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Artisans’ Signatures from Pre-Mongol Iranian Metalwork. An Epigraphic and Palaeographic Analysis

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Abstract

The paper focuses on Iranian and Eastern Iranian artisans who signed metalwork datable up to the Mongol period. An updated list gathers 37 names, for the most already known but scattered in many different publications. The epigraphic and palaeographic analysis, supported by drawings of signatures, highlights general rules and specific exceptions.

Keywords

Islamic metalworkers – signatures – Iran – Khurasan – Sistan

How much do we know about medieval artisans from the Iranian and Eastern Iranian area and the metalwork they created? Artisans were most probably analphabetic; they left no written trace other than their own works.1 At these we should look then. Starting from Mayer’s work (1959),2 this paper will be the occasion for assessing the state of the art, mostly from an epigraphic and palaeographic point of view, about artisans’ signatures.

* Arabic transliteration has been chosen throughout the paper, with the exception of artisans’ names spelled in Persian in the original inscriptions.

Typically, metalwork bear benedictory inscriptions, which give no information of historical interest. Texts attesting the manufacturing are rare: they usually limit to the artisan's name, only in exceptional cases giving the date and place of production, or the name of the recipient and/or patron who ordered the work.

From a terminological point of view, we know that silversmiths were diversified from goldsmiths already in the Sasanian period. Such an ancient distinction confirms the development of different specializations. Most probably, valuable artefacts from the mid-12th century onward were the outcome of a joint work of at least two different professional figures: the artisan that made the object (the coppersmith or goldsmith), who was responsible for its manufacturing, and the person who conceived and executed the decoration, the designer. The latter could be an engraver, a chiseller and inlayer. Such work distribution emerges from few inscriptions that bear more than one artisan's name and specify their role.

Specialized artisans served the wealthy clientele, while the humbler ones made objects of daily use or working tools for common people. Some works, such the manufacturing of scientific and medical instruments, and some decorations, as the incision on silver to host the niello, required a specific training and highly skilled hands. These capable people probably represented a sort of élite among the artisan class. Moreover, goldsmith and merchants of precious metals were for the majority non-Muslim, in consideration of the Islamic orthodoxy ban on the matter.

This brief study has faced some limits, such as the unavailability of images portraying all the recorded signatures, and doubts about chronology or even authenticity raised by some metalwork. Notwithstanding, thirty-seven artisans' names, generally introduced by the term 'amal, 'the work of', are included within the geographical and chronological boundaries of this list. The first group gathers sixteen signatures ending in a nisba, 'adjective of geographic relation', while the second group those without nisba. They appear in the English alphabetical order among each group. The epigraphic and palaeographic

3 Allan, Persian Metal: p. 19.
analysis have been led on the available pictures, helped by drawings of 30 signatures (24 made by the author).

Names Ending in a *nisba* [16 entries]

ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Maṣʿūd al-Nīšābūrī7 – 

1. **Inkwell**, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably second half of 12th c., yet in the Brummer Collection, then in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. No. 48.108).8

The signature (Pl. I.1) appears in a continuous band running on the flat shoulder of inkwell’s lid. The band, interrupted by three series of four roundels each (framing the zodiac signs) includes a benedictory inscription, in two sections; the third section is occupied by the artisan’s name. The text disposes, as in other sections, in two superimposed lines, clearly divided by a copper inlaid fillet. All the inscriptions are inlaid with silver: unfortunately, the signature portion is in a bad state of preservation; the inlay is completely vanished making the reading more difficult. The script is a plain kufic with vegetal scrolls running on the background.

ʿAmal introduces the artisan’s name, which is composed by an *ism*, ‘name’, a *nasab*, ‘genealogy’, and a *nisba* indicating the city of Nishapur.

The signature is part of the object decorative scheme: it shares the same position of the benedictory text and follows the closing expression *li-ṣāḥibi-hi*; the writing and decorative style are coherent as well.

2. **Perfume-sprinkler**, copper alloy inlaid with copper, undated: probably 12th c., yet in the Sarre Collection, then in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.9

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No clear picture of the signature is published, but some information is available. The signature lies vertically along the object’s body, introduced by ‘amal. The script is kufic with diacritical dots: three dots appear under the so demarcated šī in the term Nišābūrī, while the first yāʾ is omitted according to an archaic custom. The object bears also some Persian maxims.10

Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad al-Marwazī11

1. **Cauldron, copper alloy, undated: probably second half of 12th-early 13th c., former Stuart C. Welsh Collection, Cambridge, Massachusetts.**12

The signature (Pl. I.2) is framed by a trapezoidal cartouche on the back flange of the cauldron. The text disposes mainly on a single line, but the last term – the nisba – appears above it. The upper margin of the cartouche ends, in the corners, in a vegetal motif. Series of two and three deep nicks repeat above the cartouche on the flange margin.

The script is floriated kufic, with sharp triangular apices; some letters, namely the kāf in Bakr and the ḥā’ in Ahmad end up in a curl. The terminal of the lām in ‘amal traces a kind of step and ends in a little curl as well. Few dots appear above and below letters without any diacritical role; vegetal elements (leaves) are visible on the background and originating from the letters. The text exceeds cartouche margin on both lateral sides; further decorative elements appear outside of it.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by a nasab and a nisba indicating the city of Merv. The signature is richly decorated by many added elements. The script itself generates some of them. It would be worthy to remind that signatures usually are the only kind of text appearing on cauldrons.

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2. **Cauldron, undated: probably second half of 12th-early 13th c., Art Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi (Inv. No. 1/3).**

The signature (Pl. I.3) is extraordinarily similar to the previous one: same position, frame, text and its disposition, script, and decorative elements. The two differ in few tiny details. The nicks, engraved between the flange edge and cartouche margin, are again in alternating series of two and three, but they appear slightly moved toward the right. The trilobed flower above the rāʾ in the term Marwazī is less defined in its petals.

Other unsigned cauldrons, spread in many collections, were probably issued by the same workshop.14

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Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sijzī

– **Bowl, copper alloy, undated: probably late 10th c., yet in the Martin Collection, then in the Brummer Collection, and finally in the Sydney Burney Collection, London.**

The signature (Pl. I.4) runs into a band below the external rim of the bowl. The text disposes on a single line, with the exception of the starting mīm in Muḥammad and the lām and sīn in Sijzī, which are in a higher position. The script is a kufic with ornamental apices. Drop-shaped elements and chevrons appear above short letters, probably to fill the empty spaces. The inner circle of the mīms defines a four-petalled vegetal element.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal, and is composed by a kunya, ‘patronymic’, an ism, a nasab and a nisba, the latter pointing to the region of Sijistan, largely known as Sistan.

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The signature is part of a longer text of unknown content.17

Abū Sahl al-Harawī – see Muḥammad b. Abī Sahl al-Harawī

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Harawī18 –

Lampstand shaft, copper alloy, undated: probably 12th c., former N. Heeramaneck Collection, New York.19

There is no available picture of this signature. The artisan’s name is introduced by the term ‘ʿamal and followed by a maxim certainly concerning its work: li-kull ʿajal kitāb wa li-kull ‘amal ʿawāb, ‘every moment is inscribed, and every work is rewarded’.

ʿAlī b. (…) al-Isfīrāʾinī20 –

Small ewer, copper alloy, undated: probably late 12th c., yet in the Peytel Collection, now in the Louvre Museum (Inv. No. MAO428).21

The signature (Pl. II.1) lies on the ewer’s body, approximately near the lower junction point of its handle. It runs horizontally, unframed, in the free space comprised between a continuous band and a cartouche. The script is cursive; there are some dots, but it is unclear whether they play a diacritical role or not.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘ʿamal and is composed by an ism, a nasab and a nisba pointing to a city on the north-west of Nishapur. The nasab composition is unclear: the name ʿUmar is reported by Mayer, while

17 Unfortunately, the full inscription has never been published.
20 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 38.
on the Louvre Museum website Awf is proposed. The state of preservation in that portion makes it impossible to read more. The following term, muwaqqit, according to the Louvre record, would be an epithet.

The signature must have been added to the object later than the manufacturing time, since it is clearly extraneous to the decorative scheme. According to Melikian Chirvani it could date to the 13th century and it would confirm that artisans’ signatures increased the artefacts value, so that it became worthy to add some fakes ones. Recently, the microscope analysis of the ewer has revealed that the signature lies on a stratigraphic level different from that of other inscriptions, thus confirming the addition.

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Hašan b. Muḥammad b. Sijzī –  

- *Ewer with lamp-shaped spout, copper alloy, undated: probably late 10th-early 11th century, former Rawza Museum, Ghazni (Inv. No. 32).*

The signature (Pl. II.2), split in two sections, lies along two sides of the ewer’s neck: in the first section (ʿamal Hašan b.), the inscription proceeds downward, while it goes upward in the second one (Muḥammad b. Sijzī). This peculiar scheme recurs on another signed ewer from Transoxiana (see Ahmad).

The text is unframed and vertically disposed. The signature is the only inscription on the object. Artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal, and is composed by an ism and a double nasab, the second term of whom happens to be a nisba indicating the region of Sistan. Unusually, it lacks the article.

The writing style is a peculiar kufic script, characterized by ornamental triangular apices and decorative additional terminals (see for example the ḥāʾ in the term Hašan). The mīm has a pointed drop-shaped body.

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24 I am indebted to Annabelle Collinet, curator of the Islamic Department at the Louvre Museum, who has kindly shared first results of her project ‘ISLAMETAL, an Archaeometallurgical Study of the Louvre Iranian World Collection of Metalwares, 10th-15th century AD’.
Ḫājakī Tūsī –

- Cauldron, quaternary alloy, undated: probably 13th century, Ashmolean Museum (Inv. No. 1969.87). The signature lies on the cauldron's flange opposite to the pouring one. Unfortunately, the object is unpublished and no further information is available. Artisan's name is composed by an ism (possibly derived from a title) and a nisba pointing to the city of Tus.

Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Harawi

- Ewer, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, šaʿbān 577/10th December 1181-7th January 1182, Museum of Georgian History, Tbilisi (Inv. No. MS 135). An Arabic inscription containing the signature and the date goes down from top to bottom of one ewer's flute; other ten flutes are occupied by Persian verses. The text is horizontally disposed and framed into a long cartouche. On the background runs a complex vegetal motif, observed also on the non-epigraphic flutes, which makes the reading difficult.

The artisan's name is introduced by al-ʿamal – awkwardly provided with the article – and al-naqqās, 'the decorator'.

The place of manufacturing, Herat, unusually is stated in the inscription. According to Allan, this ewer along with the Bobrinsky bucket (see below Masʿūd b. Aḥmad) would be enough in support of al-Qazwīnī's appreciation of silver inlaid (ṣufr) artefacts from the city of Herat.

The script is cursive as in the Persian inscription as well, but no specific picture of the signature is published.

27 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 59.
29 The Persian inscription attests that the ewer was meant for ablutions, and not for serving drinks.
Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī – محمد القزوني

Cauldron, copper alloy, undated: probably 12th-13th c., formerly in the Bobrinsky Collection, now in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. KI.3554). The signature (Pl. II.3) lies on the cauldron’s pouring flange, framed in two cartouches that flank the central ornamental grill. The flange is broken in one corner, but the damage affects just the cartouche margin, not the inscription. Each cartouche has a straight and a concave side; the text disposes on two lines. Spiralling scrolls run on the background.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism and a nisba pointing to the city of Qazvin.

The script is a kufic characterized by sharp apices and pentagonal mīms. The mīm in the term Maḥmūd is raised above the ḥāʾ, as it usually occurs in writing this name and Muḥammad one; the final dāl is elevated half way between the lām of ‘amal and the wāw in Maḥmūd: the latter is concave-cut to host it. The apices topping the article hastae in the term al-Qazwīnī are awkwardly affronted to fit one another, instead of being addorsed.

The inscription is well integrated in the cauldron decorative scheme.

Muḥammad b. Abī Sahl al-Harawī – محمد بن أبي سهل الهروي

Inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: second half of 12th-early 13th c., Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (Inv. No. 54.514). The signature (Pl. II.4) is on the lid side, framed into a cartouche. The text lies mainly on a single line; few letters dispose above it. The script is a plain kufic, characterized by the hāʾ’s written as in final position regardless to the position they occupy (see the terms Sahl and al-Harawi).

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31 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 59.
33 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 65.
A richly budded spiralling scroll runs on the background. The inscription is inlaid with silver, just as any other epigraphy on the inkwell. The signature follows a standard benedictory text, which occupies the other two cartouches on the lid side. So, it is perfectly integrated in the object’s decorative scheme.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism, a nasab and a nisba, the latter pointing to the city of Herat.

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sijzī – محمد بن أحمد السجزي

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Iṣfahānī35 – محمد بن علي الإصفهاني

Muḥammad Ṭūsī36 – محمد طوسي

35 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 66.
ʿAmal introduces the artisan's name, composed by an ism and a nisba with no article pointing to the city of Tus, in Khurasan.

The text disposes mainly on two lines, but many exceptions are visible: the round mīm in the term ʿamal descends below the main writing line, while the first three letters in the term Muḥammad (mīm-ḥaʾ-mīm) are superimposed one another. The sīn in the term Ṭūsī is raised above the preceding wāw and the following yāʾ shows a descending terminal.

Letters like ʿayn, mīns, ūn and wāw tend to a full rounded shape. Some others are significantly bigger than the others: see the lām, ḥāʾ and dāl.

The signature is so deeply integrated in the object decorative scheme not to differ in any respect from the inscription it is put along. Clearly, it was not meant to stand alone, but to be read continually. The vegetal motif is engraved with a depth similar to that of letters, so that, thanks also to the cursive script, the two elements tend to camouflage together.

Nāṣir b. Asʿad al-Nīsābūrī37 –

– Inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably second half of 12th c., yet in the Brummer Collection, then in the Adrienne Minassian Collection, New York.38

The signature (Pl. III.1) lies on the lid side, framed in a cartouche, following a benedictory inscription closed by the expression li-ṣāḥibi-hi. The text disposes on a single line. The script is a plain kufic, whose features reveal close similarities with the signature by ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Aḥmad al-Nīsābūrī (see above).

The artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal and is composed by an ism, a nasab and a nisba, the latter pointing to the city of Nishapur.

This is one of the few Seljuq metalwork bearing Persian inscription beside Arabic ones.39

37 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 76.
38 Ağā-Öğlu, “Preliminary Note”: p. 124, figs. 3-5; Melikian-Chirvani, Islamic Metalwork: p. 72.
39 The expression muẓaffar bād, ‘be he victorious’, has been detected among the Persian inscriptions running on the inkwell box. See Ağā-Öğlu, “Preliminary Note”: p. 124.
Pāydār b. Marzabān al-Qāʾinī –  

Polylobed tripod base of lampstand, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably late 12th-early 13th c., the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. IR-1545). The signature (Pl. III.2) runs unframed on the base shoulder, divided in three sections by four roundels and followed by benedictory terms. The text is inlaid with silver.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism, a nasab and a nisba, the latter pointing to the city of Qāʾin, in the region of Kuhistan, southern Khurasan. The names are clearly of Persian origin.

The script is cursive, characterized by wide terminals of the nūn. The text disposes on a single line, but the second alif in the term Pāydār and the mīm in Marzabān are elevated above the letters preceding them; moreover, the alif shows an erroneous ligature with the following rā’. The mīm in the first term ‘amal remains open at its top as a half-circle. An elongated chevron appears above the final yaʾ at the end of the inscription. No other sign or background decoration is visible. This hand-written-like style is limited to the signature, and differs significantly from the other scripts employed for benedictory texts on the object: cursive along the base polylobed rim and kufic around the neck. The signature was given a well visible position on the object, even enhanced by the silver inlay and the different script.

Šāḏī (al-Harawī) –  

1. Pen-box, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, 607/1210-1, probably from Merv, Freer Gallery, Washington DC (Inv. No. 36.7). The signature (Pl. III.3) lies on the pen-box lid side. Even if unframed, the inscription was comprised in the central section by the two now missing

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closing plates. The text is split in two sections by an elaborated knot. In the first, the artisan’s name, composed by an ism and the nisba al-naqqāš, ‘the decorator’, is introduced by ʿamal; while the second section contains the date (fi ʿsuhūr sana sabʾ wa sittumiya). The text disposes on a single line, with the exception of some letters raised on an upper line in the second section: in particular, the rāʾ in the term ʿsuhūr, whose hāʾ is also written as in final position; the conjunction wāw between the terms sabʾ and sittumiya, and the last two letters of the latter.

The script is a kufic traced by a thin line and characterized by half-lance-shaped apices. Additional hastae with an apice evolving in a half-palmette pair with the lām in the term ʿamal and the alif in Šāḏī and al-naqqāš. The final yāʾs in the artisan’s name and in the term fi are treated as a knot with up-ending terminal in form of a duck head. The latter feature repeats in the terminal of the final šīn in the term al-naqqāš. A knotted lām-alif group is suspended as a chevron to fill the empty space left above the terms sana sabʾ; with its horizontally disposed apices it echoes the additional hasta at the beginning of inscription (see the term ʿamal).

The inscription is perfectly integrated in the decoration and equally silver inlaid.

2. Portable pen-box (provided with a tiny inkwell), copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: most probably early 13th century, retrieved in Badghis, northeast of Herat.43

The signature (Pl. III.4) lies on top of the pen-box, framed into an isolated trapezoidal area. The text disposes on a single line; letters are quite tight together, given the short space available. The script is a bold kufic, characterized by šīns with degrading teeth. Ligatures are either rounded, descending below the writing line, or flat and short. Hastae show half-lance-shaped apices; an additional hasta is put beside the lām and behind the mīm in the term ʿamal, so to create a pair; nonetheless, its apice does not mirror the lām’s one, but evolves in a bigger vegetal leaf. The terminal of the final šīn climbs up ending as a hasta with apice. The most interesting letter in the composition is by far the yāʾ in the term Šāḏī: it is shaped as a knotted bow, with an up-ending terminal, just as in other pen-boxes signed by the same artisan. This peculiar drawing makes it a sort of artistic mark.

The epigraphical background is minutely ring-dotted and tripartite flowers emerge from delicate thin stems and scrolls, filling the empty spaces above short letters. The whole decoration is inlaid with silver. The artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal and is composed just by the ʾism, followed by the nisba naqqāš.\textsuperscript{44} This last term is written without article, in smaller and thinner letters. The inscription appears very neat; the refined background is coherent with that visible on the bigger section of the object’s top.

The name of the patron/recipient, Majd al-Mulk al-Muẓaffar, vizier of sultan ‘Alāʾ al-dīn Muḥammad Ḵwārizm-šāh, is also expressed.\textsuperscript{45} Considered his high profile, the object was likely made in the reign’s capital.

3. \textit{Pen-box provided with a tiny inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably first quarter of 13th century, Louvre Museum (Inv. No. MAO2228)}. The signature (Pl. IV.1) occupies the same position as in the preceding two pen-boxes. The test disposes on a single line, with the exception of the final ʿin in the term al-naqqāš, which is obliquely raised on an upper line for space lacking. The letter terminal overlaps the preceding hasta. The script is a plain kufic with some recurring features typical of Šāḏī: the additional hasta above the ṣīn in the term ʿamal, so to pair the ḥāʾ’s one; the knotted ẓāʾ in his name; the alternate squared flat or rounded ligatures between letters.

Letters are boldly engraved as in the pen-box from Badghis, but the silver inlay is far thinner, so that the inscription looks different. An inlaid cursive benedictory inscription runs on both the object sides, and a third one, just engraved, is framed in cartouches on the backside. All inscriptions share the same ring-dotted and vegetal background.

4. \textit{Bird-shaped toilet flask, copper alloy inlaid with silver, undated: most probably early 13th century, purchased in Kabul where it arrived directly from Herat}.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Mayer (\textit{Metalworkers}: p. 12) underlined that the term naqš could mean either decoration or design, thus indicating a practical or theoretical work. Herzfeld, instead, interpreted it as ‘engraver’.

\textsuperscript{45} The presence of a pedigree on an object of this period is exceptional; the only other specimen is a bowl entitled to the vizier of Khurasan (Melikian-Chirvani, “Bronzes – VII”: p. 232). Such use spread in particular in the 14th century.

The signature lies on the larger area of the almond-shaped object, framed into a cartouche and horizontally disposed. The inscription is inlaid with silver, as the whole decoration. The text disposes on a single line. The script is kufic, with half-lance-shaped apices. Again, an additional hasta appears beside the lām in the term ‘amal.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism, the professional designation al-naqqāš and the nisba al-Harawī. The latter element appears only on this object, while it usually is omitted from other works by the same artisan.

The signature is in a bad state of preservation and not clearly visible in the available picture.

These objects were probably made between Merv and Herat. Other unsigned works can be ascribed to his workshop, if not to the artisan himself.47

\[\text{...}\]

‘Umar b. Abīl-ʿAlā b. Aḥmad Iṣfahānī48 – می‌شود این‌ها به عنوانی می‌دانند

– Pen-box, copper alloy, 569/1173-4, formerly in the Siouffi Collection, present owner unknown.49

Unfortunately, there is no available picture of the object. The artisan’s name is composed by an ism, a kunya used as a name by his father, a second nasab related to his grandfather and a nisba referring to the city of Isfahan.

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48 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 87.
49 Wiet, Cuivres: pp. 19 no. 7, 23 no. 7, 81 no. 2, 166 no. 18; Répertoire Chronologique d’Épigraphie Arabe, IX (Cairo: IFAO, 1937): no. 3314bis; Harari, “The Arts of Metalwork”: pp. 2491, footnote no. 1, 2520: he reports that the object has disappeared.
Names without *nisba* [21 entries]

Abū’l-Fāṭḥ – أبو الفتح

– *Sub-globular ribbed ewer, copper alloy, undated: probably 11th-12th c., Kabul Museum (former collection, Inv. No. 58.2.19).*

The signature (Pl. IV.2) occupies one of the ewer’s ribs. A long rectangular cartouche goes vertically down the rib defined by two fillets of cuts; the text disposes into it. The inscription is preceded by an engraved decorative lozenge, and a hole left by the missing spout.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ʿ*amal*, and is composed just by a *kunya*. The script is a bold kufic, characterized by cut sloping letters and sharply pointed *mīm* and *fāʾ*. The final *ḥāʾ* in the term al-Fāṭḥ shows a flattened terminal, which comes back below the letter itself.

The background is ring-dotted, and the inscription deeply engraved to outstand onto it. Some additional signs – big dots – appear above the *wāw* in the term Abū and above the horizontally raised ligature between the *tāʾ* and the *ḥāʾ* in Fāṭḥ. A palmette included into a spiralling scroll is added at the end of cartouche, while a vegetal stem raises before the inscription beginning, then falling on the *ʿayn*.

The signature disposes into a space naturally provided by the object morphology and defined by the same decorative feature – the fillets with cuts – employed on other ribs.

After the term al-Fāṭḥ there are two signs more, which can be interpreted in many ways. They could even be a couple of *hastae*, with no meaning, used just to fill the empty space remained. It could be a *wāw* with an up-ending terminal paired by an additional *hasta*; or it can be read as *bin*, then as the artisan’s name would continue. In this regard, it would be worthy to note that the ewer bears four cartouches, conceived and disposed in axial pairs: two include a benedictory text; the third cartouche is the signature’s one and the fourth is empty, but well defined and complete of vegetal elements at its beginning and end. So, one could suppose that the fourth cartouche was meant to host the second part of artisan’s name, or even the name of a second artisan, if the letter closing the signature’s cartouche is a *wāw*.

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51 No other *nūn* among those inscribed on the ewer shows an up-ending terminal, nor any *wāw*. 
Abūʾl-Munīf (?) b. Maṣʿūd52 – incubus

- Incense burner, copper alloy inlaid with gold and silver, undated: probably early 13th c., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Inv. No. 46.1135).53
The signature (Pl. IV.3) lies on the backside of the object’s upper half. The latter is divided in three sections: the central, rectangular one bears a cartouche, whose silver inlaid margin generates in the centre a knot dividing the space in two sections. There the signature disposes vertically, mainly on a single line. The inscription and its vegetal background are inlaid with silver, just as the other decorative elements on the object. The vegetal scrolls running on the background of all inscriptions are richly foliated and floriated.

The script is a peculiar kind of kufic, characterized by slim letters tight one another, the hastae, the sīn teeth and the nūn are particularly elongated; the mīms show pentagonal bodies, the wāw in the term Abū is similarly pointed, while the ʿayn draws a perfect upturned triangle. The wāw in the term Maṣʿūd, instead, looks composed by interlacing squared segments: the upper one is probably flattened to consent the little final dāl to dispose above it. Both the final fāʾ in al-Munīf and the nūn in the term bin have climbing up terminals. The fāʾ, in particular, facing directly the knot interruption mirrors in a far rigid way its shape.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by a kunya and a nasab.

Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad54 – incubus

- Padlock, copper alloy, 541/1146-7, retrieved in the ruins of Wolga-Bulghar, Bilyarshk, Kazan Museum.55

52 Mayer, Metalworkers: pp. 25-6.
The artisan’s name is composed by a kunya, employed as the ism, and a nasab.

There is no available picture of the object.

Aḥmad (…) – ) […]

- Ewer with lamp-shaped spout, copper alloy, undated: probably 10th c., retrieved in Šāhrīstān, Usrūšāna (Transoxiana, modern-day Tajikistan).56

Signature’s first section – the only part deciphered by archaeologists – reads from top to bottom the artisan’s ism, introduced by the term ‘amal; the name probably continues in the second section, disposed on the other side of the ewer.

This object is part of a numerous group of signed ewers from Transoxiana, which shares some morphological and decorative features with the ewer signed by Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sijzī (see above).

al-Faḍl or Bā Faḍl – الفضل / بـ أحمد

- Sub-globular ribbed ewer, copper alloy inlaid with copper, undated: late 10th-early 11th c., Museum of Georgian History, Tbilisi (Inv. No. MS 134).57

The signature (Pl. IV.4) lies along the rib below the ewer’s pouring lip. It disposes horizontally on a single line, framed in two rectangular cartouches, with concave short sides, alternated to three roundels. In the first cartouche, unfortunately not published, the introductive term ‘amal is followed by an additional hasta. The background is ring-dotted.

The script is kufic with sharp apices. All the letters are linked together: that would represent an orthographic error in the reading Bā Faḍl – since the alif should be separated from the fā’ – as well as in the reading al-Faḍl – since the article alif should be separated from the lām.

Two additional drop-shaped elements appear on the ground, respectively above the fā’ and below the ḍād; they are maybe meant to represent leaves. The first letter is probably a bā’, given its shortness in respect to the

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following lām, whose height is paralleled just thanks to a decorative vegetal element emerging from the apice.

The decorative composition observed on the signed rib repeats with the same scheme on another rib, bearing a benedictory expression, also inlaid with copper. The writing style is the same, just as the other decorative elements.

…

ʿAlī b. Abī Naṣr – علي بن أبي نصر

- Feline-shaped incense burner, copper alloy, undated: probably 11th c., retrieved in the excavation of Khulbuk (southern Tajikistan) in 1978, Donish Institute of History, Dushambe (Inv. No. 571/1).58

The available picture portrays a long trapezoidal cartouche, with concave short sides, on one side of the feline body. It frames the maxim kull ʿamal rijāl, ‘to every work [its] accomplisher’, disposed on a single line. The script is kufic with sharp apices; most of letters’ terminals climb up and evolve in bipartite vegetal elements.

The signature should precede it, on the other side of the feline. Artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal and is composed by an ism and a nasab.

…

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Abūʾl-Qāʾim – علي بن محمد بن القيم

- Aquamanile in shape of three sculptured animals, copper alloy, muḥarram 603/August-September 1206, the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. Az-225).59

The signature (Pl. V.1) goes down one side of the cow’s throat, unframed and obliquely disposed following the object’s shape. The whole inscription deploys along both sides of the cow’s neck and throat and continues on its

snout as well. It states that the three zoomorphic elements of the sculpture-
lke vessel were cast in one and expresses the name of the patron, Rūzbih
bin Afrīdūn (bin) Burzin, and that of his brother the recipient, Šāh-Burzin bin
Afrīdūn (bin) Burzin. The inscription was originally inlaid with silver: just
traces remain.

A cut split in two the first term, ʿamal, which introduces the artisan’s
ism, two nasabs (one composed by an ism, the second by a kunya), and the
professional nisba al-naqqāš, ‘the decorator’. The second nasab usually is
reported as Abūʾl-Qāsim: Abūʾl-Qāʾim seems to suit better the inscription
lettering.

The text disposes on a single line, but some words show superimposed
letters (i.e. the term ʿamal, Muḥammad, al-Qāʾim). The script is cursive,
characterized by hastae enlarging toward the top, final yāʾs, wāw, nūn and
šīn with wide terminals. Chevrons appear above short letters such as the
initial ʿayn in ʿamal and ‘Alī, and the bāʾ in bin; other two evolve in an up-
turned trilobed flower: just before the term Muḥammad and above the yāʾ
in the term al-Qāʾim.

This peculiar aquamanile shows a decoration composed by both free ele-
ments and scenes framed into cartouches. The long inscription follows the
cow’s shape as a sort of collar; once silver inlaid as the near seven-disc ro-
settes, it should have been of strong effect.


The artisan is mentioned by Mayer in the Chronological List of Metalworkers
and ascribed to Persia, but there is no further information about his work, or
available picture of the incense burner.

The artisan’s name is composed by an ism and a nasab.
Hasan-i Bā Sahl\[^{61}\] – حسن بابل

1. *Cylindrical ewer, copper alloy, undated: probably late 12th-early 13th c., sold at Sotheby’s in 1971.*\[^{62}\]
   The signature is in a very bad state of preservation and very few details are visible in the available picture, which consents no drawing. A rectangular cartouche, with slightly concave short sides, frames the text horizontally disposed. Artisan’s name is introduced by *ʿamal* and is composed by an *ism* and a *nasab* spelled in Persian. The kufic script runs against an almost disappeared vegetal background.

2. *Cylindrical ewer, undated: probably later than the previous one, Herat National Museum (Inv. No. 02.26.86).*\[^{63}\]
   The signature (Pl. V.2) lies in the upper register of the ewer’s body, framed into a rectangular cartouche with slightly concave short sides. The inscription is inlaid with copper as the crescents on the bucket. Spiralling scrolls ending in bilobed leaves run on the background.
   The text in plain kufic disposes on a single line: the ḥāʾ is the only letter to show a sort of apice. *Lāms* draw a typical flat ninety-degree angle; the ḥāʾ is written as it was in final position; the *mīm* shows a vertical segment departing from its body. The *nūn* is rounded and has a high vertical terminal. Similar features recur on other works by the same artisan.
   The signature is perfectly integrated in the decorative scheme: it shares spaces, style and colours with the other elements.

3. *Bucket, copper alloy, undated: probably early 13th c., from Herat (?), formerly in the Coiffard Collection, then sold.*\[^{64}\]
   The signature (Pl. V.3) lies on the bucket’s body, framed in its upper register and isolated from the following benedictory sequence by two roundels. The latter is a typical feature employed to interrupt continuous bands on buckets.
   The text disposes on a single line, occupying the whole height available. The *hastae* are extremely high, especially compared to *sīns’* teeth, which are quite short and degrading. The script is a plain kufic. The initial ḥāʾ in the term Hasan climbs up and split in two vegetal terminals.

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\[^{62}\] Ibid.: pp. 9-12, pls. 1-111, figs. 1-5.


\[^{64}\] Melikian-Chirvani, “Bronzes – VI”: pp. 15-23, figs. 10-1.
Artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism and a nasab spelled in Persian.

The inscription is inlaid with copper, just as the crescents included in the roundels that flank it. Floriated spiralling scrolls are engraved thinly on the background. The signature is perfectly integrated in the decorative scheme: it occupies the space usually hold by the main benedictory inscription, interrupted by roundels with crescents. Also, the background is the traditional one.

Observing the bucket decoration, Melikian-Chirvani reckoned that Ḥasan-i Bā Sahl was a naqqāš. Other unsigned works can be assigned to the same artisan.

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Maḥmūd Āḥmad

– Mortar, copper alloy, undated: probably 12th-13th century, unknown owner.

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ʿAmal introduces the artisan’s name, composed by two isms and followed by another incomprehensible term. The signature is reported, but not published in a picture.

Masʿūd b. Aḥmad –

*Bucket, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, muḥarram 559/December 1163, Herat, purchased in Bukhara, formerly in the Count Bobrinsky Collection, then in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. IR-2268).*

The name of the patron who ordered the work, al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Rašīdī, starts the inscription on the rim, introducing the names of two artisans, whose roles are distinguished by the verb ḍaraba and the professional designation al-naqqāš, ‘the decorator’ (Pl. V.4). The first is related to Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, thus responsible for the manufacturing; the second to Masʿūd b. Aḥmad, the inlayer, whose name is preceded by the title ḥājib, ‘chamberlain’, introduced by ʿamal. Both artisans’ names are composed by an ism and a nasab. Finally, the name of the recipient, Ḥwjā Rūkn al-Dīn ʿAzīzī b. Abūʾl-Ḥusayn al-Zinjānī, is followed by a good wishing formula (‘may his glory last long’). Names of patron and recipient include a nisba, while the artisans’ ones lack it.

The text runs framed into a semi-circular band with concave short sides; it disposes on a single line, but many letters are raised over the wide terminal of the preceding ones, in order to save space.

The inscription has partially lost its silver inlay, revealing the engraved substratum. Given also the semi-circular shape of the object, some terms result obliquely written, in particular the term ʿAbd, which repeats in the name of the patron and that of the manufacturer.

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The script is a slightly rigid cursive. *Hastae* tend to insert in the terminal of preceding letters. Tiny chevrons appear above the bāʾ in the term ḥājīb and the qāf in al-naqqāš; a rounded chevron appears above the šīn in al-naqqāš. The name Muḥammad is written with its first three letters superimposed. Two additional letters appear at the band’s end.

The place of manufacturing is exceptionally stated mentioning explicitly the city of Herat, and not inferred by a *nisba* – which makes it a certain fact. The presence of a double signature is another unusual feature.

The bucket presents an extraordinary elaborated decoration, including three epigraphical bands on the body, in kufic and cursive (with animated script), expressing good wishing. Texts containing historical information, instead, are not considered part of the decoration; nonetheless, these inscriptions are inlaid with silver to stand out clearly on the surface metal. Their writing style is also far simpler than those adopted in the decoration.

Muḥammad⁷¹ – محمد

– Inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably 12th c., formerly in Possession Demotte, then in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. No. 35.128).⁷²

The signature (Pl. VI.1) lies on the flat shoulder of the inkwell’s lid, split into three roundels alternated to as many cartouches, the latter framing a cursive benedictory inscription. The same scheme recurs in another inkwell, signed by Šāh Malik (see below). The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘ʿamal and is composed by an *ism*, followed by the professional *nisba* al-bayyāʿ, ‘the dealer’.

The script is a very simple kufic. The initial ʿayn in ‘ʿamal is quite squared and appears slightly compressed; the mīm is round and barely pointed. The term Muḥammad is interestingly different from the common script: all letters lie on the same line, just the terminal of the ḥāʾ goes back below the writing line, as the ligature between the second mīm and the dāl. The bāʾ
and yāʾ in al-bayyāʿ differ in height; the final ʿayn draws a ninety-degree angle.

The background is minutely ring-dotted. The engraved letters stands out thanks to a black compound. Both the roundels and signature are inlaid with copper, to distinguish them also through colour from the cursive benedictory inscription inlaid with silver.

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Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid: see Masʿūd b. Ahmad.

…

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (?) – محمد بن عبد الواحد

– Cauldron, copper alloy, undated: probably 11th-12th c., former Mazar-i Sharif Museum (without Inv. No.).

The signature (Pl. VI.2) is still unpublished. It runs on the cauldron’s flange opposite to the pouring one, framed into a trapezoidal cartouche. The text disposes on a single line, with the exception of the first mīm in the term Muḥammad, which is raised.

Artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by an ism and a nasab. The latter term is severely deteriorated and almost unreadable. The knotted article is still clear on the contrary of following letters: given the similarity between the first of whom and the ḥāʾ in the term Muḥammad, and taken into account the residual space, the name Ḥasan looks the most plausible.

The script is a rigid foliated kufic characterized by sharply pointed letters and apices. The apice of the ḥāʾ in Muḥammad originates a bipartite palmette. At least four chevrons appear at different heights above short letters. Further stylized vegetal elements are visible on the epigraphical ground.

Three groups of two nicks are engraved on the flange margin. Cartouche ground is engraved so to let the inscription standing out as the geometrical and vegetal decoration on the pouring flange: this feature attests that inscription and decoration were conceived in same style.

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73 Laviola, Islamic Metalwork: in print.
Nāṣir –

- **Ewer**, copper alloy inlaid with copper, undated: probably 11th-early 12th c., the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. SA-12680). The signature (Pl. VI.3) lies on the ewer’s round shoulder, framed into a trapezoidal cartouche, with concave short sides, and flanked by two roundels including a lozenge. The cartouche background is minutely dotted. Two elements extraneous to the inscription appear above the last two letters. ‘ʿAmal introduces the artisan’s name, which is composed only by an *ism*. The script is a kufic characterized by sharp sloping apices and straight flat ligatures, with the exception of the descending round one between the ‘āyn and mīm in ‘amal. The mīm resembles a ḥāʾ in final position. The alif in the term Nāṣir descends the writing line, while the final rāʾ climbs up with its terminal.

The inscription and the decorative structure are inserted into a bigger band filled with a cursive benedictory text against an intricate vegetal background: since the signature interrupts such decoration, it is clear that its presence in that area was planned from the very beginning. Moreover, both the text and the roundels’ margin are inlaid with copper to make them stand out.

Nūširwān b. Muḥammad –

- **Semi-circular box**, undated: probably early 13th c., formerly in the Harari Coll., then in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Inv. No. 15195). The signature (Pl. VI.4) lies inside the lid. The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘ʿamal and is composed by an *ism* and a *nasab*. No picture of the signature is available, but a drawing traced by Rice shows a cursive script complete of almost every diacritical dot. The majority of letters’ terminals – squared in the lām of ‘amal and the first wāw in Nūširwān, round in the nūn of Nūširwān and the bāʾ in bin – descends below the writing line. The first mīm in the name Muḥammad is raised, while other letters dispose on a single line.

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74 Mayer, *Metalworkers*: p. 76.
77 There is no available picture of the signature, but a drawing traced by Rice.
Pāydār – پایدار

- *Ewer with lamp-shaped spout, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably late 12th c., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. No. 54.64).*

The inscription (Pl. VII.1), divided in two sections, starts with the owner’s name, *al-šayḫ al-faqīh Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Sijzī*, introduced by the term *ṣāḥibu-hu*. The *nasab* and *nisba* appear in the second section, which continues with the artisan’s name introduced by *ʿamal*. Melikian-Chirvani has wondered if this artisan could be identified with Pāydār b. Marzabān al-Qāʾinī (see above). Unfortunately, the signature limits to the *ism* without giving any other specification, thus leaving the doubt open. Should they be the same person, the *nisbas* on his works, al-Qāʾinī and al-Sijzī (from the ewer’s owner), would indicate two bordering regions where a possible centre of production could have been based.

The signature runs unframed on the ewer’s body, above the zoomorphic cartouches that flank the central arch. It is marked by the *niello* and inlaid with silver, as other inscriptions on the object, but written in a peculiar kufic script, characterized by sharply angular letters, triangular *mīms*, just hinted round apices on the *hastae*. The final *yāʾ* in the name ‘Ali goes back below the writing line. This writing style is employed also for an unframed benedictory inscription on the lower side of the spout, but has nothing in common with another kufic adopted in the benedictory band running on the ewer’s lower body.

Ṣāʿid b. Aḥmad

1. *Casket, copper alloy inlaid with silver, undated: probably late 12th c., formerly in the Sassoon Possession, then in a private collection.*

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78 Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork*: pp. 75-6, figs. 43-44.
79 The name of a later owner (Aḥmad b. Muḥammad) is traced with *niello*, in cursive, on the ewer’s lower body.
The signature (Pl. VII.2) lies on the casket front wall. A silver inlaid cursive band, running against an intricate background made of tight spiralling scrolls, frames the central decoration. The upper line reads the artisan’s name (ism, nasab and the title al-faqīh) introduced by ‘amal. The dāls in the terms Ṣā‘id and Aḥmad have a peculiar wavy upper terminal. The bāʾ in bin is raised in respect to the following nūn.

2. Fragmentary handle of incense burner, copper alloy, undated: probably late 12th c., formerly in the British Museum (Inv. No. 96-5-12-2), then lost.

The signature (Pl. VII.3) runs horizontally along the handle top, framed into a rectangular cartouche with concave short sides flanked by two roundels. ‘Amal introduces the artisan’s name, which is composed by the ism followed by the title al-faqih and an interrupted further term, most probably a nisba starting with al-mar(wazī) or al-maw(ṣilī). Lacking the nasab, in this case, one can assume that the title is directly related to the artisan and not to his father (see object no. 1).

The text disposes on a single line. Hastae show just hinted apices; the dāl in the name Ṣā‘id has a curl-shaped up-ending terminal.

Two further epigraphical bands run on both handle sides including a benedictory text: all inscriptions on the object are in kufic against a vegetal background.

Šāh Malik

1. Inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver, undated: probably 12th-early 13th c., yet in the Peytel Collection, then in the Kofler Collection, Lucerne.

The signature (Pl. VII.4) lies on the inkwell’s lid, into three roundels that interrupt benedictory cartouches (cf. the inkwell by Muḥammad al-baṣṣā’ī). The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘amal and is composed by two elements originally indicating titles that should be read as one ism.

The script is a plain kufic on empty background. The hāʾ in the term Šāh is written correctly as a final letter, with its double up-ending terminal interlaced. The hastae in Šāh and Malik are straight and descend the
writing line. The final kāf in the term Malik shows a zigzag shaped up-ending terminal.

The signature appears very neat, precise and its peculiar arrangement provides it with a strong visual impact. It is integrated in the object’s decorative scheme, occupying roundels usually including vegetal motifs and employed as separators. The different script in respect to the main text immediately draws the attention. As far as visible from the black and white picture, the signature looks inlaid with silver while the benedictory inscription with copper: a colour detail that again marks an immediate difference between the two.

2. Inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with silver; undated: probably 12th-early 13th c., Baron Carnap Collection, Cairo.84
No picture of this signature has been published so far.

…

ʿUmar b. al-Faḍl b. Yusuf85 –

Pen-box, copper alloy inlaid with copper and silver; 20 ḏūʾl-qaʿda 542/April nth n48, the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. SA-12688).86
The signature lies on top of the object, framed into a band running close to the box outer perimeter. The inscription includes the name of the recipient, ʿAlī b. Yusuf b. ʿUṯmān al-Ḥajj, and the date of manufacturing as well. The artisan’s name is introduced by ʿamal and is composed by the ism, two nasabs and the nisba al-bayyāʿ, ‘the dealer’.

The inscription is inlaid with silver just as the cursive others, expressing good wishing, present on the object. Vegetal scrolls run on the background. The script is a plain kufic. ʿAmal is still well visible, at least in its first two letters that preserve the inlay; then, the inscription becomes more obscure because of the bad state of preservation and the partial loss of silver inlay. The date is introduced by the term bi-taʾrīḥ.

The signature is perfectly integrated in the object’s decorative scheme and treated as other inscriptions; its thematic difference is marked by the different writing style.

85 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 87.
Yūsuf b. al-Ya’qūb

1. *Pen-box, copper alloy, undated: 12th-13th c., formerly in the Marquet de Vasselot Collection, present owner unknown.*

The signature (Pl. VIII.1) lies on top of the object, at the beginning of the actual pen-box section, after the one devoted to the included inkwell. It is framed by a cartouche and silver inlaid as the whole decoration. A vegetal motif is just hinted on the background.

The artisan’s name is introduced by ‘*āmal* and is composed by an *ism* and a *nasab*, the latter awkwardly provided with an article. The text disposes mainly in two lines. The script is kufic, characterized by foliated apices in form of bilobed leaves; also, short letters’ terminals reposing on the writing line show further vegetal elements (see for example, the *fāʾ* in the term Yūsuf and the *nūn* in *bin*). Some letters are significantly smaller than others – the *mīm* in ‘*āmal*, the *sīn* and *fāʾ* in Yūsuf. All the composition is based on the delicate joint of letters in the short space available. Above the *sīn* in the term Yūsuf there is a sort of chevron.

Additional *hastae* appear in the text: some are suspended such the one above the initial *ʿayn* and beside the *lām* to create a pair; some, instead, are full bodied such as the pair at the end of the cartouche, which seems to have no role in the text meaning. This group of letters is crossed by the suspended final *bāʾ*. The *wāw* in al-Ya’qūb has an up-ending terminal with apice: the latter is mirrored by an additional one, so to create the effect of a *lām*-alif group.

The inscription is part of the object’s decorative scheme, with its own devoted space; it also employs the same line and silver inlay.

To be thorough, it would be worthy to mention few signatures more that have been left out of this list. A bird-shaped aquamanile from the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. IR-1567) would be the most ancient dated object (180/796-7), if confirmed. The date could be read as 280/893-4 as

88 Mayer, Metalworkers: p. 92; Ivanov, “84. Figure of an eagle” in Loukonine, Ivanov (eds.), Lost Treasures of Persia: p. 111; Ivanov, Masterpieces: no. 1: pp. 10, 70-1.
well. The place of production, stated in the inscription running around the bird neck, is variously interpreted by scholars: madīnaʾl-Fazz (or al-Fuzz), a quarter of Nishapur; Kashan, Iran; Kasan, in Central Asia. The artisan’s name, Sulaymān, gives no further information about it. Since no picture portrays the whole inscription, there are no elements to prefer one hypothesis to another.

The famous ‘Fould bucket’ from the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. 1R-1668), signed by Muḥammad b. Nāṣīr b. Muḥammad al-Harawī figures out of the list because of the persuasive reasons offered by Ivanov in support of its mid-13th century Anatolian provenance. Among these, the Mongol origin of the laqab bahādur al-Islām, ‘champion of the Islam’, part of the recipient’s name, which should have entered the Arabic/Persian language after the Mongol conquest (circa 1220). At first, the object was assigned by Gyuzalyan to the mid-12th century Khurasan, probably also relying upon the artisan's nisba, which indicates the city of Herat.

Ḥasan al-Qāšānī signs the controversial silver salver dated to 459/1066-7 and dedicated to the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslān (r. 1063-1072). The object raises doubts so strong about its authenticity that the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston (Inv. No. 34.68), where it is housed, reports in its on-line record that the salver could be a modern forgery. Moreover, the precious metalwork was left out of the recent exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of New York devoted to the Seljuqs. The signature is part of a long inscription in foliated kufic, running in a band below the inner rim. The artisan’s name unusually is introduced by the term ṣanʿa, ‘workmanship’.

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92 “Court and Cosmos. The Great Age of the Seljuqs”, April 27th-June 24th.
Conclusive Remarks

The large majority of signatures is fully integrated in the objects decorative scheme, occupying a space that is traditionally decorated and receiving the same treatment reserved to the other elements: for example, when the inscriptions on the object are inlaid, signatures are as well. The inlay, in most cases made with silver, is important to make the text stand out on the surface, so to make the information well visible.

Signatures usually are framed by cartouches; sometimes they run in continuous bands as part of a longer inscription, which can include further information or be a benedictory one. Two inkwells (by Muḥammad and Šāh Malik) represent a smart way of putting the signature in relation with a benedictory inscription maintaining the two texts strictly separate on a graphical ground.

Unframed signatures represent limited cases. The vertically disposed ones, with the artisan’s name split in two sections, date back to the 10th century (see Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sijzī and Aḥmad); later ones, even if unframed are somehow in accordance with the object decoration, and often inlaid. Just one of these signatures, on the ewer by ‘Alī b. (...) al-Isfīrāʾīnī, seems to have been added later.

Artisan’s name is always introduced by ‘āmal that could also be interpreted as the verbal passive form ‘amila, ‘made by’. In the rare occasion of a double signature – detected so far only on the Bobrinsky bucket – ‘āmal is replaced by more specific terms, such as the verb ḍaraba to indicate the object manufacturer and al-naqqāš for its decorator.

The term al-naqqāš recurs before the name (see Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Harawī) or after it (see Šādi al-Harawī, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abūl-Qā’īm, Maṣʿūd b. Aḥmad): according to its position in the name sequence, it can hold the role of a professional designation or that of a nisba, derived from the person’s job. Another professional nisba related to the artisan activity is al-bayyā’, ‘the dealer’, recurring two times after the name (see Muḥammad and ‘Umar b. al- Faḍl b. Yūsuf).

Titles unrelated to the professional field are extremely rare in signatures: ḥājib, in its one and only occurrence, precedes the name Maṣʿūd b. Aḥmad. According to Ettinghausen, the use of high rank titles by common people

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93 Nisbas derived from professional designations differ from the other kinds, usually related to a social group, a place, etc., because the final adjectival -i is optional. See Sublet, Jaqueline, s.v. “Nisba”, in EI² VIII (1995): p. 54.
from the eastern Iranian area should be regarded as a progressive degradation of titles themselves.94

Artisans’ names usually are composed by an *ism* and a *nasab*; in few cases, the *ism* is replaced by a *kunya*; just in one occasion, a *kunya* and an *ism* precede the *nasab*. The latter usually goes back to the previous generation, only in five cases up to the grandfather. Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sijzī represents the rare circumstance of a *nasab* entirely composed by a *nisba* (the *ism* should have been omitted).

Sixteen among recorded names end in a geographical *nisba*, which cannot be taken for granted as the artisan actual birthplace. Since it usually follows the *nasab*, it could refer to his ancestors. Sometimes, a *nisba* is attributed to characterize someone who has travelled or has spent part of his life in a region different from his origin’s one. Moreover, the artisan’s provenance not always coincides with the object’s place of manufacturing, since artisans’ mobility and travelling work are well attested facts. The Bobrinsky bucket and the Tbilisi ewer dated to 577/1181-2 are unusual exceptions because their provenance from Herat is explicitly stated in the inscriptions.

Still standing the above-mentioned limits, the detected *nisbas* can provide a hint about the artisan’s origin. Tracing on the map the cities and areas indicated by the *nisbas*, the Khurasan region definitely stands out through many different cities: Herat (five signatures), Nishapur and Tus (two signatures each), Merv, Isfīrāʾin and Qāʾin (one signature each). Other two *nisbas* indicate the Sistan region, while Isfahan (two signatures) and Qazvin (one signature) speak for the proper Iranian area (Pl. VIII.2).

Four cases (Ḫājakī Ṭūsī, Muḥammad Ṭūsī, Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sijzī and ʿUmar b. Abī l-ʿAlā b. Aḥmad Iṣfahānī) represent an exception to the rule that commends the *nisba* to be accompanied by the article.

Very rarely signatures are followed by further expressions: no religious formula has been identified, but two maxims related to the artisan profession follow the signatures of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Harawī and ʿAlī b. Abī Naṣr.

Some of these signed metalwork inform about other people beyond artisans. Two names of patrons are expressed: al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Rašīdī, who patronized the famous Bobrinsky bucket, and Rūzbih bin Afrīdūn (bin) Burzin, who had an extraordinary aquamanile made for his own brother Šāh-Burzin bin Afrīdūn (bin) Burzin. Majd al-Mulk al-Muẓaffar, vizier of sultan ‘Alāʾ al-dīn Muḥammad Ḫwārizm-šāh, could have been either the patron or recipient of a pen-box by Ṣāḏī.

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Names of recipients include the ḥwāja Rukn al-Dīn ‘Azīzī b. Abūl-Ḥusayn al-Zinjānī, the merchant the Bobrinsky bucket was made for, and ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. ʿUtmān al-Hajj, who received a pen-box dated to 542/1148 signed by ʿUmar b. al-Faḍl b. Yūsuf. The term ṣāḥibu-hu introduces al-šayḫ al-faqīh Āḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Sijzī on a ewer from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Inv. No. 54.64). The name is particularly interesting since it ends in a nisba adopted by two artisans. Finally, the name ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāji appears on a feline-shaped incense burner from the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (Inv. No. 1R1565), datable to the 11th-12th century.95 The name, inlaid with silver, is framed in a rectangular cartouche on the feline breast, thus in a prominent position, but since ʿamal lacks, it is impossible to determine whether it is the artisan or recipient name.

Turning to strictly epigraphical issues: the kufic script is generally preferred to cursive in signatures and declined in its many variants. Ornamental apices of two kinds at least, sharp sloping or half-lance-shaped, have been detected. In some cases, vegetal elements appear on the epigraphical ground or originate from letters. Chevrons of varying shape and size are employed to fill empty spaces and with a decorative intent, rather than playing a diacritical role. Traditional spiralling scrolls occur as a background in those signatures that are most similar to benedictory inscriptions present on the object. Otherwise, the background can be dotted or ring-dotted, or even plain.

Arabic language is still dominant, but Persian is becoming popular in 12th-13th century inscriptions, characterizing some names or employed beside Arabic for inscriptions of different content on the same object.

Some general rules emerge from this analysis: the signature holds a clear visible position, still keeping a balanced role in respect to other inscriptions and decorative elements; a standardized terminology and sequence of terms

is adopted in composing it. On the other hand, some space is left for creativity to those artisans gifted with a stronger artistic taste, whose signatures reveal a specific and recognisable style.

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Biographical Note

Valentina Laviola has devoted her PhD research to eastern Iranian metalwork and is about to publish a volume of Islamic metalwork from Afghanistan. She is a member of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan and Adjunct Professor of Islamic Art and Archaeology at the University of Bologna.
Plate 1.1 Signature by ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Masʿūd al-Nīšābūrī (after Ağa-Oğlu, "Preliminary Note": fig. 2).

Plate 1.2 Signature by Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad Marwazī no. 1.

Plate 1.3 Signature by Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad Marwazī no. 2.

Plate 1.4 Signature by Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sijzī (after Harari, Survey: fig. 81a).

Plate II.1 Signature by ʿAli b. (…) al-İsfirāʾi.
PLATE II.2  Signature by Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sijā.

PLATE II.3  Signature by Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī.

PLATE II.4  Signature by Muḥammad b. Abī Sahl al-Harawi.

PLATE II.5  Signature by Muḥammad Ṭūsī.

PLATE III.1  Signature by Nāsīr b. Asʿad Nīsābūrī (after Ağa-Oğlu, "Preliminary Note": fig. 5).
PLATE III.2 Signature by Pāydār b. Marzabān al-Qāʾinī.

PLATE III.3 Signature by Šāḏī (al-Harawī) no. 1.

PLATE III.4 Signature by Šāḏī (al-Harawī) no. 2.

PLATE IV.1 Signature by Šāḏī (al-Harawī) no. 3.

PLATE IV.2 Signature by Abūʾl-Fath.
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PLATE V.1  Signature by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Abū’l-Qāʿim.

PLATE V.2  Signature by Ḥasan-i Bā Sahl no. 2.

PLATE V.3  Signature by Ḥasan-i Bā Sahl no. 3.
PLATE V.4  Signature by Mas'ud b. Ahmad.

PLATE VI.1  Signature by Muhammad.

PLATE VI.2  Signature by Muhammad b. al-Hasan (?).

PLATE VI.3  Signature by Nāṣir.
PLATE VI.4

PLATE VII.1
Signature by Pāydār.

PLATE VII.2
Signature by Ṣāʿid b. Aḥmad no. 1 (after Rice, “Studies – VI”: fig. 2).

PLATE VII.3
Signature by Ṣāʿid (b. Aḥmad) no. 2 (after Rice, “Studies – VI”: fig. 9).

PLATE VII.4
Signature by Šāh Malik.
Plate VIII.1 Signature by Yusuf b. al-Ya’qūb.

Plate VIII.2 Cities mentioned by artisans’ nisbas (re-worked by the author after GoogleEarth).
Table of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td>Asian and African Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>AION</td>
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<td>AO</td>
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<td>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</td>
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<td>BF</td>
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