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EPIGRAPHY III. ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS IN PERSIA
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EPIGRAPHY

iii. Arabic inscriptions in Persia

In Persia, as in the rest of the Islamic lands, Arabic was the basic language for foundation and religious texts on buildings and objects. In the early Islamic period these texts were usually written in some variant of the angular script known as Kufic (see CALLIGRAPHY). From the 12th century inscriptions in Persian became more common, especially for poetic texts, and cursive scripts tended to replace angular ones. In general, inscriptions on portable objects made in Persia followed the forms and styles of monumental inscriptions (Blair, Bloom, and Wardwell).

Monumental inscriptions. Although Pahlavi continued to be used until the 6th/12th century in inscriptions in such isolated regions as the Caspian coast (e.g., the tomb tower at Lājīm in Māzandarān; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 2331; Blair, 1992, no. 32), foundation texts on buildings in the Islamic period were usually written in Arabic. Persian first appeared in commemorative inscriptions, which were less formal than foundation texts. Beginning in the mid-4th/10th century the Buyids (q.v.) included Persian names in commemorative texts carved at Persepolis, e.g., an inscription carved in the name of ʿAżod-al-Dawla in 344/955-56 (Plate I; Donohue, pp. 74-75; Blair, 1992,

no. 7). Dates in Persian first appeared in the mid-5th/11th century (e.g., in a carved inscription of Abū Kalījar dated 2 Ābān 438/24 October 1046; Moṣṭafawī, p. 340; Blair, 1992, no. 43). The first foundation text in Persian is from the Ilek–Khanid mausoleum at Safīd Boland in Farḡāna, datable to 447-51/1055-60 (Nashch and Kochneu; Blair, 1992, no. 47). In the late 5th/11th and early 6th/12th centuries Persian verses were used on such palaces as Rebāṭ-e Malek (471/1078-79) northeast of Bukhara (q.v.) and the Ghaznavid Masʿūd III's palace at Ḡazna (505/1111) in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the use of Arabic for such texts remained standard in Persia even in the Qajar period (1193-1342/1779-1924).

A fully developed tradition of monumental Arabic inscriptions on Persian architecture can be documented only from the mid-4th/10th century (Blair, 1992, introd.). Earlier examples rarely survive in Persia, probably because of the impermanent materials used. According to contemporary chroniclers, however, the early ʿAbbasid caliphs' foundation inscriptions on Persian buildings resembled those used elsewhere. For example, an inscription of al-Manṣūr (136-58/754-75) on a treasury in Azarbaijan, recorded by the early 4th/10th-century scholar Abū ʿAbd-Allāh Moḥammad Jahšīārī (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 43), is comparable to contemporary inscriptions commemorating repairs and enlargements to the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) at Mecca by the same caliph and his successor, al-Mahdī (158-69/775-85; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, nos. 40, 48-52). Inscriptions of the 3rd-4th/9-10th centuries recorded in the Caucasus by the 19th-century traveler M. N. Khanikoff were similar. Grave markers from early Islamic Persia were also inscribed in Arabic. The earliest known example is a tombstone discovered in the Emāmzada Jaʿfar at Damḡān (q.v.), recording the death of a Zaydī descendant of the prophet ca. 267/900 (Adle, pp. 292-97). A handful of 4th/10th-century crested grave covers excavated at Sīrāf on the Persian Gulf and a series of steles dating from the 5th/11th century onward from the Yazd region are also inscribed in Arabic (Lowick, pp. 79-115; Afšār, II, pp. 909-16).

From the next 150 years, approximately seventy-five inscriptions survive. They decorated mosques, tombs, palaces, minarets, and such civil structures as walls, bridges, and cisterns. The most complete formula for construction texts consisted of the *besmela* (see BESMELLĀH), the verb (generally *amara be-benāʾ* "ordered the construction [of],") some mention of the structure (often indicated only by a pronoun), the name and titles of the patron, the date, and the name of the artisan. Adjectives were rarely used to qualify the structure

built, though the foundation inscription in rhymed prose on the Gonbad-e Qābūs ordered by the Ziyarid prince Qābūs b. Vošmgīr in 397/1006-7 is one notable exception (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 2118; Blair, 1992, no. 19). As in the rest of the Islamic world, during the course of time the list of the patron's titles grew longer. The patrons themselves, some of whom were women, represented the myriad small dynasties that flourished in Persia and Transoxania in the 10th-11th centuries: the Hasanuyids, Kakuyids, Bawandids (see ĀL-E BĀVAND), Ziyarids, Ḵᵛārazmšāhs, Firuzanids, Shaddadids, Ilek-khanids (Qarakhanids), and the like. The artisans' signatures were also in Arabic. In addition to builders, such as the man who signed the tomb tower known as the Pīr-e ʿAlamdār in Damḡān in 417/1026-27, other specialists included the woodcarver who signed the columns in the mosque at Ḵīva (ca. 400/1010) or the ironworkers who signed the gates at Yazd and Ganja (see EBRĀHĪM B. ʿOṮMĀN) in 430/1040-41 and 455/1063 (Blair, 1992, nos. 34, 26, 41, 48, respectively). The usual formula for the signature was *ʿamal* ("work [of]") or *ʿamela* ("[so-and-so] made").

There is no standard corpus of inscriptions dating after the 12th century, but many are included in the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet), of which seventeen volumes covering the period up to 783/1381, plus a geographical index, have appeared. Other inscriptions can be found in works on individual Persian provinces and cities, for example, those by Loṭf-Allāh Honarfar on Isfahan and Īraj Afšār on Yazd, as well as the volumes published by Anjoman-e āṯār-e mellī (q.v.). The general trends are thus clear. The basic formula remained the same as in earlier periods, but the texts became longer and more flowery. The patrons boasted ever more elaborate titles and epithets, and adjectives and metaphors abounded. In the foundation inscription on the mosque of Shaikh Loṭf-Allāh in Isfahan, for example, Shah ʿAbbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) is lauded as "the greatest sultan, the most generous king, the reviver of the virtues of his pure fathers, the propagator of the religion of the infallible Imams, Abu'l-Moẓaffar ʿAbbās al-Ḥosaynī al-Mūsawī al-Ṣafawī, Bahādor Khan, may God the Exalted make his kingdom eternal and may his ships sail in the seas of eternity" (*al-solṭān al-aʿẓam wa'l-ḵāqān al-akram . . .*; Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, p. 402).

In addition to historical inscriptions, there were also religious inscriptions in Arabic, including koranic citations, Hadiths, poems, prayers, and pious phrases. Some koranic texts, such as the famous Throne verse (*Āyat al-korsī*, Qurʾān 2:255), are general evocations of the glory of Islam and were popular

on many types of buildings in all periods. Others, such as 9:18 (*ennamā yaʿmoro masājed Allāh man amana be'llāh wa'l-yawm al-āḵer wa aqāma al-ṣalāt wa atā al-zakāt wa lam yaḵša* "The mosques of God shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in God and the Last Day and perform the prayer and pay the alms and fear none but God alone; it is they who are expected to be among the guided") and 55:26-27 (*koll man ʿalayhā fān; wa yabqā wajh rabbek ḏu'l-jalāl wa'l-ekrām* "All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet still abides the face of thy Lord, majestic splendid"), are more specific and allude to a building's function as mosque or tomb. Specific passages sometimes permitted plays on words with the name of the founder; for example, verse 17:79, (*ʿasā an yabʿaṯak rabbok maqāman maḥmūdan* "Soon will thy Lord raise thee to a laudable station") was popular with patrons named Maḥmūd, including Shah Maḥmūd, the Muzaffarid ruler of the region who restored the Madrasa-ye Emāmīya/Bābā Qāsem (755/1354) in Isfahan (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, p. 309).

Hadiths were not as common as koranic quotations in Islamic epigraphy. The earliest example from the Persian world decorates a wooden *meḥrāb* (niche) removed from the congregational mosque at Iskodar in the Zarafšān valley in Tajikistan and now in the United Republic Museum in Dushanbe (Deniké, fig. 4; Blair, 1992, no 27). The style of floriated Kufic in one of the rectangular framing bands suggests a date ca. 400/1010. The text, which refers to the inestimable rewards for those who guard the front line, is appropriate to a site on the frontiers of Islam; it is not attested in the major concordance of canonical Hadiths (Wensinck et. al.) and may well have been invented for the occasion. Hadiths soon became more popular, perhaps because they were more adaptable than koranic citations. Some were simply familiar sayings, but most were chosen because they were appropriate to the buildings or places on which they were inscribed. In the tomb of Tūmān Āqā, one of Timur's wives, in the Šāh-e Zenda cemetery outside Samarqand (808/1404-5), the saying "The tomb is a door and everyone enters it" (*al-qabr bāb wa koll al-nās dāḵalahu*) is inscribed above the doorway to the mausoleum, and "Hasten with prayer before you miss it" (*ʿajjelū be'l-ṣalāt qabl al-fawt*) and "Hasten with repentence before death" (*ʿajjelū be'l-tawba qabl al-mawt*) above the portal to the mosque (Golombek and Wilber, I, p. 249; Shishkin). Often Hadiths were chosen for sectarian purposes. A *meḥrāb* added to the congregational mosque in Isfahan in 710/1310 after Sultan Öljeitü (Uljāytū, 703-17/1304-17) had converted to Shiʿism (Plate II, Plate IIa), is inscribed with a Hadith attributed to Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb to the effect that whoever frequents a mosque will receive one of

eight benedictions (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, p. 120). The Hadith was probably directed at the traditionally Sunni population in this troublesome sectarian city. Under the Safavids Hadiths became especially popular. For example, in the mosque of Shaikh Loṭf-Allāh in Isfahan several are included in the large band of *ṯolṯ* script (see CALLIGRAPHY) at the base of the dome signed by the celebrated calligrapher ʿAlī-Reżā ʿAbbāsī (q.v.) in 1025/1616-17. The text begins with a prophetic Hadith about the rewards for pious Muslims. This is followed by two additional passages about the actions suitable for someone going to a mosque. The two authorities cited are the Ahl al-Bayt (q.v.) and Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq, respectively (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, pp. 407-10).

Arabic religious poems were also inscribed on buildings in Persia. Some of the blind niches on the interior of the mausoleum of Shah Aḥmed Qāsem known as the Dar-e Behešt outside the Kāšān gate in Qom (780/1378) are inscribed with verses extolling the lineage of the deceased, ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar (Modarresī Ṭabāṭabāʾī, II, 46). Persian poetry was common on 9th/15th-century buildings, but under the Safavids Arabic poetry again became popular. The mosque of Shaikh Loṭf-Allāh provides a good example. On the large band framing the arches on the north and south sides of the interior is a poem signed by Bāqer, the builder, asking the *čahārdah maʿṣūm* (q.v. “fourteen infallible ones”) to intercede for Shaikh Loṭf-Allāh in the hereafter. A similar band on the east and west arches contains a poem invoking the *čahārdah maʿṣūm*. This poem, as suggested by Honarfar (*Eṣfahān*, pp. 412-15), may be by Shaikh Bahāʾ-al-Dīn ʿĀmelī (q.v.), the famous Imami scholar of the period of Shah ʿAbbās I. Pious phrases in Arabic were common in inscriptions in all periods. They included such general expressions as “God is the greatest” (*Allāho akbar*), the ninety-nine “beautiful names” of God (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥosnā*, see Gardet), and the names of revered people like the four rightly guided caliphs or the *čahārdah maʿṣūm*. Many phrases reflect sectarian loyalties. A reference to “Moḥammad’s pure and pleasing family” in the bay over the *meḥrāb* at the 4th/10th-century congregational mosque at Nāʾīn may well indicate Shiʿite patronage for the structure (Blair, 1992, no. 9).

In the early Islamic period architectural inscriptions in Persia were written in plain forms of angular script used elsewhere in the Islamic world. Beginning in the 4th/10th century this simple script was elaborated in several ways. One of the simplest variants was “foliated Kufic,” in which the tips of the letters swell into leaf forms. An early example occurs on the lintel at the tomb of the Samanids in Bukhara (320s/930s; Bulatov, pl. 9; Blair, 1992, no. 4). This script in

turn developed into “floriated Kufic,” in which independent floral motifs sprout from the letters and in the spaces between them, as in the foundation inscription framing the portal to the mausoleum at Tīm in the Zarafšān valley in Uzbekistan (367/977; Pugachenkova, fig. 43; Blair, 1992, no. 11) and the superb cut-plaster inscriptions on the interior of the Emāmzāda Yaḥyā b. Zayd at Sar-e Pol in the province of Toḵārestān (Jūzjān) in northern Afghanistan (ca. 500/1100; Bivar; Blair, 1992, no. 75).

Both foliated and floriated Kufic were popular in the western Islamic world, where they were particularly associated with Fatimid (q.v.; 358-567/969-1171) monuments in Cairo, for example, al-Azhar and the mosque of al-Ḥākem. One variety of script that seems to have originated in the eastern Islamic world, however, is “interlaced Kufic,” in which the stems or bodies of the letters are plaited. A crested grave cover from Sīrāf dated 364/975 (Lowick, pl. X) has a single interlaced letter (the *kāf* in *raḥmateka*), but another grave cover, dated less than two decades later (383/993), has extensive interlacing: Single letters are plaited, two or three consecutive letters are intertwined, and the ligature between the two *lām*s of *Allāh* has been transformed into a lattice of three superimposed trilobes (Lowick, pls. XII and XIII). Interlacing also occurred in architectural inscriptions. One of the first surviving examples is in the mosque at Ardestān (q.v.): Although the mosque seems to have been extensively rebuilt in 553-55/1158-60 (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, nos. 3224, 3238), the koranic band in the arcade running south from the corner of the court can be attributed on stylistic grounds to about 400/1010; it contains an interlaced *kāf* (Blair, 1992, no. 23).

Interlaced script is difficult to read and was thus usually reserved for well-known texts, like the koranic verses on the crested grave covers, in the mosque at Ardestān, or on the minaret at Termeḏ dated 423/1031-32 (Blair, 1992, no. 38 and figs. 61-62). In order to increase legibility, ornament was gradually removed to the upper zone of the inscription, so that only the ascenders and tails, rather than the bodies, of the letters were plaited. This kind of script occurs in the two foundation inscriptions (407-11/1016-21) on a tomb tower in the Rādkān valley of the Alborz mountains south of Sārī: on a stucco plaque above the doorway and in the band encircling the tower below the roof. In both inscriptions the patron, the Bawandid prince Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad, is named (Flury, 1920; idem, 1921).

Despite the restriction of interlacing to the upper zone, inscriptions were still somewhat cluttered. To reduce the clutter and increase the legibility, the

ornament in the upper zone was the separated and enlarged so that it was equal in weight to the bodies of the letters in the lower zone. Elaborate plaiting was replaced by floral decoration. A superb example of such "bordered Kufic" is the foundation inscription, with the name of the patron, the Saljuq vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, formerly in the "*madrasa*" at Ḵargerd in Khorasan (ca. 465-70/1072-77; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 2789; Blair, 1992, no. 57) and now in the Mūza-ye Īrān-e bāstān in Tehran. Herzfeld (1943, p. 16, figs. 35-36) called it "perhaps the masterpiece of Kufic epigraphy in Iran" (Plate III). The stucco inscription is organized in three zones. The lower contains the bodies of the letters, outlined with beading. It is balanced by an upper zone of approximately equal width containing two tiers of palmettes, which appear to grow from the ascenders. The medial zone is allotted to the ascenders themselves, which are generally unornamented. The inscription projects about 7.5 cm from a background of floral arabesques, and the two levels of carving highlight the contrast between the organic elements in the background and the rigid ascenders that march in stately rhythm across the band.

The shift in monumental epigraphy from angular to cursive scripts can also be documented in the inscriptions dating before the 12th century. Cursive script first appeared in commemorative texts such as those carved at Persepolis; by the second half of the 11th century it was in use for foundation inscriptions on buildings. Some of the first examples survive on the stucco *meḥrābs* added to the Masjed-e Pāmanār at Zavāra in 461/1068-69 (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, pp. 171-75; Blair, 1992, no. 51); these cursive inscriptions, which include the name of the patron, are played off against larger framing inscriptions with koranic texts in Kufic. Persian artists quickly realized the decorative possibilities of juxtaposing angular and cursive scripts. Stone fragments from Ḡazna in the name of Ebrāhīm b. Masʿūd (Flury, 1925, nos. 4-7; Blair, 1992, no. 69) show the sophisticated way in which the Ghaznavids exploited style to underscore content: on one panel from a *meḥrāb* three types of script—cursive, foliated Kufic, and simple Kufic—contain three types of text, namely koranic, pious, and historical. Such a juxtaposition of scripts for rhetorical and artistic effect appeared at the same time in Saljuq lands. In the sanctuary dome added to the great mosque in Isfahan in 479-80/1086-87, for example, the monumental koranic inscription carved on the impost blocks is in cursive script, whereas the foundation inscription in brick relief encircling the base of the dome is in Kufic (Galdieri, p. 38; Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, p. 76; Blair, 1992, no. 61).

After the 6th/12th century Kufic was relegated to a secondary role and

appeared primarily in repeating panels or stylized motifs. “Square Kufic” became popular under the Il-khanids and may have imitated Chinese seal script (Krachkovskaya, pp. 23-24). Often such panels simply repeat such pious phrases *al-molk le’llāh* (dominion belongs to God) or the names of highly regarded people. The stucco panels in “square Kufic” in the shrine of Pīr-e Bakrān at Lenjān outside Isfahan (703-12/1303-12) are particularly elaborate and spell out the names of God and the *čahārdah maʿṣūm* (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, pp. 256-60). Glazed bricks could also be set into surfaces in common bond so that they spelled out words in Kufic script. This technique, sometimes called *bannāʾī* (builder’s), was an easy way to enliven vast wall surfaces and “drench” the architecture in writing. First used in the 6th/12th century, it became characteristic of monuments built by the Timurids in Central Asia. The exterior of the shrine of the Sufi shaikh Ḵᵛāja Aḥmad Yasawī at Yasī/ Turkestān (799-801/1397-99) is covered with great expanses of continuous geometric patterns enclosing square Kufic designs. Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilbur (p. 210) have suggested that such inscriptions were not meant to be read as individual statements, but rather, that the repetition of sacred names was comparable to verbal repetitions in the Sufi *ḏekr* (q.v.).

The most popular cursive script in later centuries was an elongated *ṯolṯ*. Beginning in the 14th century, a second inscription was often interwoven in the ascenders of the first. The earliest surviving examples in Persia are the inscriptions painted on the plaster revetment in the interior of the tomb of Öljeitü (Uljāytū) at Solṭānīya (Blair, 1987, pp. 43-96). Color was also exploited to underscore the message. In foundation inscriptions framing portals, the patron’s name was often highlighted in yellow in the center of a white inscription on a dark-blue glazed ground. In an early example dated 851/1447, on the portal leading to the winter prayer hall (*šabestān*) in the congregational mosque at Isfahan the name of the ruler, Solṭān Moḥammad, grandson of Šāhroḵ, is set off in ocher (Honarfar, *Eṣfahān*, pp. 122-23).

Inscriptions on portable objects. Arabic was the standard language on coins and was also used for dedicatory inscriptions on metalwork, textiles, and ceramics, though other languages continued to be used on objects made for several centuries in such isolated areas as the mountains near the Caspian Sea or Central Asia. For example, a hoard found in Māzandarān and now in the Mūza-ye Īrān-e bāstān, included three silver bowls, two inscribed in Pahlavi with the name Wandād Hormazd of the Kārens, a local ruler in the late 2nd/8th century (Ghirshman; Henning). On the basis of a Sogdian note written

in ink on a silk textile from the treasury of the collegial church of Notre Dame at Huy, Belgium, Dorothy Shepherd was able to identify a whole group with a type that medieval authors called "Zandanījī," referring to the town of Zandana near Bukhara (Shepherd and Henning, esp. pp. 38-40; see also ABRĪŠAM iii., esp. pl. XII/2, where the legend has been transposed with that of pl. XII/1).

By the 4th/10th century dedicatory inscriptions in Arabic had become standard. A good example is a silver wine service found at Hamādān, now also in the Mūza-ye Īrān-e bāstān. It comprises three conical bowls, two saucers, a tray, a ewer, two small jugs, a bottle, and a cup. Seven of the pieces are inscribed with the name of the amir Abu'l-ʿAbbās Valgīn b. Hārūn, identified as "client of the Commander of the Faithful," a title that suggests a date ca. 400/1010 (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, nos. 2154-60). Instead of the standard foundation text that appears on architecture and begins with *amara be-benāʾ* (ordered the construction [of]), objects were usually inscribed with dedicatory texts invoking blessings and good wishes on the owner. The inscription on the wine service, for example, asks for God's blessing (*baraka men Allāh*). This type of inscription on a silk fragment found in the church treasury at Saint-Josse-sur-Mer near Calais (Louvre, Paris, no. 7502; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 1507; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 981) invokes glory and good fortune (*ʿezz wa eqbāl*) for the commander Abū Manṣūr Baḵtekīn (d. 349/960-61), who served the Samanid amir of Transoxania and Khorasan ʿAbd-al-Malek b. Nūḥ (r. 343-50/954-41).

Like the foundation inscriptions, these dedicatory inscriptions became more elaborate over time. A bronze pencase in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., (no. 36.7; Plate IV) has a benedictory inscription invoking glory, good fortune, and twenty other benefits for its owner for eternity. In the dedication encircling the lid, he is identified as "the most grand vizier, the great, the wise, the just, the one assisted by God, the victorious, the triumphant, Majd-al-Molk, the honor of the government and religion, the flame of Islam and the Muslims, the chosen among the kings and sultans, the light of the nation, the benefactor of the people, the example of the great ones and his equals, the pillar of dignity, the lord of viziers, the king of lieutenants, the governor of Iran, the grand vizier and ruler of Khorasan, al-Moẓaffar, son of the deceased vizier, Majd-al-Molk" (Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 3671). Herzfeld (1936-37) identified this man as one of the last viziers of the Ḵʷārazmšāhs. Another inscription between the hinges on the rim of the lid at the back includes the

signature of the artist, *ʿamal Šāḏī al-naqqāš* (the work of Šāḏī the engraver), and the date 607/1210.

Already by the 12th century such dedicatory inscriptions were often written in Persian. The classic example is a superb bronze known as the "Bobrinski bucket," after a former owner, and now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg (no. CA-12687), which was made for a merchant in 559/1163. It is decorated with friezes of merrymakers, animals, and animated inscriptions inlaid in copper and silver. Around the rim is a long text in Persian, in which it is recorded that the piece was ordered by ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd-Allāh Rašīdī; "struck" (*żarb-e*; inlaid?) by Moḥammad b. ʿAbd-al-Wāḥed; and "made" by (*ʿamal-e*) Ḥājeb Masʿūd b. Aḥmad, the decorator in Herat for its owner, the exalted Ḵᵛāja Rokn-al-Dīn, glory of the merchants, trustee of the Muslims, ornament of the pilgrims and the two sanctuaries, Rašīd-al-Dīn ʿAzīzī b. Abu'l-Ḥosayn [sic] Zanjānī (Ettinghausen, 1943; Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, no. 3280; corrections in Melikian-Chirvani, pp. 82-83 nn. 60-61). A bronze aquamanile in the shape of a zebu feeding her calf while a leopard bites the hump on her back, also in the Hermitage (no. AZ-225), and dated 603/1206 has a dedicatory inscription in Persian (Giuzalian, pp. 102-5). On metal wares from the 9th/15th century onward, dedicatory inscriptions were replaced by Persian verses (e.g., Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, chap. IV).

The most common religious inscriptions on portable objects made in Persia are koranic verses. They occur frequently on coins and luster-painted ceramics. Qurʾān 2:137, which contains the longest word in the Qurʾān, *fa-sa-yakfīkahom-Allāh* (God will be sufficient for you against them), seems to have served as a talisman and was inscribed in many media, from a cobalt bowl excavated at Samarra in Mesopotamia to luster-painted tiles, coins, and tombstones (Miles, pp. 155-56). Luster-painted tiles were decorated with a limited range of koranic inscriptions, especially well-known passages such as the Throne Verse and the short suras from the end of the book. These texts were chosen for their appropriateness to the site where tiles were mounted. In tombs, for example, they often contained references to the Day of Judgment and the horrors of hell (Watson, pp. 150-51).

During the Safavid period Arabic poems and phrases invoking Shiʿite figures became common on coins and metalwork (Melikian-Chirvani, Chap. V). Pious phrases were ubiquitous in all media in all periods, and phrases like *al-molk le'llāh* became such clichés that they were often misspelled or stylized beyond recognition. Such stylized repeat patterns can be found around the rims of

mīnāʾī (lit. “enamel”; see CERAMICS) ceramics and on innumerable carpet borders.

There is one type of Arabic inscription that seems to have been specific to one particular type of portable object: the moralizing aphorisms found on slip-painted ceramics made in eastern Persia and Transoxania in the 4th/10th century and often associated with the patronage of the Samanid dynasty. The inscriptions praise the virtues of patience, work, intelligence, knowledge, generosity, and the like. A typical example is *al-tadbīr qabl al-ʿamal yoʾmanaka men al-nadam; al-ṣabr meftāḥ al-faraj* (Planning before work protects you from regret; patience is the key to comfort; Bol’shakov; Volov, p. 117). These inscriptions were sometimes written in an elaborate plaited script that makes them extremely difficult to decipher.

Like architectural inscriptions the inscriptions on objects made in Persia in the early centuries are generally written in some form of angular Kufic script and follow a similar progression from simple to more elaborate foliated, floriated, interlaced, and bordered types. Interlaced Kufic is often associated with the Samanid slip-painted wares. Kufic script became more and more stylized and was eventually relegated to repetitive phrases, whereas the more easily legible cursive script was used for dedicatory inscriptions. In many elaborate luster-painted tile assemblages, such as the cenotaph cover made by Moḥammed b. Abī Ṭāher for the shrine at Qom in 602/1206 or the *meḥrāb* made by Abū Zayd for the shrine at Mašhad in 612/1215 (Watson, figs. 103-4), bands of stylized Kufic are played off against various styles of cursive. Despite this secondary role, Kufic was still used for sophisticated patterns. A tile said to have come from the Masjed-e Šāh in Isfahan (Art Institute, Chicago, no. 1926.1186) has a repeating Kufic inscription with the koranic phrase “God, there is no god but He” (*Allāh lā elāh ellā howa*). The first four words are repeated in white on a dark blue ground on the four sides of the tile, and the tall stems of the letters form an interlocking pattern in the center. The fifth word, *howa*, is repeated four times in turquoise above the stems of the letters and forms an internal square.

By the 12th century cursive scripts had replaced angular ones. The celebrated luster-painted plate made by Sayyed Šams-al-Dīn Ḥasanī in 607/1210 (Freer Gallery of Art, no. 41.11) has a long dedicatory inscription in *nask*ò around its rim, invoking everlasting glory on an amir and *esfahsālār* (military commander) whose name is unfortunately lost; the poetic text inscribed on the interior and exterior of the gadrooned vessel walls are also in *nask*ò and

include an ode with alternating hemistichs in Arabic and Persian, a quatrain, and good wishes (Guest and Ettinghausen). In later centuries *nask*ò was replaced by *ṯolt¯*. A group of low brass bowls inlaid with gold and silver are typically decorated with four figural roundels alternating with four epigraphic cartouches inscribed in elongated *ṯolt¯* with hooked ascenders; on the basis of their titulary, they have been attributed to the province of Fārs in the early 8th/14th century (Melikian-Chirvani, chap. 3). As in architectural inscriptions, the ascenders of the letters are sometimes elongated, and a second inscription in Kufic is inscribed across them (e.g., Freer Gallery, bowl, 80.25; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 6-1886; Melikian-Chirvani, pp. 213-14). On metalwork produced under the Timurids and Safavids, *nastaʿlīq* (see CALLIGRAPHY) script was common, especially in Persian verses.

One script seems to have been unique to metalwork: anthropomorphic or zoomorphic script, in which the letters or parts of them assume human or animal form. Ornithomorphic script, in which the letters are transformed into birds or the tails of the letters end in birds' heads, was used on Samanid slip–painted ceramics and later on bronzes produced in the same region. By the 12th century anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and human-headed scripts were fully developed on eastern Persian metalwork. The best example is the Bobrinski bucket (see above). In the upper, cursive inscription the top halves of the letters have been transformed into figures of revelers, dancers, and musicians, whereas the lower halves are in bird or animal shapes or end in bird and animal heads. The middle inscription is in Kufic with interlaced ascenders. In the lower inscription, also in cursive, the letters terminate in human heads, and animals chase one another through the ascenders. The only known example of such a script in a medium other than metal work is the human-headed cursive in a Persian inscription from the harbor fortress at Baku, dated 632/1234-35 (Bretanitskiĭ, pp. 82-87); it is of such mediocre quality, however, that it must have been derivative from metalwork.

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Plate I. Simple Kufic engraved at Persepolis in 344/955-56. Photograph after Blair, 1992, p. 222, plate 11.

Plate II. Detail of inscriptions on the stucco mehrāb dated 710/1310-11 in the winter hall of the mosque at Isfahan. Photograph courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Herzfeld Archives, no. 2136.

Plate III. Detail of bordered Kufic inscription from the madrasa at Ḵargerd, ca. 465-70/107-12. Photograph courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Herzfeld Archives, no. 2736.

Plate IV. Various scripts on an inlaid bronze pen-box; eastern Persia, 607/1210: human-headed nasḵ with good wishes around the base, and signature of the artist and date in ornithomomorphic Kufic above. Freer Gallery, 36.7. Photograph courtesy of Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.