thou glisten like gold, mine is twice thy strength to fare speedily over the face of the water. I can run two miles twice ere thou run a mile. Because of thy ponderous weight thou lovest repose. It is seemly for me to hold dominion over thee, for I am clever and shifty." The copper pot replied: "Well known is thy shiftiness. If thy claim is just, let us essay to proceed together, battle line facing battle line." And they journeyed as if bound together, joined at their two shoulders. The copper pot went a straight course because of its weight, but the clay pot overturned from its face to its belly because of its lightness, and showed a back side instead of a face, and it went a crooked way. The wind cast it upon the pot of cooper, and the waves abetted the wind, and they cracked and shattered the clay pot on the copper.*[22]

The moral of this story is quite obvious and also given by the author of this book: "The parable is for a poor man who strives to overreach the rich. He cannot vie with one stronger than he, and when he vaunts himself over him he is humbled and outstripped, for the race is not to the swift."[23] Whether we accept this moral or not, the animation of these two objects and their ability to speak and even fight is a further evidence for the medieval inclination to associate life to objects.

III

Of course, the round body of a vase, the slender neck of a bottle and even its handle or spout immediately recall the main parts of the human body. Conversely, literary sources frequently compare the beauty of a human being to that of a specific object. These sources are to be found already in pre-Islamic times. For example, in a certain *qasīda* (laudatory poem), the beauty of a female breast is compared to an ivory box (*huqqu al-'āj*).[24] In another pre-Islamic *nasib* verse (short prelude of the *qasīda*) the female lover is compared to a monk's lamp which lights up during the night, and her cheeks are oval like metal mirrors.[25] Moreover, a usual parable is that which describes the neck of a fair young man or woman as resembling a silver vase.[26] For example, al-Jahiz provides us with the following description of a young man: "His neck was like a silver vase [*ka'-anna 'unuquhū ibrīqu fiddatin*], his foot the tongue of a snake, his eye a mirror and his belly a Coptic garment [*qubtīyatun*]."[27] And in one of the marvels of Thousand and One Nights, *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, the beauty of the neck of one of the daughters of the king Qamar al-Zaman is described as resembling a silver jug and her throat as evoking the memory of a mirror.[28]

Of course one cannot draw a direct line of interpretation between word and image. But also a clear division between the two is superficial. Moreover, Islamic inscribed artefacts and the shaping of calligraphy into figurative forms suggest a flow of these two types of representation. Bearing this idea in mind, while observing Islamic vessels and their decoration, one might start to unravel why objects were treated as if having the characteristics of a human being. The two exquisite water jugs (eighteenth/early nineteenth century), probably from Sicily, in the Museum of Ethnology in Munich are richly decorated on their bodies as if precious jewellery would have affixed to them (FIG. 67).[29] The pale green late eleventh-century ewer from the David Collection in Copenhagen, however, 'poses' in an expressive gesture (FIG. 68).[30] Its head, so to speak, is slightly turned back in a particular stance, as if arrogantly opposing someone.[31] It is likely that precious vessels were indeed

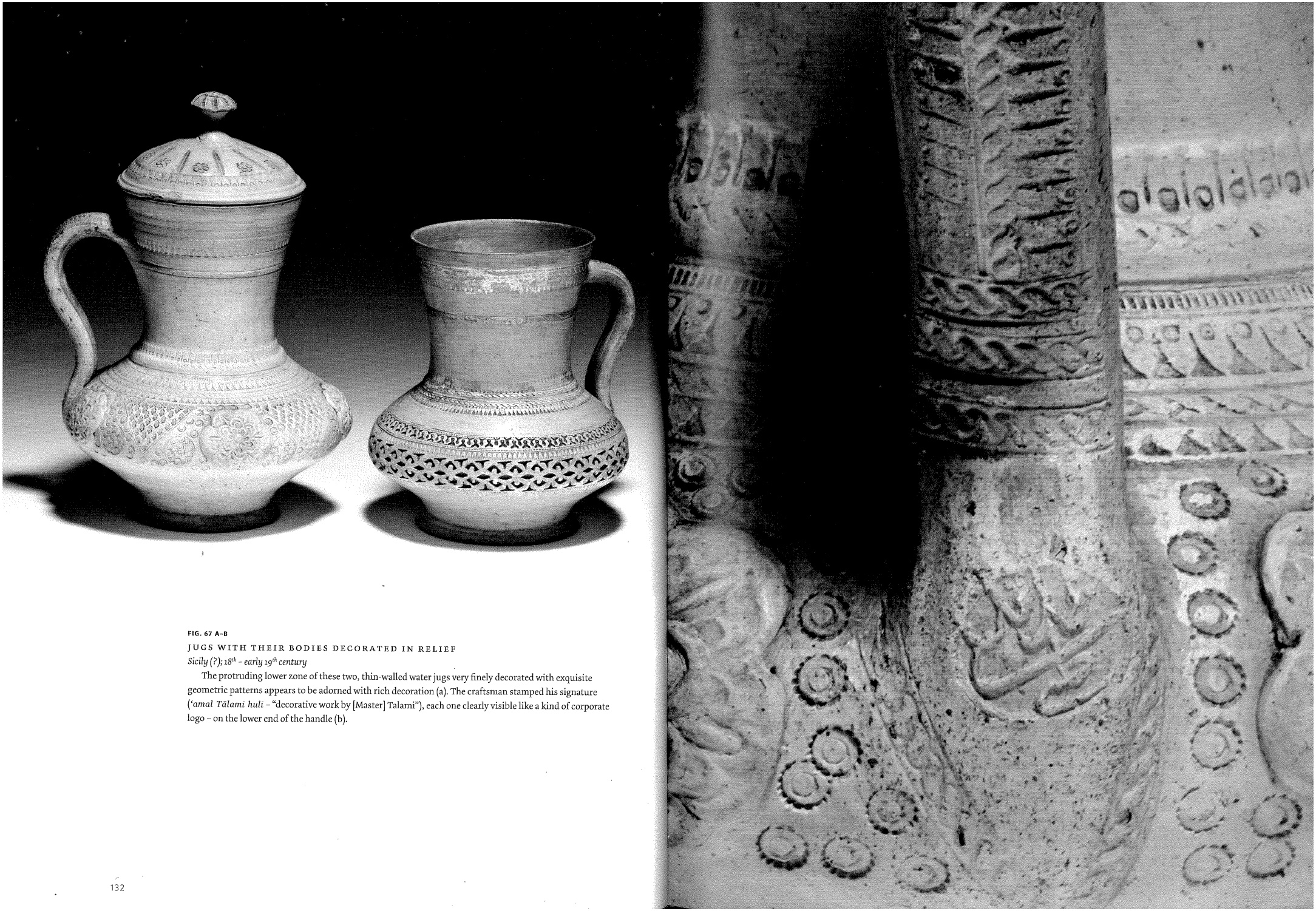


FIG. 67 A–B

JUGS WITH THEIR BODIES DECORATED IN RELIEF

Sicily (?); 18th – early 19th century

The protruding lower zone of these two, thin-walled water jugs very finely decorated with exquisite geometric patterns appears to be adorned with rich decoration (a). The craftsman stamped his signature (*'amal Tālamī hulī* – "decorative work by [Master] Talami"), each one clearly visible like a kind of corporate logo – on the lower end of the handle (b).

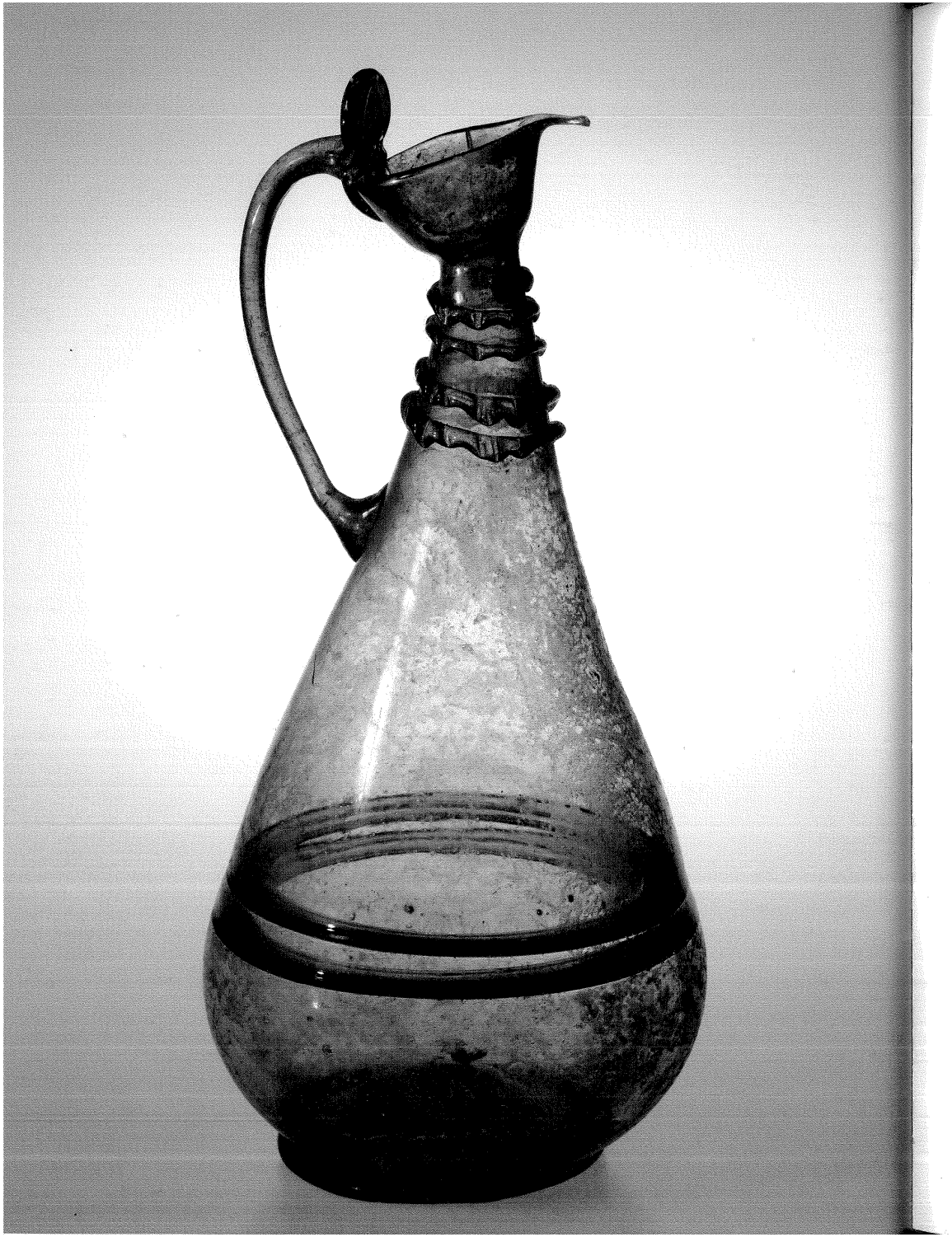


FIG. 68
PITCHER WITH 'HEAD' TURNED SLIGHTLY BACKWARD
Syria, Iraq or Iran; late 11th century

Early glass work of this kind from the Islamic period was free-blown. Already in Antiquity, the region between Egypt and Iran led in glass production.

decorated with superb gems, hanging on their necks or attached to their bodies. Examples of such jewel-decorated objects appear already at the very end of the seventh century in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (FIG. 61). Precious vessels are depicted between impressive acanthus scrolls. An amphora with curved handles is decorated with precious stones, such as pearls and rubies; a necklace hangs from the neck of this amphora; and earrings are attached to the upper parts of its handles.[32] It must be noted that specific objects which were made to be worn either by woman or man are perfectly designed to fit the human body. They appear therefore as human particles. The best examples are perhaps clothes, shoes, gloves and even hats. The Iranian dervish cap or bonnet (second half of nineteenth century) in the Museum of Ethnology in Munich (FIG. 69, CF. 70) with its embroidered inscriptions organized in cartouches appears then, at least metaphorically, as a 'talking head'.[33] The inscription in Persian, which is only partly legible, mentions the felt hat and 'crown' of the dervish as well as epigrams referring to Islamic mysticism. Another hand-shaped finial of a Shi'a standard is inscribed with *Allāh* and the names of the 'holy family' and therefore appears as a 'talking sign' (FIG. 71).

IV

Indeed, the best evidence for considering objects as human beings is the abundance of inscriptions, which decorate many of them. For these inscriptions, when read aloud, 'give' a voice to the objects, as if the objects speak (cf. also the essay by Behrens-Abouseif in this book). The best example for a speaking object in the Middle Ages is, of course, the book. But, in fact, any artefact bearing an inscription on its body addresses the beholder in its own language.[34] The idea of decorating objects with inscriptions, especially those which directly speak to the owner or the beholder in the 'I' form, has a long tradition and can be traced back to the ancient period. For example, numerous inscriptions on Greek vases appear as addressing the beholder like: "I greet you" or "I belong to so-and-so." Later, in the Middle Ages, the typical Latin inscription "I was made by ... (*me fecit*)" illustrates a similar tradition.[35]

In medieval Islam, inscriptions frequently appear on portable objects. The inscriptions contain a range of texts. The majority of them include good wishes, Qur'anic quotations and poetry. But there are also numerous inscriptions of historical character. These usually mention the date and place of the pieces' manufacture and also the specific names of the persons involved in the creation of the artefact, like the patron, owner or craftsman. Some of the inscriptions are composed in a way suggesting that the objects actually speak, telling us of their function and merits or professing to us good wishes. Some of them are of a high poetical appeal.

It is therefore no less interesting to examine where exactly, namely on which part of the objects, inscriptions appear. The early

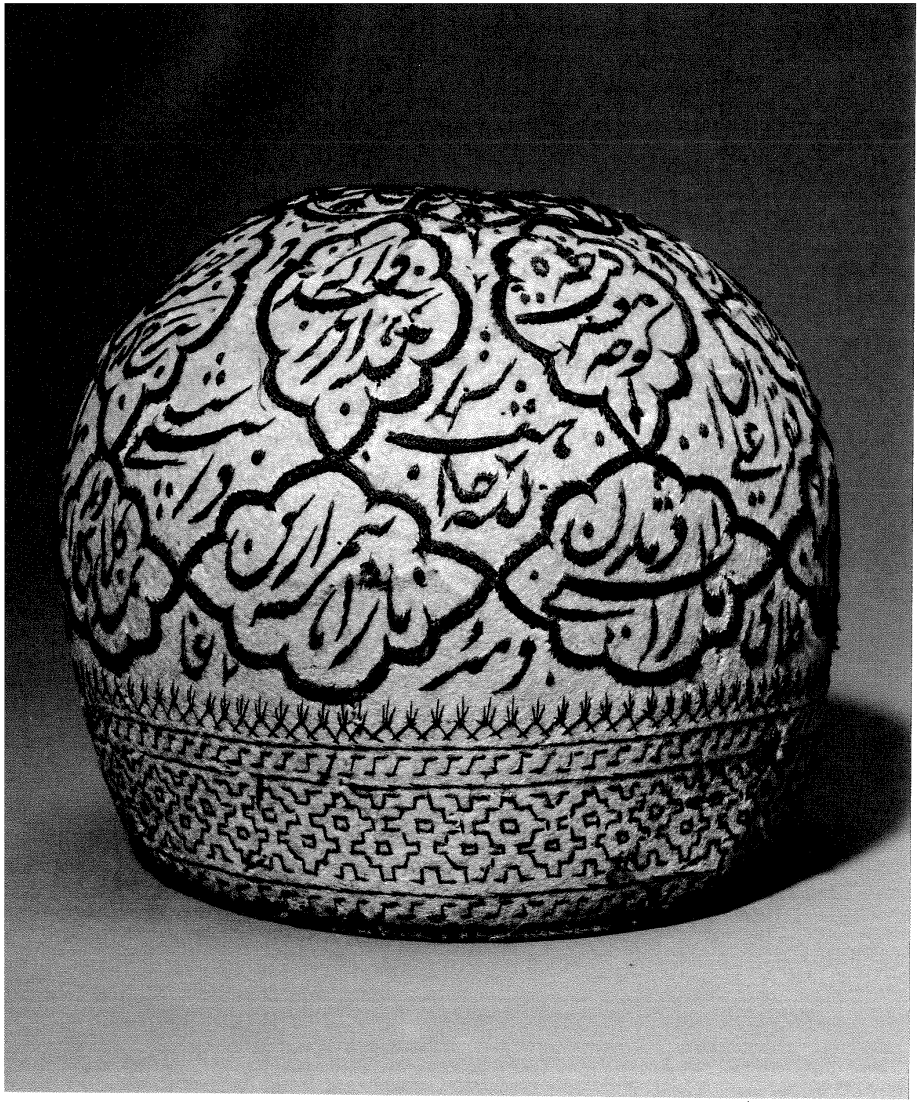


FIG. 69

DERVISH 'CROWN' COVERED WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Iran; 19th century

The cartouches on this embroidered felt cap, which presumably belonged to a seeker of God of the Khaksar order, contain concepts of dervish life and mystical maxims. Such caps are among the primary insignia of an order.

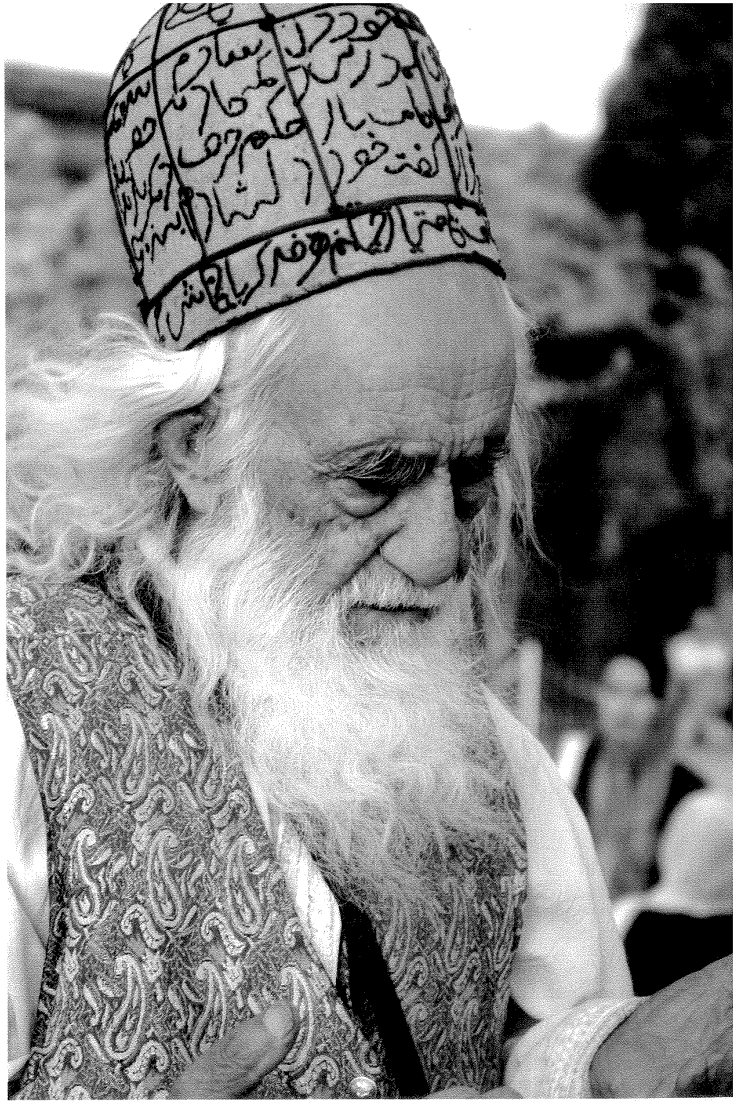


FIG. 70

DERVISH WITH TALL FELT CAP

This mystic visiting the grave of the poet Hafiz in Shiraz (Iran) wears a cap decorated with inscriptions. The segments are filled with invocations to 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the first Shi'ite imam.

FIG. 71

STANDARD FINIAL IN THE SHAPE OF A HAND

Karachi/Pakistan; 1st half of 20th century

The names *Allāh, Muhammad, Fātima, 'Alī, Hasan* und *Husain*.are written in calligraphy on the back of this metal hand in the shape of a *tughrā* (originally the Ottoman sultan's seal) Along with the name of God are written the names of the five holy 'People of the House' (*ahl al-bait*) who are specially venerated by Shi'ite Muslims.

FIG. 72

BOWL WITH KUFIC SCRIPT

Iraq; 9th century

The four palmettes direct the observer's view to the Arabic inscription in wedge-shaped stylised Kufic. It reads "Blessings for the owner – a work by Mohammad al-Sala[h]". Abbasid bowls of this type were often decorated with similar blessing wishes.

71

72

Abbasid, white-glazed dish in the Museum of Ethnology in Munich bears a Kufic inscription which runs in three short rows at the centre of its inner part (FIG. 72).[36] The inscription is painted with a bright inky-blue pigment and is highly stylized. Four stylized plants, or better perhaps leaves, encircle this inscription. These vegetal motifs call the beholder's attention to the central Arabic inscription and at the same time frame it; the horizontal line at the base of each plant suggests a rectangular frame to the geometrized Kufic inscriptions. In this sense, one may even propose that the firm and angular ductus of this inscription compels us to read it in a specific tone, as if the dish talks to us with a crystal-clear voice, saying: *baraka li-sāhibihī, 'amal Mohammad al-Salh* ("Blessing to its owner – the work of Mohammad al-Salh."). Moreover, since it is likely that this type of dishes and bowls was in daily use in the Abbasid court, it is possible that the inscription was slowly revealed to its owner, or its beholder, as soon as the food placed within was consumed. Thus, the whole process of reading of this inscription was given a specific sound and rhythm and even the pace of reading was set.

In contrast to this early Abbasid dish, the Kufic inscriptions on the upper inner and outer rims of the so-called Minai Beaker in the Museum of Ethnology Munich, datable to the eleventh century, are written in a rather free and joyful script, as if the object speaks to us at ease and in a nonchalant mode (FIG. 73).[37] The fact that they decorate the rims, or one may even say the lips of the beaker, enhances the idea of a speaking object. The inscription appears then as if emerging from the beaker mouth, and, one may even go further and suggest that, the moment we drink out of it, these repetitive Arabic words appear as if murmured and muttered from mouth to mouth. Unfortunately it is difficult to decipher these recurring words. They appear as if repeating the words *Allāh, Allāh*.

The word *Allāh*, which is depicted in a nineteenth-century decorative frame at the very centre of an eight-pointed star from Iran, is extremely stylized and its angular letters are perfectly set within the square shape. In fact, the calligraphic design of the word *Allāh* strongly recalls a script usually found on seals (FIG. 74), and the star encompassing the name of God in its core creates a starry-like aura around it.[38] The word *Allāh* appears then as an emblem, as if stamped at the centre of this star-shaped mirror. It needs not to be legible because it is identified through the well-known image of the name of God. Thus, this artefact does not necessarily speak the written word out loud, but rather hints at the sealed character of the divine manifestation in a visual form – the image of the word.

The dervish metal rod from Iran, datable between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, is a further variation of the use of script on objects and the textualization of the object (FIG. 75).[39] The upper part of this rod or standard is made of letters, which can be read as *yā 'Alī* and *yā Allāh* ("Oh 'Ali" and "Oh Allah"). This artefact is quite remarkable because the Arabic inscription is not painted or inscribed on the object, but rather shapes the object and dictates its specific form. The script freed itself, so to speak, from the surface of the artefact and took a shape, a three-dimensional form.

V

As mentioned above, the best notion of man's desire to give objects mouths to talk is the use of the 'I' form in the inscribed inscriptions decorating these objects. The best example is the famous cylindrical ivory pyxis in the Hispanic Society of America dated 966 CE and signed by its maker, Khalaf (FIG. 76).[40] It bears some poetical verses, which are carved in Kufic script around the base of its domed lid. The inscription addresses the beholder and reads:

> *The sight I offer is of the fairest, the firm breast of a delicate maiden. Beauty has invested me with splendid raiment that makes a display of jewels. I am a receptacle for musk, camphor, and ambergris.*[41]

This verse is highly interesting because this cylindrical box addresses the beholder and calls his attention to look at its beauty. In fact the object tempts the beholder, speaking to him in metaphors, and suggesting to him even visual-erotic pleasure because it resembles "the firm breast of a delicate maiden." Moreover, the object also informs the beholder of its function. This aspect is in frequent use in medieval Arabic inscriptions. The fact that objects tend to confirm their functions reveals to us how much emphasis was put on the purpose that the artefact was made to fulfil and on the aesthetic experience that involves the object's visual life. A similar notion could be detected in the following example. A candlestick in the Benaki Museum in Athens, which is signed by its maker – the master 'Ali, son of Umar, son of Ibrahim al-Shankari al-Mawsili – in the year 717 H/1317–1318 CE, was once, according to an inscription incised in one of its medallions, endowed to the sanctuary of the Prophet in Medina by Mirjan Aqa.[42] It bears the following verses:

FIG. 73

BEAKER WITH INSCRIPTIONS ON THE EDGES

Ray/Iran; 11th century

This Minai ware beaker seems to speak to the observer or drinker through its buoyant Kufic-like inscriptions on its inner and outer rims. The words appear to emerge directly from the mouth of the vessel.

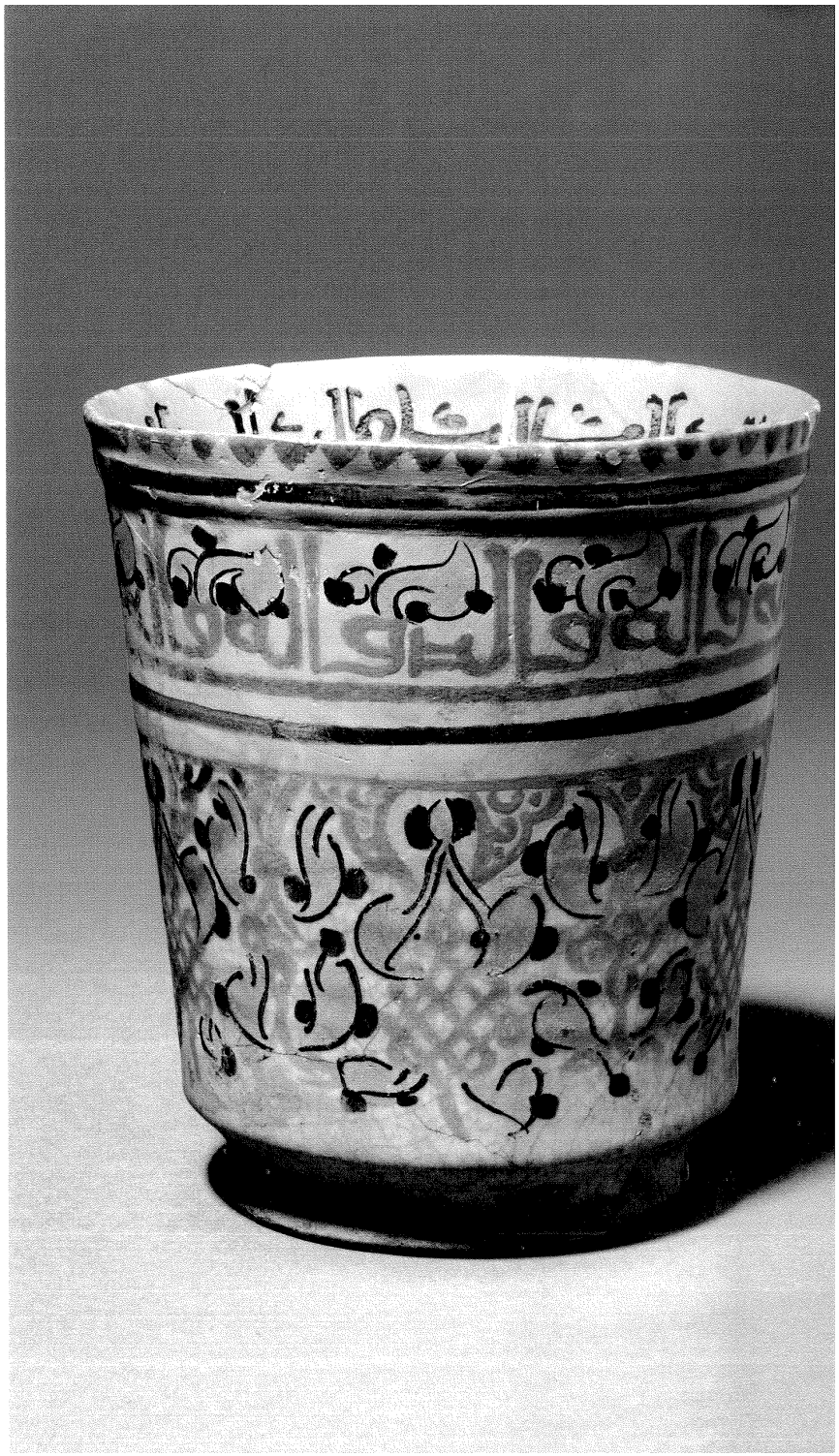
I preserve the fire and its constant glow. Dress me in yellow garments.
I am never present in an assembly without giving the night the appearance of day.[43]

In numerous other cases, objects specially made for private and personal use speak in an expressive, almost vulnerable, tone about their emotions, as if telling us secrets from the private life of their owners. The best examples for this genre are the speaking handkerchiefs. One of the verses embroidered on a handkerchief (*mindīl*), which is recorded in the *ādāb* (good conduct and refinement) literature of the historian al-ʿAyni (1361–1451), proclaims:

I am the mindīl of a lover pining,
Consumed by desire, a prisoner of separation.
I was the best of mindīls, but
the tears of the lovers have changed me.[44]

But not only portable and personal objects could speak; sometimes, so it appears, also furniture and even buildings could talk. In one of the medieval sources found in the geniza chamber in the synagogue of Ibn Ezra in Fustat we hear of a specific inscription which was due to be carved on a wooden bookcase or perhaps embroidered on its curtain. According to Goitein, this inscription was written in poor Hebrew strung together by Arabic syntax, and is dated to the eleventh century.[45] It reads at the beginning:

I, the bookcase (speak to you) open me and study whatever you find in me.
I am exalted and esteemed more than any other case because of that which is inside me.
In other cases they keep silver and gold or precious clothing, things that are of no avail and do not save from the flames of hellfire.
But I, the bookcase, keep the tree guarded in Paradise, which belongs to the beloved.



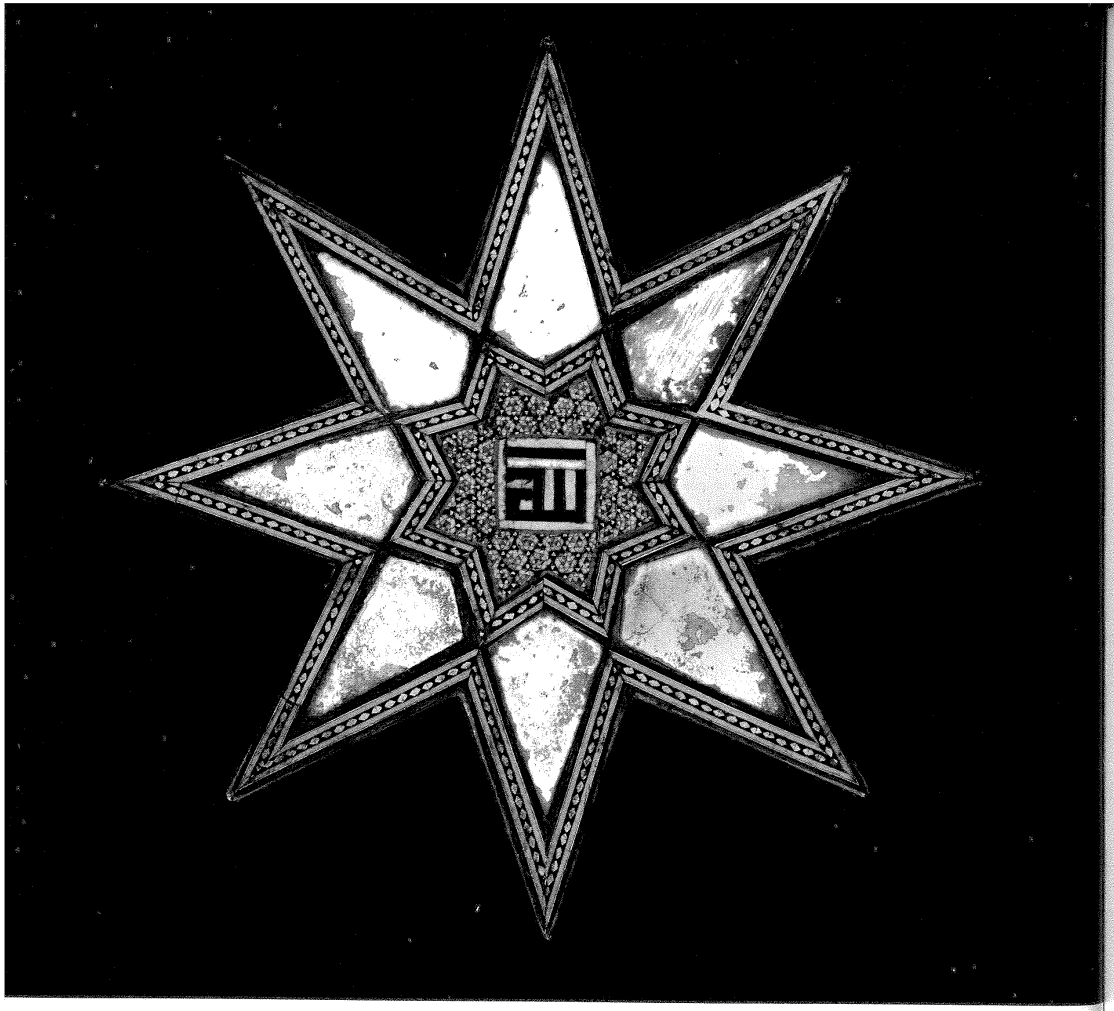


FIG. 74
STAR WITH THE WORD *ALLĀH*
Iran; 19th century

The name of God in the centre of the eight-armed star is written in extremely geometric square Kufic. This inlay work might have formed part of a wall or ceiling covering for a room.

"What has the straw to do with the wheat?!" In me he keeps (the Torah).
Turn here and contemplate the perfection of her words and say to her: be (fem.) my confidant, brother (!), and kin.
I, the Torah, am of supreme beauty, no blemish is in me.
How many are the pleasures and enjoyments to be found in me.
Every man is seeking three things in life, but cannot obtain them except through me:
Pleasures and enjoyments, combined with greatness, esteem, and praise, and escape from all worries and misfortunes.
They are called "my cherished, my dear ones" ...

The various literary and visual sources concerning objects that I have chosen to discuss in this short study suggest that artefacts gained high aesthetic esteem in medieval Islam. They were treated almost as individuals and were sometimes even compared to human beings. This probably contributed to the high level of craftsmanship that was put into the making of these objects and, more importantly, to their significant role as media of expression: conveying messages, transmitting and preserving information, stimulating and perhaps even activating their beholders by recalling ideas, thoughts, beliefs and feelings.

But, why do we tend to consider objects as having human shapes and even active qualities such as speaking, thinking and even loving? It is clear that conferring these qualities of living organism on artefacts is rooted in our desires or even needs to render objects into human forms and thus to see ourselves – as if mirrored – in the objects. We cannot simply talk about objects as living creatures. It is ludicrous, and we do not really believe that they are alive. But to solve this issue by inscribing it with the binary metaphoric-literal system is to simplify this interesting phenomenon. I would even say that the creation of a general meta-level for understanding objects, be it as living creatures or as having magical qualities (that we are unable to control), should be further discussed. It is as W. J.T. Mitchell says while speaking on images: "The life of images seems to be incorrigible metaphor, a metaphor that we cannot avoid" (2004: 16).[46]

Let me conclude this article with a poem inscribed on the lid of a Syrian or Egyptian elliptical copper box, which was probably made in the late Mamluk period and which is kept in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.[47] The repetitive inscription reads: "He, who discovers in my beauty the meaning of pleasure for the eye, will arise himself until his intelligence will weave a fabric; so that he understands all the meanings – patience is the servitude of the impatient."[48]

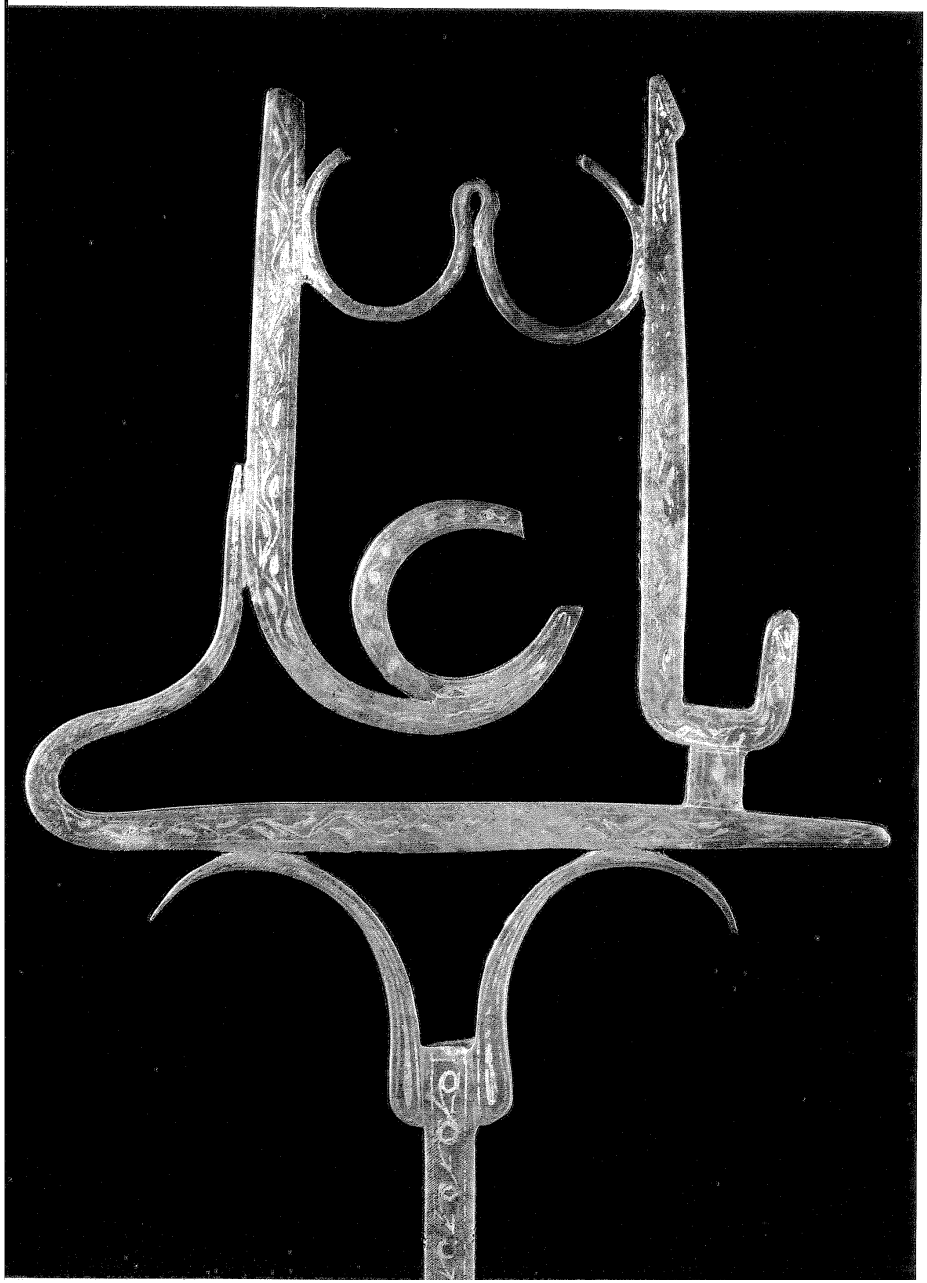


FIG. 75

DERVISH STAFF WITH CALLIGRAPHIC CROWN

Iran or Turkey; 18th/19th century

The upper end of this staff is calligraphically shaped as *yā ʿAlī* ("Oh 'Ali") and *yā Allāh* ("Oh Allah"). It served as the regalia of an Islamic mystic who belonged either to a Shi'ite Sufi order in Iran or the Turkish order of the Bektashi. 'Ali himself is honoured as a master of callligraphy and is therefore considered the patron saint of calligraphers.

FIG. 76

PYXIS WITH KUFIC INSCRIPTION

Madinat az-Zahra/Andalusia dated 357 H/966 CE

The lower edge of the lid of this famous dated and signed ivory pyxis is decorated with some poetic verses in which the box speaks to the observer and praises its own beauty.

Arabic Epitaphs from the Near East

MOHAMED RAHIM

Although funeral rites in Islam are very clearly defined,[1] there have always been regional differences which reflect traditional customs. This can be observed in Egypt, for example, where a mixture of Islamic and ancient Egyptian funeral ceremonies has evolved.[2] Interesting in this context is the relationship between death and life as understood by Arabs in pre-Islamic times. Reference to this is made in sura 102, "Rivalry in worldly increase"; from this sura it can be assumed that at that time pride constituted a central aspect of Arabs' attitude toward death. This had to do with the relatively small number of the dead, in particular of soldiers of one's own tribe killed compared with other tribes, or that the most important leaders of one's own tribe were still alive, or if they had already died, one was proud that one's own dead were more important than those of other tribes. What counted under all circumstances was to use the relationship to the dead to increase one's own standing. This mindset, so foreign to us today, which sees the dead purely in terms of statistics and evaluates the death of someone to the advantage of the living, suggests that the human relationship of the living to their deceased relatives ended with their funeral. The dead were commemorated in order to emphasize one's own success and thus one's own power.

With the introduction of Islam, this view received an additional dimension derived from the conviction that life begins in the grave after death.[3] Based on this assumption, people began to build majestic graves intended to impress visitors and reflect the status of the deceased. The graves of the wealthy were now constructed like palaces with courts. A tradition of decorating graves with verses from the Qur'an evolved in the hope that this would bring relief to the deceased in the grave. The selection of verses from the Qur'an played an important role here. Very widespread were those verses concerning forgiveness and God's mercy, for example sura 89:27-29, 'the dawn', and the famous ' throne verse' (2:255) in the modern era (see p. 109). Another quotation for this purpose, particularly popular in the ninth century, is the eighteenth verse of the third sura located on the last of the tombstones discussed here.[4] Man lets the deceased testify what God himself testifies, namely that

FIG. 77

TOMBSTONE WITH KUFIC INSCRIPTION

Near East; dated 206 H/821–822 CE

What distinguishes this epitaph is the use of a pious aphorism from the tradition of the Prophet which says that man can only find consolation and compensation in God.

there is no God but Him.[5] As a rule, this verse, like all five tombstones discussed in this essay, is followed by the Islamic profession of faith; the thought here was the statement by the Prophet to the effect that those whose last words were the profession of faith would go to paradise.[6]

Below are presented in chronological order some tombstones from the collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich. The intervals between their dates of origin differ greatly. Between the first and the second lie five and a half decades, between the second and the third only sixteen years; the third and fourth, in contrast, are separated by over five centuries, and the fifth is not dated. Most likely they originated in the Near East, but the museum has no more detailed information about their origin.[7]

The first stone (FIG. 77) bears the following inscription:

Bismillāh ar-rahmān ar-rahīm
Inna fī Allāh ʿazā min kulli musība
Wa halaf min kulli hālik wa darak
li-māfāt wa anna azam al-masā-
ʾib la-musibat an-nabī Muhammad sallā A-
llāh ʿalayhī wa sallam hadā qabru Ahmad
b. ʿĪsā b. a. al-Qatr al-Bazzāz a-
l-Maghribī shahida allā ilaha illā allāh
wahduh lā sharika lahū wa anna Muhammadan ʿabdu-
hū wa rasūluhū sallā Allāh ʿalayhī wa sallam tuwuffīya fī
Jumādā al-awwal sannat sitt wa māʾatayn

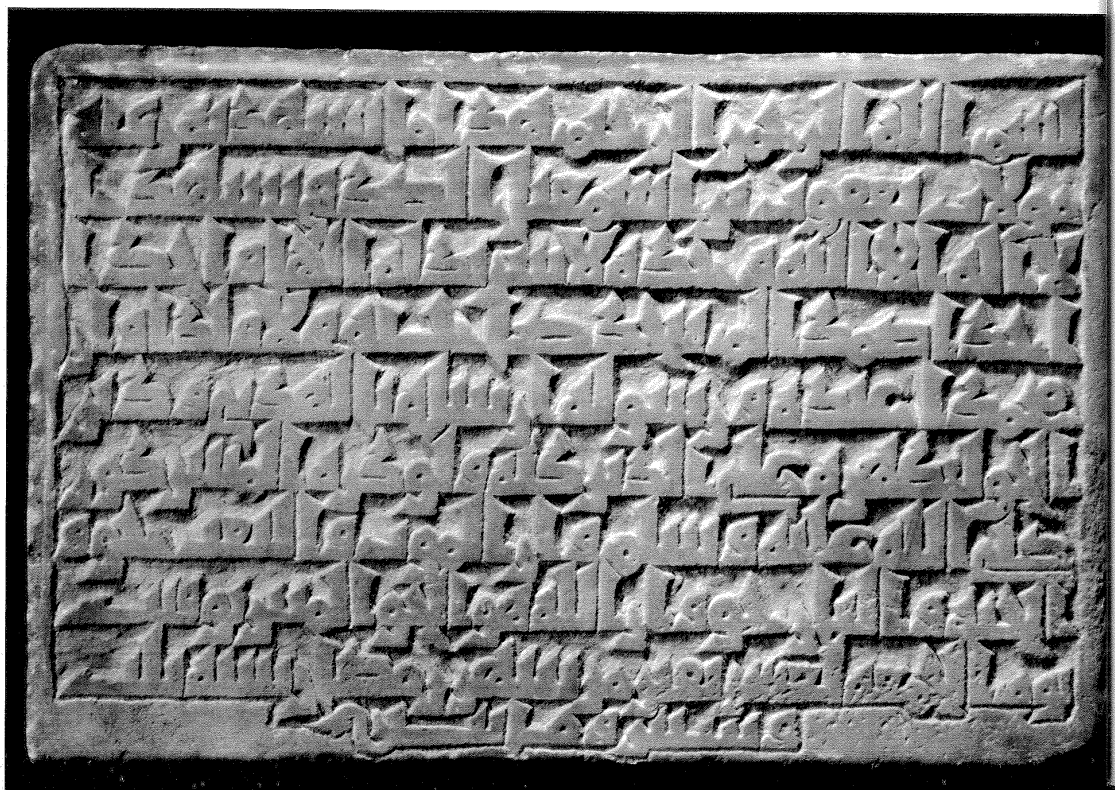
In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.
Verily in every misfortune one finds consolation in God
and compensation for all that is transitory
and attainment of the missing; and the greatest misfortune was
the one caused

FIG. 78

TOMBSTONE WITH INSCRIPTION IN KUFIC SCRIPT

Near East; dated 263 H/877 CE

After the *basmala*, the tombstone inscription from a practised hand gives the name of the deceased and the creed followed by a prayer then a short verse from the Qur'an and religious truths which go back to a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad.



(by the death) of the Prophet Muhammad;
may God bless him and grant him salvation. This is the grave of Ahmad
b. ʿIsa b. a. al-Qatr al-Bazzaz a-
l-Maghribi. He testified (to the fact that) there is no God but Allah,
who is single, without participator; and Muhammad is his servant and messenger; may God bless him and grant him salvation!
He died in the month
Jumada al-awwal in the year 206 H [821/22 CE]

The stone measures 58.5 cm in height and 51 cm in width. The inscription consists of eleven lines 54 cm long, and is written in Kufic script. It suggests that the calligrapher was experienced; he distributed the text well over the area available except for the last line where he misjudged the space left and was forced to write smaller. The text begins as customary with the *basmala* (that means the phrase: "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate") and with a statement seldom encountered on tombstones, namely that it is only in God that one finds consolation, compensation and attainment of the missing. This message comes from the Sunna (i.e. the tradition of the Prophet) and therefore has an authority which permits it to replace the Qurʾanic verses otherwise customary here.[8] Normally it is used at funerals to express condolences because the words are those spoken at the death of the Prophet and therefore appear appropriate for such situations. Apparently an attempt was made to avoid using verses from the Qurʾan on tombstones by selecting a suitable substitute from the Sunna; in the period attested by the date of death, the feeling for the binding character of the prohibition of such inscriptions was still strong. Characteristic of the time of origin is the following inscription wherein the relatives of the deceased are consoled by an allusion to the death of the Prophet. This thought, which comes from a *hadīth* (sayings of the Prophet)[9], was particularly topical since the death of the Prophet was experienced as relatively recent at the time. As customary, the name of the deceased follows with additional information about his origin and profession, which distinctly exceeds what was considered acceptable from an Islamic viewpoint. The profession of faith forms the conclusion.

It should be noted that a feature of the old Kufic script is retained, namely syllabification, which later was not considered admissible; this is a convention which is found in older Qurʾan manuscripts in the initial phase of vocalization. On the other hand, we regularly find here an element which points to the future, namely the minaret-like ornamentation of the ligature between the letters *lām* and *alif* in playful curved lines.

The second tombstone (FIG. 78) is inscribed as follows:

Bismillāh ar-rahmān ar-rahīm hadā mā shahida bihi wa ʿalayh mawlāy Yaʿqūb b. Ismāʿīl as-Sadafī shahida
allā ilaha illā allāh wahduh lā sharika lahū ilahan wāhidan ahadan samadan lam yattahid sāhibatan wa lā waladan wa anna Muhammadan ʿabduhū wa rasulūhū arsalahu bi-l-hudā wa dīn al-haqq li-yuzhirahu ʿalā ad-dīni kullih wa law kariha al-mushrikūn
sallā allāhu ʿalayhī wa sallam wa anna al-mawta wa al-baʿta haqq wa
Al-jannata wa an-nār haqq wa anna Allāh huwa al-haqq al-mubīn tuwuffīya fī
Yawm al-jumʿa li-ʿashrin baqayna min shahri ramadān sanat talāt Wa sittīn wa māʾatayn

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful! This is what my master Yaqub b. Ismail as-Sadafi attests: That there is no God but Allah, who is single, without participator; he is one, unique, eternal; he had neither begotten a son nor had a consort. Muhammad – may God bless him and give him salvation – is his servant and messenger. He sent him with right guidance and with the true religion, to establish it above all religions, though the infidel abhor this; and death, resurrection, heaven and hell do truly exist; and he is Allah, the obviously truthful. Died on Friday, the twentieth Ramadan, in the year 263 H [877 CE]

The stone measures 75 cm in height and 49 cm in width. The inscription in Kufic characters consists of ten lines, 70 cm long. The script is carved in relief by a practised hand and ornamented with some playful elements. The minaret in the ligature of the letters *lām* and *alif* has not been executed consistently but only in the places which the inscriber liked; apparently he was aiming for variety, although specific reasons for his decision in each case cannot be detected. His dealing with space clearly shows his aesthetic idea; he reduces the size of certain ligatures like those of *kāf* in order to make room to centre the closing line, thus separating the date of

FIG. 79

TOMBSTONE WITH INSCRIPTION IN KUFIC SCRIPT

Near East; dated 279 H/892–893 CE

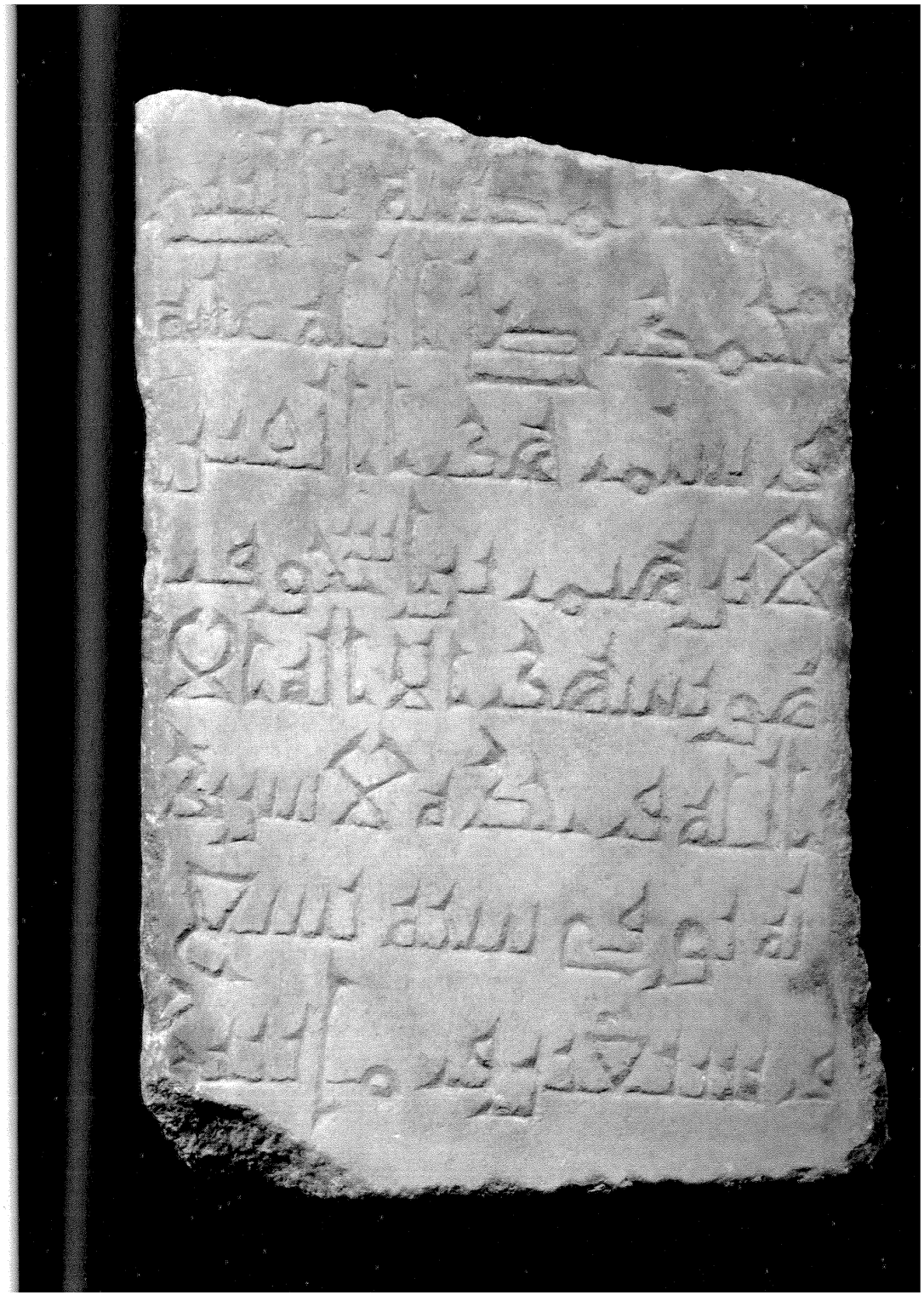
The rather inexperienced craftsman used a playful Kufic script with many minaret ligatures and suggestions of tree leaves for this Arabic epitaph.

death from the rest of the text. Moreover, he retained the feature of the *alif* ligature from the right. This is a feature of Kufic script. The stonemason begins as customary with the *basmala*, followed by the name of the deceased and his profession of faith, and adds a well-known prayer referring to a *hadīth*[10] usually said after morning prayers for which the faithful are promised a reward. He then proceeds to a verse from the Qur'an (9:33), which is traditionally linked to the prayer cited here and concerns monotheism and the true religion; it is usually paraphrased and repeated in the *'īd* prayer spoken at the end of the month of fasting. This is immediately followed by a statement which goes back to a *hadīth*[11] and summarizes the Islamic faith, namely the reality of death, the resurrection, heaven and hell; all that is omitted here is mention of the punishment in the grave, which would be inappropriate on a tombstone. Altogether, with the text and in particular the last section, it apparently aims to secure the intercession of the Prophet in the hereafter by invoking almost the entire core content of Islam.

The third tombstone (FIG. 79) bears the following inscription:

(...) Allāh bi-n-nabī
Muhammad sallā allāhu 'alayhī
wa sallam hadā al-qabr
li-Ibrāhīm b. al-Lāhiq wa
huwa shahida allā ilaha illā
allāh wahduh lā sharika
lahū tuwuffīya sanat tis'un
wa sab'īna wa mā'atayni

... Allah, by the Prophet
Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him salvation.
This grave is for
Ibrahim b. al-Lahiq, and
he attested that there is no God but Allah,
who is single, without participator.
Died in the year 279 H [892/893 CE]



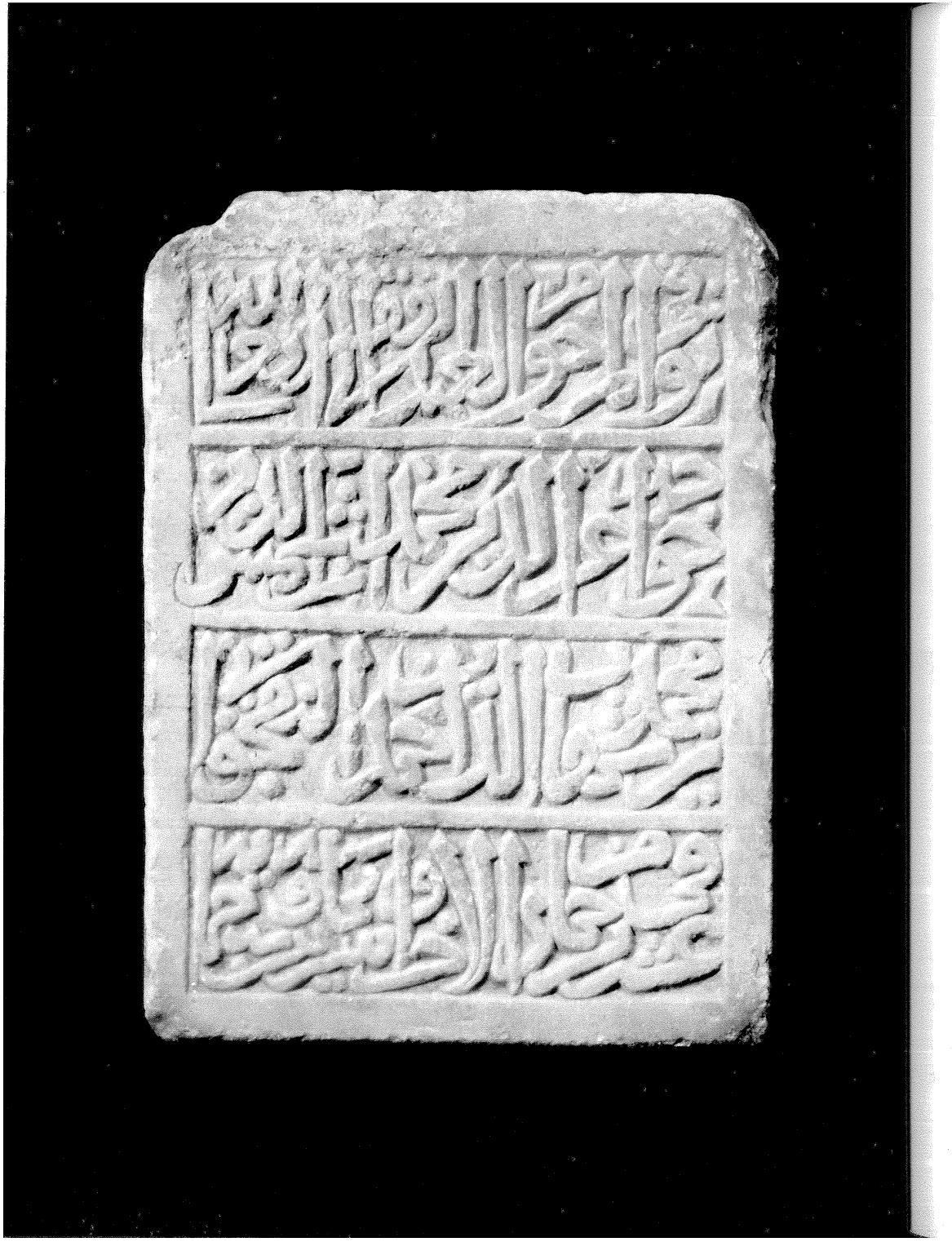


FIG. 80
TOMBSTONE WITH INSCRIPTION IN *DĪVĀNĪ* SCRIPT
Near East; dated 722 H/1322 CE
The relief work and proportioning of this tombstone show that it was carved by a very professional stonemason.

The stone measures 44 cm in height and 28 cm in width. The inscription consists of eight lines in Kufic script. This tombstone has been damaged in several places. The beginning of the text is missing. The Kufic script here is playful, with many minaret-ligatures and suggestions of leaves. The first line begins with two illegible words which have been entirely obliterated; presumably a line above is missing, namely the *basmala* line with which tombstone inscriptions usually begin. Apparently the inscriber was not an experienced craftsman, a master of his craft. This can be seen by the apportioning of space, for which he lacked a trained eye. This is most obvious in lines 4 and 5, where he writes so closely that he is even forced to write one word above the line. This explains why the graphemes in the middle are distinctly smaller and closer together than in the upper and lowest three lines, where they appear relatively oversized. Noteworthy are the graphemes Ḥ, K und D, which are written slanted and very long. The inconsistent and thus confusing appearance of certain graphemes is also striking. The text is typical for tombstone inscriptions with the usual dates and the Islamic profession of faith.

The fourth tombstone (FIG. 80) bears the following inscription:

Tuwuffīya al-marhūm al-ʿabd al-faqīr ilā Allāh taʿālā
Jawwād ʿIzz ad-Dīn Muhammad Atīr ad-Dīn b.
Muhammad b. Shihāb ad-Dīn Ahmad ad-Damjawānī
fī ʿishrīn min Jumād al-āhir itnayn wa tamanīn wa sabʿimāʾa

The servant showered with grace, who is in need of God's mercy, had died,
Jawwad ʿIzz ad-Din Muhammad Atir ad-Din b.
Muhammad b. Shihab ad-Din Ahmad ad-Damjawani,
on twentieth Jumad al-Ahar 722 H [1322 CE]

This stone measures 36 cm in height and 26 cm in width. The inscription consists of four lines. This is a later work from the fourteenth century which was made by a very professional stonemason, as we see from the reliefs and the apportioning of the stone with its four uniform lines which are executed in *dīvānī* script with some *thuluth* elements. It was intended to erect the stone vertically, so rays of light would fill the recesses. This explains why the relief was designed optically wide; when viewed from a distance of some three meters it looks as if seen under a microscope. As usual, the text contains vital information about the deceased. Striking is the omission of the profession of faith which was characteristic for the late Middle Ages and the modern era, and the appearance of the designation *marhūm* (literally "object of mercy") which is generally used for the deceased today. This participle replaces the phrase *rahimahu allāh* "God have mercy on him", since the optative of the simple past, which is now obsolete, was already on the wane.

The last tombstone (FIG. 81) bears the following inscription:

Bismillāh ar-rahmān ar-rahīm
shahida Allāhū annahū lā ilaha illā huwa wa al-malāʾikatu wa
[ʾū]lū al-ʿilmi qāʾiman bi-lq[isti]
lā ilaha illā huwa wa huwa al-ʿazīz al-hakīm
hadā mā shahida ʿalayhi
Muhammad b. Hasan b. Ghulām
al-Ghamdī tashahhada allā ilaha illā allāh wahduh
lā sharika lahū wa anna Muhammadan
ʿabduhū wa rasūluhū sallā allāhu ʿalayhī wa sallam

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.
Allah (himself) is witness that there is no God save Him, and the angels and those who have the knowledge (are witness, too).
He provides justice. There is no God save Him, the Powerful, the Wise. [sura 3:18]

This is, what Muhammad b. Hasan b. Ghulam al-Ghamdi bears witness to:
He attests that there is no God save Allah, who is single, without participator, and that Muhammad is his servant and messenger.
May God bless him and grant him salvation.

The stone measures 50 cm in height and 28 cm in width. The inscription consists of twelve lines framed by a simple ornament The space containing the script is 38 cm long and 23 cm wide A triangle, which presumably contains the date, is found in the middle of the frame. This cannot be seen on the stone but is assumed since next to the name of the deceased the date of death was one of the indispensable elements of every tombstone inscription. The script used is simple archaic Kufic lettering without punctuation which is difficult to read and is even close to ancient Kufic because it retains the ligature of the *alif*, in order to point to its possible link

FIG. 81

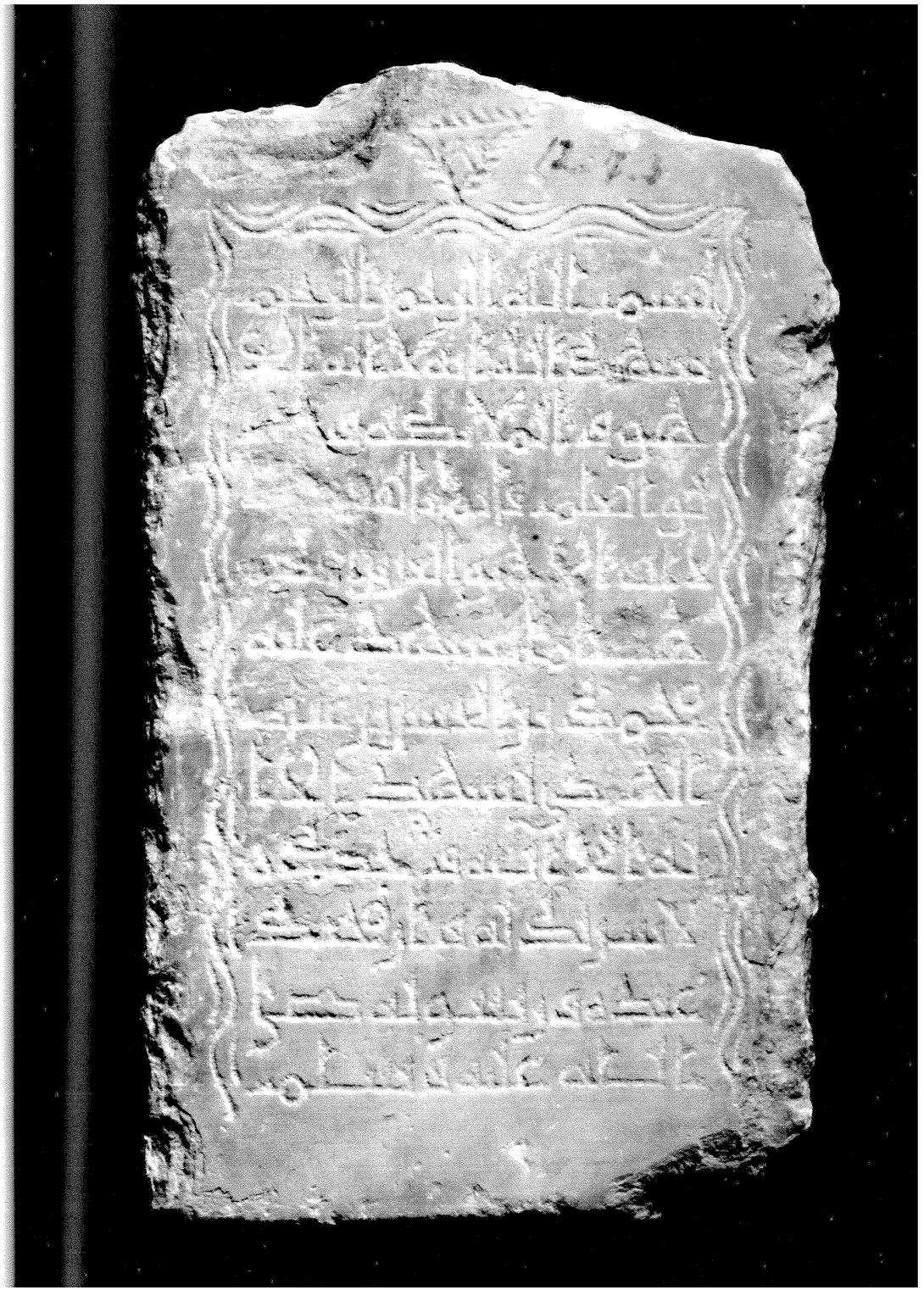
TOMBSTONE WITH INSCRIPTION IN ARCHAIC KUFIC SCRIPT

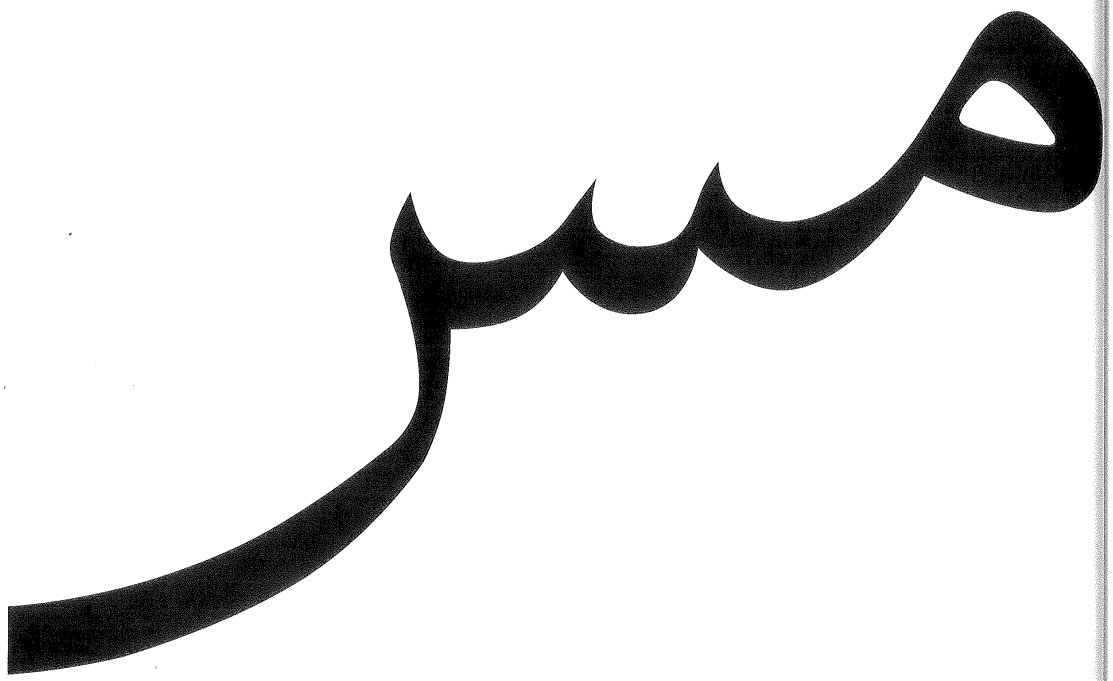
Near East, after the 9th/10th centuries

In early Islam, epitaphs with verses from the Qur'an were still not customary and even not admissible; this changed only in the 9th century. The use of the verse 3:18 on this stone, whose inscription is written in a decidedly archaic style, therefore suggests that it dates from a later period.

to the right, a phenomenon which completely disappeared in the course of the later development of Kufic script. This does not mean that the object was created at the time ancient Kufic was in use, but merely reveals the writer's ignorance. The fact that the stone was made later than the archaic script would suggest is shown by the use of the verse 3:18 from the Qur'an; originally in Islam inscribing tombstones was forbidden[12] and the use of Qur'anic verses for such purposes was completely inadmissible[13]. This changed only in the ninth century.

Particularly noteworthy here is the selection of the type of stone. It is a piece of rock which is not suited to inscription. The inscriber's lack of experience, which made it difficult for him to perform his task, is obvious; he was unable, for example, to maintain a regular space between the lines. While he understood how to execute the script, he lacked an eye for distributing the text over the lines. Also noteworthy is the fact that he forgot to indicate the date of death after specifying the name of the deceased. Apparently he attempted to insert it subsequently, but it is barely legible as he used figures instead of letters, as was customary. The origin of the stone is completely unknown; the text gives no indication, since it is formulaic and has no regional features such as dialectical characteristics which would permit a corresponding attribution.





Calligraphy on Islamic Coins

STEFAN HEIDEMANN

Introduction

Western coinages in the Hellenistic tradition are praised for the beauty of their images complementing perfectly the circular space. The art of the portrait flowered in particular in the Hellenistic world, the early Roman Empire, and then again a millennium later in the Renaissance. Since the Renaissance, Greek and Roman coins have been understood in the antiquarian mind as objects of art comparable to sculpture or painting. The Italian sculptor Pisanello (*c.* 1395–1455) invented the art of the medal, imitating Roman coins. Western numismatics developed in the Renaissance and numismatics became part of art history. In the tradition of Johann Winckelmann (1717–68) it focuses on portraits, human depictions, and architecture. While art historians trained in the classical Western tradition rarely appreciated the almost aniconic aesthetics of Islamic art in general and that of coins in particular, the beauty of written and embellished documents made of metal has become more accessible to modern viewers, who have learned to appreciate aesthetic concepts others than those measured by Greek and Roman ideals.

Islamic and Chinese cultures developed different aesthetics in the design of coins than western Europe. Both cultures created outstanding numismatic artefacts. In the late seventh century, Islamic authorities initially created coins as text documents. Early coins are anonymous, containing parts of the Qurʾan, the divine revelation, and the necessary administrative information. Later, names of caliphs, sultans, kings, governors and even the names of the die-engravers were added. The art of the coin in the Chinese and in the Islamic world focused on the beauty of the designed characters and a proportionate distribution of text on the available limited, mostly circular space. The roots of coin design in the Islamic world lay nevertheless in the Hellenistic tradition, whereas Chinese coinage drew on a different past. The early Islamic Empire covered the old Hellenistic world from western North Africa to Central Asia.

What sets Islamic coins apart from their Western counterparts? Early Islamic coins can be described above all as bearers of texts of up to 150 words. The texts on coins during the first six and a half centuries of Islam reflect the entire hierarchy of power

82 83 84 85

FIGS. 82–83

DINAR *(Umayyads, Damascus/Syria; dated 93 H/711–12 CE)*

DIRHAM *(Umayyads, Kufa/Iraq; dated 79 H/698–99 CE)*

The style of the calligraphy on these coins is closer to the common curvilinear script of the Persian Pahlavi writing or the earlier private and official letters than to the elegant angular Kufic of monumental inscriptions such as are found at the same time on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

FIG. 84

DIRHAM

Umayyads, Darband/Caucasus; dated 119 H/737 CE

In the course of later decades of Umayyad rule, the style of writing on coins shifted to elegant, angular Kufic such as that also used for Qur'an manuscripts and monumental inscriptions.

FIG. 85

DINAR

Abbasids, near Baghdad/Iraq; dated 167 H/783–84 CE

Even after the Abbasid coup, calligraphy on gold coins retained certain features of Umayyad gold: less emphasis on the vertical and rectangular letters, and the word's base line moulded into the round of the coins.

at the time and indicate where the coins were minted. Usually they name the town, sometimes the urban quarter, and occasionally even the palace where the coin was minted. Coins typically indicate the year, sometimes the month and occasionally the day of striking. Religious legends provide clues to the political orientation of the authorities who commissioned their production. The inclusion of the name in the coin protocol (*sikka*) and the Friday sermon (*khutba*) served to prove to subjects who the actual ruler was. Both the coin protocol and the Friday sermon had the same political value. The Friday sermon, however, was purely verbal and therefore transient, whereas on coins the protocol is permanently stored on a metal object which was reproduced in great numbers, like a published 'bulletin of state'. Images – although never a dominant trait – were almost always present in Islamic art in general and on Islamic coins in particular, although they never played a major role. With few exceptions, images were almost all confined to copper coins. In contrast to other artistic objects or written documents, coins were industrially manufactured mass products. Due to the division of labour the engraving of the die (*naqqāsh*) is sometimes highly artistic, whereas the preparation of the flan (the unstruck metal disc) and striking were done rather superficially in order to produce as many coins as possible as rapidly and as economically as possible, at times almost mocking the mastery of the engraver.

The Written Word of God as Representation of Islam and Its Empire

The Zubayrid and Kharijite challenges of the early Umayyad Caliphate between 681 and 697 CE – the years of the Second *Fitna* – created the political context for the definitive creation of epigraphic coin design. The activities of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) that followed the Second *Fitna* can be seen as embracing the defeated moderate Zubayrid and the more extremist Kharijite propaganda as far as possible in order to reunite the Islamic elite. It was at this point in history at the latest that the idea of an Islamic universal empire in its own ideological right emerged. In 72 H/691–92 CE 'Abd al-Malik built the present Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as the stage of the imperial religious cult. Between the years 72/691–92 and 77/696–97 the Umayyad government experimented with new symbols of religion and imperial power, not all of which are well understood today. However, the recurrent theme of all experiments in coin design was the inclusion of the name of the Messenger of God as the putative founder of the empire (*Muhammad rasūl Allāh*), and sometimes also the profession of faith, the *shahāda*. Finally, the definitive iconic representation of Islam and the Islamic Empire on coinage was launched. In 77/696 new *dīnārs* (FIG. 82) – probably minted in Damascus – bear the new religious symbol of Islam: the *shahāda*, encircled by the *risāla*, the prophetic mission of Muhammad (variety of Qur'an 9:33) and on the opposite side, as a symbol of the ultimate sovereignty of the empire of the Word of God, a variation of the *sūra ikhlās* (variety of Qur'an 112), and the date of minting. Late in 78/697–98, the governor of the East ordered the reform of the *dirham* design in his realm, almost similar to the new *dīnārs*, but adding the mint name. These coins are among the oldest surviving text carriers of the Qur'an. Until the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75 CE) precious metal coinage remained anonymous. The reform of 'Abd al-Malik constituted a historically unprecedented breach with Hellenistic coin imagery going back about a millennium in the Roman west and the Iranian east. The aniconism, the non-use of images, of the precious metal coins is the result of the character of the 'iconic' new symbols: the Qur'anic Word of God as an expression of sovereignty and the empire and the profession of faith as an expression of the religion. Anonymity on coins did not mean modesty, because the new Islamic universal emperor claimed to be nothing less than *khalīfat Allāh*, "deputy of God". This presupposes an entirely new understanding of the role of the Islamic Empire and its religion, and led to coins becoming objects of calligraphy.

Kufic Script in the Early Islamic Period

The models for the calligraphic art on coins later always vacillated between the styles of the chanceries, the art of Qur'anic calligraphy and epigraphic inscriptions on monumental architecture. Although the Umayyad Empire was far from being a centralized state, Umayyad and early Abbasid coinage shows a high degree of uniformity owing to its Sasanian heritage. The style of script used on early reformed gold and silver coinage maintained a curvilinear appearance, probably a legacy of early die-engravers trained to engrave the much rounder Pahlavi script (FIGS. 82–83). At the same time – in contrast – the calligraphy of the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock shows a highly artistic elegant rectangular Kufic of a quite different – although currently unknown – tradition. During the more than fifty years following the introduction of the epigraphic coins, the style of script gradually changed, from an ordinary scribe's script to the style of monumental inscriptions and Qur'anic vellum manuscripts (FIG. 84). Like the calligraphers of early Qur'an editions, engravers exploited the inherent tendencies of the Arabic script. The letters became more rectangular shaped and elongated, the Kufic style. They exaggerated the vertical characters and the horizontal lines between the letters. Rectangular letters were also horizontally elongated. Letters consisting of one or more short vertical lines or which were rounder or had an oblique component were reduced in size to highlight the exaggerated components. The end-*nūn* or the tail of the end-*'ayn* could result in accentuated crescents, dipping sometimes far below the line. Although the script had to be placed in the circle, on *dirhams* the elongated base line of each word remains stiff and straight and does not bend to the circular shape of the coin (FIGS. 85, 86). The peak of these exaggerated elongations of vertical and horizontal lines was reached in the period from Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) until the style reform of al-Ma'mun (r. 810–33). The more text had to be crammed into the limited space, the more untidy it looks (FIG. 87).

There were differences in the calligraphic treatment of gold and silver. The tendency to exaggerate vertical and horizontal lines applied to both. But until the reform of al-Ma'mun the style on gold coins remained closer to the more archaic curvilinear early Umayyad coins. This is evident in those mints which produced gold and silver at the same time, such as Madinat al-Salam (the palace city of Baghdad), and al-Rafiqa (the garrison and palace city of Harun al-Rashid on the Euphrates). The reasons for this preference for an old, almost archaic style for the gold are not known. The old style probably symbolizes trusted values. Coin hoards from Iran show that Early Abbasid *dīnārs* remained in circulation at least for hoarding purposes until the first half of the tenth century.

The devastating war of succession between the caliphs al-Amin (r. 809–13) and al-Ma'mun marked a turning point. After his decisive victory, the latter initiated a coinage reform which went along with a re-organization of the system of mints. In 201/816–17, the reform started by adding more text to the coin design (FIG. 87) and achieved its definitive form in 206/821–22 (FIG. 88). The new style was adopted over the next few years in almost all mints. The

FIGS. 86–87
DIRHAM *(Abbasids, Rayy/Iran; dated 146 H/763–64 CE)*
DIRHAM *(Abbasids, Isfahan/Iran; dated 204 H/819–20 CE)*
On Abbasid *dirhams* the tendency toward extreme emphasis of the vertical, horizontal and rectangular letters was continued. The more text had to be accommodated into the circular field of the coin with words set on a stiff and straight base line, the more disorderly and thus unsatisfactory the design of the coin appears.

FIG. 88
DIRHAM
Abbasids, Madinat al-Salam; dated 208 H/823–24 CE
Due to al-Ma'mun's coinage reform, a curvilinear script was used for *dirhams* and a second verse from the Qur'an added to the margin. The legends on the coins became anonymous again.

FIG. 89
QUARTER DIRHAM
Abbasids, Baghdad/Iraq; dated 282 H/895–96 CE
Special coins were minted for occasions at court as multiples or fractions of the standard *dirham*. Compared with customary coins these coins stylistically and in terms of the quality of minting were always outstanding. The quarter *dirham* is one of the smallest silver denominations. It shows the name of the caliph with split tops of vertical letters and a swirling arabesque for the final round letters.

words of two marginal inscriptions now bend to the circular shape of the coin, becoming neat curvilinear and enhancing legibility. The new style of coinage of al-Ma'mun reverted to anonymity. The return to simple curvilinear script, the anonymity of coinage and the innovation of the added Qur'anic phrase on the outer margin was an attempt by al-Ma'mun to regain political credibility by pointing to traditional values and design.

In 219/834, al-Mu'tasim billah (r. 833–42) abolished anonymity again and added his name to the coin reverse. In the last third of the third/ninth century occasionally new embellishments were added in coin design: on some coin issues the tops of the vertical letters became slightly split (FIG. 89). This feature soon spread all over the empire until it became almost a common feature. At the same time whipping floral arabesques with split endings for *nūn*, *yā'* or *rā'* appeared as the Samarra style spread. About the 290s/900s swirling arabesques were a regular feature on Samanid *dirhams* in eastern Iran and Transoxiana. Pointed tops of circular letters such as *qāf*, *fā'*, *mīm*, and *wāw* were added early in the fourth/tenth century (FIG. 90). In the central lands of the caliphate, namely in western Iran, Kufic calligraphy on coins reached its artistic zenith between the 350s/960s and 370s/980s when Buyid die-engravers marked their products with their names in a minuscule script.

New Developments from the East

The success of *naskhī*, the copyist's script, would not have been possible without the new medium of the chanceries, paper, and the attendant spread of literacy. The art of Chinese papermaking entered the Islamic world before 700 CE and was first mentioned for Samarkand in Transoxiana. During the eighth century, the use and manufacture of paper spread to Iran and Iraq. The availability of paper as an affordable writing material was the basis of the extraordinary success of Islamic civilization in the ninth and tenth centuries, the blossoming of theology and law, of historical writing and literary production, of translation and natural sciences. It served as a driving force for the remarkable centralization and bureaucracy of the state. Paper changed the style of writing.

In the early Islamic period, the copyist's handwriting of the chanceries does not seem to be refined enough for Qur'anic manuscripts and representative epigraphic inscriptions including texts on coins. In about the 290s/900s, *naskhī* was first applied on coins in the remote but prosperous east of the empire in Samanid Transoxiana. The coins continued the style of 'Abbasid *dirhams* in the tradition of al-Ma'mun's reforms; inscriptions and protocol remained written in angular Kufic script, but the Samanids and some of their vassals used *naskhī* for the first time to emphasize the name of the actual issuing local ruler (FIG. 91). It took more than a century until a refined version of the *naskhī* became used for ceremonial and sacred functions. The famous calligrapher Ibn Bawwab (d. probably 423/1031) in Baghdad is much revered for his refinement of *naskhī*. The earliest surviving Qur'an manuscript in *naskhī* by his hand is dated to 391/1000–01.

The ascendancy of *naskhī* in the decades around 400/1000 marks the final apogee of Kufic calligraphy on coinage in the east, probably because the rise of *naskhī* allowed for more artistic playful variations. Surprisingly, the most outstanding results were not achieved in the old central lands of Islam but in Central Asia, the realm of the Turkic Qarakhanids (first period 991–1040), especially in regions which had recently come under the sway of Islam; cities such as Balasaghun (present-day Burana near Bishkek, Kyrgyztan), Uzkand (present-day Özkend, Uzbekistan), and others produced extraordinary calligraphic art. At the same time, to the south in eastern Iran, in the realm of the Ghaznavids, calligraphic art on coins also reached a high level, using different-sized letters, swirling arabesque tails and triangular fins at the tip of the vertical characters (FIG. 92).

The production of dies was nevertheless subject to the division of labour and the rationalization of workflow. The rulers demanded more elaborate titles; and more religious inscriptions had to be squeezed onto the limited space available on the dies. Prefabricated punches came into use, mostly ringlets for circular letters (FIG. 93), but sometimes whole words were just punched with a single tool onto the die.

FIG. 90

'ADL DIRHAM

Buyids, Shiraz/Iran; dated 400 H/1009–10 CE

At the end of the 10th and 11th centuries, the monetary system of the Islamic empire deteriorated. Nevertheless, from time to time some rulers attempted to reform the system of coinage in their regions, but without permanent sucess. The Buyids in the province of Fars in south-western Iran introduced a new *'adl* (just) coinage based on the model of the popular coins from the period before al-Ma'mun's reforms. They only used a single inscription on the margin of the obverse side of the coins and decorated the coins with excellent calligraphy.

FIG. 91

DIRHAM

Banijurids, Balkh/North Afghanistan; dated 292 H/904–05 CE

This *dirham* is one of the earliest examples for the use of *naskhī* script. On the obverse side is the name of the Banijurid ruler in *naskhī*. The Kufic script in this composition is highly artistic, for example the ligature of three letters *rā', yā'* and *kāf* in the third line on the obverse side is designed as an abstract flower.

FIG. 92

DINAR

Ghaznavids, Ghazna/Afghanistan; dated 406 H/1015–16 CE

The playful element in calligraphic art on coins is continued under the Ghaznavids in eastern Iran with the importance of the inscriptions emphasised by differently sized letters. The name of the caliph, who resided far away in Baghdad without real power, is always acknowledged in a very small script on the obverse side as suzerain. The arabesques, swooping finals and three triangular fins on the ends of the verticals find their counterparts for example in contemporary metalwork in eastern Iran.

FIG. 93

DINAR

Eastern Saljuqs, north Afghanistan; dated 493 H/1099 CE

Although the floral Kufic script does not appear especially fine, this coin shows how much text can be accommodated in minuscule script: the hierarchy of three rulers with their detailed titles, the location of the mint and the month of minting, and finally parts of three different verses from the Qur'an, and a sword as *tamghā* with heraldic character. The die-engraver used punches for specific letter forms such as a ringlet punch for circular letters to ensure efficient production.

FIG. 94

SIKANDARI DIRHAM

Khwarazm Shahs, Samarkand/Uzbekistan; dated 610 H/1213–14 CE

A strangely formed Kufic often appears on large, strongly alloyed *dirhams* from Central Asia in the 7th–13th centuries: it is angular and instead of playing with elongated verticals or with balanced proportions of breadth and density, the inscriptions make the impression of a broad frieze on a wall with some rounded letters. Models for a script of this type can be found in the bands of inscription on brick architecture of the period.

FIG. 95-96

DIRHAM *(Zangids, Aleppo/Syria; dated 572 H/1177 CE)*

HALF DIRHAM *(Zangids, possibly Aleppo; undated, possibly 1175–80 CE)*

Successful introduction of a weight regulated *dirham* coinage in Syria in 571/1175 under the rule of the Zangids led to two different patterns, one for the *dirham* (fig. 95) and another for the half *dirham* (fig. 96). The first was struck in an attractive Kufic style with suggestions of floral Kufic. On the second, all inscriptions – for the first time in a regular coin series – were written in *naskhī* with vocalization marks such as *fatha, damma, sukūn* and *shadda*.

Calligraphy on monumental architecture also influenced coin design. In eastern Iran beginning with the seventh/thirteenth century we find an odd rectangular Kufic on broad thin, debased fiduciary *dirhams* in Central Asia (FIG. 94). The broad band of script has its nearest parallel in contemporary decoration and inscriptions set in bricks on mosques, minarets and mausoleums.

The Era of the Scribe's Script – *Naskhī*

Although Kufic remained the predominant style until the seventh/twelfth century on coinages in the Islamic world, *naskhī* had occasionally been used on coins from the end of the third/beginning of the tenth century. In the West it probably occurred for the first time in 490/1096–97 on a unique issue of a Fatimid *dīnār* in Egypt. After 558/1162–63 Nur al-Din Mahmud (r. 1127–46) introduced *naskhī* or better a hybrid *kūfī-naskhī* style as an almost regular feature of his copper coins in Damascus. A change occurred with the introduction of the first silver coinage with a regulated weight in 571/1175–76. The *dirham* itself remained in a pleasing Kufic (FIG. 95), while the half *dirham* was entirely in *naskhī* without distinguishing dots but including diacritical vocalization (*ashkāl*) (FIG. 96). The parallel and succeeding Ayyubid coinage in Syria also changed from Kufic to *naskhī* during Saladin's reign (r. 564–89/1169–93) (FIG. 97). Distinguishing dots and vocalization were sometimes applied. On Mamluk coins scribal ligatures even appeared which combined those letters which should be set apart (FIG. 98). The play between Kufic and *naskhī* style is a recurrent theme in coin design in the middle period of Islam. In the Rum-Saljuq realm in Asia Minor, a third form of chancery script (*dīvānī*) was added to coins, providing administrative information about mints and dates (FIG. 99). The Almohads in the west applied a distinct *maghribī* variant of *naskhī* on their coins (FIG. 100).

From the Mongols to the Gunpowder Empires

In 1258, with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and the final downfall of the Islamic Empire, the canon of standard inscription for coinage changed in Mongol Iran and Central Asia. Political authority was

FIG. 97
DIRHAM NASIRI
Ayyubids, Damascus/Syria; dated 616 H/1219–20 CE

Also on Ayyubid coins which were reformed in the same year, Kufic alternated with well-proportioned *naskhī*. Sometimes diacritical dots are found on Ayyubid coins, for example here in the date *sitta 'ashara* (sixteen) in the margin.

FIG. 98
DINAR
Bahri Mamluks, Hamah/Syria; dated 698–708 H/1299–1309 CE

The fine pen of the scribes in the Mamluk chanceries even led to the use of ligatures in *naskhī* on coins, which was not otherwise permitted, for example here the letters *dāl* and *alif maqsūra* in the word *bil-hudā* on the obverse side.

FIG. 99 A-B
DIRHAM
Rum-Saljuqs, Konya/Turkey; dated 641 H/1243–44 CE

Three different types of script are used on this coin: on the obverse side a Kufic inscription frames a lion and the sun, and the middle of the reverse side shows *naskhī* script. The administrative information on the edge, the mint and date, are written in *dīvānī*, another cursive of the chancery.

now derived from the family of Genghis Khan which governed an empire from the borders of Silesia to Korea. New scripts and languages, such as Uighur, Phagspa, and Chinese entered Islamic coin design to address the new authorities (FIGS. 101, 103). Uighur script developed from Aramaic-Syriac script and Phagspa developed from Tibetan at the court of the Great Khan Qubilai in Beijing in 1268–69. It was used on coins in the Mongol Ilkhanid and Chaghatay realms.

The weight-regulated, almost pure silver coinage, which was already established in Syria and in Asia Minor and other territories, was now firmly adopted in the Mongol realm. An almost regular devaluation of the money was achieved by slightly reducing the weight of the standard denomination. Different designs had to be created in order to distinguish one coin issue from the other (figs. 101–103). Some designs were taken from architectural elements, such as the prayer niche (FIG. 102), the square-*kūfī* (FIG. 103, OBVERSE), and the 'brick' -*kūfī* (FIG. 103, REVERSE). The inscriptions – frequently the easily recognisable *shahāda* – is spirally scrolled, mostly from the outside inward.

Later, after *c.* 1500 CE, in Iran, calligraphy became more refined on coins even in provincial mints where the dies were probably supplied by central workshops. The style of the script on the coins became dependent on the now dominant ceremonial style, the 'hanging' or *ta'līq* script, for official documents and poetry. Epigraphic friezes in monumental architecture of that time achieve a kind of transparency by using glazed tiles or *opus sectile* (mosaic from segmented tiles); the inscription is laid upon differently coloured scrolling foliage often on a dark or blue background. A similar effect is achieved on coins by exploring for the first time the coin's potential as a three-dimensional relief. This aspect of the coin as a sculptural object was never previously exploited for calligraphy and marked a major step forward in the coin's artistic appearance. A *ta'līq* inscription sometimes suggesting the rhythm of the pen's movement in different heights of the relief is set on spirally scrolling foliage in the background. Safavid coinage often not only gives the name of the ruler, his titles, religious inscriptions, and administrative information but frames the ruler's name in couplet: "Throughout the world imperial coinage came, struck by God's grace in Tahmasp Thani's name; mint of Tabriz 1135" is written on the reverse of the coins of one of the last Safavid rulers Tahmasp II (r. 1722–32) (FIG. 104). This style of double-layered calligraphy was continued by the following Iranian dynasties (FIG. 105). Similar in calligraphy are coins of the Mughal Empire from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century where we find *ta'līq*, but usually without scrolling foliage in the background (FIG. 106). The third 'Gunpowder Empire', the Ottoman, applied a conventional proportionate *nashkī* on its coins. In contrast to the other two post-1500 empires of the Islamic world, the Ottomans used a calligraphic *tughrā* as imperial symbol, sometimes as the only symbol of state on the coins. The *tughrā* is a heraldic device and a calligraphic version of the sultan's name, with his titulature and blessing for him (FIG. 107).

FIG. 100
DINAR
Almohads, Madinat Bijaya/Algeria; undated

A form of *naskhī* was also used in the *maghribī* script in the West. Elegant whipping tails of the final letter in each word are characteristic of this style.

FIG. 101
DOUBLE DIRHAM
Ilkhanids, Baghdad/Iraq; dated 699 H/1299–1300 CE

This coin shows the name of the Ilkhan and the standard profession of faith in a simple floral Kufic script, whereas the blessing wishes for the messenger of God at the edge and the administrative inscriptions are in *naskhī*.

FIG. 102
DOUBLE DIRHAM
Ilkhanids, Gulistan/Azerbaijan; dated 720 H/1320–21 CE

This coin bears another verse from the Qur'an which does not appear otherwise on coins, namely the verse *fa-sayakfīkahumu Allāhu wa-huwa l-samī'u l-'alīm* – "God will protect you from them. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing" (2:137). The first very long word of this verse about God's protection is formed like an arch suggesting of a prayer niche.

Conclusion

The brief survey of calligraphy on coins explores a field of Islamic art which is hardly known although often admired, and commentary is sometimes given on the calligraphy of single issues. The art of writing on coins established itself at the moment when the Qur'anic message became an iconic symbol for Islam and its empire. The small form set certain limits; coins as documents required certain formulae, and their production as an absolute medium of exchange, meaning money, required techniques of mass production. As miniature official inscriptions of the Islamic Empire and its successor states, calligraphy on coins is always orientated towards the current forms of representation of these states, be it the art of Qur'anic calligraphy, the style of monumental architecture, or the fine art of courtly poetry rendered in calligraphy or finally the sultan's name in calligraphy.

106

FIG. 103

DOUBLE DIRHAM

Ilkhanids, Barda'/Azerbaijan; dated 734 H/1333–34 CE

This type of coin was only minted for two years under Ilkhan Abu Sa'id. Its design is derived from building decoration – geometric Kufic with the profession of faith on the obverse side and 'cut-brick' Kufic on the reverse side (cf. fig. 94).

FIG. 104

TEN SHAHI

Safavids, Tabriz/Iran; dated 1135 H/1722–23 CE

In 1135/1722 upon his accession to the throne, Shah Tahmasp had large coins minted in several cities of his evanescent empire, including in Tabriz, the ceremonial capital of Iran. The name of the ruler is contained in a rhyming poem on the reverse side which is written in a script similar to *ta'līq*. The obverse side shows the profession of faith and the names of the twelve Shi'ite imams.

FIG. 105

TUMAN

Qajars, Khuy/Iran; dated 1239 H/1823–24 CE

This inscription in *ta'līq* lies on a background ornamented with tendrils. The broad empty edge contrasts with the dense calligraphy in the middle.

FIG. 106

200 RUPEES

Mughals, Shahjahanabad (Delhi)/India; dated 1083 H/1672–73 CE

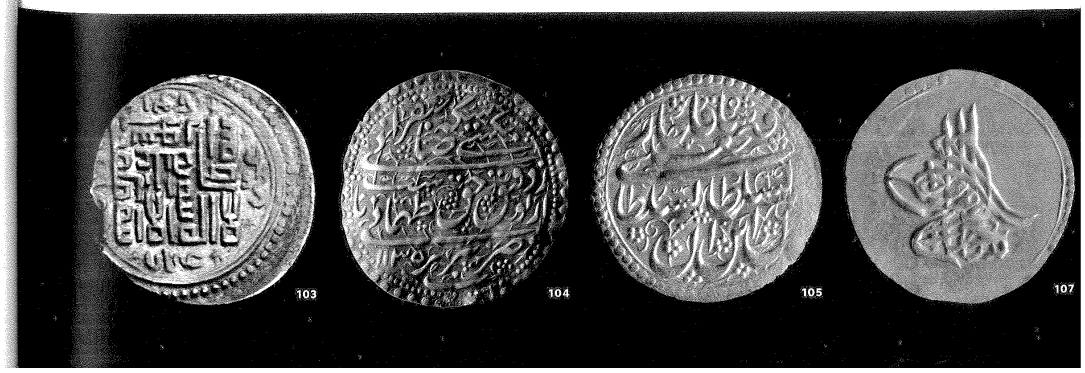
The coin is partly struck and partly engraved. This is noticeable particularly at the end on those places on which the pressure of striking failed to produce a satisfactory result. On special occasions at the court, the Mughal rulers presented dignitaries with such huge coins of gold and silver. The calligraphy is in the attractive *ta'līq* script. The central panels on the front and back sides contain Awrangzeb's name and titles together with the mint and the date. On the edge are written verses praising this money and the mild and glorious rule of Padishah Awrangzeb.

FIG. 107

QUARTER ALTIN

Ottomans, Istanbul/Turkey; dated 1203 H/1791–92 CE

The calligraphic *tughrā* with the name of Selim III and his titulature serves as a unique imperial symbol on the obverse side. The coin's beauty is achieved by the balance between free space and dense calligraphy.



103 104 105 107

A Late Mamluk Lidded Tray with Poetic Inscriptions

DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

Although a number of lidded boxes of diverse size and function survive from the late Mamluk period, a lidded tray in the collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich is so far singular.[1] The circular tinned copper tray with a lid bears the name of the Mamluk emir al-Sayfi Taghriwirmish. The name of the patron, the blazon and the style of the tray attribute it to a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century production, either from Egypt or Syria.

The tray is engraved inside and outside; its vaulted lid is engraved on its entire exterior surface (FIGS. 108-109).

The Patron

The blazon engraved on the tray was common in the late Mamluk period from the reign of Sultan Qaytbay to the Ottoman conquest in 1517.[2] The inscriptions of the tray identify the patron Taghriwirmish as the "secretary of the Great Secretary", *dawādār al-dawādār kabīr*, mentioned once, and *dawādār al-dawādār*, mentioned twice. This title, which is not common in Mamluk epigraphy, obviously refers to an office in the household of the Great Secretary, who at that time was the major executive authority at the Mamluk court after the sultan. This office is regularly mentioned in Mamluk chronicles.[3] The first emir to bear this title during the reign of Sultan Qaytbay was Yashbak min Mahdi (d. 1480),[4] described by Ibn Iyas as the second executive authority in the state after the sultan. His successors until the fall of the Mamluk sultanate in 1517 were: Aqbardi min ʿAli Bay, Janbalat min Yashbak, followed again by Aqbardi, Qansuh Abu Saʿid, Tumanbay, Qansuh al-Ghawri, Misirbay al-Sharifi, Azdumur min ʿAli Bay, ʿAllam min Qaraja.[5] Although the office was maintained for a short period after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt under the first governor installed by the Ottomans, who was the Mamluk emir Khayrbak (1517–22), it is unlikely that the tray with the Mamluk blazon would have been commissioned at that time. Being of secondary importance, the secretary of the Great Secretary is not likely to be mentioned in the chronicles or biographical encyclopedias unless his career ascended to a higher position. In fact, no person combining the name Taghriwirmish with the titles *al-Sayfī* or *Sayf al-Dīn* and *al-dawādār* is recorded in the sources during the

FIG. 108

LIDDED VESSEL WITH ROYAL TITLES AND POETIC VERSES

Egypt or Syria; late 15th/early 16th century

The tray engraved inside and outside with numerous inscriptions bears the name of its donor al-Sayfi Taghriwirmish who held a high office at the Mamluk court.

FIG. 109

INTERIOR SURFACE OF THE TRAY WITH DECORATIVE PATTERNS AND INSCRIPTIONS

period suggested by the style of the blazon. The only eligible candidate to be the patron of the tray might be Taghribirmish[6] Kasabay al-Shishmani al-Muʾayyadi, also known as al-Rammah, who became *wazīr* during the reign of Sultan al-Ghawri in the month of Shaʿban 908 H/February 1503 CE.[7] He held this position for many years with interruption and died in Safar in 919 H/April 1513 CE at an advanced age. The title *wazīr* had lost much of its significance at the end of the Mamluk period; its office holder was no longer the highly powerful great vizier of earlier periods, but rather a financial official in the sultan's household.[8] If this emir is the one mentioned on the lidded tray, this vessel would have been commissioned prior to his appointment as *wazīr* in 1503. As this identification is rather uncertain, one may extend the period in question to 1517, the date of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.

The Tray

The interior of the tray is engraved with a segmented circle consisting of six registers alternating with medallions. Two of the registers are epigraphic; the four others display alternating decorative patterns. Two of the decorative registers display a row of three knotted medallions, and the two others a dense overall weave pattern. The epigraphic registers include an inscription partly published by Gaston Wiet (FIG. 110).[9] Two opposite roundels include composite blazons, two are filled with a y-shaped over-all pattern, and two are filled with the weave pattern. An interlace rosette with a blazon in its middle occupies the centre of the tray. The inscriptions read as follows:

Mimmā ʿumila bi-rasm al-maqarr al-sharaf al-karīm al-ʿālī
al-mawlawī al-amīrī al-kabīrī
al-sayfī Taghrīwirmish dawādār al-dawādār kabīr al-maqām
al-sharīf ʿazza ansāruh

One of [the things] made for the most noble authority, the honourable, the lofty, the lordly of the Great Emir,[10]
Sayf al-Din Taghriwirmish, the secretary of the Great Secretary of the Noble Majesty, may his victories be glorified.

A similar text is inscribed on the exterior wall of the tray, occupying four registers, however, rather than two, the whole composition being doubled to form twelve registers-and-medallions decorated with the same patterns as on the interior (FIG. 111). The princely titles inscribed in the exterior include two items that are not inscribed inside: *al-mālikī* and *makhdūmī*.

Mimmā ʿumila bi-rasm al-maqarr al-ashraf al-karīm al-ʿālī
al-mawlawī al-amīrī al-kabīrī al-mālikī
al-makhdūmī al-sayfī Taghrīwirmish dawādār
al-dawādār al-maqām al-sharīf ʿazza ansāruh

One of [the objects] made for the most noble authority, the honourable, the lofty, the royal of the Great Emir, the patron, the well-served, Sayf al-Din Taghriwirmish, the secretary of the secretary of the Noble Majesty, may his victories be glorified.

The Lid

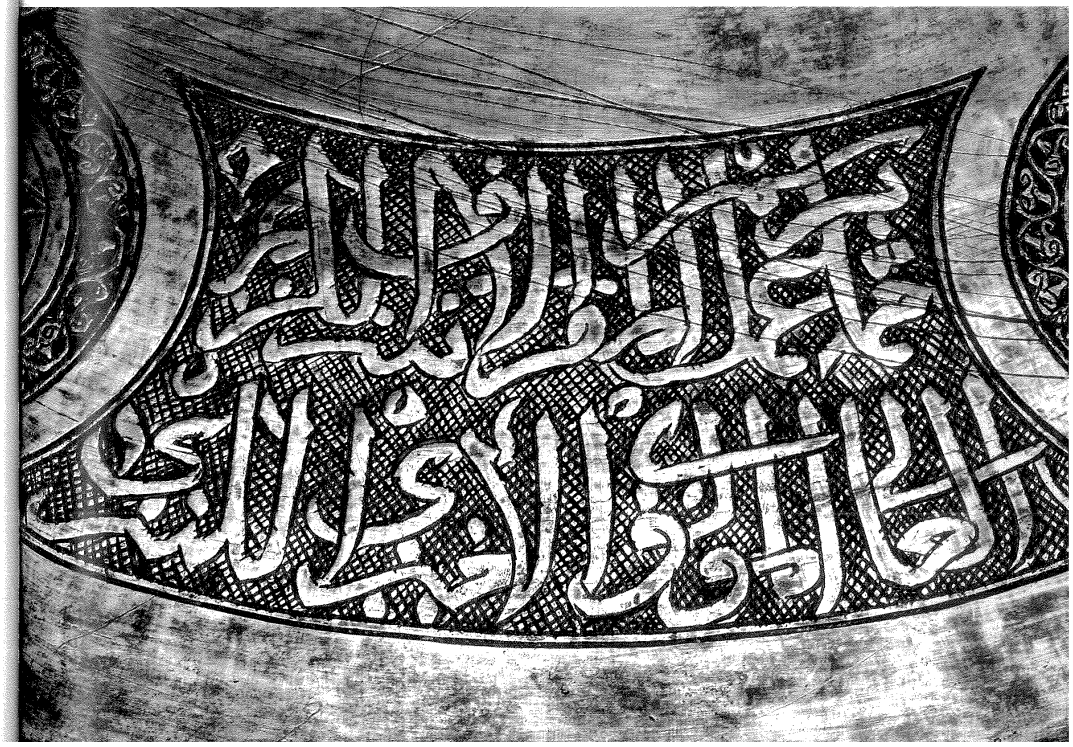
The vaulted lid is engraved with a rosette radiating from the apex, surmounted by a handle in the shape of a small cup. The thirty-two petals of the rosette cover most of the lid's surface, and are engraved with two alternating patterns in two alternating colours, tinned white and bare red copper. A segmented band surrounds the rosette at the edge of the lid; it is composed of twelve registers alternating with medallions; four segments are inscribed and the eight others bear the alternating patterns applied elsewhere on the same tray (FIG. 112). The number of the rosette petals thus does not correspond evenly to the division of these surrounding segments. Four of the twelve medallions that cut the registers include a blazon; the eight others are decorative like the previous ones.

The inscription around the rosette reads:

Mimmā ʿumila bi-rasm al-maqarr al-ashraf al-karīm al-ʿālī
al-mawlawī al-amīrī al-kabīrī al-sayyidī al-mālikī al-makhdūmī
al-ʿadadī al-dhukrī
al-sayfī Taghrīwirmish dawādār al-dawādār
kabīr al-maqām al-sharīf ʿazza ansāruh wa dāmat laka al-saʿāda waʾl-salāma

One of [the things] made for the most noble authority, the honourable, the lofty, the royal, of the Great Emir, the patron, the possessing, the well-served, the succour, the treasure, Sayf al-Din Taghriwirmish, the secretary of the Great Secretary of the Noble Majesty, may his victories be glorified and may [God] perpetuate your happiness and well-being.

FIG. 110 (below)
INSCRIPTION ON THE INSIDE WITH ROYAL HONORIFICS



This inscription includes the titles *al-ʿadadī, al-dhukhrī* and *al-sayyidī*, which do not figure on the tray, and it ends with a good wishing formula addressed in the second person to the owner. We thus have three inscriptions with honorary titles of slightly diverging content.

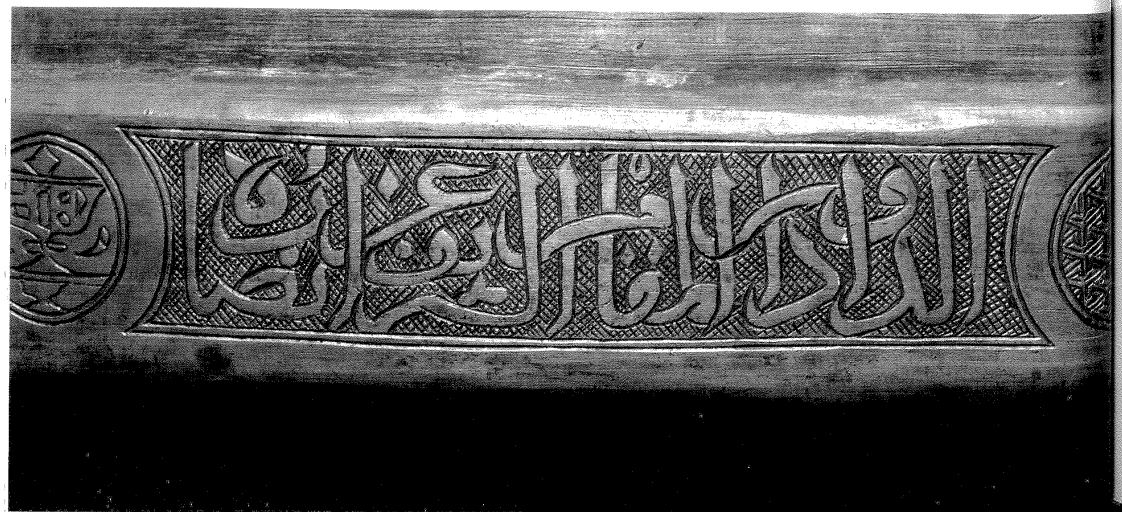
The series of titles inscribed here is multi-layered: the titles of Taghriwirmish are the ones that precede the words *al-amīrī al-kabīrī* referring to the Great Secretary, meaning the secretary of the sultan. The following titles refer to the Great Secretary. The sultan is referred to by the title *al-maqarr al-sharīf*, followed by praise.

The lid bears a second inscription, which is along the low vertical wall that runs parallel to the upper wall of the tray when it is covered (FIG. 113). This inscription is included in six registers within a band of eighteen registers, the twelve others being engraved with the two aforementioned alternating decorative patterns, knotted medallions and a weave pattern. Eighteen medallions alternate with the registers, six of them are filled with the composite blazon, the others with decorative motifs. The inscribed text consists of a poem in the first person praising the beauty of the vessel and addressing good wishes to the beholder, whose face is compared with the shining moon and body with a slender young stem.

man tamaʿ ʿnā fī jamālī huzhat al-ʿayn yarānī
lī tarzu min al-khayri qad hawā kul al-maʿānī
kayfa lā yasmū jamālī waʾl-nufūs tahw(a) wisālī
lā zilta yā mālikī ma dumta fī diʿa
wa anta min kulli hamm khālī ʿl-bāli yā taʿat
al-qamar al-munīr al-bāhir yā qāmat al-ghusn al-ratibi

Who contemplates my beauty will find me a delight to the eye
My looks are full of good meanings
How would you not hail my beauty when the souls long for my love?

FIG. 111
INSCRIPTION ON THE OUTER EDGE OF THE TRAY WITH HONORIFICS



May you, my owner, be at continuous ease,
your mind free from all sorrow, oh you are (like) the ascendance of the shining and dazzling moon, oh you whose figure is like a supple branch.

All inscriptions are written in *thuluth* script and engraved against a cross-hatched ground. It is interesting to note that the script style of the historical inscriptions is not identical with that of the poem, its vertical letters being more slender and elongated. They may have been the work of different hands.

The Artistic Context

Although the shape of this lidded tray appears so far to be singular in the repertoire of published Mamluk metalwork, its decorative design and the content of its inscriptions are very common on late Mamluk vessels made of tinned copper.[11] A related lidded cylindrical box made of copper in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection bears extensive inscriptions including the same poetic text as this tray. It is anonymous, however (FIG. 114).[12] The tray of Taghriwirmish is typical of the revived Mamluk metalwork that emerged in the second half of the fifteenth century, after almost a century during which very few Mamluk metal vessels are documented.[13] By that time the silver-inlaid brass vessels with inscriptions containing princely titles and names, which were characteristic of the Bahri Mamluk period of the fourteenth century, had gone out of fashion. The revival introduced a variety of new styles of vessels made of tinned copper with engraved decoration. Although many of the vessels of the style represented by the Munich tray bear the names of high-ranking emirs of the late Mamluk establishment, the quality of their craftsmanship indicates that their use must have been practical rather than ceremonial. A dish of that type bearing the name of the eminent Emir Yashbak min Mahdi al-Dawadar is inscribed with a text indicating that it was made a religious endowment (*waqf*) for his mausoleum in Cairo.[14] This explains that this category of vessels, which exist in large numbers, were made for the practical use of religious foundations, and most likely also for Mamluk barracks and military camps, rather than for the emir's personal or ceremonial use. Some of this production, which is anonymous and sometimes crude, may have continued after the Ottoman conquest in 1517. It is not clear whether Egypt or Syria was the centre of this production. The craftsmanship of the Taghriwirmish tray conforms to the mass production of this type of metal ware. As mentioned above, the division of the rosette that decorates the lid into thirty-two petals does not geometrically correspond to the division of the framing band into twelve registers or the division of the vertical wall of the lid into eighteen segments. As a result, the design of the covered tray appears inconsistent and flawed when seen from the side. Moreover, the difference in the script between the poem and the emir's name and titles suggests that the tray may have been pre-fabricated with the poem already inscribed on it, leaving the cartouches empty for the patron's name to be inserted later.

Aside from this functional group of metal ware there were other styles of late Mamluk vessels created for the more exclusive princely use. They display unprecedented techniques of engraving and inlay, and novel decorative designs and shapes.[15] Among the striking specimens of this luxurious metalwork are a silver inlaid brass basin in the name of Sultan Qaytbay at the Victoria and Albert Museum and another splendid one with gold inlay at the Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul.[16] Another group of mostly anonymous vessels, labelled in the past as "Veneto-Saracenic", characterized by a distinctive style of intricate arabesques and inlay work combined with new, often European shapes, is mostly represented in European collections. As in the case of the famous Mamluk carpets, these vessels seem to have been produced largely for export. Most of them are not inscribed, although a sub-group of them with more conventional Mamluk forms displays names of emirs inserted in cartouches within the decoration.[17] Among the inscribed exceptions is a remarkable bowl in the Khalili Collection, signed by Master Mahmud, with cartouches on the body and the rim containing typical late Mamluk self-praising texts.[18]

Poetry on Metal Vessels

The tradition of inscribing poetic texts in the first person praising the inscribed object goes back to earlier periods and is documented elsewhere in the Muslim world (cf. the contribution by Shalem in this volume).[19] Already in the early Abbasid period, love poems and other apropos poems were inscribed on various objects used by gallant cavaliers (*zarīf*), such as furnishings, vessels, instruments, and textiles.[20] Some rare cases of Mosul metal vessels of the fourteenth century,[21] and enamelled glass vessels, either Ayyubid or Mamluk, attest to the continuity of this tradition.[22] A Mamluk enamelled glass bucket, recently sold at Sotheby's, bears an inscription that is unique on glassware but quite common on Mamluk metal bowls and basins. Formulated in the first person, the text describes the

FIG. 112 (left)
INSCRIPTION ON THE LID WITH HONORIFICS AND A WISH

FIG. 113 (above)
INSCRIPTION ON THE WALL OF THE LID WITH A POEM ON THE VESSEL'S BEAUTY

FIG. 114

LIDDED VESSEL WITH A POEM

Egypt or Syria; 2nd half 15th/early 16th century

This late Mamluk vessel is decorated with poems praising its beauty and wishing its owner well.

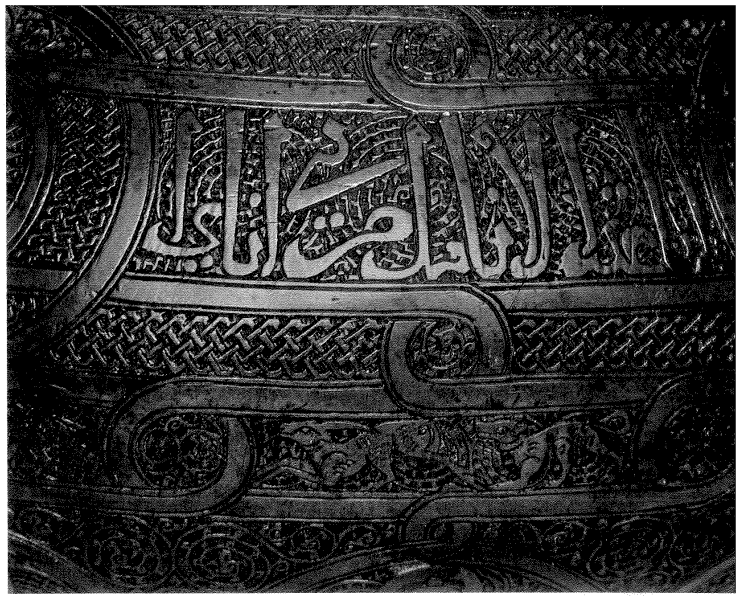


FIG. 115

WATER BASIN WITH POETIC INSCRIPTION

Syria or Iraq; around 1400 CE

The creator of this work of art, Master Ahmad al-Hakam, whose signature is found on the rim of the basin, has engraved an inscription indicating the basin's function. In it, the object itself speaks: "The ten fingers have formed me into a vessel, I hold cool water."

vessel as a "toy for the fingers", containing cold water.[23] The same text appears on a bowl in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, attributed to Syria or Iraq *c.* 1400 (FIG. 115).[24] Mamluk inscriptions of this kind have rarely been published although they exist in large numbers.[25]

The text on the Taghriwirmish tray is quite common not only on late Mamluk vessels of the tinned copper mass production, but is also found on a European-shaped pail of the so-called Veneto-Saracenic style in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (FIG. 116). There it fills cartouches integrated in the intricate design of the vessel. The quality and clarity of the inscription attribute the pail to a late Mamluk workshop, not to Venice, as indicated in the catalogue.[26]

In some late Mamluk vessels of the common type, as in the Taghriwirmish tray, the poetic inscriptions are combined with the name and titles of the patron. This development took place in the later Mamluk period; the metal vessels of the time of the Bahri-Mamluks (1279–1382) were inscribed either with names and titles or with poetic epigraphy. However, they did not combine names with poetry. The majority of silver-inlaid brass vessels of this perio are inscribed with names or anonymous titles and only few bea poetic inscriptions, whereas the majority of tinned copper vessel of the same period, which are mostly anonymous, are inscribe with poetic, self-praising or votive inscriptions, occasionally als with love and wine poetry. They were obviously of lower status tha the inlaid ones. In the fifteenth century, the use of poetic inscrip tions becomes a characteristic feature of the prevailing tinned cop per production.

Unlike contemporary and later Iranian vessels, which mostl cite classical Persian poetry, the poems on Mamluk metal ware ar not easily read. Often fragments of diverse texts are juxtaposed o one vessel. Many of the inscriptions are of vernacular characte with misspellings or grammatical errors, and some may have bee compiled by the craftsmen themselves. We know, however, tha some Mamluk poets wrote poetry to adorn vessels.[27] An inscrip tion on a late Mamluk bowl in the collection of the Islamic Museur of Qatar can be identified as the work of the fifteenth-century poe

Taqiyy al-Din ibn Hujja al-Hamawi.[28] A corpus of the poetic inscriptions of Mamluk metalwork still needs to be published to elucidate this interesting aspect of Mamluk culture.

While it bears features of princely patronage, such as the inscription with the patron's name and titles, the tray of Taghriwirmish was an object of daily use, and probably of mass production. The juxtaposition of the patron's princely titles with the praise of the vessel's beauty, which conveys pleasure (*nuzha*) to the eye, emphasizes the craftsmanship of the metalworker and raises him to a high status. The references to the "beautiful meanings", encapsulated in the vessel's form (*tarz*), and to the "souls longing for love" bear mystic connotations. Although not a masterpiece of Mamluk metalwork, this tray reveals a noteworthy development in late Mamluk material culture.

FIG. 116

CAULDRON WITH POETIC INSCRIPTION

Egypt or Syria; 1st half of 16th century

The cartouches on this silver-inlaid bronze cauldron in the so-called Venetian-Saracen style contain the same verses of poetry as on the Munich Taghriwirmish tray.

An Inscriptional Carpet from Anatolia

MARYAM EKHTIAR

An Anatolian inscriptional carpet from the collection of R. G. Hubel, probably a copy of a seventeenth-century carpet, which is kept in the Islamic collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich, is of an unusual type (FIG. 117).[1] It is rectangular in shape and has an attractive palette of colours: blue-green, brick red, light ivory, ochre and dark blue; the field and borders are covered with inscriptions in a variety of scripts. The carpet has a large cruciform medallion with a symmetrical design of long, serrated leaves in light ivory colour, called *saz* after the name of the reed pen with which fine drawings were executed in Ottoman art, furthermore geometric patterns in ochre as well as peonies and other floral forms. This medallion is placed slightly off-centre on a light blue-green background divided into small irregular compartments. Each compartment contains an inscription in light beige *naskh*. There is the arm of another cruciform medallion under the central one along its vertical axis. Cartouches with inscriptions in elongated *naskh* are found at the end of the horizontal and vertical arms of the central medallion. The inscriptions on the right side of the carpet are a mirror image of the ones on the left (FIGS. 117-118). The border, which is in brick red, contains inscriptions in elongated *naskh* punctuated by four star-shaped elements with inscriptions in geometric Kufic script framed by inner and outer guard borders containing a chain design of inverted "S" shapes.

The highly religious inscriptions on this carpet distinguish it from others produced in the same period. The inscriptions on the field in compartments are in the form of invocations and cite the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of Allah (*asmā' al-husnā*), as well as related auspicious numbers. The ninety-nine names refer to the comprehensive unity inherent in the all-embracing Greatest Name.[2] The inscriptions seen at the end of each arm of the cruciform medallions bear the short invocations *Allāh akbar* ("God is the Greatest") and *Allāh akbar kabīran* ("God is the Greatest ..."), that is to say prayer formulas recited at the time of religious festivals or during the pilgrimage to Mecca, while the longer continuous inscription on the border contains sura 2:255, the 'throne verse' (*ayat al-kursī*) from the Qur'an, which reads:

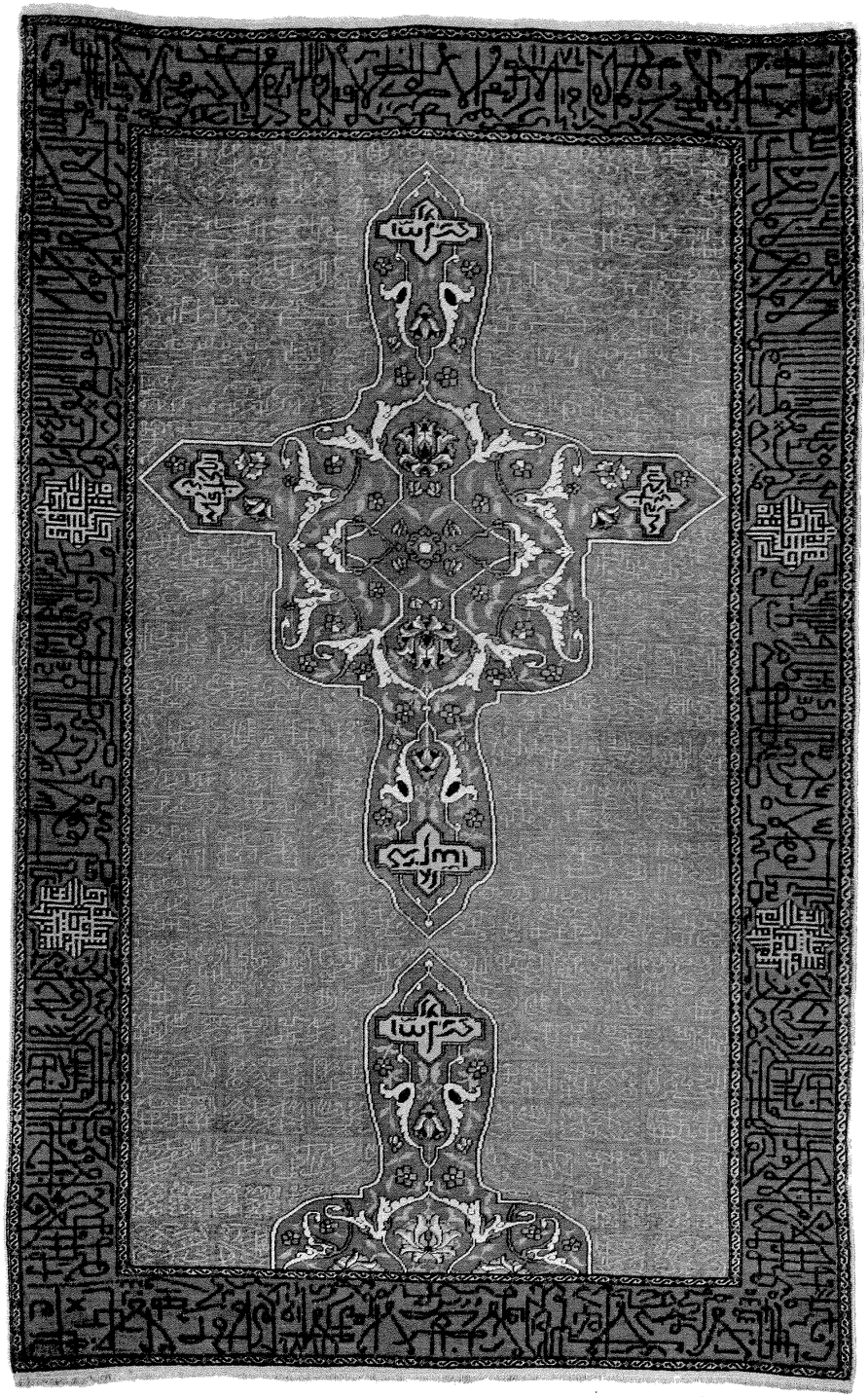


FIG. 117 (left)

INSCRIPTIONAL CARPET WITH THE 99 MOST BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF GOD

Turkey; 19th century

The inscriptions in *naskh* in the many small irregular panels on the right side are a reflection of those on the left side. The vertical letters in the same calligraphic style in the broad border are specially emphasized. In contrast, the four striking octagonal star motifs on the long side of the border are filled with geometric Kufic.

FIG. 118 A (below)

DETAIL OF THE UPPER LEFT CORNER OF THE CARPET

Allah, there is no God but He the living, the eternal! He neither slumbers nor sleeps. Whatever is in the heaven and earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede with Him without His permission? He knows what is in front of them and behind them (now and in the future) and they can partake of His knowledge only in so far as He wishes. His throne embraces the heaven and the earth and maintaining both are no burden for Him and He is the exalted, the sublime.

The geometric Kufic inscriptions in the star-shaped medallions within the border contain the invocation which is recited before the call to prayer.[3]

The original function of this rug is a somewhat perplexing. This carpet is very similar to one found in the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAK) in Vienna, Austria, which has been referred to as a prayer rug (*sajjada*).[4] Like the Vienna example, the Munich carpet does not contain a niche and thus does not follow the traditional prayer rug format, the dimensions are clearly larger than a typical *sajjada* and since the entire border and field are covered with inscriptions – including the area at the bottom on which the worshipper placed his feet – it is unlikely that a true Muslim believer would place his feet on Qur'anic verses during prayer. However, the extensive use of Qur'anic inscriptions as ornament suggests that it was likely used in a religious context. Perhaps, these carpets were used as talismanic objects and intended to protect their owner(s) from harm. The inclusion of auspicious numbers reinforces this argument.

Visually, the Vienna and Munich carpets are quite similar. However, while the Munich example has a more pleasing colour palette and a more balanced composition, the weaving in the Vienna carpet is finer and the designs more sophisticated. The field of the Vienna carpet is mustard yellow with inscriptions in dark blue; the two cross-shaped medallions contain *saz*-like forms in beige and floral scrolls in dark blue and red on a dark brown ground. Both carpets are covered with irregular compartments containing inscriptions in the same style of *naskh* and have cross-shaped medallions slightly off-centre with quarter medallions under the central one. The Munich example is in better condition, less worn and is woven more evenly and mechanically. However, one of the chief differences between the two carpets is in the borders. In the Vienna example, the border contains *saz*-like scrolls which are intertwined with the large *naskh* inscriptions, whereas the Munich example does not include any vegetal pattern in the borders.

A careful reading of the inscriptions on both carpets reveals that the Vienna carpet served as the model for the Munich one, since the inscriptions in the Vienna example are highly legible and comprehensible while the ones on the Munich carpet are not always legible. They appear to have been woven by weavers not particularly conversant with the Arabic language and script. The inscriptions seem as though they were drawn rather than written, suggesting that the Munich example is a later copy, most probably from the nineteenth century, woven in a provincial workshop or by a foreign weaver.[5]

Angela Völker of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst attributes the Vienna carpet to the western Anatolian Uşak region based on materials, techniques and structure. This carpet was said to have been found in a mosque in the Syrian town of Aleppo. This carpet is distantly related to a large group of inscriptional prayer rugs in the traditional prayer rug format (with niches) in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum collection in Istanbul, several of which belong to the so-called Salting group, now firmly attributed to sixteenth-century Central Iran.[6] The Fletcher inscriptional prayer rug at the Metropolitan Museum in New York has also been associated with this group.[7] Looking at the Vienna and Munich examples it is possible that they were inspired by the Salting group of inscriptional prayer rugs, although the format is quite different. The Salting carpets are, for the most part, traditional prayer rugs with niches whereas the Vienna and Munich examples both contain cruciform medallions. The symmetrical knot is used in both the Vienna and the Munich examples, and is not used in the so-called Salting group, which is typically woven using an asymmetrical knot.

It is not unusual for a carpet to be a later copy of an earlier original. Great carpets were often copied not only during the same period and in the same region, but centuries later and in remote regions from their original models. The Vienna carpet is a prime example; it is the original model for the Munich carpet and was subsequently copied several times.[8] The existence of these copies poses intriguing questions. Further research and analysis of this group of carpets would shed light on their production and allow for a more certain attribution of the Munich example.

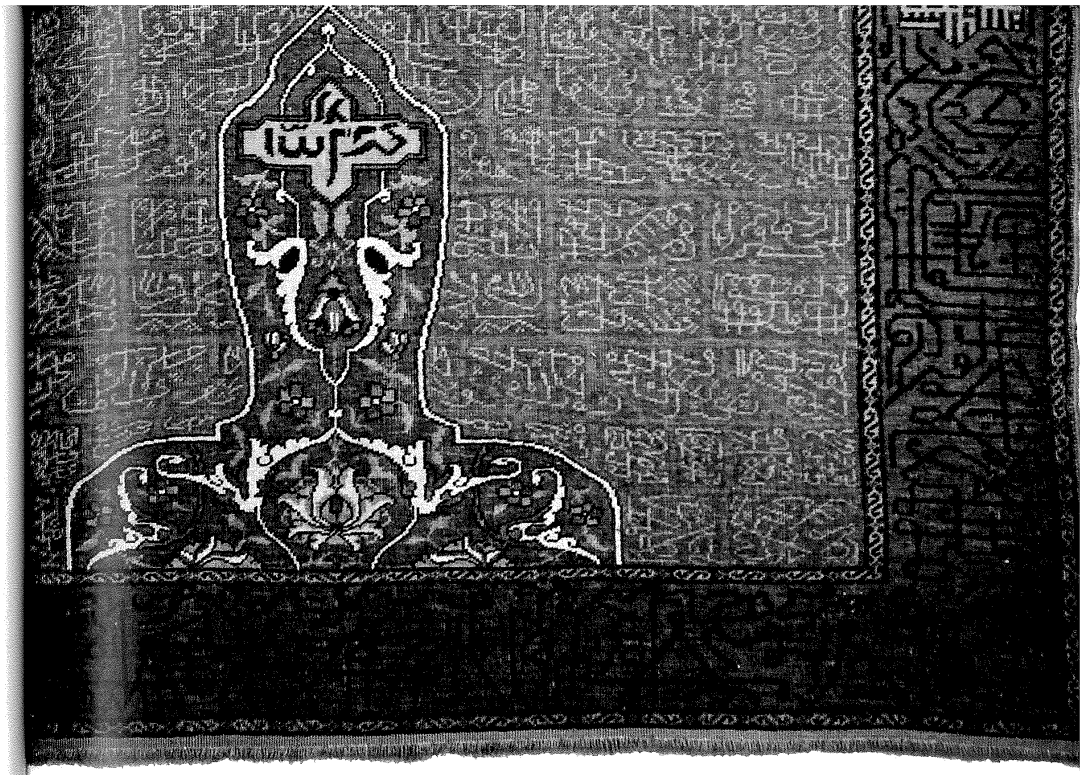
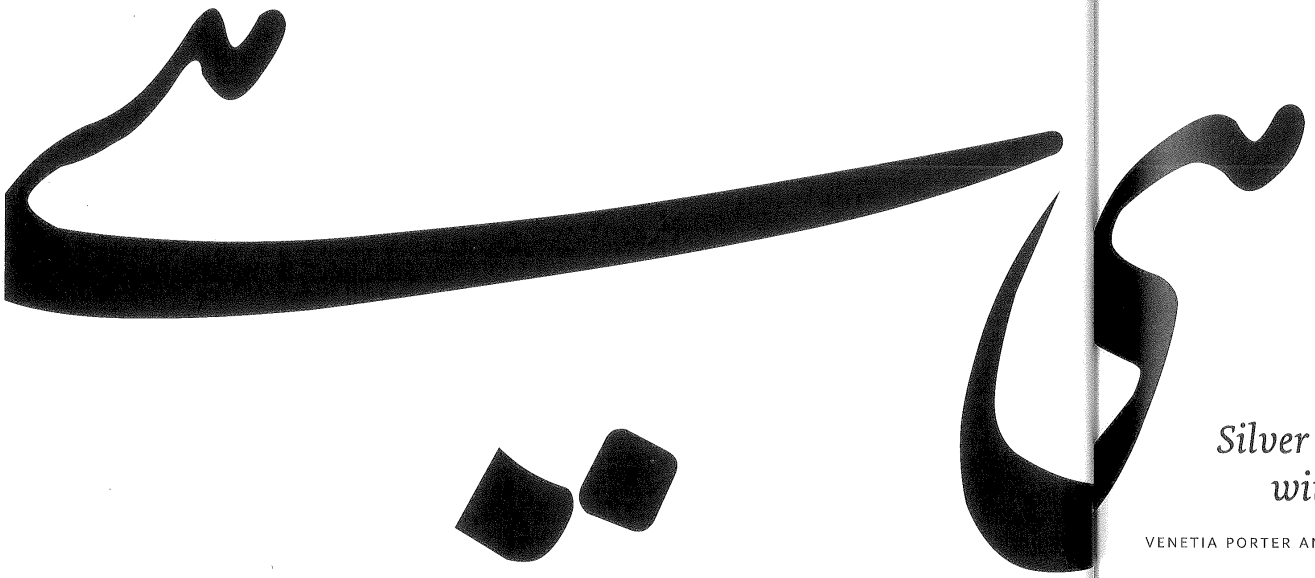


FIG. 118 B
DETAIL OF THE LOWER RIGHT CORNER OF THE CARPET



Silver Amulets with Inscriptions from Iran and Afghanistan

VENETIA PORTER AND JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

Amulets can be defined as objects which bring good luck and protection. In the Muslim world these are most often engraved with Arabic inscriptions which connect profoundly to Islamic belief. The amulet collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich, of which a selection is documented here, shows all the characteristics of amulets (*talesm, tavīz*) from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran and Afghanistan.[1] One extraordinary piece however may be Uzbek, either from northern Afghanistan or Uzbekistan: a rectangular brass amulet set into a turquoise mount (FIG. 119).[2] Two of the amulets bear dates, the lock (FIG. 120), 1302 or 1303 H/1884–85 CE, and the arm amulet of the *bāzūband*-type (FIG. 128), 1331 H/1912–13 CE. These amulets were variously made to be worn as pendants, fixed to the arm or onto a belt and in one case used as a padlock. The cylindrical ones would have housed amulet scrolls and the octagonal boxes miniature Qur'ans. The material from which an amulet was made is important: carnelian, for example, was favoured by the Prophet Muhammad himself, turquoise was thought to ward off the 'evil eye' and is often attached to the clothing of newborn babies. In Iran and Afghanistan, amulets made of metal, in particular silver, are regarded as particularly efficacious. The inscriptions on the amulets described here are in a variety of cursive scripts, some more elaborate than others. They include simple scratched inscriptions or texts written with wide letters set against a hatched ground. For the most part the inscriptions are in *naskh*, but occasionally there is a trace of *nasta'līq*, the script style most associated with the Iranian world (although it is not generally used for Qur'anic inscriptions, but more often reserved for poetry) while there is clear *nasta'līq* on one example (FIG. 132). For the backgrounds these can consist of hatched grounds, or clusters of dots.

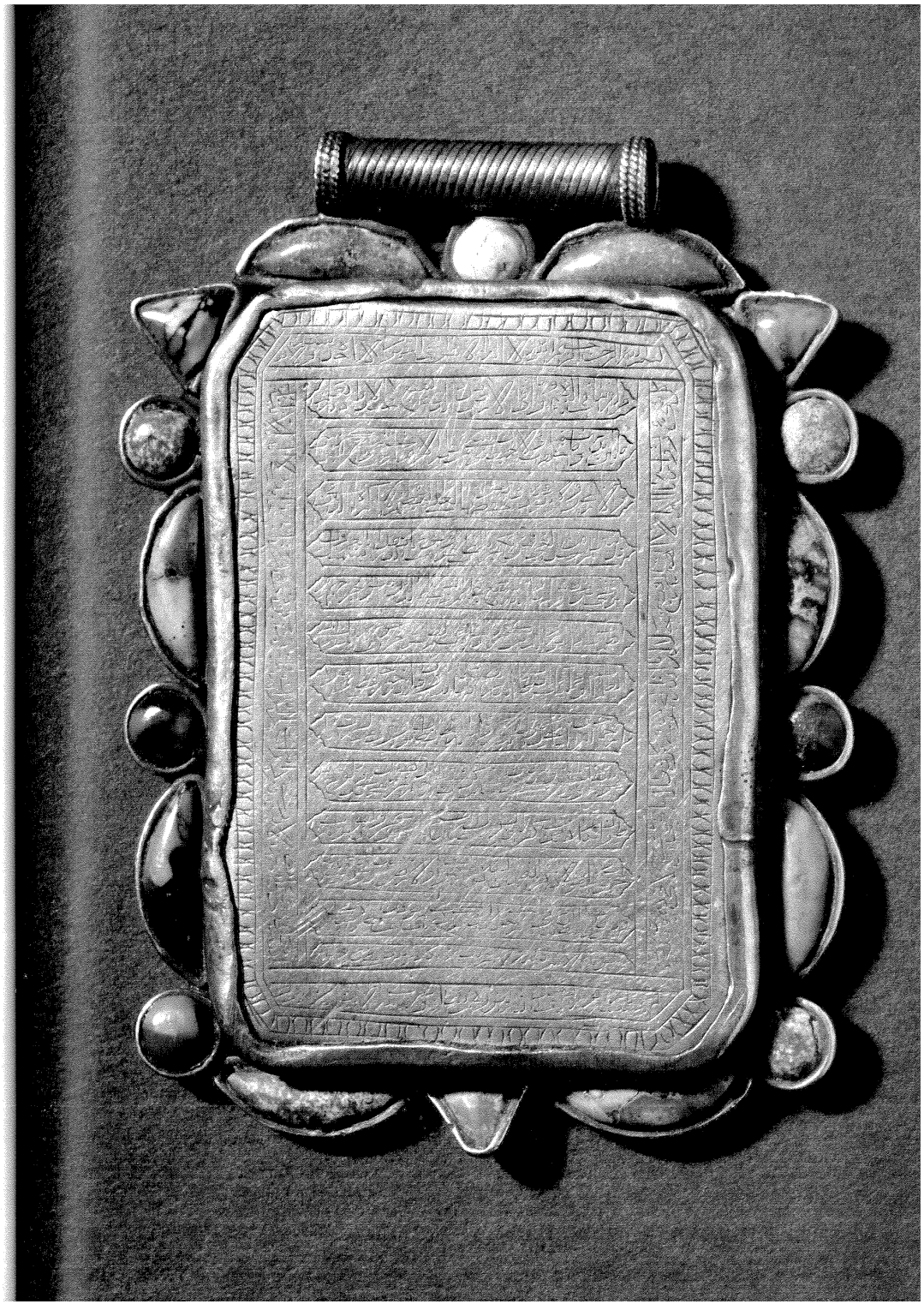
In common with other amulets, the texts are mostly from the Qur'an and consist of particular verses associated with their protective power. Nevertheless, it is an interesting feature how often the verses are not complete, perhaps in order to fit the available space. Most popular is the 'throne verse' (*āyat al-kursī*) from *sūra al-baqara* (2:255) (FIGS. 119, 124, 132; for the complete text see the article of Ekhtiar, p. 190). This verse is also known as the 'verse of

FIG. 119

AMULET WITH 'THRONE VERSE'

North Afghanistan or Uzbekistan; 19th/early 20th century

The rectangular amulet with verses from the Qur'an is decorated on the sides with small turqoise stones like an ornamental picture frame.



seeking refuge' or the 'verse for driving out Satan'.[3] Other popular Qur'anic texts often used in amulets are the short suras known as the 'four declarations', suras 109, 112, 113 and 114; the last two suras are additionally known as *al-mu'awwidhatān*, the verses of 'seeking refuge from evil', and they provide "the antidote to superstition and fear."[4] The Prophet was said to have used these verses to protect himself from bewitchment.[5] It also appears that these verses are particularly favoured among the Shi'a, perhaps stemming from the tradition that Imam Husain apparently wore these two suras around his neck before he was martyred.[6] A clear Shi'a connection can be seen in the invocation to 'Ali ibn abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and brother-in-law, fourth of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and first of the Shi'a Imams, which appears on a number of the amulets (figs 123, 128). Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly when this phrase first occurs, it begins to appear with some frequency in the Safavid period in the early sixteenth century on metalwork and seal stones.[7] The amulets also include other more esoteric elements, such as groups of letters and magic squares.

Locks

The silver lock (FIG. 120 A-B) is engraved on both sides. The texts include repetitions of the *basmala* (that means the phrase: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"), a Qur'anic line "there is nothing like him" from sura 42 verse 11, and invocations to God using some of the Most Beautiful Names of God (the *asmā' al-husnā*) which includes *al-karīm* (the Generous) and *al-'azīz* (the Mighty), and prayers for the family of the Prophet Muhammad. These are all in the cursive script *naskh*. The lock is dated at the base of one side 1302 or 1303 H/1884-85 CE.[8] In addition to this inscribed lock there is a group of much smaller leaf-shaped *qofl-e abjad* (alphabet-locks) which are only engraved with numerals.[9]

Circular Amulet-pendants

The piece illustrated here (FIG. 121), is set as a pendant with carnelian beads around the edge and consists of four concentric bands with a magical square in the centre. It is engraved with Qur'anic inscriptions in a variety of styles. Starting from the outside, the first band has sura 68:51-5210 inscribed in a wide cursive script

FIG. 120 A–B (below)

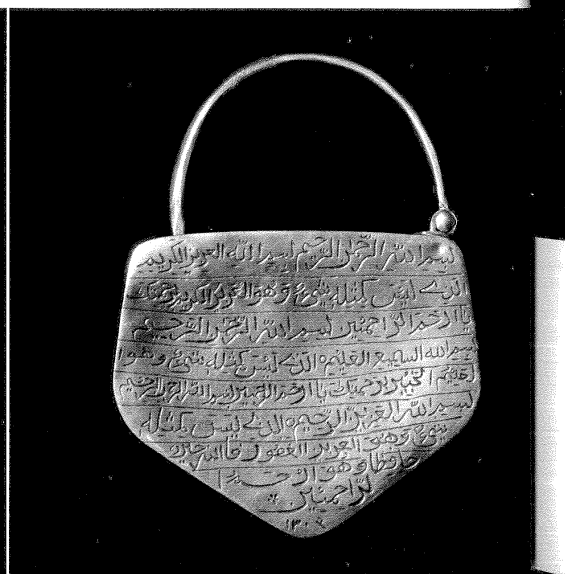
AMULET IN THE SHAPE OF A PADLOCK ENGRAVED WITH SCRIPT

Iran or Afghanistan; dated 1302–03 H/1884–85 CE

This amulet inscribed on both sides in *naskh* contains religious formulas, invocations and prayers.

120 A

120 B



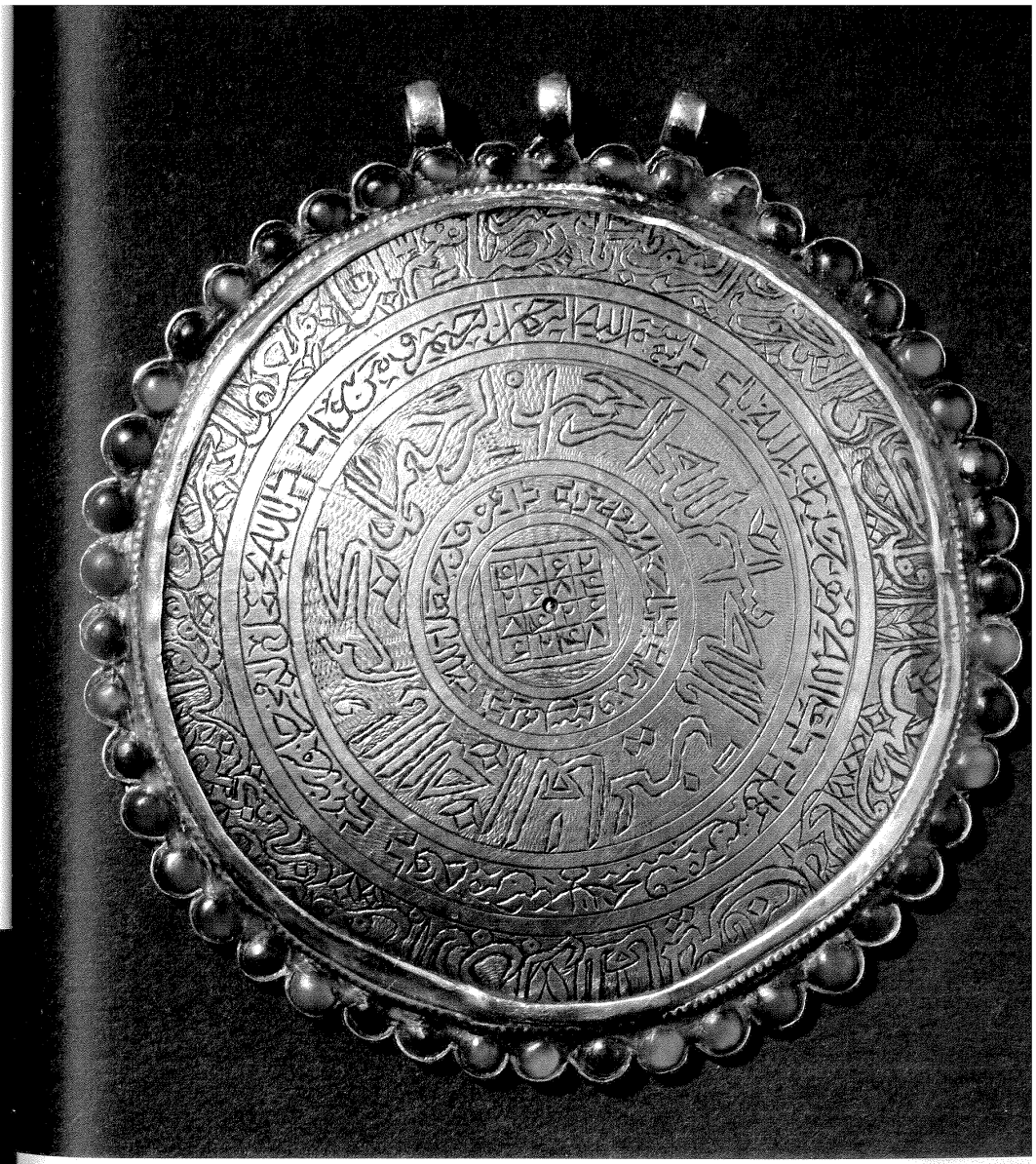


FIG. 121

ROUND AMULET PENDANT WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Afghanistan or Central Asia; 19th/early 20th century

The amulet decorated with agate beads is engraved in different styles with verses from the Qur'an. In the centre is a small magical rectangle with numbers.

FIG. 122

ROUND AMULET PENDANT WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Afghanistan or Central Asia; end of 19th/early 20th century

In the centre of the tile-shaped cartouche is the protective invocation: "Oh You who removes obstacles!" The border inscription contains sura 112, 'The Purity'.

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begets not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him.

FIG. 123

OCTAGONAL AMULET WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Iran or Afghanistan; mid-20th century

The inscription which runs around the rectangular inner panel contains the well-known and often quoted protective *nādi 'Alīyyan* – "Call 'Ali, who manifests wonders ..." – which identifies the wearer of the amulet as a Shi'ite.

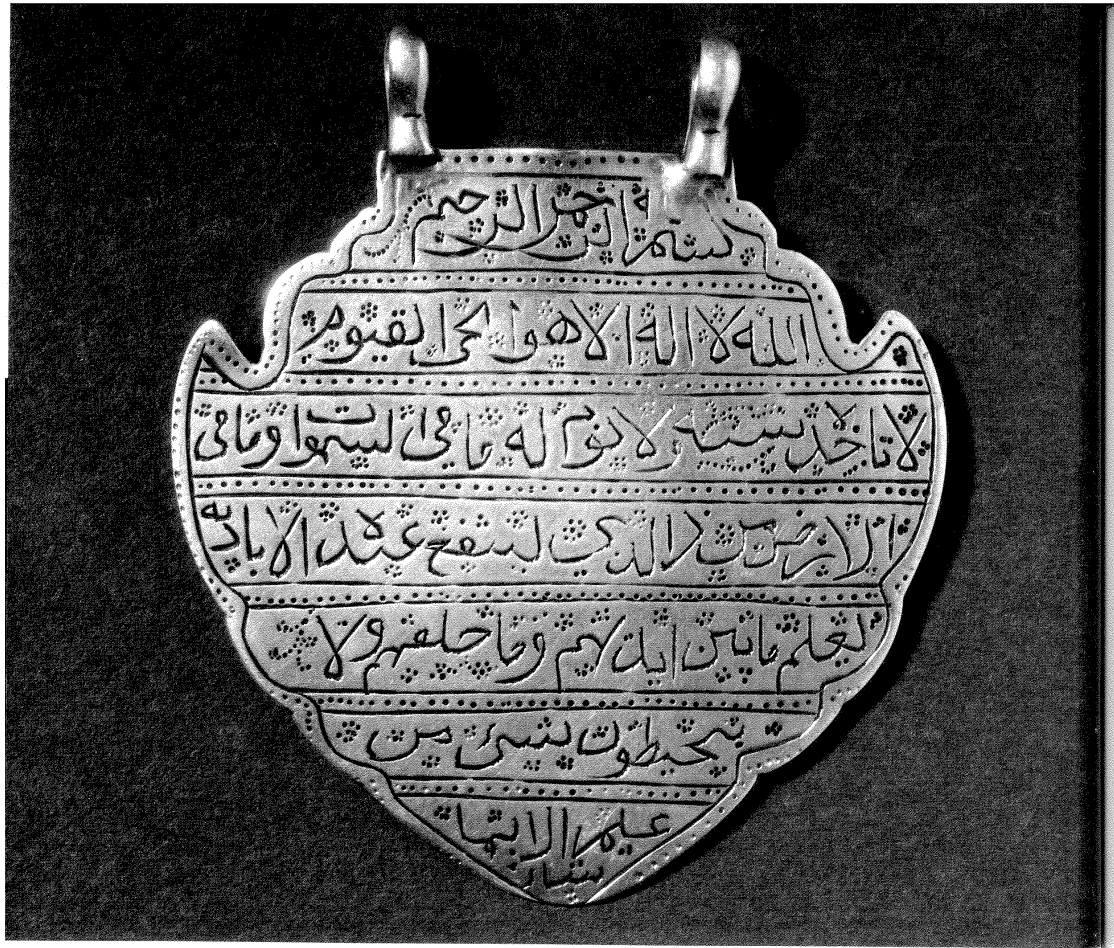


FIG. 124
LEAF-SHAPED AMULET PENDANT WITH VERSE FROM THE QUR'AN
Iran or Afghanistan; mid-20th century

The shape of this silver amulet is very common in the Middle East and is engraved with the 'throne verse' (2:255) from the Qur'an which the Prophet is said to have called "the Master of all verses."

against a hatched ground. The beginning of the verse is indicated by a plant motif. Band 2 starts with the *basmala* and continues with sura 65:2–3, which is completed in band 4.[11] The text in band 2 is engraved in simple *naskh*, the line intersected by four decorative motifs in the shape of a horizontally placed H. Band 3 has again the *basmala*, and is followed by invocations to God: *yā karīm* (oh Generous One), *yā Allāh* (oh God), [*rabb*] *al-ʿālimīn yā Allāh* [Lord] (of the worlds, oh God). This is in a wide cursive script against a hatched ground as in band 1. In the centre is a 4 x 4 magic square; in whichever direction they are added, the numbers make up the number 20.[12] A similar-shaped pendant (FIG. 122), but smaller and made of brass, has a cartouche in its centre with an invocation to God: *yā kāfī al-muhimmāt* – "oh You who are capable of solving difficulties."[13] Around the edge and simply engraved is the whole of *sūra al-ikhlās* 112 ('Sincere Religion').[14]

Rectangular and Octagonal Amulet-pendants

An octagonal silver pendant (FIG. 123) is engraved in *naskh* script with a series of invocations. Preceded by the numerals 786, which are the numerical equivalent of the *basmala*, the outer inscription is the popular invocation to Imam 'Ali: "Call upon 'Ali who makes wonders appear, you will find him a help to you in adversity, all care will clear away through your prophethood, oh Muhammad, through your friendship, oh 'Ali ibn abi Talib." Lines 1–4 of the central square first have the *basmala* and the *shahāda* (the Profession of Faith "there is no God but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God") with the specific Shi'a addition "'Ali is the friend of God." The rest of the amulet is inscribed as follows: "The kingdom belongs to God the One and Only, the Victorious, God is my protector, Glory belongs to God. For God shall accomplish his purpose [Qur'an 65:3], for every care there is something good. My hope is in God. You are my trust. My protection is from your creation. My trust is in God. As God wills, there is no power except in God. My trust is in God, the Protector. God, the King. I am witness to God, I am a proof for God."

Several smaller rectangular and octagonal amulet-pendants in the collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich have a 4 x 4 magic square just on one side or on both sides filled with numerals and Names of God.[15]

Arrow-shaped Amulet-pendants

This common type of amulet-pendant, often also described as leaf- or heart-shaped, is found in varying sizes between Iran and northern India.[16] It has smooth or foliate sides and is engraved on the front side with inscriptions and/or other signs and motifs. The example shown here (FIG. 124) has an inscription in cursive script (*naskh*) which is divided into seven lines with background of clusters of dots making up heads of flowers. It consists of the 'throne verse' (2:255) of the Qur'an. Two elongated leaf-shaped amulets, both made of very thin silver, are more esoteric in character: in addition to invocations to God and to 'Ali in the top section, they have magic squares in the centre filled with numerals and letters.[17]

Arm Amulets

These amulets known as *bāzūband* are worn on the upper right arm or on both arms, often for protection in battle. They are found in a variety of shapes, oval, round or rectangular, and have links through which a thread would have fastened the amulet to the arm either on the back or on the sides.[18] The inscriptions on an oval-shaped piece are written in a careless scratched style with clusters of dots in the background.[19] The outer inscription which follows the shape of the amulet consists, after the *basmala*, of Qur'an sura 68:51 but it breaks off in the middle of the word *yaqūlūn* and misses out the last words of the verse for lack of space. In the centre, the inscription starts with the first line of sura 68:52 and then continues with the 'victory verse' 61:13 ("Help from God and a speedy victory"). On the front side of the oval amulet illustrated here (FIG. 125), which is more curved for the arm, inscriptions, largely undeciphered at present, surround a 4 x 4 magic square. There are two clusters of numbers in the otherwise decorative border. The *bāzūband* is unusual in that there is another magic square on the underside, also 4 x 4, each square of which is divided by diagonal lines into four.

A *bāzūband* (FIG. 126) consisting of three sections (the middle one a small oval-shaped box) connected by wire links and with an attached chain has the same inscription on each of the three sections: *yā qādhī al-hājāt* – "oh You who settles affairs", a popular invocation to God. The script is cursive, loosely based on *nastaʿlīq*, the flat pieces to the left and right of the box with a hatched background.

Silver arm amulets made up of three hinged sections constitute a rather common form, especially in Afghanistan, as several such examples from there are found in the Munich collection. The inscriptions on a particularly fine piece (FIG. 127) are deeply engraved in cursive script within horizontal lines that are enclosed within cartouches.[20] The background is decorated with hatching

FIG. 125

OVAL-SHAPED AMULET WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Iran or Afghanistan; end of 19th/1st third of 20th century

This amulet which is well-crafted but engraved and inscribed hastily was worn on the upper arm. Another 16-panel magical rectangle appears on the inner side.

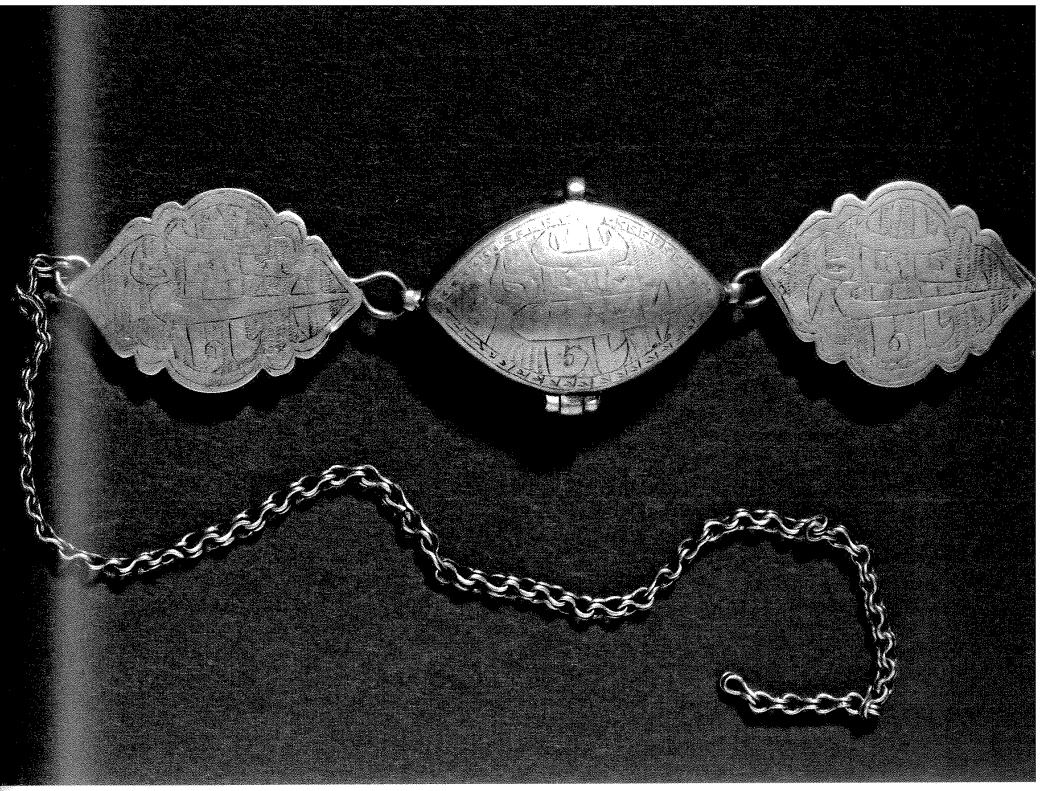


FIG. 126

UPPER ARM AMULET WITH SMALL BOXES

Iran or Afghanistan; 19th/1st third of 20th century

Each of the three parts of this amulet is inscribed with the same invocation to God. The oval box was intended for an additional amulet written on paper.

FIG. 127 (below)
UPPER ARM AMULET WITH INSCRIPTIONS
Afghanistan; 19th/1st third of 20th century
The cursive inscriptions contain the well-known protective formula to 'Ali and verses from the Qur'an.

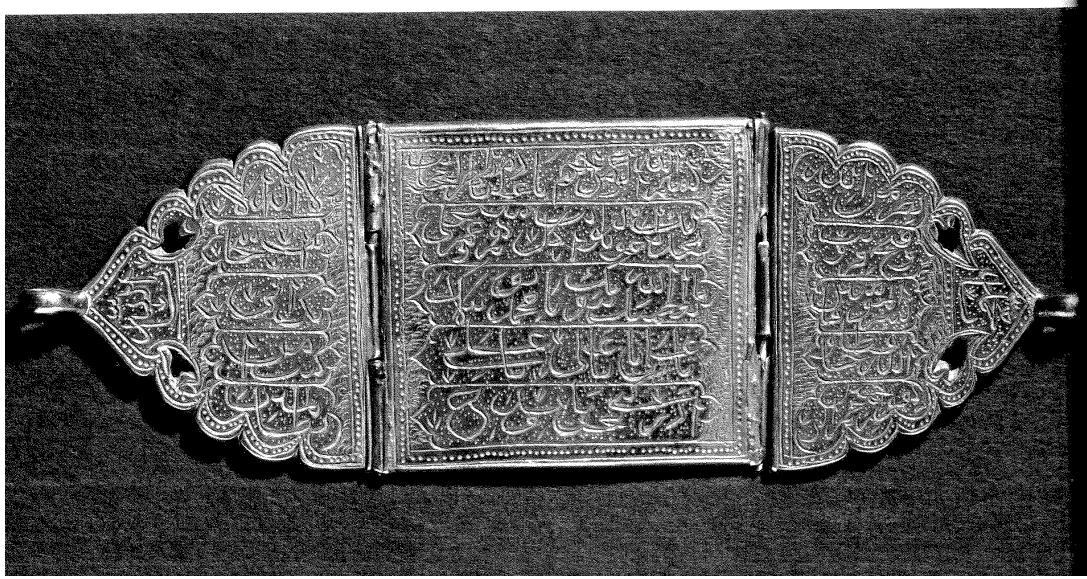
FIG. 128 (right)
UPPER ARM AMULET WITH INSCRIPTIONS
Afghanistan; dated 1331 H/1912–13 CE
The protective texts on this talisman are placed below each other, similarly to a scroll. The formulas suggest a Shi'ite context.

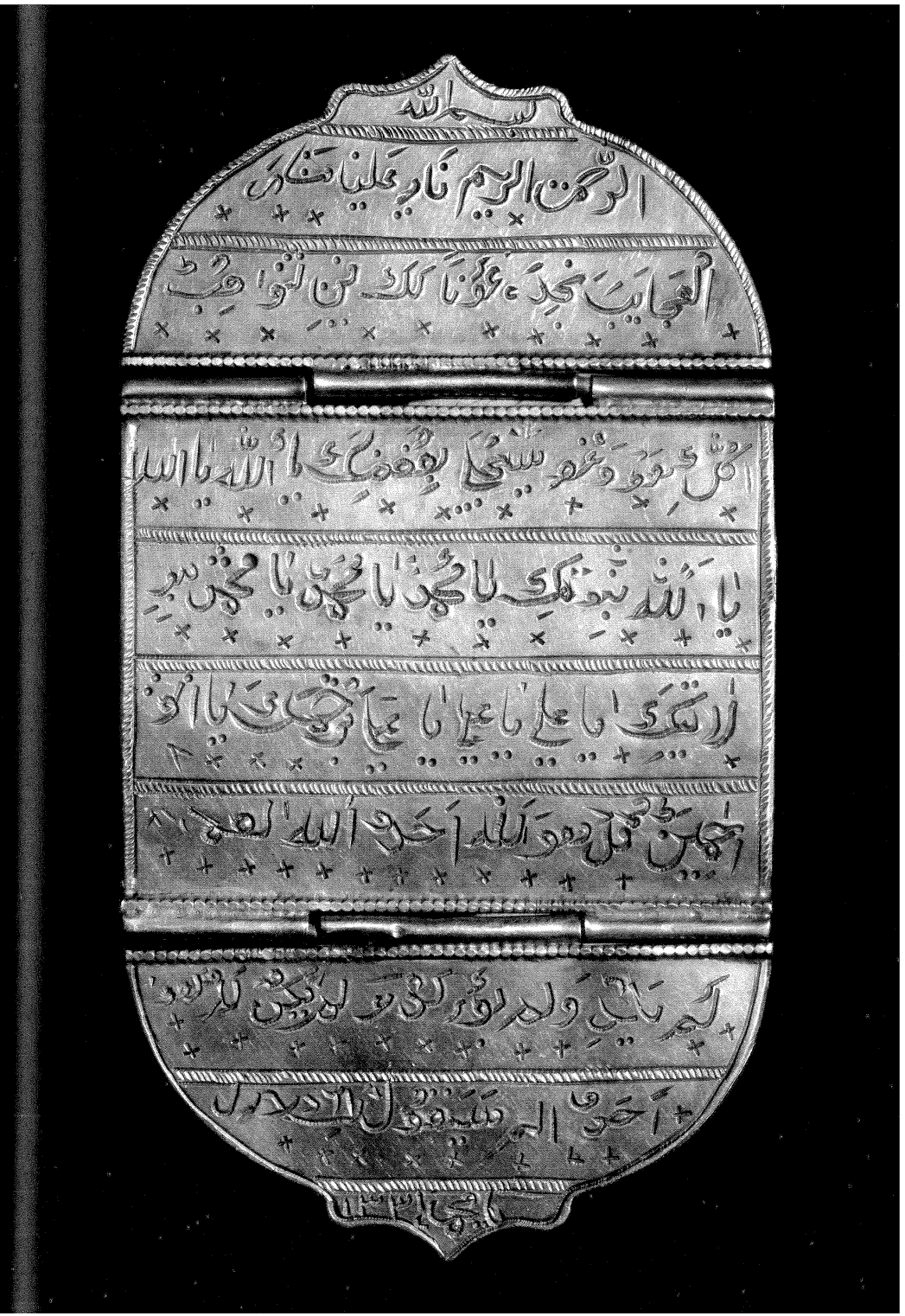
and clusters of dots. The bow-shaped section on the right begins with the 'victory verse' from Qur'an (61:13): "Help from God and a speedy victory. Proclaim the good tidings to the faithful, God is the protector." The rectangular central section contains the invocation to 'Ali with the addition of the words "oh *budūh*." *Budūh* is the name of the magical square in which the letters *bā, dāl, waw, hā* appear at each corner and has become a protective talismanic word in its own right.[21] The bow-shaped section on the left is inscribed with Qur'an 21:87, "There is no God but You, Glory be to You." More recent, comparatively less well-made examples of the same amulet type in the Munich collection are engraved with the 'throne verse' (2:255), the *basmala* and magic squares.[22]

An interesting *bāzūband* of a somewhat broader shape (FIG. 128) is engraved in cursive script (close to *naskh*) within horizontal lines. The inscription starts with the *basmala* on the upper bow-shaped section and continues into the rectangular central part with the invocation to Imam 'Ali with slight variations from the usual formula.[23] This is followed in the last line of the central piece into the lower bowed-shaped section by sura 112 ('Sincere Religion') and the letters *alif-lām-mīm*, followed by the words: "He says: pray for Muhammad" and the date 1331 H/1912–13 CE. The letters *alif-lām-mīm* are some of the mysterious letters of the Qur'an which appear at the beginning of twenty-nine of the 114 suras of the Qur'an.[24]

Amulet Boxes

Octagonal and circular silver amulet cases are often attached to bands and worn on the upper arm and some contained miniature Qur'ans.[25] An example of this type is FIG. 129, where the inscriptions are in cursive script against a hatched ground. Engraved on the slightly curved lid is part of the 'throne verse' (2:255, lines 1–5), while on the four vertical segments of the box are invocations and on the bottom a magic square. Around the sides, the invocations to God using the Divine Names consist of *yā hannān* (Oh the Compassionate) on one side, on another *al-wāthiq* (the Trusting One), *al-'alī* (the High), *al-'athīm* (the Great) and *yā dayyān* (the Devout). Such amulet boxes were often made in pairs to be worn one on each arm.





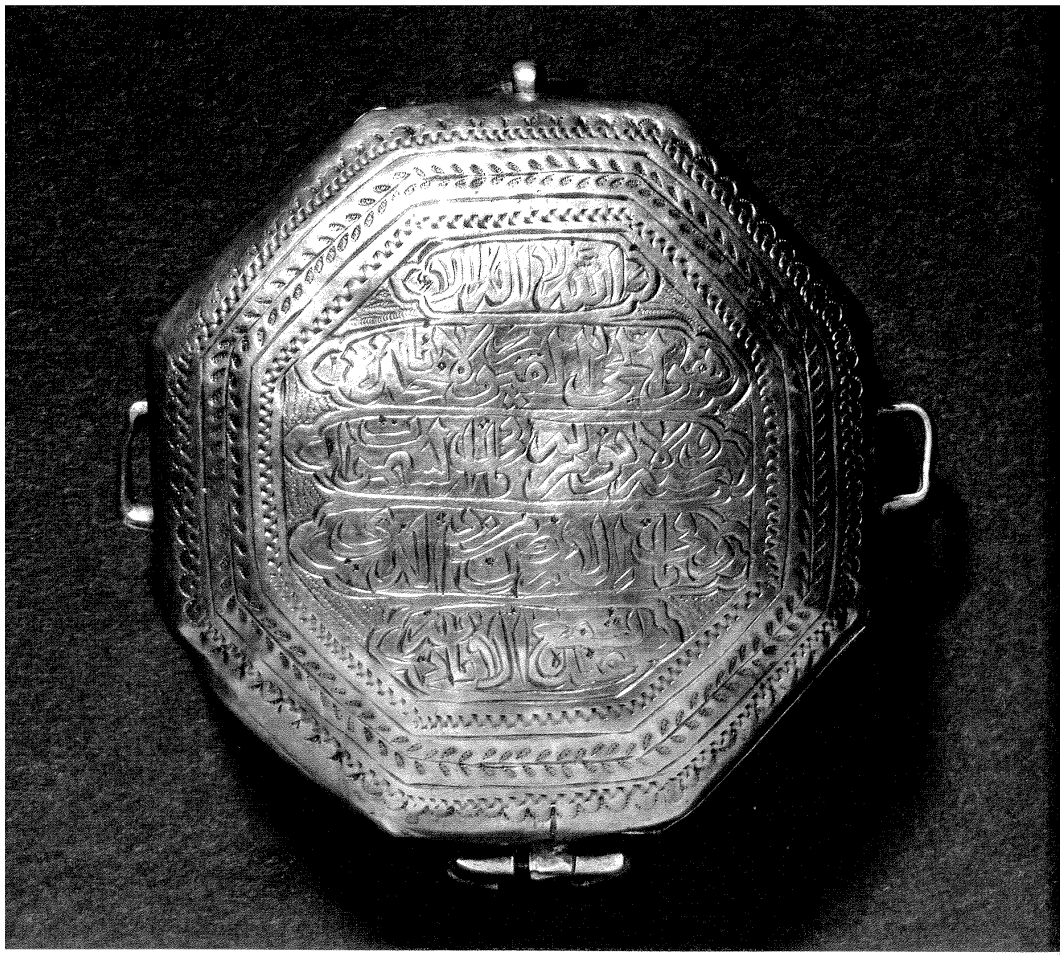


FIG. 129

OCTAGONAL AMULET CASE WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Iran or Afghanistan; 19th/1st third of 20th century

According to tradition, boxes for preserving a copy of the Qur'an written in minuscule script were usually attached to both upper arms. The first part of the 'throne verse' is written on the lid.

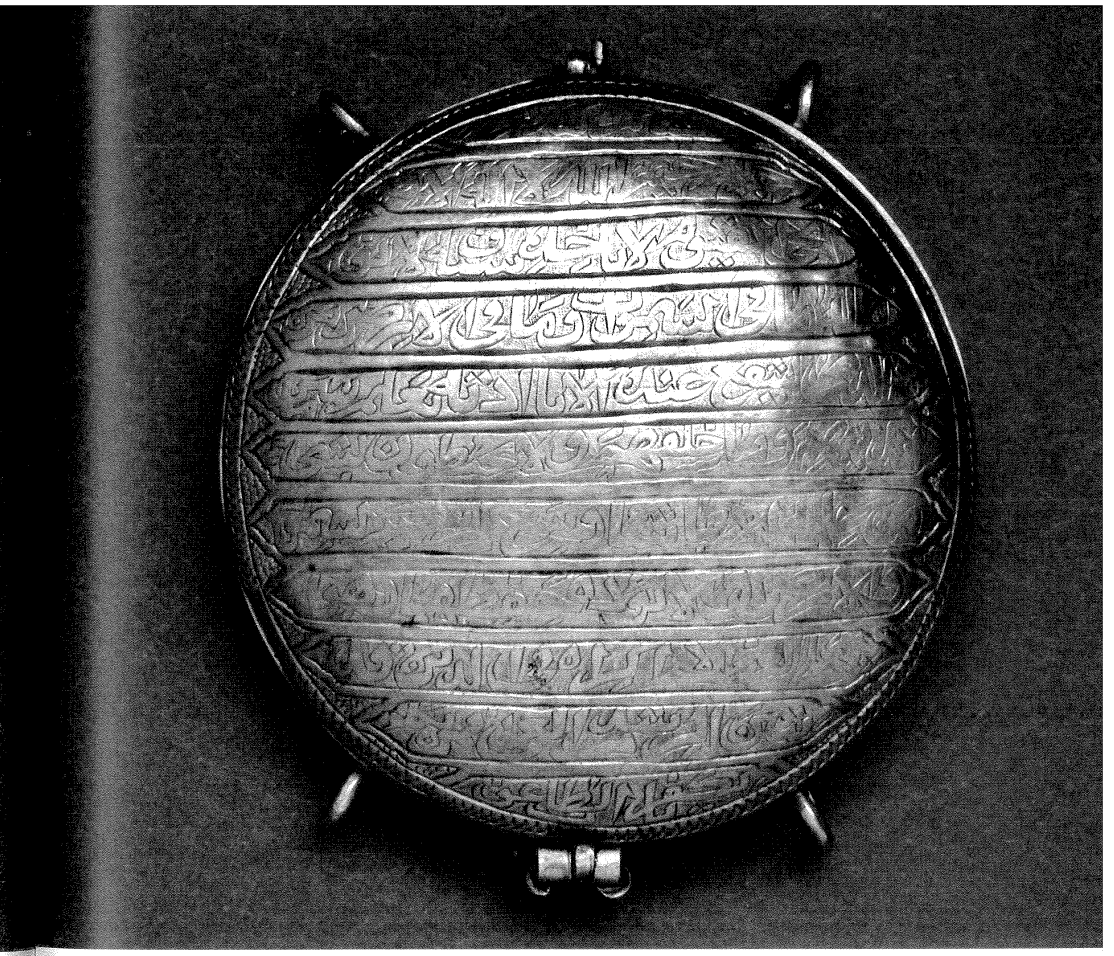


FIG. 130

ROUND AMULET BOX WITH VERSES FROM THE QUR'AN

Iran or Afghanistan; 19th/1st third of 20th century

This box on whose lid the 'throne verse' is also inscribed contains religious-magical texts presumably for additional protection. In popular belief, the 'throne verse' has as much blessing power as half of the Qur'an.

FIG. 131 (above)
CYLINDRICAL AMULET CAPSULE WITH PRAYER TEXTS
Iran or Afghanistan; 19th/1st third of 20th century
The capsule of heavy silver engraved with cursive inscriptions contains a paper amulet.

FIG. 132 (below)
CYLINDRICAL AMULET CAPSULE WITH 'THRONE VERSE'
Afghanistan; 1st half of 20th century
On round amulet capsules like this one made of chased silver sheet, the holy texts are embossed by means of stamps.

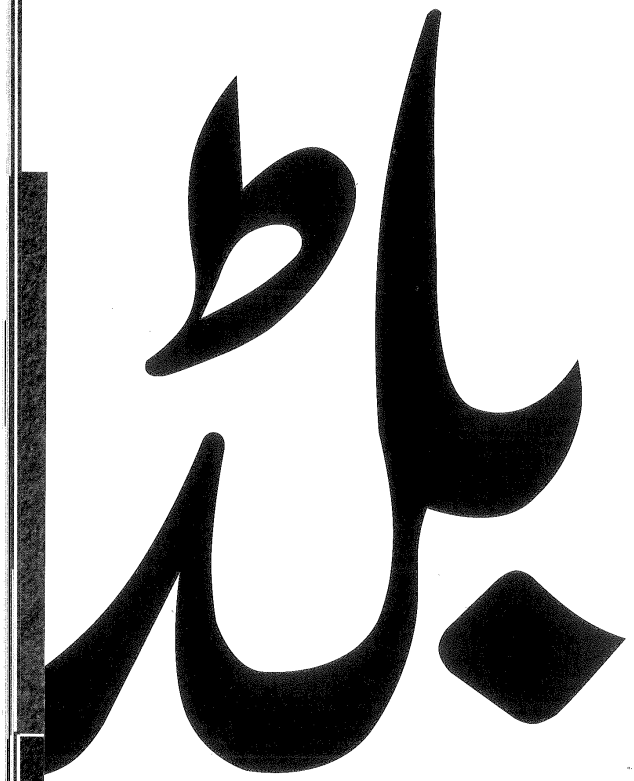
A very similar example to FIG. 129 is a pair in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection[26] which has the *āyat al-kursī* split between the two boxes. On a finely worked circular box (FIG. 130) the whole of verse 255 has been inscribed on the lid as well as the first three lines of verse 256, which would presumably have been completed on the second box. Another example in the Munich collection is inscribed with the 'victory verse' (Qur'an 61:13) and with most of sura 2:256.[27]

Amulet Cases

Amulet cases from Iran and Afghanistan in the form of six-sided and round cylindrical tubes are either decorated with floral patterns or covered with Islamic inscriptions. Usually, they are suspended from cords by two or three loops to be worn around the neck, but they can also flank a central amulet box. Such tubes would have contained rolled-up paper talismans.[28]

Among the six-sided pieces of the Munich collection one amulet case (FIG. 131) made of thick silver is especially well-executed. It is inscribed with the following prayer: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Oh renowned in the skies, oh renowned on the ground, oh renowned in this world and in the next even though tyrants and rulers work hard for the suppression of Your light and the extinction of Your world, so let it be, nevertheless, that Your light will persist and Your word be disclosed." The other six-sided amulet cases in the collection, all made of thin silver sheet, are engraved with sura 109, sura 113 as well as with invocations to Muhammad and 'Ali.[29]

Whereas inscriptions are more often engraved on the flat surfaces of the six-sided cylindrical tubes, occasionally they are also found on round tubes with fluted ends, here the inscriptions standing out in relief in *repoussé* technique, each line within a floral cartouche. Such pieces come particularly from Afghanistan and neighbouring regions of Central Asia where women generally wear them in pairs, but at times also in bundles on their dress. This type is illustrated by FIG. 132 inscribed with the 'throne verse'.



Truck Calligraphy in Pakistan

JAMAL J. ELIAS

Introduction

Vehicle decoration is a widespread practice across the world and is commonly used as a means of self-expression. The degree of decoration varies tremendously, ranging from relatively simple stickers carrying slogans (as seen in western Europe and the United States) to entirely customized automobiles, trucks and buses that represent a major passion in the lives of their proud owners. Pakistan is a country where elaborate decoration of vehicles is a normal part of everyday life, and includes everything from bicycles and push-carts to large trailer trucks.[1] Truck decoration is especially noteworthy since not only is it a visually striking practice but it is pervasive, as trucks transport the great majority of goods inside Pakistan. In spite of all their practical purposes, every truck in Pakistan is ornately decorated, and normal wear and tear necessitates a complete renovation of each truck's decorative programme every five years. As such, truck decoration represents both a vast informal economy as well as a major arena of public expression.

Truck Decoration

Most Pakistani trucks do not belong to companies with large fleets but rather to individuals (or family groups) who own no more than a handful of trucks. Usually, these owners buy a bare chassis consisting of the cabin, engine, frame and wheels, which is then taken to a workshop where it gets its bodywork, is painted, and then decorated. Truck decoration consists of a combination of calligraphy, painting, metalwork and appliqué of plastic and reflective tape. Decisions regarding the decorative programme are normally made by the owners in consultation with the artists and, to a lesser degree, the driver, although the latter buys small decorative or religious objects which he attaches to the vehicle after the truck has been completed and is already in service. On occasion, drivers also commission smaller pieces of calligraphy to go on the vehicle.

There are a number of distinct styles of truck decoration in Pakistan which correspond closely to geographic and ethnic regions.[2] The commonest style is that found across the northern Punjab, Hazara District and Azad Kashmir (Pakistan-administered Kash-

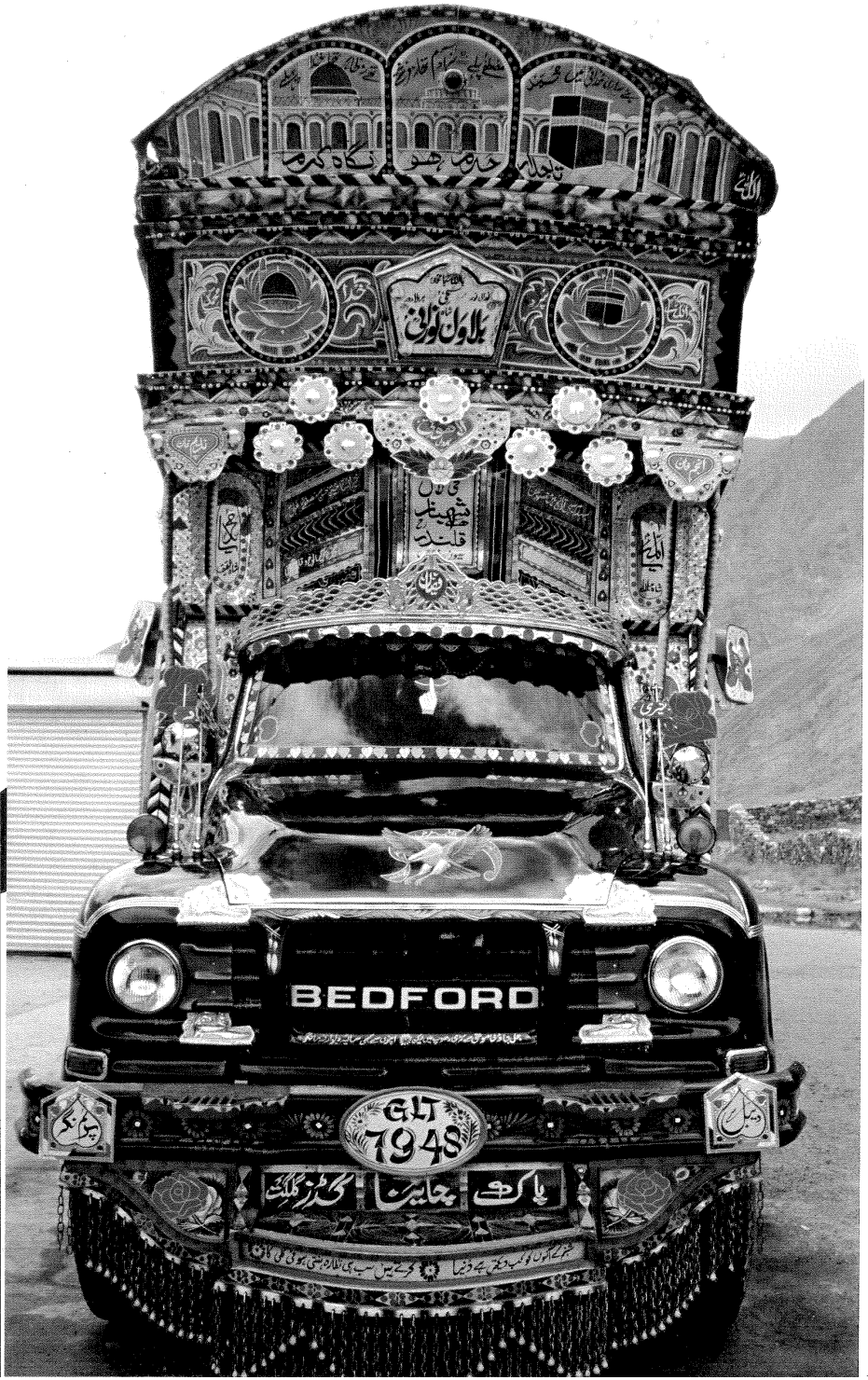


FIG. 133
RELIGIOUS EPIGRAPHY ON A PAKISTANI TRUCK
The richly embellished front of the truck is decorated with icons and a number of protective formulas in which God and the Prophet Muhammad are invoked. The calligrapher used the *nasta'līq* and *naskh* scripts.

mir), which can be called the Punjabi style. This is closely related to the Peshawar style, which differs from the Punjabi style mostly in its greater use of carved wood, especially above the windshield and on the doors. The Balochi style is the most elaborate, above all in its use of dramatic extensions to the front bumper and extensive and intricate mosaics made of reflective tape.

Contents

Stylistic variation notwithstanding, Pakistani truck design follows certain clear – if unspoken – rules concerning the nature of decorations and writings as well as their placement. The front of the vehicle is the most elaborate and combines religious and (what might best be described as) 'high culture' literary and artistic references. The sides of the vehicle have painting chosen for primarily aesthetic reasons (landscapes with or without buildings, beautiful animals and portraits of real and imagined people) as well as writing identifying the company to which the truck belongs. The back of the truck, though less ornate than the front, is often as rich in its decoration, and is the only place where humorous aphorisms and large examples of visual art are found (for a number of reasons, both practical and conventional, the sides of the truck are almost never used for large designs or paintings such as panoramic landscapes).

Although the designs and images represent the more striking aspects of the trucks' visual decoration, they are not readily understood as providing any explicit or systematic message by the majority of people who look at the truck. In contrast, the textual material that is included as part of the truck's decorative programme is very clearly selected to be seen as well as read, and to provide explicit messages concerning the identity and concerns of the individuals associated with the truck. This applies to the high-quality calligraphy that forms part of the decorative programme when the truck is first completed in a workshop, as well as other, less formal and frequently less skilful, examples that are added later on. Unsurprisingly, text is used to impart mundane information such as the name of the owner and transportation company, as well as to advertise the services of painters and body-makers involved in the trucks' completion. But it is also text, rather than image, that is used to actively engage viewers in the most direct manner and to communicate a variety of messages with them, as is apparent from the following examples.

Text, Image and Message

The first example (FIG. 133) shows the front of a truck decorate in the Punjabi style common to northern and central Pakista and in Pakistani-administered Kashmir (Azad Kashmir). Religiou epigraphy is used extensively in this example, frequently inte mingled with pictorial representations. The Kaaba in Mecca ar the Prophet's mosque in Medina appear twice in pictorial form, the second and fourth frames on the arched panel at the very top the truck, and in the circles towards the outside of the rectangul panel directly below it. Accompanying these pictorial represent tions, the names of Allah and Muhammad are invoked four times writing as *yā Allāh – yā Muhammad*: (1) on the extreme ends of th top panel (the *yā Muhammad* is damaged); (2) on the panel belo it immediately to the outside of the circular medallions with th Kaaba and Prophet's mosque in them and again (3) in very sma writing on the central medallion; and (4) towards the outside of th curved panel above the windshield.

In every case, the words *yā Allāh* and *yā Muhammad* are wri ten from right to left as one faces the truck, in accordance with th way the Arabic (as well as Urdu and Persian) scripts are writte from right to left. It is noteworthy that the pictorial representatio of the Kaaba and the Prophet's mosque – which signify God ar His Prophet, respectively – also appear from right to left on th truck. As such, the images can be seen as pictorial renditions of th names; in other words, the image and the text are interchangeab in this context.

There are several other pieces of religious epigraphy on th panels above the windshield of this vehicle; across the very top a couplet describing Muhammad's status as the primordial huma being:

bane sārī khudāī meñ Muhammad Mustafā pehle
na Adam thā na farishte the na zāhir thā Khudā pehle

In all God's creation Muhammad was made first,
there was no Adam, there were no angels, God was not apparent.

At the bottom of the same panel is the inscription *tājdār-e haram h nigāh-e karam* ("Crown-bearer, he is, vision of grace"), an honorif title given to Muhammad and popularized in modern Pakistan in *qawwālī* song by the Sabri Brothers.

To either side of the medallion at the centre of the second panel from the top is the phrase *sapurd-e Khudā* ("in God's protection"). Both central medallions invoke the names of saints, the crown-shaped top one that of Shah Bilawal Nurani, "luminescent light, all afflictions stay away" (*nurāni nūr har balā dūr*), and the lower rectangular one of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, the most popular Sufi saint in all of Pakistan.

The metal medallions hanging off the bottom of the middle panel have the names of the owners on either end (Anjum Khan and Nadim Khan) and the name of the truck in the middle (*Lāhūtī Kārvān* – "Divine Caravan"). The word *Fayzān* ("benefactor") appears right above the windshield, and is most likely another name for the truck.

The grille on either side of the central medallion on the curved cowling above the windshield has two couplets, the first asserting that Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband 'Ali, and their sons Hasan and Husain are the best of human beings. The lower couplet is very popular on trucks in various parts of the country:

kī Muhammad se vafā tū ne to ham tere haiñ
yeh jahān chīz hai kyā luh-o-qalam tere haiñ

If you are faithful to Muhammad, then I am yours.
What is this world after all, the pen and the tablet are yours.

The lower half of the truck carries more calligraphy, though it is different in its focus: at the bottom of the radiator under the name Bedford, there is a non-religious couplet written on a very narrow band:

jal jāo khāmushī se kari dhūp meñ lekin
apnoñ se kabhī sāya-e dīvār na māngo

Burn away in silence under the blazing sun, but
never ask your relatives for the shade of a simple wall.

Below that are the registration number and two small panels on the ends of the bumper advertising the route. Directly under the oval registration plate is the name of the truck company (Pak China Goods, Gilgit). At the bottom is another non-religious couplet:

shabnam kā ānsū ko kab dekhtī hai dunyā
karte haiñ sab hī nazāra hāñstī hui kalī kā

Who ever notices the tears of the morning dew
everyone is busy looking at the smiling rosebud.

This truck is an excellent example of the incorporation of calligraphy into a decorative programme as well as for the use of text to impart information about the owners of the truck and their attitudes towards religion. Many of the religious references are to Sufi saints and poetry, suggesting that – like many Pakistanis – the owners' religiosity expresses itself through Sufism.[3]

The calligraphy is also of consistently high quality, using several different scripts (especially variations of *nasta'līq* and *naskh*). There is no discernible reason why a particular calligraphic script is used in a particular place, but the consistent attention to style makes it clear that the owners care deeply about the role of writing in the ornamentation of the truck. This is frequently the case, particularly on the front of the vehicle, which functions as its 'face' to the world, but there is often a discrepancy in quality between examples of writing on any one vehicle.

FIGURE 134 provides an example of a truck with similar levels of attention to detail in the extensive use of calligraphy deployed in its design. As in the previous example, Allah and Muhammad are invoked both visually and textually – in the outermost circles on the top panel and in the outer circles on the panel below it. The central medallion on this panel contains three names, those of Allah, Muhammad and 'Ali (evoked as *nabī* – "prophet" – and *wāris* – "successor" – respectively). 'Ali was the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and is deeply revered by many Sunnis in Pakistan, in addition to his central role as the first Imam in Shi'ism and as the first successor to Muhammad according to the majority of Sufis. The rest of the medallions contain epithets of God. All the calligraphy in this example is in variations of the same style, one that is commonly used for writing Arabic (as opposed to Urdu and Persian). This is appropriate in this context because both epithets of God and the names of Muhammad and 'Ali are in Arabic and evoke the Qur'an.

A variant of the similar calligraphic style is used in the large central medallion of the truck in FIG. 135, which declares "Allah is the Best of Providers" (*Allāh khayr ar-rāziqīn*). However, in this example there is an epigraphic band of substantially lower artistic value: written in white on a red background, it is in two parts. On both outer ends,

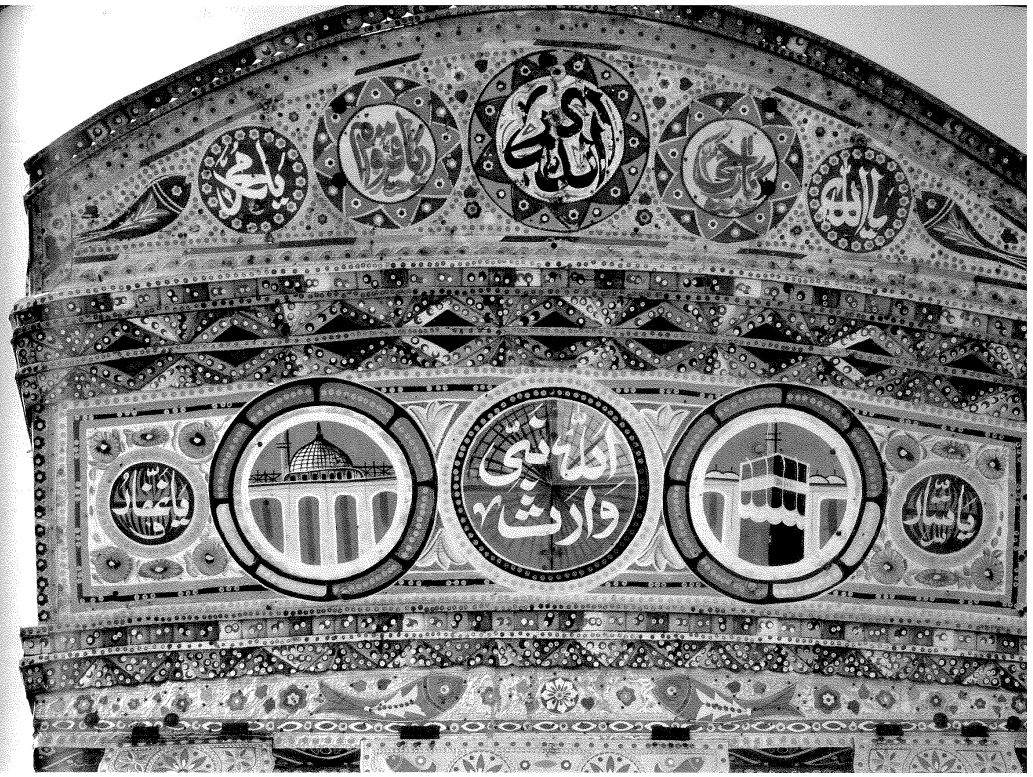


FIG. 134
INSCRIPTIONS ON THE 'CROWN' OF A TRUCK
The part of a Pakistani truck raised like a crown is always reserved for inscriptions with religious character here for invocations to Allah, Muhammad and 'Ali.

FIG. 135
APHORISM ON THE FRONT OF A TRUCK
In the central medaillon at the upper edge of the picture is written "Allah is the best provider." Pious Pakistanis use this aphorism frequently in everyday life.

FIG. 136 (following double page)
RELIGIOUS EPIGRAPY ON THE 'CROWN' OF A TRUCK
The central medallion is filled with the names of Sufi saints, framed by peacocks, fish and eye symbols.

it says "The Name of God" (*nām-e Khudā*). This surrounds an Urdu couplet with a religious theme:

terī shān zu'l-jalāl hai
terī māng rizq-e halāl hai
merī 'ajizī ko kar qabūl
merī zindagī ka savāl hai

Your glory is majestic,
your requirement is honest labour.
Accept from me my weakness,
it is a question of my life.

It is not uncommon for such verses to be added to the vehicle after the original decorative programme has been completed.[4] Owners and drivers will commission the work from calligraphers who are sometimes less skilled, and the difference in quality is quite apparent to the informed viewer.

A similar variance in the calligraphy's artistic merit is found in the example in FIG. 136, showing the front of a truck, although in this case it appears that the calligrapher was more adept at using the *nasta'līq* script – commonly used for Urdu – than the *naskh* used for Arabic. The Arabic phrases *yā Allāh* and *yā Muhammad* appear in white on the roses, and the formula *māshā'allāh* ("as God wishes") appears at the centre of the metallic piece directly above the inverted red triangle. The epigraphy on either side of the formula gives the name of the body-maker (M. Iqbal Islam Bodymakers, Khushab). The two metal medallions applied to the outside in the bottom of the image, as well as the central medallion with two eyes, all have the names of Sufi saints of regional significance. Finally, as in the previous example, there is a religious couplet in white on a red background (to the outside of this red band it says *vāh! vāh!* – "Oh! Oh!") and *nām-e Khudā* ("the Name of God"):

yeh sab terā karam hai āqā
keh bāt ab tak banī hui hai

It is by Your grace, O Lord,
that things are still going well!

Ambivalence of Signification

The back of the truck contrasts with the front in many ways. The relative informality of the back, plus the frequent wear and tear to which it is subjected, means that there is almost never any overt religious content to the epigraphy on the back. This is exemplified by the case in fig. 137: the tailgate of the truck (occupying the top half of the image) has the name of the truck company, Bhatti Goods Transport Company, Badin, Badin being a city south of the centre of Sindh province. The black panel directly below the tailgate has two short aphorisms together with the name of the individual – Mulazim Khan, the driver – who commissioned them:

tū chīz barī hai mast mast
You are an intoxicating thing!

and

jalne vāle (kā) mūnh kālā
May the jealous onlooker's face go back!

To the bottom of the truck in FIG. 137 four moveable panels are fixed with a variety of epigraphic themes. In addition to the registration number written in both English and Urdu, the outer plates display two very popular formulas: "Come safely, leave safely!" (*khayr nāl ā, khayr nāl jā*) and "A mother's prayers are the breeze of heaven!" (*mān kī du'ā jannat kī havā*). The two inner middle panels have the names of the owners (Abdul Hamid Naik and Abdus Sattar Naik) and that of the truck (M. Zubair Naik Aeroplane, probably after the father or elder brother of the other two owners). This set of panels also provides a reference to the home town of the owners, using a familiar formula in which the prayer "Long live!" is followed by the name of a place, in this case a village named Sultan Khan Baloch.

The truck in FIG. 137 represents an excellent example of the transformation of Pakistani truck decoration from a regional phenomenon, in which owners and drivers from a particular ethnically defined area get the bodywork as well as the ornamentation completed in their home region, rather than the place where they reside. As evidenced by its registration plate, from a legal standpoint this truck is from Dera Ismail Khan, an ethnically mixed town in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) approximately 300 km west of Lahore. The population is primarily Baloch and Pashtun, although

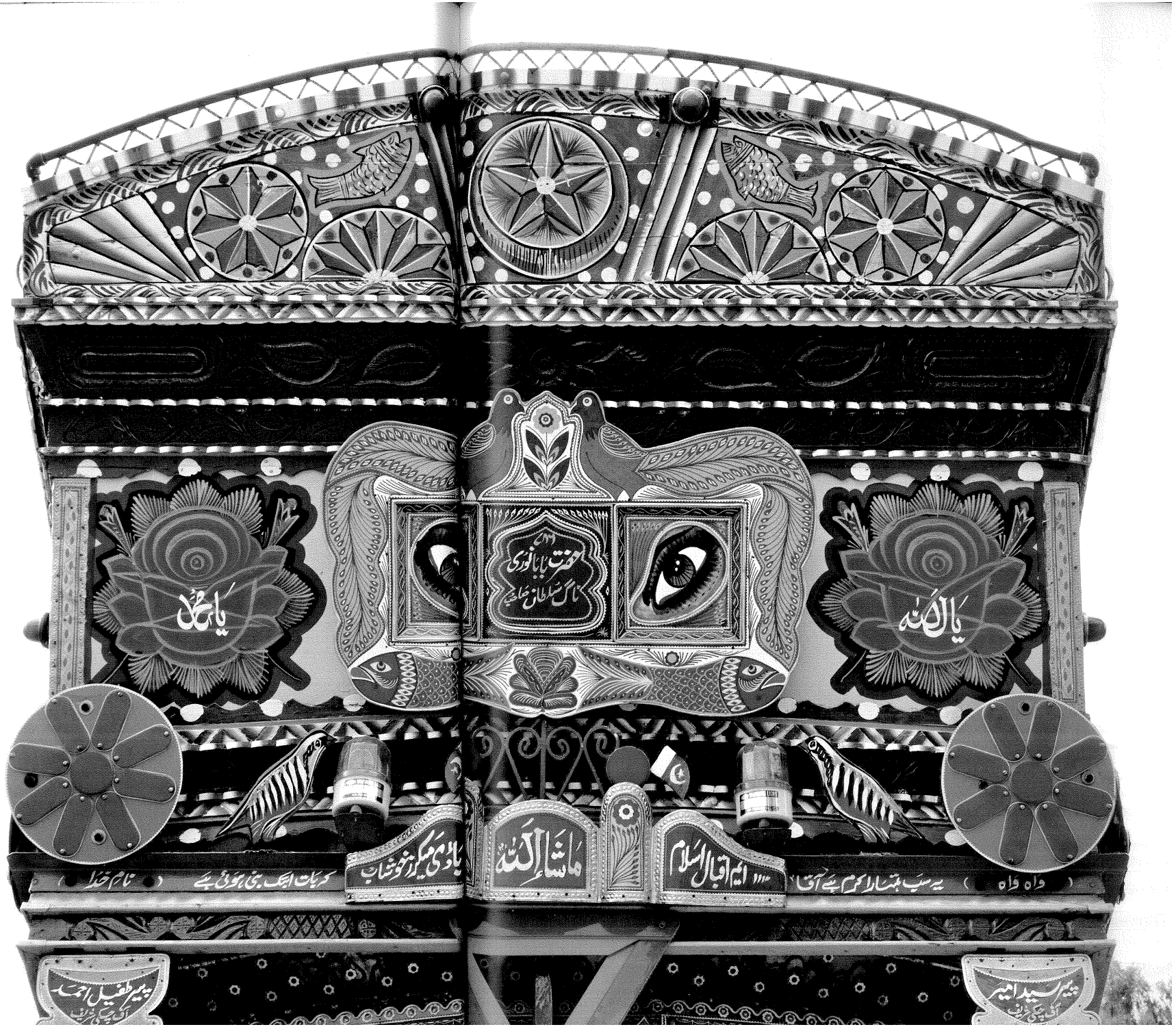
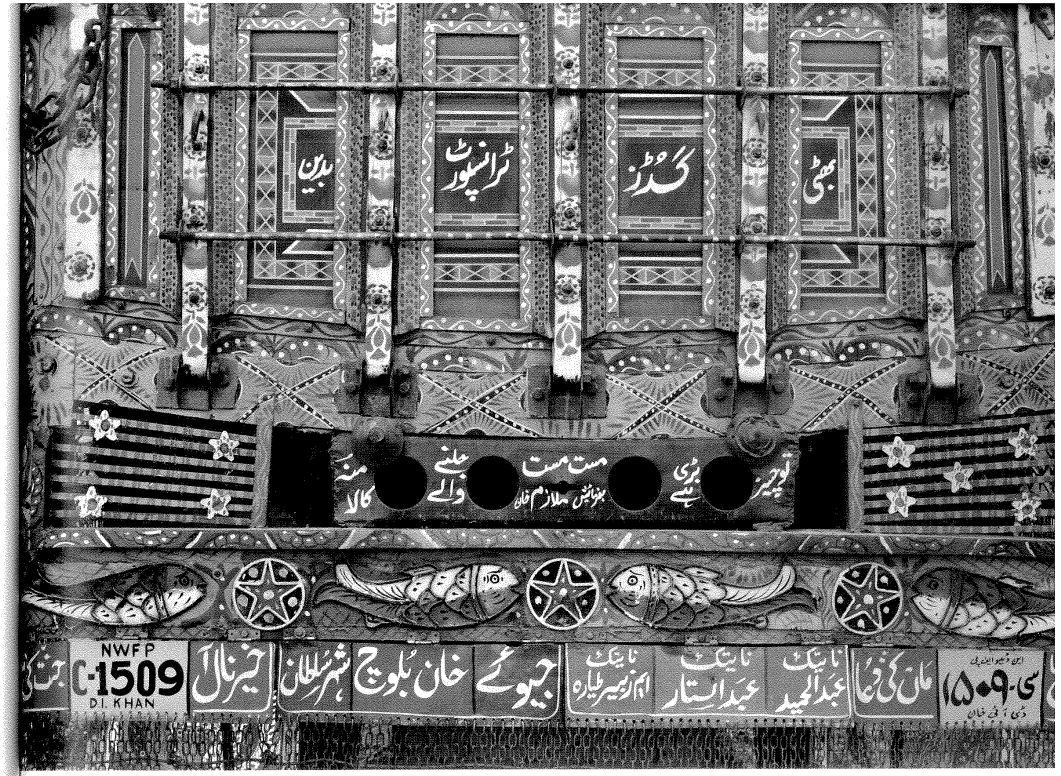

یا اللہ
یا محمد
محنت بابا نوری
ناگ سلطان صاحب
ماشاء اللہ
ایم اقبال اسلام
یادی میکر خوشاب
کہ یات ایتک بنی ہوئی ہے
نام خدا
واہ واہ
یہ سب ہتسارا کرم ہے آقا
پیر طفیل احمد
پیر سید امیر

FIG. 137

BACK OF A TRUCK WITH INSCRIPTIONS

Various names, aphorisms and short sayings are written below the tailboard.



the major language of the district is Siraiki (closely related to Punjabi, the commonest language in Pakistan). However, the company which owns (or leases) the truck is based in Badin, approximately 1000 km from Dera Ismail Khan by road and in an entirely different ethnic area. The writing on the vehicle is either in Urdu (the national language, used commonly on trucks throughout Pakistan) or in Punjabi, with no examples of Sindhi or Balochi in evidence.

In recent times, a significant subgroup of Pakistan's trucks have started breaking the traditional, albeit informal, rule of restricting religious writing and images to the front of the vehicle.[5] Religious epigraphy has begun to appear on the sides and the back of vehicles, although in almost all cases they consist of exhortations to piety rather than medallions containing the names of God, the Prophet, or Sufi and Shi'a saints which serve as talismans protecting the truck, its operators and its cargo. FIG. 138 shows the bottom half of the truck in FIG. 136 and is an example of such writing on the front bumper, with its two outermost panels declaring: "Prayer is the path to salvation" (*namāz rāh-e najāt hai*) and "Prayer is the key to heaven" (*namāz jannat kī kunjī hai*). The inner panels bear more traditional messages: the central ones declare "Dear Mother! I need your prayers! I just need the cool breeze of your bosom!" (*piyārī mān! Mujh ko terī duʿā chāhiye! Tere ānchal kī bas thandī havā chāhiye!*), to the outside of which is the truck's name, Bulbul-e Hazara (The Nightingale of Hazara, Hazara being a district just northwest of Islamabad, home to a disproportionate number of truck and bus drivers).

Religious exhortations of this sort are found on the sides of vehicles, occupying the same locations and written in the same styles used for displaying the name of the transportation company to which the truck belongs or the names of cities where the company has offices. Religious messages are almost never found on the back of the vehicle for several practical reasons, all of which relate directly to questions of piety and propriety: (a) the back of the truck suffers a much higher degree of wear and tear than the rest of the vehicle, and it is considered inappropriate to have religious messages on the section of the vehicle that gets damaged the quickest; (b) trucks frequently carry 'dirty' loads such as fertilizer and other ritually unclean commodities; and (c) people routinely clamber over the back of the vehicle as it is loaded and unloaded, and it is considered improper by Pakistanis to step on religious names and words. On the back of a truck whimsical sayings or expressions of folk wisdom can be found, such as *muhabbat sab ke liye, nafrat kisī se nahīñ* ("Love for all, hate for no one"), also written on an iron decoration piece shaped as an eagle with outstretched wings which belongs to the Oriental collection of the Museum of Ethnology in Munich (FIG. 139).

The major exception to the practice of refraining from references to religion on the back of the vehicle is found on dump trucks employed in the quarrying and transportation of gravel and other construction materials. Especially on the Potohar Plateau near Islamabad, such trucks carry a variety of messages advertising the religious affiliation of the owner. The truck in FIG. 140 is an excellent example of this style. The top of the vehicle displays the slogan "O Allah! Help us!" (*yā Allāh! Madad!*) in blue, with exhortations of the first four caliphs of the Sunnis on either side. Immediately below it is a couplet in Urdu asking for God's mercy: "Your servant is a sinner, but You are merciful, Lord! – Showing grace to your servant is Your glory, Lord!" (*banda to gunahgār hai tū rahmān hai Mawlā – bande peh karam karnā terī shān hai Mawlā*). The central panel has a banner with the message *jihād* on it, while the medallions on either side celebrate the name of a Sunni Muslim missionary movement (*Daʿwat-e tablīgh zindabād*). Below the crossed swords is the name of the owner (Gul Faruq), while the bottom panel has the name and telephone number of the company to which the truck belongs (Ejaz and Co. Building Material Suppliers, Haripur).

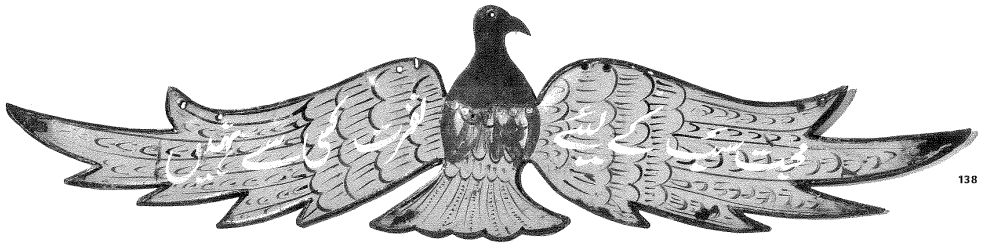


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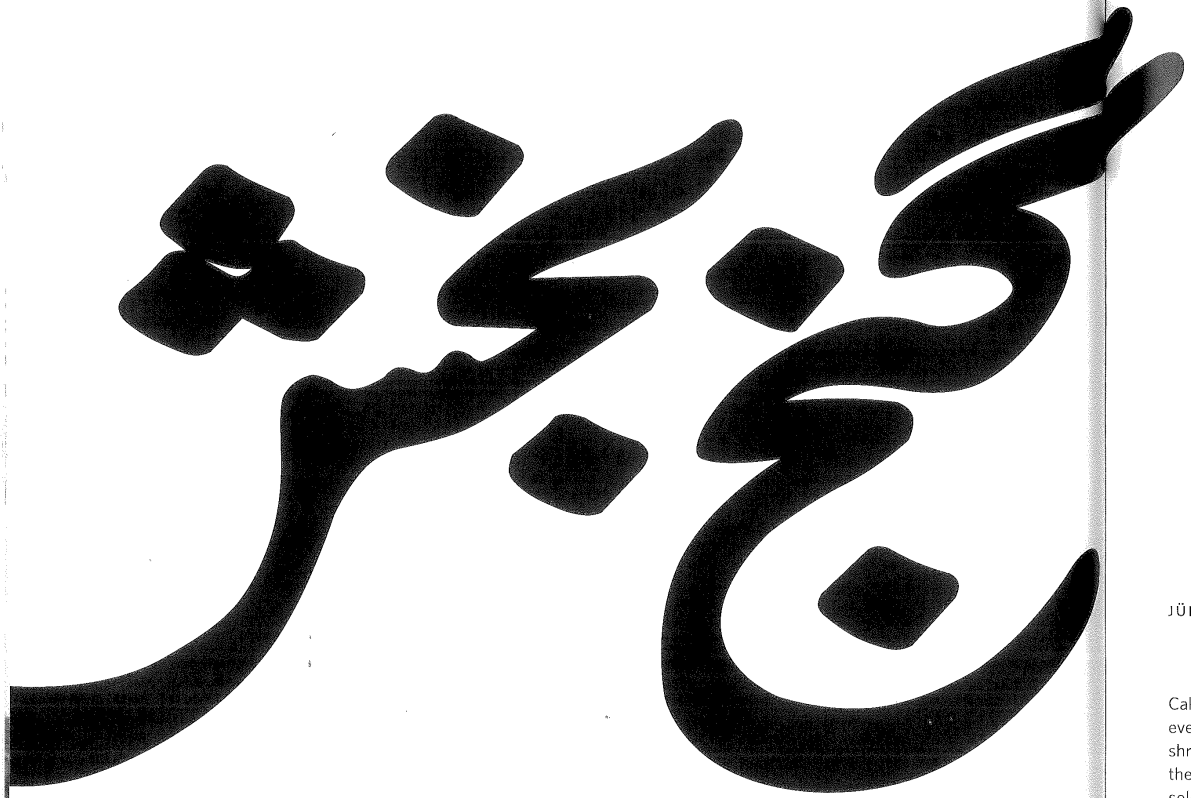
FIG. 138 (left above)
DECORATIVE PANEL IN THE SHAPE OF AN EAGLE WITH INSCRIPTION
Pakistan; 1970s/1980s
The decorative panel on a truck shows the message of peace "Love for all, hate for no one" in Urdu.

FIG. 139 (left below)
DECORATIVE SCRIPT EMPHASIZING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRAYER
These inscriptions are located on the bottom half of the truck whose 'crown' can be seen in fig. 134.

FIG. 140 (right)
INSCRIPTIONS WITH SUNNI ISLAMIC CONTENT
The back of a dump truck is inscribed with invocations to God and the four caliphs of Sunni Islam and references to the missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat.



Calligraphy in the World of Sufi Shrines in Pakistan

JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

Calligraphy, epigraphic ornaments and inscriptions dominate both everyday life in Pakistan in general and the visual programme of shrines of Sufi saints in particular. In the popular Sufi tradition in the Punjab and Sindh, from where the following examples were selected, Arabic script decidedly serves as a manifestation of Islamic spirituality and is accordingly perceived as belonging to the sacred sphere. In the inscriptions from contemporary popular Islam presented in greater detail here, the artists endeavoured for the most part to use calligraphy, although there are also texts of a more informative and functional nature.

Calligraphy in Architecture

In the low-lying regions of Pakistan, the exteriors and sometimes the interiors of tombs and adjacent buildings (such as homes of shrine attendants, dervish lodges, Shi'ite assembly halls) and other sacred places connected with the life of Sufi saints are often decorated with calligraphy. At the shrines of Sunni saints, for example, one finds along with the *basmala* formula and the profession of faith invocations of God and the prophets as well as occasionally of the *chār yār*, the "four friends", meaning in this case the first four righteous caliphs. Expressions praising Allah, such as *yā hayy – yā qayyūm* ("Oh, the Alive, oh, the Self-Subsisting") can also frequently be found on religious posters, on motor vehicles and elsewhere in public spaces.[1] In contrast, the mausoleums of Shi'ite saints are decorated with the names of the Holy Family, in other words the names Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain. Invocations such as *yā 'Alī madad* – "Oh 'Ali, help!", addressed to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the first Imam of the Shia, as well as Persian eulogies for Imam Husain reveal distinct links between the shrine in question and the Shi'ite denomination. However, these Arabic formulas often say more about the religious identity of the adherents and the corresponding social milieu of the deceased saint than about their actual religious affiliation, which may have been less clearly defined. This is not the case at the shrines of Sufi poets, where the faithful frequently can read the mystical verses written on the arch surfaces or cartouches, for example in Punjabi

FIG. 141

CALLIGRAPHIC WALL DECORATION IN A DERVISH HERMITAGE

In the assembly hall next to a saint's shrine in Sehwan Sharif (Sindh/Pakistan) the 'red Sufi' Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is invoked in an inscription painted in red. His nickname Jhule Lal ("the Red one who rocks himself" – like a child in the cradle) is the name of the ancient water deity of the Indus whose alter ego the Qalandar saint has become.

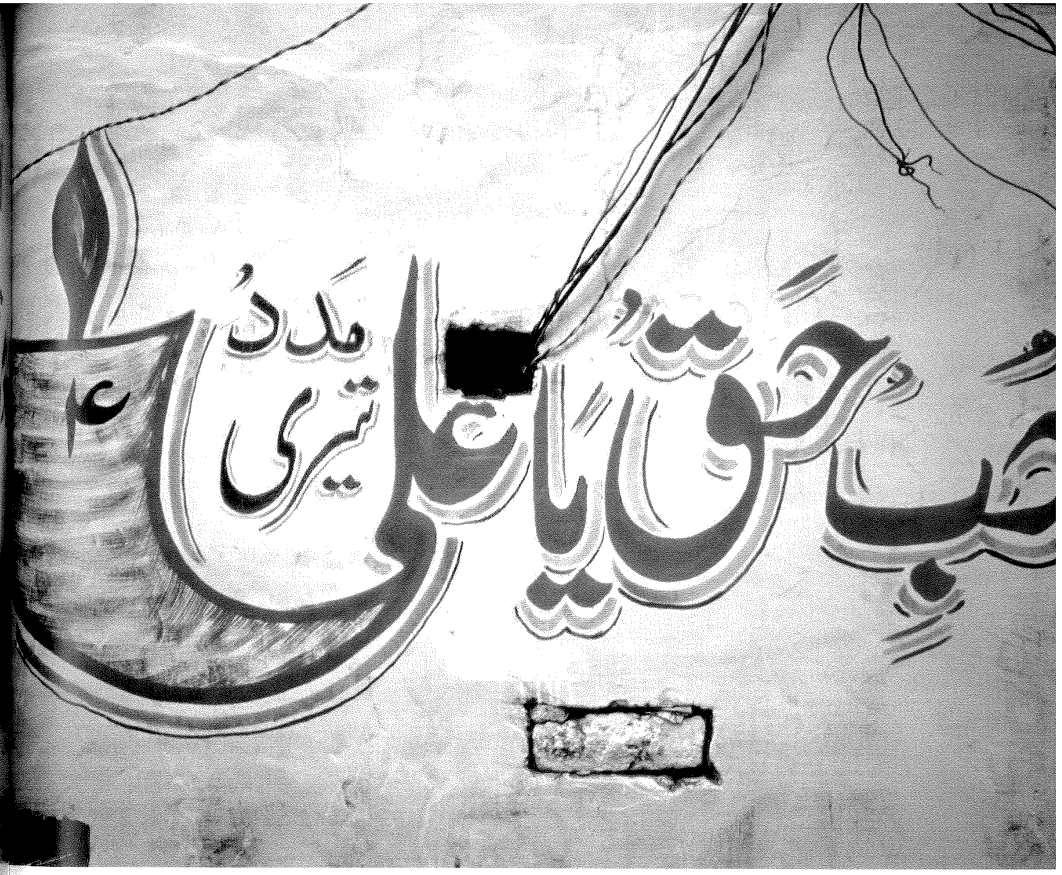


FIG. 142

CALLIGRAPHIC WALL DECORATION ON A DERVISH HERMITAGE

A dervish and former trance dancer who lives in a poor quarter on the outskirts of Lahore (Punjab/Pakistan) has had "True love, oh 'Ali!" written on the outside wall of his modest home.

FIG. 143 (below)
SUFI POSTER WITH THE TOMB OF THE PATRON SAINT OF LAHORE
Lahore/Pakistan; 2004

Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh Hujwiri (d. 465 H/1072 CE), whose name is written on the poster in yellow letters above the dome of his tomb, is considered, along with Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, as Pakistan's most famous Sufi saint. The praise in the two red cartouches reads: "Bestower of treasures, blessing of the world, reflector of the splendours of God; an accomplished guide for the ignorant (and) and guide on the path for the learned." The names listed below on the right side give his descent and on the left his spiritual geneology.

FIG. 144 (right)
STICKER WITH INSCRIPTIONS
Peshawar/Pakistan; 1988

Stickers with religious content are pasted on objects both in Sufi shrines and mosques and in everyday life on vehicles, shop windows, machines, etc. The two wings of the butterfly contain the names Allah (right) and Muhammad (left). Below them are the Kaaba in Mecca and the Prophet's mosque in Medina. The *basmala* formula is written on the insect's head and on its body the profession of faith in Kufic-inspired letters.

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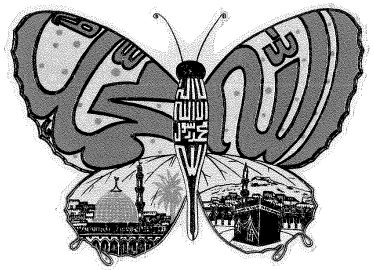

at the mausoleum of Bullhe Shah (d. 1758) in Kasur.[2] At most Sufi shrines where emphasis is placed on aesthetic appearance, the names of the saints and their honorifics are displayed in prominent places. Inscriptions are usually written in bright colours and are often framed with decorative motifs and ornaments. Today, however, there is also a trend toward mirror mosaics. The script is – with only a few exceptions – the *nastaʿlīq* commonly used for Urdu in Pakistan.

Since the 1980s I have found the most enchanting forms of popular calligraphy on dervish lodges, dervish hermitages and small devotional buildings frequently close to saints' shrines in the Punjab and Sindh. Among the most notable is the Kafi Bodla Bahar, in other words the dervish hospice (*kāfī*) of the saint Bodla Bahar[3], the most famous pupil of the popular Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (d. 1274), in Sehwan Sharif in the province of Sindh in southern Pakistan. The whitewashed outer walls of the buildings and some of the walls inside the lodge are decorated with the names of the saints and their successors and with pious invocations in bright colours. My photographic documentation shows the condition of the *kāfī* in November 2007 (a year later this folk art already had been whitewashed). The calligraphic inscriptions extant at that time were painted in 2006 by Shaukat ʿAli Shauqi, a follower of Bodla Bahar, who lives as a calligrapher, sign painter and singer in Dina in northwestern Punjab. FIG. 141 shows one of his inscriptions in the dervishes' assembly hall. Written zestfully in red are the words *Jhūle Laʿl – Qalandar mast*: Jhule Lal – "the Red One, who rocks himself" (like a child in the cradle) – which is Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's nickname, and the phrase following it means roughly the "enraptured Qalandar."[4] Next to this in green is the name Sayyid Khadim Jalali-Qalandri, Bodla Bahar's living successor who has inherited this saint's charisma and belongs to the Sufi order of the Jalali Qalandri.[5] Calligraphic inscriptions of this type which decorate individual walls of the half-open assembly hall create a devotional atmosphere around the central fire in which the mystical quality of the Arabic script unfolds. Formulas of praise such as *Jhūle Laʿl – Qalandar mast*, which the dervishes repeatedly recite and exclaim in ecstasy during their ritual gatherings, also appear on the walls here. Calligraphy of this type is a harmonious expression of the world of Qalandar dervishes. In a very similar manner inscriptions on an oil-lamp house at the shrine of Sain ʿAbdul Majid in Nurpur Shahan near Islamabad and at the pilgrimage destination of Cho-tombi near Sehwan Sharif are expressions of devotion to Sufi saints.

An unusual and original calligraphic inscription is located on an outer wall of the dervish hermitage of Baba Firuz Sain, who lives in a cemetery in Kot Lakhpat at the outskirts of Lahore. On his instructions, the young calligrapher and sign painter Mohammad Riaz inscribed *hubb-e haq yā ʿAlī* – "True love, oh ʿAli" (FIG. 142) in red paint superimposed on ochre yellow which gives it more depth. In the interstices between the letters *lām* und *ye* of the saint's name *madad terī* – "Help (comes) from You" has been added in black. Imaginatively and closely linked to local devotional popular Islam, the calligrapher has formed the curve of the last letter of the pious Shi'ite invocation like a flame or candle, thus evoking the motif of the oil lamp which is lit as a votive offering at saints' graves.[6] It refers both to the famous light verse in the Qurʾan (24:35) and thus to the divine light and to the image of the moth – so popular in mystical poetry – which flutters around the light and is itself consumed by the flame. However, in the present depiction the number 4 which has been inscribed on the candle suggests the very special ritual context of the veneration of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. According to a well-known saying which has found its way into devotional songs, *chār charāgh tere bālan hamisha, panjwān maiñ bālan āʾī bālā jīwe lāʾlan* – "Four oil-lamps always burn for you, I have come to light the fifth for the Praised One. Long live Laʾl."[7]

Calligraphy inside a Mausoleum

While outside the inner sanctuary at Sufi shrines religious scrolls, placards and posters with images of saints are often hung up, in the *sanctum sanctorum* only ornamental and calligraphic designs are allowed in compliance with the orthodox avoidance of images. Thus on the inner walls of the sanctuary we find framed reverse-glass paintings, posters (FIG. 143) and embroidered inscriptions, religious calligraphic inscriptions which are written directly on the wall, banners bearing inscriptions, and today often stickers (FIG. 144) as well. Precious, richly decorated banners and embroideries with religious verses and names of saints embroidered on them are usually donated to the shrine. This applies in particular to the cloths on which verses from the Qurʾan have been stamped or embroidered (*chādar, ghilāf*) and which are placed on the saint's tomb (SEE FIG. 143). Epigraphy is naturally found mostly on the headstone, which is often richly decorated (CF. FIG. 143). Particularly in Sindh, headstones of Sufi saints are crowned with turbans, which sometimes have an embroidered band beneath with inscriptions. All calligraphic inscriptions, pictures, etc. inside and outside the

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FIG. 145
INSCRIBED WATER POTS

The two pots painted green bear the inscription *derah Phulāñ Wālī Sarkār*, i.e. they belong to the place in the city of Rawalpindi (Punjab/Pakistan) where the 'Saint of Flowers' lives. The addition *Sa'īn Salīm* is the name of a dervish who serves him.

FIG. 146 (left)
ROOT WOOD WITH "MUHAMMAD" WRITTEN ON IT

Such calligraphic 'proofs of divine action in nature' are sometimes carried by peripatetic dervishes. The Malang from the coastal city of Karachi in southern Pakistan presents his root wood like a sceptre.

FIG. 147 (right)
CEREMONIAL HEADDRESS WITH RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

During a procession, the Sayyid (descendant of the Prophet) from a dervish lodge in Sehwan Sharif (Sindh/Pakistan) wears a voluminous headdress with inscriptions (invocation to 'Ali, profession of faith, designation of the lodge).

shrine are sacred objects imbued with the saint's blessing power which are touched and kissed with reverence.

Calligraphy in the Context of the World of Sufis and Dervishes

On their pilgrimages to sacred destinations, peripatetic dervishes often carry banners embroidered with religious inscriptions which they attach to their tent or shelter (*derah*) as a visible sign of their affiliation with a particular Sufi saint. Transportable articles for daily use such as water pots (FIG. 145), which form part of the inventory of shrines, are sometimes also inscribed with the names of saints.

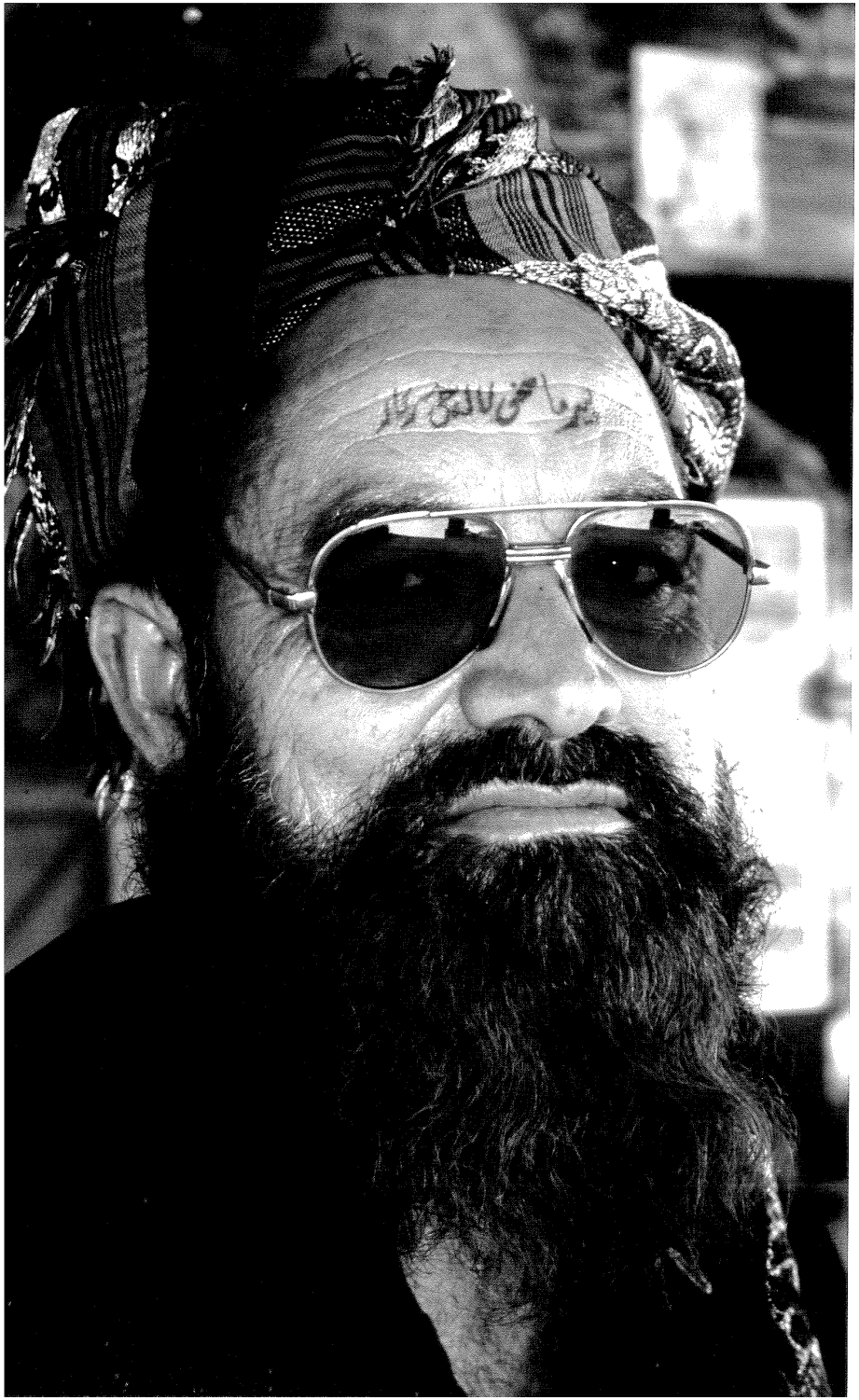
While in the past dervishes' alms bowls decorated with inscriptions in Sufi lodges were presented as sacred objects like relics and presumably at times formed part of the paraphernalia of peripatetic mystics, today there are hardly any such vessels made from coco de mer, metal or wood decorated with calligraphic inscriptions.[8] However, some dervishes, in particular of the Qalandar order, sometimes have unusual objects with inscriptions: during a saint's festival in Rawalpindi in October 1992 I met a *malang* (dervish) who called himself Sabil-wala and carried with him an object formed from the root of the *nīm* tree which – with some imagination – could be read as the name of the Prophet (FIG. 146). To facilitate legibility, he had fastened it to a piece of white cardboard. This proof of the divine in nature, created so to speak by Allah himself, was his 'computer', which provided him with answers to all his questions. Some dervishes carry with them such 'proofs of God', in which they believe they recognize Arabic letters in the marks in a stone, the grain pattern of a piece of wood or the veins of a leaf.

Highly symbolical calligraphy can still be found today in clothing: Along with jewellery with pendants in calligraphic forms and inscribed amulets we find different types of headgear embroidered with pious invocations which are worn as part of the ceremonies in processions (FIG. 147). Some dervishes in the Punjab and Sindh wear robes embroidered with texts on the chest; the brown shirt-like dress of a shrine attendant in Sehwan Sharif is embroidered with the words *Faqīr Karāmat 'Alī Shāh – murshid Cho(tho) Umrāni* (Fakir Karamat Ali Shah – [his] spiritual guide [is the saint] Chotho Umrani). *Bābā Firūz Dīn – Jandiāla Sher Khān – Pīr Wāris Shāh da malang* was written on the long red robe of an itinerant dervish in the Punjab. Like a visiting card, this inscription says that Baba Firuz Din is a dervish of the famous Sufi poet and saint Pir Waris Shah, who is buried in the village of Jandiala Sher Khan near Shaikhupura.[9] At an *'urs* for Shah 'Abdul Latif in Bhit Shah in Sindh I met a devotee of the saint on whose blue shirt the invocation *'alī Allāh pāk – haq Latīf, sach Latīf* was embroidered (FIG. 148). While the first part of the inscription invokes God as the Highest and the Pure One, the second part contains a popular formula in which the pilgrims fervently praise Shah Latif, the great Sindhi mystic poet and saint.

According to Sufi tradition, some saints bore their mystic profession of faith on their foreheads. When the Egyptian Sufi Dhu'l-Nun (796–859) died, the following words were reportedly written on his forehead: "This is the friend of God who died for love of God, killed by God."[10] Moreover, legend has it that the following was written on the forehead of Khwaja Muin ud-Din Chishti (1142–1236), the first master of the Indian Chishti Sufi order: "He is a lover of God and died in love of Allah."[11] FIG. 149 shows the devotee of a living Qalandar saint near Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, who obeyed the command of this Sufi master and had the words *pīr-e mā Sākhī Lālā Jī Sarkār* ("Our master, the magnanimous Lala Ji Sarkar") tattooed on his forehead. Such strong and irreversible acts of devotion are occasionally found among dervishes as well as pious adherents of Sufi saints.

Finally I would like to mention that animals are sometimes blessed by means of inscriptions – and not only sacrificial animals but holy animals such as the horse named *māshā'allāh* ("as God wishes") in Sehwan Sharif (FIG. 150). It belongs to Bodla Bahar's dervish lodge and is believed to have been the horse used for riding by this deceased saint; no- one else may ever ride it. *Māshā'allāh* is spoken to as the *faqīr* of the great Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and is led every day in Sehwan from one shrine to the next, where it reverently greets the saints.

FIG. 148 (left)
EMBROIDERED INSCRIPTION WITH INVOCATION TO A SUFI SAINT
This inscription on a pilgrim's shirt praises God and the saint Shah Latif (Sindh/Pakistan).



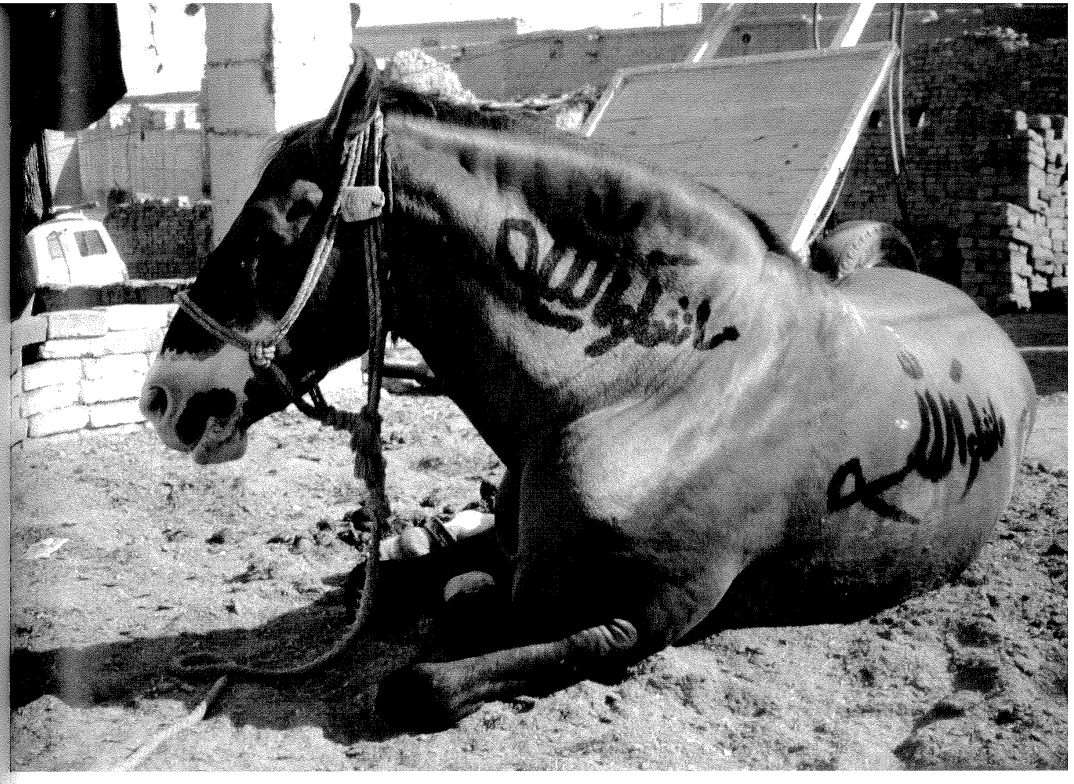


FIG. 149

PIOUS DISCIPLE OF A SUFI SAINT WITH TATTOO ON HIS FOREHEAD

The tattooed inscription reads Lala Ji Sarkar, one of the saints of the Qalandar movement who is intoxicated with God and lives in the wilderness near Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

FIG. 150

HOLY HORSE WITH RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

This horse, whose name *māshā'allāh* is written on the animal's neck and flank, is dedicated to a mythical saint from Sehwan Sharif (Sindh/Pakistan).