

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

‘The Calligrapher is An Ape!’ Arabic Epigrams on Pen Boxes (Sixth/ Twelfth–Ninth/Fifteenth Centuries)

Frédéric Bauden

IN THE COURSE of excavations at the site of the Bloomberg’s future European Headquarters between 2010 and 2014, a stunning discovery was made in the very centre of London.¹ An iron stylus to write on wax tablets from the Roman period (dated c. 62–70) was unearthed. What made this discovery ‘one of the most human finds’, as it was described by its finder,² was not the fact that the place of discovery was to become a building that now accommodates hundreds of journalists who used to take note with similar, but more modern, objects until a couple of decades ago. Rather, it is the inscription

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 - 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jul/27/joke-on-roman-souvenir-bloomberg-building-site-city-of-london> (consulted on 22 December 2020).

that was uncovered on its facets, which revealed that the stylus was a gift brought back from the city ('*ab urbe*'), understood as the *caput mundi*, that is, Rome:

I have come from the city. I bring you a welcome gift with a sharp point that you may remember me. I ask, if fortune allowed, that I might be able [to give] as generously as the way is long [and] as my purse is empty.³

The person who had these words engraved on the stylus had recourse to poetry. Even if the imperfections of his epigram betray the work of an amateur,⁴ he successfully expressed various images (association of the sharp point with remembrance, fortune with poverty, generosity with long distance).

This inscribed stylus may be unique in the Roman world, but in Islam, gift-giving often went along with poetry, a tradition that was deeply rooted in the *zarf* etiquette with which the group of elegant people (*zuraḥā'*) identified themselves in the third/ninth–fourth/tenth centuries.⁵ In the following centuries, the literati never missed an opportunity to compose poetry to thank a friend or a colleague for sending a gift inscribed with or accompanied by some verses. Just as the person who brought back the Roman stylus to offer it to a friend composed some verses that he had inscribed on the object to convey his feelings, writing tools in Islam were frequently adorned with engraved inscriptions, some of which consisted of poems.

With the increase of power enjoyed by the class of secretaries, the pen box (*dawāt*, a Persian term that originally designated the inkwell) came to represent an emblematic symbol of their status. In the Mamluk period, the executive secretary was known as the *dawādār* ('pen box-bearer') [Figure 16.1], and the pen box became a visual emblem used by their holders in a wide variety of settings, from portable objects to architecture. Most of the earliest examples

3 Roger Tomlin, 'Roman London's First Voices: A Stylish Postscript', *Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents Newsletter* 21 (2018): 4–5. For a revised reading and translation, see Denis Keyer, 'Inscription on a Roman Stylus from London', *Hyperboreus: Studia Classica* 25/2 (2019): 340–50.

4 Keyer, 'Inscription on a Roman Stylus', 348.

5 On the link between the inscribed objects and the gifts exchanged by the refined ones, see, more recently, Antonella Ghersetti, 'The Rhetoric of Gifts, or When Objects Talk', in Monique Bernards (ed.), *'Abbasid Studies IV: Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies, Leuven, July 5–July 9, 2010* ([Cambridge], 2013), pp. 130–41; Yaron Klein, 'Abū Ṭayyib al-Washshā' and the Poetics of Inscribed Objects', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138/1 (2018): 1–28; Olga Bush, 'Poetic Inscriptions and Gift Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World', *Gesta* 56/2 (2017): 179–97.



Figure 16.1 A cross-legged ruler surrounded by the executive secretary holding the pen box (left) and the sword holder (right) (Musée du Louvre, Paris, no. LP 16).

of this writing tool that have been preserved date from the Seljuq period.⁶ The shape of the pen box varied from the model with a tapering end⁷ towards the most common oblong format with either angular or rounded edges. Each of these models functioned with a sliding compartment or a hinged lid. It could be made from a

6 With the exceptions of a ceramic pen box tentatively attributed to Iran and to the second/eighth-third/ninth century (TEI, no. 15767) and an ivory pen box from al-Andalus dated 394/1003–4 (TEI, no. 45122).

7 See examples in Géza Fehérvári, *Islamic Metalwork of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1976), pp. 73–6 (nos. 80–4); Giovanni Curatola, *Islamic Metalwork from the Aron Collection* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2020), pp. 160–1 (no. 71), 164–5 (no. 73).

wide variety of materials, including ceramics, ivory, wood,⁸ bronze, steel and even gold. In his manual for secretaries, al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) devoted several pages to this writing tool where he provides useful details on the material,⁹ and explains that, in the Mamluk period, the shape with the rounded edge was reserved for the secretaries of the state chancery while the secretaries working in the financial bureau, the judges and their scribes preferred the model with angular edges. According to him, each of these categories also favoured a specific material: bronze and steel for the first, wood for the second. Generally speaking, decorations, in the form of human figures (*ṣuwar*) and inscriptions, inlaid with precious metals like gold and silver, had to be avoided, according to al-Qalqashandī who defended in this respect the Shafi'i point of view. Half a century before him, another Shafi'i scholar already condemned such a practice and only allowed the use of gold and silver in very limited quantities.¹⁰ If similar condemnations indeed led to the production of pen boxes devoid of human figures after the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century, silver and gold continued to be employed for the inlay of the decoration and the inscriptions.

In a recent study, Ludvik Kalus focused his attention on the function of the pen case in the Mamluk period, the types of inscriptions they were adorned with, providing for the first time an inventory of all the known items from the Mamluk period belonging to

8 A hard wood, like ebony (*ābanūs*), another dark timber, Indian rosewood (*sāsam*), or a scented one, like sandalwood (*ṣandal*). For a rare ebony pen box that has been preserved, see no. 18.

9 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Rasūl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjama wa'l-Ṭibā'a wa'l-Nashr, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 430–4. The information found in this section was summarised by Ludvik Kalus, 'Écritaires: objets fonctionnels et symboliques indissociables des cérémonies officielles à l'époque mamelouke', in Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (eds), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies in Diplomats and Diplomacy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 801–3; Rebecca Sauer, *Towards a Pragmatic Aesthetics of the Written Word: Al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) between Balāgha and Materiality*, PhD dissertation (Habilitationsschrift) (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, 2018), pp. 105–23; Rebecca Sauer, 'The Pen-box (*dawāt*): An Object between Everyday Practices and Mamluk Courtly Gift Culture', in Marlis Saleh (ed.), *Exchange in the Mamluk Sultanate: Economic and Cultural* (Louvain, Paris and Bristol, CT, forthcoming) (a revised version of the preceding reference).

10 Al-Subkī, *Mu'īd al-Ni'am wa-Mubīd al-Niqam*, ed. David W. Myhrman, *Kitāb Mu'īd al-Ni'am wa-Mubīd al-Niqam. The Restorer of Favours and the Restrainer of Chastisements* (London: Luzac & Co., 1908), pp. 42–3.

the type with angular edges,¹¹ the whole representing a corpus of some twenty objects, the majority of which already appear in the *Thesaurus d'épigraphie islamique* (henceforth referred to as TEI).¹² Kalus' study also offers a reading of the inscriptions (of a sovereign or poetic nature) that remains tentative and partial due to the difficulties posed by this type of material and access to it.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the issue of Arabic poetic quotations on all the known pen boxes, regardless of chronological, geographical or structural restrictions, by offering, sometimes for the first time, a satisfactory reading which can be considered definitive, in most cases, thanks to the identification of the poems in the sources. While the use of poetry is a widely known practice in the arts of Islam, rare are the attempts to identify the poems in the sources, particularly those found on objects from the Mamluk period.¹³ Doris Behrens-Abouseif emphasised that poetic inscriptions

11 In the TEI, the two types, the one with angular and the other with rounded edges, are differentiated by the use of two specific words: respectively *écritoire* and *plumier*.

12 *Thesaurus d'épigraphie islamique* (TEI), édition 2020, dir. Ludvik Kalus, codir. Frédéric Bauden, dev. Frédérique Soudan (Paris, Genève, Liège: Fondation Max van Berchem, 2019), available at <http://www.epigraphie-islamique.uliege.be/Thesaurus>. Beside this recent study, two MA theses should also be mentioned here, though they are difficult to consult and incomplete: Nuhā Abū Bakr Aḥmad Faraghlī, *al-Duwī wa'l-Maḥābir fī Miṣr mundhu 'aṣr al-Mamālīk: dirāsa athariyya-fanniyya*, MA thesis (Cairo: Jāmi'at al-Qāhira, 2004); Ḥājar Jamāl Muḥammad Jābir, *al-Duwī wa'l-Maḥābir fī al-'aṣr al-mamlūkī*, MA thesis (Cairo: Jāmi'at al-Qāhira, 2011–12); extracts available at <https://tinyurl.com/8mfsjsdj> (consulted on 20 December 2020). To the best of my knowledge, there exists no systematic study of the pen boxes taking into consideration the artistic elements and the inscriptions, and covering the whole period from the earliest known examples up to the end of the Mamluk period.

13 For the rare case of a poem composed by Ibn Hija (d. 837/1434) identified on a Mamluk bowl, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'A Late Mamluk Lidded Tray with Poetic Inscription', in Jürgen Wasim Frembgen (ed.), *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam* (Munich: Prestel, 2010), pp. 183–4. For a distich from a poem by al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī (second half of sixth century) inlaid on a box ornated with Christian figures and made in Syria in the eighth/fourteenth century, see D. S. Rice, 'The Brasses of Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/3 (1950): 631. For poems found on Mamluk metalwares whose authors were not identified, see Behrens-Abouseif, 'A Late Mamluk Lidded Tray'; Behrens-Abouseif, 'Veneto-Saracenic Metalware, a Mamluk Art', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9/2 (2005): 147–72; Behrens-Abouseif, 'A Late Mamluk Oil Lamp in the Hungarian National Museum', in Patricia L. Baker and Barbara Brend (eds), *Studies in Honour of Professor Géza Fehérvári* (London: Furnace Publishing, 2006), pp. 155–60, pl. XVI.

on Mamluk objects are seldomly deciphered not only because the intricacy of the letters represents a challenge for the best epigraphist, but also because the metre is not always strictly respected, without speaking of the fact that these pieces of poetry are most of the time unidentified. Structural damage over time can provoke the loss of significant parts of the text and thus complicates the task of the decipherer. However, once the identification of a poem in the sources is possible, it allows one to attribute it to a specific author and/or context providing helpful insight to better understand its use on a given category of objects like the pen box. The pen boxes were made for rulers and high-ranking officials, including judges and secretaries working in the various governmental and regional bureaux. The relationship these actors could establish with this object, its decoration, and its inscriptions, cannot be overlooked. In the pages that follow, I propose to address issues linked with the origin of the poems, the reuse of a poem on more than one pen box, the concept of epigram, particularly in the Mamluk period, and the connection that can be established between this form of poetry and the secretaries who were often themselves literati and composers of poetry. Finally, the poetics of the inscribed pen boxes will be investigated in light of recent studies where concepts like *prosopopeia* and *ekphrasis* were applied to poetry quoted on objects. But before getting to the heart of the matter, the corpus on which this study is based should be presented.

The corpus

The selection criteria was the identification in the sources of verses of poetry engraved on pen boxes.¹⁴ Some twelve epigrams are listed in Appendix 1 (numbered with letters from A to L). Under letter M, I collected several epigrams and formulas often repeated on more than one pen box that I could not spot in the sources. All these epigrams and formulas were found on twenty-two pen boxes detailed in Appendix 2 (numbered 1 to 22) where the basic information is provided for each item together with a picture, the references where they are described, and the reading and translation of the inscriptions.¹⁵

All the pen boxes have an oblong shape with, for the vast majority, angular corners, with the exception of seven items where these are

14 This means that some pen boxes including verses of poetry were excluded from the corpus, like an early seventh/thirteenth-century pen box in the British Museum (no. 1884,0704.85; see TEI no. 36866) and another item dated 643/1245–6 in the Louvre Museum (no. K3438; see TEI no. 2706).

15 The pen boxes are arranged in alphabetical order of the city where the object is preserved. Objects sold at auctions and whose current location is unknown (nos. 18–22) are listed at the end by alphabetical order of the name of the auction house.

rounded (nos. 5, 7, 9, 15, 17, 21, 22). These examples with rounded corners are also known as wedge-shaped.¹⁶ No. 19 is a composite pen box made of two parts that originally belonged to two different pen boxes. It now functions as a sliding pen box. Apart from this particular item, all the others have a hinged lid and internal compartments when these have been preserved. The basic material used to produce the pen boxes is brass for the main parts with silver and, sometimes, gold, for the inlaid inscriptions and decorations. Only one item is made of ebony for the main parts with an ivory plaque where the inscription was engraved and inserted in the upper part of the lid.

The pen boxes are rarely dated. Within our corpus, only three give a date of production: nos. 5 (653/1255–6), 12 (702/1302–3) and 16 (704/1304–5). In some cases, an approximate dating can be proposed when the dedicatee is a famous ruler, like no. 8, which was specifically dedicated to the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741/1341). For the remaining items, I have adopted the dating indicated by historians of art on the basis of stylistic features. The oldest item in the corpus appears to be no. 18, apparently datable to the sixth/twelfth century, while the most recent (no. 21) seems to be from the ninth/fifteenth century, though this dating is debatable. Between these two extremes, one notices that most of the pen boxes are dated or datable to the seventh/thirteenth century and eighth/fourteenth century, the latter being predominant. These two centuries appear to correspond to the golden age of the pen box.

The presence of the name of the craftsman who executed the pen box or was responsible for the engraving of the inscription is just as rare as the mention of the date of production on the object. Only one such name appears in the corpus for no. 5: Alī b. Yaḥyā al-Mawṣilī.¹⁷ He describes his work as related to the engraving (*naqsh*) of the inscriptions and the decoration. The place of production is another piece of information that is seldom indicated by the craftsman. In the corpus, just one pen box: (no. 5) explicitly indicates that it was made in Mosul. As for the dating, I relied on the identifications made by historians of art on the grounds of stylistic features. If we except the pen box just mentioned, whose place of production is clearly identified as the capital of the Jazira in the mid-seventh/thirteenth century, and two other items (nos. 4 and 22) also attributed to this

16 Linda Komaroff, 'Pen-Case and Candlestick: Two Sources for the Development of Persian Inlaid Metalwork', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 23 (1988): 90. One will notice that most, if not all, of the objects with these rounded corners are attributed to a region that covers western Iran, southern Anatolia and northern Syria.

17 The following pen boxes with no poetic inscriptions in Arabic provide the name of the craftsman: TEI nos. 2590, 2706, 2935, 8311, 8311, 22196, 22252, 33074, 33558, 34793, 35437, 36022, 36050, 47069, 49739, 50038, 50202.

region, the remaining pen boxes, for the most part, are ascribed to the Mamluk realm, that is, either Syria or Egypt.¹⁸ Specialists of metalworking also located the production of four pen boxes either in Syria or Anatolia (no. 9), in Syria or western Iran (no. 7), or simply western Iran (nos. 15 and 17).

Though my goal in this study is not to discuss such attributions regarding the dating and the place of production, one must bear in mind that they are far from being unanimously accepted by historians of art. For instance, nos. 15 and 17 belong to a group of pen boxes with rounded corners offering distinctive characteristics: the golden inlaid inscriptions are in minute *naskh* script; they are inscribed in oblong hexagonal cartouches; their decoration is quite similar. Two other pen boxes, not included in this study because they do not meet the afore-mentioned selection criteria, may be added to this group:

1. A pen box in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (no. 91.1536)¹⁹
2. Another pen box in the Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris (no. I 1959 [D 980])²⁰

18 Deciding between Syria and Egypt is no easy task, though it is generally recognised that Syria remained a major centre for metalworking until Tamerlane's invasion. For instance, we know that at the end of the seventh/thirteenth century, a renowned secretary belonging to a family that included numerous representatives who worked in the same capacity for the state chancery in Cairo ordered a pen box for his father from Damascus. See commentary to pen box no. 16 in Appendix 2.

19 This object was heavily restored during the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century in Timurid Iran, cancelling the decoration and replacing the old inscriptions on the external parts with new ones, though leaving the damaged internal decoration untouched. For the inscriptions added in the ninth/fifteenth century see TEI no. 34124. Inside the lid, most of the original golden inlaid inscriptions in cartouches placed in two concentric circles are not more readable. Nevertheless, small sections can be deciphered (no attempt to read them was made so far). In the external circle, on the left upper edge, one can still read
افتح [دواة] ا (...)

and, on the lower edge, starting from the centre

[ا]لبقاء والحلم و / الحياء والجدود / (...) لا زا / لت سعوده ظا / هرة ونجومه زا / هرة لا لاح صباح
ونودي حي على الفلاح

Then in the internal circle, on the centre upper edge:

[المجا] / هد المرابط / المتأغر الغا / زي ركن الإ / سلام والمسلمين / تاج الملوك / والسلطين / (...)
followed, on the centre lower edge, by:

(...) / حا / فظ البلاد ما / حي البغى وا / لعناد عز أ / نصاره وضا / عف اقتداره /
وعلا شأنه (...).

These portions of text correspond to some of those found on pen box no. 15. See under no. 15 in Appendix 2, for the lower part of the external side of the body and on the top of the lid.

20 The inscriptions found on this item are similar to those on the top of the lid of pen box no. 15. See TEI no. 10102.

Both pen boxes have been considered to be of western Iranian provenance by Assadullah Melikian-Chirvani and Glenn Lowry, and of Syrian origin by James Allan, while for the dating they suggested either the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century or the early ninth/fifteenth century.²¹ It should be mentioned here that similar titles and exactly the same supplication found on pen box no. 15 as well as those parts still decipherable on the Jacquemart-André piece can be read on a tray now in the Aron collection that Allan attributes to north-western Iran and from c. 700/1300–720/1320.²² The titles correspond to those of Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zangī (r. 541/1147–569/1174) and were used afterwards by the Seljuqs of Rūm, the Atabeg of Mosul Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu', the Ayyubids and the Mamluks.²³ If the dating proposed by Allan is correct, it implies that it should be revised accordingly for these two pen boxes and the others belonging to the same group as they moreover present similar stylistic features.

Some of the pen boxes were executed for a dedicatee whose name is provided. This is the case for three items: no. 8 was made for the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad; no. 12 for the Rasulid sultan al-Mu'ayyad Dāwūd in 702/1302–3; and no. 6 for a high-ranking amir, as indicated by his title *al-maqarr*, whose name can be read Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Jazarī al-Mu'ayyadī. In most cases, however, the identity of the dedicatee remains unknown. In some cases, the titles consent to guess the rank of the person for whom the object was made. The title *al-maqām*, normally reserved for the sultan or his heir, is mentioned on one pen box dated 704/1304–5 (no. 16). Its attribution to the then ruling sultan in Egypt, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, is however dubious as the title is not followed by the usual epithet (*al-sharīf*), but by

21 See Komaroff, 'Pen-case and Candlestick', 99, n. 2, and 100, n. 15. As Komaroff notes, Lowry stated that the Jacquemart-André piece was dated 1412–13 but no such date appears on the object.

22 The golden inlaid inscriptions are in *naskh* script and in cartouches too. See TEI no. 50102; James W. Allan, *Metalwork of the Islamic World: The Aron Collection* (London: Philip Wilson for Sotheby Publications, 1986), pp. 132–5 (the end of the supplication, rendered by Allan *رجى على إصلاح ما ولاح ...*, must probably be corrected as follows: *ما لاح صباح ونودي حي على الفلاح*, as found on pen box no. 15).

23 *al-Mu'ayyad al-manṣūr al-muẓaffar* were used altogether for the first time by Nūr al-Dīn in 537/1142–3 and in this order from 551/1156. Nikita Elisséeff, 'La titulature de Nūr ad-Dīn d'après ses inscriptions', *Bulletin d'études orientales* 14 (1952): 174. *Muḥyī al-'adl fī al-'ālamīn* and *munṣif al-maẓlūmīn min al-ẓālimīn* appear among his titles after 551/1156, when Nūr al-Dīn instituted the Hall of Justice (*Dār al-'Adl*) in Damascus where the grievances of the people (*maẓālim*) were dealt with. Ibid. 181. *Māḥī al-bughā wa'l-'inād* is attested for the first time in an Ayyubid inscription in Damascus dated 641/1243–4. See TEI no. 2681.



Figure 16.2 A (left): Eagle replaced by a five-petalled rosette on a Rasulid pen box (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 370-1897); B (centre): Eagle on a Mamluk pen box; made for one of Qalāwūn's sons (Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, inv. no. MW.405.2007) C (right): Eagle on the frontispiece of a Mamluk manuscript dedicated to one of Qalāwūn's grandsons (St Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts).

another one (*al-ʿālimī*) that is rather unexpected immediately after *al-maqām*.²⁴ The next two titles, which stood below the rank of sultan, are *al-maqarr* and *al-janāb*. Each is represented in the corpus by two pen boxes (respectively nos. 3 and 6, and nos. 11 and 14).

Besides the inscriptions usually written in *thuluth*, *naskh* or interlaced Kufic scripts, the pen boxes are generally decorated with geometric and floral designs, without forgetting animals like ducks and hares. Only four objects include human figures. No. 4 is adorned with scenes representing a seated ruler surrounded by court officials, musicians and dancers (bottom of the compartment), planetary and zodiacal figures (top of the lid), and musicians and drinkers (around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges). Similar scenes depicting pairs of musicians and dancers adorn no. 22. Beside these examples, several scenes showing horsemen, some of whom are hunting, and groups of two men engaged in some activity decorate the external sides of the body and the upper side of the lid of pen boxes nos. 5 and 16. In the latter case, blazons in the shape of a crested eagle looking to the right originally decorated the pen box. These were later replaced with five-petalled rosette [Figure 16.2, A]. The latter ornament is known to have been the official Rasulid heraldic emblem.²⁵ On the contrary,

²⁴ See an explanation in Ludvik Kalus and Christiane Naffah, 'Deux écritures mameloukes des collections nationales françaises', *Revue des études islamiques* 51 (1983): 101-2.

²⁵ See Noha Sadek, 'Red Rosettes: Colors of Power and Piety in Rasulid Yemen', in Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (eds), *And Diverse are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 230.

the crested eagle looking to the right seems to have been the heraldic emblem of some of Qalāwūn's descendants [Figure 16.2, B–C].²⁶

An educated prince transformed into an ape, the salvific power of calligraphy in a tale of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the missing link with pen boxes

In *The Thousand and One Nights* (from now on referred to as *Nights*), embedded in *The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad*, the tale of the second *qalandar*, or dervish, narrates the story of one of three one-eyed mendicants who, by telling their adventures, hope to save their life. Originally, this second mendicant was a prince who had received an excellent education in his young age. He was first taught how to read and write, then started to study the Qur'an until he was able to recite it according to the seven readings, proceeded with jurisprudence and grammar until his eloquence reached a high level. He also perfected his practice of calligraphy to such a point that he surpassed the foremost calligraphers of his time. His father sent him to the king of India to reciprocate an embassy that the latter had addressed to him. On his way to India, he was attacked by a group of Bedouins but managed to escape and found refuge in a city where he earned his living as a woodcutter in a tailor's shop. After an episode that saw him irritating a genie, he was transformed into an ape and abandoned in a remote place. After several days, he reached the seashore where he saw a boat and succeeded in jumping aboard and gaining the captain's trust. The boat sailed until it called at a harbour where people were being informed of the death of the local king's vizier. The merchants were informed that the king was looking for someone to replace the vizier. The future incumbent had to have a good practice of calligraphy and the candidates were asked to demonstrate their skills. The king's men handed round a ten-cubit long and one-cubit wide roll (*darj*) and asked the merchants who were

26 See Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 818, fig. 27.2, for the lid of a pen box made for one of the sons of Qalāwūn, 'Alī (d. 687/1288), designated by his father as his heir (see fig. 1B; now at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, inv. no. MW.405.2007); Leo A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry. A Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 169–70, for a manuscript dedicated to the latter's son, Mūsā b. 'Alī (687/1288–718/1318) (see fig. 1C). It is not known why the Rasulid pen box was initially adorned with eagles. The inscriptions mentioning the Rasulid sultan seem to have been altered, a fact that could indicate that the pen box was originally made for another dedicatee who would have belonged to Qalāwūn's offspring. See Rachel Ward, 'Mean or Green? Mamluk Vessels Recycled for the Rasulid Sultans', in Alison Ohta, J. M. Rogers and Rosalind Wade Haddon (eds), *Art, Trade and Culture in the Islamic World and Beyond from the Fatimids to the Mughals: Studies Presented to Doris Behrens-Abouseif* (London: Gingko Library, 2016), pp. 38–41.

present and could write to demonstrate their prowess in calligraphy. After they had finished, the ape seized the scroll and made gestures to indicate that he was willing to write. Even though the merchants were fearing that the ape would throw the scroll into the sea or tear it to pieces, the captain sided with the ape. At that moment, the ape grabbed the pen and started to write several lines according to six calligraphic styles (*riqāʿ*, *muḥaqqaq*, *rayḥān*, *naskh*, *thuluth* and *tūmār*), each style being exemplified by one distich. Witnessing his mastery, the king's soldiers brought the ape to their master who had dispatched for him a robe of honour (*khilʿa*) and a she-mule, ignoring the fact that he had just promoted an ape vizier. In astonishment, the king was amazed by the ape's manners and skills: he could even play chess! Well-versed in magic, the king's daughter, brought to her father's presence to witness the wonder, understood that the ape was in fact a prince upon whom a genie had cast a spell. She vowed to free the prince from the spell, fought the genie and successfully overcame him. The prince recovered his human shape though, during the fight, a flying spark hit the prince's face and he lost an eye. He later decided to become a mendicant until he was brought in Hārūn al-Rashīd's presence with two other one-eyed *qalandars* like him, each narrating his story in order to save his life. Charmed by his story, the caliph promoted him chamberlain (*ḥājib*) and gave him a high position in his palace.²⁷

This tale belongs to what is considered the core corpus of the *Nights*. It covers nights 40 to 52 in what is still regarded as the oldest manuscript of the collection of tales, the Galland manuscript.²⁸ Datable to the ninth/fifteenth century, this manuscript was produced in Syria, and was used by Antoine Galland (1646–1715) to produce his French rendition of the tales published between 1704 and 1717.²⁹ Aboubakr Chraïbi has shown that this story highlights

27 For more details, see Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (eds), *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara; Denver; Oxford: ABC Clio, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 338–40.

28 In the Būlāq and the Calcutta II ed., it occupies the nights 12 to 14.

29 While Mahdi proposed to attribute the manuscript to the eighth/fourteenth century, Grotzfeld rather argued for the late ninth/fifteenth century on the basis of the mention of a gold coin that was introduced by the Mamluk sultan Barsbāy in 829/1425. See Heinz Grotzfeld, 'The Age of the Galland Manuscript of the *Nights*: Numismatic Evidence for Dating a Manuscript?', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 1 (1996–7): 50–64. Contrary to what Grotzfeld stated regarding the dating on the basis of numismatic evidence, the manuscript could have been produced shortly after 829/1425 as demonstrated by Warren C. Schultz, *Numismatic Nights: Gold, Silver, and Copper Coins in the Mahdi Manuscript of Alf Layla Wa-Layla* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2015), p. 24. For the Syrian origin of the copy, see Margaret Sironval and Lahcen Daaif, 'Marges et espaces blancs dans le manuscrit arabe des *Mille et une nuits*

that success cannot be reached through education (be it religious), money or power, but through spiritual exploration and selflessness both encouraged by the adoption of a mystical style of life (the prince becomes a mendicant). The religious education he received did not accurately prepare him to face the events that happened to him since he left his father's court. On the contrary, it drove him to make the wrong choices and, consequently, his education was more of a burden than a godsend.³⁰ As valid as it may be, this analysis understates the point that the educated prince is liberated from his spell that transformed him into an ape thanks to his education: his practice of calligraphy allows him to escape his degrading condition. He is brought to the king's court, who has already appointed him as his vizier. Despite his dismay, the king is captivated by the ape's good manners and his – written – eloquence, and his daughter identifies him as a bewitched prince. Without his prowess in calligraphy, the prince could not have demonstrated his other skills, his eloquence and his educated manners. Calligraphy thus entails a salvific power in the story.³¹

The idea that the *Nights* belonged to the level of literature identified as popular, that is, meant for the masses (*ʿamma* in Arabic), generally accepted in the past, has now been challenged for years. The *Nights* are rather considered as hovering between two extremes of popular and erudite literature, and, at the same time, between the oral and the literary. In other words, the *Nights* are part of what has been coined as *littérature moyenne*. The prose text interspersed with poems largely faithful to the traditional metres, a phenomenon called prosimetrum, plays a significant role in the classification of the *Nights* in this intermediate position.³² Notwithstanding the

d'Antoine Galland', in Christian Müller and Muriel Roiland-Rouabah (eds), *Les Non-dits du nom: Onomastique et documents en terres d'islam. Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Sublet* (Damascus and Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2013), p. 113. For the Syrian origin of the version it holds on linguistic ground, see Jérôme Lentin, 'La Langue des manuscrits de Galland et la typologie du moyen arabe', in Aboubakr Chraïbi (ed.), *Les Mille et une nuits en partage* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2004), pp. 434–55.

30 See Aboubakr Chraïbi, 'Quatre personnages éduqués du début des *Mille et une nuits*', in Catherine Pinon (ed.), *Savants, amants, poètes et fous: séances offertes à Katia Zakharia* (Beirut and Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2019), § 37.

31 Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of the Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 394–5, devotes to this story a section entitled 'Iconic inscription or calligraphy' but fails to analyse the significance of calligraphy in the tale, merely limiting himself to summarise the tale.

32 Geert Jan van Gelder, 'Poetry and the *Arabian Nights*', in Ulrich Marzolph, and Richard van Leeuwen (eds), *The Arabian Nights*

importance of prosimetrum in Arabic literature, the lingering question of the reason of the inclusion of poems in the *Nights* and their function is still the matter of a heated debate nowadays. Some have argued that, in most of the cases, the poetry does not play a crucial role in the plot and that it is thus superfluous. This view is generally presented as the Western approach towards poetry and its function in a narrative text. Such a view is strengthened by the variety the reader notices between different redactions and versions of the *Nights* where the poetry differs, demonstrating that the compilers and copyists could not refrain from adding, substituting or cancelling some poems or parts of them. This position is disputed today because it expresses a Western-centric appreciation of poetry and does not take into account the role it plays in the *Nights* as a commentary made by the narrator,³³ or the fact that it fits in the text just as illustrations in European books.³⁴ Be that as it may, the six distichs quoted in the tale of the educated prince transformed into an ape correspond with one of those rare cases where poetry is essential to the plot. First of all, they are the medium through which the prince exhibits his mastery of calligraphy and, in the end, recovers his human shape. Second, these distichs have to do unsurprisingly with writing: four of them include the verb *kataba* ('to write') while several others evoke one of the writing tools (*qalam* 'reed pen'; *miḥbara* 'inkwell'; *dawāt* 'pen box'). By including them in the tale, the narrator substantiated the prince's education and prowess in calligraphy.

Yet, what is the link between this story and the pen cases? Four (nos. A–D) of the six distichs that the ape penned on the roll to demonstrate his mastery of calligraphy, as represented in the version of the Galland manuscript, were identified on ten pen boxes (nos. 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21), that is, almost half of our corpus. The distichs

Encyclopedia (Santa Barbara; Denver; Oxford: ABC Clio, 2004), vol. 1, p. 14.

33 A function called in Arabic *tamaththul*. On this value of poetry in the *Nights*, see Walīd Munīr, 'al-Shi'r fī *Alf layla wa-layla*: tamaththul al-wāqī' wa-istiqtāb al-dhākira', *Fuṣūl* 12/4 (1994): 200–22. According to Wolfhart Heinrichs, 'The Function(s) of Poetry in the *Arabian Nights*: Some Observations', in A. Vrolijk and J. P. Hogendijk (eds), *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 361, though, the poems in the *Nights* having such a function are not as frequent as Munīr pretends.

34 This idea was already defended by John Payne, one of the translators of the *Nights* in the nineteenth century, and was recently reformulated by Wolfhart Heinrichs, 'Modes of Existence of the Poetry in the *Arabian Nights*', in Maurice A. Pomerantz and Aram A. Shahin (eds), *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 530; Heinrichs, 'The Function(s) of Poetry', p. 362.

are either fully or partly (one verse) quoted and, in one case, even repeated on the same object (no. 1). The presence on pen boxes of distichs whose main theme regards the writing activity, as we saw above, is not surprising in itself, but their presence in a tale where they play such a central role and their almost ubiquitousness on the pen boxes clearly raise questions, the first of which, and perhaps the most central of all, being: which came first? In other words, were the craftsmen who made the pen boxes inspired by the tale in the *Nights* to such a point that they inlaid the most inspirational distichs on the objects in question, or were these poems included in the tale by a narrator or a copyist because they were widespread at his time and, among other things, used by craftsmen who produced pen boxes? This chicken or the egg causality dilemma, where we should be considering the cause and the effect, may seem trivial as we do not have all the cards in hand, but the paradox is still worth considering by providing keys to answers in favour of the first and the second.

The *Nights* vs the pen boxes

Let us scrutinise the *Nights* in the first place. As we saw, the tale of the educated prince transformed into an ape belongs to the core corpus of the collection. Accordingly, it should be dated to the early Abbasid period, that is, mid-third/ninth century, from which the oldest attestation of the text is known.³⁵ The oldest pen box on which one of the distichs is found being datable to the early seventh/thirteenth century (no. 9) – keeping in mind that this dating is based on stylistic, and debatable, grounds – the odds are overwhelmingly in favour of the *Nights*. Things are however more complicated than they seem. In an article published in 1915, Horovitz revealed that, after perusing the poetry in the Calcutta II edition, he found that it included some 1,250 poems (after excluding 170 repetitions) and that he succeeded in identifying about a quarter of them in anthologies and collected works of poets, some clearly attributed to famous poets, others quoted anonymously. Thanks to these results, he was also able to state that most of the identified poets lived between the third/ninth and the eighth/fourteenth century, with a peak in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth century. Horovitz's aim was to use these results as one of the indicators for the history of the text of individual stories and of the collection as a whole. His conclusion was that this study proved that the Egyptian version represented by the Calcutta II edition received its final shape at the beginning of the

35 Heinz Grotzfeld, 'The Manuscript Tradition of the *Arabian Nights*', in Ulrich Marzolph, and Richard van Leeuwen (eds), *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara; Denver; Oxford: ABC Clío, 2004), vol. 1, p. 17.

eighth/fourteenth century.³⁶ One can argue of course that the sample (one quarter) was not significant enough to reach such a conclusion. Moreover, Horovitz made his search in anthologies and collections of poetry that were available at his time. Hundreds of additional texts have become available meanwhile.³⁷ Nevertheless, his results have the merit to offer a useful assessment. For the last three centuries of his study, he could show that most poets lived in the Mamluk sultanate, that is, either in Egypt or in Syria.

Various elements were thus added to the tales during the early Mamluk period, additions that can be regarded as amplifications and interpolations that better appealed to an Egyptian and Syrian audience (readers and listeners) of that time.³⁸ This contextualisation of the tales is well known because the *Nights* are recognised as 'an outstanding source' for those interested in the social history of the Mamluk period.³⁹ In the tale of the educated prince, several

36 Josef Horovitz, 'Poetische Zitate in Tausend und eine Nacht', in Gotthold Weil (ed.), *Festschrift Eduard Sachau zum siebzigsten Geburtstage Gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1915), pp. 375–9. Unfortunately, Horovitz only published the results of his inquiry, limiting himself to list the poets by century. The details of his identifications remain unpublished.

37 To the best of my knowledge, nobody took over Horovitz's work. 'Abd al-Šāhib al-'Uqābī's *Dīwān Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriyya li-l-Tibā'a, 1980) is merely concerned with organising poems from the *Nights* according to genres, providing explanations for some words but with no attempt of any sort to identify the poems. Husayn Šabrī Muḥammad, *Ash'ār Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Dār al-Kutub wa'l-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya, 2003) and Qāsim Makhlaḥ al-Kurdī, *Dīwān Ash'ār Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 2002) limit themselves to gather the poetry from the *Nights*. The problem of these collections lies in the fact that their authors do not take into account the differences noticed between versions.

38 The historical approach has been applied to some of the tales in the *Nights* to date them. See William Popper, 'Data for Dating a Tale in the Nights', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1926): 1–14; Patrice Coussonnet, 'Pour une lecture historique des Mille et Une Nuits: Essai d'analyse du conte des deux vizirs', *IBLA* 48 (1985): 85–115; Patrice Coussonnet, *Pensée mythique, idéologie et aspirations sociales dans un conte des Mille et une nuits: Le récit d'Ali du Caire* (Cairo: IFAO, 1989); Jean-Claude Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des Mille et Une Nuits. Essai sur l'édition de Būlāq (1835)* (Arles: Sinbad/Actes Sud, 2013); Jean-Claude Garcin, 'Le Passage des anciennes à de nouvelles *Mille et Une Nuits* au xve siècle', *Médiévales* 64 (2013): 77–90.

39 Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 121.

contextual clues⁴⁰ can be listed, the most significant of which being, for our purpose, the following three:

- During his education, the prince learned how to recite the Qur'an according to the seven readings (*qirā'āt*). He was then quizzed about the *Shāṭibiyya*. This text was composed by an Andalusī scholar, al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1194), who, in 572/1176, travelled to Alexandria shortly after the end of Fatimid rule before settling in Cairo until his death. Entitled *Hirz al-Amānī fī Wajh al-Tahānī*, this didactic poem, whose aim was to help students memorise the seven variant readings of the Qur'an, quickly came to be known as a best-seller in terms of teaching handbooks to such a point that it was reported that whoever learns it will enter Paradise.⁴¹ If the narrator of the tale in the Mamluk period wanted to engage with his audience, he could not have selected a better example in this specific field of the variant readings of the holy text.
- When the prince transformed into an ape demonstrated his calligraphic skills, he did so according to six styles: *riqā'*, *muḥaqqaq*, *rayḥān*, *naskh*, *thuluth* and *tūmār*.⁴² The mention of six calligraphic styles is reminiscent of the 'six scripts' (*al-aqlām al-sitta*) as they were first codified by Ibn Muqla (d. 328/940) and his followers, Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 413/1022) and Yāqūt (d. 698/1298). These styles were later classified by the calligraphers of the Mamluk period into two groups: the rectilinear (*muḥaqqaq*, *rayḥān*, *naskh*) and curvilinear styles (*thuluth*, *tawqī'*, *riqā'*).⁴³ The comparison of the six styles in question with those listed in the tale reveals one discrepancy: instead of quoting the *tawqī'* style, the tale mentions the *tūmār* style. This style is attested in the Mamluk period: it was considered as a hybrid style that could be written with characteristics of either style of the two

40 The 'indices contextuels' as outlined by Garcin, 'Le Passage', 89.

41 Zohra Azgal, 'Andalusī Scholars on Qur'ānic Readings in the Islamic East: The Case of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī (538–90 H/1143–94 CE)', in Maribel Fierro and Mayte Penelas (eds), *The Maghrib in the Mashriq: Knowledge, Travel and Identity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 243–4, 247–9.

42 In the Būlāq ed., ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Safaṭī al-Sharqāwī (Cairo: Maṭba'at Būlāq, 1835; repr. Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1964), only four distichs are quoted corresponding to the following calligraphic styles: *riqā'*, *rayḥān* (A), *thuluth* (C), *mashq* (D), while in the Calcutta II ed., ed. William H. Macnaghten, *The Alif Laila or Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night, Commonly Known as 'The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (Calcutta: W. Thacker and Co; London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1839–42), six distichs for each of the following styles are cited as follows: *riqā'*, *rayḥān* (A), *thuluth* (C), *naskh*, *tūmār*, *muḥaqqaq* (D).

43 Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 318.

above-mentioned groups, though its main characteristics was its monumentality.⁴⁴ Despite the overlap of calligraphy with the chancery, not all the styles listed above were applied in the issuing of documents. In his handbook for budding secretaries, al-Qalqashandī stated that eight styles were used by the Mamluk chancery: *tūmār*, *mukhtaṣar al-tūmār*, *thuluth*, *khafīf al-thuluth*, *tawqīʿ*, *riqāʿ*, *muḥaqqaq*, *ghubār*.⁴⁵ One will notice the presence here of the *tūmār*, mentioned in two different sizes just as the *thuluth*. *Tūmār* was specifically reserved for the sultan's signature.⁴⁶ On the contrary, al-Qalqashandī does not record *rayḥān* as one of the styles required for documents produced by the chancery. This combination of styles that were widely practised by calligraphers in the Mamluk period, calligraphers who often worked for the state or local chancery,⁴⁷ could not escape the attention of the narrator: if the prince was a professionally skilled calligrapher he had to be able to write according to six styles. The substitution of the *tawqīʿ* with the *tūmār* could imply that he preferred to list the most significant of the styles used by the chancery: the one reserved for the sultan's signature, the ultimate expression of his power, because with his signature he validated the document.

- When the king's envoys asked the merchants to write samples of their handwriting to find a skilled substitute to the defunct vizier, they submitted them a roll (*darj*) that the ape eventually seized to show that he mastered calligraphy. The narrator specifies that the roll was ten-cubit long and one-cubit wide. The standard used to provide these measures, the cubit (*dhirāʿ*), tallies with the information provided by al-Qalqashandī for documents issued by the Egyptian state chancery. The width of the document was indeed calculated according to the cubit used to measure fabrics (*dhirāʿ al-qumāsh*) and could reach a maximum of two cubits depending on the category of the document and the recipient's status. The length of the document was conditioned by the text and the recipient's status given that the interlinear space varied according to that status. In the Mamluk period, the roll evoked in the tale would have measured some 58 cm in width and several metres in length.⁴⁸

44 Ibid., pp. 349–51.

45 al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-Aʿshā*, vol. 3, p. 52. See also Adam Gacek, 'Arabic Scripts and Their Characteristics as Seen through the Eyes of Mamluk Authors', *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 144–9.

46 Gacek, 'Arabic Scripts', 147; Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 349–50.

47 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250–1517): Scribes, Libraries and Market* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), p. 87.

48 On the rules applied by the Mamluk chancery, see Frédéric Bauden, 'Mamluk Diplomatics: The Present State of Research', in Frédéric

Once again, this detail helped the narrator to better fit the tale in the contemporary context.

These contextual clues seem to point to the reworking of the tale in the Mamluk period, at the earliest at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, when the *Shāṭibiyya* became widely known. Helpful as they can be to place this reworking on a timeline, these clues clearly muddle up the cards because the pen boxes where one of the four distichs was inlaid are datable, at the earliest, to the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, the vast majority being from the eighth/fourteenth century, with one clearly dated 704/1304–5 (no. 16). Geographically speaking, most of them were produced in the Mamluk realm (Syria or Egypt), with some being attributable to western Iran. The pen boxes would thus be contemporary with the amplifications and interpolations made to the tale, the most significant of which could have been the inclusion of the six distichs corresponding to the six calligraphic styles. At this point, it seems that this coincidence shortens the odds on the distichs being first used on pen boxes. Let us now consider this possibility.

The pen boxes vs the *Nights*

An interesting line of enquiry consists in dating the distichs, either when they were composed or when they were first inscribed on pen boxes. As we just saw, the earliest dated pen box where one of the four distichs was inlaid is from the year 704/1304–5 (no. 16) while the earliest datable one is from the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century (no. 9). Distich C precisely appears on the latter pen box, whose area of production has been identified as Syria or Anatolia. It also features on two additional pen boxes (nos. 6 and 7), both datable to a century later, with one (no. 7) made either in Syria or western Iran. The theme of the distich revolves around the ephemeral character of human life and the lastingness of writings. Hence, the second verse pinpoints the necessity of paying attention to what one writes, fitting this advice in an ethical scheme combined with a threat: one could have to face in the afterlife the results of what he wrote. Only the second verse of the distich was inscribed on the three above-mentioned pen boxes. The distich could be found in several sources, the oldest of which (Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*) is from the beginning of the fourth/tenth century.⁴⁹ The author quoted the distich in a chapter dealing with knowledge and

Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (eds), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 47–54.

49 There are older attestations, but of the second verse only. For this and what follows, see the commentary in Appendix 1 under C.

adab and failed to name the poet who composed it. It is only a century later that it is placed in the mouth of the famous *adab* writer al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–9). Quite interestingly, the second verse resurfaces in the early Mamluk period in connection with secretaries. When Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) was appointed secretary of the bench (*muwaqqiʿ al-dast*) in 754/1353 in Syria – his first public office – his father composed a poem to congratulate his son. The third verse was nothing else than a verbatim quotation (*taḍmīn*) of the second verse of distich C. It thus served as an advice to his son who just started his career as a secretary. The fact that this verse was well known and widespread by that time in Syria is corroborated by al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), who quoted the poem composed by al-Subkī's father in his biography of Tāj al-Dīn, characterising the old verse as 'famous' and 'firmly established'. Slightly before its quotation by al-Subkī's father, we find it also paraphrased by another prominent member of the class of secretaries who worked for the state chancery in Cairo but who was of Syrian origin: Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349). In his handbook for would-be secretaries, al-ʿUmarī paraphrased it in recommendations to be included in a deed of appointment for a judge. All these elements prove that, at the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century at the earliest, distich C widely circulated in the circle of secretaries both in Syria and in Egypt. It is worth mentioning that about the same time, we also note that it was inscribed on the walls of a tomb in a Christian cemetery located in the Kharga Oasis in Egypt by a Muslim visitor, a further proof that the poem appealed to other layers of the population.⁵⁰

If only distich C could be identified in sources from the third/ninth–fifth/eleventh century, similar contextual clues listed above for its use in the circle of secretaries exist for distich B. In this distich, the pen box speaks in the first person, making its user swear an oath to never use it to cancel someone's source of living (*qaṭʿ rizq*). Like the preceding distich, this one functions as a parae-netic message addressed to secretaries not to abuse their position to deny someone else's rights. Found on three pen boxes, two datable to the eighth/fourteenth century (nos. 1 and 13), and the last to the following century – though, in this last case, the dating appears dubious (no. 21) – all of which were produced in the Mamluk realm, this distich was also known to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī. In a work devoted to expounding how those appointed to public positions should behave (*Muʿīd al-niʿam*), al-Subkī addressed some recommendations to

50 The same distich, together with distich D, still drew the attention in the early Ottoman period, as both were noted down by a later reader of the Galland manuscript on one of its blank pages. The same two distichs were also penned on the top of a Samaritan marriage contract drafted in Palestine. For the references, see the commentary to C in Appendix 1.

the category of secretaries (*kātib al-sirr*), one of which precisely concerns the abuse of power to cancel someone's source of living (*qaṭʿ rizq*). He concludes by quoting distich B which, he states, he read on a pen box that belonged to a secretary of the chancery. Beside al-Subkī's testimony, we also have additional evidence of the use of B on another pen box. While evoking the integrity of the Merinid sultan Abū ʿInān Fāris (d. 759/1358), the Maghribi historian al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1631) admitted that it reminded him of information regarding an inscription allegedly found on Abū ʿInān's pen box. This inscription consisted of the very same epigram registered in our corpus under B with one additional verse at the beginning linking the pen box to the ruler by naming him. He proceeded by stating that he had seen a pen box with this epigram – but without the additional personal verse – in the ownership of a secretary in Fez, thus in the early eleventh/seventeenth century.⁵¹ Both testimonies provide an unambiguous proof that, by the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, the presence of this epigram on pen boxes was already attested, something confirmed by those found in our corpus.

One last epigram (no. A) must be considered here with regard to contextual clues. The meaning it conveys diverges radically from the preceding two as it underlines the limitless power of the pen box's owner, even comparing it with the might of the Nile. Given this reference, the epigram could hardly have been composed outside Egypt. It appears on just one pen box (no. 16) that is precisely dated 704/1304–5. As it will be shown below, this pen box is also related to a family of distinguished secretaries who led the state chancery of Cairo from the establishment of the Mamluk sultanate until the first quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century. The epigram was also spotted in a ninth/fifteenth century-collection of Persian letters composed by the renowned Maḥmūd Gāwān Gīlānī (d. 886/1481).⁵² Gāwān was born in Gīlān where his family played an important role at the political level. Upon his father's death, he was forced to flee the region and travelled with his elder brother and the latter's four sons to Mecca and then Cairo. In the Egyptian capital, Gāwān met and studied with the great scholar of the age, the traditionist Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), in 843/1440. He also stayed in Damascus for the same purpose.⁵³ In 857/1453, he reached Deccan where he soon rose to prominence, becoming chief minister of the local Bahmanid ruler, while managing, at the same time, a commercial business with ties

51 For the references to al-Subkī and al-Maqqarī, see the commentary to epigram B in Appendix 1.

52 See commentary to epigram A in Appendix 1.

53 For the time Gāwān spent in Egypt, see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-Lāmiʿ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1934), vol. 10, pp. 144–5. For his brother's biography in the same work, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 94–5.

that reached the capitals of the three main powers of the Near East (Mamluk Cairo, Ottoman Bursa and Timurid Herat).⁵⁴ In his collection of official and personal correspondence (*Riyāz al-inshāʾ*),⁵⁵ a letter addressed to his brother, who settled in Mecca,⁵⁶ includes a quotation of epigram A. Given Gāwān's stay in Egypt and in Syria we can reasonably surmise that he became acquainted with the epigram during this period. Himself a secretary, his quotation of the epigram should not surprise us either.

The examples detailed above for three epigrams out of the four mentioned in the tale of the educated prince turned into an ape demonstrate that, by the early eighth/fourteenth century, these poems circulated widely among secretaries. Testimonies regarding their presence on contemporary pen boxes made for secretaries and sultans, as we saw, strengthen the idea that they were already used as a medium to transmit a message on this category of objects. With the exception of only one epigram, the existence of which is attested since the late third/ninth century, the three others cannot be dated. However, the oldest datable pen box where one of these epigrams feature (no. 9) being from the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, we can reasonably admit that they circulated before the testimonies detailed above. Is this enough evidence that the epigrams were first inscribed on the pen boxes and later inserted in the eighth night of the *Nights*? In other words, does it allow us to break a tie in our chicken and egg dilemma? Not really, given that the amplifications and the interpolations introduced in the tale can be dated, at best, from the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, that is, precisely when our oldest pen box featuring one of the four epigrams was produced. But, as Shahrazād would say, this is not the end of the story: another epigram (no. E) could be our tiebreaker.

A tiebreaker?

A fifth epigram (E) needs to be analysed at this point. This epigram also appears in the Galland manuscript of the *Nights*, but in another tale: the story of *Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī and His Son Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan*, also known as *The Tale of the Two Viziers*.⁵⁷ The plot can be summarised as follows: the two sons of the vizier of Egypt succeed him; to strengthen their ties, they vow to marry on the same day, to have

54 On Gāwān, see Emma Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 133–8.

55 On this work, see Stephan Popp, 'Persische diplomatische Korrespondenz im Südindien des 15. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 162/1 (2012): 95–125.

56 H. Kh. Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwān, the Great Bahmani Wazir* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1942), pp. 32–3.

57 See the reference in the commentary to epigram E in Appendix 1.

sexual intercourse with their wives on the same night, and to marry their children as they are convinced that they will respectively have a son and a daughter. Even before they could carry out their plan, they argue about the dowry. Nūr al-Dīn decides to leave secretly, and, after a long travel, he reaches Basra where he marries the local vizier's daughter. Despite the separation, the two brothers see their vow realised. In the end, daughter and son will find each other and get married as their fathers had planned.⁵⁸

The epigram is quoted in the seventy-third night during which Nūr al-Dīn is introduced to the sultan of Basra by his father-in-law the vizier who, on the same occasion, requests his master to appoint Nūr al-Dīn in his place. During the presentation, Nūr al-Dīn recites the epigram to greet the sultan. The distich thus consists of good wishes for the sultan's life and power whose longevity is expressed through similes ('as long as morn and eve will differ', 'as long as the nights will last'). The same epigram was inscribed on a pen box (no. 15) made around the end of the seventh/thirteenth and the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century, and whose area of production was identified as western Iran or Syria. In the Calcutta II edition of the *Nights*, another version is quoted: the first verse expresses, with different words, the same wishes uttered by Nūr al-Dīn in the other epigram ('as long as dusk and dawn last'), while the meaning of the second verse completely differs. Quite interestingly, the first verse of this second version was also inscribed on the same pen box, at the end of the other epigram and, more importantly, epigram D was inlaid on it too.⁵⁹ Therefore, two epigrams (D–E) found in two different tales in the *Nights*, including an alternative version for one of these, found their way on the same object. This concomitance could hardly have taken place by chance, and it proves that these epigrams circulated widely already in the seventh/thirteenth century and, more probably in northeastern Syria or western Iran given the place of production of pen box no. 15.⁶⁰

Why could epigram E be a tiebreaker in deciding which came first (the epigrams on the pen boxes or in the *Nights*)? To answer this question, we must now turn to *The Tale of the Two Viziers* and its origin. Just as in the tale of the educated prince metamorphosed into an ape, this tale includes several contextual clues that point to the Mamluk period too. However, unlike the previous tale, this tale was not the object of amplifications and interpolations to

58 See Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pp. 317–19.

59 See the commentary to epigram E in Appendix 1.

60 See the commentary to epigram E in Appendix 1. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the second hemistich of verse 1 in epigram E ('as long as morn and eve will differ') is attested on a bowl made in Iran in the sixth/twelfth century.

adapt it to a contemporary audience. Rather, it was established that the whole story was created in the Mamluk period: the topography of the places described, the details regarding the economy and the society, not to speak of the administration and the documents it issued, are all elements that constitute an essential part of the story. All these elements point to an author who was familiar with the milieu he is depicting, an author who exalts the men of the pen and, more particularly, the category of secretaries, to whom it seems to be dedicated. Once again, we see the secretaries featuring at the forefront. We can also underline the coincidental aspect of the story, a phenomenon some Mamluk historians paid attention to by naming it 'strange coincidence' (*gharīb/ʿajīb al-ittifāq*).⁶¹ Not by chance, the name Nūr al-Dīn gave to his son was ʿAjīb.

All the contextual clues point to the creation of the tale at the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century⁶² and, according to Garcin, the version of the *Nights* as represented by the Galland manuscript, datable to the same century, is the result of a rewriting that took place at the beginning of that century, when *The Tale of the Two Viziers* was also composed.⁶³ If we take this dating for granted, it solves our dilemma: the epigrams were first inscribed on the pen boxes whence they were then chosen to amplify some tales of the *Nights* and lend them more credence to a contemporary audience.⁶⁴ As we saw, the secretaries surfaced on several occasions in the preceding pages. The pen box, which they considered as their emblematic tool, was a vehicle for the expression of their power. As literati, they could not express it in a better way than by resorting to poetry.

61 Frédéric Bauden, 'Maqriziana I: Discovery of an Autograph Manuscript of al-Maqrīzī: Towards a Better Understanding of His Working Method, Description: Section 2', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10 (2006): 134.

62 Popper, 'Data for Dating a Tale', was the first to point to a date of composition situated between 819/1416–17 and the 830s/1427–36. Coussonnet, 'Pour une lecture historique', brought forward further details corroborating this dating. He was followed, more recently, by Garcin, 'Le Passage', p. 84; Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, pp. 75–6.

63 Garcin, 'Le Passage', pp. 83–9; Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, pp. 193–6. Garcin dates the version contained in the Galland manuscript between 827/1424 and 846–7/1443 and attributes it to a Syrian author.

64 Another interesting example of an epigram needs to be quoted here, though the place where it was inscribed has not been preserved. An epigram of four verses found on a portal leading to an assembly hall of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813–218/833) was recorded in *Kitāb al-Muwashshā* (Book of the Brocade) by al-Washshā' (d. 325/937). The second verse was also identified in al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's (d. 502/1108) *Muḥāḍarāt al-Uḍabā'*, but the four verses also appear in *The Thousand and One Nights*, inserted in a seven-liner. See Klein, 'Abū Ṭayyib al-Washshā', 16–17.

This leads us now to consider the role played by epigrams in relation to this milieu.

Verse inscription vs epigram

By the time the pen boxes of our corpus were executed, inscribing verses of poetry on objects had become a well-established practice whose roots can be traced back to the early Abbasid period when objects came to be used as a medium to convey a message to the person to whom they were offered.⁶⁵ This custom is best exemplified by the *ẓurafāʾ* ('the refined ones') of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century, a group of members of the elite moving in the caliphal court who behaved according to an etiquette (*ẓarf*) that impacted a full range of their manners, from the way they dressed, walked, stood, to how they spoke and even smelled. This group's distinction relied less on wealth or descent than on literary prowess where communication and speech played a central role. One of the most ostentatious ways for them to put into practice this etiquette was to inscribe maxims of wisdom or verses of poetry on the most mundane objects that they themselves used or that they offered to an elegant fellow. A contemporary, Abū Ṭayyib al-Washshāʾ (d. 325/937), devoted a book to this practice (*Kitāb al-Muwashshāʾ* [The Book of Brocade]) where he took note of the poems found on some of the objects where they were inscribed.⁶⁶ Some of these objects, such as ring stones, offered limited space, forcing the refined ones to combine wittiness with concision: one hemistich or one verse at the maximum.

In epigraphy, this characteristic of poetic terseness is usually identified with the epigram, that is, broadly speaking, a short engraved poem. However, in the field of Islamic epigraphy, this term is not generally encountered to describe Arabic verse inscriptions.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the practice of inscribing short verses on objects in Islam was quite common as al-Washshāʾ's book perfectly demonstrates, but it is not the only case to document the practice.

65 For this and what follows, see *ibid.*, 1–2.

66 The inscriptions found on ring stones were the object of a detailed study: Ludvik Kalus and Frédérique Soudan, 'Les Sceaux dévoilent leurs propriétaires: "soufi raffiné", "homme de résolution" ou "homme de passion"? L'*adab* au service de la sigillographie: Extraits du *Kitāb al-Muwaššāʾ d'al-Waššāʾ*', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 2 (2007): 157–80. For the quotation of one of the epigrams listed by al-Washshāʾ in his book on an ivory-veneered casket made in Sicily or southern Italy, see Bush, 'Poetic Inscriptions', p. 185. With regard to inkwells, see Hana Taragan, 'The "Speaking" Inkwell from Khurasan: Object as "World" in Iranian Medieval Metalwork', *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 33–4.

67 See the discussion in Adam Talib, *How Do You Say 'Epigram' in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), chapter 3.

Authors of the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth century were also attracted by such short verses noticed on objects. We have already considered one epigram of our corpus (B) that was inlaid on three pen boxes (nos. 1, 13, 21). In the mid-eighth/fourteenth century, al-Subkī stressed that he read it on a pen box and, according to al-Maqqarī's testimony, the same epigram was inscribed on the pen box of the Merinid ruler who was a contemporary of al-Subkī. Al-Maqqarī further emphasised that he then saw the same epigram quoted by al-Subkī on a pen box that belonged to a secretary of Fez. A similar example can be identified in epigram F of our corpus. This epigram was noticed on a pen box by Muḥammad b. Aydamur al-Musta'ṣimī (d. 710/1310), an author from Baghdad, himself a poet, calligrapher and secretary. Two pen boxes in our corpus (nos. 6 and 18) were decorated with it. These cases show that epigrams found on pen boxes drew the attention of these secretaries who were themselves poets, the main feature being that the authors of these poems were not known to them.

Of course, we are aware of similar epigrams whose authors are known thanks to the sources. As noted by Marco Schöller in a work dedicated to putting the epitaphs in context, there exist plenty of examples of verses of poetry mentioned in the sources where a paratext helps to determine their status of epigram: for instance, 'He composed the following inscription for a sword'.⁶⁸ With regards to pen boxes, we can quote here the case of a famous Syrian secretary and poet, Ibn Nubāta (d. 768/1366), who is said to have composed an epigram for a pen box made of steel (*fūlādh*).⁶⁹ The issue at stake here is that, despite the profusion of such examples in the literature, these epigrams look more like theoretical samples than practical ones: to the best of my knowledge, none of these epigrams composed on purpose was ever found on preserved objects. So far, because in our corpus we have two examples that can be scrutinised: it will soon appear that both epigrams are linked by their history as well as by the object.

68 Werner Diem and Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), vol. 2, pp. 315–16, quoted by Talib, *How Do You Say 'Epigram' in Arabic?*, p. 162, n. 2.

69 Al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān al-ʿAṣr wa-A'wān al-Naṣr*, ed. 'Alī Abū Zayd et al. (Beirut and Damascus: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir and Dār al-Fikr, 1997–8), vol. 5, p. 357. Al-Ṣafadī also collected some epigrams inscribed on objects in a dedicated chapter of his *al-Rawḍ al-Bāsim wa'l-'Urf al-Nāsim*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Majīd Lāshīn (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-'Arabīyya, 2005), pp. 219–21 (*mā yuktab 'alā al-ālāt*). The examples include a Qur'an stand (*kursī*), an oil lantern (*fānūs*), a ruler (*mīṣṭara*), suspended ornaments of a necklace (*shamsāt*) and a bowl (*tāsa*).

The first epigram (I) was composed for one of the most prominent secretaries who worked for the state chancery at the beginning of the Mamluk sultanate: Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1293). The author of the epigram was his son, Faṭḥ al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 691/1291), himself a secretary. We know that he composed the epigram in question for a brass pen box that he wanted to offer to his father. In this two-liner, Faṭḥ al-Dīn devoted the first verse to the object and the second to the dedicatee, his father, whose name appears at the end (‘Made for the servant of God who desires His mercy and seeks refuge with Him: Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir’). As for the second epigram (K), it was penned by none other than Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir when he saw an engraved pen box. We thus not only have two examples of epigrams composed by two renowned Egyptian secretaries of the late seventh/thirteenth century and mentioned in the sources as specifically written for pen boxes, but both are actually found on one of the most nicely executed objects in our corpus: the Paris pen box with representations of horsemen (no. 16). Dated 704/1304–5, this pen box can obviously not be identified with the object offered by Faṭḥ al-Dīn to his father as both died at short distance about ten years earlier. Consequently, the personalised part of Faṭḥ al-Dīn’s epigram (the mention of his father’s name) was replaced with other words in accordance with the metre. As for his father’s epigram, it reproduces almost faithfully the version quoted by one of the sources except that it ends abruptly in the middle of the third verse. This item shows that epigrams said in the sources to have been composed for a given object could indeed be engraved and, as in the case of the Paris pen box, even reused at some distance with some modifications to anonymise them if need be.⁷⁰ Our corpus proves that the recycling of famous epigrams on the same category of objects was common: most of the epigrams we identified were recycled on more than one pen box.⁷¹ In one case (G) it was even recycled six times.

The author who quoted the verses composed by Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, al-Ṣafadī, characterised them as one of the most emblematic examples of his epigrams (*maqāṭīʿ*, sing. *maqṭūʿ* / *maqṭūʿa*). As Adam Talib has recently shown, by the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century, or slightly earlier, very short poems started to be referred to as *maqāṭīʿ*, and he makes the case for the identification of this term with the word epigram.⁷² He argues that the Arabic term was far from new but that a semantic – or terminological – shift had taken place as it came to almost exclusively refer to what can be identified as a new

70 Epigram F was also inlaid in another pen box (no. 10).

71 Only epigrams A, E and J feature on one pen box. The reader will find in Table 16.1 the list of the pen boxes where the epigrams and formulas are indicated.

72 In the more restrictive sense of ‘a little poem ending in a “point”’. Talib, *How Do You Say ‘Epigram’ in Arabic?*, pp. 163 and 214.

genre of poetry where the number of verses was less pertinent than its structure.⁷³ As Talib puts it:

it is the resolution – the concluding point of the *maqṭūʿ*, something rather like a punchline – that explodes the accumulating pressure, resolving the dialectical tension between signifier [...] and signified [...]. This basic operational formula gives the *maqṭūʿ* its general structure [...] and it is therefore one of the principal hallmarks of the genre.⁷⁴

Another feature of the shift lies in the anthologising of this pithy poetry. For the eighth/fourteenth century, Talib cites four representatives of this movement who collected their own production of very short poems. Among these four, three were active at the chancery in Syria.⁷⁵ Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir's epigram was clearly labelled by al-Ṣafadī as a *maqṭūʿ* not only because of its brevity – a four-liner – but first and foremost because of its use of double entendre (*tawriya*), a rhetorical feature particularly appreciated in the Mamluk period. The most successful epigram in our corpus (G), inlaid on not less than six pen boxes, also belongs to this category. Composed by an obscure poet, Abū Jalank (d. 700/1300–1), who earned his position as boon companion of the ruler of Mosul or Mardin because of a spirited rejoinder, it resorts to all sorts of assonances and wordplays on the theme of writing that could not escape the attention of secretaries.

Themes, motifs and functions of the epigrams

As underlined by Robert Irwin, '[i]n the highly literary court culture of medieval Islam, courtiers were expected to be able to extemporize verses and much of the poetry was composed to be inscribed on objects'.⁷⁶ At the same time, during the first century of the Mamluk sultanate, we notice a shift of poetic performance and production outside the context of the court.⁷⁷ We have seen that such verses

73 The vast majority of these very short poems were two-liners. Ibid., pp. 13, 17.

74 Ibid., pp. 23–4.

75 Ibid., p. 17. These are al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Nubāta, Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 779/1377), and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. c. 750/1350). The first three were secretaries in Syria.

76 Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture, and the Literary World* (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), p. 173.

77 Talib, *How Do You Say 'Epigram' in Arabic?*, p. 86 ('These collections also provided an apposite forum for the projection of a wide and contemporary literary community in the period which – for the first time in the history of Arabic literature – the court was no longer the centre of poetic performance and production.').

of poetry were specifically composed for pen boxes by literati who played a significant role as secretaries in a chancery environment. Such poems were not only engraved on one given object probably destined for a gift, as in the above-mentioned case of Faṭḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Zāhir with his father, but the craftsmen reused them on several occasions, sometimes mixing them from time to time as Table 16.1 demonstrates. These artists thus referred to some kind of a repertoire of renowned epigrams. One must keep in mind that these inscriptions were, in most cases, designed and engraved by calligraphers whose ties with the chancery were close. The chanceries (state and local) hired secretaries who had also been trained in the art of writing according to the styles that were used to issue documents. Contrary to what has been argued, such calligraphers of the Mamluk period worked as engravers too.⁷⁸ The link between calligraphers, secretaries and the chancery helps to explain the widespread reuse of these famous epigrams.

Of course, the calligraphers did not limit their repertoire to such epigrams. They also had recourse to other poems, some of which with no link to the action of writing, and from older periods. Epigrams C and K, for instance, were first recorded by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi in his *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*. Epigram K, a four-liner that is also a panegyric, was even composed by him for a prominent political figure of his time in al-Andalus. The first two verses, where the contextual element is found, were overlooked by engravers who only quoted the last two verses on two pen boxes (nos. 4 and 17).

The overwhelming theme addressed in the epigrams regards power and its impact on those who could be subjected to the decisions penned with the help of the writing tools – the reed pen, the ink, the pen box – of which the latter is the emblematic symbol. The idea that might is right permeates literary and historical sources of the Mamluk period. The period saw indeed the emergence of powerful families who monopolised public functions: judges, secretaries, imams, and so on. Recommendations made to those who were granted such positions never failed to remind them that they should behave in agreement with the law. We can quote here the moralistic stances made by al-Subkī in his *Muʿīd al-Niʿam*. When speaking of the scribes working in the bureau (*dīwān*) of the amirs, he stressed that they should treat gently the peasants (*fallāḥūn*) and that they should all avoid unlawful deeds. In this context, he mentioned a

78 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 339, where she underlines the difference between Mamluk and Iranian calligraphers ('The Iranian calligraphers must have used paper designs or stencils. In contrast, metalworkers in the Mamluk domains still worked out their inscriptions within their own craft techniques without recourse to paper designs'). Behrens-Abouseif, *The Book*, pp. 121, 123, 130, has recently shown that this characterisation does not hold true.

Table 16.1 List of the pen boxes and of the epigrams/formulas inscribed on them

Pen box no.	Date	Place of production	Poem/ Formula no.	Location	Comment
1	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	B	Lid (inside) Body (outside) Lid (outside) Body (inside, bottom)	Repeated twice Repeated three times
2	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	G	Lid (inside)	Verses 1–2 only
3	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	D	Lid (inside)	Verse 1 only
			G	Lid (perimeter of the lower edges)	Verses 1–2 only
			M8	Body (outside)	
4	Second half of seventh/ thirteenth century	Jazira	H	Lid (outside and inside)	Verses 1–2 only (respectively outside and inside)
			K	Body (outside)	Verses 3–4 only
5	653/1255–1256	Jazira (Mosul)	H	Lid (inside)	Verses 1–2 only
6	First half of eighth/ fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	C	Lid (perimeter of the lower edges)	Verse 2 only
			F	Lid (inside)	
7	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Western Iran	C	Lid (outside)	Verse 2 only
8	First half of eighth/ fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	G	Lid (outside perimeter) Body (external)	Repeated twice
			M5	Lid (outside perimeter) Body (external)	Repeated twice
9	First half of seventh/ thirteenth century	Syria or Anatolia	C	Lid (outside)	Verse 2 only

Table 16.1 (continued)

Pen box no.	Date	Place of production	Poem/ Formula no.	Location	Comment
10	Early eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	G I M1 M5 M6	Lid (perimeter of the lower edges) Lid (outside) Body (outside) Lid (perimeter of the lower edges) Lid (inside) Body (outside)	Repeated twice
11	First half of eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	M7 M6 M7 M8	Lid (inside) Lid (inside) Body (outside) Body (outside)	
12	702/1302–1303	Syria or Egypt	L	Body (inside, bottom)	
13	First half of eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	B	Lid (inside)	
14	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	D	Lid (inside)	
15	Late eighth/fourteenth century	Western Iran	D E M7 M8	Lid (outside perimeter) Lid (perimeter of the lower edges) Lid (outside perimeter) Lid (outside perimeter)	Verse 1 only

16	704/1304-1305	Syria or Egypt	A	Lid (inside)	Verses 1-2 and 3 only
			I	Body (inside, sides)	
			J	Lid (outside)	
17	End eighth/fourteenth- beginning ninth/fifteenth century	Western Iran	G	Body (outside)	
			K	Body (outside)	Verses 3-4 only
			M1	Lid (inside)	
			M3	Body (outside)	
			M4	Lid (outside)	
18	sixth/twelfth century	Egypt or Sicily	F	Lid (outside)	Verse 1 only 2 nd hemistich of verse 2 and verses 3-4
19	First half of eighth/ fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	G	Body (outside)	
			M7	Body (outside)	
20	eighth/fourteenth century	Syria or Egypt	L	Lid (inside)	
21	ninth/fifteenth century (?)	Syria or Egypt (?)	B	Lid (outside)	Lid (perimeter of the lower edges)
22	Second half of seventh/ thirteenth century	Jazira	M3	Lid (perimeter of the lower edges)	

person who had read the following verses engraved on a pen box belonging to a scribe⁷⁹ (*majzū' al-rajaz*):

١	لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ مَرْتَبَةٍ	دَوَائِنَا سَعِيدَةٌ
٢	مَنْقُوشَةٌ مَكْتُوبَةٌ	عَرُوسُ حُسَيْنٍ جُلَيْتٌ
٣	عَلَى الْكَرَامِ الْكُتُبُ	قَدْ انْطَلَتْ جَلَّتْهَا

Our pen box is blissful
It is without rank
A beauty bride it is, burnished
And engraved with inscriptions
Its decoration has fooled
The noble scribes

Upon reading this epigram, the person exclaimed that the pen box's decoration could only deceive the scribes who behave as robbers by applying illegal taxes (*mukūs*). For al-Subkī, it should not come as a surprise if scribes committing unlawful acts are later seen beaten and exposed at the market.⁸⁰ On another occasion, he quoted epigram B to urge secretaries not to use their instrument of power, the pen box, to cancel someone's source of living (*qaṭ' rizq*), the same expression being found in the poem. This moral tone, even taking the shape of a deterrent in the story narrated above, pervades several epigrams found on pen boxes. These epigrams (A, D, I, M_I, M₂, M₃, M₄) focus on the favours and good deeds that the owner of the pen should do while epigram C reminds him that his deeds will be weighed on Judgement Day. The message epigrams F, G and H convey is more balanced: it reminds the secretary that, through his pen, he can do good things and, at the same time, silence enemies and destroy destinies. This ethic question culminates in Epigram I, attributed to the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law and fourth of the rightly-guided caliphs, 'Alī b. Abī Tālib (r. 35/656–40/661): it echoes the above-mentioned moral tone by referring to a Qur'anic verse that emphasises the vanity of life on earth, thus inviting the pen box's owner not to behave as a greedy person. In view of what precedes, it is no wonder if a mystical element can be identified in some epigrams and formulas, like epigram C that is quoted by al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073) in his *al-Risāla* (*Epistle on Sufism*) in relation with al-Jāhiz's repentance for what he had written. The same mystical tone is transmitted

79 This epigram was engraved on the pen box of a famous Egyptian secretary, Tāj al-Dīn al-Ṭawīl (d. 711/1312) and is attributed to him. See al-Ṣafādī, *A'ṡān al-'aṣr*, vol. 2, pp. 103–4 (no. 512; al-Ṣafādī doubts that it was composed by him); Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-Kāmina fī A'ṡān al-Mi'a al-Thāmina*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1966–7), vol. 1, p. 50 (no. 1403).

80 Al-Subkī, *Mu'īd al-Ni'am*, pp. 42–3.

by a formula identified on pen box no. 1 ('This life does not last long, so live it in obedience [of God's precepts]'). This formula is first mentioned by al-Tha'alibī (d. 429/1037–8) in connection with mysticism;⁸¹ then by al-Māwardī (364/974–450/1058) in his *Adab al-dunyā wa'l-dīn* in the same context.⁸²

In addressing these issues, the poets availed themselves of recurrent motifs. The most reiterated regards the opening of the pen box. The verb *fataḥa* ('to open') features in four epigrams (D, F, H, I), and in three cases (F, H, I) it is even used in the imperative mood ('Open'). The action consisting in dipping the reed pen in the receptacle of ink is frequently expressed through the root MDD: beside the word *midād* (ink) that derives from it, words like *istamadda* and its *maṣdar* (the action of dipping in the ink)⁸³ and *mudda/madda* ('a dip of ink') are often combined in the poems (see B, D, F, M1). Logically linked to the dipping, the idea of flowing flares up time and again: in one case, one can interpret the mention of the Nile as a metaphor for this motif, but generally the flow is simply rendered through words like *tafajjara* ('to flow'; G), *jarā* ('to stream'; I, M2, M4), *fāḍa* ('to inundate'; M1), sometimes in connection with words like *ma'īn* ('source'; G), *ūyūn* ('springs'; G), *manba'* ('source', M2).

Among the recurrent themes, we must also evoke the supplications in the form of phrases seeking blessings for the owner of the object as it features on almost every item in the corpus. 'Might' (ʿizz), 'prosperity' (*iqbāl*), 'success' (*yumn*), among others, belong to this category of wishes often combined with bolstering adjectives like 'perpetual' (*dā'im*), 'exalted' (*āl*), 'increasing' (*zā'id*). As noted by Margaret Graves in an article devoted to these supplicatory formulas, 'in spite of its ubiquity, this particular class of inscription has thus far garnered little direct scholarly attention', because they 'do not usually provide the documentary data that art historians crave'.⁸⁴

81 Al-Tha'alibī, *al-Tamthīl wa'l-Muḥāḍara*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw (Cairo: al-Dār al-'Arabiyya li-l-Kitāb, 1983), p. 173.

82 Al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Dīn wa'l-dunyā* [sic] (Jedda: Dār al-Minhāj, 2013), p. 199 (*ba'd al-mutaṣawwifa*). See also al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zahr al-Ādāb wa-Thimār al-Alqāb*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1953), vol. 2, p. 810. It was later identified as a prophetic ḥadīth but it does not appear in the traditional corpora. In epigraphy, it overwhelmingly features in a funerary context with a first attestation in Uzgend (Ferghana; modern Kyrgyzstan) datable to 582/1186–7 (see TEI no. 15559). The second time it was used was in Ahlat (act. Turkey), where it appears on several epitaphs (see TEI nos. 22986, 22993, 30022, 30419, 31421, 31423, 31425).

83 On this operation, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, vol. 3, pp. 42–3.

84 Margaret S. Graves, 'Say Something Nice: Supplications on Medieval Objects, and Why They Matter', in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *Studying the Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 1935–2018* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018), p. 323.

Yet, as she argues, they can still prove useful for taxonomic classification. One such case can be put forward for a formula engraved on pen box no. 15: 'May four [things] help you with mankind: might, support, prosperity, and help'.⁸⁵ Such a supplication probably finds its origin in a verse composed for Nāṣir al-Dawla, the Hamdanid ruler of Mosul (r. 317/929–356/967; d. 358/959), by al-Sarī al-Raffā' (d. 362/973), a poet active at the court of Sayf al-Dawla⁸⁶ (*al-basīt*):

وَأَظْفَرْتُكَ بِمَا أَمَلْتُ أَرْبَعَةً النَّصْرُ وَالْفَتْحُ وَالْإِقْبَالُ وَالظَّفَرُ

Four [things] granted you victory over what you hoped for:
Support, conquest, prosperity, and triumph

This example shows that the trend consisting in using such supplications was deeply rooted in court culture. In other cases, the supplication may be accompanied by a formula expressing hope that the owner will benefit from such qualities as long as possible. This is conveyed by a topos in the form of a comparison: 'as long as a dove coos'.⁸⁷ This phrase appears for the first time in a poem attributed to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (15/637–81/700) who is said to have declaimed it over al-Ḥasan's tomb.⁸⁸ In epigraphy, its earliest use dates from the sixth/twelfth century on an inkwell from Herat,⁸⁹ but the first time it was inscribed on a dated object (a bowl from Shiraz) is the year 705/1305–6.⁹⁰ A few years later, it was inscribed inside Öljeitü's tomb in Sultaniyya.⁹¹ Its use in epigraphy seems to have been almost exclusively limited to Iran and Anatolia, areas where it was highly appreciated as it became some sort of a leitmotif.⁹² In our corpus, it was engraved on pen box no. 9 whose area of production is identified with Syria or Anatolia. On the basis of the epigraphic evidence, the presence of this leitmotif on the pen box could thus help to assign its production rather to Anatolia or perhaps even Iran.⁹³

85 *Sā'adatka ma'a al-anām arba'a izz wa-naṣr wa-iqbāl wa-ta'yīd*.

86 Al-Sarī al-Raffā', *Dīwān*, ed. Karam al-Bustānī, rev. Nāhid Ja'far (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1996), p. 203.

87 *Mā nāḥat ḥamāma*.

88 Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān fī Tawārīkh al-A'yān*, ed. Muḥammad Barakāt et al. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla: 2013), vol. 7, p. 131 (*sa-abkika mā nāḥat ḥamāma ayka*).

89 TEI no. 33936 (*li-ṣāḥibihi al-sa'āda wa'l-salāma wa-tūl al-ʿumr mā nāḥat ḥamāma*).

90 TEI no. 26934.

91 Sheila Blair, 'The Epigraphic Program of the Tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniyya: Meaning in Mongol Architecture', *Islamic Art* 2 (1987), p. 56 (no. 49e).

92 There are forty-two inscriptions registered in TEI.

93 For a similar comparison, see the second hemistich of the first verse of epigram E ('so long as morn and eve will differ' and, in another version,

The poetics of inscribed pen boxes

The role of poetry inscribed on objects in the Islamic sphere has recently drawn the attention of historians of art interested in characterising the relation to be established between the two. In this respect, elements such as the place reserved to the inscription on the object, the meaning of the inscribed text and its legibility, the message it transmits and its relation with the nature of the object and its other forms of decoration are central. In a seminal article, Olga Bush has lately argued that the recourse to the poetic figure of *prosopopeia* (a first-person voice attributed to an inanimate object) can be fruitful to interpret the crux between a poem, the object on which it is inscribed, particularly in the case of a gift, and its beholder or, in other words, how the object is experienced by its recipient or owner.⁹⁴ Another fruitful line of enquiry consists in focusing on the verbal representation of the visual content of the inscribed object, that is, the rhetorical device called *ekphrasis*. Hana Taragan successfully applied this concept to an inkwell adorned with scenes depicting a secretary with his tools (paper, reed pen, penknife, cylindrical inkwell) and inscriptions including one that described the virtues of the man holding it.⁹⁵ This combination of visual and verbal presentation of the inkwell's function corresponds well to the definition of *ekphrasis*.

Among our corpus, the cases where the pen box speaks in the first person are quite limited. Moreover, we are not aware of any of them having been explicitly offered as a gift.⁹⁶ The epigrams and formula do address the owner, generally in the imperative mood, for instance to enjoin him to open the pen box, but the voice is the poet's. But when the pronoun 'You' is used, 'I' is part of the dialogue.⁹⁷ In two rare cases (epigrams B and M3), the pen box does speak ('I put to oath who uses me to write'; 'O my owner! Touch the hand of the scribe'). A formula (M6) also makes the pen box address the owner by explaining that his ascension to power thanks to endurance allowed him to witness the positive effect of the object whose body (*jism*) is described as yellow and delicate, covered with a vest (*qamīṣ*) of wealth. In another example, the pen box narrates a story (*hādhihi*

'as long as dusk and dawn last'). It is worth noting that the formula with the dove was used in combination with the latter on two objects: see TEI nos. 32458 and 33936.

94 Bush, 'Poetic Inscriptions'. See also Klein, 'Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Washshā'.

95 Taragan, 'The "Speaking" Inkwell'.

96 If we except the epigram composed by Fath al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir for a pen box he commissioned from Damascus to offer it to his father. As we saw, the pen box has not been preserved but the epigram was recycled, in its anonymised version, on two items.

97 Bush, 'Poetic Inscriptions', 185–6.



Figure 16.3 *The cross-legged ruler (left) and the astrological configuration (right) (Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale). Photo: Guido Piacentini.*

qiṣṣatī, 'This is my story'), a standard formula (M8) reused on three items (nos. 3, 11, 15). In all these examples, the concept of *prosopopeia*, which, rather than describing, stages the experience, proves meaningful.

As far as the verbal and visual representation is concerned, nothing similar to the 'speaking' inkwell analysed by Taragan can be invoked in relation with the pen boxes of our corpus. The visual representations that ornate some of the pen boxes have no link with the activities of the secretary. The scenes depict moments of entertainment typical of court life (hunting, music, drinking). In one case, however, the visual representations and the epigram are deeply interlaced. Pen box no. 4 presents three astrological configurations on its lid and a cross-legged seated figure at the centre of the main internal compartment [Figure 16.3]. The astrological configurations illustrate the sun, six planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Eva Baer has convincingly interpreted these scenes in the context of cosmic setting where the ruler fits.⁹⁸ She failed however to connect these scenes with the epigrams that she did not read. The most significant of these is the one inlaid in gold on the lid, starting from the top and proceeding on the inside (H). The two verses belong to a four-liner composed by a poet from Mosul for the local ruler and successor of the Zangids, Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu' (r. 631/1234–657/1259). In the first

98 Eva Baer, 'The Ruler in Cosmic Setting: A Note on Medieval Islamic Iconography', in Abbas Daneshvari (ed.), *Essays in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Katharina Otto-Dorn* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1981), pp. 13–19.

verse, inviting the owner to open the pen box, the author refers to 'the auspicious ones' (*al-su 'ūd*), an obvious reference to stars known as an omen of good fortune. With its astrological representations, the pen box thus embodies the meaning of the first verse. In light of this, it is tentative to consider pen box no. 4, attributed, on stylistic grounds, to the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century, as having been made for Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu'.⁹⁹ The context for the composition of the verses, the identity of the poem and the dedicatee, the astrological configurations, and the stylistic characteristics of the pen box constitute a bundle of clues that could substantiate this identification. One might add that the fact that the craftsman who engraved the text did not master Arabic could strengthen this interpretation.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the pen box could also correspond to a diplomatic gift made by this ruler to advertise Mosul's luxury products.¹⁰¹

The operational dimension constitutes another useful analytical frame. How did the owner or the beholder interact with the pen box? How was the engraved text apprehended? As argued by Margaret Graves, these questions raise the issue of movements made by the object in the owner's hands. In order to read the inscriptions, the beholder needed to follow a given order imposed by the way the inscribed text was inlaid. Actions like opening, closing and rotation were required in order to fully understand the meaning of the inscriptions.¹⁰² On the pen boxes in our corpus, the part of the object that receives the major attention, both in terms of decoration and inscription, is the lid, either its top or its inside, usually both. Most of the epigrams were engraved on the lid thus conveying immediately their message in the form of a reminder, which, as we saw, consists mainly in recommendations to and exaltation of its owner. In the second place comes the external walls of the body, followed by the internal wall of the main compartment and, finally, the lid's lower edges. The bottom of the pen box is never decorated with inscriptions. Generally speaking, the text is written in *thuluth* style, in large and easy to read characters. Even though parts of the words can be written on several levels, the text must have been legible when each object left the craftsman's workshop. With the passing of

99 Ibid., p. 13, considers it as Ayyubid.

100 See commentary to epigram H in Appendix 1. The engraver made a mistake in the quotation of the first hemistich of the second verse (*kam fī murā 'āt al-nufūs* instead of *kam fī yarā 'ik lil-nufūs*). There are also orthographic problems with the other epigrams found on this pen box.

101 Julian Raby, 'The Principle of Parsimony and the Problem of the "Mosul School of Metalwork"', in Venetia Porter and Mariam Rosser-Owen (eds), *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft, and Text* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 29.

102 Graves, 'Say Something Nice', p. 324.

time, the external sides of the pen box suffered the most: some parts were damaged by blows; the inlaid precious metal (silver or gold) was often removed or came off. In such cases, parts of the text became hard to decipher. Keeping these hazards in mind, the first owner's experience with the object must have been complete. Even when the inscriptions were made in *naskh* style, as in the group of pen boxes mostly attributed to western Iran (nos. 15 and 17), where the text was placed in small cartouches hardly exceeding three millimetres in height, they remain readable because the craftsman inlaid them in gold on a dark bottom. Undoubtedly, these items required more attention from the owner who wanted to read the inscriptions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the first systematic attempt to identify in the sources poetic inscriptions found on the same category of objects, pen boxes, eleven epigrams could be retrieved in a great variety of texts. In some cases, they were quoted in these texts as specifically found on a pen box or attributed to a poet and to a context that proves useful to interpret their presence on such objects. Some of these epigrams were composed in the context of court culture: they were addressed to a ruler by a boon companion. Some others were authored in the context of gift-giving, a practice that originated in the Abbasid period. Together with other short poems and formulas, these eleven epigrams could be deciphered on twenty-two pen boxes mainly produced in Syria (or Egypt) and western Iran and between the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. It shows that these epigrams were popular among the craftsmen who did not hesitate to reuse them. In so doing, they must have relied on a repertoire of inscriptions that widely circulated in the major centres of metalworking. The link between the calligraphers, who prepared the models on paper (designs or pencils), but sometimes inlaid the inscriptions themselves, and the world of the chancery, where secretaries were required to get training in calligraphy, enlightens us about the popularity and the ubiquity of these epigrams on an object that, ultimately, was perceived as the symbol and the emblem of a social category embodying the rule of law. It reveals the relations between the craftsmen who made these objects and the elite represented by the secretaries and, consequently, between real life and literature. The pen boxes were made for a specific clientele that was in a position to understand and interact with the inlaid inscriptions. The epigrams were chosen on purpose; sometimes they were even composed on purpose. This link did not go unnoticed. When the text of *The Thousand and One Nights*, as it is preserved in the Galland manuscript, was rewritten, during the mid-ninth/fifteenth century, several contextualising elements as well as some new tales were added to the core corpus. The writer, probably a Syrian, could not

refrain from quoting some of the epigrams inlaid on pen boxes in a tale narrating the adventures of an educated prince. The inclusion of these epigrams in a tale where the hero owns the recovery of his human shape to his mastery of calligraphy proves, if need be, how popular these short poems were among secretaries, calligraphers, and craftsmen.

Appendix 1. List of the epigrams and the formulas

A. *Al-Tawīl*

١ فَمَا خَصَّ مِنْهَا أَوَّلَ دُونَ سَابِعٍ ٢ يَخْرُبُ بِهِ الْأَمْصَارَ خَمْسُ أَصَابِعٍ	لَهُ قَلَمٌ عَمَّ الْأَقَالِيْمَ نَفْعُهُ فَمَا نِيْلٌ مِصْرٍ مِثْلَ نَائِلِهِ الَّذِي
--	---

His pen has showered bounty everywhere,
 And without favouritism he favoured every land.
 The Nile gives nothing like his gifts,
 He, whose five fingers can destroy towns.

Pen box no. 16.

This epigram appears in the forty-eighth night in *The Thousand and One Nights* where the educated prince transformed into an ape shows his ability in writing calligraphy. In the Galland manuscript, it features in the second position with regard to the *muḥaqqaq* style.¹⁰³ In the Būlāq and the Calcutta II edition, it is quoted in the same place but for the *rayḥānī* style.¹⁰⁴ In his collection of letters, Maḥmūd Gāwān quotes an almost similar version in a letter he addressed to his brother.¹⁰⁵

The above-mentioned version corresponds to the reading found in the Galland manuscript with two slight differences: in the second hemistich of the first verse, one reads *awwalan* instead of *awwala* and *shāʾiʿ* instead of *sābiʿ*. It is clear that the copyist of the Galland

103 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Alf Layla wa-Layla) from the Earliest Known Sources (Leiden: Brill, 1984), vol. 1, p. 169; *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Bruno Halflants, *Le Conte du portefaix et des trois jeunes femmes dans le manuscrit de Galland* (xive–xve siècles). Édition, traduction et étude du moyen arabe d'un conte des Mille et une nuits (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 2007), p. 218; trans. Husain Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights: Based on the Text of the Fourteenth-Century Syrian Manuscript* (London and New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 106.

104 The night number also differs: no. 13. *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Būlāq ed., vol. 1, p. 38; Calcutta II ed., vol. 1, p. 94.

105 Maḥmūd Gāwān Gilānī, *Riyāz al-Inshāʾ*, eds Chānd b. Ḥusayn and Ghulām Yazdānī (Hyderabad: Dār al-Ṭabʿ, 1948), letter no. 22, p. 105.

manuscript did not understand the reference to the seven climes. Some more correct readings adopted here are found on pen box no. 16.

The poet plays here with the opposition between *ʿamma* and *khāṣṣa* with reference to the division between the two traditional social layers, the *ʿamma* (the common people, the vulgar) and the *khāṣṣa* (the elite, the entourage), thus indicating that the owner of the pen box does not differentiate between the privileged and the others in granting favours. He then uses the image of the seven climes (*iqḷīm*), through the words *awwal* and *sābiʿ*, inspired by the division of the world according to Ptolemean geography.¹⁰⁶ A kind of *jinās* (paronomasia) can also be detected on several occasions: the words *qalam* (pen)/*iqḷīm* (clime), *nīl* (Nile)/*nāʾil* (gift), *Miṣr* (Egypt)/*amṣār* (towns). The last words of the second verse are easy to understand by anyone who is familiar with Egypt and the process of the Nile's flooding. The minimal level to be reached at the Nilometer to have the levies broken and the water discharged was sixteen cubits. Each cubit was divided into twenty-four fingerbreadths (*iṣbaʿ*). Failing to reach the required level could lead to a period of famine. As a consequence, the rising of the Nile was scrutinised with anxiety and five fingerbreadths, as mentioned at the end of the second verse, could make the difference. One finds an echo of this in an epigram composed on such an occasion in 803/1400.¹⁰⁷ Hence the use of the verb *kharaba* (to destroy, to ruin) in the verse makes sense. It is in this place of the verse that we notice the greatest variety in the other quotations of the epigram. On the pen box, it is replaced with *rāna* (to take possession).¹⁰⁸ In Maḥmūd Gāwān's letter to his brother, an alternative verb (*rawat*, 'irrigate') gives a more positive tone to the Nile's power. In the end, it should also be recorded that the five fingers refer to the hand that holds the reed pen.

B. *Majzūʿ al-rajaz*

١	بِالْوَجْدِ الْقَرْدِ الصَّمَدِ	حَلَفْتُ مَنْ يَكْتَسِبُ بِي
٢	فِي قَطْعِ رَزْقٍ لِأَحَدٍ	أَنْ لَا يُمَدَّ مَدَّةٌ

106 In the medieval period, *iqḷīm* rather came to mean province.

107 See Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Frantz Steiner, 1960–75), vol. 1/ii, p. 634: 'The Nile level was short of sixteen fingerbreadths. It reached them during the night, exceeding them by five fingerbreadths, on which occasion one said: (*al-kāmil*).'

١	أُولَيْتُنَا بِالْكَسْرِ جَبْرًا ذَائِمًا	يَا نِيلَ مِصْرَ كَمْ يَدٌ لَكَ بِالْوَفَا
٢	كَرَّمَا فَكَانَتْ لِلْوَفَاءِ خَوَاتِمًا	أَوْفَيْتَ قَبْلَ الْكَسْرِ خَمْسَ أَصَابِعَ

108 A *wāw* is also added before *al-amṣār*, cancelling the implied reference to the Nile's power.

I put to oath who uses me to write
 By the One, the Peerless, the Everlasting
 That he would never dip his pen in me
 To deny a man his source of living.

Pen boxes nos. 1, 13, 21.

As the preceding one, these two verses are part of the series of epigrams mentioned in the forty-eighth night in *The Thousand and One Nights*. It occupies the third position with regard to the *rayḥān* style in the Galland manuscript,¹⁰⁹ whereas it is missing in the Būlāq and the Calcutta II editions.

In his *Muʿīd al-Niʿam*, the Shāfiʿī scholar al-Subkī quotes this epigram in the section on the secretary of the chancery (*kātib al-sirr*) and in relation with his advice to him that he should refrain from cancelling someone's source of living (*qaṭʿ rizq*), as is best exemplified, he says, in the epigram that follows which a secretary of the chancery had inscribed on his pen case.¹¹⁰ In his evocation of the Merinid sultan Abū ʿInān Fāris, al-Maqqarī mentions the testimony of one of this sultan's closest secretaries who stated that he was never ordered to write something unlawful or against good practice. This testimony reminds al-Maqqarī of an inscription that was engraved on Abū ʿInān's pen box. The above-mentioned epigram follows preceded by an additional verse that goes as follows (same meter):

أَنَا دَوَاةُ فَارِسٍ أَبِي عَنَانَ الْمُعْتَمَدُ

I am the pen box of Fāris
 Abū ʿInān the Reliable¹¹¹

Al-Maqqarī then proceeds by stating that he saw the epigram, but without this additional verse, inscribed on a golden inlaid pen box belonging to a friend of his who was a secretary in Fez. The coincidence led him to think that this was Abū ʿInān's pen box.¹¹²

109 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Mahdi, vol. 1, p. 170; *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Halfants, p. 218; trans. Haddawy, p. 106.

110 Al-Subkī, *Muʿīd al-Niʿam*, p. 44. The same passage is quoted by Ibn Ṭulūn, *Naqd al-Tālib li-Zaghal al-Manāṣib*, eds Muḥammad Aḥmad Dahmān, Khālid Muḥammad Dahmān and Nizār Abāza (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir, 1992), p. 73.

111 Read *al-Muʿtamad* because Abū ʿInān's official title was al-Mutawakkil. Note that the official title of his son, Abū Zayyān Muḥammad, during his first brief reign, was al-Muʿtamid.

112 Al-Maqqarī, *Azhār al-Riyād fī Akhbār ʿIyād*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al. (Rabat: al-Maʿhad al-Khalifī li-l-Abḥāth al-Maghribiyya, 1978–80), vol. I, p. 40.

This same epigram was found on three pen boxes (nos. 1, 13 and 21). On no. 1, it is repeated on two different places and one will notice that some words are written phonetically or according to a dialectal pronunciation (كتابتُه for بالواحد, لحد for لأحد). On no. 21, the first hemistich was profoundly modified with the first word replaced by a synonym (*aqsamta*) and what follows being cancelled. Consequently, the meter is not more respected.

C. *Al-Wāfir*

١ كَتَابَتْهُ وَإِنْ فَتِنَتْ يَدَاهُ ٢ يَسُرُّكَ فِي الْقِيَامَةِ أَنْ تَرَاهُ	وَمَا مِنْ كَاتِبٍ إِلَّا سَتَبَقَى فَلَا تَكْتُبْ بِكَفَاكَ غَيْرَ شَيْءٍ
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Every writer's text will survive,
 Even after his hands pass away.
 Don't let your hand write anything except
 What you would like to see on Judgement Day.

Pen boxes nos. 6, 7, 9.

The oldest attestation of this epigram, in its full version as given above, is found in Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's (c. 328/940) *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* where the author cites it in a chapter dealing with knowledge and *adab*.¹¹³ The epigram is attributed to an unnamed poet (*wa-qāla al-shā'ir*). However, the second verse is quoted for the first time by Ibn Qutayba (213/828–276/889) in relation to al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–9).¹¹⁴ One century later, al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 425/1034) quotes it verbatim, once again without identifying its author (*qāla ba'ḍ al-shu'arā*).¹¹⁵ In the same century, the second verse of the same epigram is placed in the mouth of the famous *adab* writer al-Jāhiz. According to al-Qushayrī (376/986?–465/1073), who mentions the story, someone saw al-Jāhiz in a dream and asked him what God had done with him. Al-Jāhiz's reply consisted in the verse.¹¹⁶

113 Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, ed. Mufid Muḥammad Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), vol. 2, p. 78.

114 Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth wa'l-Radd ʿalā man Yurīb fī al-Akḥbār al-Muddaʾa ʿalayhā al-Tanāquḍ*, ed. Abū Usāma Salīm b. ʿĪd al-Hilālī al-Salafī al-Atharī (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, and Cairo: Dār Ibn ʿAffān, 2009), p. 144. In this source, the verse is recited by al-Riyāshī (d. 257/871) to criticise al-Jāhiz as an unreliable source.

115 Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Uḍabāʾ wa-Muḥāwarāt al-Shuʿarāʾ wa'l-Bulaghāʾ*, ed. ʿUmar al-Ṭabbāʿ (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, 1999), vol. 1, p. 131.

116 al-Qushayrī *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maṭābiʿ Muʾassasat Dār al-Shaʿb, 1989), p. 609. See also Toufic Fahd, *La Divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), pp. 302–3.

Just like the two preceding epigrams, it also features in the forty-eighth night in *The Thousand and One Nights*, more particularly in the Galland manuscript in the third position with regard to the *naskh* style,¹¹⁷ while in the Būlāq and the Calcutta II editions it is quoted in the same place but for the *thuluth* style.¹¹⁸ Some modifications were introduced in the first verse.¹¹⁹

By the early Mamluk period, the second verse had come to circulate more widely in the circle of secretaries as is attested by its quotation in a poem composed by al-Subkī's father on the occasion of his son's appointment as secretary in Syria in 754/1353.¹²⁰ When he made reference to this poem in al-Subkī's biography, al-Ṣafadī (696/1296–764/1363) stressed that the verse in question was a quotation (*taḍmīn*) of a famous (*mashhūr*) and firmly established (*mutam-akkin*) verse.¹²¹ Secretaries of this period were undoubtedly aware of its existence and did not hesitate to allude to its paraenetic message in documents they drafted as is witnessed by one such reference in recommendations addressed to a recently appointed judge composed by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (700/1301–749/1349).¹²²

Apart from its use on pen boxes, various other examples from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods attest to the popularity of this epigram. A Muslim who visited a tomb in an Egyptian Christian cemetery (Kharga Oasis) in 755/1354–5 left a graffito on its walls memorialising his presence. He introduced the inscription with the two verses in question.¹²³ In the early Ottoman period, a reader of *The Thousand and One Nights* in the Galland manuscript excerpted the two verses and wrote them down on a blank leaf inside the

117 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Mahdi, vol. 1, p. 170; *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Halfants, p. 218; trans. Haddawy, p. 106.

118 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Būlāq ed., vol. 1, p. 38; Calcutta II ed., vol. 1, p. 94.

119 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Mahdi, vol. 1, p. 170 (... *illā sa-tablā / wa-tabqā* (sic) *al-dahru mā katabat yadāhū*); *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Būlāq ed., vol. 1, p. 38 and Calcutta II ed., vol. 1, p. 94 (... *illā sa-tafnā / wa-yabqā al-dahru mā katabat yadāhū*).

120 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubrā*, eds Maḥmūd Muḥammad M. al-Ṭanāḥī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964–76), vol. 10, p. 193; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Wustā*, vol. 2, Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 259Y, fol. 96b.

121 Al-Ṣafadī, *A ḡān al-ʿAṣr*, vol. 3, p. 437.

122 Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *al-Taʿrīf bi'l-Muṣṭalaḥ al-Sharīf*, ed. Samīr al-Durūbī (al-Karak: Jāmiʿat Muʿta, 1992), vol. 1, p. 168 (وَحْكَمْ لَهُ بِهِ حَكْمًا يَسْرُهُ) [يوم القيامة أن يراه وإذا كتب له به ذكر بخير به إذا بلى وبقي الدهر ما كتبت يداه]. See also *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 205. A comparison with the verses found in *The Thousand and One Nights* shows that Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī was aware of this modified version and not the original one found in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*.

123 Ibrahim Mohamed Haggagi, 'Graffites arabes de Bagawât', *Annales islamologiques* 14 (1978): 283 (no. 25); TEI no. 21881.

manuscript, showing that its meaning appealed to him.¹²⁴ In the mid-thirteenth/nineteenth century, we also see this very epigram reused on top of a Samaritan marriage contract.¹²⁵

D. *Al-Basīt*

١ إِذَا فَتَحْتَ دَوَاةَ الْعِزِّ وَالنَّعَمِ فَاجْعَلْ مِذَاكَ مِنْ جُودٍ وَمِنْ كَرَمٍ
٢ وَاكْتُبْ بِخَيْرٍ إِذَا مَا كُنْتَ مُقْتَدِرًا يَشْهَدُ بِفَضْلِكَ حَدُّ السَّيْفِ وَالْقَلَمِ

If you open this pen box of blessing and might
Take your ink from munificence and kindness.
Then write good deeds to the extent you can;
Both pen and sword will bear witness to your grace.

Pen boxes nos. 3, 14, 15.

As with the third preceding epigrams, this one appears in the forty-eighth night in *The Thousand and One Nights*. In the Galland manuscript, it features in the sixth position with regard to the *tūmār* style.¹²⁶ In the Būlāq and the Calcutta II editions it is quoted in the last position too but for the *mashq* and the *muḥaqqaq* style respectively.¹²⁷ The version given here corresponds with the text found in the Galland manuscript. In the Būlāq and the Calcutta II editions some modifications were made, mostly to the second hemistich of the second verse, cancelling the reference to the traditional pair formed by the sword and the pen, that is, the military and civil servants who worked for the government in premodern Islam.¹²⁸ On pen boxes nos. 3 and 15, the first verse only is quoted and it corresponds to the version found in the Galland manuscript. As for pen box no. 14, where the second verse also appears, it slightly differs from the version given by the Galland manuscript: *dumta* instead of *kunta* and *ahl* instead of *ḥadd*. The pen box thus makes more obvious the reference to the people of the sword and of the pen, an expression commonly found in the sources to refer to the two above-mentioned categories of servants.

124 Sironval and Daaïf, 'Marges et espaces blancs', p. 98 (no. 5). For another epigram extracted in the same context, see the next poem (D).

125 Firkovitch, Sam. X, 80, dated 1856. The contract was bought by Firkovitch in Nablus in 1864. See Reinhard Pummer, *Samaritan Marriage Contracts and Deeds of Divorce*, vol. II (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), pp. 162–4 (ed.), 246–7 (trans.), pl. CIV. The next epigram in our corpus (D) also figures on this contract.

126 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Mahdi, vol. 1, p. 170; *Alf layla wa-layla*, ed. Halflants, p. 219; trans. Haddawy, p. 106.

127 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Būlāq ed., vol. 1, p. 38; Calcutta II ed., vol. 1, p. 95.

128 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Būlāq ed., vol. 1, p. 38 (... *mu ʿadhiran / bi-dhāka sharrafta faḍlan nisbat al-qalam*); Calcutta II ed., vol. 1, p. 95 (... *fa-qad nusibta bi-hādhā al-nasab wa'l-qalam*).

Like the preceding epigram, this one was selected in *The Thousand and One Nights* by a reader of the Galland manuscript who took note of it on a blank leaf.¹²⁹ It was added also on the top of a Samaritan marriage contract from the mid-thirteenth/nineteenth century.¹³⁰

E. *Mukhallā‘ al-basīt*

١	مَا اخْتَلَفَ الصُّبْحُ وَالْمَسَاءُ	دَامَ لَكَ الْعِزُّ وَالْبَقَاءُ
٢	فِي نِعْمَةٍ مَا لَهَا انْقِصَاءُ	وَعِشْتَ مَا دَامَتِ اللَّيَالِي

May you long live in glory,
 So long as morn and eve will differ
 And may you live in bliss,
 Inasmuch as the nights will last.

Pen box no. 15.

This epigram is part of a three-liner attributed to the *dā‘ī* Abū al-Barakāt b. Muḥammad al-‘Alawī by Yūsuf al-Zawzanī (d. 431/1040).¹³¹ It is mentioned in the seventy-third night in *The Thousand and One Nights* narrating the tale of the two viziers. The version given above is found in the Galland manuscript.¹³² In the Calcutta II edition, it is replaced with the following epigram where the meaning of the first verse is quite similar to the version found in the Galland MS:¹³³

١	وَدُمْتَ مَا دَامَ الدُّجَى وَالْفَجْرُ	دَامَتْ لَكَ الْإِنْعَامُ يَا سَيِّدِي
٢	رَقَصَ الزَّمَانُ وَصَفَّقَ الدَّهْرُ	يَا مَنْ إِذَا مَا ذُكِرْتَ هَمُّهُ

My Lord! Eternal favour is yours
 May you live as long as dusk and dawn last
 When your ambition is mentioned
 Time dances and eternity claps

Both the epigram found in the Galland manuscript and the first verse of the alternative poem in the Calcutta II edition are quoted on the

129 Sironval and Daaif, ‘Marges et espaces blancs’, p. 98 (no. 6).

130 See note 125. The reading of the second verse is closer to the version found in the Būlāq edition.

131 al-Zawzanī, *Ḥamāsāt al-Zurafā‘ min Ashhār al-Muḥdathīn wa’l-Qudamā‘* (Beirut and Cairo, 2003), p. 41. See also Ibn Aydamur, *al-Durr al-farīd*, vol. 6, p. 206).

132 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Mahdi, vol. 1, p. 232; trans. Haddawy, p. 163.

133 *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Calcutta II edition, vol. 1, p. 155. The verses seem to follow the *rajaz* meter, but with many imperfections. In the Būlāq edition, vol. 1, p. 57, the two verses are replaced with a different poem composed of three verses.

same pen box (no. 15). The quotation is verbatim in the first case while in the second some differences may be noticed.¹³⁴ The second hemistich of the first verse (*mā ikhtalafa al-ṣubḥ wa'l-masā'*) also appears on four objects dating from the sixth/twelfth to the tenth/sixteenth centuries and produced in Herat, Iran and Spain.¹³⁵

F. *Al-Kāmil*

١ ٢	وَغُلُوْ مُنْزَلَةٍ وَعِزٌّ بَاقٍ صُمُّ الْعَدَى وَمَفَاتِيحُ الْأَرْزَاقِ	افْتَحْ دَوَاةَ سَعَادَةٍ وَمَرَاقٍ أَقْلَامُهَا إِذْ تَسْتَمِدُّ مِدَادَهَا
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Open a pen box that grants bliss, ascent,
 Exalted position, and lasting power.
 The pens inside, when dipped in its ink
 Will silence foes, and open fortune.

Pen boxes nos. 6 and 18.

This epigram was read on a pen box by Muḥammad b. Aydamur al-Mustaʿsimī (d. 710/1310), who quoted it in an anthology of poetry where the verses are arranged according to the alphabetical order of the first letter of the first verse.¹³⁶ It is found inlaid on two pen boxes (nos. 6 and 18), one of which (no. 18) predates Ibn Aydamur al-Mustaʿsimī's time as it was apparently made in the late Fatimid period. However, it cannot be identified with the pen box he referred to as on this object only the first hemistich of the first verse was inscribed. On the contrary, no. 6 presents the whole epigram, but is from a later period. In both cases, one notes some light differences that do not modify significantly the meaning of the poem.¹³⁷

G. *al-Mutaqārib*

١ ٢	فَفِي رَاحَتَيْكَ زَمَامُ الزَّمَانِ وَغَيْظُ الْعَدُوِّ وَنَيْلُ الْأَمَانِي	تَصَرَّفَ وَوَقَعَ بِمَا تَشْتَهِي وَفِي ذِي الدَّوَاةِ سُرُورُ الصَّدِيقِ
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134 Part of the poem was inlaid on a part of the pen box covered by one of the original hinges. The end is difficult to read but seems to correspond to what follows: *wa-dumta malikan dhā al-dujā wa'l-fajrī*.

135 TEI nos. 17672 (pitcher; Herat; 889/1484–5), 27254 (box; Spain; 8th/14th c.), 32458 (bowl; Iran; 10th/16th c.), 39989 (bottle; Iran; 6th/12th c.).

136 Ibn Aydamur al-Mustaʿsimī, *al-Durr al-Farīd wa-Bayt al-Qaṣīd*, ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2015), vol. 4, p. 7 (*mā wajdtuhu maktūban ʿalā dawāt*).

137 Both have *bi-tarāqī* (with self-exaltation) instead of *wa-marāqin*. No. 6 has also *martaba* instead of *manzila* (same meaning), and *summ al-ʿaduwwī fa-fātiḥ* ('will poison the enemy and thus open fortune') instead of *summ al-ʿidā wa-mafātiḥ*. None of these differences impacts the meter.

٣	تَفَجَّرَ مِنْهَا مَعِينُ الْمَعَانِي	عُيُونُ الْأَقَالِيمِ أَقْلَامُهَا
٤	وَتُخَضَّبُ مِنْهُ بَنَانُ النَّيَّانِ	فَتُخَضَّبُ مِنْهُ غُرُوسُ الطُّرُوسِ

Act as you please and sign with whatever you like
 As the reins of time lie in your hands.
 Within the pen box is delight for the friend,
 Rage for the enemy, and the granting of wishes.
 The springs of the lands are its pens
 Wherefrom flows the source of the connotations.
 With it, the shoots springing from the sheets abound,
 And the fingertips of eloquence are dyed.

Pen boxes 2, 3, 8, 10, 17, 19.

The composition of this epigram is credited to an Aleppan poet whose name was Shihāb al-Dīn Abū'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Ḥalabī (d. 700/1300–1),¹³⁸ better known as Abū

¹³⁸ On him see Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, *Tālī Kitāb Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, ed. Jacqueline Sublet (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1974), p. 30 of the Arabic text (no. 41) and p. 40 of the French translation (no. 41); al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mirʾāt al-Zamān*, ed. Ḥamza Aḥmad ʿAbbās (Abu Dhabi: Hayʾat Abū Zabī li-l-Thaqāfa wa'l-Turāth wa'l-Majmaʿ al-Thaqāfī, 2007), vol. 1, pp. 507–10 = ed. Li Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī's Dhayl Mirʾāt al-zamān* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 235–7; al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafī*, eds ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUthaymīn, Turkī b. Fahd Āl Saʿūd and Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2019), vol. 3, p. 139 (no. 288); al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa'l-Aʿlām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990–2000), vol. 52, p. 494 (no. 828); al-Dhahabī, *Muʿjam al-Shuyūkh*, ed. Rūhiyya ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), p. 82; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi'l-Wafayāt*, ed. Helmut Ritter et al. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1931–2010), vol. 6, pp. 271–4 (no. 2766); al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, vol. 1, pp. 190–4 (no. 91); Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Uyūn al-Tawārīkh*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Sattār (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa'l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 2017), vol. 1, pp. 423–6 (no. 663); Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt wa'l-Dhayl ʿalayhā*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1973–4), vol. 1, pp. 60–2 (no. 25); Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadhkirat al-Nabīh fī Ayyām al-Manṣūr wa-Banīhi*, eds Muḥammad Muḥammad Amin and Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAshūr (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1976–86), vol. 1, pp. 236–7; al-Zarkashī, *Uqūd al-Jumān ʿalā Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Fatih 4434, fols 24b–25b = ed. Mohammed El Hafiz Mustafa, *A Critical Edition of the First Part of Kitāb ʿUqūd al-jumān wa-tadhīl wafayāt al-aʿyān by Muḥammad b. Bahādur al-Zarkashī*, PhD dissertation (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 71–6; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-Mushtabih fī Dabt Asmāʾ al-Ruwāt wa-Ansābihim wa-Alqābihim wa-Kunāhum*, ed. Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿIrqūsī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1986–93), vol. 3, p. 446; Ibn Khaṭīb

Jalank,¹³⁹ that is, the egret bearer.¹⁴⁰ Abū Jalank's name was recorded for posterity mainly for his witty epigrams, which eventually cost him his life. According to the sources, while Aleppo was besieged by Ghāzān Khān's army during the winter of 700/1300–1, he left the citadel with a group of fellows trying to gain some booty. They were met by the Mongol army. His horse hit by an arrow, Abū Jalank, who could not flee because of his being overweight, was taken as a prisoner. Interrogated about the soldiers defending the city, he overstated their number in a way that irritated the commander who put him to death.

Apart from the circumstances of his death, little is known of him except that he became the boon companion (*nadīm*) of the ruler of Mosul (or Mardin), a position that he was offered as a result of a spirited rejoinder.¹⁴¹ His poetry seems to have been widely appreciated even though al-Ṣafadī judged it as average.¹⁴² The existence of a collection of his poetry (*dīwān*) is attested, but only examples quoted by the various sources have been preserved.¹⁴³ The epigram featuring on

al-Nāṣiriyya, *al-Durr al-Muntakhab fī Tārīkh Mamlakat Ḥalab (min al-lawḥa 59a ilā al-lawḥa 119b)*, ed. Sa'd b. 'Awad al-Ḥarithī, PhD dissertation (Mecca: Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 2010–11), pp. 101–5; al-'Aynī, *ʿIqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān: ʿAṣr salāṭīn al-mamālīk. Hawādith wa-tarājīm*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb 1987–2009), vol. 4, pp. 152–4; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa'l-Qāhira* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya li-l-Ta'lif wa'l-Nashr, 1929–72), vol. 8, pp. 194–6; Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa'l-Mustawfi fī ba'd al-Wāfi* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1984–2009), vol. 1, pp. 221–3 (no. 113); Sibṭ Ibn al-ʿAjāmī, *Kunūz al-Dhahab fī Tārīkh Ḥalab*, eds Shawqī Sha'th and Fāliḥ al-Bakkūr (Aleppo: Dār al-Qalam al-ʿArabī, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 295–8.

139 On the correct reading of this name, see Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-Mushtabih*, vol. 3, p. 446.

140 A Turkish name already attested in the fourth/tenth century. See al-Kāshghārī, *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (Urumchi: Shinjang Khalq Nashriyati, 1981–4), vol. 3, p. 507; Reinhart P.A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Leiden: Brill, 1881), vol. 1, p. 209; Khayr al-Dīn al-Asadī, *Mawsūʿat Ḥalab al-Muqārana* (Aleppo: Jāmi'at Ḥalab and Ma'had al-Turāth al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1981), vol. 3, p. 132. However, according to the latter source, though less convincingly, the word may be Turkish but deriving from the Persian *chālāk* to designate the boon companion (*nadīm*) or the witty fellow (*zarīf*). See al-Asadī, *Mawsūʿat Ḥalab*, vol. 3, p. 74.

141 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 6, pp. 271–2; al-Ṣafadī, *A ṯān al-ʿAṣr*, vol. 1, p. 191 (who hesitates between Mosul and Mardin); Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, vol. 1, p. 60; al-Zarkashī, *Uqūd al-Jumān*, MS, fol. 24b = ed. El-Hafiz Mustafa, vol. 1, p. 71.

142 al-Ṣafadī, *A ṯān al-ʿAṣr*, vol. 1, p. 194 (*shi'ruhu mutawassīṭ*).

143 Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 222 (*lahu dīwān shi'ri*). According to Sibṭ Ibn al-ʿAjāmī, *Kunūz al-Dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 298,

no less than six pen boxes is mentioned by one contemporary source, the Damascene historian al-Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326), who says that it was transmitted to him by al-Birzālī (d. 738/1338), who himself heard it directly from Abū Jalank.¹⁴⁴ Al-Birzālī took note of Abū Jalank's poetry while he was in Damascus in 679/1280-1.¹⁴⁵ If this is correct, the epigram could be dated to the period preceding that date. No information is however provided on the context into which it was composed. The version given above reflects the one found in al-Yūnīnī and Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn with slight adaptations improving the reading confirmed by the interpretation found below.¹⁴⁶

Abū Jalank starts his poem with two verbs in the imperative mood that can also be interpreted as meaning 'administer and sign', two functions obviously linked to the secretary's work. In the third verse, he plays with two words (*aqlām/aqālīm*) with a different etymology but with – in appearance only – a similar root creating some kind of assonance (*jīnās*). It reminds of epigram no. A, where the same pair was used. With the last verse, the poet explains what is the impact of the source of connotations (*ma'īn al-ma'ānī*) flowing from the pens. For this, he compares the letters on the page to the image of the growing shoots (*ghurūs*) that become abundant, and, as a consequence of the writing activity, the fingertips are dyed by the ink. He once again makes use of assonant pairs of words (*ma'īn al-ma'ānī*, *ghurūs al-ṭurūs*, *banān al-bayānī*) without forgetting the two verbs (*takhṣīb* and *tukhḍab*) that, with the exception of one diacritical dot, are written in the same way. Finally, the last two verses end with an obvious reference to another pair: literary motifs (*ma'ānī*) and eloquence (*bayān*). Both elements are often considered together, for

it was entitled *Miftāḥ al-Surūr fī Shi'r Abī Jalank*. Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. 8, p. 195, took note of several of his epigrams (*maqāṭī'*) in his book entitled *Ḥilyat al-Ṣifāt fī al-Asmā' wa'l-Ṣifāt*. On this work, see Talib, *How Do You Say 'Epigram'*, pp. 61-70.

144 al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, ed. 'Abbās, vol. 1, p. 510 = ed. Guo, vol. 2, p. 237. The same epigram is quoted by Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Uyūn al-Akhhār*, vol. 1, p. 426, on basis of the same source (al-Birzālī).

145 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tawḍīḥ al-Mushtabih*, vol. 3, p. 446.

146 In al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān*, ed. 'Abbās, vol. 1, p. 510, we find for the last verse: *fa-tukhḍabu minhu 'arūs al-ṭurūs wa-tukhṣību minhu banān al-bayānī*, in ed. Guo, vol. 2, p. 237, this becomes: *fa-tukhḍabu minhu 'arūs al-ṭurūs wa-tukhḍabu minhu bayān al-bayānī*, without speaking of the fact that in the third verse Guo chose *ghuyūth* in place of *'uyūn* though this last reading was found in one of his manuscripts. The poet would have hardly used the same verb twice in the same verse (*tukhḍabu*). In Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Uyūn al-Akhhār*, vol. 1, p. 426, the reading of the poem is almost identical to the version established above with one exception: the editor read *ghuyūth* instead of *'uyūn*.

instance the *ʿilm al-maʿānī waʾl-bayān* (stylistics and the theory of imagery) identified as a sub-category of rhetorics.¹⁴⁷

On the pen boxes, the epigram was quoted extensively (nos. 8 and 10) or only partly (the first three verses on no. 17; the last three verses starting from the second hemistich of the second verse on no. 19; or just the first two verses on nos. 2 and 3). Some slight differences are noticeable in the words and in the orthography.¹⁴⁸ Finally, it is worth mentioning that the epigram fully quoted on pen boxes 8 and 10 is completed by a formula (M5) that rhymes with it though the meter is not respected.

H. *Majzūʾ al-kāmil*

١	دَوَقَّعَ الدُّنْيَا عَطَايَا	اِفْتَحْ دَوَاتَكَ بِالسُّعُو
٢	سِ مِنْ التَّمَنَّى وَالْمَنَآيَا	كُم فِي يَرَاكَ لِلنَّفُو
٣	ءِ بِمَا أَبَادَ مِنَ السَّرَايَا	وَلَكُمْ أَشَادَ مِنَ الْبِنَا
٤	أَبْدَى لَكَ الْكَتَّ الْخَفَايَا	وَإِذَا دَحَا ثَمَّ انْتَحَى

Open your pen box with the auspicious ones
And scatter, all over the world, bounties.
Within your pen, can so many wishes be granted,
And so many destinies be fated!
How many buildings did it erect
With the palaces it demolished?
When it extends, then retracts,
The hidden puns to you it reveals.

Pen boxes nos. 4 and 5.

Ibn al-Shaʿār (d. 654/1256), a craftsman born in Mosul who earned his living by making beauty tools and camel saddles and died in Aleppo,¹⁴⁹ records this epigram in his biographical dictionary of contemporary poets where he attributes it to Muḥammad b. Ḥaydar b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-ʿAlawī al-Mawṣilī (571/1175–6–641/1243).¹⁵⁰ The latter

147 Seeger A. Bonebakker, 'al-Maʿānī waʾl-bayān', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second ed.), vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), pp. 898–901.

148 The word *ghayz* in the second hemistich of the second verse is replaced by *kayd* 'deception' (no. 3) or *kabt* 'submission' (nos. 8 and 10). The letters *dād* and *zāʾ* may be interchanged reflecting the undifferentiated pronunciation of both sounds: *ghayd* instead of *ghayz* (no. 17); *tukhzab* for *tukhdab* (no. 19).

149 Ibn al-Mustawfī, *Tārīkh Irbīl*, ed. Sāmī b. al-Sayyid Khammās al-Saqqār (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1980), vol. 1, p. 384.

150 Ibn al-Shaʿār, *Qalāʾid al-Jumān fī Farāʾid Shuʿarāʾ hādihā al-Zamān al-mashhūr bi-ʿUqūd al-jumān fī shuʿarāʾ hādihā al-zamān*, ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), vol. 6, pp. 11–18 (no. 741). The epigram is mentioned on p. 16.

was the chief (*naqīb*) of the descendants of ‘Alī in Mosul on three occasions, first under the Zengids, then twice during the reign of Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’ (r. 631/1234–657/1259). According to the author, Ibn Ḥaydar composed the verses specifically for Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’ and recited them directly to him.¹⁵¹

The poet starts by inviting the owner of the pen box to open it and to scatter (*waqqi‘*) bounties, the verb also evoking the signature applied by the ruler or his secretary on orders aiming at offering boons. The opening of the pen box is to be made ‘with the auspicious ones’ (*al-su‘ūd*), that is, the *sa‘d al-su‘ūd* (‘omen of good fortune’) that corresponds to the twenty-fourth lunar mansion where two stars (βξ) located on the west shoulder of Aquarius and a third star (c¹) in the end of the tail of Capricorn are located.¹⁵² This reference to the zodiac is highlighted by the decoration of one of the pen boxes where the epigram was inlaid (pen box no. 4): it is indeed decorated with a medallion, repeated three times, where a princely figure is seated cross-legged (the sun?) and surrounded by a first circle formed by the six planets and a second circle composed of the twelve signs of the zodiac (see figure 16.3, right).¹⁵³ In the second and third verses, the poet exalts the might of the pen box and, metaphorically, of its owner. The epigram concludes with a reference to the movements of the pen, going forward and backwards, thus revealing the text written that can sometimes be a pun to be decoded.

I. *Al-Kāmil*

١ تَجْرِي بِوَافٍ مِنْ عَطَاءٍ وَافِرٍ ٢ وَالْمُسْتَجِيرِ بِهِ ابْنُ عَبْدِ الظَّاهِرِ	إِفْتَحْ دَوَاةَ سَعَادَةٍ أَقْلَامُهَا عَمِلَتْ لِعَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَاجِي عَفْوِهِ
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Open a blissful pen box which pens
 entail more than an abundant gift.
 Made for the servant of God who desires His mercy
 And seeks refuge with Him: Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir

Pen boxes nos. 10 and 16.

According to al-Ṣafadī, this epigram was composed by Faṭḥ al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Zāhir. Born in Cairo in 638/1240–1, Faṭḥ al-Dīn was the son of the famous Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir who worked as secretary of state (*kātib al-sirr*) and head of the chancery (*ṣāhib dīwān al-inshā’*) under the first Mamluk sultans and

151 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 16 (*wa-anshadanī qawlahu fīhi [al-Malik al-Raḥīm Badr al-Dīn]*).

152 Kunitzsch, *Untersuchungen zur Sternnomenklatur der Araber* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961), p. 103 (no. 257, 10).

153 See Baer, ‘The Ruler’.

composed several biographies of them.¹⁵⁴ Faṭḥ al-Dīn followed in his father's footsteps and became one of the secretaries active at the state chancery under the reign of Baybars (r. 658/1260–676/1277) until he was raised to the position of his father later in his career. While accompanying the sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689/1290–693/1293) during one of his military campaigns in Syria, Faṭḥ al-Dīn died in Damascus in 691/1291, one year before his father.¹⁵⁵

Al-Ṣafadī quotes the above-mentioned epigram as an example of Faṭḥ al-Dīn's poetry, explaining that he composed it to have it inscribed on a brass pen box that he ordered from Damascus to offer it to his father.¹⁵⁶ The first verse opens with an invitation that is reminiscent of the way the preceding epigram started, with one important difference: the reference to the lunar mansion bringing good fortune has disappeared even though the word replacing it derives from the same root (*sa'āda*). The poet then uses the hackneyed image of the pens from which boons flow (*tajrīl*). The second verse is entirely dedicated to the future owner of the pen box: Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir himself. Faṭḥ al-Dīn plays here with the ambivalence of the name 'Abd Allāh which can mean 'the servant of God' but which was also at the same time Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's name ('Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Zāhir b. Nashwān).

This epigram can be found on two pen boxes (nos. 10 and 16) with one substantial modification: Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's name was substituted with other words that respect the meter (*li-yawm al-ākhir*) and are connected to the preceding expression (*al-mustajir bihi*), that is, 'seeks refuge with Him for the Last Day'. The poem was thus slightly adapted to cancel the personal reference. At the same time, the expression 'Abd Allāh recovered its original meaning of 'servant of God' and cannot be interpreted anymore as being connected to a person whose name was 'Abd Allāh.¹⁵⁷

Pen box no. 16, dated 704/1304–5, confirms that the epigram was still appreciated more than a decade after its author's death. It is worth mentioning that Faṭḥ al-Dīn's son, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī (d. 717/1317), was still alive at that time and that he was also active at the state chancery.¹⁵⁸

154 Frédéric Bauden, 'Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, Muḥyī l-Dīn', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Three* (2017): 125–8.

155 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 3, pp. 366–8 (no. 1443).

156 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 3, p. 368 (*wa-kattaba 'alā dawāt nuḥās ista'malahā bi-Dimashq li-wālidihī*).

157 In his study of pen box no. 16, Melikian-Shirvani was convinced that the dedicatee's name should have been 'Abd Allāh. Kalus and Naffah, 'Deux écrivains', 103–4, correctly pointed out that this could hardly be the case.

158 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 22, pp. 52–61.

J. *Majzū' al-rajaz*

١	أَوْصَافُهَا مُكَمَّلَةٌ	دَوَاةٌ مَوْلَانَا بَدَتْ
٢	أَقْلَامُهَا الْمُعَدَّلَةٌ	بِحُسْنِهَا قَدْ شَهِدَتْ
٣	لِأَنَّهَا مُنْزَلَةٌ	قَدْ أَعْجَزَتْ آيَاتُهَا
٤	لِأَنَّهَا مُفَصَّلَةٌ	أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ غَدَتْ

The qualities of our Lord's pen box
consummate looked.

To its beauty its equilibrated
Pens attested.

Inimitable are its signs
Because they were revealed.

The essence of the book appeared
Since it was clearly explained.

Pen box no. 16.

This epigram is quoted by al-Ṣafadī in the biography he devoted to Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1293),¹⁵⁹ where he mentions it as an excellent example of his epigrams (*maqātī'*), in which, he says, Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir excelled more than in long poems (*qaṣā'id*). Al-Ṣafadī found the said epigram in a holograph copy of Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's book entitled *Faltat al-Yarā'a wa-Laftat al-Barā'a* (The Slip of the Pen and the Turnabout of the Excellence) and he underlines that the author composed it about an engraved pen box.¹⁶⁰ Al-Ṣafadī did appreciate it as he mentioned it again in one of his treatises dealing with rhetorical devices, more particularly the double entendre (*tawriya*).¹⁶¹ While Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's *Faltat al-Yarā'a* has not been preserved, his *Dīwān* is available and the epigram can be read there too.¹⁶²

The poem turns around the description of the qualities of a pen box belonging to a high-ranking person. It stresses its perfection as well as the balance of its pens. The last two verses include an obvious evocation of the Qur'an (*iqtibās*) and, more

159 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 17, pp. 257–90 (no. 240).

160 al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 17, p. 281 (*wa-ammā shi'ruhu fa-aḥsanuhu al-maqātī' wa-ammā al-qaṣā'id fa-rubbamā qaṣṣara fihā, wa-min dhālika mā naqaltuhu min khaṭṭihi min Kitāb Faltat al-yarā'a wa-laftat al-barā'a; qāla fī dawāt munazzala*).

161 al-Ṣafadī, *Faḍḍ al-Khitām 'an al-Tawriya wa'l-Istikhdām*, ed. 'Abbās Hānī al-Sharrākh (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2013), p. 49.

162 Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *Dīwān*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, MS Shi'r Taymūr 101, p. 29 = *Dīwān al-Qāḍī Muḥyi al-Dīn 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir* (t. sanat 692 h.), ed. Gharīb Muḥammad 'Alī Aḥmad (Cairo, 1990), p. 106.

particularly, of verse 114 of *sūrat al-An‘ām*. The verb *shahida* ('to attest'), in the second verse, strengthens the link with the Qur'an by evoking the profession of faith. The signs (*āyāt*) of the pen box are inimitable (*a‘jāzat*) for the simple reason that they were part of a revelation (*munazzala*); thus the essence of its writing (*umm al-kitāb*), here standing for the pen box,¹⁶³ becomes obvious because it was made distinct (*mufaṣṣala*). *Āya* designates first and foremost the Qur'anic verse; *i‘āz* prominently stands for the dogma of the inimitability of the Qur'an; *tanzīl* refers to the revelation; the *umm al-kitāb* is the original of the scripture on the preserved tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*); and finally *mufaṣṣal* defines a portion of the Qur'an. The reader is inclined to understand upon the first reading these Qur'anic references, but the poet also wants him to pay attention to the double entendre of the four words with which the verses conclude: *mukammal* also means 'executed'; *mu‘addal* 'adorned'; *munazzal* 'engraved'; and *mufaṣṣal* 'carved', while *āya* can also refer to the message that the pen box carries. Thus Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir's epigram describes, through *ekphrasis*, the pen box and its physical qualities. The link being made with the Qur'an is not casual: according to some exegetes, the letter *nūn* found at the beginning of the *sūrat al-Qalam* (68) stands for the *dawāt*.¹⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir was aware of this interpretation and astutely plays with it in his epigram.

This epigram was used in part only on pen box no. 16 where the preceding epigram (no. 1), composed by Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir's son, Faṭḥ al-Dīn, also features. On the pen box, the third verse is not quoted and what corresponds to the fourth verse in the version given above stops abruptly after the first word of the second hemistich (*li-annahā*). Interestingly, in the version quoted by al-Ṣafadī in his *Faḍḍ al-khitām*, the last two verses are inverted as it seems to be the case on the pen box too.¹⁶⁵ Another difference also deserves to be mentioned here: on the pen box, the verb at the end of the first hemistich reads *ghadat* instead of *badat* without changing the meaning. This reading is similar to the one found in Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir's *Dīwān*.¹⁶⁶ If this is correct, it would mean that Ibn ‘Abd

163 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā*, vol. 2, p. 431, describes the pen box as the *umm al-ālāt al-kitāba* ('the mother of writing tools').

164 See the details in Sauer, *Towards a Pragmatic Aesthetics*, pp. 107–8; Sauer, 'The Pen-box', section 3.

165 Al-Ṣafadī, *Faḍḍ al-Khitām*, p. 49. The last word of the third verse is given there as *muṣaqqala* instead of *mufaṣṣala*. This reading must result from a mistaken reading of the manuscripts by the editor because it annihilates the double entendre referred to above.

166 Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Dīwān*, MS, p. 29 = ed. Aḥmad, p. 106.

al-Zāhir used the same verb twice with the same meaning in the same epigram, a feature that appears quite unlikely.¹⁶⁷

K. *Al-Kāmil*

١	فَأَفَقَّأَهُ أَبَا الْعَبَّاسِ	أَلَّهُ جَرَدَ لِلنَّدَى وَالْبَاسِ سَيْدِ
٢	فَقَبَضَ الرَّجَاءُ إِلَيْكَ رُوحَ الْيَاسِ	مَلِكٌ إِذَا اسْتَقْبَلَتْ غَرَّةَ وَجْهِهِ
٣	وَمَحَبَّةٌ تُجْرِي مِنَ الْأَنْفَاسِ	وَجْهٌ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْحَيَاءِ سَكِينَةٌ
٤	أَلْقَى عَلَيْهِ مَحَبَّةً لِلنَّاسِ	وَإِذَا أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ يَوْمًا عَبْدَهُ

As a present and an object of might, God unsheathed
 A sword that He awarded to Abū'l-‘Abbās.
 A king! When you face the blaze on his face
 Hope will carry away the spirit of desperation.
 Due to modesty, his face expresses tranquillity,
 and love that flows from exhaled air.
 If God ever loved His servant,
 He will bestow upon him affection for mankind.

Pen boxes nos. 4 and 17.

This poem was composed by the Andalusian Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi and was recorded by him in his *adab* encyclopaedia entitled *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* where it figures twice. On the first occasion, he explains the circumstances that led him to declaim the said poem to Abū'l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Abda, the vizier and general (*qā’id*) of several Umayyad caliphs who died in 305/917.¹⁶⁸ The second quotation of the poem is placed in the middle of a section devoted to the necessity to reveal one’s affection to people.¹⁶⁹

The poem has no link with pen boxes. Composed as a panegyric of a prominent figure, it praises Abū'l-‘Abbās’ qualities.¹⁷⁰ Being named at the end of the first verse, it is not surprising that only the last two verses were reused on pen boxes. Decontextualised, both verses rather exalt God’s love for His creation and, particularly, the owner of the pen box where this poem was inlaid.

This was the case for two pen boxes. While it is quoted verbatim on no. 17, it presents one difference on no. 4 where the word *yawman* is replaced with another one that so far resists any interpretation.

167 It is impossible to read عَدَت (*‘uddat*) as in Kalus and Naffah, ‘Deux écritaires’, p. 98, because in such a case the meter is not respected.

168 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 1, pp. 226–7.

169 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 2, p. 166 (only the last two verses).

170 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s laudatory poetry was judged as mediocre. Carl Brockelmann, ‘Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second ed.), vol. 3 (Leiden and London: Brill and Luzac, 1986), p. 676.

L. *Al-Hazaj*

١	حَيَاةَ خُلُوةِ الْمُحِبِّ	إِذَا مَا شِئْتُ أَنْ تَحْيَا
٢	وَلَا تَحْرِصْ عَلَى الدُّنْيَا	فَلَا تَحْسُدْ وَلَا تَبْخُلْ

If you wish to live
A pleasant life,
Be not envious, nor avaricious,
Nor greedy for the present life.

Pen boxes nos. 12 and 20.

This poem is attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35/656–40/661) and is found in his *dīwān*.¹⁷¹ As already noted by Goldziher, the verses allude to a Qur’anic passage repeated twice, first in *sūra Luqmān* (31), verse 33; then in *sūra Fāṭir* (35), verse 5: ‘so let not the present life delude you’ (*fa-lā taghurrannakum al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*).¹⁷²

It is found on two pen boxes (nos. 12 and 20, the first one dated 702/1302–3) with some slight differences that do not alter either the meaning nor the meter. The version is in both cases similar which attests to the circulation of this poem under this form. In the first verse, the adjective *ḥulwa* is replaced by *sahla* (‘easy’). In the second verse, the last two verbs are substituted with two alternatives, *taḥqid* (‘resentful’) and *taghtarr bi-* (‘deceived by’), the last verb echoing in stronger term the link with the Qur’anic passage.

M. Other inscriptions

This section includes epigrams and formulas found on the pen boxes where they are often repeated on more than one object but that could not be identified in the sources.

1. Epigram in *ṭawīl* meter:

١	إِلَيْهَا يَحُجُّ النَّاسُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَوْضِعٍ	دَوَائِكَ لِلْأَمَالِ بَابٌ وَكَغَبَةٍ
٢	وَقَدْ فَاضَتْ الْأَرْزَاقُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَنْبِعٍ	وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا مَدَّةٌ تَسْتَمِدُّهَا

For the expectations your pen box is a door and a Ka‘ba
To which people make the pilgrimage from everywhere.
It is nothing else than ink that it takes.
Boons have become abundant for anyone who obeys.

171 ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Dīwān Amīr al-Mu‘minīn al-Imām ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Karam (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, 1988), p. 219.

172 Max van Berchem, ‘Notes d’archéologie arabe, troisième article: étude sur les cuivres damasquinés et les verres émaillés, inscriptions, marques, armoiries’, *Journal asiatique* 1904 (janvier–février): 48, fn. 1.

Pen boxes nos. 10 and 17.

2. Epigram in *ṭawīl* meter:

دَوَاةٌ بِمَجْرَاهَا مَجَارِي سَعَادَةٍ وَمَنْبَعُ أَرْزَاقِ الْأَنْامِ مَدَا الدَّهْرِ

A pen box that, when flowing, is a source of happiness
And of boons for the humankind continually.

Pen box no. 1.

3. Epigram in *kāmil* meter:¹⁷³

١	يَا صَاحِبِي تَلَمَّسْ كَفَّ الْكَاتِبِ	إِنَّ الدَّوَاةَ سَعِيدَةً قَدْ شَرَّفَتْ
٢	كَمْ يَكْتُبُ بِدُمُوعِهَا مِنْ رَاكِبِ	وَتَشْرَفَتْ مِنْ أُمْسَةٍ وَتَعَطَّرَتْ
٣		وَيَدُ مَعَهَا سَعَادَةٌ (...))

The pen box is auspicious, honoured as it is.
O my owner! Touch the hand of the scribe.
A hand honoured by a scented touch.
How many riders write with [the water of] its tears.
A hand that comes with bliss (...).

Pen boxes nos. 17 and 22.

4. Epigram almost in *ṭawīl* meter:¹⁷⁴

١	بِهَا نَفَقُ اللَّعَانِ لِي بِشَفَاوِيهَا الْقَالِي	دَوَاتُكَ فَاسْعُدْ وَابْقَ فِي ظِلِّ دَوْلَةٍ
٢	بِكَفِّكَ يَأْمَنُ قُدْرَةً صَاعِدٌ عَالِي	إِذَا مَا جَرَى فِي جَلِيَةِ الطُّرْسِ نَفْسُهَا

[This is] your pen box. So rejoice and remain in the shadow of a state
Where the curser perishes. With its two edges, speech is mine.
Should, by your hand, its inscription decorate the sheet,
Someone rising high would be safe in terms of power

Pen box no. 17.

¹⁷³ The meter is not fully respected, particularly in the first foot of second hemistich in verse 2, where *yaktubu* does not fit (one expects at this place of the verse: — — —).

¹⁷⁴ The reading of the second hemistich in verses 1 and 2 is tentative. While the meter is correct for verse 2, it is not respected in the second hemistich of verse 1.

5. Formula:¹⁷⁵

قدم وابق في نعمه ما دامت الأطيار على غصن بان¹⁷⁶

Prepare [for yourself a reward with God] and stay in His bounties as long as the birds will stand on a branch of willow.

Pen boxes nos. 8 and 10.

6. Formula:

علوت من العلياء ما شئت بالصبر إلى أن رأيت الرزق من قلبي يجري وأصبح جسمي أصفرا ذا لطافة عليه قميص من الخير ومن (...) ترى¹⁷⁷

With patience, you ascended from the lofty heights as you wanted until you saw the boon flowing from my pen. My body became yellow and delicate and upon it you see a covering made of benefit and of (...).

Pen boxes nos. 10 and 11.

7. Formula:

وقع فإن الدواة قد حضرت والأمر سهل لديك

Sign as the pen box has come and the order has become easy for you.

Pen boxes nos. 10, 11, 15, 19.

8. Formula:

وهذه قصتي وقد حضرت وليس في كل ساعة تصل

This is my story. It has come but it does not come at any time.

Pen boxes nos. 3, 11, 15.

¹⁷⁵ This formula is always used in conjunction with epigram G.

¹⁷⁶ The image of the branch of willow was already used by Imru' al-Qays (d. mid-6th c.). See his *Dīwān*, ed. and trans. Mac Guckin de Slane, *Le Diwan d'Amro'lkaïs. Kitāb Nuzhat dhawī al-kays wa-tuḥfat al-udabā' fī qasā'id Imri' al-Qays ash'ar al-shu'arā'* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1837), p. 45 (Arabic text), verse 17.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. the following verse (almost perfect *tawīl*) found on several objects of the late Mamluk period: بلغت من العلياء أعلى المراتب وفانرك التوفيق من كل جانب. See Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, 'Venise, entre l'Orient et l'Occident', *Bulletin d'études orientales* 27 (1974): 112; Behrens-Abouseif, 'Veneto-Saracenic Metalware', 149–50.

Appendix 2. Catalogue of pen boxes.

- I. Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum, no. 0947 (previously in the Mathaf al-fann al-islāmī, Cairo, no. 3394).

Length: 30 cm; width: 9 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for a dedicatee whose titles cannot be deciphered anymore. Syria or Egypt, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: Faraghlī, *al-Duwī*, pp. 50–1.

On the top of the lid, the following inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by a roundel containing a radial list of titles not more decipherable:

دواة بمجراها مجاري سعادة ومنيع أرزاق / الأنام مدا الدهر عز يدوم بصاحبها¹⁷⁸

On the inside of the lid, an inscription in *thuluth*:

حلفت من يكتب بي بالواحد [كذا] الفرد الصمد أن لا يمد مدة في قطع رزق لأحد وعز الدنيا بلمال
[كذا] والآخرة بالأعمال¹⁷⁹

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, an inscription in *thuluth*:

دواة بمجراها مجاري سعادة ومنيع أرزاق الأنام مدا الدهر¹⁸⁰

On the external side of the body, starting on the front and proceeding clockwise around it, an inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers:¹⁸¹

حلفت من يكتب بي بالواحد / الفرد الصمد أن لا يمد مدة في قطع رزق لحد [كذا] / دواة
بمجراها مجاري || سعادة ومنيع أرزاق ا || لأنام (الأنام) مدا الدهر / (...) الأمر إلا فيها / (...)
الله (...) || الد || نيا (الدنيا) سعادة [كذا] (ساعة) فاجعلها طاعة¹⁸²

178 'A pen box that, when flowing, is a source of happiness and of boons for the humankind continually. May might last through its owner.'

179 'I put to oath who uses me to write by the One, the Peerless, the Everlasting that he would never dip his pen in me to deny a man his source of living. Glory in this life [is attained] with material goods and in the afterlife with deeds.'

180 'A pen box that, when flowing, is a source of happiness and of boons for the humankind continually.'

181 Some parts of the inscription are unreadable because they are effaced.

182 'I put to oath who uses me to write by the One, the Peerless, the Everlasting that he would never dip his pen in me to deny a man his



Figure 16.4 Pen box, *Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum*, no. 0947. Photo: Mohamed Ali.

2. Algiers, Musée national des Antiquités et des Arts islamiques,¹⁸³ no. II. Mi.009.¹⁸⁴

Length: 26.8 cm; width: 6.6 cm; height: 5.8 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box. Syria or Egypt, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: Georges Marçais, *L'Exposition d'art musulman d'Alger* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1906), pl. 22; Georges Marçais, *Le Musée Stéphane Gsell: Musée des antiquités et d'art musulman d'Alger* (Algiers: Imprimerie officielle du Gouvernement général d'Alger, 1950), p. 36 and pl. 25; María Jesús Viguera Molíns et al., *Ibn Jaldun. El Mediterráneo en el siglo XIV. Auge y declive de los imperios. Exposición en el Real Alcázar de Sevilla, Mayo-Septiembre 2006. Catálogo de piezas* (Seville: Fundación El

source of living. Glory in this life [is attained] with material goods and in the afterlife with deeds. A pen box that, when flowing, is a source of happiness and of boons for the humankind continually. (...) authority only in it (...) for God (...). This life does not last long, so live it in obedience [of God's precepts].'

183 Formerly Musée Stéphane Gsell, Musée des antiquités et des arts musulmans d'Alger.

184 Bequeathed by Rodolphe Rey (1866–1942), president of the Bar in Algiers.



Figure 16.5 Pen box, Algiers, Musée national des Antiquités et des Arts islamiques, no. II. Mi.009 (from *al-Šināʿāt al-maʿdiniyya*, p. 65).

Legado Andalusí and Fundación José Manuel Lara, 2006), p. 68; *Al-Šināʿāt al-maʿdiniyya al-islāmiyya min khilāl majmūʿat al-Maḥaf al-waṭanī li-l-āthār al-qadīma* (Algiers: Musée national des antiquités et des arts islamiques, 2009), pp. 63–6; TEI no. 41875.

On the top of the lid, in two registers, an inscription engraved at a later date and barely legible:

دولة مرسم ليلي علي (؟) / (...) لا العدو ومعنى الولي (؟)¹⁸⁵

On the inside of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي ففي راحتك زمام الزمان ففي ذي الدواة سرور الصديق وغيظ العدو
ونيل الأمان¹⁸⁶

Inside the body, along the sides of the compartment for the pens, a silver inlaid inscription in interlaced Kufic is difficult to decipher.

¹⁸⁵ The inscription does not make sense. Any attempt to translate it would be useless. In Viguera Molíns et al., *Ibn Jaldun*, p. 68, it is tentatively read: دواة رسم (...) / لا العدو مع الولي.

¹⁸⁶ 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, rage for the enemy, and the granting of wishes.'

3. Baghdad, The Iraq Museum, no. 721 'ayn.¹⁸⁷
 Length: 30 cm; width: 7.5 cm; height: 6.5 cm.
 An angular oblong silver inlaid pen box made for a dedicatee whose title was *al-Maqarr*. Syria or Egypt, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: *Dalīl Mathāf al-āthār al-ʿarabiyya fī Khān Marjān bi-Baghdād* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma, 1938), pp. 37–8; and pl. 33; Zakī Muḥammad Ḥasan, *Aṭlas al-funūn al-zukhrufiyya wa'l-taṣāwīr al-islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Jāmiʿat al-Qāhira, 1956), p. 170, no. 520 and p. 464, no. 520; Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Sattār ʿUthmān, 'Dawr al-muslimīn fī ṣināʿat al-aqlām', *Dirāsāt āthāriyya islāmiyya* 4 (1991): 186; Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 816, no. 16; TEI no. 36864.

On the inside of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by a roundel containing a radial list of titles:

إذا فتحت دواة العز والنعم فاجعل مداد / ك (مدادك) من جود ومن كرم وقع بي فأنا الدنيا¹⁸⁸

In the roundel, a silver inlaid radial list of titles in *thuluth*:

المقر العالي المولوي الأميري المالكي الملكي¹⁸⁹

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edge, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:¹⁹⁰

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي ففي راحتك زمام الزمان ففي ذا الدواة سرور الصديق وكيد العدو ونيل
 الأمان¹⁹¹

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:

لا زلت يا مالكي¹⁹²

187 The present location of this pen box is not known.

188 'If you open this pen box of blessing and might, take your ink from munificence and kindness. Use me to sign as I am this world.'

189 'The eminent excellency, the master, the amir, the royal owner'.

190 The sides of the body are not visible on the pictures available to me. The reading that follows is an improved version based on a defective reading found in *Dalīl Mathāf al-Āthār al-ʿArabiyya*, p. 38 (تصرف ووقع) and a comparison with epigram no. G. (بما بي ففي امان من حيل الزمان ففي ذا الدواة سرور الصديق وكيد العدو ونيل الاماني)

191 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, deception for the enemy, and the granting of wishes.'

192 'May you not cease [to own me], o my owner!'

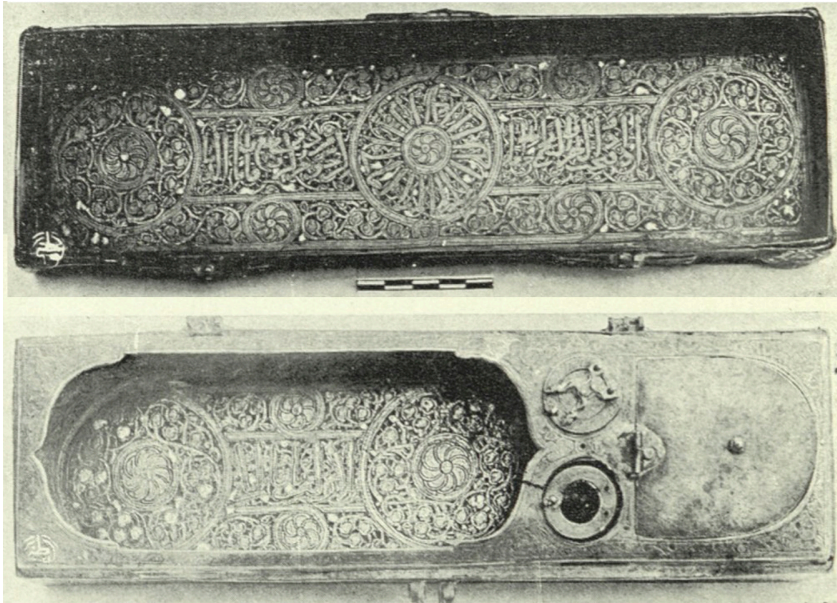


Figure 16.6 Pen box, Baghdad, The Iraq Museum, no. 721 'ayn (from Dalil Maṭḥaf al-āthār al-arabiyya, pl. 33).

On the external front side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:¹⁹³

(...) في كل ساعت [كذا] (ساعة) (...) عزه (...) لدواة العز والعمر¹⁹⁴

On the hinges, one word repeated:

سلطان

4. Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, no. 2129.¹⁹⁵
Length: 29.2 cm; width: 8.4 cm; height: 6.6 cm.
An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box.
Jazira, second half of seventh/thirteenth century.

Bibliography: Baer, 'The Ruler', p. 17; Eva Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York

¹⁹³ The sides of the body are not visible on the pictures available to me. The reading that follows was made by Ludvik Kalus on the basis of pictures he could consult in the L. A. Mayer Museum of Islamic Art in Jerusalem in the 1980s. See TEI no. 36864. The first part could correspond to formula M8.

¹⁹⁴ '(...) in each hour (...) his might (...) to the pen box of might and life'.

¹⁹⁵ Bequeathed by Urbano Savorgnan (1704–77) in 1778.



Figure 16.7 Pen box, Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale. Photo: Guido Piacentini.

Press, 1983), p. 271; Sheila R. Canby et al., *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), pp. 273–4, no. 174b; Kalus, 'Écritiores', p. 815, no. 14 and pp. 817–18, no. 19; TEI no. 9563.

On the top of the lid, the following golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers:

افتح دوائك بالسعود / والدنيا عطايا¹⁹⁶

On the inside of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by a roundel:

كم في مراعات النفوس من التمني والمنابا | [كذا]¹⁹⁷

Inside the body, along the sides of the compartment for the pens, a silver inlaid inscription in interlaced Kufic:

العز الدائم¹⁹⁸ (repeated several times)

On the external side of the body, starting on the front and proceeding clockwise around it, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in registers separated by roundels:

اكتب بتفريخ هم واندفع / إذ أعز بهجة وأبطلا [كذا] (أباطيل؟) / و[] لأرزاق واعلم بأنك بقا [كذا]
(تبقى؟) / والذي صعت [كذا] (صنعت؟) يداك من الخبـ / ر (الخير) وشيء باق وعز يدوم الـ

196 'Open your pen box with the auspicious ones, the world is bounties'.

197 'In the respect for human beings, can so many wishes be granted, and so many destinies be fated!'

198 'Perpetual might'.

[كذا] / وجه عليه من الحياء سكينه / ومحبة تجري من الأنفا / س (الأنفاس) وإذا أحب [!] الله سلا
 (؟) / [ع]بده (عبد) ألفا [كذا] عليه محبة / للناس عز يدوم [و]إقبال¹⁹⁹

5. Copenhagen, Davids Samling, no. 6/1997.

Length: 36.3 cm; width: 7.5 cm; height: 5.7 cm.

A rounded oblong silver inlaid brass pen box. The engraver's name is 'Alī b. Yaḥyā al-Mawṣilī. Jazira (Mosul), dated 653/1255-6.

Bibliography: Kjeld von Folsach, *Art from the World of Islam in The David Collection* (Copenhagen: Davids Samling, 2001), no. 506; Almut von Gladiss, *Die Dschazira: Kulturlandschaft zwischen Euphrat und Tigris* (Berlin: Museum für Islamische Kunst, 2006), pp. 73-4, no. 28; Raby, 'The Principle of Parsimony', pp. 23, 32 n. 61; TEI no. 43812.

On the top of the lid, on the perimeter, an inscription, originally silver inlaid, in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by knots, starting from the right side on the front:²⁰⁰

(...) والثناء والـ[ب]قاء (والبقاء) والغناء والأمر ا [كذا] / والبقاء والتأ[ي]يد (والتأييد) والسعادة
 دائما / والمجد والعلاء (...) / (...) / (...) / (...) / (...) والشكر (...) / (...) / (...) / (...) ²⁰¹

On the inside of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* in a register:

افتح دواتك بالسعود ووقع الدنيا عطايا كم بي يرا عك للنفوس من التمني والمنايا²⁰²

Above and below the register, separated by small roundels, a silver inlaid inscription in *naskh*:

199 'Write [something] that dispels grief and act with effectiveness as in so doing it will strengthens joy, trivialities, and boons. Know that you will remain as well as the good deeds and anything lasting that your hands will make. Due to modesty, his face expresses tranquillity, and love that flows from exhaled air. If God loves His servant, He will bestow upon him affection for mankind. Permanent might and prosperity.'

200 Several parts of the inscription are effaced and prevent any attempt to decipher them.

201 '(...), praise, permanence, wealth, authority, permanence, support, prosperity for ever, glory, loftiness, (...), comfort, gratitude, (...)'.
 202 'Open your pen box with the auspicious ones, and scatter, all over the world, bounties. Within your pen, can so many wishes be granted, and so many destinies be fated!'



Figure 16.8 Pen box, Copenhagen, Davids Samling, no. 6/1997 (Photo Museum).

عملت هذه الدواة / بالموصل المحروسة / في سنة ثلاث / وخمسين وستمائة²⁰³
والبقاء والغناء أبدا / لصاحبه نقش / علي ابن يحيى / الموصل في التاريخ²⁰⁴

Inside the body, along the sides of the compartment for the pens, a silver inlaid inscription in interlaced Kufic is difficult to decipher.

On the external side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* is placed in registers separated by roundels, starting from the front, after the first roundel:

العز الدولة وا / لسلامة (السلامة) والكرامة وا / للطف (اللطيف) والرحمة والركن والسعادة
والراحة وا / لشكر (الشكر) والعطاء و / التأييد والنظر / والعلو والنعمة والنصـ[ر] والأمر /
والبقاء أبدا لصاحبه²⁰⁵

6. Doha, Museum of Islamic Art, no. MW.258.2003.²⁰⁶

Length: 33.2 cm; width: 7.9 cm; height: 6.5 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for a dedicatee whose title was *al-Maqarr* and whose name was Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Jazarī al-Mu‘ayyadī. Syria or Egypt, first half of eighth/fourteenth century.

²⁰³ ‘This pen box was made in Mosul the Protected in the year six hundred fifty-three’.

²⁰⁴ ‘Permanence and wealth for ever to its owner. Engraved by ‘Alī b. Yahyā al-Mawṣilī on the date [indicated].’

²⁰⁵ ‘Might, power, well-being, magnanimity, benevolence, mercy, pillar, prosperity, comfort, gratitude, giving, support, insight, grandeur, favour, help, authority, and permanence for ever to its owner’.

²⁰⁶ Formerly in the Aron Collection (London). Sold at Christie’s, 14 October 2003, no. 30.



Figure 16.9 Pen box, *The Museum of Islamic Art, Doha*, no. MW.258.2003.
Photo: Chrysovalantis Arsenios Lamprianidis.

Bibliography: Allan, *Metalwork*, pp. 35–6 and 80–I, no. 5; Kalus, 'Écritaires', pp. 814–15, no. 13; TEI no. 50090.

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by small roundels, starting from the right side on the front:²⁰⁷

مما عمل برسم مولانا المقر الكريم العالي المولي / السيدي المحترمي المخدومي العالمي /
لعاملي الأميري الكبير النجمي نجم²⁰⁸ / الدين محمد بن عبد الله الجزري المؤيدي خلد الله /
نظامه || بدو || م وإقبال لملكه (؟) / وطول عمر (...) || فلا تكتب بخطك غير شيء يسرك في
القيمة (القيامه) أن تراه / اليمن والعز معز وبقا الدوام / والدولة القاهرة على الأنام / ونفاذ الأراء
لصاحبه عز || (...) على الأنام (...) / عز ونعم وإقبال وتأيد²⁰⁹ (بـ)

207 Parts of the inscription are covered by the hinges and the clasp and cannot be read.

208 The two words were read الشمس by Allan, *Metalwork*, p. 80. In the Christie's catalogue essay, the second word is correctly read while the first is interpreted as corresponding to الحمى for al-Hamawī, a proposal that must be rejected on two grounds: first, the *nisba* al-Hamī is not attested for the city of Hamah, second such a *nisba* would not be found before the *laqab*. The repetition of the *laqab* first as a *nisba*, then its full form, is well attested in the Mamluk period. See one example, precisely for the same *laqab*, in Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, p. 266 ('al-Najmī Najm al-Dīn').

209 'What was made for our lord, the noble and lofty excellency, lord and master, respected and served, erudite and acting, the great amir al-Najmī Najm al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Jazarī al-Mu'ayyadi – May

On the inside of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by one polylobed roundel:

افتح دواة سعادة بتر اقي وعلو مرتبة وعز باقي / أقلامها إذا تستمد مدادها سم العدوي ففاتح
الأرز اقي²¹⁰

7. Jerusalem, L. A. Mayer Museum of Islamic Art, no. M 226–73.²¹¹
Length: 32 cm; width: 6.5 cm; height: 6.4 cm.
A rounded oblong engraved brass pen box. Syria or western Iran, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 52459.

On the top of the lid, an engraved inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels:

فلا تكتب / بخطك / غير شيء / يسرك / في القيمة (القيامة) / أن تراه²¹²

8. Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, no. B69.0740.²¹³
Length: 30.5 cm; width: 9.5 cm; height: 8.5 cm.
An angular oblong silver inlaid brass pen box made for the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 693/1293–694/1294, 698/1299–708/1309, 709/1310–741/1341). Syria or Egypt, first half of eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: F. R. Martin, *Ältere Kupferarbeiten aus dem Orient* (Stockholm, 1902), pl. 4; Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 809, no. 4, and pp. 815–16, no. 4a; TEI no. 7504.

God perpetuate his rule without interruption, with prosperity, (...), and long life. Don't let your hand write anything except what you would like to see on Judgement Day. Success and might strengthened and everlasting, vanquishing rule over mankind and perspicacity to his owner. Might (...) over mankind (...). Might, favour, prosperity and support.'

²¹⁰ 'Open a pen box that grants bliss with self-exaltation, elevated position, and lasting power. The pens inside, when dipped in its ink, will poison foes, and open fortune.' Note that the final *yā'* in *al-arzāqī* corresponds to the pronunciation of the last foot in prosody. The same phenomenon was mistakenly applied to the word *al-ʿaduwwī*.

²¹¹ Bought from Saeed Motamed (1925–2013), Frankfurt, on 12 March 1973. It should have been offered for sale by Sotheby's on 27–8 October 2020, sale L20224 lot 70. The sale was cancelled shortly before the fixed days.

²¹² 'Don't let your hand write anything except what you would like to see on Judgement Day'.

²¹³ Bequest of Yūḥannā Dāwūd.



Figure 16.10 Pen box, L. A. Mayer Museum of Islamic Art, no. M 226–73.
Photo: Sotheby's.

On the top of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels:

عز لمولانا السلطان الملك ا / لناصر (الناصر) العالم العادل ناصر / الدنيا والدين محمد بن قلاون²¹⁴

On the perimeter of the lid, starting from the top on the right, then clockwise, a silver inlaid inscription placed in six registers separated by knots:

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي ففي راحتك زمام / الزمان وفي ذا الدواة سرور الصديق / وكبت العدو
ونيل الأمانى عيون الأقاليم / أقلامها تفجر منها معين المعاني / وتخصب منها غروس الطروس
وتخصب / منها بنان البياني قدم وابق في نعمه ما دامت الأطيار على غصن باني²¹⁵

On the internal side of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

عز لمولانا السلطان الملك الناصر العالم العامل المجاهد ناصر الدنيا والدين محمد بن السلطان
الملك المنصور قلاون²¹⁶

On the external side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the front:

²¹⁴ 'Might to our Lord the Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir, erudite and just, Nāṣir al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Muḥammad b.Qalāwūn'.

²¹⁵ 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, submission for the enemy, and the granting of wishes. The springs of the lands are its pens wherefrom flows the source of the connotations. With it, the shoots springing from the sheets abound, and the fingertips of eloquence are dyed. Prepare [for yourself a reward with God] and stay in His bounties as long as the birds will stand on a branch of willow.'

²¹⁶ 'Might to our Lord the Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir, erudite and acting, the warrior, Nāṣir al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Muḥammad, son of the al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn'.



Figure 16.11 Pen box, Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, no. B69.0740.

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي في راحتك زمام الزمان وفي ذا الدواة / سرور الصديق وكبت العدو
ونيل الأمان عيون الأفا || ليم (الأقاليم) أقلامها تفجر منها || معين المعاني وتخضب منها غرو /
س (غروس) الطروس وتخضد || ب (تخضب) منها بنان البياني / قدم وابق في نعمه ما دامت
الأطيار على غصن باني²¹⁷

9. Kuwait, Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, no. LNS 17 M.

Length: 21.5 cm; height: 3.5 cm.

A rounded oblong gold and silver inlaid brass pen box. Syria or Anatolia, first half of seventh/thirteenth century.

Bibliography: Ghada Hijjawi Qaddumi, *Variety in Unity: A Special Exhibition on the Occasion of the Fifth Islamic Summit in Kuwait* (Kuwait: Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, 1987), p. 133; Faraghli, *al-Duwī*, p. 72; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Metalwork from the Arab World and the Mediterranean* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2021), p. 62–5, no. 22; TEI no. 50153.

²¹⁷ 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, submission for the enemy, and the granting of wishes. The springs of the lands are its pens wherefrom flows the source of the connotations. With it, the shoots springing from the sheets abound, and the fingertips of eloquence are dyed. Prepare [for yourself a reward with God] and stay in His bounties as long as the birds will stand on a branch of willow.'



Figure 16.12 Pen box, Kuwait, *Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya*, no. LNS 17 M (© The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait).

On the top of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by one roundel:

فلا تكتب بخطك غير شيء / يسرك في القيامة أن تراه²¹⁸

On the external side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the right rounded corner on the front:

لصاحبه [السعادة (السعادة) وا / لسلامة (السلامة) طول ا || لعمر (العمر) ما ناحت حمامة /
العزاء والبقاء ا [كذا] / والحمد ا [كذا] والثناء || والرفعة (الرفعة) وال [كذا] / لعلاء (والعلاء)
والعلو || والسخاء والا [كذا] (الآلاء)²¹⁹

10. Kuwait, *Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya*, no. LNS 101 M.

Length: 30 cm; width: 8.5 cm; height: 7 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box.
Syria or Egypt, early eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: Giovanni Curatola and Salam Kaoukji, *Arts of Islamic Lands: Selection from the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait* (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, 2016), p. 95, no. 110; Behrens-Abouseif, *Metalwork*, pp. 106–9, no. 32.

²¹⁸ 'Don't let your hand write anything except what you would like to see on Judgement Day'.

²¹⁹ 'To its owner prosperity, well-being, long life as long as a dove coos, and equanimity, permanence, commendation, praise, elevation, loftiness, grandeur, munificence, and blessings'.



Figure 16.13 Pen box, Kuwait, *Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya*, no. LNS 101 M (© The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait).

On the top of the lid, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* in a register separated by a roundel:

افتح دوات [كذا] (دواة) سعادة أقلامها تجري وتسعد من عطاء || وافر عملت لعبد الله راجي
رحمة ربه والمستجير به ليوم الآخر²²⁰

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by small roundels, clockwise starting from the right side on the front:

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي في / راحتك زمام الزماني وفي / ذا الدواة سرور الـ[ص]ديق /
وكبت العدو ونيل الأمانى || عيون الأقاليم / أقلامها تفجر || منها معين المعاني فتخضب / [منه]
غروس الطروس وتخطب [كذا] (تخضب) منه / بنان البياني قدم وابق في / نعمه ما شـ(...)
[على غصـ]ن بان / عز يدوم لصاحبها²²¹

220 'Open a blissful pen box which pens flow and gratify an abundant gift. It was made for the servant of God who desires his Lord's mercy and seeks refuge with Him for the Last Day.'

221 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, submission for the enemy, and the granting of wishes. The springs of the lands are its pens wherefrom flows the source of the connotations. With it, the shoots springing from the sheets abound, and the fingertips of eloquence are dyed. Prepare [for yourself a reward with God] and stay

On the internal side of the lid, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

علوت من العلياء ما شئت بالصبر إلى أن رأيت الرزق من قلبي يجري وأصبح جسمي أصفرا ذا
لطفة عليه قميص من [] لخير ومن [كذا] ترى وقع فإن الدواة قد حضرت والأمر سهل لديك²²²

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي ففي راحتك زمام الزمان وفي ذا الدواة سرور الصديق وكبت العدو
ونيل الأ[ماني]²²³

On the external side of the body, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the right on the front:

دواتك للآمال / باب وكعبة إليها يحج / الناس من كل موضع / فما هي إلا مدة تستمد[ها] || وقد
فاظت [كذا] (فاضت) الأرزاق || من كل متبعي علوت / من العلياء ما شئت بالصبري / إلى أن
رأيت الرزق / من قلبي يجري وأصبح جسمي أصفرا || ذا لطفة عليه قميص من²²⁴

II. London, British Museum, no. 1881,0802.20²²⁵

Length: 31 cm; width: 9 cm; height: 8 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for a dedicatee whose title was *al-Janāb*. Syria or Egypt, first half of eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: Rachel Ward, *Islamic Metalwork* (London: British Museum Publications, 1993), fig. 85; Douglas E. Barrett, *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1949), pl. 27; Faraghli, *al-Duwā*, pp. 52–3; Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 818, no. 20; TEI no. 42967.

in His bounties as long as (...) on a branch of willow. Everlasting might to its owner.'

222 'With patience, you ascended from the lofty heights as you wanted until you saw the boon flowing from my pen. My body became yellow and delicate and upon it you see a covering made of benefit and of (...). Sign as the pen box has come and the order has become easy for you.'

223 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, submission for the enemy, and the granting of [wishes].'

224 'For the expectations your pen box is a door and a Ka'ba to which people make the pilgrimage from everywhere. It is nothing else than ink that it takes. Boons have become abundant for anyone who obeys. With patience, I ascended from the lofty heights as I wanted until I saw the boon flowing from my pen. My body became yellow and delicate and upon it [you see] a covering made of [benefit].'

225 Bequeathed by William Burges (1827–81) in 1881.



Figure 16.14 Pen box, London, British Museum, no. 1881,0802.20 (Photo Museum).

On the top of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by a roundel:

[إ]ن الدواة لكل فضل تصيح / والسعد أصله وفتى منها ينصح²²⁶

On the internal side of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in two registers separated by a roundel with a radial inscription:

علوت من العلياء بالصبري ! / لى (إلى) أن ر[أ]يت الرزق من قلبي يجري²²⁷

In the roundel, a golden inlaid radial inscription consisting of titles:

الجناب العالي المولوي الكبيرى المالكي السبدي الهمامي الغياثي الذخري²²⁸

226 'The pen box comes into possession of any grace. Good fortune is its foundation and a young man receives from it good advice.'

227 'With patience, you ascended from the lofty heights until you saw the boon flowing from my pen'.

228 'The lofty honour, the great lord, the owner, the generous master, the sparing succour'.

On the external side of the body, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the right on the front:

وقع من ماء الدو / اة (الدواة) وقد حظرت [كذا] (حضرت) الد / هر (الدهر) طوعا لديك / وافعل
الخير || ما استطعت فما تحمد قوما || إلا مما فعلوا و / هذه قصتي وقد و / صل (وصل) وليس
في كل / ساعة يصل ا [كذا] || العز والبقاء والنصر على²²⁹

12. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 370-1897.²³⁰

Length: 34.5 cm; width: 8 cm; height: 12.5 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for the Rasulid sultan al-Mu'ayyad Dā'ūd (r. 696/1296–721/1321). Syria or Egypt, dated 702/1302–3.

Bibliography: Van Berchem, 'Notes', pp. 46–8, no. IV; Ward, 'Mean or Green?', pp. 38–41; Kalus, 'Écritiores', p. 808, no. 2, and p. 815, no. 2a; TEI no. 3873.

On the top of the lid, an originally inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a panel:

عز لمولانا السلطان الملك المؤيد العالم العادل هزبر الدنيا والدين داود بن مولانا السلطان الشهيد
الملك المظفر عز نصره²³¹

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*, clockwise starting from the right side on the front:

عز لمولانا السلطان الملك المؤيد العالم العادل المجاهد المراتب المتأخر هزبر الدنيا والدين
داود || بن مولانا السلطان [الشهيد] (الشهيد) || الملك المظفر ابن مولانا السلطان الشهيد الملك
المنصور عز نصره || عملت في سنة اثنين [كذا] وسبعمائة²³²

229 'Sign with the ink of the pen box as it has come. Time is voluntarily on your side. Act well as far as you can and do not praise people except for their deeds. This is my story. It has come but it does not come at any time. Might, permanence, and victory to [continues with the previous line; see previous note].'

230 Purchased on behalf of the South Kensington Museum (nowadays the V&A) in 1897 from Edgar and Alice Whitaker, executors for the Istanbul estate of William Henry Wrench (1836–96).

231 'Might to our lord, the Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, the erudite and just, Hizbar al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Dāwūd, son of our lord the late sultan al-Malik al-Muzaffar – May his victory be strengthened.'

232 'Might to our lord, the Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, the erudite and just, the stationed warrior and the defender of the frontiers, Hizbar al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Dāwūd, son of our lord the late sultan al-Malik al-Muzaffar, son of our lord the late sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr – May



Figure 16.15 Pen box, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 370–1897 (Photo Museum).

On the internal side of the lid, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels:

عز لمولانا السلطان / الملك المؤيد العالم / العادل هزبر الدنيا و / الدين عز نصره²³³

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:

إذا ما شئت أن تحيا حياة سهلة المحيا / فلا تحسد ولا تحقد ولا تغتر بالدنيا²³⁴

13. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 371–1897.²³⁵
Length: 29.5 cm; width: 8.2 cm; height: 8.8 cm.

his victory be strengthened. It was made in the year seven hundred and two.'

²³³ 'Might to our lord, the Sultan al-Mu'ayyad, the erudite and just, Hizbar al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Dāwūd – May his victory be strengthened.'

²³⁴ 'If you wish to live an easy life, be not envious, nor resentful, nor deceived by the present life.'

²³⁵ Purchased on behalf of the South Kensington Museum (nowadays the V&A) in 1897 from Edgar and Alice Whitaker, executors for the Istanbul estate of William Henry Wrench (1836–96).

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box.
Syria or Egypt, first half of eighth/fourteenth century.²³⁶

Bibliography: Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 817, no. 18; TEI no. 36862.

On the top of the lid, an engraved inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register separated by a roundel:

العز في الطاعة والغناء في / القناعة الصبر سلامة والعجلة ند [[م]ة²³⁷

On the internal side of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth*:

حلفت من يكتب بي بالواحد الفرد الصمد / أن لا يمد مدة قلم في قطع رزق لأحد²³⁸

On the external side of the body, an engraved inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the right on the front:

العز في الطاعة والغناء في القناعة / الصبر عبادة والخير دعاء الصبر سلامة || الصبر عبادة ||
العز في [إطاعة] الغناء في الـ [كذا] / لقناعة (القناعة) الصبر نعمـ[ة] (...) بكل شيء آخر ||
الصبر عبادة²³⁹

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

إن كتب [كذا] [كتبت؟] بأمد (بالمدة؟) أبلغت القصد وأملت الأمل فاكذب وقل ما تسمي إن الخير
أحب النعمات²⁴⁰

236 Only the internal part of the compartment for the pens is original. The remainder was probably produced at a later date (thirteenth/nineteenth century ?).

237 'Honour is attained in being obedient and wealth in being frugal. Patience is source of success while impatience is source of regret.'

238 'I put to oath who uses me to write by the One, the Peerless, the Everlasting that he would never dip his pen in me to deny a man his source of living.'

239 'Honour is attained in being obedient and wealth in being frugal. Patience is devotion and acting well is supplication. Patience is source of success. Patience is devotion. Might is attained in being obedient and wealth in being frugal. Patience means bounty (...) with everything. Patience is devotion.'

240 'If you write with ink (?), you will reach your goal and will give reason to hope to the hopeful. Write and utter what you name. Doing good is the most desirable favour.'



Figure 16.16 Pen box, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 371-1897 (Photo Museum).

14. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 8993-1863.²⁴¹

Length: 30 cm; width: 8.5 cm; height: 7 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for a dedicatee whose title was *al-Janāb*. Syria or Egypt, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: Kalus, 'Écritaires', p. 817, no. 17; TEI no. 36858.

On the top of the lid, an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register separated by a roundel:

الجناب العالي المولوي / الأميري الكبير الغازي عز²⁴²

On the internal side of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

إذا فتحت دواة العز والنعم اجعل مدادك من جود ومن كرم واكتب بخير إذا ما دمت مقتدرا
فقد شهدت بفضلك أهل السيف والقلم²⁴³

241 Purchased by the South Kensington Museum (nowadays the V&A) in 1863.

242 'The lofty honour, the master, the great amir, the conqueror – May (...) be strengthened'.

243 'If you open this pen box of blessing and might, take your ink from munificence and kindness. Then write good deeds to the extent you can. People of the pen and the sword will bear witness to your grace.'



Figure 16.17 Pen box, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 8993-1863 (Photo Museum).

On the external side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by roundels, clockwise starting from the rear:

الجناب الكريم العا / لي المولوي الأميري / الكبير الغازي / العادلي المجاهدي || المسابطي [كذا]
(المرابطي) المثارعي || الغوثي الذخري / الهمامي القوامي / النظامي المالكي / العالمي العاملي
|| الورعي الزاهدي²⁴⁴

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, an illegible silver inlaid inscription in interlaced Kufic placed in a register separated by a roundel.

15. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 17.190.822.²⁴⁵
Length: 28.3 cm; width: 5.7 cm; height: 6.7 cm.
A rounded oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for an unnamed sultan. Western Iran or Syria, late eighth/fourteenth century.

²⁴⁴ 'The noble and lofty honour, the master, the great amir, the just conqueror, the stationed warrior, the defender of the frontiers, the sparing succour, the generous and methodical supporter, the owner, the acting erudite, the pious abstinent.'

²⁴⁵ Gift of John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1917.



Figure 16.18 Pen box, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 17.190.822 (Photo Museum).

Bibliography: Maurice S. Dimand, *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1930), pp. 115–16; Maurice S. Dimand, *A Handbook of Muhammadan Art*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1944), p. 150 and fig. 89; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Le Bronze iranien* (Paris: Musée des arts décoratifs, 1973), p. 84; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, 'Les Bronzes du Khorassan, I', *Studia Iranica* III/1 (1974): 40; Glenn D. Lowry, 'Iskandar Mirza and Early Timurid Metalwork', *Oriental Art* 17/8 (1986): 12, 14, 15, 17, 20 and fig. 3; Komaroff, 'Pen-Case', p. 92–4 and fig. 6; Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles and Washington: County Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 139, 141 (no. 48), 339; TEI no. 10108.

On the top of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in cartouches on two levels and separated by a roundel:

عز لمولانا / المالك العا / لم (العالم) العادل / المؤيد المظ / غر (المظفر) المنصور / المجاهد ا /
 لمرباط (المرباط) ا / لمناغر (المناغر) العا / زي (الغازي) ركن الإسلام / م (الإسلام) والمسلمين
 / تاج الملوك / [و]السلطين || محيي العد / ل (العدل) في العالم-ين [العالَمين] / منصف المظ
 / [لوم-ين] (المظلومين) من الظالمين المؤيد بتا / بيد (بتأييد) رب العا / لمين (العالَمين) عز
 أنصاره / وضاعف ا [sic] / اقتداره و / علا شأنه و / لا زالت سعوده ظاهرة²⁴⁶

246 'Might to our master, the erudite and just owner, the helped victor, the victorious stationed warrior, the defender of the frontiers, the

On the perimeter of the top of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in cartouches separated by roundels, anti-clockwise, starting from the right side:

إذا فتحت / دواة العز / والنعم فاجعل / مدادك من جود / ومن كرم إذا فتحت / دواة العز / فا / نزلها
(فانزلها) اقلاما / جود ووقع / منك بالكرم / داواة افتح البيا [كذا] (الباب؟) / وفتوجد [كذا] (فتجد؟)
با [كذا] / يناديه فنو / دي (فنودي) بالنجاح / إذا فتحت / لأمر فيه عس(؟) / (...) / بالفلاح وقع /
لأن الدواة / قد حضرت والأ / مر (الأمر) طوع [كذا] (طوعا؟) لديك / يمتثل وهذه / قصتي وقد
/ حضرت وليس / في كل ساعة / تصل والعز / والبقاء وا / النصر (النصر) والبقاء / لصاحبه
أبد[!] (أبدا)²⁴⁷

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh*, clockwise starting from the right side on the back:

عز يدوم وإ / قبال (إقبال) لصاحبه / وطول عمر مع / الأنام ممدود وسا / عدتك (ساعدتك) مع
الأنام أ / ربة (أربعة) عز ونصر وإ / قبال (إقبال) وتأيد / دام لك العز || والبقاء ما / اختلاف
الصبح || والمساء وعشت / ما دامت البيا [كذا] / لي (الليالي) في نعمة / ما لها انق / [ضاء
(انقضاء) دامت لك / [الإنعام] (...) / ودمت ملك [كذا] (ملكا؟) / ذا الدجي و / الفجري وسا /
عدتك (ساعدتك) على ا / لأنام (الأنام) أربعة || العز والنصر وإ / قبال (الإقبال) والظفر²⁴⁸

On the upper part of the external side of the body, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in cartouches separated by large and small roundels, clockwise starting from the right rounded end:

conqueror, support of Islam and the Muslims, crown of the kings and sultans, revivor of justice in the worlds, the one who establishes the right of the oppressed in the face of the oppressors, the one who benefits from the support of the Lord of the Universes – May his helpers be strengthened, his might redoubled, his standing elevated and his auspicious ones conspicuous.'

- 247 'If you open this pen box of blessing and might, take your ink from munificence and kindness. If you open the pen box of might, put inside it pens of munificence and sign with kindness. Pen box, open (the door?) and you will find (...) that calls it. Success was proclaimed. If it is opened for an order in which lies (...), prosperity [will be proclaimed?]. Sign as the pen box has come and the order [that] is obedience in your presence will be executed. This is my story. It has come but it does not come at any time. Might, permanence, victory, and permanence to its owner forever.'

- 248 'Permanent might and prosperity to its owner, and long extended life with mankind. May four [things] help you with mankind: might, support, prosperity, and help. May you long live in glory so long as morn and eve will differ; and may you live in bliss inasmuch as the nights will last. Eternal [favour] is yours. (...) May you stay a king master of dusk and dawn. May four [things] help you with mankind: might, support, prosperity, and triumph.'

والحد الصا / عد (الصاعد) والدو || لة (الدولة) لصاحبه / عز لمولانا / المالك ا / العالم (العالم)
 العا / دل (العدل) المؤيد / المظفر ا / لمنصور (المنصور) / المجاهد / المرابط ا / لمتاغر
 (المتاغر) العا / زي (الغازي) / ركن ا / لإسلام (الإسلام) و / والمسلمين / عز يدوم || وإقبال /
 لصاحبه || وطول الد / عمر (العمر) مع / الأنام / ممد[ود] (ممدود) / [و]سا[عد] / تك (ساعدتك)
 على ا / لأنام (الأنام) أر / بعة (أربعة) عز / ونصر و / إقبال و / [ا]لعز (العز) الدا / ثم (الدائم)
 وا / لعمر (العمر) المبارك²⁴⁹

On the lower part of the external side of the body, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in cartouches separated by large and small roundels, clockwise starting from the right rounded end:

والعلاء و / النصر على || الأعداء / تاج الملوك / والسلطين / منصف / المظلو / مين
 (المظلومين) من ا / لظالمين (الظالمين) / المؤيد بتأ / يد (يتأييد) رب ا / لعالمين (العالمين) /
 محيي ا / لعدل (العدل) / في العالمين / عز أنصاره || وضاعف / اقتداره || وعلا شأنه / ولا
 زالت / سعوده / ظاهرة / ونجومه / زاهرة ما / لاح صباح / ونودي / حي على / الفلاح / والعز
 و / [ا]لبقا وا / لجلى والحياء والعلو²⁵⁰

On the part separating the compartment for the pens and the one for the ink, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* in a register:

عز لمولانا المالك العالم العادل المؤيد المظفر المنصبـ[و]ر²⁵¹

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed on two levels in cartouches separated by large and small roundels:

249 'And the rising degree and the rule to its owner. Might to our master, the erudite and just owner, the helped victor, the victorious stationed warrior, the defender of the frontiers, the conqueror, support of Islam and the Muslims, Permanent might and prosperity to its owner, and long extended life with mankind. May four [things] help you with mankind: might, support, prosperity (sic). Perpetual might and blessed life.'

250 'Grandeur and victory over the enemies. Crown of the kings and sultans, the one who establishes the right of the oppressed in the face of the oppressors, the one who benefits from the support of the Lord of the Universes, revivor of justice in the worlds, —May his helpers be strengthened, his strength redoubled, his standing elevated, his auspicious ones conspicuous and his stars bright as long as the morning will begin to show and that "Come to safety" will be cried out. Might, permanence, distinctness, modesty, and grandeur.'

251 'Might to our master, the erudite and just owner, the helped victor'.

عز لمولانا / المالك العا / لم (العالم) العادل / المؤيد المظ[فر] / المنصور / المجاهد || المرابط /
 المثاغر الغا / زي (الغازي) / ركن الإ / سلام (الإسلام) والمسلسل[مين] / عز أنصاره / وضاعف
 [اقتداره]²⁵²

16. Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. OA 3621.²⁵³

Length: 32.4 cm; width: 8.5 cm; height: 7 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box made for a dedicatee whose title was *al-Maqām*. Syria or Egypt, dated 704/1304–5.

Bibliography: Christiane Naffah and Ludvik Kalus, 'Une écritoire mamelouke au musée du Louvre', *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 31/2 (1981): 79–89; Kalus and Naffah, 'Deux écritoires mameloukes', pp. 90–104; Kalus, 'Écritoires', pp. 813–14, no. 12; Sophie Makariou in Francis Richard, *Chefs-d'œuvre de la collection des arts de l'Islam du musée du Louvre* (Riyadh: Musée national, 2006), p. 51; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'A Mamluk Pen Box Connected to the *Thousand and One Nights* and the Historian Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir', *Muqarnas* 39 (2022): 23–36. TEI no. 3904.

On the top of the lid, an originally silver (?) inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by medallions:

دواة مولانا غدت أو / صافها (أو صافها) مكملة بحسنها قد شهدت / أقلامها المعدلة / أم الكتاب قد
 غدت لأنها²⁵⁴

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, an originally silver inlaid inscription in interlaced *kufic* placed in registers separated by roundels, barely decipherable, but possibly the following formula repeated:

اليمين والعز الدائم²⁵⁵

On the internal side of the lid, an originally golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

-
- 252 'Might to our master, the erudite and just owner, the helped victor, the victorious stationed warrior, the defender of the frontiers, the conqueror, support of Islam and the muslims – May his supports be strengthened and [his strength] redoubled.'
- 253 Purchased from Albert or Alexis Sorlin-Dorigny (1855–1936) in 1894.
- 254 'The qualities of our Lord's pen box consummate appeared. To its beauty its equilibrated pens attested. The essence of the book appeared since it [sic: the end is missing].'
- 255 'Success and permanent might'.



Figure 16.19 Pen box, Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. OA 3621. Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Claire Tabbagh / Collections Numériques.

له قلم عم الأقاليم نفعه فما خص منها أول دون سابع فما نيل مصر مثل نائله الذي به ران
والأمصار خمس أصابع²⁵⁶

Inside the body, on the bottom of the compartment for the pens, an originally golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register flanked by two medallions:

عز يدوم به المقام العالمي و²⁵⁷

256 'His pen has showered bounty everywhere, and without favoritism he favoured every land. The Nile gives nothing like his gifts of which he takes possession and the towns are five fingers [sic].'

257 'May might last through him, the erudite eminence and [sic: the inscription stops abruptly]'. The formula *'izz yadūmu bi* is uncommon as one rather expects the preposition *li*. Hence Ludvik Kalus proposed to rather read the inscription *gharr yudawwim bi* ('a small spring from where the erudite eminence draws'). See Kalus and Naffah, 'Deux écritoires', p. 101. In my point of view, the first reading remains valid and is even confirmed by a similar formula found on pen box no. 1.

Inside the body, along the sides of the compartment for the pens, a golden inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register separated in two parts by a large roundel. The text starts on the rear side, clockwise, with the right size upside down:

افتح دواة سعادة أقلام[هـ] تجري وتسعد || من عطاء وافر / عملت لعبد الله || راجي رحمة ربه
والمستجير به / ليوم الآخر عملت في || سنة أربع وسبعما / ثمة من الهجرة²⁵⁸

17. Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. OA 7531.²⁵⁹

Length: 24.2 cm; width: 6.6 cm; height: 4.8 cm.

A rounded oblong silver and golden inlaid brass pen box.
Western Iran, end eighth/fourteenth–beg. ninth/fifteenth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 36884.

On the top of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in six cartouches separated by double roundels:

دواتك فاسعد وابق في / ظل دولة بها نفق اللعان / لي بشفاويها القالي / إذا ما جرى في حلية /
الطرس نقشها بكفك يا / من (ياأمن) قدرة صاعد عالي²⁶⁰

On the internal side of the lid, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in six cartouches separated by double roundels:

دواتك للأمال باب وكعبة / إليها يحج الناس من / كل موضع وما هي إلا / مدة تستمدها وقد
فاضت / الأرزاق من كل مو / ضع (موضع) والبقاء لصاحبه²⁶¹

On the external side of the body, a golden inlaid inscription in *naskh* placed in cartouches separated by large roundels, clockwise starting from the right rounded end (starting from the right on the forefront):²⁶²

One should thus understand that in both cases the owner of the pen box is the means through which permanent might is attained.

- 258 'Open a blissful pen box which pens flow and gratify an abundant gift. It was made for the servant of God who desires his Lord's mercy and seeks refuge with Him for the Last Day. It was made in the year seven hundred and four of the Hegira.'

- 259 Bequeathed by Baroness Adèle Salomon de Rothschild (1843–1922) in 1922.

- 260 '[This is] your pen box. So rejoice and remain in the shadow of a state where the curser perishes. With its two edges, speech is mine. Should, by your hand, its inscription be applied in the decoration of the sheet, someone rising high would be safe in terms of power.'

- 261 'For the expectations your pen box is a door and a Ka'ba to which people make the pilgrimage from everywhere. It is nothing else than ink that it takes. Boons have become abundant from everywhere. Permanence to its owner.'

- 262 Some parts of the inscription are covered by the hinges.



Figure 16.20 Pen box, Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. OA 7531. Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Hervé Lewandowski.

تصرف ووقع بما تشتهي في راحتك / زمام الزمان وفي ذي الدواة / سرور الصديق وغيض
 [كذا] (غيظ) العدو / ونيل الأمان عيون الأفا / ليم أقلمها [كذا] (أقلامها) تفجر منها معين /
 لمعاني (المعاني) غيره وجه عليه من / الحياء سكينه ومحبة تجري من / الأنفاسي وإذا أحب الله
 يوم- [يوما] / عبده ألقى [عليه محبة للناس] / غيره إن الدواة سعيدة قد شرفت / يا صاحبي
 تلمس كف الكاتب / وتشرفت من لمسة وتعطرت كم / يكتب بدموعها من راكبي ويد / معها
 سعادة (...) وغيره²⁶³

18. Present location unknown. Offered for sale by Christie's, sale 7 October 2008, no. 46.²⁶⁴

Length: 32.5 cm; width: 7 cm; height: 6 cm.

A carved ebony and ivory pen box with bronze mounts. Egypt or Sicily, sixth/twelfth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 48496.

²⁶³ 'Act as you please and sign with whatever you like as the reins of time lie in your hands. Within the pen box is delight for the friend, rage for the enemy, and the granting of wishes. The springs of the lands are its pens wherefrom flows the source of the connotations. Another one [poem]. Due to modesty, his face expresses tranquility and love that flows from exhaled air. If God ever loves His servant, He will bestow upon him affection for mankind. Another one [poem]. The pen box is auspicious, honoured as it is. O my owner! Touch the hand of the scribe. A hand honoured by a scented touch. How many riders write with [the water of] its tears. A hand that comes with bliss (...). Another one [poem].'

²⁶⁴ Formerly in the Stora collection and displayed at the 1910 Munich exhibition.



Figure 16.21 Ebony and ivory pen box. Photo: Christie's.

On the top of the lid, a carved ivory plaque with an inscription in foliated *naskh* (the hinge in the middle covers part of the text):

افتح دواة سعادة بتراقى و[علو مـ]رتبة وعز باقي بركة²⁶⁵

19. Present location unknown. Offered for sale by Sotheby's, sale 24 October 2007, lot no. 142.²⁶⁶

Length: 22.5 cm.

An angular oblong silver and golden inlaid brass composite pen box.²⁶⁷ Syria or Egypt, first half of the eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 46047.

On the external side of the body, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers separated by large roundels, starting on the front side, after the central roundel:

وقع إن الدواة / قد حضرت [كذا] (حضرت) والدهر طوع [كذا] (طوعا) لديك / وسهل ا [كذا]
وغيظ العدو ونيل الأمانى ا [كذا] / عيون الأقاليم أقلا / مها (أقلامها) تفجر منها معين ا [لمعاني]
فتخصب منها غروس الطروس وتخطب [كذا] (تخصب) || منها بنان في الزمانى²⁶⁸

- 265 'Open a pen box that grants bliss with self-exaltation, elevated position, and lasting power. Blessing.'
- 266 I am grateful to Doris Behrens-Abouseif for sharing with me detailed pictures of all the parts of the inscription.
- 267 The top constituted the interior base of another pen box and was added to the body of the present pen box.
- 268 'Sign as the pen box has come. Time is voluntarily on your side and [authority] is easy. [Within the pen box is delight for the friend,] rage for the enemy, and the granting of wishes. The springs of the lands are its pens wherefrom flows the source of the [connotations. With it, the shoots springing from the] sheets abound, and the fingertips are dyed with time.'



Figure 16.22 A silver and golden inlaid pen box. Photo: Sotheby's.

20. Present location unknown. Offered for sale by Sotheby's, sale 24 October 2007, lot 144.

Length: 30 cm; width: 8.5 cm; height: 7 cm.

An angular oblong silver inlaid brass pen box. Syria or Egypt, eighth/fourteenth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 46393.

On the internal side of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

إذا ما شئت أن تحيا حياة سهلة المحيا / فلا تحسد ولا تحقد ولا تغتر بالدنيا²⁶⁹

21. Present location unknown. Offered for sale by Sotheby's, sale 8 October 2008, no. 122.

Length: 24.5 cm; width: 7.2 cm; height: 7.6 cm.

A rounded oblong silver inlaid brass pen box. Syria or Egypt, ninth/fifteenth century.²⁷⁰

Bibliography: TEI no. 49988.

On the top of the lid, two lines of an originally silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register:

أقسمت بالواحد الفرد الصمد أن لا تمد في مدة في قطع رزق لأحد كن محسنا بكل [ما] يخصني
وتفوز فضيلة بالذكر الجميل وما تغنم [أ]لحسن في نفس الطرس أو الأحسن الفعال يسمى الطرس
المعلم²⁷¹

269 'If you wish to live an easy life, be not envious, nor resentful, nor deceived by the present life'.

270 These attributions are doubtful as the shape of the pen box and the quality of the execution of the inscriptions show.

271 'You swore by the One, the Peerless, the Everlasting that you would never dip your pen [in me] to deny a man his source of living. Be



Figure 16.23 A silver inlaid pen box. Photo: Sotheby's.



Figure 16.24 A silver inlaid pen box. Photo: Sotheby's.

On the external front and rear sides of the body, four lines of an originally silver inlaid inscription in Kufic placed in an oval medallion, the whole barely readable.

On the lower front edge of the lid, an ivory plaque with one engraved word:

الجزائر²⁷²

22. Present location unknown. Offered for sale by Sotheby's, sale 7 October 2009, no. 78.²⁷³

charitable with everything that matters to me, you will earn a favour by leaving a good remembrance. You will not attain excellence [by writing] on the same sheet; otherwise the most excellent and effective would called the trained sheet (?).'

²⁷² 'Algeria (?).'

²⁷³ Formerly part of the Minassian collection (New York).



Figure 16.25 A silver inlaid pen box. Photo: Sotheby's.

Length: 27.8 cm; width: 5.4 cm; height: 6.3 cm.

A rounded oblong golden and silver inlaid brass pen box.
Jazira, second half of seventh/thirteenth century.

Bibliography: TEI no. 46463.

On the perimeter of the top of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in Kufic placed in a register and separated by roundels, starting on the top:

العز الدائم والإقبال الزائد / والدولة الباقية والـ [كذا] / الرفعة العالية والبركة أبدا لصاحبه || العز
الدائم والإقبال الزائد والدولة / والرفعة العالية (...) / (...) والنعمة (...) والبركة أبدا لصاحبه²⁷⁴

Around the perimeter of the lid's lower edges, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in registers, clockwise starting from the right side on the front:

إن الدواة سعيدة قد شرفت يا صاحبي تلمس كف الكاتب / وتشرفت من لمسة وتعطرت كم يكتب
بدموعها من راكبي (...) فأسعدوا الناس فاعبدوا (?) / عند الملوك فشرفوا (...) والنعمة والرفعة
والرحمة والبر والعافية لصاحبه²⁷⁵

274 'Perpetual might, increasing prosperity, lasting power, exalted position and eternal blessing to its owner. Perpetual might, increasing prosperity, wealth, and exalted position, (...) grace (...) and eternal blessing to its owner.'

275 'The pen box is auspicious, honoured as it is. O my owner! Touch the hand of the scribe. A hand honoured by a scented touch. How many riders write with [the water of] its tears (...). Rejoice people, (?) by the

On the internal side of the lid, a silver inlaid inscription in *thuluth* placed in a register and separated by a roundel:

أحمد الله على نعمه وأعوذ به من نقمه / وأستزیده من فضله وكرمه²⁷⁶

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rulers and honour (...). And grace, elevation, mercy, piety, and health to its owner.’

- 276 ‘I praise God on His graces and seek refuge in Him from His punishment and ask Him for increase of His bounty and His generosity.’

- Ibn Aydamur al-Mustaʿsimī, *al-Durr al-Farīd wa-Bayt al-Qaṣīd*, ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2015), 13 vols.
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