The extensive use of inscriptions is one of the distinguishing features of Islamic architecture. The first example of Islamic architecture, the Dome of the Rock built in Jerusalem in 691–692, was decorated on the interior with religious and historical texts inscribed in bands that emphasized architectural forms (see Figure 1.4). Throughout the course of Islamic civilisation, religious and historical inscriptions on buildings proliferated, becoming more elaborate in content and style, and inscriptions are still a major decorative feature of modern buildings (see Figure 1.5).

The corpus of monumental inscriptions in the Islamic lands is, therefore, vast, and it can be analysed in many ways. Several different approaches are presented in the six chapters in Part II. The first is linguistic, and Chapter 2 examines the various languages used in monumental inscriptions.

Chapters 3 and 4, by contrast, present different kinds of monumental inscriptions. Van Berchem, the founder of the field of Islamic epigraphy, was trained as a historian, and hence he saw the study of inscriptions as a way of correcting or supplementing textual sources, which are more liable to redaction and corruption. Following his lead, most scholars have divided Islamic inscriptions into historical and religious categories, and much of the work by Wiet and others in the MCIA concentrated on the development of titulature and other information presented in historical texts.

The traditional Western approach that focuses on historical inscriptions underscores the changing nature of Islamic civilisation through the centuries. The disadvantage of this approach is that it slight religious inscriptions. This large group of texts, which includes passages from the Koran, hadith or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, piou phrases and ejaculations, prayers and poems, is often more numerous and longer than historical texts and written in a larger format. In traditional Western scholarship, however, they are often dismissed as mere banalities. Despite this lack of study, these religious texts can shed light on the meaning and function of a building or construction. Even the most stereotyped formulas, such as blessings on the Prophet’s family, reflect sectarian beliefs or theological positions, and longer Koranic passages were often chosen or quoted hadith coinced with reference to contemporary events. Certainly, the culture itself never made a distinction between
historical and religious texts, for Koranic texts are often included in the midst of other sections giving information about the name of the patron and date of construction. One reason to maintain the distinction between historical and religious texts, however, is that different types of research materials and standard works usually address the different categories (see Chapter 1). No evaluation of the standard reference works and ways to exploit them.

Another way of dividing up the corpus of Islamic inscriptions is to follow a functional typology, as Gaube did in his essay for the Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie. Following the headings used in the RCFA, he divided monumental inscriptions into such categories as foundation and restoration inscriptions, endowment texts, funerary texts, decrees, signatures and commemorative texts. These categories are not exclusive but often overlap, as in the case of a foundation inscription which may also contain the signature of a craftsman. Nevertheless, the separation into different categories underlines the different reasons why inscriptions were put on buildings, and each category usually supplies a different type of information. The typological approach also points up philological changes, for different grammatical constructions are generally used for the different categories.

Six types of monumental inscriptions are discussed here. By far the largest is the group of foundation and restoration texts, put up to show who had ordered the construction and to stake out territory. The discussion of this, the largest and most important type of monumental inscription, comprises Chapter 3. The five other types of monumental inscription are not as numerous, and they are grouped together in Chapter 4. Endowment inscriptions supply lists of endowed property and topographical details. Administrative decrees reveal the workings of contemporary bureaucracy and government. Funerary texts or epitaphs give the names of the deceased for whom the building was erected. Commemorative texts record the presence of a particular person in a particular place at a specific time. Signatures supply the names of craftsmen.

A third approach is geographical, and in Chapter 5 the corpus of monumental inscriptions is divided regionally. The four different regions are arranged from west to east: the Maghrib or Islamic West, the central Islamic lands, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Two shorter chapters review the different types of inscriptions used on different kinds of structures (Chapter 6) and survey the development of styles of monumental inscriptions (Chapter 7). Given the vast number of monumental inscriptions that survive in the Islamic lands, it is impossible to catalogue or even mention every one here. Rather, the intention here is to point out the areas of research and the kinds of questions that have been raised by different approaches and topics. Not every inscription fits all the categories, but the information discovered and the methods used should be suggestive for any new work.

— Chapter 2 —

The Languages Used in Monumental Inscriptions

Arabic was the standard language for writing monumental inscriptions in the Islamic lands. Arabic had been used for writing monumental texts in Syria several centuries before the coming of Islam. The oldest inscription known in the Arabic language (RCFA 1) is written on a basalt stele from the site of al-Namsara, the fortified post of Safa located some 120 km south-east of Damascus. The five-line funerary text records that the building was the tomb of the Arab prince Imrāl-Qays, who died in 328 CE; it is written in Arabic words spelled out in Nabatean characters. The oldest examples of Arabic writing date from the fourth century CE. They include a trilingual inscription in Arabic, Greek and Syriac dated 312 CE from Zabad in the Syrian steppe south-east of Aleppo (RCFA 21) and three inscriptions dating between 528 and 668 CE found to the south and south-east of Damascus (RCFA 5-9; Gehrmann 1972: 152).

Arabic continued to be the major language of monumental inscriptions in Islamic times. As the language of the revelation, it acquired special sanctity, and it was always the most common language for religious texts. These include not only citations from the Koran, but also hadiths and other pious invocations. Arabic was also the major language for the historical part of the inscription. The first foundation inscription to survive, the record of a dam ordered by the first Umayyad caliph Mu‘awiya at Ta‘if in the Hijaz in the year 58/677-8, comprises six lines of Arabic scratched in the rock wall of the dam (Miles 1945).

Foundation inscriptions in Arabic soon assumed a more monumental form. Under the fifth Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705), Arabic replaced Greek and Persian as the standard language of administration and taxation. Arabic inscriptions in the caliph’s name survive on coins, milestones and buildings from the year 723/691-2 onwards, and all use Arabic written in a similar form of the angular script, commonly if misleadingly known as Kufic (Blair 1955). The letters are well proportioned and well spaced, and attention was paid to making the script both legible and imposing. Both the form of the text and the style of the writing were followed in other inscriptions set up by Syria under the Umayyads, as at Qasr al-Burq‘ in 81/770 (Gaube 1974) and Qasr al-Hayr West in 100/719 (RCFA 37).

From early times, Arabic was the main language for inscriptions not only in the heartland of Islam but in other regions as well, particularly for monumental inscriptions prepared under the auspices of the caliphal chancelleries. Relatively few monumental inscriptions survive from the earliest centuries of Islam, and most of them are in greater Syria. Those from other regions have been destroyed, partly because of the less durable materials used, but written reports incorporated by medieval authors suggest that these now-deadly inscriptions were similar to those that have survived in Syria. The tenth-century scholar al-Fadlan (d. 551/961), for example, records several inscriptions in standard Arabic form on the gates to Acre and Sidon (RCFA 37) and on a treasury in Azarbajan (RCFA 43).

In a few isolated areas in Iran, notably the mountainous region south of the Caspian Sea, older traditions were preserved into Islamic
times, and Pahlavi continued to be used there alongside Arabic for monumental inscriptions. This preservation of Pahlavi is not surprising, for many Sassanian traditions remained strong in the area. A few metalwares from the eighth century are inscribed with the name of a local ruler of Mazandaran, and Pahlavi and Arabic were used together on three tomb towers (see Figure 2.6) erected in the region in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Hertzfeld 1933; Blair 1992a, nos. 51, 53, 79). Generally, the Pahlavi text repeats that in the Arabic, but gives the date in the Yazdiggirdi rather than the hegira calendar (see Chapter 15 for further details on the various calendars used in inscriptions).

In medieval times, Persian came to be used for some monumental inscriptions in Iran. Surviving commemorative texts, such as the ones carved by the Buyids at Persepolis, show that in the tenth and eleventh centuries Persian names, dates and other words were introduced slowly. The first Persian inscription to survive on a datable building is at the tomb at Safid Buland in the northern part of the Farghana Valley in Uzbekistan (see Figure 2.7). Recently deciphered by Nastisch and Kochnev, the inscriptions include a Persian poem at the top of the zone of transition in mantār akhtān mākhdir mabdal metre rhyming in dīr that names the deceased, the Qarakhanid Muhammad b. Nasr, and a partly destroyed foundation inscription in Persian at the top of the walls that names the patron, his son Muṣīz al-Dawla 'Abbas. The inscriptions show that the tomb dates from the year 1014-60, a century earlier than was previously thought (Blair 1992a, no. 47). The Qarakhanids were probably not the
first dynasty to use Persian in monumental inscriptions. Their predecessors in Khurasan and Transoxiana, the Tahrids (813-73), the Samanids (819-1005) and the Saffarids (867-c. 1455), were known for their revival of Persian literature, and their monumental buildings may well have had Persian inscriptions.

Inscriptions in Persian continued to be used on buildings erected by the Qaraqhansids and others in the eastern Islamic lands from the late eleventh century onwards. One example is the caravanserai known as Ribat-i Malik in the Zarafshan Valley between Samarqand and Bukhara, which was restored by the Qaraqhansid Naser b. Ibrahim in 471/1078–9. The inscription over the portal seems to be a Persian poem rhyming in ayy and describing the construction of the building as a palace worthy of Paradise [Blair 1928, no. 18]. The palace built by the Ghaznavid ruler Mas'ud III [r. 1009-1115] at Ghazna had a lengthy Persian poem around the courtyard that extolled the ruler and his palace [Bonhac 1966]. The northern tower at Uzgun is another Ghaznavid building with a foundation inscription in Persian. The cursive inscription on the arch of the portal is a Persian sentence saying that construction of this palace (polvastkhname) began (aghaz kardan ast) on Thursday the 4th of Rabii' II of the year 547 (9 July 1152), and the text over the door gives the name and titles of the Qaraqhansid Husayn b. Hasan b. 'Ali Mubtaj (Yukhnowsky 1947). This is also the time when inscriptions in Persian begin to appear on dated metalwork made in the eastern Iranian lands (see Chapter 9).

Persian was the literary language of the eastern Islamic lands, and Persian verses were inscribed on both buildings and other objects made in a wide area from the thirteenth century onwards. Persian verses occur on several buildings from Sindh, Aval, Khorasan, and Transoxiana. The earliest known was reportedly composed by Sultan Kayku'su for his tomb in the Shi'ite Madrasa in Sivas shortly before his death in 1320. The Sircali Madrasa in Konya, built in 640/1243-4, under Kaykhusraw I son Kayqubad, has a Persian verse in praise of the builder Muhammad al-Tusi. Several verses by Firdawsī decorated the tomb of Shah Ata in Konya constructed in the late thirteenth century as well as stone buildings erected in Nishtar and Tokat in the fourteenth century. Similarly, a lustre frieze with verses from the Shihaltusnî was used to decorate the palace erected at the end of the thirteenth century by the Mongol ruler Aqa at Takht-i Sufyana in north-western Iran [Melikian-Chirvani 1985, 1986, 1991].

Despite the common use of Persian verses, either taken from literature or composed for the occasion and eulogising the patron or his works, Arabic continued to be the standard language for foundation texts and signatures. The difference between Persian verses and the Arabic foundation text is clear from the palace built by Mas'ud III at Ghazna. In addition to the long Persian poem around the courtyard, the Italian excavators of the site discovered several marble screens with an Arabic inscription saying that it was the work of Muhammad b. Husayn b. Muharak finished on 25th of Rabi' II of the year 5055 (March 1111). In Chaharmahal, a system of decoration was also made between the different types of text and the two languages used for them, for the lengthy Persian poem is written in flared Kufic while the brief and straightforward Arabic foundation text is in a readable naskh.

Tradition and sanctity are two common explanations for the persistence of Arabic in monumental inscriptions in Iran. Legibility may be another reason for the slow introduction of Persian into monumental epigraphy. Most inscriptions from the early period are written in the angular form of script known as Kufic and have few or no diacritical marks or dots to distinguish the letters of the same shape. The root system in Arabic, where most words follow standard forms based on triliteral roots, makes it possible, though difficult, to read such undotted texts. Persian, by contrast, is an Indo-European language and has no such roots and standard forms to help the reader. Its looser grammatical form, which gives rise to wonderful plays on words in poetry, makes it much more difficult, even impossible, to survive occurs in the madrasa built by the

Germanas Yü'külb Çelebi at Rumayha in 874/1467 (Ulunzade 1953). This appears in the monumental inscriptions at Edirne in the mid-sixteenth century [Dikmen 1982, no. 402 and 403], and by the end of the century had become the standard language for foundation inscriptions in Turkey. There may have been the result of the increased prestige of the Turkish language following the Ottoman conquests of Arabia and elsewhere in the early sixteenth century. Arabic was still used occasionally for monumental inscriptions in Turkey, particularly those in mosques, as in the foundation inscription on the portal of the Selimye mosque at Edirne [see Figure 2.8]. Persian was also used on public taps and tanks (jadîrvas), although most are in Turkish (Aynur and Karatepe 1995). The Tophane fountain (see Figure 3.9) built by Mahmud I (r. 1730–54), for example, has Turkish verses on the sides over the basin.

Many of these Ottoman inscriptions, particularly the Turkish but also some of the Arabic ones, were written in verse. The verses were set in cartouches, and the shape of the cartouche can be used as a clue to dating. In these poetic inscriptions, the date is often given in a chronogram at the end. In the foundation inscription in the Selimye Mosque, for example [Dikmen 1982, no. 57], the final couplet reads (sadı cihat tâbi'ân al-i-salat ya'da yazdım kâna ta'akk al-talâm) [The phrase “The grace of God” came to be the date/chronogram of foundation, and [the phrase] “The Grace of the Good Lord” was the date/chronogram of completion]. The dates are written in ciphers at the upper end of each horizontal, ‘year 976’ (corresponding to 1568-9) and ‘year 983’ (corresponding to 1574-5).

Many of the Turkish inscriptions are extremely difficult to read. Not only is the language intricate, but words are occasionally written phonetically or in an unusual order. Calligraphic flourishes and decorative arrangements also hinder legibility. Unusual interlacing and ligatures, for example, could be added between letters, and words could be written in mirror-script. Arabic was also the predominant language in east Africa. With the exception of a scant handful
2.8 Foundation inscription in Arabic over the portal to the Selimiye mosque at Edirne, giving chronograms with the dates of foundation (976/1568-9) and completion (982/1574-5).

2.9 Detail of the foundation inscription in Turkish on the fountain near Tophane in Istanbul, early eighteenth century.
of inscriptions in Swahili or Portuguese, almost all others are in Arabic. They include a finely
carved dedicatory inscription in the congregational
mosque at Kisimukazi, Zanzibar (Flury 1923) and
sixteen dedicatory inscriptions commemorating
the foundations of mosques in Lamu, Kenya between
the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries
(Freeman-Grenville and Martin 1973).
The sanctity of Arabic script is clear from
inscriptions in other areas, and inscriptions written
in other languages but using Arabic script are also
recorded in Southeast Asia during the later
centuries of Islam. In Java and Sumatra, for example,
inscriptions were usually written in the Javanese
language, sometimes in Javanese characters
but sometimes in Arabic characters. In eastern
Indonesia, some nineteenth-century texts were
written in Arabic script but in the language of
Teimur, from the sultanate of the same name.

— Chapter 3 —

Foundation Inscriptions

By far the most common type of monumental
inscription is the foundation or restoration
inscription. This type of inscription contains
five basic elements in the following order: (1) the
basmula or invocation to God, (2) a verb indicating
what was done, (3) the object of the work, (4) the
name of the patron and (5) the date of construction.
These elements were already standard in the
first monumental inscriptions set up under the
Umayyads at the end of the seventh century and
the beginning of the eighth, and continued to be
so over time as inscriptions became longer and
more complicated.

Let us look briefly at each of the five elements
in turn, using three examples of foundation
inscriptions from different periods and places.
The earliest (see Figures 3.10 and 3.11) is the
mosaic band running around the outer face of
the ambulatory around the Dome of the Rock
(RCEA 9). It now contains the name of the
‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn, who repaired the
building in 216/831 according to several other
inscriptions on copper plates nailed to the
wooden lintels of the interior doors (RCEA
209–10), but van Berchem (JUCA Jerusalem, no.
215) showed that the original foundation
inscription had contained the name of the
Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who ordered the
building in 72/692.

We can contrast this foundation and restoration
inscription from the caliphal period to two later
ones: a medieval example (see Figures 3.12 and
3.13) running along the east façade of the funerary
complex erected by the Mamluk sultan Qa‘iṣ on
the main street of Cairo in the late thirteenth
century (RCEA 483) and a later example (see
Figures 3.14 and 3.15) running around the portal
of the mosque of Shuykh Lu’uf al-Tab’i in the early
seventeenth century (Hunæf 1977:412–13). As these are all
major monuments erected by important rulers,
they illustrate some of the changes that occurred
in foundation inscriptions on royal buildings
erected across the Islamic lands from earliest
times to the later period.

Most monumental inscriptions, like most
actions carried out by devout Muslims, open by
invoking God’s name. The most common form
is the full basmula, ‘In the name of God the
Merciful, the Compassionate’ (bism Allah al-
rahmān al-rahim), but the invocation can be
shortened to the first two words or lengthened
with other, sometimes rhyming phrases. The
form used often depends on the space available,
and the short form was common in tight spaces.
There were also regional variations or variations
according to the type of building on which the
basmula was used. For example, the phrase
‘al-dhāna F‘Allah mta al-shayṭān al-tātu’ (I seek
refuge with God from Satan the cursed) was
often put before the basmula in foundation
inscriptions in North Africa. This phrase probably
reflects the conservative leanings of patrons
there, who usually belonged to the Maliki school
of law. This form was also common on madrasas
throughout the Islamic lands and underscored the
role of these buildings in disseminating the faith.

In reading a foundation inscription, it is
important to find the basmula, for it usually
marks the beginning of the text. This is obvious on a frame band that runs along a façade or around a portal. In the case of the inscription on Qal‘a‘un’s funerary complex in Cairo, for example, the text begins on the right corner of the façade beneath the minaret. In the mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, the basmala and the foundation inscription begin on the right edge of the portal.

The beginning of a text on a circular building is less obvious, but finding it shows how the building was planned and oriented. On the Dome of the Rock, for example, the basmala shows that both inner and outer bands of inscription begin on the south, or qibla, side. Identifying the beginning of a circular text also means that one can then examine the words to the right of the basmala for the date, the piece of information usually put at the end of the foundation inscription and the one most sought by historians.

The second element of a standard foundation text is the verb. There are many different verbs in Arabic for building. The simplest is ba‘d and this is the one used in the inscription on the Dome of the Rock. Most foundation inscriptions, however, do not talk about construting but about ordering construction, and hence the most common verb is ʿamara (‘he ordered’). It could be used alone in this form (‘he ordered’), but more
Islamic Inscriptions

often was compounded with words like bi-`iqama (‘the erection’), bi-`inshā (‘the construction’), bi-
`ina`abat (‘the building’), bi-`umrah (‘the making’), bi-`iṣnāda (‘the building’) or bi-`insāba (‘the estab-
lishment’). This later form became increasingly common in medieval times and is the one used
on both Qal‘a’un’s complex and the Mosque of
Shaykh Lutfallah. Other common forms were
miṣna`un amara (by him) [literally, ‘part [of what] he
ordered’] or hadithun mu`amara (‘this is what he
ordered’). Gane gives a brief survey of the differ-
ent forms of amara used in different places, but
much more work needs to be done compiling
lists of the standard forms used at different times
in different areas, particularly by different classes
of patron or on different kinds of buildings.

Restoration texts generally used the same form
as foundation texts. They can be foundation
texts. For example, the inscriptions on copper
plates marking al-Ma‘mun’s restorations to the
Dome of the Rock use the form miṣna`un amara
by him. Restoration inscriptions can also replace
the verb amara with ḥaddāda (‘renew’). Sometimes
the specific work that was done is indicated, as
in a restoration text recording the repanning of two
pillars in the Great Mosque of Damascus in 375/1
179–80 by the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Nasir
Yusuf (CCE 3345), where the inscription speci-
fies that the ruler ordered the two pillars to be
revered in marble (niṣba`a tarkhib ḥadhab [sic] al-
kalākul). The verb in a foundation inscription is
usually followed by the object constructed. This can be
simply the pronoun huwā (‘it’), leaving it to the
reader to interpret what ‘it’ is. Al-Ma‘mun’s
restoration inscriptions use this generic pronoun.
More often, however, the type of work was specified.
Shah ‘Abbas’s foundation, for example, is called
a mosque (imarāt). Other well-known types of
buildings include a congregational mosque (darwaza),
tower (barq), bath (bimaristan), fountain (sabba) and
the like. Sometimes, the foundation inscription
could enumerate the various parts of a building
complex. The foundation inscription on Qal‘a’un’s
complex, for example, tells us that the complex
includes not only the tomb but also a theological
school (madrasa) and a hospital (bimaristan).

3.13 Detail of the foundation inscription across
the façade of Qal‘a’un’s tomb complex.

3.14 Foundation inscription around the portal of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah in Isfahan,
dated 1012/1603–4 (after restoration).
The nouns used in a foundation text can indicate either a form or a function, and the modern reader needs to interpret these words, for many of them changed in meaning over time. A particularly wide range of different terms was used for funerary monuments, including masqūn (‘resting place’), turba (‘tomb’), qubr (‘grave’), qubbah (‘dome’), musâhba (‘martyrdom’), qasr (‘palace’) and even the Persian khwâbghâb (‘resting place’) as well as many others. Any definition of a particular term applicable at a particular time or place does not necessarily pertain at other times or places. This is true, for example, of the word qubbah, used in both ‘Abd al-Malik’s inscription on the Dome of the Rock and Qal‘a’un’s inscription on his funerary complex. On the Dome of the Rock, qubbah seems to denote a form, a domed building, while on Qal‘a’un’s funerary complex it denotes the function that took place in that form, a domed tomb.

Similarly, several different words could also be used for what we today consider the same thing. The words mi‘dhan (literally, ‘place of the call to prayer’), sawmn ‘a (also ‘hermitage’ or ‘monk’s cell’) and mawṣū‘a (‘minaret’) can all designate what we call minaret, and the word mawṣū‘a may have designated a lighthouse as well as a tower. In order to understand correctly what was meant, the reader must look at how these words were used in the specific time and place that the foundation inscription was set up.

At first nouns were used solely in foundation inscriptions, but, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, adjectives were commonly used to qualify what was built. Thus, in the foundation inscription on the Dome of the Rock, the noun qubbah is used alone, whereas in the two later foundation inscriptions, each noun is qualified by an adjective. Qal‘a’un’s tomb is ‘noble’ (shartī), his madrasa ‘great’ (mu‘izz azzama) and his hospital ‘blessed’ (mubārak). Shah ‘Abbas’s mosque is also ‘blessed’ (mubārak). These adjectives were not physical descriptors but rhetorical ones. The most common term is mubārak (‘blessed’), followed by other similar phrases such as shartī (‘noble’), azim (‘great’) and ʿalī (‘elevated’). Their function was to make the building acceptable as waqf, technically the alienation in perpetuity of property and the revenues from it for the benefit and endowment of a pious foundation, for according to Islamic tradition all religious endowments had to be pleasing to God.

In a typical foundation inscription, far more space was given over to the patron than to what he built, and from the earliest inscriptions, the patron’s name was accompanied by titles and eulogies. Over the centuries, this part of the foundation inscription grew by leaps and bounds and was composed of numerous rhyming phrases that intoned the glory of the patron in ringing verse. Our three examples show this change clearly. As reconstructed by van Berchem, the foundation inscription on the Dome of the Rock records that the building was erected by God’s servant ‘Abd al-Malik, the Commander of the Faithful, and a short eulogy follows his name.

The explosion in names and titles is clear when we compare this modest text on the Dome of the Rock to that on the funerary complex erected by the Mamluk sultan Qal‘a’un six centuries later. The bold inscription band runs along the east façade of the complex at mid-height overlooking the Qasba, the main street of medieval Cairo. The text, which begins in the north-east corner under the minaret, runs along the qibla wall of the tomb, continues across the entrance portal to the corridor linking the various parts of the complex, and then finishes along the main façade of the madrasa. The Mamluk ruler is called our lord and master, the greatest sultan, al Malik al-Manṣūr, the wise, the just, the one who is aided by God, the victorious, the fighter, the triumphant, Sword of the World and the Faith, Sultan of Islam and the Muslims, lord of kings and sultans, sultan of the earth in longitude and latitude, king of the world, sultan of the two ‘Iraqs and the two Egyptians, king of the two continents and the two seas, inheritor of royalty, king of kings of the Arabs and Persians, possessor of the two qiblas, keeper of the two noble sanctuaries, Qal‘a’un al-Salihī, partner of the Commander of the Faithful. A five-part eulogy following his name asks God to prolong his greatness and glory.

Shah ‘Abbas’s name and titles on the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah are different but almost as
grand. He is the greatest sultan and noblest khaqan, reviver of the virtues of his pure fathers, propagator of the religious sect of the infallible imams, Abu'l-Muzaffar Abbâs al-Husayni al-Musavi al-Safavi Râhbat al-Khan, and a benefactor asks God to make his kingdom endure and his ships sail in the seas of eternity.

Both Islamic nomenclature and Islamic terminology are complicated topics, and in order to compare different names and titles used in these inscriptions, a few short notes on the composition of Islamic names are useful. Islamic names generally have five elements in a standard order: (1) the nabî, an honorific title; (2) the kunya, a patronymic; (3) the ism, a given or personal name; (4) the rashid, a genealogy, and (5) the nishâb, an epithet of origin or affiliation. In addition to these standard parts of the name, titles and other important people were often identified by various kinds of titles.

The central element is the person’s given or personal name (ism), which is included in almost all foundation inscriptions. It was traditionally drawn from a relatively small repertory of personal names sanctioned by Islamic tradition. Examples include names and epithets of the Prophet, companions, Biblical figures who appear in the Koran, and compounds using the name of God. The Safavid shah Abbâs, for example, took his name from the Prophet’s uncle Abbâs b. Abd al-Muttalib, as did the Abbasid dynasty, who were descendants of his son Abdallah. In the inscription on the Dome of the Rock, the Umâyyah caliph’s given name is ’Abd al-Malik, literally meaning ‘slave of the king’ and signifying that the caliph was God’s servant. The Abbasid caliphs adopted regnal names of a theocratic nature, expressing dependence on God, reliance on Him, or participation with Him in the work of ruling. Thus, the repairs to the Dome of the Rock carried out in 346/858-9 were done by the caliph al-Ma’mun (literally, ‘he who trusts in God’). With the increasing importance of Turks and Persians, given names in those languages also appear. The name Qâla’un is Turkish, although no-one is sure what, if anything, it means.

Two parts of the name follow the ism. In standard form, the given name is followed by the genealogy (nassab), with each forebear introduced by the word ibn (‘son’) or batin (‘daughter’). In transcription, these two words are often abbreviated as b and b. When the patronymic derived authoritatively or legitimacy from his family, then the genealogy could be quite long. This was typical in the case of Khurâsân in funerary texts. In foundation inscriptions, by contrast, the genealogy is quite short, usually no more than one or two generations. None of our three examples of foundation inscriptions contains a genealogy, for none of these rulers derived much authority from his family tie. Qâla’un was a manumitted slave, and hence his paternity was irrelevant, although his descendants derived legitimacy from his. In the case of ’Abbas, his genealogy is subsumed in his nishâb. The nishâb, the final element in a name, was an epithet denoting the origin or place of residence derived from the name of a tribe, town or country. It could also indicate affiliation to a legal school or religious group or sometimes a profession. Qâla’un carried a single epithet, al-Safavi, meaning that he had received training under and been manumitted by the Ayyubid sultan al-Husayn al-Salih Ayyub. ’Abbas, by contrast, carries three. He al-Husayni, signifying that he claimed descent from the Prophet’s grandson Husayn al-Musavi, signifying that he was also descended from the Musavi line of the seventh Shi’ite imam Musa al-Kazim (d. 803/1400), and al-Safavi, signifying that he belonged to the Safavi line of Safi descended from Sai al-Din Ardabili (d. 735/1334).

Two parts of the name precede the ism. The one just before it is usually the kunya, a patronymic usually comprising a compound with Abu (‘father’). It was originally composed with the name of the eldest son, but was then constructed with an attribute or quality of the bearer and assumed a metaphorical meaning. Thus ‘Abbas is Abu-l-Muzaffar (‘Father of the Victorious’).

In foundation inscriptions, these four parts of the ruler’s name (kunya, ism, nassab and nishâb) are often quite succinct, much more space is taken up by titles, which become increasingly flowery. In the inscription on the Dome of the Rock and on coins issued in his name, ’Abd al-Malik is entitled ‘abd allâh, literally meaning ‘God’s servant’. This was the standard title used by Umayyad rulers. The ’Abbâsids continued to use the title, but Abu al-Mu’min added another title, umân (literally, ‘leader’), as in the inscriptions signaling his repairs to the Dome of the Rock.

With the break-up of power in the tenth century, many new titles were awarded or assumed. One of the most important was sultan. The word sultan originally had the abstract sense of power or authority, but it was adopted as a title by the Saljuqs and Ghaznavids in the eleventh century. It became the most important title of later rulers. It is the one used by Qâla’un, who is not only the greatest sultan (al-sultan al-sâ‘i) but also the king (al-malik). It was similarly used by ’Abbas, who is also the greatest sultan as well as the most noble Khâqân. Khâqân, a word of Persian origin denoting the same idea, was used by the Qarakhanids and then adopted by various Mongol sovereigns of Persia, Mongol, and later self-saints. From there, it passed into the Egyptian sphere and had political connotations with its eastern and northern neighbours. Part of its popularity was probably due to the fact that it rhymed with sultan.

In the inscription on the Dome of the Rock, ’Abd al-Malik is also identified by his caliphal title, amir al-mu’minin. Various translated as ‘Commander of the Faithful’ or ‘Prince of believers’, it signified his authority as leader (amir) of the community of believers (al-mu’minin). Both Umayyad and ’Abbâsids caliphs continued to use this title, and, in the mid-eighth century, they rewarded functionaries whom they wished to honor with the title ‘Commander of the Faithful’ (amir al-mu’minin, or amir al-mu’minin). Alternate forms were soon adopted, such as ‘Sincere Friend’ or ‘Glory of the Commander of the Faithful’ (afwâd al-mu’minin, amir al-mu’minin). As this kind of title proliferated, it decreased in importance, but it still indicated a particular ruler’s relationship to the caliph. Part of Qâla’un’s authority, for example, is derived from his nominal position of the commander of the Faithful (qâsim amir al-mu’minin).
of religion and seculur power that were juxtaposed in the Alh-Adawla pair. This idea of contrast appears in several of his other compound titles. He is, for example, sultan of the earth in longitude and latitude, king of the world (sultân al-ard dibât al-ird wa-rum al-Usâit). The titles also play on words. Qala’un’s titles ‘inheritor of royalty, king of kings of the Arabs and Persians’ (wrâth al-mulk mulk al-Usâit wa-l-qajân) contains three words derived from the same root m-l-k (‘to rule’) set right next to each other.

Many of these compound titles also contain duals. This tradition can be traced as far back as the third caliph ‘Uthman, who was known as Dhu’l-Nuurayn (“possession of two lights”). The duality often alludes to the two branches of government, the sword and the pen, representing two sources of authority, the military and the legal system. Thus, the vizier of the Boyad ruler Rukan al-Dawla was called Dhu’l-Qilâstây (‘possession of the two capabilities’, that is, the sword and the pen). These titles with dual attributes were undeniably popular because they made ringing eulogies when composed in pairs that rhymed with the dual ending ây. Qala’un bears four such titles with dual attributes, arranged in two sets of rhyming pairs. In the first set, each dual is also compounded; he is sultan of the two ‘Iraqs and the two Egyptians (sultân al-’irâqayn wa-l-misrayn) and king of the two continents and the two seas (mulk al-barrayn wa-l-bahrân). The first phrase refers to the division of the province of ‘Iraq into Arab and Persian sections and to the parallel division of Egypt into Upper and Lower sections. The second set refers to the two continents, Africa and Asia, and the Mediterranean and Red seas. In the second set, Qala’un is possessory of the two gilâs and keeper of the two noble sanctuaries (gilâh al-ghilâtayn hâdhâm al-huramayn al-shâtîyat). The two gilâs refer to the regular direction of prayer toward Mecca and the original gilâ of Jerusalem, the two noble sanctuaries to the sanctuaries at Mecca and Medina.

‘Abbas’s titles are quite different. The Safavid shah derived his authority not from his relationship to the caliph nor from his authority over the shrines in Mecca and Medina, but rather from his descent from the Prophet. Thus ‘Abbas’s titles underscore his affiliation to Shi’ism. He is reviver of the virtuous of his pure fathers (muhyti muntazam dibâthi al-tâbiîn). The phrase about revival goes back to medieval times when it was associated with the revival of orthodoxy and tâhid as a propaganda weapon. Nur al-Din, for example, was ‘reviver of justice in this world and the next’ (muhyti al-âdâ fi-l-fâtimâ) in works which he undertook after 531/1136 (Ellenstein 1932–3). Similarly, the Anatolian Saljuq vizier Fâkhr al-Din ‘Ali is called the ‘reviver of orthodoxy’ (muhyti al-sunnah) in the endowment deed to the Gök Madrasa in Sivas (Rogers 1956: 70). ‘Abbas has switched the focus, however, and instead of reviving orthodoxy he is reviving Shi’ism, and the phrase ‘his pure ancestors’ denotes the Prophet’s family. Much the same message is conveyed by ‘Abbas’s second title, ‘propagator of the religious sect of the infallible imams’ (munawwar ma’dhdhab al-ala’imm al-mu’tâmîn).

In addition to the various parts of his name, a foundation inscription usually includes eulogies and benedictions for the ruler. These phrases grew apace with the titles. The benediction for ‘Abd al-Malîk is fairly short and asks simply God to accept the work from him and be pleased with him (taqabbala allâh minhu wa raddiyya ‘áníh). The emphasis in these eulogies soon changed from God’s acceptance to his beneficence for the person blessed. The benediction for al-Ma’nun asks God to prolong his existence (allâh abâghu’î); it was the standard form reserved for caliphs in the Abbasid period.

Like titles, benedictions grew longer and more elaborate over time. The benedictions following Qala’un’s name and caliphal title asks God for five things: to make the ruler’s glory endure, to glorify his victories, to elevate his sign, to double his powers and to make his cities flourish (allâh masâhu wa d’azza insinâhu wa d’âlâ manrâhu wa d’âlâ izaqdatâhu wa’amma munakhâlu). The eulogy following ‘Abbas’s name asks God the Grace to make the ruler’s kingdom eternal and let his ships sail in the seas of eternity through the grace of Muhammad and his good pure infallible family (khulâd alâl wa’llâh mukhâlu wa’llâh fi-rûhâl al-fâkhahâ bi-muhammad wa allâh al-tâyyibîn al-tâhidîn al-mu’tâmîn). These later and longer eulogies continue the theme of extending the ruler’s life taken up by the ‘ Abbasids and add that of glorifying his name. Like titles, these long eulogies were often composed as rhymes and plays on words.

Foundation inscriptions also had to be laid out to fit the shape of the building, and the text could be manipulated to fit the space available. In the case of the inscription around the outer arcade in the Dome of the Rock, the words ‘Ameen, Lord of the Worlds’ (amâin rabb al-alamîn) finish the text and fill out the band along the south-east face. Most foundation inscriptions, however, are written along the main façade of a building, and as the patron’s titles and eulogies got longer, there was more scope for adjustment to fit the available space.

In Qala’un’s funerary complex, the foundation inscription is a long band that runs along the street side of the building. The Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi called such a band a tâsit, the term used for an inscribed textile or the inscription on a textile. These bands were deliberately laid out to enhance the ruler’s prestige and authority. Thus, the foundation inscription for Qala’un’s funerary complex was composed so that the introductory phrase about ordering the work takes up the space under the minaret, while the ruler’s lengthy titles fill the space on the qibla wall of his tomb. His name Qala’un and caliphal title, Associate of the Commander of the Faithful, fall on the projecting jamb to the right of the portal and the eulogies fill the bay over the entrance corridor, connecting the various parts of the complex. Since the madrasa in the complex also broached on the main street, the standard form was altered and extended so that the foundation inscription continues on the left side of the entrance corridor with another long band of titles lauding the patron and grammatically qualifying the him in the eulogies. Qala’un receives another eight to ten compound titles referring to his role sabha as mawan, fida’i, rebels, before his main honorific: ‘Sword of the World and the Faith’, his name Qala’un, his caliphal title ‘Associate of the Commander of the Faithful’ and a short benediction asking God to extend his days.

Qala’un’s funerary complex shows how a foundation text could be manipulated to unify and tie together the various parts of a complex. The foundation text on a single building could also be adapted to underscore the ruler’s sovereignty and authority. Many foundation texts are found on the portal, which is usually vaulted. In Iran and the eastern Islamic lands, the portal assumed the form of a pilaster, a flat masonry or brick structure framing three sides of an arched opening. The foundation inscription could be written along the curved sides of the arched opening, as at Rihâ-i Malik, the late-eleventh century caravanserai on the road between Samangan and Bukhara (Unsworth, plate 373). The text could also be set in a U-shaped band along the sides of the framing pilaster, as on the twelfth-century caravanserai known as Rihâ-i Sharaf north of Mashhad on the road to Merv (Erdingerhaus and Grabar, fig. 296).

A third alternative was to set the foundation inscription around the three sides of the pilaster, as was done on the mosque of Shaykh Luflâh. Like that of Qala’un, ‘Abbas’s foundation inscription is set at mid-height, in this case above the doorway but below the masqasat semicircle. The text is set out so that ‘Abbas’s name and titles sit exactly over the doorway, and thus anyone who entered the building had to walk, literall y and figuratively, under ‘Abbas’s sway.

Style enhances the message. The tail of the letter ây in the word ta’âal is at the left side of the door returns to the right and extends across all the way across the doorway to the beginning of the shâb’s titles on the right side. This horizontal stroke in the middle of the band emphasizes the division of the bands into two registers and distinguishes the text above the portal with the name and titles.

To emphasize his rule, the ruler’s name was sometimes highlighted in a different colour, particularly in Iran where inscriptions were often executed in tile mosaic. This was probably the case in the mosque of Shaykh Luflâh, for old photographs showing the portal before restora-