Islamic Inscriptions

Riggsberg. At the same time, more and more doubts began to surface about the authenticity of these textiles. After Wetl [1948] had published eighteen more silks from an anonymous collection, Florence Day [1951] wrote a particularly vitriolic review of Wetl’s book, challenging virtually everything that he had written about the silks. The controversy continued into the 1970s. The Abegg Foundation published the so-called Rigginsberg Report, nos. 37–8 of the Bulletin de Liaison du Centre International d’Étude des Textiles Anciens (often abbreviated as CIETA), in which doubts were expressed about many of the eighty-nine ‘Bayyid’ silks in their collection. In the next issue of the Bulletin [nos. 39–40, 1972], Dorothy Shepherd countered with a spirited defence of the Bayyid silks.

Inscriptions played a key role in determining the authenticity of these problematic pieces in the 1960s [Blair ct al. 1993]. The Cleveland Museum requested a report on the inscriptions on the ‘Bayyid’ textiles, including thirty-seven inscribed pieces in their collection and eighty-four in other collections. Individually, the inscriptions did not seem exceptional, but reviewing the inscriptions as a whole raised serious doubts, for only a handful, mainly the pieces associated with the original discovery at Rayy in 1924–5, conformed to titulature and epigraphic forms standard in the period. A first step was to compare the names and titles used in the textile inscriptions with those used elsewhere, mainly in architecture since so few other inscribed objects from the period have unimpeachable credentials. Such a comparison showed that the eight textiles naming Bayyid amirs and other known historical figures, including the shroud of St Josse naming Abu Mansur Bakhshin (see Figure 11.1) and the silk naming Baha’ al-Dawla (see Figure 13.24), followed the same protocol used in monumental inscriptions. Most of these pieces had long-established provenance.

In contrast to these well-known individuals on textiles with an established provenance, none of the other people named on the ‘Bayyid’ silks could be identified, although they bore significant titles such as exalted amir [al-amir al-asif]. Their titles were unusual, sometimes unprecedented at such an early date. Moreover, the same or very similar names occurred on several pieces. For example, palms in Cleveland and the Textile Museum were made for people with the same name, father’s name and grandfather’s name [‘Ali b. Muhammad b. Shahrazad] but with a different great-grandfather [Rustam and Rastaway]. It was also possible to distinguish the traditional types of texts used on well-attested pieces (and on contemporary objects) – generalised formulas of good wishes to the owner – from the unusual types of texts on the other ‘Bayyid’ silks, especially poems in Arabic lamenting death and asking God’s forgiveness drawn from a range of sources.

Three other textiles (see Figure 13.75) inscribed with the same, very early date [203/818–19] stuck out by the unusual wealth of information inscribed on them, such as the names of the patron and weaver and place of manufacture. This wealth of information, moreover, always had some peculiarity when compared to monumental texts of the same period: it included terms or names (for example, Baghdad instead of Madinat al-Salam) not attested until much later.

Studying the inscriptions on the ‘Bayyid’ silks raised such grave doubts about their provenance that it was decided to test these textiles further by the method of carbon-14 analysis developed in the 1970s using an accelerator mass spectrometer. Radiocarbon dating confirmed the doubts raised by epigraphic analysis and showed that only a handful of textiles, mainly but not exclusively those associated with the 1924–5 finds at Rayy and with inscriptions naming known historical figures, are medieval in date (between the tenth and the twelfth centuries). Most are not, and are forgeries produced in the early twelfth century just after the initial finds. Some, including those with the most aberrant and over-informative inscriptions, such as one of the three supposedly made at Baghdad in 203/818–19, were even made after 1950 since they contain radioactive isotopes produced by atomic bombs and tests.

The study of the Bayyid silks has several important implications for epigraphic study. It
confirmed that inscriptions on textiles and other portable objects from this early period followed the standard forms used on architecture. It also showed that establishing a corpus of inscriptions was necessary to show up significant variants. Finally, the study made it clear that while epigraphic analysis was suggestive, it needed to be combined with other analytical techniques, including technical and stylistic analysis, to produce definitive conclusions.

Copying inscribed textiles is not only a modern phenomenon; it also occurred in medieval times, when the prestige and beauty of these dresswork silks woven in the eastern Islamic lands led to their being copied in the western Islamic lands, even down to the inscriptions. The most famous copies are known as the ‘Baghdad’ silks, and a similar combination of epigraphic and technical analysis was used successfully to distinguish medieval copies from their models and assign the copies to the correct place of manufacture. One silk made into the shroud of San Pedro de Osma (d. 1109) in the cathedral of Burgos de Osma in Spain (see Figure 12.76) has large roundels with human-headed lions and small roundels with mirror inscriptions repeating the sentence ‘This is among the things made at Baghdad, may God protect it’ (ḥādith mināmu ‘umma bi-inma’na al-baghdād hasaba ar-Rah). Day (1954) showed that the spelling of ḥādith with two long alifs is peculiar to the western Islamic lands and confirmed the Spanish attribution for the whole group of these textiles woven in a distinctive type of lampas weave.

The inscription on another textile (Shepherd 1957, Ettinhausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 138) made up into a chasuble, or ecclesiastical mantle, for the Spanish saint San Juan de Ortega (d. 1163) names the Almoravid ruler ‘Alī ibn Yusuf (r. 1104–41). Using the inscriptions on these pieces, it is possible to attribute some fifty examples of these sumptuous silk and gold textiles to Almoravid Spain (1056–1147). The fact that they were immediately used in burials for Christian saints shows how valuable they were in medieval times.

Inscriptions are a reliable means of identifying textiles made for the Almoravid successors, the Almohads (r. 1130–1269), although far fewer pieces have survived, probably because of the cultural and religious conservatism of the dynasty. Like earlier Spanish textiles, these too were cherished in medieval times and were preserved in Christian burials. They are almost all tapestry-woven and generally show less figural decoration, with interlacing replacing the figural roundels used on earlier pieces. Some have a large band with a single word or phrase, such as al-yumn (‘good fortune’) or al-baq’at ‘Arab (‘everlastingness [belongs] to God’), repeated in a stylized Kufic script with paired verticals ending in palmettes.

Another type of script common on Almohad textiles is a fluid cursive that shows many of the special features typical of the distinctive script known as maghribi and used in the western Islamic lands. These characteristics include a hook or curve at the top of shafts, a hook or spur at the bottom of the final alif, sloping shafts in the letters ‘a’ and ‘r’, and a single dot below or above to distinguish the letters ‘a’ and ‘q’. These cursive inscriptions often repeat pious phrases. The band on a silk-and-gold tapestry made into a cap for the infante Fernando of Castile, son of Alfonso VIII, founder of the Monastery of Santa María le Real de Huélegas (Dodd 1992, fig. 4), for example, bears the phrase that Gómez-Moreno translated as ‘In the Lord is our solace’. The same fluid script was used on larger pieces to form a border around a field decorated with a strapwork pattern.

Occasionally the cursive inscription bands on Almohad textiles contain a longer text. The most famous example is the splendid banner preserved, like many other Spanish textiles, in the monastery of Las Huelgas (Dodd 1992, no. 92). It is popularly known as the Las Navas de Tolosa Banner because it was thought to have been captured in 1212 at the decisive battle when Alfonso VIII defeated the Almohad sultan al-Nasir, but the banner was probably a trophy won on campaign by King Ferdinand III (d. 1252), who gave it to the monastery during construction. A band across the top invokes God’s blessing, and bands around the field contain Koran 61:10–11. Such banners were often carried on parade; banners inscribed with pious invocations and Koranic texts are depicted in one such parade celebrating the end of Ramadan shown in a painting from a celebrated copy of al-Hariri’s Maqārnas in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale, MS arabe 5887, fol. 191), colour illustration in Ettinhausen and Grabar 1987, 1181) painted by Yahaya b. Mahmud al-Wasiti in ‘Iraq in 654/1257.
after 1310. Its clear provenance allows a group of related silk and gold lampas textiles to be attributed to Iran in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries [Wardwell 1988:9]. The earliest textile attributable to the Ottomans [Ehrenhausen 1985] is a striped silk in the monastery of Studenica, Bosnia, with the name Bayazid Khan, probably referring to Bayazid I [r. 1389-1402].

Reading the name on the textile is, however, not always sufficient grounds for attributing provenance, for the person named on the textile may be the recipient, and the piece woven elsewhere and intended as a gift. For example, a lampas fabric of silk and gold with paired falcons made into a cope, or long ecclesiastical cape, and preserved in the Marienkirche in Danzig [JCEA 1873, Arts of Islam 1976, no. 151], shows dovecages enclosing paired birds whose wings are inscribed 'Glory to our lord the just and magnanimous sultan, Nasir ...'. The inscription is thought to refer to the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qala'un [r. 1290–1291 with interruptions], but the piece may have been woven in Central Asia, since it shows technical characteristics of silks woven there.

The problem of using titles to attribute textiles is particularly vexing with the Mamluks, for they drew their titles from a limited range, and some were honorific or generic. Recent studies (for example, Mackie 1984) found only a handful of pieces with the names of Mamluk sultans who could be identified precisely. They all belonged to early members of the sequence [Qala'un, al-Ashraf Khalil and Muhammad b. Qala'un], and some of these few pieces may have been gifts as they use the Persian rather than the Arabic form of the name 'Muhammad Qala'un without an ibn'. Another handful of textiles is inscribed al-malik al-nasir, a title used by four sultans in the fourteenth century, although the silks are generally attributed to the reign of al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qala'un. A striped silk inscribed 'Izz al-mawlawâ al-sultan al-malik al-mu'ayyad [Glory to our lord, the sultan, the king, the one who is assisted [by God]'] seems on stylistic grounds to be earlier than the reigns of the two fourteenth-century Mamluk sultans who bore that title, and was probably intended for the Nasrid sultan of Yemen, Mu'ayyad Da'ud [r. 1356–1332]. Other textiles are inscribed al-sultan al-malik al-mu'azzam al-ma'azzafar and al-malik al-ashraf, titles borne by five or six sultans. Hence title alone is insufficient to associate Mamluk textiles with particular sultans, and one must use inscriptions alongside technical considerations and stylistic developments seen in the other arts.

Similarly for textiles woven in Spain in the later period, epigraphy has to be combined with stylistic and technical comparisons, for most of the pieces are inscribed only with short phrases. One group woven in gold and silk thread comprises Spanish variations of the striped and inscribed silks produced for the Mamluks. The inscriptions repeat the phrase 'Izz al-mawlawâ al-sultan used on the Mamluk silks, but the florid style of cursive script resembles that used earlier on pieces made for the Almohads, and the technique and decorative motifs are also Spanish. Other Spanish silks woven in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have strapwork patterns combined with inscriptions in angular and cursive script similar to those done in tile and stucco at the Alhambra palace in Granada (see Figure 5.42). The wilful juxtaposition of several different styles of script can be seen on the finest piece from the Nasrid period [see Figure 12.77], a splendid silk curtain now in Cleveland (good details published in Wardwell 1985). Cartouches along the central band are inscribed in naskh with wa la ghãbl bâ'llah ('There is no victor save God'), the motto that the Nasrid dynasty [r. 1333–1365] had inscribed in the same way on many of its inscriptions. The cartouches are set in small epigraphic arches composed of the word al-yannâ ['good fortune'] written in mirror reverse in Kufic with interlaced stems. Bands across the top and bottom of the curtain repeat the phrase al-malik lilâh [‘dominion belongs to God’] in a stylised Kufic with interlaced stems. Cartouches in the side panels contain the fuller phrase al-malik lilâh wahdah [‘dominion belongs to God alone’] in a stylised naskh. In all cases, the desire for symmetry was more important.
were specific commissions, and the historical references in their inscriptions help to define distinctive schools of textile production. Good examples are the two tapestry-woven banners captured at the battle of Salado in 741/1340 and preserved at the Alcázar de las Delicias, Zebrano, Badajoz, or the two tapestry-woven banners created for the city of Toledo Cathedral: one dated 1251/1840 in the name of King Ferdinand III of Castile, and the other a gift to the city from King John II of Castile in 1265/1849. Both are conserved in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, and are examples of the finest Gothic tapestry weaving in Spain.

Epigraphic information can still be instructive in assigning provenance, even when the inscriptions contain only generalised good wishes or even pseudo-inscriptions. For example, a group of sumptuous gold lampas-woven silks that has recently appeared on the art market is said to have come from Turkish meries. On stylistic and iconographic grounds, they have been attributed to various places, ranging from the Seljuk Anadolu (993) to the Central Asia (1100–1200). However, the style of pseudo-Kufic inscriptions with animal heads and interlaced verticals on some pieces (see Figure 12.76) lends weight to an attribution to the eastern Islamic lands, where both these epigraphic features are known.

Despite the generic nature of inscriptions on many textiles made in the later period, a few were specific commissions, and the historical references in their inscriptions help to define distinctive schools of textile production. Good examples are the two tapestry-woven banners captured at the battle of Salado in 741/1340 and preserved at the Alcázar de las Delicias, Zebrano, Badajoz, or the two tapestry-woven banners created for the city of Toledo Cathedral: one dated 1251/1840 in the name of King Ferdinand III of Castile, and the other a gift to the city from King John II of Castile in 1265/1849. Both are conserved in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, and are examples of the finest Gothic tapestry weaving in Spain.

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Holbein, so called because they are depicted in the work of Hans Holbein II (1497–1543), and the type known as re-entrant, keyhole or Bellini carpets, after the one that is depicted in Gentile Bellini’s *Virgin and Child Enthroned* in the National Gallery in London.

With the introduction of silk and fine knotting in Safavid times, it was possible to knot extraordinarily complex patterns with amazing detail, including inscriptions. Several signed and dated carpets survive from the Safavid period and provide much of the basis for dating a large group of carpets to the mid-sixteenth century. The most famous is the impressive pair known as the Ardabil carpets, which were probably made for the shrine of Shah Rukn-ud-Din at Ardabil. There is a well-preserved one in the V&A, London [Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 214], and a patched one in the Los Angeles County Museum. Although they are said to differ in knot count, texture and pile length, both are knotted in the same technique and show the same design with the same cartouches at one end. The first two lines contain a couplet from an ode by Hafiz, saying that ‘I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold. My head has no resting place other than this doorway’ (nūt astān-i to-am dār jahān panah-i nās / sīr-i mard-i be-ins in dār hawala-gāb-i nīzāt). A third line contains the signature ‘Work of a servant of the court, Masqad of Kāshān’ (‘azam-i bāndā-yi dargāb maqṣad-i kāshānī), and the date is written below: the year 948, corresponding to 1538–39 [Itzig 1990]. It is inconceivable that Masqad alone tied the 60,000 knots in these two carpets. Rather, he probably drew up the designs for the paper cartoons from which these elegant carpets were woven at different scales. On the basis of his title, King (1996) suggested that he might have been the acting superintendent of the shrine.

Maqād must have selected the couplet from Hafiz deliberately to suit the intended location of this sumptuous pair. Based on their reconstructed size (9 × 5.30 m), King (1996) has suggested that they would have been laid side-by-side in the large octagonal hall known as the Jamat Sarat. The inscription supports his suggestion. The reference to threshold (astān) would have been appropriate for the Safavid dynastic shrine, which was often called a threshold. When the carpets were laid in the hall, the cartouches would have fallen at one edge, presumably the south-west side facing the main doorway to the courtyard and the qibla. The quotation from Hafiz, with its references to refuge (Persian panah), testing place (hāwala-gāb) and doorway (dār), was obviously chosen as appropriate for carpets designed for the Safavid dynastic shrine and would have been especially suitable should the hall have served, as is often imagined, as Tahmasp’s intended tomb.

Another signed and dated Safavid carpet is a smaller medallion carpet with hunting scenes in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 58]. In the centre is a small cartouche inscribed with the name Ghayath al-Din Jami and the date 949 (1540–41), sometimes read as 946/1537–8. The centripetal design, with mounted and turbaned figures fighting lions, deer and other animals, suggests that the royal throne was meant to be set at the centre of the carpet, thereby covering the cartouche with the signature and date and underscoring the humility of the artist.

Inscriptions were also popular on the large-scale pictorial carpets introduced in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century. They often had borders with geometric calligraphy surrounding scenes from such literary works as Firdawsi’s *Shahnameh* and Nizami’s *Khamsa*.

It is also possible to add an inscription when making a flat-weave, as on the distinctive type of reversible cotton flat-weave known in Persian as zīlā. Sets of these flat-weaves were often given as endowments to mosques and shrines in the drier regions of Iran, particularly around Yazd, and the band of inscription along the edge often contains details about the manufacture and endowment. The most famous is a set of thirteen made by Shaams Quli al-din Maybudi and given by Khansheh Begum in Ramadan 957/July 1556 to the congregational mosque in the Nuriyya Khānqāh in Taft, a village south-east of Yazd [Abshar, 1993; Itzig 1990].

Some of the flat-woven mats or fans made of rush or hemp and commonly used in the Levant and North Africa are also inscribed in Kufic. They usually contain generalised good wishes, but a few have blessings for a specific person. One fragment in Stockholm has good wishes to a specific person who may have been an unidentified ‘Abbasī caliph [Lamont 1938, no. 31], and a fan in the Abegg Foundation, Riggisberg [Otvavsky and ‘Abbas 1995, no. 21] invokes blessing, good fortune and joy to Abu’l-Husayn. He can be identified as the Bishshīd ruler of Egypt [r. 964–7] and his name is found on another piece in the Islamic Museum, Cairo [no. 1483/2]. Hence many contemporary pieces (for example, a plastered rush mat in the Textile Museum, Washington 73.678, and a woven hemp and straw mat once in the al-Sabah Collection illustrated in Jenkins 1983: 43) are similarly dated to the tenth century.

The technique of weaving the text can make it difficult to read the inscription on a flat-weave, particularly on a single surviving example. Often the piece is fragmentary and the inscription incomplete. Words are usually unpointed, and the nishā can be read in several ways. A zīlā in the Hermitage [Masterpieces of Islamic Art 1990, no. 61], for example, is signed by Ustad ‘Ali Nushabadi and the date ends with the month Ramadan without giving the year. Dates can sometimes be read in different ways by looking at the reverse side. Abshar and Itzig [1993], for example, have argued that the date on an inscribed zīlā fragment discovered in the congregational mosque at Maybudi, signed by ‘Ali Baydāk haji Ḥajji Maybudi and customarily read as Rabi’ II 1080/October 1475, should be revised to 1088/1774.
Other Portable Arts

Glass

Glasswares were produced throughout the Islamic lands from earliest times onwards, Syria and Egypt, traditional centres of glassmaking in pre-Islamic times, continued to be important centres of production in Islamic times. Museums there, particularly the Damascus Museum and the Islamic Museum, Cairo, contain some of the most important pieces of inscribed glass, as does the Corning Museum of Glass in New York State. These collections have not been published in their entirety, and often the inscriptions on the pieces are unread or unreadable. Much of the work on inscribed glass is done in exhibition catalogues, such as the 1976 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, Arts of Islam, and Ayl's 1981 catalogue on the art of the Mamluks.

Glassmakers in the Islamic lands inherited a variety of techniques to decorate glass objects, and some of them, such as incising and relief carving, could be adapted to include inscriptions. Typically, these short passages in Arabic offered good wishes to the owner. A stemmed goblet in the Metropolitan [Jenkins 1986, no. 16], for example, bears a band of Kufic incised around sides with 'blessing from God to its owner' (baraka min allah h-sabilihim). A similar text is incised on a cup in the David Collection, Copenhagen, and several examples with incised inscriptions excavated at Raqqa, Syria, are in the National Museum, Damascus. The same sorts of blessings are carved in relief on several bowls [Arts of Islam 1979, nos 129-30], but the relief technique makes it more difficult to shape the letters and the texts are very short and sometimes unreadable.

Most of these objects can only be dated approximately on stylistic grounds, mainly to the ninth or tenth centuries. Only recently have fragments of glass been recovered from controlled archaeological contexts, and even then the pieces may well have been imported. Otherwise, localisation depends on stylistic criteria, and the range of attributions is broad, so that the same piece, such as a relief-cut bowl in the Islamic Museum, Cairo, with a simple text of blessing, may be attributed to tenth-century Egypt [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 130] or Iran [Juttinghausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 245]. Because of the identification of Egypt as a major centre for the production of rock crystal, much early glass was traditionally assigned to there, but recent excavations and publications have uncovered more material from Iran, which is increasingly recognised as another important centre in early Islamic times (Krüger 1991).

Stamping allowed for more precise texts. Glass weights used to calibrate metal coins were the most common variety of stamped glass. In a business transaction, coins were weighed in bulk against glass weights, which could not be altered. Glass weights were produced in Egypt in large numbers from the eighth century to the fifteenth and were typically inscribed with the name of governors or officials. The earliest known examples bear the name of 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Malik, who was governor and finance director of Egypt from 86/701 to 90/709. The latest weights date from the very end of the fifteenth century. Most museums have large collections of weights, which are important evidence for economic history. Those in the British Museum, for example, were catalogued by A. H. Morton (1985). Similar stamped appliques bearing the names of governors or officials and the capacity that they guaranteed were attached to vessels used for measuring.

In a related technique, Islamic glassmakers pinched the hot glass with tongs whose jaws were decorated with simple inscriptions or other patterns. These short texts were repeated several times on the same vessel. A cup in the Metropolitan [Jenkins 1986, no. 17], for example, is inscribed in Kufic eight times vertically along its sides with the phrase 'blessing to its owner' (baraka li-sabilihim).

Painting on glass allowed far more latitude for inscriptions. In particular, early Islamic glassmakers exploited the expensive lustre technique, in which the surface was painted with copper or silver oxide and then fired at a controlled temperature high enough to fuse the metal to the surface but insufficient to soften the glass and cause the object to collapse. These lustred glasswares were expensive to produce, and the inscriptions on them show that they were luxury wares meant to be enjoyed by rich patrons. A cup in the Damascus Museum [no. 16031], similar in shape to the one with incised decoration in the Metropolitan, is inscribed vertically in lustre five times along its sides with the admonition 'Drink and rejoice to the sound of music'.

In contrast to early Islamic glasswares inscribed with other techniques, several examples of lustre-painted glass from Egypt and Syria bear historical inscriptions, including names of specific patrons, sites of production, and dates in the eighth and ninth centuries. The earliest datable example is a broken goblet found at Fustat in 1966 and now in the Cairo Museum [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 119]. The band of Kufic inscribed around the rim says that it was among the things ordered by 'Abd al-Samad b. 'Ali. He was governor of Egypt for one month in 773 under the Abbadids caliph al-Mansur. Another lustred glass fragment in the Cairo Museum [no. 12735/6] says that it was among the things made in the al-bila style in Egypt in the year 183 of the hegira. The date, corresponding to 779-80 CE, is written in Coptic numerals, and the meaning of the phrase 'the al-bila style' is not clear (Yunis 1975). A bowl in the Corning Museum [see Figure 15.276] is inscribed 'Basmala. Blessing to him who drinks from this cup made in Damascus under the supervision of Sunbat in the year ...'. The text breaks off after the word sunat ['year'] with an initial alif, but on stylistic grounds the bowl is usually attributed to the eighth century. Damascus is also mentioned on a goblet found at Raqqa and now in the National Museum. The Kufic inscription is divided by rosettes into five parts which mix good wishes and historical information. The three that have been deciphered say: 'Drink and be gay, made in Damascus; join in the cares of [your] mate'.

Making these special kinds of glasswares was a high-status profession in the early Islamic period, and several pieces of lustred glass in the Cairo Museum are signed. These include several fragments [nos 8187, 13658/2 and 15370] signed by ‘Abbas b. Nusayr. He may possibly be connected with the Nusayr b. Ahmad b. 'Ayham who made six pear-shaped glass canes for the amir Rabi’ [Rice 1958]. Youssef [1972] identified Rabi’ as the high-living son of Ahmad b. Tulun who rebelled against his nephew Harun b. Khumarwayh and was assassinated in 896.

The detailed inscriptions show that these luxury glasswares were specific commissions for the most important members of society. The texts are readable and precise, and the specialised craftsmen, particularly those who made lustred glass, took pains to make their texts legible. These texts stand in direct contrast to one on an intact cup in the Metropolitan [Jenkins 1986, no. 20], with a complete but unreadable Kufic inscription around the rim. The cup is remarkable for its fine state of preservation and for its unusual epigraphic style. The text is punctuated by the letter wa (and) surrounded by three dots and the tail of a letter that returns to the right. The inscription differs in style from the squat dotted letters used on the goblet found at Fustat and other pieces, and the cup in the Metropolitan must have been made at a different (possibly modern?) time.

Inscriptions are also found on another rare type of luxury metallic glassware known as gold glass. It was made using a sandwich technique in
which a bowl was first decorated on the interior with gold and enamel, after which another bowl was blown into the first. Several pieces have gold inscriptions enlivened with spots of blue enamel. Unlike lustre, the technique of gold glass limited the text to short words. The text around the rim of a fragmentary bowl in the David Collection, Copenhagen, for example, is written in a stylised Kufic with letters ending in four lobes like the palm leaves decorating the main band around the bowl. It is apparently a pseudo-inscription that was not meant to be read.

In the late twelfth century under the Ayyubids, lustre-painted and gold glass wares were replaced by a new and simpler technique of enamelling and gilding, in which coloured glass pastes and gold, either in the form of leaf or powdered dust, were applied to the surface of the glass vessel and then fused to it by firing. The Islamic Museum, Cairo, has the largest collection of these wares. Wiet's catalogue of the enamelled lamps and bottles there, first published in 1929 and reissued in 1962, contains entries for 118 objects, arranged by museum accession number. Eighty-seven of them can be dated precisely because of the people named in their inscriptions. They range from a bottle bearing the name of the last Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo, Salah al-Din Yusuf (r. 1237-60), to a lamp bearing the name of the Mamlik sultan Qal'ubay (r. 1266-96). These datable pieces include two important series, one from each branch of the Mamlik line: thirty-five lamps in the name of the Bahri sultan Hasan (r. 1247-55 with interruption), and twenty-two in the name of the Burji sultan Barquq (r. 1285-99 with interruptions). Each entry in Wiet's catalogue contains a detailed description of the object as well as a transcription and translation of the inscriptions on it. At the end of the volume, Wiet compiled a chronological list of all dated or datable enamelled wares known to him at that time.

Although both Egypt and Syria have been cited as the place where the technique of enamelling glass developed, Wenzel (1962) has worked out a line of chronological development based on the patrons named on these luxury wares. The technique may have developed out of a prototype using only gold, which can be seen on a flask in the British Museum inscribed with the name of 'Imad al-Din Qarisi, atabeg of Mosul and Aleppo from 1137 to 1146. In Ayyubid times, the gold was applied to glass vessels in two different ways, either in silhouette or raised over a thick enamel ground. The bottle in Cairo mentioning the last Ayyubid ruler of Aleppo, Salah al-Din Yusuf (Arts of Islam 1976, no. 131), provides a localisation for the first type with red enamel drawing over the silhouetted gold. Pieces in the second, raised style, such as a beaker once in the Landesmuseum in Kassel, or a flask in the Hermitage, contain the characteristic Ayyubid esoteric "glory to our lord, the sultan" [zazzal bi-nawzalat al-sultan]. Most of the decoration on pieces in this early style typical of the early thirteenth century is figural, but it generally includes one or more inscription bands, almost always in cursive script.

Gradually in the late thirteenth century under the Mamliks, blasons were introduced. A tiny perfume bottle in the Corning Museum (Arti 1981, no. 46), for example, is decorated with a composite blazon of a lion and a striped field. The lion was the blazon of Baybars and his son Baraka Khan, and the striped field was used by the Hamar branch of the Ayyubids who served the Mamliks. The composite blazon on the perfume bottle probably belongs to an official from Hama who was in the service of Baybars or his son.

By the fourteenth century, figural motifs had declined in popularity, and inscription bands became the main subject of decoration on enamelled glass. The texts were generally set on a floral ground and interrupted by roundels with emblems, areas of contrasting pattern, or suspension handles on mosque lamps. These bold bands are ingeniously set out so that both text and technique underscore their meaning.

This can be seen most clearly on mosque lamps, the most characteristic form of enamelled glass. The typical lamp (see Figure 13.80) is about 30 cm high, with a wide and flaring neck, sloping shoulders with six applied handles, bulbous body, and prominent foot or bulbous ring. A small glass container for water and oil with a floating wick was inserted inside the lamp, and the lamp itself was suspended by chains from the ceiling. Sometimes the chains were held together above the lamp by an egg-shaped object, also of enamelled glass. Thousands of such lamps must have been commissioned to illuminate the mosques and charitable foundations established by the Mamliks.

The decoration of these lamps varies, but most have bold inscriptions in thuluth encircling both the body and neck. The inscription on the bulbous body generally names the patron and is written in reserve against a blue ground, with the letters piled on top of each other and outlined in red. Most surviving lamps were made for sultans, and the inscriptions use the royal form "glory to ... [zazzal bi-nawzalat al-sultan]. Some ten surviving examples were made for al-Nasir Muhammad Jr. 1324-1340 (with interruptions), some fifty for Hasan, and nearly forty for Barquq.

Other mosque lamps were made for prominent citizens and use the form mimara 'umla bi-rasim ('one of the things made for'), followed by the patron's name and sometimes his specific foundation. The inscription on the one in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for example, says that it
was made for the blessed hospice (rifāḥ) of Karim al-Din. He was a civil official of the class known as ‘men of the pen’. Those made for Mamluk amirs are often decorated with blazons as well as names. One made for the amir Aydaki (Jenkins 1985b, no. 47), for example, has roundels with two addorsed bows on a circular red field, indicating that he was Bowman to the Sultan. Another made for the cup-bearer Shadrash (Arts of Islam 1976, no. 138) has roundels with a red cup between two bars, the upper black and the lower red.

The inscription around the neck is written in blue enamel outlined in red and typically contains the opening part of the Light Verse (Koran 24:35):

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a wick-holder wherein is a light, the glass as it were a glittering star, lit from a blessed tree.

Different lamps contain slightly different amounts of the verse. The most complete, on a lamp made for Baraqq (Wiet 1929, no. 182), goes as far as the word yiṣābūl (‘lit’), but in most cases the Koranic text stops after the word ‘glass’ (al-misbāḥ). The verse describes a floating lamp in a glass and refers here to the glass lamp on which it is inscribed. When the enamelled glass lamp was lit, the patron’s name and titles written in reserve around the bulbous body would have glowed with divine light, a stunning visual realisation of the beautiful Koranic metaphor inscribed around the neck in opaque blue.

Production of enamelled glass seems to have declined sharply in the fifteenth century, and only a handful of lamps date after the reign of Baraqq. The inscriptions on pieces from the late fifteenth century are more hasty written, and Wiet characterised the writing on the one made for Qaṣīhbāy at the end of the fifteenth century as ‘basturdised’. As the lamp also differs from earlier lamps in layout, style and tonality of the enamel, Wiet suggested that the inelegant letters had been laid out by a foreign workman who misunderstood the original model. These enamelled lamps were also imitated in late nineteenth-century Europe by such masters as Emilie Galle. Although the revival was copy of the shape of the Mamluk prototypes, they are generally anepigraphic, as are most glasswares made elsewhere in the Islamic lands in later periods.

Ivory

Luxury objects made of or decorated with ivory were produced throughout the Islamic world whenever the material was available. Most ivory came from Africa, so the Mediterranean Islamic lands, particularly Syria, Egypt, Spain and Sicily, were the primary centres of ivory working, but India also supplied enough to meet its own needs in medieval times. The range of ivory objects was limited by the shape and size of the elephant’s tusk: small objects such as combs, boxes and chessmen were carved whole from the block, while larger boxes were made of separate pieces usually joined with ivory pegs. Inscriptions could be carved in relief or incised, and the decoration was sometimes enhanced by painting and gilding. The major study of early Islamic ivories is Kühnel’s magisterial work: Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen VIII-XIII Jahrhundert (Berlin, 1931), which contains general essays and a catalogue of 110 pieces, with superb plates and the text a translation of the inscriptions on each piece.

The earliest ivory objects generally did not have inscriptions as part of their decoration. One of the few that does is a pyxis in St George in Cologne. An inscription incised with dots around the base of the conical lid invokes blessings on the caliph and says that the piece was made in Aden for ‘Abd Allah the Commander of the Faithful, referring to one of two first ‘Abbasid caliphs. Another inscribed object from early Islamic times is an elaborate chessman in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris, in the shape of a nobleman riding in a howdah on the back of an elephant and accompanied by warriors and horsesmen. The underside of the base is incised in simple and undotted Kufic with the signature of the craftsman: the work of Yusuf al-Bahri. Although the carver’s niṣba is an Arab tribal name well attested in the early Islamic period,
the piece is carved in the sculptural style of India, and attributes have ranged from the ninth century [Kühnel 1971, no. 171 to the twelfth [S. C. Welch 1988, no. 72].

Ivory became more readily available by the ninth and tenth centuries, and the Aghlabids of Tunisia [c. 800-909] carried on a flourishing trade in ivory from sub-Saharan Africa. One of the few pieces known to have been made in Tunisia (see Figure 53.61) is a rectangular wooden casket with ivory plaques in the Archeological Museum in Madrid [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 145]. A Kufic inscription on the lid records that the box was made for the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'tazz [c. 953-75] at al-Mansuriyya, the city near Qaysaryan that served as his capital until 972. The end of the inscription, now missing, once recorded the name of the person who made qinna'a'itat, a name read as Ahmad (or Muhammad) al-Kharasani.

This ready supply of ivory was the basis for the best-known group of inscribed ivories produced in the Islamic lands, the thirty-three objects made in Spain between the mid-tenth and the eleventh century [in addition to Kühnel 1971, see also Fernández 1935-40]. They are all boxes. The larger caskets may have been for regalia, but the smaller ones were designed to hold jewellery and other precious commodities, for the verses inscribed on a cylindrical pyxis in the Hispanic Society of America record that it was a container for musk, camphor and ambregris. They are all carved in high relief on a smooth ground, and most have the Arabic inscriptions carved in a plain or foliated Kufic script on the lower edge of the lid. The texts begin on the right front of the rectangular boxes or to the left of the clasp on the cylindrical pyxides. Since the Spanish ivories form such a closely knit group, they offer a wonderful opportuniy to study epigraphic developments in both content and style.

Over the course of two centuries, the text on Spanish ivories generally becomes longer and the script more elaborate. The first pieces began only with ‘this is what was made for’ [ba'dhu la ma'amal il], but later pieces offer more blessings and good wishes to the patron or owner, whose name is often recorded. The owners were members of the caliph’s family, particularly women, important officials at court and, later, members of the Dhar al-Nunayd, the Berber family of party kings [Arabic muluk al-’azadil] who took control of Toledo in the early eleventh century after the disintegration of the Spanish Umayyads. Two places of manufacture are recorded: Madinat al-Zahra’, the Umayyad palace city east of Cordova, is mentioned on two pieces made in 355/966, and Cuenca, the Castilian city near Toledo that was under the control of the Dhar al-Nunayd, is mentioned on three pieces associated with their patronage in the mid-eleventh century. Eight of the ivories are dated between 335/946 and 441/1050-50, and several others can be dated by the titles used in the inscriptions. The high proportion of dated pieces suggests that many of the ivories were made for specific events.

The inscriptions on the Spanish ivories also record the name of the person who supervised the work. Introduced by the phrase ‘ali yadari (literally, ‘under the hands of’), he was generally an important slave in the caliphal household. The supervisor is distinct from the carver, who is often left unsigned. Sometimes inscriptions in a company are misplaced. Carvers seem to have worked in teams, for a particularly large and complex casket in Pamplona [Dodd 1993, no. 4] is inscribed on the interior of the lid ‘the work of Faraj and his apprentices’ [‘amal faraj wa talamānithā], and five other names are inscribed in other places on the casket. The craft may have become hereditary, for the two carvers who made ivories for the Dhar’s-Nunayds seem to belong to the same family. The Spanish ivories also document the increasing elaboration of Kufic script. The earliest pieces

were made in the 960s, such as a cylindrical box and a casket made for the daughter of the caliph Abd al-Rahman III [Dodd 1993, nos 1 and 2] and the caskets and pyxides made for Suhb, concubine of al-Hakam, show relatively simple Kufic, decorated only with an occasional trilobed cartouche or floral motif above a letter. These decorative details were quickly multiplied and enlarged, and pieces made in the 960s, such as the famous pyxis in the Louvre made for al-Mughra [ibid., no. 3], have floral scrolls that are often suspended like brogns from the upper border of the inscription band. By the early eleventh century, as on the Pamplona casket [ibid., no. 4], the flowers float above the letters and fill the upper zone of the inscription. On this particularly elaborate piece, the letters of the inscription are also headed. By the mid-eleventh century, as on the Palencia casket [ibid., no. 7], the simple Kufic of the earlier pieces has evolved into a floralized script.

Equally fine relief-carved ivories were also produced for the Fatimids in Egypt, but in contrast to the Spanish caskets and pyxides, the Fatimid ivories are small plaques decorated with superbly carved figural scenes and do not have inscriptions. The small group of Spanish ivories made for a limited elite also stand in contrast to a much larger group of painted and gilded ivories attributed to Sicily in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries [Pinder-Wilson and Brooke 1975]. More than three pieces are known, including caskets and pyxides made of thin sheets of ivory secured by ivory pegs often supplemented with metal clasps and gilt metal braces.

Like the Spanish ivories, the Sicilian caskets and pyxides are inscribed at the base of the lid, but the technique, style and context of the inscriptions differ from those on the earlier Spanish boxes. The inscriptions on the Sicilian pieces are painted or incised, usually in a cursive script, but occasionally in an elaborate floriated Kufic. The texts include good wishes to the owner, sometimes with the phrase ‘bez yadhu [lit sababi] [glory to its owner] endures’, a phrase not known on other portable objects. Another text comprises two well-known distichs in the metre muntazam that are repeated several times in the Thousand and One Nights and mention lovers.
beneath a coverlet. Painted and gilded caskets were also made in Spain from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, and one casket in the Institut de San Juan [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 153] Dodd 1992, no. 50] has a poem composed as though the object itself were speaking.

In the later period, ivory seems to have been scarcer. A few pierced cylindrical boxes made in the fourteenth century are assigned to either Egypt or Spain. One box formerly in the Rothschild collection bears the name and titles of the Mamluk sultan Salih (r. 1311-54). Other boxes similar in style are inscribed with good wishes suggesting that the owner will enjoy good luck [Ati 1981, no. 106] or with a poem written as though the object were speaking [Dodd 1992, no. 51]. Ivory plaques were also used to decorate manquetry or inlaid doors, minbars and other furnishings. Many plaques show figural or geometric decoration, but a few are inscribed, such as the polygonal ones in the Islamic Museum, Cairo, from a table made in 1169 for Khwānd Baraka, mother of Sultan Shabsa, or the rectangular ones [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 155] with the name of the Mamluk sultan Qal'ah [r. 1268-96].

Small ivory objects and ivory inlays were also popular in Ottoman court workshops, and several fine examples were published in Ati 1987 on the age of Sultan Bayazan. A carved owl mirror-back in the Topkapi Palace (no. 73) has an inscription carved around the rim with three couples of Ottoman verse, a dedication to Sultan Bayazan by the calligrapher Chani, and the date 919/1514-5. Wooden boxes for the Koran were often decorated with ivory inscriptions around the base of the lid. One sixteenth-century example (no. 109) has carved plaques with Koranic verses and prayers; a dodocagon-shaped top found in the mausoleum of Mehmed III, who died in 1603 (no. 110), has a tashīch inscription in ivory inlaid in ebony with a hadith on the virtues of the Koran.

Ivory was rare in Iran, but was apparently used in many of the same ways. Five panels in the Iran Bastan Museum [Arts of Islam 1976, no. 158] from the tomb of Shah Isma'il (d. 1524) at Arakib are carved in openwork with Koranic inscriptions in naskh against a scrolling floral ground.

**Rock Crystal**

Rock crystal, clear colourless quartz in hexagonal crystals (Arabic bilāwir), was imported from East Africa, the Laccadive and Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean, and North Africa to many of the Islamic lands, where it was carved into such small objects as pendants, flasks, vessels and lamps. Some 180 medieval objects are known, most of them preserved in European royal and church treasures and a few excavated, notably at Pustai (Old Cairo) and Susa in Iran. Many were published by C. I. Lamn in his compendium, Mitteilungen der Göttinger Kunstverwaltungen aus dem Nahen Osten, published in Berlin in 1930. The only technique of decoration on medieval pieces is carving. Given the broad spread of decorative motifs and the extensive trade in precious objects in medieval times, it is difficult to assign provenance on the basis of motifs used. Inscriptions are therefore one of the primary ways of localising objects of rock crystal.

Three rock crystal objects bear names associated with the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt (r. 905-1171). The earliest [see Figure 13-82] is a pear-shaped crucifix decorated with confronted seated lions in the treasury of San Marco in Venice (Corotola 1993, no. 63). Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 177]. The Kufic inscription carved around the neck invokes blessing from God on the inam al-'Aziz billah, the Fatimid caliph who ruled from 975 to 996. The inscription was read more than a century and a half ago by Michelangelo Lanci (1843-6), and the Kufic with rising tails is a masterpiece of the genre. One significant but so far unexplained detail is the interlaced kuf in baraka, far interlacing is characteristic of the eastern Islamic lands in the tenth century and coincides with other Persianate features of the crucifix such as the shape, elongated lip, and something like the sense of the handle.

A similar crucifix with confronted birds (possibly ostriches), formerly in the Medici collection and now in the Pict Palace, Florence [Corotola 1993, no. 63]. Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 178] is inscribed over the palmette between the birds 'for the Commander of Commanders'.
Another with confronted hawks in the treasury of the Cathedral Church of SS. Peter and Paul in Florence (1529-1530) bears a similar inscription that has been read as *baraka wa surt wa l-iub al-mansur*. The title *makhzoum* was only assumed by Fatimid vassals at the end of the eleventh century, and reading the inscription in this way would place this piece a century later than its stylistic cousins. To get around this difficulty, Rice suggested reading the inscription as *baraka wa surt al-makhzoum al-mansur* to make it a generalised blessing written slightly incorrectly (the carver would have omitted the *wa* in *al-makhzoum*), but this explanation is convoluted and such a string of epigraphs does not conform to the standard pattern.

The form of anonymous blessings varies on other rock crystals as well. A tall vase in the treasury of San Marco (Curtola 1934, no. 55) offers blessings to an anonymous lord (*lawla dawla wa l-mahall wa sahal a. mawlanda*) in an elaborate Kufic with rising tails. A mace head in the Islamic Museum in Cairo (*Arts of Islam* 1976, no. 202) invokes good wishes on an anonymous owner (*gibil wa baraka li-sa'ibibi*) and the names of both Muhammad and 'Ali (*muhammad wa 'ali khaliman*, perhaps alluding to the Shi`ite affiliation of the Fatimids). A small bottle in the V&A (*Pinder-Wilson 1941*) offers blessings to an anonymous owner (*baraka li-sa'ibibi*), and another bottle in the Islamic Museum, Cairo (*Arts of Islam* 1976, no. 207), probably intended to hold kob, offers the blessing to an anonymous female owner (*baraka li-sa'ibibi*). The gender of its owner shows that some rock-crystal objects, like some ivory boxes from Spain, were made for women. Since the range of objects is so small, it would be productive to study the varying forms of these anonymous blessings and the style of script in order to delineate different groups.

Rock crystal was fashionable in later times, particularly under the Ottomans and Mughals, but the later taste was entirely different. One objects are generally anegraphic and instead are encrusted with precious gems.
Jahangir in 1608/1618-19, the fourteenth year of his reign, at Fathpur Sikri.

The Mughals also commissioned new jade objects. Inscribed pieces date from the reign of Jahangir onwards, and the inscriptions are similar to those added to older pieces. The earliest known is a grey-green wine cup in the Brooklyn Museum [Indian Heritage 1983, no. 550] inscribed with Persian verses in praise of wine, Jahangir’s name and titles, and the date 1607-8 given in regnal and hegira years. The most exquisite is a white cup in the shape of a half-gourd in the V&A [Indian Heritage 1983, no. 316] Blair and Bloom 1994, fig. 377] inscribed with Shah Jahan’s title and the date 1662/1666-7. Similar objects were made of other precious stones. A wine cup for Jahangir, recently acquired by the Rhode Island School of Design [Indian Heritage 1982, no. 373], is made of quartz and chrysomel moscovite and has incised decoration, perhaps in imitation of chasing on metalwares.

Other types of jade objects made for the Mughal emperors were inscribed in similar ways, sometimes with additional information. For example, an inkpot in the Metropolitan [Indian Heritage 1982, no. 352] has cartouches on the body enclosing Jahangir’s name and the date 1638/1618-19. A second inscription on the underside of the foot ring names Mum'in Jahangiri, one of the only jade carvers to be mentioned. The location of his signature, like that of other Safavid artists, shows his subservience to his royal patron. A tiny prattled cup in Benares [Mattey 1995, fig. 8] is inscribed that it was an antidote to poison [pajdzahr]. The many small hardstone objects commissioned by the Mughals, including perfume phials, jewellery and other personal adornments, archer’s rings and weapons, were also inscribed, but the small surface area meant that the inscriptions are generally limited to concise statements of royal propriety. Daggers, swords and shields are often inscribed with exalted appellations such as ‘World Astonisher’ or ‘Terror Slayer’.

Jade seems to have been rarer under the Safavids, but the handful of inscribed pieces shows that the inscriptions generally follow Timurid models in layout, content and style, if not technique. A black tankard in the Topkapi Palace, for example, is inscribed around the neck with the name of the first Safavid Shah Ismail I [r. 1501-24], but the inscription, like the other arabesque decoration, is inlaid with gold wire. A rather plain bowl in the V&A is inscribed with dates and a dedication by ‘Abbās I (r. 1611) to the shrine at Ardabil. A seal in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin (Survey, plate 158A) is inscribed with the name of ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-66). Jade was much more popular under the Ottomans, but they preferred engraved and bejewelled decoration and the pieces are generally anepigraphic, although occasionally the Ottomans added inscriptions to earlier pieces.

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Function as wine cups and tankards, but nasta’ lilq replaces the thuluth used on the earlier pieces, and the dates are given in both regnal and hegira years. The white tankard made for Ullugh Beg, for example, was engraved twice by the Mughals: first on the upper edge of the rim in 1622/1633-14 with Jahangir’s name and titles, and then below the handle in 1636/1646-7 with Shah Jahan’s title sahib-i qurrāt (Lord of the [Auspicious] Conjunction). Similarly, an anepigraphic dark green tankard made for the Timurids and now in the British Museum was engraved around the neck with Persian verses alluding to wine-drinking and the date of its acquisition by