The interplay of various texts and scripts is well illustrated [see Figure 10.63] by a fine Koran-stand in the Metropolitan Museum (RC1964.83.57). On the exterior, the bottom is decorated with a polylobed arch enclosing a floral arabesque ground. Carved in relief above the densely packed ground is a thuluth inscription with invocations to the Twelve Imams. A small diamond at the bottom bears a word or two in square Kufic. The top is decorated with a square filled with the same arabesque ground and the word ‘Gold’ repeated four times. Another inscription carved in muḥāṣṣa at the bottom of one side gives the name of the craftsman, Ḥasan b. ʿSulaymān Ṭabāhah. Finally, an inscription incised around the top of the interior says that the stand was endowed to the so-far unidentified Sādirrū Māṭrās in Dhu‘l-Hijjah 767/October-November 1360.

Much woodwork survives from the later period in Iran and Central Asia, as palaces and pavilions typically had wooden porticos (Persian tābār) with wooden columns and caprals, ceilings and screens (Ozatti 1976). Some of these pieces bear inscriptions, which are the keys to dating, but in general the role of inscriptions diminishes in this period as inscriptions are abandoned in favour of all-over decoration. From the sixteenth century onwards in Iran, wooden doors were frequently painted and varnished in a technique commonly but erroneously called Islamic lacquer, and the epigraphic panels typical of earlier examples are replaced by figurative scenes derived from book-painting.

Inscribed wooden minbars continued to be popular in Anatolia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They used the same form as earlier models, but the techniques became increasingly simplified. The finest minbars were still made using the tongue-and-groove technique (Turkish kundakdar), as on the minbars donated to the congregational mosques at Būrūj in 720/1320-1 (RC1964.74), Manisa in 718/1318-19 (RC184.79.014) and Burās in 802/1400-1400. Sometimes this laborious technique was imitated by using individual boards carved in relief and mounted on the minbar frame, and in a few later pieces this technique is further simplified so that both the frame bands and the strapwork panels have been glued or pinned to boards, as on the minbar from the Ahī Ebnān mosque in Ankara [186] 1413-14. The persistence of patrons’ names, dates and signatures shows that these were still expensive pieces or donations.

Under the Ottomans, however, most minbars were usually made of other luxury materials such as marble, while wood was used for chests, thrones and arms made for the imperial court. These fancy objects were inlaid with ivory, precious metals, mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell and encrusted with semi-precious stones. One of the earliest is a hexagonal walnut chest for a thirty-part Koran in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul (Ottoman Civilisations 1983, no. 109; Blair and Bloom 1991, fig. 254). The exterior is veneered with ebony encrusted with ivory panels so that the white letters of the inscriptions stand out from the dark ground. The texts include well-known Koranic verses (for example, 2:255; 3:18-19; 48:8-9), and a foundation text saying that the box to protect the Koran was ordered by sultan Bayezid II in 931/1525-6 and made by Ḥasan b. Ḥasan al-qābiḥ al-ʿatā (‘the ephemeral frame-maker’).

These fine furnishings continued to be made and endowed to tombs complexes in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries during the heyday of Ottoman rule (Ottoman Civilisations 1983, nos 775-8, 8146-51, Atk 1985, nos 107-11). Some pieces have generic inscriptions, with Koranic verses and hadiths but without the names of specific patrons. Others include the names of court artisans, and these signatures help us to flesh out their careers. One such is Ahmed Dalğıc. Recruited as a janissary, he was trained in the imperial palace in Istanbul, studying mother-of-pearl inlay under Ahmed Usta and architecture under Sinan. In September 1598, Ahmed was promoted to imperial court architect, serving seven years in that post before being awarded the rank of pasha. During his tenure as court architect, he designed the mausoleums of Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603), and for it he made and signed a magnificent pair of doors and a tall Koran box, both inlaid with tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl (Ottoman Civilisations 1983, no. 151).

The larger quality of inscribed woodwork surviving from the later period in the Yemen allows us to document the tradition there. Grillwork, for example, may have been used since pre-Islamic times, but one of the earliest pieces to survive is the wooden screen in the tomb chamber of the Ashrarifa madrasa built at Tā‘izz in 1307-8 (Lewcock and Smith 1976, plate 7). Wooden cenotaphs become more elaborate, with multi-storeys and domed edicules, and the inscriptions show that these imposing objects were erected by the Zaydi imams in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to bolster their family line. The Imam al-Husayn al-Mansur (r. 1566-70) had one erected for himself in the Abbâr mosque at Sar‘a and another erected for his father al-Qasim al-Mutawakkil (r. 1516-26) in the corner of the mosque which he had built there. Al-Husayn al-Mansur’s son al-‘Abbâs al-Mahdî (r. 1547-76) continued the tradition. Another undated cenotaph was also installed in the mosque at Sar‘a for Yahya al-Hadi, the Imam who had introduced Zaydism to the Yemen in the ninth century. In addition to the foundation text, most of these pieces include short inscriptions among the arabesque and geometric decoration. The cenotaph for Yahya al-Hadi is distinguished by horizontal cartouches carved with inscriptions in the Ottoman style.
Ceramics

Inscriptions on ceramics made in the Islamic lands contain a range of texts, and the length of the text depended in part on the technique used. The simplest method is to mould or carve the text in the soft clay, but this technique limits the text to single words or simple phrases. Potters could paint inscriptions on glazed objects, but the colour might run during firing and the overglaze decoration was fragile and subject to wear or even to flaking. The piece could be fired a second time, but this was an added expense used only for the finest wares. Potters in the Islamic lands also developed the technique of underglaze painting, in which the glaze protected the inscription and other decoration from wear. The inscriptions on ceramics include good wishes, Koranic quotations and poetry, but the ones that have attracted the most attention are historical texts, including the names of potters and patrons and dates of production. Historical inscriptions are particularly prominent on medieval Persian ceramics, and the importance of dates, written out in words or in numbers at the end of an inscribed band, was recognized at an early date. Sarre's Dukmayser persischer Bankunst, published in Berlin in 1901, already contained a chapter on dated lustre-painted tiles. Kühnel (1934–1935) and Wiet (1931 Appendix II) expanded the number of dated examples. Etinghausen (1935) understood the point that dated pieces often provide the only means of localising a whole group or type, and by the time A Survey of Persian Art was published in 1939, he had compiled a list of more than 300 examples of dated Persian ceramics, including 137 lustre-painted tiles and vessels. The number of dated pieces has continued to grow. Day (1947) added several pieces to Etinghausen's list, and Watson (1961) was able to list 250 examples of dated lustreware alone.

Another sought-after piece of information written on ceramics is the name of the potter or workshop (Sauvage 1965: 41–50). These signatures are particularly important since they are almost the only information that we have about potters and the only way that we can reconstruct their careers. In most cases the signature is hidden in the foot ring or on the bottom of a vessel, but sometimes it was written in a more prominent place. On earthenware bowls from 'Abbasid times, the signature was often painted in cobalt blue on the opaque white glaze in the centre of the bowl. On medieval Persian wares, the signature is part of a long inscribed band that often ends with the name of the potter and date. Signatures predominate on expensive wares, particularly lustre-painted and enameled wares, but are also found on cheaper, unglazed wares (Volov Colombe 1966, Baez 1986). Signatures are often preceded by a verb or word denoting action. The most common form is 'amal/ 'umal/ 'umal (work of 'made'). The term sama' ('designed') is also used, but the typical signature on lustrewares has kataba ['wrote'] or better 'decorated', as inscriptions are only a part of the design. The use of the verb kataba links these ceramics with the arts of the book and implies that lustrewares were considered appropriate surfaces for painting and thus precursors to the flourishing tradition of book illustration that emerged in Iran in the fourteenth century. Sometimes it is not clear whether the name denotes a potter or a workshop, for the same name may be found on a variety of wares and written in a variety of styles. A good example is Muslim (Jenkins 1968). Royal or court signatures and epigrams were also inscribed on ceramics. Bivar (1979) identified the sign-manual (idanat) of a ruling sultan, probably Arash (r. 1165–76), incised on the bottom of a sgraffito sherds excavated at Takht-i Sulayman. It reads t'samamtu bi'l-Tahh (I have held fast to God) and was apparently countersigned below, perhaps by the sultan who held effective power. Blaome of Mamluk amirs and protocols of sultans are found on numerous potsherds (Mayor 1933), and the slogan of the Nasrid ruler Muhammad II: 1259–72, wa-la ghulilib bi'l-Tahh [there is no victor save God], was inscribed all over the plaster walls of the Alhambra palace at Granada (see Figure 7.43).

The most common texts on Islamic ceramics are good wishes, with single words or bands invoking blessing, happiness, prosperity and the like. Although the most common, these texts are the least studied. Most studies concentrate on unique ceramics seemingly created for a specific moment and bearing long historical inscriptions, and there are very few studies of common types with repetitive texts, often with good wishes. Notable exceptions which give the complete text on each piece are ABD's catalogue of ceramics in the Freer Gallery, Washington DC, Ceramics from the World of Islam (1973) Phylon's catalogue of ceramics in the Benaki Museum, Athens (1965), and Grube's catalogue of the early ceramics from the Khalili Collection in London (1996). Lack of study means that we do not have even basic information about these expressions of good wishes. We still do not know, for example, how the form of good wishes changed over time.

One reason for the lack of study of these expressions of good wishes may be the difficulty in reading these texts, for many are unusual, even unreadable. Several explanations can be proposed for this illegibility. Due to the repetitive nature of ceramics, which were normally produced in multiple examples, the text may have become increasingly illegible as it was repeated. This would have been the case when the inscription, composed by a designer, was written by an illiterate craftsman. Legibility may also have been obscured by decorative concerns, and we do not know whether legibility or aesthetics was more important. At certain times, potters seem to have deliberately exploited the decorative effects, for example by painting or staining in the glaze so that the letters would run. The arbitrary division of words and phrases could also heighten the aesthetic effect (Flury 1959). A good example is the phrase 'for its owner' which is frequently divided bi'sal bi'salbi.

This division not only resulted in two equal groups of three letters, but also provided a well-balanced, symmetrical arrangement in the first group with a low sa'd in the middle flanked by the two uprights of the lam and ali'. The second group could then be squeezed in over the alif between the uprights.

Lack of information about these expressions of good wishes on ceramics makes it difficult to explain the nature of some texts, particularly single words or names. When a word or name is not preceded by a verb, it can be unclear whether it is a signature or a general evocation of good wishes. The words sa'd, for example, may be read as either 'happiness' or the proper name of a potter or workshop (Jenkins 1968). The word 'ahmad, found on several Samanid slip-painted bowls, has been read both as the name of the potter and the word 'more praiseworthy' (Grube 1996: 56). The interpretation may depend on the location of the inscription and the historical context, and sometimes such ambiguity may have been intentional.

Another type of inscription on Islamic ceramics which is related to the general category of good wishes comprises moralising aphorisms or proverbs. These can be taken from Koranic verses, as in iasa'abik kalimin alah (God will suffice you against them), Koran 2:15 (The longest word in the Koran, it was a popular 'Abbasid slogan that was inscribed on a variety of objects from the ninth century onwards. Other aphorisms were more popular in nature, as in the collection (1971) arranged by the twelfth century Arab philologists al-Maydani, d. 518/1124]. Moralising aphorisms,
Islamic Inscriptions

Islamic pieces from pre-Islamic ones. The finest wares, known as Urnayyad Palace Wares, have simple Arabic inscriptions and other designs painted in red on an earthenware body covered with a buff slip. Unglazed oil lamps from several sites in the eastern Mediterranean also have moulded inscriptions containing simple pious phrases and historical texts in Arabic (for example, RCEA 13:51 and Grupe 1966, no. 1). They give the name of the patron or artisan (who can be Muslim or Christian), the site (the most common is Jerrah) and the date (published examples range from 99/717-18 to 1234/723-4).

Inscriptions became more prominent on wares made in the eighth and ninth centuries under the 'Abbasids. Many inscribed fragments were uncovered during German excavations at Samarra, and Sarre's publication of the ceramics from the site (Sarre 1955, 81-93) contains one of the first studies of inscriptions on Islamic ceramics. Sarre assumed that all pieces found at Samarra had to date from the brief period when the site served as the 'Abbasid capital (962-92), but this is not necessarily true and one must use a wider horizon. More recently, the inscribed fragments in the extensive collection in the Benaki Museum were discussed in the catalogue by Philon (1981), who published the chapter on inscriptions in Mantej Bayani-Wolpert's two-volume study of the Benaki collection (pp. 293-502). Much information is amassed, although the discussions are not always clear. A similar arrangement of text and epigraphic appendix can be found in Grupe's (1966) catalogue of the early ceramics from the Khalili collection. A wide variety of polychrome glazes was one of the innovations introduced under the 'Abbasids, and glazed examples of moulded relief wares, like their unglazed counterparts, often had short simple inscriptions in Arabic. There are, for example, several pieces with the name Abu Nasr [A. Lane 1939]. His most complete signature occurs on a square condiment dish in the British Museum. The inscription is usually read 'anāl abu nasr al-bustān bi-misnāt 'the work of Abu Nasr al-Bustān Mihr [that is, Egypt]', but the inscription is undotted so that al-bustān has also been read al-nasr, and the word bi-misnāt open to question. On other pieces, the text occurs in other forms (al-bustān instead of al-nasr) and other styles (the mihr, for example, is round, not triangular as on the condiment dish), so the text cannot always be read reconstructively, but perhaps the name of a workshop or type of ware, and the varied find-spots of this type of ware (from Egypt to Iran) suggest that it had a widespread provenance.

Another signature occurs on a hemispherical bowl found at Raqqa in Syria and now in the Damascus Museum (Arts of Islam 1976, no. 310). A band around the rim is inscribed the work of Ibrahim the Christian [made] at Hira for the amir Sulayman, son of the Commander of the Faithful. The patron is believed to be Sulayman, son of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim (r. 754-75). It is extremely rare to find a specific patron, particularly such an important one, named on this utilitarian ware, and its occurrence here may perhaps be explained by the almost eggshell thinness of the piece.

Another type of inscribed 'Abbasid ceramic comprises earthenware bowls with an inscription painted in blue or green on an opaque white glaze, sometimes tin and sometimes alkaline. Since the inscription was painted with a brush, the artist had more latitude to write a longer text, and these bowls often have several lines of text written across the open surface of the interior. Texts include good wishes, particularly baraka l-subhah (blessing to its owner), tawakkul tabtiha (trust in God is sufficient!), and the Koranic phrase from 2:137 (fayadakthahum illah) ('God will suffice you against them'). Sometimes the pious phrase is followed by the name of the artisan, such as 'anāl mugammad ad-dālī (the work of Muhammad the ...), or on a bowl in the Staatsliche Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich (see Figure 11.64). Writing was used on these dishes not only to convey information, but also for decorative purposes, as the letters are often transformed ornamentally. Consequently, it is easy to read only the well-known parts of the text, but words such as the second part of the artisan's name are sometimes difficult or even obscure.

'Abbasid lustrewares, both polychrome and monochrome, were also decorated with a few letters or words of text. The most common text is a stylised version of al-mulk (dominion belongs to God). The word is sometimes repeated along a horizontal line which serves as the base for all letters, with no gap between words. This form is found both on fragments and on the monochrome lustre tiles used to decorate the mihrab at the Great Mosque at Qayrawan in Tunisia (Marquès 1928). On other polychrome wares, a single word or phrase, often repeated, is written in thick well-spaced letters with triangular endings on the letters alī and him. These inscribed 'Abbasid ceramics apparently served as models for inscribed wares produced in other regions of the Islamic world. For example, a bowl found at Madinat al-Zahrā' and dating from the caliphal period in the tenth century (Dodd 1992, no. 23) has the word al-mulk painted across the open face with thick letters with triangular tops like the inscriptions on 'Abbasid polychrome wares.

Inscriptions become more prominent on the slipwares associated with eastern Iran in the tenth and tenth centuries under the patronage of the Samanid dynasty (919-1005), and large numbers were excavated at Nishapur (Wilkinson 1973) and other sites in

Early Period

Inscriptions have been used to decorate Islamic ceramics at least since the early eighth century when the first distinctly Islamic ceramics appeared, and indeed it is the appearance of Arabic inscriptions that is often used to distinguish Islamic pottery from pre-Islamic ones. The finest wares, known as Urnayyad Palace Wares, have simple Arabic inscriptions and other designs painted in red on an earthenware body covered with a buff slip. Unglazed oil lamps from several sites in the eastern Mediterranean also have moulded inscriptions containing simple pious phrases and historical texts in Arabic (for example, RCEA 13:51 and Grupe 1966, no. 1). They give the name of the patron or artisan (who can be Muslim or Christian), the site [the most common is Jerrah] and the date (published examples range from 99/717-18 to 1234/723-4).

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Central Asia. These earthenware ceramics, mainly plates and bowls with a red or buff body covered with a white slip made of diluted fine white clay, presented an ideal surface for painted decoration in various metallic oxides mixed with diluted clay. One of the most common and distinctive types is a black-on-white ware, in which inscriptions and other decoration were painted in manganese over the white slip. The type may have derived from 'Abbasid white wares, which present a similar aesthetic and have many of the same texts and calligraphic features, including extra-long verticals, triangular endings on letters, and a miniature script that gives the impression of bristles springing from a horizontal line.

The texts painted on these slipwares range from single words or phrases such as baraka li-sabihi (blessing to its owner) to longer Arabic proverb, 'Patience is the key to felicity' (al-sulh mithal al 'irab) or 'Planning before work protects you from regret' (al-tadhr qa'id al-'amal yaminaka min al-na'd). Many examples are given by Belfaud, Volkov (Gomchenk), Ventrone and Ghoschani. The inscriptions are usually written around the rim of the vessel, sometimes with another word written like a pivot in the centre, although occasionally the texts are written as a single band stretching across the surface. A decorative device often marks the beginning of the phrase. On a plate in the Freer Gallery, for example (see Figure 11.65), a palmette, set at about seven o'clock on the platter, marks the beginning of the aphorism al-tawd min akhlaq al islam (Generosity is a quality of the people of Paradise). From the point of view of style, the remarkable feature of these inscriptions is the plainness and twinning at the both the bodies and the stems of the letters, a feature which often threatens to obscure the legibility of the text, yet at the same time transforms it into a vehicle of artistic achievement.

Boullet (1982) has attempted to connect this epigraphic type of slip-painted earthenwares with early converts to Islam who were more conservative, suggesting that the buff wares painted with ligral scenes found at the same sites were favoured by later converts, who belonged to a more populist sector of society. His essay, while stimulating, is not entirely convincing, for there is no clear evidence that the different types of earthenware were used exclusively by one sector of society or another, but his essay deserves attention as a rare attempt to set the objects in context and to explain the meaning of the epigraphic ornament.

Middle Period

Fine ceramics made in Egypt under the Fatimids (969–1171), particularly lustrewares, were also decorated with inscriptions, which gradually become longer and more elaborate in style as the letters sprouted leaves and flowers. The texts are usually benedictions such as nasr ('victory'), yumn ('good fortune'), surat ('joy') and the like, written in a band across the surface or around the rim or flaring side of a plate and bowl. Fatimid lustrewares were imported into Spain and provided the model for the local style of lustreware produced there, some of which have similar bands of benedictory inscriptions around the rim. The same sorts of good wishes are also inscribed on fine ceramics made in medieval Syria, both the types known as Tell Minis and Raqqah wares (Porter 1984, Grube and Toghibni, 1988–9). These good wishes were repeated so frequently that on some pieces the texts have become illegible patterns.

Names of patrons and signatures of potters or workshops also occur on a few pieces of Fatimid lustreware, and these names are particularly helpful in assigning dates to the ceramics as a group ('Abd al-Ra'uf 1938). The most famous is a fragmentary plate in the Islamic Museum, Cairo, dedicated to Qiblan, who is called qiblan al-alam ('commander-in-chief'), a title he bore between 401/1011 and 404/1013 (al-Ra'isi 1956). Jenkins (1988) has identified twenty-one potters who signed seventy-two pieces from the Fatimid period, usually with the word 'amal (work of'). They include 'Ali al-Baytar, Ahmad ibn-far al-Baari, but the most prolific potter was Muslim b. al-Dhahab, whose name appears on some forty complete or fragmentary lustreware vessels (Jenkins 1988, Philon 1980: 688). A fragmentary plate inscribed by him in the Benaki Museum, Athens (see Figure 11.66) is dedicated to someone whose name ends in al-Hakimi. The two-line inscription reads 'amal Muslim ibn al-dhahab wifq / ... al-hasan qibal al-hakimi ('the work of Muslim b. Dhahab to please / ... al-Hasan qibal al-Hakimi'). The inscription presumably refers to the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1021) and suggests that Muslim was active in the late tenth or early eleventh century. Other pieces by Muslim are inscribed 'in Egypt' ('in Egypt'). Inscriptions that include the word 'amal (work of) clearly indicate the signature of the potter Muslim, but the varied styles of script and forms of signature suggest that Muslim may have also been the name of the workshop. A few rare pieces of
Syrian ware are inscribed with the potter's name, such as a vase with the name of al-Malik al-Majishad Abd al-Dunya wa'l Din Shirkuh, an Ayyubid prince from Homs who died in 617/1220 [RCEA 4178]. The question of signatures on Fatimid wares is complicated by the varying location of the writing. Most pieces are signed on the outside, in the base of the foot ring, but some are signed on the inside and others on both sides. The example of the word al, meaning either happiness or a proper name, shows how interpretations differ. Although he was once thought to be the most versatile potter of the Fatimid period, Jenkins (1988) found the word in a variety of scripts on forty-six fragments of varying types and decoration and concluded that it was not a signature but a beneficent. In the mid-twelfth century, a major revolution in ceramic technology took place when potters adopted an artificial body made from ground quartz mixed with a small amount of white clay and ground glaze. This material, usually known as "fine" or "stome-paste", could be decorated in an extraordinarily wide range of decorative tech-niques. With the revolution in technology came an explosion in dated and signed pieces. By contrast, only a few earthenware pieces are dated, such as two unglanded relief wares signed by Abu-Ma'mar [514] in 612/1215, a ewer in Cairo and a bottle in the Louvre [RCEA 3783 and 3784].

The scarcity of dated earthenware makes it difficult to interpret the dates. One of the very few dated earthenwears is a high-stem bowl with sgrafitto decoration in Chicago (Survey, fig. 355) with several words and ciphers crudely scratched on the bottom. The words seem to be a signature, the work of "fahy the potter" [fahy al-yahya bisharla], and the ciphers "al" are clear, but their meaning is not. Pope interpreted them as the last two digits of a date and suggested [583] or [183] 995 or 1065, whereas Day interpreted them as the first two digits of the date and read another line incised to the right as a final 96, making the date 916/1513. Without any other indication that these numerals indicate a date, they could also be a potter's mark. The sloppiness of the line shows that the potter was not a calligrapher and that the inscription was not part of the decoration. Since this type of ware is probably the most common type of dated ceramic in the Islamic period, it is difficult to use this cipher for dating sgrafitto wares.

In contrast to earthenware, many kinds of Iranian wares are dated, and the prominence of dates and signatures distinguishes these medieval Persian ceramics from those made elsewhere. The dates and signatures are quite conspicuous, often written at the same height and in the same style as the Khorasan text or poetry that precedes them in a band on the inside or outside of a vessel or the edge of a tile. The dates and signatures usually occur on the finest vessels, suggesting that these pieces were unique commissions and setting them apart from typical ceramic wares made in multiple examples for sale on the open market.

The relative quantity of dated wares also allows us to put the pieces in order and draw conclusions about the dates of production. The most famous examples of moulded wares with a monochrome glaze are two large vases dated 689/1290 and 694/1295 in the Metropolitan Museum [RCEA 4879; Survey, plate 795g] and the Freer Gallery [Art 1973, no. 71]. Grove (1968, no. 148) has recently published a fragmentary bottle in the Khalili Collection signed by 'Ali Buhuni and dated 545/1150-51. Lack of provenance for the piece and its unusual date, a century and a half before the other two dated pieces and twenty-five years before any other dated piece of sgrafitto ware, suggests, however, that this date should be treated with caution until technical analysis can confirm the authenticity of the piece.

Several pieces of underglaze-painted wares are also dated, but the dates are often written in ciphers, which are difficult to read. A good example is an openwork underglaze-painted ewer in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. Wiet read the ciphers as 162/1666, making the ewer the earliest dated piece, but Bahrani read the same ciphers as 657/1259 (evidence summarised in Grove 1968: 153). Other dated examples of underglaze-painted wares painted in black and blue range from 657/1259 [RCEA 3601; Survey, plate 739a] to 612/1215 [the Mary jug in the Metropolitan Museum, RCEA 5785], and a polychrome example of underglaze-painted ware is dated 675/1274 [RCEA 4668a, Survey, plate 735A]. So the later date for the Cairo ewer seems more probable, but without publication of the text it is impossible to be definitive.

The most common types of dated and signed wares are the two most expensive types of medieval Iranian ceramics: lustre-painted and enamelled wares. Although expensive, these techniques gave the potter great freedom of expression, enabling him to paint elaborate figural scenes and long inscriptions. Many inscriptions on lustrewares were recorded by Bahrami (1949) and the basic surveys by Watson (1988) and Choueiri (1995) include extensive epigraphic information, as the inscriptions provide much of the evidence for the localisation and organisation of production. These inscriptions are written in two scripts: a stylised Kufic used for good wishes that sometimes degenerates into repetitive combinations of meaningless letters, and a scratching curved naskh with many disconnected letters used for poetry and prose, including signatures and dates. Potters signed and dated their wares in various ways. Watson's Appendix I includes a short discussion of the words used, and his Appendix II includes a paragraph on the scripts used for the numbers. These surveys show the value of reading many texts together, as it is possible to decipher the hastily written scrawls on some pieces because it is written more clearly on others. The high number of signed and dated pieces also allows us to draw broader conclusions about the nature of production, interpretations that are not possible when working with a rare or unusual piece. Inscriptions show that the centre of production was Kashan. A lustre bowl found at Qasr and now in the V&A (Watson 1985, colour plate G), for example, is signed by Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Nishapuri. 'Living in Kashan' (al-maqran bi qashlan). Similarly, star tiles made in 738 and 756/
1327-9 (RCCE 1373-8, 5789-8) are inscribed with the name of the site Kashan. The text on several tiles asks God to protect the city from the accidents of time, suggesting perhaps that Kashan was suffering economic decline in the mid-fourteenth century. Work was carried out in a workshop, for the text on several other tiles says that the master Jamal al-‘arqash worked in the workshop (shakhsish) of the sayyid of sayyids Reza al-Din Muhammad b. Sayyid Zayn al-Din ‘Ali the potter (al ghabad).

The three styles of lustrewares produced at Kashan had varying amounts of epigraphy. Pieces in the monumental style, none of which is dated, have large figures painted in reserve but relatively few inscriptions. With the introduction of the miniature style, artists were free to paint small-scale designs in bands or panels on a variety of vessels shapes, and the inscriptions on these pieces are longer and more serious. In addition to stylised or pseudo-inscriptions and conventional blessings to the owner, they contain quatrains in Persian as well as four dates ranging from the third day of 1275/20 June 1859 (the well-known vase in the British Museum, Survey, plate 636b) to Jumada I 930/May 1523 in a dish in the Khalili collection, Watson (1987, fig. 39) and two signatures by Abu Zayd (a fragmentary vase dated 987/1579, Watson 1987, plate 33 and a dish in a private collection in Tehran dated Rajab 989/March 1702).

Inscriptions play their fullest role on lustrewares in the Kashan style, in which figures are drawn in reserve on a lustred ground relieved by a series of small spirals or commas scratched through the lustre to give it a lighter texture. Concentric bands written in different scripts often surround a central motif. Cursive inscriptions are both scratched though the lustre and painted on the white glaze; angular inscriptions are often set into ornate fringes on a scrollwork ground. The texts are mainly verses, usually Persian quatrains, although a few Arabic poems have also been identified. Generalised good wishes to the owner are common, but references to individual patrons are rare. Two notable exceptions are the vizier al-Husayn b. Saljan, to whom a lustre jar in the Bashrami collection was dedicated, and a large plate in the Freer decorated with a complex scene including a sleeping groom (see Figure 8.4). The text reserved in white from the brown ground of the rim (RCCE 3672, Guest and Ettinghausen 1981, Ghouchni 1993) contains blessings to an unidentified amir and commander [al-sulayt], the signature of the potter, and the date Jumada II 607/November 1210. Further inscriptions painted in brown on a white ground on the inside and outside walls contain a combination of various odes, a quatrains and good wishes in a mixture of Arabic and Persian.

The Freer lustre plate is one of the nearly sixty dated vessels in the Kashan style known from the pre-Mongol period, and the large number of dated pieces allows us to draw various conclusions about production. We can bracket the approximate beginning and end of production from a sherd of a dish in the British Institute of Persian Studies made in Dhar al-Hijri 1253/September 1190 (Watson 1985, fig. 55) and a bowl in the Kelekian collection (Survey, plate 773b) made in 624/1226. The dated vessels also suggest that the main period of production took place in the first two decades of the thirteenth century. The number of dated vessels in the Kashan style also allows us to eliminate other lustrewares with conflicting dates. A bowl in the Khalili collection (Crabbe 1936, no. 383), for example, is dated in words 'Shawwal five hundred and four' (March 1111), but on the basis of its shape and style of decoration, the bowl clearly belongs to the early thirteenth century.

Inscriptions also play a major role in the decoration of lustre tiles (Bahrami 1937, Kami et al. 1983, Ghouchni 1991, Carbone and Masuya 1993). Star and cross tiles usually have an inscribed border; frieze tiles have a roundup inscription in the main field, and mihrab or tombstone tiles, which can comprise up to forty individual tiles in a single ensemble, often have numerous inscriptions in a variety of scripts. This panel of three tiles decorated with a hanging lamp [see Figure 11.62], for example, has several inscriptions written in relief. The Throne Verse (Koran 2:255) begins in the rectangular frame and continues in the field below the lamp inside the arch. The signature of Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Ahmad Bubuya the builder [al-buwa] fills the spandrels. The most unusual inscription is the arch of the niche, which is composed of the word faurakhdishab written in interlaced Kufic. The rest of the Koranic phrase from 2:257 faurakhdishab allah wa tawwur al-samt is ‘allam (‘God will suffice you against them, for He is the all-hearing, the all-knowing’) continues around the lamp.

In addition to the verses found on vessels, tiles are also inscribed with Koranic passages and hadith. They are drawn from a limited repertoire, and certain favourite passages predominate. Star tiles often have Koran 1 and 112. The Throne Verse (Koran 2:255) is also popular. Tiles from tombs are often inscribed with chapters from the end of the Koran, texts that deal with the Day of Judgment, while those from mosques are taken from the middle of the book and stress man’s duty to God.

Tiles were produced for a longer span of time than vessels. The earliest dated tile in the Islamic Museum, Cairo, was made by Abu Zayd on Wednesday, the end of Safar 600/November 1209 (RCCE 5877, Ghouchni 1993, fig. 1). Tile production continued after the Mongol conquest of Kashan in 1224, the time when the production of lustrewares vessels ceased, and a continuous series of tiles was produced into the middle of the fourteenth century. One of the latest is a star tile from the shrine of Imam Rida at Mashhad made by Haydar on 9 Ramadan 706/August 1309 (Ghouchni 1993, fig. 3). Production continued sporadically into the twelfth century (Watson 1975).

In comparison to lustrewares, enameled wares contain less documentary information, and even that which does exist is sometimes suspect. A lustre lustre is relatively easy to fake or add to these texts which are painted over the glaze. For example, the date 640/1243 on a bowl in the V&A, which is written in an irregular form with the hundreds before the tens (ti sitam‘a wa arb‘a‘n) in a restored area of the bowl, should be disregarded. As with lustrewares, the texts on enameled wares can best be read in groups. In addition to highly stylized Kutubi inscriptions with good wishes and longer cursive texts with poetry, the
Late period

As in other media, the role of inscriptions in ceramic decoration diminished in the late period, although the occasional piece with a name or date is still one of the fundamental ways of localising a type. Inscriptions suggest that the production of lustrewares petered out under the Mongols: there are some vessels dated in the 660s/1260s, 670s/1270s and 680s/1390s, but the latest lustre vessel in the series is dated 685/1284, although regular production of lustre tiles continued until 740/1340–50. Several moulded millefiores and tiles glazed in a single colour, usually turquoise, have dates in the early fourteenth century, establishing a range for the production of those wares. After enameled wares went out of fashion, they were replaced by the type of enameled and gilded ceramics known as lajarina ware, from lajar, the Persian word for lapis lazuli, because of the deep blue glaze that characterises many of them. A fragmentary star tile dated 715/1315 once in the collection of Richard Ettinghausen, and a bowl dated 776/1374–5 in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, provide documentary evidence for the span of production. The major type of wares produced in Iran in the fourteenth century, the underglaze-painted Sultanabad wares, however, are generally anepigraphic.

The lustrewares produced at this time at the other end of the Islamic lands, in Spain under the Nasrids (r. 1320–1499) were also inscribed, and the large surfaces of these big pieces allowed for lengthy inscriptions, usually repeated phrases of good wishes. The best-known lustrewares from Nasrid Spain are the Alhambra Vases, so called because some were found in the Alhambra Palace at Granada [Ettinghausen 1943; Renes 1992]. They are traditionally divided into two chronological groups based on shape, technique and epigraphic style. The earlier type, usually dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, has a bulbous shape and short neck (for example, vases in Palermo and St Petersburg, Dodd 1991: nos. 110–11) and is decorated in monochrome lustre with a wide central register inscribed in bold Kufic. The later type, usually dated...
to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century (for example, a vase in the Musco Hispano-musulmán, Granada), has a more elegant shape and additional decoration in cobalt blue or gilding, with a narrow band of cursive script. The texts are usually repeated phrases of good wishes, but a fragmentary jar in the Freer Gallery also has an Arabic poem written as though the vase were speaking and asking the onlooker to contemplate its excellence (Nykl 1957). The use of repeating expressions of good wishes was typical of Nasrid work in many media, followed by the honorific titles of unidentified owners. These ceremonial wares were probably mass-produced to be sold to the households of various amirs. An occasional piece, however, was made on specific commission. A bowl found at Toli in upper Egypt, for example, is decorated in the centre with an eagle and inscribed around the rim with the name of a specific judge (Decorbée and Gayraud 1981). Some stemmed cups and fragments bear potters’ signatures, especially that of Shâraf al-Ahwâzî (Atti 1981). Dates and signed pieces also provide guideposts for the evolution of different types of ceramics produced in Iran in later times (Ehl, ‘Ceramics xiv-xx’). Lustreware, including tiles and vessels, was produced sporadically until the twentieth century (Watson 1975, 1985), but a spurt of production occurred in the second half of the seventeenth century. Only one example is dated – a long-necked bottle once in the Wallis collection (Watson 1985, fig. 136), and even that date is unclear – but several vessels are signed ‘the work of Khatîn’. Another lustreware revival occurred in the late eighteenth century and is associated with the work of ‘Ali Muhammad (Scrase 1976). The sporadic production of lustreware can be documented through a few other dated lustre tiles used to mark graves or building foundations, and five mosques in central Iran have tiles mimbar dating from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century (O’Kane 1986). One of the few sites of production that can be identified in inscriptions on Timurid ceramics is Mashhad. It is mentioned on two underglaze-painted vessels: a spittoon in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, whose foot bears a scratched inscription saying that it was made for our lord Husain al-Din Shâr â at Mashhad in 838/1434-5 (Grube 1974), and a plate in the Hermitage, whose cavetto bears an inscription that it was made there in 837/1434-5 (Ivanov 1980, Main and Bloom 1994, fig. 301). Other rare examples of dated Timurid ceramics include a series of four pieces of black-under-green painted wares, dating between 837/1434-5 and 906/1404-5. Later Iranian ceramics also include a handful of unique dated specimens and several series of dated examples. Unique pieces include a damaged blue-and-white spray-marked dish of the 17th century with an inscription around the edge in Persian verse ending with the date 930/1523-4, and a dish depicting the zodiac in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, signed by ‘Abd al-Wahid and dated 977/1570-1. Dated series include the handful of dated pieces of Kizak ware, ranging from 1035/1626 (as a teapot in the British Museum) to 1057/1646 (a base for a winechalice in the V&A), and the signed and dated examples of blue-and-white ranging from 1581/1665 to 1618/1700-1 and assigned to Nârîn (Scrase 1991: 930-9). The Kizak wares also have Persian imitations of Chinese marks in the foot ring. The square or tall slender marks used on earlier examples were gradually replaced by sketchy marks resembling a capital A or by multiple crosses painted in black. In general, the dated pieces from the later period are more modest in quality than the superb dated examples of medieval times. This may indicate a change of taste and suggest that these wares were not signed and dated by the potters as a mark of esteem, but rather were made as remembrances or souvenirs for the market. Few of the other, than the dates, have been published.

The Qajar (r. 1779-1924) had a strong taste for wares decorated with their names and other signs of rank, and even ceramics ordered from abroad had inscriptions. The dinner services that Fath ‘Ali Shah (r. 1797-1834) ordered from the factories of Crown Derby and Wedgwood for the Golestán Palace in Tehran, for example, were inscribed with his name and the date 1315/1898-9. Inscribed pieces also provide the basis for localising various types of Ottoman ceramics, but only recently have Atasoy and Ruby (1989) integrated the very few inscribed pieces with technical and stylistic criteria to sketch an overall survey of the development of İznik wares. The basic dated pieces of İznik ceramics are tiles and furnishings, especially ceramic mosque lamps, made for building complexes with established dates. The extensive tile revetment at Mehmed’s complex at Bursa, known therefore as the Green (Yetki) complex and built between 823/1420 and 837/1434, shows that the impetus for the
extraordinary revival of glazed ceramics, after a hiatus of more than a century, came from Iran, as the mibrab is signed ‘the work of the masters of Tabriz’. Judging from tiles in other dated buildings, the atelier continued to work for the Ottoman sultans for the next half-century.

Dated vessels are much rarer. One of the most famous is a small ewer in the British Museum with an inscription in Armenian mentioning the donor, a certain Abraham of Kitâhya, and a date equivalent to 1510. Its rarity is clear from the fact that it is constantly cited in the literature and that its inscription has given rise to the common name of the type, Abraham of Kitâhya ware. Another famous piece in the British Museum is a mosque lamp found at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (see Figure 11.69). It has a fragmentary inscription around the foot ring with the date 956/1549, the signature of the artisan (read variously as Muṣli, Musalli or even Musallā), and the name of the İznik saint Efrefezade Rumi. The only dated piece from the early seventeenth century is a dish with a prunus tree in the Musée de la Renaissance, Châlons-en-Champagne, inscribed and dated under the foot [1035/1626-7] (Emmaus and Kalus 1979).

There are more dated examples of İznik ceramics from the later seventeenth century, and they document the widening of the market and the declining quality of the type. Several dated pieces from the 1640s include a dish with a cilt inscribed on the rim in cursive Greek with the equivalent of 1640 and a second dish with a Greek inscription mentioning Nicaea and the Church of St George in Nicaea and the date 1646 (Atasoy and Raby 1969, fig. 635). A series of fifteen dishes with uncial Greek inscriptions is dated between 1666 and 1678. The texts are extracts from the Psalms or religious invocations, but the inscriptions on them are similar in style and orthography to a tile dated 1667 designed as a setting for a fountain and inscribed with a donor or artist’s dedication and the name (La)karis. The same epigraphic style is used on tiles in the Great Lavra inscribed with the date 1678 and the name of the maker, a Christian monk Zostimas. Inscriptions continue on wares made at Kitâhya in the eighteenth century. A polylobed censor with polychrome decoration in the Cincinnati Art Museum, for example, bears an Armenian inscription stating that it was made in 1726 [1726-7 CE].

As in the rest of Ottoman art, inscriptions play only a minor role on İznik ceramics, and mosque lamps are the only group to make use of large-scale inscriptions. They have Koranic quotations or pious texts, particularly the professions of faith and the names of the Four Orthodox caliphs, as the pious nature of these texts was appropriate for objects destined for a religious setting. The inscriptions are of mediocre quality and were probably the work of the potters themselves, who were sometimes blindly copying a model. The Hebrew inscription on one lamp, for example, is written upside down and makes no sense. So few other pieces have inscriptions on them that the ones that do are considered unusual. A tankard painted in blue and red in the ‘Rhodian’ style, for example, is inscribed with an aphorism in Ottoman Turkish that the house of this world is an inn and that whoever does not see it must be mad [Arts of Islam 1975, no. 423].

Ceramics were not a major part of the Indian artistic tradition, but the Mughals did collect Chinese porcelains, and those in the imperial collection were often inscribed on the underside with the emperor’s name, date of acquisition and weight of the vessel (Markel 1990).
### Chapter 12 Textiles

Inscribed textiles have always played an important role in Islam. Undoubtedly the most famous is the Kiswa, the veil that has covered the Ka’ba in Mecca since pre-Islamic times. Today the veil is a black cloth with bands of inscriptions from the Koran woven in gold thread, but in the past it could be of virtually any colour, including white, green or even red. Supplying the veil was a great honour, and rulers fought for the right to do so as it was a sign of sovereignty. Inscribing one’s name on the Kiswa became an important prerogative of the ruler from early Islamic times. The Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi, for example, preserves an account of a Kiswa woven at Tunis under the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi in 1507 (ACE 441).

The Kiswa is a unique piece made for a specific occasion and pattern, once the pattern was established, it could easily be repeated. The constant repetition of patterns makes it particularly difficult to date textiles, and the inscriptions on them provide an important method for doing so.

Inscriptions could also be added during weaving, particularly with tapestry weaving, in which mosaic-like patterns are created by using discontinuous wefts, that is, wefts that go back and forth around only a few warps to create a small coloured area. This technique was suitable for cotton, linen and woolen fabrics woven on tapestry looms. Plain linens, for example, could be decorated with bands and medallions with inscriptions (as well as figurative, floral and geometric motifs) - tapestry-woven in brightly coloured wool or silk. This technique, already common in pre-Islamic times, was suitable for the loose linen robes worn in Egypt. The robe was woven in the form of a cross with a slit for the head in the centre and tapestry-woven bands on either side of the neck opening and across the top of the sleeves. The garment could be made up without cutting the loom length, and the inscribed or decorated bands would fall in the appropriate places.

There are few general studies of the inscriptions on textiles, in part because few scholars have expertise in both textile studies and terminology and in Arabic and epigraphy. The most successful publications are joint endeavours in which a textile specialist teams up with an epigrapher. A good example of this type of work is Ouaïsky and ‘Abbas’s (1999) catalogue of the medieval Islamic textiles in the Abbé Foundation in Riggsberg outside Berne, Switzerland. The foundation has a wide-ranging collection of textiles, and this catalogue contains images, cotton and silks dating from the ninth century to the fifteenth. For each piece gives a transcription and translation of the text, and fine colour plates and drawings allow the reader to see the styles of script.

### Early Period

The two techniques by which inscriptions could be added during weaving - embroidery and tapestry - were used in early Islamic times for the large group of textiles known as tınez (tīnāz). The term is derived from the Persian word ‘to embroider’ (īzāstān) and originally designated any embroidered ornament. In the early Islamic period, textiles were often decorated with inscriptions containing the caliph’s name and titles, and these fabrics were made up into robes of honour worn by the caliph or bestowed by him as official gifts. The term ‘tīnez’ came to refer either to the embroidered or tapestry-woven inscription band or to the fabrics or garments on which these inscription bands are found. To confuse the matter further, the term also referred to the workshops in which these various fabrics were made, in-syncedēche bū dār al-tīnez (‘factory for tīnez’). In later times, the word ‘tīnez’ was also used in the Arabic-speaking lands for the long bands inscribed with the ruler’s name and titles decorating the façades of important buildings. The long band across the front of the tomb complex of Sultan Qal‘un along the main street in Cairo is a good example of such an inscribed band (see Figures 5.12 and 5.13), and al-Maqrizi called the inscription a tīnez.

The institution of the tīnez, in which textiles were produced in factories under state supervision, was modelled on Byzantine and Sassanian precedents, although it is not clear whether pre-Islamic workshops were taken over and kept in operation or whether entirely new factories were founded. The institution was already in operation in early Islamic times when pieces inscribed with the caliph’s name were produced under the Umayyads of Syria (II. 663-705). A wool tapestry in the Textile Museum, Washington 22, and a fragmentary silk twill, found in Egypt and now cut up and dispersed in several museums (Day 1952; Arts of Islam 1976, no. 130), both mention Marwan, probably referring to the Umayyad caliph Marwan II (r. 744-50). The inscription embroidered in yellow along the edge of the silk further states that it was woven in the workshop of Bâgâ, suggesting that a factory existed in what is now Tunisia, perhaps at Qabîs (modern Gabès).

The institution of the tīnez flourished in the Islamic lands under the rule of the ‘Abbasids and Fatimid caliphs from the late ninth century until the thirteenth when a new taste evolved for patterned silks and all-over embroidered or printed cottons. Most surviving examples of tīnez come from the burial grounds at Fustat (Old Cairo), for these prized and expensive textiles were often used for shrouds, and their inscriptions, offering God’s blessing to the deceased (Sokolov 1957a). A few examples have also been preserved in European church treasuries. Major collections of tīnez fabrics are found in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, which has nearly 1,000 inscribed pieces, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Textile Museum, Washington DC.

The basic work to consult on the subject of tīzā is the fine catalogue of the dated tīzā fabrics in the Textile Museum published in 1955 by Kühnel [and Bellingen]. In addition to the wool tapestry made for the Umayyad caliph Marwan, the catalogue contains pieces made for thirteen 'Abbasid and seven Fatimid caliphs. The sixteen appendixes catalogue many other types of inscribed fabrics, including rush mats, Yemeni ikat cottons, painted and gilded pieces of zhalmah [a fabric of silk cotton, half-silk], Indian-dyed cottons, and so on. Each entry begins with a brief description of the piece with technical information supplied by Lotna Bellingen. This is followed by a description of the inscription, with text given in both Arabic and translation, and several paragraphs of commentary. There is also a long discussion of the technical aspects by Bellingen, describing how the inscriptions were done.

Bellingen’s essay on technique is important for epigraphy, for the choice of fabric affected the type of stitch used and the way in which the inscription could be worked (see also the essay by Schöner [1997] in the Rijksbureau voor Ziekemeisterij). It is difficult, for example, to mark out inscriptions on linen, the traditional fabric woven in Egypt: a needle with an eye does not penetrate, and ink runs. In order to form the letters of the inscription on a linen fabric, the designer needed to count the threads, and hence he could not use the types of stitches that predominated in the eastern Islamic lands, chain and blanket stitches, since they cover the threads, rendering them impossible to count. Instead, Egyptian weavers used a variety of other stitches, including back and stem stitches, which put more strain on the ground material or embroidery thread and often produced more irregular letters.

The plates, charts, and notes at the end of Kühnel and Bellingen’s catalogue [1955] make the volume all the more useful. More than fifty plates show not only the overall inscriptions but also details of the techniques used. One chart lists the pieces in chronological order so that the reader can follow the evolution of material and spinning, stitches, factory, supervisor and date. Two other charts discuss factories and supervisors.

Studying the inscriptions on tīzā fabrics shows that over the course of several centuries both the titles and the style used for the inscription became more elaborate. A typical piece made for an ‘Abbasid caliph in the late ninth or early tenth century (see Figure 12.70) has one long line of text in a simple form of angular Kufic script. The text begins with the basmala and blessings for the caliph under whose authority the textile was made and continues with the name of the vizier who ordered the piece, the place of production, the name of the supervisor and the date.

Variations in wording may indicate different places of manufacture or different rulers. The phrase ‘al’ yakūf (literally ‘under the hands of’) for, example, was used on Egyptian pieces before the name of the factory supervisor, while in the eastern Islamic world it preceded the name of the government official who ordered the textile to be made. Tīzā made for the Fatimid caliphs, who were Isma‘ili Shi‘ites, often included such sectarian phrases as ‘People of the House’ [ahl al-‘bayr] or ‘his pure ancestors’ [al-ba‘thi al-abtar].

In the tenth century, the scripts used in tīzā inscriptions became more mannered in style, as the shafts of the letters became taller and the tails were flatter. The text was sometimes written in two facing bands. A linen textile made for the Fatimid caliph al-‘Aziz in the Textile Museum (73.432), for example, has a tapestry-woven inscription of large angular script with arabesques forming discs at the heads of the high [85 mm] letters. The text invokes God’s blessing on his servant and friend, the Imam al-‘Aziz; it was ordered by the vizier Ibn Killis in 370/981-2 and probably made at Tunis.

In the eleventh century, tīzā inscriptions became shorter and more decorative with the introduction of non-historical texts that repeated a single word or phrase such as ‘blessing’ [bāzkal] or ‘good fortune’ [al-‘ayn]. The central or shoulder-shaped tails of the letters were extended below the base line. In pieces made for the caliph al-Zahir (r. 1020-35), the terminals are still attached correctly to descending letters (see Figure 12.71), but gradually the large endings were applied at regular intervals and attached indiscriminately to any letter, thereby obscuring the text and making it more difficult to read. The text on a linen piece woven a century later (Textile Museum 73.461), probably for al-Mustansir (r. 1091-94), is almost impossible to read because of the capriciously disposed shoulder-shaped ends of the letter.

Readable texts were eventually replaced by a decorative ‘Kufesque’ script (for example, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 50.876). The increasing illegibility of the text was accompanied by an increased use of decorative bands, either small-scale geometric patterns or designs of animals in cartoon style. These narrow bands were executed in a variety of colours and generally occur in pairs, with one decorative band framed by inscribed bands and the other decorative band isolated on the ground some distance away (for example, Textile Museum 73.543 made for al-Mustansir).

In the 13th century the stylised angular scripts were replaced by canoptic ones, as on a linen textile woven c. 1100 under the supervision of the vizier al-Afdal (see Figure 12.72). The decorative bands were wider and more elaborate, often containing medallions with animals or geometric motifs, and are themselves framed by narrower bands with inscriptions or pseudo-inscriptions (for example, Royal Ontario Museum 561.107.3). A wide variety of colours was used, but yellow-green often predominates, perhaps in imitation of luxury textiles that used gold-wrapped thread.

Fibrous texts describing court vestments and furnishings speak primarily of silks, but very few pieces of this type survive. One exception (PAD 1968) is a silk in the Islamic Museum, Cairo, of the type known as raqshah, a white silk soaked in gum, smoothed, and polished with a shell called tambo. Originally measuring some 110 by 70 cm, the bright white piece is embroidered in black
with seventeen lines of text. A magnificent band of simple Kufic at the top has Kufic texts (a paraphrase of 1:88 and 9:129) and good wishes. The sixteen lines of so-called 'eastern' or 'broken' Kufic below contain a marriage contract between two Fatimid aristocrats, an aged shaykh and the middle-aged daughter of an amir. The piece can be dated to the mid-eleventh century as the text mentions the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir. Most surviving tīrāz pieces, by contrast, are linens and other lightweight fabrics, mainly fragments from mantles, summer outfits, undergarments, turbans, shawls, sashes, napkins, presentation towels, and furnishing fabrics like curtains.

The only complete garment to survive is known as the Veil of Ste Anne, so-called because it has been preserved as a relic in the Church of Ste Anne at Apt in France (BCEA 1868a, Matraix and Wiet 1949; Arts of Islam 1976, no. 81). A length of bleached linen measuring 3.1 by 1.5 metres and woven in tabby, it is decorated with three parallel bands of ornament tapestry-woven in coloured silk and gold thread. The centre band has three medallions with sphinxes encircled by an inscription in Kufic script naming the patron, the Fatimid caliph al-Mustāli, and the supervisor of the work, his vizier al-Afdal (the same person for whom the tīrāz illustrated in Figure 12.73 was made). The bands along either side are decorated with birds, animals and another inscription stating that the textile was woven in 479/1086 or 480/1087 (the last digit is not clear) at the royal factory of Damietta, a well-known textile manufacture in the Nile Delta. The piece was probably worn as an overgarment or mantle, with the small slits at the sides for the hands and the central band containing the inscribed medallions falling down the back. Since both the lord and bishop of Apt took part in the First Crusade in 1099, the cloth was probably brought from Egypt or Syria as plunder and preserved as a relic.

In addition to these tīrāz pieces made for the Abbasids and Fatimids, another well-known group of inscribed fabrics from the early Islamic period comprises ikat cloths made in the Yemen. In the ikat technique, the warp and sometimes the weft threads are tie-dyed to produce patterns when woven. Ikat weaving was a speciality in Central Asia and the Yemen, where it had been introduced across the Indian Ocean from the Indian subcontinent, and a series of spectacular cotton ikats was produced at San'a and other cities there in the ninth and tenth centuries. These fabrics have characteristic variegated stripes produced by dying parts of the natural-colour cotton warps blue and brown before weaving and then weaving these dyed warps with natural cotton wefts.

Yemeni ikats can be divided into two groups, based on the types of inscriptions on them (Golumbeck and Gervais 1977; Blair 1986: 68-91). One group is decorated with inscriptions embroidered in an interlaced Kufic script, with numerous arcs inserted for decorative purposes in the base line of the inscription and in the vertical staves. Dated pieces range from 370/883 to 316/923. The other group of inscribed Yemeni ikats has inscriptions painted and gilded in elaborately plated and foliated Kufic. Three pieces, dating from the late tenth century, are inscribed with the names of imams and amirs of the Yemen. Legibility was important, and on the pieces with historical inscriptions, interlining was restricted to single letters and decoration was restrained.

In contrast, the inscriptions on other ikats with pictorial texts are much more elaborate, with an extraordinary number of arcs, bumps, triangles, curls and other decorative devices inserted between and around the letters Extremely laborious to read, these pictorial texts are legible only because of their limited repertory of phrases. This piece in the Textile Museum (see Figure 12.74), for example, is inscribed with God's blessing on the Prophet (bih al-Allāh 'alā muhammad). Most of the painted and gilded decoration comprises triangles inserted between the two lines of al-Allāh and the interlining of the dāl in muhammad.

Tīrāz were also woven for the Umayyads of Spain. The most recently, the entries in Dalds 1962 with bibliographies and colour illustrations. The earliest is the tapestry-woven fragment known.
as the Veil of Hisham II (976–1013), which was found in 1853 wrapped around a reliquary in the church of Santa Maria del Rivero of San Esteban de Gormaz in Soria (RCEA 2174; Dörr, 1993, no. 31). It is thought to have been one of the ends of the caliph’s veil or headress which was wrapped like a turban with the ends falling loosely to the arms. Its technique and epigraphy are typically Spanish: the gold wefts are gilded strips of membrane Z-wrapped around a silk core, and the half-palmettes on the Kufic letters resemble those found on contemporary ivories and mosaics. A similar technique and epigraphic style are used on another eleventh-century textile discovered in 1978 in the Collès church in Puente de Montalbana in Huasco (Dörr, 1993, no. 32).

Medieval Silks

In addition to embroidery and tapestry weaving, it is also possible to incorporate an inscription while weaving a fabric, but this is a much more difficult process, especially when using a drawloom. The drawloom, which has a complicated system of drawstrings that raise and lower the pattern warps, had been developed in ancient China in the first centuries BC. It spread to Iran in pre-Islamic times and was eventually adopted in all the Islamic lands where silk was woven. Since the drawloom had fine strings instead of the older cumbersome system of shafts, it allowed larger quantities of finer fabrics to be woven with less effort. It was, however, extremely laborious to set up and was used for sumptuous patterned fabrics with compound weaves, often worked with gold thread, and repeated in different combinations.

Most early Persian silks did not have inscriptions, as it was difficult for the weaver to coordinate the running text with a repeating pattern. Pardistically, it was an inscription inked on the back of one piece that allowed Shepherd and Henning (1950) to identify and localise one group of these brightly coloured silks with roundels enclosing paired birds and other motifs. The silk textile was kept in the church treasury at Huy in Belgium among the relics of St Dominic, who died in the sixth century and was canonised in the eighth and whose relics were assembled in the twelfth century. A note in Sogdian script states that the cloth was made at Zandana, a town near Bukhara, and the group is therefore known as Zandnni silks. The writing is similar to other inscriptions discovered at the Soghdian citadel of Mt Mug in Central Asia, destroyed by the invading Arabs in 733, and the group of silk textiles is therefore dated to the late seventh or the eighth century, when Islam was first brought to the area.

By the tenth century, Persian weavers had figured out how to incorporate long inscription bands on their elaborately patterned drawloom silks. One of the finest examples to be preserved is the shroud of St Josse (see Figure 12.71) woven in the mid-tenth century probably in eastern Iran. Silk textiles woven on a drawloom using a similar technique but different designs were also produced at this time in western Iran. They are known, somewhat amusingly, as the ‘Baqi silks’. The saga began when several silk fragments and other objects were clandestinely excavated in late 1924 and early 1925 at a site known as Bibi Shahr Bami near Rayy, south of Tehran in Iran. Other similar textiles appeared on the market in the 1920s and 1930s, and many were acquired by major museums and private collectors. The extraordinary artistic and technical importance of these medieval silks was quickly realised, and they were the subject of many important exhibitions, publications and symposia. Following the 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art at the Royal Academy in London, Wetl (1933, no. 3, RCEA 3177) identified one piece, a silk that had been made up into a tunic (see Figure 12.74), as inscribed with the name of the Buyid ruler Bahz al-Dawla (r. 998–1013), and the group became known as the ‘Baqi silks’.

More and larger pieces, even complete gowns woven to shape, appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, and many were acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Abegg Foundation in...