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THE SELJUQS AND THEIR SUCCESSORS

ART, CULTURE AND HISTORY

EDITED BY SHEILA R. CANBY,
DENIZ BEYAZIT AND MARTINA RUGIADI

EDINBURGH
University Press

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road
12 (2f) Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Typeset in Trump Medieval by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire
and printed and bound in Malta by Melita Press

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4744 5034 8 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 5037 9 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 1 4744 5036 2 (epub)

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**PART FOUR
IDENTITIES: RULERS AND
POPULACE**

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ghaznavid, Qarakhanid and Seljuq Monumental Inscriptions and the Development of Royal Propaganda: Towards an Epigraphic Corpus

*Roberta Giunta and Viola Allegranzi*¹

THE EPIGRAPHIC MATERIAL with provenance from the eastern Iranian area, attributable to a period from the late tenth to early thirteenth centuries, represents a primary source for understanding a political-cultural framework in transformation. The rise of three important dynasties of Central Asian Turkic origin – the Ghaznavids (977–1086), the Qarakhanids (*circa* 992–1213), and the Great Seljuqs (1040–1194) – brought about a renewal and evolution in the political context of the eastern Islamic regions and in strategies of propaganda and legitimisation of power.² The monumental inscriptions also attest to the stimulus imparted by building programmes in certain urban centres, which developed as seats of religious, scientific and literary debate and thereby intensified the network of exchanges within the confines of the caliphate.³

Given that there is no pre-existing comprehensive study of the epigraphic material related to these dynasties, it would be desirable to begin with the systematic organisation and cataloguing of all possible inscriptions, both whole and fragmentary. Following this, it will then be possible to carry out detailed comparative analyses, which can demonstrate innovations in content as well as in the linguistic and palaeographic forms of these documents.⁴ Previous epigraphic studies touching on this overall region have often achieved interesting results, but have dealt exclusively with the presentation of single inscriptions or groups deriving from a specific context.⁵ This circumstance, together with quite frequent shortcomings in methodology, has brought about a dispersal of the available data and limits the comprehension of epigraphic practices encountered in contexts that are often distant and diverse, which might inform us concerning the diffusion of models and the mobility of artisanal skills.

The project underlying this essay concerns the development of a corpus of Ghaznavid, Qarakhanid and Seljuq inscriptions, which integrates with the research that the authors have pursued for a

number of years.⁶ It is designed to address a series of difficulties, above all involving the state of conservation of the texts. These are often extremely fragmentary and/or decontextualised, sometimes without adequate photographic or graphic documentation. In fact, the great part of the materials derives from sites that are now partially or completely destroyed, where archaeological research has not always enabled thorough dating and where it may now be impossible to conduct further fieldwork. Moreover, many of the monuments that did preserve inscriptions *in situ* have quite recently been subject to massive restoration interventions, which have entirely or partly obliterated the epigraphic bands.⁷ Moreover, the complex historical-political framework of the Iranian pre-Mongol world is known only through a limited number of sources and is still the subject of research and debate.⁸ These obstacles make it difficult to reconstruct the original locations and functions of the inscriptions, to identify the patrons and addressees, and to arrive at precise dating.

In this first stage of the project, the development of the epigraphic corpus concentrates on those monumental inscriptions that reveal at least one of the names of a ruler, the name of a high political office holder, or a date. Attempts are then made to resolve any uncertainties in the initial textual analysis, through cross-checking against numismatic and historiographic sources.⁹ The inscriptions that appear to lack historic-documentary information (ruler, office holder, date) will be examined later – that is, after the first project stage has enabled the application of comparative palaeographic analysis for purposes of dating. The established chronology may subsequently help in attributing (and interpreting) inscriptions sponsored by other contemporary dynasties and those executed on artefacts which, more often than not, are anonymous and decontextualised.

The corpus

The 'royal inscriptions' attributable to the Ghaznavid, Qarakhanid and Seljuq dynasties present numerous specificities and raise investigative problems of various kinds. Good progress has been made in collecting and analysing the texts entered in the Ghaznavid section of the corpus. This task has benefitted from the involvement of the current authors in the activities of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan and in the management, reorganisation and study of the mission's archival records, which until this time have gone largely unpublished.¹⁰ The inscriptions originate exclusively from Ghazni, capital of the dynasty until 1173.¹¹ Almost all of these items were added to the state collections through the activities of the French Archaeological Delegation to Afghanistan (1923) and especially the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan (1957–78).¹² Except for numerous pieces recovered during excavations of the supposed palace of Mas'ūd III, these inscriptions were not collected from

their original contexts, and it is impossible to trace the monuments to which they pertain. In fact, many years of study were necessary to arrive at a deeper understanding of the material, to facilitate the reassembly of inscription fragments found in distant parts of the city and beyond, to propose interpretations for incomplete texts, to reconstruct royal protocols and finally to advance hypotheses based on the evolution of writing styles.

The names of seven Ghaznavid dynastic rulers – Sebuktigīn (r. 977–97), Maḥmūd b. Sebuktigīn (r. 998–1030), Mas'ūd I b. Maḥmūd (r. 1031–40), Mawdūd b. Mas'ūd I (r. 1041–48), Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I (r. 1059–99), Mas'ūd III b. Ibrāhīm (r. 1099–1115) and Bahrām Shāh b. Mas'ūd III (r. 1117–50) – recur in inscriptions of civil and funerary character.¹³ All of these inscriptions are carved in low relief in marble, except for the epigraphic bands of two minarets, which are in baked brick.¹⁴ The most frequently surviving name is that of Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I. The inscriptions of this ruler were certainly part of an extensive building programme, promoted in a phase of dynastic rebirth,¹⁵ subsequent to the severe defeat that Ibrāhīm's father Mas'ūd I suffered in 1040 at Dandanqan, at the hands of Seljuq troops guided by Ṭughril Beg and Chagrī Beg.

Despite the severe fragmentation of texts and the generally poor state of conservation, the Ghaznavid inscriptions present significant features. Among these are the frequent indication of a genealogical line (in ascending or descending order), a telling reflection of a strongly centralised state; the absence of the name of the caliph; absence of the names of ministers or other important officers of the state; the use of the title of sultan; the abundance of *laqabs*; the use of metrical inscriptions in Persian language; the coexistence of different writing styles on the same support; the elaboration of some varieties of Kufic script; and the introduction of cursive script.

The Qarakhanid inscriptions are few in number, from widely distributed sites of both Transoxiana and Ferghana, and present difficulties for proposing confident attributions to known political personages. This is partly a reflection of the complex political organisation of this dynasty, in which a confederation of states was controlled by different and often competing branches of the family. Beginning in 1040, the Qarakhanid dominions were composed of western and eastern khanates, the former with a capital at Samarqand, the latter with two capitals at Balasagun and Kashgar; to this there was soon added an independent state in Ferghana, with Uzgend as the main centre. This context complicates the task of reconstructing the dynastic chronology based on a thorough genealogy.¹⁶

The only Qarakhanid inscriptions recovered by excavation are from the pre-Mongol site of Afrasiyab (Samarqand).¹⁷ The other epigraphs have been recorded on still-extant structures and standing remains, but even these have suffered severe degradation. The large majority of texts are executed in baked brick or carved in

stucco.¹⁸ Three inscriptions, all highly fragmentary, are attributed to sovereigns of the western khanate. The inscription in the domed hall of the Mausoleum of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidī at Termez has been attributed to Aḥmad b. Khidr (r. 1086?–89 and 1092–95).¹⁹ Moreover, the several fragments of painted epigraphic bands excavated from the site of a royal pavilion on the lower terrace of the citadel of Samarqand/Afrasiyab and the fragmentary inscription on a panel originating from this same citadel, interpreted as the construction text of a Qarakhanid mausoleum, could be related, respectively, to the names of Mas'ūd b. Ḥasan (r. 1160–71) and the honorifics of Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 1178–1203).²⁰ Another three texts cite some authorities of Ferghana. The inscriptions ornamenting the interior of the mausoleum of Shāh Faḍl at Safid Buland (Ala-Buka district, Kyrgyzstan) seem to allude to the governor of Ferghana, Muḥammad b. Naṣr (d. after 1056), and to his son 'Abbās b. Muḥammad;²¹ the name and titles of the latter personage also appear in a graffiti dated 1041, recorded in the Vorukh valley (a Tajik enclave in Kyrgyzstan).²² Finally, the khan of Ferghana, al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan (r. circa 1137–56) is mentioned as the patron of the northern mausoleum in Uzgend, built in 1152.²³ By contrast, the epigraphic fragments do not permit identification of the personage cited in the inscription on the portal of the Ribat-i Malik (see the second case study below), nor of those mentioned in the historical texts on the façade of the southern mausoleum of Uzgend (1185–87).²⁴

The Ferghana inscriptions show the most complete Qarakhanid titling, with the name of the authority preceded by numerous titles and *laqabs*, expressed in Arabic or Turkic language, and followed by a genealogical string emphasising the descent from a specific branch of the family. As with the Ghaznavid inscriptions, none of the Qarakhanid epigraphs mentions the name of the caliph. Again, we see the use of Persian language, of cursive script and of new varieties of Kufic script.

The Great Seljuq inscriptions compose the largest section of the corpus. These are often conserved in entirety, sometimes *in situ* and generally in moderate to good condition. These advantages have contributed to the inscriptions drawing more profound attention from scholars,²⁵ but such interest is also due to the importance of the Seljuqs throughout the Iranian and Near Eastern areas, as well as the close relations between some of the rulers and the Abbasid caliphal line. Almost all of these texts concern events of construction, restoration, or reconstruction; they are written in simple or floriated Kufic, or, more rarely, in cursive, and carved in relief on bricks or stone slabs. The provenance is from a very extensive territory, reaching from Khurasan to Syria and Anatolia, and includes materials from some of the central cities of the caliphate, among them Isfahan, Damascus, Aleppo and Jerusalem. The preliminary stage of gathering and cataloguing the materials included the exami-

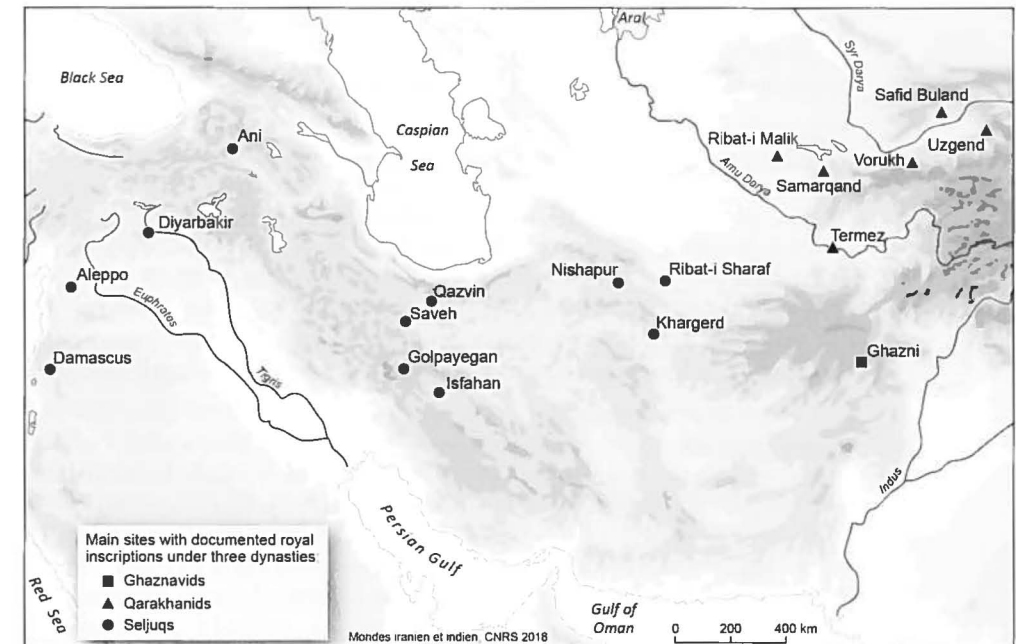


Figure 8.1 Main sites with documented royal inscriptions of the Turkic dynasties, late tenth to early thirteenth century. Source: © Mondes iranien et indien, CNRS 2018

nation of more than thirty one inscriptions. The largest group (about twenty inscriptions) is ascribed to the twenty-year reign of Malik Shāh b. Alp Arslān (r. 1073–92), with provenance of Ani (Armenia), Damascus and Aleppo (Syria), Jerusalem, Diyarbakir (Anatolia) and Isfahan (Iran). The five inscriptions pertaining to the Great Mosque of Damascus also mention his brother Tutush, who controlled Syria from 1078 to 1095; the inscription of the Mausoleum of Ṣāliḥīn in Aleppo quotes his son 'Aḍud al-Dawla Abū Shujā' Aḥmad.

The remaining inscriptions date back to the sultanates of three of Malik Shāh's sons, Maḥmūd I b. Malik Shāh (r. 1092–94; Diyarbakir), Muḥammad Tapar I b. Malik Shāh (r. 1105–18; Diyarbakir and Damascus, as well as Saveh, Qazvin, Golpayegan and Isfahan in Iran), and Sanjar b. Malik Shāh (r. 1118–57; Diyarbakir and Isfahan). Finally, a further inscription in Diyarbakir bears the name of Maḥmūd II b. Muḥammad I (r. 1118–31).²⁶ Particular attention must be paid to some fragmentary epigraphic bands originating from sites in the eastern regions, which present greater problems in deciphering and interpretation, in particular from Khargird in Quhistan, Nishapur and the Ribat-i Sharaf in Khurasan.²⁷

The complexity of the Seljuq sultanate is reflected in almost all the 'royal inscriptions' recorded to date (Figure 8.1). Ample space is provided for mention of the authorities in power, well codified and noted pursuant to a rigid hierarchy. Some cases – for instance, the

inscriptions of the Great Mosque of Damascus, the al-Aqsa Mosque of Jerusalem and the inscription on the minaret of Saveh – include mention of the supreme caliphal authority.²⁸

Innovative features of epigraphy under the Turkic dynasties

A first comparative analysis of the inscriptions produced in the eastern Iranian area following the advent of the Turkic dynasties highlights some specificities that distinguish them from both preceding and contemporary Islamic epigraphic traditions. The following sections present the major epigraphic innovations observed in the corpus, which also constitute lines for further in-depth research.

Language

Arabic remained essentially the sole language of the inscriptions produced across the entire caliphate until at least the tenth century. However, during the eleventh century the use of New Persian²⁹ began to gain ground in the epigraphy of the eastern Islamic provinces.³⁰ The first known instances of inscriptions entirely composed in Persian pertain to the western Qarakhanid territories (for example, the inscriptions of Safid Buland and the Ribāṭ-i Malik) and from the Ghaznavid capital (the inscriptions from the Ghaznavid palace and other areas of Ghazni city).³¹ Although none of these texts bears a date, the mentions of some rulers and the related archaeological dating suggest that most of them pertain to a period from the second half of the eleventh to the early decades of the twelfth century. The common feature of this group of inscriptions lies in their composition in poetic form. Epigraphic Persian thus seems to make its appearance in specific types of monuments (palaces, mausoleums), in the form of inscriptions in verse that flank texts of other kinds executed in Arabic (texts of construction, Qur'anic inscriptions, expressions of well-wishing). This tradition would then expand and evolve during successive eras; in the second half of the twelfth century the newly erected Qarakhanid monuments continue to be embellished with epigraphic bands in Arabic and Persian (for example, the mausoleums of Uzgend and the painted pavilion excavated in Afrasiab). The only observed case of Persian used for a foundation text in prose is that at the entrance to the northern mausoleum at Uzgend (1152). As a final note, research to date has not detected any use of Persian in the inscriptions of the Great Seljuqs.³²

Names and honorifics

The large part of the proper names of the Ghaznavid, Qarakhanid and Seljuq rulers are of Arabic origin, signalling their adherence to the Arab-Muslim onomastic model. However, there are also cases

where the name of the sovereign descends from Iranian or Turkic traditions: examples include 'Bahrām' (which was already the name of several Sasanian kings) for the former, and 'Arslān' (referring in Turkish to 'lion', a totemic animal) for the latter.³³ The honorific titles inserted in the official protocols of the rulers and on coinage were as a rule conferred by the caliph in person and are naturally expressed in Arabic. In royal inscriptions produced over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the name of the sovereign is preceded by numerous honorifics that emphasise his political and religious merits. The multiplication of titles and *laqabs* is witnessed in particular in the Seljuq and Qarakhanid inscriptions, while in extant Ghaznavid inscriptions the family lineage is particularly emphasised through the chain of patronymics (*nasabs*; see the first case study below). In some Persian inscriptions (such as at Safid Buland, Ribāṭ-i Malik and Ghazni), the titles of Arabic origin are transcribed in a Persianised form that adapts to the sound and metric structure of the text (for example, 'Sayf-i dawlat' for 'Sayf al-dawla'). This is a pattern that can also be observed in Persian works of prose and verse of the same era. The eastern Islamic potentates equally express their linguistic plurality through the use of hybrid titles, combining terms that originate from the various Arabic, Persian and Turkic royal protocols (for example, Malik Shāh, Malik Arslān, Shāhanshāh al-a'zam).³⁴ As noted above, the Qarakhanid honorifics demonstrate the widest variety of titles of Turkic origin, always accompanying honorifics in Arabic and always transcribed in the latter language. This goes along with the impetus given to the creation of a Turko-Islamic literary tradition in the first Qarakhanid period.³⁵

Script

The inscriptions of the three dynasties are executed in a rich variety of Kufic script styles, developed in a process begun in the Samanid era and best known from the pottery vessels of Khurasan.³⁶ Beginning in the first half of the eleventh century, pronounced regional variations developed in many of the styles of Kufic script already in use in the western areas of the caliphate,³⁷ accompanied by the appearance of new graphic solutions, often strikingly ornamental. In the most remarkable cases, the stonemasons concentrated this treatment in the terminal parts of the letters, developing an ever more harmonious effect in the upper epigraphic field, without detracting from the legibility of the texts. This is particularly the case in the variants of the so-called 'bordered Kufic',³⁸ in both vegetal and geometric types, of which the Seljuq inscription of Khargird offers an excellent example.³⁹ The Ghaznavids also developed a new style known as 'square Kufic', without decorative elements, but with the words arranged in a manner forming square or rectangular cartouches or

lozenges. At present, the oldest known exemplar of this particular script is from Ghazni, on the fragment of a marble slab that also preserves the portion of an epigraphic band bearing the honorific of Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I in cursive.⁴⁰ It also seems that the Ghaznavids were the first in the entire Muslim world to use cursive script in monumental epigraphy, as witnessed in the epitaph of Maḥmūd b. Sebuktigīn (m. 1030) and in a construction text bearing the name of Mawdūd b. Mas'ūd I (r. 1041–48).⁴¹ The oldest Seljuq inscriptions in cursive can be dated to the reign of Malik Shāh (for instance, the inscription of Nishapur and an inscription of the Great Mosque of Isfahan; see the third case study below). The use of cursive seems to appear in Qarakhanid inscriptions by the end of the eleventh century. The examples dating from the second half of the twelfth century show that this script was already fully developed by this time, including in the western regions of the caliphate.

Three case studies

This section of the chapter presents three case studies in order to illustrate some of the issues involved in the analysis of these epigraphic documents and to demonstrate the need and potential benefits of adopting a cautious, critical approach in interpreting the epigraphic documents derived from problematic architectural and archaeological contexts. The cases presented here deal with each of the three dynasties.

Fragments of epigraphic bands containing portions of names and honorifics: a marble arch of the Ghaznavid Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I

In 1923, the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan documented the upper right corner of the epigraphic frame of an arch, no longer in its original context (Figure 8.2). The information was published two years later by Samuel Flury.⁴² The scholar ascribed the fragment to Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I, on the basis of a brief portion of the honorifics of this ruler. No information was published on the position of the piece, which had been discovered reused, in the back wall of an architectural niche. In 1958 the fragment was again documented by the Italian Archaeological Mission, now specifying that it had been found in the niche, which was within the Ziyārat 'Alī Muḥammad Abū Abī Sayyid 'Arabī, situated 200 m west of Ghazni's citadel.⁴³ Some twenty years later, in 1978, the Italian Mission conducted test excavations in the immediate vicinity of the minaret of Bahrām Shāh, and from these recovered the upper left corner of a marble arch. Giunta had the opportunity to study the fragment and its inscription; based thereupon, she established not only that the piece pertained to the reign of Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I, but also that it was the left part of the same frame published by Flury, in spite of being recovered some

1000 m from the first fragment.⁴⁴ Later yet, in 2002, during the registration and organisation of Ghazni's archaeological materials in the reserves of the National Museum of Kabul, the Italian Mission recorded the presence of a marble frame fragment bearing the name of Maḥmūd b. Sebuktigīn. The provenance of the fragment was unknown; however, Giunta inserted it among the inscriptions in the name of this ruler – in spite of some uncertainties, due to a style of cursive script that seemed to fit better in the epigraphic production of the second half of the eleventh century.⁴⁵ Several years later, through continued study and numerous attempts at reconstructing portions of epigraphic bands, including the preparation of new drawings, it became clear that this piece and the two other fragments definitely belonged to the frame of the same arch of Ibrāhīm and that the name of Maḥmūd was only mentioned as part of the genealogical lineage of this later ruler.



Figure 8.2 *Graphic reconstruction of the arch of Ibrāhīm b. Mas'ūd I (Ghazni).* Source: Drawing by Giunta and Passaro, 2015, © R. Giunta and C. Passaro

[...] مويّد الدين مغيث المسلمين أبي المظفر إبراهيم //
 بن ناصر دين الله أبي سعيد مسعود بن يمين الدولة ... //
 [...] أبي القسم محمود بن نا[صر]...

Uncertainties about function and reading: the Qarakhanid inscription on the arch of the portal of the Ribāṭ-i Malik

This inscription has long been known to the scholarly community (Figure 8.3);⁴⁶ however, its function and attribution are far from being resolved. There still exists debate over the history of this complex, which lies on the road connecting the cities of Bukhara and Samarqand. Based on historiographic sources, the Ribāṭ-i Malik was long considered a caravanserai constructed by the Qarakhanid sovereign Shams al-Mulk Naṣr b. Ibrāhīm (r. 1067–80). However, recent studies have shown that the structure underwent important transformations over time and have proposed that the monument initially served as a Qarakhanid extra-urban residence, ultimately becoming a caravanserai in the post-Mongol era.⁴⁷ Scholars generally accept the dating of the first stage of the complex to the second half of the eleventh century, but the epigraphic sources have not

yielded an exact date.⁴⁸ In fact, although many consider the portal inscription a foundation or restoration text,⁴⁹ the surviving parts do not contain any date and do not inform us about the monument's function. From the first part of the text, the honorific title *sultān-i jahān* ('Sultan of the World' in Persian) can be reconstructed, but this does not correspond to any official title transmitted by the numismatic or historiographic sources; this makes it difficult to identify an association with a dominant historic personage. The inscription presents the further specificity of being composed entirely in Persian language and in verses, as shown by the repetition of the rhyme *-āy*. The reading is complicated by the use of a variety of Kufic script in which many letters can be confused on account of their almost identical shapes and by the absence of diacritical marks. These features, together with some lacunae, have so far prevented a full reading of the text.⁵⁰ However, the definite passages show that the inscription refers to a building (most likely the Ribāt-i Malik itself) constructed by a 'Sultan of the World' and with God's blessing, which turns out to be an earthly paradise. These were recurring themes in the Persian panegyric poetry of the time, probably cited for the purpose of celebrating the splendour of the monument and the associated magnificence of its patron. Thus, in spite of its prominent position, the inscription on the Ribāt-i Malik's portal probably did not function as a foundation text, but as a laudatory and commemorative welcome address. This does not preclude the possibility that a more traditional (Arabic?) text recording the patron's official titles and undertaking was inscribed on some of the lost parts of the building. First-person examination of the inscription allowed Allegranzi to advance a new version of the extant text:

[...] سلطن جهان که کرد این جای بنای زین را [ه] خلق (؟) و ایمنی بودش رای
از بهر خدای کـ [ر] د [ان] عالی جای از وی بتمامی تند (؟) بر [س] د خدای
مانند بهشت گشت این جای خراب بر منظر (؟) فرارو (؟) [...] ⁵²

[The Sul]tan of the world who erected a building in this place,
pondered over the people (?) and safety of this route (?).
For God he has done [that] (?) an elevated place,
thank to him quickly(?) [it was brought (?)] to completion. God
transformed this place in paradise;
destruction at the sight (?) [. . .]

Interpreting the construction history of the Great Mosque of Isfahan: a Seljuq Qur'anic epigraph in cursive

Among the Seljuq inscriptions of the Great Mosque of Isfahan, those running along the abacuses of the pilasters within the southern domed hall are clearly different. In the 1970s, an architectural survey discovered a further part of this same epigraphic band on the north-

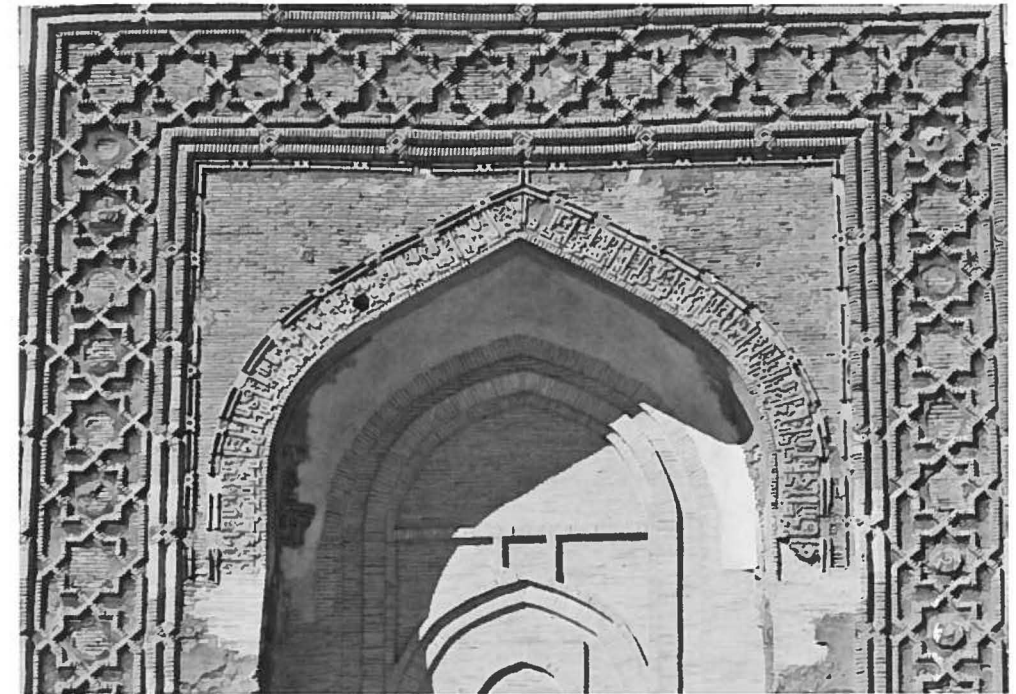


Figure 8.3 The inscription at the portal of the Ribāt-i Malik. Second half of the eleventh century, Navoyi, Uzbekistan. Source: Photograph by the author, 2015, © Viola Allegranzi

ern side of the abacus of the eastern pilaster on the external facade of this hall (Figure 8.4). Unlike the other inscriptions of the domed hall – moulded in baked brick and executed in a particularly sober Kufic script – this epigraphic text is carved in plaster and executed in a very refined cursive on a background scroll. The surviving portions can be traced to Qur'anic verses 9:18–19 and 23:6. The choice of these verses, almost certainly used for propagandistic purposes, is already a matter of discussion.⁵³ However, it seems also useful to reflect on the dating of the entire plaster epigraphic band, particularly given the existence of cursive script used for the transmission of Qur'anic verses. This aspect is noteworthy indeed because, according to the current state of knowledge, the oldest cursive inscriptions (dating to the eleventh century) seem to have been meant mainly for the transmission of historical-documentary information (names and titles of authoritative figures, dates, construction texts), while Kufic writing continued to be reserved for religious expressions and Qur'anic verses.

This domed hall, once a free-standing pavilion, dates back to the reign of Malik Shāh b. Alp Arslān (r. 1073–92), celebrated in the Kufic inscription that runs beneath the dome and also mentions his powerful minister Nizām al-Mulk. This inscription is undated but has



Figure 8.4 *The Qur'anic cursive inscription in the domed hall of the Great Mosque of Isfahan. Late eleventh century, Isfahan, Iran. Source: Photograph by the author, 2014, © Roberta Giunta*

been attributed to 1086–87.⁵⁴ The epigraphic band on the northern exterior wall of the domed hall was obliterated by the addition of the southern iwan, which incorporated the pavilion into the plan of the mosque – an event variously situated during the course of restoration works after the fire that damaged the mosque in 515/1121–22.⁵⁵

A re-examination of the archaeological data and an overall reconsideration of the Seljuq monumental inscriptions could shed light on the period when the epigraphic plaster band was created. It still remains to be determined whether it was carried out at the same time as the construction of the domed hall, or in a subsequent reworking, prior to the construction of the iwan. In the first case, it would be one of the oldest Qur'anic inscriptions in cursive script in the entire Islamic world but, above all, the first cursive Qur'anic inscription commissioned by the Seljuqs. It would in fact precede the three texts of endowment of the dome in the Great Mosque of Qazwin (509/1116).⁵⁶

Notes

1. Roberta Giunta authored the section entitled *The Corpus* and the first and third cases studies; Allegranzi is the author of *Innovative Features of Epigraphy under the Turkic Dynasties* and of the second case study.
2. Among the numerous historical studies, some of the most relevant are Bosworth 1963, 1977; Biran, 'Il-Khanids'; Peacock 2010, 2015.

3. See Durand-Guédy 2010; Karev 2013; Allegranzi 2014.
4. The only two previous repertoires of Islamic inscriptions are Combe, Wiet, Sauvaget et al. 1931–96 (hereafter *RCEA*), and Soudan and Kalus 2017 (hereafter *TEI*). Both of these were specifically conceived as relatively simple instruments for gathering information concerning a maximum number of epigraphic items. Given this, they do not provide for comment, nor the analysis of texts and their context. The *TEI* provides important updates to the *RCEA*, particularly concerning the inscriptions from the Eastern Islamic area, including texts in Persian and Turkic languages. The combination of these repertoires thus compensates for the scarce attention provided to inscriptions from the Islamic context in the published volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (1955–).
5. Among the most significant studies are de Khanikoff 1862; Flury 1925; Bombaci 1966; Sourdél-Thomine 1974, 1978, 1981; Nastič and Kočnev 1995; Nastič 2000; Giunta 2005a. However, there are also studies that deal with a more substantial number of inscriptions on the basis of geographic (Babadjanov and Rahimov 2011), geographic-chronological (Blair 1992) or linguistic (O'Kane 2009) parameters.
6. See Giunta 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2010, 2015, 2017, 2018; Allegranzi 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019.
7. Examples would be the loss of the interior wall decoration of the mausoleum of Shāh Faḍl at Safid Buland (Blair 1992, figs 76–78) and the transformation of that of the mausoleum of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī at Termez (Blair 1992, fig. 112, and Babadjanov and Rahimov 2011, p. 391).
8. See Bosworth 1963, pp. 7–24; Bartol'd 1968, pp. 1–63; Meisami 1999. Notable among more recent studies are Fourniau 2001; Herzig and Stewart 2015.
9. This investigative method had previously given encouraging results in the study of elements in the Ghaznavid and Ghurid honorifics (Giunta and Bresc 2004).
10. In 2004, Roberta Giunta was appointed vice-director of the Mission, with responsibility for the Islamic section and direction of the Islamic Ghazni Archaeological Project (Giunta 2005a). Viola Allegranzi has been a member of the mission research team since 2008. The mission has instituted an online archive (<http://ghazni.bradypus.net>), supported by co-financing from the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' (2011–13; 2019–20).
11. On this date, the city passed under the control of the Ghurid sultan Mu'izz al-dīn Muḥammad b. Sām (1173–1203), and the last Ghaznavid ruler, Khusraw Malik (1160–86), transferred to Lahore, from where he continued to exercise power until the collapse of the dynasty. It should be noted that there are no known epigraphic inscriptions from the archaeological site of Lashkari Bazar, near Bust, bearing the names of a ruler or a date from the period of Ghaznavid reign (Sourdél-Thomine 1978).
12. The Ghaznavid section of the corpus includes a small number of examples from public and private collections held in other nations. Their provenance is unknown.
13. Giunta and Bresc 2004, pp. 166–216; Giunta 2005a. The name of Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd (1030–31) appears on an emerald seal, held in a private collection (Bivar 1987; Giunta 2005a, p. 526, n. 4). Also, the names of Bahrām Shāh b. Mas'ūd III and Khusraw Malik b. Khusraw

- Shāh (1160–86) appear on three glass medallions: that bearing the name of Bahrām Shāh was recovered during excavations of the palace of Termez (Field and Prostov 1942, p. 145; Carboni 2001, p. 275), those with the name of Khusraw Malik are said to originate from Ghazni (Carboni 2001, pp. 272–74, nos 73a, 73b).
14. Concerning the inscriptions on the two minarets, see in particular Sourdel-Thomine 1953, pp. 108–22.
 15. These inscriptions are thus far the only documentation of this building programme carried out in the capital. No relevant historiographic sources are known as of yet.
 16. Kočnev 2001 offers the most thorough study on the genealogy. Relying largely on numismatic sources, the author corrects some previous interpretations of the dating.
 17. On the history of the excavations at Samarqand, see Grenet 2004.
 18. The existing studies on Qarakhanid inscriptions often provide imprecise or incomplete deciphering of the texts and palaeographic information, thus requiring further verification and revision. In the case of items with provenance from the regions of Samarqand and Bukhara, the study has benefitted greatly from first-person examinations by Viola Allegranzi, made possible by missions to Uzbekistan in the years 2015 and 2017 (See Allegranzi 2016; 2017, pp. 381–408).
 19. Blair 1992, p. 168, no. 63. The updated chronology is based on Kočnev 2001. We also note that in recent works published in Uzbekistan the inscription is ascribed to the third quarter of the twelfth century (Babadjanov and Rahimov 2011, p. 385).
 20. See Karev 2005 and Masson 1971, respectively.
 21. Nastič and Kočnev 1988; Nastič 2000.
 22. Blair 1992, p. 115, no. 42.
 23. Ākubovskij 1947.
 24. Umnâkov 1927; Nastič and Kočnev 1995. Some studies based on historical sources attribute the foundation of the Ribât-i Malik to the Qarakhanid sovereign Shams al-Mulk Naṣr b. Ibrāhīm (460–72/1068–80). See Bartol'd 1968, pp. 248, 315; Karev 2013, pp. 125, 126. According to epigraphic and numismatic data, at least two individuals, a sovereign and a military commander, were involved in the construction of the southern mausoleum of Uzgend, completed by 1187 (Nastič and Kočnev 1995, pp. 190–96).
 25. Some of the more in-depth studies are Kay 1897; van Berchem and Strzygowski 1910; Diez 1918; Herzfeld 1921; Gabriel 1935; Wiet 1940; Godard 1949a; Miles 1965; Grabar 1990; and Blair 1992, esp. pp. 149–52, 158–67.
 26. Almost all the Seljuq inscriptions are classified in the *RCEA* (vols 7 and 8) and in the *TEI* (in both cases with previous bibliography).
 27. The epigraphic fragments in terracotta recovered during the excavations at the site of Tepe Madrasa in Nishapur are now dispersed between the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) and the National Museum of Iran (Tehran). For these, there is a hypothesis of attribution to Malik Shāh (see Blair 1992, pp. 170–71, no. 64; Canby, Beyazit, Rugiadi and Peacock 2016, pp. 257–58, no. 162). The inscription of Khargird, also in the National Museum of Iran, could be traced to the powerful Seljuq minister Nizām al-Mulk (Blair 1992, pp. 149–52). The inscription on the iwan of the Ribât-i Sharaf seems to be the sole epigraphic document bearing the name of Sanjar b. Malik Shāh (r. 1118–57; see

- Godard 1949a, pp. 10–13). Note that the inscription bearing the name of Ṭughril III b. Arslān Shāh (r. 1176–94), executed on a panel in gypsum plaster, allegedly excavated in the vicinity of Rayy (Iran) and held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (no. 1929–69–1), is considered highly suspect (see Hillenbrand 2010; Canby, Beyazit, Rugiadi and Peacock 2016, pp. 76–77, no. 16).
28. This usage was justified on the basis of the 'theory of imamate'. On this, see Crone 2004, pp. 232–49; Campanini 2011.
 29. New Persian refers to the Persian language transcribed in the Arabic alphabet, which gained widespread usage following the Islamic conquest. Note, however, that bilingual inscriptions in Arabic and Middle Persian (Pahlavi) were executed in the first half of the eleventh century in northern Iran (Blair 1992, p. 85, no. 31, and p. 88, no. 32).
 30. On the introduction and expansion of Persian in Islamic epigraphy, see O'Kane 2009.
 31. Umnâkov 1927; Bombaci 1966; Nastič 2000; Allegranzi 2017, 2018, 2019. An inscription in Arabo-Persian with provenance from a mausoleum built at Zalamkot (Swat, Pakistan) in 1011 (Rahman 1998), and a Buyid inscription executed at Persepolis in 1046, in which a few Persian words are inserted to communicate the date (Blair 1992, p. 118, no. 43), should also be mentioned.
 32. However, it should be noted that the inscription on the mausoleum of Mu'mina Khātūn at Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan, 1186) concludes with some verses in Persian (Jacobsthal 1899, p. 21). This monument was founded by the local Eldiguzids, a very influential line of Atabegs in the late Seljuq period.
 33. Concerning the use of Turkic names in the Ghaznavid period, see Bosworth 2001, where previous studies are exhaustively listed; see also Perry 2006. It is notable that most studies so far have focused on the names of Turkish officers and *ghulāms*, while the issue of Turkish names and titles adopted by rulers is less investigated. An exception is represented by Pritsak's essay on the Qarakhanid lineage (Pritsak 1954), even if further numismatic studies have shown that it is not possible to deduce the hierarchy of the entire Qarakhanid family on the basis of their Turkic titles, as had been hoped (Kočnev 2001, pp. 50, 51).
 34. The Buyid dynasty had already adopted the ancient Iranian title *shāhan-shāh*, as early as the tenth century. See Madelung 1969.
 35. Vásáry 2015.
 36. See Kračkovskaâ 1949; Volov 1966. Very few monumental epigraphs have been conclusively ascribed to the Samanid rulers, making it difficult to reconstruct accurately the evolutionary process of writing styles in the Khurasan and Transoxiana regions, which may have begun as early as the first half of the ninth century.
 37. The most distinctive are the different Kufic styles with ornamental apices, and above all what is known as floriated Kufic (see Grohmann 1957; Tabbaa 1994; Blair 1992).
 38. The term derives from the French 'coufique à bordure ornementale', first used by Flury 1925.
 39. See Blair 1992, pp. 149–52.
 40. This fragment was first reported by Bivar 1986.
 41. Giunta 2001; Giunta 2005a, pp. 527–28, 532–34.
 42. Flury 1925, pp. 74–75, no. 3, pl. XIII.I.
 43. We greatly appreciate the painstaking work of Dr Martina Massullo, in

- locating and geo-referencing information from the *ziyārāt* of the city, and of her development of a map with indications of cemetery areas (Massullo forthcoming).
44. Giunta 2001, pp. 534–35.
 45. Ibid. pp. 528–29.
 46. Umnâkov 1927 provided the first epigraphic study on the monument, whose ruins have attracted scholarly attention since the mid-nineteenth century.
 47. See Karev 2013, p. 126 (with bibliography). Nemceva 2009 provides the most recent summary of archaeological research on Ribât-i Malik.
 48. Umnâkov 1927, pp. 187–88, published a Qur'anic inscription recorded from a minaret, in the southwest corner of the site, which was later destroyed. Nemceva 2009, figs 61, 63, also documents a fragmentary inscription found inside the complex, attributed to the twelfth century for archaeological and stylistic reasons.
 49. See, for example, Blair 1992, p. 153, no. 58.
 50. The reading of the inscription by Umnâkov 1927, p. 187, is repeated by Bombaci 1966, p. 37 – who notes certain similarities with the poetic inscriptions of the Ghaznavid palace at Ghazni – and by Blair 1992, p. 153, no. 58. A slightly different version, still with omissions, is provided in Babadjanov and Rahimov 2011, p. 493.
 51. The last character is damaged and an alternative reading of the passage would be *rā[d] khulq*—that is, 'generous disposition'.
 52. The damaging and restoration of the two jambs of the archway prevent us from defining the length of the lacunae at the beginning and end of the text.
 53. See in particular Grabar 1990, pp. 32–33; Scerrato 1994.
 54. See, for example, Blair 1992, pp. 160–63.
 55. A Seljuq inscription which celebrates the restoration of the building following the fire is carved on the north-eastern gate of the mosque (see Giunta 2018, pp. 13–14).
 56. *RCEA*, vol. 8, nos. 2965–67.

CHAPTER NINE

Inscribed Identities: Some Monumental Inscriptions in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus

Patricia Blessing

STUDIES ON INSCRIPTIONS in medieval Islamic monuments in Anatolia have primarily concentrated on the historical content, including the date of the foundation and the patron. Often more so than chronicles of the time, inscriptions reflect the complex dynamics of religious and political identity, language and frontier cultures that were at stake in late-thirteenth-century Anatolia, as the region shifted between Seljuq and Mongol rule.¹ Inscriptions became an expression of a frontier society at the intersection between Byzantium, the Christian kingdoms of the Caucasus and the Islamic world. Based on case studies of architecture and epigraphy, this chapter discusses the location of inscriptions on buildings, exploring how these placements, together with the use of different types of script materials and sizes, were part of a carefully conceived scheme.² This analysis will show that inscriptions were placed deliberately in order to establish a specific way of perceiving the monument and its patron.

Carved in stone or inlaid in cut-tile mosaic, foundation inscriptions and other monumental inscriptions in medieval Anatolia are largely in Arabic, although there also exist Persian ones, such as the no-longer extant quotations from the *Shahnama* on the city walls of Konya, as mentioned by Ibn Bibi, historiographer and author of the major chronicle of the history of the Rum Seljuq Sultanate in the thirteenth century.³ Qur'an passages are important elements in overall programmes of inscriptions in a monument; yet often they have not been well studied and are neglected in many of the epigraphic surveys.⁴ Full inscription cycles can serve as guides through the building and confer a carefully crafted view of the patron. This observation points to the problem of literacy and the question of how widespread an understanding of the formulaic Arabic in these texts was in Anatolia, where Greek, Armenian and Turkish were dominant, while Persian was the literary language of the Seljuq court.⁵