

چون جهانم حلقه سبی بود
 یخین ریش بسیار افند
 تمه ای دین خند آن بحر شرف
 حو نهایی کز لبندی آسمان
 پهر بریدند آن سپهر راز راز
 کحت آن دیکه که امشب بس عظیم
 دیکه کی کنش که تیر سپهر زمرک
 ابخین کز مرگ می ترسد لم
 کرشم میسر اجل با کار و با
 ای دروغا که نهان است و تیغ
 بهش گفت اضعیف ناتوان
 استخوانی چند در هم خسته
 تو نیندانی که هر که زارد
 پست کرد و در سحر طشت نکون
 که تو آلوده که پاک آندی
 که تو لای در جهان سمرمان
 پست تقیض طغ مغنی دلستان
 سخت متعجب دارد دراز
 قرب صد پوراخ در متعارو
 چون بر شمشیر با لدا راز
 فیلسوفی بود و پارسش گرفت
 چون بر وقت مردن آن خوش

کی چنین عالی مرا پی بود
 سر نهادی تشنه دل بر آستان
 پس جمع اکفند خوار
 بر نهادم من اسیر استیم
 چون اجل آید میسر مزار
 مفرات کعبه
 نغز او در استخوان مکه آسم
 شد خاک و هر چه بودش ما در
 و ز شش آن طشت دایم پر خون
 قطره آبی که با خاک آید
 نیست بخش طاق بودن کارو
 مرغ و ماسی که در آزدی
 علم میستی ترا از بس گرفت
 میزم آمد که در خود صد خور

مرکب با اژدهای هفت سر
 داشت بس بر ما جنید راه
 چون بدید آن سپهر خند پاکجا
 در چنان کی که م با جبین
 مر که یاد از اجل کیت مع دست
 تو نیندانی که عمرت پیش و کم
 هم برای مردت پرورده
 آفتاب تیغ زن در کشت او
 قطره آب از قدم تا فرقی در
 پست در شقیقه آو آزی در که
 محمود زندگان خاشخ شوند
 پال و عمر او بود فرنی سندر
 در میان میزم آید پست

در تو زلف و دایم خواجوز
 کمترین چرخش سپردار افند
 یک شبی میگفت در بغداد حرف
 همچو خورشید کی زیبا سپهر
 دم زرد و آن جمع را دل داد
 هم بود زین پیش و کم نایدین
 وادی در پست و منی زارد
 جان بر آید در خستین نزل
 هم قلم شیخ و هم دست
 جز در زینیت در پست ای
 چند خواستی اندشتی استخوان
 پست باقی از دو دم مانی
 هم برای بردنت آورده اند
 این همه سپهری برد در طشت او
 کی تواند که در با در میسر
 هم بسوزی هم براری جان
 موضع آن مرغ در سند و تسل
 همچونی در وی بسوی راز
 زیر سر آو از او رازی که
 در خوشی با بک او پیش شوند
 وقت مرگ خود بداند آشکار
 در دهن صد نوحه خود راز





Islamic Calligraphy

ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL

with the assistance of
Barbara Rivolta

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

New photography of MMA objects by Katherine Dahab, Anna-Marie Kellen, and Eileen Travell; cover by Bruce Schwarz. The Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Covers: Details of pages from 'Aṭṭar's *Mantiq At-tair* (The Language of the Birds). Iran, Herat, A.H. 892 (A.D. 1486). Written in Nasta'liq by Sultan 'Alī al-Mashhadī. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. (front)

63.210.34r. (back) 63.210.47r.

Inside front cover: Detail of a wood Koran stand. West Turkestan, dated A.H. 761 (A.D. 1359). Carved with fourfold repetition of "Allah."

Bottom (not shown) contains names of twelve Shia imams and signature of artist, Ḥasan ibn Sulaiman of Isfahan. Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.218)

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FINE CALLIGRAPHY, whether written on paper, painted on clay, or carved in stone, is one of the high achievements of Islamic culture. Arabic writing was formalized and embellished out of the need to transcribe the Koran, which, until shortly after the death of the Prophet, had been passed among believers through an oral tradition. While copies had to be accurate, they also had to be worthy of the sacred verses. It is not surprising, therefore, that a beautiful hand was encouraged to set them down, and scribes aimed for balance, elegance, and harmony in their work, dedicating their skills—and sometimes their entire lives—to their art. In Muslim lands master calligraphers achieved an even higher status than painters. In this brief history many of the illustrations are of pages from the Koran, providing important continuity, but equally fascinating are other literary documents and inscribed objects, both secular and religious; they have special qualities that gave rise to new styles, from the arcane Musalsal, used for "secret" messages, to the light and elegant Nasta'liq, which is often complemented by delicate miniatures in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persian manuscripts.

The author of this *Bulletin*, Dr. Annemarie Schimmel, has served for the last ten years as consultant for Islamic art on matters pertaining especially to calligraphy and inscriptions. She was ably assisted with this project by Barbara Rivolta, a member of the Department of Islamic Art. Dr. Schimmel has contributed to numerous Museum publications, most notably as co-author of *Anvari's Divan: A Pocket Book for Akbar* and *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India*. Dr. Schimmel has recently retired from her position at the Museum and from her other American post as well, at Harvard, where she was Professor of Indo-Muslim Culture, and has returned to Bonn, where she will continue to produce erudite and invaluable publications on Islamic calligraphy, literature, and religion.

Philippe de Montebello
DIRECTOR

PURITY OF WRITING is purity of the soul." Thus states an old Arabic saying that points to the importance of writing, and especially of beautiful writing, in Islamic culture. Islam is the first religion in which a distinction was made between the "People of the Book," that is, those who possess a revealed sacred scripture, and those who have no written revelation. Hence the importance of keeping the "revealed" book, the Koran, in the best possible form was central from both the religious and the aesthetic viewpoints. Furthermore, the aversion in Islam to figural representation, which is not expressly prohibited in the Koran, led Muslims to develop within the art of

calligraphy an unsurpassable variety of styles.

The revelations given to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 (the year of his death) were first scribbled down on various materials, from bones to palm leaves. In the days of his third successor, Caliph 'Uthmān (r. 644–56), the material was edited, and completely written copies of the Koran were produced to be sent to the different centers of the expanding Islamic empire. From that time on, thousands of pious scribes copied the Koran, as it was regarded as the absolutely binding Divine Word, which had to be written as beautifully as possible. Muslims believed that by copying the Koran, or parts

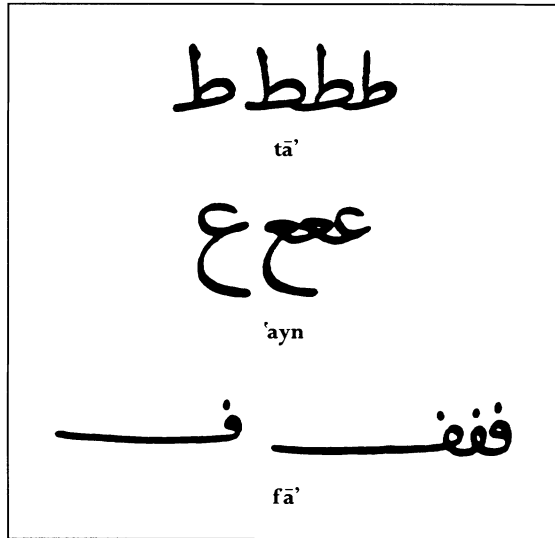
of it, the scribe would receive heavenly reward.

The script in which these copies were made during the first centuries of Islam developed out of a rather ungainly Arabic alphabet, which, like all Semitic scripts, runs from right to left. It is angular, and spacing was done not so much according to the exigencies of grammar but rather for aesthetic reasons. Each of the twenty-eight letters of the alphabet could change shape slightly according to its position in a word—whether as the initial, middle, or final

1
KORAN LEAF

Central Islamic lands, Egypt(?), 9th century. Written in Kufic, Sura 47:36. Ink, colors, and gold on parchment. 9 3/8 x 13 1/8 in. (23.8 x 33.3 cm). Gift of Professor R. M. Riefstahl, 1930 (30.45)





2

Three letters of the Arabic alphabet illustrating the different shapes taken according to the position in a word. The letters (reading each line from right to left) are shown in an initial form, connected to the same letter in the medial position, and connected to the letter in its final shape. At the far left the letter stands in its independent form.

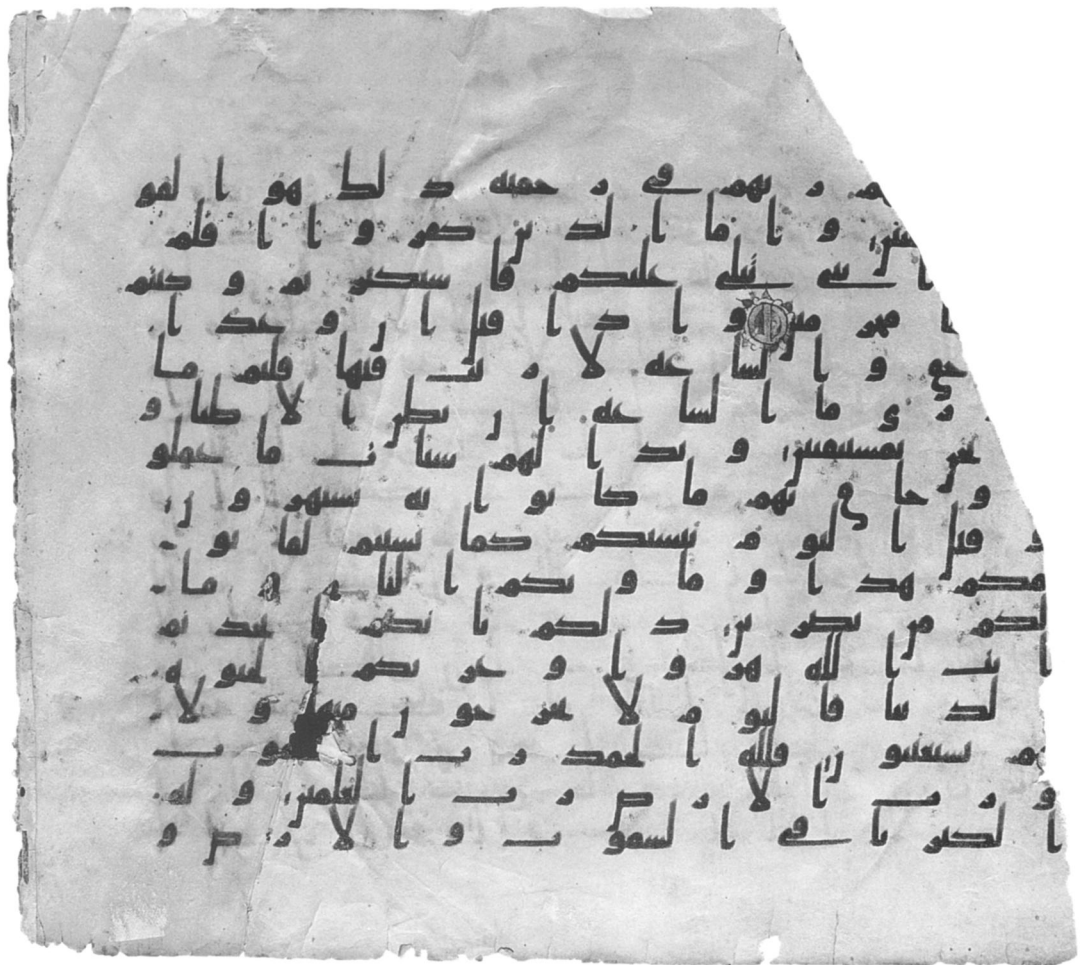
character (figs. 1, 2). The diacritical marks put over and under a number of Arabic letters to distinguish them—there are twenty-five consonants and three long vowels—were added to the bare outlines only at a somewhat later stage, as were vowel signs, which were usually colored green, red, or gold. The writing was generally on vellum in ink that was predominantly of a brownish hue, although black also appears.

It is customary to call the first, impressive style of Arabic writing used for the Koran Kufic, after the city of Kufa in Iraq. However, there were various styles in Mecca, Medina, and other places, and a distinct “slanting,” Mā’il, style (fig. 3) is found in some of the first known copies. As there are no signed early Korans, it is barely possible

to identify the place where they were written or their date, but now—thanks to recent finds in the Great Mosque at Sanaa, Yemen—we hope to solve some of the problems connected with these early manuscripts. They were usually laid out in a broad format, reflecting the long horizontal Kufic strokes, but they were apparently of different sizes. Although a saying ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad exhorted the pious to write in large letters—as the word of God needed to be shown in full majesty—there are also extremely small copies (fig. 4), which may have served traveling scholars, who could easily carry them in a sleeve or in the folds of a turban.

Kufic was, however, a script not only fitting for copies of the Holy Writ, but,

because of its angularity, also ideally suited for epigraphy, whether on stone (fig. 5), wood (fig. 6), ceramic, or metal objects such as coins (fig. 7). While the lettering was rather clearly defined in copies of the Koran, which, after all, had to be legible even though the pious would know the texts by heart, its development in other mediums shows an extraordinary flexibility. The long verticals in which Arabic is very rich—the Arabic article *al* (the) consists of two prominent high letters (ﻻ)—were often elongated to end in various kinds of flourishes. Palmettes and flowerlike designs sprout out of the letters of foliated Kufic (fig. 8), and the imagination of the artists seems to have been almost boundless. They often filled the spaces between high letters with extended decora-



(above)

3

KORAN LEAF

Late 8th–first half 9th century.
Written in Mā'il, Sura 45: end
of verse 30–verse 37. Ink, colors,
and gold on parchment.

9½ × 11 in. (24.1 × 28.3 cm).

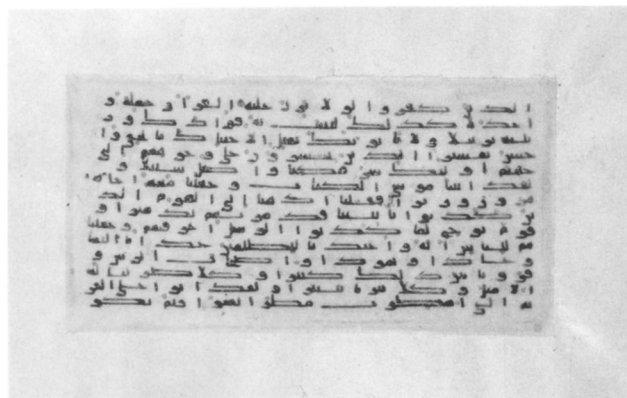
Gift of Adrienne Minassian,
in memory of Dr. Richard
Ettinghausen, 1979 (1979.201v)

(right)

4

KORAN LEAF

Central Islamic lands, probably
Egypt or Iraq, 9th century.
Written in Kufic, Sura 25:32–40.
Ink on parchment. 1½ × 2⅞ in.
(3.8 × 7.3 cm). Rogers Fund, 1962
(62.152.2r)



TOMBSTONE

Iran, 10th century.
Carved in Kufic with
the name "Yusuf" and
the profession of faith
and prayers for the
deceased. Alabaster.
10½ × 5 in. (26.67 ×
13.01 cm). Fletcher
Fund, 1934 (34.152)





6
FRAGMENT FROM A MINBAR

Iran, Yazd, dated A.H. Jumada 1 546 (A.D. 1151). Carved in Kufic with the profession of faith; ordered by Abū Bakr Ibn Muḥammad in the time of 'Alā'addīn Garshāsp, a governor of Yazd under the Seljuks. Wood. 18¼ × 30⅞ in. (46.35 × 76.51 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1934 (34.150.2)

tions known as *mashq*. Over the course of time they began to plait the long letters and wove them into knot patterns so intricate that one sometimes has the impression that the knots were designed before the text was written. This is particularly true of architectural epigraphy and inscriptions on metalwork.

The first Kufic Korans often had only three or five lines on a page. Since this resulted in a vast number of pages, the Holy Writ, comprising 114 chapters in descending length, was soon

divided into thirty parts, or *juz'*, one for each day of a thirty-day month. To contain these parts, special cases and metal boxes were made that were usually decorated with Arabic inscriptions as well (fig. 10).

Numerous metal objects bear writing in fine Kufic, and it was a special trend in Seljukid times, during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, to decorate with inscriptions not only boxes and candlesticks but also bronze and iron mirrors, which were prized possessions



7
GOLD COIN

Egypt, A.H. 366 (A.D. 976–77). Inscribed in Kufic in the name of the Fatimid caliph Al-'Azīz (r. 975–96). Diam. 1 in. (2.5 cm). Gift of Darius Ogden Mills, 1904 (04.35.3341r)





10
KORAN CASE

Spain, Granada, second half 15th century. Embroidered in Thuluth. Leather, with silver wire. $4\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ in. (12.36 × 10.8 cm). Rogers Fund, 1904 (04.3.458)

of the wealthy (fig. 9). In fact, the sumptuousness of mirror backs is a constant theme in medieval Persian poetry.

During the first three centuries of Islam (622 to

ca. 1000), the Kufic style for manuscripts flourished in many variations. Iran was an especially fertile ground for innovations. In the late tenth century letters became more elongated and slimmer, and,

as a corollary, the format changed from broad (fig. 11) to high. During this same period vellum was replaced by paper. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Korans from eastern Iran showed remark-

(left)

8

BOWL

Eastern Iran or Transoxiana, Samarkand or Nishapur, 10th century. Painted in foliated Kufic, "Blessing and fortune to its owner." Earthenware, white engobe, slip painted, incised, and glazed. Diam. $10\frac{7}{16}$ in. (26.5 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1975 (1975.195)

9

MIRROR

Iran, 12th century. Inscribed in Kufic with good wishes to the owner. Bronze. Diam. $7\frac{5}{8}$ in. (19.35 cm). Rogers Fund, 1942 (42.136)





11
KORAN LEAF

Iran, 11th century. Written in Eastern Kufic (formerly called Karmathian Kufic), Sura 54: end of verse 35—verse 39. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 9½ × 13⅝ in. (24.1 × 33.85 cm). Rogers Fund, 1940 (40.164.5r)



12
KORAN LEAF

Iran, 11th–12th century. Written in Eastern Kufic, Sura 5: 15–16. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 11¾ × 8¾ in. (29.85 × 22.22 cm). Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1929, H. O. Havemeyer Collection (29.160.24)

able similarities to contemporary carved or engraved designs in architecture (figs. 12, 13). Interestingly, comparable developments in plaited and foliated Kufic appear in architectural epigraphy at almost the same time in various Islamic lands. This may have been due to the ease with which artists during those years could travel throughout the Islamic world, which stretched from Spain to Transoxiana.

While Kufic inscriptions on ceramics—such as the fine Nishapur bowl of the tenth century (fig. 14)—are remarkable for the beauty of the writing, they also serve as a compendium of Arabic

proverbs and adages, without, however, being exactly datable.

A particularly fascinating medium in which Kufic letters appear, frequently in strange forms, was the *tirāz*, that is, inscriptions woven in or embroidered on fabrics produced in official weaveries. They often bear the name or title of the ruling king or else that of an official who ordered the fabrics to be made (figs. 15 a–d). Products of the workshops in Fatimid Egypt are especially well known and often give the exact date of their manufacture. Sometimes, however, the writing offers almost insurmountable difficulties to the scholar, as is the

case with the famous ikat fabrics of Yemen with their golden painted inscriptions (fig. 16).

After the thirteenth century Kufic went out of fashion. It is used today, especially in its rectangular form, for decorative purposes in epigraphy and in a somewhat mannered version still appears in chapter headings of the Koran; it is also the basis for modern calligraphic painting. On the whole, the Kufic style has been restricted to Arabic, and only in a very few instances, in northern and eastern Iran, do Persian texts occur in Kufic inscriptions.

Kufic was not the only style used by the Muslims in



¹³
SECTION OF A KORANIC INSCRIPTION ON A TOMBSTONE

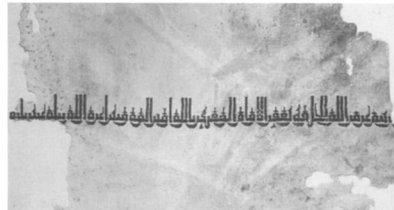
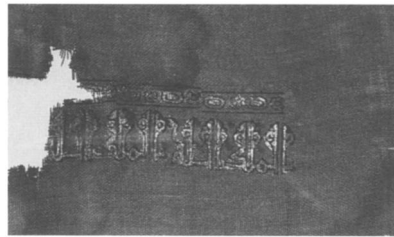
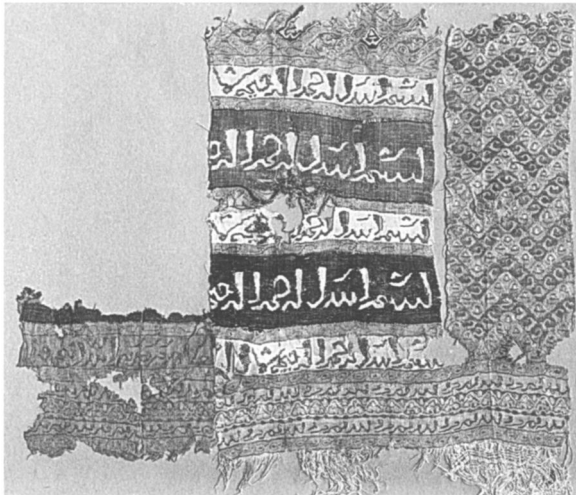
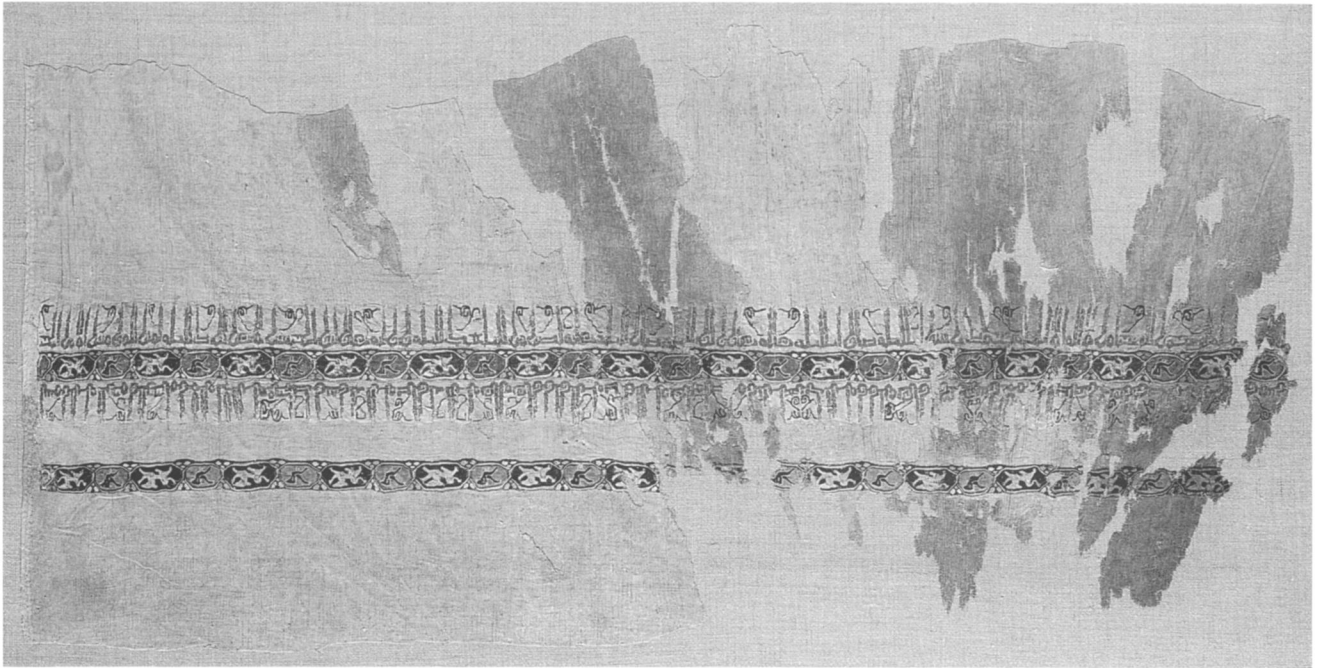
Iran, Ghazna, late 11th century. Written and decorated in the same style as fig. 12; beginning of Sura 29:57, "Every soul will taste death." Illustration: Arthur Upham Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art: From Prehistoric Times to the Present*, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 1746, fig. 601

14

BOWL

*Iran, Nishapur, 10th century.
Painted in Kufic, "Deliberation
before action protects you from
regret. Luck and well-being."
Earthenware, white engobe, slip
painted, incised, and glazed.
Diam. 18 in. (45.72 cm).
Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)*





b

d

15 a-d
TIRĀZ

(a) Egypt, early 11th century. Inscription woven in Kufic with the name of the Fatimid caliph az-Zāhir (r. 1020–35) and the Shia profession of faith. Plain-weave linen and silk tapestry band. 25 × 10¾ in. (63.5 × 27.3 cm). Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.136.1)

(b) Egypt, 12th century. The basmala, woven in cursive script, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Plain-weave linen and silk tapestry band. 10¾ × 7½ in. (27.3 × 19.05 cm). Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.136.2)

(c) Egypt, 10th century. Woven in Kufic, "The Kingdom belongs to God." Plain-weave linen and silk tapestry band. 8¾ × 6½ in. (22.2 × 16.5 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1931 (31.106.26)

(d) Egypt, A.D. 908–32. Embroidered in Kufic, "...glory from Allah to the Caliph Ja'far, the Imam al-Muqtadir bi'llah, Commander of the Faithful. Allah make him mighty." Linen and silk. 10 × 6¾ in. (25.4 × 17.1 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1931 (31.106.52)



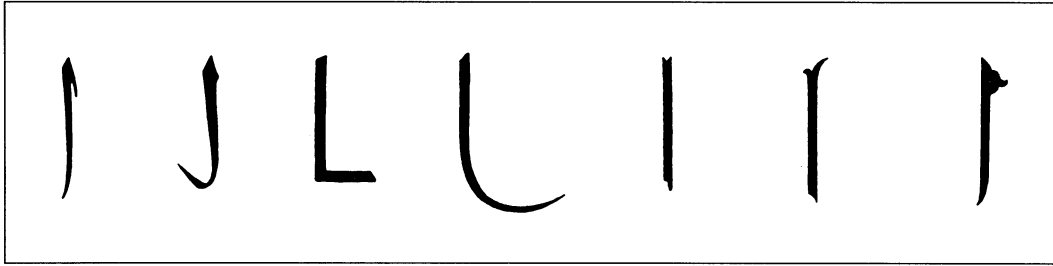
16
TEXTILE

Yemen, 10th century. Inscription written in Kufic. Plain-weave cotton, black ink, and applied gold leaf. 23 × 16 in. (58.42 × 40.64 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1929 (29.179.9)

the early centuries of Islam. It was, however, the most typical stately ductus for sacred writing and epigraphy, while everyday correspondence was carried out, mainly on papyrus, in a flowing, often scribbled cursive hand. In 751 the Muslims, in the wake of their invasion of central Asia, discovered the use of paper, and from that time on not only was Chinese paper imported on a grand scale to be used for important documents, but mills for the production of rag paper were established in various parts of the Islamic world. Paper enabled the scribe to develop

distinguished, more elegant styles of writing, and Arabic sources tell of admirable documents written on thin Chinese-silk paper or on thick Khanbaliq paper—documents that unfortunately have not survived. We have learned, however, from a survey of book art and librarianship compiled during the late tenth century, Ibn an-Nadim's *Fihrist* (Register), that in his time more than twenty different cursive hands must have existed. As he does not give examples, none of them can be identified authoritatively, although we know that Ghubār (dust) was a minute

hand used for pigeon post and that some of the styles, like Thuluth (one-third), were originally named for the format of the paper on which they were to be written. (There was also a very large hand called Thuluthain [two-thirds] for important documents.) However, it is clear that the calligraphic styles used in government offices and especially in chancelleries were very complicated, filled with ligatures and sometimes also abbreviations. This custom was continued throughout the centuries because the writers wanted to ensure the “secret” or personal character

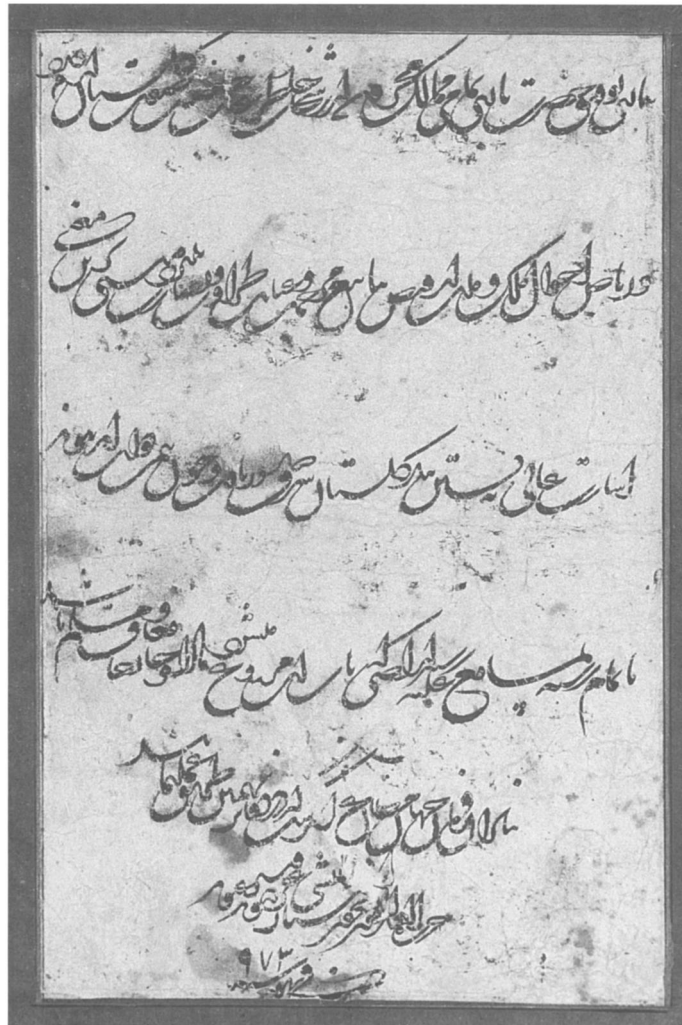


17
The alif, first letter of the Arabic alphabet, in different styles

of the documents by using scripts like Musalsal (chain-like)—in which all the letters are connected—that could be deciphered only by specialists. Thus the great mystical poet Jalāluddīn Rūmī (d. 1273) complains in one of his Persian poems, “You wrote to me in Musalsal, that means you do not want me to read it!” A document in the Metropolitan Museum from Iran (fig. 18), written in Tauqī’, a typical chancellery script, is an example of this tendency to obscure. On the other hand, a crisp style called “that of the copyists,” the Warraqīn, was developed. It was easy to read and fast to write, for the copyist was supposed to produce many pages every day to earn his daily bread.

All cursive writing was first standardized by Ibn Muqla (d. 940), the vizier of the Abbasid court. He invented a system still used in teaching calligraphy, that is, the measuring of the pro-

portions of letters by differing numbers of rhomboid dots and triangles. He also established firm rules about the exact relationships between the letters of the Arabic alphabet. The first letter, *alif*,



18
LEAF OF CALLIGRAPHY
Iran, Safavid period, dated A.H. 973 (A.D. 1565–66). Written in Persian in Tauqī’, signed munshī (secretary) [name is illegible]. Ink on paper. 6⁵/₁₆ × 4 in. (16.07 × 10.16 cm). Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.152.9)

Iraq, Baghdad, dated A.H. 707
(A.D. 1307–8). Written in
Muḥaqqaq and *Kufic*, signed by
Aḥmad as-Suhrawardī. Ink, colors,
and gold on paper. $20\frac{3}{16} \times$
 $14\frac{1}{2}$ in. (51.3 × 36.83 cm).
Rogers Fund, 1955 (55.44r)



which is basically a straight vertical line (fig. 17), served as the yardstick for all the other letters, and the height of the *alif*—five, seven, or nine dots—established the style of writing.

Ibn Muqla, who was, according to his admirers, “like a prophet in the field of calligraphy,” was followed by Ibn Hilāl Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1020), who added a softer touch to the calligraphic rules and whose writing is therefore more elegant than that of his predecessor. In the course

of the next century and a half the art was refined by masters in Iran, Iraq, and Egypt, among whom a woman calligrapher, Shuhda, played an important role. Elegant cursive writing reached perfection under Yaqut (d. 1298), whose name has become synonymous with “master calligrapher.” He developed the rules for the so-called six styles—Thuluth, Naskh, Muḥaqqaq, Rīḥānī, Riqāʿ, and Tauqīʿ. According to legend, he had six master pupils, and one of them, Aḥmad as-

Suhrawardī (d. after 1318), influenced the Arabic-Turkish tradition (fig. 19).

The six styles were used, at least in the centuries immediately following Yaqut, for specific purposes. Muḥaqqaq, a “dry” style with sharp edges and a marked contrast between the very high *alif* and the flat, pointed lower ending, was the favorite hand for copying the Koran both in Mamluk Egypt (fig. 20) and in Iran during the late thirteenth to fifteenth century. This stately

Egypt, Mamluk period, 14th century. Written in Muhaqqaq and Thuluth (in band), end of Sura 83—beginning of 84. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 12 × 8¾ in. (30.5 × 22.2 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Pickering, 1969 (69.149)



style could be used in lavishly decorated copies, for the letters lent themselves to writing in a large size. For example, the giant Koran in the hand of one of the princes of the house of Tamerlane (d. 1405), in which the *alif* measures thirteen centimeters high and eight millimeters wide, is perhaps the most impressive example of a perfect Muhaqqaq, and the observer wonders how the calligrapher could have worked with such large pieces of paper (fig. 21).

There were exact rules for writing. Learning calligraphy was a long and difficult process: one had to sit in the proper way, holding the paper or parchment with the left hand, which rested on the left knee so that it could bend slightly under the movement of the pen, for only in this position could the perfect rounds of the “letters with a train” be achieved (fig. 22). The calligrapher trimmed the reed pen according to strict rules, that is, it had to be cut more or less obliquely,

depending on the style to be written; at a specific point on the nib the calligrapher placed a small incision so that a regular flow of ink was guaranteed. Calligraphers prepared the ink themselves, as there were numerous trade secrets in the making of black, brown, golden, or other colors from soot, ox gall, and various ingredients. These secrets were carefully kept and handed over only to initiated disciples, for calligraphy, like poetry and the knowledge of Prophetic traditions,



(above)

21

FRAGMENT OF A KORAN LEAF

Iran, Timurid period, first half 15th century. Written in Muhaqqaq, Sura 28:82–83. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 28½ × 42 in. (72.4 × 106.68 cm). Rogers Fund, 1921 (21.26.12)

(right)

22

A SCRIBE

Attributed to Bichitr. India, Mughal period, ca. 1625. Leaf from an album. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image 4⅞ × 2¾ in. (10.5 × 7.1 cm). Private collection. Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.



had to be learned through an established line of masters, which went back to the time of the Prophet and especially to his fourth successor, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. To this day a good calligrapher will refer to a relationship to a master of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Only after a long period of studying all of the arts connected with calligraphy was the disciple allowed to sign his work; the *ijāza* (permission [to sign]) corresponds, so to speak, to an academic degree. Many calligraphers were employed in workshops and chancelleries,

and even nineteenth-century postage stamps or money from Turkey and other Islamic countries bear witness to the survival of the skill of drawing elegant letters. While ordinary copyists were so low on the social ladder that poor man's food was known as "copyists' bread," masters whose art was acknowledged assembled students around them and wrote for the nobility. However, very few reached the rank of court calligrapher, for which they would be well paid and highly honored. In fact, a considerable number of rulers in the

Islamic world, from North Africa to India, excelled in calligraphy, this art being taught to every gentleman and, in some families, also to women.

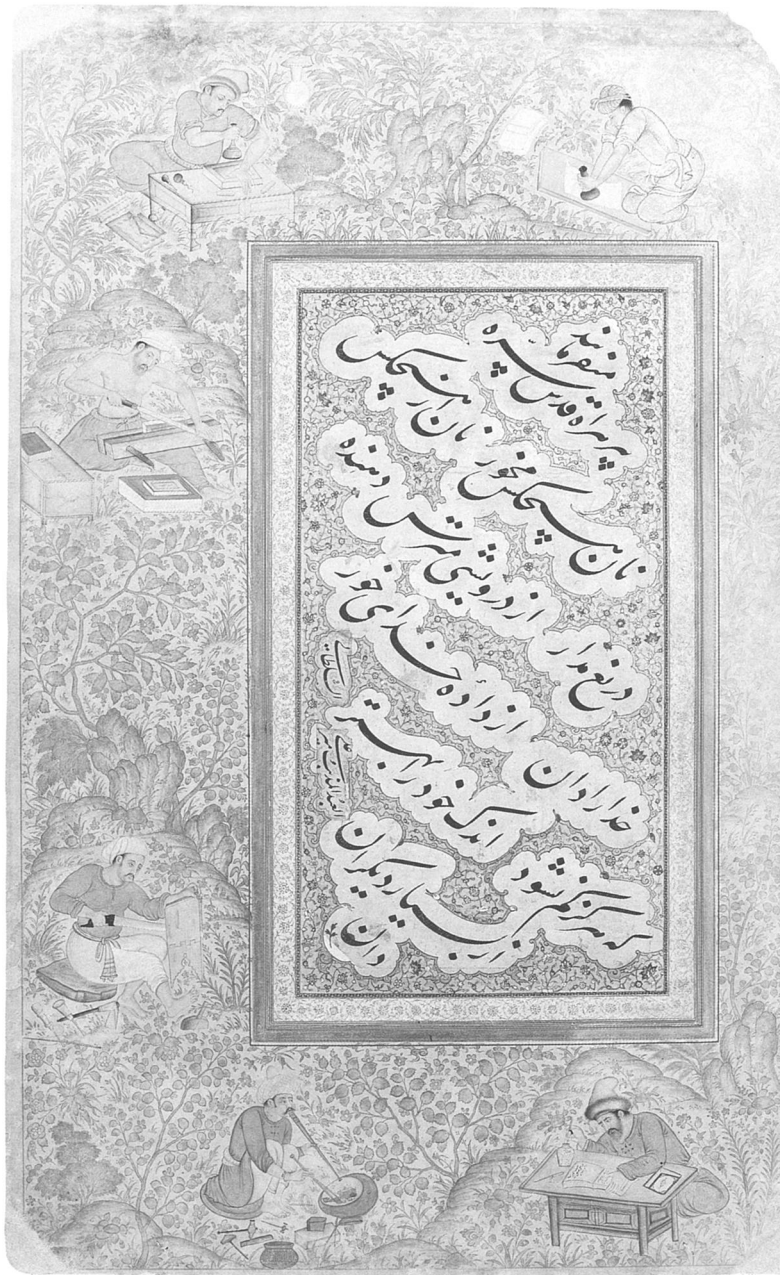
Just as the preparation of ink and pens was an art in itself, inkstands and pen boxes were often lavishly decorated, sometimes with good wishes for the owner, pious invocations, or verses written in praise of the miracle-working pen (figs. 23 a,b). The inkwell was filled with silk shreds to give the ink the necessary thickness. The paper had to be burnished,

23 a,b
PEN BOXES

(a) Syria or Egypt, 13th century. Inscribed in Kufic with blessings and good wishes. Brass, inlaid with silver. $1\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ in. (4.44 × 24.8 × 6.35 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lucy W. Drexel, 1889 (89.2.194). (b) Iran, Safavid period, 16th century. Inscribed in Thuluth and Naskh with the names of the Shia imams and the invocation Nādi 'Aliyyan; signed by Hasan Ramadan Shāhī. Brass, chased, engraved, and inlaid with silver. $2\frac{7}{8} \times 1\frac{3}{16} \times 3\frac{1}{16}$ in. (7.3 × 34.1 × 9.8 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1975 (1975.350.1)



b



(left)

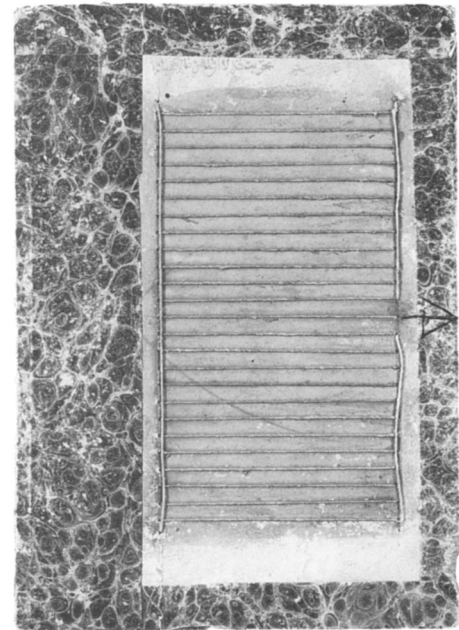
24
PAGE OF CALLIGRAPHY FROM THE
JAHANGIR ALBUM

Depicts the artisans of a library, including a polisher of paper, a decorator of bindings, a bookbinder, and a scribe. India, ca. 1615. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

(below)

25
RULING FRAME

Turkey or Iran, 17th–18th century.
Cotton twine and ink on paper.
9½ × 6⅝ in. (24.1 × 16.8 cm).
Gift of H. P. Kraus, 1973 (1973.1)



preferably with an agate to make it smooth and shiny (fig. 24). Often a ruling device of strings (fig. 25) was pressed between two sheets of paper or parchment to produce thin guidelines. Finally, the calligrapher who wished to copy the Koran had to be in the state of ritual purity, as “only the

purified should touch it” (Koran, Sura 56:78). Once prepared, the calligrapher would begin writing, either in large Muhaqqaq or its smaller version, Rihānī. A mere copyist of secular texts would probably write them in Naskh, the very name of which originally meant “abrogation,” and then “copying.”

For documents and nonliterary works, Tauqīʿ, a chancellery hand, or Riqāʿ would be used.

Naskh later became the generally accepted form for writing Korans (fig. 27) and secular Arabic or Turkish texts, and Arabic print is based on this style. It was developed into a fine art



26

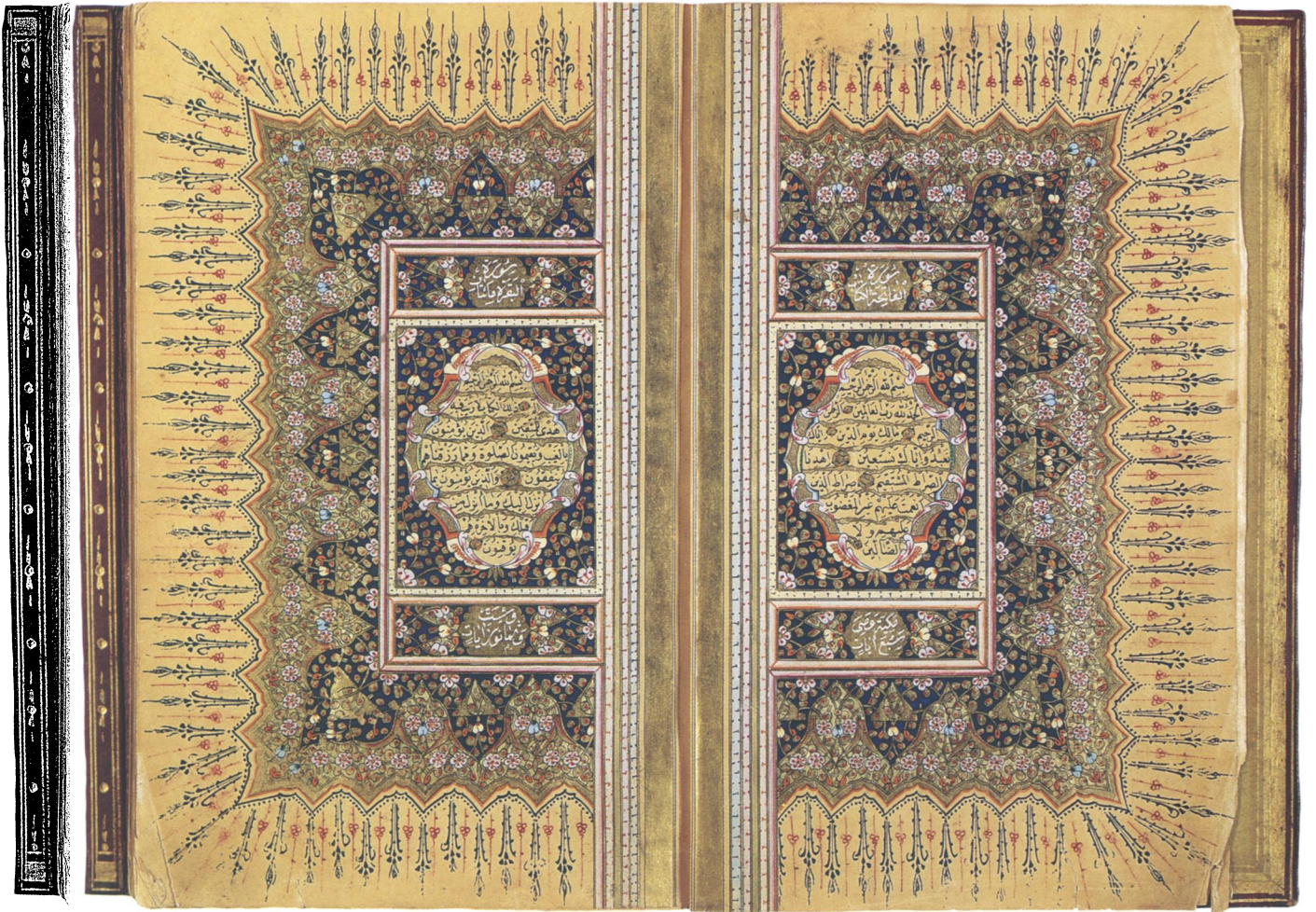
ALBUM PAGE

Turkey, Istanbul, Ottoman period, ca. 1500. Written in Naskh (below) and Thuluth by Shaikh Hamdullah with ḥadīth (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 9³/₈ × 12⁵/₈ in. (23.9 × 32 cm). Purchase, Edwin Binney, 3rd and Edward Ablat Gifts, 1982 (1982.120.3)

form in Turkey by Shaikh Ḥamdullah (d. 1519), who, like several other famous calligraphers, was said to have been granted a vision of Khidr (a saint regarded as the spiritual guide of those who travel on the way to God), in which he was taught this

specific style. Everyone who has seen Turkish copies of the Koran from about 1500 on recognizes the thin, slightly slanting script (fig. 26) that was continued through the centuries by the long chain of Hamdullah's disciples and had its last great master in 'Azīz

Rifā'ī (d. 1934), who helped to develop the modern school of Egyptian calligraphy. In Iran, on the other hand, the Naskh style was generally much more rounded, stately, and perfectly upright, probably in contradistinction to the "hanging" style of Persian



27
FIRST TWO PAGES FROM A KORAN

Turkey or Iran, dated A.H. 1268 (A.D. 1848). Written in Naskh. Colors and gold on paper. 6 1/4 x 4 1/4 in. (15.9 x 10.8 cm). Gift of Elizabeth Riley, 1980 (1980.603)

calligraphy. Its unsurpassed master was Aḥmad Naīrīzī in the early eighteenth century (fig. 28). To this day Iranian Naskh can be easily distinguished from Ottoman. The Naskh of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, which was influenced by Iranian tradition, has even narrower round endings and tends to look somewhat cramped.

As was the case with Kufic, the cursive scripts were also used largely for

epigraphy. In fact, one of the cursive hands is found predominantly in inscriptions on stone, metal, and wood: It is the “soft,” rounded Thuluth, the counterpart of the “dry” Muhaqqaq. Thuluth can also be seen in numerous chapter headings of the Koran and even on whole pages where an important text is to be highlighted. Thus in a Koran at the Metropolitan Museum, Sura 96, the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, is

written in golden Thuluth (fig. 29). But Thuluth's greatest achievements were in architectural inscriptions, where it was used almost simultaneously in Anatolia and in Delhi, slowly replacing the all too complicated geometric Kufic. Thuluth is also found on glass, metalwork, textiles, and wood (fig. 30).

Perhaps the best known examples of Thuluth epigraphy come from the Mamluk period in Egypt, when the large, heavy style reached its height. Objects for daily use, like combs (fig. 31), were inscribed with good wishes for the owner. Mosque lamps (fig. 33) and metal stands, to mention only a few examples, are impressive to the viewer even if the inscriptions cannot be read. Legible texts, which frequently contain a sequence of titles, often enable scholars to identify the owner or donor. Thus it is known that the stand (fig. 32) was made for Bahādir al-Badrī, a Mamluk governor of Hims, Syria, in A.D. 1319.

In other cases it is as difficult to identify the exact time and provenance of a piece of cursive writing as it



28

LEAF WITH ARABIC PRAYERS

Iran, Safavid period, dated A.H. 1126 (A.D. 1714). Written in Naskh by Aḥmad Nāirizī. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 9 × 5 in. (22.86 × 12.7 cm). Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.152.14)

يَكْفُرُ بِكَ بَعْدَ الدِّينِ ﴿١٠﴾ الْبُرْهَانِ
بِأَحْسَنِ الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١١﴾



قال الشيخ رضي الله عليه وسلم
من قرأ سورة البقرة اعظمها
الفضل في الدنيا والآخرة
فقد أحسن القرآن

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ
الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٣﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ
يَعْلَمْ ﴿٤﴾ كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَ
كَارٍ ﴿٥﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٦﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ





(left)

29

KORAN PAGE

Egypt, Mamluk period, 14th century. Written in Thuluth and Kufic (in band), end of Sura 95, beginning of Sura 96. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 20 × 13¼ in. (50.8 × 33.65 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.146.1)

30

FINIAL

Iran or India, late 14th–15th century. Carved in Thuluth with the Shia profession of faith. Wood, turned and painted. 13 × 7½ in. (33.02 × 19.05 cm). The Louis E. and Theresa S. Seley Purchase Fund for Islamic Art and Rogers Fund, 1988 (1988.346)

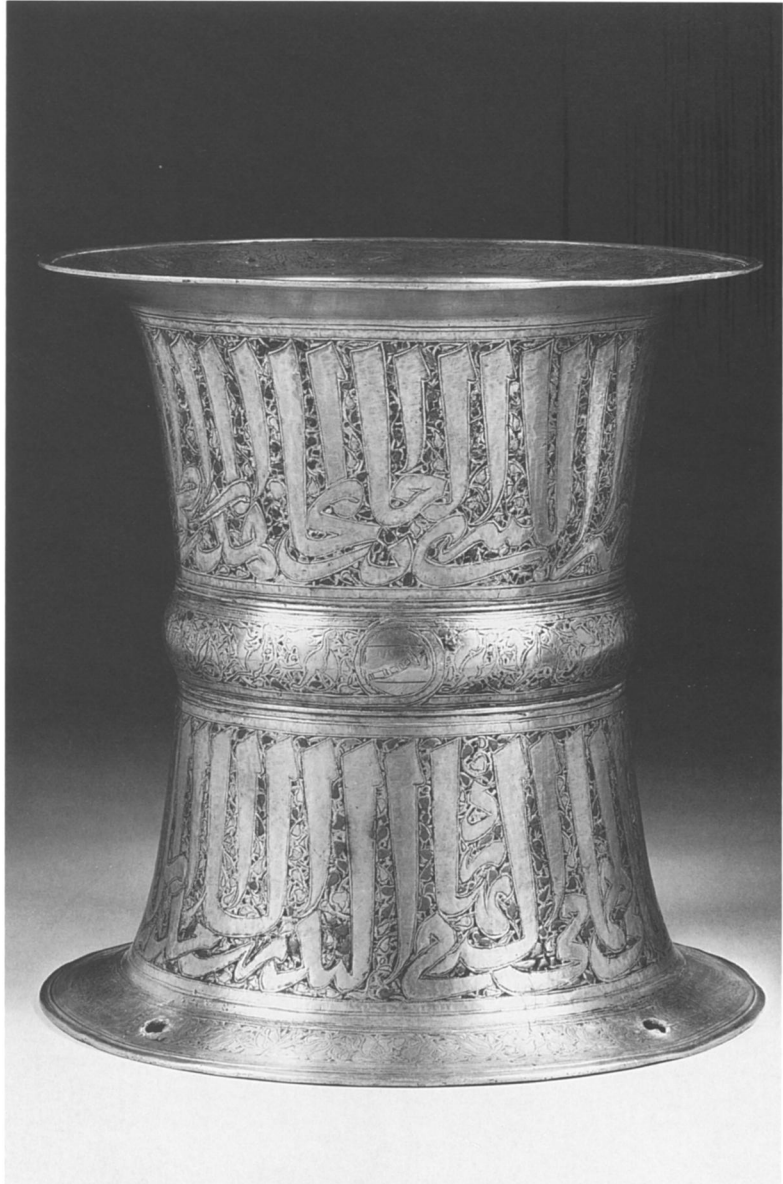


31
COMB

Egypt, 13th century. Inscribed in Thuluth, "permanent well-being." Wood, painted. 3 × 3 in. (7.62 × 7.62 cm). Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.118.17)

(right)
33
MOSQUE LAMP

Syria, Mamluk period, mid-14th century. Painted in Thuluth, part of Sura 24:35 (the Light verse), honorific names, and blazon of the donor. Glass, free blown, enameled and gilded. H. 13 in. (33.02 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.1537)



32
STAND

Syria, first half 14th century. Inscribed in Thuluth. Brass, inlaid with silver. H. 9⁵/₈ in. (24.43 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.598)



is to determine them for early Kufic. Sometimes a clue is provided by the ornamentation of a page, and sometimes by linguistic considerations. A manuscript of the Koran (fig. 34), the individual leaves of which are now dispersed in many museums and private collections, shows by the interlinear translation of the Arabic into rather archaic Persian that it was certainly written in the eastern Muslim lands, anywhere from eastern

Turkey to India. Korans in similar hands are found in other collections, some of them even containing translations in both Persian and Turkish. The elegant border in this manuscript, which contains sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*) in nicely drawn red or blue Kufic, seems to have been added at a later stage.

Cursive inscriptions are also found on ceramics, not only on large, imposing tiles

that adorned the walls of mosques and mausoleums (fig. 35) but also on smaller ones. Scribbled around the borders of many of them are Arabic texts, often quotations from the Koran, which point to the use of the tiles on sacred buildings (figs. 36 a,b), or Persian verses or sayings. The same is true of numerous Persian bowls, plates, and other ceramics, mainly of the thirteenth century. These pieces are often decorated

34
KORAN LEAF

Eastern Islamic lands, Turkey, Iran, central Asia, or India, 14th century. Written in Muḥaqqaq with Kufic border, Sura 5:55 with interlinear Persian translation. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 14⁵/₈ × 11³/₈ in. (37.131 × 28.88 cm). Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.152.8)





35
TILE

Iran, Kashan, 13th century. Inscribed in Thuluth, first words of Sura 2:285; in Naskh (top border), Sura 34:39–40. Composite body, underglaze and luster painted. $7\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{1}{2}$ in. (19.7 × 40 cm). Gift of Mrs. Frederick F. Thompson, 1915 (15.76.4)

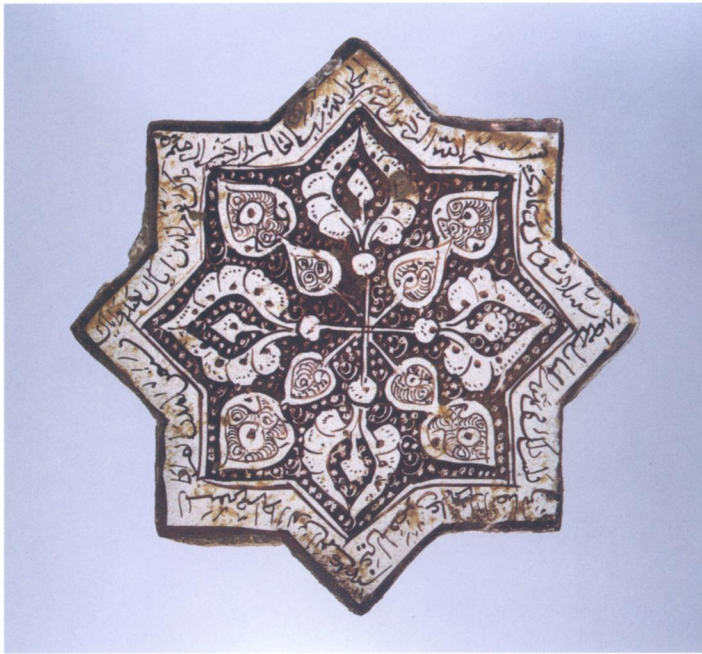
with Persian poems, usually quatrains (*rubā'īyāt*), and thus constitute a source of literary history, although the writing is anything but perfect and can often be deciphered only with great difficulty. A particularly splendid example of the application of different writing styles is a fourteenth-century mihrab from Iran (fig. 38). The main inscription, in fine Muḥaqqaq, contains Sura 9, verses 18–22, which speak of the duties of the believers and heavenly reward for those who build mosques. The niche is surrounded by a frieze in Kufesque style enumerating the five pillars of faith: profession of faith, prayer, alms tax, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. The inscription in

the center states that “the mosque is the house of every pious person.”

It is natural that a prayer niche (fig. 37), intended to direct the attention of the faithful to Mecca, the sacred center of Islam, should be heavily decorated with writing; but it is equally understandable that objects that were likely to be used on floors or for seats would not carry inscriptions, for there is the danger of treading upon or sitting on letters that might contain the name of God. Only rather late were there occasionally rugs bearing inscribed medallions, usually with Persian verses or dates.

At the eastern and western fringes of the Islamic world, in India and the Maghrib, a variety of calli-

graphic styles developed. In both places the rules elaborated by Ibn Muqla were not strictly applied, and, as Arab historians such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) tell us, calligraphers did not practice letter by letter until each letter was perfect but immediately wrote the entire word, which gives both the Indian style (*Bihārī*) and the North African–Andalusian style (*Maghribī*) a very different look: the complete harmony of measured proportions is missing. *Maghribī* Korans were written up to a late date on parchment with lavish use of golden ink (fig. 39), but there were also styles in which the letters appear extremely thin and seem to wear little buttons on the top; they can also be, as is



a



b

36 a, b
TILES

(a) Iran, Kashan, dated Ramadan A.H. 663 (A.D. 1265). Inscribed in Naskh, Sura 1. Composite body, underglaze and luster painted. Max. W. 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (20.6 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.105). (b) Iran, Kashan, 13th century. Inscribed in Naskh with sayings concerning fasting as a preparation for the banquet of Paradise. Composite body, underglaze and luster painted. Max. W. 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (17.44 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.106)



37
NICHE

Iran, Sultanabad, dated A.H. 722 (A.D. 1322). Inscribed in Naskh, Sura 11:114. Composite body, molded and underglaze painted. 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 26 in. (69.5 × 66 cm). Gift of William Mandel, 1983 (1983.345)

(right)

38
MIHRAB

Iran, Isfahan, ca. A.D. 1354. Main inscription in Muhaqqaq, Sura 9:18–22. Mosaic tile, composite body, painted and glazed. H. 135 in. (342.9 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
كَمَنْزِلِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ الْأَرْجاسِ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ الْبِسْمُ وَاللَّهُ لَقَوْمٍ أَعْيُنُهُمْ

الزُّمُرِ وَاللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْأَرْجاسِ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ الْبِسْمُ وَاللَّهُ لَقَوْمٍ أَعْيُنُهُمْ
الزُّمُرِ وَاللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْأَرْجاسِ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ الْبِسْمُ وَاللَّهُ لَقَوْمٍ أَعْيُنُهُمْ

الزُّمُرِ وَاللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْأَرْجاسِ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ الْبِسْمُ وَاللَّهُ لَقَوْمٍ أَعْيُنُهُمْ
الزُّمُرِ وَاللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْأَرْجاسِ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ الْبِسْمُ وَاللَّهُ لَقَوْمٍ أَعْيُنُهُمْ



مسجد بيت المقدس

the case in Andalusia, very thin and narrow (fig. 40); the round endings, however, are always prominent. North African and Andalusian manuscripts often excel in their colorful geometrical decoration, which is fully developed in the frontispieces of the entire Koran or of parts of it (fig. 41).

However, a good number of calligraphers in the western Islamic world were well aware of the classical tradition and practiced it. For instance, the motto of the last Moorish kings of Granada, *Wa lā ghāliba illā Allāh* (There is no Victor but God), which a visitor sees in the decoration throughout the Alhambra, is usually written in fine, flowing Thuluth and has become almost an icon; it appears in more or less perfect replica wherever the kings of Granada ruled (see fig. 10). Some textile inscriptions from North Africa and Spain, most of which contain good wishes for the ruler (fig. 42), show the same pleasantly rounded Thuluth

style, and so do some inscriptions and manuscripts.

A different development took place in Iran. The grammatical structure of the Persian language, being Indo-Germanic, is unlike Semitic Arabic and has many verbal and nominal endings that require one of the rounded Arabic final letters. To accommodate the swing of the endings, a style developed that slanted somewhat from the upper right of the page to the lower left.

From its earliest days this style, called Ta'liq (hanging), was used in chancelleries, while poetic and prose manuscripts were often written in a somewhat stiff, angular Naskh. But the "hanging" style appealed more to Persian taste and was more compatible with Persian grammar. Calligraphers soon devised an elegant version of Ta'liq, known as Nasta'liq.

Shortly before 1400, Mir 'Alī, a master from Tabriz, saw in a dream a flock of





40
KORAN LEAF

Spain, 14th century. Written in Maghribī and Kufic (top), Sura 39:1. Ink, colors, and gold on parchment. 21 × 22 in. (53.34 × 55.88 cm). Rogers Fund, 1942 (42.63)

41
FRONTISPIECE OF ONE JUZ'
(A THIRTIETH PART) OF A KORAN
North Africa, 18th century. Ink, colors, and gold on parchment. 6 × 8 in. (15.24 × 20.32 cm). Purchase, Gift of George Blumenthal, by exchange, 1982 (1982.120.2)

geese, and he was instructed by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (see also p. 44) to imitate the birds' curved shapes, be it the wing, be it the beak. He did this by applying the rules of Ibn Muqla for measuring the letters to the "hanging" style, and in this way—at least

according to tradition—became the inventor of Nasta'liq. This style soon gained popularity in the areas under Persian cultural influence, which stretched from Ottoman Turkey to Muslim India. From the fifteenth century on, a great number of calligraphers





copied the masterpieces of classical Persian literature, lyrical poetry or long epics such as 'Attār's (d. 1220) mystical *Mantiq at-tair* (The Language of the Birds), an allusion to Sura 27:16, in which Solomon is mentioned as understanding the birds' language (fig. 43). Nasta'līq, however, was rarely used for Arabic texts: there are only three known copies of the entire Koran in this style, although one may find some Nasta'līq prayers and pious invocations.

Nasta'līq has been rightfully called "the bride among calligraphic styles." It lends itself perfectly to copying love lyrics and romantic or mystical epics. The beauty of a perfect poem is enhanced

by the calligraphy, and both are enhanced in turn by the sumptuous or dreamlike border decorations executed by master artists. In illuminated manuscripts the equilibrium between the painting and the text, which is sometimes integrated into the illustration, is of special importance. The same observation is valid not only for Persian but also for Turkish poetry. For at the time that the masters of Nasta'līq were active in central and eastern Iran, the Timurid court of Herat was a center of both Persian and Chagatay Turkish poetry. The ruler, Sultan Ḥusain Baiqarā (r. 1470–1506), was a mediocre poet in Chagatay, but his verses were copied time and again by the greatest

42
TEXTILE

Spain, 15th century. Woven in Thuluth, "Glory to our lord the Sultan." Silk, compound weave. 10⁵/₈ × 21¹/₄ in. (26.97 × 53.97 cm). Rogers Fund, 1918 (18.31)

(right)

43
LEAF FROM
'ATTĀR'S *MANTIQ AT-TAIR*
(THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIRDS)

Iran, Herat, dated A.H. 892 (A.D. 1486), border ca. 1600. Written in Nasta'līq. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 15¹/₂ × 8 in. (39.37 × 20.32 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1963 (63.210.47)

بر علی طویسه که پر عهد بود
 گفت فدای اهل و ذریه زائر
 که خوشی جنت و ذوق وصل
 چون حال او با نزدیک شد
 چون بگویند اهل جنت حالش
 زانکه ما اصحاب جانی هستیم
 چون شدیم اگر که ما اهادیم
 سر کجای کین آتش آید کار که
 حسرت و آه و جرات مایت
 که تو محرومی دم از عالم نزن
 از بنی در خواست روی بر نیان
 خواجه دستوری او او را
 که ز غم که وی جرات روح
 داغ دل او که در میدان
 دیگر کسی که ای دامای
 به پیدل بن لید آتر مان
 گفت ما را منت وادی است
 و ایناید در جهان این آه پس
 وادی غش پست از بن کن
 پس سیوم

فردا کی

حال خود که میدتا خود چش حال	دان که ما را در بشت پر کمال
شت خلد از شرم او تا گریه شد	در مشد و غ آن حال جانفشان
اهل و ذریه در جواب بایش	کامی فایغ ز فرد و پس جان
از قدم تا فرق عشق تو کشیم	روی چون غم ما را را اشک
و ز چنان وی چنین افتادیم	ز آتش حسرت دل ناسا و ما
ز آتش و ذریه کجا ماند جز	سر که اند در ش حسرت پد
در جرات ذوق و راحت ماید	که درین سنبل تو مجروح آید

مناجات

گفت ریک و خاک که پستیان	روی ز بر ریک که دم و خاک
داغ نیکو تر بود مجروح را	نمایاری داغ دل این جایگاه

حوالت گفتن

دید ما شد درین وادی سیاه	بسیاست می نماید این طریق
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حکایت

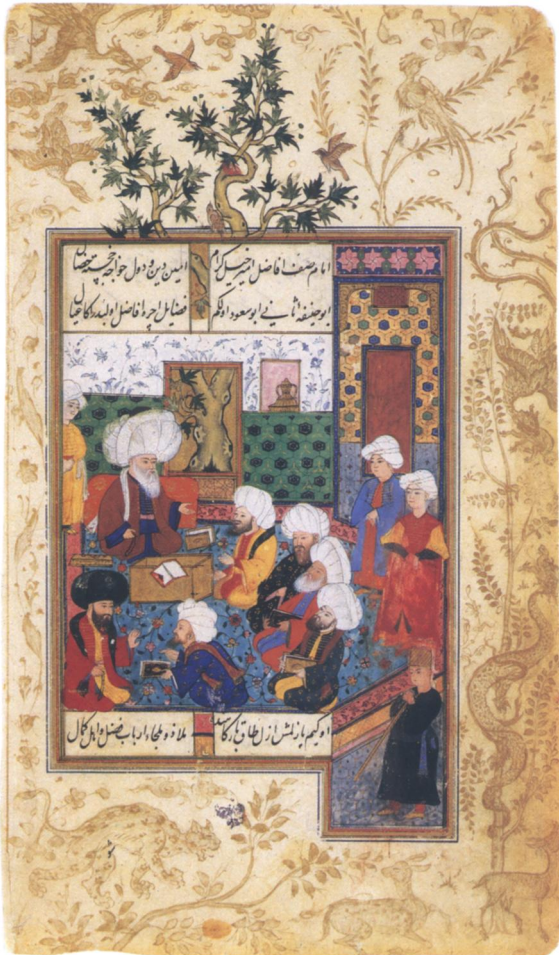
یست از دوسک او آگاه پای	چون آید باز سنین آه و دور
یست و داری طلب آغاز کار	کجا بارت دستمانی بحیبه
و ادیت زان حرفت	میت شتم وادی همه

پساک و دادی بد و عهد
 اهل جنت را پسند اشک
 روی بنمود آفتاب و اهل
 جلد را ز نام ماند زشت
 سر چه گفتند آن پست پستان
 حسرت و دامانگی از درد کما
 آس و ذریه پیر از زیاده
 کم تو آن کرد از و غیرت پدید
 محرم خلوت که روح آمدی
 داغ می ز بر جرات دم نزن
 تا که ز در بر صلاش نماز
 زانکه بر مجروح را غیبت
 کی توان کرد بی سببی تو بخا
 اهل دل از داغ بشناسند
 چند و چند پست این راه حق
 حالتش آمد به یاد ز زبان
 چون کنش میفت وادی که
 چون سنت گم می های همسور
 این شد تا بنیایم پسر
 استعنا صفت

master of the age, Sultan 'Alī Mashhadī (d. 1519; figs. 45 a,b). Sultan 'Alī, who indefatigably copied thousands and thousands of pages during his long life, also calligraphed some of the poetical works of Maulānā 'Abdur-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492). Jāmī, mystic, poet, and philologist, was a friend of the sultan, and he composed numerous epic poems as well as sophisticated lyrics. Among his tens of thousands of verses cal-

ligraphed by numerous writers is a poem in which he describes the secrets of the letters; for the mystics of Islam had discovered in the early days of calligraphy that each letter held mysteries that had to be properly understood—speculations about the “primordial dot” emerged in the mystical tradition at the time that Ibn Muqla invented the measuring of the letters by dots. Therefore the mystics referred to the secret

qualities and mysterious interconnections of the letters in their interpretations of religious texts (fig. 46). Is not the Divine Word expressed through letters, the letters of the Koran? And are not human beings, like the letters, written by the hand of the master calligrapher, the Creator himself? Furthermore, comparisons of Arabic letters with the most variegated items and especially with the parts of the human



44
THE GREAT MUFTI ABŪ SU'UD
TEACHING LAW

Leaf from a divan (collection of lyrical poems) by the Ottoman poet Baqī (d. 1600). Turkish, mid-16th century. Written in Nasta'liq. Illustration, gouache on paper. 8⁵/₈ × 4³/₁₆ in. (21.9 × 10.7 cm). Gift of George D. Pratt, 1925 (25.83.9)

(right)
45 a,b
LEAVES FROM A DIVAN
BY SULTAN HUSAIN BAIQARĀ OF
HERAT (r. 1470–1506)

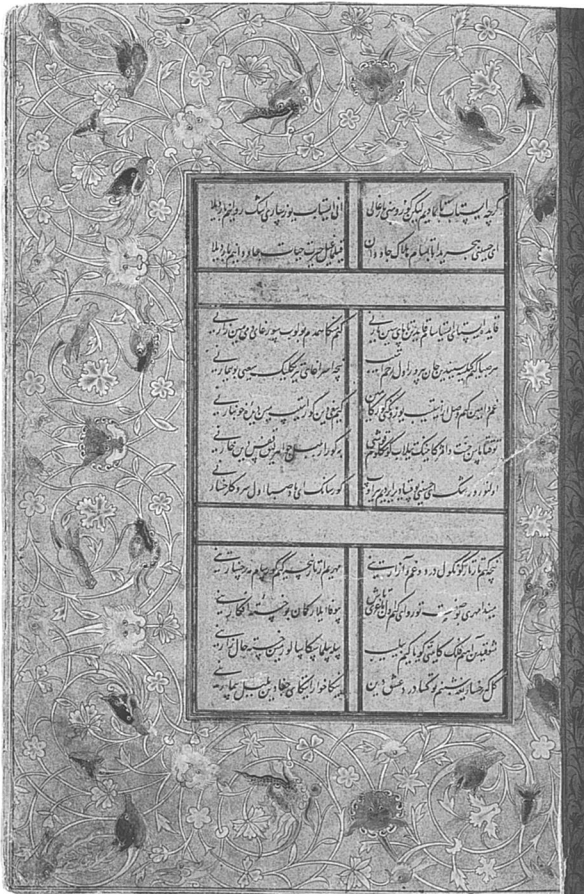
Iran, Herat, Timurid period, dated A.H. 905 (A.D. 1501). Chagatay Turkish, written in Nasta'liq by Sultan 'Alī Mashhadī (d. 1519). Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 10¹/₂ × 7¹/₄ in. (26.67 × 18.41 cm). Purchase, Richard S. Perkins and Margaret Mushekian Gifts, 1982 (1982.120.1)

body and face are commonplace in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poetry. And as much as the calligrapher had to understand the deeper meaning of the letters, so the poet and, in fact, every well-educated person had to know how to play with letter symbolism when writing elegant prose or poetry. Moreover, as every letter of the Arabic alphabet has a numerical value, it was easy to invent chronograms from meaningful sentences.

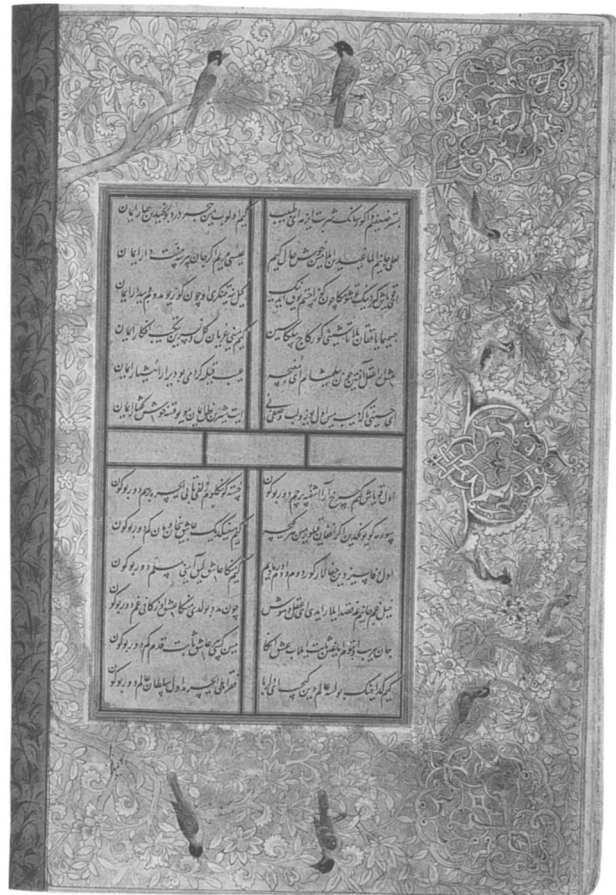
Thus calligraphy and calligraphic imagery permeated every aspect of life in the medieval Islamic world. One of the masters who both composed and calligraphed chronograms was Mir 'Alī Haravī (d. ca. 1550), who grew up in Herat toward the end of Ḥusain Baiqarā's reign, was later taken by the Uzbeks to their court in Bukhara, and produced there an enormous number of flawless pages of poetry and, less frequently,

prose (fig. 47). He states at the beginning of a treatise on calligraphy:

Boundless praise and countless lauds to the Creator! The painted album of the sky is one fragment from the works of His bounty and excellence, and the well-cut illuminated sun is one paper scrap from the lights of His bounty and elegance. [Praise to Him who is] the artist, the pen of whose creative art is the writer of the script [or "facial down"] of the heart-ravishing beauties; the inventor, the line of whose invention is the painter [of every lovely looking form...].



a



b



46
**POEM BY MAULĀNĀ
 'ABDUR-RAHMĀN JĀMĪ (d. 1492) ON
 THE SECRETS OF THE LETTERS OF
 THE BASMALA**

*Iran, Herat, or India, 16th century.
 Written in Nasta'liq and Kufic.
 Ink, colors, and gold on paper.
 7½ × 3⅝ in. (19.05 × 9.19 cm).
 Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest,
 1952 (52.20.8v)*

(right)

47
**ALBUM LEAF FROM A TREATISE ON
 CALLIGRAPHY BY MIR 'ALĪ HARAVĪ
 (d. ca. 1550)**

*India, Mughal period, ca. 1630–
 40. Ink, colors, and gold on paper.
 15 5/16 × 10 in. (38.9 × 25.4 cm).
 Purchase, Rogers Fund and The
 Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955
 (55.121.10.39v)*

In the course of his introductory essay, Mir 'Alī quotes a poem:

When a script is devoid of
 the element of beauty

The paper becomes black-
 faced [i.e., disgraced].

The script should run from
 the pen in such a way

That its reader becomes rest-
 ful thanks to it.

A nice script written in a
 nimble hand—

The pen is an elegant key to
 one's daily bread.



همچو سپاس بے حد عاقلی که کردی
منصور سپهر قطعه ایست از انوار
کمال او در مطلع منور سر رسد
انوار پس از کمال او صالحی که است
همسایش محراب جوانی که است
و بدی که است همسایش منصور

In many of his verses Mir 'Alī complains of his fate—that “calligraphy had become a chain for his feet”—for he was not able to leave his “exile” in Bukhara while his work was sought after by princes and kings in India and Iran.

By the late sixteenth century India had become a region where Nasta'liq was highly appreciated. Many artists left Iran and the Herat area in the wake of the political turmoil that occurred after the end of the Timurid rule in 1506. They migrated

from their native country and traveled to the subcontinent to enjoy the generosity of the Mughal emperors, some of whom were good calligraphers as well. In fact, Nasta'liq became the favorite script during Mughal rule. Coins (fig. 48) and objects such as Jahāngīr's inkpot (fig. 49) were inscribed in this style, and inscriptions in Nasta'liq were incorporated into architecture. The beauty of the writing was highlighted by the use of precious colored or gold-flaked paper; marbleized paper was, and still is,

very highly appreciated by calligraphers (fig. 50).

In Iran the development of Nasta'liq continued in all fields. The influence of Mir 'Imād al-Husainī (assassinated 1615), who was known for his crisp style (fig. 51), extended in later centuries to Ottoman Turkey, where the masters of Nasta'liq still follow his example exactly. Aside from calligraphy proper there were numerous objects decorated with Persian inscriptions—brass pieces, for example, were often embellished with historical or,



48
GOLD COIN

India, Agra mint, dated A.H. 1028 (A.D. 1619). Inscribed in Nasta'liq with a dedication to the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27). Diam. 7/8 in. (2.2 cm). Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898 (99.35.7402r)

49
INKPOT

India, Mughal period, dated A.H. 1028 (A.D. 1619). Made for the emperor Jahāngīr by Mu'min. Nephrite, carved with Nasta'liq inscription; gold cover and chain. 2 1/2 × 3 1/4 in. (6.4 × 7.9 cm). Anonymous Gift, 1929 (29.145.2)





50
LEAF OF CALLIGRAPHY

India, Kashmir or Deccan, 17th century. Written in Nasta'liq by Muhammad Ṣālīḥ, "the scribe," with the Shia invocation Nādi 'Aliyyan (see p. 44). Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 12¼ × 8½ in. (31.1 × 21.6 cm). Purchase, Richard S. Perkins Gift, 1986 (1986.109.2)

more frequently, literary inscriptions in engraved, embossed, or a jour technique. Candlesticks might be decorated with verses alluding to the radiant beauty of a beloved's face (fig. 52):

I see the candle of those with heart radiant thanks to your face.
I see that all those who have a heart have turned their hearts' face toward you.
You are the ruler of the world—may a single hair

never disappear from your head,
For I see the world to be depending on a single hair of yours!

The love of calligraphy is demonstrated by the attempt to preserve as many frag-



ments of fine examples of writing as possible. Even the *siyahmashq*, exercises in which one letter or word was copied over and over until it was perfect, became collector's items. Miniature paintings and even large pieces of

calligraphy were often surrounded with minute bits of nicely written poetry that had been cut from older pages, or else pieces representing different calligraphic styles were pasted together (fig. 53). To destroy a fragment on which

something was written was regarded as a sin—for fear that the name of God might be found on it!

In the calligraphic tradition of Iran, especially after 1501, when the Shiite dynasty of the Safavids was established

(left)

51
LEAF FROM A POEM BY AMĪR
KHUSRAU DIHLAVĪ (d. 1325),
COPIED IN NASTĀLĪQ BY MIR 'IMĀD
AL-HUSAINĪ

Iran, Isfahan, Safavid period, dated
A.H. 1017 (A.D. 1608). Ink, colors,
and gold on paper. $11\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ in.
(25.57 × 19.05 cm). Rogers Fund,
1946 (46.126.3)

52
BRASS CANDLESTICK

Iran, Safavid period, 16th
century. Engraved in Nasta'liq
with a Persian rubā'i (quatrain).
H. $11\frac{3}{8}$ in. (30.1 cm). Gift of
Mrs. Lucy W. Drexel, 1889
(89.2.197)





53
LEAF OF CALLIGRAPHY

Iran, Safavid period, 16th century. Written in Nasta'liq, Muhaqqaq, and Tauqi'. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 6 × 8 in. (15.24 × 20.32 cm). Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Jerome A. Straka Gift, 1982 (1982.120.4)

and Shia Islam became the official religion of Iran, two formulas are met with time and again. The first one, also used in the Sunni tradition, is "There is no brave young hero [*fatā*] but 'Alī and no sword but Dhu'l-fiqār." 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, the fourth caliph and first imam of the Shia (r. 656–61), who is also considered a master calligrapher, is the prototype of the fighter for the faith, the unsurpassable hero and the source of wisdom. Therefore

this saying adorns many pieces of arms and armor, although it appears also in less obvious contexts (fig. 54).

The other formula that one is likely to see in Persian and partly Indian inscriptions after 1501 is the invocation of 'Alī, called after its beginning *Nādi 'Aliyyan* (Call upon 'Alī, the manifester of miracles...). It is used as a protective prayer on almost every possible material and is often combined with the favorite Koranic verse of the Shiites, "Help from God and near victory" (Sura 61:13).

There are inscriptions on and in mausoleums of Shiite rulers with poems in honor of

the Prophet's daughter and 'Alī's wife, Fātima the Radiant, and her sons Ḥasan

(right)

54
MOSQUE LAMP

Turkey, Ottoman period, first quarter 16th century. Painted in Kufic and cursive scripts, "The One," "Kingdom belongs to God," and the formula "There is no brave young hero but 'Alī and no sword but Dhu'l-fiqār." Composite body, painted and glazed. H. 6⁵/₈ in. (16.8 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1959 (59.69.3)





55
PLAQUE

Iran, fourth quarter 17th century. Inscribed in Thuluth, against a ground of arabesque scrolls, with a verse from an Arabic poem containing epithets for Fātima and her sons. Cut steel. L. 15 in. (38 cm). Rogers Fund, 1987 (1987.14)

and Ḥusain (fig. 55). The Hand of Fātima, used as a protective talisman, appears in various materials, sometimes, as in our example, with the just-mentioned formulas and the names of the twelve Shia imams (fig. 56), which are ubiquitous on Safavid and Deccani metalwork. The Shia enlargement of the general profession of faith, “There is no deity but God, Muhammad is God’s messenger,” by “Alī is God’s friend” is likely to appear in Persian and Deccani inscriptions. In

Ottoman Turkey, on the other hand, one finds allusions to the sword Dhu’l-fiqār, divine names, and short prayers on sword hilts, and sometimes even on the blades. The steel blade illustrated here (fig. 57) bears poetic inscriptions in Turkish inlaid in gold; as on most blades they are written in mixed calligraphic styles. Sura 112 (the profession of God’s unity) and the Throne verse (Sura 2:255) are most likely to be found on arms and armor (fig. 58).

The artists in Iran and neighboring countries not only wrote down or invented texts and pious formulas or prepared large models for inscriptions on the walls of minarets and other buildings, they also performed amazing technical feats in *découpage*. They cut out minute letters in Nasta’līq or other styles and pasted them on colored paper so skillfully that the script, even from a short distance, looks as if it had actually been written on the page (fig. 59). Artists from Herat

seem to have invented this technique about 1500, for one copy of Ḥusain Baiqarā's *Divan* in Sultan 'Alī's hand has been produced in this manner. Later, artists in Turkey gained fame for their elegant *découpage*.

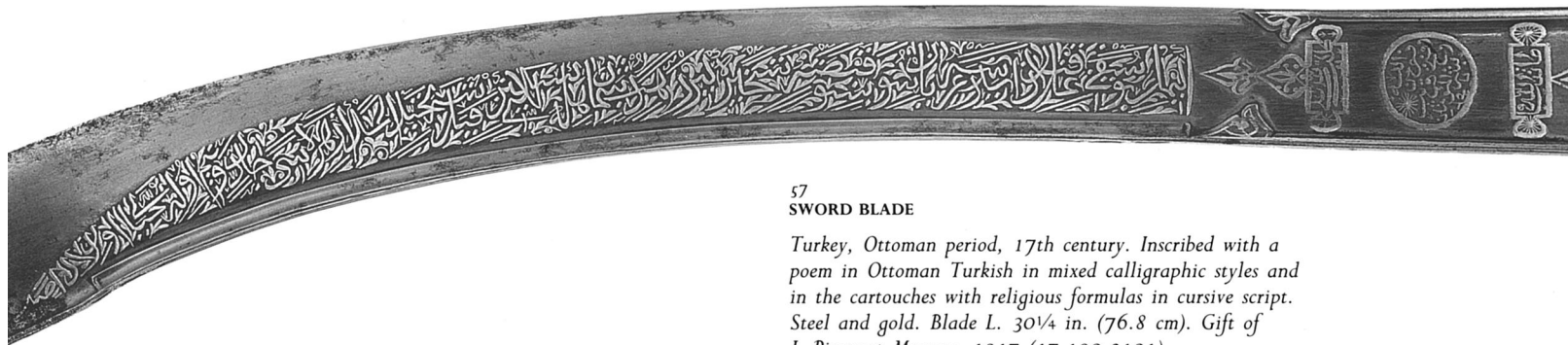
During the seventeenth century the Shikasta (broken style) grew out of Nasta'liq. Simplifying the letters with "teeth" by straightening them out (as had been done earlier in chancellery scripts) and by connecting letters in an

unusual way, such scripts sometimes make the untutored reader despair just looking at them. Yet, this style is still a favorite of Persian and Indian Muslims, and a fine page of Shikasta, when executed by a classical



56
BATTLE STANDARD IN THE FORM
OF THE HAND OF FÁTIMA
(USED TO AVERT THE EVIL EYE)

Iran, early 18th century. Inscribed in Nasta'liq with the names of the twelve Shia imams, the Shia invocation Nādi 'Aliyyan, and verses from the Koran. Silver with niello inlay. 19¼ × 9 in. (48.9 × 22.9 cm). Gift of Dr. Marilyn Jenkins, 1984 (1984.504.2)

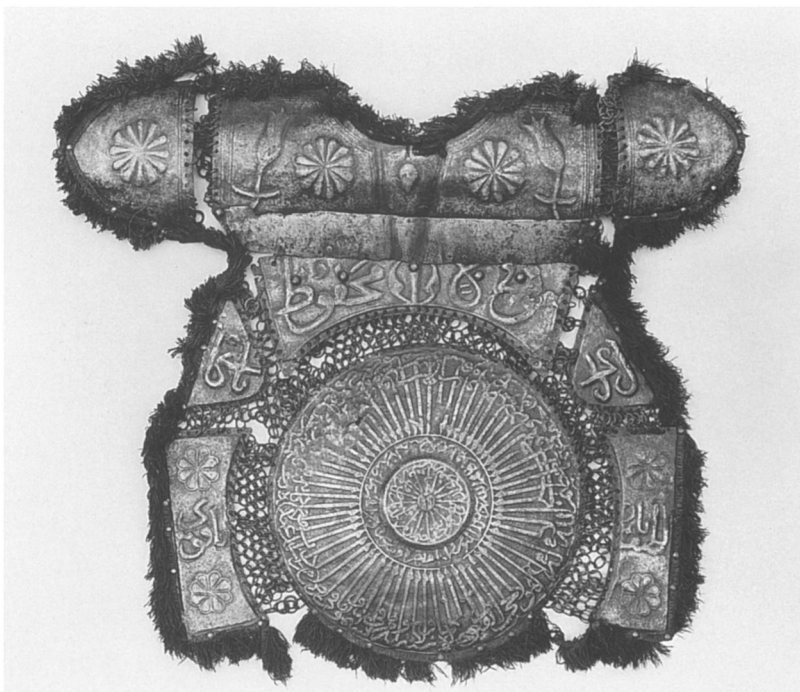


57
SWORD BLADE

Turkey, Ottoman period, 17th century. Inscribed with a poem in Ottoman Turkish in mixed calligraphic styles and in the cartouches with religious formulas in cursive script. Steel and gold. Blade L. 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (76.8 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.2101)

58
CUIRASS WITH PECTORAL DISK

Turkey, Ottoman period, 1557–1600. Inscribed in center, Sura 112; around central disk, “rewards of patience and fear of God,” Sura 76:12; on outer ring, Ayat al Khursi (Throne verse), Sura 2:255. Iron and silk. Max. Diam. 11 in. (27.9 cm). Bequest of George C. Stone, 1936 (36.25.345)



(right)

59
PAGE OF POETRY FROM A POEM
BY SHĀHĪ (d. 1453)

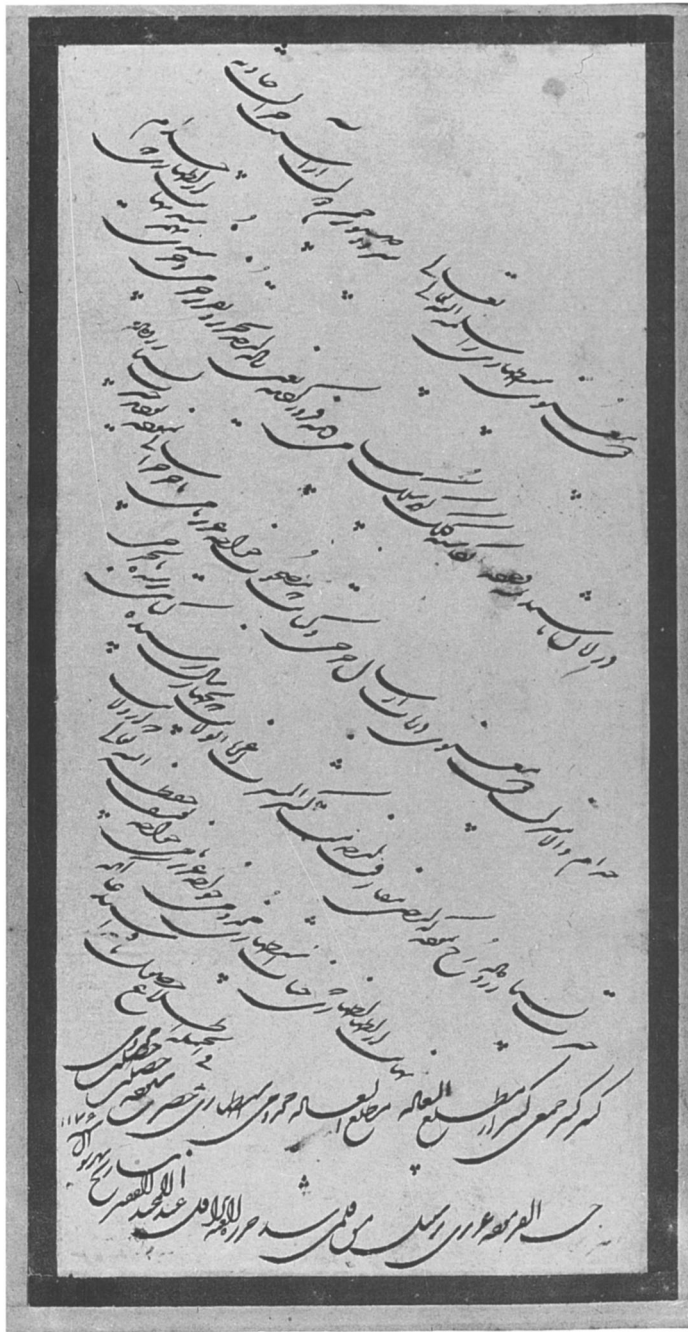
Iran or Turkey, 16th century. Découpage in Nasta'liq. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (22.22 x 14.6 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lucy W. Drexel, 1889 (89.2.2152)



مولانا امیر کا

کہ زینب بہ ایم و والدہ
رند و وی و سیدہ باغبان
آب و رنگ دار و سر و لاله
جو کل و صف حسن جاہر کاشی
ہر گاہ و فی وقت از سادہ

علاوہ اس کے



60
LEAF OF CALLIGRAPHY

Iran, dated A.H. 1174
(A.D. 1760–61). Written in
Shikasta; signed by 'Abdul Majīd
Tāliqānī (d. 1773). Ink on paper.
9½ × 4½ in. (24.13 × 11.43 cm).
Rogers Fund, 1946 (46.126.4)

(right)

61
TOMBSTONE IDENTIFIED AS THAT OF
MAHMŪD, SON OF DADA
MUHAMMAD OF YAZD

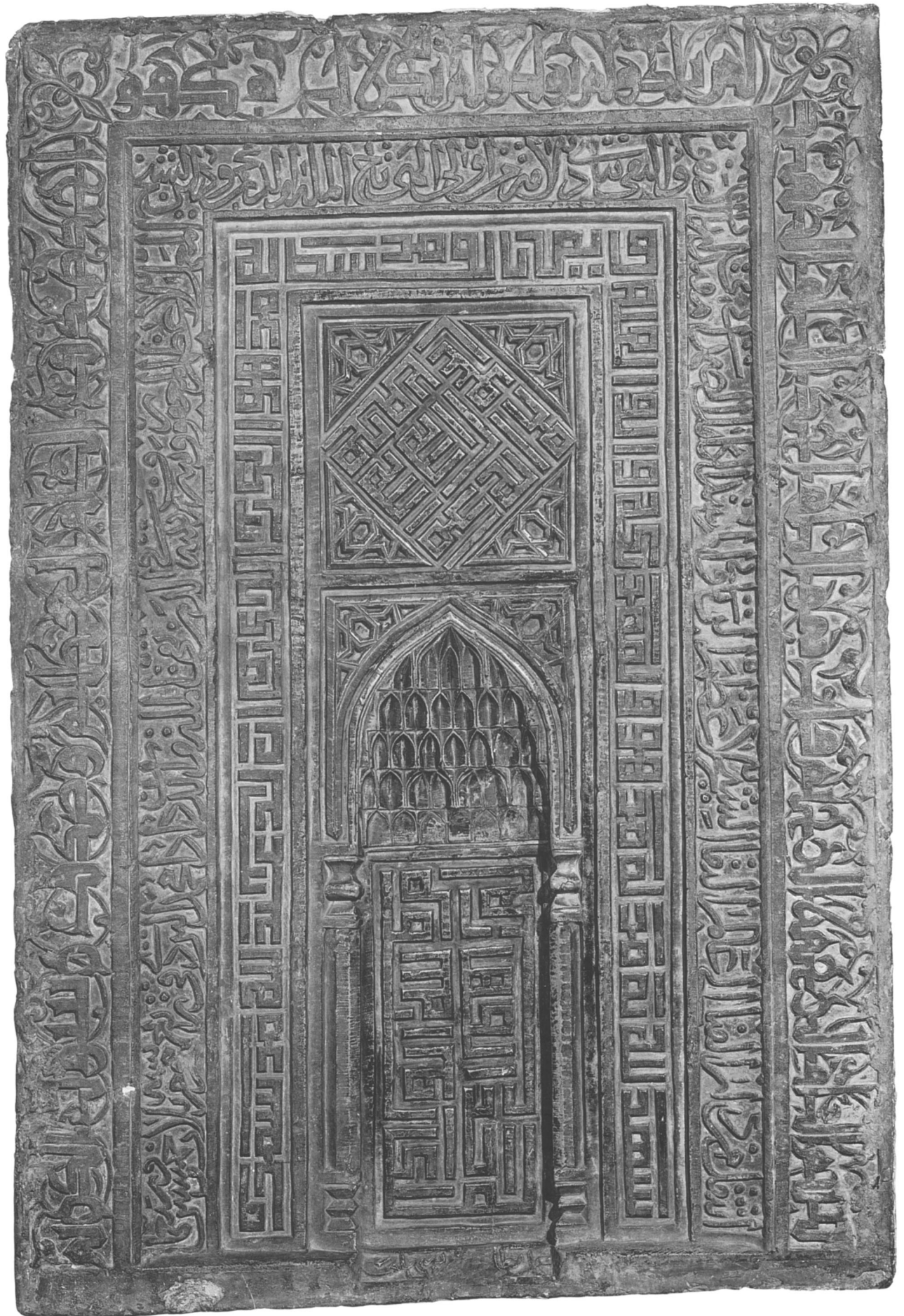
Iran, dated 1352. Inscribed in
square Kufic in relief in the lower
part of the niche, in the square
above the niche, and in the
surrounding frame; signed Nizāmī,
son of Shahāb(?). Marble.
32¾ × 21¾ in. (83.2 × 55.25 cm).
Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.120)

master like 'Abdul Majīd Tāliqānī (d. 1773) (fig. 60) or by a contemporary artist, often reminds one of modern graphic art, just as a page of stately early Kufic has an "iconic" quality to it.

Calligraphers never tired of inventing new forms. The technique of square Kufic

appeared in the early Middle Ages on architecture because both brick and tile work lent themselves perfectly to this style, in which the angular Arabic letters were even more simplified than usual in order to permit more or less legible sentences in a defined space (fig. 61).

The cursive hand, too, could be used to produce inscriptions of remarkable strength. In India the indigenous art of stonecutting, in which mainly Hindus excelled, was developed to create unusually powerful inscriptions. This is especially true of Bengal, where during



the late fifteenth century a number of inscriptions for mosques were composed that doubtless rank among the finest examples of Islamic lettering. In the dedicatory panel below (fig. 62) the elongation of the arrowlike high letters of the Arabic text in a forceful rhythm and the weaving of a group of bow-shaped letters into the upper level is certainly ingenious.

Most of these Indian inscriptions emphasize the importance of building a mosque, for "Whosoever builds a mosque for God Most High, God will build for him a house in Paradise"; this saying, attributed to the Prophet, occurs with slight variations in many Bengali mosques.

One calligraphic art form, at first restricted to the princely chancelleries, is that of the *tughrā* (fig. 63).

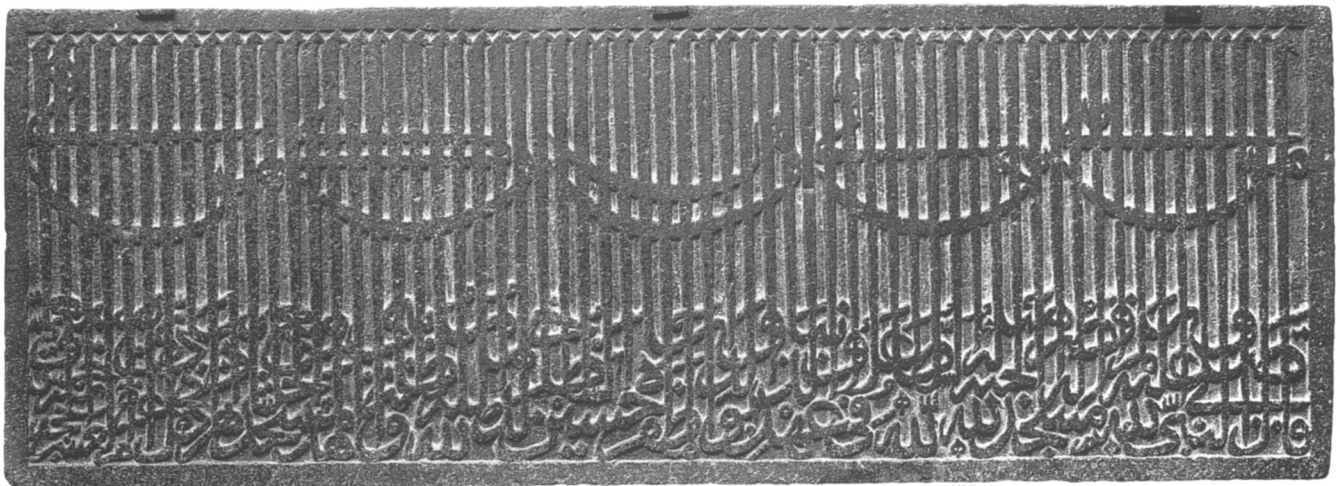
Originally the *tughrā* was used as the king's hand sign, or emblem, and as a specific design at the beginning of a document drawn up by a senior official. In Ottoman Turkey the *tughrā* was elaborated into a highly sophisticated motif, with each Ottoman emperor having his own type. All *tughrā*, however, consist of three high shafts and two ovals protruding to the left, with the names of the ruler and his ancestors in the lower center. This arrangement has been explained as representing the three middle fingers and the thumb (the prints of which formerly may have been used for signatures). However, another interpretation is that the design derives from the three standards decorated with yak tails carried by central Asian Turkish rulers in battle or in processions. Whatever the true ori-

gin, drawing and embellishing a *tughrā* was an important duty in the imperial chancelleries.

In the course of time the word "*tughrā*" came to mean "artificially shaped writing," and today a *tughrā* can be any kind of unusual and often very elegant way of joining words into decorative shapes, including flowers, animals, or architectural forms. One would even be inclined, in modern parlance, to call the delightful peacock illustrated here a *tughrā* (fig. 64). Drawn by an imaginative

62
PANEL WITH DEDICATION FOR
A MOSQUE

*Bengal, Gaur, dated A.H. 905
(A.D. 1500). Inscribed in Thuluth
in "bow-and-arrow" style. Gabbro.
16 1/8 x 45 5/16 x 2 3/4 in.
(41 x 115 x 7 cm). Purchase, Gift
of Mrs. Nelson Doubleday and
Bequest of Charles R. Gerth, by
exchange, 1981 (1981.320)*





63
**TUGHRĀ OF SULTAN SŪLEYMAN
 THE MAGNIFICENT** (r. 1520–66)

Turkey, Istanbul, Ottoman period, mid-16th century. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. 20½ × 25⅜ in. (52.07 × 64.44 cm). Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

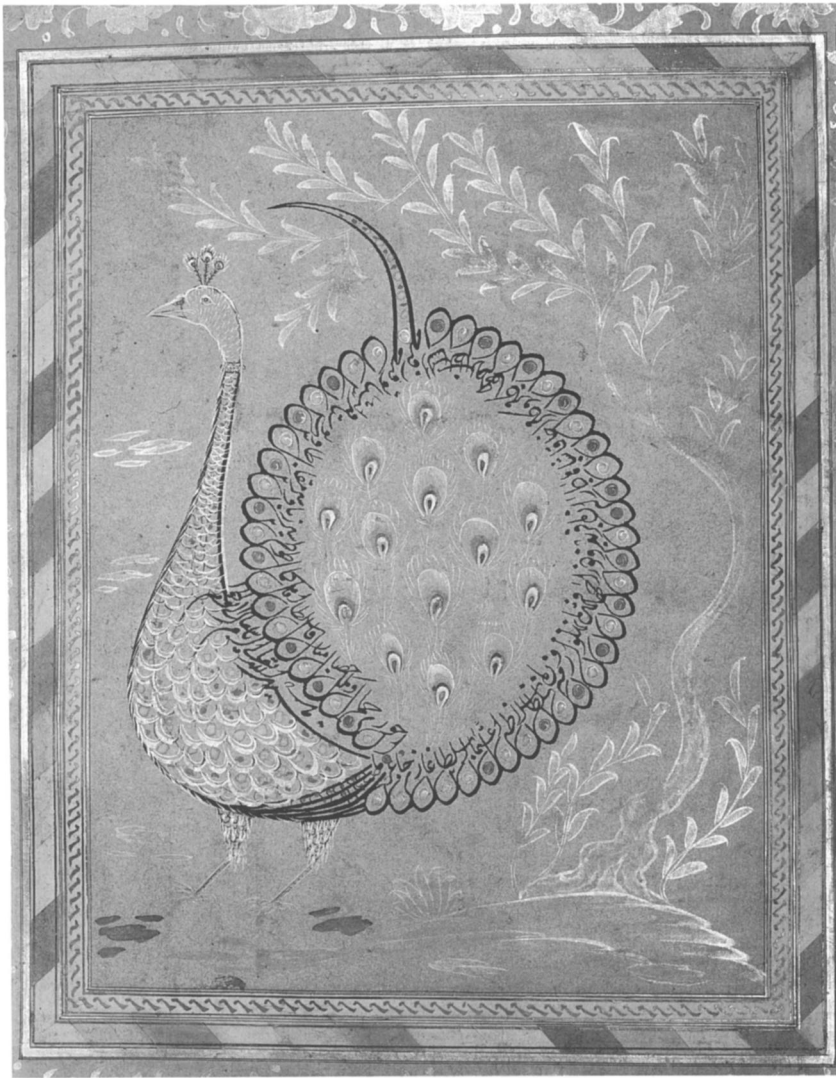
Turkish scribe in Dīvānī script, it is composed of blessings for an unnamed Ottoman ruler of the seventeenth century.

An interesting development can be observed in the decoration of silver and bronze objects of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: letters of both Kufic and Naskh are written in zoomorphic form, as lions, giraffes,

birds, and harpies, or the high stems simply end in human heads (fig. 65). In connection with these styles—often barely legible kinds of script and complicated tughrā shapes—pseudowriting should be mentioned. It developed rather early, in part because most of the craftsmen who executed the inscriptions were illiterate and just imitated the external shapes of

the letters more or less accurately, and also because the mere act of copying an inscription, even incorrectly, was seen by many as filled with blessing, or *baraka*.

Perhaps the finest expressions of purely decorative script, or calligrams, are the mirror-writing repetitions of words, especially the fourfold or even eightfold repetition in star or roundel shape of the



64
ALBUM LEAF

Turkey, 17th century. Peacock with tail composed of a calligraphic inscription in *Divānī* script eulogizing an Ottoman sultan. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. $9\frac{9}{16} \times 7\frac{1}{16}$ in. (24.3 × 17.9 cm). Louis V. Bell Fund, 1967 (67.266.7.8r)

(right)
65
EWER

Iran, Khurasan, early 13th century. Inscribed on neck and shoulder with blessings and good wishes. Bronze, engraved and inlaid with silver. H. $15\frac{1}{2}$ in. (39.37 cm). Rogers Fund, 1944 (44.15)

name of God (inside front cover), and invocations of one of the Ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of God (fig. 67, inside back cover), which, by their very presence, confer a blessing on the buildings where they are used or to the objects that they adorn. There are also mirror images or artistically devised calligrams containing the *shahāda*, the profession of

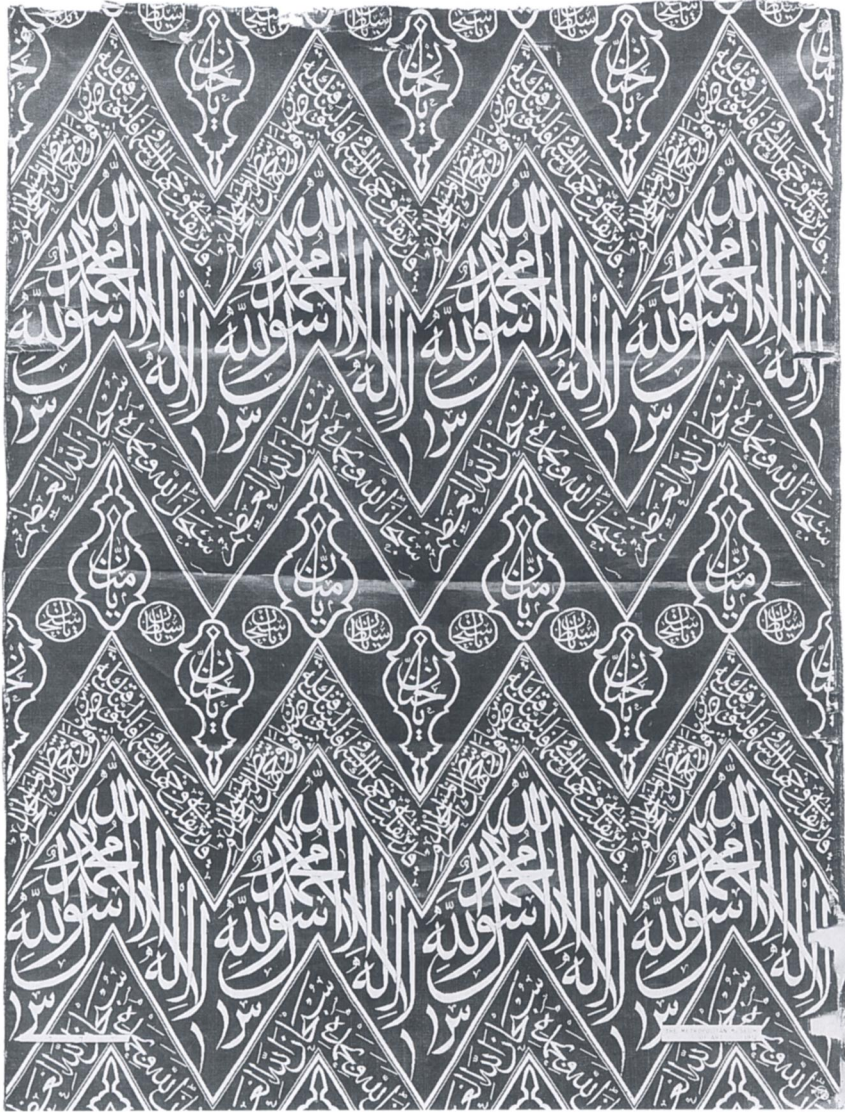
faith, “There is no deity but God, Muhammad is God’s messenger.” Its first part, consisting of eleven vertical and two small round letters, is and was an especially important and excellent calligraphic device. Woven into a tomb cover (fig. 66), it is thought to convey blessings to the deceased and, as it were, help answer the question that the interrogating angels in the

grave will pose, “What is your creed?”

Calligraphy is the most typical of the Muslim arts. When looking at its different styles and the inventive ways in which Muslim calligraphers from West Africa to Malaysia used the letters—never forgetting their sacred qualities—one will certainly agree with the sixteenth-century Iranian author Qāḍī Aḥmad, who, well aware that most of his compatriots were illiterate, wrote, “If someone, whether he can read or not, sees good writing, he likes to enjoy the sight of it.”

Calligraphy was a high art, largely a sacred art, and doubtless an art that required untiring devotion, “soft” char-





(left)
66
TEXTILE TOMB COVERING

Turkey, Ottoman period, 18th century. Woven in Muhaqqaq with the profession of faith, invocation, and pious formulas. Silk, satin, and plain weaves. 38¼ × 26¾ in. (97.15 × 67.94 cm). The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.460)

(below)
67 and inside back cover
ARCHITECTURAL ROUNDEL

India, Deccan, probably Bijapur, late 16th–early 17th century. Carved with invocation in mirrored script, “O Mighty.” Painted sandstone. Diam. 18½ in. (47 cm). Edward Pearce Casey Fund, 1985 (1985.240.1)



acter, and love. Only few of those who set out to study it reached the heights of success. But anyone who has indulged in the beauty of Arabic letters and tried a

hand at them would probably echo the sentiments of the unknown calligrapher from the lower Indus Valley who wrote in the seventeenth century:

Everyone who lives through the “Water of Life” of the pen Will not die, but remain alive as long as life exists.

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بوعلی طیبی که بر عهد بود
 گفت فدای اهل دوزخ زازار
 که خوشی جنت و ذوق وصال
 چون حال و با ناز دیک شد
 چون بگویند اهل جنت حال خویش
 زانکه ما اصحاب جانجی خوشیم
 چون شدیم اگر که ما افتادیم
 سر کجا کین آتش آید کار که
 چهرت و آه و جرات بایت
 که تو محرومی دم از عالم نرن
 از بنی در خواست مروی برینا
 خواجده پستوری او او را
 که ز غم کردی جرات روح
 داغ دل آور که در میدان
 دیگر کشتی که ای دانای
 به بیدل بنالید آتر مان
 گفت ما را صفت و ادبی است
 و ایناید در جهان ان راه پس
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 پس سپرم

مناجات

حال خود گوید تا خود چشمال	دان که ما را در بشت پر کمال
ست خلد از سرم او تا یک	در سر و غ آن حال جان نشان
اهل دوزخ در جواب آیدش	کاشی فارغ ز فرد و پس جان
از قدم تا فرق عنقه کشیم	روی چون نمود ما را آشکار
وز چنان دیدی خین افتادیم	ز آتش حسرت دل نسا و ما
ز آتش و دوزخ کجا ماند جز	سر که شد در شس حسرت پد
در جرات ذوقی بر جرات	که درین منزل تو مجروح آید

مفاتیح

گفت ریک و خاک که ریت این	روی ز بر ریک کرم و خاک که
داغ نیکو تو بود مجروح را	تا نیاری داغ دل این جایگاه

جوانم گفتن

دیده باشد درین ای سیاه	بر سیاحت می نماید این طریق
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حکایت

میت زد نسک او آگاه سپ	چون نماید باز سینه او دور
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پاک و دادی جد و بند
 اهل جنت را پر سپند آشکار
 روی بنمود آفتاب و کلال
 جمله را نام ماند زشت
 سر کفشتند چنان پست
 چهرت و اما مذکی از روی
 آس و دوزخ ببرد اندام
 کم تو اند که از و غیرت پدید
 محرم خلوت که روح آمدی
 داغ می ز بر جرات دم نزن
 تا که از در بر صلاش نماز
 زانکه هر مجروح را غیبت روی
 کی توان کرد بسوی تو نگاه
 اهل دل از داغ نباشند
 چند و پنک است این راهی
 حالتش آمد بدید اندر زبان
 چون کشی صفت و ادبی کمال
 چون سنت گلهای صبور
 بدست نه چنان پاک
 کلام بادت دهنده ای عظیم
 میت در ادبی طلب آفتاب کار
 و ادیت زان معرفت
 میت شتم و دادی
 استعنا صفت