

WORLDS WRIT SMALL

FOUR STUDIES ON MINIATURE ARCHITECTURAL FORMS IN THE MEDIEVAL MIDDLE EAST

VOLUME I

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

ABSTRACT

While academic discussion of ornament within medieval Islamic art has laboured much over the codification and meaning of certain forms, there has been relatively little research to date on the visual and iconographic function of architecture as ornament in this context. Those few authors that have dealt with this issue have focused overwhelmingly on two-dimensional architectural representations, largely ignoring the considerable body of portable objects from the medieval Middle East that imitate architecture through three-dimensional forms, whether in a mimetically coherent fashion or in a more elliptical or reconfigured manner. This thesis proposes, first and foremost, that there is significant cultural meaning inherent in the use of architecture as an inspiration for the non-essential formal qualities of portable objects from the medieval Islamic world. Through iconographic analysis of the relationships that such objects form with architecture, an understanding of both full-size architecture and its miniature incarnations in the medieval urban context is advanced within the thesis.

To maximise the intellectual scope of the study whilst still enabling an in-depth treatment of the material, four discrete studies of different object groups are presented. All of these are thought to date from approximately 1000 to 1350 CE, and to come from the core Middle Eastern territories of Persia, Syria and Egypt. The first chapter examines the glazed ceramic ‘house models’ believed to originate in late or post-Seljuq Persia. The second discusses six-sided ceramic tables from the same milieu, and more numerous related tables produced in Syria during the same period. In the third chapter carved marble jar stands from Cairo, apparently produced from the twelfth century onwards, are analysed. The final chapter, on metalwork, broadens its approach to encompass two very different strains of production: inkwells from Khurasan and incense burners from the breadth of the Middle East.

Because much of the thesis focuses on material that has been dramatically understudied, it performs the primary action of compiling examples of each of the object types under study. Though this information is presented as a *catalogue*

sommaire, this component of the thesis is not regarded as an end in itself. The major tasks of the thesis are the identification of the architectural tropes that are being evoked within each object group, analysis of the manner in which those forms have been modified to suit the miniature context of the objects, and the location of meaning within such diminutive evocations of architectural form. Through comparisons with other objects, full-size architecture, two-dimensional representations of architecture and historical texts, the thesis moves discourse on this type of motif in Islamic art beyond the traditional and sometimes superficial discussion of ‘ornament’, re-setting architectural iconography within larger contexts of urbanisation and city culture of the medieval Islamic world.

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This study is dedicated, with love, to the memory of Oliver Charles Grant.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND REFERENCING

The system followed for transliteration from Arabic and Persian is essentially that of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with the following modifications: proper nouns, names of places and of historic personages that have entered the language or have a generally recognized English form are anglicized, *j* replaces *dj*, and *q* replaces *k*. For the sake of simplicity plurals have normally been formed using the English convention of adding an 's', and dates are given in the Common Era (CE) calendar unless otherwise stated.

References to electronic sources, unpublished museum records and sale catalogues are given in full within the footnote text and excluded from the bibliography; all other references follow the author-date system.

CONTENTS

VOLUME I

Declaration.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Note on transliteration.....	ix
Table of Contents.....	xi

INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE AS ORNAMENT, ORNAMENT AS ARCHITECTURE.....	1
Ornament, Iconography and the Third Dimension: <i>The Mediation of Ornament</i>	2
Aspects of the Miniature.....	8
Framing the Question: Examples and Scope.....	12
Methodologies, Limitations and Structure.....	16

CHAPTER ONE

MIMESIS AND THE DOMESTIC SPHERE:

CERAMIC ‘HOUSE MODELS’ FROM PERSIA.....	23
Dating and Provenance.....	24
Authenticity.....	28
Historical Background: Seljuq Figural Art and Ceramic Production.....	30
Characteristics and Types.....	34
Architectural Elements: Introduction.....	40
Decorative Edging.....	41
Corner Projections.....	48
Side Piercings.....	52
External Decoration.....	56
Inscriptions.....	58
Animal Motifs.....	59
Geometric Motifs.....	62
Activity of Figures.....	65
Possible Meanings.....	72
Conclusions.....	83

CHAPTER TWO	
RECONFIGURING AN ARCHITECTURE OF ASPIRATION: CERAMIC TABOURETS FROM PERSIA AND SYRIA.....	85
Historical Background of Persian Group.....	87
The History of Raqqa.....	88
Twentieth-Century Archaeology in Raqqa.....	90
The Objects: Physical Characteristics.....	93
Authenticity and Reconstruction.....	96
Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: Literary Sources.....	97
Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: Artefacts.....	101
Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: The Evidence of Painting.....	106
Architectural Parallels.....	112
Polygonal Structures and Garden Architecture.....	113
Pavilions in Miniature Painting.....	120
Screens and Grilles.....	123
True Archways and Arched Windows.....	130
Balustrades.....	133
Inscriptions.....	137
<i>Muqarnas</i>	140
Corners.....	142
Moulded Arabesques and Vegetal Designs.....	144
Plaited and Knotted Motifs.....	145
Stepped Motifs.....	146
Figural Painting.....	147
Meaning of the Form.....	150
Conclusions.....	154
CHAPTER THREE	
URBANISM IN <i>PARS PRO TOTO</i> : MARBLE JAR STANDS FROM CAIRO.....	155
Existing Scholarship and Known Examples.....	156
Function and Features.....	157
Artistic Background: The Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries in Egypt.....	165
Architectural Motifs: Introduction.....	170
Inscriptions.....	171
Waisted Arches.....	177
Other Blind Arches.....	182

Engaged Columns and Pilasters.....	186
Legs and True Arches.....	189
Geometric Interlace Motifs.....	193
Water Architecture.....	194
<i>Shādirwān</i> within <i>Salsabīl</i>	195
Pools.....	199
Lion Heads.....	202
<i>Muqarnas</i>	207
Human Figures.....	211
Animal Figures.....	214
Marble.....	215
Urbanism.....	217
Conclusions.....	220
CHAPTER FOUR	
THE RECASTING OF THE DOMED MONUMENT:	
INKWELLS AND INCENSE BURNERS.....	223
Part One: Inkwells.....	228
Existing Scholarship.....	233
Monumental Forms.....	235
The Lobed Cupola.....	242
Arched Panels.....	248
Miniature Arcades.....	255
Inkwells: Summary.....	259
Part Two: Handled Incense Burners.....	260
The Domed Cylindrical Incense Burner with Handle (cat. nos 4.34–4.53).....	262
Origins of the Form.....	263
The Buddhist Connection.....	266
Handled Burners with Arcades (cat. nos 4.54–4.57).....	276
Handled Square-Bodied Burners (cat. nos 4.58–4.68).....	281
Handled Burners: Summary.....	288
Conclusions.....	288
CONCLUSION.....	293
APPENDIX.....	299

BIBLIOGRAPHY	303
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VOLUME II

CATALOGUE

VOLUME III

FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE AS ORNAMENT, ORNAMENT AS ARCHITECTURE

In the case of miniatures, in contrast to what happens when we try to understand an object or living creature of real dimensions, knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts.¹

Within the pages of this thesis Lilliputian houses, pavilions, water structures and domed monuments are formed from miniature *īwāns*, arches, pilasters, walls, doorways, *muqarnas*, screens, pools, domes, and inscription bands. Architectural elements have been scaled down and shuffled around in a world of largely functional objects. That these objects are not all of the highest class of workmanship or in the top social category of material culture would indicate that this phenomenon was not primarily an innovation in elite art, but rather the response to an impulse felt throughout society. The overarching question is simple, but it opens up huge vistas: why should this be the case? Why do a substantial number of small-scale objects from the medieval Islamic world mimic the formal vocabulary of architecture? Or to put it another way, can the use of miniaturized three-dimensional architectural forms within decorative contexts be understood to have any significance, beyond fulfilling the most basic functions of ornamentation?

A fundamental assertion of this study has to be that there can be some form of meaning in the visual arts, at the lower levels of production as well as the higher, and in the context of the ‘applied arts’ as well as the more thoroughly explored fields of painting and sculpture.² The material creativity present at many if not all levels of society in the medieval Middle-Eastern city – which is attested by the existence of

¹ Lévi-Strauss 1966: 23–4.

² On ‘meaning’ in the context of Islamic arts, see Watson 2007: 229–30. I cannot fully subscribe to Watson’s proposal that the search for meaning should be abandoned and replaced with an acceptance that most motifs are nothing more than pleasing decoration; however, his concurrent suggestion that we should work to understand more fully both the visual effects of ornament, and the social contexts in which the works themselves were created and used, is absolutely to the point.

the objects presented within the thesis – presupposes a vigorous and sophisticated visual culture fully engaged with the ideas and concerns of its own time. Within that culture, or rather those cultures, the particular qualities of these objects that ape the forms of architecture reveal certain attitudes towards not only the portable objects of everyday life but also architecture in its many incarnations. In the course of trying to reconstruct and understand those attitudes, specific questions of iconography and function inevitably lead on to larger issues of perception and meaning. Thus, meaning is to be sought primarily in the objects and their cultural surroundings, but also in the avenues for critical thinking opened up by the objects themselves.

Ornament, Iconography and the Third Dimension: *The Mediation of Ornament*

The function of ornament is in itself something that has proved remarkably resistant to codification.³ Within the field of Islamic ornament, the greatest debt any study such as this must owe is to the fourth chapter of Oleg Grabar's *The Mediation of Ornament*, and the present thesis is ultimately an extended response to some of the questions raised by that text. Grabar has done more in this particular work to open up new avenues of thought regarding the use of architecture as ornament in the medieval Islamic world than has any other author, and 'The Intermediary of Architecture' represents the only extended, general meditation on the subject to be found within the parameters of published Islamic art history.⁴ His approach to the subject of ornament is necessarily idiosyncratic: much of his argument hinges on the definition of ornament as a carrier of beauty, ergo a producer of pleasure, which he then analyses in terms of the mediation this pleasure-inducing aspect enables between the viewer and the object.⁵ The possibilities of this *terpnopoietic* ('provider of pleasure': Grabar's neologism) function are enhanced as the text develops by the observation that one function of ornament is its capacity for evocation. The specific evocative qualities proposed for architecture are those of boundaries and protection.⁶

³ See Watson 2007, and the book-length discussions of this question found in Grabar 1992 and Gombrich 1979.

⁴ Unpublished studies on certain aspects of this decorative strain can be found in the PhD theses of Gehan Ibrahim (2006) and Metzada Gelber (2008): these works will be discussed where relevant below.

⁵ See also Grabar 1987: 178–94.

⁶ Grabar 1992: 230.

Grabar's chapter on architecture as ornament focuses almost exclusively on two-dimensional architectural imagery,⁷ principally paintings on walls and manuscripts, but also relief-carved images.⁸ Indeed, *The Mediation of Ornament* as a whole is overwhelmingly concerned with two-dimensional systems of applied decoration: this is, by implication, the area Grabar set out to illuminate, but one could argue that his own definition of ornament, given below, should permit greater emphasis on fully three-dimensional forms. Thus, 'Ornament, as an initial definition, is differentiated from decoration in the sense that decoration is anything, even whole mosaic or sculpted programs, applied to an object or to a building, whereas ornament is that aspect of decoration which appears not to have another purpose but to enhance its character'.⁹

One might go further and venture that the introduction of the third dimension to ornament (rather than just to the carrier of that ornament) fundamentally modifies the role of ornament as defined by Grabar's text. Most of the objects examined by Grabar have seen ornament applied like a thin skin over a pre-existing object. Even when that object is a three-dimensional form, like the many vessels he illustrates, or even buildings, the presence of this applied ornament does not normally rupture or seriously modify the basic physical form of its carrier. But many, if not all of the objects that will be examined in the present study necessitate a serious recasting of this idea of ornament, because they engage either directly or obliquely with the formal and conceptual implications of making an object, or part of an object, in the form of a miniature building. Thus, the object itself becomes a representation of a building, or part of a building, while still fulfilling its primary practical function.

⁷ Like other sections of the book, the chapter on architecture as ornament moves from the particular to the general, beginning with a lengthy analysis of two architectural manuscript paintings from the then recently-discovered Şan'ā' Qur'an. Brend has noted that Grabar's passages on the Şan'ā' Qur'an are a virtuoso performance by any standards, but the very uniqueness of the images involved makes all the more pressing some of the questions resisted by Grabar, particularly 'why here?' and 'why not elsewhere?' (Brend 1995: 362). For an interesting recent comment on the Şan'ā' Qur'an frontispieces and their operational features as architectural representations, see Roxburgh 2008: 760–1.

⁸ Throughout this study low relief-carvings will generally be classed with two-dimensional forms of representation because of the close kinship such pieces generally bear with the representational mechanisms of two-dimensional works, which do not involve a thorough-going recasting of the object through three dimensions.

⁹ Grabar 1992: 5. While this definition seems to me to be problematic, and not borne out by dictionary definitions, it is presented here simply as the core of Grabar's own thinking on the subject.

This should not mean that Grabar's theory of ornament as an intermediary, fulfilling its role through the provision of sensory pleasure, becomes entirely null and void, because a fully articulated architectural form may still be able to act as an intermediary of this type.¹⁰ However, in such cases the entire form can no longer be understood in the terms of a programme of applied ornament that constitutes, as Grabar's proposal would have it, a surface-based and emotive interface between object and user, without the complication of iconographic referents.¹¹

Within the parameters of architecture as three-dimensional ornament, the manipulation of object forms into architectural frameworks can take the form of fairly complete mimetic reproductions of plausible architectural schema. On the other hand, architecture as ornament can be far less programmatic, sometimes to the point where architectural elements are perhaps best conceived of as a form of manipulation of the surface, albeit one that is not iconographically empty: this end of the spectrum lies closest to Grabar's discourse on ornament. The various stands discussed in chapter two will demonstrate these parallel treatments of architecture as ornament most clearly.

A supplementary aspect of the definition of ornament being advanced within this thesis must be that even if very coherently mimetic, the miniature architectural form can still be counted as a form of ornament if the primary function of the object taking that form is non-mimetic. To use the example that will be seen in chapter two, the architectural form of a stand in the shape of a pavilion still constitutes ornament, however representational it may be of the appearance of a pavilion. For this reason

¹⁰ For example, his interpretation of certain two-dimensional architectural ornament from sacred contexts 'as evocations and as intermediary filters that modify the spaces in front or ahead of them' could permit a similar interpretation for three-dimensional forms (Grabar 1992: 191).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185–6. It may be that the case of architecture is unique amongst Grabar's categories in this sense, and indeed he paves the way for this interpretation in the closing paragraph of 'The Intermediary of Architecture' when he discusses the function of true architecture:

By understanding ornamental architecture as a charged intermediary between user or viewer on the one hand, and some action on the other, we are perhaps simply acknowledging the more profound truth of architecture in general, that it is always at the service of man and has no greater purpose than to adorn his manifold activities[...]

(*Ibid.*, 193).

the house models examined in chapter one, while possibly ornamental in some senses of the word,¹² cannot at present be included in the category of ornament, as current scholarship suggests that they are primarily mimetic and symbolic.

This is not to say that Grabar has entirely ignored modelled forms of architecture as ornament. The final lines of ‘The Intermediary of Architecture’ do, rather abruptly, usher in the third dimension. From the Islamic world, inkwells, lamps and incense burners are cited as significant examples of the phenomenon of architecture as three-dimensional ornament. Note that all of these examples, some of which will be examined in the fourth chapter of the present study, are containers or emitters of things of some significance: ink, light and perfumed smoke. Grabar’s conclusion on these objects – that they can be understood to employ the outward forms of miniaturised architecture as intermediaries that modify or enhance the quality or value of their contents and also affect one’s behaviour towards those contents¹³ – is closely linked to his analysis of many two-dimensional forms of architectural representation, which he proposes as a means of creating boundaries, normally separating something that is inside from that which is outside of it, and sometimes simultaneously as a means of focusing or framing a subject.¹⁴

Grabar’s unwillingness to deal in further depth with three-dimensional examples of architecture as ornament betrays the somewhat uncertain position of architecture among his four intermediaries: architecture stands alone in being both a man-made entity (unlike his second and fourth intermediaries, geometry and nature) and one that exists in three dimensions (unlike writing, his first and most fully explored intermediary). That said, his hypothesis that containers made in architectural form are created as a means of exalting their own contents is a convincing starting point, suggesting that the use of a three-dimensional architectural form privileges the objects in some way, and this will be reviewed at a later juncture.

¹² Probably the second definition found in the OED entry for *ornamental*, ‘serving as an ornament or decoration’, comes closest to describing the house models.

¹³ Grabar 1992: 191–3.

¹⁴ This is the point at which Grabar’s analysis comes closest to that of Gombrich, who proposes the function of ornament as composed of the qualities of ‘framing’ and ‘filling’ (Gombrich 1979: 75).

But perhaps the major point of departure between the present study and Grabar's text lies in the attribution of more specific, and specifically iconographic, meanings to architecture as ornament. Although Grabar permits a degree of evocative function for the largely two-dimensional architecture that he presents as ornament, he specifically excludes those architectural images that relate to an identifiable external referent, for example the topographical depiction of the city of Jerusalem found in Madaba church in Jordan, from his thesis on architecture as ornament.¹⁵ This agenda may be a reflection of the need to prevent recognisable topographic images of specific buildings from clouding the issue of ornament and how it functions.¹⁶ However, this does not answer the question of how to treat those forms that refer to an identifiable *type* of building rather than a specific monument. Grabar's interpretation appears to deny the possibility of an iconographic reading for images or forms that are not specifically intended as representations of specific, individual buildings that exist in the real world.¹⁷ Hence, he refuses the option of an iconographic reading for those forms that connote or even explicitly represent a specific type of architectural structure rather than a named individual monument, arguing that '[p]recision of depiction is needed for [certain two-dimensional forms of architecture as ornament] to be buildings, but the specificity of that precision is secondary to the power of evocation'.¹⁸

I would counter that the evocation-led experience he describes may itself, in some circumstances and certainly in the case of much of the material in the present thesis, depend greatly on the viewer's identification of a specific type of structure or of parts thereof, by a process that is probably best described as iconographic identification. Krautheimer's iconography of medieval architecture suggests that within the medieval Christian world a dominant form of architectural copying existed, which privileged the approximate copying of characteristic elements over attempts to

¹⁵ Grabar 1992: 185–9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185–6. A very complex example that partly sidesteps the 'real world' criteria can be found in the Christian images of the heavenly Jerusalem. This phenomenon is referenced by Grabar (*ibid.*, 185) and explored further in Toussaint 2008.

¹⁸ Grabar 1992: 191. In some ways this is another manifestation of the rather uncertain place of three-dimensional ornament in Grabar's arguments, as these lines must have been written with only a certain type of two-dimensional architectural decoration, such as the architectural settings of medieval frontispieces, in mind.

replicate the appearance of the whole structure: this trope depended on the observer's recognition and appreciation of 'a general pattern and its implications' over precisely copied forms.¹⁹ This relationship between the copy and the original is also borne out in representations of buildings in western sculpture and painting: '[l]ike the [architectural] "copies" they show the disintegration of the prototype into its single elements, the selective transfer of these parts, and their reshuffling in the copy.'²⁰ As will be shown below, this description could equally be applied to the adaptations and imitations of architectural form that took place in certain portable objects of the medieval Islamic world. The point is that the characteristic elements of an architectural *type* – be they general forms, such as a polygonal ground plan or domed profile, or an individual unit such as a portal, screen, column or arcade, or a particular combination of elements – are recognized as such by the viewer, and by this means some if not all of the evocative powers of the type of structure being depicted are activated, along with all its contingent emotional, spiritual or workaday connotations.²¹ Thus the iconographic identification that has prompted the evocation necessarily comes to be of the utmost significance to our understanding of the *modus operandi* of the ornamental form itself.

To this end, a basic iconography of architectural forms will be built up in the following chapters. A central concern of the four studies that make up the thesis is the identification of miniature architectural components with their full-size counterparts in order to construct a better idea of the iconographic charge carried by the miniature architectural forms, and to begin reconstructing their role within medieval Islamic cultures. In practical terms this will necessitate a thoroughgoing dissection of the dominant architectural components of each type of object, the comparison of those elements with full-size architectural forms, with representations of architecture, and with textual evidence regarding the ways in which architecture was viewed and understood by medieval viewers. Although at times laborious, this strategy is necessary if the assertions as to the type of architecture being represented,

¹⁹ Krautheimer 1971: 121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

²¹ On architectural connotation, see Eco 1997: 187–90.

and by extension the meaning of that architecture in an individual decorative context, are to be convincingly grounded.

Aspects of the Miniature

Beyond the questions raised by Grabar's studies, ornament makes some very pragmatic demands of its own media. In the case of architecture as ornament, the most obvious of these is miniaturisation. No man-made architectural construction can function as ornament on a portable object without having first been shrunk enormously. But what are the implications of miniaturisation? What does it mean to miniaturise something? That there can be an element of the maniacal in the making of miniature things – 'we'll make the whole world *small*!'²² – is undeniable. In addition to the eye-straining concentration needed to create an object both small and detailed, miniaturisation permits control of a finite world, and enables a form of possession that would not otherwise be possible. At the same time, miniaturisation facilitates an immediate comprehension that cannot be attained with full-size objects, as the gaze does not need to wander to take in every aspect of the miniature.²³ It is, as Lévi-Strauss says, a trade-off, in which the man-made miniature 'compensates for the renunciation of sensible dimensions by the acquisition of intelligible dimensions'.²⁴ The significance of this for the present study lies in the possibilities that miniaturisation introduces into man's relationship with that most pervasive of man-made things, architecture: with the loss of true architecture's imposing qualities and monumentality comes something that can be held in the hands, that is within the reach of everyone.

The miniature as a cultural phenomenon has been usefully approached from viewpoints grounded in anthropology,²⁵ phenomenology,²⁶ and cultural studies.²⁷ One very significant observation made within anthropological discourse on the

²² *The Devil-Doll*, Dir. Tod Browning, 1936.

²³ Edmund Burke, 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. I (London, 1826): 267–8, cited in Mack 2007: 54.

²⁴ Lévi-Strauss 1966: 23–4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–5; Gell 1999: 166–9; Mack 2007.

²⁶ Bachelard 1994.

²⁷ Stewart 1996: 37–69.

miniature is the distinction between the model and the microcosm. If a model is defined as a strictly scaled down version of a larger entity, often one that has an instructive or educational purpose,²⁸ it is, as Mack has observed, by definition mimetic.²⁹ On the other hand, microcosms are ‘neither scrupulous and small reproductions of larger totalities, nor fragments of larger entities’.³⁰ Rather, the microcosm of this definition is a physical form of miniaturised ‘essence’ that can stand in for a larger concept, even for an idea of the world. This may take the form of an approximated miniature which presents a recognisable imitation of form but drops unnecessary detail, concentrating on and often enlarging the aspects of most significance: such a description would fit the house models of chapter one, although these are also described at times as models. On the other hand the principle of *pars pro toto* may permit a part or a drastically reconfigured set of elements to be presented as a microcosmic invocation of a larger form, an idea most fully explored in the *kilgas* of chapter three.³¹ However, both of these aspects of the microcosm will be seen in the relationship of many of the miniature architectural forms in the forthcoming chapters to full-size architecture, inasmuch as it is most frequently the *idea* of a type of full-size architecture that is being realized or alluded to within the miniature forms, rather than an attempt at creating a fully mimetic scale model. In all instances this process of miniaturisation carries with it the danger of misrepresentation and a lack of clarity, but at the same time it enables us to see which elements were deemed most significant by the artists.

²⁸ Jordanova 2004: 447–8; Smith 2004: 5–32.

²⁹ Mack 2007: 71–2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71. For example, Mack (after Stewart) asserts that the religious relic is a type of microcosm, wherein one small part of the holy body can be entirely saturated with, and thus stand in lieu of, the power of its sacred source: this is contrasted with the ‘inert’ relationship of an architectural fragment to the building from which it came (*ibid.*, 69; Stewart 1996: 134–5). A conflation of these two ideas can be seen in the dissemination of the stones of the Holy Sepulchre throughout Europe as sacred relics (Ousterhout 2003: 20–21).

³¹ Krautheimer, using different terms, touches upon this in his discussion of depictions and descriptions of architecture in the European Middle Ages. He presents a conception of representation that shifts through time, with early examples dependant on the selection of a few outstanding elements for representation, normally structured in accordance with their religious importance. From the thirteenth century onward however he posits a move towards copies, depictions and descriptions that ‘strive more and more towards giving a reproduction of the original in its visible aspects’ (Krautheimer 1971: 130), i.e. a transition from microcosmic to model-based understandings of architectural representation.

One further avenue of comparative study that must be considered at this point is that of miniature architectural forms in non-Islamic cultures. A considerable amount of research has been done in the fields of European and latterly Byzantine microarchitecture, particularly in recent years.³² However, although they are comparable in some senses with the subjects of the present thesis, the medieval objects normally designated by the term ‘microarchitecture’ appear to be exclusively Christian, meaning not only that they come from Christian countries, but also that they are almost always to be found in sacred contexts.³³ Reliquaries, monstrances, ciboria, censers, chrismatories, aedicules, sacrament houses and donor statues all present instances of a free-standing microarchitecture, and of course the accretions of architectural ornament that appear on capitals, baldachins, tombs, canopies and even baptismal fonts can hardly be separated from this category. Timmermann has demonstrated that even outside the ecclesiastical context, the forms of microarchitecture were exploited within medieval European civic ritual for their liturgical connotations, for example by connecting certain structures related to the administration of justice with the narrative of the Passion.³⁴

The inseparability of the particular corpus of material referred to as microarchitecture from the practices and the physical and mental environment of the Christian church means that ‘microarchitecture’ is not an appropriate term for the present study. This is not just because the subjects of this thesis come from Islamic lands. It is also because, on the whole, they are notable for their proximity to secular concerns, predominantly those of urban domestic life, and thus are quite distinct in every sense from the objects of the study of microarchitecture as it is presently defined.³⁵ It is neither desirable nor possible to proceed in a straight line from scholarship that deals

³² A key text is Bucher 1976. More recent studies on medieval European microarchitecture can be found in Timmermann 2007, 2007 (a) and 2008, and Cornelison 2004. Angar, who has not yet completed her doctoral thesis on miniature architecture in the Byzantine world, has published some work on this understudied area (see Angar 2008 and 2009).

³³ For example, the published proceedings of a recent major conference on microarchitecture in the Middle Ages (Kratzke and Albrecht 2008) contains twenty-six papers, only one of which (Angar 2008) makes a sustained engagement with material made outside Europe.

³⁴ Timmermann 2007 and 2008.

³⁵ The identification of this phenomenon with the Christian church to the exclusion of all other cultures and contexts, to the extent that it is not really possible to use this implicitly neutral term for miniature architecture outside the church context, can of course be cited as yet another instance of Eurocentrism in art history.

with exquisitely-crafted liturgical objects to that which seeks to find meaning in what are at times quite crudely-made artefacts of a largely domestic material culture. As such, studies in European and Byzantine microarchitecture provide important perspectives and may suggest paths for future scholarship, but can only be of limited value in the preliminary search for meanings amongst the subjects of the present study.³⁶

Beyond Christian microarchitecture there are other forms of miniature architecture that will be considered within individual chapters: funerary models found in Ancient Egypt, China and Mexico, and votive maquettes and urns of architectural form from the ancient Mediterranean and the Holy Land make interesting subjects for comparison with the ‘house models’ of chapter one, while some of the more architectural incense burners of Teotihuacán and Mayan cultures could be compared with the objects examined in chapter four. All of these manifestations of the urge to create miniature architecture are valuable for the present study, but none of them explains the diverse appearance of architectural forms on the many quotidian subjects of this thesis. The medieval Middle Eastern applications of this idea appear to have been less confined to specific contexts than was the case with comparable artefacts from other cultures, suggesting that an ‘architecturalising’ decorative impulse was broadly felt, rather than existing only in response to certain ritual or spiritual requirements.

In more general terms, art-historical texts have tended to situate ideas of the miniature within object-specific frameworks, as in the large bodies of scholarship on miniature painting of all kinds, where the miniature is only one aspect of the object amongst many others and is rarely considered as a quality in its own right.³⁷ While this thesis follows an object-based model, the cultural, aesthetic and philosophical implications of miniaturisation are a recurring concern within the individual studies.

³⁶ A particularly interesting idea which has appeared in studies of the Saint Chapelle in Paris is the suggestion that the entire built structure should be understood as a type of macro-reliquary (Weiss 1995: 308; Branner 1968: 8–9, 22; *idem* 1971: 5–6). This reversal of the standard paradigm (which posits small as an imitation of, and therefore subordinated to, a larger ‘original’) highlights the potential potency of the very small, a concept that will be shown to be of great importance.

³⁷ However, although the author’s background lies in anthropology, Mack 2007 could be considered a work of art history as much as it is a work of anthropology.

Framing the Question: Examples and Scope

To explain the genesis of the question it is necessary to go back in time. The germ of this thesis lay in an earlier study of the Ottoman Qur'an boxes of architectural form now in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul. The most striking aspects of that group seemed to me to be those that had been least discussed in earlier literature: that is, the complex blend of mimesis and fantasy played out in the architectural iconography of the boxes; the significance of the full-size architectural sources to which those forms alluded, and the intellectual and spiritual implications of a quasi-architectural form for an object with a function as rarified as the enshrinement of the word of God.³⁸

While that article tried to answer rather complex formal and conceptual questions in relation to a single group of Ottoman objects, it became increasingly clear that there was scope for a much larger investigation into the use of three-dimensional architectural forms among portable objects. A preliminary attempt at drawing up a corpus of medieval examples of this decorative mode lingered on objects that were, like the Qur'an boxes, containers of one sort or another.³⁹ But further investigation started to cast up many more examples of the phenomenon, not just containers but also other types of functional object – and even objects whose function was not clear.

Almost from the outset, then, it was obvious that the principal danger to the present study lay in an overload, rather than a paucity, of potential material. Although the overarching questions posed by the thesis are of a fundamentally philosophical nature, the aim was always to try to answer these through sustained close analysis and contextualisation of individual objects or groups of objects: this seems to be the surest route in art history toward saying something worthwhile about both objects and theoretical issues. In the event it turned out to be particularly pertinent to the current investigation as many of the objects that form its focus were found to be

³⁸ A revised version of that paper is currently in press (Graves forthcoming).

³⁹ See the comparative material cited in Graves forthcoming: ms. pp. 23–4.

seriously understudied, and there was sometimes no previous scholarship available on which to build.⁴⁰

Given the complexity of the questions being asked of this body of evidence, it would not be possible for a broad survey to provide a satisfactory level of engagement with or interrogation of the material.⁴¹ With the necessity for close study of objects at the forefront of the task, and predetermined limits on the length of the thesis, it was clear that the entire study could not encompass significantly more than four or at the most five discrete groups of objects. In order to achieve something approaching coherence, the individual groups selected for study had to strike a balance between the display of sufficient commonalities to permit useful comparisons between the groups, and the maintenance of sufficient diversity to maximise the intellectual scope of the study. As the focus of the question came to settle on the urban cultures of the medieval period in the Islamic world, pieces that fell far outside a loose temporal definition of that period (c. 900–1250 CE) were not considered, and the geographical area was restricted to the core Middle Eastern territories lying from Egypt to Iran and Afghanistan. This particular period saw a considerable swell of artistic activity in these areas, and some of the object groups under discussion appear to be unique to their own particular cultural and geographic locations; however, these unique groups are still part of a larger cultural phenomenon of ‘architecturalising’ decoration on portable objects. The exclusion of the Maghrib, the Arabian Peninsula, much of Central Asia, and Turkey and Eastern Europe from the principal focus of the thesis did not mean that objects from these areas could not be considered as comparative or secondary material.

A short note regarding terminology for the eastern end of the geographical area of focus is necessary. For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘Persia’ has been used throughout to refer to the large cultural area historically known by this name, which

⁴⁰ A review of the existing literature, where it exists, is given at the beginning of each section.

⁴¹ Ibrahim has undertaken a broad survey of meaning within a large number of forms of two-dimensional architecture as ornament. While her study throws up many interesting new points through its ambitious programme of image analysis, the recurring argument of architectural representations as a form of ‘disguised signature’ of the artist is contentious, and many of the author’s symbolic readings seem too cursory to be entirely convincing at this stage (Ibrahim 2006: 82, 281).

encompasses the present-day political entities of both Afghanistan and Iran. Correspondingly, the adjective ‘Persianate’ has occasionally been used to describe things viewed as characteristic of that cultural area. However, the country name ‘Iran’ has been used when describing the present-day location of monuments, people and things that are found within the modern political boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Returning to the development of the thesis itself, it was during the initial phases of research clear contenders that started to emerge: that is, groups of objects that appeared promising or intriguing in the clarity (or sometimes complexity) of their relationship with architecture, but which also presented in sufficient numbers to enable certain conclusions to be drawn about the societies that had produced them. To find one object that miniaturises architecture in a particular way is interesting but does not easily permit larger hypotheses about the role of architecture as ornament, beyond that which can be said about that specific object.⁴² To find thirty or forty more of the same type of object, all interacting in various ways with one specific type of architecture, encourages the belief that this is not an isolated phenomenon or the whim of a single artist but may in fact be part of a significant trope within the visual culture of that society. Given the lack of existing research in this area, the rather conservative focus on large object groups was necessary at this stage to ensure that interpretive conclusions were grounded as convincingly as possible in the evidence of the objects. One result of this selection criterion is that the enquiry is predominantly, although not exclusively, concerned with what might be classed as ‘material culture’ rather than ‘fine arts’, as the requirement for artefacts that constitute large groups of one type has inevitably led to a focus on objects that have been manufactured in large numbers for consumption at a middle level of society.⁴³

⁴² That this approach is also valuable is demonstrated most vividly by Grabar’s readings of the *Ṣan‘ā’ Qur‘an* frontispieces (Grabar 1992: 155–62).

⁴³ I do not feel it necessary to justify my choice of material in this aspect: it has been fifty years since Ettinghausen (1969 [a]: 298–9) wrote that the selection of Islamic objects for display in western museums ‘has separated the really significant material from the tens of thousands of artistically mediocre and intellectually arid pieces’. The time to re-assess cultural production at levels below those of the elite has since arrived in this field as it has in the rest of art history.

Observing all of these criteria, four groups were accordingly selected. These are the so-called ‘house models’ of Seljuq or post-Seljuq Persia; related *tabourets* from Persia and similar objects from Ayyubid Syria; a form of jar stand, known as a *kilga*, apparently unique to Cairo in the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods (and possibly later); and a final section encompassing two different forms of metalwork container, inkwells from Persia and incense burners from across the medieval Middle Eastern lands. The process by which the items chosen to represent metalwork were selected was rather more complex than that of the other groups, and the means by which this decision was reached will be described below. Taken overall, the subjects of the study encompass three different media and must have been in use at various different levels of society, while the relationship to architectural forms varies greatly from group to group, as will be demonstrated in the individual chapters.

These variations notwithstanding, each of the four types of object (five if one counts the two metalwork groups separately) displays a consistently three-dimensional conception of architectural forms. In this aspect the subjects of study are quite distinct from previous scholarship that focused discussion of architecture as ornament on two-dimensional representations of architecture, much of which has centred on the depiction of architecture within miniature painting.⁴⁴ The position of architecture as one of the most visually accessible forms of art and patronage in the medieval world justifies looking at the subject of architecture as ornament from the point of view of less elite forms of art than book-painting, as the reflection of architecture in the arts around it is demonstrably not a phenomenon that is restricted to the luxury arts. Three-dimensionality, and the practical and theoretical implications thereof, is correspondingly one of the principal concerns of this enquiry.

⁴⁴ Notably Grabar 1992: 155–72 and Ibrahim 2006. For a selection of texts that deal specifically with the treatment of architecture and architectural space within miniature painting see the general discussion in Pauty 1933–4; on architecture within author frontispieces, Hillenbrand 2006: 195–203; on the *Maqāmāt* illustrations, Barrucand 1986 and 1994, Serajuddin 1975; on architecture in Timurid and later painting, Serajuddin 1968, De Angelis and Lentz 1982, Golombek 1985, Yazar 1991, and Sims, Grube and Marshak 2002: 169–200. See also the representation of sacred spaces within pilgrimage scrolls discussed in Roxburgh 2008: 753–74, and the two-dimensional representations of sacred Muslim architecture in Renard 2001: 406–7 and Bernardini 2000: 95–102. The representational function of architectural imagery in such contexts is a separate issue from that under discussion here, and one that will be touched upon at certain points within the thesis itself.

A further group of objects considered for inclusion were the large relief-decorated unglazed jars of the type known as a *ḥabb*, from the Jazira. Although not at first sight overtly architectural in their decoration, many examples of these objects display an articulation of the surface that appears to owe much to an architectural conception of spatial division, and they could provide an important manifestation of architecture as ornament within the Mesopotamian cultural sphere.⁴⁵ However, the conception of architecture that this group displays seemed, upon reflection, to have more essentials in common with two-dimensional systems of architectural representation than with the more sculptural concerns of the rest of the objects in the thesis. Ultimately it became preferable to sacrifice this section than to curtail the analysis of, and dialogue between, the other groups.

Methodologies, Limitations and Structure

The principal visual component of the present thesis is an illustrated *catalogue sommaire* composed of four sections, one for each of the major object groups covered in the text. Each section is made up of individual catalogue entries giving the dimensions, provenance and current location of every object in the group that has been identified during the course of study, or as much of this information as is known. Select bibliographical references are also given where relevant, as well as an illustration of each object. The guiding principle for this, the backbone of the thesis, has been to gather as complete a profile of the four groups under study as was possible within three years; to assemble those examples into a basic ‘catalogue’ that is illustrated and provides an easy mode of reference for the reader; and to use this as the starting point for an extended inquiry into the meaning of, and motivations behind, miniature architectural forms in the medieval Islamic world. Additional objects and comparative images that do not form part of the *catalogue sommaire* have been presented in a separate volume of figures.

⁴⁵ For example, the prevalence on the *ḥabbs* of figures (human, animal and mythical) contained within quasi-architectural niches, or the recurring motif of ‘the woman in the window’ (itself related to far older Mesopotamian imagery) could be cited as examples of an architectural division of surface space, to say nothing of the overtly architectonic formulation of space enacted in the transformation of the earliest simple handles into an elaborate system of projecting flanges and recessed arches. For examples see Reitlinger 1951: figs 11–23 and Sarre 1905: 70–73.

It is of course inevitable that the four ‘catalogues’ that have been assembled will not be complete. Had the intention of this thesis been merely to gather as many examples as possible, and present a *catalogue raisonné* of types, motifs and so forth, it would be more awkward to admit incompleteness; but even in those circumstances it would never be possible to say with mass-produced objects of this type that one had assembled the definitive catalogue. Naturally, the bulk of the data collection was done through museum and collection visits: additional funding from the AHRC enabled research expeditions to Iran, Syria and Egypt, and funding from other sources went towards travel within Turkey, Western Europe and North America. Equally naturally, unavoidable restrictions on time and money meant that not every collection that might have proved fruitful could be visited. To this end, published sources and web catalogues were supplemented with images of unpublished objects provided by museum professionals and helpful colleagues.

Inevitably, certain collections presented particular problems. The continued closure of the Islamic Museum in Tehran meant that I was unable to view any objects from that collection during my visit, and there seems to have been little systematic publication of the objects in this institution.⁴⁶ Efforts to examine the collections of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (of particular relevance for the chapter on *kilgas*) came to nothing in spite of the co-operation of employees of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, because the ongoing renovation of that museum made access impossible, while images were apparently non-existent.⁴⁷ At the same time, most of the *kilgas* of the Coptic Museum in Cairo are in deep storage and could not be opened without the written consent of the relevant governmental department, a circumstance which neither I nor the curator Nadja Tomoum were able to overcome in the time available.⁴⁸ Fortunately the majority of the *kilgas* in the Cairo museums were published by Knauer and Ibrahim (see chapter four), although some of their images are of poor quality.

⁴⁶ Nobody I encountered during my visit to Tehran was able to give me any idea of the likely date of re-opening of this museum.

⁴⁷ Iman Abdulfattah is thanked in particular for her efforts on my behalf.

⁴⁸ It is hoped that there will be an opportunity to examine this material in the future.

Beyond the practical problems of creating four sizeable catalogues of material, the greatest limitation faced by any study of this type is that inherent in the necessary contrivance of having a limited number of studies stand in for an entire tranche of visual culture across a vast area. As already stated, the present work has sacrificed the breadth of a survey for the depth of four long and focused studies. The value of this approach lies in the presentation of a series of examples illustrating some of the ways in which architecture was employed as three-dimensional ornament on portable objects of the medieval Middle East, and thereby enabling more sustained discursive analysis of this phenomenon than earlier authors have been willing or able to undertake.

A final methodological point to note before moving to an outline structure of the thesis itself concerns the role of comparative material within this discussion of the architectural form and its artistic functions. One result of the preponderance of mid-status material in this thesis is the necessity of opening out the comparative material amongst which similar motifs or concepts have been sought. The artistic and conceptual concerns in operation at this level – which may overlap with, or correspond to, those of the so-called folk traditions – are frequently less refined, more durable, and much harder to fix accurately in time and space than those of the luxury objects created for the elite with Islamic art history has traditionally concerned itself. While it would obviously be preferable to draw comparative material from sources known to lie close to the material under study, this is sometimes impossible when dealing with the undocumented, messy and often rather problematic material in question. To take a case in point, the extremely long duration and broad reach of certain very fundamental ideas represented by some of the material in this thesis – for example, the model of the house as a talismanic symbol and safeguard of home, or the association of voluptuous naked female figures with fertility and by association with water – is amply attested within certain pre-Islamic artefacts, but is not readily evident in surviving material from the medieval Islamic world that could be usefully compared with the material in chapters one and three. In such cases, it is preferable to note clear similarities between the medieval material and the pre-Islamic – while also acknowledging that distance in time and space

forbids a direct connection – than to ignore it. This is because the principal point of concern is the postulation, in the lack of direct historical documentation, of what certain motifs or forms created in the medieval period might have represented to their creators and owners, and what conceptual rationale or (potentially ancient) visual tradition such forms might have sprung from.

Finally, the structure and subjects of the thesis will be briefly outlined. Chapter one introduces the most completely mimetic objects within the study, the so-called ‘house models’ of Persia. This chapter also establishes the mechanism by which the first three chapters will broach the material. After an introductory section which establishes both the physical characteristics and the historical background of the objects, individual elements of the objects that can be identified as architectural are compared separately and successively with full-size architecture and source material to create as full a picture as possible of the architectural reference points depicted within each object. A third section follows, in which the suggested functions of the house models within existing literature are examined, before final conclusions are presented: the domestic sphere and the implications of mimesis are of major concern for the interpretations developed.

A type of ceramic stand most frequently referred to as a *tabouret* forms the subject of the second chapter. Two quite different versions of this type of functional object appear to originate from Persia and Syria, the former generally strongly mimetic and the latter more obliquely related to architecture. The lack of consensus regarding how these stands were actually used has meant that the grounding section of this chapter includes discussion of the general context of furniture in the medieval Islamic world as well as the historical and archaeological contexts of the *tabourets* themselves. The analysis of architectural parallels for this group encompasses a considerable variety of sources, and this chapter moves the argument away from relatively straightforward mimetic miniaturisations of architecture and towards a more complex, reconfigured and even playful form of architectural referencing. Conclusions on this chapter also develop the issues of taste and aspiration in urban culture as played out within both architecture and portable objects.

The third chapter again follows the three-part structure of grounding first, taking apart for architectural parallels second, and finally reassembling for conclusions. In this chapter the *kilga*, a type of carved stone stand for water jars, is shown to reconfigure drastically the forms of a particular architectural unit while simultaneously retaining a miniaturised version of that unit's function, thus expanding the idea of a microcosmic function within the canon of miniature architecture. Further to the idea of the microcosm, the apparent uniqueness of the *kilga* to Cairo paves the way for discussion of the material, function and decoration of the object as a product of the city's own needs and self-image; in this manner the discourse on urbanism and its reflection within miniature architectures is also extended.

Finally, the fourth chapter encompasses two separate groups of metalwork objects. Unlike previous chapters, the fourth section examines objects about which a considerable amount has already been written. Further, there is in the case of metalwork a wealth of material that could be proposed to bear formal similarities with architecture, some of which will be discussed briefly at the start of chapter four. Rather than attempt to cover the entire field of medieval Islamic metalwork searching for elements derived from architectural forms, chapter four focuses on two groups of objects from this category that have been viewed as representing reasonably complete and self-contained references to architecture. That is to say, they take an overall form that can be read as architectural, rather than embedding a lone element derived from architecture within a non-architectural body. The first group – Persian inkwells – is discussed in light of the interpretations of previous authors and whether or not an architectural reading is plausible for these pieces. The second half of the chapter analyses, in a similar vein, a large number of incense burners from various locations, this time encompassing debates about provenance that may have significance for the architectural interpretations given to some of the objects. Subjecting the pieces to a critical gaze opens up further questions regarding the reliability of contemporary interpretations, in addition to furthering discussion of taste and the status of architecture in the medieval urban Middle East.

The last part of the thesis draws together the conclusions mounted within each chapter. The primary questions of the thesis are reviewed: why should architecture be felt to be a fitting, attractive, elegant, appealing or necessary way of adding meaning or value to an object? And what has been gleaned about the position of the objects under discussion, and the monumental forms that they mimic, from this exploration of the relationship between the architectural environment of the medieval Middle East and the microcosmic world of ornament in which it is reflected?

CHAPTER ONE

MIMESIS AND THE DOMESTIC SPHERE:

CERAMIC ‘HOUSE MODELS’ FROM PERSIA

Believers, do not enter the dwellings of other men until you have asked their owners' permission and wished them peace. That will be best for you. Perchance you will take heed.⁴⁹

The surviving group of glazed ceramic objects commonly known as ‘house models’, generally ascribed to the late- or post-Seljuq period in Persia (here very loosely defined as c.1150 to 1250 CE), are now in museums and private collections around the world.⁵⁰ This dispersal is a condition that they share with the other subjects of this thesis. It is not possible to say at this stage how many such house models there are in existence, as scholarly literature on these objects is scarce and many of those that have been identified in the course of this study have not been publicly exhibited for many years.⁵¹ For this reason, one of the aims of this study is to bring together as many examples as possible, in order to study these unusual objects as a group in their own right, rather than as a footnote to the rest of the ceramic production of the late Seljuq period.

The first sections of this study will introduce the house models, their features and their structure, and describe the historic circumstances of their production. The

⁴⁹ Qur'an 24:27. Quotations from the Qur'an here and throughout are taken from the translation by N.J. Dawood (London, Penguin Books, 1999).

⁵⁰ Substantial parts of this chapter have already been published or are in press: see Graves 2008 and Graves forthcoming (a).

⁵¹ Mirela Ljevaković (University of Munich, 2006) has written an unpublished Masters dissertation on Seljuq house models. I have not been able to read the manuscript, but have spoken to her about her work: we had each found examples that the other had not come across, suggesting that there are probably a very great number of these objects all over the world. I would like to thank her for sharing some of her thoughts on this group with me. I also extend sincere thanks to Melanie Gibson (SOAS) for generously sharing the information she had gathered on the house models during the course of her doctoral research on Persian and Syrian figurines.

second and longer part will concentrate on iconographic analysis, and the questions of function and meaning that have arisen naturally during the study of these objects.

Dating and Provenance

The material that forms the subject of this chapter, and the related objects in chapter two, are part of the large body of ceramic material generally termed ‘Seljuq monochrome ware’. The very small number of scientifically documented excavations performed in Iran and Afghanistan, and the very large volume of the material, mean that this group has presented consistent problems for archaeologists and art historians. In common with Seljuq monochrome ware in general, not one of the house models so far encountered, or of the monochrome tabourets in chapter two that are attributed to the same historical background, is accompanied by a proper excavation report or hard-and-fast attribution to a specific site. Although this is, to put it mildly, a frustrating state of affairs, it is not unique. As Mulder has noted, properly documented excavations of the medieval period in the Middle East are so rare they can be listed in one line, and Persian material, with the exception of that excavated at Nishapur, routinely appears in collections and on the market without any convincing excavation record.⁵²

The current state of knowledge about ceramic production and decoration in late Seljuq Persia suggests ceramic production appears to have been most inventive and most prolific in the western part of the country, with the potters of Kāshān acquiring a particularly good reputation in the medieval period: the city is believed by many scholars to be the main centre of luxury ceramic production in the medieval period.⁵³ Fritware, thought to have entered Persia at some point in the early- to mid-twelfth century (see below) was almost certainly produced in significant quantities at a number of centres; however, as Watson notes, ‘[w]e are unfortunately still far from

⁵² Mulder 2001: 7. Scott Redford informed me in conversation in 2008 that he does not know of a single house model to have been uncovered at a scientifically documented excavation.

⁵³ Ettinghausen 1936: 44–75; Watson 1973–5: 3–4. It has been proposed that Egyptian potters carried the lustre glaze technique, seen on a great number of spectacular Fatimid Egyptian ceramics, to Persia in the twelfth century along with the fritware technique. See Watson 1999: 299–300.

being able to distinguish even the key characteristics of the major centres other than Kashan'.⁵⁴

It should be noted that the only house model included in this study that has any record of an excavation site attached to it is cat. no. 1.52, reportedly excavated at Rayy in 1913,⁵⁵ however, Rayy was the Persian site to which most fine ceramic works were automatically ascribed before the tide of favour swung over to Kāshān in the 1930s, and would therefore have been the excavation site most likely to be cited by a dealer eager to authenticate his wares.⁵⁶ Similarly, it is almost certainly the increase in scholarly attributions of certain works to Kāshān that caused someone at the Metropolitan Museum to add the word 'Kashan' onto the object file for cat. no. 1.50 long after it had originally been acquired.⁵⁷ It can be assumed that this is not based on original reports of where the object was found. Many museum labels and accession records suggest attribution of the house models to Rayy or Kāshān, although such attributions do not appear to have been made on the basis of reliable excavation records. A label attribution in the British Museum gives Sangān-i Bālā as the production site of cat. no. 1.11, but I have been unable to find out if this is based on a dealer's attribution or a more reliable source. Similarly, scholars have published caption attributions to Rayy,⁵⁸ Sulṭānābād,⁵⁹ and Sāva,⁶⁰ although these all appear to be speculative. Watson has completely demolished the idea of Sāva as a centre of ceramic production, citing a total lack of objective evidence.⁶¹

Because there exist a number of lustre ceramics with dates and historical inscriptions, the art historical narrative of medieval Persian ceramic production has tended to focus most closely on lustre wares. Although only three of the house models are decorated with lustre glaze (cat. nos 1.23, 1.40 and 1.50), the implications that can be gleaned from the development of lustre ware are significant. The earliest dated pieces

⁵⁴ Watson 2004: 303.

⁵⁵ Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin: object file for accession number I. 4646.

⁵⁶ Watson 1973–5: 1. On similar practices amongst the purveyors of pre-Islamic Persian antiquities, see Carter 2001: 175.

⁵⁷ Metropolitan Museum, New York: database object file for accession no. 20.120.66.

⁵⁸ Soustiel 1985: 103.

⁵⁹ Kühnel 1970: 112–3.

⁶⁰ Pope 1981: Vol. 4, 1625–7.

⁶¹ Watson 1973–5: 4.

of Persian lustre ware come from the last three decades of the twelfth century, but their appearance suggests the technique had been mastered some time before this.⁶² Schnyder, Watson and Grube, amongst others, have suggested with regard to lustre ware that many of the arguments for stylistically distinct centres of lustre painting in late Seljuq and Mongol Persia should in fact be interpreted as evidence for the stylistic development of lustre painting over time, and do not need to point to distinct schools.

Further, the same scholars propose that there is little need to look beyond the well-documented site of Kāshān as the centre of Persian lustre production, although non-lustre ceramics were certainly produced at other locations also at this time.⁶³ Moreover, we can probably assume that where lustre ware was being produced less luxurious wares such as monochrome-glazed pieces were also being made, for any industry is unlikely to consist only of top-tier production.⁶⁴ However, the largely monochrome-glazed house models could have been created at other sites: the large number of monochrome-glazed sherds found at Rayy along with several kiln wasters indicate a healthy ceramic production,⁶⁵ and it is natural to assume that any major urban centre would have some ceramic production, at the very least to supply the utilitarian needs of the local market.⁶⁶ Without further evidence, it is hard to see how the house models can be attributed more specifically than to Persia, possibly western Persia, and this is reflected in a lack of agreement amongst scholars as to the city of origin of any two house models.

The chronic lack of dated material from this group means that dating is normally based on analysis of glaze, decoration and clay as compared with other ceramic products attributed to medieval Persia. The house models – typically composed of a

⁶² Watson 2004: 347.

⁶³ Schnyder 1972: 190–1; Watson 1973–5: 9–13; Grube 1992: 315. Redford and Blackman have raised some objections to this theory of a single centre of production, suggesting that the ubiquity of extremely fragile fritwares, ‘in quantities massive enough to supply virtually every archaeological site in Iran with luster pottery’, argues against extensive transportation from a few centres of manufacture (Redford and Blackman 1997: 235).

⁶⁴ See the instructions for creating lustre and other fine glazes in the 1196 *Jowhar-nāme-i Nezāmi* by Muḥammad al-Jowhar al-Nishāpuri (Porter 2003: 427).

⁶⁵ Watson 1973–5: 2, n. 2.

⁶⁶ Hillenbrand 1987: 319.

fairly pale, biscuit-coloured fritware body with thick, translucent greenish, turquoise or, much less commonly, dark blue glaze – fit comfortably in these terms with the Persian ceramic production of the late twelfth to thirteenth centuries.⁶⁷ As there are no dated examples and apparently no written sources that refer to these enigmatic objects, we must accept this dating, placing the house models within the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the production of fairly low-status figural ceramic models seems to have been most plentiful.

The house models are normally included within the large and enigmatic corpus of ceramic glazed figurines classed as ‘Seljuq’. Although it is true, as Grube points out, that the lack of evidence for similar small, figural and non-functional objects from the pre-Seljuq period does not mean that such objects never existed before that time, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the zenith of production of such objects.⁶⁸ Why there should have been so much sculptural ceramic production from this time and place is unclear; as will be described below, the growth in figural imagery has been attributed to a range of factors and we may simply have to understand much of the ceramic sculpture of this period as one, relatively easily-produced facet of this phenomenon. Ceramic is far easier to model than say stone or metalwork, and hence much folk tradition finds its expression in low-level ceramic production.⁶⁹

To conclude, then, in the absence of a secure connection to a particular site, the house models are attributed to Persian monochrome production of the late twelfth or thirteenth century on the basis of their frit bodies, glaze type and sculptural nature. Without better excavation records, which are not likely to be forthcoming, it is impossible to say more than this. In the light of this general lack of documentation, the following section will outline certain features that should be treated with caution.

⁶⁷ Compare with range of glazes seen in Watson 2004: 314–8.

⁶⁸ Grube 1966: 165–6.

⁶⁹ Melanie Gibson is currently preparing her doctoral thesis on glazed ceramic figural sculpture from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iran and Syria, and it is hoped that her research may shortly answer some of these questions.

Authenticity

The house models do not seem to have been, in the early days of Islamic art collecting, particularly highly regarded. The substantial group at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin is unusual: for the most part collected in the 1920s, this group can be directly connected to the taste of the then director of the museum, Freidrich Sarre, who had an interest in small sculptural objects and ethnographic oddities before many others in the field gave much consideration to such objects.⁷⁰ Given that they were collected before there was a significant market for them, the pieces in the Museum für Islamische Kunst can be regarded as relatively unproblematic. Many of them show evidence of restoration work, but this is normally recorded on the object files and was in many cases done in-house rather than by over-zealous dealers.

Similarly, many of the pieces in major collections can be seen to have arrived in the museums in the early part of the twentieth century, having been picked up in Iranian cities by travellers, collectors and curators, most of whom probably regarded them as interesting but not of massive value. For example, cat. no. 1.13 was acquired by Charles Marling while working in Tehran in the first decade of the twentieth century, and donated to the Victoria and Albert in 1928.⁷¹ Such pieces, with plausible provenances and early dates of entry into documented collections, do not by and large give much cause for concern. However, the faking of Islamic art objects was a growth industry by the time of the Burlington House exhibition of Persian art in 1931.⁷² Initially this would have been more likely to be encountered amongst the popular ‘fine wares’, such as dishes and vessels,⁷³ but in the later part of the twentieth century the market for Islamic art objects increased enormously, and in recent years Islamic art has come to fetch higher prices at auction than would have seemed possible even a decade ago.⁷⁴ This growth of interest in the Islamic arts, alongside more general changes in the ways that people collect and think about art,

⁷⁰ Jens Kröger informed me of this during my visit to the museum in May 2007.

⁷¹ See *Marling, Sir Charles M. and Lady Lucia*, Victoria and Albert Museum archive ref. MA/1/M 844.

⁷² British Museum 1996: 3. On the 1931 exhibition, see Wood 2000: 119–125.

⁷³ On the prevalence of this amongst certain types of wares, see Watson 1999: 304.

⁷⁴ This seems to be the result of a complex set of factors: see Harris 2006: 96–7.

has resulted in the house models becoming increasingly collectible. Any house models that appear on the market today without much of a pedigree should be looked at long and hard.⁷⁵

A memo from the Metropolitan Museum, written in 1974, reports on the findings of a conservation team asked by the Islamic Department to analyse two ‘sculpted ceramic tiles’, which can from the context be taken to mean house models or very closely related objects.⁷⁶ One of these was apparently rectangular and one circular, and both had been called into question because of their unusual iconographic and stylistic features (including animals and birds), construction and startling glaze colour. When examined under a microscope, under ultra-violet light and using x-radiograph, the pieces were both found to be composed largely of modern elements, with a limited amount of original ceramic material, possibly from a number of different artefacts. These pieces, which needless to say never entered the Museum’s collection, were compared in laboratory analysis with two of the house models included in this study (cat. nos 1.1 and 1.24). Both of the latter were felt after similar examination to present no problems with regard to authenticity.

There are most likely some examples of house models that have been faked from whole cloth, and there will be other examples that have been very heavily restored, or overpainted, or have been assembled, like some of Piranesi’s antiques, from disparate bits of genuine material into a new, artificial artefact.⁷⁷ A related object now in the Glass and Ceramics Museum in Tehran, of which the main body may be genuine, is decorated with figures that are clearly of recent production (fig. 1.1). The first thing to question would be the size of any house model: one can see from the ‘group shot’ of the Berlin house models (fig. 1.2) that the size of these objects is actually very consistent in the main, and most of the others in the catalogue also have very similar dimensions: between about 14 to 18 cm long and 9 to 11 cm wide. Any

⁷⁵ For this reason the catalogue for this chapter does not include a number of house models offered for sale in recent auctions: without having examined them myself, there seems to be too much that is questionable about the appearance of some of these objects. See for example Bonham’s, New Bond Street, Sale 16223, *Indian and Islamic Art*, 6 October 2008, lot no. 113.

⁷⁶ Interdepartmental Memo, Metropolitan Museum of Art, dated 7 June 1974.

⁷⁷ On Piranesi see Sørensen 2003: 792–5. For an interesting study of a dish in the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, that proved to be a composite of five or more separate objects, see Norman 2004: 75–6.

pieces much larger or smaller than this should be approached with caution. However, the best-known piece in the Metropolitan Museum (cat. no. 1.24) is distinctly larger than most other house models and yet according to the analysis undertaken at the Metropolitan Museum it should be viewed as a genuine artefact of the medieval period, so size cannot be considered an absolute guide.

When examining a piece more closely, technical warning signs would include a glassy and acid-bright turquoise glaze (this was one of the qualities cited by the Metropolitan team to have first raised questions about the rejected pieces); a glaze that is completely clean, shiny and without pitting; and bright iridescence that appears to have been applied over the glaze and comes off in onion-skin layers. For all of these reasons, I am inclined to believe that cat. no. 1.30 may be of recent manufacture, and as such it will not be further discussed in this study.

Historical Background: Seljuq Figural Art

It has been noted many times that what is often referred to as the late Seljuq period (c. 1150–1250) in Persia saw an unprecedented flowering of figural art across all media.⁷⁸ Although the possible socio-historical explanations for the burgeoning of figural art in this period are not something that can be comprehensively investigated by this study, it is necessary to our understanding of the house models, and some of the subjects of later chapters, that the historical background of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Persia is sketched out.⁷⁹

The Seljuqs, originally a Turkic nomadic dynasty, rose rapidly to power in the mid-eleventh century, defeating the Ghaznavids in Khurasan and the Buyids in Western Persia and Iraq. At the height of their power the Great Seljuqs, orthodox Sunni Muslims, controlled a huge area, stretching from Eastern Persia to Syria and into Arabia. After the death of the Seljuq Sultan Malik Shāh in 1092 the central government lost its way somewhat, and members of the Seljuq family established

⁷⁸ Ettinghausen 1970: 113–31. See also Baer 1973: 96; Pancaroğlu 2000: 23–36. For a brief review of the scholarship of this topic, see Pancaroğlu 2000: 36–43.

⁷⁹ The following passages are drawn from Lambton 1968: 203–83; Bosworth 1968: 1–203; Bosworth 1998: 155–61; Bosworth 1998 (a): 161–75; and Carole Hillenbrand 1985: 9–20.

increasingly autonomous principalities throughout the Seljuq territories, which in several cases passed into the hands of military commanders and vassals as the inevitable power struggles of a disintegrating empire did their work. The intensely complex relations of the successor states throughout the period up to the Khwarazmian invasions in the early thirteenth century and the Mongol conquests that followed them will not be discussed here. While studies of architectural monuments may have the necessary data to distinguish between dynasties within the enormous area that can be termed ‘the Persian world’ in the tenth to thirteenth centuries, studies of the quotidian objects of material culture from inadequately documented excavations do not.⁸⁰ For the purposes of the present study, the term ‘late Seljuq’ will continue to be used, albeit in full awareness of the problems of such a label.⁸¹ Watson has proposed the term ‘pre-Mongol’ as a preferable alternative to ‘Seljuq’ in discussions of Persian art of the mid-twelfth century up to the Mongol incursions of the 1220s, but in the present context this term might give the misleading impression of a total sea-change in artistic production before and after the Mongol invasion, and for this reason it will not be used.⁸²

The Seljuq period saw the formal large-scale introduction of what were to become key aspects of medieval Islamic social life. The *madrasa*, or religious school, was taken to new heights under Nizām al-Mulk, vizier to the Seljuq Sultans Alp Arslān and Malik Shāh; and the *futuwwa*, a type of brotherhood like a guild but with a strong chivalric code, rose to prominence in the late Seljuq period. Commerce too appears to have become more structured and stable, and texts celebrating the honest merchant and his vital place in contemporary society begin to appear in this period.⁸³ The formalization of the rules of the marketplace, a further development of this period and one of considerable relevance to the house models, will be discussed below.

⁸⁰ See Hillenbrand 2000 (a): 128–9; and Carole Hillenbrand 1985: 9–10.

⁸¹ For discussion of the problems of the term ‘Seljuq art’ as related to the period of the great Seljuqs and afterwards, see Fehérvári 1973: 1–2.

⁸² Watson 2006: 325, n.; Grabar 1968: 627.

⁸³ Lambton 1962: 122–24.

In an attempt to grasp the meaning of the profusion of figural imagery from the late Seljuq period, Grabar initially divided it into three iconographic cycles: the princely cycle, the astronomical cycle and a less clearly defined cycle of love or meditation, possibly merely a variant on the princely cycle.⁸⁴ He later extended this framework to include six cycles: princely, astrological, literary, daily life, private life, and meditative.⁸⁵ Obviously, the last and loosest of the first three defined cycles was revised and broken down by Grabar to form four new discrete cycles. It is no coincidence that while the first two cycles of Grabar's configurations arrive in the Seljuq era as mature iconographic cycles – the princely cycle has its roots in pre-Islamic Persia,⁸⁶ and astrological cycles of figurative imagery have an ancient and noble lineage across Europe and Asia⁸⁷ – the imagery which appears to have become codified for the first time in the Seljuq era, concerning what are basically secular human activities rather than the iconographies of power or magic, has proved much harder to classify and interpret.⁸⁸

Grabar concluded that this new imagery arose directly, and apparently solely, as a result of the growth in patronage of an increasingly strong urban mercantile class, effectively a bourgeoisie,⁸⁹ in late Seljuq-era Persia and Anatolia as the central power of the Seljuq state collapsed into a number of minor principalities and greater urbanization took place across what had been the Seljuq Empire.⁹⁰ This analysis has been questioned by Ettinghausen, and more recently by Pancaroğlu.⁹¹ The increasing

⁸⁴ Grabar 1968: 645–6.

⁸⁵ Grabar 1968 (a): 181–90.

⁸⁶ See for example Harper 1979: 49–64 and Yarshater 1983: 1113–29.

⁸⁷ On the Classical tradition of constellation images and their subsequent development in the Islamic world, see Wellesz 1959: 2–12. For an example of an astrological text believed to date from the Seljuq period, and comparisons between the illustrations and contemporary ceramics, see Raby 1994: 108–9.

⁸⁸ Ettinghausen 1969 (a): 299.

⁸⁹ It must be stated from the outset that the terms 'bourgeoisie' and 'middle class' do not sit comfortably in discussions of medieval Islamic society, because such terms, however widely used, are transposed from the self-defined social construction of modern European society (in which context they are by no means unproblematic), and cannot be free of inappropriate connotations. Following the model presented by Lapidus, which saw urban Mamluk society divided into four strata – the ruling elite (*al-khāṣṣa*), the notables (*al-a'yān*, including the '*ulamā*' and rich merchants), the common people (*al-ʿamma*, including traders and working people) and the lumpenproletariat – the sections of the population here denoted by the term 'middle-class' would be those of Lapidus' second and third categories that existed below the elite but nonetheless had money to spend on decorative objects. (Lapidus 1984: 79–85; see also Mulder 2001: 96, n. 243.)

⁹⁰ Grabar 1968: 648.

⁹¹ Ettinghausen 1970: 113; Pancaroğlu 2000: 40–1.

urbanization of Seljuq Persia, the development of city culture and the subsequent growth of the Persian bourgeoisie is a historical fact, and one that is of considerable significance for the present study,⁹² but as Ettinghausen has noted, urbanization was not a uniquely Seljuq phenomenon at this point and was in fact taking place in many other parts of the Islamic world during this period without necessarily engendering a zenith of artistic activity with a particular florescence of figural art in every area that it occurred.⁹³ He suggested that a number of other factors also contributed to the ‘artistic explosion’ of the Seljuq period. The increased stability and organization of many aspects of commerce in this period, as evinced in the legal and didactic texts of the time, appear to have led to a relatively buoyant economic situation in urban centres, in turn leading to high levels of demand for manufactured goods.⁹⁴ Simultaneously, the revival of the Persian language, and the move beginning in the eleventh century from the hieratic Kufic scripts (for example, cat. no. 1.14) to cursive scripts enabled artisans to decorate a wealth of objects with Persian inscriptions of poetry and other texts less formal and potentially more personal than the often eulogistic Arabic inscriptions that had previously dominated. Thus decorative objects were increasingly aligned with secular literary and folklore traditions, arguably deepening the connection between artist and object.⁹⁵

Ettinghausen also notes, as does Pancaroğlu, the self-laudatory nature of some of the signatures on works of this period, suggesting that a change in the status of the artist-craftsman was also taking place.⁹⁶ However, on this point Pancaroğlu is ultimately forced to conclude that although the role of the artist in the growth of specifically figurative imagery in the late Seljuq era, as evidenced by the primacy of artists over patrons in the inscriptions on decorative works of that period, should be more highly rated than it has been to date, ultimately the ‘bourgeois taste and demand for these [figural] images probably gave rise to images at a broad range of craftsmanship and cost and maintained them in the open market’.⁹⁷ Thus the house models may be

⁹² Heidemann 2005: 85, 105.

⁹³ Ettinghausen 1970: 113.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114–8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118–25.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123–25.

⁹⁷ Pancaroğlu 2000: 257–9.

understood as a relatively low-status strand within this burgeoning interest in figural imagery seen at several levels of society.⁹⁸

As has already been suggested, the terms ‘Seljuq’ and ‘late Seljuq’ as absolute designations are problematic in that they really refer to a complicated set of states in an extremely turbulent and dynamic period of Middle Eastern history, ending (by historical convention) with the destruction and subsequent new artistic directions that came with the Mongol conquests of Persia in the early part of the thirteenth century. In fact, it is much more likely that there was not a total rupture, and some artistic activity exhibited considerable continuity between the Seljuq and Mongol periods.⁹⁹ The label ‘Seljuq’ is not used in the present thesis in any politically absolute sense; at any event, many of the conclusions that will be drawn about the house models and their iconography relate to an urban social environment that was by no means limited to Seljuq Persia.

Characteristics and Types

All of the house models are made from earthenware, and are glazed and fired. For the most part they are made from a hard and light-coloured fritware body, although pinkish and sandy-coloured bodies are also seen, suggesting greater or lesser degrees of clay in the body makeup (see for example cat. no. 1.13).¹⁰⁰ Fritware, a type of earthenware composed largely of quartz with some alkaline glaze frit added, and noted for its hard, pale body and good bonding with the alkaline glazes of the period, was a relatively recent innovation in the late Seljuq period.¹⁰¹ Although this is a controversial issue, analysis of a range of early Islamic ceramics has suggested a foundation for fritware technology in some of the clay ceramics of ninth-century Iraq, where tiny particles of glass (like the glaze frit of fritware) were added to a clay

⁹⁸ On the sliding scales of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture in medieval Islam see Shoshan 1991: 68–79.

⁹⁹ Grabar (1968: 627) notes that this is particularly true of ceramic production, ‘in which some of the most remarkable objects of the so-called ‘Seljuq’ style were demonstrably manufactured after the Mongol conquest’. See also Milwright 1999: 504.

¹⁰⁰ The make-up and characteristics of medieval Islamic fritware and glazes are discussed in detail in Wulff 1966: 146–7, and Bernsted 2003: 23–8.

¹⁰¹ A manuscript written in Persian by Abū’l Qāsim in 1301 describes the composition of the white frit as ‘ten parts of the aforementioned white *shukar-i sang*, ground and sieved through coarse silk, and one part of ground glass frit mixed together and one part of white Lūrī [*or*: Warkānī] clay dissolved in water’. (Allan 1973: 113–4; see also Bernsted 2003: 25.)

body to increase the hardness and density when fired, and where the first use of a quartz-based slip on certain lead-glazed wares is evident.¹⁰² The potters of Iraq appear to have carried this technology to Fustāt in Egypt, where they are thought to have moved to set up lustre potteries in the late tenth century, and where true fritwares first appear in the early eleventh century.¹⁰³ It is believed that Fatimid potters then brought the technique from Egypt to Persia during the period of political instability that began when the Fatimid dynasty started to collapse in the later twelfth century, and it eventually became the dominant type in Persian glazed ceramics of the period.¹⁰⁴

The majority of the house models are monochrome glazed in blue or turquoise, or, less frequently, green. The monochrome blue glazes range in colour from a light greenish-turquoise, soapy glaze, as seen on cat. no. 1.11, to a very dark cobalt blue (see cat. no. 1.12). This reflects the tonal range of other types of late Seljuq ceramic production.¹⁰⁵ However, not all the house models are monochrome. Several examples (cat. nos 1.8–1.10, 1.14, 1.18, 1.25–1.27) incorporate touches of underglaze cobalt blue with a thick translucent turquoise glaze, as does a piece now in Chicago (cat. no. 1.16), which also boasts some rather startling black painting. Intriguingly, all of the examples that have been decorated with touches of cobalt are figural pieces, possibly indicating the greater perceived importance of the human figure over other forms of imagery, at least at this level of production.¹⁰⁶ Cobalt has been used without a great deal of skill or delicacy to highlight edges of the walls, the tips of the decorative edging to the courtyard roof, and frequently the heads, hands or instruments of the figures and the tops of the objects in the centre of the courtyards. The fragment in the Louvre (cat. no. 1.10) shows most clearly the cackhandedness of the cobalt application: note the pooling of cobalt that has gathered in the left corner behind the figure.

¹⁰² Mason and Tite 1994: 77–83; see also Mason and Keall, 1999: 139–42.

¹⁰³ Mason and Tite 1994: 83–7; Watson 1985: 24–5; Bloom 2007: 168–9.

¹⁰⁴ Mason and Tite 1994: 90; Grube 1992: 313; see also Watson 2004: 54; and Watson 1999: 299–307.

¹⁰⁵ See for example Grube 1994: 176–87.

¹⁰⁶ Baer 1999: 36–41.

It is evidence of the low-to-mid-range status of the house models that they were generally monochrome glazed (the cheapest and simplest option for glazed wares, although of course glazed wares are not in themselves the lowest rung of ceramic production), but that producers also occasionally felt compelled to elaborate a little on their decoration.¹⁰⁷ In this they are comparable to other ceramic products of the Seljuq period, such as the fritware dishes and bowls glazed in white and decorated with small touches of cobalt blue,¹⁰⁸ or the pre-Mongol lustre wares decorated with turquoise and cobalt, as well as lustre, all applied with varying degrees of skill.¹⁰⁹ A house model in Tehran (cat. no. 1.27) is unique in that it appears to incorporate four different shades of blue glaze, from palest blue to dark cobalt, thus showing that sometimes more trouble was taken over the production of these pieces, although in this case not enough to take the decoration of the figures beyond a very basic daubing with two shades of blue. A piece recently sold at auction displays an extraordinary degree of overpainting in several colours including red and gold, but given how far its appearance lies from anything else seen in this group, it seems extremely unlikely to be original.¹¹⁰ Finally, there are at least three examples that have been decorated with lustre (cat. nos 1.23, 1.40 and 1.50). This would suggest that versions produced in higher quality materials, as well as basic monochrome glazed pieces, were available for purchase at different levels of society.

Painted inscriptions appear only rarely amongst the group: small, illegible cursive inscriptions have been rapidly executed in brown lustre on cat. nos 1.40 and 1.50, while an entirely different type of inscription in strong black Kufic appears on the external walls of cat. nos 1.14 and 1.15. There are stamped or moulded inscriptions on the external walls of three further house models (cat. nos 1.1, 1.2, 1.12), in every case done in a crude form of Kufic script that has been rendered even more obscure by the pooling of the glaze.

¹⁰⁷ On the low status of ceramics in the hierarchy of manufactured goods in the medieval Middle East as attested by contemporary sources, see Milwright 1999: 505.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Watson 2004: cat. L.21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, cat. C.0.6.

¹¹⁰ Sold at auction at Bonham's, New Bond Street, Sale 15257, *Islamic and Indian Art*, 19 April 2007, lot no. 76. I have been told that this piece is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar, but have been unable to confirm this.

The house models are, in every case that I have been able to confirm, glazed all over apart from on the underside. The example from the Victoria and Albert Museum is particularly interesting, as it can clearly be seen on the underside that the piece has cracked during firing, and the thick glaze has partially sunk through the crack in the bottom (fig. 1.3). The piece also has four rough areas at each corner that look as if a piece of clay was broken off each corner after firing. It seems likely that rather than being evidence of some legs or supports that were intended to remain attached to the house model but have since been lost, these are the remains of four elevating feet of clay put under the house after modelling but before glazing and firing to enable the glaze to cover it evenly to the bottom, and possibly also to keep it from sticking in the base of the kiln.¹¹¹ It should be noted that this feature did not occur on any other house models that were examined at first-hand; the more usual means of separating or supporting items in a kiln while they are being fired is with individual spurs of pre-fired clay that do not bond with the objects (although spurs may leave small indentations in glaze) and are discarded after use.¹¹²

The examples in the catalogue have been ordered roughly by structural characteristics. The typology presented here is not intended to be exhaustive; however, in the absence of existing published scholarship on this subject, it is important that some preliminary typological observations should be established before proceeding further. The first, the most clearly defined and the largest of these groups is what may be termed the archetypal group. This is the group on which this study will concentrate, as it is the group that is most consistent in its iconography, and which supplies the structural and stylistic features that are incorporated into and adapted by other groups. The architectural elements exemplified by this group will be discussed in detail below. The archetypal group comprises cat. nos 1.1 to 1.24, and can also be understood to include the variant form of cat. nos 1.25 to 1.27. Thus, the group comprises some fifty percent of the known pieces.

¹¹¹ See the illustration of a piece of kiln furniture from Raqqa with traces of turquoise glaze in Jenkins-Madina 2006: 23.

¹¹² These are referred to by Oliver Watson (2004: 31) as ‘tripods’ because of the three-legged shape of those used for separating dishes in the kiln.

The standard plan is a rectangular four-sided box, with a flat top projecting partially over the central space from all four sides, creating an open central area surrounded by a shallow roofed corridor, open at the front. A perforated decorative edging stands upright at the inner edge of the roof sections, creating a ‘fence’ around the edge of the open central area: the lustre example in the Louvre (cat. no. 1.23) is the only house model to have an open central space but no pierced decorative upright edging around the inner roof edge and, in addition, no projections at the four corners of the roof space. Small pyramids, cones or fluted points normally stand at the four corners of the roof; in some cases there are more of these distributed evenly around the roof area. The four flat, solid external walls frequently bear some modelling on the exterior, such as the moulded Kufic inscriptions described above, running animal figures or faint curvilinear designs; less frequently the external walls may bear pierced decoration (cat. nos 1.23 and 1.24). The majority of examples in this archetypal group have four narrow upright rectangular openings, one pierced through each end of both long external sides of the structure; occasional pieces have eight entrances each, pierced through each end of each of the four external sides.

However, the most striking feature of all the house models in the archetypal group is that they contain moulded figures arranged around the edge of the courtyard. There are most commonly eight to ten figures, of such a size that they stand from base to upper surface almost like caryatids. Additional objects, apparently representative of wine jars and tables with unidentified objects on them, are frequently arranged in the centre of the courtyard area. One example from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. no. 1.24) contains an arresting and unique group of figures including moulded drinkers and what appears to be an *Imām* on a *minbar*.¹¹³

Three further examples – cat. nos 1.25 to 1.27 – contain a core section that is similar to the inhabited central spaces of the archetypal pieces, but on these examples the roof is also occupied by a line of animals standing nose-to-tail around the central opening. The walls of these pieces are made not from flat panels of clay but from

¹¹³ The *minbar* of this piece appears to have either four or five steps: Bierman has noted from textual sources that all pre-1075 *minbars* in Egypt (of which none survive) appear to have had five steps leading to the topmost, where the *Imām* sat (Bierman 1998: 357).

large open rings of clay placed side by side: a larger version of the decorative edging found on the roofs. This form of wall is also found on three further examples (cat. nos 1.28–1.30), each of which bear solid roofs decorated with animals. These pieces have been described as representations of caravanserais¹¹⁴ or hunting lodges.¹¹⁵ It is not clear whether these circular openings are intended to represent round windows, some sort of crudely-depicted arcade, as Pope suggested,¹¹⁶ or are simply another variant on the decorative external wall. If these pieces were read as caravanserais, windowed or open arcaded outer walls would not make sense, as caravanserais were essentially designed to keep the outside out and the inside in, and medieval Persian caravanserais did not tend to have multiple openings in their external walls.¹¹⁷

This leads us to the second major sub-group within the genre. Cat. nos 1.31–1.50, although varying considerably in many respects, are united by the fact that their decorative *raison d'être* is not an open central space occupied by figures, but a solid flat roof which forms a space for decoration of all sorts. Many of these pieces bear a clear echo of the archetypal form of house model, with a central area of the roof demarcated by an upright decorative edging. This area may contain a decorative plaque, pierced designs or even modelled animals (cat. nos 1.30 and 1.32). It may be that the original iconographic significance of the house model form, with its drinkers and musicians (to be discussed in more detail below), became lost or was not understood properly in the first place, or perhaps over time it was felt not to matter too much, and the form was adapted to different decorative ends.¹¹⁸ A further notable feature of this second group is the placement of the weight-bearing walls some way back from the outer edge of the base of the piece: struts which take a variety of forms, from architectural (such as the ornate arches of cat. no. 1.33) to zoomorphic (see the feline heads of cat. no. 1.49) to figural (cat. nos 1.37 and 1.38), are ranged around the outer edge of the form, presumably providing some extra support for the

¹¹⁴ Fehérvári 1996: 150.

¹¹⁵ See the sale notes in Christie's South Kensington, sale 5331, *Islamic Works of Art and Textiles*, 11 April 2008, lot no. 274.

¹¹⁶ Pope 1981: Vol. 4, 1623.

¹¹⁷ See for example the caravanserai plans in Kiyani and Kleiss 1995: 742.

¹¹⁸ For a parallel loss of original meaning in the image of the pre-Islamic 'fire-maker', in this case eventually leading to a new motif with an apparently distinct meaning in the Islamic period, see Wenzel 2005: 140–158.

roof panel but surely primarily decorative. This characteristic is rarely seen on examples in the archetypal group (cat. nos 1.20–1.22).

There is one particular type of closed-roof house model that deserves to be considered separately. Although structurally part of the closed-roof group, on these examples a panel of moulded figural imagery forms the entire roof of the model (cat. nos 1.47–1.50). Two of these, in Berlin and New York (cat. nos 1.49 and 1.50 respectively) bear designs so similar that they may well have been made from the same mould, although the superior painting and glazing of the lustre example in New York mean that the design is considerably clearer on this piece than on the green-glazed example in Berlin. What appears as an indistinct image of one figure leaning over another on the Berlin example is revealed on the lustre piece to be an unmistakable representation of two figures in bed, with a cover falling in folds over their bodies. The obvious connotations of this design, combined with the mysterious ceremony being represented in the better-known example from the Metropolitan Museum (cat. no. 1.24), led Grube to believe that these pieces, and the house models in general, should be regarded as wedding gifts; this suggestion will be discussed in more detail below.¹¹⁹

Finally, there are the hexagonal, boat-shaped items now in Paris and Berlin (cat. nos 1.51 and 1.52). Although different from the rest of the group in plan, cat. no. 1.51, with its occupied central space, bears a very close similarity to the oblong house models, and cat. no. 1.52 displays similarities in glaze, scale and decorative motifs to certain of the house models. Entirely distinct from the rest of the group is the piece illustrated by Fehérvári (cat. no. 1.53).¹²⁰ There are no other examples at all similar to this piece and as such it will not feature heavily in the following discussion.

Architectural Elements: Introduction

Any hope of establishing the meaning of such unusual and enigmatic objects as the house models must lie in iconographic analysis, hopefully re-contextualising the

¹¹⁹ Grube 1976: 174 (n.); Grube 1992: 315.

¹²⁰ Fehérvári (2000: 106) mentions that there are more house models in the Tareq Rajab collection, but does not say whether they resemble this very unusual piece or conform to the more common types.

pieces to some degree in the process. Naturally, in the context of a thesis on miniature architectural forms, the iconographic study of this particular group will focus on those aspects that can be proposed as representations of architectural elements. Furthermore, the study will focus on the architectural elements of the archetypal group, as this appears to be the more coherent and meaningful section of the material. Hence, a few idiosyncratic details lying outwith the archetype, such as the rather fanciful forms of arch seen on cat. nos 1.32–1.35, will not be brought into the discussion.

The architectural components that make up the archetypal form, and the implications of their inclusion on the house models, will first be examined, following which the analysis will turn to the external decoration of the house models. The last section on iconography will analyse the activity of the figures within the house models and the possible meaning of those figures in such a context; from these iconographic studies one possible meaning of the objects will be extrapolated. A final section will discuss the suggestions others have made as to the meaning of the house models, and will outline the conclusions of this study.

Decorative Edging

Of all the house models presented here, only cat. nos 1.23, 1.49, 1.50 and 1.53 do not have a fringe of decorative edging standing upright around the courtyard area roof edge, and/or around the outer roof edge. This edging takes the form of a row of small rings, each stuck to its neighbour. These rows of rings appear to have been made by attaching a line of individual clay rings, flat on both sides as if they were sliced from a single long tube (which, if this were the case, would presumably have to have been formed around a solid cylinder like a stick), and touching the roof edge with their lowest edge, and their neighbours on either side. The individual rings are joined to each other and to the edge of the roof with glaze, which has in most cases completely filled in the gaps between them.

The row of rings may then be levelled off at the top with small wedges of clay inserted into the join between each pair of rings and smoothed over the top, as seen

for example on cat. no. 1.3, although this is quite frequently the result of restoration. More typically this edging is topped by a small ball or cone of clay inserted at the joining point of each pair of circles and purposely raised above the level of the rings, to create a second tier of decoration, seen clearly on cat. no. 1.13.

Before discussing what this edging may be intended to represent, it should be noted that the same type of upright pierced edging exists on a number of Seljuq ceramic vessels. A turquoise monochrome glazed vessel in the Gemeentemuseum, dated by Teske to the first half of the twelfth century,¹²¹ and an unlabelled but very similar vessel currently in storage at the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 1.4), are both decorated around the entire lip of the vessel with exactly the same type of decorative edging built up out of rings set side by side and plugged on the top edges with small balls of clay. Note also the presence of two rather perilously perched modelled animal figures on fig. 1.4, stressing the proximity of such vessels to the house models, with their figural forms. The same decorative edging also appears, in a rather complex tri-lobed form, as the frame over the *howdah* on the back of a remarkable blue-glazed earthenware elephant in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (fig. 1.5), and on a similar, even larger piece glazed in white with touches of cobalt and turquoise in the Khalili Collection, London.¹²² Finally, it appears in yet another context, this time at least in part iconographically related to the architectural forms of the house models: the turquoise glazed so-called ‘tabourets’ that also appear to originate from late Seljuq Persia, and form the subject of the next chapter. Some of these (cat. nos 2.1 and 2.4–2.8) incorporate the decorative edging, this time as a kind of architectural decoration along the lower edges of the modelled archways or windows. The form can even be seen in another medium, namely on a metalwork incense burner now in Detroit.¹²³

One could, perhaps, regard the inclusion of this decorative edging on other, more utilitarian earthenware products of the Persian Seljuq period, and even on purely

¹²¹ Teske 1999: 30.

¹²² Grube 1994: 250–1. Further examples of this type of elephant figurine, of which there appear to be a significant number, are listed in Grube’s text.

¹²³ Detroit Institute of Arts, 1993.52.

decorative objects, as an indication that its presence on the house models is incidental and representative of nothing more than a handy bit of standard decoration. It must be true that the decorative edging was something of a potter's standard, otherwise it would not appear on several very different types of ceramic product in this manner. We may surmise, from its appearance on the vessels, that it was probably used primarily as a fairly quick and easy way of giving a normal vessel a fancy edge. The elephant figures are far more elaborate, and the use of the decorative edging on the *howdah* frame may be purposefully imitative of a form of pierced, decorative wood, or it may merely be an unusual use of a standard decorative form. As regards the tabourets, it seems likely that the form is in this instance being used in imitation of some particular architectural decoration, a low fence or balustrade, and as such it is much closer to the use seen on the house models.

On the house models themselves, this same edging is used with such consistency that it becomes an important component of the overall design, and one of the defining elements of the house model genre as a whole. The architectural components of the house models are designed on very schematised lines, including only the iconographic elements – walls, floor, roof, courtyard and so forth – that are utterly necessary to communicating their enclosing form to the viewer. Therefore it is hard to believe that the prominence given to the decorative edging around the courtyard area, even if it is made from a standard decorative form, is entirely arbitrary: a decorative 'extra' that does not in itself resemble anything may be purposefully used in a certain context because within that context it connotes something specific.¹²⁴ This must lead inevitably to the question of what this edging is intended, in the case of the house models, to represent.

To follow Pope's suggestion that the larger row of rings forming the walls of cat. nos 1.25 –1.30 should be understood as representative of an arcade, let us first try reading

¹²⁴ For example, the balls of cotton wool glued onto landscapes drawn by craft-minded children: cotton wool on its own is not representative of anything other than cotton wool, but once stuck above the horizon of a landscape will be read by the viewer as 'clouds', while gluing it below the horizon and adding some black lines prompts the reading 'sheep'.

the decorative edging of the courtyard as a type of arcade also. If we examine surviving Persian Seljuq architecture for traces of free-standing decorative arcades projecting above the roof level of buildings, there does not seem to be any evidence of this as a form of architectural decoration. It is true that there are examples of miniature blind arcades found in the upper edges of walls in some Seljuq-era Persian buildings, such as the blind arches on the lower edge of the dome interior in the caravanserai at Ribāṭ-i Sharaf (1114–15),¹²⁵ but a blind arcade inside a dome does not bear much relation to the free-standing courtyard ‘frill’ of the house models.

One could perhaps even try to draw comparisons with the carefully articulated dwarf arcade occupying the top register of all four walls of the pre-Seljuq tomb of the Samanids (c. 892–943) in Bukhara, in modern day Uzbekistan (fig. 1.6), which is not a true open arcade but does allow some light to pass through to the interior via perforations in the interior wall. However, this building, from an earlier period and a different geographical region, bears little resemblance to the overall form of the house models in its vertical emphasis and domed roof. Closer to the period in question and closer to the idea of a freestanding arcade is the tomb of the Seljuq Sultan Sanjar at Merv, in Turkmenistan.¹²⁶ This monument includes a large arcaded gallery around the upper floor of the square building, below the dome and flush with the outer walls (fig. 1.7). However, as with the tomb of the Samanids, it is hard to argue that the square, domed form of the tomb is comparable to the low, open, oblong structure of the house models. There would also have to be an enormous degree of disproportion in scale for the roof edging of the house models to be read as a gallery, as well as the structural problem of such a gallery having an arcade but no walls or roof. And finally, although the human figures of the house models are indeed disproportionately large compared to the houses that they occupy, the possibility of reading the tiny holes of the decorative edging as a series of arcaded windows seems to stretch the suspension of disbelief too far, as well as failing to chime with the overall architectural form of the models.

¹²⁵ Hillenbrand 2000: 344–5; see the photographs taken by Bernard O’Kane at www.archnet.org.

¹²⁶ The restored tomb can be seen at WHTour, ‘Merv: Sultan Sanjar’s Mausoleum’. *WHTour.org: UNESCO World Heritage Sites in panography* [accessed 06/06/08], <http://www.world-heritage-tour.org>.

If the upright projections were to be read not as arcades but as crenellations, similar problems arise. Crenellations can be seen on the outer walls of certain monuments from later periods, as on the *chapar-khaneh*¹²⁷ outside Maybud (fig. 1.8), but these tend to be very large buildings with an emphasis on defence or imposition, and as such seem a relatively unlikely model for the ‘house models’.¹²⁸ Finally, although it would be tempting to draw a parallel between the repeated rooftop openings of the decorative edging and the *panjeh*, a small opening to the street found in the parapet of Zoroastrian houses in Yazd, the *panjeh* is in fact an isolated element and does not appear in repeating sequences.¹²⁹

It will be useful at this point to step away, momentarily, from the finer details of the house models and to consider their overall form once more. It is essential to note that while the house models represent an extremely simplified version of an architectural form, they have not been simplified down to the most basic level – that of a plain, four-sided box with no roof, no architectural elements and no further definition of interior space – which they could have been, had the craftsman’s only interest been in assembling a group of figures in an undefined space. Therefore the house models must be understood as being definitely intended to portray a recognisable type of architecture. Of course, the clue is right there in the name ‘house model’. If one looks at an aerial image of contemporary domestic architecture from the old quarters of Isfahan or Yazd, one starts to realise that the house models do in fact follow the basic form of traditional Persian urban housing: a square, or more often rectangular open courtyard surrounded on all four sides by walled or open-fronted flat-roofed chambers.¹³⁰ Try to imagine placing all the house models illustrated here in a cluster next to each other, edge to edge.¹³¹ If the imagination banishes all the turquoise musicians from this scene, this would in fact start to look something like the old

¹²⁷ A type of post-house where messengers and travellers could change horses.

¹²⁸ See also the illustration of Bashnighan Castle in Pooya 1993: 110.

¹²⁹ The *panjeh* appears to exist only to hold the greenery and flowers that remain after the *panjeh* ceremonies have been conducted on the roof immediately prior to the New Year (see the discussion of *Norouz* below): see Jamzadeh 2001: 19.

¹³⁰ Al-Azzawi 1986: 54.

¹³¹ On the multiplication of the courtyard unit into ‘clusters, neighbourhoods, urban sectors and, finally, the entire city’ of Yazd, see Kowsar 1989: 80.

town of Yazd (fig. 1.9).¹³² The house models represent a regularised, simplified but elementally intact version of a type of dwelling that has existed in Persia for millennia.¹³³ The fact that the house models do not have any obvious comparators in surviving Seljuq architecture indicates that they are made in imitation of a form of architecture that we would not expect to survive for many hundreds of years: that is, unexceptional domestic architecture, in the form of the courtyard house.¹³⁴

This has two interesting implications. Firstly, that the house type on which these twelfth- or thirteenth-century objects are modelled has persisted, through its eminent suitability for the Persian climate, to the present day with so little modification in terms of basic layout that we can relate it to contemporary vernacular architecture. Secondly, that the intention of the artists was to create models that celebrated not the grand monuments or pious foundations of their day, but an emphatically normal and even bourgeois type of architecture.

As one might have expected, archaeological remains suggest that the courtyard house was indeed a standard form of dwelling in urban medieval Persia.¹³⁵ The well-documented excavation at Sabz Pūshān, Nishapur (northern Persia), carried out in the 1930s by Wilkinson and others from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, uncovered a large number of dwellings based on the plan of small rooms grouped around an open court: Dimand remarked at the time that the houses were ‘not unlike

¹³² The emphasis on the vernacular architecture of Yazd that will be seen throughout this chapter is a reflection of the fact that the old town of Yazd is one of the best-preserved traditional cities of substantial size to survive in Iran. Thanks to its architectural significance, it has been proposed as a UNESCO world heritage site (see UNESCO, ‘The Historical Structure of Yazd’. *UNESCO World Heritage Tentative Lists* [accessed 06/06/08], <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists>). Thus the continuity of vernacular architectural forms to the present day is to some extent an artificial conceit: had the march of progress not been forcibly stopped, old vernacular architecture in Yazd might by now have been replaced with high-rises, as has happened in other Iranian cities. However, the fact remains that Yazd’s old town is still very much a working quarter and not a museum; such vernacular architecture is well suited to the climate it occupies.

¹³³ The courtyard house in Iraq can be traced back to the Uruk period in the fourth millennium BCE (Fethi and Roaf 1986: 41).

¹³⁴ On the courtyard house tradition in the Gulf States, see Waly 1992. For more detailed technical discussion see Scudo 1988: 82–91.

¹³⁵ Difficulty in accessing archaeological data from Iran dating from later than 1979 has forced this chapter to rely heavily on relatively old excavation reports. See Haerinck 2007: 1104–5.

those of modern times'.¹³⁶ The presence of carved plaster and painted decoration in some of the houses led Wilkinson to believe that they had been the houses of 'people of means, perhaps merchants, or less probably, officials'.¹³⁷ Most of these were built of mud brick and layers of mud built up into walls; the coins found by the excavation party were mostly from the 'Abbasid and Samanid periods and date the site to first construction in the late eighth century, and abandonment after the tenth century'.¹³⁸

In the south of Persia, on the Gulf coast, lie the remains of Sīrāf, a significant trading port in the ninth and tenth centuries, and the site of further well-preserved remains of medieval domestic architecture.¹³⁹ Here again we see the courtyard house: 'Site F', believed by Whitehouse and his colleagues to represent a wealthy suburban residential area lying between the main mosque and the potters' quarters (located next to the city wall), is composed of several separate houses built of stone and mortar, and once again the plan is that of 'a courtyard with one or more entrances surrounded by rooms each of which is entered from the yard'.¹⁴⁰ A plan of the Sīrāf houses is shown in fig. 1.10. Comparisons between these plans and the images of Yazd's old quarter (figs 1.9 and 1.11) would suggest that there is a very strong degree of continuity in Persian vernacular architecture from before the Seljuq period to the present day.

As there is, unsurprisingly, no complete standing example of domestic architecture from the Seljuq period, we must use this continuity in vernacular architectural forms to compare the house models with the vernacular architecture of the present day, in order to understand the architectural features above ground level that are represented on the house models. The decorative edging is a case in point: on the roof edge of the

¹³⁶ Dimand, Hauser, Upton and Wilkinson 1938: 3. See also Godard's argument that the four-*īwān* plan of early *madrasas*, and later mosques and *caravanserais*, originated in Persian residential architecture (Godard 1951: 1–9).

¹³⁷ Wilkinson 1973: xxx.

¹³⁸ Dimand *et al.* 1938: 5–8.

¹³⁹ Whitehouse 1971: 255–6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 258. It is believed that these houses were in some cases more than one storey high (Whitehouse 1970: 14), which does not agree with the apparently single-storey building type represented by the house models, but as the multi-storeyed nature of the Sīrāf houses was apparently considered noteworthy and remarkable by al-Iṣṭakhṛī (writing c. 950), we can assume single-storey buildings (normally with subterranean basements in order for the occupants to escape the heat of the afternoon sun) were more common in medieval Persia (Whitehouse 1968: 3).

courtyard visible in fig. 1.11, there is a simple upright perforated ‘lip’ made from rows of brick built up to a small height. The overall effect of this elaboration is of a delicate, decorative low fence around the top edge of the courtyard, and is directly comparable to the use of the decorative edging seen on the house models.

Decorative brick architecture has existed in Persia since before the Seljuq period,¹⁴¹ and it is most probable that these decorative ‘frills’ on the house models represent nothing as highly developed as arcades, but a form of the more basic decorative brick ‘lip’ that has persisted in Persian domestic architecture to the present day. An Iranian colleague has identified this ‘lip’ as serving a number of purposes: it prevents dust from falling into the courtyard from the roof; it provides a small safety block at the edge of the drop into the courtyard (this being an environment where people may use their roofs for sleeping, drying clothes etc), and may additionally serve to give a more neat and level appearance to the roof edge from ground level.¹⁴²

The choice of a standard decorative finish like the ‘row of rings’, also used on vessels, for this role seems to be a reflection of the contextually activated resemblance of such a decorative edging to the architectural decoration it is standing in for. One may also understand the free-standing edging of the house models as a decorative conceit and as a sort of framing device, drawing the eye in to the interior but also demarcating the edge of the courtyard space as the start of the significant space of the house model. Thus the decorative edging provides a rare example of an element from domestic architecture, adapted for use in miniature both as an ornamental device and a marker of iconographically significant space.

Corner Projections

Now that it has been established that the house models were made in imitation of vernacular domestic architecture, the remaining architectural features, or at least those that are employed consistently throughout the group, will be discussed in comparison with relatively recent vernacular architecture in Persia. Naturally, where

¹⁴¹ Wilber 1939: 18.

¹⁴² My thanks to Yahya Islami of the Department of Architecture, University of Edinburgh, for this information.

it is possible, comparisons will be made with earlier vernacular architecture, but the nature of such structures and the ways in which they have been preserved means that there is generally little archaeological information remaining about external decoration or the characteristics of upper floors or roofs.¹⁴³

A second detail appears almost as consistently on the house models as the courtyard edging: that is, the projections seen on the four corners of nearly all of the house models. These range from simple cones (see the crudest example in the group, cat. no. 1.22) and plain four-sided ‘studs’ of pyramidal shape (for example cat. no. 1.13, where one of them has fallen off before glazing) to florets made of six small balls of clay arranged around a seventh ball (cat. no. 1.11). Many take the form of a conical projection with indented vertical lobes (seen particularly clearly on cat. no. 1.12). Some have further projections arranged at intervals along the roof, either of the same type as those seen at the corners (cat. nos 1.14) or – in the case of cat. no. 1.43 – differentiated from the corner projections by the use of a floret rather than a lobed conical form for the interstitial projections. Finally, one of the more elaborate models in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 1.26) bears four prominent animal heads in the place of corner projections, and a further closed-roof example (cat. no. 1.35) is decorated with four lozenge-shaped projections that may also be crudely modelled animal heads. However, these last elaborations are the exception rather than the norm.

There is clearly a decorative element to these projections, particularly in the case of those house models that have more than four. However, the inclusion of the four corner projections on almost every example would indicate that, like the use of the decorative edging around the courtyard, this is an ornamental feature which has been included in the overall design because it also, and perhaps primarily, serves as an identifying architectural element. A suitable comparator for these projections can indeed be found within Persian vernacular architecture, in the form of the wind-catcher (*badgīr*). This is a well-known and celebrated innovation of Persian architecture, which is thought to have existed for thousands of years.

¹⁴³ Roaf 1982: 58.

The principle of the wind-catcher is simple. A vertical airshaft projects above the roof of the building, with vents turned to face the prevailing wind, or, in the case of more elaborate designs, vents all around which can be partially blocked in order to keep those facing the prevailing wind open. Wind is drawn down the shafts of the windcatcher; if there is no wind, the air in the shaft warms up and acts as an air stack, drawing the cooler air from below which is in turn replaced by air from the courtyard and a draught is maintained.¹⁴⁴ The most celebrated examples of these are spectacular constructions rising far into the air, such as the windcatcher at Dawlatābād in Yazd.¹⁴⁵

However, far humbler versions, operating on the same principle, can be seen in many examples of Persian vernacular architecture, and indeed elsewhere in the Middle East.¹⁴⁶ These can take the form of cuboidal projections above the roof level with a row of arched openings facing the prevailing wind,¹⁴⁷ but there are even simpler related structures which are composed merely of shafts opening onto the roof, topped by a short conical structure with openings all around it and a peaked top.¹⁴⁸ Fig. 1.12 shows two examples of this type of rooftop vent in Yazd; others, both at rooftop level and mounted on domes, can be seen in fig. 1.9. Other types of rooftop vent, such as the tall narrow pointed ‘chimney’ visible in the foreground of fig. 1.13, or the very basic holes topped by tiny pitched roofs seen in fig. 1.14, abound in traditional Persian architecture. Some of these might be better described as ventilation and/or lighting shafts,¹⁴⁹ but even the humblest ventilation or lighting shaft is of great importance in the type of housing represented by the house models: that is to say, densely packed urban housing in a desert environment where windows to the street are, for a variety of practical reasons and social conventions, not an option.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴⁶ Scuddo 1988: 87.

¹⁴⁷ See the examples illustrated in Herdeg 1990: 41.

¹⁴⁸ On the complex and interrelated functions of wind-catchers, ventilation tunnels, water sources and courtyards in cooling the courtyard house throughout the day, see Scudo 1988: 85–90.

¹⁴⁹ Danby 1986: 87–8.

¹⁵⁰ See Gazzard 1986: 19. In addition to privacy and cleanliness, al-Azzawi (1986: 56) has noted improved security as a further benefit of the lack of windows to the street seen in the traditional courtyard house.

A second possibility is that the corner projections are intended to represent corner domes of some description. Domes appear frequently in the domestic architecture of the Persian plateau, for the very good reasons that a domed roof loses more heat than a flat one in the cooler evening air, and helps keep the interior cool by raising the ceiling height and thus leaving the relatively cool air at room level.¹⁵¹ In addition to the domes topped by glazed structures to let in light, visible in fig. 1.13, domes with ventilation in their crowns can be seen in fig. 1.14. But these domes are invariably large swellings of a shallow curve and as such are very hard to relate to the small and pointed forms of the house model roof projections. It is possible that the corner projections were understood by the medieval viewer as a sort of very abbreviated shorthand for corner domes, but the scale and forms employed make it seem more likely that they refer to the much smaller and more sharply projecting vent-tops visible on the roofs on Yazd. This would make a particularly good match in the case of those house models that bear corner projections of the lobed form, as these lobes may be imitative of the openings in the vent tops, but this does not exclude those of other types from being viewed as less careful and more abbreviated versions of the same.

If we accept that the corner projections of the house models are intended to represent similar forms of projecting covers over ventilation shafts, their intentional kinship with vernacular domestic architecture, as opposed to any imitation of the forms of monumental architecture, is once again emphasised. It is true that, as with the suggestion that the decorative edging represents a type of brick courtyard edging such as is used today, this cannot be concretely proved because the lack of archaeological evidence available from above the ground floor level of medieval Persian houses makes the job of reconstructing domestic roof forms very difficult.¹⁵² It is also true that the corner projection forms seem largely decorative, although interestingly they do not appear widely on other Seljuq ceramic products, unlike the decorative edging. However, the adaptation of decorative forms as miniature

¹⁵¹ Beazley and Harverson 1982: 26.

¹⁵² Roaf 1982: 58.

versions of real architectural elements on the house models does not mean that those forms are intended to be solely decorative in this context: as with the decorative edging, this seems most likely to be a pre-existing decorative element in Seljuq moulded ceramics which has been incorporated into the house model design precisely because of its proximity in this miniature context to an architectural form.

There is another issue at play here: the inherent limitations of moulded and modelled ceramic as a medium, the tiny scale of the house models, and the relatively low production standards employed all mean that such objects must necessarily utilise forms that are miniature approximations of the things they are supposed to represent, rather than being carefully crafted scale models.¹⁵³ Almost all of the figures are press-moulded, allowing the craftsmen to produce lots of them quickly, but making the achievement of fine detail, dynamism and differentiation almost impossible, and occasionally the distortions inflicted by the mould combine with the pooling and obscuring of detail by a heavy glaze to render the figures utterly grotesque.¹⁵⁴ The walls, too, frequently bear moulded designs, often extremely difficult to read. In this context, the use of pre-existing, easily manufactured decorative forms to approximate architectural features seems feasible. As with the decorative edging, the four corner projections are included so consistently on the house models that they can be accepted as having an iconographic role beyond that of mere decoration. In some cases this element, originally architectural, has been elaborated into something that is perhaps best understood primarily as a decorative mode, as in the case of cat. no. 1.43 where the roof has also been decorated with florets.

Side Piercings

To try to understand the last apparently architectural feature of the archetypal house models, we turn once again to domestic architecture. Piercings, normally of floor-to-

¹⁵³ On moulded ceramics in medieval Syria see Mulder 2001: 11.

¹⁵⁴ See the abstract by Boris Marshak on the Sogdian moulded terracotta figurines of horsemen, in which he suggests that craftsmen made their moulds by pressing an extant figurine into clay to take an impression, and then used this mould to produce their own figurines (translation given in Naymark 2003: n.p.). By this means, not only were defects reproduced, details lost and modelling deteriorated into grotesque approximations, but a large degree of shrinkage can also be seen over time as the fired size of the figure would of course be smaller than the mould from which it had been made. It is possible that this technique has also been employed on the house models, although the very small but fairly standard size of the figures might argue against this.

ceiling height and an upright rectangular shape although sometimes atrophied into small circular holes (cat. no. 1.9), are frequently included on the longer walls of the house models. They are not a uniform characteristic, although appearing as they do on cat. nos 1.1–1.16 and 1.24 they constitute a dominant characteristic of those house models that have been classed above as conforming to the archetype or an elaboration of the archetype. It seems unlikely that they should represent windows, as the Persian houses of the medieval period, like those seen today in the old quarters of many medieval Middle Eastern and North African cities, probably had few if any external windows at ground floor level: the surroundings would be too hot and too dirty to make this desirable, as well as leaving the private quarters of the house open to the public gaze.¹⁵⁵

It is more believable that these piercings might represent doorways. The positioning of the piercings is in every one of these cases at the ends of the walls, so that in none of the archetypal models do the side piercings open directly onto the courtyard. When one holds up a model of this type and looks through the piercing, there is nothing visible except the piercing on the other side, or, at the very best, the back of one of the figures.¹⁵⁶ This can be compared, in very simplified and approximated terms, to the entrances to traditional courtyard houses, whereby a screen wall behind the door prevents the courtyard from being viewed from the doorway, or else an indirect entrance along a bent-axis tunnel or vaulted passageway is employed.¹⁵⁷ A medieval description of the entrance to a large urban house in Fustāt, found in the Cairo Geniza documents, testifies to this architectural trope in the medieval Islamic world:

¹⁵⁵ Whitehouse 1971: 262; Warren 1996: 270; Beazley 1996: 320.

¹⁵⁶ The strict restrictions placed by the Qur'an on entering private domestic space (see the quote at the head of this chapter) did not necessarily stand in the case of buildings which were freely accessible to the public, such as shops, caravanserais, warehouses or baths: see the writings of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī and Mujāhid quoted in Alshech 2004: 304–5. This may explain why only those very unusual models with animals on the closed roof panels, suggested by Fehérvári to represent caravanserais (cat. nos 1.28 and 1.30) have prominent, frontal openings, although my concerns about cat. no. 1.30 have already been given.

¹⁵⁷ Gazzard 1986: 23; Fethi and Roaf 1986: 41. An additional advantage of the indirect entrance is that it acts as a sound lock (Danby 1986: 88).

Through the gate one enters a hallway, *dihlīz* [a Persian word], paved with marble [...] From the aforementioned hallway one enters a second hallway, from which one comes into a large ground floor.¹⁵⁸

The way from the door to the central courtyard necessitated a right-angled turn and thus prevented passers by from seeing into the inner chambers of the house when the door was open. This tradition of modest entrances from which the central courtyard, and hence the centre of life in the house, is not visible, holds fast in traditional Persian architecture.¹⁵⁹ Rice also observed this in the houses of early twentieth-century Persia.¹⁶⁰

But the number of piercings on the house models does not make sense if they are to be read as entrances. The ninth- and tenth-century houses at Nishapur and Sīrāf appear to have had one, or at the most two entrances.¹⁶¹ By and large, Middle Eastern courtyard houses have few openings, normally not more than two.¹⁶² Why then create four or even eight of them on the house models?

It is very hard to see what these piercings could have been used for, if they had any use at all; and if they did, why they appear on many but not all of the models. Questions of function will be discussed in more depth below, when the conclusions of various scholars as to the meaning and purpose of the house models are examined. Kühnel's statement that the house models were hung on ribbons as decorations might suggest that the piercings were for enabling their suspension, but since he gave no reason or evidence for this suggestion, and not all of the house models have these piercings, this should not be accepted as a certainty by any means.¹⁶³ This particular topic must be concluded less satisfactorily than the previous two: it is possible to read the side piercings as architectural openings, but a different solution might give a better explanation.

¹⁵⁸ Goitein 1978: 16.

¹⁵⁹ Beazley 1996: 320.

¹⁶⁰ Rice 1923: 168.

¹⁶¹ Winlock, Hauser and Upton 1934: 8; Whitehouse 1971: 259–61.

¹⁶² Scudo 1988: 85; Gazzard 1986: 23.

¹⁶³ Kühnel 1970: 112.

In the architectural form of the house models there is a powerful echo of much older conceptions of the house or building-shaped object as a form of sacred vessel or cult object, particularly those pieces that encapsulate the idea of the house in *pars pro toto*, i.e. the miniature building that stands for, and thus simultaneously embodies and protects, a real building. There are a vast array of artefacts from the ancient and Classical periods of both the Mediterranean world and Near East as far as Central Asia that relate directly or indirectly to this concept, and a comprehensive survey of them is entirely outside of the scope of this study. Particularly relevant examples include the cult vessel in the form of a tower mounted by a figure restraining two lions (fig. 1.15), thought to come from Syria, nineteenth century BCE,¹⁶⁴ and a mysterious vessel also from ancient Syria, slightly larger than the house models, topped with human figures and animals (fig. 1.16).¹⁶⁵ The domestic shrines of Classical Egypt known as *naos* (fig. 1.17), and similar objects from the Archaic Mediterranean world (figs 1.18 and 1.19) that appear to represent the goddess of the house enshrined within a model dwelling, can be understood as variations on the idea of the miniature house as a shrine wherein the force that protects the real house may dwell.¹⁶⁶ There are also mysterious earthenware model buildings from the third millennia BC recovered during archaeological digs in Syria (figs 1.20 and 1.21), purpose or purposes unknown,¹⁶⁷ and a further group of stone-carved reliefs from south Arabia sometimes referred to as ‘house models’ (fig. 1.22), although one author has suggested that these should in fact be understood as images of furniture rather than built structures.¹⁶⁸

Above and beyond these heavily symbolic, often enigmatic artefacts, there are also the funerary model buildings of Ancient Egypt, and Chinese tomb models from the

¹⁶⁴ Metropolitan Museum of Art 1984: 22–3.

¹⁶⁵ This piece, in the National Museum, Damascus, was not labelled: it is currently presented in a display labelled ‘3000 BC to 700 BC’.

¹⁶⁶ See Saile 1985: 89–95.

¹⁶⁷ The round model was excavated at Syria in 1954 at the site of Mari by a French-led expedition, who reported the piece as ‘*une magnifique maquette architecturale*’ (Direction Générale des Antiquités 1955: 14). The excavators were understandably excited by the piece’s value as a representation of a now lost form of architecture, but did not make any suggestions as to its purpose.

¹⁶⁸ Beek 1959: 269–73. See also the neolithic artefacts, function unknown, that are sometimes referred to as ‘house models’ (McHugh 1990: 265–72), in particular a well-known piece from Bronze Age Palestine (Richard 1987: 29).

Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) onwards, all of which are explicitly linked to burial practices.¹⁶⁹ The drive to produce miniature buildings for funerary or ceremonial contexts appears to be near universal: similar types of object have been also been found in South America, for example those pieces from the Ecuadorian cultures of the Bahia I period (between 2500 and 1500 years ago; fig. 1.23), or more complex pieces from Nayarit Mexico (c. 200 BCE–300 CE).¹⁷⁰ Similarly, the production of ossuaries in the form of stylised miniature buildings is a phenomenon seen from the ancient Levant¹⁷¹ to Byzantine Syria¹⁷² and Sogdian Bactria of the sixth to eighth centuries (fig. 1.24).¹⁷³

We can surmise from this mass of material that the manufacture of model buildings is a common trait amongst many cultures. Frequently, model structures appear to have been connected with funerary practices, either through the use of votive models to serve in the afterlife of the deceased, or in the creation of receptacles of architectural form for remains. The latter is interesting in its suggestion of the ‘fitness’ of architecture as a form of ornament to be applied to the serious business of protecting human remains, and returns us to the idea of *pars pro toto* through the substitution of a small architectural container (an ossuary) for a large one (a building). However, there is no evidence that the house models were associated with funerary practices, and the inclusion of such models in graves would not fit with any known Persian burial practices. On the whole, it seems more likely that the house models under study may be connected with the late lingering of an ancient tradition of household protection through house-shaped shrines and objects.¹⁷⁴ This idea will be discussed in more detail below

External Decoration

As will have become clear by this point from the images of Yazd and plans of Sīrāf, the architectural unit of the house models is not in fact a reflection of the true

¹⁶⁹ Adams 2007: 18; Rawson 1999: 13; Thorp 1986: 361–2, 376–7.

¹⁷⁰ Estrada and Meggers 1961: 916–7; Rathje 1976: 1259.

¹⁷¹ Meyers 1970: 1–6; Levy 1986: 98.

¹⁷² Peña 1997: 132–3.

¹⁷³ Grenet 1982: 160–1.

¹⁷⁴ On talismans and magic in the Islamic world, see Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997: Vol. 1, 59–63 and 132–47.

structure of Persian houses en masse, but a pared-down and rationalised representation of the individual unit as it would be if it were removed entirely from its neighbours. In other words, it is the microcosmic ‘idea’ of the house that is being represented, rather than each house model forming a model or portrait of a specific house.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, as an artificially isolated architectural unit, each of the archetypal house models has four clearly visible external walls, whereas in reality such buildings would frequently have had fewer than this, the others abutting directly onto other buildings.¹⁷⁶ Domestic external walls at ground level in medieval Persia do not generally appear to have been viewed as surfaces for extensive decoration; the excavations at both Nishapur and Sīrāf found evidence of internal decoration, stucco at both sites and painted decoration also at Nishapur, but apparently no evidence of external decoration.¹⁷⁷ Presumably the dirt of public passageways, coupled with narrow streets that would make it difficult to get far enough from an external decoration to view it properly, meant that decoration was reserved for internal surfaces. This may also reflect the inward focus of the housing structure, looking in towards the courtyard, rather than outward through external windows.¹⁷⁸

That is not to say that external decoration is unknown in urban Persian domestic architecture. Attractive and ornate decorative brickwork can be seen on the houses of Dizfūl, for instance (fig. 1.25),¹⁷⁹ and there is of course a considerable body of external architectural decoration surviving on the monumental architecture of the Seljuq period. But the more usual domestic solution of the medieval period seems to have been to save the decoration for the insides of the building, while the outsides were left with a solid mud or plaster coating.¹⁸⁰ This may account for the relative variety of decorative techniques used on the external walls of the house models: in this area of the house model, the artist has something of a blank canvas. With the architectural form of the house model established through the partially roofed

¹⁷⁵ See the discussion of model and mimesis in Mack 2007: 69–72.

¹⁷⁶ See Scudo (1988: 84). One of the advantages of this close clustering is a minimum of solar exposure on the external and internal walls (Fethi and Roaf 1986: 47); another is the economical value of such a dense pattern (al-Azzawi 1986: 56–7).

¹⁷⁷ Hauser 1937: 23–36; Wilkinson 1973: xxx; Whitehouse 1971: 258.

¹⁷⁸ A comparable approach to housing in Iraq has led to ‘an almost total concentration of architectural features on the courtyard elevations’ of the courtyard house (Fethi and Roaf 1986: 41).

¹⁷⁹ See also Fouroughi 1970: 210.

¹⁸⁰ Dimand and Wilkinson 1937: 8.

courtyard structure of the models and the architectural elements of courtyard edging, rooftop vents and (possibly) entrances, the outer wall has in some cases been treated as a ceramic surface for decorating in whatever style seems most suitable, rather than as a miniature architectural element. That said, there are echoes of architectural decoration in the treatment of a number of the external walls, which will be discussed below. A number of the archetypal house models display hard-to-read, moulded decoration of vaguely curvilinear form (cat. nos 1.6, 1.17, 1.19 and so forth); these will not be discussed here as there is extremely little to be gleaned from them.

Inscriptions

The art historian pins a lot of hope on inscriptions. As stated above, five of the house models are adorned on the external walls with inscriptions, although as is sadly so often the case, these do not yield the conclusive statements of purpose that one might hope for. The inscription of the Gemeentemuseum house model (cat. no. 1.15) has been judged illegible, is hardly visible in reproductions, and must be passed over. The Boston museum example (cat. no. 1.14) is written in a Kufic script, not with the highest degree of skill. This inscription is visible, but sadly largely illegible. Dr Alain George has attempted a reading of this piece, but beyond the tentative interpretation of one section as *al-naṣr al-‘ālī* (‘the exalted victory’) or possibly *li-naṣr al-‘ālī* (‘the victory of the exalted’), the inscription remains undecipherable.¹⁸¹

The Burrell collection example (cat. no. 1.12) has a stamped or moulded Kufic inscription running around all four external walls.¹⁸² As might be expected with a moulded inscription, the poor quality of the moulding coupled with the pooling of the glaze has rendered this inscription illegible.¹⁸³ It is possible that this is in fact a pseudo-inscription; if not, the inscription itself has been so debased, possibly in literary terms and certainly through the qualities of the medium, that it no longer functions as a real inscription but rather as the sign of one.¹⁸⁴ Very similar, possibly

¹⁸¹ My sincere thanks to Alain George for providing this reading.

¹⁸² A stamp for a simple Kufic inscription, of similar dimensions to that of cat. no. 1.12 and thought to be from ninth- to eleventh-century Persia, is illustrated in Fehérvári 2000: 345.

¹⁸³ Alain George and Noorah al-Gailiani were both kind enough to examine this inscription, but neither of them could decipher anything from it.

¹⁸⁴ Aanavi 1969: 1–3.

even identical, moulded inscriptions also appear on the outer walls of cat. nos 1.1 and 1.2. Interestingly, these last two pieces agree so closely in characteristics of figures, structure, and, as far as can be told, inscription that they could have been made from the same set of moulds. If we accept this as evidence of mass-production, the implication would be that there was a considerable market for this kind of object, a theory that is reinforced by the large number of surviving house models. One could postulate further that demand for these objects would have been found among those members of society who did not see a mass-produced decorative object as being beneath them, i.e. the middle classes. It seems fair to assume that the lowest classes would not have spent what little money they had on decorative ceramic objects.

Animal Motifs

It is an interesting feature of the house models in the archetypal group that the most common form of external wall decoration is the animal frieze. Cat. nos 1.3–1.5, 1.8–1.10 and 1.16 are each decorated on their external walls with a frieze of running animals that appears to have been impressed with a stamp, or may possibly have been mould-made. Additionally, the moulded and pierced walls of the Louvre lustre example (cat. no. 1.23) bear a more elaborate but very similar version of the same design. This piece was perhaps intended for a more affluent customer than the other examples in the group, suggesting that Pancaroğlu's 'broad range of craftsmanship', the consequence of an increase in bourgeois demand for these and similar objects, was indeed in operation.

The running animals on all of these models appear to represent lions or some similar animal with a long tail, frequently curved backwards over the body (see cat. no. 1.4), a rather barrel-shaped chest and strong back legs.¹⁸⁵ The forms of the animals have been obscured somewhat by black paint on cat. no. 1.16, but we can tentatively assume them to be similar to those seen elsewhere. Note the similarity between the forms of the animals seen on the house models and those of Ayyubid Syrian architectural decoration, such as the examples on the Bāb al-Faraj and now in the

¹⁸⁵ Note the formal similarity to the lion figures on the sides of a cast bronze mortar thought to be from thirteenth-century Diyarbakır, illustrated in Roxburgh 2005: 77.

Aleppo museum (fig. 1.26).¹⁸⁶ There are also relief carvings of lions walking in profile, with head held frontally and tail arched over the back, such as those found on stone panels at Cerablus (fig. 1.27), that could be compared to those on the external walls of cat. nos 1.3 and 1.4. Öney argues that so many lion figures appear in Anatolian Seljuq architectural decoration because they are symbols of strength and therefore protective talismans, which she also relates to shamanistic practices.¹⁸⁷ Otto-Dorn also notes the lion as a symbol of the sun in Anatolian Seljuq art, exemplified in the lion that carries the bust of the sun on the bridge of Jizre in southern Turkey.¹⁸⁸ The architectural use of lions appears to have had an apotropaic significance in many contexts, certainly stretching back to the pre-Islamic period, and as such the frequent use of lion motifs around the outside of the house models may represent a form of magical protection of the domestic environment itself (as symbolised by the house model) from harm.¹⁸⁹

The running cat motif was not however limited to architecture, and it would be misleading to present it as a solely architectural device: it can in fact be found on a multitude of other objects of the period. To give just a few examples, a painted frieze of cats of a similar outline, if larger scale, to those moulded on the outer walls of cat. nos 1.3 and 1.4 appears on a *champlevé* ewer thought to originate from twelfth- or thirteenth-century Persia (fig. 1.28). In another medium, running animals including what appear to be cheetahs can be found charging around the outer rim and upper and lower friezes of the famous Mamluk metalwork bowl of c. 1300, widely known as the 'Baptistère de St Louis'.¹⁹⁰ Further, there a considerable number of ceramic wares from late-Seljuq Persia and contemporary wares from Syria that are decorated with painted images of single felines, some of them quite bizarre-looking.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Similar carved lions are still in place on the western side of the city walls of Aleppo.

¹⁸⁷ Öney 1969: 63–5.

¹⁸⁸ Otto-Dorn 1978–9: 107–8.

¹⁸⁹ Trzcionka 2007: 109 and 111. On the use of lion images within personal amulets, see Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997: Vol. 1, 138.

¹⁹⁰ Illustrated in Hillenbrand 1999: 154.

¹⁹¹ For example see three Syrian examples from the David Collection (Folsach 2001: 144), one of which shows a cat apparently standing on a bull, while the other two represent single beasts who have become completely unshackled from reality.

Modelled lion figures also appear in Seljuq architectural decoration, notably in the Anatolian cultural area. These are thought to have been intended as apotropaic devices, protecting the buildings from harm, and this belief may well be reflected in the miniature felines found on the house models.¹⁹² Many of the examples are monumental forms modelled in the round and were originally on large public and private buildings, like those seen at the Citadel in Kayseri and the inner fortress of Aleppo, and can perhaps be compared to the large modelled lion squatting on the roof of cat. no. 1.31.¹⁹³ Simple gutters, corbels and cantilevers carved with gargoyle-like lions' heads also appear in this period, and it is possible that the feline heads which appear on several of the 'closed-roof' type house models are related to this innovation; these motifs appear widely on the surviving monuments of Seljuq Anatolia, and Otto-Dorn has related them to similar sculptures found on Armenian churches.¹⁹⁴

Again, it would be disingenuous to suggest that such forms are unique to architecture. The inclusion of modelled forms of cats or lions on vessels as feet or handles is also a feature of the ceramic products of the late Seljuq period. This can be seen in the seated cats or lions used as feet on a late Seljuq turquoise ewer in the Museum für Islamische Kunst (fig. 1.29) and a similar use of lion feet on a tabouret in chapter two (cat. no. 2.6), which look every bit as incongruous to the modern viewer as the feline heads on the house models (see the side supports of cat. nos 1.49 and the lion bust on cat. no. 1.52).¹⁹⁵ Then of course there are the feline-shaped incense burners of Eastern Persia in the eleventh to twelfth centuries,¹⁹⁶ and the lion fountain heads found throughout the Islamic world, of which more will be said in chapter three.

¹⁹² Öney 1969: 63–5; Otto-Dorn 1978–9: 109–114.

¹⁹³ Öney 1969: 43–5 and figs 1, 3 and 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46–8 and figs 17–30; Otto-Dorn 1978–9: 110.

¹⁹⁵ Another vessel boasting handles made from modelled lions or cats, thought to be from early thirteenth-century Kāshān, is now in the David Collection, Copenhagen, accession no. Isl. 98. (Illustrated in von Folsach 2001: 153.)

¹⁹⁶ An example in the David Collection is illustrated in von Folsach 2001: 471; one from the Donish Institute of History, Dushanbe is illustrated in Loukonine and Ivanov 2003: 106; and an example from the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, is illustrated on p. 107 of the same book.

It is clear from the inclusion of lion/feline motifs on other types of product that for reasons unrelated to the iconography of the house models the cat or lion was a popular decorative motif in the medieval Middle East.¹⁹⁷ It is possible, at the same time, that in the context of the house models they were intended to remind the viewer of motifs in monumental architectural decoration of the period, and further, that the use of lions as external decoration for the house models had an apotropaic significance, connected to the possible function of the house model as a *pars pro toto* embodiment of the house itself. Finally, there is also the distinct possibility that their inclusion on the house models was prompted by an iconographic reading of particular significance to the domestic context: Pope's suggestion that the house models be read as *Norouz* or New Year gifts, and that in this context the lion motifs may have solar symbolism, is an attractive idea that will be discussed in more detail below.¹⁹⁸

Geometric Motifs

Clearly legible geometric external decoration is encountered on only three of the house models. Of these, only one exhibits painted geometric decoration: that is, the little crosses painted on the roof in lustre on cat. no. 1.23. Although a similar form of decoration can occasionally be seen painted on walls in modern-day Iran (fig. 1.30), the use of such a design on a roof has no architectural parallels that I am familiar with, either in medieval times or modern. Alternatively, it is possible that the repeating pattern of crosses on the roof of cat. no. 1.23 is in fact a painted representation of the type of solid/void brick screen or wall seen in fig. 1.31, perhaps even a flattened image of the brick 'lip' around the courtyard edge discussed above and visible in cat. no. 10.

The other instances of geometric external decoration amongst the house models are moulded rather than painted, and found on walls rather than ceilings. Cat. no. 1.24, the most elaborate example from the Metropolitan Museum, has pierced walls that appear to represent a typical solid/void brick decoration, the cross-shaped

¹⁹⁷ For discussion of the earlier history of lion symbolism in Islamic art, see Baer 1967: 112–5; and Hartner and Ettinghausen 1964: 161–71.

¹⁹⁸ Pope 1981: Vol. 4, 1623 (n).

perforations forming the void. This piece has, it should be noted, undergone extensive restoration work on the side panels, but it does appear from a photograph taken pre-restoration that there was enough original material remaining to make the current reconstruction plausible.¹⁹⁹ It is possible to compare this design to certain patterns executed in glazed and unglazed brick, particularly those that create a solid/void type pattern with some design elements projecting beyond others, such as the patterning on the minaret of the Masjid-i Jāmī' at Dāmghān, believed by Herzfeld to date to the middle of the fifth century AH.²⁰⁰ However, it might be possible to suggest a closer match for this type of decoration. The simpler brick frieze with a pierced pattern, already seen on the rooftops of Yazd (fig. 1.11) and the facades of Dizfūl (fig. 1.25), at times appears in contemporary vernacular Persian architecture in the form of an entire wall (fig. 1.31). This is essentially the same design as that seen on the sides of cat. no. 1.24, although on the house model the design has been rendered smoother and less workaday by its skilful execution in miniature and the addition of glazing.

A third form of geometric decoration, seen on cat. no. 1.13, takes the form of a moulded repeating pattern of stepped zigzags fitted together in a simple tiling procession, essentially a form of meander. It occupies a panel framed all around by straight lines on each of the four external walls of the house. It may be that this design is intended to mimic a simple form of glazed brick decoration, which the turquoise glaze of the model also recalls. Brick patterning, both glazed and unglazed, is a characteristic form of architectural decoration of the Seljuq period in Anatolia and Persia, and Wilber has illustrated a comparable stepped design in fired unglazed brick from the spandrel of a ruined building at Sangān-i Bālā, Khurasan, dated by Wilber to c. 1100, and by Pickett to c. 1140.²⁰¹ The vogue for strapwork decoration in glazed tile appears to have started not long after this point; the earliest extant example in Persia appears to be the tympanum of the Gunbad-i Surkh, Marāgha, dated 1148 and incorporating turquoise glazed elements in an unglazed

¹⁹⁹ See the pre-restoration image in Grube 1992: 316 and Graves 2008: 234.

²⁰⁰ Wilber 1939: 30–1 and fig. 2; Pickett 1997: 23, 27 and plate 5.

²⁰¹ Wilber 1939: 31 and fig. 3; Pickett 1997: 24 and plate 2.

background.²⁰² As Pickett has pointed out, from this point on the glaze begins to encroach more and more on the unglazed areas before ultimately taking over with the advent of walls fully covered in spectacular glazed mosaic in the Timurid period.²⁰³ Thus any intentional inclusion of glazed brick-style designs, emphasised by the turquoise glaze of the house model, may represent an attempt on the part of the manufacturer to mimic recent developments in monumental architectural decoration.

We have seen that there appears to be an adaptation of the house model outer surface to surprisingly disparate decorative modes: epigraphic, figural, and geometric. There is in the house models an enormous discrepancy of proportion and iconographic intention involved in decorating the outer walls in this way, so that they are suddenly treated on the outside as decorative ceramic objects, when on the inside they are little buildings. This discrepancy of proportion is even more apparent in the treatment of the figures in the house models, which are of course completely out of scale with their surroundings.

However, there is in the case of the figures a well-known principle of representation at play, whereby the most important element – typically the human component – of a representation is depicted as larger than the less important details of surroundings, which can be rendered schematically if necessary.²⁰⁴ In addition to this, the practical requirements of moulded ceramic and the obscuring qualities of a thick glaze combine to make it almost impossible to create recognisable human figures under a certain size, all of which in turn create an almost instinctive understanding in the viewer that these figures are supposed to be understood as humans rather than giants or caryatids. With this natural focus on the human interior of the house models, the artists have been left to decorate the external walls of the house models as they saw fit: in most cases, this has meant opting for unambitious small-scale moulded decoration, while acknowledging that it is the inside, not the outside of the house models that is their *raison d'être* as objects.

²⁰² Pickett 1997: 29.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰⁴ Arnheim 1974: 195–7.

Activity of Figures

It has now been demonstrated that the architectural forms of the house models can be accepted as those of the vernacular domestic architecture of the late Seljuq period. That is to say, for the most part they represent houses that are neither palaces nor hovels; most likely, they should be compared to the houses excavated at Nishapur, which were believed by Wilkinson *et al.* to be the houses of merchants or people of similar status.²⁰⁵ It is this proximity to a fairly ordinary, though still probably quite affluent, experience of life in the medieval period that makes the house models so fascinating: there are very few instances from Middle Eastern culture of artefacts which depict anything so close to middle-class domestic life in the medieval period. The dominance of the courtyard space within the courtyard house means that it must be understood as the most important part of the house; as such, it is natural that it becomes the most fully articulated part of the house models.²⁰⁶ Within this domestic context, it is the figures that constitute the focus of many of the house models, and they will here be examined in more detail.

Twenty-six of the examples gathered contain human figures. The figures are, with the exception of the modelled figures in cat. no. 1.24, invariably of the moulded type, made from clay pressed into a fairly simple mould. Of those I have been able to examine first hand, none exhibit any modelling at the back, and indeed the backs of the figures are very difficult to see as they are pressed up against the back of the courtyard. In those cases where the backs can be glimpsed, the indentations left by the fingers that pressed them into the mould are sometimes clear. Already, this demonstrates that the figures of the house models represent one of the simplest forms of ceramic figurine, and as such can be considered as being significantly down the scale of value from those larger Seljuq figurines moulded in the round and polychrome-painted, such as fig. 1.32. However, there is a close relationship in iconography between the house model figures and those more luxurious Seljuq

²⁰⁵ Wilkinson 1973: xxx.

²⁰⁶ Noor 1986: 62.

figurines representing drinkers and musicians, with the house model figures perhaps constituting a more ‘budget’ version of this type.²⁰⁷

Some of the house model figures are further elaborated and differentiated by the addition of projecting modelled arms, holding tiny modelled instruments (cat. nos 1.12 and 1.13).²⁰⁸ The remainder are, with the exception of the blobby figures of cat. no. 1.22 (which are so crudely modelled as to defy classification), and the modelled figures of cat. no. 1.24, flat-moulded figures only. However, these entirely flat-moulded figures range widely in quality and distinctiveness, from the fairly lumpy and indistinct (for example, cat. no. 1.3) to the relatively well defined (see cat. no. 1.13, where individual features of hair and face can be distinguished). The entirely flat-moulded figures are normally differentiated by basic attributes into various types of musician, with pipe players and *‘ūd* players predominating although tambourine players and other types are sometimes seen; figures that appear to be drinking, although the differentiation between the types is not as clear amongst the entirely flat-moulded figures as they are amongst those with modelled arms and attributes; and figures with raised arms and often prominent navels, possibly representative of dancing girls.²⁰⁹ The figural types, and the numbers of each figure in each house model are not standard. It is also interesting to note that these figures do not appear only in the house models: a flute player who seems to have strayed from home appears on the side of a glazed figurine of a camel with a litter in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²¹⁰ Thus the mass-produced form of these little figures was apparently deemed suitable for incorporation into other ceramic products that might be dressed up with the addition of a few people.

²⁰⁷ For example, the turquoise-glazed tambourine player in the British Museum (acc. no. 1928 7.21). Earlier examples of these forms are known, although they are rare and not necessarily made of ceramic: see for example the tiny bronze tambourine player from Fatimid Fustāt illustrated in O’Kane 2006: 79.

²⁰⁸ An interesting comparison can be made with a flat earthenware dish surrounded by crudely modelled figures with outstretched arms, some of which appear to be holding instruments, thought to originate from Gilan, first millennium BCE (Kiyani 1978: 222–3).

²⁰⁹ Individual terracotta figures with raised arms, suggested by Safar to represent dancing girls, are illustrated in Safar 1945: plate 20. The prominent navels of the house model ‘dancers’ can be compared with those of the cross-legged drinking figures seen on an earthenware ceramic mould reputed to have been excavated from Ghazni and now in the al-Sabah Collection (Watson 2004: 144). Both types of figures may possibly be related to Indian prototypes.

²¹⁰ Illustrated in Ettinghausen 1970: 126.

Although the quality of the figures may vary, and the group makeup is not completely standard from house to house, we may still conclude that with the exception of cat. no. 1.24 they represent a fairly tightly-bound iconographic group: drinkers and musicians, an iconography suggestive of pleasure and celebration. This impression is compounded by the presence of what appear to be wine jars in the central courtyard of a large number of the house models. The identity of the large disc in the centre of the courtyard of many of these examples, normally topped with small balls of clay, is less clear; we will return to this element towards the end of the study.

The iconographic unit of the drinker had been current in the Persian cultural area long before Seljuq times.²¹¹ An article by Esin on the history of cup rites in Turkish and Central Asian art traces the motif back to convergent traditions from India, Persia, China and the Central Asian nomadic heritage.²¹² One of the most startling forms of this figure is found in the enigmatic *babas* or *balbals* of Central Asia (fig. 1.33). Thought to have been a form of a grave marker, a great number of these Turkic stone carvings of the sixth to eighth centuries CE represent male figures holding a cup to their chest in one hand, while the other rests on their sword.²¹³

It is true, as Esin says, that ‘[t]he prestige of the cup rites suffered a blow through Islam’,²¹⁴ but there is plenty of evidence that wine-drinking continued in the early Islamic period and beyond, and that it continued in some circumstances as a festive and celebratory activity, albeit one that was *ḥarām* (illicit).²¹⁵ The image of the drinker, seated cross-legged and holding the cup at chest height with one hand, remained remarkably consistent through many centuries of Islamic art. In addition to other examples from the Seljuq period (see again fig. 1.32), there are many examples

²¹¹ See Gelfer-Jørgensen 1986: 30–63.

²¹² Esin 1969: 224–37; on the image of the drinker in the Seljuq period see also Otto-Dorn 1982: 154–8.

²¹³ Frumkin 1970: 47; Erdélyi 1978: 205–12; Hayashi 2003.

²¹⁴ Esin 1969: 237.

²¹⁵ See Feins 1997: 49–98, and 254–68.

from Fatimid art, in the ceiling paintings of the Cappella Palatina²¹⁶ and the wall-painting from the bath at Fustāt,²¹⁷ and on lustre ceramics from tenth-century ‘Abbasid Iraq (fig. 1.34), and a medal of the same period.²¹⁸ Such was the pervasiveness of this image that it also made its way into the common iconography of ceramic decoration amongst the Cilician Armenians during the Crusader period.²¹⁹ As an iconographic unit, the drinker appears to have been related to the imagery of the so-called ‘princely cycle’ of pre-Islamic Persia: Sasanian and early Islamic imagery frequently includes drinking figures and figures pouring wine as attendants on the ruler, along with musicians,²²⁰ and the royal drinker holding the sacred cup and attended by cup-bearers has also been identified by Esin as a Central Asian image of kingship that was adopted by the Seljuq rulers.²²¹ Individual figures of musicians, meanwhile, were in common currency in the material culture of the ancient Middle East (fig. 1.35),²²² as well as the Classical world,²²³ to say nothing of the individual clay figures of musicians found at Wāsiṭ.²²⁴

To find the hidden nuances contained in medieval representations of music and drinking, let us turn to al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (‘Revival of Religious Sciences’), written in 1096–7 A.D, probably in Persia. This book constitutes a massive amount of material, enjoining all manner of spiritual, religious, legal and practical concerns of the medieval Muslim world. Of particular interest is the *Kitāb ādāb al-samā’*. This book details the conditions under which music and singing may be lawful, and it should be remembered that this was written in the Seljuq period and thus may be accepted as a reasonable reflection of the actual social concerns of the Seljuq period. The association between music and drinking lies at the heart of al-

²¹⁶ Ettinghausen 1942: 114 and fig. 7.

²¹⁷ O’Kane 2006: 64–5.

²¹⁸ Illustrated in Esin 1969: 248.

²¹⁹ Vorderstrasse 2005: 69.

²²⁰ Ettinghausen 1956: 250–6;

²²¹ Esin 1969: 245–54; see also Otto-Dorn 1982: 149–194.

²²² See also the example from Sūsa illustrated in Goetz 1946: 16.

²²³ See for example the many terracotta figurines of tambourine players, flute players and so forth from the first or second centuries CE, now in the National Museum, Damascus. See also Gelfer-Jørgensen 1986: 97–110.

²²⁴ Safar 1945: plate 19.

Ghazālī's discourse, and forms the crux of his arguments against the lawfulness of music in many circumstances:

[A]long with wine, was forbidden all that was a badge of people who drank it, in this case stringed instruments and pipes only.²²⁵ [...] So these [musical instruments] are forbidden as a consequence of wine being forbidden, and for three reasons. The first is that they incite to the drinking of wine; for the pleasure found in them is only complete through wine. Like this reason is the forbidding of a little wine. And second is that they, in truth, are closest in kin to the drinking of wine and remind assemblies of men of drinking. [...] The third reason is that the gathering together to do such things after such a gathering together has become one of the customs of dissolute people.²²⁶

In truth, al-Ghazālī is not altogether consistent regarding the lawfulness of music: at some points in the text he condemns music entirely, then at other points he suggests that music is in fact a good thing on certain occasions such as weddings, festivals births, circumcisions and so forth.²²⁷ He eventually concludes that 'It follows from all that has proceeded, sectionwise, that music and singing is sometimes absolutely forbidden and sometimes permissible and sometimes disliked and sometimes to be loved.'²²⁸

However, in the section of the *Ihyā'* that examines the governance of the marketplace, the prohibition is clearer: the breaking of musical instruments is repeatedly referred to as an example of the duties of the *muḥtasib* (an official who was responsible for the enforcement of law in medieval and later Islam, in particular in the marketplace):

[A]s to breaking musical instruments and pouring away alcohol [...] these things are done in the knowledge that they are correct without having to resort to any personal judgement. They thereby do not require the permission of the ruler.²²⁹

This practice is also referred to throughout the fourteenth-century *Ma'ālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba* of Ibn al-Ukhuwwa. This *ḥisba* manual was written in the early fourteenth century AD, probably in Egypt, but was known in Syria soon after the

²²⁵ al-Ghazālī 1901: 211.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 212–3.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 223–4.

²²⁸ al-Ghazālī 1902: 13.

²²⁹ al-Ghazālī 1999: 155.

author's death in 1329.²³⁰ *Hisba* manuals of this sort contain lengthy guidelines governing the rules of the marketplace, including lists of forbidden transactions, from which we can reconstruct quite a rich picture of everyday life in medieval Islamic cities. According to Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, it was forbidden for anyone to sell musical instruments, to play them for gain or to pay anyone to play them.²³¹ The *muhtasib* is even urged to destroy any instruments that he sees.²³²

Of even greater significance to the iconography of the house models is a further stipulation by al-Ghazālī regarding music played within a private residence. He writes:

Know that when a man closes the door of his house and is concealed within its walls, no one may enter to discover any sin without his permission. That is, except when someone outside the house can perceive what is going on inside, such as when the sounds of music are so loud that they pass through the walls of the house. Whoever hears this may enter the house and break the instruments [...] The *muhtasib* must not eavesdrop by another person's house in order to hear the sound of a musical instrument, nor smell for alcohol, nor feel someone's robe for the shape of a musical instrument, nor ask the neighbours to find out what is happening in another house.²³³

Again, this is clearly echoed by Ibn al-Ukhuwwa:

If the sounds of music issue from a house whose occupants are playing instruments in full view the *muhtasib* may forbid their continuing. But he may not enter the house and attack them or inquire into anything besides the one offence.²³⁴

These excerpts, and others like them, form a corpus of early and medieval Islamic texts that formulate a legal conception of domestic privacy. The best-known injunction on this theme is found in Qur'an 24:27 (quoted at the head of this chapter), but there are in fact a great many legal texts concerned with this very problem. A recent article by Alshech has charted the development of complex laws during the medieval period concerning whether or not it is acceptable to spy on a private house looking for evidence of sin when it is already known, from the sound of music or the smell of alcohol or the information of servants, that sin is going on

²³⁰ Levy 1938: xvi–xvii.

²³¹ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938: 12, 19, 78.

²³² *Ibid.*, 12.

²³³ al-Ghazālī 1999: 157–60.

²³⁴ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938: 13.

inside.²³⁵ Most authors argue that this is not permissible, and many of them are very strict regarding the circumstances in which the market inspector, government official or concerned upright citizen is allowed to enter the house and prevent sinful acts from occurring.²³⁶ As Alshech has noted, the very existence of such a multitude of laws restricting or forbidding the penetration of private domestic space in the medieval Islamic world suggests that that privacy was seen as something that urgently needed to be protected. Thus, the medieval conception of privacy as a function of closed domestic space is here articulated in the form of the most common type of dwelling, the courtyard house.²³⁷

From the evidence of the medieval authors, several key concerns can be extracted: firstly, that the link between drinking and music was clear to medieval observers, which would suggest that occasions at which both occurred simultaneously were of relatively frequent occurrence.²³⁸ Secondly, that although the official stance on drinking was that it was *ḥarām* and therefore not permitted, the issue of music, particularly in festive contexts, was far less cut and dried. Thirdly, and most suggestively, that the playing of musical instruments and drinking in a closed and private environment were in many if not all instances activities that were to be tolerated provided they could not be seen or heard by anyone outside the house.²³⁹

Particularly telling in the *ḥisba* text of Ibn al-Ukhuwwa is the line ‘He may not...inquire into anything besides the one offence’, which we may take to mean that the *muḥtasib*, even if he had been alerted by the sound of music to an illicit musical gathering, could not then proceed to look for other incidences of *ḥarām* activity, such as drinking. In the light of these texts, it is here proposed that the house models represent festive or celebratory activities that tended, for reasons of propriety and legality, to take place in enclosed domestic settings. The question of what type of activity that could be will be discussed at the end of the following section.

²³⁵ Alshech 2004: 291–332.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 312–26.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 328–9; Gazzard 1986: 21–22.

²³⁸ See for example Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who in the eleventh century remarked that he stayed nearly a month in Juzjānān in Khurasan and was ‘constantly drunk on wine’ (Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 1).

²³⁹ On this point note Danby’s observation that the courtyard house provides excellent sound insulation as well as good internal acoustic qualities (Danby 1986: 88–9).

Possible Meanings

Scholars have not come to a general agreement on the nature and purpose of the house models, nor on what they are supposed to represent. There has been very little written about the house models as a group; for the most part, scholarly discussion of these objects has been limited to brief references in passages on other three-dimensional Seljuq ceramics, occasional catalogue entries and museum bulletins.²⁴⁰ The relative lack of scholarship available on the house models as a discrete group is part of a wider uncertainty as to how best to classify the wide range of Persian and Syrian figurines, a problem which has not been resolved to date. Those that have openings somewhere about their person, such as fig. 1.32, have been read as vases or jugs by many scholars, although some of these readings are problematic and there remain some awkward pieces that do not have any openings and thus defy practical classification in this way.²⁴¹

The terminology that has been applied to the house models highlights the uncertainty felt as to their original intended place in the world of objects. Most recent scholars who have engaged in discussion of these objects have been content to use the term ‘house model’ or ‘model of a house’ or even ‘courtyard model’, terms which have the merit of not being misleading even if they do not lead anywhere themselves. However, other more directive terms have also been used. Teske refers to the example from the Gemeentemuseum (cat. no. 1.15) by the Dutch word *bakje*, which translates roughly as ‘little basin’.²⁴² It seems extremely unlikely both conceptually and practically that such objects, filled as most of them are with figures of people, were intended to be filled with liquid which would drown the occupants and fill the tiny courtyard, and, in many cases, spill out of the openings in the walls. Likewise, the miniature volume of the house models and the extremely cluttered interior spaces which many of them display would make them useless as containers for small solid objects such as sweets or other food. Therefore it is extremely unlikely that tray,

²⁴⁰ I understand that a published version of a conference paper by Mirela Ljevaković, “‘Keramikhausemodell’ seldschukischer Zeit”, will be appearing in the future as part of the conference proceedings of the Ernst Herzfeld-Gesellschaft 2007 meeting.

²⁴¹ Rogers 1969: 156–8; Grube 1966: 166–73.

²⁴² Teske 1999: 62.

basin or any other word indicative of the role of container or dish is a suitable label for these objects.

There have been other labels that imply a practical purpose for these house models. Soustiel has noted that they were at one point referred to as ‘paintbrush-holders’ in some sale catalogues.²⁴³ This categorisation may have been made initially by dealers who viewed the perforations in the roof of objects like cat. no. 1.53 (presuming of course that there are more objects like this) as being for scribes or illuminators to store brushes in whilst working with different colours of ink or paint. The existence in the twentieth-century collectors’ market of a considerable number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Moroccan ceramic inkwells of architectural form, made in the rather elaborate form of miniature buildings with several holes sunk in the top for different colours of ink, may well have served to confuse the issue and to lead to the medieval Persian house models being given a similar designation.²⁴⁴ However, there seems to be no evidence that the Persian house models were ever intended to be used in this or any other practical way, and with the possible exception of cat. no. 1.53 they are completely unsuited to the purpose; there have not been any attempts to pursue this designation in current scholarly literature and it can be safely abandoned at this point.

There is a further label which has been more frequently applied to the house models and which cannot be so summarily dismissed, and that is the term ‘toy’. Several scholars have been of the opinion that the house models, and the entire category of pottery figurines, are representative of a trade in children’s toys in the Seljuq and post-Seljuq periods. The excavation of many such figurines at a site in Wasit in central Iraq led the excavators to believe they had found the remains of a toyshop,²⁴⁵ although Grube has pointed out that it was more likely the storeroom of a potter specialising in figurines.²⁴⁶ More recently, Fehérvári suggested in his catalogue entry on cat. no. 1.30 (my reservations about this piece have already been expressed) that it

²⁴³ Soustiel 1985: 103.

²⁴⁴ See the example illustrated in Loviconi and Belfitah 1991: 47.

²⁴⁵ Safar 1945: 36.

²⁴⁶ Grube 1966: 173.

may have been a toy caravanserai, and Irwin in his 1997 book *Islamic Art* included an illustration of the house model currently in the National Museum of Oriental Art in Rome (cat. no. 1.5), and captioned it ‘Iranian Ceramic Courtyard Toy(?)’.²⁴⁷ He suggests that it and other miniature ceramic forms from the Seljuq/post-Seljuq period were probably originally intended as toys for children, citing Ibn al-Ukhuwwa’s *ḥisba* manual as evidence of this.

The passage Irwin is referring to is in the section on ‘Forbidden Commercial Transactions’: ‘It is not lawful to sell musical instruments or clay images such as the toy animals sold at festivals for children to play with.’²⁴⁸ Similarly, at one point in the *Iḥyā’*, al-Ghazālī states that it is not lawful to sell the animal toys made of clay given to children on festivals.²⁴⁹ The related issue of dolls and their lawfulness is also brought up by Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, who comes to a different conclusion on this point: ‘Articles used as playthings and not intended for any sinful purpose (their only object being to accustom girls to the rearing of children) are to be regarded as a means of education and to be differentiated from the images of living creatures and idols’.²⁵⁰ He goes on to relate the story of ‘Ā’isha (the child-wife of the Prophet) and her dolls, which also appears in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’*.²⁵¹

Without delving too deeply into this particular tradition, which has been the basis of much dispute about the lawfulness of dolls and figurines in Islam down the ages, what may we deduce from Ibn al-Ukhuwwa and al-Ghazālī? We must conclude that modelled figures of animals in clay, intended for children, were made and sold in medieval Persia and other parts of the Islamic world, were associated with festivals, and were popular enough to require formal laws forbidding their manufacture.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Fehérvári 1996: 118; Irwin 1997: 173.

²⁴⁸ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938: 19.

²⁴⁹ Rosenthal 1986: 616.

²⁵⁰ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938: 13.

²⁵¹ Al-Ghazālī (1901: 225–6) relates the tradition that the Prophet, upon finding ‘Ā’isha playing with something she had made, asked her what it was and she replied that it was a horse with wings, like the horse of Solomon. The tradition does not appear to state what the figure of the winged horse was made of – some commentators suggest clay and rags (Rosenthal 1986: 616) – but al-Ghazālī cites this as an example of ‘the custom of children making up a figure of clay and pieces of paper without completing the figure’ (al-Ghazālī 1901: 226).

²⁵² Naymark has noted that although aspects of the pre-Islamic traditions of ceramic figurine production in Central Asia were affected by the coming of the new religion – figurines of Sogdian

However, these sources do not mention model figures of people, other than the reference to dolls, and more importantly the evidence of the sources does not necessarily suggest that the modelled animals intended for children were glazed, or even fired.²⁵³

Some scholars have perhaps taken it for granted that the children's toys described in the sources above were glazed because a substantial number of glazed figures have survived from the Seljuq period, but in this context the clue lies in the term 'survived'. The act of glazing makes ceramics physically more likely to survive because they have been fired and coated with a barrier of glaze, and therefore may break but will not disintegrate as unfired, sun-hardened clay might; but more importantly glazing moves an earthenware object further up the scale of human manufacture in terms of both status and expense. It is safe to assume that more care will generally be taken by an owner to ensure the survival of a glazed earthenware object than an unglazed one, as the glazed object is more valuable and more special. Similarly, a fired object is more likely to be cared for than the same object in an unfired state.²⁵⁴

Playthings for children are not, even in the age of plastic, expected to last; it seems therefore highly unlikely that a medieval Persian family would wish to spend money on toys for their children which cost over the odds and would not last long in the hands of most children. In the early twentieth century, Rice saw Persian children playing with home-made clay models of people and animals, and noted that these were invariably very short-lived playthings.²⁵⁵ The clay models shown to a photographer by refugee children in the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo

gods and elaborate ceramic ossuaries are not found after the end of the eighth century CE – the production of figurines of animals and fantastic creatures never completely ceased in Central Asia (Naymark 2003: n.p.).

²⁵³ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938: 89.

²⁵⁴ It should of course be noted that there is a large body of unglazed but fired material that has survived from the medieval period (Safar 1945: 36–7 and plates 18–22). However, these figurines need not be read as toys either: Ackerman has suggested that pre-Islamic clay figurines of birds and animals might be better understood as votive figurines than toys, citing the practice of using such cultic models from the fourth millennium BCE into the Sasanian period in Western Asian sites (Goetz 1946: editor's note).

²⁵⁵ Rice 1923: 130.

(fig. 1.36) are representative of this form of plaything, and are of course all unglazed. The model of a winged horse described in the tradition of ‘Ā’isha and the dolls, if it was made of clay, must have been unglazed, if not unfired: wings of paper or rags could not be glazed and fired in a kiln. No unglazed, unfired children’s toys are known to have survived from Seljuq times, so far as I am aware, but it is interesting to look at an image like fig. 1.36 whilst thinking of the tradition of ‘Ā’isha and the dolls. The juxtaposition of such an image from the twenty-first century with a *ḥadīth* from the infancy of Islam not only illustrates the universal nature of play, but also suggests that the toys given to children in intervening periods, including the Seljuq era, may have been of a similar cast: roughly modelled individual figures of unglazed, unfired clay, made in the forms of everyday people, animals and things, and created not for posterity but for play.

Even if one were to accept the unlikely possibility of fired and glazed toys for children in medieval Islam, the house models would seem to be frankly rather disappointing as toys. Not only do their fragile additions – people, decorative edging, corner projections – cry out to be broken, but even more off-puttingly, they contain figures and objects which have been fixed in place and cannot be moved or changed in any way, and there is little room in most of them for anything else to be included in the interior scene. To illustrate this, a bird’s eye view of the interior of the example from the Brooklyn Museum is shown in fig. 1.37. There is clearly no room for other objects to be inserted into the *mise-en-scène*, as the entire floor space is taken up with figures and objects that are fixed to the floor. If they were made up of loose individual pieces that could be taken out and rearranged, a case could be made for them as toys, albeit extremely breakable ones. As it is, the entire element of ‘play’ is completely missing from them. For this intuitive reason alone one should hesitate to use the term ‘toy’ in discussion of the house models; when taken together with the lack of evidence for the existence of fired and glazed toys for children in medieval Persia, the idea that they are toys may be abandoned once and for all.

Having thus disposed of the possibility of the house models having been originally intended as either containers or toys, let us turn to the other suggestions as to their

function made in various sources. In some museum records it is suggested that these models represent mosques. For instance, the Seattle Arts Museum accession records give the title 'house model' to cat. no. 1.18, but the label displayed next to this object when I first saw it in 2005 stated that it may be a representation of a mosque. This can probably be classified as one of the Western misreadings of Islamic objects that stems from a desire to understand all visual culture of the Islamic world as being primarily religious, and as such is hardly likely to be a satisfactory explanation of the house model iconography.²⁵⁶ As has already been mentioned, Fehérvári states that cat. no. 1.53 is a model of a mosque, although he certainly does not ascribe this meaning to the house models as a whole and is largely non-committal on the subject, noting that 'there is no general agreement about the function or purpose of these models', although he had previously suggested that cat. no. 1.30 may be a toy.²⁵⁷ Soustiel suggests that cat. no. 1.23 is a possibly a miniature temple and serves a votive function, although he gives this caption a tentative question mark.²⁵⁸

Kühnel, after stating that the purpose of the house models is unknown, suggests that they may have been hung from ceilings with ribbons as decoration, but does not say why he thinks this to be the case and gives no further information on them.²⁵⁹ Rogers suggests that they should be regarded as offerings to the Buddhist temples of Mongol Persia, although no other authors have taken this view.²⁶⁰ Grabar skirts the issue of the house models and associated figurines of people and animals altogether in his discussion of Seljuq ceramic art, suggesting only that they belong in his later-to-be-expanded third Seljuq iconographic cycle of 'love or meditation'.²⁶¹ Pancaroğlu posits that the house models represent a three-dimensional variant on the ancient theme of the enthroned ruler with attendants, although she bases this attribution on an assumption that most of the house models contain figures arranged in such a way that this interpretation could be made, which does not in fact appear to be generally

²⁵⁶ See Graves forthcoming (a).

²⁵⁷ Fehérvári 2000: 106–7.

²⁵⁸ Soustiel 1985: 103. A house model sold at auction in Paris in 2005 was also labelled *temple votif*, quite possibly after Soustiel's designation, but this is hardly a sufficient explanation of the nature of the house model (Piasa Paris, 'Lot no. 115'. *Piasa Paris, Vente du 13 avril 2005: Archéologie, Art d'Orient* [accessed 31/05/07], <http://www.auction.fr/cp/piasa/index.php>).

²⁵⁹ Kühnel 1970: 112.

²⁶⁰ Rogers 1973–4: 173.

²⁶¹ Grabar 1968: 646.

true.²⁶² Leaving aside for the moment the obvious exception of cat. no. 1.24, the arrangement of the figures within the house models is generally quite democratic.

There is however a more plausible explanation for at least some of these models that has been put forward in several sources, namely that they are gifts associated with traditional Persian *Norouz* (New Year) festivities. This association appears to have been recorded first by Pope, who also suggests that they might be connected with the watch that takes place on the longest night of the year.²⁶³ He goes on to propose that either of these explanations would be supported by the modelled lion present on the roof of cat. no. 1.31 as the lion is a long-standing symbol of the sun in Near Eastern cultures, and the inclusion of a lion figure on such an object would represent either the celebration or invocation of the sun associated with New Year's Day and the winter solstice respectively.²⁶⁴ This would agree with the observations of the scholars cited in the discussion of lion motifs above. If we take this to be the case, we may make a similar assumption about those other examples discussed above which incorporate lion or feline figures into their external decoration.

Perhaps a more concrete argument for the identification of these objects with *Norouz* comes from an examination of the figures and other objects arranged inside the courtyards. Soustiel suggests that the disc with seven balls of clay on it in the centre of the courtyard in cat. no. 1.23 represents a pedestal table covered with the *haft sîn* ('seven s's') which are the key component of traditional *Norouz* festivities.²⁶⁵ This is a plausible explanation, but there are several arguments against this. Firstly, not all the tables in the house models have seven things on them. Cat. no. 1.13, for example, has more than seven, although the thickness of the glaze makes it hard to discern exactly how many. Secondly, many of the tables in the house models bear a strong resemblance to the illustrations of tray tables covered with fruits in certain miniature paintings, such as those visible in a late thirteenth-century illustration of the *Da'wat*

²⁶² Pancaroğlu 2000: 31–2.

²⁶³ Pope 1981: Vol. 4, 1623.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1623, n. This theory is supported by the evidence of Hartner and Ettinghausen, who suggest that images of the lion-bull combat can be understood to represent dates of solar significance, including the New Year (Hartner and Ettinghausen 1964: 163–4).

²⁶⁵ Soustiel 1985: 103.

al-aṭibbā' of al-Mukhtār Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Buṭlān, suggesting that this may have been a representational convention that crossed media,²⁶⁶ and the painted versions of this type of table are not believed to have any association with *Norouz*. Finally, the extant artefact that most closely resembles the tables of the house models is a stand described as a 'fruit dish' of fourteenth-century Egypt, thought to have been commissioned by the Yemeni Rasulids, with seven indentations in a broad circular top, mounted in a single central foot (fig. 1.38). This piece is not known to be associated with *Norouz* celebrations in any way, and has been conjectured to be a tray for fruit or sweets.²⁶⁷

However, the *Norouz* argument is appealing for other reasons too. *Norouz* as a festival originated in the Zoroastrian period in Persia, and celebration of this festival appears to have involved ritual wine-drinking and music. A textual description of Zoroastrian nobles celebrating *Norouz* in the Parthian courtly romance *Vīs u Rāmīn* survives in the eleventh century recension of the poem by the Persian poet Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī: 'The wine-filled cup passed among them... To one side minstrels sang to the wine... each had the glowing ember of wine in his hand.'²⁶⁸ Within Islamic contexts, there is evidence from the 'Abbasid period that the celebration of certain Persian festivals with drinking and music was not an unknown practice in Baghdad at least. A companion of the Caliph al-Rāḍī (934–940) sang the following lines at a festival of the autumn equinox:

On the festival of Khusrawani
At the autumn equinox
Offer the guests the ancient wine jugs.
Give them a cup of the old
Royal vintage [*al-khusrawani 'atiq*] of the Chosroes
For this is the feast of the Persian Kings
Let those who drink raisin liqueur [*al-zabib*]
Keep away: their taste is not mine
I know the wine I drink is forbidden [*haram*]
But I ask God's pardon, for he
Is kind and indulgent.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Illustrated in Ettinghausen 1977: 144.

²⁶⁷ Ivanov *et al.* 1990: 22; Piotrovsky and Pritula 2006: 57.

²⁶⁸ Boyce 1984: 70.

²⁶⁹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab* [Beirut, 1978], pp. 245–6; trans. given in Feins 1997: 257.

Some of the ancient *Norouz* traditions have survived to the present day, and it would appear that in the medieval period the drinking of wine had not been entirely eradicated from the celebrations, allowing us to interpret the house models as perhaps depicting medieval celebrations of *Norouz*. Melikian-Chirvani has shown through reference to Persian poetry of the twelfth to seventeenth centuries that a precious vessel, the wine-boat, was produced for the initiated to celebrate *Norouz* or the end of Ramadan, the ‘*Īd*.’²⁷⁰ This is amply demonstrated in a verse composed by the fourteenth-century poet Salmān Sāvajī on the celebration of *Norouz*, for the Il-Khanid ruler Sultan Uways:

Cupbearer, run your gold boat in the sea of rubies
 Look at the figure of the sun united with the new moon
 I am weary of the sorrows of this world: stand up, bring us vine juice
 That I may with liquid gold wash the dust off my heart
 Here comes the New Year’s day, the moon of merry company, and the New Year
 Blessed be the day, the month, and the year for the king of the world.²⁷¹

Alternatively, the activity of the figures may represent not an actual celebration of the festival, but some lingering cultural memory of the festival in its pre-Islamic incarnation, receiving commemoration within the medium of late Seljuq ceramics. Donaldson noted in 1938 that the traditions surrounding *Norouz* varied widely throughout Persia, but that the practice of visiting the houses of family and friends was common to all communities, and that nomadic communities in particular partook in ritual music and dancing.²⁷²

It is also noteworthy that the traveller Corneille Le Brun recorded that in early eighteenth-century Persia there existed a practice of giving the ruler gifts on festival days, specifically mentioning ‘wax images representing houses, gardens and other such things’ that were presented to the king on the fourth day of Shawwal.²⁷³ This appears closely related to the tradition of creating representations of trees, figures and other forms in sugar that was a feature of lavish ceremonies in the medieval

²⁷⁰ Melikian-Chirvani 1990–91: 10.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷² Donaldson 1938: 122–3.

²⁷³ Brun 1718: Vol. I, 191.

Middle East.²⁷⁴ It is even possible that the pieces of ‘ambergris, amber and musk moulded into shapes and figures’ at a ceremonial banquet of al-Mutawakkil are also connected to this idea.²⁷⁵ Thus the house models may also represent part of a larger tradition of giving model houses on festival days, presumably as good luck gifts or perhaps simply as decorative objects, but being made of a less ephemeral substance, they have survived where wax and sugar have not.

The final suggestion, put forward by Grube, is that the house models represent wedding gifts.²⁷⁶ As discussed above, he has based this theory on the erotic imagery of cat. nos 1.49 and 1.50, and on the mysterious ceremony being represented in cat. no. 1.24, which does certainly appear to involve a religious figure facing a couple.²⁷⁷ The erotic imagery on cat. nos 1.49 and 1.50 may in fact be descended from that of ancient artefacts like the piece illustrated in fig. 1.39, which are believed to have played some role in ancient fertility rites: such objects are occasionally referred to as a hierogamus, or image of a sacred marriage.²⁷⁸ Again, this may represent some kind of lingering cultural tradition that had by the medieval period lost its immediate significance, but continued as a decorative motif. As an additional weight to Grube’s argument, the appearance of seven objects in various ceremonies related to marriages as described in ethnographic texts compiled by Massé may suggest that the seven objects that were proposed to represent the *haft sîn* could also be interpreted as the seven nails, seven jewels or seven drugs mentioned in these sources, although once

²⁷⁴ ‘For decoration on every table I saw a confection like an orange tree, every branch and leaf of which had been executed in sugar, and thousands of images and statuettes in sugar’ (Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 57); ‘From them [honey and thickened sugar] are shaped human and fruit-like forms displayed on pedestals like brides on nuptial thrones, ornamentally disposed in their coloured variety and appearing like beautiful flowers’ (Ibn Jubayr 1952: 118). The sugar figurine could also be a medium of satire and protest: two hated medieval Cairene *amīrs*, Qawsūn and al-Nashw, were portrayed in sugar figurines at their executions, the former nailed on a camel and the latter depicted on the gallows (Rabbat 2006: 111).

²⁷⁵ Al-Tha‘ālibī 1968: 100.

²⁷⁶ Grube 1976: 174 (n.); Grube 1992: 315.

²⁷⁷ Denny has suggested that this piece is a model of a mosque (Denny, Walter, ‘Molded Toy Representing a Mosque: Image ID nos. C 058 and C 059’. *Artstor: Islamic Art and Architecture Collection* [accessed 18/01/07], <http://www.artstor.org>).

²⁷⁸ A fragment of a very similar piece, also from Sūsa, is illustrated in Goetz 1946: 16, where it is described as an image of the goddess Ishtar and her lover Tammuz in bed. An unusual carved stone plaque from ancient Egypt, 11cm by 9.2. cm, found at the Osiris temple in North Abydos, may be related to this form of ancient Middle Eastern artefact. The plaque depicts a man and woman having sex, possibly on a bed; it has been suggested to represent an appeal for fertility on the part of the donor (Marlar 2007: 111–20).

again this hits a snag when there are more than seven objects represented on the central 'table'.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Massé 1954: 47–8. See also the discussion of another celebratory seven – seven cups of wine on festive occasions – in Shapur Shahbazi 2003: 514–15.

Conclusions

There is no clear answer to the question of meaning and function within the house models. The most promising suggestions to have emerged to date are the *Norouz* and wedding celebration readings of their iconography. It is proposed, based on the evidence given above, that they represent middle-class domestic environments and were probably intended for middle-class consumers, and that they are best understood as gifts of a celebratory or commemorative nature (in the sense of commemorating a happy event), quite possibly related to the celebration of specifically Persian non-Muslim festivals or significant events in the life of a family.

Within the larger setting of the thesis the house models are the only form presented that could be classed as a model, because they represent the only object group that has been created solely for its representational function. As the thesis is focused on objects of largely secular and frequently domestic character, most of which fulfil a primary ‘practical’ function of holding, dispensing or supporting something else, true models do not feature heavily within this milieu. However, it is questionable to regard even the house models as a form of true model, for they represent not individual houses but a Platonic idea of the house. To illustrate the opposite, the most famous true models of architecture from the pre-modern Islamic world are probably those carried in Ottoman processions and illustrated in the *Surname* illustrations, such as the model of the Süleymaniye mosque paraded before the Sultan, or the models of the Ka‘ba and the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina made by Sinan.²⁸⁰ Clearly, the very point of such objects is their mimetic relationship with real and identifiable structures, although it would of course be wrong to call these architectural models as they must have been intended as processional models rather than as tools for the architect’s trade.²⁸¹ An earlier counterpart for this phenomenon may be seen in the seventy model citadels built along the road from the Bāb al-Naṣr to the Citadel of the Mountain by the *amīrs* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad for his triumphal entry into the city of Cairo in 1303.²⁸² All such objects are regal in function, and

²⁸⁰ Necipoğlu-Kafadar 1986: 236–40; Necipoğlu 2005: 161, 176.

²⁸¹ Necipoğlu-Kafadar 1986: 239.

²⁸² Rabbat 2006: 109–10, n. 28, citing ‘Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk*, 1: 938–40; Ibn Taghrī-Bīrdī, *al-Nujūm*, 8: 165–68.

therefore largely removed from the obviously domestic concerns of the house model, although if the house models are regarded as participating within domestic ceremonies they might be argued as having a connection with this group of eminently ceremonial objects.

The house model, in presenting a simplified miniaturisation of the domestic environment, and foregrounding the qualities of enclosure and internality, offers both a celebration of the concealed festivities of the domestic sphere and a potentially talismanic synecdoche of the house itself. The representation of unremarkable middle-class domestic architecture seen amongst the house models is, to the best of my knowledge, unique amongst three-dimensional objects from the medieval Middle East, and this gives one of the strongest clues as to their original role within Persian society. Ultimately, the house models reveal glimpses of the lifestyle and concerns of the urban bourgeoisie of medieval Persia, but continue to conceal their exact meaning from modern audiences.

CHAPTER TWO

RECONFIGURING AN ARCHITECTURE OF ASPIRATION: CERAMIC TABOURETS FROM PERSIA AND SYRIA

The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it.²⁸³

It has been noted by several scholars that there has not yet been a comprehensive published study of the six-sided ceramic tables, hereafter referred to as tabourets, that are such a remarkable feature of so-called Raqqa ware (cat. nos 2.12–2.28), and are also, though less frequently, met with in the ceramic production of late/post-Seljuq Persia (cat. nos 2.1–2.10, and possibly 2.11).²⁸⁴ These objects, and their complex relationship with architectural forms, are the subject of this chapter.²⁸⁵ As with the previous study, the initial task was to assemble as many examples of this object type as possible, in order to present the group *as* a group. The tabourets are now scattered all over the world. Certain museums, such as the Freer Gallery or the David Collection, have a particular concentration of these items, but there are also single examples in many other locations and doubtless more will emerge through salerooms in the years to come.

Because the Syrian tabourets are so closely related to certain other ceramic products ascribed to Ayyubid Syria, namely the numerous rectangular and triangular stands attributed to Raqqa, many examples of the latter groups have also been catalogued and will be referred to throughout the study. However, the architecturalising impulse seen sporadically throughout the decoration of the Syrian group is most consistently

²⁸³ Bachelard 1994: 150.

²⁸⁴ Most recently, Oliver Watson has noted that although no survey has yet been carried out, the probable total number of such medieval ceramic hexagonal tables is some dozen (Watson forthcoming: n. 61). In fact, the catalogue for this chapter includes twenty-eight examples. Two further examples in the Freer Gallery (acc. no. 13.11) and the Sadberk Hanım Müzezi, of which I was not able to obtain images, bring the current total to thirty. My sincere thanks are due to Dr Watson for making the manuscript version of his article available to me.

²⁸⁵ A condensed version of this chapter is currently in press: see Graves forthcoming (b).

and coherently manifested within the six-sided tabourets, and it is on these, along with the more explicitly architectural designs of the Persian tabourets, that this study will focus. Those stands that do not exhibit any of the architectural features that form the subject of discussion have not been included in the catalogue: my research to date has uncovered fourteen such examples, some of which are extremely small and of poor quality, and their exclusion from the discussion is necessary in order to maintain focus on the ‘architecturalising’ ornament seen on the great majority of examples.²⁸⁶

This study will start by setting the tabourets and stands in context through discussion of their presumed historical background and circumstances of production, as well as a brief summary of the archaeological data available. Following this will come discussion of the possible role of such objects in their original context, as extrapolated from literary sources, artefacts and the evidence of miniature painting. The role and nature of furniture in the medieval Islamic world is something of a neglected area, with most authors still relying heavily on Sadan’s excellent 1976 monograph.²⁸⁷ Within this context, there is need for a closer examination of sources and possibly comparable objects, both artefacts and depictions, in order to draw out conclusions about how the tabourets and stands may have been used. The third and longest section of this chapter will concentrate on the architectural forms employed or referenced within the ceramic tabourets and stands, and the possible parallels for these motifs to be found in full-size architecture, before making some attempts to explain the motivation behind architecturalising ornament in this particular context.

As the tabouret corpus appears to comprise two distinct groups which are presumed, from the tangible differences between those groups in form, degree and type of

²⁸⁶ Examples of Syrian triangular and rectangular stands that have not been included in the catalogue because they do not exhibit any of the architectural elements that form the subject of discussion can be seen in the following sources: Kühnel 1927: plate I fig. 27; Direction Générale des Antiquités, 1955: 48; Watson 2004: 298–300; Folsach 2001: 163; Gray 1974: figs 29 and 31; and Grube 1963: fig. 4. Additional unpublished pieces include a tiny triangular stand in the British Museum, inv. no. 1928 7–21 7; a rectangular stand in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, acc. no. M.45.3.109; a triangular stand in the National Museum, Aleppo; a small rectangular lustre stand in the Museum of Islamic Ceramics, Cairo, inv. no. 258; and a triangular piece sold at Bonham’s, sale 12051, *Islamic and Indian Art including Contemporary Indian and Pakistani Paintings*, 28 April 2005, lot no. 372.

²⁸⁷ *Le Mobilier au Proche-Orient Médiéval* (Leiden, Brill).

decoration, to be from culturally distinct, although by no means disconnected, areas, it is important to start by presenting a short summary of the historical background of both the Persian group and the Syrian group.

Historical Background of Persian Group

The smaller group, here termed ‘Persian’, is generally thought, like the house models of the preceding chapter, to have come from late- or post-Seljuq Persia (cat. nos 2.1–2.10, possibly 2.11).²⁸⁸ This attribution appears to have been based on the proximity of some of their decorative forms to those of other artefacts of late Seljuq ceramic production. The ‘row of rings’, shown in the previous chapter to be a common motif of various types of Seljuq ceramic production, is apparent on some of the late Seljuq tabourets, again (as with the house models) in an architectural context. The turquoise glaze used on this group appears to form an acceptable match with that of other, more common Seljuq ceramic objects, and the generally elaborate and striking nature of the moulded and modelled decoration accords with current understanding of the decorative arts of the late- or post-Seljuq period.

As has already been noted with regard to the house models, there is perhaps a tendency to ascribe a Seljuq Persian provenance to all medieval objects of unusual or odd appearance originating from the Middle East without proper documentation, owing to the previously discussed florescence of the visual arts in Seljuq Persia, and so it is difficult to state categorically, without technical analysis of clay type, glaze and so forth, whether the ‘Persian’ tabouret group should definitely be ascribed to Seljuq Persia.²⁸⁹ Commonalities between the twelfth- and thirteenth-century underglaze-painted ceramic products of Raqqa and other Syrian sites, and those of Seljuq Persia and Fatimid Egypt during the same period, have been noted by Öney. She suggests that these can be taken as evidence that not only were Syrian ceramics exported in large quantities to the Seljuq lands, but also that Syrian artisans were probably active in Anatolia.²⁹⁰ In fact, the difficulties encountered in trying to

²⁸⁸ Ettinghausen (1976: 9), in the paragraph he dedicates to these objects, states confidently that they are products of twelfth-century Iran.

²⁸⁹ Grabar 1969: 173–4.

²⁹⁰ Öney 1999: 365–9 and plates 48–9.

separate Syrian and Persian material of the fourteenth century, sharing as they do a common ceramic heritage from the Ayyubid and Seljuq periods, have been noted as an ongoing challenge for historians of ceramics.²⁹¹

On balance, I see no reason to disagree with the general designation of (late) Seljuq Persia or twelfth- to thirteenth-century Persia, which will be maintained here for this group. Perhaps it is best to accept here that such one-line historical and geographic designations are at best rarely watertight and at worst misleading, and that they certainly do not tell us very much about the original cultural milieu, with all its varying and unexpected factors, in which an object was created.

As the social and political background of Seljuq ceramic production has been outlined in the chapter on the house models, it will not be repeated here. It is the more numerous group of tabourets and related objects believed to be from Ayyubid Syria that must now be set against a short historical background.

The History of Raqqa

The city of Raqqa is absolutely dominant in the scholarship of medieval Syrian ceramic production.²⁹² Marilyn Jenkins-Madina's recent book, *Raqqa Revisited*, gives a detailed history of the long shadow cast by Raqqa on the study of ceramics from this region. The first ceramic finds purporting to be from Raqqa appeared on the market and in subsequent scholarship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁹³ The first published suggestion that these finds could be from the ancient court of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) was made by Migeon in 1907, fuelling a rash of misattributions to the ninth century by dealers, notably the Kouchakji Frères, and scholars.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Tonghini and Grube 1988–9: 89.

²⁹² Although the Arabic name for the city was al-Raqqa, I have followed the example of Jenkins-Madina and used 'Raqqa' throughout this study (Jenkins-Madina 2006: 6 n. 8.)

²⁹³ Jenkins-Madina (2006: 12–13, citing Migeon 1901: 192–208) reports the first appearance of such ceramics in 1901; Tonghini and Grube (1988–9: 61 n. 4, citing F. Kouchakji, 'Glories of er-Rakka Pottery', *International Studio*, LXXXVI [1923], pp. 515–24) state that the first appearance of Raqqa pottery on European markets occurred in 1895.

²⁹⁴ Migeon 1907: 258–9, 284–5; Jenkins-Madina 2006: 13–17. It is little wonder, when Hārūn al-Rashīd is one of the very few characters from Islamic history that many people in the west have ever heard of, that dealers were keen to milk the connection for all it was worth.

The reasons for this erroneous association between the ceramics of Raqqa and the ‘Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd lay in the history of the city.²⁹⁵ The site later occupied by Raqqa was first settled by the Babylonians. This was then destroyed by the Sasanians, rebuilt by Justinian, and finally taken by the Arabs in 639 or 640. In the early ‘Abbasid period, a new city called al-Rāfiqa (‘the companion’) was founded nearby by the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75), who settled a Khurasanian military detachment, loyal to the ‘Abbasid ruler, within its walls.²⁹⁶ Eventually a huge marketplace occupied the area between Raqqa and al-Rāfiqa,²⁹⁷ and the twin cities formed the largest urban centre west of Baghdad in the western ‘Abbasid Empire until the foundation of Samarra in the ninth century.²⁹⁸

In 796 the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) decided to move his residence to an enormous palace complex he had built to the north of the two cities. Following his death, the focus of power moved back to Baghdad and Raqqa’s glory days were over. After a period of decline, the city now known as Raqqa (the original Raqqa having fallen into ruin, the name was now assumed by its sister city al-Rāfiqa) was conquered by the first Zangid ruler, ‘Imād al-Dīn Zangī (r. 1127–46). The city revived somewhat under the building programmes of the Zangids, and under the subsequent rule of Saladin (r. 1171–93).²⁹⁹ The Ayyubids successfully defended the city in the thirteenth century from the Rum Seljuqs and the Khwarazmshah, but the Mongols overwhelmed them and the city was destroyed in 1259–65, leaving little to note until excavations began in the nineteenth century.

²⁹⁵ The history presented here is drawn from Jenkins-Madina 2006: 5–7; Meinecke 1995: 410–414; and Heidemann 2006: 33–52.

²⁹⁶ al-Balādhurī 1966: 280.

²⁹⁷ This area is notable for the abundant evidence of early glass manufactories, as well as potteries. See Heidemann 2006: 35–37.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33. The great size and significance of Raqqa is sometimes overlooked; see Heidemann 2003: 9–11.

²⁹⁹ Heidemann 2005: 86–95.

Twentieth-Century Archaeology in Raqqa

Current excavations at Raqqa have been in progress for decades, and continue to reveal much about the city and its chequered history.³⁰⁰ Findings have shown that the city was indeed a major centre of ceramic production in the ‘Abbasid period, although the ceramics discussed in this chapter are certainly from a later date.³⁰¹ The area once covered by the marketplace between the twin cities exhibits the remains of many kilns, particularly at the Tell Aswad site in the market area between Raqqa and al-Rāfiqa, where extensive quantities of largely unglazed material appear to have been produced in the eighth and ninth centuries.³⁰² Al-Muqaddasī, writing in the tenth century, refers to an area of or near Raqqa as *al-Raqqa al-Muḥtariqa*, or ‘the burning al-Raqqa’.³⁰³ Although this has been interpreted as meaning an area or suburb that had been destroyed by fire, Heidemann has suggested that this may in fact refer to the area of pottery and glass manufacture in the marketplace between the cities, the smoke from the kilns and glass furnaces giving it the appearance of burning.³⁰⁴

Archaeologists believe they have identified the remains of eleventh-century pottery production at Tell Fukhkhar,³⁰⁵ eleventh- to twelfth-century pottery and glass production at Tell Bellor,³⁰⁶ and some eleventh- to twelfth-century pottery production at Tell Zujāj, although the latter was unfortunately removed prior to the beginning of scientific excavation in 1992.³⁰⁷ The location of these sites close to a large area of clay shows that this site was chosen for its proximity to the raw

³⁰⁰ Since 1994 Julian Henderson (University of Nottingham) and his team have been conducting extensive fieldwork at the site: see Henderson *et al.* 2002: 34; Challis *et al.* 2002–4: 139–53; Henderson *et al.* 2005: 130–145; Heidemann 2006: 34–5.

³⁰¹ See Porter 2004: 41–4.

³⁰² Watson 1999 (a): 86; Heidemann 2006: 34–5, 40; Challis *et al.* 2002–4: 146; Henderson *et al.* 2005: 138–41. A study of the ‘Abbasid ceramics found at Tell Aswad is currently being prepared by Marcus Milwright and others (*An Abbasid ceramic workshop at Tell Aswad al-Raqqa, Syria. Excavations 1998–2001*, cited in Henderson *et al.* 2005: 144). The numismatic evidence suggests that activity in Tell Aswad declined in the first half of the ninth century, possibly as the result of a series of Bedouin raids suffered by the city in this period (Heidemann 2006: 42–3).

³⁰³ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, quoted in Heidemann 2006: 45–6.

³⁰⁴ Heidemann 2006: 45–7.

³⁰⁵ Tonghini 1995: 197–205; Tonghini and Henderson 1998: 113–127; Challis *et al.* 2002–4: 148; Henderson *et al.* 2005: 141–2. Heidemann (2006: 48, n. 106) has expressed some reservations about the eleventh-century date.

³⁰⁶ Henderson *et al.* 2002: 33–4; Challis *et al.* 2002–4: 148.

³⁰⁷ Henderson 1999: 246.

materials necessary for pottery production.³⁰⁸ Mason and Keall have suggested that the petrographic evidence indicates the presence of a number of separate workshops, each using slightly different raw materials.³⁰⁹

The recent scientific excavation of Raqqa has produced considerable data regarding industrial activity in the industrial area between Raqqa and al-Rāfiqa, particularly from the ‘Abbasid period as well as the eleventh and twelfth centuries.³¹⁰ But earlier excavations, both licit and illicit, yielded large quantities of glazed fritware pottery of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries from within the walled part of the city formerly known as al-Rāfiqa.³¹¹ By that period, the population of the city had apparently declined and the highly productive industrial quarter of this time appears to have been located for the most part within the walled city, between the congregational mosque and the eastern wall.³¹²

Although ceramics from Raqqa began to appear on the collectors’ market and in scholarly texts in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the first decisive published suggestion that such wares should be dated to the Ayyubid period was a note in *The Burlington Magazine* published by Sarre in 1909. He asserted that he had witnessed the excavation of the Raqqa wares being sold at that time by the local population, and that this was taking place in a site far from the older part of the city; rather, these pieces had been clandestinely excavated from the vicinity of the ruined Great Mosque, and as such should be dated to the twelfth century.³¹³ The clandestine excavation of fritware vessels taking place in Raqqa in the early twentieth century was witnessed by Bell, who noted that unbroken pieces were rare but not unheard of.³¹⁴ The impact of these vessels on the market was sufficient to

³⁰⁸ Henderson *et al.* 2005: 142.

³⁰⁹ Mason and Keall 1999: 141. It has been suggested that the workshops themselves were located some way back from the main road running from al-Rāfiqa towards Tel Aswad, and possibly sold their wares through shops fronting the road (Henderson *et al.* 2005: 142).

³¹⁰ See Henderson 1999: 243–65.

³¹¹ Milwright 2005: 200.

³¹² Milwright 2005: 200.

³¹³ Sarre 1909: 388.

³¹⁴ Bell 1911: 59–60. Bell notes later in this passage that the preserved pieces were normally assigned to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and yet the erroneous connection with Harun al-Rashid continued to be discussed in the West for years after this point (see Tonghini and Grube 1988–9: 61 n. 4).

lead to virtually all wares from Syria being referred to as ‘Raqqa ware’ for many years.³¹⁵ Small-scale formal excavations in the area were led by the Ottoman authorities (1903 and 1906), Sarre and Herzfeld (1907–8, abortive), and de Lorey (1920s), but the results of these were not published widely and it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that major scientific excavation work was undertaken by the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities, the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus and the Raqqa Ancient Industry Project led by the University of Nottingham.³¹⁶

Against such a mixed backdrop of licit and illicit excavation, it is hard to situate most of the Syrian tabouret group within definite excavation sites. Von Gladiss mentions a fragment of a ceramic table that was taken from the Great Mosque of Raqqa (restored by Nūr al-Dīn in 1165).³¹⁷ One may assume this to be identical with the fragment published by Sarre and Herzfeld in 1911 (cat. no. 2.50).³¹⁸ That piece appears to be part of a hexagonal stand identical with, or very similar to, more complete examples now in Berlin (cat. no. 2.17). The example now in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, recorded by Kühnel as having been discovered at Raqqa in 1913,³¹⁹ is probably part of a group of twenty-one Raqqa pieces confiscated from Marcopoli, an Aleppo antiquities dealer, in September 1913 and immediately accessioned to the rapidly growing collections of the Çinili Köşk Museum.³²⁰ Complete tabourets, very similar to and possibly identical with some of the pieces illustrated in the catalogue of this study, are visible in photographs taken in Aleppo in 1909, showing ceramics almost certainly recovered from Raqqa (figs 2.1–2.3).³²¹ Judging by the similarity between the two tabourets in fig. 2.1 and the two tabourets that entered the Freer collection in 1911 (cat. nos 2.19 and 2.23), it can be assumed that Freer bought at least some of this group. Finally, a rectangular stand

³¹⁵ Tonghini and Grube 1988–9: 59.

³¹⁶ Milwright 2005: 200–1; Tonghini and Grube 1988–9: 59–60.

³¹⁷ Von Gladiss 2001: 157.

³¹⁸ Sarre and Herzfeld 1911: plate CXVII.

³¹⁹ Kühnel 1938: 21, plate 22.

³²⁰ Jenkins-Madina 2006: 34.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 28–33.

of related type is recorded as having been amongst the objects excavated from Raqqa in 1954–55.³²²

One should also note that fragments of another tabouret or stand of this type, including a distinctive turned foot, were amongst the pieces excavated from Hama in the 1930s.³²³ Ceramics from Persia, Egypt and even China were also uncovered at Hama, but even so, we should not discount the possibility that this type of tabouret was also made at locations outside of Raqqa.³²⁴ A piece of turquoise-glazed ceramic material showing confronted beasts, so similar to the complete table now in the British Museum (cat. no. 2.33) that Rice surmised that they might even be from the same mould, was excavated at Harran in 1951.³²⁵

Art-historical convention has christened the Syrian tabourets ‘Raqqa ware’, and this label may now be used to indicate type without necessarily making a claim that the piece is from Raqqa itself.³²⁶ The archaeological documentation is not clear enough for us to state definitively that this type of stand was made only at Raqqa. However, connections to the Raqqa site certainly recur throughout the group. It has even been suggested by Watson and others that the frequent recurrence of certain motifs, such as the confronted griffins on some of the rectangular and triangular stands (for example cat. nos. 2.33, 2.37),³²⁷ and the moulded signature of the craftsman Muḥammad which appears on five different tabourets (cat. nos. 2.12–2.15 and Freer Collection 13.11), indicates that the entire corpus of stands and tabourets may be the product of only a few potteries, perhaps all at one site.³²⁸

The Objects: Physical Characteristics

Even if one holds back from referring to the Syrian tabourets as being definite products of Raqqa, the characteristics of glaze, body and decoration accord

³²² Direction Générale des Antiquités 1955: 48.

³²³ Poulsen 1957: 178 and fig. 579.

³²⁴ See also Milwright 1999: 513–4.

³²⁵ Rice 1952: 70. He notes that although the table in the British Museum was bought from a dealer who claimed it was from Aleppo, ‘it is, however, a characteristic product of Raqqa.’

³²⁶ See for example Watson 2004: cat. nos K11–K15.

³²⁷ See also Grube 1963: 50, fig. 4; and Watson 2004: 300.

³²⁸ Watson 2004: 300.

reasonably well with the ceramic products of the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Syrian cultural sphere.³²⁹ As already mentioned in the previous chapter, true fritware had not been in use for very long in the Middle East in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries.³³⁰ Those stands that I have examined first hand have indeed been of a strong frit body, light in colour and tough enough to permit the use of surprisingly thin slabs for the construction of the walls and top. It is important to remember that this permitted such objects to be moved around with relative ease: in spite of their heft, they are not massively heavy.

The Syrian tabouret examples illustrated here are, without exception, monochrome glazed in turquoise or greenish-turquoise. In the majority of cases, there has been some or a great deal of iridescence, largely camouflaging the original colour. At least some of them were glazed on the inside as well as the outside, but it is difficult to ascertain whether this is always the case, as most published examples are not accompanied by any information about the interior surface.³³¹ There also exist some rectangular stands that are painted in blue on a white ground,³³² lustre on a white glaze (cat. no. 2.37) or blue and lustre on a white ground.³³³ However, within the Syrian group, all the hexagonal tabourets have been glazed in monochrome turquoise, as have the majority of the rectangular and triangular stands. The Syrian group, including the rectangular and triangular stands, are invariably made from flat, moulded slabs of fritware, stuck together, with the addition of turned feet, which must have been made separately and attached after the body had been constructed.³³⁴ They are hollow in body. All the rectangular and triangular stands, but only three of the hexagonal tabourets (cat. nos 2.11, 2.16 and 2.28), bear round holes in the upper surface.

The construction of the Syrian tabouret body from flat, mould-decorated slabs represents a significant difference between the Syrian and Persian groups. The

³²⁹ See for example Watson 2004: 296–7, and Jenkins-Madina 2006: 37–113.

³³⁰ Mason and Tite 1994: 90; Grube 1992: 313; see also Watson 2004: 54.

³³¹ Atıl 1975: 86. For example, cat. nos. 2.33 and 2.47 have been roughly glazed also on the inside.

³³² Watson 2004: 298.

³³³ Folsach 2001: 163.

³³⁴ On the manufacture of moulded wares see Mulder 2001: 33.

extensive use of moulded ceramics within Ayyubid Syria has been proposed by Mulder to reflect the stability and prosperity of Syrian cities of this period, suggesting that such wares be understood as a form of ‘bourgeois’ common ware, ‘ordinary enough that they could also form part of the daily life of a type of prosperous class of Ayyubid city dwellers in the 12th and 13th centuries’.³³⁵

The piece from the collectors’ market, published by Pope and apparently never seen again (cat. no. 2.8) can be clearly seen to be hollow inside, having lost its top surface. We can assume all the Persian pieces to be, like the Syrian group, of hollow construction. However, because some of the Persian pieces (cat. nos 2.1–2.4) have flat bases as well as solid flat tops and heavily modelled exterior decoration, one does not immediately receive the impression of hollowness. Compare this with the Syrian examples, with their elevating feet, archways between legs and frequent perforated designs allowing one to see the hollow inside clearly. It is interesting that the feet of the footed Persian examples are almost invariably large, rounded or animal-shaped and somewhat clumsy; one wonders whether these feet are always original.³³⁶ It is however quite possible that the Persian tabourets, which are in general somewhat smaller than the Syrian examples, are also heavier than the Syrian pieces (owing to their complex and deeply modelled decoration) and therefore they necessitate larger, heavier feet.

It is not only through methods of construction that the Persian and Syrian groups are immediately differentiated. It is also through the appearance, method and apparent *intention* of their decoration that the two types are instantly and decisively separated. The decoration of the Syrian group consists entirely of moulded or pierced decoration, with several motifs frequently repeated amongst the group: arabesques, inscriptions, vegetal designs, panels of star-and-honeycomb indentations (and perforations), perforated balustrades, miniature arched windows, and so forth. There is considerable variety, and appeal, in the decorative forms employed, but one never

³³⁵ Mulder 2001: 13. Although Mulder is referring in the first instance to unglazed wares, such as moulded pilgrim flasks, this analysis also seems plausible for the monochrome-glazed, moulded subjects of the current chapter.

³³⁶ Ettinghausen 1976: 9.

escapes the feeling that that one is looking at applied decoration. That is to say, one sees a functional object first, and the manner of its decoration second. By contrast, the complex modelled decoration of the Persian group, incorporating projecting elements, the occasional presence of figures, and above all a systematic attempt to represent a plausibly complete architectural scheme within each tabouret, represents a different set of intentions. Even cat. no. 2.9, which effects the least departure from the basic hexagonal outline of the tabouret itself, show a deliberately architectural division of space in the painted archways, containing seated figures, which decorate the putative upper storey. The two Syrian tabourets that are perforated by arched windows on each side (cat. nos 2.24 and 2.25), and, to a lesser extent, those that have pierced oblong openings interrupted by flat balustrades (cat. nos 2.16– 2.23), begin to approach the impression of a total building in miniature, but they do not come anywhere near the Persian examples in this respect. Why should the Persian examples be more explicit in their allusion to architectural forms? A possible answer may lie in the house models – all Persian, so far as we know – and the overwhelmingly Persian metalwork presented below, in the fourth chapter. A fully developed interest in the comprehensive articulation of miniature architectural forms seems to have existed in several media of Persian art, which does not appear to have been the case in Syrian arts of the time.

Authenticity and Reconstruction

As with the house models, indeed as with almost all objects of the medieval Islamic world, it is important to note that many of these objects were not dug out of the ground looking exactly as they do now. The Syrian tabourets now in Berlin are both noted to have been in a fragmentary state when they were first acquired, and have subsequently been restored using, in one case at least, some supplementary material.³³⁷ This is not necessarily problematic, but it is something one should be aware of. As we have already heard, Bell noted that ‘perfect specimens’ were not the norm at Raqqa.³³⁸ However, many of the Syrian group bear the marks of their restoration quite clearly, and on the whole the authenticity of the pieces does not give

³³⁷ Helmecke 2006 (a): 58.

³³⁸ Bell 1911: 59–60; see also Sarre 1909: 388.

too much cause for concern. The only piece about which one might express serious reservations is that in the Tareq Rajab Museum (cat. no. 2.28). It is a prominent characteristic of the Syrian tabouret group that all six sides of any individual piece are identical, and the Tareq Rajab piece is the only exception to this rule. This suggests that this piece may be a composite of several original artefacts and/or more recent material, rather than a complete original piece.

It is more difficult to make judgements about the authenticity of the Persian tabourets: there is a distinct lack of archaeological evidence related to these objects, and it has unfortunately not been possible to examine many at close quarters. Mackenzie notes that '[t]he Iranian field seems sometimes to have more than its fair share of fakes', and as with the house models, one would do well to bear this in mind if new pieces of this type appear on the market.³³⁹ In light of the scandal that has surrounded the Mahboubian family collections, discussion of the Persian tabourets will not lean heavily on cat. no. 2.3.³⁴⁰ Additionally, the unusually neat and regular pierced decoration of cat. no. 2.8 bears a reasonably close resemblance to that of an unpublished tabouret in a private collection which was judged by Christie's experts to be largely of twentieth century manufacture, suggesting that cat. no. 2.8 should also be treated with caution.³⁴¹ Overall, the Persian group has probably seen more restoration than is generally acknowledged, and, as with the house models, there may be some pieces that are partially composite. However, the total body of material seems to present sufficient evidence for the existence of a type, and many of the details of structure and decoration seen within this group are closely comparable with features of less startling types of Persian ceramic product, as will be shown below.

Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: Literary Sources

³³⁹ Mackenzie 1963: 170. On similar problems with pre-Islamic Persian artefacts, see Carter 2001: 175.

³⁴⁰ Houshang Mahboubian was convicted of insurance fraud in the USA in 1987, after colluding with burglars to have a shipment of his own collection stolen. It was alleged during the trial that the shipment in question included some antique material that was not genuine. See Trillin 1987: 44; Muhly 2004.

³⁴¹ Valuation assessment made by Christie's on 1 June 2003; the collector wishes to remain anonymous.

It has been frequently noted that modern western conceptions of furniture overlap only partially with the objects of the medieval Middle East that might be termed ‘furniture’.³⁴² In fact, there is not really a medieval Arabic word that corresponds in meaning with the English word ‘furniture’, although *athāth* (literally ‘belongings’) is increasingly used in modern contexts to mean household objects or furniture.³⁴³ Problems of translation go some way towards explaining the sometimes confusing terminology used for the objects under discussion in this chapter. The French term *tabouret*, normally used in French to designate a stool without arms or back, has been adopted by art historians as a name for the six-sided objects from both the Syrian and Persian groups.³⁴⁴ While this name is perhaps misleading, it will continue to be used throughout the discussion, as a one-word name is preferable to lengthy descriptive nomenclature. Other terms have also been used in other sources: the word ‘stool’ appears frequently, especially in older texts;³⁴⁵ more recently, ‘table’ has gained popularity.³⁴⁶ Soustiel’s rather plaintive label – ‘*Tabouret hexagonal ou kursi (siege, trône, support)*’ – sets out some of the difficulties encountered in trying to name these objects.³⁴⁷ The related rectangular and triangular objects of the Syrian group are commonly referred to by the somewhat inelegant name ‘stand’, a convention that will be maintained here.³⁴⁸

Names attribute functions. At present, ‘stool’, ‘tabouret’ and ‘table’ suggest that either the pieces in question were made for humans to sit upon, or they were low tables destined to support some type of object. Watson has proposed that it is difficult and probably futile to attempt to distinguish between these functions in the furniture of the medieval Middle East, as objects used to elevate people were not necessarily totally distinct from those used to elevate objects.³⁴⁹ The documentary evidence that remains would suggest that domestic life in the pre-modern Islamic

³⁴² Sadan 1976: 21–2; *idem* 1980: 99; Watson forthcoming: ms. pp. 20–24.

³⁴³ Sadan 1980: 99; *idem* 1985: 313.

³⁴⁴ See Ettinghausen 1976: figures A and B; and Pope 1981: Vol. 9, plates 702A and 758A. M. Mahboubian inaccurately uses the term ‘Tambourine’ (1970: 204–5).

³⁴⁵ Kühnel 1970: 120; Kerametli 1973: 12.

³⁴⁶ Grube 1994: 284; von Folsach 2001: 163; Fehérvári 2000: 177. Atıl (1975: 86) was one of the first to use the term ‘table’.

³⁴⁷ Soustiel 1985: 117.

³⁴⁸ See Watson 2004: 299; Grube 1994: 286; Hobson 1932: plate IX; and so forth.

³⁴⁹ Watson forthcoming: ms. pp. 20–21.

world was largely conducted close to the ground.³⁵⁰ In general, indoor meals in the pre-modern Muslim world were taken sitting at ground level on cushions and carpets, rather than seated on elevated stools or chairs.³⁵¹

The Cairo Geniza documents, an enormous collection of documents relating to various aspects of Jewish urban life in the Mediterranean Muslim countries of the tenth century onwards, provide a wealth of detail regarding the material culture of the period. We find various terms that seem to correspond to ‘table’, although these are not always clearly defined or used completely consistently. *Mā’ida*, a word commonly translated as ‘table’, had a significant legal meaning,³⁵² but as Goitein has noted, the furniture called *mā’ida* that appears sporadically in inventories does not appear to have been in very frequent use.³⁵³ He suggests that we should understand it as ‘a large tray, which was placed on a stool, with the stool itself being listed as a separate piece of furniture’.³⁵⁴ At the same time, Ahsan has concluded from various ‘Abbasid sources that the term *mā’ida* was in fact a general word for a dining table, and encompassed both the *sufra*, which he, like Goitein, defines as being a round, supple cover spread on the ground under food, and the *khiwān*, which he believes to be a term applied to a *mā’ida* when it was raised from the ground:

[the *khiwān*] was generally made of wood and stone. Affluent people preferred it to be of marble or onyx. Large round trays of brass, set on a low table and often inlaid with ebony, mother-of-pearl or tortoise-shell, were also a common sight in the houses of the rich. The Abbasid caliphs, however, had some of their dining tables made of gold and silver.³⁵⁵

The *khiwān* and the *mā’ida* also appear repeatedly in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa ’l-Tuḥaf*, an anonymous fifteenth-century compilation of eleventh-century records of the treasures and supremely ostentatious gifts of various caliphs, princes and other notables. Many of the various ‘tables’ in this manuscript are made of luxurious materials, including precious metals and onyx, as one would fully expect in a text

³⁵⁰ See Rogers 1996: 245, and Grabar 2005: 198.

³⁵¹ Sadan 1980: 99.

³⁵² ‘Eating at one table’ meant living together (Goitein 1983: 144).

³⁵³ Goitein 1983: 144.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Intriguingly, Goitein has also recorded the use of a further term *khūnjā* (Persian, ‘little table’) in the thirteenth-century Geniza documents (*ibid.*, 145).

³⁵⁵ Ahsan 1979: 158.

dealing with the exotic and valuable.³⁵⁶ In several instances it is clear that the objects in question have legs, possibly allowing us to relate them to some of the tabourets. An onyx table is described as three handspans (*ashbār*) wide and two fingers (*isba‘ān*) thick, with gold legs (*arjul*).³⁵⁷ A complicated story involving the theft of a bezoar table leg uses the word *khiwān* for the table and *qā’imah* for the leg; little can be gleaned about the appearance of the original table beyond that it must have had distinct and separable legs or feet.³⁵⁸ A lone golden table leg, set with pearls and precious stones, appears in one anecdote as having been acquired in Andalusia in 730 CE by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.³⁵⁹ Although isolated from its original context, this leg does suggest a familiarity with footed tables of the Western Mediterranean tradition amongst the Umayyad rulers.

Sadan has also noted that a non-Muslim footed table observed by a ninth-century geographer is recorded by him as a *mā’ida*,³⁶⁰ and has proposed that a differentiation between the luxurious footed table and the more workaday non-footed table existed throughout the ages in the Islamic world.³⁶¹ We also hear that the Fatimid treasuries contained ‘thousands of large and small wooden tables [trays?] with legs’,³⁶² demonstrating that the footed table was not only made from luxury materials.

What general conclusions about the function of the tabouret group can we draw from the information given above? We may surmise the existence of footed tables, often made of precious materials, owned by the extremely wealthy. In more common use were low tables for dining, which may have had larger trays placed on top of them to increase the surface available for dishes, or may have been used as they were.

Goitein notes that ‘a *ṣīniyya*, a round tray made of copper or brass, placed upon a stool, served as a table’,³⁶³ around which people sat or squatted to eat. It is quite possible that we should understand the tabourets as stands for trays. Many of the

³⁵⁶ al-Qaddūmī 1996: 72, 90, 114, 188.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁶⁰ Sadan 1976: 75.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁶² al-Qaddūmī 1996: 235; see also Rogers 1996: 248.

³⁶³ Goitein 1983: 144.

pieces are of such squat dimensions that they would elevate trays of food to a comfortable height for diners seated on the ground, and it is possible that the taller pieces might have been intended for attendants to serve from. One argument against the use of certain of the Syrian groups as tray stands is the presence of circular holes in the tops of a few of the hexagonal tabourets (cat. nos 2.11, 2.16 and 2.28). It seems most likely that these were intended to receive vessels such as cups, pitchers or storage jars, as indeed must the holes in the tops of all the Syrian stands of triangular or rectangular form. There are references to storage jars with conical bases and their jar stands in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa 'l-Tuḥaf*,³⁶⁴ and indeed this is the function of the Egyptian *kilgas* to be discussed in the next chapter, although the latter are monumental objects in comparison with the mid-size to tiny ceramic stands and tabourets.

A final model from the textual sources is the table made of turquoise and decorated with precious stones reported by the author of the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa 'l-Tuḥaf*, who says:

It was among the things that had passed down to the Abbasids from the treasuries (*khazā'in*) of the Umayyads, to whom it had been transferred in turn from the Sasanid treasures. An expert informed me that this table (*mā'ida*) was rather more than one [hand]span wide and could accommodate a bowl (*jām*) for sweetmeats, and that it had belonged to 'Aḍud al-Dawlah Fannākhusrāu, who had found it in Rayy...³⁶⁵

That the table 'could accommodate a bowl for sweetmeats' might conceivably mean that it had an indentation or hole into which to receive such a bowl, although it is equally possible that this merely means it had a top surface large enough to sit a bowl on. In either event, this is an important comparison for the ceramic tabourets.

Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: Artefacts

The lack of many surviving pieces of furniture from the pre-modern Middle East presents a problem for attempts to understand the function of the tabourets. Looking for comparable forms in surviving furniture, there are certain forms from the ancient world that have the potential to illuminate the function of the stands with holes in the

³⁶⁴ al-Qaddūmī 1996: 194, 234.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 194–5.

top. At Gordion in Turkey, the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Phrygia, two excavation sites yielded objects initially understood as screens by excavators. When properly reconstructed these proved to be elaborate serving stands from the eighth century BC, with circular holes carved in the top of each stand (fig. 2.4).³⁶⁶ Each hole showed signs of use and darkening; deposits of bronze were found on the upper surface of the rings on one of them, and bronze vessels were uncovered nearby.³⁶⁷ An item of furniture that is entirely dedicated to holding one, two or at the most three vessels may seem, to modern minds, a little inefficient. But from the Phrygian stands there is evidence of a tradition of creating furniture that was substantial in size, well made, even ostentatious, but dedicated to holding only a small number of individual vessels, and it may be possible to suggest a kinship in function between such objects and the Syrian stands that are topped with holes. An even more ancient artefact which can also be compared to the Syrian stands is a bronze openwork stand, possibly from Episkopi, Cyprus, decorated with mould-cast images of men carrying various objects and one playing an instrument. This piece is thought to date from c. 1250–1050 BCE, and presumed to have been originally intended to take one vessel such as a cauldron (fig. 2.5). Naturally, no direct connection is proposed between such ancient artefacts and the medieval tabourets, but the very ancient tradition of solid stands with circular openings to take round-bottomed vessels suggests this as a likely use for the tabourets and stands with circular openings.

Naturally, the suggestion that the Syrian tabourets and stands with holes in the top are intended for holding vessels has been made by other authors. The most commonly suggested use is for holding lamps,³⁶⁸ or inkwells.³⁶⁹ Goblets and vases,³⁷⁰ bowls for food and drinking vessels,³⁷¹ and beakers and bottles³⁷² have also been suggested. The suggestion by Makariou that the triangular stands, with their invariable three holes, are for holding vessels containing the staples of the scribe's

³⁶⁶ Simpson 1996: 193–4.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁶⁸ Watson 2004: 298; Fehérvári 2000: 177.

³⁶⁹ Watson 2004: 298; Fehérvári 2000: 177; Makariou 2001: 203; Direction Générale des Antiquités 1955: 48.

³⁷⁰ Rice 1952: 70.

³⁷¹ Porter 1981: 37.

³⁷² Watson 2004: 298.

trade – ink, sand and blotting tow – is an appealing idea.³⁷³ But what of the hexagonal tables, many of which do not have any holes in the upper surface? A picture of these little tables is slowly building up: operating a little above floor level – the right height to be convenient for someone seated on the floor – these may have borne a single large dish or perhaps more likely a tray carrying several dishes.

Another artefact that must be discussed is that which has become known as a *kursī*. In various texts, this term has been taken to mean ‘seat’ in the general sense, stool, throne, footstool, stand and even lectern.³⁷⁴ Sadan has suggested that *kursī* may be interchangeable with yet another term, *mirfa*‘, and that both can be used in various contexts to mean a stand (*mirfa*‘ coming from the verb *rafa*‘a, ‘to elevate’), as well as the primary meaning of ‘seat’ for *kursī*.³⁷⁵ The name *kursī* has been applied to a famous six-sided object from Mamluk Cairo (fig. 2.6) although as Rogers observes, the term may not be contemporary with the object.³⁷⁶

Opinion is divided over whether the Mamluk piece, with its central cavity and lockable doors, should be regarded as a container or a stand in the first instance, demonstrating yet again the difficulties inherent in trying to make medieval Islamic objects fit into modern furniture terms.³⁷⁷ Names notwithstanding, with its six-sided form and turned legs it is powerfully reminiscent of the Syrian tabouret group, although at 81 cm high it is more than twice the height of any of the ceramic examples. The grandiose increase in size that has taken place in the Mamluk example is less remarkable when one considers the materials from which it has been made (brass with silver inlay), and the patron for whom it was created: according to Hillenbrand, the inscriptions of this piece repeat the words ‘Glory to our Lord the Sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’ fifty-four times.³⁷⁸ Note the architectural

³⁷³ Makariou 2001: 203.

³⁷⁴ Huart 1986: 509.

³⁷⁵ Sadan 1976: 93–4.

³⁷⁶ Rogers 1996: 249. It has been noted by James (1988: 31) that in Mamluk documents the term *kursī* normally applied only to reading stands.

³⁷⁷ Graves forthcoming (b).

³⁷⁸ Hillenbrand 1999: 154.

arched doors, and the arches between the legs.³⁷⁹ The use of lions as feet on certain of the Persian tabourets may refer to prototypes in metalwork, and it should not be totally discounted that there may have been tabourets made of metal, as well as wood, that have not survived.³⁸⁰

But even the ceramic tabourets may have been a social step up from the wooden examples that they almost certainly imitate, and which must originally have been the more common type. The perishability of woodwork objects, which are prey to decay, or may even be re-used for firewood or building material in areas where wood is scarce,³⁸¹ has meant that those items of medieval furniture surviving today are not necessarily the most representative, but the most durable. For many ancient cultures, we have only miniature models of furniture made from clay to inform us of the real furniture of that civilisation, almost all the originals having perished centuries ago.³⁸² Watson has highlighted the unnecessary copying of carpentry details, such as the turned feet of the Syrian examples, as a clear indicator that the ceramic tabourets ape wooden table forms.³⁸³ A rare wooden table from Afghanistan, now in the David Collection (fig. 2.7), holds some clues as to the appearance of the wooden cousins of the ceramic group, as do some elements of the ceramic tabourets themselves. This table is part of a small group of pigmented wooden material thought to come from caves in northern Afghanistan and acquired by the David Collection in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Several of the pieces from this group including the table have been carbon dated and the results of this testing agree with an eleventh- to early thirteenth-century date.³⁸⁴ The piece has been restored, but the thick turned legs of the wooden example correspond closely, allowing for the characteristics of different media, to those of the ceramic tabourets, and the incorporation of modelled wooden

³⁷⁹ Sophie Makariou has recently presented a paper in which she suggested that this object was intended to resemble a medieval mosque treasury or *bayt al-māl* ('The Louvre *Kursi*: Usage and Symbolism', paper presented at *The Art of the Mamluks*, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 25 September 2009). Her connection with the *bayt al-māl* connects very closely to an argument presented in Graves forthcoming *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman Qur'an boxes of architectural form.

³⁸⁰ See the crouching lions supporting a silver vessel illustrated in Baer 1983: 160. The appearance of similar forms in ceramic, already mentioned in chapter one, may be an example of the imitation of metalwork in ceramic forms of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Tabbaa 1987: 98).

³⁸¹ Rogers 1996: 245.

³⁸² Theodossiadou 1996: 73–83 and plates 19–22; see also Cholidis 1992.

³⁸³ Watson forthcoming: ms. p. 22.

³⁸⁴ Folsach 2003: 75, 91.

components to form a miniature section of *mashrabiyya* screen between each pair of legs in the Afghan table is a not-too-distant echo of the pierced side panels of some of the ceramic examples, as will be discussed below.

Also related to the ceramic tabourets in terms of ornament is an ivory table now in the al-Sabah collection in Kuwait (fig. 2.8), thought to originate from Mamluk Syria or Egypt.³⁸⁵ Although of square rather than polygonal plan, this piece incorporates a series of tiny balustrades of turned ivory along the sides of the stand, segmenting the void between the tabletop and the lower crossbeam. The teardrop shapes of these ivory balusters are matched, albeit in a flattened version that gives a silhouetted form, in the pierced decoration of several of the ceramic tabourets. On some of the ceramic tabourets and stands the balusters appear to have been inverted for no apparent reason (cat. nos 2.16, 2.18, 2.22, 2.23, 2.41). It is possible that the balusters were moulded separately and applied afterwards, in these cases by someone unfamiliar with the original form that they imitated. Another possibility is that these pieces were restored incorrectly.

A further artefact that incorporates a miniature balustrade is a well-known fourteenth-century Mamluk object in Cairo (fig. 2.9).³⁸⁶ Various referred to as a table, a stand or a Qur'an cupboard, this piece again highlights the problems of translating furniture terms and types from medieval Near Eastern to contemporary Western modes. A masterpiece of inlaid wood, it incorporates a modelled miniature balustrade within a decorative scheme that marries miniature architectural motifs in two and three dimensions with geometric panels of great complexity.³⁸⁷ Its polygonal form is close to that of the ceramic tabourets, but at a height of 115 centimetres it is a far taller object than any of that group. However, the use of miniature architectural forms within a larger design that does not in its entirety replicate any architectural model is reminiscent of several of the Syrian tabourets, and this wooden object gives

³⁸⁵ Jenkins 1983: 89.

³⁸⁶ A very similar object, found in the Mosque of Çoban Mustafa in Gebze (founded c.1523), is held in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul (acc. no. 241).

³⁸⁷ See Graves forthcoming.

us another clue as to the possible appearance of the wooden prototypes of the ceramic tabourets.

The most striking piece of comparative material is a brass object now in Los Angeles (fig. 2.10). The top of this remarkable piece is not original, and the arch-shaped windows now filled with cloth may originally have had attachments for hinged doors, but it appears to be a unique example of a metalwork table that is extremely close in both polygonal outline and architecturalising ornament to the tabouret group as a whole. The history of this piece is unclear. Linda Komaroff is reasonably confident that it is a brazier from Syria, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century.³⁸⁸ A pair of brass panels now in the Khalili Collection (fig. 2.11) may have originally formed part of a similar structure: note the lobed arch outlines visible on both the Khalili and LACMA pieces, and one may compare both with the lobed arches seen between the legs of the brazier being used for cooking in the centre of an illustration of court life in a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Diryāq* (fig. 2.12). Thus, there is some evidence for the existence of polygonal metalwork stands or braziers, comparable in form to the ceramic examples that have survived, and possibly also related to wooden structures that have not survived.

Furniture in the Medieval Islamic World: The Evidence of Painting

In the absence of an extensive surviving selection of furniture types from the medieval Islamic world, the most obvious sources for the paraphernalia of middle-class life in the medieval Middle East are the famous illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī.³⁸⁹ The illustrations of eleven of these manuscripts have been published, although in many cases the only versions available are the microfiches published by Grabar, which are not always entirely legible.³⁹⁰ Of the illustrated *Maqāmāt* manuscripts, few are dated: the famous Bibliothèque Nationale *arabe* 5847 (henceforth referred to as the al-Wāsiṭī *Maqāmāt*, after the artist-scribe) is dated 634

³⁸⁸ Email correspondence with the author, 26 June 2008.

³⁸⁹ I would like to thank Shirley Guthrie for her generous assistance with this section.

³⁹⁰ Grabar 1984. Two further unpublished illustrated manuscripts exist in Manchester and Şan‘ā; see Grabar 1984: 16–17.

AH/ 1237 CE;³⁹¹ the remainder are dated either explicitly or through comparative analysis to the early thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth centuries, an unusually short span for an illustrated manuscript tradition.³⁹² As regards place of origin, many of the later examples are believed to have been executed in Syria or Cairo, but attempts to attribute the earlier examples to Baghdad, Mosul and other centres have defied precise localization.³⁹³

The text deals with the exploits of a medieval rogue called Abū Zayd, and his long-suffering and somewhat naïve foil al-Ḥārith, who is also the narrator of the stories. The value of these illustrations for the present study is the opportunity they provide for the illustration of scenes set in all walks of medieval Arab life, as Abū Zayd's fortunes rise and fall; the *Maqāmāt* allows the inventive artist to take miniature painting far beyond enthronement scenes and palace life.³⁹⁴

One of the most common types of table seen in the *Maqāmāt* illustrations is a large, low, three-legged table (see fig. 2.13 A–C). This type appears frequently in the al-Wāsiṭī manuscript, often bearing vessels. It appears in all sorts of contexts in this manuscript: wealthy house, humble house, tent, and even cave. Such tables in this manuscript are invariably yellow-golden in colour, suggesting that are to be understood as brass or possibly wood, and on occasion they bear some linear decoration that may be intended to represent incised, moulded or painted decoration.³⁹⁵ A *Maqāmāt* manuscript in the British Library also incorporates the three-legged table into several scenes: the tables in this manuscript are also golden-coloured, and frequently decorated with curlicues. Again, the three-legged table is at times shown being carried complete with vessels and bread (see fig. 2.13 A). The Istanbul *Warqā' wa Gulshāh* manuscript, from early thirteenth-century Anatolia, also contains examples of the three-legged table type,³⁹⁶ as does an illustrated copy of the *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'*, speculatively attributed by Baer to mid-thirteenth century

³⁹¹ Also known as the Schefer *Maqāmāt*, after a previous owner. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 8–9, 14–17.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

³⁹⁴ For an example see Ettinghausen 1977: 65.

³⁹⁵ See the table in the cave in fol. 3v of the al-Wāsiṭī *Maqāmāt*.

³⁹⁶ Illustrated in Sims, Grube and Marshak 2002: 140.

Syria.³⁹⁷ One can propose more than a passing similarity between some of the low three-legged tables represented in these illustrations and the miniature terracotta models of tables excavated at the ancient sites of Ur (Iraq) and Sūsa, suggesting a very ancient tradition for this type of table in the Middle East.³⁹⁸

The three-legged table of these *Maqāmāt* illustrations is not a very close comparator for the tabouret group. However, the manner of their use is highly suggestive: time and again, we see figures seated on the ground, or occasionally on floor-cushions, helping themselves to the food that rests atop these three-legged tables. Normally two or more characters will be seated around a single table; occasionally, when there is a particular interest in depicting conspicuous consumption, several tables will serve a group.³⁹⁹ The tables are brought to the diners fully laden.⁴⁰⁰ The non-supported trays that are shown being carried in (fig. 2.14) were presumably destined to rest on some sort of support.

The low single-footed stand also appears frequently in the *Maqāmāt* illustrations,⁴⁰¹ notably the Vienna *Maqāmāt*: a single-footed table appears to be float above the revellers in a tavern (fig. 2.13 D). It is important to understand that these floating tables and stands are resting on the floor ‘upstage’, rather than being intended to represent shelves: a similar spatial arrangement is seen in an illustration of *The Banquet of the Physicians*, probably from Syria, 1273.⁴⁰² The forms of the single-footed stands vary; see the various types illustrated in fig. 2.13 D–F. Again, there are interesting comparisons to be made with ancient models found at Ur and Tell Hūēra.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ Baer 2002: fig. 2.

³⁹⁸ Cholidis 1992: plate 2, no. 180, plate 6, nos 205 and 206, and plate 7, no. 207.

³⁹⁹ For example, fol. 47v of the al-Wāsiṭī *Maqāmāt*, showing the feast of the merchant of Sinjar.

⁴⁰⁰ The practice of bringing in the tables fully laden is depicted in countless later miniatures of court life and enthronement scenes (an Ilkhanid example is illustrated in Masuya 2002: 80). The *Maqāmāt* illustrations prove that this was practised at all levels of society.

⁴⁰¹ However, this type of table appears only rarely in the al-Wāsiṭī manuscript: see Guthrie 1995: 190, ill. p. 182.

⁴⁰² Illustrated in Ettinghausen 1977: 144.

⁴⁰³ Cholidis 1992: plate 2 no. 179, and plate 3 no. 189.

The lack of precise correspondence between the tabourets and the single-footed stands and three-legged tables should not deter us from reading the tabourets as tray stands: their height would make them suitable for this, and it is not always clear whether the *Maqāmāt* illustrations show single-unit tables, or trays on stands. It might even be argued that the hole in the centre of an object such as cat. no. 2.11 could provide a stabilising resting spot for a large hemispherical dish, although it seems more likely that it was intended for a smaller vessel which would fit more securely into the hole. It is also entirely possible that the ceramic examples were relatively unusual objects and as such never made it into the illustrations of contemporary manuscripts.

Certain other elevating objects depicted in the *Maqāmāt* illustrations and related images look like large candlesticks, which may well be what some of them are intended to represent.⁴⁰⁴ These pieces are clearly far taller and more elongated than the ceramic tabourets and stands, and they give us some demonstration of how light sources may have been elevated to a useful height in medieval Arab contexts.⁴⁰⁵ The lack of illustrations of light sources on low tables and stands suggests that the ceramic tabourets and stands are less likely to have been intended as stands for lamps in a general domestic context, and therefore this interpretation can probably be abandoned.

Additionally, there are certain illustrations that appear to depict single vessels sitting on individual low-footed stands (fig. 2.13 G). These can be read as low oblong stands with turned feet. Although these feet are more knobby and top-heavy in appearance than the collared, turned feet of the Syrian tabouret group, this type of depiction may still be intended to represent something akin to the feet of cat. nos 2.17 or 2.18. These examples are also important as they establish the existence of low stands for single vessels. Another form of low footed table, seen in certain of the Dioscorides

⁴⁰⁴ This may be the lamp set on a stand like a column (*‘amūd*) referred to in al-Jāhīz (Grabar 2005: 199). See also the elevated vessel in the al-Wāsiṭī *Maqāmāt*, fol. 13v, illustrated in Guthrie 1995: 153; and a vessel or other object shaped like a bird mounted on a stand in the Freer Gallery *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, 32.20v, illustrated in Atıl 1975: 53 and 60.

⁴⁰⁵ See the metalwork examples of similar types of object illustrated in Baer 1983: 11–20, and illustrations of elevated stands in the *Kitāb al-Diryāq* (Paris, Bib. Nat. 2964, p. 31) and the *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides (Freer Gallery of Art, 32.20), both illustrated in Baer 1983: 8–9.

miniatures (fig. 2.13 H), is of interest for this study in its display of a shouldered-arch shaped opening between the legs: this can be tentatively linked to some of the arch-shaped openings formed between the legs of various tabourets, although not one of the latter takes the form of a shouldered arch.⁴⁰⁶

A different type of stand is represented in the Oxford *Maqāmāt* manuscript.⁴⁰⁷ Fig. 2.15, showing the last encounter between Abū Zayd and al-Ḥārith, is set in a mosque, and while the left and central arcades of the schematised tripartite architectural setting are occupied by the two principals of the story, the right-hand arcade is taken up by an extremely large vessel and two small ones, elevated on a stand decorated with floral motifs. Presumably the vessel is a point-ended jar, which is kept upright by the insertion of the pointed end into a recess in the stand. From the religious setting, we can assume this to be a water jar, and the vessels beside it to be drinking cups, while the top contains a cloth plug.⁴⁰⁸ The stand itself is blocky in outline, with two tapering feet creating a curved shouldered-arch shaped opening between them. A somewhat similar jar, resting in a wooden stand, is visible below the stairs in one of the illustrations of the Istanbul *Maqāmāt*.⁴⁰⁹ If we assume the water jar in the Oxford *Maqāmāt* to be earthenware, and drawn to scale, one would imagine the stand to be made from wood or stone rather than ceramic. However, an unglazed ceramic stand bearing a remarkable similarity to this piece, even down to the decoration, is currently on display in the National Museum in Aleppo, where it is successfully supporting a large unglazed jar, albeit an empty one (fig. 2.16).⁴¹⁰

Although it seems unlikely that the ceramic tabourets were used for sitting, the question of seat types in manuscript illustration should be briefly considered. There are rather ambiguous objects of oblong shape used as seats in the al-Wāsiṭī manuscript (fig. 2.17). The light colouring of these objects suggests that they are supposed to be read as wooden, or possibly metal, and are decorated with panels of

⁴⁰⁶ For further stands and tables in the Dioscorides miniatures see Buchtal 1942: 24–7, 30.

⁴⁰⁷ In the illustration of the first *maqāma* in this manuscript (fol 7 v.), a large amphora appears to have been shoved into a flowerpot-shaped stand.

⁴⁰⁸ See Guthrie 1995: 190.

⁴⁰⁹ Grabar 1970: 212. These images will be further discussed in the next chapter.

⁴¹⁰ Mr. Assad Yusuf informed me when I visited the museum that the date of this Syrian object is unknown.

simple arabesque decoration.⁴¹¹ Finally, there are illustrations of seats that apparently combine turned legs with solid panels, sometimes also incorporating turned balustrades. The Istanbul *Maqāmāt* contains several examples of this type of seat: fig. 2.18 depicts the *qāḍī* seated on a low broad seat with a back, the base of which has short turned legs, solid and void sections, and a central panel decorated with a criss-cross design that may be intended to represent a *mashrabiyya* panel, or alternatively a section of inlaid decoration. Fig. 2.19, depicting Abū Zayd as schoolmaster, shows him on a seat of polygonal plan with turned feet and balustraded sides. Watson has cited a further illustration from the St Petersburg *Maqāmāt* (fig. 2.20) as an example of a wooden table incorporating turned elements and solid panels, supporting an inkwell.⁴¹² If this is indeed a table, this would make it a very important comparison piece for the Syrian ceramic tabourets. In fact, it is very hard to tell if this section of furniture is supposed to be a separate table, or part of the seat of the *qāḍī*.⁴¹³

This survey of the various sources of evidence regarding the uses and appearance of furniture types in the medieval Islamic world has not produced any single term, description, artefact or illustration that can be called a perfect match with the ceramic tabouret group. However, the evidence that has been presented makes it easy to see a place for the tabourets within this world. We can conclude that food was commonly eaten by diners who sat on the floor and helped themselves from a single central dish, which was normally elevated slightly above floor level by being placed on a low table or stand. Trays were frequently set on separate stands. Tables and tray/stand combinations of this type were carried in to the diners fully laden, and were removed from the room at the end of a meal: they were not situated permanently in one spot, but were moved to the place they were needed.⁴¹⁴ This suggests that they were of wood, or possibly ceramic, rather than stone. We have also seen that there were elevated stools and chairs, but it is clear enough that these were

⁴¹¹ See Watson forthcoming: ms. p. 22, n. 107.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, ms. p. 22.

⁴¹³ A similar miniature in the Istanbul manuscript (fol. 77; Abū Zayd before the Walī in the twenty-third *maqāma*) shows a domed inkwell sitting on what is unmistakably an extension of the dais-seat of the Walī.

⁴¹⁴ Goitein 1983: 48; see also the tenth-century North African eating habits described in Ibn al-Haytham 2001: 153–5.

rarely encountered in the domestic milieu. At any rate, the Syrian tabourets are not physically suited to use as stools: many of them are too narrow to be used as such, and being made of fritware and balanced on six legs, are probably not stable or sturdy enough for this use. Further, if they were to be used as stools, this would raise some serious questions about the purpose of the holes in the top of cat. nos 2.11, 2.16 and 2.28 (!) The Persian examples, being squatter, might conceivably be used as stools, but it seems highly unlikely that something as carefully designed to look like a building as cat. no. 2.1 was intended to be sat upon, unless the company had a keen and strange sense of farce, as well as very small backsides.

Finally, an important parallel for the group is a rather smaller, six-sided stand with small rounded feet and pierced sides, bearing a circular hole in its upper surface, which is now in the Samarqand Regional Museum (fig. 2.21).⁴¹⁵ This piece has been suggested to be a lantern of the Samanid period,⁴¹⁶ but more likely this represents a more modest incarnation of the tabouret group, of great significance in its illustration of the geographical and temporal extent of the form.

Architectural Parallels

As the overarching interest of this thesis lies in the appropriation of architectural forms by portable objects, this section will concentrate on the hexagonal tabourets. It is in this group, not in the triangular and rectangular Syrian stands, that miniature architectural forms are most closely allied with an architectural or quasi-architectural outline (the six-sided, flat-topped form of the tabourets), thereby creating the possibility of reading the objects in question as miniature architectural or quasi-architectural forms. Naturally, where the other types of Syrian stands serve to illustrate a particular motif, they will also be called into the discussion, but the emphasis remains on the six-sided tables. It has already been demonstrated that there are differences in the use of architectural motifs between the Persian and Syrian tabouret groups, and many features that are particular to one or the other of the two

⁴¹⁵ Rosalind Wade Haddon is thanked for drawing this piece to my attention.

⁴¹⁶ Mouliérac 1992: cat. no. 305.

groups will be considered individually. However, the first architectural parallel to be discussed will be the six-sided form common to both groups.

Polygonal Structures and Garden Architecture

Before proceeding to the dominant reading of the six-sided form in the context of this group, it should be noted that the polygonal plan of the tabourets could refer to several architectural modes found in the medieval Middle East. Blair's article on the octagonal pavilion at Naṭanz (dated by an inscription to 999 CE) highlights some thirty octagonal tomb towers in Persia, dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, as possible comparators for the octagonal pavilion at Naṭanz.⁴¹⁷ However, while this demonstrates the continuity of an octagonal plan for funerary architecture from the Buyid period onwards in Persia, octagonal-plan architecture is by no means found only in funerary contexts, and there is no reason to suppose that the tabourets represent funerary architecture. The formal mismatch between the flat-topped tabourets and the domed funerary architecture described by Blair, to say nothing of the possible conceptual problems of eating off miniature funerary architecture, would suggest that they should not be regarded in this light. Instead, there are a large number of structures found within palace contexts that use the polygonal ground plan in rather more *bon vivant* contexts.⁴¹⁸

It would appear that Ettinghausen was the first to propose that the tabourets should be understood as images of a now-vanished garden architecture or the pavilions of the wealthy,⁴¹⁹ a reading that has been repeated in several sources.⁴²⁰ In making this suggestion, he cites only two examples of the Persian tabourets (cat. nos 2.2 and 2.7) and does not mention the possible relation the six-sided Syrian pieces would have to this reading.⁴²¹ However, let us pick up this idea where Ettinghausen left it, and see if further connections can be made.

⁴¹⁷ Blair 1983: 83.

⁴¹⁸ There are many cases in Islamic architecture of the same form being used for several distinct functions, for example the four-*īwān* plan which is used for houses, mosques, madrasas and caravanserais.

⁴¹⁹ Ettinghausen 1976: 9.

⁴²⁰ Watson 1985: 106; Fischer 1995: 64; Redford 2000: 100.

⁴²¹ It is typical of Ettinghausen's scholarship that his very brief discussion of these pieces – almost an aside – should constitute some of the most insightful and influential published observations to date.

The major problem in proving or disproving this conjecture is the lack of comparable full-size architectural remains.⁴²² Garden architecture tends, by its very nature, to the ephemeral, and remains are scarce, whilst textual references are often unclear. There are early references to a canvas pavilion and a domed wooden pavilion created for al-Manṣūr in the eighth century,⁴²³ and to a double-domed pavilion made of wood and canvas for Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁴²⁴ In addition to these tent-like creations, some early fixed structures could be drawn on for comparison, such as the octagonal stone pavilion that stood over a pool at Khirbat al-Mafjar.⁴²⁵ The latter has been suggested by Grabar to reflect a now-lost Classical tradition of garden pavilions that resemble ciboria, although he does not rule out the possibility that it is an Umayyad invention.⁴²⁶ A magnificent garden pavilion, set amongst the fruit gardens and flowing streams of the royal grounds in Jūy-i Mūliyān in the tenth century, is described by Narshakhī, although the description is hard to interpret.⁴²⁷

There appears to have been a considerably greater interest in the creation of freestanding architectural units in Anatolia and the Jazira in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries than is to be seen in earlier palace complexes.⁴²⁸ Textual evidence can be taken as indicative of a transition from temporary to permanent forms of architecture within the Seljuq elite, as luxurious tents shaded into freestanding kiosks grouped within an encircling wall.⁴²⁹ Ibn Bībī's descriptions of thirteenth-century Seljuq court life are tantalising: he mentions a great number of fixed and movable pavilions (*kūshkhā-yi rivān u sākin*) constructed for the welcome of the Seljuq Sultan to the Anatolian cities of Kayseri and Konya.⁴³⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn gives us a slightly later description of a garden erected in 1302 by Ghazan Khān near Tabriz, which included

⁴²² Adamova 2007: 102.

⁴²³ Al-Tha'ālibī 1968: 48–9; Mas'ūdī 1861–1930: Vol. 6, 426–7.

⁴²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī 1989: 320–1.

⁴²⁵ Reconstruction in Hamilton 1988: 56, and 60–62.

⁴²⁶ Grabar 1973: 159.

⁴²⁷ Narshakhī 1954: 27.

⁴²⁸ Necipoğlu 1993: 14–18; Hillenbrand 2000: 415–6; Redford 2000: 55. The more quotidian use of tents and pavilions as a form of temporary encampment set up before the erection of permanent buildings and the establishment of a town is noted in Narshakhī 1954: 7.

⁴²⁹ Hillenbrand 2000: 415–6; Golombek 1995: 141–2. See also Brookshaw 2003: 202.

⁴³⁰ Redford 2000: 30, n. 94, citing Ibn Bībī, *Mukhtasar-i Saljūqnāmah/ Die Seltschukengeschichte des Ibn Bībī*, trans. Herbert W. Duda (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 96.

pavilions, towers, a bath, a golden trellis tent and a tent of state that took three years to make and one month to erect.⁴³¹ An enormous trellis tent of Ögedei, said to be large enough to accommodate a thousand people, was a permanent fixture at one of his camping grounds.⁴³²

Therefore, when we talk of garden architecture in the medieval Middle East, we are speaking of structures that may dissolve the boundaries between permanent and impermanent architecture.⁴³³ The use of wood, textiles and unbaked brick has prevented the survival of such architecture to the present day.⁴³⁴ Additionally, the textual sources for these more ephemeral forms of architecture make it difficult, without architectural remains or clear depictions, to distinguish what exactly is meant by the various different terms used. *Kūshk*, *jawsaq*, *qaşr* and *manẓar* ('belvedere') have all been translated as 'pavilion' by Redford in his studies of the garden architecture of the Anatolian Seljuq site of Alanya; yet those same words have been allocated the general meaning of 'palace' by Brookshaw,⁴³⁵ demonstrating the opacity of function(s) within the structures thus named, and the interchangeability of the terms within the sources.⁴³⁶

There remain a handful of archaeological sites that should be mentioned. The Alanya pavilions and palaces discussed by Redford are an important case study;⁴³⁷ he has suggested that the end decoration of certain carved marble and limestone slabs thought to come from medieval Persia should be understood as reflections of two-storied kiosks similar to those at Alanya (fig. 2.22).⁴³⁸ In addition to the Alanya

⁴³¹ Cited in O'Kane 1993: 250.

⁴³² Boyle 1972: 127.

⁴³³ Note that pavilions were not the sole preserve of the Turkic and Persianate lands: see the references to freestanding palace structures in Fatimid Egypt in Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 57.

⁴³⁴ Brookshaw 2003: 207, citing Bayhaqī, *Ta'riḫ-i Bayhaqī* (Mashhad, 1971), pp. 294, 352.

⁴³⁵ Brookshaw 2003: 211, n. 21.

⁴³⁶ Redford 2000: 30, n. 94. The English word 'pavilion' is itself neutral to the point of vagueness: there are no less than fifteen different meanings of the word pavilion listed in the OED, encompassing temporary and permanent structures, the opulent and the ornamental, freestanding structures and subdivisions of larger buildings, and concrete objects and literary allusion.

⁴³⁷ Redford 2000: 31.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100; Redford 1993: 219. Examples of this type of object in New York, Haifa and Paris are illustrated in Baer 1967: plates 1–6; a further example, now split into two parts, is now in the David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 11a-b/1978 (illustrated in Folsach 2001: no. 396); and two similar pieces, one including a miniature *muqarnas* hood, are now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,

pavilions one might also cite the twelfth-century square pavilion at Qal‘a-yi Dukhtār in Azerbaijan, which has been suggested by Hillenbrand to recall the nearby Parthian pavilion of Qal‘a-yi Zāhhāk, thus allying the square stone pavilion to pre-Islamic princely architecture.⁴³⁹

The most significant material remains for comparison with the tabourets are the octagonal kiosks of the Mongol Ilkhan Abāqā in the summer palace at Takht-i Sulaymān. Built in the 1270s, these have been conjectured to be a banqueting area, featuring wide windows that reached down almost to the floor and benches along the walls (the north octagon), and possibly a sleeping area (the south octagon).⁴⁴⁰ A further freestanding dodecagonal structure also exists at this site, purpose or purposes unknown.⁴⁴¹ The famous lustre and blue tiles from the interior of the octagonal structures, with their chinoiserie motifs, can be compared to contemporary textiles from China, and suggest a parallel between ceramic architectural decoration and textile-based structures.⁴⁴² This could also be linked to the use of textiles to decorate stone pavilions, particularly in preparation for a special event or party.⁴⁴³

The royal gardens of the Timurid period, wherein the rhythms of nomadic existence, the transition from summer residence to winter residence, and the mingling of permanent and impermanent forms of architecture combined to create a relationship with the garden environment that was quite unlike that of a historically urban kingship, have been more thoroughly documented and commented upon than those of earlier dynasties.⁴⁴⁴ The writings of Clavijo, who was present at Timur’s court in Samarqand in 1404, have left us a detailed description of gardens and garden architecture in the time of Timur:

inv. nos M.73.5.5 and M.71.73.29. Baer makes almost no mention of the architectural ornament of the pieces in her study of this group (Baer 1967: 121–2).

⁴³⁹ Hillenbrand 2000: 412–5.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 422–3; Huff 2006: 104.

⁴⁴¹ Hillenbrand 2000: 423.

⁴⁴² My thanks to Yuka Kadoi for drawing this to my attention. See also Naumann and Naumann 1969: 35–65; Blair 1993: 241–2.

⁴⁴³ Brookshaw 2003: 208. Brookshaw (*ibid.* 219, n. 160) also notes that the Persian phrase *majlis ārāstan*, meaning ‘to set up’ a *majlis* (an assembly or meeting, either formal or convivial, and also the hall in which it is held) literally means ‘to adorn’ it.

⁴⁴⁴ Andrews 1978: 143–87; Wilber 1979: 127–33; Gronke 1992: 18–22; O’Kane 1993: 249–68; Golombek 1995: 137–47.

We found it to be enclosed by a high wall, which in its circuit may measure a full league round, and within it is full of fruit trees of all kinds, save only limes and citron-trees which we noticed to be lacking. Further there are here six great tanks, for throughout the orchard is conducted a great stream of water, passing from end to end: while leading from one tank to the next they have planted five avenues of trees, very lofty and shady which appear as streets, for they are paved to be like platforms. These quarter the orchard in every direction, and off the five main avenues other smaller roads are led to variegate the plan, enabling the whole orchard to be traversed and very conveniently seen in all parts. In the exact centre there is a hill, built up artificially of clay brought hither by hand: it is very high and its summit is a small level space, that is enclosed by a palisade of wooden stakes. Within this enclosure are built several very beautiful palaces, each with its own complement of chambers magnificently ornamented in gold and blue, the walls being panelled with tiles of these and other colours.⁴⁴⁵

The next month, Clavijo records his visit to the Bāgh-i Dilgusha ('Garden of Heart's Ease')⁴⁴⁶ where he saw Timur seated in state before a palace formed of three vaults and a dome that stood at the centre of the garden.⁴⁴⁷ Later the party moved to another garden, at the centre of which was a resplendent palace with the ground plan of a cross, and finally they moved on to yet another garden, this time with the most magnificent palace, covered with gold and blue tilework, at its centre.⁴⁴⁸ Later descriptions of the gardens of Samarqand, given by Bābur in his memoirs, mention several kiosks or similar structures; perhaps best known is his description of the pavilion built by Ulugh Beg in a garden adjoining the Bāgh-i Maydān at Samarqand: 'In the same garden he also built a four-doored hall, known as the Chīnī-khāna (Porcelain House) because its *īzāra* are all of porcelain; he sent to China for the porcelain used in it.'⁴⁴⁹ Compare this description with the sumptuous examples of the

⁴⁴⁵ Clavijo 1928: 215–6. Very often palatial garden pavilions appear to have been set on hills, either natural or artificial. In addition to the obvious optical benefits of such a location, Flood has suggested that there is also a cosmological dimension to the setting, possibly referencing the jewelled palace built on Mount Alburz by Kai Khusraw in the *Shāhnāma* (Flood 1993: 228; see also Pope 1981: Vol. 3, 1421). Golombek has pointed out that the pavilion mounted on a central hill also remains in view in all parts of the garden, while the pavilion situated at the far end of the garden comes as the climax of the visit (Golombek 1995: 137).

⁴⁴⁶ Golombek and Wilber 1988: 174.

⁴⁴⁷ Clavijo 1928: 219–227; Golombek and Wilber (1988: 175); Golombek 1995: 138.

⁴⁴⁸ Clavijo 1928: 227–30.

⁴⁴⁹ Bābur Pādshāh 1990: 80. Golombek and Wilber note that excavations carried out in 1941 at an area that may correspond to this site uncovered hexagonal blue and white porcelain tiles from the Ming imperial factories, as well as local tiles imitating the Chinese ones (Golombek and Wilber 1988: 177).

chīnī-khāna that survive at Ardabil and Isfahan (fig. 2.23),⁴⁵⁰ dominated by the ‘search for pleasure’.⁴⁵¹ A second description, this time of a garden structure visited by Bābur in Herat in 912 AH (1506–7 CE), has been read by O’Kane as descriptive of an octagonal structure:

Muzaffar Mīrzā took me to where there was a wine-party, in the Ṭarab-khāna (Joy-house) built by Bābur Mīrzā, a sweet little abode, a smallish, two-storeyed house in the middle of a smallish garden. Great pains have been taken with its upper storey; this has a retreat (*hujra*) in each of its four corners, the space between each two retreats being like a *shāh-nīshīn*; in between these retreats and *shāh-nīshīns* is one large room on all sides of which are pictures which, although Bābur Mīrzā built the house, were commanded by Abū-sa‘īd Mīrzā and depict his own wars and encounters.⁴⁵²

O’Kane has taken Bābur’s description of the structure of this building as support for his proposal that the dodecagonal Namakdān, which is in fact octagonal on the inside (fig. 2.24), near the Abdullah Ansari shrine complex in Afghanistan, was originally a Timurid construction rather than a seventeenth-century monument as suggested by Golombek and others.⁴⁵³ Although the Namakdān is twelve-sided, and the tabourets are without exception six-sided, we need not discount it as a possible reflection of the type of structure imitated by the tabourets. It may be that six-sided architectural structures of this type existed but were erected on a less elaborate and permanent basis than the Namakdān. Equally, it is possible that within the miniature medium of the tabourets, six sides were preferable for structural reasons and were felt to be an acceptable stand-in for structures with eight or more sides: that is, they connoted such structures adequately by being polygonal, and this was felt to be sufficient.⁴⁵⁴

It is very easy to draw parallels between some of the Persian tabourets and the Namakdān, with its two storeys, recessed arches (some superficially, some fully recessed), engaged brickwork columns and slight projecting lip on the roof. Although the main *īwāns* on cat. no. 2.1 are full height, the mid-relief standing figures seen

⁴⁵⁰ See also the late sixteenth-century miniature painting of Bābur being entertained in a *chīnī-khāna* in Timurid Herat, from a *Bābur-nāma* (British Library Or. 3714, fol. 252 v), illustrated in Subtelny 1995: 57.

⁴⁵¹ Grabar 1990 (a): 19.

⁴⁵² Bābur Pādshāh 1990: 302.

⁴⁵³ O’Kane 1987: 299–300; Golombek 1969: 70; Babaie 2002: 25, n. 40.

⁴⁵⁴ On the interchangeability of octagonal, dodecagonal and circular plans amongst medieval monuments intended to represent the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem see Krautheimer 1971: 117–21.

occupying the spandrels on either side of each *īwān* are suggestive of an upper storey. More explicitly two-storied, although less squat in overall form and therefore less immediately assimilated with the Namakdān, is cat. no. 2.7. One could compare the niche-like balconies of the Namakdān with the upper arches of this piece, which, although only shallowly recessed, are nonetheless to be understood from the fact of their being recessed at all (when it would be far easier to use low relief decoration) and from the carefully moulded row of projections placed at the base of each, as representing occupiable balconies. Additionally, cat. nos 2.8–2.10 can all be understood as polygonal, two-storied buildings with prominent arched recesses, balconies or window grilles on each side of the upper level. The balustrades are here defined by the ubiquitous ‘row of rings’.

Less explicitly, the arched perforated windows on each side of cat. nos 2.24 and 2.25, although of a quite different slim and decorative form, are reminiscent of this structure and the immediate impression of an architecture that provides views all around. O’Kane also cites the Hasht Bihisht in Tabriz, an octagonal structure, two storeys high with entrances on every other side leading into a central domed area, which was described by an Italian merchant who travelled in Persia between 1511 and 1520.⁴⁵⁵

There is in fact one object in Berlin (fig. 2.25) that appears to represent an eight-sided structure of at least two storeys, with tiny moulded figures looking out from between decorated columns. This piece looks so much like an octagonal viewing platform or belvedere of some sort that we can perhaps accept it as a representation of such: compare this piece with the kiosk in the centre of the Khwājū bridge (fig. 2.26). There is nothing left to suggest what the Berlin object was for, what the upper storey(s) looked like, and whether it was originally part of a much larger structure. However, it is very likely that this piece was not used primarily for support, as the tabourets were: the narrow footed base, and the slim central core from which the platforms, figures, columns and decoration protrude, would suggest that this piece had a decorative rather than a structural role.

⁴⁵⁵ Grey 1873: 173–7.

Pavilions in miniature painting

Miniature painting is a risky source for architectural history: it greatly distorts architectural form, bending it back, opening it out and causing whole structures to recede, project, or separate into their component parts.⁴⁵⁶ Simultaneously though, the meticulously constructed and very particular idiom of the miniature painting involves a great deal of interpretation on the part of the artist: rather than just being shown a building, we are being shown a building as a painter chose to represent it.⁴⁵⁷ From this we can make judgements not only about the architectural types being represented, but also about how those architectural types were understood by a contemporary audience, how they may have worked as architecture, and how human beings interacted with and modified their architectural surroundings.⁴⁵⁸ One can only try to distinguish the realities of architectural form from the idiosyncratic decisions made regarding representation in this context; one cannot completely separate the two. That said, it is possible to outline some architectural representations from miniature painting, predominantly Persian, which could provide parallels for the tabourets.

All of the physical structures discussed thus far have been rectangular, octagonal or dodecagonal, rather than following the hexagonal plan indicated by the tabourets. As has been noted by Brookshaw, all polygonal pavilions share a key quality: '[o]ctagonal or multi-*ayvān* pavilions provided performers [in a *majlis*] with a wide choice of venues, each offering their audience a unique view of the garden from a particular angle.'⁴⁵⁹ The interpenetration of interior and exterior that is afforded by such pavilions, and similar structures such as the *tālār* and various types of mirador, belvedere and so forth, is a notable characteristic of the architecture of the Eastern Islamic lands. The Ghaznavid palace described in a *qaṣīda* by Farrukhī Sīstānī had four different porticoes, each of which opened onto a different scene.⁴⁶⁰ An early

⁴⁵⁶ See Hillenbrand 2006: 198; Golombek 1985: 130–33.

⁴⁵⁷ On the parallel process within literary descriptions, particularly the *qaṣīda* genre, see Meisami 2001: 22–3, 42.

⁴⁵⁸ On cultural encoding in images of architectural space, see Roxburgh 2008: 759–61.

⁴⁵⁹ Brookshaw 2003: 206.

⁴⁶⁰ Meisami 2001: 23. See also Flood 1993: 189–90 and Ruggles 1990: 73–82.

image of a polygonal, two-storied structure found in the double frontispiece of the *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'* (1287) has been interpreted by Hillenbrand as an octagonal building, although the liberties being taken with architectural space in this painting make it hard to say for sure.⁴⁶¹ However, in spite of the apparent dominance of the octagonal plan, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings also show hexagonal garden structures directly comparable with the tabourets.

There are structures that are really canopies rather than buildings, such as the elevated flat roof mounted on wooden poles, with a very low wall at ground level, shown in a painting from Mughal India from c. 1550,⁴⁶² and another in a frontispiece executed for Sultan Ibrāhīm Mīrzā in Qazvin, dated 1581–2 (fig. 2.27).⁴⁶³ But there are also a great number of taller, more solid-looking constructions that appear to follow a hexagonal plan. Frequently it is not clear whether these buildings should be understood as freestanding units, as it is sometimes hard to judge whether attendant architectural panels are supposed to be read as further structures extending beyond the core hexagonal building, or as a view of the same building from a different angle.⁴⁶⁴ For example, in the mid sixteenth-century miniature of Yūsuf and Zulaikha entering the pavilion of love (fig. 2.28), it is not absolutely clear whether the couple occupy a further apartment, situated to the right of the apparently hexagonal main structure, or if their encounter is to be understood as taking place within the hexagonal building itself, behind the privacy of the closed door where only the viewer can see it.

A similar confusion is presented in a painting from the 1527/8 *Shāhnāma* now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: is the architectural panel on the far left-hand side part of a further building, suggesting that the six-sided pavilion which forms the architectural focus of the scene is attached to a larger building complex?⁴⁶⁵ A famous earlier painting of a rather wild party at the court of Ḥusayn Mīrzā (from a *Bustān* of

⁴⁶¹ Hillenbrand 2006: 198.

⁴⁶² 'The Princes of the House of Timur', British Museum OA 1913.2-8.01. Illustrated in Canby 1999: 175.

⁴⁶³ For a typology of garden structures in Persian miniature painting see Pope 1981: Vol. 3, 1422–25.

⁴⁶⁴ Images of six-sided pavilions can also be seen in a perspectively rendered French etching (eighteenth century?) of *The Palace of Sa'adat Abad at Isfahan*, illustrated in Katouzian 1986: 42–3.

⁴⁶⁵ Illustrated in Welch 1996: 34.

Sa'dī, dated 893 AH/ 1488 CE and painted at Herat; fig. 2.29) shows, set within a courtyard, a six-sided structure which may definitely be understood as free-standing. This structure is placed cheek-by-jowl with a very elaborate tent in which Sultan Ḥusayn and a wilting companion are seated: Golombek has presented this image as an emblem of the co-existence of courtly and nomadic life in the Timurid royal sphere.⁴⁶⁶

Of these representations of six-sided structures, the more solid examples appear to be made of brick covered with tile. These same 'solid' examples are normally two-storeyed, with *īwāns* and/or windows on the ground floor and further windows on the upper floor. Interestingly, although we find examples of both the solid and the canopy types with pointed roofs or awnings rising to a point,⁴⁶⁷ the roofs of these structures are very often flat and populated, with a curious miniature hexagonal structure topped with a pointed canopy raised on six poles appearing on very many of these flat-roofed examples. These structures probably represent some form of ventilation, as well as perhaps a means of letting light in: they may be a rather grander version of the basic roof vents seen in fig. 1.12.⁴⁶⁸ In several miniature paintings figures can be seen peering or listening down these structures, apparently spying on the action taking place within the building below, and it is clear that these little rooftop canopies shelter some form of open connection between the inside of the building and the outside air.⁴⁶⁹

It seems likely that the flat tops of the tabourets intentionally echo the flat roofs of these garden structures represented in Timurid and Safavid painting; indeed, that the flat-topped form of the unadorned polygonal table may have prompted an association with garden architecture in the minds of the craftsmen, and could in fact have been the impetus for developing an architectural vocabulary of decoration on these objects. On this point the present thesis must disagree with Ettinghausen's suggestion

⁴⁶⁶ Golombek 1995: 145.

⁴⁶⁷ A canopy with a richly ornamented polygonal roof, which appears to be made from textiles, forms the centrepiece of the painting 'A City Dweller Desecrates a Garden' in the Freer Gallery *Haft Awrang*, dated 1556–65 (illustrated in Welch 1996: 117).

⁴⁶⁸ O'Kane 1987: 12–13.

⁴⁶⁹ See Atil 1990: 220, and Sims, Grube and Marshak 2002: 197.

that the architectural forms that the tabourets imitate would have necessarily had a domed or conical roof, which has been dispensed with on the tabourets to allow them to function as tables.⁴⁷⁰ Brookshaw has noted that many sources refer to a *majlis* taking place on the roof of a pavilion, which would clearly not be possible if they were not largely flat.⁴⁷¹

From the preceding discussions, it will be seen that there is precious little evidence, be it archaeological, textual or painted, regarding the role and appearance of polygonal garden architecture from the late twelfth/ thirteenth century in the Middle East. However, the evidence for just such polygonal structures from later periods may allow us to deduce pre-existing traditions of this type of building: the ‘fixed and movable pavilions’ described by Ibn Bībī might conceivably have encompassed polygonal structures like those represented by the tabourets. There is, unfortunately, a particular dearth of evidence relating to the development of garden architecture and similar freestanding structures in the Ayyubid lands, which has forced this study to rely overwhelmingly on Persian sites, paintings and descriptions. However, the following sections will assume from the outset that there is an intentional kinship with garden architecture manifested throughout the tabouret group, albeit in very varying forms, and will discuss the uses of architectural form within the group with principal reference to garden architectures, although other forms of architecture will also be brought into discussion.

Screens and grilles

Having to a certain extent privileged the Persian tabourets thus far, analysis of individual architectural forms will start with discussion of a motif that highlights the complex relationship between the Syrian tabourets and the decorative vocabulary of architecture. Certainly, architectural screens also appear within the Persian group. These are largely self-explanatory and conform to the more straightforwardly mimetic representational mode of the Persian group as a whole, with its emphasis on the representation of a complete, miniaturised architectural schema. The perforated

⁴⁷⁰ Ettinghausen 1976: 9.

⁴⁷¹ Brookshaw 2003: 206.

panels located beneath the *muqarnas* in the *īwāns* of cat. nos 2.2 and 2.3 would certainly suggest window grilles, as would the many perforated panels apparently adorning both the upper and lower sections of the *īwāns*, and the secondary positions between columns, on cat. no. 2.8.

The use of perforated screens on garden pavilions is attested by the panels of brown, black or red geometric patterning shown on the upper windows of countless structures in Timurid miniature painting (see fig. 2.29), probably made from wood.⁴⁷² The use of *mashrabiyya*, a type of screen constructed from slender pieces of wood arranged in geometric patterns, was in part a technique born out of the scarcity of wood in parts of the Islamic world: even small branches could be used, thus maximising the potential of timber.⁴⁷³ Blair has also shown that window grilles made of metal existed in the Ilkhanid period, citing both fragmentary remains and the images of such structures seen in the paintings of the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*.⁴⁷⁴ Additionally, the remains of glazed stucco window grilles dated to the first half of the thirteenth century were excavated at the mosque of Hoca Hasan in Konya: these are mould-made structures, with a fragment of brown glass still adhering in one spot (fig. 2.30).⁴⁷⁵

If one examines the Syrian group looking for the same mimetic representational mode that is found on the Persian tabourets, there is little to discuss. Cat. nos 2.24 and 2.25 have perforations which are clearly to be read as windows, but these are completely open and there has not been any attempt to represent tiny window grilles within them. But this would miss the point. The architectural form of the window grille or screen has taken an allusive turn within the Syrian group. Cat. nos 2.12–2.15, which are clearly a closely related group if not products of the same mould, all feature the striking use of a deeply-moulded ‘star-and-honeycomb’ pattern on the central panel of each side. On cat. nos 2.13–2.15, the six hexagonal honeycomb

⁴⁷² O’Kane 1987: 12.

⁴⁷³ Rogers 1996: 246.

⁴⁷⁴ Blair 1993: 242. A later metal window grille, donated by Shahrukh to the tomb of the Imām Rizā in Mashhad in 1414/15, may also be relevant here (Hayward Gallery 1976: 204, cat. no. 245 [not illustrated]).

⁴⁷⁵ Bakırer 1999: 128.

segments surrounding each central star have been perforated right through, while the rest of each star-and-honeycomb panel remains deeply recessed but not perforated. Only on the Freer stand (cat. no. 2.12) do all the hexagonal components of the star-and-honeycomb panels appear to have been perforated, while the stars all remain opaque.

It is not only on the tabourets that this design appears. Several rectangular stands (cat. nos 2.29–2.32) incorporate the star-and-honeycomb pattern along their long sides, and it is also visible on the short sides of at least one further rectangular stand (cat. no. 2.33; it may well be present on more, but the short sides are often invisible in the available reproductions), as well as a triangular stand (cat. no. 2.43). Sometimes (for example, cat. no. 2.32) the design is entirely opaque and without perforations, in which form it also appears on the upper surface of certain examples (see cat. no. 2.17). The honeycomb design is also echoed in the low-relief design of hexagons and six-lobed florets seen on the top surface of cat. no. 2.25.⁴⁷⁶

It is proposed that the origin of this partially pierced geometric decoration lies in architectural screens and/or strapwork designs. Helmecke has presented a wooden strapwork panel from the cenotaph in the mausoleum of the Imām al-Shāfi‘ī in Cairo, dated 1211 (fig. 2.31) as a comparator for the star-and-honeycomb design seen on the top of cat. no. 2.17, suggesting that this would reinforce an early thirteenth-century date for the tabouret in question (and, by inference, for the group as a whole).⁴⁷⁷ In fact, an earlier version (mid-twelfth century) of the same design can be seen on the wooden Fatimid portable *mihrāb* from the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya.⁴⁷⁸

A more immediately comparable use of this motif, albeit on a tiny scale and from a later date, can be seen in the perforated panels of the hexagonal *kursī* from Mamluk Egypt, dated 1327–8 (fig. 2.6). When viewed up close (fig. 2.32), the background of the panels is made up entirely from a tiny openwork repeating pattern of star-and-honeycomb. This perforated and repeated version of the design is very close to that

⁴⁷⁶ Illustrated in Grube 1994: 284.

⁴⁷⁷ Helmecke 2006: 57.

⁴⁷⁸ Illustrated in O’Kane 2006: 59.

of the Syrian tabourets. It is entirely likely that both the strapwork designs and the perforated versions of this motif took their inspiration from the same source, quite possibly *mashrabiyya* designs or even stucco grilles. The star-and-honeycomb design is a pattern of medium complexity, nowhere near as intricate as some, but also far more difficult to render than a simple intersecting square grid. As wooden screens are not something that has tended to survive from the medieval period, it is hard to prove that the star and honeycomb panels of the tabourets are reflections of these architectural elements. However, the St Petersburg *Maqāmāt* manuscript furnishes us with an example of the design, which may be intended to represent a wooden grille, projecting upward from the top of a building (fig. 2.33).⁴⁷⁹

On the other hand, if the star-and-honeycomb form of the tabourets is descended from stucco grilles, which of course would be closer relatives in terms of materials, the thirteenth-century stucco window lattice from Konya forms an important comparator, based as it is on a hexagonal system.⁴⁸⁰ Bakırer has suggested the origin of such designs in the geometric ornament of eighth- and ninth-century Umayyad, ‘Abbasid and Tulunid architecture, particularly in window grilles: similar, if more complex, designs can be seen in the stucco grilles of the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque in Cairo (fig. 2.34).⁴⁸¹ An even closer match is to be found in Egypt, in a stucco grille in the tenth-century church of El-‘Adra (fig. 2.35). Also significant are the alabaster window grilles in the Raqqa Museum. Although on a much larger scale than the tabourets, these have repeated hexagonal openings, comparable to the designs of the tabourets.⁴⁸² Comparable grilles from the al-Aqsa mosque have also been cited by Flood,⁴⁸³ and interlace stucco window grilles based on a hexagonal grid have been recovered from Khirbat al-Mafjar and Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Something similar can be seen on the original cresting of the Ḥākim Mosque in Cairo (late tenth–early eleventh century): see the illustration in Creswell 1978: vol. 1, plate 18b.

⁴⁸⁰ See the reconstruction in Bakırer 1999: 133.

⁴⁸¹ Bakırer (*ibid.*, 131) has prepared analytical drawings of the Ibn Ṭūlūn grilles that apparently demonstrate their close formal analogies with those of Hoca Hasan. On the evolution of more complex forms of repeating geometric design in Islamic architecture, see Lu and Steinhardt 2007: 1106–10.

⁴⁸² Illustrated in Flood 1993: figs 32 and 42. Alabaster was not an unusual material for early Islamic window frames; see Henderson 1999: 258.

⁴⁸³ Flood 1993, citing Hamilton 1949: pl. xxi.

⁴⁸⁴ Illustrated in Talgam 2004: vol. 2, figs 14 and 66.

The star-and-honeycomb pattern is also met with in tilework, as is shown by some of the tiles from Takht-i Sulaymān.⁴⁸⁵ The pattern also appears in a later image, apparently representing paths, a lawn and flowerbeds in a Mughal painting dated 1594 (fig. 2.36), demonstrating its use in various contexts over time: the repetition of the motif across media demonstrates its pervasive appeal, as well as adding a further layer of association with the garden environment.⁴⁸⁶

Beyond the star-and-honeycomb screen patterns reflected in the Syrian tabourets, a further type of ceramic window grille has survived to the present day: an example can be seen in the piece from thirteenth-century Persia now in the David Collection (fig. 2.37). A similar tile with one single opening in the form of an eight-pointed star is in Los Angeles (fig. 2.38). Glazed ceramic window trellises, superficially similar in overall appearance to fig. 2.37 but formed from separate tiles connected to each other by bronze or wooden dowels, were excavated at Qal‘at Banī Ḥammād, suggesting that the use of glazed ceramic elements within windows may have been relatively widespread.⁴⁸⁷

Two other tabourets from the Syrian group contain perforated panels of particular interest (other than those with balustrades, which will be dealt with separately). Cat. nos 2.26 and 2.27, so similar in appearance that they appear to have been made from the same mould, each bear a complex star-in-cross design, framed by four small square perforations, in the upper part of each panel. The continuing interest in perforations within the Syrian group suggests that this too should be read as an echo of a screen, grille or a type of window, rather than merely as a kind of strapwork design with arbitrary holes in it. A comparison could be made with fig. 2.38, and also with a pair of twelfth- or thirteenth-century Syrian monochrome glazed tiles with

⁴⁸⁵ Illustrated in Masuya 2002: 93.

⁴⁸⁶ A related design of eight-pointed stars within a complex lattice appears on the leather binding of a Qur’an from Morocco, dated 1256 (Ettinghausen 1969 [a]: plate 7). Ettinghausen (*ibid.*, 297) draws a parallel between this design and the cross-axial arrangement which he sees as dominant in various aspects of Islamic art from the Seljuq period onwards, and which he attributes to the four-*īwān* plan of the Seljuq mosque.

⁴⁸⁷ Jenkins-Madina (1999: 291–3, figs 1–4) dates at least one of these to post-1062.

star-shaped central piercings now in the Khalili Collection, suggested by Abraham to be windows.⁴⁸⁸

It is even conceivable that the partially pierced star-shaped designs of cat. nos 2.26 and 2.27 could represent some sort of stained glass window: the textual sources gathered by Flood attest to the existence of such windows from the early Islamic period onwards, with the individual panes set in a carved stucco framework;⁴⁸⁹ windows made from coloured glass set in plaster frames were found at Nishapur.⁴⁹⁰ The suggestion received from these early sources that there was a strong association between the garden pavilion and coloured glass makes this an even more attractive reading.⁴⁹¹ However, while cat. nos 2.26 and 2.27 may allude to a form of glazed window, they stop short of actually incorporating glazed panels within the ceramic body of the tabouret. Not so the elaborately architectural ceramic lantern from Raqqa, now in New York (fig. 2.39).⁴⁹² This piece, in the form of a domed square building with corner towers, bears on two sides pierced rosettes with four large and four small lobes, covered from the back with panes of coloured glass to form a pretty, if rather basic, type of stained glass window. The overtly architectural form of the lantern, similar to that of certain other forms of container to be discussed in chapter four, attests to an interest in medieval Syria in ceramic products that ape architectural forms, and although it does so far more assertively than the Syrian tabourets, both the tabourets and the lantern can be considered as part of an architecturalising decorative trope that is expressed in ways both overtly mimetic and obliquely allusive.

We return finally to screens. An important aspect of the screen, *mashrabiyya* or otherwise, is that one can be hard pressed to say whether it should be counted as

⁴⁸⁸ Abraham 2007: 102–3.

⁴⁸⁹ Flood 1993: 188–9; O’Kane 1987: 12.

⁴⁹⁰ Wilkinson 1986: 150–2.

⁴⁹¹ Flood 1993: 189.

⁴⁹² Jenkins-Madina (2006: 116–7) notes that there is a similar object in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (acc. no. 50.39), and a third example was sold at auction at Sotheby’s in 1986 (she gives the lot number – 157 – but does not give the month or title of the sale).

architecture or furniture.⁴⁹³ The blurring of the lines between furniture and architecture is characteristic of the tabouret groups as a whole. As has been shown, the interest of the creators of the Persian group appears to have lain in the representation of a building, in miniature. But the Syrian group does something less straightforward: these pieces pick up various architectural elements, recombining them without using a consistent scale or even a consistent architectural scheme, to create objects that connote architecture without mimetically reproducing it. Although, unlike the Persian tabourets, they are of no conceivable value as records of actual building types of the medieval period, their idiomatic relationship with architectural motifs and surfaces makes them a fascinating, and difficult, set of artefacts. The use of star-and-honeycomb panels suggests a direct reference to certain architectural surfaces, probably screens of some description, but the Syrian tabourets stop short of spelling out precisely what their relationship with those screens might be. The allusive aspect of the Syrian examples sets them apart from the predominantly mimetic Persian material that has been studied thus far – both the house models and the Persian tabourets – and opens up a new aspect of discourse on the miniaturisation of architecture.

As a system of representation, the three-dimensional reconfiguration and manipulation of architectural elements has its parallels in poetic descriptions of architecture. Certain poets, particularly in the later Ghaznavid and Seljuq traditions, seem to have felt free to dwell on any elements they pleased when describing architecture: concrete description is sacrificed in favour of a vivid abstraction, with certain elements dramatically foregrounded whilst more prosaic components are dropped entirely.⁴⁹⁴ Rather than the laborious description of an architectural structure, the mind's eye is presented with the dazzling sensory effects of certain aspects or features, so that the structure itself becomes a series of hyperbolic experiences, the relationships between which are not always clear.⁴⁹⁵ In contrast to rhetorical description, we see the tabouret all at once, and thus our experience of it is

⁴⁹³ As has been observed by Roaf (1996: 21), the modern European equations of 'portable' with furniture and 'permanent' with architecture are not really satisfactory in this context.

⁴⁹⁴ Meisami 2001: 32–3.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25, 42.

almost instantaneous when compared with the time taken to experience architectural space at first hand, or to read or listen to a verbal description. But in common with poetic descriptions of architecture, the subjects of the present study represent architecture as it appears after having been filtered through the minds of men: the rhetorical architectural microcosm, presented as a sequence of individual elements, is analogous to a visual *ekphrasis* of the miniature that seeks the most arresting, important or attractive elements and shoves them into the viewer's notice, at the expense of overall representational clarity. The visual game of *ekphrasis* that takes place when the representation of a man-made structure is reconfigured in this manner is key to understanding the tabourets, as well as the subjects of the following chapters.

True Archways and Arched Windows

The Persian tabourets make considerable use of the recessed *īwān*, often with a *muqarnas* hood; this will be discussed in the section on *muqarnas*. However, the use of pierced arched windows occurs only within the Syrian group, and on only two examples: cat. nos 2.24 and 2.25. Recessed arched window or balcony motifs also appear on one Persian example – cat. no. 2.7 – on the upper floor, but these are rather simpler in outline than the Syrian windows, and are recessed rather than perforated. The two Syrian examples with windows form a small but distinct sub-group of the Syrian tabourets: it is possible that there is a third member of this group visible in fig. 2.3.⁴⁹⁶ The use of arched windows, represented in so literal-minded a way that they are even framed by colonettes on either side, takes these pieces closer to explicit miniaturisation of an overall building type than any of the other pieces in the Syrian group. In addition to the colonettes, the windows of both are arched at the top and framed by projecting lobed motifs in the upper spandrels (clearly visible as vegetal volutes in cat. no. 2.25, homogenised into a volute outline without definition in cat. no. 2.24), and framed on the lower edge by further applied arabesques, this time with a small point projecting upwards into the centre of the lower window edge and

⁴⁹⁶ Without further information on the provenance of cat. no. 2.25 it is entirely possible that it is identical with the piece in fig. 2.3.

mirroring the calyx below which projects downwards into the arch space created between the legs.⁴⁹⁷

A comparison can be made between these windows, particularly that of cat. no. 2.25 with its clearly defined arabesque decoration, and an architectural arch appearing in the Paris 3929 *Maqāmāt* manuscript (fig. 2.40).⁴⁹⁸ The archway on the left-hand side of the building (a mosque) represents a type of arch very similar to those of the tabourets. A partially-shouldered, slender silhouette is topped by an arch of slight ogee form with decoration forming an extended peak and two vegetal volute forms on the spandrels. The strange springing of this form is particularly interesting. The arch in the manuscript does not appear to represent a window, and may not be a door either, for the lamp hanging in it would make this use problematic. It is in fact possible that this is a depiction of a *mihrāb* complete with hanging lamp, although it may alternatively be intended to represent some other type of mosque architecture, such as a schematically represented arcade or passageway.⁴⁹⁹

There is possibly a second correlation that can be made between the arch forms of the Syrian tabourets and contemporaneous representations of *mihrābs*. Several of the rectangular stands incorporates end panels decorated with single applied arches on a flat background (cat. nos 2.38–2.40). The forms of the arches on the rectangular stands are very similar, with colonettes from which spring the arches, round or (in the case of cat. no. 2.38) slightly lobed, while arabesque tendrils decorate the spandrels of cat. no. 2.38 in a similar manner to those seen on cat. no. 2.25. The painted lamp that hangs from the apex of the arch on cat. no. 2.39 moves the applied arch, a decorative motif with unclear representational significance when used in a random configuration with non-architectural elements, into the realm of more considered architectural imagery, with an obvious relationship to the image of the lamp hanging in the *mihrāb*.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Grube (1994: 284) describes this motif as characteristic of Raqqa ware.

⁴⁹⁸ See Grabar 1984: 8.

⁴⁹⁹ See Dickie 1972: 42–3.

⁵⁰⁰ Al-‘Ush (1963: 138) likens this image to the *mihrāb* that contains a hanging lamp, both in actual *mihrābs* and in the *mihrāb* image as seen on prayer rugs.

The arches on the triangular stand (cat. no. 2.46) are less clear, apparently tri-lobed and sprung from straight sides, but of similar proportions to those on cat. no. 2.38. All of the relief-moulded arches on the stands can probably be compared with so-called *mihrāb* tiles from the medieval Middle East. One of these (fig. 2.41) from twelfth- or thirteenth-century northern Syria, now in the Louvre, represents a low relief arch sprung from collared colonettes, with arabesque designs in the spandrels. The incorporation of the painted lamp on cat. no. 2.39 moves that piece very close to the so-called *mihrāb* tiles, which frequently bear a depiction of a lamp within the central space. Lamps notwithstanding, the proximity of such a piece, made of turquoise-glazed ceramic and depicting such similar colonettes, to the arches represented on the tabourets and stands, would suggest a close relationship between the two types of ceramic object.

Finally, there may be a case for suggesting that the arched forms created between the legs of almost all of the Syrian tabourets (see the various types in fig. 2.42) are intentionally reminiscent of architectural arch forms. After all, the footed Persian tabourets make no attempt to create arched spaces between the legs, preferring to cut straight across in a rather inelegant style. Of the Syrian group, only cat. nos 2.18 and 2.28 take this approach. All other Syrian examples make some attempt at creating a dynamic space between the legs, most commonly a fairly basic shouldered arch shape with a pointed arc (for example, cat. nos 2.12–2.15) or a rounded arc (cat. nos 2.22 and 2.23). Cat. nos 2.19 and 2.21 have elaborated this slightly to create a tri-lobed arch between broad shoulders (well-defined in the case of cat. no. 2.21, less so on cat. no. 2.19).

Arch forms approximating to these types, and also, like many of the tabourets, decorated with arabesques on the spandrels, can again be seen in the Paris 3929 *Maqāmāt* (fig. 2.43). In such illustrations, we are looking at the means employed to denote architecture in a fairly rapid and rudimentary fashion: in this case, the specific architecture of the mosque, as suggested by the very schematised arcades and the hanging lamps. Emphatically, this does not mean that we should avoid the *Maqāmāt* illustrations and other paintings of this type for comparison because they do not

represent a ‘realistic’ drawing of existing architecture, but rather that we may rely on them to interpret for us how architecture was understood and mediated through its depictions in non-architectural media of the medieval period. In this context, they are possibly a more useful source than the extant full-size architecture of the period. If all that is required to suggest architecture in a book painting is a frame with some shouldered arches and lamps, we may presume that the Syrian tabourets were engaging in purposeful play with these conventions through the use of extraneous shouldered arch shapes on every panel. Once again, it is the reconfiguration, rather than the faithful reproduction, of architectural elements that forms the principal decorative mode of the Syrian tabouret group.

Balustrades

Like true arches, pierced balustrades are a characteristic of the Syrian rather than the Persian group. Certainly, there are features that should be read as balustrades or low fences within the Persian group also: these are situated around the lower edges of cat. nos 2.1 and 2.3–2.8, creating a low fence in front of the recessed *īwān* areas. In all but cat. no. 2.3 these are constructed from a ceramic device already described in the house models chapter: the ‘row of rings’, taken within the house model group as standing in for a type of low, decorative brick lip or fence around the courtyard area. It is entirely feasible to take them as standing in for such an architectural motif in this context as well. A similar use of the ‘row of rings’ is displayed on cat. no. 2.7, this time in a double layer, giving the impression of a window half-covered by a screen or fence. A surprisingly close parallel is to be found in the monochrome green glazed element decorated with an openwork design found at Qal‘at Banī Ḥammād (fig. 2.44), suggested by Marçais to be part of a balustrade.⁵⁰¹ However, the closest match for the Sulṭāniyya balustrades amongst the tabourets is to be found on cat. no. 2.8, about which piece certain reservations have already been expressed.

In the Persian examples, the use of the balustrade is fairly straightforward: the row of rings appears in the right place for us to read it as such. On one example (cat. no. 2.1)

⁵⁰¹ Jenkins-Madina 1999: 291, citing Georges Marçais, *Les poteries et faiences de la Qa‘la des Beni Hammad (XI siècle)* (1913), p. 11 and plate 3.3. Jenkins-Madina is inclined to believe this is part of a window rather than a balustrade.

there are even human figures depicted sitting in the *īwān* behind such a balustrade, to ensure that we understand its meaning. But on the Syrian examples, we are once again exposed to a less literal representation of a miniature architectural form. As has already been noted, the balustrades on the Syrian group take the invariable form of teardrop-shaped balusters, collared top and bottom, and evidently representing a near two-dimensional rendering of a turned three-dimensional form (see figs 2.8 and 2.9). These appear over two levels on each side of cat. nos 2.21–2.23, on a single level on each side of cat. nos 2.16–2.20, and on one panel of cat. no. 2.28. Pierced balustrades of this type also appear on the long side of two rectangular stands (cat. nos 2.34 and 2.35) and the short sides of various others (cat. nos 2.29, 2.31, 2.37 and 2.42), as well as forming the primary motif of two near-identical triangular stands, cat. nos 2.44 and 2.45. A variant of this motif can be seen in those examples that bear designs representative of the same type of balustrade, but without any piercings: see the end panels of cat. no. 2.41, and the side panel of cat. no. 2.36.⁵⁰² As such, this motif is one of the most widely used across the entire Syrian group of tabourets and stands.

It is assumed the ceramic balustrades of the Syrian group to have been made in imitation of wooden forms like those employed on wooden furniture such as fig. 2.9. These wooden models may well have been inspired in turn by full-size wooden balustrades, such as were used architecturally. A wooden screen with rows of balustrades, thought to have been made for the mausoleum of the Seljuq *amīr* Duqāq (r. 1095–1104) and now in the National Museum in Damascus, must represent the apogee of medieval Syrian woodcarving.⁵⁰³ On a more modest scale, several *Maqāmāt* illustrations, particularly from the St Petersburg manuscript, show low fences apparently made of turned balustrades: these appear in various contexts, including across the front of an archway and around the base of a minaret,⁵⁰⁴ and along the upper edge of a building, presumably forming a fence around the edge of a flat roof (fig. 2.45). Turned balustrades, presumably wooden, also appear in furniture

⁵⁰² The side panels of cat. no. 2.36 have been erroneously interpreted as an image of ‘burning lamps’ (Moadin 2006: 167) but are better understood as an image of a balustrade: compare the form of the individual ‘lamps’ with those on cat. no. 2.44.

⁵⁰³ Al-Moadin, Mona, ‘Wooden screen in two parts’, *Museum with no Frontiers* [accessed 22 September 2009], <http://www.museumwnf.org>.

⁵⁰⁴ St Petersburg *Maqāmāt*, p. 275.

contexts within the *Maqāmāt* manuscripts, as has already been noted, and balustrades also appear in circumstances that are somewhere between furniture and architecture, for example the side of the *minbar* in fig. 2.46. It is possible that even the relief decoration on the lower half of cat. nos 2.26 and 2.27 is intended to represent a balustrade-like motif: compare this design to the *minbar* banisters of fig. 2.46.

Like the star-and-honeycomb pattern, the balustrades of the Syrian tabourets and stands represent the use of an element that crosses over from furniture to architecture, once again emphasising the decorative double game that is being played.⁵⁰⁵ Not one of the Syrian tabourets is completely free from perforated design elements, suggesting that this was considered an extremely important feature of the group. It should be briefly considered that these ceramic tabourets may have served as a type of hot plate or chafing dish. It would be possible, with a small brazier of the right dimensions, to place one of the tabourets directly over a brazier that would heat the underside of the top surface, and the underside of anything placed in the central hole, thus keeping it warm.⁵⁰⁶ If this was the case, the perforated sides seen on many of the Syrian tabourets would both allow the circulation of air, bringing oxygen to the burning coals, and would shine out with the glow coming from within.⁵⁰⁷ The brass table in Los Angeles may, as Komaroff suggests, actually be a brazier, in which case there would be an extant precedent for this interpretation. However, if this were also how the medieval tabourets were used, one would expect to see evidence of this in extensive traces of soot and scorching on the insides, which to the best of my knowledge has not been reported by archaeologists or curators.

In representational terms, the inclusion of the perforated balustrades causes us to read the tabourets as representing one or two storeys, and also to read them as a penetrable and therefore three-dimensional space: perhaps the inclusion of so many perforated elements within the Syrian group is part of an alternative means of

⁵⁰⁵ See Roaf 1996: 21–3.

⁵⁰⁶ On the use of charcoal braziers at Nishapur, see Wilkinson 1944: 285–7.

⁵⁰⁷ Travellers in early twentieth-century Persia describe the use of a very large low wooden table referred to as a *kursī* (so-called because it looks like a seat; Wilkinson 1944: 286) which was placed over a brazier of hot charcoal and covered with a padded quilt, around which the inhabitants of a house would sit in winter (Rice 1923: 172–3; Donaldson 1938: 100; Wilkinson 1944: 286).

creating a three-dimensional, semi-architectural space, rather than relying on the careful rendering of complete buildings in miniature as practised by the artists of the Persian group. Again, this forces the difficult question of why such a distinction should operate. It would appear that the Persian artists gravitated towards fully realized architectural forms where their Syrian colleagues did not, but it is hard to say exactly what in their respective representational traditions would have dictated this.

Inscriptions

One motif which sets the tabourets apart from the rectangular and triangular stands is moulded inscriptions and the manner of their use. There are several rectangular stands that take inscriptions as a primary decorative motif: see cat. nos 2.38–2.42.⁵⁰⁸ But only on the tabourets are inscriptions incorporated within a larger and more varied overall decorative scheme. One could argue that only the tabourets are large enough to permit a varied decorative scheme, but the use of inscriptions within the tabouret group as a whole also forms an apparently purposeful reference to architectural inscriptions, and for this reason should be considered in more depth.

First, a very interesting and repeated inscription should be mentioned for the implications of its content. Five of the Syrian tabourets bear an identical, or near-identical, inscription in cursive script on the lower inscription panels of each: *‘āmal Muḥammad*, ‘the work of Muḥammad’. This inscription appears on cat. nos 2.12–2.15,⁵⁰⁹ and also on a further example from the Freer Gallery of which I was unable to obtain an image (acc. no. 13.11).⁵¹⁰ It is quite possible that at least two of these pieces (cat. nos 2.12 and 2.14) were made from the same mould, so similar are they. If these inscriptions are to be relied on, we can surmise that several of these pieces were made by the same potter or at least in the same workshop, and that, as one might have guessed from the use of moulded slabs, mass-production was the standard. Such ideas would chime with the suggestion by Watson that the group as a whole is the product of only a few workshops.⁵¹¹

Moulded cursive script also appears on the lower panels of cat. nos 2.16 and 2.17, where the inscription has been read as *al-sa‘āda* (‘happiness’), in both cases.⁵¹² This is also the reading given for the panels of cursive inscription on the upper panels of the windowed tabouret, cat. no. 2.25, and may well be the correct reading of the

⁵⁰⁸ An example illustrated in Watson 2004: cat. K.13, has been read as a contraction of *al-‘izz al-dā‘im* (‘perpetual glory’); the same reading has been made of the inscription on cat. no. 2.41 (Grube 1994: 284).

⁵⁰⁹ Atıl 1975: 86; Ölçer 2002: 68; Kerametli 1973: 12; Poulsen 1970: 290; Soustiel 1985: 117; Helmecke 2006: 57.

⁵¹⁰ As stated in the catalogue entry for cat. no. 2.12, I was unfortunately unable to obtain an image of this piece because it was deemed too fragile to photograph.

⁵¹¹ Watson 2004: 300.

⁵¹² Helmecke 2006: 57; and Helmecke 2006 (a): 58.

inscription occupying the same position on cat. no. 2.24, and possibly also that of cat. no. 2.18.⁵¹³ Such expressions are extremely common on mid-status medieval objects of the Islamic world.⁵¹⁴ A panel of cursive text is also visible on the middle band of cat. no. 2.22, but cannot be made out from the reproduction.

Among the Syrian tabourets, the uses of inscriptions are quite varied. Generally, they appear at the top or bottom of the object, or on both top and bottom. Several boast Kufic inscriptions around the upper section of the body, and cursive inscriptions below (cat. nos 2.12–2.15, 2.18 and 2.22). Generally the Kufic script is of a fairly simple, even crude type, but on cat. no. 2.15 it is startlingly complex and quite out of keeping with the rest of the group. The long upright stalks incorporate foliated ends and plaiting, and the inscription panel is far taller than any other in the group. Plaited Kufic appears on Ayyubid metalwork objects of the early thirteenth century,⁵¹⁵ and enormous blue and lustre tiles from Persia, dating from around 1300 and featuring monumental plaited Kufic, are now in the British Museum and demonstrate a slightly later interest in this type of script in Persian architectural contexts.⁵¹⁶ One tabouret, cat. no. 2.23, appears to have a simple Kufic inscription running vertically up and down both sides of each panel, as if the inscription has broken loose from its moorings, although the piece has sustained considerable damage and it is difficult to make out if this is definitely the case, or indeed if this is original.

The codification of *naskhī* and its monumental sister *thuluth* probably occurred during the early thirteenth century; although cursive scripts had proliferated, Kufic continued to be used as well.⁵¹⁷ Cursive scripts were used for monumental inscriptions, such as that of the Mustanşiriyya *madrasa* in Baghdad, dated 1232–3,⁵¹⁸ but there also existed a multitude of less imposing cursive architectural inscriptions. For an example that lies close to those of the tabourets, see the cursive inscription on the stucco window grille from thirteenth-century Konya (fig. 2.30). What little of this

⁵¹³ Grube 1994: 284.

⁵¹⁴ Pancaroğlu 2007: 28–9.

⁵¹⁵ See the 1226 candlestick base illustrated in Makariou 2001: 142.

⁵¹⁶ Illustrated in Hillenbrand 1999: 202.

⁵¹⁷ Blair 2008: 211–4.

⁵¹⁸ Illustrated in Hillenbrand 1999: 125.

inscription has been deciphered includes the words *sa 'āda* ('happiness') and *salāma* ('peace').⁵¹⁹ Thus, while the cursive inscription panels of the tabourets can be imagined as an appropriately scaled-down imitation of monumental architectural inscriptions in cursive script, a kinship with a more modest, decorative use of running cursive inscriptions, also in an architectural context, is simultaneously maintained. In this aspect, the Syrian tabourets illustrate one of their unique qualities as a microcosmic image of architecture: an inscription panel can be read as a scale model of a much larger architectural component, but with only the slightest change in visual inflection it can also be understood in its true dimensions as something small and modest, yet in this case still related to architecture.

Within the Persian group it can be seen how explicitly architectural such inscriptions can be in a more mimetic context. The narrow bands of Kufic inscription framed at the top of each panel of cat. nos 2.5 and 2.7 can be located immediately within a medieval architectural vocabulary. There are a large number of funerary buildings from medieval Persia that observe a polygonal plan and are adorned with a proportionally narrow band of Kufic script near the top of each side, encircling the entire monument. Two such monuments are the tomb towers at Kharraqān, from 1067–8 and 1093 (figs 2.47a and b) and a later example is the Gunbad-i Qabud at Marāgha, Iran.⁵²⁰ Many of these inscriptions include the names of their builders.⁵²¹ A non-funerary use of this type of Kufic inscription is seen in the Annunciation scene from al-Bīrūnī's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, c. 1307 (fig. 2.48). The proportions of the *īwān* and inscription panel in the al-Bīrūnī Annunciation are a very close match for the side panels of Persian tabourets cat. nos 2.5 and 2.6, linking the semi-schematic representation of architecture across media. One of the Persian lustre-painted tabourets (cat. no. 2.9) also has an inscription running around the upper edge of the 'walls': this is in a cursive script such as is met with very frequently on other

⁵¹⁹ Bakirer 1999: 128.

⁵²⁰ Illustrated in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 150.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

ceramic products of this period, particularly bowls and dishes,⁵²² and also in an architectural context on tilework.⁵²³

The use of inscriptions on the tabourets highlights yet again the differences in artistic intention between the Persian and Syrian groups: where the Persian group uses inscriptions in a scale and position that is in keeping with the overall replication of an architectural form in miniature, the Syrian group again employs a motif that comes from the world of architecture within positions that reference architectural inscriptions, but without creating scale models of them. Once more, the groups are divided not necessarily by the geographical label they carry but by the differing intentions of the artists.

Muqarnas

Muqarnas appears only on cat. nos 2.2–2.6. Presumably the complexities of modelling such an intricate three-dimensional architectural device in miniature, coupled with the inherent need for depth in such a device, made it an unsuitable form of decoration for the flat-moulded Syrian tabourets. It certainly appears to have given some trouble to those craftsmen who did attempt it on the Persian models, where it is generally extremely flat and only sketchily realised. In every case the representation of *muqarnas* occurs within the upper section of an *īwān*: no ceramic example that has thus far been identified has attempted a transitional ‘crust’ of *muqarnas* between wall and overhanging top/roof, like that seen on fig. 2.11 and familiar from tomb towers such as the Gunbad-i ‘Alī, Abarqūh (1056). The origins of *muqarnas* are unclear. Individual painted plaster segments from the ninth or tenth century found at Nishapur have been speculatively reconstructed as *muqarnas*, although as Wilkinson notes there is no sign of the means by which they were attached to the architecture.⁵²⁴ The survival of eleventh-century *muqarnas* elements *in situ* from Central Asia to North

⁵²² See for example Watson 2004: 356–9. On this form of inscription see also Bayani (2007: 155), who notes that it cannot really be ascribed to any of the classical styles of script but has affiliations with *ta’liq*.

⁵²³ See the tilework group in Berlin which includes a tile dated to 1266–7, illustrated in State Museums of Berlin 2003: 102. On the use of cursive-script *Shānāma* texts as palace decoration in the Ilkhanid period, see Blair 1993: 243.

⁵²⁴ Wilkinson 1986: 251; Tabbāa 1996: 321.

Africa has been proposed as evidence that the form must have evolved at least a century earlier and subsequently diffused through the Islamic lands.⁵²⁵

Tabbaa records that the earliest surviving *muqarnas* portal vaults to survive in Iran date from the Ilkhanid period (1256–1353), but that the technical facility of the surviving constructions indicates the existence of considerably earlier examples. Both of the octagonal kiosks flanking the west *īwān* at Takht-i Sulaymān (c. 1275) were once covered with *muqarnas* vaults, the remaining fragments of which permitted Harb to reconstruct the manner in which *muqarnas* was made during the Mongol period: prefabricated moulded plaster units were fitted together in tiers with chiselled filler elements.⁵²⁶ A further stucco plate found near Takht-i Sulaymān, bearing incised geometric patterns on its underside, has been interpreted as the ground projection of a section of *muqarnas* vault, suggesting that this was the principal means of disseminating such complex architectural instructions.⁵²⁷ Taken in this light, the flattened appearance of the *muqarnas* on cat. nos 2.4–2.6 may not only be the result of an artist with insufficient depth of material to represent stepped niches, but may also form a type of visual shorthand derived from the schematic transmission of architectural information for didactic purposes.⁵²⁸ On the other hand, there are buildings from the Seljuq period which display flattened brickwork *muqarnas* as a full-size decorative element, for example the Tākistān mausoleum, and the *muqarnas* of these tabourets may be intended to recall such forms.⁵²⁹

The honeycombed *īwāns* of cat. no. 2.3, although comparable to the rather less clearly moulded *muqarnas* of cat. no. 2.2, are significantly more elaborate than anything else seen in the group and perhaps gives grounds for suspicion. More plausibly, cat. nos 2.4–2.6 display very low-relief designs that one reads as a near two-dimensional depiction of a *muqarnas*, in part only because it is positioned within

⁵²⁵ Tabbaa 1996: 321.

⁵²⁶ Blair 1993: 242; citing Ulrich Harb, *Ilkhanidische Stalaktitengewölbe* (Berlin, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1978). See also Huff 2006: 104–5.

⁵²⁷ Blair 1993: 242; citing Harb *op cit*.

⁵²⁸ On architectural plans see Grabar 1992: 174–8.

⁵²⁹ See Hillenbrand 1972: 48–9, and plates III a and b.

the apex of the *īwāns*.⁵³⁰ A rather similar depiction of *muqarnas*, albeit slightly more clearly delineated, can be seen on a glazed tile decorated with a figure seated within an *īwān* with a *muqarnas* semi-dome (fig. 2.49).

The use of *muqarnas* within the *īwāns* of the Persian tabourets can be directly related to a description of a pavilion in the Bāgh-i Safīd at Herat, rebuilt in 1410–11, given by ‘Abd al-Razzāq:

Each of its four stalactite-decorated (*muqarnas*) aivans reached to the arch of Saturn; the crenellations [*kungura*] of its lofty castle (*qaṣr*) reached the arc of Jupiter. The dadoes were of jasper inlaid with figurative decoration... skilful painters carried out a programme in every room and niche in the manner of a Chinese picture-gallery.⁵³¹

Allowing for hyperbole, this passage describes ‘a crenellated pavilion...with aivans decorated with stalactites, and with carved stone dadoes and a decoratively painted interior.’⁵³² *Muqarnas* became an extremely popular and characteristic element of Islamic architecture, and was made not only from stone but also from ceramic components, at least in the case of later *mihrābs*, *muqarnas*-hooded niches (fig. 2.50) and portals such as that of the Friday Mosque at Yazd. The presence of *muqarnas* *īwāns* on several of the Persian tabourets probably reflects the popularity of this architectural fashion from the twelfth century onwards, and suggests that they should be dated no earlier than the twelfth to thirteenth centuries.⁵³³

Corners

The treatment of the corners on the tabourets will be discussed very briefly, before analysis moves from structural motifs to surface decoration. The corners of the Persian tabourets are decorated, almost without exception, with a complex arrangement of freestanding glazed struts, surely modelled after wooden structures. No such structures appear in miniature painting, or in existing architecture, as far as I

⁵³⁰ An illusionistic two-dimensional representation of *muqarnas* was reported as a wonder (*ajība*) of the Fatimid mosque of al-Qarafa by al-Maqrīzī, who described it as appearing like three-dimensional *muqarnas* if seen from the centre but flat if viewed from the side (Rabbat 2006: 101–2).

⁵³¹ O’Kane 1987: 11, citing ‘Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, *Maṭla‘ al-sa‘dain va majma‘ al-baḥrain* (Lahore, 1963), p. 111.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³³ Tabbāa 1996: 321–2.

have been able to establish. The corners of the Syrian group are more simply modelled, normally delineated by a substantial corner facing which presumably helps strengthen the join between panels, possibly also referring to engaged stone columns, although these are most commonly a feature of the polygonal mausolea of the Persianate world (fig. 2.47). The pavilion at the centre of the Bāgh-i Dilgusha, a garden in Timurid Samarqand, is described in the *Zafar-nāma* of Sharāf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (composed c. 1425) as having ‘marble columns at the edges of its corners/foundations’, and it is possible that this aspect of garden architecture is being reflected in the corner facings of the tabourets.⁵³⁴

The illustration *Farīdūn Mourning for Iraj* from the Demotte *Shāhnāma* (fig. 2.51) contains a section of architectural decoration around the door that is very close to the moulded decoration around the upper windows of cat. no. 2.7. The same painting depicts a column with chevron stripes ending in elaborate volutes that appear to be more a product of the miniature painter’s art than the architect’s. Such decoration is closely comparable to that found on the six vertical joins of cat. no. 2.24, again suggesting a possible relationship between painted representations of architecture and the relief-moulded motifs seen in the tabouret group.

A similar low-relief depiction of barley-sugar columns topped by volute capitals is visible in a stucco panel from the large palace at Rum Seljuq Qubādābād (fig. 2.52) showing a mounted hunter. While the columns of this piece can be compared to the corner facings of cat. no. 2.24, the outline and content of the panel show remarkable similarities to the upper section of the *īwān* in cat. no. 2.10 (of which more below), clearly asserting a relationship between the decoration of the tabourets and that of palatial architecture.⁵³⁵ In this context, it is also worth recalling the Persianate aspirations of Rum Seljuq architecture, with its suburban palace gardens complete with freestanding pavilions, although at Qubādābād the transformation to a palace

⁵³⁴ Golombek (1995: 139) appears to be citing Sharāf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, *Zafar-nāma*, ed. Muhammad Abbasi, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1336 S.) but does not give a reference for this quote.

⁵³⁵ Redford has suggested that this figure can be identified with Sultan ‘Alā’ al-dīn Kayqubād, who built Qubādābād as his summer palace: the first coins minted by ‘Alā’ al-dīn depicted a similar figure (Redford 1993: 221, n. 19).

architecture modelled on the caravanseraï rather than the pavilion had already begun.⁵³⁶

Moulded Arabesques and Vegetal Designs

Within the Persian tabouret group, there is only one notable use of moulded arabesque motifs: on cat. no. 2.1, a symmetrical low-relief moulded design, based loosely on a bud pointing upwards and flanked by curving tendrils, is located within the tympanum space of the *īwān* on each side. Two figures moulded in slightly higher relief sit underneath, one holding a drinking cup and the other playing a pipe, both very much in the spirit and style of the figures in the house models. A clear comparison can be made between the motif decorating the *īwān* of cat. no. 2.1 and the arabesque decoration of slightly later architectural tile arches, such as the Salting *mihrāb* in the Victoria and Albert Museum (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century; fig. 2.53). Note within the Salting *mihrāb* the use of other motifs already met with in this discussion: colonettes for the arch, rapid painted cursive inscriptions of *naskhī* type around the tympanum, and monumental relief-moulded *thuluth* inscriptions in the main border.

Arabesque designs appear more frequently, and in more variety, within the Syrian tabouret group. In some instances, such as cat. nos 2.16, 2.17, 2.24 and 2.25, there are dedicated panels within the overall decorative scheme that are occupied by a major symmetrical arabesque motif. At other times, arabesque designs have been used as space-fillers: this is particularly the case on cat. nos 2.20 and 2.21, where the moulded design is composed entirely of twining tendrils which are wrapped like a picture frame around the areas occupied by perforated balusters. The effect is repeated on two of the rectangular stands, cat. nos 2.34 and 2.35. Minor tendril designs also appear on the spandrels of the ‘leg arches’ on cat. nos 2.19 and 2.22. Arabesque designs also appear on the top surfaces of many of the stands. Finally, there is also a sub-group of Syrian stands on which arabesques appear in conjunction with adorsed griffins, although these motifs will not be discussed here.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 219–21.

⁵³⁷ See cat. nos 2.33 and 2.37.

Such moulded arabesque designs certainly have parallels in other ceramic products of the Syro-Egyptian world: see for example the turquoise-glazed bowl in fig. 2.54, and even the barbotine decoration of the jar stand in fig. 2.16. But there is also an interesting comparison to be made with painted images of architectural decoration seen in the *Maqāmāt* manuscripts: for example, square panels of arabesque architectural decoration very similar to those used on the upper sections of cat. nos 2.16 and 2.17 appear above the two flanking windows of an illustration from the al-Wāsiṭī *Maqāmāt* (fig. 2.55). A description of an Egyptian house found in the Geniza documents mentions that ‘the ceiling is painted in the Syrian fashion’, and it is possible that such painted architectural elements in the *Maqāmāt* illustrations are to be understood as carved and painted wood.⁵³⁸ Although it may again be argued that these painted arabesques in the *Maqāmāt* illustrations are not necessarily a ‘realistic’ representation of contemporary architecture, the fact that arabesque motifs are used so frequently within architectural illustrative schemes would suggest that it is possible to understand them as having architectural significance. Again, a ‘double game’ appears to be in play within the Syrian tabouret group, with the crossover between architectural motifs and ceramic design becoming increasingly blurred.

Plaited and Knotted Motifs

Panels of moulded decoration imitating plaited forms are seen occasionally throughout the group, mainly on the Syrian stands. A relatively simple type of plaited motif appears frequently on the end panels of the rectangular type, most clearly visible on cat. no. 2.37, where the design has been highlighted with lustre paint, and a fragment (cat. no. 2.48). Similar, but more complex, panels of plaited or interlace designs appear on cat. nos 2.44 and 2.45, and on a further fragment (cat. no. 2.47). Once again, there is a directly comparable architectural design represented in a *Maqāmāt* illustration, this time from the Paris 3929 manuscript (fig. 2.40). The rather odd panel of plaited decoration seen on the lower right of the building is an exact match for the simpler plaited design seen on the Syrian stands, and is also repeated in the painted decoration of cat. no. 2.9, where it can be seen decorating two engaged

⁵³⁸ Goitein 1978: 17.

columns on either side of the lower central panel. The same design can be seen painted in lustre on glazed fritware tile sections of uncertain date now in Los Angeles.⁵³⁹ This particular design is intriguing, and one wonders whether it may have parallels in other media also.

A last noteworthy motif that just falls into this group of twisted, linear designs is the relief-moulded interlaced cross design seen on the side panels of cat. no. 2.11. This motif, believed by Melikian-Chirvani to constitute a celestial symbol of the heavens, is very frequently met with on east Persian metalwork (see chapter four) as well as appearing within the architectural ornament of Nishapur, and one wonders if this piece may originally have come from further east than its findspot in Samsat (central Turkey) would suggest.⁵⁴⁰ However, the motif certainly did travel west: a fragment of incised ware excavated from the Hippodrome in Istanbul bears exactly the same design. Talbot Rice suggests that such motifs might have more in common with the art of Fustāt than with that of the rest of the Byzantine world.⁵⁴¹ A Hebrew Codex of the Prophets dated 895 and executed in Tiberius, Palestine also bears this symbol as the central motif in its frontispiece, and, as with many simple and seemingly enduring and transferable symbols, it is very difficult to say where this form may have originated.⁵⁴²

Stepped Motifs

A painted design that appears on only one example from the group also has specific parallels in both painted and true architecture. This is the stepped geometric design, a type of meander, which runs around the edges of cat. no 2.37. A direct comparison can be made with the edge of the stand which bears a bottle and ewer in the famous Fatimid painting of a nude female musician, where the frontally represented stand is composed entirely of one framed band of meander mounted on two small feet.⁵⁴³

⁵³⁹ Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2002.1.203a-c.

⁵⁴⁰ Melikian-Chirvani 1975 (a): 188; *idem* 1986: 73; Wilkinson 1986: 104.

⁵⁴¹ Rice 1965: 221.

⁵⁴² Illustrated in Ettinghausen 1977: 191.

⁵⁴³ Illustrated in Bloom 2007: 113; see also Rice 1958 (a).

The same device is seen in architectural or semi-architectural contexts within *Maqāmāt* illustrations: a semi-architectural frame on columns and across the top of the architectural space in fig. 2.43. In many ways, the use of this motif within the *Maqāmāt* illustrations is quite similar to that of the lustre-painted stand: it seems to exist somewhere between architectural decoration and framing device. The same motif appears on the (extensively restored) wall of the Rum Seljuq Sāhibiyya Madrasa in Kayseri (fig. 2.56), where it is effectively used as a three-dimensional framing device; on the front section of a carved Seljuq limestone slab now in New York, where it combines with engaged columns to form a passage of quasi-architectural ornament;⁵⁴⁴ and further afield, as a frame on the carved stucco bands in the arches of the Ibn Ṭūlūn mosque.⁵⁴⁵ However, the meander is by no means limited to architectural decoration. The appearance of a similar design on the base of a twelfth-century metalwork inkwell (fig. 2.57), on a casket where it is used to represent a chain or rope tying together two ravaging felines,⁵⁴⁶ and its use as a non-architectural framing device within book painting,⁵⁴⁷ show that it was not exclusively architectural, and the greatest virtue of this ancient form of linear decoration may be its transferability from one medium to another.

Figural Painting

The last formal aspect of the tabourets to be discussed is figural painted decoration. This type of decoration is employed only on two of the Persian tabourets, cat. nos 2.9 and 2.10. Both of these examples are lustre painted, which places them rather above the rest of the tabouret group in terms of status and craftsmanship. The painting of cat. no. 2.9 is as good as anything seen on more orthodox luxury ceramics of the Mongol period in Persia. The decoration of this piece represents a complicated double play on painting as representation and painting as imitation of architectural surfaces. The drinking figures in the upper arches aid our understanding of the architectural space, by providing a human scale-marker through which we can

⁵⁴⁴ Illustrated in Baer 1967: plate 6.

⁵⁴⁵ Illustrated in Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 57.

⁵⁴⁶ Illustrated in Rice 1958: fig. 8 and plate 3.

⁵⁴⁷ See the frame of the individual image panels in a page from a *Kalila wa Dimna* manuscript dated 1307–8 (British Library Or. 13506), illustrated in Carboni 2002: 218.

understand the spatial arrangements being represented.⁵⁴⁸ It would be considerably harder to understand this piece as representative of architectural space were these figures not present. The same can be said for the drinker/musician figures arranged in pairs in the lower levels of cat. no. 2.10, echoing the placement of figures in cat. no. 2.1. As such, this painted decoration works on one level to represent a populated building.

However, at another level, these paintings may also be intended to reflect the painted decorative schema of true architectural pavilions.⁵⁴⁹ An early instance of this is the pleasure pavilion built by the Ghaznavid ruler Mas‘ūd I (r. 1030–40) outside Herat, which he had painted inside with images from the *Kama Sutra*.⁵⁵⁰ Somewhat more prosaically, one of the miniatures in the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma* shows a wall decorated with a landscape scene, presumably painted, above a tile frieze and dado.⁵⁵¹ The citadel palace at Alanya featured towers decorated inside with geometric frescoes.⁵⁵² We have already heard Bābur’s account of the Ṭarab-khāna of Bābur Mīrzā in Herat, where he commented upon the ‘large room on all sides of which are pictures which, although Bābur Mīrzā built the house, were commanded by Abū-sa‘īd Mīrzā and depict his own wars and encounters’; a similar effect must have been employed at Maḥmūd’s palace at Bāgh-i Naw in Ghazna, painted with images of the ruler feasting and in battle.⁵⁵³ Other records make it clear that, in the Timurid period at least, pavilions with painted interiors were the height of fashion for the wealthy: Golombek and Wilber describe the Bāgh-i Shimal, a now-vanished garden of Herat thought to date to the Timurid period, thus:

The palace had pavilions at each of its four corners. The corner stones of these pavilions were of Tabriz marble, and the courts were paved with marble. The lower interior walls were clad with faience, as were the exterior walls. The upper interior walls were covered with frescoes executed by the

⁵⁴⁸ See Mack 2007: 47.

⁵⁴⁹ Painted decoration had of course been used in palace interiors in the Persian world for hundreds of years, for example at Lashgarī Bāzār (Blair 1993: 242–3; Schlumberger 1952: plate XXXI). Figural representations within tilework were also a common form of decoration on Ilkhanid palaces (see Blair 1993: 243).

⁵⁵⁰ Golombek 1995: 142, citing Abu’l Faḍl Baihaqi, *Istoriī Mas‘ūda*, trans. A.K. Arends (Moscow, 1969), p. 617.

⁵⁵¹ Blair 1993: 242; illustrated in Grabar and Blair 1980: no. 39.

⁵⁵² Redford 1993: 220.

⁵⁵³ Bābur Pādshāh 1990: 302; Meisami 2001: 28, 30.

best artists of Persia and Iraq, working under the direction of ‘Abd al-Hayy.⁵⁵⁴

A further building in Herat was also decorated with paintings: ‘[t]he extra-mural Bāgh-i Safīd was also reconstructed around 1410, its tall pavilion (*qaṣr*) decorated with *muqarnas ayyāns*, adorned with dadoes of jasper and painted throughout in the manner of a Chinese ‘picture-gallery’ (*nigārkhāna*).’⁵⁵⁵

With this information, is it not also possible to interpret the painted decoration of the lustre pieces as frescoes, while simultaneously reading them as depictions of the occupants of the buildings? The creators of the tabourets naturally did not create a painted interior surface, as the interior was not visible in the majority of cases, nor were they apparently interested in the creation of a mimetically precise model. Thus, the wearing of the interior decoration on the outside, which would destroy the logic of the model, can be comfortably accommodated within the visual and spatial ‘rules’ of the microcosm: that which appears most interesting and characteristic is depicted where it can be best seen. The fresco reading would make particular sense in the case of cat. no. 2.10, where a horseman fills the upper level of each *īwān*. Plainly, this motif could not be intended to represent an actual use of the building, and should instead be understood as a miniature version of some kind of fresco, such as those seen by Bābur at the Ṭarab-khāna in Herat. The direct relationship between this motif and that illustrated in the stucco panel at Qubādābād (fig. 2.52) has already been noted.

It has also been suggested by Fischer that the circular motifs in the lower central panels of cat. no. 2.9, with their fat birds, fan-shaped foliage and curlicue background, should be read as depictions of ponds.⁵⁵⁶ This is possible, although pools are normally represented on thirteenth-century lustre dishes by drawing a straight or undulating line across the circular area of the dish, near the bottom of the scene, with the minor segment of the circle thus forming a pool and often inhabited by fish.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Golombek and Wilber 1988: 176.

⁵⁵⁵ O’Kane 1987: 11; Golombek and Wilber 1988: 177–8.

⁵⁵⁶ Fischer 1995: 64.

⁵⁵⁷ See for example Watson 2004: 375.

However, the success of that mode of representation depends upon the whole area of decoration being circular in form, which is not the case in cat. no. 2.9. Therefore we may tentatively accept Fischer's reading, which follows the logic of the representations of pools seen in later miniature paintings, where small bodies of water are frequently viewed in plan.⁵⁵⁸ The image of the pond engenders a further link between the tabouret group and garden structures, a type of architecture that has been associated with water, fountains and pools in the Middle East since ancient times.⁵⁵⁹ For example, the palace at Takht-i Sulaymān encompassed a large artificial pond,⁵⁶⁰ and Timur was seated in state behind a great pool with fountains when Clavijo was first taken into his presence.⁵⁶¹ Clearly, water was considered an essential component of luxury within garden design of the period. The interaction of pavilion architecture with artificial ponds and streams is an architectural and literary trope encountered throughout the medieval period across the Islamic world.⁵⁶² As Flood has suggested, such imagery appears to partake in the language of cosmic kingship: the pavilion as a microcosm, the centre of the earth, around which the stars and planets rotate, via their reflections in the water.⁵⁶³ That such imagery should only be evoked on the most expensively decorated of the tabourets is unsurprising: even if aspirationally architectural in form, the majority of the tabourets are nothing more grandiose than monochrome ceramic tables, and as such cannot be expected to participate in the most complex allegories of kingship.⁵⁶⁴

Meaning of the Form

The use of architectural motifs within decorative schema that imitate garden architecture, and possibly other types of architecture, is displayed throughout the

⁵⁵⁸ For example, the pool in which the maidens bathe in a *Khamseh* illustration thought to have been executed in Herat, c. 1425–50 (illustrated in Lentz and Lowry 1989: 275).

⁵⁵⁹ See Wilber 1979: 3–5; Golombek and Wilber 1988: 179, citing the *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*.

⁵⁶⁰ Blair 1993: 240.

⁵⁶¹ Golombek and Wilber 1988: 175–6; Golombek 1995: 137.

⁵⁶² Flood 1993: 184–9.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁶⁴ As Flood (*ibid.*, 239) has also noted, to focus one's attention so minutely on the symbolic aspects of an artefact, as the art historian frequently must, inevitably distorts the significance of such symbolism, which is, after all, only one aspect of the object. He quotes Krautheimer (1971: 122): 'Rather than being either the starting point or else a *post festum* interpretation, the symbolical significance is something which merely accompanied the particular form which was chosen for the structure'.

tabouret group. The architecturalising vein which has been demonstrated throughout this chapter can be both explicit and representative, as in the case of the Persian group, or subtler and more elliptical, as in the case of the Syrian group. This leads to one simple question: why? Why did a particular mode of decoration that makes heavy references to architecture arise particularly with this specific group of objects? It has already been established that they should be viewed as stands or tables, and as such they are objects with a practical function. Why then should there be a demand for practical objects which allude to architecture in this rather whimsical manner?

There are possibly two factors at play here. Ettinghausen has posited that the imagery or decor of a room or building may be used to reflect the activities that took place in that location.⁵⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Grabar has suggested that architecture, in both its true form and in representation, is ‘always meant to be an invitation to behave in certain ways.’⁵⁶⁶ How did one, or was one expected to, behave within the context of garden pavilions? To answer this question, let us hear what happened to Bābur after he sat down in the Ṭarab-khāna garden pavilion:

Two divans had been set in the north *shāh-nīshīn*, facing each other, and with their sides turned to the north. On one Muẓaffar Mīrzā and I sat, on the other Sl. [*sic*] Mas‘ūd Mīrzā and Jahāngir Mīrzā. We being guests, Muẓaffar Mīrzā gave me the place above himself. The social cups were filled, the cup-bearers ordered to carry them to the guests; the guests drank down the mere wine as if it were water-of-life; when it mounted to their heads, the party waxed warm.⁵⁶⁷

As Brookshaw has shown, the garden pavilion, at least in the medieval period in Persia, was the setting of the famous *majlis* culture of drinking, poetry and sometimes dancing.⁵⁶⁸ The interaction between such activities and their architectural setting is of the utmost importance to readings of the tabourets. The description of John Comnenus sitting in his Persianate pavilion in the Byzantine imperial palace, drinking to the health of the Persian figures depicted on the walls, comes to mind.⁵⁶⁹ The pleasure pavilion of Mas‘ūd I, with its erotic wall paintings, must be viewed as

⁵⁶⁵ Ettinghausen 1972: 35.

⁵⁶⁶ Grabar 1992: 193.

⁵⁶⁷ Bābur Pādshāh 1990: 302.

⁵⁶⁸ Brookshaw 2003: 201–8.

⁵⁶⁹ Mesarites 1972: 229.

one big architectural invitation to behave in very specific ways: refer here to the architectural setting of Yūsuf and Zulaikha in fig. 2.28. Even when not in use for orgies or drinking parties, the pavilion must have been an absolutely aspirational form of architecture, bound up with pleasure, hospitality and sensuous enjoyment of nature and other things. The description of paintings of hunting, drinking and musicians in the Ghaznavid palace of Bū Rushd Rashīd-i Khāṣṣ may have found reflections in the painted interiors of pavilions.⁵⁷⁰ It is possible that the tabouret group may have been intended for use in such a setting, reflecting in miniature the surroundings in which they were used, with all the connotations of the good life that such a form would bring. However, the social context of these objects, which are in the main not of the highest quality of materials or craftsmanship, seems unlikely to have been found in the highest echelons of society where the patrons of such elaborate pavilions moved. Alternatively, the tabourets were, for those classes of the population that could never afford a real garden pavilion, the only means of attaining ownership of such a thing.⁵⁷¹ When Nāṣir-i Khusraw refers to ‘all the trappings of kings, such as canopies, pavilions and so on’, the aspirational aspect of the tabourets seems rather transparent.⁵⁷²

In addition to this, there may be a further element of whimsy and mimesis here. The medieval Middle-Eastern predilection for richly patterned textiles encompassed many floral and vegetal designs. Goitein remarks that the textiles recorded in the Geniza documents were ‘destined to give the house the look of a garden’, while the tenth-century author al-Azdī likens a house full of carpets and furnishings to the ‘ground covered with flowers’.⁵⁷³ The garden carpets of Persia are well known,⁵⁷⁴ and at least one ancient precedent for the surviving examples is found in a description attributed to Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (one of the companions of the Prophet), probably recorded in the eleventh century and rescinded in the fifteenth century within the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa ’l-Tuḥaf*:

⁵⁷⁰ Meisami 2001: 33.

⁵⁷¹ Of course, not every garden had a pavilion (Subtelny 1995: 40).

⁵⁷² Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 62.

⁵⁷³ Goitein 1983: xiii; Al-Azdī cited in Milwright 2001: 106.

⁵⁷⁴ See Curatola 1985: 90–7.

Sa'd found in al-Madā'in (Ctesiphon) the [carpet called] 'al-Qiṭf,' sixty cubits (*dhira'*) long by sixty cubits wide (*fī 'ard sittīn dhira'an*); it is a one-piece carpet measuring one *jarīb*. On it were [images of] paths like [those in] palaces and gemstones (*fuṣūṣ*) [so arranged as to look like] rivers, and among this there was a monastery-like building (*ka al-dayr*). Within its borders were [designs that] looked like cultivated land in spring time, with herbaceous plants (*mubqilah*) woven in silk over stalks of gold [thread]. Its blossoms were of gold, silver, and the like. Its ground was rendered with gold, its richly coloured designs (*washyuhū*) with gemstones (*fuṣūṣ*), its fruits with precious stones (*jawhar*), and its leaves of silk and gold paint (*mā' al-dhahab*). The Persians used to call it 'Khusrau's *Bahār*' [Khusrau's Spring], but the Arabs called it 'al-Qiṭf.' The [Persians] had prepared it for the winter when the flowers had ended, and when they wished to drink, they drank on it, imagining they were sitting in a garden.⁵⁷⁵

To enter the gardens of Paradise, so heavily encrusted with jewels and precious metals in later Qur'anic exegesis,⁵⁷⁶ 'is to penetrate a world of which luxury and artifice are the enduring characteristics'.⁵⁷⁷ Might this not have found its echo on earth in the embellished garden carpet described above?⁵⁷⁸ Into an artificial environment of this nature the insertion of fabulous pavilions (*khīyām*) of paradise would only be an extension of the heavenly metaphor.⁵⁷⁹ Some garden carpets are complete with illustrations of pavilions, but it does not seem impossible that others were decorated on occasion with three-dimensional models made especially for the purpose.⁵⁸⁰ Grabar notes that the Greek embassy to Baghdad in 917 witnessed pavilions amongst the toy-like sculptures made from precious metal and jewels that they saw in the gardens of the 'Abbasid caliph, although it is unclear from the text whether these were miniature, full-size or something in between:⁵⁸¹ they may have been something akin to the 'miniature' silver mosque described in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf*, into which fifteen people could fit for prayers.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁵ al-Qaddūmī 1996: 171; see also Morony 1989: 479.

⁵⁷⁶ Flood 1993: 194–7.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁷⁸ The suggestion being that the garden carpet could be both a substitute for a real garden, and a terrestrial expression of paradise (Curatola 1985: 92).

⁵⁷⁹ Qur'an 55:72.

⁵⁸⁰ Curatola (1985: 96) discusses but does not illustrate a seventeenth-century garden carpet in Jaipur Museum decorated with the miniature image of a pavilion.

⁵⁸¹ Grabar 1969: 184; Le Strange 1897: 41; see also Necipoğlu 1993: 7.

⁵⁸² al-Qaddūmī 1996: 85.

Conclusions

As the ceramic tabourets are manifestly rather more quotidian artefacts than the fabulous Spring Carpet of Khusraw, and probably operated within a bourgeois environment of patterned floral textiles, perhaps even garden carpets, may we not place the tabourets into this urban milieu as miniature pavilions in an ersatz textile garden? Or, in an equally kitsch sleight of hand, could they not have been incorporated within parties held in the modest garden of a courtyard house, standing in for a grander garden and a full-size pavilion? Finally, it is also possible that they were intended for use within real garden pavilions, creating a rather *chi-chi* correspondence between the miniature and the full-scale environment.⁵⁸³ The Persian forms of the tabouret make the mimetic reference to garden architecture absolutely explicit, while the Syrian versions play with architectural elements, forcing them into complex reconfigurations. Both articulate a form of architecture that must surely, in its full-size incarnations, have been beyond the means of most people.

⁵⁸³ If one can for a moment forget the resoundingly negative connotations of the term, it can be conceded that the tabourets fit admirably into the definition of ‘kitsch’ provided by Baudrillard (1998: 111): ‘To the aesthetics of beauty and originality, kitsch opposes its aesthetics of simulation: it everywhere reproduces objects smaller or larger than life; it imitates materials (in plaster, plastic, etc.); it apes forms or combines them discordantly[...]’.

CHAPTER THREE

URBANISM IN *PARS PRO TOTO*: MARBLE JAR STANDS FROM CAIRO

A full description of the qualities of its markets and its munificence would extend to a great length. It is enough to say that it is the most important of the metropolises of the Muslims, their greatest pride, and the most populous of their towns [...] Its commerce is remarkable, its trades profitable, its wealth abundant. Nowhere will you find sweeter water, more agreeable people, finer linen, or a river more beneficent.

For all that, its dwellings are cramped and full of fleas, the rooms noisome and oppressive. Fruits are scarce, the water is muddy, the wells filthy, the houses are dirty, bugridden and stinking, mange is chronic. Meats are expensive, dogs numerous. The people use abominable oaths, their manners are vile. They are in constant fear of famine and the failure of the river, and are on the verge of compulsory exile – in fact they are constantly expecting calamity.⁵⁸⁴

The third group of objects to be examined in this thesis – marble jar stands believed to originate from tenth- to thirteenth-century Egypt – differs from the previous groups in several important aspects. The change in material, from ceramic to marble, is obvious enough, as is the move west to Egypt. More significantly, in size, weight and cost, the jar stands must take their place well above the ceramic objects of the previous chapters, and the degree to which the status of the jar stands as (in the main) relatively luxurious objects has affected the modes of their decoration will be discussed below. The jar stands appear to be unique to Egypt, quite possibly even specifically to Cairo, and, unlike the house models or the ceramic tabourets, a reasonable explanation of their use has already been proposed and will be outlined below. There is also a less immediately tangible, but very significant, difference between this group and the preceding two: for the first time in this study, a group of objects is being presented for which there is already a body of scholarship, albeit a very scanty one.

⁵⁸⁴ al-Muqaddasī 1994: 183.

Existing Scholarship and Known Examples

The existing body of scholarship in fact comprises one very short article from 1947, and one full-length and one short article both published in the late 1970s. Of the studies from the 1970s, the article by Ibrahim is full of interesting observations but runs to less than four pages of text and presents only a few of the numerous examples of this type of jar stand held in the Cairo museums; it almost feels as if it was intended to be a longer study that did not reach fulfilment.⁵⁸⁵ The considerably longer and more ambitious article by Knauer gathers together many more examples and makes some attempt at assembling a stylistic typology, suggests much interesting comparative material, and contains extensive and important discussion of the possible Classical antecedents of the jar stands, but it is frequently cursory in its analysis of individual decorative motifs, and in some places reveals through omissions or misreadings that its author is not a specialist in Islamic art.⁵⁸⁶ The earlier article, by Elisséeff, is extremely useful in that it outlines how the jar stands worked, and provides a reading of the inscription on the example formerly in the Boston Athenaeum, but is too short to carry much additional information.⁵⁸⁷ Beyond these sources, there are the usual brief catalogue notes (see the references given in the individual catalogue entries), most of them heavily or entirely dependent on the three articles cited above.

Knauer relates that she located over sixty of these jar stands. Unfortunately, her illustrations are limited and she does not give details of many of the examples she encountered, making it impossible to trace many of the *kilgas* she mentions. The jar stands vary greatly in the elaboration of their decoration, and from Knauer's illustrations of some of those she encountered in private houses, and more recent images of some of the examples sold at auction, we may deduce that many of those not in museum collections are of the plainest sort.⁵⁸⁸ Two examples of this relatively plain type are on display at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, but I have been

⁵⁸⁵ Ibrahim 1978: 1–25.

⁵⁸⁶ Knauer 1979: 67–101.

⁵⁸⁷ Elisséeff 1947: 35–8.

⁵⁸⁸ Knauer 1979: 71, 74, figs. 9–10.

unable to obtain any images of them.⁵⁸⁹ Similarly, it would appear that many of the pieces in the Coptic Museum that have not been illustrated by Ibrahim or Knauer are of limited interest to the art historian: Ibrahim reports that '[t]here is a variety of stone jar-stands in the Coptic Museum of different shapes, either plain or poorly carved.'⁵⁹⁰

The present study has assembled sixty-nine examples, and a further six were seen in museums but unfortunately could not be photographed and therefore have not been included within the catalogue.⁵⁹¹ Not mentioned in the existing literature are the pieces in London, Manchester, Stockholm, Paris, Kuwait and Philadelphia, all but one of the substantial collection in the Gayer Anderson Museum, and (presumably) the pieces that have recently been sold through the auction houses. As was outlined in the introduction to this thesis, one of the chief problems facing this chapter was the inaccessibility of the Cairene collections.⁵⁹² The limited and relatively poor-quality images published by Knauer and Ibrahim have to provide the visual information for many of the examples from the Museum of Islamic Art and the Coptic Museum. These images are far from ideal, but the wealth of ornament found on the jar stands as a group is such that there is ample material for discussion nonetheless.⁵⁹³

Function and Features

The jar stands have an Arabic name: *kilga* (singular) or *kilāg/ kilgāt* (plural).⁵⁹⁴ Ibrahim notes that this word is particular to Egypt, as the stand itself seems to be.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁸⁹ Accession number AI 88-22, and a piece on loan from a private collection, on display in December 2007.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibrahim 1978: n. 3. Nadja Tomoum tells me that the Coptic Museum has at least forty *kilgas* on its records, although the term appears to have been used within the Museum's records to describe a separate and distinct type of marble jar table (see below) as well as the *kilgas* that form the subject of the present chapter, so it is impossible to know at this stage how many they actually have.

⁵⁹¹ In addition to the two examples seen in the Institut du Monde Arabe, four unlabelled examples were displayed on the floor of the Fatimid room in the Museum of Islamic Ceramics in Cairo, but I was not allowed to photograph them. Knauer in her article mentions five further examples in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo of which I was not able to obtain any images (acc. nos 32, 668, 685, 14099 and 22402), and a further two in the Coptic Museum (acc. nos 3890 and 4111).

⁵⁹² See introduction.

⁵⁹³ Unfortunately some of Knauer's photographs were destroyed during an airport security check (Knauer 1979: n. 7).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibrahim 1978: 1.

The word does not appear in historical sources, and Ibrahim cites one Dr. al-Misri as her source for the information that it is composed of two words of Turkish or Persian origin: *kil/gil/gel* meaning ‘silt’ or ‘mud’ and *gah* meaning ‘place’.⁵⁹⁶ Thus the total word *kilga* refers to a place where silt accumulates and, strictly speaking, actually designates the earthenware jar that the stand once held (see below).⁵⁹⁷ However, the term is used to describe both the jar and its stand. In the absence of further suggestions as to etymology, this reading seems acceptable, and at any rate will not have much bearing on further discussion of the objects.⁵⁹⁸

The strange shape of the *kilgas* tells how they were used. A large, unglazed earthenware water jar with a round or pointed end, known as a *zīr*, was, when full, rested upright in the circular cavity of the trunk.⁵⁹⁹ Stands that take an upright, pointed jar have already been seen in the previous chapter (figs 2.15 and 2.16). In this position, the water that slowly seeped through the body of the jar as the process of evaporation took place would collect in the bottom of the trunk cavity. From there, it would trickle down through the arched opening into the slightly lower trough projecting from the front of the stand, where it would collect and could be scooped up with a cup or bowl. The wear left by centuries of scooping is clearly evident in the worn troughs of some of the *kilgas*, for example the completely plain specimen photographed by Knauer in the courtyard of the mosque of Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalā’ūn in 1978.⁶⁰⁰ Although at that point no longer used with a porous water jar, and thus having become nothing more than a convenient stand for a non-porous water container, this example demonstrates the longstanding role such stands held in Cairene public life.⁶⁰¹ Other examples exhibit a worn smoothness on the inside of the trough and occasionally streaks on the outside of the same area, suggesting a periodic

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 and n. 1.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, citing the Turkish-Arabic dictionary of Muhammad ‘Ali al-Unsi al-Bayruti, *al-darari al-lami’at fi muntakhabat al-lughat* (1902), pp. 464 and 193, and the Persian-Arabic dictionary of Muhammad Althoungi, *Golden Dictionary* (Beirut), pp. 507 and 225.

⁵⁹⁷ The earthenware body of some early Islamic amphorae from Cairo is described as ‘silt fabric’ by archaeologists (see Gascoigne 2007: 166), and it is just possible that the *kil* in *kilga* could refer to the material of the jar rather than its contents.

⁵⁹⁸ Some further suggestions as to etymology are given by Knauer (1979: n. 6).

⁵⁹⁹ Ibrahim 1978: 1. In Maghribi usage, *zīr* (plural *azyār*) means ‘conical jar’.

⁶⁰⁰ Knauer 1979: 73.

⁶⁰¹ Knauer (*ibid.*, 72) points out that this example may well have been in continuous use for centuries.

overflow of water, as can be seen on the example in Manchester (cat. no. 3.14).⁶⁰²

The original function of the *kilgas* has been somewhat obscured in some museum displays by their habitual presentation as stands for (much later) non-porous jars made of alabaster or marble (see for example the piece in Philadelphia) from which water was accessed directly, thus rendering the frontal trough superfluous.⁶⁰³

The jars themselves that would have been used with the *kilgas* are no longer in existence, and one can only conjecture what they must have looked like. As they must have been of unglazed earthenware it seems unlikely, although by no means impossible, that they would have been heavily ornamented. The extraordinary level of decoration seen on some surviving earthenware *ḥabbs* from the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Jazira certainly attests to the existence of such objects in another part of the Islamic world.⁶⁰⁴ To my knowledge though, no such heavily ornamented examples have ever been recovered from excavations in Egypt. The extraordinary volume of unglazed ceramic that was thrown away on the rubbish dumps of Cairo every day is recorded in the fifteenth century by al-Maqrīzī, suggesting that unglazed earthenware was viewed as an entirely disposable product,⁶⁰⁵ and in the absence of any other evidence it is assumed that the jars used with the *kilgas* were of a relatively plain type, perhaps similar to examples excavated at Samarra.⁶⁰⁶

In addition to cooling the water through evaporation, this method of water storage also had the benefit of performing an elementary filtration of the Nile water that was used to fill the water jars.⁶⁰⁷ The use of Nile water for drinking appears to have led to the development of an enormous industry of water carrying, with Cairo reputedly home to fifty thousand camels belonging to water-carriers in the eleventh century.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰³ The inappropriate combination of stand and jar presented in many museums was first noted by Elisséeff (1947: 36–7) and has been repeated by many subsequent authors.

⁶⁰⁴ See Reitlinger 1951: 11–22.

⁶⁰⁵ Milwright 1999: 505; see also Mulder 2001: 94.

⁶⁰⁶ Illustrated in Iraq Government 1940: plate XXIII.

⁶⁰⁷ We have the evidence of Ibn Riḍwān (1984: 91) that the Nile was the common source of drinking water for many inhabitants of Cairo during the Fatimid period. Ibn Riḍwān leaves the reader in little doubt about the risks of drinking Nile-water, noting that carrion, animal and human excrement and general refuse were all dumped in the Nile by the residents of Fuṣṭāṭ (Ibn Riḍwān 1984: 106–8).

⁶⁰⁸ Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 46.

Although al-Maqrīzī records a number of quotes from writers praising the water of the Nile for its sweetness and clarity, he also notes that other authors warned against drinking unpurified Nile water.⁶⁰⁹

Evidence of the filtration practices of Fatimid Egypt are found in the text *Risālā fī dafʿ maḍārr al-abdān bi-arḍ Miṣr*. Its author, Ibn Riḍwān (998–1068) was appointed chief physician by the Fatimid caliph al-Mustaṣṣir,⁶¹⁰ and wrote his medical treatise in response to the claims of a Tunisian doctor, Ibn al-Jazzār, that Egypt was particularly unhealthy.⁶¹¹ Ibn Riḍwān is extremely firm on the necessity of purifying Nile water before drinking it, suggesting several methods for doing this:

As for water, Nile water should be drunk from places where the current is strongest and the rottenness is least [...] Everyone should purify this water to the extent that it is agreeable to his temperament [...]

It is desirable to skim the purified water and, then, to drink it. Clarification is accomplished by putting the liquid in ceramic vessels, earthenware, or skins, and removing what is filtered from it by secretion. If you wish, you may heat the liquid by fire, place it in the night air until it is pure, and skim what is clarified... This water is made better by clarifying it several times [...]

The best water is in Ṭūbah, when the cold is most intense. Because of this, the Egyptians know by experience that the water of Ṭūbah is the best water. Thus, many of them begin to store it in thin waterskins and china, and they drink it all year and claim that it does not change. Also, they do not purify the water at this time because of their belief that it is of the utmost purity. As for you, do not rely on that belief and purify it in any case. The stored-up water certainly will change.⁶¹²

Although Ibn Riḍwān does not mention stands for jars in his discussion of filtration, Knauer has noted that as his concerns lay with larger medical issues and the prevention of epidemic disease, his silence on the actual equipment needed for purification does not necessarily indicate that jar stands of all types were not known to him.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁹ al-Maqrīzī 1900: 175–83.

⁶¹⁰ Dols 1984: 57; Schacht 1971: 906.

⁶¹¹ See Dols 1984: 67–9. On the rivalry between Ibn Riḍwān and another of his peers see Baer 2002:

1.

⁶¹² Ibn Riḍwān 1984: 135–6.

⁶¹³ Knauer 1979: 71.

Indeed, the stress laid on the purification of drinking water in Ibn Riḍwān's text implies that it was not only for the prevention of life-threatening diseases that this process was considered important. Elsewhere in the text, Ibn Riḍwān says of the population of al-Bushmūr that 'their disposition is grosser [than that of the peoples of southern Egypt], and stupidity is dominant because they eat very coarse foods and drink bad water.'⁶¹⁴ Later, public waterworks are used as an analogy for bodily systems: 'Galen and other physicists said that in the winter many viscid, phlegmatic substances and filth gather in the body and stick fast in the stomach, the vessels, and the veins, as viscid and filthy substances stick fast in the watercourses of canals and drains.'⁶¹⁵

Taken altogether, the quotes from Ibn Riḍwān demonstrate both an awareness of the need for clean drinking water for the medical reasons that we recognise today, and a warning about the filth present in the Nile and other contaminated waterways, but there is another shade of meaning as well. If one believes, as Ibn Riḍwān did, that the character of a people depends on the balance of the bodily humours, which could be affected by all sorts of factors including the humidity present in the air and the character (hot/cold/dry/wet) of the foods eaten,⁶¹⁶ and that any change in these bodily humours was potentially catastrophic, the quality of the water drunk in Cairo takes on a new significance.⁶¹⁷ It is not only for the prevention of disease, both localised and epidemic, that clean water should be made available; it is also for the prevention of corruption of the civic body itself, for the protection of the character and temperament of the people from the degeneration that must necessarily take place when spoiled water becomes the standard drink. Against such a background, the *kilgas* and their role in the provision of clean(er) drinking water must assume some significance as a vehicle of social good, even if used only in a private house for the family and its guests.

⁶¹⁴ Ibn Riḍwān 1984: 115.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–7. See also Goitein 1969: 93, on the maintenance of plumbing in medieval Cairo.

⁶¹⁶ On warnings against certain vegetables for both religious and Galenist reasons, see De Smet 1995: 53–69.

⁶¹⁷ On Galenism and Ibn Riḍwān, see Dols 1984: 3–24.

It is not clear at this stage whether the *kilgas* were originally intended for private or public use. Certainly Knauer photographed one in public use in the mosque of Qalā'ūn as recently as the late 1970s, and there are others that are recorded as having been brought to the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo from Mamluk mosques: cat. no. 3.20 from the mosque of Maghlbāy Ṭāz (*sic*), Cairo,⁶¹⁸ cat. no. 3.26 from the mosque of Zayn al-Dīn, Cairo,⁶¹⁹ and cat. no. 3.10 from the mosque of Qāyṭbāy in Manshiya, Alexandria.⁶²⁰ Herz Bey also records a *kilga* brought to the museum from the mosque of 'Saghry Wardy' (Taghrī-Bīrdī) in al-Salība, and one brought from the mosque of Qāyṭbāy (in Cairo?), but unfortunately his descriptions are too general to enable us to match them to individual pieces.⁶²¹ The *kilga* now in the National Museum in Damascus (cat. no. 3.44) was moved there from the Great Mosque of Damascus in 1928,⁶²² although it is presumably of Egyptian manufacture like the rest of the group and may not have been made specifically for the Umayyad mosque.

Elisséeff proposes, on the basis of a *waqf* text cited by al-Maqrīzī, that the water jars (and by inference, their stands) were intended to provide water for ritual ablutions rather than for drinking.⁶²³ If this reading were correct, then presumably most of the *kilgas* would have been intended for the normally public arena of the mosque, or an equivalent semi-private worship space in palaces or large houses. However, Elisséeff's source for this is Sauvaget's translation of a passage from al-Maqrīzī's fifteenth-century *Khiṭaṭ*, on the Fatimid Azhar Mosque. In fact, the translation of the *waqf* quoted in al-Maqrīzī's text reads only 'for the purchase of pottery jars which will be stood next to the cistern and filled with water, and for the cost of their transport.'⁶²⁴ There is no mention of the use of the water within the text as translated by Sauvaget: the relevant footnote – 'To be used for ritual ablutions, in the absence of running water' – appears to be Sauvaget's interpolation.⁶²⁵ Prisse d'Avennes follows this interpretation, stating that 'in some early mosques one occasionally still

⁶¹⁸ Ministry of Culture 1969: 199.

⁶¹⁹ Herz Bey 1895: 29.

⁶²⁰ O'Kane 2006: 119.

⁶²¹ Herz Bay 1896: entries 32 and 33.

⁶²² Knauer 1979: n. 35.

⁶²³ Elisséeff 1947: 37.

⁶²⁴ al-Maqrīzī, 1946: 164, my translation from the French.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 1, again my translation.

encounters a small sculpted stone basin, which contained water for the ablutions of great personages or certain private individuals', and even illustrates two *kilgas*.⁶²⁶ However, as he speaks about this usage in the past tense, there is nothing to indicate that this information is anything other than hearsay.

Against this, Ibrahim does not doubt that the *kilgas* are part of a mechanism for the provision of clean water specifically for drinking, noting that the point-ended earthenware jars probably used with them were still in use for this purpose in rural Egypt at the time she was writing.⁶²⁷ Knauer also comes to this conclusion.⁶²⁸ Additionally, evidence from 'Abbasid writers shows that a very large earthenware jar known as a *ḥabb* (pl. *ḥibab*) was used in the eastern Islamic lands for the provision of public drinking water in mosques, and also for private homes where large families lived.⁶²⁹ In the ninth-century text *al-Bukhalā'* ('The Misers') of al-Jāḥiẓ, a story is recounted which begins with the slave of al-'Anbarī's mother appearing with an empty jug and asking for cool water. Al-'Anbarī replies:

My mother is much too sensible to send an empty jug for me to return it full. Go and fill it with water from your large water jar and empty it into my large jar – then fill it up with water from my water-cooler so that there may be something in return for something.⁶³⁰

Elsewhere in the text a landlord complains of the additional strain guests will place on a rented house:

When there are many of the family, visitors, guests, and drinking cronies, a lot of water needs to be poured and large water jars that drip and (porous) jars that percolate must be brought into use, up to many times more than previously. How many a wall has the lower part of it eaten away, the upper part crumbling, its foundations giving way and its structure threatening to collapse – all due to a dripping water jar, (water) percolating from a jar, the excessive (use of) well water and bad management.⁶³¹

Finally, given the emphasis placed on the filtration of drinking water (with no mention of filtering water for washing) by Ibn Riḍwān, we may continue with the

⁶²⁶ D'Avennes 1983: 194.

⁶²⁷ Ibrahim 1978: 1.

⁶²⁸ Knauer 1979: 71.

⁶²⁹ Ahsan 1979: 127, citing al-Ṣābī, *al-Wuzarā'* (1958), pp. 26, 391, and al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bukhalā'* (1958), pp. 70, 101, 177.

⁶³⁰ al-Jāḥiẓ 1997: 96–7.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

assumption that the *kilgas* were for the provision of clean drinking water. Another story in *al-Bukhalā'*, although intended as an illustration of the miserliness of those from Merv, illustrates a perceived difference between water that is suitable for drinking, and that which is merely for washing:

I was in Ibn Alī Karīmah's house, he hailing originally from Merv, when he saw me doing the ablution (before prayer) from a pottery jug, and he exclaimed: "Allah forbid! Are you doing your ablution with drinking water with the well there in front of you?" "It isn't drinking water," I said, "only water from the well." "So you'd spoil our jug for us with saltiness!" he said – and I didn't know how to disembarass myself from him.⁶³²

It is harder to know if the *kilgas* were intended for the public or private provision of water. The monumental scale, at times elaborate decoration and variable but generally moderate-to-high standards of workmanship on the *kilgas* would suggest that they were intended for display as well as functional use, and it seems quite possible that these pieces were used in both public and private spheres. The pieces thought to have come from mosques must presumably have been donated to those mosques by wealthy citizens: the provision of drinking water is historically a sacred act in the Islamic world, and one of the foremost concerns of charitable foundations and pious individuals.⁶³³ At the same time, *kilgas* made from expensive marble and elaborately carved may also have been intended for the private homes of the wealthy: the twenty-odd examples now in the Gayer Anderson Museum demonstrate that this is where some of them, at least, ended up.⁶³⁴

Ibrahim has noted, in her studies of Mamluk Cairene residential architecture, that even more modest housing of that period normally had a recess for water jars near the entrance to the residential unit, a recess which was called the *bayt azyār*,⁶³⁵ and she has posited that this may have been the intended site of some of the *kilgas*.⁶³⁶ She

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶³³ See Kuran 2001: 865, 879; and Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 112–3. On the merit of providing water or building aqueducts in the 'Abbasid empire, see Ahsan 1979: 186–8.

⁶³⁴ Knauer 1979: 74.

⁶³⁵ Ibrahim 1984: 57; *eadem* 1978 (a): 27.

⁶³⁶ Ibrahim 1978: n. 19. See also the illustration from the Istanbul *Maqāmāt* of the house of al-Ḥārith which shows the water jar stored next to the door, underneath the stairs, a detail which is viewed by Grabar as indicative of a bourgeois residence (illustrated in Grabar 1970: fig. 2). The jar under the stairs is also seen in the St Petersburg *Maqāmāt*, p. 90 (Grabar 1963: 99). An earlier image of what

also believes that they were more likely to be intended for secular buildings than religious ones, because of the presence of figural decoration on some examples.⁶³⁷ Some sources have suggested that various individual stands were intended for palaces on the basis of their decoration; this will be discussed more fully below.⁶³⁸

Artistic Background: The Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries in Egypt

Only one of the *kilgas* has so far been found to be dated. The Kufic inscription running around the outer rim of the trough and along the tops of the side panels of MIA 4328 contains a damaged inscription which has been read as a date ending in *‘īn wa khamsami’ah*, and has been concluded as referring to 570 or 590 of the Hegira calendar, that is to say 1174–5 or 1193–4 AD.⁶³⁹ More recently the same damaged inscription has been read as referring to 550 AH, or 1155–6 AD.⁶⁴⁰ However, from the available illustrations all I can make out is the *yaa* and the *nun* before *wa khamsami’ah*, which could mean, depending on the space available for the ordinals, that the object is dated to anywhere between 520 and 590, i.e. between 1125–6 and 1193–4.⁶⁴¹ It is possible that when the 570 or 590 reading was made the inscription was less damaged and the remains of the inscription were more conclusive, but without further information on this point it may not be possible to date the piece more accurately than to the twelfth century.

If one accepts the 570/590 reading of the date, the piece is placed early in the brief, eighty-year reign of the Ayyubids in Egypt, when the country was under the rule of Saladin, followed by his successor al-‘Azīz ‘Uthmān.⁶⁴² Alternatively, the more cautious dating of the piece to 520 or later in the century means that it could be from the late Fatimid or early Ayyubid periods. This elaborate piece, with its ornate lion-

can be assumed to be jars of water in an architectural context, in this case located outside the mosque for ablutions, is seen on the frontispieces of the Ṣan‘ā’ Qur’an (Grabar 1992: 160).

⁶³⁷ Ibrahim 1978: 3.

⁶³⁸ See Shovelton, Emily, ‘*Kilga*, Jar-stand’, *Museum with no Frontiers*. MWNF [accessed 12/06/08], <http://www.museumwnf.org>.

⁶³⁹ Ministry of Culture 1969: 200. This reading is also given in Ibrahim 1978: 2–3, and O’Kane 2006: 118. Knauer (1979: 69) says this piece is dated to ‘the nineties of the sixth century of the Hegira, i.e. in the decade between A.D. 1193 and 1203’, but does not state her source for this information.

⁶⁴⁰ Asker (1998: 180); this dating would situate the piece in the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Fā’iz (r. 549–55 AH).

⁶⁴¹ Robert Hillenbrand and Alain George are both thanked for their help with this inscription.

⁶⁴² See Chamberlain 1998: 215–20.

carved feet, *muqarnas* side panels and seated human figures, has naturally become the fixed point around which the dates of the rest of the group have been arranged. It has been suggested that the more elaborate pieces, particularly those with an emphasis on figural decoration and Kufic inscription, are products of the Fatimid to Ayyubid periods (909–1252),⁶⁴³ while the plainer examples come from the early Mamluk period or possibly even later.⁶⁴⁴ Knauer has posited that the high frequency of deliberate mutilation of figural elements within the group would also suggest that many of the *kilgas* were created in an earlier cultural milieu that was more tolerant of figural imagery, probably the Fatimid period, and sometimes paid a price for their lively decoration in later periods.⁶⁴⁵ Often represented in surveys of Islamic art as a more austere artistic culture, the Mamluk period does appear to see figural art decline in popularity, on luxury goods at least.⁶⁴⁶

If we are to accept the reading of the more elaborate *kilgas* as products of the Fatimid period, continuing production into the Ayyubid period but eventually giving way to a less ornamented product in the Mamluk era, we must examine the group in the context of the arts of these periods. It should be noted here, as it has been in earlier chapters, that there are problems with using these dynastic names – Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk – as absolutes. Bierman has noted that focusing on ruling groups when attempting to define the visual identity of a period will inevitably lead the art historian to dwell on the elements with which those in power have sought to distinguish their creations from those which have gone before.⁶⁴⁷ In the case of major state-sponsored constructions, i.e. buildings, this programme of differentiation from previous dynasties is significantly easier to delineate and categorise than is possible with smaller, less expensive artefacts. It is possible to create a visual

⁶⁴³ Dynastic dates from Petry 1998: 517–20, where they have been drawn from Bosworth 1996.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibrahim 1978: 3.

⁶⁴⁵ Knauer 1979: 73, 80–81.

⁶⁴⁶ See for example Grabar 1984 (a): 7, who notes the substitution of epigraphic motifs for figural ones during the Mamluk period; Blair and Bloom 2003: 279; Baer 2003: 58; and von Gladiss 2004: 201.

⁶⁴⁷ Bierman 1998: 369.

dynastic timeline using architecture; to do the same thing with portable objects is far harder, if not impossible.⁶⁴⁸

The literature on the Islamic arts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has naturally tended to use the dynastic labels, if only for the sake of convenience. Bloom and Grabar have both outlined cases against using the dynastic label 'Fatimid' to describe all Egyptian art objects and architecture from this period, pointing out how little the Fatimid princes themselves can have had to do with much of the artistic production.⁶⁴⁹ It seems best to assume that the *kilgas*, presumably relatively expensive but evidently not very rare objects, existed within the large category of artefacts that follow to some extent the tastes exhibited in high society (as evidenced by the most luxurious goods produced within that society) but are not necessarily immediately or coherently affected by changes in the political, dynastic or religious sphere in the same way that monumental architecture can be.⁶⁵⁰

Grabar has noted that for the better part of a century (from the foundation of Cairo in 969 until the secure establishment of the Seljuqs in the east in the mid-eleventh century and the arrival of the crusaders in 1099),⁶⁵¹ the Isma'ili Shi'i Fatimid state in Egypt constituted the most focused and powerful force in the Islamic world.⁶⁵² He has posited that for this reason the Fatimid capital may have acted as a magnet for artisans and artists, a status reflected in artistic developments taking place in the later Fatimid period.⁶⁵³ Noting the increasing interest in figural art, which he believes first appeared on royal ivories but eventually spread to many media during the later eleventh century, Grabar suggests that this was due to a change in taste brought about

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 339–74. For this reason, Islamic art survey texts (and the traditional survey texts of other types of art, such as medieval European) very often start each new dynastic or historical section with architecture (and sometimes architectural decoration), before moving on to the 'decorative arts': see Blair and Bloom 2003; Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina, 2001; Hattstein and Delius, 2004, and so forth.

⁶⁴⁹ Grabar 1999: 11; Bloom 2007: 7–8. See also Contadini 1998: 1.

⁶⁵⁰ See Grabar 1977: 215–6 and n. 31, on the importance of the 'social cost' of any individual technique.

⁶⁵¹ For a recent survey of the Fatimid story prior to this point, see Bloom 2007: 15–49.

⁶⁵² Grabar 1969: 173.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.* Significantly for the current study, Grabar also highlights the formal similarities between artistic developments under the Fatimids and the later growth of styles referred to as 'Seljuq', although he later determines that they are not causally connected (*ibid.*, 173 and 186; *idem* 1977: 219).

by, in the first instance, the dispersal of the Fatimid treasury in the mid-eleventh century.⁶⁵⁴ The well-developed urban middle class that had grown up under the relative stability of Fatimid rule⁶⁵⁵ – the same ‘urban bourgeoisie’ Grabar had cited earlier as being responsible for the growth of figural themes in Seljuq art – was receptive to these rich tastes, some of them originating in Byzantine gifts to the Fatimid treasury and earlier treasuries. And thus, according to Grabar, ‘it is this bourgeoisie which transformed the international art of princes into a locally Egyptian version of Islamic art.’⁶⁵⁶

Although it is true that the dispersal of the Fatimid treasury must have brought an astonishing battery of luxury artworks into the public or semi-public realm, it seems rather reductionist to take this single, if major, event as the genesis of something as complex as the formation of a set of artistic preferences that appear to have penetrated many levels of society.⁶⁵⁷ Recently some scholars have proposed more nuanced versions of events, suggesting that the Fatimid dynasty embraced modes of propaganda and public display that were already extant within the Mediterranean world,⁶⁵⁸ both through ceremonies and via the production of material artefacts, but that they also assimilated these phenomena quickly and skilfully to unprecedented effect.⁶⁵⁹ Through the media of coins, banners, seals, textiles, buildings and so forth, visual symbols and texts of the dynasty could be circulated and a powerful sense of visual identity constructed.⁶⁶⁰ Gift-giving between nobles, both within the dynasty and beyond it, was another means by which precious and rare objects circulated within the medieval world, and fabled treasuries were established.⁶⁶¹ This practice was not in any way exclusively Fatimid, although it is from the textual records of the

⁶⁵⁴ Grabar 1969: 183; Shalem 1996: 56.

⁶⁵⁵ Grabar 1977: 218. The evidence of the Cairo Geniza documents would certainly attest to the flourishing state of the mercantile classes during this period: see Goitein 1967 and 1971, and Frenkel 2001: 45–48.

⁶⁵⁶ Grabar 1969: 185.

⁶⁵⁷ The volume of precious goods which passed through the Fatimid markets *en route* to the courts of Muslim Spain and Sicily, and the Byzantine court in Constantinople, does appear to have been vast, and according to al-Maqrīzī Egyptian merchants were the first to handle them (Shalem 1996: 56, citing al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ* [Beirut, c. 1970] Vol. 1, 414–5).

⁶⁵⁸ For an earlier comparison of the Byzantine and Fatimid courts, see Canard 1951: 365–415.

⁶⁵⁹ Bloom 1985: 20–38.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 26–31; Bierman 1998 (a).

⁶⁶¹ Bloom (1985: 27) notes that the reign of al-Manṣūr (948–53) saw ‘the beginning of a concerted policy of gift-giving as well as collecting’. See also Hillenbrand 1999: 63, and Grabar 1969: 235–6.

Fatimid treasury that the fullest picture is available today.⁶⁶² Bloom has also argued against Grabar's 'dispersal of the treasury' theory on economic grounds, pointing out that the profound economic crisis that had resulted in the looting of the Fatimid treasuries would be unlikely to have left the bourgeoisie comfortable enough to spend lots of money on luxurious gewgaws.⁶⁶³

After the death of the childless Fatimid caliph al-Fā'iz in 1160, various political figures jockeyed for position in Cairo, putting on the throne a boy-caliph who died before he was twenty-one. The breakdown of Fatimid power allowed Saladin to take over Cairo in 1171, and following the death of his overlord Nūr al-Dīn in Damascus in 1174 Saladin formalized the establishment of the Sunni Ayyubid state in Egypt as in Syria.⁶⁶⁴ The period of Saladin's rule saw a renewed building programme in Cairo, with work starting on the citadel in 1176–77, and the construction of a city wall around Fustāṭ and Cairo.⁶⁶⁵ There seems to have been a considerable degree of continuity between architectural works of the Fatimid period and those of the Ayyubid period,⁶⁶⁶ although Korn has made a case for regarding some Ayyubid Cairene architecture as less conservative than other authors have suggested.⁶⁶⁷ However, the so-called 'minor arts' appear to have changed more significantly. Bloom has noted the deterioration of ceramics, considerable changes in coinage as the Ayyubid dynasty continued, and the movement seen within luxury metalwork from engraved or punched styles to a predominantly inlaid mode, although some forms and symbols from Fatimid metalwork appear to have been maintained.⁶⁶⁸ The status of the *kilgas* as semi-architectural, with their monumental bulk, architectural material, and architectural motifs (albeit in miniature) would naturally create strong links with developments and retentions taking place in full-size architecture, and it is probably most fruitful to look to architecture when assessing their decoration.

⁶⁶² Bloom 2007: 157. See al-Qaddūmī 1996.

⁶⁶³ Bloom 2007: 158. Bloom (*ibid.*, 168) has also noted that the quality of Egyptian fritware appears to take a nosedive around 1075, suggesting that the economic crisis of the period also affected this medium.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 175–6; Chamberlain 1998: 213–5.

⁶⁶⁵ Chamberlain 1998: 216–7.

⁶⁶⁶ Bloom 2007: 178.

⁶⁶⁷ Korn 2001: 112–5.

⁶⁶⁸ Bloom 2007: 181–3; Allan 1985: 130–9; Allan 2003: 25–47.

The decline of the Ayyubid dynasty and the arrival of the Baḥrī Mamluk sultanate over the decade between 1250 and 1260 led Egypt in new directions, both politically and artistically.⁶⁶⁹ Mamluk arts, particularly architecture, have been the subject of a great number of publications over the last thirty years.⁶⁷⁰ This review of the artistic culture of Egypt in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries will not outline the developments that took place under the Mamluks, although certain architectural elements of the period may be mentioned below in relation to the individual motifs of the *kilgas*.

None of the *kilgas* have so far been found to bear a dedicatory inscription. With no *kilga* securely or even tentatively dated later (or earlier) than the twelfth century, and the decoration of many individual *kilgas* conforming to certain characteristics of Fatimid-era art (an interest in, and an inventive conception of, human and animal figures being the most obvious),⁶⁷¹ it is natural to assume that many of the more elaborate examples date from the Fatimid period or slightly later. Strategies for dating, based on characteristics of individual components such as script type and individual architectural motifs, cannot be relied upon for great accuracy but will help to fix the *kilgas* within general visual milieux, and as such will be employed where possible within the discussion of those individual motifs below.

Architectural Motifs: Introduction

As in previous chapters, this section of the study will concentrate on the motifs found amongst the *kilga* group, both applied and structural, that can be construed as originating from, or imitative of, full-size architecture. Analysis of individual motifs and forms will be followed by a brief discussion of the means by which the figural motifs present on several examples might fit within this strongly architectural decorative programme. Observations on the medium of the *kilgas* will be followed by a brief discussion of the relationship between the *kilgas* and medieval models of urbanism, followed finally by conclusions.

⁶⁶⁹ Northrup 1998: 244–9; Irwin 1986: 26–34.

⁶⁷⁰ Baer 2003: 49. For examples of this recent scholarship see Behrens-Abouseif 1989, 1995, 1995 (a), and 2007; Atıl 1981; all articles in *Muqarnas*, Vol. 2: *The Art of the Mamluks* (1984), and so forth.

⁶⁷¹ See Ettinghausen 1942, 1955 and 1956, and Grabar 1977: 219.

The present study has purposefully refrained from any systematic attempt at organising the *kilgas* into a formal typology. The catalogue for this chapter is very loosely grouped according to certain motifs, but the arrangement is more or less arbitrary. There are simply too many things going on in the group as a whole, too many motifs appearing in too many permutations, to make this a valuable approach. Knauer spends much of her article attempting to divide the *kilgas* into types that are slippery at best, and she freely and correctly notes that this typology cannot be used for dating purposes.⁶⁷² While the basic form of the *kilga* remains relatively fixed, no two examples are exactly alike, and very few are really close enough in appearance to warrant grouping them together. Many elements appear in various different forms across the group as a whole, and the sometimes overwhelming use of ornament can make it very hard to decide which feature, if any, is the dominant component in the decorative programme of an individual *kilga*. The present study opts instead to analyse the *kilgas* element by element, and within each new section those examples that demonstrate one particular use of the decorative motif under discussion will be analyzed as a group and in comparison with one another. Although this may not permit the creation of a formal typology, it is more likely to lead to an understanding of the most important aspects of the architecturalising decoration of the *kilga* group.

Inscriptions

A large number of the *kilgas* bear inscriptions: see cat. nos 3.1–3.9, 3.14–3.21, 3.29, 3.34, 3.35, 3.50 and 3.57. The role of the inscriptions within the overall decorative programmes of the *kilgas* has been very little discussed by earlier authors. Elisséeff makes some observations on the style, content and possible dating of the inscription on cat. no. 3.18, and translations of some of the inscriptions are given in various sources, but beyond this little mention is made of inscriptions save the frequent citation of the Kufic script as a reason for dating individual stands to the Fatimid period.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷² Knauer 1979: 73.

⁶⁷³ Elisséeff 1947: 35–6; Knauer 1979: 69; Voigt, Friederike, ‘Jar-Stand (*kilga*)’, *Museum with No Frontiers*. MWNF [accessed 12/06/08], <http://www.museumwnf.org>.

Those inscriptions that have been deciphered invariably work within a very standardized oeuvre of benedictory phrases. It has already been seen that one of these inscriptions (cat. no. 3.1) gives a partial date; the remainder of the inscription surviving on the same *kilga* reads *baraka kāmila wa ni‘ma shāmila wa salāma dā’ima wa ‘izz li-ṣāhibihi*,⁶⁷⁴ or ‘perfect (or everlasting) blessing, enfolding favour, enduring salvation and glory to its owner’.⁶⁷⁵ This is fairly typical: *baraka kāmila* (‘perfect blessing’) also appears on cat. no. 3.20 (mutilated),⁶⁷⁶ and on cat. no. 3.15,⁶⁷⁷ and a longer but very similar inscription has been read from cat. no. 3.8.⁶⁷⁸ Elisséeff’s analysis of the inscription on cat. no. 3.18 is particularly interesting, as he describes the mistakes and elisions present within the repeated text on that *kilga*, on an inscriptive panel which stretches to a total length of 177 cm.⁶⁷⁹ On this example, *baraka* (‘blessing’) has become *barakāka*, while *shāmila* (‘enfolding’) is shortened five times out of eight to *shā*. *Kāmila* (‘perfect’/ ‘everlasting’) only appears after *baraka* within two of the eight repetitions of the formula, which in its proper form would read *baraka kāmila wa ni‘ma shāmila*.⁶⁸⁰

Ibrahim states that a number of the *kilgas* employ the formula *al-‘izz al-dā’im* (‘everlasting glory), suggesting that this can be used to place those *kilgas* bearing this particular phrase in the Ayyubid period, as it was not in common use until that time (see a version of the phrase in cursive script on one of the Raqqa stands, cat. no. 2.41).⁶⁸¹ Sadly, she does not tell us which *kilgas* bear this formula, and the information available from her photographs does not make this any clearer. Similarly, although she supplies the information that *al-mulk* (‘the power’, sometimes shorthand for *al-mulk li’llāh*, ‘the Power is God’s) and *al-yumn* (‘prosperity’) also appear on *kilgas*, we are again not told which, and the inscriptions are rarely legible from the images provided.⁶⁸² An example recently sold at auction

⁶⁷⁴ Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet 1937: 279.

⁶⁷⁵ ‘*Bénédiction parfaite, faveur étendue, salut durable et gloire à son possesseur!*’ (*ibid.*, 279; Wiet 1971: 41.)

⁶⁷⁶ Ministry of Culture 1969: 198.

⁶⁷⁷ Asker 1998 (a): 180.

⁶⁷⁸ Philon 1980: 15.

⁶⁷⁹ Elisséeff 1947: 35.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 35–6.

⁶⁸¹ Ibrahim 1978: 3.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

(cat. no. 3.57) bears a single panel on the side with the phrase *al-yumn* written in large letters and a rather mongrel script, but a short, emblematic inscription of this type appears to be the exception rather than the rule amongst the *kilgas*.⁶⁸³

The contents of the inscriptions of the *kilgas*, then, would appear to be entirely formulaic, and to participate in the shared vocabulary of benedictory expressions common to many of the so-called ‘minor arts’ of the medieval period.⁶⁸⁴ Although such expressions are commonly found on low- to mid-status objects, with the formulaic repetition of *baraka*, *al-mulk* or *al-yumn* appearing frequently on ceramics and so forth,⁶⁸⁵ this does not mean that stock benedictory phrases do not also appear on objects intended to serve in the high life.

A carved rock-crystal inkwell from the Fatimid era in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo bears an inscription that reads *iqbāl wa baraka li-ṣāḥibihi, Muḥammad wa ‘Alī kilāhumā*. This phrase has been translated by Yousuf as ‘Blessing from God for both owners, Muhammad and ‘Ali’. He proposes that the inkwell was originally made for two brothers who served as writers under al-Ḥākim and were put to death by the order of that caliph.⁶⁸⁶ This reading would make the inkwell inscription considerably more proprietorial than anything thus far gleaned from the *kilgas*, naming as it does the owners. However, an alternative reading of this phrase, provided by Carole Hillenbrand, is ‘fortune and blessing upon its owner, (and) on both Muḥammad and ‘Alī’.⁶⁸⁷ This accords closely, in its use of a standard benedictory format, with the inscriptions of the *kilgas*; the quality of the simple Kufic script used on the inkwell is also reasonably close to that of the *kilga* inscriptions. If we accept Hillenbrand’s reading, the use of such a stock phrase on a luxurious rock-crystal object makes the standardized inscriptions and lack of dedications seen on the *kilgas* less startling. Similarly, the inscriptions on the extremely luxurious incense burner of Muḥammad

⁶⁸³ According to the auction description of this piece, further inscriptions are found on the back and far side (Christie’s London, King Street, sale 7038, *Islamic Art and Manuscripts*, 26 April 2005, lot 17).

⁶⁸⁴ See for example Contadini 1998: 37 (plate 5), 67 (plate 24), 87 (plate 36b).

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87 (plate 36b).

⁶⁸⁶ Yousuf 1999: 311.

⁶⁸⁷ My thanks to Carole Hillenbrand for this reading. Her reading seems to me the more likely of the two, as there is nothing beyond the names Muḥammad and Alī’ to identify the historical writers, whom Yousuf believes to have been the original owners, with the inkwell, and of course those particular names are most frequently used in benedictions to refer to the Prophet and his son-in-law.

ibn Khutlukh al-Mawṣilī (cat. no. 4.57), which name the craftsman but not the owner, express stock benedictions of a very similar kind.⁶⁸⁸

The inscriptions found on the *kilgas* are, as far as it is possible to tell in the case of those seen only in low-quality images, almost invariably written in a form of elongated but still fairly stocky Kufic. Elisséeff has observed of the inscription on cat. no. 3.18 that ‘the inscriptions are the work of an unskilled and ignorant stonecutter; the letters are cut without grace or regularity; mutilations are numerous’, and it would be fair to say that this poor quality of inscription is fairly common amongst the *kilga* group.⁶⁸⁹ A similar standard of workmanship can be seen in the inscription of cat. no. 3.14, with letters of irregular thickness and uneven base line, sometimes displaying a separation between the tops of shafts and the upper border but at other times allowing shafts to continue without differentiation into the border line, and with no attempt at elaboration or manipulation of the script. Inscriptions of this low quality appear on many other examples, and a repeated device of even lower quality, which may be a very truncated expression or even a pseudo-inscription, appears on cat. no. 3.16.⁶⁹⁰

Other *kilgas* bear inscriptions that are one step up in terms of quality: see for example the inscriptions on the basin edges of cat. nos 3.1 and 3.19–3.21. Although not uniform in execution, the inscriptions on these examples are flat, filling the available space between the two enclosing border bands above and below, and are again simplistic but evince a slightly greater degree of elaboration than the examples previously discussed. Letter stalks have been given a slanted top and even the slight ‘tail’ – originally borrowed from calligraphy – that can be seen on monumental inscriptions (see fig. 3.1).⁶⁹¹ There has also been a greater attempt at allowing the letters a little breathing space in the lower register, so that the tails of some letters

⁶⁸⁸ Allan 1986: 66. See also the various similar benedictory formulae inscribed on Khurasanian trays (Melikian-Chirvani 1976 (a): 205–7), and those found on the inkwells under discussion in the next chapter (Arts Council 1976: 172; Aga-Oglu 1946: 122–4).

⁶⁸⁹ Elisséeff 1947: 35.

⁶⁹⁰ On pseudo-inscriptions, and the difficulties encountered in attempting to separate ‘true’ pseudo-inscriptions from highly abbreviated formulae or poorly written texts, see Aanavi 1969: 54–81, and Aanavi 1968: 354–5.

⁶⁹¹ Grohmann 1957: 188–94.

protrude below the baseline of the script. The beginnings of floriation are evident in on some of the letters on cat. no. 3.1.

On the whole, though, these inscriptions are not of a very high standard of craftsmanship and the letters are still crowded, restrained and flat. The only examples known so far that really seem to go beyond this are cat. nos 3.2, 3.3 and the inscription panel just visible on the back of cat. no. 3.29. Cat. no. 3.2, although still exhibiting an inscription around the trough that is cramped and rather flat, has allowed more space for the inscription around the side panel and the artist has invested some effort in making the letters of these sections appear refined and well-shaped. Note the use of what appears to be an interlaced *lam-alif* in the bottom left-hand corner of the side panel shown in cat. no. 3.2, the two stalks curving back towards each other in a pincer shape. This device is also seen on cat. no. 3.3, on the right-hand side of the back panel, and on the back of cat. no. 3.6, and is comparable to the slightly more angular *lam-alif* found on the *maqṣūra* of the Azhar Mosque.⁶⁹²

The fineness of the carving on cat. no. 3.3 is notably more pronounced than on other examples, and is particularly obvious within the inscription. The letters are carved in greater relief than on any other *kilga* and appear slightly bevelled, rather than flat; they are also regular in thickness and more or less consistent in proportioning. More space has been allowed around the letters: rather than appearing to have been hemmed in between two borders, they travel comfortably across the surface with sufficient *Lebensraum* for elegant dips below the baseline and even some curlicues on the upper shafts that begin to approach floriated Kufic in its monumental forms. Inasmuch as one can make out the inscription on the lower back panel of cat. no. 3.29, it would appear that this also employs semi-floriated shaft tops.

It has been shown that the inscriptions on the *kilgas* bestow stock benedictory phrases and are of a level of craftsmanship that ranges from basic to something better than that. In both of those aspects, they are not especially closely related to

⁶⁹² See also the alphabet of characters from the Azhar inscriptions in Tabbaa 1994: 123 (after Grohmann). For an esoteric reading of the more complex interlaced *lam-alif* motif in Fatimid inscriptions, see Bierman 1989: 285–6.

architectural inscriptions, which tend, for obvious reasons of size, status and positioning, to be far more complex in both execution and content. However, the inescapably architectural medium of the *kilgas* – marble apparently drawn from spolia, as will be discussed below – and the architectural posturing of their decoration lead the viewer into a near-automatic architectural reading of the epigraphic decoration. There is a great sense of three-dimensionality to the *kilgas* as a group, and this is in many cases enhanced by the scrolling epigraphic band that wraps around the object, appearing most frequently as a continuous ribbon around the three sides of the frontal trough but in many cases also continuing on to the side panels of the trunk either as a single, isolated band on each side (for example cat. nos 3.1 and 3.15) or as a continuous frame of inscription around three edges of the side panel (as seen on cat. nos 3.2–3.7) and sometimes encompassing the back panel as well (cat. nos 3.3, 3.6, 3.14, and 3.17). It is also interesting to note how frequently plain or parallel striped bands are used in similar positions on those of the group that do not bear inscriptions (for example, cat. nos 3.59–3.63). As inscription bands tend to be found on the better carved and more elaborately decorated examples, it would seem that perhaps the plain or striped bands were the poor man’s version of epigraphic panels, possibly even having borne painted inscriptions at one point.

One of the first architectural comparisons that springs to mind is the façade of the Aqmar Mosque in Cairo (1125). In particular, the very long inscription panels that continue across the façade of that building, wrapping themselves around projecting columns while maintaining a level baseline, are reminiscent of those on the *kilga* troughs. An earlier use of the Kufic wrapping inscription band can be seen in the Azhar Mosque.⁶⁹³ There is also a very direct comparison to be drawn between the framing bands surrounding the *muqarnas* panels on the Aqmar Mosque (fig. 3.2), which initially appear to be continuations of the epigraphic band below but upon closer inspection reveal themselves to be decorated with plaited and knotwork designs rather than writing, and the similar bands of knotwork that appear framing blind arches, *muqarnas* panels and figures in niches on cat. nos 3.10, 3.15, 3.28 and 3.29.

⁶⁹³ Flury 1936: 366–8.

There are many other architectural inscriptions from the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods that could furnish parallels, but extended comparisons between these and the *kilga* inscriptions would be very repetitive. The salient points are the use of Kufic, and the relatively narrow, long ribbons of inscription that wrap around projecting forms and turn corners. The chronology of the development of refined Kufic inscriptions in various parts of the Islamic world, and the question of geographical precedence, remain topics of some debate that are outside the scope of this thesis.⁶⁹⁴ The present study will be content with noting that inscriptions in foliated, floriated or otherwise elaborated Kufic script are by no means unique to Fatimid Egypt, but are nonetheless strongly characteristic of the architectural programme of the Fatimid rulers.⁶⁹⁵ Floriated Kufic began to be challenged by cursive scripts as the script of choice for monumental inscriptions in Cairo only with the establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty in the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁶⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the use of Kufic for long bands of non-historical, particularly Qur'anic, inscription was a characteristic of the Fatimid period *and* later periods in Egypt (for example the inscriptions framing the arch panels in the Mausoleum of the 'Abbasid Caliphs, dated 1242).⁶⁹⁷ As such, the 'miniaturised monumental' Kufic script carved into the *kilgas* can only be used as a general tool for dating.

Waisted Arches

A surprising mistake made by Knauer is her misreading of the most frequently recurring motif in the *kilga* group. This is a rather ornate blind arch, with an upper section formed from a tricusped or polylobed arch swelling out from a rather tightly squeezed neck formed between two square or slightly pointed shoulders, mounted on

⁶⁹⁴ Grohmann (1957: 206–9, 212–13) has argued for a gradual development of foliated Kufic through several different sources, which ultimately led to the development of fully-refined floriated Kufic in Fatimid Egypt. Tabbaa (1994: 126), although not in agreement with the former part of this argument, has concurred with the latter. On the development of the script in Egypt before the Fatimid period, see Bloom 2007: 54, and Blair 1999: 112–3. On the development of foliated and interlaced Kufic script in the eastern Islamic lands, see Flury 1925: 61–87; *idem* 1930: 43–58; and Blair 1992: 38–40 and 223.

⁶⁹⁵ Tabbaa (1994: 126) has asserted a political motivation for the sudden development of Kufic under the Fatimids. However Blair (1999: 109) suggests instead that it was instead 'a logical aesthetic development' by skilled craftsman desirous of an elegant means of filling and balancing space within inscriptions.

⁶⁹⁶ Tabbaa 1994: 121, 137–140.

⁶⁹⁷ Illustrated in Creswell 1978: Vol. 2, plate 32b. See also Flury 1936: 366.

an upright oblong or square lower section (see fig. 3.3). The form will henceforth be referred to as a ‘waisted arch’. Knauer states unequivocally that this motif represents ‘[a]n upright three-lobed tree or leaf motif on a rectangular base’,⁶⁹⁸ repeating this at several points throughout her article.⁶⁹⁹ This incorrect reading of the motif has been repeated by at least one later author.⁷⁰⁰ Such is Knauer’s adherence to this idea that she even proposes that the side and back panels of cat. no. 3.52 ‘feature an architecturally framed alveoled niche – a miniature mihrab – containing the customary upright lobed leaf, which also occurs in the diagonal niches’.⁷⁰¹

The waisted arch is visible in one form or another on the majority of the *kilgas*. The commonest sites for this particular motif are the chamfered corners of the trunk. It is less frequently met with on the side panels of the stand body and sometimes appears on the back panel. An arch that is relief-carved and therefore not load-bearing offers the artist and the architect an open field for experimentation,⁷⁰² and fantasy arches are a notable feature of the *kilgas*. Ibrahim refers to the waisted arch found on the *kilgas* as a ‘lobed Samarra arch’, stating that it first appears on the Jawsaq al-Khāqāni: she is presumably referring to stucco forms such as the niche seen in fig. 3.4.⁷⁰³ Herzfeld suggests that such motifs are descended from a ‘broken arch springing from a pair of brackets – this being a Hellenistic motif’, and that this form of arch is called *kufulī* (vowels uncertain) in Baghdad.⁷⁰⁴ For the purposes of the present study such a motif will continue to be referred to as a waisted arch. Also suggesting a Mesopotamian origin, Baer has noted the presence of a waisted arch closely comparable to those of the *kilgas* on a stone slab found by Herzfeld in Mosul.⁷⁰⁵

⁶⁹⁸ Knauer 1979: 67.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77–8, 82, 84, 89.

⁷⁰⁰ Moraitou 1999 (a): 149.

⁷⁰¹ Knauer 1979: 83–4.

⁷⁰² Hillenbrand 1982: 251.

⁷⁰³ Ibrahim 1978: 1 and n. 6.

⁷⁰⁴ Herzfeld 1942: 23.

⁷⁰⁵ Baer 1985: 9–11.

Although it may have originated in Samarran motifs and been further developed in Iraqi sites such as Imām Dūr,⁷⁰⁶ the waisted arch also went on to become particularly characteristic of Fatimid and later Egyptian architecture. It is dramatically employed, in an elaborately polylobed form, as a blind decorative motif on the flanks of the Bāb Zuwayla gate towers (1092; fig. 3.5),⁷⁰⁷ and appears, in a number of variations, on a great number of other Fatimid structures. Examples include the window in the western minaret of the mosque of al-Ḥākim (1003; fig. 3.6); the flat-topped blind arch on the lower left of the Aqmar Mosque (1125; fig. 3.2); the drum windows of the Shaykh Yūnus Mausoleum (early twelfth century)⁷⁰⁸ and those of the Sayyida Ruqayya Mashhad (1133; fig. 3.7); and a two-dimensional decorative device on the interior of the dome in the *maqṣūra* of al-Ḥāfiz, in the Azhar Mosque (1138).⁷⁰⁹

The motif continued to be used in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods, for example in the blind arcade on the drum interior of the Burj al-Zafar (1176–93; fig. 3.8); the minaret of the Ṣālīḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb funerary complex (1242–50; fig. 3.9); and the upper minarets of the Ḥākim Mosque (c.1303; fig. 3.10). Korn sees the blind waisted arch as a signifier of the continuation between Fatimid and Ayyubid architectural decoration, citing the example of the Burj al-Zafar.⁷¹⁰ Ibrahim has noted that this arch type even makes its appearance on Ottoman Egyptian architecture (fig. 3.11).⁷¹¹ The history of this particular motif, with its apparent connection to Egyptian architecture, appears to span a considerable timescale but is most clearly identified with Islamic architecture of the Fatimid to Mamluk periods.⁷¹² An interesting point to note is the apparently total absence of the motif from the *kilgas* with unequivocally Christian symbols (cat. nos 3.22 and 3.23), suggesting that it might be a self-consciously Islamic form of architectural decoration, or at least may have come to be perceived as such.

⁷⁰⁶ Herzfeld 1942: 20–4.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibrahim 1978: n. 6; Korn 2001: 106.

⁷⁰⁸ Illustrated in Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, plate 112a.

⁷⁰⁹ Illustrated in Bloom 2007: 151.

⁷¹⁰ Korn 2001: 106.

⁷¹¹ Ibrahim 1978: n. 6.

⁷¹² Korn 2001: 106 and n. 13.

The positioning of the blind waisted arches upon the *kilgas* enhances, to a certain extent, their quasi-architectural construction. When they occupy the chamfers, the resemblance between the trunk and an eight-sided architectural drum is highlighted by the arches, calling to mind the aforementioned monuments sporting drum decoration of pierced or blind waisted arches, either repeated or alternating with another motif. The waisted arches found on the chamfers are frequently set between a pair of engaged columns (see for example cat. no. 3.5), thus enhancing their proximity to certain decorative arcades in full-size architecture. One may compare these *kilgas* with the interior of the drum of mausoleum no. 24 in the Aswān cemetery (eleventh century; fig. 3.12): although the latter example comes from the inside rather than the outside of the building, the alternating rhythm of ornate arches and thick rounded columns is closely related to the usage of the motifs seen on the *kilgas*. The process by which architectural elements are reconfigured, allowing the inside of a building to be worn on the outside of the *kilga*, is of critical importance for understanding the decorative vocabulary of the *kilgas* and will be more fully explored below.

The waisted arch set within panels is also at times directly reminiscent of architectural decoration. It is hard, looking at the framed waisted arches on three sides of cat. no. 3.14, not to be reminded of certain *miḥrāb* panels or of decorative arches set into the façades of eleventh- and twelfth-century buildings. On cat. no. 3.14 the arch of the back side is set within a central panel and framed by a continuous double-bordered plain band that runs around the top and sides of the panel and continues around the object. This is strongly reminiscent of the continuous bands of decoration seen on façades such as that of the north-eastern side of the mosque of al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalāʾiʿ (1160; fig. 3.13). The setting of blind waisted arches within plain panels also recalls instances of architectural decoration such as the recessed waisted arch set within a plain arch over the Bāb al-Akhḍar (1153, fig. 3.14). Spectacular framing bands of epigraphic decoration – one of the most celebrated features of Fatimid architectural decoration, seen for example on the virtuoso carved *miḥrāb* of al-Afḍal in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn (1094; fig. 3.15) –

find a rather prosaic echo in low-relief arches in plain panels framed on three sides by bands of epigraphy, as seen on the side panels of cat. no. 3.17 and others.

The blind waisted arch is the single most common motif on the *kilga* group as a whole. It frequently appears in several forms on one stand and it is the most prominent architectural element present on the wildly figural *kilga* now in the British Museum (cat. no. 3.21). It is possible that the waisted arch, with its frequent appearance in full-size architecture of the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, forms a means of identifying the *kilgas* with the city of Cairo in the Fatimid period and later: a form of civic self-identification may be at work here.

However, the waisted arch, while dominant in Cairene architecture, is not unique to Egypt. Variations of the form also appear in the façade of the ‘Arab ‘Ata mausoleum at Tim (977),⁷¹³ the north dome chamber of the Friday mosque at Isfahan (eleventh century; fig. 3.16),⁷¹⁴ and the Baghdad Gate at Raqqa (eleventh or twelfth century?).⁷¹⁵ A later use of the motif can be seen in a fourteenth-century wooden *minbar* in the Friday Mosque at Nā’īn, in central Iran (fig. 3.17);⁷¹⁶ The context of the *minbar* is an interesting one for such an architectural motif, existing as the *minbar* itself does somewhere between architecture and furniture.⁷¹⁷ Within the overall programme of the Nā’īn *minbar*, the waisted arches appear to solidify certain architectural inferences. The upper part of the *minbar* becomes a one-man tower, the waisted arches a frieze of architectural decoration that could either be read as playfully miniaturized within the full-size decorative scheme of this very small ‘tower’, or as signifiers of the overall miniaturisation of the tower element, shrunk from an imagined monumental form (with large-scale waisted arches) to a one-man version. One would never try to argue a direct relationship between the Nā’īn *minbar* and the Cairene *kilgas*, but it is interesting to compare the appearance of the waisted arch in these two different contexts, both of which occupy an area of what might be

⁷¹³ Illustrated Blair 1992: 225.

⁷¹⁴ See Grabar 1990: 49–55.

⁷¹⁵ Illustrated in Robert Hillenbrand 1985: 34–5. Hillenbrand argues for a twelfth-century date for this structure, against Creswell’s earlier suggestion that the gate dates from 772.

⁷¹⁶ Smith 1938: 21–35.

⁷¹⁷ See chapter two.

termed slippage between architecture and furniture, the monumental and the miniature, and both of which employ the waisted arch to concretise a decorative conception of the object itself as miniature architecture.

Other Blind Arches

Such is the dominance of the waisted arch motif within the *kilga* group that there are few examples of other types of blind arch decorating these objects. In the most straightforward example, now empty-niched arches that once contained figures,⁷¹⁸ composed of semicircular apices sprung from engaged columns with vase-shaped capitals and bases, decorate the sides of cat. no. 3.32. This arch is of a fairly basic and common form, such as can be seen in the architecture of the Aghlabids (for example, in the arcaded prayer hall of the ninth-century Great Mosque at Kairouan, with spolia columns) through to a more elongated version seen in some of the *mihrābs* of the Mamluks (to take just one example, the mausoleum of Qalā'ūn, 1284–5: see fig. 3.18).⁷¹⁹ The appearance of a very similar arch in the central aisle of the Fatimid mosque of al-Ḥākim (fig. 3.19) further emphasises the futility of trying to use this kind of very common architectural form as a precise date marker.

A different form of blind arch decoration, possibly depicting a broken-headed arch similar in form to the true arches found between the legs of many of the *kilgas* (see below), is visible on the side panels of cat. no. 3.51, but the available image is not clear enough to make the design truly legible. Knauer has drawn a parallel between this design, in particular the circle floating in the head of the arch, and the stucco decoration on the pillar next to the *dikka* in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn (fig. 3.20), speculatively dated by Behrens-Abouseif to the Tulunid or Ikhshidid periods.⁷²⁰

The most elaborate non-waisted blind arch of the whole group is that seen on the side panels of cat. no. 3.33, now in the Gayer Anderson Museum, Cairo. The blind arch is set within a miniature architectural programme that occupies the entire side panel. The edges of the panel that meet the corner chamfers are decorated with two levels of

⁷¹⁸ Knauer 1979: 82.

⁷¹⁹ Behrens-Abouseif (2007: 139) notes that this is the largest and most lavish Mamluk *mihrāb*.

⁷²⁰ Knauer 1979: 77, n. 32; Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 54; see also Creswell 1979: vol. 2, 349.

engaged colonette, stacked one on top of the other. On each side the lower of these sits on top of a partially projecting baseline, which continues towards the centre of the panel to provide support for the shorter engaged columns, with fairly crudely carved capitals and bases, that constitute the sides of the arch. From these short columns springs an arch delineated by a repeated pattern of little relief-carved circles, while this pattern simultaneously frames the three outer sides of the rectangular upper section of the panel. At the centre of the upper edge, where the framing lines of circles meet, is what appears to be a feline head. The field of the arch itself is recessed, the apex being carved in imitation of an architectural shell-capped form, and the rectangular section between the engaged columns carved with a symmetrical design of arabesque vine-scrolls. Note that this piece appears to have sustained wilful damage to the chamfers at both front and back, most likely because human figures that once occupied those positions have since been removed.

Knauer has already pointed out the resemblance between certain of the *kilgas* (although not, in fact, this one) and elements of the very famous Aqmar Mosque façade.⁷²¹ Although her analysis was restricted to a comparison between the framed panels of *muqarnas* on that monument and similar designs on the *kilgas* (of which more below), the Aqmar Mosque façade also provides an obviously comparable motif for the shell-topped arch of cat. no. 3.33 (fig. 3.21). The shell-topped, recessed niche and engaged columns capped at both ends with simple rounded capitals and bases relate directly to the central design of the side panel of cat. no. 3.33 side panel.⁷²² This particular motif on the Aqmar Mosque has been cited to as a direct reference to the Tulunid architectural heritage of the city,⁷²³ one referent for this being the pointed-arched windows flanked with colonettes that pierce the upper wall of the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque.⁷²⁴ In fact, we may also trace the miniature shell-topped arch to a pre-Cairene Fatimid source: the shell-capped fluting lining the *mihrāb* of the Great Mosque at Mahdīyya (916; fig. 3.22). As Mahfoudh notes, the decoration of the Mahdīyya *mihrāb* was not a new form, but it was undoubtedly of importance

⁷²¹ Knauer 1979: 83.

⁷²² Creswell (1978: Vol. 1, 243) identifies the engaged columns of these niches as having ‘Persian lotus-like capitals and pedestals’.

⁷²³ Mazot 2004: 152.

⁷²⁴ Illustrated in Creswell 1979: vol. 2, plate 100.

for the subsequent development of Fatimid architecture.⁷²⁵ Following the Fatimid period, such motifs are also echoed in the miniature niches lining Mamluk *mihrābs* such as that of the mausoleum of Qalā'ūn (fig. 3.18).⁷²⁶

An additional comparison that should be noted is the striking resemblance between the vine-scroll filled, shell-topped arch carved on the side of cat. no. 3.33, and a very similar design on one of the soffits of the Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem (fig. 3.23). Both clearly draw from a common source in Classical motifs, and the Aqṣā soffits were compared by Marçais to Byzantine ivories as well as motifs in Coptic art.⁷²⁷

To return to the Aqmar Mosque façade, there is in fact another element we should refer to when seeking to understand the decoration of cat. no. 3.33. This is the small, carved motif of an arched niche with a hanging lamp in the apex, and a pierced, star-shaped grille occupying the central panel of the niche (fig. 3.24). Although Williams has stated that this panel invokes the Light Sura (Qur'an 24:35) and a Shi'ī tradition,⁷²⁸ Behrens-Abouseif sees this motif as representative of the *shubbāk*, or grille (sometimes surmounted by a dome) behind which the caliph sat on ceremonial occasions: in such a context, she regards the hanging lamp as a symbol of the caliph himself.⁷²⁹ She then takes the argument further, suggesting that the carved rectangular panels located to the right of the carved niche (fig. 3.25), which have been regarded as representations of a door by several authors,⁷³⁰ could be interpreted as a symbol of the role of office of the Fatimid viziers, citing a Fatimid office called *ṣāḥib al-bāb* ('master of the door').⁷³¹

However interesting this symbolism may be, though, it is patently not appropriate to transfer complex symbolic meanings from the high-status, high-impact and visually eloquent façade of a major mosque to the rather more quotidian site for decoration

⁷²⁵ As precursors of the Fatimid decorative niche, Mahfoudh (1999: 133–4) suggests the blind brick arches of the Aghlabid cupola of the Great Mosque of Kairouan.

⁷²⁶ Further discussion of dwarf arcades in general will be presented in chapter four.

⁷²⁷ Marçais 1979: 127–8.

⁷²⁸ Williams 1983: 45–6.

⁷²⁹ Behrens-Abouseif 1992: 34.

⁷³⁰ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 243; Williams 1983: 47; Behrens-Abouseif 1992: 32–5.

⁷³¹ Behrens-Abouseif 1992: 35.

presented by the *kilgas*. The Aqmar façade offers an interesting set of comparisons for the *kilga* group as a whole, and cat. no. 3.33 in particular, principally because it demonstrates a decorative vocabulary in which, regardless of precise symbolic meanings, miniaturised representations of architectural elements could be employed as discrete motifs, depicted in partial dislocation from the surrounding programme, while at the same time contributing both visually and symbolically to the overall programme. The arch on the side of cat. no. 3.33 can be fruitfully compared with the miniature blind arches and the pierced niche of the Aqmar mosque on purely formal terms, but in a more general sense we can compare the somewhat stop-start decoration of the *kilgas* with the Aqmar Mosque façade's miniaturised elements, and with the composition of its overall decorative scheme from elements that are largely discrete, but happily coexistent with each other.

Finally, there is also an element from the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque that could be brought into play here (fig. 3.26). Of the five flat stucco *mihrābs* situated on the piers of this late ninth-century mosque, this is one of the two thought by Creswell (after Flury) to date from the period of the mosque's construction.⁷³² As Williams has noted, the central panel appears to date from a later period, quite possibly the early Fatimid; she bases this attribution on the resemblance between the outline of the central flat-topped waisted arch motif and that of the Aqmar mosque façade (fig. 3.2) which is in turn very closely related to the waisted arches of the *kilgas*.⁷³³ Returning to cat. no. 3.33, it is the surrounding frame of the Ibn Ṭūlūn *mihrāb*, made up of small circles with central indentations, that is remarkably close to the framing device employed around the arch and upper outside edges of the side panel of this *kilga*. This device appears to be descended from Samarran stucco-work (see fig. 3.4). The motif does not appear on any other *kilgas* that I have encountered, and it is possible that cat. no. 3.33 has been designed with an older model of architectural decoration in mind than many of the other *kilgas*.

⁷³² Creswell 1979: Vol. 2, 349.

⁷³³ Williams 1983: 46.

Engaged Columns and Pilasters

Already briefly touched upon in the discussion of blind waisted arches, a notable architectural feature of the *kilgas* is the use of engaged columns or pilasters. They are most frequently found flanking the chamfers of the trunk, whether they surround figural or animal designs (for example cat. no. 3.14 or 3.20), blind waisted arches, or some other element, such as the curvilinear motif on cat. no 3.3. These are overwhelmingly of a simple type, with plain, rounded columns, and capitals and bases that vary from the carefully carved vase-shaped type on cat. no. 3.3, to the less carefully carved examples on which capitals and bases appear as rounded drumstick ends (cat. nos. 3.14 and 3.15). Most lie somewhere in between, with some attempt at carving a sort of belted hourglass shape on each capital and base.

An elaboration is seen on cat. no. 3.28, which places unusual emphasis on engaged columns within a larger, elaborately figurative decorative scheme. This piece presents a double set of engaged colonettes flanking each chamfer, one plain and one barley-sugar column on each side of the guards occupying the chamfers. The bases and capitals, once again matching in size and shape, have been carved with some attempt to create a stepped or collared shape.

There are many instances of engaged colonettes or pilasters in full-size Cairene architecture, and it will be sufficient to mention only one instance. The Aqmar mosque façade furnishes a pertinent comparison: the engaged colonettes flanking the shell-topped niches in the spandrels of the main portal (fig. 3.21) are formed from columns decorated in the upper half with barley-sugar twisting, and topped and tailed with evenly sized vase-shaped columns.

Furthermore, there are also several *kilgas* on which the principal decoration of the side panels is a central engaged column or pair of columns. An apparently unique piece (cat. no. 3.34) displays two thick columns on each side panel from which a heavy arch is sprung, with further engaged columns decorating the back chamfers. Other *kilgas* that incorporate engaged columns as a major decorative element of the side panels (cat. nos 3.35–3.39) do so without the architectural justification of an

arch, and these central columns tend to look rather incongruous as decorative elements.⁷³⁴ Cat. nos 3.37 and 3.38 are the simplest versions of this type, with thick central columns on the side panels running from top to bottom of each panel. The capitals of these examples are not well-defined, while the bases do not seem to exist.⁷³⁵

In contrast with the thick-columned pieces, the smaller columns of cat. nos 3.35, 3.36 and 3.39 are executed in lower relief, framed within the side panel by an inscription band or a plain band, and completed by vase-shaped capitals and bases. The effect is at once more elegant, and more integrated, than the large projecting columns of the examples discussed above. An obvious parallel for the slimmer form of central column, if one considers only form and not placement, is the pair of stone pillars supporting the arch leading to the *mihrāb* in the Ḥākim mosque (fig. 3.19). These have long, smooth columns and almost equally-sized, matching vase-shaped capitals and bases, very similar in overall effect to the shapes of the engaged columns on cat. nos 3.35 and 3.39. It should be noted that a similar form of column is found flanking the marble *mihrāb* of the Azhar mosque in Cairo, thought by Creswell to date to the restoration of the mosque in 1325: we can assume a relatively long lifespan for this type.⁷³⁶

It is, however, hard to read any of these ‘central column’ designs architecturally in any way other than as an engaged column or pair of columns placed in the middle of a blank wall as an independent and central decorative motif, a motif for which I have been able to find only one convincing parallel from full-size architecture. The two applied pilasters that previously formed part of the decoration of the eastern vestibule of the Great Mosque of Damascus present a partially comparable appearance, inasmuch as they are each set, in isolation from each other, within a scheme dominated by panels of cut marble, and appear almost as if they are floating on a

⁷³⁴ Knauer (1979: 74–6) cites further examples of this type seen by her in the house of Shaikh al-Sihaimi in Cairo, in the first room of the Coptic Museum, and on the stairs of the modern Greek Orthodox church of St. George in old Cairo.

⁷³⁵ One would like to know how cat. no. 3.37 came to be in a museum in Tuscany, a question which Knauer gamely pursued, sadly to no avail (*ibid.*, 74–5, n. 22).

⁷³⁶ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 55.

watery backdrop provided by the veining of the marble.⁷³⁷ However, while the ‘central column’ designs of some *kilgas* may, like the pilasters of the Great Mosque of Damascus, relate directly to Classical forms of marble decoration, it should also be remembered that while some of the *kilgas* boast architectural motifs combined in such a way that logical comparisons with full-size architecture can be made for sustained passages of the decorative scheme, many combine architectural motifs with other sorts of decoration and play with architectural forms rather than making any attempt at sustained mimetic representation of full-size architecture.

In addition to comparisons with full-size architecture, it is important to consider a very small object from the Fatimid period that also seems to depict engaged columns. The so-called *Grotta della Vergine* (fig. 3.27) in the San Marco Treasury is, according to Shalem, actually an architectural representation in rock crystal, set upside down, and decorated with representations of columns with Ionic capitals.⁷³⁸ Alcouffe regards this piece as representative of Classical rather than Islamic manufacture.⁷³⁹ As a comparison for the architectural edifice he introduces a carved rock crystal salt-cellar from late-antique Carthage with six arches whose columns are carved in the round (fig. 3.28).⁷⁴⁰

If we accept the *Grotta della Vergine* as a piece of Fatimid rock-crystal carving, and Shalem argues persuasively that we should,⁷⁴¹ then this is an important comparison for the *kilgas*. In this case, it is interesting that while the extremely luxurious rock crystal object, which Shalem tentatively suggests could be understood as a reliquary,⁷⁴² makes use of engaged columns or pilasters with flat bases and what do

⁷³⁷ Illustrated in Creswell 1979: Vol. 1 part 1, plate 47. On the comparison of cut marble with water see Milwright 2005 (a): 213–5, and Barry 2007: 630–1.

⁷³⁸ Shalem 1996: 135, 149, 223–4; *idem* 1996 (a): 58. Rogers (1998: 135) does not accept Shalem’s reading of this object as a representation of architecture, but his suggestion that it is the prow of a Gothic *nef* (a ship-shaped table ornament) seems less convincing than Shalem’s interpretation. Note that Alcouffe has no trouble accepting this piece as architectural, although he ascribes it to the Classical rather than Islamic world (Alcouffe 1984: 117).

⁷³⁹ He suggests that it may originally have been the upper part of a sceptre, although there are no comparable surviving examples (Alcouffe 1984: 117–20).

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 117 and fig. 8a.

⁷⁴¹ Shalem 1996: 60.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 63–4, n. 33. On the use of domed, possibly funerary architectural forms for Islamic reliquaries, see also Graves forthcoming.

indeed appear to be Ionic capitals (represented in a fairly truncated way by circular scroll forms projecting from each side of each column top), the *kilgas*, a more commonplace object, appear to have rejected all such Classicising and have plumped squarely for architectural motifs, including column forms, that reference their own contemporary architectural surroundings in Islamic Cairo. It is difficult to make serious conjectures, as the Grotta della Vergine is by no means securely attributed to Fatimid production, but perhaps what we are witnessing is a greater degree of integration between the *kilgas* and the urban fabric they inhabit than could necessarily take place with smaller, more precious and less durable objects of the highest level of craftsmanship.

Legs and True Arches

One element of the *kilgas* that remains hard to explain is the appearance of the legs. With very few exceptions, the body of the *kilga* is mounted on four thick stumpy legs, with the back legs normally standing fairly straight while the front legs typically take a pronounced step forward, projecting some way under the trough. It is not absolutely clear why the *kilgas* should all be elevated in this way, but this must be in part for reasons of cleanliness. Water kept at floor level would obviously be less hygienic than water kept raised from the floor, and the symbolic associations between elevation and cleanliness may have been as significant in this as any practical requirements.⁷⁴³ The very frequent use of fluting on the legs – quite possibly a petrified image of cascading water – led some early authors to believe that the *kilgas* were intended to look like tortoises, a mistake which has already been corrected by Knauer.⁷⁴⁴

While the legs themselves are worthy of comment, it is the arch formed between the legs that is of real interest to the present study. As with the Syrian tabourets of chapter two, the area between the legs has almost invariably been elaborated into an open arch. In spite of the high frequency of the blind waisted arch within the group,

⁷⁴³ See the discussion of architectural elevation, cleanliness and sanctity in Graves forthcoming.

⁷⁴⁴ The misreading of the *kilgas* as tortoises by Max Herz Bey and subsequent authors was based in part on the appearance of the legs but mainly on a misreading of the worn projecting knobs found on the front of many of the *kilgas* as tortoise heads, while close examination reveals that they are in fact lion heads (Knauer 1979: 70 n. 7): see the relevant section on lion heads below.

there is only one *kilga* so far identified on which the waisted arch has been used to articulate the space between the legs: cat. no. 3.29, a complex figural piece in the Coptic Museum. This piece is generally very elaborately decorated.⁷⁴⁵ All other examples use some version of the broken-headed arch in this particular location.

Two examples sport two broken-headed arches side by side on the side panels between the legs, supported by a solid base strut and thus forming a fully enclosed pierced arch (cat. nos 3.10 and 3.20): a single enclosed pierced arch is met with on only one other example, cat. no. 3.51. Almost all other examples use an open arch form, or some approximation of it, between the legs with the sides of the arch running down to join the bases of the feet (fig. 3.29). One wholly exceptional piece in the Gayer Anderson Museum (cat. no. 3.69) appears to have been constructed without the usual arrangement of four splayed legs, and thus has no real arch between its supports, but this piece this is the only one I have encountered to do so.

The forms of the broken-headed arches found between the legs vary somewhat from one example to the next, in part due to variations in quality of carving. Taken overall, some examples of the broken-headed arch found on the group are quite rounded (for example cat. no. 3.24) while many more take a form close to a broad, shouldered arch (see cat. no. 3.2). The motif that breaks the top of the arch, meanwhile, takes a variety of forms, running from the merest vague projection breaking the line (cat. no. 3.37) to a sharp ogee point (cat. no. 3.56). The commonest design by far, though, is some variation on the theme of a short, three-pointed upright projection with ogee lines rising from the two outer corners to a slightly higher point in the middle, at times shaped like a miniature keel arch. This motif may appear with or without the elaboration of additional shoulders (as on cat. no. 3.19), and on more carefully carved examples the whole arch is very often enhanced by the addition of an incised line a few millimetres beyond the edges of the arch itself, tidying up the line of the arch and enhancing its decorative form. The three-pointed projection of the true arch is in many instances closely comparable to the uppermost part of the blind waisted

⁷⁴⁵ Both Ibrahim (1978: 2, plates I and IV) and Knauer (1979: 89, fig. 38) give particular prominence to this piece within their illustrations.

arches found on the chamfers and side panels (for example, compare these on cat. no. 3.5).

The broken-headed arch is a surprising choice for the *kilgas* since, as O’Kane has pointed out, it is more commonly met with on the full-size architecture of Persia than that of Fatimid and Ayyubid Egypt.⁷⁴⁶ Some comparable forms can be seen in Syrian Ayyubid architecture. Compare the forms of the twin arches breaking into the apex of blind arch above the portal on the façade of the ‘Ādiliyya Madrasa, Damascus (1123; fig. 3.30), with those rounded broken-headed arches seen on *kilgas* such as cat. no. 3.15, as well as the obvious comparison that could be made between twin arches and the two *kilgas* that sport two arches side by side between the legs. However, a much closer match exists in the shape of the window surrounds of the Ayyubid entrance block of the Aleppo Citadel (fig. 3.31), which display a pointed, scalloped crown breaking from curved shoulders sprung from straight sides, the whole composition being mounted on a shouldered arch. Herzfeld regards this form of broken-headed arch as largely interchangeable with the waisted arch, noting that a further example of the broken-headed arch, very closely comparable to that of the Aleppo Citadel, appears on fireplaces in the Syrian Ayyubid *madrasa* Khān Nabk.⁷⁴⁷ The close association of this form of arch with the architecture of Ayyubid Syria might suggest an Ayyubid rather than a Fatimid date for some of the *kilgas*, although the close relationship between the broken-headed arch and the waisted arch observed by Herzfeld means that treating the two arch forms as completely separate is problematic.

From further afield, a reasonably close parallel exists in the stucco frontage applied to a load-bearing arch in the Friday Mosque at Bastām in Iran (1302; fig. 3.32).⁷⁴⁸ Similar forms of arch can be seen in the well-known double frontispiece of the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, painted in Baghdad in 1287.⁷⁴⁹ A further comparison can be made with a large, thirteenth-century architectural carving from Diyarbakır and now

⁷⁴⁶ O’Kane 2006: 119.

⁷⁴⁷ Herzfeld 1942: 49–50.

⁷⁴⁸ Seherr-Thoss 1968: 112.

⁷⁴⁹ See Hillenbrand 2006: 200.

in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul (fig. 3.33). Thought by the curators to have been taken from a fountain or a charitable building,⁷⁵⁰ this piece displays a pair of broken headed arches with spiky, three-pointed projections amongst a complex programme of figural and epigraphic decoration. The scale of these arches is perhaps twenty-five to thirty centimetres from base to apex of arch, not including the projection, therefore they cannot possibly have been made for humans to pass through, unless they were at head height and the space below was left open enough to admit a human body. Presumably they had some decorative function, perhaps as the surround for a pair of windows, or perhaps, following on from the suggestion that they may have come from a fountain, water passed through them.

The archway carved into the *kilga* trunk, allowing the passage of water into the projecting trough, is in virtually every case also rendered as a broken-headed arch.⁷⁵¹ In the great majority of cases, the broken-headed arch lying between trunk and trough is closely related to the form of the broken-headed arch employed between the legs of the same example. Thus almost all adopt some kind of three-pointed projection at the apex of the connecting arch, while some (for example cat. no. 3.13) are less carefully articulated and display only a vaguely pointed projection. Only the most poorly decorated make no attempt at broken-headed decoration on the connecting arch (see cat. 3.61). If the Seljuq plaque with the pointed arches was indeed taken from a fountain, this could mark a connection between this type of arch and water devices that either travelled from Egypt to Anatolia, or was perhaps in currency across part of the Islamic world in the medieval period. Several early Ottoman *sabils* in Jerusalem incorporate a niche carved in the form of a shouldered arch, surrounding the area of the water outlet, which adds another dimension to the association between broken-headed arches and flowing water.⁷⁵² It is the association with water and water architecture that becomes one of the most important aspects of the architectural elements of the *kilgas*, as will be demonstrated below.

⁷⁵⁰ Ölçer 2002: 103.

⁷⁵¹ It would appear that the connecting arch on cat. no. 3.3 was originally something very elaborate, possibly with three or more projecting volutes, but the damage sustained by this piece makes it hard to reconstruct.

⁷⁵² Rosen-Ayalon (1989: 592–603) notes that this form of arch is typically Turkish; on its early appearance in Turkey see Creswell 1998: 2–8.

Geometric Interlace Motifs

One further major form of decoration, seen on the side panels of cat. nos 3.41–3.50 and the back panel of cat. nos 3.6 and 3.15, is the interlace motif. It should be noted that interlace motifs are found in many media, including the various minor arts and perhaps most importantly manuscript illumination – particularly Qur’anic illumination – as well as architectural decoration. Interlace motifs are generally (although not exclusively) cast in the role of decorative space filler and ordering bands throughout these various media.⁷⁵³ As the source of such designs need not be directly connected to architecture and may well stem from motifs originally created with the pen, a specifically architectural meaning is not at first glance obvious or necessary. Knauer compares these motifs on the *kilgas* to the interlace panels playing a supporting role in the façade of the Ince Minare Madrasa in Konya, as well as certain secondary motifs from the Hākim Mosque (fig. 3.34), but one is left with the feeling that such parallels are born out of the use of a common stock of minor motifs that extends across many media, rather than a specifically architectural field of reference.⁷⁵⁴

However, the motif *was* familiar in architecture, where it had in some instances undergone certain refinements, and evidence of this can be seen in the central motif of the Ibn Ṭūlūn *miḥrāb* panel (fig. 3.26) – a symmetrical, geometric interlaced motif combined with a foliate design ending in a trefoil at the top of the arch field. This very closely resembles the simple geometric interlace designs, ending in foliate forms, seen on certain of the *kilgas*. The example framed on the Ibn Ṭūlūn *miḥrāb* is naturally more complex, as befits its more elevated status, but the flattened angular form of the interlace ‘ribbon’, the simple crossover knot, and the prominent foliate endings are all shared with the form as it appears on the *kilgas*. Further, the placement of the design as the central motif in a major field, rather than as a minor motif within a larger programme, aligns the form of interlace found on the *kilgas* sufficiently closely with the Ibn Ṭūlūn *miḥrāb* to make the comparison worthwhile.

⁷⁵³ An obvious exception to this would be the use of carpet pages within both Bible and Qur’an manuscripts, where interlace motifs may become the primary element of the composition.

⁷⁵⁴ Knauer 1979: 79.

This relish for the interlace motif, and the willingness to allow it centre stage, is an interesting aspect of both the Ibn Ṭūlūn *mihrāb* and the *kilgas*, and may in both cases be descended from the decoration of another medium entirely, quite possibly Qur'anic illumination, but has been adapted to the architectural context.⁷⁵⁵

Water Architecture

Knauer has rightly pointed out that the section of the *kilgas* marking the transition from supporting trunk to projecting trough – that is, the archway through which water descends into the trough following filtration – in some instances directly imitates elements from full-size water architecture.⁷⁵⁶ Specifically, these elements are the *salsabīl* and the *shādirwān*. Although Knauer takes the *shādirwān* to be a 'monumental type' of *salsabīl*,⁷⁵⁷ the *salsabīl* is in fact the overall name for a water feature made up of several components, while *shādirwān* refers to one of the elements of the *salsabīl*.⁷⁵⁸ Very briefly, a typical *salsabīl* is composed of a water source (tap or spout) starting some distance up a wall, most commonly the back wall of an *īwān*. Water flows from this point down a carved, inclined stone slab, which is the *shādirwān*, and then continues along a narrow channel until it reaches a pool, normally in the middle of the courtyard. There may additionally be a small intermediary pool between the *shādirwān* and the final pool.⁷⁵⁹ The most celebrated medieval example of this arrangement that is still standing is that of the Ziza Palace in Palermo (fig. 3.35), built for the Norman king William II (1166–85).

It is, at this stage, almost unnecessary to comment on the much-vaunted association in the Islamic world between earthly waters and those of paradise.⁷⁶⁰ As Tabbaa has highlighted, the lazy and uncritical application of a paradisaal meaning to all elements of Islamic garden, courtyard and water architecture design has at times led to sloppy analysis of those aspects of urban design.⁷⁶¹ However, the very name *salsabīl*

⁷⁵⁵ A broad comparison can be made with the frontispiece of an Umayyad Qur'an illustrated in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 75.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 76–7.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁵⁸ Tabbaa 1985: 34; Mostafa 1989: 37 and 40.

⁷⁵⁹ Tabbaa 1987: 198.

⁷⁶⁰ See Schimmel 1985: 6–9 for the relevant Qur'anic and poetic citations.

⁷⁶¹ Tabbaa 1985: 34; *idem* 1987: 197; see also Rabbat 1985: 71–2.

appears to be a direct reference to a specific Qur'anic description of a fountain that will be met with in paradise.⁷⁶² This allows us legitimately to infer some paradisaical connotations from the *salsabīl*, although it seems unnecessary to rely too heavily on heavenly associations when the earthly arrangement of the *salsabīl* must have been very pleasant all by itself. The flow of the water, the trickling sound it made and the cooling effect of evaporation as a thin film of water flowed over the broad textured surface of the *shādirwān* must have combined to make it a delight to sight, sound and sensation.⁷⁶³

Shādirwān within Salsabīl

The *shādirwān* as an architectural unit is extremely interesting, and there are, fortunately, some medieval examples that can be usefully compared to the miniaturised *shādirwān* sections of the *kilgas*. At the eleventh-century site of the Qal'at Banī Ḥammād in Algeria, several slabs of marble carved with slightly raised, overlapping zigzags (fig. 3.36) or ornate chevrons (fig. 3.37) were recovered by Golvin and his team.⁷⁶⁴ One of these was almost two metres long and almost half a metre wide, with decoration comprising a repeating pattern of overlapping relief-carved tri-lobed chevrons, cascading from one end of the central trough to another and punctuated by a five-petalled flower design. At one end of the slab were carved three raised fishes, their heads angled towards the starting point of the three lines of repeating chevrons (fig. 3.38). The purpose of the zigzags or chevrons was to break up the water as it ran down the *shādirwān*, thus maximising evaporation and its cooling effect, although it is also interesting to note that the representation of water through repeated lines of zigzags also appears to have been a standard pictorial convention in medieval Egypt.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶² Marçais 1962: 639; Qur'an 76: 17–18.

⁷⁶³ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 124.

⁷⁶⁴ Golvin 1965: 122–3 and plates XLIII and XLIV. Tabbaa (1987: 201–2) has observed that the patrons of Qal'at Banī Ḥammād probably strove to imitate the palatial architecture of Baghdad and Samarra.

⁷⁶⁵ See for example the zigzagged surface of the water in the carved cedar panel representing the Baptism of Christ, from the door panels of the Church of the Virgin, al-Mu'allāqa, Old Cairo, c. 1300 (illustrated in Cormack and Vassilaki 2008: 352). This pictorial convention may also be related to the use of zigzags on the central column of the 'Arabic' fountain at Monreale (Tabbaa 1987: 205–6).

Other remains of *shādirwāns* and *salsabīls* have been partially preserved in various locations. The Ghaznavid royal suburb at Lashgarī Bāzār in Afghanistan contains, in the fortified southern palace, a water channel running through the length of the palace and punctuated by three basins.⁷⁶⁶ Closer to the home of the *kilgas*, Creswell reported on the excavation of complete *salsabīls* in two of the houses of medieval Fustāt (fig. 3.39).⁷⁶⁷ At least two of these displayed more or less all of the elements of the *salsabīl* proper: spout, *shādirwān* (or space for one), short canal, first pool, longer canal, second pool. It is easy to forget, without seeing them in operation, that the components of the *salsabīl* must have worked to create quite different effects with water at different points in the sequence. The alternation of movement and stillness, the creation of a thin veil of liquid over the *shādirwān*, and the illusion of solidity borne by water pushed along a narrow channel must have combined to create a quite dazzling effect, yet surely one that was also conducive to contemplation and meditation.⁷⁶⁸

Creswell also mentions an Ayyubid example of the *salsabīl* with a *muqarnas* hood, in the *madrassa* of Nūr-al Dīn in Damascus (1172), as the oldest surviving datable example after that at the Ziza Palace, but unfortunately this has since been destroyed.⁷⁶⁹ The twelfth-century description of Ibn Jubayr suggests that the arrangement of the Ayyubid example tallies with those already discussed:

One of the finest-looking colleges in the world is that of Nur al-Din – may God’s mercy rest upon his soul – and in it is his tomb – may God illumine it. It is a sumptuous palace. Water pours into it through an aqueduct [*shādirwān*] in the middle of a great canal, filling an oblong fountain and finally falling into a large cistern in the centre of the building. The eyes are enchanted by the beauty of the sight, and all who see it renew their supplications for Nur al-Din – may God’s mercy rest upon his soul.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁶ Schlumberger 1952: 260–1.

⁷⁶⁷ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 121–7. As far as dating goes, Creswell has intimated that they may be no earlier than the late eleventh century.

⁷⁶⁸ Tabbāa 1987: 198; 215–6. See also the description of watercourses in the palace of Ṭughānshāh by the Seljuq poet Azraqī: ‘Turquoise, like drawn-out wire, it descends/ from the corner of the golden water-pipe to the reservoir. You’d say that skins of refined gold were being cast off/ by silver-bodied serpents with turquoise bones’ (Meisami 2001: 32).

⁷⁶⁹ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 124; Tabbāa 1985: 34.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibn Jubayr 1952: 296–7; my interpolation of *shādirwān* from the Arabic text given in Herzfeld 1942: 40, n. 2.

The niche from which the water coursed was apparently crowned with what Herzfeld refers to as ‘archaic’ *muqarnas*.⁷⁷¹ Although Ibn Jubayr tends to use rather hyperbolic prose, we should not discredit his description of the effect of the *salsabīl* at Nur al-Din’s *madrassa*-mausoleum.⁷⁷² The impression of the cascading water must have been impressive, because it is almost the only thing Ibn Jubayr mentions when describing this building.

A highly decorated *shādirwān* thought to date from the early Mamluk period is now held in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (fig. 3.40). This piece has a border design of lions chasing gazelles, while the central panel bears a design that, although very much elaborated, is basically composed of repeating zigzags.⁷⁷³ There are in Cairo complete examples of Mamluk *salsabīls* that incorporate *shādirwāns*, for example a *sabil* associated with the Amīr Qijmās al-Ishāqī Mosque (1479–81).⁷⁷⁴ Marçais and more recently Tabbaa have assembled a number of examples of the *salsabīl* arrangement, noting that that by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it had apparently become a common feature in the courtyards of medieval palaces and rich houses.⁷⁷⁵ The development of the *sabil* as an independent or semi-independent architectural unit, very often connected to a Qur’an school, appears to have taken place under the Mamluks and Ottomans in particular, with a number of Cairene *sabils* surviving.⁷⁷⁶

The most important aspect of the *shādirwān* and *salsabīl* arrangements, for our purposes, is how closely the full-size architectural *shādirwāns* have been copied on some of the better-carved *kilgas*. Cat. nos 3.1, 3.2, 3.18, 3.20, 3.21, 3.26, 3.28 and 3.30 each display a clearly defined, downwardly sloping area of transition between the trunk and trough of the *kilga*, in each case carefully carved to imitate precisely the surface texture of a full-size *shādirwān*. The clearest comparison can be made with the *salsabīl* at the Ziza Palace (fig. 3.35). The miniature *shādirwāns* are

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁷² Netton characterizes this grandiloquent prose style, with its emphasis on the ‘necessary awe’ of the writer, as ‘tourist *adab*’: see Netton 1995: 145–52.

⁷⁷³ Wiet 1930: 10. Tabbaa (1987: 211) reports that there are many more of these in the same museum.

⁷⁷⁴ A photograph of this *shādirwān* exists in the Creswell archives, neg. EA.CA.3706, available online at www.archnet.org.

⁷⁷⁵ Marçais 1962: 641–45; Tabbaa 1985: 34–5.

⁷⁷⁶ Mostafa 1989: 35; Ahunbay 1999: 47–52.

frequently articulated with side panels carved with short parallel lines, sometimes slightly raised, to imitate the stepped side sections of a full-size *shādirwān*. The central part of the panel, meanwhile, is decorated with a pattern of repeating zigzags, sometimes very worn and faded (e.g. cat. no. 3.21).

The trickling water collecting below the porous jar naturally required a frontal trough in which to gather, thus giving rise to the basic outline of the *kilgas*, and it must have been equally obvious to any craftsman ready to think about it that the trough should be lower than the trunk for maximum efficacy: these are very simple questions of engineering. From this point, it is not hard to imagine how the trickling of the water down a sloped marble surface brought the architectural *shādirwān* to mind. Note that there is no way the miniature *shādirwān* area of the *kilgas* could have functioned like a full-size *shādirwān*. The slow trickle of water seeping through a clay jar would never have taken place at a sufficient speed and volume to imitate the rippling veil of water, and the splash and gurgle, that a full-size *salsabīl* functioning at full tilt would have produced.⁷⁷⁷ Thus the miniature *shādirwān* of the *kilgas* could not have been intended to perform as a little brother of the full-size *shādirwān* in any absolute sense; rather it must have been intended as an iconographic unit that, while certainly both whimsical and contextually prompted, was neither solely ornamental nor purely practical.

Knauer notes the importance of the *shādirwān* component of the *kilgas* early in her article, and she explores this aspect carefully within the historical context, mentioning pool forms and lion-headed spouts (see next sections).⁷⁷⁸ But she does not go far enough. The miniature *shādirwān* sections are possibly unique within the surviving artefacts of the medieval Islamic world, in that they are effectively bits of tiny, semi-functional architecture. This, the utterly explicit imitation of a very particular full-sized architectural model, with form, surface appearance and most importantly *function* all approximated in miniature, signposts the clearest path to understanding the decorative iconography of the *kilgas*. We should regard the *kilgas*,

⁷⁷⁷ See Tabbaa 1987: 198. I do not think Knauer gives this point sufficient consideration.

⁷⁷⁸ Knauer 1979: 70, 76–7.

or at any rate the most elaborate and carefully executed examples, not as rag-bags of architectural and other motifs, played out as the craftsman fancied across the surface of the object, but as collections of iconographic units that play on the theme of architecture, specifically water architecture. The miniature *shādirwān* sections make this explicit. As regards the other components of the group iconography, there is much that may be viewed as whimsy, and many examples that are not of sufficient quality to enter into a sustained dialogue with full-size architecture, but this reading will aid us in understanding the group as a whole.

Pools

The troughs of the *kilgas* take the form of a recessed pool cavity with a curving bottom and a tongue-shaped top outline formed of straight sides and a semi-circular or chamfered front end. This cavity is recessed within a basically cuboidal piece of marble, thus effectively creating two spandrels at the front of the trough when seen in bird's eye view. The spandrels tend to be partially recessed and may be decorated with engraved arch forms. An additional feature of well over half of the examples with surviving troughs is the single bulging half-cylinder that projects from each side, normally situated about halfway along the trough and in keeping with the band of inscribed, plain or striped decoration that runs around the edges of the troughs.

As with the discussion of the *salsabīl* and *shādirwān*, Knauer's analysis of the trough forms of the *kilgas* and their relationship with architectural pools is entirely to the point, but does not really go beyond formal comparisons. She compares the troughs of the *kilgas* with the basins found in the Qal'at Banī Ḥammād (fig. 3.41); note the scalloped edges and pendant decoration in the corners, both comparable to the recessed decoration seen on the corners of the *kilga* troughs.⁷⁷⁹ The scalloped corners of the *kilga* pools can be most directly compared with the large pool at the *madrasa* of Nūr al-Dīn in Damascus as represented in Herzfeld's plan (fig. 3.42).

Comparisons could also be made with the pools included in the *salsabīls* of medieval Fustāṭ. These take the form of a square body with an octagonal pool recessed within

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 77, n. 30; Bourouiba 1971–5: 235–45. See also the elaborate scalloped designs on the recessed steps of the marble mud filter in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Kairouan (late ninth century), illustrated in Hattstein and Delius 2004: 136.

it, a form also seen at the Ziza.⁷⁸⁰ Effectively, the form of the *kilga* troughs, with their recessed chamfered corners, is that of one of the Fustāt house pools (see fig. 3.39) with one end lopped off and a water source feeding directly into it. As there is no discernible functional need for these front chamfered corners that imitate domestic and palatial pools, we may assume that there was some conscious intention to deploy the forms of full-size water architecture within the iconography of the *kilgas*. One could take this even further and propose that the side projections seen on so many examples, which are very often recessed or indented in some way, also relate to the forms of pools like that shown near the start of the *salsabīl* in fig. 3.39, which has a semicircular recess in each side at the top level while the recessed pool itself is octagonal.⁷⁸¹

As was the case with the *shādirwān* component, the transformation of the trough section of the *kilga* into an architectural pool must have been prompted in part by the object's own function, i.e. the delivery of water into a marble recess. The fact that the pool form has been truncated when compared with its full-size cousins does not mean that it is an inconsequential choice of motif. Rather than attempt the impractical and pointless task of mimetically replicating a *salsabīl* from start to finish, including all those long channels, the artists of the more sophisticated *kilgas* are offering us an abbreviated version of the *salsabīl*, with the water source, *shādirwān* and architectural pool compressed and miniaturised into a single, water-providing unit. Through the same logic of the miniature that might permit the viewer to read a *minbar* as a microcosm of the mosque, the *kilga* can be read as the concentrated essence of the *salsabīl*.⁷⁸²

Having established that the standard shape of the trough section is not arbitrary but in fact relates directly to full-size architectural water features, what then are we to make of this discovery? Why would it be considered desirable to create an entire class of objects that played games of iconography with full-size water features? The prevalence of the *salsabīl* and related features in the palaces of the Islamic world

⁷⁸⁰ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 125; Tabbaa 1987: 205.

⁷⁸¹ Creswell 1978: Vol. 1, 126.

⁷⁸² Hillenbrand 1999: 146.

from the eleventh century on has already been discussed, and as we have seen from the Fustāṭ houses, the wealthy urban classes also apparently sought *salsabīls* for their homes. To understand the cultural context of this profound interest in water features, we should turn to the literary evidence.

There are occasional mentions of water in Fatimid court poetry, although most of these are not very different from the paradisaical evocations of water seen in other court poetry of the Islamic world.⁷⁸³ However, there is an interesting description of the city of al-Manṣūriyya (the Fatimid capital from 949 to 972) written by al-Muqaddasī in the tenth century: ‘It is rounded like a cup, and there is not another place like it. The ruler’s palace is in the centre of the city, just as in Baghdād, and water runs through the middle of it.’⁷⁸⁴ Bloom has proposed Madīnat al-Zahrā, with its pools and spolia, as a direct influence on al-Manṣūriyya,⁷⁸⁵ the remains of the rectangular and circular pools that formed the centrepieces of each palace at Manṣūriyya were identified following aerial imaging of the site in the 1940s.⁷⁸⁶ The Manṣūriyya palace complex was described by Ibn Hammād as containing ‘lofty and splendid structures having marvellous plantings and tamed waters’.⁷⁸⁷ Al-Manṣūr built a palace facing a pool, and various extensions to the waterworks were made by al-Mu‘izz.⁷⁸⁸ A more elaborate description of a palace is provided in a poem by ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Iyadi, a court poet to both al-Manṣūr and al-Mu‘izz:

Now that glory has become great and the great one rules over the stars, a porticoed
pavilion spreads,
He built a dome for dominion in the midst of a garden which is a delight to the eye,
In well-laid-out squares, whose courtyards are verdant, whose birds are eloquent,
Surrounding an enormous palace among palaces, as if you could see the very sea
gushing in its corners.
It has a pool for water filling its vast space across which eyes race and flit.
The rivulets which gush into it lie like polished swords on the ground.
In the midst of its waters an audience hall stands like Khawarnaq amidst the
Euphrates’ flood,
As if the purity of its waters – and its beauty – were as smooth as glass of azure
hue...

⁷⁸³ See for example Smoor 1995: 141 and 153.

⁷⁸⁴ al-Muqaddasī 1994: 203.

⁷⁸⁵ Bloom 2007: 40–1.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁸⁷ Bloom 1985: 28.

⁷⁸⁸ Bloom 2007: 38.

...The foam dissolves on the face of its waters as does the rain on parched soil.⁷⁸⁹

It is clear from these texts that water features and pools were powerful symbols of status, grandeur and wealth for the Fatimid rulers. The association between palaces and pools had existed in the Mediterranean and Islamic worlds since pre-Islamic times, and certainly continued long after the Fatimids were gone.⁷⁹⁰ As the Fustāt excavations show, some of the most affluent urban classes also participated in this preserve of the wealthy with domestic pools, *salsabīls*, and other types of fountains. It is possible that the *kilgas*, by mimicking the iconography of the *salsabīl*, alluded to the much-vaunted association between earthly watered gardens and those of paradise, a trope that should not be ignored just because it is wearily familiar. But more pertinent is the way in which the sculptors have adopted elements from full-size water architecture, miniaturised them and stuck them back together in abbreviated forms to create a shorthand, self-contained response to the *salsabīl* and related water structures. The appropriateness of such a form, either in a religious context or a palatial one, is clear.⁷⁹¹ The next section of this study will look at another element that appears to allude to water structures.

Lion Heads

A key source for the function of the *shādirwān* is the famous painting on the Cappella Palatina ceiling (mid twelfth century) of a *salsabīl* in action (fig. 3.43). Not only does this painting show the *shādirwān* and a frontal pool with semicircular recesses on each side, much like that found in Fustāt house IV, but it also shows the form of the water spout, an element that is missing at the Ziza Palace and other surviving examples of the *salsabīl*. This takes the form of a large feline face, with water pouring from its mouth down the *shādirwān*. Although Knauer mentions this painting, and has elsewhere identified the bosses that appear so frequently on the *kilgas* as being lions' heads rather than the tortoise heads earlier scholars had

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁹⁰ Bloom 1985: 29; see also Clavijo's accounts of Timur's gardens and pavilions, quoted in chapter two.

⁷⁹¹ Tabbaa (1985: 36; *idem* 1987: 218) suggests that the meditative or joyous aspects of the *salsabīl* may have been stressed at different times, depending on whether the context was religious or palatial, but that neither meaning dominated the other.

mistaken them for, she does not appear to see any particular significance for the *kilgas* in the connection between the lion-head motif and water architecture.⁷⁹²

Lion-shaped fountain-heads and waterspouts are a famous feature of the Islamic art of Spain, some of the best-known examples being those at the Court of the Lions in the Alhambra.⁷⁹³ A bronze lion, thought to come from an eleventh- or twelfth-century fountain in Islamic Spain, was sold at auction in 1993,⁷⁹⁴ and there are others that may come from Fatimid Egypt, such as the example in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.⁷⁹⁵ These are fountain-heads in the form of whole lions, but there is also a rich tradition from the Graeco-Roman period onwards, and apparently present in almost every area touched by Greek influence, of waterspouts made of clay, carved stone and bronze, in the form of lions' heads.⁷⁹⁶ A marble object recovered at Qal'at Banī Ḥammād (fig. 3.44) is clearly a waterspout carved in the shape of a rather sleek and compact lion with a broad grin and a hole in its mouth for water to run out of. *À propos* of this piece, Golvin quotes the eleventh-century poet Ibn Ḥamdīs, who described a North African palace where he saw a pool, on the edges of which were seated marble lions with water coming from their mouths which looked like 'the melted blades of swords'.⁷⁹⁷ The animals seen by Ibn Ḥamdīs were probably rather grander than that found at Qal'at Banī Ḥammād, but the latter appears to be representative of a fairly common form of decorated waterspout.⁷⁹⁸ The form was by no means limited to the Maghrib: as well as pieces from Fatimid Egypt⁷⁹⁹ and Hammadid Algeria,⁸⁰⁰ there are a number of examples from Afghanistan,⁸⁰¹ demonstrating the broad sweep of the ancient form's popularity. In the Anatolian

⁷⁹² Knauer 1979: 70, n. 7; 77, n. 30; 86.

⁷⁹³ Illustrated in Hillenbrand 1999: 194.

⁷⁹⁴ Meyer and Northover 2003: 49.

⁷⁹⁵ See Bloom 2007: 98.

⁷⁹⁶ Hill 1963: 51–2. Willemsen (1959) has catalogued an enormous number of Classical lion waterspouts; for an example with some formal similarities to fig. 3.44 see Willemsen 1959: plate 117.

⁷⁹⁷ Golvin 1965: 155 (my translation from the French).

⁷⁹⁸ Tabbaa 1987: 202.

⁷⁹⁹ See the bronze lion believed to have functioned as a fountain-head, illustrated in O'Kane 2006: 74–5.

⁸⁰⁰ Merabet, Leila, 'Fountain Mouth'. *Museum with no Frontiers*. MWNF [accessed 15 September 2009], <http://www.museumwnf.org>.

⁸⁰¹ Kalter and Pavaioli 1987: 63; similar pieces exist in Kabul and Ghazni, from the palace of Mas'ūd III, c. 1150, where they formed part of the palace water system.

Seljuq world and quite possibly beyond, drinking from fountains in the shape of lions or bearing depictions of lions was believed to bring good health.⁸⁰²

Almost all of the *kilgas* boast one, or more commonly two, lion heads projecting substantially above the connecting arch through which the water trickles. Several examples have evidently lost one or both of their lion heads at some later point, either by accident or (as is more likely in the case of those where both heads have been removed), by design: see for example the spaces where bosses once were on the otherwise well-preserved cat. no. 3.44. A great number of those that remain seem to have been worn smooth over time, or perhaps were only lightly defined in the first place. Their smoothness gives rise to the possibility that this element of the *kilgas* may have been repeatedly touched, perhaps for superstitious reasons although the possibility of a practical function, such as the attachment point for a cup on a chain, remains. However, there remain enough projections with well-defined animal faces for us to get the general idea (see the startlingly well-defined felines of cat. no. 3.12, which may well have been enhanced at some point in the more recent past, and the rather more familiar medieval feline faces on cat. no. 3.33).

The salient point is that none these could actually have functioned as waterspouts. The water came from the jar behind them and entered the pool area by way of the trunk, rather than being piped through the mouths of the lion heads, which were at any rate not hollowed out. In this case, why is there such a strong emphasis on this element, appearing as it does on the vast majority of surviving *kilgas*?

Part of the answer to this question must lie in pre-Islamic Coptic prototypes. Knauer has suggested that the lion-headed bosses projecting from early Coptic ‘jar tables’ published by Strzygowski might be the forerunners of the bosses on the later *kilgas*, just as the Coptic ‘jar tables’ themselves are forerunners of the *kilgas* in terms of function (fig. 3.45).⁸⁰³ This seems very likely. Some of the Coptic ‘jar tables’ bear lion-headed bosses that in fact function as waterspouts, being connected by a pipe to

⁸⁰² Ölçer 2005: 396.

⁸⁰³ Knauer 1979: 92–3.

the basins in which the jars stood and thus allowing the water that seeped out of the jars to drain out through the lion's mouth. Other examples are decorated with a lion or sometimes human-headed boss that is not functional: Badawy has pointed out similarities between the Coptic lion-headed bosses (both functional and non-functional) and lion-faced waterspouts of the Graeco-Roman and Coptic worlds, suggesting that the original model for both may come from the lion-faced gargoyles on ancient Egyptian temples.⁸⁰⁴ He proposes the libation tables of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, which seem to mimic architectural models down to the inclusion of central figural waterspouts, as an intermediary form between the temple and the jar table.⁸⁰⁵

A 'jar table' excavated at Bahnasā in the 1980s was retrieved from an area near the entrance to a large house, in a section of the site thought to date to the early Islamic period.⁸⁰⁶ The findspot of the Bahnasā stand accords with Badawy's assertion that in Pharaonic Egypt a special place was kept in the vestibule or main hall of the house for large water jars set on stands, which in turn connects to Ibrahim's suggestion that the *kilgas* may have been kept in a niche near the door of the house.⁸⁰⁷ It does not seem far-fetched, in this context, to connect the sometimes functional lion-faced waterspouts of the 'jar tables' with the non-functional lion-headed bosses of the *kilgas*.

A further comparison can be made with an unusual object from slightly further afield. While Badawy has published drawings of fragmentary unfired clay objects of architectural form, which he suggests are another type of Coptic jar stand, an elaborate and complete example exists from Murcia (fig. 3.46).⁸⁰⁸ This very large structure is also designed to hold unglazed earthenware jars of water, but being made of unfired clay water seepage would permeate the entire structure. Navarro Palazón and Castillo argue that the bosses projecting immediately below the surface on which the jars stand, modest here but zoomorphic in other examples, would become sodden

⁸⁰⁴ Badawy 1967: 56–61.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 59–61.

⁸⁰⁶ Askar 2006: 157–8.

⁸⁰⁷ Badawy 1967: 56; Ibrahim 1978: n. 19.

⁸⁰⁸ With thanks to Anna McSweeney for drawing this object to my attention.

and drip with water, and thus intentionally recall waterspouts. They explicitly connect the Murcia stands with the *kilgas*, arguing that the marble lion heads of the *kilgas* – which of course would not become permeated with water, although it is possible that they might drip a little with seepage – are decorative leftovers, suggesting that the *kilgas* were originally conceived as marble imitations of earthenware stands of the Murcia type.⁸⁰⁹ This is possible, although it seems more likely that the *kilgas*, the Coptic jar tables and the Murcian architectonic stands originate from a common source, and each type has been elaborated into a distinct and separate category of object, each with its own manner of functioning.

As regards the lions' heads on the *kilgas*, one might suggest that once again we are witnessing a manipulation of the forms associated with water features, a kind of game-playing that has reconfigured the miniaturised components. Because the *kilgas* cannot, for practical reasons, actually incorporate functional lion-headed waterspouts within the miniature *salsabīl* arrangements that they present, a functionally void stand-in is presented in the form of these lion-headed bosses. If the point were to render a *salsabīl* accurately in miniature, the lion heads would also have to be situated somewhere behind the upper end of the *shādirwān*: as it is, their presence is merely a reference to the waterspout of a full-size *salsabīl* arrangement. The apparently great importance of this motif within the group suggests that they are considered key to the basic decoration of the *kilga*, which would in turn suggest that they are a major visual prompt in the process of getting the viewer to understand the iconography of the *kilga* as a reference to that of the *salsabīl*. That some examples appear to have uncarved projections or even flat circular bosses in their place (cat. no. 3.52, for example) would suggest that the meaning of this motif has become lost over time or in inferior production, and has mutated into a simple pair of projections or bosses with no reference to the original imitations of lion-headed waterspouts. The principal question that remains is why there should be two, rather than one, on so many examples. A satisfactory answer to this question has yet to be uncovered.

⁸⁰⁹ Navarro Palazón and Castillo 1995: 207–8.

There are also many examples among the group of a rather flatter type of lion-headed boss, or in some cases a largely featureless boss that may or may not be descended from the lion-headed boss, to be seen on the side panels of some *kilgas*.⁸¹⁰ This motif appears at the top centre of many side panels, typically although not exclusively appearing above panels of *muqarnas* (see cat. no. 3.1) or panels of framed waisted arches (cat. no. 3.14).

There is an interesting proximity between these fairly flat, undifferentiated feline head bosses and those seen on certain variants of the house model group discussed in chapter one. It is probable that in the context of the *kilgas*, no less than in the case of the house models, they are carriers of architectural connotations without being directly imitative of a specific architectural arrangement, in addition to their decorative qualities and possible apotropaic significance.⁸¹¹ An apparently unique variation on this form is the pair of what appear to be human-headed bosses on the side panels of cat. no. 3.56. This motif may simply reflect an artist playing around with established forms, or it might possibly have some symbolic, perhaps apotropaic, function also. Three-dimensional human heads as isolated decorative units are rare even in Fatimid art, and it is hard to find a parallel for this design.⁸¹² At any rate, this particular motif does not seem to be popular and no further instances of it have been found. There are also a great number of other instances of the use of lions in architectural decoration from the Fatimid and Mamluk periods in Egypt, which will not be discussed here.⁸¹³

Muqarnas

One of the most striking aspects of the *kilgas* is the use of the *muqarnas* motif, most frequently employed as a discrete panel (cat. nos 3.1–3.13, assumed in the case of cat. no. 3.7), but also used on some examples as an arcuated multi-tiered band or

⁸¹⁰ Ibrahim (1978: 4, n. 13) states that '[b]osses with lion heads rarely appear on the sides', but this is incorrect: the motif is quite common.

⁸¹¹ See Öney 1969.

⁸¹² It is possible that there may some formal similarity between these heads and that of the relief-carved musician seen on the tenth-century marble panel found at Mahdiyya (Bloom 2007: 30), but without a better view of the sides of cat. no. 3.56 this cannot be demonstrated one way or another.

⁸¹³ For example, the *shāri'a al-a'zam* ('Great Street') leading from the palace to the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn and decorated with stucco lions (Bierman 1998: 350), or the carved lions of Baybars (Baer 2003: 50–1; Creswell 1978: Vol. 2, plates 46–7).

border (cat. nos 3.28–3.31).⁸¹⁴ No example other than the *muqarnas*-heavy cat. no. 3.31 features niches in the chamfers decorated with *muqarnas*. It can be fairly observed that the use of *muqarnas* amongst the *kilgas* has tended to occur on the most elaborately decorated and skilfully carved examples, although there are two examples in Kuwait (cat. nos 3.9 and 3.13) that are of a lower quality, in terms of both execution and inventiveness of decorative programme, but also feature *muqarnas* side panels, albeit in fairly rudimentary form.

Ibrahim has noted that the *muqarnas* panels of the *kilgas*, which she refers to as ‘angular stalactites’ may be used as a reasonable indicator of date. She suggests that the earliest extant *muqarnas* of this type on Cairene monuments are those on the Aqmar Mosque façade (1125; fig. 3.21) and the slightly later mausoleum of Yahyā al-Shabīh (1150), noting that Ayyubid uses of *muqarnas* follow this popular type.⁸¹⁵ Bloom has shown that the earliest dated use of the *muqarnas* in Egypt is that seen on the cornices of the minaret of the Mashhad al-Juyūshī, dated to 1085 (fig. 3.47), and he has also pointed out that in this and other early cases the level of skill evident in the *muqarnas* decoration makes it clear that the craftsmen involved must already have been familiar with the technique.⁸¹⁶

The early history of the *muqarnas* in the central Islamic lands was touched upon in chapter two. As regards its development in Egypt, stucco *muqarnas* segments, thought to date from the eleventh century or possibly even the tenth, were excavated from a bathhouse in Fustāt.⁸¹⁷ However, the first full *muqarnas* hoods in Egypt appear to date from no earlier than the mid-thirteenth century, although the *muqarnas* hood was known in Syria over a century before.⁸¹⁸ A different form of the *muqarnas* in the Maghrib may be represented in the glazed ceramic parallelepipeds excavated at Qal‘at Banī Hammād, which were speculatively reconstructed into an angular

⁸¹⁴ Knauer has divided the *muqarnas* group up differently, attempting to distinguish between those that employ a ‘firmly framed stalactite niche’ and those that have ‘several tiers of shallow, stilted alveoli’ (her groups nine and ten respectively: see Knauer 1979: 82–8), but this becomes so confused and requires so much qualification through other motifs and forms that it seems best to discuss the *muqarnas* as one motif.

⁸¹⁵ Ibrahim 1978: 2.

⁸¹⁶ Bloom 1988: 21. See also Grabar 1977: 211–3.

⁸¹⁷ Behrens-Abouseif 1993: 502.

⁸¹⁸ Bloom 1988: 21; Creswell 1978: Vol. 2, 146–8.

pendentive form (fig. 3.48).⁸¹⁹ It was the presence of these elements that suggested to Tabbaa that the Qal‘at Banī Ḥammād *salsabīl* was located in a very early, crude *muqarnas* niche,⁸²⁰ and although these glazed ceramic elements are not closely related to the carved stone *muqarnas* niches that relate to the *kilgas*, their connection with water architecture is significant when one considers the frequency with which later *salsabīl* arrangements sprang from *muqarnas*-hooded niches.⁸²¹

The Aqmar Mosque panel is clearly the closest extant parallel for those *kilgas* that bear a framed panel of *muqarnas*, even down to the form of the *muqarnas* with its segments descending in size and dwindling away into relief-carved lines, but it is hard to say to what extent the *kilgas* might have been consciously imitating architectural motifs found on mosques. It is certainly possible that some of them were intended for mosques (see above), but could every one of the thirteen examples that bears a *muqarnas* panel be directly imitating one example of mosque decoration? And how can the figural elements be squared with this interpretation? It is true that the *kilgas* seem to have mixed and matched their architectural vocabulary, but the combination of devices drawn from religious and non-religious contexts, including in some instances nudes alongside *muqarnas* motifs, seems quite hard to swallow on objects that may have been destined for a religious setting.

An alternative suggestion is that although the surviving examples of the *muqarnas* from Fatimid times are found in religious contexts, this was not in fact the whole picture. Although it is reasonably close in date to the *kilga* dated to the twelfth century (cat. no. 3.1), which is one of those bearing panels of *muqarnas*, the Aqmar mosque was surely not, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the only site of a framed panel of *muqarnas*. Bloom’s suggestion that *muqarnas* in Egypt may initially have had predominantly vernacular applications, only appearing on religious architecture from the twelfth century, would explain why, when the *muqarnas* does appear on extant religious buildings of the twelfth century, it is accomplished and

⁸¹⁹ See Golvin 1965: 122–7; Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 276–7; and Tabbaa 1996: 321.

⁸²⁰ Tabbaa 1985: 34.

⁸²¹ Tabbaa 1987: 212.

confident.⁸²² In this light, it is proposed that the use of *muqarnas* on the *kilgas* need not be understood in any religious mode, and even that a vernacular domestic use of *muqarnas* within water architecture may have existed in Egypt by the twelfth century.

Although the first surviving examples of major *salsabīls* with *muqarnas* hoods in Egypt date from the Mamluk period, there were extremely grand twelfth-century examples of this form at Palermo (1166–89; fig. 3.35) and Damascus (1172; fig. 3.42), as well as the speculative version reconstructed from finds at the Qal‘at Banī Ḥammād (eleventh century).⁸²³ Is it not then possible that there were earlier domestic or vernacular Egyptian arrangements that incorporated an element of *muqarnas* within the *salsabīl* arrangement, even if the overall design was not as grandiose as the Mamluk royal *salsabīls*? This is appealing as it connects directly to the explicitly water-related architectural motifs of the *kilgas* (*shādirwān*, pool and lion-headed bosses). It is also possible, as Ibrahim suggests, that those *kilgas* that incorporate the *muqarnas* motif were intended to reference *ḥammām* architecture, as there is a higher incidence of nude figures amongst the *kilgas* that feature *muqarnas*, where they appear on five stands out of seventeen, than in the rest of the group (four out of fifty-five).⁸²⁴

If we were to accept this reading, it is not necessarily problematic that the *muqarnas* is depicted on the outside wall of the water source, rather than inside, where it could be understood as an imitation of a *muqarnas* vault, hood or grotto. Naturally nothing carved on the inside of the trunk would be visible when the stand was in use, and as has already been shown, the craftsmen of the better *kilgas* seem to have taken great delight in the manipulation of architectural motifs, pulling the *salsabīl* to pieces and sticking it back together in an abbreviated form. In this context, it is possible to understand the design on the outside of the trunk as a visible simulacrum for something that should be, if the logic of full-size architecture were to be followed, on

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 27–8.

⁸²³ Tabbaa 1989: 212. For example, the *muqarnas* hood above the *salsabīl* in the al-Ghannamiyya madrasa, Cairo, 1372–3, Creswell archive negative no. EA.CA.2492, available online at www.archnet.org.

⁸²⁴ Ibrahim 1978: 3.

the inside of the trunk. As with the Syrian tabourets, individual elements are manipulated to create an object that alludes to full-size architectures in all sorts of ways, without actually being a scale model.

Human Figures

The present study will offer little discussion of the figural motifs on the *kilgas*, as this is the area that has been most thoroughly gone over by other authors.⁸²⁵ It is the interaction between the human figures and their architectural surroundings that is of most significance for this study. A remarkable feature of the *kilgas* is the presence of nude figures.⁸²⁶ These are generally found either seated on ledges projecting from the front chamfers (cat. nos 3.1, 3.2, 3.8, 3.14, 3.27, 3.30 and 3.41) or standing in niches in the middle of the side panels (cat. nos 3.28 and 3.29). Knauer notes that an example in the Museum of Islamic Art, possibly cat. no. 3.32, originally contained figures in the niches of the three main panels which have since been almost completely obliterated.⁸²⁷ An unusual example in the Museum of Islamic Art (cat. no. 3.26) features standing nudes on the back chamfers, and an example in the Coptic Museum (cat. no. 3.25) features a tiny naked human superimposed on the chest of a lion-headed eagle on the side panels. This imagery might be drawn from the myth of Zeus and Ganymede, although a similar image, in the painted decoration of the Capella Palatina, has been interpreted as an image of royal apotheosis.⁸²⁸

The poses of the nude figures that occupy the chamfers or niches of the *kilgas* – both hands raised, or, less commonly, hands held to the chest – have been tentatively linked to Coptic models by Ibrahim, who has also suggested that the *kilgas* were possibly intended for use in secular settings by both Muslims and Copts.⁸²⁹ The figures with raised arms could certainly reflect the *orans* pose of a praying figure

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2; Knauer 1979: 79–82, 84–89.

⁸²⁶ On depictions of nudes in the Classical world and their relationship to those of Coptic and Fatimid Egyptian art, see Jones 1975: 6–7.

⁸²⁷ Knauer 1979: 82.

⁸²⁸ Ettinghausen 1977: 46 and 50. Another version of this image appears on a bowl in the al-Sabah collection, from eleventh- or twelfth-century Persia (Watson 2004: 259); it has been interpreted there as a representation of Zal's rescue by the Simurgh.

⁸²⁹ Ibrahim 1979: 2–3. Note that according to Brett the Coptic population of Egypt at the start of the Fatimid period was a considerable force, 'numerous, coherent enough and sufficiently skilled to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new regime' (Brett 2005: 22).

with arms extended, seen often in Coptic art, although this pose is rarely if at all adopted by nude figures in Coptic contexts. The nude image of the Classical Daphne holding branches aloft to symbolize her transformation into a tree, apparently the standard iconography of this subject within Egypt, perhaps comes closest to the appearance of the raised-arm nudes on the *kilgas*, although of course the latter do not hold any vegetation, and the connection seems hard to secure.⁸³⁰ It is possible that a connection may be drawn with ancient images of nude goddesses holding their arms aloft, found from Cilicia to the southern Levant and related to standing images of Egyptian goddesses found on votive stelae.⁸³¹ Without intervening examples a direct connection cannot be argued, and it is outwith the scope of this thesis to track the image of the raised-arm nude through the ancient to the medieval Mediterranean, but the emphasis placed on rounded belly and breasts, and the appearance of crowns on at least two examples of this type from the *kilgas* (cat. nos 3.28 and 3.29) are suggestive of those much earlier images with their prominent bellies and sometimes elaborate headdresses.

The breast-cupping figures may likewise be connected to ancient imagery, although in this case the most obvious sources for comparison come from further east. The pre-Islamic Persian and Mesopotamian figurines of breast-cupping women, possibly goddesses, are comparable in pose although generally even smaller in scale.⁸³² The Phoenician goddess Astarte, wholeheartedly adopted within Cyprus and elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, spawned a great number of small clay plaques of breast-cupping goddesses, normally standing and frequently wearing elaborate jewellery.⁸³³ One of the most closely comparable figures encountered during the course of this study is a bread mould in the form of a seated female nude holding her breasts, excavated at Mari (Tell Hariri) in Syria and thought to date to the beginning of the second millennium BCE.⁸³⁴ Again, such an ancient image cannot be assumed to be the direct forerunner of the *kilga* breast-cupper, but the persistence of such a

⁸³⁰ Gabra and Eaton-Krauss 2006: 11. See also Beckwith 1963: plates 61 and 64.

⁸³¹ See Pulak 2008: 347.

⁸³² See Goetz 1946: 15; Villard 1931: 95.

⁸³³ Two examples from sixth century BCE are illustrated in Karageorghis, Vassilika and Wilson 1999: 62.

⁸³⁴ From the Parrot excavations; now in the National Museum, Damascus.

powerful and widespread folk tradition in Islamic Egypt is entirely possible. The connection of such ancient nudes with fertility suggests a possible reading of the *kilga* nudes as fertility figures also, which is particularly interesting in light of the ancient connections between water and fertility.⁸³⁵

Intriguingly, the standing nudes in niches depicted on cat. nos 3.28 and 3.29 are both accompanied by standing guards with two hands resting on the pommel of the sword: on cat. no. 3.28 they are in the chamfers, and on cat. no. 3.29 one appears on the back panel.⁸³⁶ Ibrahim interprets these as overall representations of a well-guarded harem, which is an appealing reading, suggestive of an overarching architectural conception at play within these two examples, although it is equally possible that the figures allude to a specific mythology of which we are no longer aware.⁸³⁷

An important aspect of the examples featuring nudes is the partial attempt at defining architectural space through the use of figures. On the group as a whole figures are generally modelled in high relief, almost in the round, and with the exception of the two atypical examples, cat. nos 3.25 and 3.26, the figures are integrated within semi-architectural spaces. The figures on the chamfers do not appear in mid-air, they have been given ledges to sit on and in one case pilasters to hold on to (cat. no. 3.14), similar to those flanking the standing guards on the chamfers of cat. no. 3.28. On cat. no. 3.30 the figures are so poorly and flatly carved that it is impossible to tell if they are nudes or not, but they are also given ledges to sit on. Even the very low-relief drinkers carved on the front chamfers of cat. no. 3.42 are seated on carved cushions within their chamfers. A comparison can be made with the Umayyad brazier from al-Fudayn (fig. 3.49), with its erotic figures and revellers all contained within their allotted archways: have the figures been created to fit the architectural space that surrounds them, or has the architectural space been articulated specifically for their containment? Once again, the human form provides a comparative means of judging

⁸³⁵ See the statue of the goddess with a flowing vase excavated at Mari and now in the National Museum, Aleppo (illustrated in Aruz, Benzel and Evans 2008: 31). Such is the power of this idea that water is still connected with fertility in many cultures today: see Paradellis 2008: 127.

⁸³⁶ Knauer has compared these with the Persian stucco sculptures of standing figures now in New York and London; see Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 171.

⁸³⁷ Ibrahim 1978: 2.

scale, casting a comprehensible set of dimensions upon the miniaturised and abbreviated architecture of the *kilgas*.⁸³⁸

The standing nudes of cat. nos 3.28 and 3.29 are both standing within carefully framed niches, with their feet on a cornice of *muqarnas*. The only human figures identified thus far that are not really integrated into their architectural surroundings are the aforementioned strange figures on cat. nos 3.25 and 3.26, and the low-relief mounted riders (perhaps relics of the princely cycle, along with the drinker on cat. no. 3.42?) seen on the side panels of cat. no. 3.24 and the back chamfers of cat. no. 3.21.⁸³⁹ Even the rather worn and two-dimensional figures who appear to be carrying something on the back chamfers of cat. no. 3.42, charmingly suggested by Knauer to represent the water-carrier and his goatskin, are standing on narrow ledges and almost give the impression of marching around to the front of the *kilga* to empty their waterskins.⁸⁴⁰ Thus the interest of the artists appears to have lain not only in the representation of human figures, but also in the placement of those figures in architectural or semi-architectural space.

Animal Figures

Beyond the aforementioned lions' heads and mounted horses, there remains a smattering of less consistent animal imagery on the *kilgas*. Two examples with overtly Christian symbolism, cat. nos 3.22 and 3.33, are decorated with lions and deer or ibex that can, in this particular context, also be taken to have a Christian meaning. An ancient association between deer and water effected the Christian use of this animal as a symbol of the thirsting soul, and makes the deer a natural choice of decoration for a *kilga* to be used in Christian contexts.⁸⁴¹ Lions also appear as the feet of two of the examples bearing Kufic inscriptions (cat. nos 3.1 and 3.21), and lion-headed feet on a third example (cat. no. 3.32).

⁸³⁸ Mack 2007: 47; Levi-Strauss 1966: 23–4.

⁸³⁹ On the image of the rider see Dodd 1969: 225–9.

⁸⁴⁰ Knauer 1979: 81.

⁸⁴¹ Gelfer-Jørgensen 1986: 124.

Beyond lions, the most commonly seen animals on the group are eagles (cat. nos 3.19, 3.20, 3.32 and 3.9; the last being very hard to make out). All of these appear on the chamfers, either carved in low-relief or projecting fully outwards, with the body thrust forward and a long pair of very stylised wings attaching the eagle to the trunk of the *kilga*. A comparison could be made with the rather similar forms of the eagles carved on the end panels of a marble basin found at Madīnat al-Zahrā' and dated 987–988 (fig. 3.50); note the arcade decoration seen on the long sides of the latter, the decoration of which links water with architecture, marble and regal animals in Islamic Spain not long before the *kilgas* were apparently doing the same in Egypt.⁸⁴² Finally, adorsed pairs of fabulous winged beasts, either griffins proper or winged lions, appear on the side panels of three examples (cat. nos 3.19, 3.20 and 3.26). The regal connotations of all of these creatures – lions, eagles and griffins – might suggest a specifically royal symbolism within the decoration of certain *kilgas*.⁸⁴³ However, the appearance of lions, eagles and fabulous beasts on other products that are unlikely to have had any connection with royalty means that this is by no means certain.⁸⁴⁴

Marble

The architectural forms of the *kilgas* may well have been prompted, to a certain extent, by their material. Marble was an important architectural material in medieval Cairo, with much of it possibly coming from spolia, and the *kilgas*, even those that are not of the highest quality, must have been a preserve of the relatively rich.⁸⁴⁵ Ibrahim suggests that the proportions of the *kilgas* are such that they could have been made from sections of Roman columns.⁸⁴⁶ The use of marble in private residences seems to have been a clear indicator of wealth.⁸⁴⁷ In the Geniza documents a very

⁸⁴² Gladiss 2004: 238; a very similar design of eagles and confronted creatures decorates the end panels of a second marble basin, made for 'Abd al-Malik, 1002–7 (see Baer 1998: 113).

⁸⁴³ Shovelton has suggested that the lion-feet of cat. no. 3.21 indicate that it was intended for a royal context rather than a religious one: See Shovelton, E., 'Kilga, Jar-stand', *Museum with no Frontiers*. MWNF [accessed 12/06/08], <http://www.museumwnf.org>.

⁸⁴⁴ See for example the confronted lions on a bath-scraper from twelfth-century Persia (illustrated in Watson 2004: 117).

⁸⁴⁵ Bierman 1998: 357.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibrahim 1978: 1.

⁸⁴⁷ See the descriptions of the palace of the caliph Hishām in Damascus, with its marble pavement and walls faced with marble, in Milwright 2001: 105.

expensive house of the Fatimid or Ayyubid period (Goitein does not specify) is carefully described:

Through the gate one enters a hallway, *dihlīz* [a Persian word], paved with marble, in which there are two benches [...] One reception hall is long; its walls are of marble and it has two passages panelled with carved wood [...] The reception hall has on its front [that is, the wall opposite the entrance, in Arabic *ṣadr*] a wind-catcher, a ventilation conduit, whose floor and walls are of marble [...] In front of it there is a gilded wash basin [...] The open court of the ground floor has a fountain of marble, and the entire court, its floors and its walls, is covered with marble.⁸⁴⁸

Goitein notes that rather pernickety descriptions of marble-tiled or wood-panelled surfaces were a necessary precaution in property contracts, as such materials could be removed and sold if not recorded in the contract.⁸⁴⁹ The use of marble on the most visible wall of the reception hall (that facing the entrance), when the other walls were plastered, confirms the social value of marble as a material symbol of affluence.⁸⁵⁰ Above all, the Geniza document demonstrates the desirability of marble in the homes of the wealthy urban classes. Al-Maqrīzī tells the story of a fourteenth-century *qāḍī* who built a house with seven *qā'as* (central halls or courtyards), each of them decorated with luxurious carved marble, which so roused the envy of a certain *amīr* that the latter had the marble confiscated.⁸⁵¹

The 'gilded wash basin' of this particular contract should probably not be compared to the *kilgas*, as the materials differ, and there is at present no reason to believe that the *kilgas* were ever gilded.⁸⁵² Goitein maintains that this 'wash basin' was stationed near the wind catcher in order to enable those who slept there during the summer (a practice attested to by documents from the Geniza cache), to perform their ritual ablutions immediately upon rising; but it is possible that such a receptacle was meant for storing clean water in the coolest part of the house (i.e. next to the ventilation

⁸⁴⁸ Goitein 1978: 16–17.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁵⁰ Al-Khafājī, writing in the Ottoman period, says of the vestibules of Cairo's wealthy that special attention must be paid to them, for 'that is where the visitor is received and where the guests wait until admitted inside the house and where the amir's mamluks sit all day' (Ibrahim 1984: 55–6, citing Aḥmad al-Khafājī, *Shifā' al-Ghalīl Fīmā fī Kalām al-'Arab min al-Dakhīl* [Cairo, 1952], p. 124).

⁸⁵¹ Ibrahim 1984: 57, citing al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ* (Bulaq, 1853): vol. 2, 59–62.

⁸⁵² In another article Goitein records that the word in question is *ṭastīyya*. The word *ṭast*, meaning 'wash basin', occurs in a large number of the Geniza trousseau documents, amongst lists of copper vessels, but this was the only appearance in the Geniza cache of *ṭastīyya*, at the time of writing (Goitein 1978 [a]: 170).

shaft) and thus was intended for keeping drinking water cool.⁸⁵³ ‘Abbasid texts mention a vessel called a *muzzammila*, an apparently insulated jar-shaped pot with a metal tap, which was used for storing water and keeping it cool during the day; at night the water was transferred into a vessel called a *barrāda* which was exposed to the wind and the water was cooled.⁸⁵⁴ The area near the ventilation shaft may also have been where the *kilgas* were kept. As has already been noted, Ibrahim refers to a *bayt azyār*, or niche for storing water jars near the entrance of a house, as a possible site for the *kilgas*, although she also notes that since the *kilgas* were decorated on all sides, we can assume that they were meant to be viewed from all angles.⁸⁵⁵

As far as the *kilgas* themselves are concerned, the use of marble is significant in that it links them not only with the fabric of the city of Cairo itself, but also in that it connects the individual structure of the *kilga*, through medium, with the architecture of privilege, even with the full-size architectural structures that it mimics. One must recall McLuhan’s famous axiom, and concede that here too the medium is at least part of the message.⁸⁵⁶

Urbanism

‘Medieval Islamic civilization’, writes Udovitch, ‘was predominantly an urban civilization’.⁸⁵⁷ In his view, it was not only the sheer number of large urban centres founded or greatly expanded during the early and medieval Islamic period that made it so; the political, economic and material culture of Islam itself was intrinsically urban. In this contentious assertion he follows William Marçais, whose early attempt at defining the essence of the Islamic city had a profound effect on the later

⁸⁵³ Goitein 1978: 17.

⁸⁵⁴ Ahsan 1979: 127, citing al-Jāhīz, *al-Bukhalā’* (1958), p. 101; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Ta’rīkh al-mulūk wa’l-umam* (Hyderabad, 1938–43) Vol. VI, p. 9; Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara* (Cairo, 1921) Vol. I, pp. 23, 60; Aḥmad Taymūr, ‘Tafsīr al-alfāz al-‘Abbāsiya’, *Majallat al-Majma’ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī*, II (1921), pp. 269–70, 324–5 (quoting from *Shifa’ al-Ghalīl* and *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Harīrī*).

⁸⁵⁵ Ibrahim 1978: n. 19.

⁸⁵⁶ McLuhan 1968: 7.

⁸⁵⁷ Udovitch 1978: 143. See also Grabar 1976: 89–116.

scholarship of Islamic urbanism, although the essentialist model has been dramatically revised in recent years.⁸⁵⁸

Regardless of whether or not Islam itself is posited as an urban phenomenon, the vital role of city culture in the medieval Islamic world remains a historical fact.⁸⁵⁹ The ‘renaissance of the cities’⁸⁶⁰ that took place in certain parts of the Islamic world in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries had its effects, as Mulder reminds us, on ordinary citizens as well as the elite. The continued emphasis that has been placed on the circumstances and consumption of the elite in both medieval historiography and contemporary art history has largely ignored the majority of the urban population, as well as focusing attention on a very small section of the surviving artistic production.⁸⁶¹ As the present thesis proceeds from the assumption that the various subjects of study represent an engagement with architecture that was felt at almost all levels of society, the implications of an ‘urban sensibility’ that permeated the civic body are of great significance.

The volume of literature on medieval Islamic urbanism is overwhelming; that on Cairo alone is formidable.⁸⁶² Heidemann has pointed out that the eleventh- and twelfth-century growth of city culture was preceded by the ‘cultural and economic peak’ reached in Egypt under Fatimid rule.⁸⁶³ Fustāṭ replaced the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria as the foremost metropolis of the country in the Islamic period, and was augmented in the tenth century with the construction of the nearby Fatimid capital at Cairo. The conurbation went on to become the largest city in the Islamic world, with a population estimated at a possible 450,000 in the thirteenth century.⁸⁶⁴ The writings of Ibn Zūlāq (919–996) and Musabbiḥī (977–1030) reveal the complex

⁸⁵⁸ Marçais 1928: 86–100; for critiques and reassessments see Abu-Lughod 1987: 155–60; Neglia 2008: 3–18; Raymond 2008: 47–58.

⁸⁵⁹ For evidence of this look to the summaries of the major urban centres of the Islamic world, both inherited and founded, in Kennedy 2008: 93–113 and Denoix 2008: 115–139.

⁸⁶⁰ Heidemann 2005: 84–5.

⁸⁶¹ Mulder (2001: 93–4) was referring in the first instance to the cities of Greater Syria, although her argument stands for many other major cities of the medieval period. See also Lev 2001: 1.

⁸⁶² For a few examples amongst many, see Udovitch 1978: 143–62; Garcin *et al.* 1982: 145–216; Raymond 2000; Behrens-Abouseif 2008: 295–316; Denis 2008: 1085–1113.

⁸⁶³ Heidemann 2005: 84–5.

⁸⁶⁴ Brett 2005: 4.

social stratification of Fustāṭ-Cairo.⁸⁶⁵ It seems from the medieval sources that although these twin cities lay very close to each other, they were felt by both residents and visitors to be quite distinct.⁸⁶⁶ Nonetheless, no small degree of civic pride seems to have been common to residents of both cities. The horror experienced by medieval residents of the Egyptian capital when forced, through business or marriage, to live in the countryside, or even the provincial cities, is recorded again and again in the Geniza documents.⁸⁶⁷

Within historical descriptions of medieval Cairo, certain paradoxes emerge. The startlingly contradictory statement by al-Muqaddasī on the nature of everyday life in the Egyptian capital, quoted at the head of this chapter, is by no means atypical. Ibrahim has shown through her research in *waqf* documentation how cramped most living quarters in Cairo must have been, the lack of space driving building upwards so that incredible numbers of people must have been literally living on top of each other.⁸⁶⁸ The squalor, overcrowding and filthy water are described in detail by medieval writers, but simultaneously we hear that this is the greatest city on earth, ‘the glory of Islam’ and the ‘*entrepôt* of the Orient’.⁸⁶⁹ ‘Indeed’, writes al-Muqaddasī, ‘were it not that it has faults aplenty, this city would be without compare in the world’.⁸⁷⁰ Ibn Riḍwān rationalises his civic pride most simply. Having outlined the epic levels of filth and overcrowding, and the diseases that both of these brought to the city, he eventually concludes:

Egypt [i.e. Cairo] has many buildings and people. Such a place is more civilized, and man by nature is surely a social being. His dwelling, then, is most appropriate in places that suit him best; he needs the many things that he finds in the city for the proper condition of his life [...] Therefore, living in Egypt is preferable, even though its prices are high, for the benefits in living here are many.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁵ Lev 2001: 30.

⁸⁶⁶ Goitein (1969: 84) suggests that this was because ‘Fustāṭ was dominated by an easygoing middle class, while Cairo lived under the shadow of a stiff court’.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83. More generally, al-Tha‘ālibī, writing in the early eleventh century, observes that one of the characteristics of Egyptian people is the rarity with which they settle in any country other than their own. (Al-Tha‘ālibī 1968: 122).

⁸⁶⁸ Ibrahim 1978 (a): 28.

⁸⁶⁹ al-Muqaddasī 1994: 181.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ Ibn Riḍwān 1984: 148.

The architectural decoration of the *kilgas* must, to no small degree, have been prompted by the close associations with architecture that their material, function and monumental form all evoke. The dominance of the waisted arch motif, with its prevalence in Cairene architecture under the Fatimids and beyond, can perhaps be interpreted as a reflection of the closeness of the *kilgas* to the very architectural fabric of the city, while their very function was necessitated by the need for clean water in a crowded metropolis. Although it is known that the Mamluk aristocracy had houses along the banks of the Birkat al-Fīl (‘Elephant pond’) at the outer edge of the city, and thus that there was a certain degree of suburban existence available for the city’s elite beyond the city walls, it seems fair to stress the urban context that was, after all, the dominant mode of existence for Cairenes.⁸⁷² It is hard to imagine a more thoroughly urban artefact than the *kilgas*.

Conclusions

In spite of the existing scholarship on the *kilgas*, it turns out that there have been many new things to say about them, particularly in the context of miniature architecture and architecturalising decoration. One of the most interesting aspects of the group, and something that it shares to a certain extent with the Syrian tabourets discussed in the previous chapter, is the breakdown of a specific architectural trope (in this case the *salsabīl*) into separate components, and the subsequent truncation, miniaturisation and manipulation of those elements. Their ultimate reconfiguration into a form that, at its most developed, references and partially recreates the *salsabīl*, along with other architecture and other forms of decoration, accords the *kilgas* a unique place within medieval Islamic art. For, unlike the tabourets, the *kilgas* are a group of objects in which decorative form is directly linked to a practically realised, if very basic, hydraulic function.

The miniature *shādirwān* at the heart of this practical function occupies a hard-to-define area somewhere between the purely symbolic and the entirely practical. Its inclined form is a necessity for the adequate functioning of the *kilgas*, but its elaboration into a flat or even stepped and zigzagged imitation of the *shādirwān* is

⁸⁷² Behrens-Abouseif 2008: 309.

prompted not by practical need but by decorative imperative. The mimetic function of this element, and the other direct references to the *salsabīl* seen in the truncated imitations of pool forms and lion-headed bosses or waterspouts, make the proposal that *muqarnas* also carried a suggestion of water architecture in this context a possibility, if only a speculative one. More importantly, the degree of manipulation and reconfiguration of architectural forms taking place through three dimensions within the group makes them entirely different from something like the carved marble architectural representations found on the door-frame of the Sultan Ḥasan complex (fig. 3.51).⁸⁷³ These last, the subject of much scholarly discussion, are generally believed to be of Crusader origin, and their relatively two-dimensional, fixed-viewpoint representations of (comparatively) logical and complete architectural structures, probably even specific structures, could hardly be farther from the jumbled three-dimensional dynamism and occasional plain weirdness of the *kilgas*.

As regards the issue of dating, there is little that has been outlined here that controverts earlier theories. Given the known twelfth-century date of cat. no. 3.1, the emphasis on the waisted arch seen across much of the group, the presence of sophisticated renditions of elements like the *muqarnas* and the *shādirwān*, and the style of epigraphy, the present study will concur with earlier authors that as a type they should be dated no earlier than the eleventh century, and that the majority of the most elaborate examples come from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ibrahim's suggestion that some of the plain or plainer examples could date from the Mamluk or even Ottoman periods is entirely plausible.⁸⁷⁴

Finally, the *kilgas* were called into existence by the pressures of urban expansion in Cairo and the urgent need for clean water in an overpopulated city, but they also reflect the city's definition of itself as the architectural wonder of the age. They are, in fact, a total product of the urban milieu, and to understand them as such makes

⁸⁷³ On the Crusader pieces see Ibrahim 2006: 62–86 (although her reading of them is somewhat confusing); Taragan 2005–6: 231–2; Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 125; Jacoby 1982: 123–33; Creswell 1922: 53–4; Herz 1899: 25.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibrahim 1978: 3.

their 'architecturalising' impulses comprehensible. They are a microcosmic manifestation of medieval urbanism itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RECASTING OF THE DOMED MONUMENT: INKWELLS AND INCENSE BURNERS

Especially that palace which has been built at his gate:
that is no palace, but a heaven, filled with suns and moons.
In place of latticed windows, around it is a silver coat of mail,
in place of a parapet, its tower wears a golden helmet.⁸⁷⁵

The case of metalwork is rather different from that of the three preceding studies. As chapters one to three each looked closely at a discrete, understudied and reasonably homogenous group, a similar methodological structure could be followed from one group to the next. Not so in the case of metalwork. In the context of the present thesis, the ‘problem’ of this medium lies in the sheer volume of material that could be said to mimic architecture, either in the reproduction of overall forms, or in the embedding of three-dimensional elements derived from architecture within more varied decorative programmes. Were the phenomenon of architecture as three-dimensional ornament within medieval metalwork to be covered in depth, analysing each relevant type in detail, it would completely overbalance the thesis. However, to ignore entirely the contribution made by metalwork to this imagery would have been unthinkable.

Various solutions to this issue were considered. One of these would have been to cherry-pick examples from the entire continuum of medieval metalwork in order to survey the varying ends to which architectural forms have been put within the medium. Chapter two has already introduced an unusual brass table with arched windows and polylobed arches (fig. 2.10), a related brass panel bearing a transitional zone of *muqarnas* (fig. 2.11) and an important Mamluk example of the brass architectural table or stand (fig. 2.6). Aga-Oglu has proposed a formal relationship

⁸⁷⁵ Farrukhī Sīstānī, *Dīvān*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rasūlī (Tehran 1932), pp. 133–4, cited in Meisami 2001: 28.

between Khurasanian ewers of flanged, fluted or faceted construction (fig. 4.1) and the shafts of certain tomb towers.⁸⁷⁶ Furthermore, there are caskets with domed handles topped with knobs and animal finials (fig. 4.2),⁸⁷⁷ square braziers with four pronounced corner projections that seem to ape the corner domes of square-plan mausolea (fig. 4.3);⁸⁷⁸ lanterns of round, square or polygonal plan with domed roofs (figs 4.4 and 4.5);⁸⁷⁹ a turned bronze baluster from Nishapur with a bell-shaped stylobate,⁸⁸⁰ and so on and so forth. All of these can be interpreted as more or less architectonic. Ceramic objects of architectural form (fig. 4.6) apparently imitative of metalwork models, and thus copying architectural forms at one remove, suggest a further possible avenue of research.⁸⁸¹

If the scope of the enquiry were to be extended into the fourteenth century and later, more material would come tumbling into the arena. There are numerous polygonal lamps with domed tops and arched doors complete with miniature doorknockers, imitative of Mamluk monumental architecture (fig. 4.7),⁸⁸² and polycandelons of polygonal or round, domed form with architectural towers, finials, arches and crenellations (figs 4.8 and 4.9),⁸⁸³ while a remarkable architectural lantern from fourteenth-century Spain or Morocco and now in the Keir Collection (fig. 4.10) demonstrates the vigorous presence of architectonic ornament in Spanish metalwork.⁸⁸⁴ Beyond lamps,⁸⁸⁵ there are not only objects that broadly follow the

⁸⁷⁶ Aga-Oglu (1934: 93–7) suggests that this was a rare instance of architectural forms exerting a dominating influence on the decorative arts although, as the current study shows, this was not actually an isolated phenomenon.

⁸⁷⁷ A second example is held in the Khalili Collection, MTW 1106 (Piotrovsky and Vrieze 1999: 162); and an oblong casket surmounted by a domed handle is now in Doha (al-Khemir 2006: 121–3).

⁸⁷⁸ See also a handled brazier of lobed square plan with four corner projections of lions' heads, sold at auction at Sotheby's New Bond Street, sale no. L04220, *Arts of the Islamic World*, 28 April 2008, lot no. 77.

⁸⁷⁹ See the Seljuq example in the Konya Müze Müdürlüğü (inv. no. 400), illustrated in Roxburgh 2005: 121. Further lanterns of uncertain date are held in the Khalili Collection, inv. nos MTW 442, MTW 853 and a strange example with a handle, like an outsize and rather unstable incense burner, MTW 889.

⁸⁸⁰ Allan 1982: 102–3.

⁸⁸¹ The function of fig. 4.6 is not clear, although it may be part of a lantern. An early ceramic lantern that may be derived from forms in metalwork is illustrated in Watson 2004: 163.

⁸⁸² See further examples illustrated in Folsach 1990: no. 339; Arts Council 1976: 196; Behrens-Abouseif 1995 (a): 70–3.

⁸⁸³ Further examples are illustrated in Behrens-Abouseif 1995 (a): 15–19 and 50–5; and Curatola 1993: 183.

⁸⁸⁴ Further Spanish material includes a cylindrical incense burner with a flat cover, decorated with an arcade, in the Louvre (OA 7880/119); a Jewish spice box of architectural form in the Victoria and

outlines of complete forms of monument, such as the caskets from fourteenth-century Persia and the Mamluk lands that are shaped like domed, polygonal or round mausolea (fig. 4.11),⁸⁸⁶ but also various forms of embedded architectural components such as the arch-shaped facets of a nine-sided candlestick from the late thirteenth century.⁸⁸⁷

The foregoing is only a selection of the material on which architectural forms are clearly articulated through three dimensions, and does not even begin to cover two-dimensional decorative motifs in metalwork that may have been derived from architecture. To attempt a survey of architectural forms in metalwork in any kind of depth would, then, have been completely impossible within the confines of the thesis. Furthermore, such a survey would detract from the overall aim of the present study. The point is not to catalogue every occurrence of an arch or a dome within the world of medieval portable objects, but to isolate those objects that appear to make a sustained engagement with architectural forms and ask not only *how* they do this but also, if possible, *why*.

A second option would have been to present a single type of metalwork object as a case study and leave that to stand in for the entire spectrum of the medium. However, while this last option might have been neater, it would ultimately have left too much undone.

For these reasons, a compromise has been proposed. Two separate forms of metalwork product were chosen as case studies, from which two or more aspects of the use of architectural forms within the vocabulary of medieval metalwork could be

Albert Museum (2090-1855); an architectonic candlestick in the David Collection (Folsach 1990: 186); a three-legged incense burner from Almería with a pierced dome and bird finial (Salellas 1950: 18) and so forth.

⁸⁸⁵ A philological correlation between architecture and lamps has also been suggested in the use of the term *manāra* to mean ‘minarets’. *Manāra* is used in early Arabic poetry to mean ‘a thing which gives light’, and hence (amongst other meanings), a lamp (Creswell 1926: 136; Bloom 1983: 20).

⁸⁸⁶ A further Persian example, from the City Art Museum in St. Louis, is illustrated in Ettinghausen 1969 (a): plate 14, where a formal comparison is drawn between this form of casket and the cylindrical inkwells discussed in the present chapter (Ettinghausen 1969 [a]: 298). Mamluk examples are illustrated in Baer 1983: 77–8; Piotrovsky and Vrieze 1999: 171; Allan 1982: 84–5; Piotrovsky and Pritula 2006: 58–9.

⁸⁸⁷ See Baer 1983: 34.

gleaned. With this model, the pluralistic nature of architecture's manifestations in metalwork remains evident and the trap of misrepresenting metalwork as something that can be 'solved' within a single study is at least avoided. Both groups were finally chosen on the basis that they could, at least in some key instances, be argued to mimic architectural forms *in toto*, rather than utilising isolated architectural motifs within an overall scheme unrelated to architecture.⁸⁸⁸ Both of the metalwork groups selected for discussion have been suggested in earlier scholarship as following the form of domed freestanding monuments; thus, by examining both forms of object it may be possible to explore and compare the changes wrought on this particular architectural form when it was transferred to metalwork. As with earlier chapters, the objects chosen to represent metalwork are in both cases specimens of which a great number of examples exist, permitting general conclusions to be made about each object type and also emphasising the ubiquity of the forms under discussion. This section, like earlier chapters, employs a 'catalogue' of objects as its primary visual reference. However, in this case an exhaustive catalogue has not been attempted, because there is simply too much material.⁸⁸⁹

The first group of objects under scrutiny comprises the cylindrical inkwells of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many of which are thought to have come from Khurasan. Overall this group is reasonably standardised in form, if not in decoration. The second half of the chapter examines the handled incense burner, a type apparently in circulation across the Islamic world and taking a number of different forms. Both groups differ quite markedly from the other subjects of the present study inasmuch as they have already been the subjects of a considerable volume of scholarly literature.⁸⁹⁰ This is due in no small part to the step we are taking up the ladder of artistic hierarchy. The preceding three chapters have dealt with objects that could be, with the possible exception of the better *kilgas* and the lustre tabourets, comfortably classed as 'material culture' or even 'folk' artefacts, but some of the metalwork objects discussed here have long been ranked among the finest examples

⁸⁸⁸ An example of the latter being Aga-Oglu's ewers.

⁸⁸⁹ On this point see Baer 1983: xix. Further examples of metalwork inkwells from the group under discussion are given in the appendix.

⁸⁹⁰ Key texts will be discussed below; see also the bibliographies for each object listed in the catalogue.

of applied arts in the medieval Islamic world, hence the large amount of attention they have received from art historians.⁸⁹¹ That said, many of the less exquisite examples have received little or no attention, and previous studies have tended to focus on the finest examples and have largely ignored the considerable volume of less glamorous material.⁸⁹²

One further group of objects considered for discussion in the present chapter were the ‘hooded’ incense burners of eastern Persia (fig. 4.12). The use of architectural forms amongst this group – most typically polylobed arches of Ghaznavid appearance, although the bird finials and strange, architectonic ‘wings’ should also be considered – has led them to be compared with *mihrābs*, both formally⁸⁹³ and symbolically.⁸⁹⁴ It is suggested here that the symbolic reading is not relevant as there is nothing to identify the barrel-bodied, footed form of the hooded burners as *mihrābs* beyond the recurring form of the arch, which is not in itself sufficient.⁸⁹⁵ Although there is much that could be said about these objects, particularly in the context of Ghaznavid and Ghurid architectural decoration, there was simply not enough space to include this group, with its very numerous examples, within the discussion of incense burners without radically curtailing discussion of the handled type, and the group was jettisoned for this reason.

Rather than follow the previous chapters in the minute examination of successive individual components, a more summary approach must be taken with the two object groups presented here. In the case of the inkwells, the first question to be examined is whether or not they should be regarded as imitative of architecture at all. This will be followed by some discussion of the forms of architecture they might be argued to reference. Two ‘architectural’ elements only will be examined in significant detail: the lobed cupola-like lid, and the use of arch-shaped panels. This last will lead to a brief discussion of the miniature arcade as a visual phenomenon within various

⁸⁹¹ On the hierarchy of manufactured goods in the medieval Middle East see Milwright 1999: 517.

⁸⁹² On the parallel situation in medieval ceramic studies, see Mulder 2001: 8–9.

⁸⁹³ Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 32–4, 42–3, n. 64–5.

⁸⁹⁴ Gelber 2008: ms. pp. 4–6 and 11.

⁸⁹⁵ As Allen has pithily observed, ‘[n]ot every niche is a mihrab’. (Allen, Terry, 1993–5, ‘Imagining Paradise in Islamic Art’ [Sebastopol, CA, Solipsist Press], published online at <http://sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/ip.html> [accessed 27 October 2009].)

media before preliminary conclusions are reached. The second half of the chapter is occupied with the handled incense burners. For simplicity's sake, this inordinate assemblage of material has been divided into loose formal groups, while for reasons of space only general observations can be made about much of the material. Discussion of possible architectural influences is necessarily dominated by issues of attribution and provenance, a particularly thorny problem in the case of the handled incense burners. While these issues cannot be solved within the present thesis, possible evidence for attributions will be sought in the various architectural monuments of the Islamic and Buddhist worlds that the burners have been suggested to imitate, and some suggestions for reassessment will be introduced. Final conclusions will briefly examine the role of the purported architectural forms of both groups within the functional aspect of the objects.

Part One: Inkwells

A very large number of cylindrical metalwork inkwells survive from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Many of them are thought to originate from greater Khurasan, an area encompassing the north and northeast of present-day Iran as well as much of Afghanistan and parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.⁸⁹⁶ The political history of greater Persia in this period has already been outlined briefly in chapter one, and will not be repeated here. For the remainder of this chapter, the term 'Persian' will be used to refer to greater Persia, and as such will be considered to encompass Afghanistan, where many of the subjects of the present chapter are thought to have originated.

Normally resting on a flat base or more rarely on three low feet, the metalwork inkwells are, as Baer notes, typically between seven and thirteen centimetres high, although some even more diminutive examples are known (cat. no. 4.17).⁸⁹⁷ The vast majority of examples are capped with a central lobed dome with a greater or lesser degree of relief in the articulation of the lobes and a slight ogee profile overall, mounted on a short cylindrical collar and topped with a rounded finial which is in

⁸⁹⁶ Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 14–15 and 23.

⁸⁹⁷ Baer 1983: 68.

turn mounted on a small band (cat. nos 4.9–4.11, 4.13–4.16, 4.18–4.32).⁸⁹⁸ This profile is remarkably standard across the group, although there are a few examples with hemispherical domes topped with a finial (often pear-shaped; cat. no. 4.1). Baer has posited that the lobed dome had become the standard form for Persian inkwells by the early thirteenth century, and that the hemispherically-domed examples, as exemplified in cat. no. 4.1, may be of Syrian or Mesopotamian origin.⁸⁹⁹ This assessment is based on a comparison between the hemispherical lids of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ayyubid and Mamluk brass incense burners and that of cat. no. 4.1, but perhaps requires more investigation before it is used as an absolute guide for attribution.

Pierced domical lids are not common amongst the inkwells, appearing only on cat. nos 4.2–4.5, and neither the dome outlines nor the appearance of the piercings are standard across those four examples. Cat. nos 4.2, 4.3 and 4.5 employ openwork arabesque designs, while cat. no. 4.4 features a lattice-like band of pierced holes.⁹⁰⁰ The dome of the latter is unusually large and rounded, and topped with a handle which resembles a miniature doorknocker. This last feature is apparently unique amongst inkwells of this type, and it is possible that this piece is a composite, as it appears to have been designed for suspension by cords fed through a set of internal tubes that match with a set of holes on the lid, which of course makes the handle on the lid redundant.⁹⁰¹ While pierced domes might argue a relationship with funerary buildings (the most obvious examples being found in the Aswān necropolis),⁹⁰² the

⁸⁹⁸ Allan has argued, based on the evidence of inscription types, that a variant profile seen on an inkwell in the Nuhad Es-Said Collection (cat. no. 4.2) has come about through the combination of a body and lower lid from twelfth-century Herat with an upper lid from a slightly different type of inkwell originating in tenth-century Persia. Allan 1982: 32; see also the Kufic script against which Allan compares this piece in Ettinghausen 1957: 332–3.

⁸⁹⁹ Baer 1983: 68; *eadem* 1972: 209.

⁹⁰⁰ A possible comparison could be made with the pierced bulbous section on the shaft of a bronze Timurid oil lamp in the Hermitage Museum (inv. no. SA-15932; illustrated in Komaroff 1992: fig. 20). A similar design appears on the much larger dome of an incense burner in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 4.44), which may be of a similar date.

⁹⁰¹ The inkwell was often fastened to the hand or the belt of the scribe, hence the need for a means of suspension (Baer 1983: 68; *eadem* 1972: 199 and n. 5.; citing Abū'l Faṭḥ Maḥmūd b. Husain Kashājim, *Dīwān* [Beirut, 1313 AH], p. 12, lines 12–15).

⁹⁰² 'Abd al-Wahhāb 1965: 95–104.

presence of the pierced dome in *ḥammām* architecture throughout the Islamic world might be another source for this particular form of decoration.⁹⁰³

At least two objects of polygonal rather than cylindrical form may possibly also be inkwells of this period. A six-sided piece in Tehran was published as an incense burner (cat. no. 4.5),⁹⁰⁴ but Allan has suggested that it may in fact be an inkwell.⁹⁰⁵ This reading is hard to reconcile with the pierced decoration on the sides of the object, although there may indeed be a solid inner shell. A second, octagonal piece is now in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 4.6). The latter has solid sides and a solid lid and as such should presumably be understood as an inkwell rather than an incense burner, which perhaps builds the case for reading the Tehran piece as an inkwell also. Both pieces have a polygonal lid mounted with a small dome topped by a finial, and as such relate closely to the cylindrical pieces under discussion. However, although both appear to be made from solid cast bronze, they are devoid of the inlaid ornament that characterises the majority of the group.

These two exceptions aside, the vast majority of the metalwork inkwells are cylindrical in form, occasionally having three or four narrow projecting tube-like attachments on the external surface that appear to have been used for suspension (cat. nos 4.7 and 4.8). More often the only projections from the cylindrical form of the metal inkwells are three (or less frequently four) loop handles attached to the main body, and a corresponding set of loops on the lid which enable the lid and body to be held together while suspended from the person of the scribe.⁹⁰⁶ More rare are examples that feature the internal suspension tubes and holes in the lid seen on cat. nos 4.5 and 4.6.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 104. Flood (1993: 229–32) notes that the use of glazed *qamariyyat* is a feature of *ḥammām* architecture from the Umayyad period onwards, while a Ḥamdānīd poem of the tenth century describes a *ḥammām* dome crowned with glass openings (cited in Flood 1993: 230).

⁹⁰⁴ Smithsonian Institution 1964: 175. Ettinghausen (1969 [a]: 298) also refers to this piece as an incense burner.

⁹⁰⁵ Allan 1982: 32; Allan 1982 (a): 44.

⁹⁰⁶ See above.

⁹⁰⁷ Allan believes that the lid of the Nuhad es-Said inkwell no. 1 is from an example of this type (Allan 1982: 32).

The lid always covers the entire upper surface of the inkwell body, and is held in place by an upright lip. On the lid surface, the aforementioned lobed central dome or cupola is topped by a finial and mounted in the centre of the flat upper surface of the lid, with a short vertical ‘wall’ at the lower edge of the lid. A fragmentary cast bronze vessel found at Nishapur suggests that this type of inkwell may have existed as early as the Samanid period, and there are glass inkwells with loop handles thought to date from the ninth or tenth century,⁹⁰⁸ but as Baer has noted, there are no complete examples known that can be securely dated before the Seljuq period.⁹⁰⁹

The inkwells very rarely bear dated inscriptions and it is normally through comparison with dated metalwork objects such as the famous ‘Bobrinski bucket’ that they are attributed to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.⁹¹⁰ That said, there is an inkwell in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 4.23) believed to bear the date 607 AH (1210–1211 CE).⁹¹¹ Materials are normally cast brass or bronze, most often inlaid with silver and sometimes copper, and niello. From the report of the thirteenth-century author al-Qazwīnī it is known that the Khurasanian cities of Herat, Nishapur and Merv were the major metalworking centres of Persia prior to the Mongol invasions of 1221–22, and that metal vessels inlaid with silver were exported from Herat.⁹¹² Cat. no. 4.9 bears the name of the craftsman Muḥammad b. Abū ’l-Sahl al-Harawī, whose *nisba* indicates that he was from Herat,⁹¹³ and three inkwells have been signed with the names of craftsmen using the *nisba* ‘al-Nīshāpūrī’, suggesting that the craftsmen of Nishapur were viewed as specialists in this art.⁹¹⁴ Thus it has been proposed that most of the inkwells can be ascribed to greater Khurasan.

⁹⁰⁸ Allan 1982 (a): 44–5, 87; Baer 1983: 67–8. There are two glass examples of this type in the Louvre, MAO S. 406 (excavated at Susa, 1912) and OA 7830 (acquired in 1925).

⁹⁰⁹ Baer 1972: 199.

⁹¹⁰ This piece bears an inscription that dates it to December 1163 CE and also gives its place of manufacture as Herat (Ettinghausen 1943: 196).

⁹¹¹ Nahla Nassar informed me of this in conversation at the Khalili Collection, February 2009.

⁹¹² Al-Qazwīnī, *Zakariya ben Muhammed ben Mahmud el-Cazwini’s Kosmographie*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1849), p. 323, cited in Kana’an 2009: 182.

⁹¹³ Ettinghausen 1943: 196; Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 75.

⁹¹⁴ See appendix, nos 31–3.

The practical and symbolic function of the metalwork inkwells has been amply discussed by earlier authors. The special place accorded to the written word in Islam, and, by extension, to the tools of the scribe, is evidenced by several references found in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, as Taragan has shown.⁹¹⁵ Baer records that various medieval authors prohibited the use of precious metals for inkwells because of this holy association, and that the tenth-century poet al-Kashājim criticised the men of his own time for being too proud of their gold- and silver-decorated inkwells.⁹¹⁶ Melikian-Chirvani and others have discussed at length the role of 'state inkwells' within medieval Persian society, suggesting that we are to understand them as objects employed at a high level within the business of government.⁹¹⁷

To this end we must also consider Taragan's suggestion that the inkwells might fall into the category of consumption by those defined by Grabar as the 'rising middle classes'.⁹¹⁸ If, as Grabar and others have suggested, this period witnesses the development of a lower tier of luxury art for the prosperous bourgeoisie, perhaps not all of the inkwells were for the exclusive use of the very highest levels of society.⁹¹⁹ The lack of dedicatory inscriptions on most of the inkwells could possibly suggest a non-aristocratic clientele, although the production of luxury portable objects that do not bear dedicatory inscriptions appears to be, as has already been outlined in previous chapters, a common phenomenon of the medieval Islamic world.⁹²⁰ Taragan has suggested as consumers an elevated class of bureaucrat scribes and perhaps learned men, for whom inkwells are both part of the stock in trade, and a symbol of

⁹¹⁵ Taragan 2005: 31–2; Qur'an 96: 3–5. Taragan also cites an unreferenced *ḥadīth* that records that the inkwell or *nūn* was the second thing created by Allah, after the pen.

⁹¹⁶ Baer 1972: 199 and n. 2, citing Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* (Cairo, 1913–19), II, p. 432, lines 5–7, and Kashājim, *Dīwān*, p. 12, lines 10–11.

⁹¹⁷ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 70–3, 92; *idem* 1976: 27–8. Lev (2001: 23) has noted that al-Maqrīzī provides a reference to Sitt Gazāl as 'the Mistress (*ṣāhibā*) of the inkwell of the Fatimid rulers, and one who knew the rules concerning the inkwell and its paraphernalia', from which we gain the interesting possibility that a woman may have been involved in bearing one of the Fatimid insignia of sovereignty.

⁹¹⁸ Taragan 2005: 40 and n. 58.

⁹¹⁹ However, Tabbā (1987: 111) has suggested that both Grabar and Ettinghausen have overstated the relative affluence of the bourgeoisie in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iran. This issue will be revisited in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

⁹²⁰ Grabar 1968: 648; Ettinghausen 1970: 113–8 and 123–5. The inscriptions seen on the inkwells tend most often to run benedictory phrases similar to those already seen on the *kilgas*, although craftsmen are sometimes named: see the complete inscriptions of cat. no. 4.19 given in Arts Council 1976: 172, and similar sets of inscriptions, naming the artist but not the owner, on the two inkwells discussed in Aga-Oglu 1946: 122–4.

office.⁹²¹ The description given in the *Chahār Maqāla* of the requirements for one who fulfils the ‘secretarial function’ suggests that there may well have been a degree of social fluidity surrounding this position, and the upward mobility of the scribe Iskāfī is illustrated in one of the anecdotes recorded by Nizāmī Arūḍī Samarqandī.⁹²² Additionally, not all of the inkwells are exquisite, by any means. A considerable volume of plain or lower-tier material exists (see for example cat. nos 4.17 and 4.18) and presumably represents the lower end of the market, within the reach of the middle classes.

Existing Scholarship

As stated above, the first question to be asked of this material is whether it is intentionally imitative of architectural forms at all. This line of enquiry is not so simple as it might at first appear. Melikian-Chirvani apparently believes it to be self-evident that the cylindrical inkwells are to be understood architecturally. He classes the entire group as ‘tower-shaped inkwells’, referring to the type as ‘the inkwell designed as a miniature monument’.⁹²³ He cites a ceramic inkwell of different form (fig. 4.13), excavated by the Metropolitan Museum’s team at Nishapur in 1937 and thought to date from the Samanid period, as a predecessor of the Persian architectural inkwell.⁹²⁴ The ceramic piece in question has a square plan with four projecting semi-circular lobes, each of which are decorated with crosses.⁹²⁵ It appears monumental in spite of its tiny scale because it has been so thoroughly articulated, and a domed lid would be, as Melikian-Chirvani suggests, reasonable to expect in this context. If one imagines a high central dome the piece does indeed bear a striking resemblance to an eastern cruciform church with projecting apses and a central cupola, such as the Church of St. John at Mastara, Armenia.⁹²⁶

⁹²¹ Taragan 2005: 39–40.

⁹²² Nizāmī Arūḍī Samarqandī 1921: 23.

⁹²³ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 73; *idem* 1982: 123.

⁹²⁴ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 73.

⁹²⁵ Wilkinson’s study of this piece and related wares makes the case for a reasonably affluent and visible class of Christians in ninth- to eleventh-century Nishapur (Wilkinson 1961: 104; *idem* 1969: 80–1; see also Ettinghausen 1969: 102, n. 24).

⁹²⁶ Davies 1991: fig. 5.

This early ceramic elaboration of an inkwell into a sacred building is naturally of major significance for the present study: why make a building out of an inkwell, which at its most basic needs to be only a plain pot? Flat-bottomed and unnecessarily bulky, the Nishapur ceramic inkwell bears a striking resemblance to the architectural inkwells of nineteenth-century Morocco (fig. 4.14), illustrating that the phenomenon of the inkwell as a miniature building was by no means limited to one period or place.⁹²⁷ Given the significance of the sacral context evoked by the Nishapur ceramic inkwell, this seems to be a case of one of Grabar's proposed motivations for architecture as ornament: the architectural form of the container enhances the value or significance of the thing contained.⁹²⁸

However, while the Nishapur ceramic inkwell presents powerful evidence for a tradition of inkwells conceived as sacred architecture, Melikian-Chirvani leaps rather too blithely to a fully architectural reading of the metalwork inkwells of Khurasan. He cites no textual, epigraphic or even visual evidence for understanding these pieces as architectural in any way, and apparently assumes that the architectural reading is so obvious it needs no further elaboration.⁹²⁹ And therein lies the problem: while Melikian-Chirvani may assume the architectural imagery of the inkwells to be self-evident, several other authors have fought shy of mentioning the issue at all, leaving a void in scholarly consensus. Baer and Taragan employ the formal language of architecture to a certain degree in their descriptions of various inkwells, with phrases such as 'a cupola or a lobed dome that rests on a flat cylindrical collar',⁹³⁰ but neither makes any explicit argument that the inkwells should be understood as imitative of architectural forms, or therefore of why an architectural form should be chosen for an inkwell.⁹³¹ Some authors are in fact careful to avoid entirely the use of unmodified architectural terminology.⁹³²

⁹²⁷ An attempt to trace a possible line of descent between the Nishapur example and the Moroccan pieces might yield very interesting results, but given the timescale and geographical distances involved it is simply too big a task to embark upon here.

⁹²⁸ Grabar 1992: 191–3.

⁹²⁹ In an earlier article, Melikian-Chirvani (1982/3: 42–3) makes a similar assertion about large Hindustani inkwells that clearly draw upon medieval Iranian sources.

⁹³⁰ Baer 1972: 208; Taragan 2005: 29.

⁹³¹ The use of terms such as 'central dome', 'collar', and 'cupola' in descriptions of these objects illustrates the apparently intuitive human tendency to transcribe descriptive nomenclature from one type of object to another. Thus we also see the use of the terms 'legs' and 'feet' in Taragan and Baer's

That said, two of the leading scholars of Islamic art appear to agree with Melikian-Chirvani's assumption that the inkwells should be understood architecturally. Ettinghausen, following on from Aga-Oglu's interpretation of certain bronze ewers as imitative of tomb towers, proposes the inkwells as an example of the transfer of architectural forms across media.⁹³³ More recently, Grabar has cited this type of inkwell as one example of an object shaped as a building,⁹³⁴ while elsewhere he has proposed the inkwells and, perhaps more pertinently, certain lamps as a medieval equivalent of 'the models of Versailles with lights shining in the royal chambers'.⁹³⁵

A comment by Grabar seems to strike at the heart of the matter. He criticises Melikian-Chirvani's argument that the domed inkwells are to be regarded as pavilions, saying that Melikian-Chirvani has taken 'too concretely what is in fact an evocation rather than a representation'.⁹³⁶ The distinction between mimesis and microcosm, the one corresponding in this case to representation, the other to evocation or even invocation, has already been shown to be of critical importance to the present study. If Grabar's comment is taken as a starting point, and we assume that the inkwells are indeed to be understood as evoking the forms of architecture, if only in the most elliptic sense, this must raise the question: which architectural forms are being drawn upon?

Monumental Forms

Firstly, which aspects of the inkwells have caused them to be read as architecture? They are all, with the exception of cat. nos 4.5 and 4.6, of circular plan. Each lid

descriptions of the inkwells, without the reader necessarily assuming that these terms are being used to describe mimetic representations of body parts, although animal feet do in fact appear sometimes on incense burners, to be discussed below, and even shod feet are sometimes represented: see the incense burner of Muḥammad ibn Qalā'ūn (illustrated in Ward 1990–1: 71).

⁹³² Allan 1982: 36.

⁹³³ Ettinghausen 1969 (a): 298.

⁹³⁴ Grabar 1992: 191. Note that the photograph that accompanies Grabar's argument (shown in the entry for cat. no. 4.9) shows an inkwell in a fully frontal elevation, very strongly side-lit. These effects make the inkwell in question look particularly monumental, but are perhaps not very representative of how it must originally have appeared when in use.

⁹³⁵ Grabar 1990 (a): 19.

⁹³⁶ Grabar 1992: 193, citing Melikian-Chirvani 1986. Certain aspects of Melikian-Chirvani's scholarship, some of which may be relevant here, have recently come in for severe criticism from one of his peers: see Soudavar 2008: 253–78, on Melikian-Chirvani 2007.

bears a lobed central dome, considerably smaller in diameter than the lid itself. A large number of the inkwells (for example cat. no. 4.9) show a pronounced batter in profile,⁹³⁷ an architectural feature that is firmly entrenched in Khurasan. Although this feature is occasionally met with in the dramatic context of the minaret, such as the *manār-i Kalān* in Bukhara or the nearby example at Wabkent,⁹³⁸ a more relevant example of this architectural feature is the tenth-century Tomb of the Samanids at Bukhara (fig. 1.6).

Certain two-dimensional decorative motifs of the inkwells may be compared with architectural decoration. Arch-shaped panels will be discussed below, but there is a great deal of other material that could be argued as relating to architecture in some way. For example, if one imagines a horizontal segment cut from the minaret at Dāmghān (fig. 4.15), this could be argued to provide a close match for the interlace decoration seen on cat. no. 4.26.⁹³⁹ Similarly, the inscription bands that are found on so many examples, written in both Kufic and cursive scripts, might also be compared to those of some of the minarets of Khurasan. The frequent alternation between bands of inscription and bands of geometric or arabesque decoration seen on the inkwells is particularly interesting in this context.⁹⁴⁰ The high inscription bands of the inkwells can also be compared with those of tomb towers, such as the eleventh-century tomb tower at Dāmghān (fig. 4.16). The interlaced outline of the panels in the form of eight-pointed stars seen on cat. nos 4.1 and 4.29 can be directly compared with similar repeated forms on the flanges of the minaret of Mas‘ūd III at Ghazna (fig. 4.17), and a near-identical motif found in stucco wall decoration at Nishapur,⁹⁴¹ as well as a common form of lustre Ilkhanid lustre tile.⁹⁴² Melikian-Chirvani has noted a correspondence between the crenellated patterns on cat. no.

⁹³⁷ Allan (1982 [a]: 44–5) notes the ‘flaring rim and foot’ on an early example in the British Museum (inv. no. 1968.7–22.3) as a significant characteristic which links it with one of the lidless, early examples excavated at Nishapur.

⁹³⁸ Hattstein and Delius 2004: 359.

⁹³⁹ Hillenbrand 2000 (a): 193–5.

⁹⁴⁰ The content of the inkwell inscriptions are of course quite different from the Qur’anic and historical inscriptions found on minarets: see Hillenbrand 2000 (a): 173–9.

⁹⁴¹ Wilkinson 1986: 237. This wall panel was originally painted in polychrome, ‘with yellow borders’. Might this have been in imitation of gold? The famous stucco panel excavated from Tepe Madrasa painted in imitation of quarter-sawn marble (Wilkinson 1986: 20) proves the existence of painted simulations of more luxurious materials within the architectural decoration of Nishapur.

⁹⁴² Illustrated in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 177.

4.28 and those of brick-pattern architecture and even painted stucco architectural decoration of medieval Khurasan.⁹⁴³ The use of silver inlay could also be argued as a reflection of certain poetic evocations of luxurious or fantastic architecture: Azraqī describes the Herat palace of Ṭughānshāh, the Khurasanian governor of the Seljuq sultan Malik Shāh, as being so filled with silver-work (*nuqra-kārī*) that it resembles Solomon's palace.⁹⁴⁴ One could continue. However, at this stage the chief concern is to establish, if possible, one or more architectural referents for the overall form of the inkwells, rather than tracking individual motifs.

For the sake of argument we will briefly ignore Grabar's warning about mistaking representation for evocation, and will search for an exact formal match between the inkwells and the extant full-size architecture of eleventh- to thirteenth-century Khurasan. Two main problems are encountered. Firstly, while cylindrical buildings from this period certainly exist, most obviously tomb towers and freestanding minarets (figs 4.15 and 4.16), these are much taller than they are broad, unlike the inkwells.⁹⁴⁵ Secondly, the lobed cap seen on most of the inkwells is no match for the generally imposing domes of tomb towers. Tomb towers topped with domes that sit like a too-small hat on a tall man are rare, and with good reason. An Ilkhanid flanged tomb tower at Bastām (northern Iran, 1300–1309; fig. 4.18) which has lost its external dome and now sports only a small, low inner dome, demonstrates the problem of this aesthetic mismatch, which robs the dramatic vertical form of the tomb tower of much of its impact.⁹⁴⁶

As Grabar has noted, the domical mausoleum is certainly the most ubiquitous type of domed construction in Islamic architecture, and while quality may vary widely, all are more or less variations on a single theme that seems to have first appeared in significant numbers in the tenth century and had come to abound by the twelfth.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴³ Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 127.

⁹⁴⁴ Meisami 2001: 31.

⁹⁴⁵ Although Hillenbrand (1982: 241) has noted that the Khurasanian tomb tower became progressively squatter after the extraordinary beginning of the form at the Gunbad-i Qābūs (1006–7), none of the extant tomb towers are as squat as the inkwells.

⁹⁴⁶ The Bastām tower probably had a conical dome in its original state (Hillenbrand 1982: 246).

⁹⁴⁷ Grabar 1963 (a): 193–4; *idem* 1966: 12–13, 38; Hillenbrand 2000: 280. Domes and domical structures were naturally not limited to funerary architecture. Grabar (1963 [a]: 197; *idem* 1966: 44)

An earlier association of the domed monument with commemorative structures is evinced by the fragment of a painting from Panjikent which shows a body contained within a structure bearing an open arcade and topped with, significantly, a lobed dome (fig. 4.19).⁹⁴⁸ It is important to bear in mind that there must have been, at the time the inkwells were being made, far more freestanding domed architecture in Afghanistan and the surrounding areas than is visible there now. The ubiquity of this form can be assumed from the considerable number of surviving examples.

In overall terms, it is actually the domed octagonal funerary monument, a type very frequently met with in Khurasan and the neighbouring areas, which provides the closest parallels for the inkwells.⁹⁴⁹ There are polygonal domed buildings that can be compared to the inkwells in terms of their squat proportions, such as the octagonal tomb at Bust (twelfth or early thirteenth century; fig. 4.20). With other examples of the form such as the Kharraqān tomb towers (1067 and 1093; figs 2.47 a and b) there is the additional parallel of the round engaged pilasters that project at the eight points of intersection between sides.⁹⁵⁰ These are described by Hillenbrand as reminiscent of the ribs of a tent frame (the whole building indeed recalling a tent),⁹⁵¹ and are called to mind directly when looking at the inkwells that bear three or four external tubes running from top to bottom (cat. nos 4.7 and 4.8).⁹⁵²

However, if the intention of the artists of the inkwells was to replicate precisely the forms of such buildings, they would presumably have made them polygonal: as it stands, cat. nos 4.5 and 4.6 are the only polygonal examples of the form encountered thus far. A fairly direct comparison with architecture can be drawn in the case of the polygonal inkwells. For example, compare the eight flat, undecorated sides, rounded dome and articulated cornice of cat. no. 4.6 with the Kākūyid tomb tower at Abarqūh (1056; fig. 4.21). As polygonal pieces do exist, however rare, we can assume that the

suggests that the use of domes in front of the *mihrāb*, and in throne rooms, pavilions and palaces, had maintained in early Islam the prestige that the form had carried over from antiquity, this elevated status contributing to their use on mausolea.

⁹⁴⁸ Grabar 1963 (a): 193.

⁹⁴⁹ Hillenbrand 2000: 286.

⁹⁵⁰ Stronach and Cuyler Young Jr 1966: 1–6.

⁹⁵¹ Hillenbrand 2000: 277.

⁹⁵² This feature also appears on a number of other mausolea, including the Gunbad-i Qabud in Marāgha (illustrated in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 150).

artists of the cylindrical inkwells would have made them polygonal if they had wanted them to be so. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the cylindrical inkwells have no relationship with polygonal structures. Krautheimer has shown that medieval European architects, their patrons and the general public apparently recognised ‘a general pattern and its implications’ to the extent that the circular plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem could be rendered as an octagonal or dodecagonal form in the medieval buildings that purported to copy it.⁹⁵³ Similarly, there exist Ottoman proxy Hajj certificates that depict the octagonal Dome of the Rock with up to seventeen sides.⁹⁵⁴ Is it then possible that the cylindrical form of the inkwells could have been unproblematically evocative of a commonly polygonal type of domed monument to a medieval Islamic audience?⁹⁵⁵

In addition to the representational approximation that may have taken place, the cylindrical plan also has a practical value. The basic form of the bronze inkwell was already that of a cylinder: examples excavated from Nishapur show early instances of the type.⁹⁵⁶ The cylinder is the most efficient form of container for ink, for as Baer notes, it meant that ink could not collect in corners and it was therefore considered preferable for this reason.⁹⁵⁷ To add a polygonal exterior to a cylindrical interior in bronze would have been expensive, heavy and cumbersome, particularly when we recall that the inkwells are believed to have been carried around by scribes, either attached to their hands or their belts. Additionally, the cylindrical pot is more pleasant to hold in the hand than a polygonal one.⁹⁵⁸ While the earlier ceramic inkwell from Nishapur (fig. 4.13) was clearly not intended to be routinely carried around, the heavy accretions of ceramic in the form of the lobed apses and reveals that articulate that piece would not present a practical problem and the artist could

⁹⁵³ Krautheimer 1971: 117–21. Krautheimer also cites the written description of an octagonal church by Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century) who reports the plan as forming a ‘circle with eight angles’, thus completely conflating the two forms.

⁹⁵⁴ Bernardini 2000: 98–100.

⁹⁵⁵ The equation of polygonal ground plans with circular forms is also occasionally met with in contemporary scholarship concerning the antecedents of the Dome of the Rock (for example Grabar 2006: 98).

⁹⁵⁶ Allan 1982 (a): 44–5.

⁹⁵⁷ Baer 1972: 199, citing Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā* p. 458, lines 2–9.

⁹⁵⁸ Having handled a large number of examples in various collections I have noted that the hand fits around the cylindrical examples very comfortably. The same cannot be said of cat. no. 4.6.

fully develop his fantasy of the architectural inkwell. Conversely, in the case of the metalwork inkwells the cylindrical model is the best, perhaps the only practical solution to the question of form. Thus architectural connotations, while they may have been prompted by the loose resemblance between the cylindrical domed form of the basic inkwell and the freestanding domical monument, also remained subordinated to the circular plan, and function appears to have won out of over form.

A further option, following the lead of chapter two, would be to consider the inkwells in reference to impermanent structures, possibly a particular type of cylindrical tent or pavilion.⁹⁵⁹ In terms of overall form and proportions of dome to cylindrical body, one can draw parallels between the inkwells and the round Turkic yurt-type tent represented in many Timurid garden scenes (fig. 4.22), with its solid, cylindrical body and small, ribbed central cupola.⁹⁶⁰ The match is not exact, for the Timurid tent never has a completely flat top, nor does its crowning dome end in a finial.⁹⁶¹ However, an earlier image of a similar tent painted in lustre on a circular ceramic plaque dated 1312 (fig. 4.23) is very closely comparable with the inkwells. Note the proportions, the slightly ogival dome, the elaborate finial and the pronounced batter.⁹⁶² Adle believes that this image represents a cylindrical domed tent (*khargāh*) pitched directly behind a larger square tent with a flat roof (*bārgāh*), which would explain the guy ropes, but this seems a rather literal-minded interpretation.⁹⁶³ It is more plausible that this is a fantastic tent – the inscription on the partner panel describes how it was seen in a dream, and after all this is a painted representation, not a didactic plan for erecting a tent⁹⁶⁴ – and as such the laws that would govern a full-size construction of monumental form have been cheerfully ignored.

⁹⁵⁹ On the possible relationship between tents and the forms of mausolea discussed above, see Hillenbrand 2000: 275; on that between tents and pavilions see O’Kane 1993: 249–68.

⁹⁶⁰ See Pope 1981: Vol. 3, 1414–5; Wilber 1979: 129, 133.

⁹⁶¹ Pope 1981: Vol. 3, 1415.

⁹⁶² On the debt owed by this piece to miniature painting, see Adle 1982: 214–17.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 203–4.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

The often dense and glittering decoration of the inkwells, with epigraphic, figural and decorative imagery represented across the group, may also be compared to the lavish textiles of later royal tents:

And in that plain they pitched for him many tents of different sort of which one had the upper and lower border woven in gold...and another was adorned with gems of various sort, which, set in broad curtains brodered with gold dazzled the eye. In the midst they also set roofs of silver... They also showed rare treasures and hung there curtains of marvellous beauty and among them a curtain of cloth, taken from the treasury of Sultan Abu Yazid [Bayezid I]...decorated with various pictures of herbs, buildings, and leaves, also of reptiles, and with figures of birds, wild beasts and forms of old men, young men, women and children and painted inscriptions and rarities of distant countries and joyous instruments of music and rare animals portrayed with different hues, of perfect beauty with limbs firmly joined.⁹⁶⁵

It is therefore possible that we should think of the inkwells in terms of Golombek's 'textile mentality'.⁹⁶⁶ Golombek has cited references to early Islamic tents ornamented with human and animal figures as well as fabulous beasts and crosses.⁹⁶⁷ Perhaps most pertinently, a tent made for the Hamdanid prince Sayf al-Dawlah was decorated inside with a scene of the Byzantine emperor paying homage to the prince, while the surrounding border – described as a garden – was decorated with images of animals and vegetation.⁹⁶⁸ In the frequent appearance of bands of marching or running animals on the inkwells, particularly on the outer edges of some of the lids (for example cat. no. 4.32), it might be possible to propose a relationship between this type of textile decoration and that seen on the inkwells and other examples of medieval inlaid metalwork. The proximity of architectural decoration to textiles has been well illustrated by Golombek, and it is possible to regard the inkwells as imitative of either a type of round tent covered in real textiles, or a built structure decorated with textiles or with some form of more permanent decoration that nevertheless refers to the 'draped world' of medieval Persia.⁹⁶⁹

⁹⁶⁵ Ibn Arabshah 1936: 216. On the considerable number of Timurid miniatures that depict rulers seated in or in front of yurts, see Lentz and Lowry 1989: 34; O'Kane 1987: 104–5; Golombek 1995: 137–47.

⁹⁶⁶ Golombek 1988: 34.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, citing T. Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, (New York, 1965), p. 21.

⁹⁶⁹ For example see Grabar (2006: 110) on the interior decoration of the Dome of the Rock.

Thus, while there is no single monument that provides a mimetically precise prototype for the form of the inkwells, the overall form of the objects, particularly their self-contained cylindricality (however squat they may be, the emphasis is still on the vertical) and the foregrounding of the lobed dome which forms the lid, suggests that they are indeed to be understood, as Grabar has suggested, as evoking monumental forms to a certain degree. The subjective nature of this position is acknowledged, but in the absence of a secure consensus amongst other scholars or any clear historical evidence the present study has little choice but to proceed on a subjective assumption based solely on appearance.

The Lobed Cupola

The lobed domical cap seems to be so significant to the overall iconography of the inkwell that it appears on the great majority of examples. And yet it seems impossible to find, in the extant architecture from the medieval period, any architectural dome that bears a close resemblance to such forms. As has already been noted, the typically small diameter of the domical section when compared with the overall diameter of the lid makes a one-to-one architectural equation with any surviving monuments difficult. A different type of domed inkwell from Persia, developed in the Safavid period and apparently only made at the highest level of craftsmanship, is proportionally taller and narrower and has a rounded ogival dome almost as broad in profile as the shaft.⁹⁷⁰ The correlation of proportions between dome and cylindrical body allows the Safavid type to appear unequivocally architectural, which cannot be said of the earlier Khurasanian pieces under study.

⁹⁷⁰ See the sixteenth-century examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. nos 1365-1904, 454:2-1888 and 2:1883 (illustrated in Komaroff 1992: figs 51, 54 and 56). The latter is also illustrated in Mayer 1959, plate IX and bears the name of the artist Mīrak Ḥusayn. The translations of the inscription on this piece are given in Melikian-Chirvani 1973: 100–1 and *idem* 1976: 24–30. See also the inkwell formerly in the collection of Paul Garnier (Migeon 1927: vol. 2, 91) which is possibly identical with Metropolitan Museum 41.120a,b (illustrated in Komaroff 1992: fig. 35). A further example in the Benaki Museum, inv. no. ΓΕ 13172 (illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 13 plate 1387A), is still attached to its double-barrelled pen case. A later example of the form in the Victoria and Albert Museum is dated 1709 (Pope 1981: Vol. 13, plate 1388C). An inkwell with attached pencase, thought to have been executed in western Persia or the Jazira around 1275, forms something of intermediary between the earlier Khurasanian type and the more elegant Safavid examples (see illustration in Digard 2002: 166–7).

However, as has already been shown in chapters two and three, architectural components can be isolated and reshuffled within the medium of the miniature object, because in such contexts architectural components do not have to do any structural work and are at liberty to become the subjects of visual play or fantasy. For this reason the element of the domical lid will be examined in isolation and compared with the representation of domes in other media as well as true architecture.

A comparison could possibly be made with some of the conical roofs of Seljuq Anatolia (fig. 4.24), which have been divided into segments and decorated with arches in low relief, effectively creating a decorative cap that resembles a tented canopy.⁹⁷¹ This device is not so very close in appearance to the bulbous, petal-shaped lobes of the caps on the inkwells that it can be presented as a definite prototype for the form. However, it is possible that its appearance in Seljuq Anatolia represents one interpretation of a more widespread form that has since been lost. Perhaps a better parallel could be suggested in the rare externally lobed domes of the early Islamic world, the best-known examples being found on the Great Mosque of Qairawān and the Great Mosque of Tunis. This form has been convincingly suggested by Creswell to follow Roman prototypes seen in the pre-Muslim architecture of Tunisia.⁹⁷² However, the considerable distance between Khurasan and Roman North Africa make this a rather unlikely source of inspiration for the domical lids of the inkwells, and in fact the formal differences between the petal-like, ogival caps of the inkwells and the rounded monumental solidity of the Tunisian domes again makes this comparison hard to sustain.

There are also a number of domes seen in miniature paintings that might be drafted in for comparison with the inkwell lids. It should be remembered that in an instance such as this, when there are comparable forms to be found in miniature painting but not really in physical architectural remains, we are either dealing with a delicate and perishable architectural phenomenon, or with something that is more allusive than

⁹⁷¹ See also the Seljuq roofs of Erzurum, illustrated in Ünal 1968: plates 4, 27, 31, fig. 110.

⁹⁷² Creswell 1979: vol. 2, 320.

literal and therefore finds its parallels in the painter's interpretation of architecture rather than that which was originally devised by the architect. The lobed dome seen on the eighth-century painting from Panjikent (fig. 4.19) presumably reflects a real tradition of lobed domes, whether those were permanent structures or textile canopies.⁹⁷³ The closest painted equivalent of the dome on the inkwells is to be seen in the buildings illustrated in the St. Petersburg *Maqāmāt* manuscript (fig. 2.20). Although the St. Petersburg domes are neither ogee in profile nor mounted on collars, the characteristic petal-shaped lobes of the inkwell domes are very closely echoed in the painted versions. The rather pear-shaped finial of the *Maqāmāt* domes is closer to those seen on the purportedly Syrian inkwell (cat. no. 4.1) than to the rounded knob resting on a collar that caps the Persian examples.⁹⁷⁴

Considerably later, there are certain small structures visible in the background of a painting of the *mi'rāj* in a sixteenth-century manuscript of the *Khamseh* of Nizāmī that take a cylindrical form topped with a ribbed or lobed dome surmounted by a finial (figs 4.25 and 4.26). In a similar fashion, the earlier image of a city – identified as Constantinople by Ettinghausen, and as Jerusalem by Grabar – being carried to Muḥammad by an angel has at its centre what appears to be a schematised, domed cylindrical building (fig. 4.27).⁹⁷⁵ In both instances, the very small scale of the architectural representations has led to the use of visual abbreviation, turning complex structures into a symbol of a building type, and this process has an obvious parallel in the three-dimensional processes of miniaturisation that have taken place on the subjects of the present thesis. It is hard to tell whether these painted images should be read as legitimate reflections of an actual building type, or simply as a kind of representational shorthand for the *idea* of an individual building; however, the latter interpretation does not exclude these images from consideration in the discussion of the inkwells if we also regard the inkwells as an evocation rather than a representation of a built structure. From such images we must assume that the domed unit, either truly freestanding or simply the most eye-catching aspect of a larger

⁹⁷³ Grabar 1963 (a): 192.

⁹⁷⁴ The pear-shaped finials can be compared with the lower sections of some of the examples illustrated in Franz Pasha 1887: fig. 128, and as such can perhaps be understood as heavily schematised stand-ins for more complex forms with more parts.

⁹⁷⁵ Ettinghausen 1957 (a): 373–6; Grabar 2006: 53.

building complex, was a widespread and extremely familiar architectural trope in medieval Persia and as such could be employed to stand in as the visual symbol for a building in contexts where pictorial space was limited.

As with other material, a comparison can also be made with poetic descriptions of architecture, which, while they may not enable us to reconstruct the buildings described, grant access to understanding how they appeared and what they meant to those who eulogised them.⁹⁷⁶ Along with vaults or arches and the arcade (*riwāq*), one of the most common architectural elements referred to in the palace description of Ghaznavid poetry is the dome (*khum* or *gunbad*), with hyperbolic description of the dome often prefiguring the image of the palace itself.⁹⁷⁷ Could the ‘cupola’ of the inkwells also stand as an abbreviated architectural signifier, a visual rather than verbal form of *ekphrasis*? The *qaṣīda* quoted at the head of this chapter, which refers to the ‘golden helmet’ worn by a tower of one of the palaces of Amīr Yūsuf in place of a parapet, has been interpreted by Meisami as meaning a gilded cupola.⁹⁷⁸ Such a poetic device is surely comparable to the visual recasting of architectural form into attenuated, miniaturised individual elements.

In a second literary interpretation, the lobed dome of the Persian inkwells has been described by Melikian-Chirvani as a reference to the *gunbad-i nīlūfarī* or ‘blue lotus dome’, a metaphor for the sky.⁹⁷⁹ This may well be true, and he constructs a persuasive argument for a celestial-kingship reading of the inkwell iconography as a whole, which is particularly attractive in light of the high frequency of astrological scenes on these objects.⁹⁸⁰ Grabar’s equation of the dome of heaven with the pleasure dome illustrates the application of this imagery beyond funerary and commemorative

⁹⁷⁶ Meisami 2001: 42.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁹ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 75. See also the celestial readings of Seljuq tomb towers put forward in Daneshvari 1977: 68–77.

⁹⁸⁰ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 75–77; for further examples with astrological scenes see Baer 1972; an example in the Keir Collection (Von Gladiss 2007: 118–9, and Fehérvári 1976: no. 80); another formerly in the Minassian Collection (Baer 1983: 261), probably identical with the David Collection’s no. 6/1972 (Von Folsach 2001: 307); and a lid in the Kabul Museum illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 69.

architecture;⁹⁸¹ witness also the frequent comparisons between palace domes and the dome of heaven in medieval Persian poetry.⁹⁸² An artistic understanding of domes as reflections of the heavens has existed in the Middle East since pre-Islamic times,⁹⁸³ and celestial imagery does indeed appear on real domes of the medieval period.⁹⁸⁴ The regal and sacred connotations of this imagery need not exclude the possibility of more quotidian contexts for many of the inkwells: imagery relating to both kingship and the heavens is seen at many levels of the artistic production of the medieval Islamic period.⁹⁸⁵

Melikian-Chirvani refers to the form of the lobed dome of the inkwells as a ‘lotus dome’, a type that is often identified with Mughal India. However, much earlier examples of the lotus dome, albeit in rather lower relief, can be seen on representations of the Buddhist architecture of Gandhara (fig. 4.28) and their dominating lobed forms make it clear why Melikian-Chirvani used this term in his discussion of the inkwells.⁹⁸⁶ While the full-size architectural remains of Gandharan Buddhism will be discussed below in the context of domed incense burners, it is the representations of such architecture that most clearly illustrate the lotus dome, as this detail has often been lost from surviving architecture. The use of a lotus form on the inner surface of the central stone of the ceiling or dome in the pre-Islamic monuments of Kashmir is noted by Sahni, and this idea appears to have been reflected in the use of the lotus as an external crowning form for the domes of Buddhist *stūpas*.⁹⁸⁷ It is worth remembering that Afghanistan before 1980 contained

⁹⁸¹ Grabar 1990 (a): 19–20.

⁹⁸² Meisami 2001: 35–6, 38; see also Grabar 1990 (a): 21. However repetitive, the recurrence of this particular trope within literature serves to highlight both the importance that must have been attached to the creation of architectural domes that rivalled the heavens, and the widely-experienced celestial associations that such domes must have borne in their original contexts: see Meisami 2001: 27–36; Meisami 2001 (a): 75.

⁹⁸³ On the ‘Dome of Heaven’, see Bloom 1993: 136–7; Lehmann 1945: 1–27; Soper 1947: 225–48; Grabar 1990 (a): 15–21. On celestial imagery in tent domes, see Wilber 1979: 130.

⁹⁸⁴ The shrine of the Twelve Imāms in Yazd still bears traces of the star motifs painted on each joint of the drum interior. See also later examples of dome interiors in Yazd in Kadoi 2005: 217–29.

⁹⁸⁵ Grabar 1968: 647–8.

⁹⁸⁶ The lotus dome was a well-developed component of *stūpa* architecture by the first to third centuries CE (Behrendt 2004: 121–3). The ceilings and dome interiors of Gandhara that are decorated with a central lotus apparently make reference to the ‘cosmic lotus’ and lotus as a solar symbol, both of which appear to have existed in India before the coming of Buddhism, and can presumably be understood as symbolic ‘domes of heaven’ (Carter 1981: 75; Soper 1947: 228–9).

⁹⁸⁷ Sahni 1915–16: 52, 54.

a great number of Buddhist monuments, so that the craftsmen of medieval Herat only had to use their eyes, presumably, to find inspiration. As lotus domes and finials will be discussed in the next section, the present discussion will present only a non-architectural artefact of Buddhist Gandhara. This tiny box reliquary from the second or third century CE was excavated at the Manikyala Great *Stūpa* in the Punjab (fig. 4.29).⁹⁸⁸ As a cylindrical container with a flat lid it can perhaps be compared to the inkwells, although the scale is very different, particularly in the use of the nine-petalled lotus flower surrounding a knob handle (made of amber in this case) which form contains a distant foretaste of the lotus-domed lid employed on the Persian inkwells. Closer in scale, if not materials, is a stone reliquary box excavated from the Kotpur *stūpa* in Afghanistan (fig. 4.30).⁹⁸⁹ Errington links the lotus lid seen on so many Buddhist reliquaries of the period with the representations of lotus flowers seen on the crowns of *stūpa* domes, thus creating another possible link in the architectural chain.⁹⁹⁰ As always, these pre-Islamic objects carry the caveat that their forms are not presented here as a literal and direct source for the form of the inkwells, but as evidence of a pre-existing tradition of knob-handled cylindrical containers with lobed radial decoration that may well have informed the appearance of the inkwells.

Finally, there are a few objects excavated at Nishapur that also follow the lobed domical form of the inkwell lids. Two bronze items – one round and one octagonal in plan – are clearly lids from vessels of some sort. Each has a domical central part decorated with raised lobes, and they presumably had finials in their original incarnations (fig. 4.31).⁹⁹¹ Eight-lobed brick and plaster bosses of similar form were found amongst the fragments of architectural decoration excavated at Nishapur (fig. 4.32). Wilkinson suggests that these were used in conjunction with flat, round brick elements decorated with an outer circle of small discs,⁹⁹² which may have presented

⁹⁸⁸ A table of forms of Buddhist reliquaries and the near-identical forms of cosmetic boxes excavated from royal graves at Tilya Tepe is given in Brown 2006: 202–3: note that all examples are round in plan.

⁹⁸⁹ A similar schist reliquary in the British Museum (inv. no. 1880.95) shows a pronounced batter, closely comparable with the form of some of the inkwells.

⁹⁹⁰ Errington 1992: 185.

⁹⁹¹ Allan 1982 (a): 53, 99.

⁹⁹² Wilkinson 1986: 100–101.

an overall appearance comparable to the domical sections of cat. nos 4.16 and 4.30.⁹⁹³ Thus, the lobed form of the inkwell lids was found on other types of lid, and on architectural decoration.

The significance of the dome itself as a dominating architectural element can be identified in the many descriptions of domed buildings that privilege the dome above all else. Accounts of the Dome of the Rock provide the most obvious examples,⁹⁹⁴ but when Nāṣir-i Khusraw, writing in the middle of the eleventh century, notes Qā'in as a city where all the buildings are domed, giving almost no further description of the architecture,⁹⁹⁵ the visual significance of the dome to the medieval viewer is underscored. While the lids of the inkwells cannot be compared directly with extant architectural domes, the consistent emphasis placed on this element of the inkwells, which in practical terms need not be anything more than plain knob, asserts the significance of the element. The comparison between representations of domes in miniature painting, particularly the *Maqāmāt* domes, represents the most useful means of approach to this motif. The liberties taken with architectural forms and motifs in miniature painting could also be taken by artists working in three dimensions.

Arched Panels

The last architectural or quasi-architectural motif to be examined within this discussion of the inkwells is the arch-shaped panel. Larger questions about the use of arches and arcades as decoration will be addressed below, but the first focus will be on those inkwells that are decorated with inhabited arcades. That is, the four examples (cat. nos 4.11–4.14) on which the main decorative motif is a sequence of three relatively large arch-shaped niches evenly spaced around the cylindrical body of the inkwell, in each of which is depicted a seated or kneeling figure who fills the space from top to bottom and is set against a background of scrolling vegetal arabesques. A related design can be seen on cat. no. 4.15, recently sold at Bonham's,

⁹⁹³ A more vertical form of brick boss with eight petal-shaped sections was also found at Nishapur; Wilkinson (*ibid.*, 101–2) has suggested from its location that it may have been a finial from a tomb structure.

⁹⁹⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 30–32.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

which bears three large niches occupied by pairs of inlaid figures, each pair seated in a double throne decorated with dragons' heads.⁹⁹⁶ However, the focus of the present study remains with the more standard complement of three seated or kneeling figures.

The niches occupied by figures take, in every case, a very similar outline. A flat bottom rises at the sides in a slight reverse curve, is squeezed in slightly at the shoulders and swells out again before meeting in a pointed ogee top. This form as a decoration for medieval Persian metalwork is seen also on an inlaid brass casket in a private collection, published by Rice, who believed it to be from the late twelfth century. In that instance the arch is occupied by a seated figure holding a cup.⁹⁹⁷ An engraved niche of the same outline – this time occupied by a large harpy – can also be seen on a Ghaznavid brass ewer from the Kabul Museum (fig. 4.33),⁹⁹⁸ and a similar niche filled not with a human or animal figure but with a pair of superposed circles that appear to represent a crescent moon, set on a background of twirling vine scrolls, adorns an ewer from the Herat Museum.⁹⁹⁹

Taragan, in her discussion of the three 'niche-shaped panels' on cat. no. 4.11, makes little mention of the form of the arches containing the human figures with which so much of her article is concerned, beyond reference to an article by Allan.¹⁰⁰⁰ In his article Allan suggests that such motifs were carried over to metalwork from painted decorative cartouches projecting from the sides of elaborate heading panels in manuscripts.¹⁰⁰¹ While this argument is plausible, the match between the arch-shaped forms on metalwork and those found in manuscript illumination is not so exact that motifs in other media should be excluded from consideration. Both stucco decoration – illustrated here in a panel from Nishapur (fig. 4.34) – and tombstones like those

⁹⁹⁶ The dragon-headed throne on which these figures sit is seen in other examples of medieval Persian metalwork: see cat. no. 4.16; Ettinghausen 1943: 19; Rice 1958: 229–30 and plate II; and Baer 1983: 258–62. Baer suggests that these figures may be personifications of the pseudo-planet *Jawzahr* (Baer 1983: 260–2; see also Allan 1982: 40; and Otto-Dorn 1978–9: 134–5). Wenzel (2005: 140–58) has proposed that images of this type are descended from the 'fire-maker' imagery of Sasanian seals.

⁹⁹⁷ Rice 1958: 227 and plate I.

⁹⁹⁸ Rowland 1971: plate 184.

⁹⁹⁹ Melikian-Chirvani 1979: 12–15 and plate 4.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Taragan 2005: 30, n. 8; Allan 1994: 119–26.

¹⁰⁰¹ Allan 1994: 119–20.

found at Bust (fig. 4.35) demonstrate the existence of a very similar decorative motif in other media and contexts. Furthermore, in the case of architectural decoration the motif is in the right orientation for comparison with the examples on metalwork, unlike the manuscript illuminations.¹⁰⁰² A different arch form seen on a carved stone slab excavated at Ghazni in Afghanistan and thought to date from the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, contains a standing figure (fig. 4.36).¹⁰⁰³ Although the arch of this piece is not a formal match for those of the inkwells, it is clearly flanked on either side by the remains of similar arches and almost certainly formed part of an inhabited arcade when originally *in situ* as palace decoration, suggesting another possible source for the inhabited niches of the inkwells.¹⁰⁰⁴

Moving from the appearance of the arch to that of its occupants on the four ‘inhabited’ inkwells, we find a remarkably consistent set of characters. Taragan has argued that these can be understood as three images of scribes engaged with the tools of their trade.¹⁰⁰⁵ On each inkwell, one of the three figures kneels and holds an object that should be read as an inkwell, apparently offering it up.¹⁰⁰⁶ As Taragan has noted, this visual example of *mise-en-abyme* places these inkwells in an unusual category of medieval Persian objects that ‘speak’ about themselves through pictures as well as words.¹⁰⁰⁷

It is interesting that none of the images of inkwells found on the inkwells themselves show the domed lid that is characteristic of the object on which the image appears. Yet this domed lid is clearly visible in the painting of an inkwell that appears in the

¹⁰⁰² An unusual tiny inkwell in the form of a deep, straight-sided and pointed arch with a hinged panel is now in the Khalili Collection (MTW 1026), and perhaps suggests a further link between the arch as a decorative form and the function of the inkwell.

¹⁰⁰³ Bombaci 1959: 10.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Bombaci (*ibid.*, 5, 10) notes the close resemblance between the figure depicted on this slab and those seen in the wall paintings at Lashgarī Bāzār (see Schlumberger 1952: plate XXXI).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Taragan 2005: 30–5. I broadly agree with Taragan’s reading of the iconography of cat. no. 4.12, which had formerly been misinterpreted by Melikian-Chirvani (1982: 124–5).

¹⁰⁰⁶ Cat. no. 4.14 bears a representation of a kneeling figure holding a flat-topped and round-bottomed object rather than an oblong one, although the many iconographic similarities between the Khalili Collection inkwell and the others of this type may allow us to read this object as an inkwell also, either of a different type or poorly represented. According to Taragan’s interpretation (2005: 30), the round-bottomed object carried by the bearded man on cat. no. 4.19 should also be interpreted as an inkwell.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

St Petersburg *Maqāmāt* (fig. 2.20).¹⁰⁰⁸ Note that the dome of the *Maqāmāt* inkwell lid is hemispherical and far closer in outline to the Metropolitan Museum example ascribed by Baer to Syria or Mesopotamia than to any of the lobed domes of the inkwells thought to be from Persia: the artist has presumably painted an inkwell modelled on those he encountered in the bureaucratic contexts of his own city.¹⁰⁰⁹ A further inkwell visible in one of the illustrations of the 1199 *Kitāb al-diryāq* (fig. 4.37) is also capped with a dome, this time of a more ogee outline, but again without any depiction of lobes.¹⁰¹⁰

Finally, as regards the inhabited arches of cat. nos 4.11–4.14, we must also return to an idea discussed in previous chapters. That is, the role of the human figure as a prompt for reading space architecturally. The figures on the inhabited inkwells perform this function to a certain degree: their appearance within the niches prompts the reading of those fields as quasi-architectural space in which people sit or kneel. This inevitably leads to a reading of the overall form of the inkwell as one that is architectural to a greater or lesser degree. In turn, this opens up a larger question regarding the extent to which we, humans who depend first and foremost on our vision for interpreting the world, will automatically interpret representations and forms to refer to or replicate things we have previously encountered.¹⁰¹¹ Studies of the eye movements of subjects asked to view paintings freely and then asked to glean specific information from the same images have revealed that ‘visual perception is purposive and related to tasks, principally the search for meaning’, and more significantly that ‘attention affects what we see and attention, in turn, can be guided by instruction’.¹⁰¹² In this light the architectural reading of the inkwells may be directly connected to the presence of certain prompts, such as the domical lid, but

¹⁰⁰⁸ Baer 1996: 374. A similar inkwell is visible in fol. 77 of the Istanbul *Maqāmāt* (see Grabar 1963: fig. 14).

¹⁰⁰⁹ Baer 1972: 209; see also Grabar 1984: 11; Rice 1959: 215–18; Ettinghausen 1977: 104–5.

¹⁰¹⁰ Melikian-Chirvani (1967: 4–16) has suggested a Persian origin for this manuscript, but most authors agree that it is of Jaziran provenance: see Pancaroğlu 2001: n. 3.

¹⁰¹¹ Visual consciousness, or the means by which we make the best possible interpretation of the visual material we encounter based on previous experiences and, possibly, on desired outcomes, is one of the least understood aspects of visual processing in humans, and one of the most fundamental properties that currently separates human brains from machines. See Huxlin 2007: 627–9.

¹⁰¹² Maginnis 1990: 113.

perhaps most suggestive of such prompts is the presence of figures within fields that connote architectural space.

Following the inhabited arch comes the uninhabited arch as decorative motif. The use of an uninhabited arch or niche occurs on only six out of the sixty-plus inkwells assembled during the course of this research (cat. nos 4.19–4.24).¹⁰¹³ Although this motif may well be present on further examples not yet encountered, it does appear from this sample that it is not particularly common.¹⁰¹⁴ Moreover, the use of this motif is not sufficiently consistent to count these examples as a group, unlike the four inkwells with inhabited arches described above.

Two of the six inkwells in question use arch motifs within a decorative scheme that also incorporates human figures (cat. nos 4.19 and 4.20). Both of these inkwells have been divided into three horizontal registers on the main body, with the outer wall of the lid forming a fourth register at the top. In both cases, the upper and lower of the three body registers are about half the height each of the central register and are occupied with inscriptions interspersed with roundels. On the piece in the David Collection the lower inscription is in Kufic and the upper is in a cursive script; the reverse is true of the Louvre inkwell.¹⁰¹⁵ On the central register of each, an inlaid niche-shaped field drawn to the full height of the register is placed equidistantly between each of the three attachment plates for the loops (the plates have been lost from the Louvre example but their placement is still clearly visible), and between each niche-shaped panel and attachment plate is a single figure, giving six figures per inkwell in all. Although the piece from the David Collection has not been published from every angle, and the Louvre piece is rather damaged and hard to read, at least some of the figures on each appear to be interacting with each other across the arch-shaped panels.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹³ See also the appendix.

¹⁰¹⁴ An arch-shaped opening can be seen in certain penboxes from medieval Persia: see Baer 1983: 69, and Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 88.

¹⁰¹⁵ On the co-existence of Kufic and cursive scripts on objects from the Seljuq period see Ettinghausen 1970: 118–20.

¹⁰¹⁶ Taragan has suggested that the running figure with a beard and pointed cap seen on cat. no. 4.19 should be understood as carrying an inkwell, rather than a purse as was thought in previous interpretations (Taragan 2005: 37; Von Folsach *et al.* 1996: 149). She also suggests that the other

The arch-shaped panels themselves are not the same on both inkwells. Those of cat. no. 4.19 are almost as broad at the base as they are at the shoulders, and terminate in a fairly shallow pointed ogee top. They are close in outline to those of the inhabited-arch inkwells described above. A similar arch-shaped field, also filled with a scrolling design, appears on an inkwell in the Metropolitan Museum (cat. no. 4.21), although in the latter example the arch takes up a greater percentage of the vessel surface and is not fully subordinated to the upper and lower registers. Note also that the outlines of the arches on the David Collection inkwell are actually formed from the crossing and interlacing of the bands that form the outer edges of the upper and lower registers, in similar fashion to the decorative miniature arcades of Mar Bahnam and Gu' Kummet.¹⁰¹⁷

The arches of cat. no. 4.20 are more unusual, with a narrow base, very tightly squeezed waist and strong outward flare to a lobed apex.¹⁰¹⁸ This form of arch is faintly echoed in the complex interlace patterns of an inkwell in the Aga Khan collection (cat. no. 4.22). Both can be directly compared with the panel found at Nishapur (fig. 4.34), and a similar design seen on a carved brick, thought to form part of a repeating sequence of wall decoration,¹⁰¹⁹ as well as the famous arch-shaped epigraphic panel on the cenotaph of Sultan Mahmūd at Ghazna.¹⁰²⁰

The placement of the arches on cat. nos 4.19 and 4.20, between the pairs of figures apparently engaged in dialogue, makes for interesting reading. Holding a small

object carried by this figure is a reed pen or sharpener, but this is not very convincing: it is clearly almost as tall as the figure. In fact, a direct comparison for both objects can be seen in some of the *Maqāmāt* illustrations of Abū Zayd from the Paris 3929 manuscript (Grabar 1974: figs 6, 7 and 10). The staff and shoulder-bag (?) carried by Abū Zayd in these illustrations are a perfect match for the objects carried by the bearded man on the David Collection inkwell.

¹⁰¹⁷ Illustrated respectively in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 293, and Whelan 1980: figs 2–8.

¹⁰¹⁸ The outline of this arch is quite similar to those forming an occupied arcade on a silver-inlaid bronze pyxis from the Ayyubid Jazirah, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Rogers Fund 1971.39; illustrated in Collinet 2001 [a]: 114).

¹⁰¹⁹ Illustrated in Wilkinson 1986: 105–6, who notes that a much larger but very similar form of arch, dated to 1116, was used as a repeating motif on the internal walls of the Friday Mosque at Qazvin. A similar form of arch is seen on a silver candlestick in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (48.1283) but this piece has recently been suggested to be a twentieth-century forgery (see the object record presented at <http://www.mfa.org/collections>).

¹⁰²⁰ Illustrated in Hillenbrand 2000 (a): 177.

object of this type in the hand, one is compelled to rotate it to see who is talking to whom. On the Louvre example, at least one pair of figures appears to be talking across an arch-shaped panel, while, moving counter-clockwise, on either side of the next arch one figure watches another who has turned his back and faces toward the attachment plate whilst kneeling and waving his arms in the air.¹⁰²¹ The dialogue is fascinating but confusing, as also appears to be the case on the David Collection inkwell.¹⁰²² The figures seem in almost all cases to be negotiating either across or away from the arch or attachment plate that lies between them and their fellow men, prompting a reading of the two-dimensional arch-shaped panel as a structural element of the inkwell almost equivalent to the three-dimensional attachment plates. This contributes to a quasi-architectural understanding of the pictorial space occupied by the figures. The arrangement of figures who are seated on a raised baseline (the lower inscription panel) and hemmed in from above by a low ceiling or frame edge (the upper inscription panel), while conversing over or around the architectonic interruptions of arches and plates, becomes almost theatrical, and this is surely intended at least in part to be humorous. There may well be a debt to shadow-play within these scenes, with their expressive postures and plain backgrounds,¹⁰²³ or even an element of spatial innovation that could be linked to the later development of margin invasion in Persian miniature painting.¹⁰²⁴

However, this analysis is still tied to the examples of arch-shaped panels that have human figures around them, even if not inside them, to provide an architectural scale and to delineate the architectural possibilities of the two-dimensional space they occupy and the three-dimensional form it is wrapped around. Those examples that sport niche-shaped panels without human occupants or attendants are somewhat less easy to read in an architecturalising vein. An example in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 4.23) is decorated with an overall scheme that closely resembles those of the four

¹⁰²¹ Particular thanks are due to Carine Juvin, who patiently allowed me to photograph this object from all angles.

¹⁰²² Note that figures with pointed hats and beards appear on both (one on cat. no. 4.20, kneeling, and at least two on cat. no. 4.19, one kneeling and one running or striding) and in both cases seem quite markedly different in appearance from the other inhabitants of the inkwell: on similar figures in ceramic painting and shadow puppetry see Ettinghausen 1934: 12.

¹⁰²³ *Ibid.*, 12–15; *idem* 1977: 82–3; Baer 1999: 38–40.

¹⁰²⁴ See Brend 2001: 39–56, and Hillenbrand 1992: 84–92.

inkwells whose arches are occupied, but in this case the arch is unoccupied and filled with a bold curvilinear interlace design on a smaller curvilinear background design, enhanced with a dark olive resinous material. A further piece in the same collection (cat. no 4.24) is also decorated with three large arch-shaped fields, but in this case the design is emboldened by the use of thick interlaced outline bands which twist off at the shoulders of the arch to form a busy network of thick frames and knotted designs.¹⁰²⁵ A similar motif is evident in the roundels of a candlestick base from Iraq or Syria.¹⁰²⁶ Once again, the parallels with Gu' Kummēt are clear.¹⁰²⁷

There is clearly an architectural element to the motif of the niche- or arch-shaped field, and it must be re-stated that these motifs on metalwork should not be judged solely as an offshoot of manuscript illumination. In some cases, most obviously cat. nos 4.11–4.14, 4.19 and 4.20, it appears that the designers of the inkwells have consciously played with the architectural implications of the form to a certain extent, creating schemata that integrate figures and arches in such a way that the architectural possibilities of the inkwell's form are brought to the fore. But in other cases, such as cat. nos 4.21 and 4.22, there is only the faintest echo of an architectural conception of form. The dissolution of the motif into a web of interlace knotwork (cat. no. 4.22) or its assumption of the role of one decorative motif amongst many rob it of this rather context-dependent meaning. However, it should not be forgotten that the use of non-structural arch forms as a decorative device in full-size architecture on occasion led to architectural decoration that also saw the arch partially dissolved within a web of tendrils and arabesques (fig. 4.38): this device is not just a preserve of the minor arts.

Miniature Arcades

It is important at this juncture to underscore the long history of the miniature arch, arcade and niche as decoration on portable objects in the Islamic world. Most

¹⁰²⁵ A very similar piece was offered for sale as part of a group of four inkwells in Christie's South Kensington, sale 5836, *Indian and Islamic Works of Art and Textiles*, 9 October 2009, lot no. 113.

¹⁰²⁶ Baer 1983: 202.

¹⁰²⁷ Note the layering of mimetic simulation: the interlaced architectural frames on cat. no. 4.24 are an imitation in engraved metal of carved stone motifs, which are themselves a manipulation of stone to look like something else, e.g., a continuous cord or interwoven thread. See Golombek 1988: 35–6.

certainly, this usage did not begin with the inkwells. The use of miniature arcades as a form of repeating decoration is relatively common amongst vessels. To give just one early example, a well-known undated dish, possibly from early Islamic Persia, and now in Berlin (fig. 4.39), is decorated with the enigmatic central image of a carefully-rendered building (possibly a Zoroastrian structure, inferred from the pair of wings represented below it), surrounded by a radial arcade of round arches on slender columns filled with vegetal scrollwork.¹⁰²⁸ King, basing his interpretation around the so-called ‘Marwān II’ ewer in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, amongst other objects,¹⁰²⁹ has argued that such arcades on Islamic metalwork take their descent from both Sasanian and Classical motifs, becoming increasingly fantastic as the medieval Islamic period progresses.¹⁰³⁰

In another medium entirely, Ewert’s work on the architectural decoration found on tenth- and eleventh-century Spanish Islamic ivories draws comparisons with decorative uses of arches and arcades in Late Antiquity, the early Byzantine period and the European Middle Ages, before charting the dissolution of the interlaced arcade into vegetal ornament on certain ivories of the Caliphate of Cordoba.¹⁰³¹ Along the way Ewert asks a very pertinent question of the pyxis in the cathedral of Braga (fig. 4.40), *viz.* are we to regard the hemispherical lid of this piece as the dome of a *qubba*? It is, to Ewert’s mind, the use of the arcade that prompts this question, indicating the extent to which the arcade as a decorative motif can be a carrier of architectural meanings.¹⁰³²

The domed lid as a prompt for an architectural reading is, then, a relatively common motif amongst certain portable objects. However, there is in the Victoria and Albert Museum a very unusual octagonal mortar from medieval Khurasan bearing decoration that is consciously imitative of an architectural arcade on an octagonal plan (figs 4.41 and 4.42), creating an architectural form that needs no lid, domed or

¹⁰²⁸ State Museums of Berlin 2003: 26–7; King 1980: 27–8; Grabar 1963 (a): 197; Pope 1981: Vol. 2, 765–6.

¹⁰²⁹ King 1980: 23–9. On the arcade decoration of this vessel, see also Sarre 1934: 14.

¹⁰³⁰ For a Sasanian prototype see the blind dwarf arcade above the portal at Takht-i Sulaymān (Pope 1946: 64–6).

¹⁰³¹ Ewert 2005.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*, 107. Unfortunately he doesn’t answer his own question.

otherwise, for it to be understood.¹⁰³³ Each outer side is engraved with a polylobed arch, once again comparable with examples found on the tombstones at Bust (fig. 4.43). Directly above the arches is a narrow projecting collar, above which runs the epigraphic frieze that decorates the everted rim of the object, and hanging in the arches are engraved images of lamps. Melikian-Chirvani rightly observes that the whole effect ‘is that of an octagonal mausoleum turned inside out’.¹⁰³⁴ Although this piece is unusual there are a few related metalwork objects, none of them as finely executed or explicitly architectural as fig. 4.41,¹⁰³⁵ as well as an undated stone mortar and pestle in the Bīmāristān Nūr al-Dīn Museum in Damascus (fig. 4.44) that could be called on for comparison.

The Victoria and Albert mortar manages to create a near-complete architectural programme largely through the detailed depiction of arches hung with lamps. A related use of this imagery can be seen in the side panels of the cenotaph of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd (1256–6; fig. 4.45) now in the National Museum, Damascus. There are six individual recessed niches on the long side of the cenotaph, each niche containing a low-relief pointed arch, with carved decoration in the centre of the arch field showing a large vase-shaped hanging lamp and two much smaller lamps, while two candles in candle-holders rest on a low folding table below. As al-‘Ush has noted, there are many medieval Islamic parallels for the image of the lamp hanging in a niche. Depending on context, such images are often understood as a reference to the *mihrāb*.¹⁰³⁶ The image of the *mihrāb* itself, and the paradisiacal connotations carried

¹⁰³³ Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 161–2.

¹⁰³⁴ *Ibid.*, 162. He cites the painted lamps seen on the internal walls of the older of the Kharraqān tomb towers (see Daneshvari 1977: 70–2, 78–80, 82–3, 100–1; and Öney 1979: 401–7) as an example of the type of architectural decoration being imitated here, although we should not discount the possibility that the artist of the Victoria and Albert mortar was thinking of real lamps hanging in open arches. Daneshvari believes that the Kharraqān lamp paintings are copies of thirteenth-century glass mosque lamps from Syria, and as such may reinforce the sense in which the tomb tower should be viewed as a shrine. If true, this would also imply that the paintings are two centuries later than the tomb itself, although given the scarcity of evidence regarding the appearance of early lamps (see Rice 1955: 214–20) it is hard to say with certainty.

¹⁰³⁵ See the example, decorated with arch-shaped panels, illustrated in Edgü 1983: 41; a related piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 13, plate 1281; and the group of twenty-two mortars decorated with merlons around the outer rim, excavated in southern Uzbekistan and thought to date to the eleventh century, illustrated in Ivanov 1998: 171 and plate XXIV.

¹⁰³⁶ Al-‘Ush 1963: 137–8.

within such images of the niche, are clearly of significance in the creation of this heavily liturgical version of the decorative arcade.¹⁰³⁷

This particular object raises a further aspect of the arcade as a decorative motif, *viz.* the possibility of the decorative arcade as a designation of the sacred. Hillenbrand has noted that the arcade in early Islamic art frequently seems to delineate boundaries or the separation of secular and sacred space.¹⁰³⁸ That the miniature arcade can carry such symbolism would explain its use in a great number of sacred or semi-sacred contexts. The arcade as decorative motif is seen on a number of *minbars*, perhaps most notably on the step-fronts of the *minbar* of the Kutubiyya Mosque in Marrakesh (twelfth century; fig. 4.46), although miniature arcades can also be seen on certain Seljuq *minbars*.¹⁰³⁹ Significant also are the individual blind arches among the small, carved panels making up the sides of the *minbar* in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, and the use of a frieze of pierced arch-shaped panels as a baluster on the same *minbar*.¹⁰⁴⁰ In addition to the sacred aspect, the occurrence of miniature arches and arcades on *minbars* can be closely related to the use of similar motifs on temporal or religious thrones or representations of seated rulers, in both the Islamic and the European spheres. For example, the arcaded step on which the feet of the figure rest in a fragmentary eighth-century statue from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī has been suggested to represent the world under the ruler's dominion.¹⁰⁴¹

Miniature arcades also appear frequently in *miḥrāb* decoration, particularly in western Islamic contexts,¹⁰⁴² and are of course a frequent form of architectural decoration, on both religious buildings and palaces, from the very beginnings of

¹⁰³⁷ The use of the niche image seen on certain multi-user prayer rugs, containing repeated images of the niche for the personal use of numbers of individual worshippers, falls into a different category.

¹⁰³⁸ Hillenbrand 1999: 57.

¹⁰³⁹ See Schneider 1980: 25.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Illustrated in Papadopoulos 1979: 395.

¹⁰⁴¹ Illustrated in Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 44. On the Byzantine heritage evident in the statue from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, see Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 45; and Grabar 1987: 152–3. A similar image of kingship is evident in a fragment in the Louvre, from Susa, eighth–sixth centuries BCE, which shows a crenellated building under the feet of the ruler (acc. no. Sb5541).

¹⁰⁴² To name but two, the *miḥrābs* in the Great Mosque of Kairouan (see Golvin 1968: 17–20) and that of the Tomb of Sultan Qalā'ūn (see Behrens-Abouseif 2007: fig. 82). Flood, following earlier suggestions by Rivoira and Creswell, believes the arcaded decoration of the Qalā'ūn *miḥrāb* to be in imitation of the now-lost arcaded main *miḥrāb* of the Great Mosque of Damascus (Flood 1997: 63–4).

Islamic art onwards.¹⁰⁴³ Amongst the portable arts there are several ninth- or tenth-century wooden panels of inlaid arch motifs, variously believed to come from chests, cenotaphs and bookbindings,¹⁰⁴⁴ and a later use of inlaid arcades on Mamluk Qur'an boxes.¹⁰⁴⁵ The bands of delicate inlaid arcades may appear in the latter as a marker of the boundary between the temporal world and the sacred space of the Word itself. Even more tightly bound to the delineation of the sacred space of the page lie the miniature arcades employed as manuscript decoration on some early Qur'ans (fig. 4.47).¹⁰⁴⁶

Inkwells: Summary

This brief survey of the miniature arcade as a decorative motif has taken us rather far from the inkwells, but it was necessary at this point to underscore the broad reach of the form and its many interpretations, rather than take the uses of the arch and arcade seen on the inkwells and incense burners (see below) out of context. Study of the inkwells has highlighted the problems of using a strictly formalistic approach to the identification and exploration of miniature architectural forms amongst the portable arts. It is in non-architectural media that the closest architectural parallels for the inkwells have been found, because in such contexts, both visual and textual, full-size architecture is recast in terms of decorative fields and identifying features. A similar recasting of architectural form, miniaturising and simplifying certain aspects whilst also mutating and adapting to a new form, may have taken place in the creation of the domed cylindrical form of the inkwells.

The element of play is never far away. When looking at these pieces, it sometimes seems as if they flicker in and out of being architectural in intention, like a three-dimensional version of the Rubin vase. At times the form itself seems nothing more than a little pot with a graspable handle, and yet after staring at the decoration of a piece like cat. no. 4.20 one can't help feeling that the craftsman was playing a double game, setting up the inkwell as a building whilst simultaneously refusing to enter

¹⁰⁴³ On the use of dwarf arcades within palace architecture, see Franz 1959: 41–7, and Talgam 2004: fig. 11.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina 2001: 98; Hillenbrand 1999: 57; O'Kane 2006: 17.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Graves forthcoming.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Grabar 1992: 164.

into any structural specifics. That this aspect of the inkwells has been so little discussed to date is surprising. The principal aim of this section has been to redress the situation by opening up new avenues for investigation, rather than to attempt a definitive answer in the limited space available, and the next section will examine a different putative relationship between the domed monument and metalwork forms.

Part Two: Handled Incense Burners

Turning now to incense burners, we must adopt a different approach. The handled incense burners of the medieval Islamic world constitute such a large and diverse body of material that this section will only be able to present a brief survey of the references to architectural forms found on this category of object.¹⁰⁴⁷ Medieval incense burners themselves present several different types. Some of these, notably the ‘hooded’ burners of tenth- or eleventh-century Khurasan, are quite homogenous, but many of the handled types shade into each other and are difficult to arrange into distinct groups.¹⁰⁴⁸ This difficulty is seriously compounded by the lack of precise geographical information for the great majority of incense burners, leaving even major pieces open to conjecture.¹⁰⁴⁹

It is known that incense burners of all types were used in funerary,¹⁰⁵⁰ royal,¹⁰⁵¹ sacred¹⁰⁵² or otherwise elevated contexts in the medieval Islamic world,¹⁰⁵³ as well as

¹⁰⁴⁷ Metzada Gelber of the University of Tel-Aviv has recently completed a Ph.D. on this material alone (Gelber 2008). I have not been able to view the manuscript itself but she has been kind enough to provide me with an extended abstract in English that summarizes her main arguments. My division of the material here roughly follows hers, although our interpretation of the material is in some cases quite different.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Other major types include the well-known zoomorphic burners in the shape of lions, griffins, birds and so forth (see Dimand 1952; Allan 1982 [a]: 86); the much simpler dish-shaped form, which appears to have been fitted with a handle in its early incarnations (Allan 1982 [a]: 43, 86); the later ‘ball’ type (Ward 1990–1: 73–80), and so forth.

¹⁰⁴⁹ See cat. no. 4.65, discussed below.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Al-Tha‘ālibī (1968: 112) describes how, when the corpse of al-Muktafī bi’llāh was borne away for washing and enshrouding, no censer could be found with which to perfume the room and a red earthenware bowl had to be brought from another house; and yet ‘in the inheritance left behind by al-Muktafī, there were thousands of gold censers’.

¹⁰⁵¹ ‘[T]hurifers burning ambergris and aloe’ were carried alongside the sultan during the ceremony celebrating the opening of the canal in Cairo in the eleventh century (Nāṣir-i Khusraw 1986: 50).

¹⁰⁵² Ibn Jubair (1952: 153) describes the burning of aloe in a censer as part of the ceremony attendant upon the reading the Qur’an by the son of a Hanafite Imām in the Haram at Mecca. See also MacCulloch 1914: 205; Aga-Oglu 1945: 28.

having a more workaday application in domestic settings.¹⁰⁵⁴ In the tenth century Ibn al-Faqīh noted that the craftsmen of Hamadan were particularly skilled in the making of various metal implements, including incense burners (*majāmir*), and as Ettinghausen comments, it is only through specialisation that such a reputation could have been achieved.¹⁰⁵⁵ Incense burners were also made from materials other than metal. Al-Tha‘ālibī records that a white stone found at Ṭūs was used to make *majāmir*,¹⁰⁵⁶ and in addition to records of plain earthenware types¹⁰⁵⁷ there exist ceramic incense burners that are clearly derivative of metalwork forms (fig. 4.48).¹⁰⁵⁸ These must have been intended for less exalted settings than some of the most finely-made metalwork versions, although many of the metalwork pieces are not themselves of the highest workmanship. Additionally, an interesting philological alignment between the censer and sacred architecture is observed by Creswell, who notes that a particular type of minaret was referred to by Cairenes as a *mabkhara*, meaning ‘incense burner’.¹⁰⁵⁹

To maintain coherence with the rest of the thesis, this section will focus on material that can be reasonably ascribed to Persia, Greater Syria or Egypt, and will not discuss in any depth objects from further west than Egypt. Furthermore, the numerous examples of the three-legged and domed type of brass incense burner found in Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria and Egypt will not be discussed here. This type can to a certain extent be regarded as a development from the earlier models that will be

¹⁰⁵³ An object described as a ‘censer of wondrous manufacture on which [fresh cut] roses revolved about a lion’ is brought in to Abū ‘Abdallāh following his lengthy interrogation by Ibn al-Haytham (Ibn al-Haytham 2001: 108).

¹⁰⁵⁴ MacCulloch 1914: 205.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ettinghausen 1978: 27, citing Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. J.M. de Goeje (Leiden, 1885), p. 253.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Al-Tha‘ālibī 1968: 133–4.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See also a handled ceramic incense burner from tenth-century Tashkent in Mkrtychev 1998: 18–19, and a further example in the Tareq Rajab Collection illustrated in Rajab 1994: 50.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Creswell 1926 (a): 257. Behrens-Abouseif (1989: 10) appears to suggest that this was not in fact a local Cairene term but Creswell’s, and she has pointed out that this minaret type does not, in fact, recall the form of any known incense burner. However, this is perhaps too literal-minded an interpretation.

examined below, and is of less pressing interest in terms of architectural comparisons.¹⁰⁶⁰

The incense burners to be examined will be placed into three categories based on formal characteristics; further discussion will demonstrate the interconnectedness of these groups and the strong possibility of transferences of form across geographical boundaries. Firstly, cylindrical pieces with domical covers (cat. nos 4.34–4.53) will be explored. The relationship with architecture is least obvious on this group, and primarily non-Islamic monuments will be investigated in this context. The focus will then move to cylindrical pieces from the eastern Mediterranean incorporating arcades (cat. nos 4.54–4.57); and thirdly, square-bodied pieces with domical and pyramidal covers (cat. nos 4.58–4.68). These last present the most obvious and sustained engagement with architectural forms, and will be compared with certain monuments of the domed square type.

The Domed Cylindrical Incense Burner with Handle (cat. nos 4.34–4.53)

The most important initial observation to be made of the domed handled burner, and of handled burners in general, is that the type apparently occurs all over the Islamic world. In the absence of adequate information regarding findspots there is a lot of scope for error, and many attributions appear to have been made on the flimsiest of grounds.¹⁰⁶¹ The present study has been forced by the sheer volume of material to follow the published attributions given for many pieces, making alternative suggestions where pertinent. The portability of the objects in question must be in part responsible for the difficulties encountered in trying to pin down forms and types to individual areas.¹⁰⁶²

¹⁰⁶⁰ For more on this particular type, see Aga-Oglu 1945: 28–45; Allan 1982: 86–9; Allan 1986: 28–9; Arts Council 1976: 218; Baer 1983: 53–7; Baer 1989: 15–20; Collinet 2001: 143; Fehérvári 1968: 37–54; Fehérvári 1976: no. 129; Hollis 1938: 137–8; ‘Izzi 1965: 258; O’Kane 2006: 130; Porter 2001: 113; Von Gladiss, 2007 b: 121–2; Ward 1990–91: 67–82; Ward 1993: 83–5.

¹⁰⁶¹ The circulation of baseless or mistaken attributions, which seem to pass from accession records into publication and thence into gospel, is a considerable problem with many of the portable objects of the medieval Islamic world, particularly at the lower levels of production.

¹⁰⁶² On luxury objects, see Shalem 1996: 17–128; on global exchange, see Abu-Lughod 1989: 137–250; Stone 2004: 73–8; Gelber 2008 (abstract): ms. pp. 11–12.

There are incense burners of the handled, cylindrical and domed type attributed to Greater Persia (cat. nos 4.34–4.36, 4.38–4.47), Greater Syria (cat. nos 4.48–4.50) and Egypt (cat. nos 4.51–4.53). However, while it is easy to accept a piece in the Kabul Museum (cat. no. 4.41), with its lotus finial and teardrop bosses, as a product of Khurasan,¹⁰⁶³ and equally to agree that certain examples show clear connections with Coptic art (cat. nos 4.52 and 4.53) and thus can be ascribed to Egypt,¹⁰⁶⁴ there are other examples that are harder to assign. Cat. no. 4.37 has been proposed as an Egyptian product within the records of the Louvre.¹⁰⁶⁵ However, the pierced, flat lotus dome,¹⁰⁶⁶ the bent and hooved animal feet¹⁰⁶⁷ and the arrow-shaped piercings¹⁰⁶⁸ on the main register of the dome all suggest Persia as a place of origin for this piece. Cat. no. 4.37 was purchased by the Louvre from the sale of a collection of Egyptian antiquities in Cairo, but it is also possible that such a portable object could have travelled to Egypt, either before or after excavation.

Origins of the Form

Although certain characteristics came to define the various forms of the lidded, handled burner associated with various parts of the Islamic world, the underlying form clearly did not suddenly spring to life fully formed in the Islamic period, but is descended from a much older tradition of lidded burner. The origins of the form of the domed, handled burner of cylindrical type are obviously of relevance for the other kinds of domed handled burner to be discussed below, and much of this discussion may be equally applicable to those examples. Goldman has traced an ancient tradition of floor-standing covered incense burners, some of them domed, back to Assyrian examples. He suggests that Persian metalsmiths followed but did

¹⁰⁶³ Melikian-Chirvani 1975: 55–6.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Bénazeth 1988: 298–99.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 298 and n. 40.

¹⁰⁶⁶ The lotus finial and lotus dome as products of Buddhist Central Asia will be discussed below.

¹⁰⁶⁷ The hooved animal feet of cat. no. 4.41, similar to this example, are cited by Melikian-Chirvani as identical with those of a bronze stand excavated at Afrāsiyāb and datable to the ninth or tenth century (Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 32).

¹⁰⁶⁸ The piercings are similar to those seen on examples assigned to Khurasan, such as cat. nos 4.34 and 4.38, although admittedly the piercings on both of the latter are composed of a separate triangle placed above a long rectangle, rather than a single arrow-shaped slit. The arrow shapes on the Khurasan burners can be compared with the arrow-shaped slits on incense burners from Achaemenid Persia (Melikian-Chirvani 1993: 115; Invernizzi 1997: 241–4; Stone 2004: 79–80; Goldman 1991: 179–4). The arrow-shaped slits of the Umayyad Qaṣr al-Kharāna in Jordan (illustrated in Urice 1987: 113–4) may also be relevant here.

not copy exactly these designs, which were in turn probably exported and locally adapted.¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus the floor-standing domed incense burner seen in a relief at the tomb of Petrosiris (c. 310–300 BCE; fig. 4.49) is to be understood as an Egyptian adaptation of a far older, Assyro-Persian type, and paralleled with the development of related forms in Greece and Phoenicia. In Goldman's hypothesis, these standing types were eventually adapted for domestic use through their evolution in the early medieval period into the handled tabletop burners under discussion.¹⁰⁷⁰

Alternatively, Stone has noted what appears to be a lidded, almost egg-shaped incense burner in a relief carving from the fifth dynasty in Egypt (middle of the third millennium BCE; fig. 4.50). She argues that later versions of this type, which feature a small, eggcup-like foot so that the burner can stand alone on a flat surface, are the prototype of the tabletop burner found in the Hellenistic world, the Indo-Persian lands and the Far East.¹⁰⁷¹ In either event, it seems that we must accept that the form of the lidded incense burner was descended from a very ancient model, was widespread throughout Eurasia and was subject to local adaptation.¹⁰⁷²

As regards the origin of the handle, Allan has noted that handled incense burners of the 'dish' type, mounted on three short legs, were excavated at Taxilā in the Punjab.¹⁰⁷³ The earliest of these, a plain iron example, was dated by Marshall to the Greek period (c. 184 BCE–early first century BCE) while a more ornate example with a lion handle is dated to the late Saka-Parthian periods (c. 87 BCE–second half of first century CE).¹⁰⁷⁴ Thus the handled, three-legged body was in circulation by the first centuries BCE, and from this form it was a small step to combine it with a domical lid: indeed, it is possible that some of the handled 'dish' forms once had domical lids which were subsequently lost.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Goldman 1991: 183.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 183–4.

¹⁰⁷¹ Stone 2004: 79.

¹⁰⁷² See the Far Eastern examples illustrated in Stone 2004: 93–4.

¹⁰⁷³ Allan (1982 [a]: 43) also records that a similar artefact was excavated from Dura Europos.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Marshall 1975: Vol. 2, 577, 595–6; Vol. 3, plates 163, 184.

The example excavated at Amman and thought to come from the Umayyad period (cat. no. 4.54) is one of the earliest datable Islamic versions of the form, but as Allan has noted, the handle is of a rather different colour from that of the body and may well be a later attachment to an earlier piece. This is also suggested by the remains of three suspension rings seen on the piece: indeed it may originally have been a censer of the hanging type.¹⁰⁷⁵ Other handled pieces ascribed to the eighth or ninth century (cat. nos 4.48–4.50) do not appear to have precise findspot information associated with them and have apparently been dated solely on the basis of stylistic features, such as the acanthus leaves on the drum of cat. no. 4.48,¹⁰⁷⁶ and without more secure evidence of their origins it would be unwise to lean too heavily on an Umayyad Syrian attribution.¹⁰⁷⁷

A distinctively Persian version of the handled burner was excavated at Shapur. The piece is quite different in appearance from that excavated at Amman and the debt to Classical ornament is lacking (cat. no. 4.35). This example, thought to date from no later than the early eleventh century, is decorated with a repeated motif of a dot within a circle.¹⁰⁷⁸ Although this design is suggested by Aga-Oglu to derive from Coptic decoration,¹⁰⁷⁹ the appearance of the same design on the so-called ‘white bronzes’ of early Islamic Persia might suggest a slightly earlier date and need not indicate a debt to Coptic art.¹⁰⁸⁰

The first principles of all of these forms are the same. A domed lid with holes in it is set on a base cup, which has a flat surface recessed within it to accommodate the burning incense.¹⁰⁸¹ That this model could have become, in its more modest tabletop incarnations, a dominant domestic form throughout the Classical world as well as

¹⁰⁷⁵ Allan 1986: 27.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Rogers 2007: 36.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Allan 1986: 25.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ghirshman 1938: 13–14; Aga-Oglu 1945: 30–1.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Aga-Oglu 1945: 30.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Melikian-Chirvani 1974 (a): 124–6, 136–47. Melikian-Chirvani proposes that the dotted circle motif made with a punch (as it appears to have been in the case of the Shapur incense burner) first appeared on Achaemenid and Sogdian silverwork, and later enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in eighth-century Persia.

¹⁰⁸¹ As Stone (2004: 78) has noted, the functionality of the incense burner necessarily places certain constraints on its design, and there are really very few basic types.

Byzantium and Persia, is hardly surprising given its relative simplicity and versatility.¹⁰⁸²

Was it the domed form of the basic tabletop burner that prompted certain associations with architecture in the minds and hands of some craftsmen? The forerunners of the form – whatever we believe them to be – do not appear to have been conceived of architecturally by their creators or users. Rather than insisting on a tidily linear chain of influences travelling one way or another across Eurasia, it seems more plausible to propose a model of semi-independent variations in architectural interpretations of the form, arising in different cultural areas where the ancient form of the domed incense burner was already established.¹⁰⁸³ The following section will focus most closely on the Buddhist architectural heritage of Khurasan as a possible influence on the decoration of the Persian examples of the domed cylindrical burner, before the arcade and the domed square monument are brought into discussion in the later sections. Discussion of the Syrian and Egyptian examples of the domed cylindrical form – cat. nos 4.48–4.53 – will be limited, as there are considerably more examples of this type from Persia.

The Buddhist Connection

Kühnel and Aga-Oglu both saw the domed, handled burner as a form that had travelled from West to East and from Christianity to Islam via looted Christian treasuries, and other more recent writers have also followed this line of thought.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, Melikian-Chirvani has put forward an argument for considering many of the Persian examples of the hemispherically-domed cylindrical burner as imitative of Gandharan Buddhist *stūpa* architecture (figs 4.51 and 4.52), thus suggesting that the form might predate both Islam and Christianity, or at least have evolved separately from the Christian versions of the form. The possibility of a Buddhist influence will be considered in the present section.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*, 82, 81 and 83.

¹⁰⁸³ See Aga-Oglu 1945 and Kühnel 1920 discussed below.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Kühnel 1920; Aga-Oglu 1945: 29–32; Ward 1990–1: 69–70; Bénazeth 1988: 298.

Melikian-Chirvani's argument is based on the resemblance between full-size *stūpa* architecture and certain features of the domical incense burners, that is to say the general resemblance to a dome¹⁰⁸⁵ raised on a drum,¹⁰⁸⁶ the calyx finial and decoration of alternating circles and triangles presented on cat. no. 4.41, and the similar dome profile and 'umbrella' finial resembling a Buddhist *chattrāvalī* (sequence of umbrella-discs) seen on cat. no. 4.34.¹⁰⁸⁷ It should also be noted at this early stage that monumental Buddhist *stūpas* have domes with very little architectural feel to them because they do not spring from an understanding of how vaults and domes behave, and so the imitation of these rather thick and heavy monumental forms in other media takes place at almost two removes from the original architectural principles of the dome, making the task of analysing relationships between architecture and its imitators even less straightforward.

Before we examine the structural motifs cited by Melikian-Chirvani as evidence for the Buddhist descent of this form of incense burner, the non-structural motifs should also be mentioned briefly here. Melikian-Chirvani has compared the 'pearl and bobbin' motif seen as a raised band on the lower part of the lids of cat. nos 4.38, 4.41 and 4.42 with a framing device seen on certain architectural panels from Gandhara (fig. 4.53), but this motif appears in so many other contexts – for example the border decoration of one of the *kilgas*, cat. no. 3.58 – that the comparison seems a little limp.¹⁰⁸⁸ He also compares the alternating registers of pierced circles and triangles on the same burner with the pierced triangles seen on representations of defensive architecture from Gandhara (fig. 4.54), and so forth, but the latter analogy does not really make the point claimed for it because there are no pierced circles visible on any of the illustrations cited by Melikian-Chirvani.¹⁰⁸⁹ Trying to demonstrate an architectural justification for each individual motif has led to an empty set of comparisons in this instance, and this should be taken as a warning.

¹⁰⁸⁵ On the form of the *stūpa* dome, see Roth's discussion of the term *bhūpasyāndamī* ('egg-like dome of the king') and its use in certain descriptions of *stūpas* (Roth 1980: 200–201).

¹⁰⁸⁶ The drums of the Gandhara *stūpas* are significant, as they can be understood as symbolic representations of the true architectural railing found on southern Buddhist monuments; this marks the boundary between the sacred space of the *stūpa* and the temporal world outside it (Errington 1992: 179).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Melikian-Chirvani 1975: 55–8; *idem* 1982: 32.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Melikian-Chirvani 1975: 56–8.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

However, other instances of two-dimensional decoration that may be related to Buddhist prototypes can also be seen in the group. The eight-petalled floral design on an undated piece in the Khalili Collection (cat. no. 4.39) certainly looks ‘eastern’, and may tentatively be connected with Buddhist imagery, such as the ‘wheel of eight spokes’.¹⁰⁹⁰ It should however be noted that an identical motif appears on a pair of silver bowls excavated at Sutton Hoo, thought to date from the seventh century. These bowls are closely related to Byzantine prototypes, so the motif, even if it originated in the Far East, had clearly spread far and wide by the Islamic period.¹⁰⁹¹ Less specifically, the banded registers of separate motifs frequently seen on the burners bear a general resemblance to the zoned decoration of the *stūpas* depicted in carved panels (fig. 4.55). The use of registers of repeated solid/void triangles seen on cat. nos 4.38, 4.41, 4.42 and 4.58 is particularly suggestive of certain repeated bands of decoration seen on representations of *stūpas*, which may represent crenellations or full-size relief carved decoration (fig. 4.56).

Perhaps more rewarding than the full-size *stūpas* as a model for comparison with the domed incense burners are the miniature votive *stūpas* or reliquary *stūpas* of pre-Islamic Afghanistan and India (figs 4.57–4.59).¹⁰⁹² A great number of these have been uncovered by excavation, often at the sites of monumental *stūpas*.¹⁰⁹³ Miniaturisation of the *stūpa* form has already been enacted on the votive and reliquary pieces, in both appearance and sacred function. As the monumental *stūpa* itself is both a focus of worship and a receptacle for sacred relics, so the miniaturised versions of the *stūpa* function as reliquaries and as portable shrines and votive offerings.¹⁰⁹⁴ Again, it is the striking combination of a large dome sitting on a drum

¹⁰⁹⁰ Roth 1980: 201–2.

¹⁰⁹¹ Bruce-Mitford and Youngs 1983: 99–102, 111–25.

¹⁰⁹² Melikian-Chirvani (1975: 58) makes some cursory reference to this phenomenon but does not explore the issue fully. See also the examples illustrated in Franz 1959 a: 16–18.

¹⁰⁹³ On *stūpa* reliquaries excavated in Afghanistan, see Taddei 1970: 70–9; Taddei and Verardi 1985: 17–20. The *stūpa* reliquary and the votive *stūpa* are of course not limited to the Gandharan area: see an example from Sung China discussed and illustrated in Munsterberg 1966: 231–3.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Taddei 1970: 80–1; Errington 1992 a: 172. To quote Carter’s analysis of one particular example, ‘[i]n essence the Bīmarān reliquary is a tiny *stūpa*, just as the *stūpa* is a giant reliquary’ (Carter 1987: 89). Roth (1980: 199) has proposed that the transportation of votive *stūpas* by pilgrims contributed to the spread of the form throughout the Buddhist world, and has even suggested that the visibility of

(seen for example on cat. no. 4.38), and a very prominent elevated calyx or umbrella finial, that most obviously connects the incense burners with the miniature *stūpas*.

Although there is little surviving evidence *in situ* for the appearance of the superstructures that topped the monumental early *stūpas*, the evidence of the miniature *stūpas* and the depictions of *stūpas* seen on certain carved panels allow us to reconstruct the original appearance of the *chattrāvalī* (figs 4.28, 4.55–4.59).¹⁰⁹⁵ The *chattrāvalī* themselves are thought not only to shelter the vertical axis of the *stūpa* but also to aid in the creation of the proper environment for housing a relic.¹⁰⁹⁶ Generally far more elaborate than anything seen on the incense burners, the *chattrāvalī* of the miniature *stūpas* and depicted *stūpas* are nonetheless comparable to the finials employed on cat. nos 4.34, 4.36–4.38 and 4.40–4.43. The simplification of this element on the incense burners does not exclude it from being regarded as derivative of *stūpa* imagery. As the incense burners must have been intended primarily as functional rather than representational objects, so the modification of this particularly unwieldy aspect of the *stūpa* iconography would have been necessary to their role as incense burners, as the enormous vertical pole of the *chattrāvalī* would be extremely unwieldy on a small, portable object, and further would make it difficult to open the hinged lid of the incense burner fully.

A significant non-architectural Buddhist source for the incense burners of Khurasan is to be found amongst the pieces excavated at Kālawān in Taxilā. The object in question is a domed, pierced copper lid, with heart- and crescent-shaped piercings and a long, elaborate finial, including what appears to be a prominent lotus knob below smaller ridged protrusions (fig. 4.60). Marshall described this piece as the lid of a vessel but Melikian-Chirvani is adamant that it should be understood as the hinged lid of an incense burner,¹⁰⁹⁷ a position which is strengthened by the resemblance between this piece and the hinged lid of the first-century Gandharan bronze incense burner on loan from Shelby White and Leon Levy to the Metropolitan

stūpas and *stūpa* shrines may have had an influence on Christian visitors to Gandhara that was manifested in later developments in Christian architecture, liturgy and artistic production.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Behrendt 2004: 122–3.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Marshall 1975: Vol. 2, 340, Vol. 3, plate 80(h); Melikian-Chirvani 1975: 58.

Museum of Art (fig. 4.61).¹⁰⁹⁸ Note that almost all of the medieval domed burners under discussion are also hinged. Thus, an ancient tradition of domed incense burners appears to have been present in Buddhist Gandhara. Incense is used extensively in northern Buddhist ritual at temples, during festivals and in various religious ceremonies; by the seventh century CE it figured heavily in the ‘presentation of offerings’, forming one of the five sensuous offerings, and the supposition that figs 4.60 and 4.61 are objects of Buddhist liturgy seems correct.¹⁰⁹⁹

To return to the calyx finials on the medieval incense burners, we might suggest that these may also be related to the use of vegetal forms of axial pole seen in some early representations of *stūpas*, which are connected by Irwin to the use of the *chattrāvalī* via the cosmic symbolism of the sacred tree.¹¹⁰⁰ More concretely, there is also a crenellated aspect to the vegetal finial of objects such as cat. no. 4.58 that reflects the crenellated *harmikā* (a kind of terrace at the top of the dome, below the *chattrāvalī*) represented on many of the *stūpa* reliquaries (for example fig. 4.57).¹¹⁰¹ Finally, the finial may also have a practical purpose. Melikian-Chirvani has noted that the calyx finial of cat. no. 4.41 serves as a little foot when the lid of the incense burner is removed and placed upside down.¹¹⁰² But it is on the Levy-White incense burner (fig. 4.61) that we see the clearest prototype of the calyx finial of the incense burners. This piece is topped with what is described by Stone as a lotus (she compares it to the lid reliquaries such as fig. 4.29), and this feature bears a very clear resemblance to many of the finials on the incense burners, for example cat. no. 4.36 or cat. no. 4.43.¹¹⁰³

A further aspect of the cylindrical domed incense burners that may be related to Buddhist architecture is the use of a decorative design on the upper dome that appears to mimic architectural lotus domes. As described above with regard to the

¹⁰⁹⁸ Stone 2004: 88.

¹⁰⁹⁹ MacCulloch (1914: 204) notes that the use of incense in Tibetan Buddhism is so prevalent it has been compared with that of the Roman Catholic church.

¹¹⁰⁰ Irwin 1980: 16.

¹¹⁰¹ Melikian-Chirvani 1975: 56.

¹¹⁰² He relates this to the celestial imagery of the *stūpa*, echoed in the celestial dome described as a *ṭāṣ-i nigūn* (‘upturned bowl’) by the Persian poets (*ibid.*, 30–43, 56; *idem* 1979 (a): 392–4; Snodgrass 1985: 65 and n. 90).

¹¹⁰³ Stone 2004: 89.

inkwells, the lotus dome was later to become a characteristic of Islamic architecture in India, but appears to have been in use in Buddhist architecture from an early date, judging by the representations of lotus domes seen on many early relief-carved images of *stūpas* (for example fig. 4.55). That a form of this motif appears on domical incense burners currently ascribed to both Persia and Egypt (for example cat. nos 4.34 and 4.37) might again lead one to suggest a Buddhist or Central Asian connection, or at least a transfer of forms, for some of those not currently ascribed to Persia.¹¹⁰⁴ In this light, compare the lotus cap seen on the relief carved *stūpas* of fig. 4.28 with the crowning decoration of the domes of cat. nos 4.37 or 4.56.¹¹⁰⁵

A more three-dimensional form of lotus cap can be seen on the unusual silver incense burner now in the Mayer Museum in Jerusalem (cat. no. 4.47). That this piece has been manufactured to a very much higher standard than the other incense burners in this group is evident not just in the use of silver, a far more expensive material than the bronze or brass from which the rest of the group have been created, but also in the elaborate Kufic inscription and foliate decoration wrapped around the body.¹¹⁰⁶ The luxurious status of this silver burner also places it closer to the inkwells of the preceding section than the other, more or less quotidian, Persian incense burners in the group, and it is interesting that in this more luxurious context the lotus cap of the dome should have become raised and lobed, like those of the inkwells.¹¹⁰⁷ Ward ascribes this piece to western rather than eastern Persia, contradicting the normal attribution made for the Harari hoard. However, the relationship between the lotus dome of this piece and those of the inkwells, which are thought to originate from eastern Persia, might well suggest an east Persian prototype for at least the lotus dome.¹¹⁰⁸

¹¹⁰⁴ Within the interpretation of *stūpa* architecture as a manifestation of the cosmic order (Roth 1980: 187–98), the lotus dome forms an axial part of the symbolism of the whole, apparently symbolising the full moon, which is equated to a lotus of sixteen petals in certain interpretations (*ibid.*, 201).

¹¹⁰⁵ See also Stone 2004: 89.

¹¹⁰⁶ As Ward has noted (1990–1: 71–2), little Islamic silver has survived, although the sources suggest it was originally a major mode of metalwork production. See also Allan 1976–7: figs 67 and 68.

¹¹⁰⁷ Ward 1990–1: 71–2.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Chattrāvalī and calyx finials and lotus domes are seen across the whole group of handled burners, not just on the examples thought to come from Persia. For example, see the piece ascribed by Rogers to Syria (cat. no. 4.48), two of the arcaded pieces thought to come from the eastern Mediterranean lands (cat. nos 4.55 and 4.56), and several of the pieces thought to originate in Egypt (cat. nos 4.53, 4.65 and 4.68). A piece in the Khalili Collection which was attributed to early Islamic Syria when recently sold at auction (cat. no. 4.49)¹¹⁰⁹ bears a carefully engraved ‘lotus base’, one of the characteristic motifs of Gandharan Buddhist architecture.¹¹¹⁰ Although it is theoretically possible that the appearance of a disc-like calyx finial, lotus dome or lotus base on some examples is a reference to the symbolism of the lotus in Ancient Egypt, where the lotus was associated in particular with the sun god Horus and the god of the netherworld, his father Osiris, it seems more likely that the impetus for at least some of these forms came from the Buddhist cultural sphere.¹¹¹¹

An illuminating comparison is drawn by Allan between the dragon-headed handle of a Syrian cylindrical incense burner with arcade decoration, cat. no. 4.57, and that of a Hellenistic incense burner from Afghanistan or Pakistan (fig. 4.62). Suggesting that a Persian intermediary in the Umayyad period would be the most likely means by which the dragon-handle reached Syria, Allan is certain that the handle of cat. no. 4.57 is a descendent of this Hellenistic Gandharan form of handle.¹¹¹² Looking closer at the drawing with which Allan has illustrated this object, a further aspect of the Gandharan incense burner strikes one very forcibly: although spherical rather than domical, it has a pierced lotus dome cap and pronounced flat finial. This piece may provide the missing link that explains how so many pierced lotus domes and dominant, umbrella-like finials seem to turn up on Syro-Egyptian incense burners: this set of architectural forms had already been digested and recast within extremely portable metalwork incense burners long before the medieval period.¹¹¹³ This

¹¹⁰⁹ Bonham’s, New Bond Street, Sale 13151, *Islamic and Indian Art including Contemporary Indian and Pakistani Paintings*, 12 October 2005, lot no. 109.

¹¹¹⁰ Taddei and Verardi 1985: 21.

¹¹¹¹ Ward 1952: 135–6.

¹¹¹² Allan 1986: 32.

¹¹¹³ See the account of trade between India and the Mediterranean world recorded in the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, translation given in Casson 1989: 51–93, and further studies in Begley and De Puma (ed.) 1991.

provides one more argument for abandoning the theory that the Persian domed incense burners are made in imitation of Coptic burners that travelled east.

It is very difficult to know how Buddhist architecture appeared to medieval Muslims in Khurasan, where Buddhism survived into the medieval period.¹¹¹⁴ As Flood has noted in his discussion of the apotropaic qualities with which Antique spolia were endowed in the medieval Islamic world, the reception of pre-Islamic artefacts and monuments within the Islamic world has tended to be viewed in terms of its role as artistic inspiration for later craftsmen, and rarely have there been attempts to assess the ways in which the medieval viewer comprehended and possibly re-imagined the material remnants of the pre-Islamic past.¹¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, there is very little evidence available with which to attempt a reconstruction of medieval Islamic reactions to Buddhism and its monuments. A degree of influence exerted by Buddhist practice on the early development of Sufi mysticism is attested within a few historical texts, although these do not discuss architecture.¹¹¹⁶ Those texts that do discuss Buddhist monuments demonstrate what Melikian-Chirvani calls ‘a general, if somewhat confused, awareness of Buddhist structures’.¹¹¹⁷ The exceptions are the medieval geographers Ibn al-Faḳīh and Yāqūt, who both give what appear to be reasonably accurate descriptions of a Buddhist *stūpa* called *Nūbahār* (‘new spring’) based on an eighth-century source, likening the circumambulation of the *stūpa* to that of the Ka‘ba and generally explaining Buddhism in terms of comparisons to Islamic practice.¹¹¹⁸ This suggests that an attempt to understand Buddhist architecture on Muslim terms did take place, although there is no evidence as to the relationship of this view to that of the majority of ordinary people. Additionally, there is some evidence from the tenth to thirteenth centuries that the Bāmiyān Buddhas and other Buddhist remains were cast in the role of ‘marvels’ in Persian and Arabic records, suggesting that although recognised as idolatrous, Buddhist artefacts continued to impress visually.¹¹¹⁹ However, given that not one of the cylindrical incense burners

¹¹¹⁴ Monnot 1997: 869.

¹¹¹⁵ Flood 2006: 143–4.

¹¹¹⁶ Scott 1995: 146–7; Monnot 1997: 87.

¹¹¹⁷ Melikian-Chirvani 1990: 497.

¹¹¹⁸ Melikian-Chirvani 1990: 496–7; Ibn al-Faḳīh al-Hamadānī 1973: 383.

¹¹¹⁹ Flood 2002: 649; Le Strange 1966: 418; al-Nadīm 1970: Vol. 2, 828–32.

can be argued as a mimetically complete representation of a *stūpa*, presenting at their most coherent a set of forms that might originally have referred to parts of the *stūpa*, it seems unlikely that an overtly Buddhist significance to the incense burners was intended or understood by the medieval period.

All this notwithstanding, there are also pertinent comparisons to be made with non-architectural subject matter. For example, a surprisingly close comparison can be made with a caryatid-style standing incense burner found at a Persian-period site in Jordan, Umm Udhayna, from the sixth century BCE (fig. 4.63). The domed burner of this piece is decorated with one register of circles and one of triangles, above a register of what appear to be keyhole or arrow-shaped piercings, and as such it creates an intriguingly close parallel for an object such as cat. no. 4.34.¹¹²⁰ The huge differences in date obviously preclude a direct causal relationship between these two examples of the domed burner, but also make their points of formal resemblance the more remarkable. If the similarities in the shapes of the piercings are not merely coincidental – which question could only be answered by a prolonged investigation into burner types of the intervening centuries, and as such is outwith the scope of this thesis – then these examples may represent an extremely long lifespan for this fairly primitive type of pierced domical burner, suggesting a pronounced tenacity of forms at the lower levels of production.

In summary then, the thesis of Melikian-Chirvani – that the influence of Buddhist architecture may have played a role in the development of the cylindrical domed incense burner in Persia – is persuasive in light of certain aspects of the objects, chiefly the *chattrāvalī* and lotus finials, lotus caps, and to a certain degree the banded decoration of the pieces, as well as possibly the emphasis on a rather squat domical form. However, the interpretation should not be taken too literally and attempts at finding Buddhist architectural parallels for every motif of every example in the group would be redundant. It can probably be assumed that it was the domical form of the incense burner, in currency since ancient times, that suggested the adoption of certain motifs associated with *stūpa* architecture, rather than the imitation of *stūpa*

¹¹²⁰ Illustrated in Bienkoswki (ed.) 1991: 96.

architecture being thought of first and the form of the burners following.¹¹²¹ If figs 4.60 and 4.61 are correctly dated, a domed, pierced burner with a prominent *chattrāvalī* or lotus finial had already evolved in Gandhara centuries before Islam.¹¹²²

The cylindrical medieval burners under discussion are, for the most part, not objects of the highest status, and were almost certainly meant for domestic rather than sacral purposes.¹¹²³ The contraction of the form into something less grand and more commonplace, although retaining and possibly developing certain rather oblique references to Buddhist architecture, does not present an appearance so similar to that of Buddhist monuments that the objects themselves must be understood as Buddhist artefacts, or as having appeared as such to medieval users.¹¹²⁴ Thus the domed monument, in this case the *stūpa*, has been recast into individual and characteristic components which are subjected to manipulation and subsequently to the gradual loss of their original meaning.

The question of architecture as an influence on the Syrian and Egyptian pieces (cat. nos 4.48–4.53) is somewhat less clear. The rather startling appearance on cat. no. 4.52 of three feet in the form of tiny aedicules, with a fourth (surmounted by a bird) taking the place of a finial, may be a slightly eccentric manifestation of the architectural drive that the form of the cylindrical domed burner displayed in many different contexts. In fact, the forms of the columned aedicules relate very closely to the aedicule form of the main body of another type of incense burner in the Louvre Coptic collections (fig. 4.64), adding yet another architectural motif to the visual

¹¹²¹ Buddhist monuments and artefacts must have been visible in some quantity in medieval Afghanistan, since some of them survived until very recently.

¹¹²² Goldman (1991: 184) notes that by Islamic times in Persia the table-sized domed burner (as opposed to the standing Achaemenid burner) had become a popular household item, and it was also popular in ‘Greece, Rome, Coptic Egypt and Byzantium’, but he does not attempt to explain the origins of the handled form.

¹¹²³ Some of the Coptic pieces may have had a liturgical function, although there are apparently no representations of handled burners (as opposed to hanging censers) in liturgical contexts from early Coptic art (see below).

¹¹²⁴ Melikian-Chirvani (1971: 58–63) has also shown that the eastern Buddhist heritage appeared in other manifestations within medieval Persian art, particularly the moonfaced ideal of beauty seen on frescoes, ceramics and manuscript illustration of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

vocabulary of medieval incense burners.¹¹²⁵ More generally, the use of calyx finials and lotus domes on these examples may, as outlined above, owe something to eastern elements that originally sprang from architecture. Overall these examples do not present obvious forms for comparison with architecture beyond the standard domical form and the prevalence of calyx or knop finials.

Handled Burners with Arcades (cat. nos 4.54–4.57)

Certain decorative and symbolic uses of the arcade have already been described above. The possibility of a contextually dependent, sacred or semi-sacred aspect to the arcade as a decorative motif has already been raised, but may be of further significance here. The motif appears on only a very limited number of the handled burners under discussion and so this analysis will be shorter than the previous section.

A reasonably secure provenance can be attached to the first arcaded example (cat. no. 4.54). This piece was found during excavations of the citadel at Amman in 1949 and was recovered from an area dated to the early Umayyad period.¹¹²⁶ As has already been noted, the handle to this piece seems to be a later addition, and the three ornamental suspension hooks attached to the rim suggest that the piece may originally have been intended as a hanging rather than a handled burner.¹¹²⁷ A more recent object report for this piece notes that the handle is in fact mounted in such a position (between two of the legs) that makes it very difficult for the piece to stand firmly without overbalancing, which would reinforce the suggestion that it was not designed as a handled object.¹¹²⁸

In this light, we can probably accept this piece, as Allan has already intimated, as an adapted example of the hanging type of lidded incense burner primarily associated with the Coptic and Orthodox churches but also found in Islamic contexts (fig.

¹¹²⁵ Bénazeth (1988: 296–7) reports that a further example of this columned form of incense burner was found at Ballana in Nubia.

¹¹²⁶ Harding 1951: 7–10.

¹¹²⁷ Allan 1986: 27.

¹¹²⁸ Naghawy, Aida, ‘Incense burner’, *Museum with no Frontiers*. MWNF [accessed 12/07/09], <http://www.discoverislamicart.org>.

4.65).¹¹²⁹ Representations of sacred or liturgical incense burners seen in early Coptic art apparently invariably show a bowl-like censer hanging from three chains and never a handled form.¹¹³⁰ In certain Christian contexts this hanging type went on to become massively elaborated and iconographically complex.¹¹³¹ The conception of the hanging censer as an architectural form is most famously elaborated in *De Diversis Artibus*, an encyclopaedic work on the medieval arts of Europe thought to date to the twelfth century or earlier.¹¹³² This text gives two lengthy descriptions of the manufacture of both repoussé and cast hanging censers, the carefully listed iconographic components of which are clearly intended to reproduce in miniature the city of heaven described in the Book of Revelation.¹¹³³ Not only the number of towers, but the number and placement of all the windows in the censer, presumably created to let the incense out, are specified.¹¹³⁴

Returning to the somewhat less exalted Amman burner (cat. no. 4.54), we note that the most significant aspect of this piece for our purposes is the openwork arcading around lower part of the lid, made from tiny but individually delineated columns and arches. This arcade is very similar to that seen on the burner found at Crikvine (fig. 4.65), and Allan has proposed that both should be regarded as the products of Umayyad Syria.¹¹³⁵ In both cases, it is the openwork arcade that dictates an architectural reading of the object as a whole. Allan, in discussion of cat. no. 4.54, proposes a form of ciborium as the original architectural model for this type of domed, cylindrical, arcaded form with columns and arches, suggesting that the same type of ciboria must also have been the model for a structure found in Islamic Syria and demonstrated in the form of the fountain in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man.¹¹³⁶ This is perfectly plausible but also, as Allan notes, impossible to prove in the absence of any truly comparable ciboria from Umayyad

¹¹²⁹ See also the various Mediterranean examples illustrated in Salellas 1950: 14–17.

¹¹³⁰ Bénazeth 1988: 294–5.

¹¹³¹ See Bucher 1976: 73 and n. 16.

¹¹³² Dodwell 1986: xviii–xx.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*, xxvii–xxviii.

¹¹³⁴ Theophilus 1986: 111–19.

¹¹³⁵ Allan 1986: 27.

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

Syria. At any rate, the Classical heritage appears to dominate this form of incense burner.

The second and third examples of cylindrical domed incense burners with arcades (cat. nos 4.55 and 4.56) are quite different from the Amman piece in several ways. Where the Amman burner is essentially a solid form with a partially pierced lid, cat. nos 4.55 and 4.56 are skeletal, open forms. The forms of these pieces are by no means identical – cat. no. 4.55 is of similar proportions to the Amman piece, with a lower body taller than its dome (and thus closer to the outline of the famous Ayyubid and Mamluk inlaid pieces),¹¹³⁷ while cat. no. 4.56 follows the common proportions of both Persian and Coptic pieces (such as cat. no. 4.42), with a pronounced dome and comparatively stunted lower body. In the light of these formal characteristics and their possible connection with various tentatively defined geographic groups, the lack of satisfactory information on findspots and provenance and the varied attributions that the handled burners have received is particularly frustrating.

Aga-Oglu proposed cat. no. 4.55 as an obviously Byzantine creation,¹¹³⁸ but as Allan has pointed out, there is nothing to mark this piece as specifically Byzantine and it is much more likely to be Syrian or Anatolian in origin: the double arches (see below) and dragon handle are strongly suggestive of such an origin.¹¹³⁹ A further example which might possibly belong in this group is a cast bronze piece in the Tanta Museum in Egypt (fig. 4.66), which is listed on the website of the General Council for Antiquities as a product of the Ottoman era, but is in fact strikingly similar in at least the form of its lid to cat. no. 4.55.¹¹⁴⁰ The date may well be a mistake and the piece may actually be a product of the medieval period. If not, this piece represents an extraordinary continuation of form across time and space.

¹¹³⁷ See Aga-Oglu 1945: 31–2.

¹¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹³⁹ Allan 1986: 30. He also describes a piece in the Musée du Cluny and a handle found in a wrecked ship off the Levantine coast that relate to this form.

¹¹⁴⁰ Eternal Egypt (author unknown), 'Censer with Open Work'. *Eternal Egypt*. Egyptian Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage [accessed 12/07/09], <http://www.eternalegypt.org>.

Ward has described cat. no. 4.56 as a product of Fatimid Egypt, but I have been unable to ascertain whether this is based on archaeological information.¹¹⁴¹ In stylistic terms, it displays a combination of lively scrollwork that compares directly to that of the Coptic incense burners (cat. nos 4.51–4.53), a floral finial (compare with that of cat. no. 4.58) and rather etiolated openwork floral or lotus dome cap, as well as a register of openwork arcading that finds its closest parallel in that of the Syrian or Anatolian cat. no. 4.55. A complex heritage indeed.

The use of the arcade on cat. no. 4.55 is more pronounced and more obviously architectural than it is in cat. no. 4.56. The double arch seen on this piece is a particularly interesting motif and is dwelt upon at some length by Allan in his analysis of the decoration of the incense burner formerly in the Aron Collection, cat. no. 4.57. The decoration of the latter is largely without parallel; the piece has been helpfully signed on the hinge with not only a name – Muḥammad Ibn Khutlukh al-Mawṣilī – but also a place, Damascus. Ibn Khutlukh also signed a geomantic table in the British Museum, dated 1241–2, and this incense burner has been dated to 1230–40 on the basis of this and other factors.¹¹⁴²

Allan argues for a variety of foreign elements and borrowings at work in this remarkable object. For the six double arches forming the main body of the piece as it survives, and the coupled columns surmounted by flat capitals interposed between them, he has suggested the engaged columns in twos and threes at Sarvistan.¹¹⁴³ Although Allan believes this to be a Sasanian structure, the palace at Sarvistan has been convincingly dated to the early Islamic period by Bier.¹¹⁴⁴ Allan also suggests the engaged columns and triple-arched squinches at Qaṣr al-Kharāna in Jordan (710; fig. 4.67) as a possible source for comparison with cat. no. 4.57.¹¹⁴⁵

¹¹⁴¹ Ward 1990–1: 70.

¹¹⁴² Allan 1986: 32–3. E. Savage-Smith and M.B. Smith have also published a study of this object that I have not been able to view, *Islamic Geomancy and a Thirteenth-Century Divinatory Device* (Malibu: Studies in Near Eastern Culture and Society, 1980).

¹¹⁴³ Illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 2 fig. 152.

¹¹⁴⁴ Bier 1986: 51–3.

¹¹⁴⁵ Allan 1986: 29. Although they are not arches with double profiles, the walls of several of the larger rooms at Qaṣr al-Kharāna are decorated with large blind arcades, which may also be relevant to the decoration of cat. no. 4.57: see Urice 1987: 72–3 and figs 27, 29, 30, 33–5.

Allan makes a further comparison with a sandstone object excavated from the Amman citadel (fig. 4.68).¹¹⁴⁶ This piece, with its arches with double profiles and engaged colonettes, is clearly architectural in intent, although it is difficult to say exactly what kind of architecture it is imitating.¹¹⁴⁷ If fig. 4.68 is indeed to be understood as an incense burner, a symbolic connection may exist between the form of the arch with double profiles and the function of the incense burner. There might also be a case for arguing that fig. 4.68 is reminiscent of the form of a fire temple, with its square, four-arched form, stepped merlons recalling those of ancient Persian architecture,¹¹⁴⁸ and what appears to be a low domical roof, incorporating four arched openings.¹¹⁴⁹ If this were the case, the glowing embers visible within and smoke issuing forth from the arches and upper vents of the piece could also recall the function of the fire temple. *À propos* this reading, Rogers argues that both the architectural incense burners and the full-size funerary architecture that many of them appear to imitate are indebted to pre-Islamic domed fire temples in Persia.¹¹⁵⁰ Allan believes that the five-lobed, fluted motif rising up in the centre of each arch on cat. no. 4.57 is self-evidently a representation of fire, which might, as he notes, prompt an immediate association with Zoroastrianism.¹¹⁵¹

A conflation of fire altar, brazier and handled burner that may be of relevance here can be seen in the imagery of the constellation *Ara*, ‘the altar’. While this is normally represented in manuscripts and astral globes as a flaming concave brazier or urn, an incense burner can be seen in its place on two brass globes from eleventh-century Valencia.¹¹⁵² These show a semi-circle resting on a square with a long handle, and clearly illustrate incense burners of the handled, domed type. Such images may

¹¹⁴⁶ Allan 1986: 30; Harding 1951: 10–11.

¹¹⁴⁷ Kehrberg (2000: 69) describes this as a ‘small replica of a domed audience hall or monumental gateway’, both of which suggestions are possible; but this in itself demonstrates how hard it is to pin down a single architectural model for this piece, or indeed for most of the objects in this chapter.

¹¹⁴⁸ A famous example being the merlons of the Apadāna staircase at Persepolis, illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 7, plate 85.

¹¹⁴⁹ Harding (1951: 10–11) suggests the piece is a fire altar, but notes that there was no trace of burning on the floor of the object at the time of excavation.

¹¹⁵⁰ Rogers 2007: 80. The presence of fire temples or the remains of fire temples in and around tenth-century Bukhara is attested in Narshakhī (1954: 31), and there were presumably many more examples visible throughout early Islamic Persia, especially in Fars where so many of them survive to this day (see Godard 1938: 70–1).

¹¹⁵¹ Allan 1986: 30.

¹¹⁵² Carey 2001: 156–7, plates 64 a and b.

indicate a closer relationship between the handled burner, the brazier and the fire altar than is obvious at first glance. More generally, the use of quasi-architectural forms seen amongst the ancient ‘fire altars’ or incense burners of the Levant suggests that the connection between sacred fire and architectural form may be very ancient indeed.¹¹⁵³

Handled Square-Bodied Burners (cat. nos 4.58–4.68)

Turning now to the last group of handled incense burners, we encounter a now-familiar set of questions regarding provenance and the transfer of forms.¹¹⁵⁴ Many of the attributions given to objects in this group, like those given to the handled burners in general, appear to be based on loose interpretations of stylistic features or relationships with other pieces which are not necessarily securely attributed themselves. These issues are exemplified in the attribution of a piece in the al-Sabah Collection (cat. no. 4.59), captioned ‘Spain, eleventh century AD’ by Jenkins in 1983.¹¹⁵⁵ The close resemblance between the handle of this piece and those seen on some Persian incense burners immediately raises questions about this attribution.¹¹⁵⁶ Additionally, the motif on the lid – the interlocking cross already met with on one of the tabourets (cat. no. 2.11) – is a frequently recurring and characteristic device in medieval Persian metalwork.¹¹⁵⁷ Although, as has already been mentioned, the motif also appears on a ceramic fragment excavated from the Hippodrome in Istanbul, it is not a common feature of western Islamic art.¹¹⁵⁸ Melikian-Chirvani views this form as a celestial symbol, signifying the rotating dome of the heavens.¹¹⁵⁹ At any event, it does not appear to be a characteristically Spanish motif. Makariou has noted the remarkable similarity between an incense burner in the Museo Arqueológico in Cordoba, thought to come from tenth-century Spain, and some of those originating in

¹¹⁵³ Depew 2004: 276; see also Huff 1998: 80, who suggests that there may have been a conflation of fire altar and reliquary in the interpretation of the twin monuments at Naqsh-e Rostam.

¹¹⁵⁴ Ettinghausen (1978: 28) states that the square-bottomed burner is rare, but this is contradicted by the evidence gathered in this section.

¹¹⁵⁵ Jenkins 1983: 40.

¹¹⁵⁶ A piece in the Metropolitan Museum commonly attributed to Islamic Spain (67.178.3) has been questioned by Ettinghausen (1978: 28), who believes the evidence put forward by Jenkins for a Spanish attribution is too meagre to be conclusive.

¹¹⁵⁷ Melikian-Chirvani 1974 (a): 135; *idem* 1975 (a): plates 5 and 6; 1982/3: 43; 1986: 73; Baer 1983: 25, 59 and 63; Ettinghausen 1943: 201; Rogers 2007: 85; Scerrato 1964: plates 2 and 3.

¹¹⁵⁸ Rice 1965: 221.

¹¹⁵⁹ Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 73.

Persia and Central Asia (she specifically cites cat. no. 4.41).¹¹⁶⁰ She is unable to explain the similarities, which must surely be a reflection of the portability of such objects and their circulation through trade networks, but this phenomenon highlights the confusion surrounding the attribution of such pieces.

Similarly, scholars are not at present united regarding the provenance of the most spectacular and best-known piece in this group (cat. no. 4.65). The Freer Museum, which holds this piece, has published it as a product of eighth- or ninth-century Egypt.¹¹⁶¹ However, it was also noted in their 1985 catalogue that the close similarity between the metal composition of this piece and that of a Persian ewer in the same collection may suggest that these two pieces are closer in origin than had previously been assumed.¹¹⁶² Baer and latterly Fehérvári have both proposed a Central Asian origin for this piece and other square-plan, domed incense burners (cat. nos 4.66 and 4.67), with Baer suggesting that eastern Islamic incense burners appear to have developed independently from but in partial parallel with Coptic prototypes.¹¹⁶³

Allan has attempted to bridge these two readings by suggesting that although the similar piece found in Sweden (cat. no. 4.66) probably came from the eastern Islamic world (strong trade links are known to have existed between these areas in the medieval period), the Freer piece should be regarded, like cat. no. 4.68, as an Egyptian product. He cites four separate qualities as evidence for this: the use of vine scrolls; the birds modelled in the round; the lion masks; and finally the resemblance to cat. no. 4.68, a piece in the Coptic museum which was presumably found locally.¹¹⁶⁴

It is true that the vine-scrolls of the dome of the Freer burner appear similar to those seen on some examples (cat. nos 4.52 and 4.53) that are generally accepted as products of Coptic Egypt, and for this feature the reading of cat. no. 4.65 as Egyptian seems acceptable. However, on the Freer burner the openwork of the lower section

¹¹⁶⁰ Makariou 2000: 116.

¹¹⁶¹ Atil, Chase and Jett 1985: 58–9.

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁶³ Baer 1983: 46–50. Fehérvári 2005: 139–40.

¹¹⁶⁴ Allan 1986: 25–6.

takes the form not of vine scrolls but of a regular interlaced geometric design, similar to that seen on a smaller panel in the lower section of a *stūpa*-like lid in the Tareq Rajab Museum, cat. no. 4.60, and possibly suggestive of eastern Persia or Central Asia rather than Egypt. The use of bird finials on metalwork is certainly not unknown outside Coptic Egypt (see cat. no. 4.61, and the very extensive use of bird finials on the ‘hooded’ type of incense burner, fig. 4.12), and zoomorphic legs of various types appear on Persian metalwork.¹¹⁶⁵ It is not impossible, then, that this piece could originate from the east, or at least owe more to the east than it does to Coptic Egypt.

The most striking aspect of the Freer burner is the overall architectural form of the piece. After the rather allusive manifestations of architectural iconography found amongst the cylindrical burners, this incense burner appears almost rudely mimetic by comparison.¹¹⁶⁶ The carefully represented architectural construction of a heavy square body, large central dome and four subsidiary corner domes is enhanced on the Freer burner by the addition of a projecting frieze of stepped merlons, calyx dome finials and miniature birds sitting on the finials. An odd note is struck in this piece, as it is in many of these overtly architectural square-bodied burners, by the use of zoomorphic feet. There is not space here to discuss the supports of the incense burners in depth. Some early hanging burners (fig. 4.65), and virtually all Islamic handled burners, stand on three or four feet, and very often these are zoomorphic to a greater or lesser degree. Zoomorphic feet are also seen, far less frequently, on some of the more complex architectural incense burners of medieval Europe (fig. 4.69).¹¹⁶⁷ Where the articulation of architectural forms is less overt, zoomorphic legs are less disturbing, appearing as one element amongst many. But in the case of the most coherently architectural burners, such as the Freer burner and fig. 4.69, this may be a

¹¹⁶⁵ See the legs made of animal forequarters and complete elephants on a lamp and an incense burner of the eleventh–thirteenth centuries, illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 13, plate 1287, or the inlaid bronze stand in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Hollis 1934: 107–9.

¹¹⁶⁶ Even allowing for the obviously non-architectural elements of legs and handles, some of the square-bodied, domed burners are almost comparable in the level of their mimetic engagement with architecture with certain Byzantine incense burners: see the famous reliquary in San Marco thought to have originally been an incense burner (Angar 2009: 163).

¹¹⁶⁷ Gaborit-Chopin 1984: 243.

consciously uncanny combination of forms, creating a miniature building that looks as if it might walk around like the house of Baba Yaga.

As regards the architectural forms imitated by the square-bodied incense burners, the famous tomb of the Samanids at Bukhara (fig. 1.6) has been noted by many authors as the most obvious extant architectural parallel for cat. nos 4.65–4.58, particularly in discussion of the Freer burner.¹¹⁶⁸ Continuing the connection with Buddhism, Fehérvári has argued that the tomb of the Samanids was itself modelled after square-bodied *stūpa* architecture, such as that employed at Guldarra (fig. 4.51).¹¹⁶⁹ However, the form of the Samanid tomb is so very much more cube-like, vertical and concise than the Guldarra *stūpa* that this relationship seems rather tenuous. The difference between the two interiors is enough to dispose of this connection as anything but secondary, although it is not impossible that Gandharan square-bodied *stūpas* might have played a minor part in the formation of this architectural type.

Allan has tried to find a comparable building in the western Islamic lands in order to solidify the identification of the Freer piece with Egypt, and makes an intriguing comparison with the Almoravid *qubba* in Marrakesh (1106–43; fig. 4.70). Not only is this structure crowned with stepped crenellations, *à la* cat. nos 4.65, 4.66 and 4.68, but the interior reveals four small corner octagons with a stellar vault above, one in each corner, giving the impression of a central dome and four smaller subsidiary domes viewed from the inside, although there are not actually any subsidiary domes on the outside.¹¹⁷⁰ It is possible that this structure, thought to be a fountain pavilion for a congregational mosque, is the only survivor of a larger and more elaborate group of multi-domed cuboidal monuments.

The Almoravid *qubba* aside, most instances of the architectural form of the free-standing domed cube represented by this group of incense burners come from funerary buildings, and it must be conceded that most of them come from the eastern

¹¹⁶⁸ Most recently, Fehérvári 2005: 139. Cat. no. 4.66 may originally have had four corner domes: a hole visible on the exposed corner suggests this to be the case.

¹¹⁶⁹ Fehérvári 2005: 139.

¹¹⁷⁰ Allan 1986: 26.

Islamic lands. There are other examples of funerary monuments that can be compared with those incense burners that take the form of a domed cube without corner domes (cat. nos 4.60–4.63 and 4.66). The tomb of Sultan Sanjar at Merv (1157; fig. 1.7) is a very grand example of this form; smaller types of domed mausoleum can be found throughout the Islamic world but forms comparable to cat. nos. 4.65 or 4.66 are perhaps particularly characteristic of Persia and Central Asia.¹¹⁷¹ Gelber has noted that an emphasis on the corners of some of the domed square incense burners (for example cat. nos 4.60 and 4.61) can be compared to an interest in engaged columns or even small towers seen on the four corners of some funerary monuments.¹¹⁷² Again, the tomb of the Samanids is an obvious example of this but there are others, for example the strongly emphasized engaged corner columns of the tombs at Uzgend (eleventh and twelfth centuries; fig. 4.71). Yet again, a comparison can also be made with Gandharan *stūpas*. Stone has noted that the use of four monumental pillars to emphasise the four corners of the square *stūpa* base is frequently seen in images of *stūpas* (fig. 4.72) and *stūpa* reliquaries.¹¹⁷³ This imagery appears to be reflected quite directly in the four projecting pillars mounted on the four corners of the pyramidal roof of cat. no. 4.58.

The use of architectural forms that have their most obvious parallels within funerary monuments automatically leads us to question the relationship between miniature and monumental in such a context. The funerary uses of incense are attested by a *ḥadīth* that permits the use of incense for perfuming a corpse, and medieval writers refer to incense burners used to scent the room in which the body is to be prepared for burial, and the shroud in which the body will be buried.¹¹⁷⁴ It is possible that the use of the forms of memorial architecture is a conscious reflection of the funerary function of incense burners, and such objects may have been intended specifically for funerary contexts. Alternatively, these burners were not intended solely for the preparation of the dead for burial but had a wider application within sacred or significant occasions, and the arresting (and presumably widely-recognized)

¹¹⁷¹ Hillenbrand 1994: 287–94.

¹¹⁷² Gelber 2008: ms. p. 6.

¹¹⁷³ Stone 2004: 88. See also Behrendt, who suggests that there was a ‘Gandhāran symbolic link between the column and the relic’ (2004: 55–6, see also 124–6).

¹¹⁷⁴ Ward 1990–1: 67; al-Tha‘ālibī 1968: 112.

appearance of funerary architecture, with its connections to the sacred, may have been drawn upon to lend a further layer of solemnity to the use of incense at a range of occasions.¹¹⁷⁵

Returning to individual architectural features, stepped merlons appear on several examples in the square-bodied group (cat. nos 4.62, 4.65, 4.66 and 4.68) and are even echoed in the decoration of one register of the main body of a cylindrical piece assigned by Rogers to eighth- or ninth-century Syria (cat. no. 4.48).¹¹⁷⁶ Stepped merlons can be closely related not only to real pre-Islamic architecture, such as the merlons on the Apadāna staircase at Persepolis,¹¹⁷⁷ but also to an ancient tradition of architectural representations hailing from the eastern pre-Islamic world.¹¹⁷⁸ The bronze Urartian city wall in the British Museum (late eighth century BCE; fig. 4.73) and the recently discovered bronze and wood brazier from Nimrud (ninth century BCE) both employ stepped merlons as an architectural signifier.¹¹⁷⁹ By the medieval period such forms were also used in the full-sized architecture of the western Islamic world, as shown in fig. 4.70, and so they cannot be taken as a strong indication of locale.¹¹⁸⁰ They do however stand as a reminder of the extent to which these forms are to be read architecturally.

This is not to say that all of the pieces in this group demonstrate the same intensity of architectural mimicry. While cat. no. 4.65 may be comparable to the Samanid mausoleum,¹¹⁸¹ another piece in this category thought to come from Anatolia (cat. no. 4.61) only refers in the most general sense to the idea of the domed

¹¹⁷⁵ Gelber (2007: 46) has suggested that the architectural shape of certain incense burners permits the transfer of certain spiritual 'virtues' associated with funerary architecture to the portable form of the burners.

¹¹⁷⁶ Rogers 2007: 36–7.

¹¹⁷⁷ Pope 1981: Vol. 7, plate 85.

¹¹⁷⁸ Stepped merlons of this type are also to be seen on the crowns of the Achaemenid kings, where they have been proposed to represent a subjugated walled city and thus present a manifestation of the might of the Persian ruler (Azarpay 1972: 109; Calmeyer 1993: 407–8).

¹¹⁷⁹ Fiorina, Bertazzoli and Bertolotto 1998: 167–80.

¹¹⁸⁰ Almagro 1987: 187, citing B. Pavon, *Las Almenas Hispanomusulmanas* (Madrid, 1967). See the early Cairene examples on the Azhar Mosque (Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 59).

¹¹⁸¹ Fehérvári 2005: 140.

monument.¹¹⁸² The square base has been completely subordinated to a large, rather top-heavy domed lid capped with a bird for good measure. Whether this should be understood as a weathervane, an actual bird on top of a building, or an ornamental finial is unclear. The literary descriptions of weathervanes from the early Islamic world are limited, but the famous horseman on the summit of the dome of the palace of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr, who pointed his lance in the direction from which enemies were going to appear, seems to provide at least one precedent, and it is possible that a larger tradition of figural weathervanes existed and was aped by the bird finials of some of the incense burners.¹¹⁸³

Other burners in this group demonstrate some of the problems of approximating architectural forms in miniature. The virtual impossibility of pro rata reduction can lead to clashing discords of scale between architectural forms and decorative bands: for example, the swamping of the dome by various banded decorative motifs that has taken place on cat. no. 4.60. The emphasis placed on the dome in representations of domed buildings, already mentioned above in the context of the inkwells, is even more evident amongst the incense burners. However, employing the form of the dome as shorthand for the entire building is not without its risks. Without finial or drum, the bulbous pierced scrollwork dome of cat. no. 4.63 is both inelegant and superfluous, looking like a human brain left to sit on top of a box.¹¹⁸⁴ Where visual play with architectural forms was largely skilfully enacted on the inkwells, creating oblique but attractive and intriguing references to monumental forms, the mimicking of architecture that has taken place on the incense burners is at times crude and abrupt. This is an inevitable result of the considerably lower standards of craftsmanship seen on the group as whole, and also the absence of a truly

¹¹⁸² The dome of this piece is so large that it completely covers the base, unlike other examples in the group which follow more convincing architectural ratios of dome circumference to body width. It may be that the lid and base of this piece do not actually belong together: without having examined them at first hand it is hard to say.

¹¹⁸³ Al-Baghdādī (1904: 87–90) also reports that each of the four domes covering the audience halls of the palace of al-Manṣūr was decorated with a different figure which turned in the wind. See also Le Strange 1924: 31.

¹¹⁸⁴ Melikian-Chirvani (1982: 31–2 and n. 58) has asserted that the cover of this piece is not from the same source as the base. The inelegance of the dome and its lack of integration with the lower section may bear out Melikian-Chirvani's argument, but more information is needed. Unfortunately I was not able to examine this piece first hand.

standardized form. The form of the domed monument has been subjected at times to rough treatment in the quest for novelty amongst the handled incense burners of the medieval period.

Handled Incense Burners: Summary

The handled incense burners have been in many ways the hardest group in the thesis to analyse because of their lack of homogeneity. Examination of these pieces has thrown up many questions of provenance and influence that the present study cannot attempt to answer definitively. Melikian-Chirvani's reading of some of these forms as imitative of Buddhist architecture, although perhaps too literal in its approach, has led to productive comparisons between this type of incense burner and other Buddhist artefacts of miniaturised architectural form. This has in turn produced a possible case for the dissemination of certain forms, notably the lotus dome, and calyx and *chattrāvalī* finials, from the eastern Islamic lands into the western.¹¹⁸⁵ If this was indeed the case, the forms in question had presumably been divested of overtly Buddhist significance by the medieval period, and indeed the cylindrical burners never appear to have been intended as precisely representational miniature Buddhist *stūpas*. The incense burners as a group are also vital to the present study because they comprise the most fully articulated references to architectural forms found in medieval metalwork, the Freer burner being the best example of this.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined metal incense burners and inkwells of the medieval Middle East, with a view to assessing whether those objects can be understood as consciously imitative of architectural forms. It has been shown that the degree of 'architecturalism' exhibited by these pieces varies considerably. The relationship between cylindrical inkwells and architecture has been found to be rather opaque, but treating the manipulation of architectural forms in three dimensions as analogous to painterly and literary means of representing architecture in the Islamic world has provided some of the most useful readings. Similarly, the relationship between

¹¹⁸⁵ While I agree with him in this instance, it must be noted that Melikian-Chirvani at times seems to be questing to establish the primacy of Persian art over that of other Islamic countries and sometimes the rest of the world: for example, see the contentious opening line of Melikian-Chirvani 1979 (a).

handled incense burners of domical form and architecture has been shown to vary widely, from the very elliptical reference that may be traced between the domical form of some burners and *stūpa* architecture, to the incontrovertible representations of the domed monument seen on other examples.

This chapter has highlighted many of the problems a purely formalistic approach to the question must necessarily face. Architecture is more than just a formal phenomenon: it is also the space in which actions are performed, a place where things are kept, and the location and emblem of an entire spectrum of cultural phenomena, from supreme power to intense religious experience to humdrum domesticity. As such, the imitation of architecture may be manifested in terms other than the direct mimicry of architectural schema. The disintegration of the form into its most significant parts – significant in function as well as visual impact – and the recombination of those elements into a kind of visual ‘essence’ of the building, a process already proposed as analogous with the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*, may perhaps explain the difficulties faced in trying to ‘prove’ architectural descent amongst some of the objects under discussion. They are not intended as portraits of specific buildings, or even as models of a type of building, and as such any attempt to make these objects match up neatly with full-size architecture is bound to fail. Simultaneously, forms that may be derived from architecture can nevertheless be divested of much of their architectural significance, a phenomenon that is illustrated by those arch-shaped decorative panels that have only the faintest possible relationship with an architectural prototype, by Aga-Oglu’s ewers with their flanged forms drawn from tomb-tower construction, and possibly by some of Melikian-Chirvani’s *stūpa*-like domed cylindrical burners.

One aspect of the objects in this chapter that should be emphasised, regarding both the definitely architectural and the less obviously so, is their functional aspect as containers or generators of things of particular significance. The incense burner, as the point of generation of sweet-smelling smoke, played an important role in both

domestic and formal rituals of hygiene and purification.¹¹⁸⁶ The inkwell similarly is a special kind of container, holding a liquid of some significance within a culture as predicated on the importance of the word as Islam.¹¹⁸⁷ The use of architectural forms for containers of the sacred or significant has obvious parallels in medieval Christian liturgy,¹¹⁸⁸ as well as among Sephardic Torah cases (*tikim*).¹¹⁸⁹ One Christian example bearing a notable formal similarity to some of the inkwells is the reliquary of Saint Matthew in the Chiesa dei Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, thought to have been made in southern Italy in the early eleventh century (fig. 4.74).

Grabar has posited that containers in the form of buildings should be treated as intermediaries that modify the value of their contents through their architectural form. This function is fulfilled, he proposes, through the change that such a form brings about in one's behaviour towards the object and/or its contents.¹¹⁹⁰ Put simplistically, architecture makes a given object more special because we believe architecture itself to be special. It is not a coincidence that the forms of architecture that have been most heavily drawn on for comparison in this chapter – Islamic funerary monuments and Buddhist *stupās* – are commemorative architecture, conceived of (explicitly in the case of the *stupās*, more obliquely in the case of the monuments) as a shrine for corporeal remains: in essence, reliquaries writ large.¹¹⁹¹ The spiritual role of the architecture invoked by at least some of the objects in this chapter must in some way have been understood as conferring significance on the contents, or at least bringing a sense of fitness and occasion to their use. Against such a background the form of the freestanding domed monument, which is characterised visually by its self-contained appearance, by the presentation of the same aspect on all sides, and above all by a central dome beneath which the rest of the monument

¹¹⁸⁶ The spiritual aspect is exemplified in the oft-quoted inscription on a Mamluk incense burner in the British Museum, 'Within me is the fire of hell but without floats the perfume of Paradise' (Ward 1993: 83).

¹¹⁸⁷ See Melikian-Chirvani 1976: 28; *idem* 1986: 70–3; Taragan 2005: 31–4.

¹¹⁸⁸ Bucher 1976: 71–4.

¹¹⁸⁹ An example from Baghdad, dated 1932, can be seen on the website of the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, http://cja.huji.ac.il/Ritual_Objects/Iraq/Torah%20case_Iraq_%20Baghdad_1932_%20Sc_%20015-5.html. Other examples of Jewish sacred objects of architectural form can be seen in Mann 1988: 14–15.

¹¹⁹⁰ Grabar 1992: 191–3.

¹¹⁹¹ Behrendt 2004: 305.

turns, and characterised spiritually by its use in serious contexts, often as a container for things of a sacred nature, presents an eminently suitable form for the miniature container.

CONCLUSION

All small things must evolve slowly, and certainly a long period of leisure, in a quiet room, was needed to miniaturize the world.¹¹⁹²

To encounter large bodies of material that have been only summarily treated in the past is, without question, a gift to the researcher. This was the situation with three of the four studies presented in the present thesis. However, new material also makes certain demands. The basic qualities of the objects in question have to be established clearly and entirely before discussion can move to more theoretical approaches. Thus examples have to be painstakingly gathered and analysed as a group, in some cases even their very function and the manner of their operation must be satisfactorily established before discussion can advance, and in the case of this thesis the minutiae of their relationships with architecture must also be turned over at length in order to establish just what kind of architecture it is with which they are engaged in dialogue. Even in the case of the metalwork examined in chapter four, much of which had already been the subject of considerable study, there was still a major task to be faced in assembling examples and scholarship before discussion could move to the basic question of whether they should even be considered as architectural. At the same time, analysing groups of objects that come from several different geographical areas and historical periods, while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of setting those objects in a historical context before proceeding with formal and theoretical analysis, necessitates the repeated establishment of historical frameworks. All of these things take time.

When I started this study, I thought that I would be working on a largely theoretical level. However, it quickly became clear that while there was ample scope for a critical investigation into the use of architectural forms on small objects from the medieval Islamic world, there were also major groups of objects, examples of which

¹¹⁹² Bachelard 1994: 159.

are on display in public museums all over the world, that had not yet been so thoroughly tilled over that there was little left to say at the level of the objects themselves. For this reason, the shape taken by the thesis has been somewhat different from that which I anticipated. The formal dissection of the objects and subsequent piece-by-piece comparison with forms from full-size architecture have occupied a greater proportion of the thesis than I expected, simply because this work had not yet been done satisfactorily and it was only through such a mechanism that the iconographic significance of the objects in question could be accessed.

The pulling apart of objects into individual motifs and searching for meaning amongst those motifs through formal comparisons with other media, while it has been fruitful in this case, has its limitations as a methodology. The author has a duty to avoid misrepresentative selections of comparative material if the validity of formal comparison is not to be undermined. Certain minor motifs, for example the meander or what Melikian-Chirvani terms the ‘pearl-and-bobbin’ pattern, may be usefully compared with architectural decoration when examined individually, but one must always remain alert to the possibility that such motifs have a far wider application across many media. Thus their presence may not necessarily reflect a conscious borrowing from architecture.

A more general danger inherent in techniques that privilege formal comparison is the trap of myopia. One can spend so much time squinting over individual elements and chasing isolated formal matches between media that the whole object under scrutiny runs the risk of disintegrating into a meaningless collection of motifs. It is for this reason that there has been a recurring emphasis throughout the thesis on both the cognitive aspects of artistic technique – that is, the decisions made regarding which architectural form is to be evoked, which elements of it will be emphasised, and how they will be altered in the miniature context – and the extrapolation of information from sources that grant access to the social, cultural and artistic lenses through which architecture was viewed.

There have been certain recurring concerns within the thesis. One of the most striking of these is the issue of class and the status of the various objects within the social structure of the medieval urban Middle East. The rather polarised medieval social structure presented by Tabbaa, of a ‘small but rich aristocracy and, many steps beneath it, a large middle class varying greatly in wealth’,¹¹⁹³ is in some ways preferable to the model of a largely undefined and excessively buoyant mercantile bourgeoisie that had been proposed in earlier studies.¹¹⁹⁴ These issues notwithstanding, it can be accepted that most of the objects in the thesis were made for consumption at a middle level of society, with some of the *kilgas* and the finer incense burners and inkwells presumably shading into a higher social stratum. That many of the objects in the thesis had barely been studied prior to this research is in part a direct result of today’s perceptions of their social status and aesthetic qualities. For those who wish to acquaint themselves with only the acknowledged masterpieces of Islamic craftsmanship, the hobbling eccentricities of the *kilgas* or the crude vivacity of the house models may seem small reward for looking beyond the exquisite. The truth of the matter, however, is that this material grants insight, admittedly of an elliptical sort, into the meanings that certain architectural forms held for what we must assume to be a large section of the population. Given the general lack of written evidence about everyday life in the medieval Islamic world,¹¹⁹⁵ the visual sources formed by the objects in this thesis are of particular significance to the construction of a ‘period eye’ on medieval Islamic urban life.¹¹⁹⁶

A related thread throughout the four studies has been the uncomfortable position of dynastic names within the study of the arts of the non-ruling classes. Labels such as ‘Fatimid period’ or ‘Seljuq’ are of course of great value in helping the reader or viewer to categorise in a general way the visual information with which they are presented. In the case of major architectural monuments, which are frequently securely dated and documented, and often have a demonstrable or at least plausible connection to the most powerful figures of the time in which they were

¹¹⁹³ Tabbaa 1988: 111.

¹¹⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 110.

¹¹⁹⁵ Wilber 1979: 127.

¹¹⁹⁶ Baxandall 1988: 29–36.

commissioned, the dynastic label is an important concern. For these reasons, architecture ‘lends itself more easily than the other arts to the formulation of hypotheses about the historical and cultural meaning of a dynasty or of a time’.¹¹⁹⁷ But I am not sure I agree with Grabar’s following suggestion, that having established hypotheses based on architecture, one can then set those hypotheses to work on the other arts.¹¹⁹⁸ How closely can portable objects made outside the court be connected with the tastes that are understood as defining the dynasty?¹¹⁹⁹ This thesis has employed the art-historical convention of dynastic labels for the purposes of convenience, particularly necessary when dealing with a large volume of material, but it could be argued that such labels are largely meaningless in this context.

A third theme which deserves brief mention in this final review is the degree to which non-Islamic factors have affected the visual culture of the Islamic world. The Coptic elements seen in many of the *kilgas* remind us that it is frequently redundant to attempt to separate out the ‘Coptic’ from the ‘Islamic’ in medieval Cairene material culture. The synthesis that has of course quite naturally taken place between cultures means that these objects are a legitimate expression of what must have been to no small degree a hybrid culture. Similarly, the Buddhist architectural imagery mooted for the incense burners is a pointed reminder of a pre-Islamic culture that had, as Melikian-Chirvani has demonstrated, maintained a strong visual presence in Khurasan for many centuries, and as such was a legitimate part of the visual self-representation of Persian culture itself. In more general terms, there is nothing intrinsically Islamic about the courtyard houses represented by the house models, or the pavilions referred to by the tabourets. The term ‘Islamic’ – used here *faute de mieux* – has been exposed as persistently problematic when working on non-religious visual culture of the Middle East, as it misleadingly equates all visual and material production with religion. The material incorporated into this thesis illustrates, perhaps more clearly than the court arts ever could, the multi-faceted visual culture at work in each of the locales covered.

¹¹⁹⁷ Grabar 1977: 213–4.

¹¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹⁹ Grabar also raises this issue in a later article (Grabar 1999: 11–12).

The complex visual position occupied by the miniature architectural form, straddling as it does representation and ornament, and mimetic and practical functions, has necessitated the employment of a series of aids to understanding that go beyond formal analysis. Perhaps the most useful of these has been to treat the three-dimensional manipulation of architectural forms that has taken place on these portable objects as analogous to the recasting of architecture found in the more widely recognised interpretive arts of painting and poetic description, as discussed particularly within chapters two and four. Through such means the process by which architectural forms are digested and reconfigured through three dimensions becomes comparable to the hyperbolic description of individual architectural elements, each one chosen for its sensory, social or spiritual impact, found in a *qaṣīda*; or the sometimes disconcerting two-dimensional constructions of physical and mental space that can be seen in miniature painting. For example, the foregrounding of the domical element on the Khurasanian inkwells of chapter four can be compared with the lavish descriptions of the dome of the ruler's palace within Ghaznavid panegyric poetry, which emphasise the dome at the cost of almost all other architectural elements. It is my feeling that this strain of analysis has the most potential for further research on the subject, now that the primary work of iconographic identification through formal comparison has been undertaken for at least the four groups presented here.

This is the mechanism by which architecture has been reconfigured, but what then is the meaning? Why did these objects engage with architecture on so many levels? The answer, as best one can surmise at this stage, would not seem to be so very surprising. Architecture is both a fundamental requirement of existence, and the medium of some of mankind's greatest and most visible achievements. It is, as was already noted in the fourth chapter, both locus and emblem of the majority of human experiences, in urban society at least. It is also the relentless backdrop of urban life. While it is acknowledged that medieval Middle Eastern societies may actually have been 'predominantly rural' in terms of the ratio of city dwellers to rural inhabitants, it seems impossible to deny that the vast majority of the surviving artwork from the period was the product of urban centres, where wealth naturally tended to

congregate.¹²⁰⁰ The architectural tropes called upon within this thesis – courtyard house, garden pavilion, water structure and domed monument – each carried within their original spheres of use a profound and presumably recognizable social signification. The present study stands as a preliminary attempt to extend knowledge of the visual sensibilities of urban life beyond the concerns of the elite.

¹²⁰⁰ Brett 2005: 4.

APPENDIX

Further inkwells of the Khurasan eleventh-thirteenth century type not included in the catalogue:

1. Inkwell lid with astrological symbols, Kabul Museum, Afghanistan. Illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 69, and Rowland 1971: plates 200 and 201.
2. Inkwell with lid, Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait, no. unknown. Illustrated in Rajab 1994: 140.
3. Inkwell with lid, Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran, acc. no. 1691.
4. Inkwell without lid, former Minassian Collection. Illustrated in Baer 1983: 261. The piece appears to be identical with a lidless inkwell now in the David Collection, Copenhagen, no. 6/1972. Illustrated in von Folsach 2001: 306, and von Folsach 1990: 194.
5. Inkwell with lid, Keir Collection, Ham, Richmond, no. 80. Illustrated in von Gladiss 2007: 118–9, and Fehérvári 1976: no. 80.
6. Inkwell without lid, Louvre, Paris, MAO 605.
7. Lid of inkwell, Paris, Louvre, AA 65, excavated by the J. Hackin mission to Ghazni and acquired by the Louvre in 1934. Illustrated in Marchal 1974: 10.
8. Inkwell without lid, Museum für Islamisches Kunst, Berlin, I. 46/63. Illustrated in State Museums of Berlin 2003: 57.
9. Inkwell with lid, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, AC1997.253.33a-b, gift of Kate Fitz Gibbon and Andrew Hale.
10. Inkwell with lid, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, AC1997.253.34a-b, gift of Kate Fitz Gibbon and Andrew Hale.
11. Inkwell with lid, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M2006.138.2a-b.
12. Fragmentary lid of inkwell, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, no. 54.515. Illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 77.
13. Inkwell with lid (external tubes type), tenth or eleventh century, formerly in the Haj Farman Collection, Tehran. Illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 73.
14. Inkwell without lid, Khalili Collection, London, MTW52.
15. Lid of inkwell, Khalili Collection, London, MTW801.

16. Lid of inkwell, Khalili Collection, London, MTW804.
17. Inkwell without lid, Khalili Collection, London, MTW571.
18. Inkwell with lid, Khalili Collection, London, MTW613.
19. Inkwell with lid, Khalili Collection, London, MTW1474. Illustrated in Piotrovsky and Vrieze, 1999: cat. no. 29; Piotrovsky *et al.* 2000: cat. no. 31; Rogers 2007: 91.
20. Inkwell with lid and external 'spokes' for suspension, Khalili Collection, London, MTW50.
21. Inkwell with lid (very small), Khalili Collection, London, MTW1519.
22. Inkwell with lid, sold at auction, Christie's, Paris, 5 November 2008, Sale 5552, 'Art des Terres d'Islam', lot 193.
23. Inkwell with lid, presented for sale at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 9 April 2008, Sale L08220, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 121.
24. Inkwell with lid, former Kelekian Collection, sold at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 25 April 2002, Sale L02220, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 81; sold again at Sotheby's, 11 October 2006, Sale L06222, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 98.
25. Inkwell with lid, presented for sale at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 18 April 2007, Sale L07220, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 90.
26. Inkwell with lid, presented for sale at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 18 April 2007, Sale L07220, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 94.
27. Inkwell with lid, presented for sale at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 27 April 2005, Sale L05220, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 92.
28. Inkwell with lid, sold at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 30 April 1998, Sale LN8265, 'Islamic Works of Art', lot no. 11.
29. Inkwell with lid, sold at auction, Sotheby's, London, New Bond Street, 15 October 1998, Sale LN8627, 'Arts of the Islamic World', lot no. 82.
30. Inkwell without lid, sold at auction, Sotheby's, April 1986. Illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1986: 79.
31. Inkwell with lid, signed by 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Ma'sud al-Naisābūrī, former collection of Joseph Brummer. Illustrated in Aga-Oglu 1946: fig. 1.

32. Inkwell with lid, signed by Nāsir ibn As‘ad Naisābūrī, former collection Joseph Brummer. Illustrated in Aga-Oglu 1946: fig. 3 and 4.
33. Inkwell with lid, signed by ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Mas‘ūd al-Nīshāpūrī, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Illustrated in Dimand 1949: 139.
34. Inkwell without lid, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. unknown. Illustrated in Dimand 1945: 90.
35. Inkwell with lid, former collection Peytel, inv. no. unknown. Illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 13, plate 1311A.
36. Inkwell with lid, collection Indjoudjian, inv. no. unknown. Illustrated in Pope 1981: Vol. 13, plate 1311C.
37. Inkwell with lid, Hermitage, St Petersburg, IR-1533, former collection N. Veselovsky. Illustrated in Loukonine and Ivanov 2003: 114.
38. Inkwell with lid, sold at auction, Sotheby’s, London, New Bond Street, 11 October 2006, sale L06222, ‘Arts of the Islamic World’, lot. no. 108.
39. Inkwell with lid, presented for sale at auction, Sotheby’s, London, New Bond Street, 18 April 2007, sale L07220, ‘Arts of the Islamic World’, lot no. 95.
40. Inkwell with lid, sold at auction, Sotheby’s, London, New Bond Street, 12 October 2004, Sale L04626, ‘Persian and Islamic Art: The Collection of the Berkeley Trust’, lot no. 83.
41. Inkwell with lid, private collection. Illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 1982/3: 43.
42. Inkwell without lid, former Harari Collection, Cairo. Illustrated in Rice 1952 (a): plate 9.

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