ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS AND PSEUDO-INSCRIPTIONS IN ITALIAN ART

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

DAI= The Journal of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah

MHJ= The Medieval History Journal

DOP= Dumbarton Oaks Papers

RAA= Revue des Arts Asiatiques

ZDMG = Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

EI= Encyclopaedia of Islam

BIKA= Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie

REI= Revue des études islamiques

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Art historians and archaeologists dealing with the interaction between the Islamic world and Latin West during the Middle Ages face problems that are related to the meaning and role played by Islamic artefacts in cross-cultural exchange, beyond the mere transfer of goods.

The gist of the present study is the transmission of Islamic epigraphic patterns used for decorative purpose to western Christendom. In particular, a specific type of epigraphic patterns that George C. Miles defined as Kufesque[1] has been taken into consideration. We intend to debate the idea of a mere invention of ornaments made up of strokes resembling Arabic letters, and introduce a sharper distinction between what concerns epigraphy or not.

It is worth recalling here the role played by epigraphy in the Islamic culture. Even though the use of inscriptions has been widely developed since remote antiquity, it had an absolutely unmatched role in Islam. In fact, Arabic epigraphy took on a priority role in the Islamic culture that cannot be found in any other society.[2]

Arabic writing was the sacred medium chosen for the Koranic revelation, and therefore the very emblem of Islamic faith. The Islamic world has not only continued the tradition of the antiquity, which used funerary and building inscriptions as a mean to promote the ideology of the ruling classes, but has expanded it in terms of space and time as well as in the variety of writing materials and utensils, the so-called *media scriptoria*.

The use of Arabic epigraphy is extended throughout Islamic territories and crossed over the borders of the Arabic-speaking communities. In fact, from the late seventh/early eight century onwards, Arabic script was the glue that kept united a world made up of countries both linguistically and ethnically different, as it was the liturgical language, the language of the *Qurʾān* whose

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[1] G. C. Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area", *DOP*, vol. 18, Washington 1964, p. 20.

[2] Cf. R. Hillenbrand, "Islamic monumental inscriptions contextualised: location, content, legibility and aesthetics", *BIKA* 3, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 13-38; See also: J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Aspects de l'écriture arabe et de son développement", *REI* 48,1, Paris 1980, pp.9-23.

archetype, i.e. the *Umm al-kitāb*, was preserved in heaven.[3] The refined taste of the educated classes for increasing intricacies in writing styles led to the shifting from the communicative value of the inscription towards a mere aesthetic function of the letters with a consequent development of superimposed ornamentation.[4] The spread of more and more refined styles of writing in Islamic countries became significant during Abbasid period also because of the influences of non-Arab artistic traditions operating in the new conquered territories.[5]

Due to such a practice, only the most cultivated class of Arab origin could read the texts hidden under the appearance of artworks. Thanks to its great aesthetic value, Arabic epigraphy succeeded in penetrating even into Western crafts. Indeed, with the intensification of trade in the Middle Ages, precious objects and fabrics began to arrive through the Mediterranean basin from eastern Islamic countries, and soon circulated over most of the Italian peninsula. This fact favoured the development of the taste for the elegant Arabic lettering more or less clearly identifiable as Arabic script, among the decorative elements of many Italian artists. Such epigraphic patterns have been labelled with the general term of "pseudo-inscriptions", that is inscriptions deemed unreadable.

As it will be demonstrated later, an extensive literature has approached the problem of their identification in western arts, and some attempts of advancing a reading of these corrupted Arabic words have been carried out. Most of them agreed on the identification of the word *Allāh* or the profession of Muslim faith, the so-called *shahāda*. The artists' awareness about the meaning of the inscriptions they more or less carefully copied has been questioned. The problem remained unsolved mainly for two reasons: first

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[3]   See E. Geoffroy, F. Daftary, "Umm al-Kitāb", *EI*, Second Edition. Consulted online on September 24, 2017 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1289>. As regards the Shia context see Y. Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs. An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, Boston 2010, pp. 241,242. W. Ivanow, "Notes sur l''Umm al-Kitâb des Ismaéliens de l'Asie Centrale", *REI* 4, Paris 1932, pp.419-482.

[4]   R. Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation", in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, Beirut 1974, pp.297-317; See also L. Korn, "Religious Inscriptions in Islamic Architecture", in *The Aura of Alif: The art of writing in Islam*, Munich 2010, pp. 102-123.

[5]   See A. Grohman, "The Origin and Early Development of Floriated Kufic", *Ars Orientalis*, 2 (1957), pp. 183-213; L. Volov, "Plaited Kufic on Samanid Epigraphic Pottery", *Ars Orientalis*, 6 (1966), pp. 107-133.

because art historians did not usually own the linguistic tools allowing them to read Arabic inscriptions; and secondly because Arabists are usually not concerned with western arts or, if so, they have interpreted inscriptions so far on the basis of the *ductus* that Arabic letters should have had.

The study of Arabic inscriptions on portable objects shows that very often, for technical reasons such as the hardness of materials and the system of production, the craftsmen's copy of Arabic script can be debased to such an extent that words can be hardly read, unless people had knowledge of the customary formulas. Because of this, we have considered the opportunity of studying the formulas, taking into consideration the overall outline of each word irrespectively of the rules governing Arabic script. This method has proved to be fruitful, as it allowed the identification of Arabic expressions in corrupted signs previously deemed mere ornamentations or mocking Arabic letters.

The study begins with an annotated bibliography, in which the possible application of the term pseudo-inscription in both the cultural contexts are investigated. As the list of literary sources suggests, this phenomenon has arisen the attention of many scholars, but at the same time each study has outlined single aspects of the problem without supplying an overall exhaustive treatment of the subject.

An unrelated and discontinuous approach to the phenomenon and weak interpretative methods are frequently used and, as matter of fact, almost all the questions raised by scholars in the mid-nineteenth century remain unsolved. A thoroughly and extensive study centred on the phenomenon of Arabic inscriptions should aim at providing cogent answers based on the lessons learned so far and, even more, on the data offered by new inter-disciplinary research.

The present study focuses on Italian Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance paintings. It both assesses how the borrowing of presumed Islamic models took place, either directly from an artefact or through the mediation of a workshop sketch, and it identifies when and why such a phenomenon triggered the creation of imitative symbolic patterns aimed at satisfying the

Weltanschauung of Western culture. Although the focus of the study is on the most relevant Italian paintings, it has been deemed useful to broaden the area and the span of time in order to determine where and when Western arts were affected by the use of Islamic epigraphic patterns.

Starting from the assumption that in most cases Western artists did not invent meaningless marks resembling Arabic script but copied real Arabic texts making a transfer of Islamic models to part of the Western artistic idiom, the study has produced relevant results supporting our position. In fact, the use of an innovative comparative method allowed us to read Islamic inscriptions and Sultanic titles within decorations on some Italian paintings from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, whereas most of the previous studies have considered them as mock inscriptions.

The use of so-called Arabic "pseudo-inscriptions" has been treated up to now as one of the ornamental motifs that affected Western art, particularly from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. It has been so far considered as a forgery[6] because it used Arabic lettering without any respect for Arabic language system and therefore, can be considered devoid of any meaning. On the contrary, we want to underscore that, at least in its early period, epigraphic decorations were a simple copy of original products created in Islamic regions circulating in the West. The proportion of the phenomenon urges a more complex approach considering the different roles it played in the centuries that saw its occurrence.

As for the presence of Arabic inscriptions in Gothic and Renaissance art, it is obvious that one of the issues that has attracted the greatest interest of art historians and palaeographers over the past two centuries can be summed up into a few questions: how was it possible that the holy personages portrayed in Italian paintings were adorned with a script that was so tightly linked to Islam and its revealed Book? What was the impact they had on the society of

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[6] This concept has been developed by V. Grassi in the article "Nondum matuta est, nolo acerbam sumere. Per una critica del concetto di pseudo-iscrizione araba", *Bullettino Storico Pistoiese*, CXVIII, 2016, pp. 3-22.

that time? Was it a form of cultural appropriation? Or an acculturated copy implying variations or interpretations? [7]

The growing interest in Oriental Art by western scholars had led to the development of many simplifications, which inevitably had to be made. Regardless of the correct spelling, readability, and legibility of the *ductus* of the single letters, an attitude gained ground according to which the terms "inscription" and "pseudo-inscription", "Kufic" and "pseudo-Kufic" have been deprived of their original meaning and given a generic and conventional one falling under the common category of ornamental patterns inspired by Arabic characters. Given this fact, these terms often became interchangeable in use.

One of the most crucial obstacles that has slowed down the development of efficient scientific investigation tools heretofore is by no doubt the far-reaching territorial extension and wide span of time in which Islamic artefacts bearing inscriptions occurred. [8] The paucity of the scrutinised material in comparison to its overall consistency and the rough set of criteria used for classifying inscriptions on objects prevented a step forward in the debate around the presence and meaning of the above mentioned ornamental epigraphic patterns.

This is the overall aporia in which our research will move. With reference to palaeography, for each pattern we will analyse in detail the *ductus* of the Arabic script trying to identify the single characters, the systemic study of the decorations and changes in shapes. Furthermore, the presence of such inscriptions will be placed in their historical and cultural context, that is the relationships established since the Middle Ages between the coastal region of the Mediterranean. Finally, a careful examination of the related literature will suggest a new multi-disciplinary interpretation for the presence of inscriptions and pseudo inscriptions in Italian Gothic and Renaissance art.

Apart from some occasional attempts to interpret them as misshaped *shahādas*, i.e. the Islamic profession of faith, the epigraphic decorations were never considered true Arabic inscriptions, because they lacked readability. This is

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[7]   See Chapter I: Annotated bibliography and state of art. Open questions.

[8]   Cfr : F. Déroche, *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*, Paris 2000.

the first assumption that we are going to rebut, showing that the readability of an inscription is not so much related to a careful and accurate copy made on Arabic-speaking craftsmen's works, as the likeness to real Arabic script depends on the artist's ability to replicate carefully the models he has at his disposal as well as on the degree of alteration of the letters that might already be present on the copies available.

When considering the decorations depicted along the rims of the thrones, in the haloes and garments of Madonnas and saints, we can realize that often they are not repeated patterns, but they are very different one from the other. This led me to make some points about the use of the term pseudo-inscription.

In order to show that the altered forms of Arabic well-wishing expressions or sovereign protocols were attested on Islamic artefacts, we will parallel the *ductus* of the word present on paintings and those occurring on different Islamic objects, proving that our readings are based on a firm ground. The classes of objects that occur more frequently are: Islamic pottery from Spain dated to the 9th -11th centuries, Mamluk metalworks in vogue in Europe between 13th to 15th century and Islamic embroideries from 10th to 15th century. Such commodities were sought after in Italy, mainly in central and northern regions, to dignify the houses of the Italian lords. Arabic words found in paintings will be compared with those found on objects. As a consequence, it can be easily inferred how a given model was transferred from an artist to another, or shared among them, even through several centuries.

Generally, in the Gothic period[9] these patterns were copied from authentic inscriptions found on Islamic fabrics and precious objects, and such heritage was continued and developed in the Renaissance period. Anyway, according to some Western scholarship the borrowing of this kind of decoration was a deliberate reference to Christianity and its history, as it will be shown later in this work.

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[9] The term "Gothic" applied first to a type of Medieval script by Humanists in the 15th century and later its use was extended to arts produced between the second half of 12th c. and the beginning of the 16th c. in Europe and between the 13th century and the first decades of 15th century in Italy. Lately art historians have felt the need for a critical review of historiography, as suggested by the seminal studies of Hans Belting, such as "*Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?*" published in Munich in 1983, which he took back in 1995 in his "*Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte. Eine Revision nach zehn Jahren*".

A fairly widespread phenomenon that can be noted in the use of encrypted Latin inscriptions concerns the ones whose appearance looks like Arabic or Hebrew, but that in reality hide encrypted and disguised Latin words. This characteristic feature has hitherto been overlooked by most of art historians and linguistics experts apart from rare cases such as the Saint Magdalen Altarpiece in Tiefenbronn.[10]

These artists were most probably unaware of the meaning of the inscriptions they were copying. This type of epigraphic decoration requires, in fact, an imaginative development of alphabetic signs when copying.

This assumption is the starting point for our search for a prototype. However, the process of transferring the decorative pattern from one medium to another one cannot be considered sheer copying, as its passage from a cultural context to another one changes its own function. In other words, when we find Arabic inscriptions in Western arts, they are used for a purpose that is internal to the cultural context that produced it and does not correspond to the role it played in Islamic culture, so such inscriptions should be understood from a Christian-Occidental viewpoint.

Since the appearance of the phenomenon, the inscriptions gradually lose their imitative intent and evolved towards a reinterpretation of the epigraphic decorations. The imitative phase can be understood as a response to the Western perception of the East as a source of exoticism and magnificence. The splendour attributed to holy personages mirrors the devotion for these *exempla* of Christian faith. This act of homage might suggest a continuity in the medieval world view but, at a closer look, the choice of the Semitic languages as well as the writing style could be representative of the refined cultural framework of Humanism.[11]

In this cultural climate, the search for new script typefaces led to the study of ancient writings, and basically Semitic writings. This field was previously

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10   M. Köhler, *St. Maria Magdalena Tiefenbronn*, Lindenberg 1998; See also W. Boeck, *Lucas Moser, Der Magdalenenaltar in Tiefenbronn* (Werkmonographien zur bildenden Kunst; Nr. 124), Stuttgart 1971.
11   R. A. Jairazbhoy, "The Decorative Use of Arabic Lettering in the West", in *Oriental Influences in Western Art*, London 1965. M. Barasch, "Some Oriental Pseudo-inscriptions in Renaissance Art", *Visible Language* 23, 1989, pp. 171–187.

confined to the clergy, but soon became the interest of scholars, artists and savants of the Renaissance period. As for the Arabic writing styles, even when they are actually mock inscriptions, they are of divergent types and differ from the basic definition of Kufic "pseudo-inscriptions".

If it is true that generally speaking the use of inscriptions for ornamental purposes favoured their iconic value against their communicative function, *a fortiori* in their transfer from one medium to another or simply from an object to a subsequent copy, the inscriptions which were often copied, carved, woven or painted by non-Arabic speakers, gradually lost their readability. While in some cases we are able to decode the *ductus* of the letters, as well as the writing styles, in many other cases the letters are so degraded that they will only be readable when the whole process of degradation can be established.

In this research, the use of Arabic characters in Italian art has been investigated and analysed by studying several paintings from the period between the late twelfth and the mid-sixteenth centuries. Those epigraphic patterns were then compared with objects which had come to Europe as imports from the Islamic world and, since then, located in churches and other collections.

The main part of the work, which deals with the reading of the inscriptions in several Italian paintings, is illustrated with 361 images from 114 plates. It is arranged in chronological order: the material is presented in four sections, one for each century[12]. In each section, after a few introductory remarks on the painting of the related period, the substantial core of the analysis, namely the deciphering, follows; the readings are often justified by comparing inscriptions found on other objects. Some results of this work will sharply contrast with what was exposed in earlier studies.

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[12]   The choice of analysing the phenomenon diachronically lay on the presumption that a possible detection of transfer of a given pattern from an artist/an artistic school to the following one might be better understood.

Annotated bibliography and state of art. Open questions

In European works of art, the presence of strokes resembling Arabic letters that cannot be read since they are supposed to be merely ornamental has been reported since the nineteenth century; most scholars labelled anything they were not able to interpret as "pseudo-inscription", without making a difference within the different patterns they met. In this section, we will present a brief but thorough history of the field studies connected to the question of inscription readability.

The first scholar to deal with pseudo-inscriptions, or rather the use of Arabic characters for ornamentation, especially in a Western context, was Adrien de Longpérier in 1846, who spoke of "*mode des bordures orientales*"[13]. First of all, he analysed Arabic inscriptions in France, and then expanded his study to those located in the rest of Europe.

Ten years later, in 1856, Owen Jones published *The Grammar of Ornament*[14], one hundred and ten tables prefaced by a text dealing mainly with ornamental styles, with a clear focus on the Islamic lands, among which we can detect *alif* and *lām* graphemes in different shapes. They were considered by the author to be the model from which many of the decorations found in Islamic and western territories are derived. In a 1877 Henri Lavoix's article titled *De l'Ornementation Arabe dans les oeuvres des maîtres Italiens* concerned the 1423 painting *Adorazione dei Magi* by Gentile da Fabriano;[15] there he observes odd-looking letters on the gold halo on the head of the Virgin Mary, which bring to mind Arabic letters, especially the *alif-lām* sequence.

In 1910, Archibald H. Christie[16] stated that what appears on medieval fabrics of Arabic manufacturing origin is already a transformation of the original text

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[13]   A. de Longpérier, "De l'emploi des caractères arabes. L'ornamentation chez peuples chrétiens de l'occident", *Revue Archeologique* II (1846), pp. 696-706.

[14]   O. Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, London 1856.

[15]   H. Lavoix, "De l'Ornementation Arabe dans les oeuvres des maîtres Italiens", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 16/19, 2e période, Paris 1878, pp. 15–29.

[16]   A. H. Christie, *Traditional methods of pattern designing: an introduction to the study of decorative art*, Oxford 1910.

due to the technical requirements of weaving processes, as well as the need for harmony and balance in the design. In his 1924 book *Les influences orientales dans la peinture toscane*[17], Soulier communicates the need to clarify the use of the term "Kufic", which the French scholar warns to be improperly used as a blanket expression to identify a composition made up of Arabic letters.

One of the first scholars to raise the possibility of giving a meaning to the sequence of Arabic letters that are not clearly recognizable, without however demonstrating the ground on which he laid his thesis, was Eustache de Lorey in 1938.[18] In his opinion, all the patterns could be explained as the abbreviations of the words *Allāh* and *baraka* (blessing), in a deformed shape due to the illiteracy of the craftsman, who was however aware that he was gaining the blessing of God simply by copying the script.

In 1941 Marquet de Vassellot proposed the theory that the *alif-lām* ligature was reworked into an ornamental form in Europe.[19] A few years later, in 1949, Ernst Kühnel wrote a treatise titled *Die Arabeske*[20] in which, in addition to dealing with the issue of Islamic decoration in general, he states, refuting de Vassellot's argument, that the ornament made up of the Arabic letters was created in the Middle East.

In 1953 Kurt Erdmann[21] compiled a catalogue of decorations with Arabic lettering present in Western art of the Middle Ages, proposing and comparing 145 specimens from France, Germany, England and Italy, including some which had earlier been reported by other scholars such as de Vassellot and Longpérier.

In 1964 another important contribution to the subject was given by George Carpenter Miles[22] and concerned the relations between Byzantium and the Arabs at a very early age.

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17   G. Soulier, *Les influences orientales dans la peinture toscane*, Paris 1925.
18   E. de Lorey, "Peinture musulmane ou peinture iranienne", *RAA*, XII :1, Paris 1938, pp. 20-31.
19   J. J. Marquet de Vasselot, *Les crosses limousines du XIIIe siècle*, Paris 1941.
20   E. Kühnel, *Die Arabeske: Sinn und Wandlung eines Ornaments*, Wiesbaden 1949.
21   K. Erdmann, *Arabische Schriftzeichen als Ornamente in der abendländischen Kunst des Mittelalters*. Mainz/Wiesbaden 1953, pp.47–49.
22   G. Carpenter Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area", *DOP* 18 (1964), pp 3-32.

If such epigraphic patterns had been considered hitherto the whimsical inventions made by western artists and craftsmen, it was thanks to Don Aanavi[23] that such inscriptions that were previously deemed meaningless were now considered "text" that would be possibly interpreted by "experts" as well-wishing expressions. He was indeed the first to open the door to the possibility that western artists had copied real Arabic texts.

In 1968 Rudolf Sellheim published an article titled *Die Madonna mit der Schahāda*[24], in which he, based on Kurt Erdmann's collection of medieval ornamentation inspired by Islam, established a "*Ganzheitsmethode*" that allowed an interpretation of the *shahāda* that was applied to the halo of the Madonna of the triptych of San Giovenale by Masaccio (1422)[25].

In 1972 Martin Forstner[26], following the method developed by Sellheim, identified the *shahāda* in the works of Gentile da Fabriano from before 1410. In particular, although he admitted that the quality of the depicted script often made the letters difficult to identify, Forstner acknowledged the profession of Islamic faith in the haloes of Gentile's Madonnas. On a closer inspection, the presumed profession of Islamic faith seems to consist in a series of oblong-shaped signs similar to the repetition of the ligatures *alif-lām*.

The repetition in sequence of these two Arabic letters was defined in 1976 by Richard Ettinghausen as a "high-short-high syndrome"[27]. Thanks to the study material left by George C. Miles, the German-American art historian concluded that occurrences in Latin and Byzantine contexts could be traced to the same source, in other words the Muslim East. The scholar fully supported Erdmann's thesis, as de Lorey and Don Aanavi already did, which holds that the letters *alif-lām* are an abbreviation of the word *Allāh*. This hypothesis, which has up to now remained unchallenged, was rebutted by Ettinghausen. He compared these accounts with the table developed by Erdmann, including

[23]   D. Aanavi, "Devotional Writing: "Pseudoinscriptions" in Islamic Art", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, xxvi, May 1968, pp. 353-358.

[24]   R. Sellheim, *Die Madonna mit der Schahada,* Leiden 1968.

[25]   C. Caneva, *Masaccio: il trittico di San Giovenale e il primo '400 fiorentino*, Milano 2001, p.215.

[26]   M. Forstner, "Zur Madonna mit der Šahāda", *ZDMG* 122 (1972) pp.102-107.

[27]   R. Ettinghausen, "The Decorative Arts and Painting: Their Character and Scope", and "The Impact of Muslim Decorative Arts and Painting on the Arts of Europe", in *The Legacy of Islam,* Oxford 1974, pp. 274-291, pp.292-300.

the various developments that this word underwent on portable objects manufactured in Europe, and reached the conclusion that its basic features can be found both in Islamic and European territories, and in particular, in Byzantine Greece.

Apart from Ettinghausen and other few exceptions[28], most of the research works were limited to asserting the presence of Arabic inscriptions on medieval and Renaissance European artworks, without venturing any attempt to read these inscriptions.

This attitude towards the phenomenon of "pseudo-inscriptions" is still present in many contemporary works, where the mainstream prefers to linger in a sort of comfort zone offered by the well-established stand of considering the ornamental writing as an arabesque without allowing further investigations. A seminal study was published by Sylvia Auld under the title *Kuficising Inscriptions in the Work of Gentile da Fabriano*, where the scholar carried out a detailed study of the historical and economical background of 15th century-Florence and Gentile da Fabriano's paintings dated from 1420 to 1426, a period in which Latin inscriptions are dropped in favour of "Kuficising" script. Auld realized that such a script was a copy of a real inscription as she says: "None of the inscriptions is legible but all are close enough to Kufic to show that Gentile's intention was to show "real" Arabic writing[29].

In 1991, Maria Vittoria Fontana published *Un itinerario italiano sulle tracce dello pseudo-cufico*[30], a collection of ornamental patterns based on Arabic letters found in central and southern Italy, Sicily included, drawn from previous publications. The author provides an easy tool to compare the patterns available in Italy. This was at the basis of a further work, published in 1999 where Fontana developed the idea of Byzantine mediation put forth by Miles and Ettinghausen as a probable answer to the presence of Arabic lettering in

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[28]   See M, Belghagi, Die Rezeption islamischer Kufimotive in der abendländischen Kunst vom 11. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert, Tehran 1988.
[29]   S. Auld, "Kuficising Inscriptions in the Work of Gentile da Fabriano", *Oriental Art* 32, no. 3 (1986), p. 247.
[30]   M.V. Fontana, "Un itinerario italiano sulle tracce dello pseudo-cufico", *Grafica* 10/17, 1991, pp. 67-84.

southern Italy.[31] Furthermore in 2001, dealing with the Madonna's and St John's halos in the Croce in the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence[32], Fontana confirmed that the script was made by a meaningless sequence of Arabic letters.

Following to a lecture held in 2005 at the Municipal Library of Fabriano, Vincenza Grassi published *Le iscrizioni arabe nell'opera di Gentile da Fabriano*[33], a study on the use of ornaments with Arabic lettering in Gentile's paintings. In contrast with the mainstream opinion hitherto current, alleging that Italian painters created meaningless squiggles resembling Arabic letters, whose sequence might sometimes be referred to the Islamic profession of faith, Grassi pointed out at the existence of a true Arabic inscription in Gentile's *Madonna dell'Umiltà* preserved in Pisa. In her reading of the Arabic inscription running along the embroidered textile, on which the Infant Jesus lies, as part of a Mamluk protocol, she discusses what kind of object might possibly be used as model, especially in the light of the existing similarities found in Pisanello's drawing portraying the arrival of the Byzantine Emperor John Paleologus in Ferrara in 1438, and the problems raised by the dating of the two works. Finally, the use of Latin prayers under the guises of Arabic lettering in the Virgin's halo was deemed to be a learned trick, whose ambiguity of meaning was a typical trait of Humanistic culture.

The following year[34], Grassi amended and updated part of her work, reviewing the field studies. She corroborated her identification of a Mamluk model in Gentile's work, establishing a comparison between a sign present on the Virgin's mantle In Gentile's *Incoronazione della Vergine*, preserved in The Getty Museum of Los Angeles and a 15th century-Mamluk silk fabric preserved in the LACMA. Both proved to be the abbreviation of the word: *al-*

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[31]   M.V. Fontana, "Byzantine Mediation of Epigraphic Characters of Islamic Derivation in the Wall Paintings of Some Churches in Southern Italy", in *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, London 1999.

[32]   M. V. Fontana, "I caratteri pseudo epigrafici dall'alfabeto arabo", in *Giotto. La Croce di Santa Maria Novella*, Firenze 2001, pp. 217–225.

[33]   V. Grassi, *Le iscrizioni arabe nell'opera di Gentile da Fabriano*, Napoli 2006.

[34]   V. Grassi, "Le iscrizioni arabo-islamiche nell'opera di Gentile da Fabriano", in *Intorno a Gentile da Fabriano. Nuovi studi sulla pittura tardogotica,* Atti del Convegno, Livorno 2007, pp. 33-44.

sulṭān. The graphic renderings of the study of the inscriptions in the Virgin's halos, processed by the present writer, are presented alongside the text.

 Grassi underlined that using Islamic inscriptions in Christian context, the artists not only intended to honor the Madonnas and Saints dressing them with the precious Oriental fabrics circulating in Italian courts, but using Semitic scripts they meant the very roots of Christianity in the Holy Land. In a further study[35] Grassi challenged the idea that illiterate and/or non-Arab craftsmen are the makers of inscriptions that are deemed to be illegible today and, therefore, labelled as pseudo-inscriptions, raising the problem of the significance of images in a given cultural context. She distinguished between the function of Islamic inscriptions in their own context, where although they appear in a degraded form, their meaning is unchanged, and the appearance of Islamic inscriptions in Western context where they subscribe to Renaissance cultural values. She argued that part of these signs that scholars judge illegible are abbreviations of well-known expressions that could be easily read by Arab speakers accustomed to them. A useful list of well-wishing expressions and prayers in their modified shortened forms is supplied.

In 2009 Rosamond E. Mack and Mohammed Zakariya published a two hand-study[36] that took into consideration two aspects in the analysis of the ornamental bands placed on the tunic and boot tops of Verrocchio's *David*: on the one hand Zakariya focused on the relation between such ornamental bands and legible Arabic, on the other hand Mack investigated the genesis and significance of pseudo-Arabic in Italian art. Although Zakariya noticed that the epigraphic patters were not random, and they appeared also mirrored in reverse, he attributed the latter feature to Verrocchio's choice to employ the lettering pattern, considered by the author a meaningless succession of Arabic letters, mostly made up of *alifs* and *lām*s, which resembles the expression "*li-llāh*". It is surprising that having acknowledged the occurrence of this kind of calligraphic composition in Muslim artistic tradition, only later he supposed that these signs could have been taken from real Islamic objects, perhaps

[35]   V. Grassi, "Abbreviations and Mock Inscriptions in Arabic Epigraphy", *Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta*, 215, Leuven 2013, pp. 503-522.
[36]   R. Mack, M. Zakariya, "The Pseudo-Arabic on Andrea del Verrocchio's David", *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 60, 2009, pp. 157-172.

Mamluk ceramics intended for export or fourteenth- and fifteenth century-Italian silk textiles "featuring exotic Eastern motifs"[37]. As for Mack, she outlined the developments of pseudo-inscriptions in Italian Art pointing out their occurrence in the Renaissance period; a topic investigated in depth in her learned *Bazaar to Piazza[38]*, where she analyzed the influence produced by luxury goods from the East on the development of Italian taste over three centuries. She considered how the borrowing of ornamental bands suggesting Arabic script negotiates cultural differences and showed how Islamic motifs were absorbed into Christian contexts. Nevertheless, Mack partly relays on the Italian studies by Bernardini, Curatola and Fontana, and dismisses the attempt of reading the so-called pseudo inscriptions. As a matter of fact, at p. 51 of her book she states: "The fairest term for Italian imitations that are mostly fantastic are often blended with each other elements is "pseudo-Arabic".

In 2010 Julia Bailey[39] dealing with the Kufesque carpet border design that can be termed an example of the tall-short-tall syndrome described by Ettinghausen, dismissed Bartels' hypothesis on the origin of kufesque from earlier Sasanian vegetal forms. In confirmation of this, some paintings of Shah Ardashir in manuscripts show that the inscription in the carpet borders can be read as a repeated succession of *al-mulk* without the ending *li-llāh* (Dominion belongs to God). This connection appears again on an illustrated copy of *Kalila and Dimna* produced in Tabriz in 1370-75. Bailey suggested that this inscription was used for propaganda purposes by the rulers, and the Iranian carpets from the 14th to the 16th century encode such message. As for 15th and 16th century Anatolian carpets, known as Holbein and Lotto carpets, they depart from the earlier kufesque versions and exhibit a loss of semantic and symbolic meaning that was no longer applicable in the new cultural context. Later Caucasian carpets do not have kufesque borders, although the rigid symmetry of design has resemblance to the script.

The following year a debatable article by Alexander Nagel[40] listed twenty-four individual comments on the topic of pseudo-scripts in relation to Italian

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[37]   Ivi, p. 161.
[38]   R. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600*, Berkeley 2001.
[39]   J. Bailey, "Carpets and "Kufesque"", *DAI* 31, 2010, pp.20-26.
[40]   A. Nagel, "Twenty-five notes on pseudoscript in Italian art", *RES,* 59/60, 2011, pp. 228-248.

beaux arts. First of all, he underlined the fact that these "illegible marks" are not messages able to be decoded as their aim is to be an icon of a "sacred past/script". It is not clearly stated if the expressions refer to the birth of Christendom in the East or to the sacralization of Arabic as language of God's revelation or else to both. Once that the equation "pseudo-script = ornament" is established, the fact that in its merely decorative value it escapes the patrons' control is rather obvious. An interesting observation, which the author unfortunately did not prove at all, hints at identifying the foreign lettering as the author's signature. This fact has proven true in more than an Italian painting that we are going to analyze. Although Nagel identifies Mamluk writing style in the works of Gentile in note 4, no reference is made to any precise reading and he limited himself to provide Mack's hint at the pseudo-scripts as activator of memories about the Holy Land. Most of what follows is of no help in the present debate.

In 2012, Vera Beyer and Isabelle Dolezalek analyzed the presence of Islamic motifs in different European contexts in order to investigate the cultural and social reasons behind the adaptation of these elements in medieval European art.[41] The study focuses on the perception of ornamental forms in the Tuscan cultural context and then investigates the "formal language shared by Mediterranean elites". The authors show that the actual presence of decorative forms belonging to a cultural and religious context that is alien to the European patterns cannot be confined to a generalisation that is determined by the juxtaposition of categories. Indeed, the contextualisation of these elements in a cross-cultural context suggests a "revision of the internalist assumption of autonomous cultural entities". The term "islamicate" expresses, in fact, a meaning related to reception, and not to the provenance of an object. The work presents a variety of objects, textiles, ivories and crystals that illustrate the various functions for which Islamic ornamental motifs were reused in European arts. In conclusion, the spread of these epigraphic styles outside the Arab-Islamic boundaries, or their direct ancestry, are to be considered in the authors' opinion as a direct consequence of the choice that

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[41]   V. Beyer, I. Dolezalek, "Contextualising Choices: Islamicate Elements in European Arts", *MHJ* 15/2, 2012, pp. 231-242.

artists exercised in employing this kind of ornamentation, rather than a phenomenon induced by cultural influence.

Some pages further, on the same number of *MHJ*[42], Dolezalek pores over the epigraphic decorations woven on the mantle of Roger II and William II's alb, the Norman kings of Sicily. The author takes into account the methodological approaches related to the concept of "transfer", "shared court cultures" and "comparison", providing information relating to the dynamics and to cultural relations current in the Mediterranean. As a result, the role played by Arabic inscriptions on textiles in the Norman area in comparison to that of other Mediterranean contexts seems to show the adaptation of these ornaments in twelfth century Sicily.

According to Dolezalek, the methodological approach that solely expresses the notion of "transfer" risks limiting the study of epigraphic ornamentation to formal considerations, while the comparative approach also provides an opportunity to examine the role of inscriptions in a given social context. In this regard, the alternate use of Latin and Arabic on the hem of the embroidered gown of William II would reflect the multicultural and multilingual character of Norman Sicilian society.

Starting off with the case of the ornamentation of the mantle of Roger II and, more generally, the production of Norman textile items, Dolezalek examined the implications of the "visual display of continuity in royal representation"[43] and the expression of merely political intentions. In contrast to what occurs in Sicilian private production, where continuity with the North African context may be demonstrated, the author excludes that the political function of the *ṭirāz* at the Ifrīqiyan court could have had continuity in the Norman courts. However, it seems likely that Sicilian private production could have influenced the Norman courts, also for technical reasons, which might have been the availability of skilled artisans. According to the author, the mantle of Roger II was produced by Arab craftsmen in Palermo, although the ornamentation was not necessarily imported from the contemporary Arab

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[42]   I. Dolezalek, "Fashionable Form and Tailor-made Message: Transcultural Approaches to Arabic Script on the Royal Norman Mantle and Alb", *MHJ* 15/2, 2012, pp. 243-268.
[43]   I. Dolezalek, "Textile Connections? Two Ifrīqiyan Church Treasuries in Norman Sicily and the Problem of Continuity across Political Change", *al-Masāq* 25/1, 2013, p. 92.

context. The type of Kufic, with its very simple forms, is different from contemporary Fatimid textile examples of Egypt, and is closer to Sicilian monumental epigraphy. The case of the re-importation of Arabic elements to the Norman visual idiom remains open, and there is the hope that there will be "more medium-specific studies of continuity in artistic practices".

Over the past two years, Vera-Simone Schulz has been disseminating articles themed on Arab epigraphic decorations in medieval Italian painting. A new approach was proposed in 2015, aiming at analysing the pseudo-inscriptions in a global context, rather than in an isolated manner that exclusively takes into account the function of the text.[44] Leaving aside the issue of the readability of the texts, here the author assumes that the Arabic lettering "arranged in a nonsensical order" might derive from a composite variety of decorative inscriptions or could merely be the invention of those very artists.

It is rather evident that the author underplays the value of the identification of the text and its sources, which on the contrary give plenty of information about the cultural, social and economic context where the phenomenon appeared. Due perhaps to the fact that the work of reconstruction requires specific linguistic knowledge, Vera-Simone Schulz like most art historians prefers to investigate the artistic practices, and their reuse in the Italian artistic sphere. In stating that "no matter how intriguing the cases in which 'Orientalising' lettering can indeed be deciphered are", the intent of her paper is clearly set on reconsidering the notion that pseudo-inscriptions are merely artistic manifestations, by highlighting the impact of Islamic artefacts, mainly metalworks and textiles, on Italian art, as well as investigating the interactions between image and object, placing the phenomenon in broader contexts, which are related to the concepts of materiality, transmedial and transmaterial dynamics.

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[44] V. S. Schulz, "From Letter to Line: Artistic Experiments with Pseudo-Script in Late Medieval Italian Painting, Preliminary Remarks", in *The Power of Line*, Chicago 2015, pp. 144-161.

Her recent article, dated 2016, deals with pseudo-inscriptions in the decoration of haloes in the *Madonna of San Giorgio alla Costa* by Giotto and the *San Giovenale* triptych by Masaccio.[45]

The study provides some interesting elements for the identification of the continuity, similarities, and differences of epigraphic patterns in haloes depicted in Florentine painting from 1300 to the beginning of the fifteenth century. Schulz offers extremely detailed analysis of graphic styles, how they fit into the artworks, suggesting comparisons with other Tuscan works and effective arguments concerning the reception of Islamic art objects in Italian painting. Unfortunately, the limits of her approach—which has been broadly used for years in the studies on such a topic—lies in the belief that everything that cannot be read falls automatically in the category of nonsensical lettering, and consequently should be considered mere decoration. Such a claim seems not to be consistent with the bibliography listed in the article, where interesting references to real Arabic texts derived from objects and workshop prototypes are reported.

In the same year, Hannah Baader and Ittai Weinryb describe the various issues encountered in articulating notions about the historical effectiveness of an object. Although this interesting and stimulating essay[46] does not contain any reference to Arabic inscriptions and/or pseudo-inscriptions, its critical investigation on the relationship between object and text proves to be illuminating and helpful for the understanding of the role played by the object plays, also in the case it bears an inscription. The idea that comes up is that images containing within themselves all kinds of graphic or epigraphic representations, or artefacts carry an "act" function. The function of the images and the specific qualities of the objects in a broader sense are fully investigated.

The article provides a series of examples according to which the meaning of an object goes beyond its iconographic function, where its value exceeds the

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[45] V. S. Schulz, "Intricate Letters and the Reification of Light: Prolegomena on the Pseudo-Inscribed Haloes in Giotto's Madonna di San Giorgio alla Costa and Masaccio's San Giovenale Triptych", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LVIII 2016, pp. 58-93.

[46] H. Baader, I. Weinryb, "Images at Work: On Efficacy and Historical Interpretation", *Representations* 133/1, 1 March 2016, pp. 1-19.

object itself, but its value relies on its "materiality", as well as its "mediality", that is the ways in which a text inscribes in its own language the effects produced by other media. In the case of objects and transmitted texts in a cross-cultural context, the work of art not only responds to its cultural or religious function, but to its own "materiality", as well as to the ability and will of its creator.

New contributions focusing on each individual aspect of the topic are being spread after 2005 at an increasingly fast rate on different media from the web to academic journals, but the heavy task of advancing new readings has been hitherto faced only sparingly.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

2.1 Islamicate artefacts in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance: trade, gifts and pillage

The relation between Christians and Muslims cannot be studied through a one-sided approach as within each side coexisted diversified attitudes toward the adversary, which changed according to the situation.

The social and political events as well as religious polemics were the scenes where Christians and Muslims developed the views they had of each other. On the one side, Christian West adopted the demonization of the enemy as a weapon to exorcise its fears, also because most of the people were completely unaware of what Islam was.[47] On the other side, Muslims deemed Byzantines as their true counterpart, peer in authority and culture[48], while the people of Latin West were judged to be no more than barbarians unworthy of any attention.

With the fall of the Empire most of the books of classical Antiquity got lost, but as early as the 10th century learned Europeans, mostly clergy, knew that the classics, especially the scientific works, had been translated into Arabic. Hence the need to access classical heritage through the translation from Arabic into Latin. This brought a deeper interest in and more precise knowledge of Islamic faith and culture, and it held particularly true during the *Reconquista*, by which the control over the territories that had previously fallen under Muslim authority was regained.[49] The first Latin translation of the *Qurʾān*, called *Corpus Cluniacense*[50], included the translations of historiographical,

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[47]   Cf. J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, London 1965.

[48]   Cf. H.C. Evans, "Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th-9th Century)", in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th-9th Century*, Ney York 2012, pp. 4-11.

[49]   J. F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain*, Philadelphia 2003.

[50]   M. Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad in Medieval Latin Literature: A Repertory*, Berlin 2011, pp.83-87.

religious and theological Arabic texts, with a preface by Peter the venerable, and was aimed at the refutation of Islam.

If Islam resulted to be a negative entity either as a religion or for its social and political significance, a far more important link was established between the Latin West and the Muslim world on the cultural level: strong was, in fact, the impact of Islamic culture on European learning during the Renaissance. As Christendom was not a unified front, Muslim-Christian relations did not develop in the same way in the Byzantine Orient and in Europe. Moreover, from the Muslim point of view, Byzantium was known and considered as a sort of "equal partner", while on the contrary the knowledge of Western Latin was almost completely absent.[51]

Italy was home to the Renaissance, which spread from the republic of Florence, under the patronage of the Medici family, and flourished in Rome, under the patronage of the popes.[52] From these Italian centers its cultural influence soon reached all over Italy, France, Germany, Holland and England.

Between the second and third decade of the fourteenth century, the Italian poet Petrarca opened a period of search, discovery and collection of manuscripts and works of art, contributing to the creation of the modern philological method based on the *collatio*[53], establishing "a foundation for the revival of oratory that would characterize the humanist movement in cities and courts across central and northern Italy"[54]. His passion for collection proliferated in intellectual circles, and rapidly scholars and sovereigns were mesmerized by the discovery of ancient literary materials. The humanists' work was supported by the munificence of patrons, who promoted by gifts of money and the purchase of manuscripts the new learning.

Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) founded the Medicean Library (now Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana), which was later developed by his worthy grandson,

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[51]   J. Waardenburg, *Muslim and Others: Relations in Context*, Berlin-New York 2003, pp. 151-161.

[52]   F. Somaini, "The Political Geography of Renaissance Italy", in *Courts and Courtly Arts in Renaissance Italy: Art, Culture and Politics, 1395-1530*, Milano 2011, pp.35-61.

[53]   G. Mestica, *Le Rime di Francesco Petrarca, restituite nell' ordine e nella lezione del testo originario sugli autografi col sussidio di altri codici e di stampe e corredate di varianti e note da Giovanni Mestica*, Firenze 1896.

[54]   D. Looney, "The beginnings of humanistic oratory", in *Petrarch: A critical guide to the complete works*, Chicago 2009, p. 140.

Lorenzo the Magnificient. Other famous patrons were Alfonso, king of Aragon and Naples (1396-1458), Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino (d. 1482) and popes from Nicolas V (1447-1455), who founded the present Vatican Library.

The process of search and collection went alongside an enthusiasm for the ancestors, a taste for ancient civilizations, and the idea of a literature that humanizes. The study of Latin and Greek manuscripts revealed the long-forgotten cultures of the Near East. When the collection of the Latin classics was well advanced around the middle of the 15th century, the search for Greek manuscripts led chiefly Italians to the East.[55] Also inscriptions, coins, medals and other curiosities were imported with the books.

The humanistic yearning after the original sources of the Bible and ancient treatises drew the interest of European scholars upon Semitic languages: Arabic, Hebrew, Chaldean (sic for Aramaic) and Syriac, which was believed to be the language spoken by Jesus.

The study of Semitic languages, which had been already fostered by Frederick II Hohenstaufen in the 13th century, was the requisite for biblical criticism.

Following to the Council of Vienne in 1311, Pope Clement V (1305-1314) ordered to establish chairs in Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean languages at the Universities of Paris, Bologna, Oxford and Salamanca. It is worth noting that the same pope exchanged embassies with the Mongol Ilkhan ruler Oljaitu to create a Franco-Mongol alliance against Muslims.

An earlier evidence of the teaching of Hebrew and Arabic can be found in the Dominican convents and in the higher schools conducted by Dominicans under the direction of the Spanish prior Raymond of Penyafort[56] O.P. (1175-1275).

Another paramount factor was performed by trade. The appreciation of Middle-eastern objects by the Western markets started as early as the

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[55]   C. O'Hagan, "Greek manuscripts in the 16th century", *British Library*, consulted online September 28, 2017. https://www.bl.uk/greek-manuscripts/articles/greek-manuscripts-in-the-16th-century.
[56]   I. Baghdiantz McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism, and the Ancien Regime*, Oxford 2008, p.29.

medieval period and is documented by the abundant collection of gifts preserved in the religious treasuries.[57] After an initial break of relations[58], the diplomatic exchange between Charlemagne and the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd opened a new era of mutual perception. Byzantium and especially Italy, France and Spain resumed and intensified commercial relations with the Muslim world. In particular, Italian city-states rose thanks to these commercial links from the 13th century. The maritime republics were the result of the new culture based on the commerce and exchange of knowledge with other countries outside Europe. Their commercial routes allowed the transmission of Islamic art beyond the boundaries of the western lands conquered by the Muslims. Not only Sicily and the southern Italy, but also Genoa, Lucca, Pisa, Siena, Florence and Venice became the outposts for the import of precious textiles and objects of vertu[59] thanks to the establishment of depots or warehouses for merchant in the Levant. The cultural achievement of Islamic lavish artefacts was widely accepted and admired by the West and the public displays of Islamic treasures- lustrous ceramics, illuminated manuscripts, embroidered silks, carved ivories, fine carpets and intricate scientific instruments[60]- have long been used as a powerful tool to show the rulers' power and secure their dynastic legitimacy. The exchange of gifts was of paramount importance in negotiations and alliances and its persuasive power allowed the meeting of the East and the West. Its use dates back as early as 801, when Hārūn al-Rashīd sent envoys accompanied by a series of gifts to the newly crowned Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne.[61] Amalfi and Venice were the main suppliers of textiles to Italy and western Europe. Embassies regarded Papacy as well, as is the case of the Īlkhāns, just to name one. This pattern was maintained and developed up to 1600.

The flow of luxury items brought from the Islamic world to Europe not only caused the outset of a dedicated market, but even islamicized local

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[57]   S.N. Fliegel, *Resplendent faith: liturgical treasuries of the Middle Ages*, Kent 2009.

[58]   See A.D. Beihammer, *Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen in arabischen Quellen (565-811),* Bonn 2000.

[59]   Antique objects of art collected for their beauty or artistic quality.

[60]   A. Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West,* Frankfurt am Main 1998.

[61]   D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*, London 2014.

craftsmen.[62] However, the influence of the Islamic art on the West was also mediated by the Byzantine world. A special attraction had textiles, which were among the items the most portable ones. A growing demand for silk textiles brought to the import of Tatar and Turkish cloths, which in Italian literature are called "*panni tartarici*"[63]. Tuscany, and in particular Florence and Siena, established tight links with the Mongol-controlled Persia from the 13th up to the early 15th century. Carpets became a status symbol in the 13th century, therefore they became so invasive in European paintings.[64] They were extensively used as tapestry covering the throne of the Virgin Mary in the so-called "*Maestà*" and the Anatolian carpets gained the favour of Italian Renaissance to such an extent that the expression "Lotto carpet" was coined. The name of some precious textiles bear witness instead to the trade of Venice and Genoa with the major cities of Egypt and Syria ruled by the Mamluks. The great trade routes through Damascus and across the Red Sea to South and South-Est Asia passed through Mamluk lands where a permanent diplomatic staff from Venice was base to protect Venetians' interests. Venice held a near-monopoly in the trade of glass and ceramics as well as metalworks. The production of metalworks was subject to a double flow of export and import, as Venetian merchants exported brass and copper in large quantities to metal workers in the Middle East and then imported the finished products. This fact gave rise to the debate on the so-called "Veneto-Saracenic metalwork" [65]. At first scholarship presumed that these items were created by Muslim craftsmen who had established in Venice. On the contrary, recently art historians have rejected this thesis arguing that such inlaid metalwork, that is ewers, incense burners, candlesticks and basins have been imported from the Islamic world into Europe, as the crafts guilds in Venice had a self-defence system so tightly managed that would not have allowed any foreign workers to establish themselves in the city. The presence of a European coat of arms on many of

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[62]   M.V. Fontana, "L'influence islamique sur la production de céramique à Venise et Padoue", in *Venise et l'Orient, 828 – 1797*, Paris 2006, pp.280-293.

[63]   See A. E. Wardwell, "Panni Tartarici: Eastern Islamic silks woven with gold and silver (13th and 14th centuries)", *Islamic Art 3* (1988–9), pp. 95–173.

[64]   P. Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe*, London 2012, pp. 276-279.

[65]   J. W. Allan, "Venetian-Saracenic Metalwork: The Problems of Provenance," in *Arte veneziana e arte islamica: Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica*, Venezia 1989, pp.167-184.

these items could be explained by the use of a space left blank to be filled into by the owners. During the Renaissance period, Islamic art objects were often depicted in portraits of patrons and their families, shown standing in domestic context. In addition to being a status symbol and a proof of international connections, they satisfied a new-born taste for exotic and expensive items.[66] The more and more growing demand for these luxury commodities led to the production of local imitations in Europe. This is the case of glass, for instance, as in the 13th century Venice moulded its production of decorated glass on the gilding and enamelling techniques, which had been developed in the Near East.[67] This was made possible not only by Venetian maritime trade with the Islamic world, but also because exiled Byzantine craftsmen settled in Venice. Besides using forms and decorative styles developed in the Islamic Middle East, craftsmen in Venice also turned for inspiration to narratives and motifs taken from Italy's classical past.

As for ceramics, glazed lustre pottery from al-Andalus was also imported to Europe. In Italy, tin-glazed wares, named "maiolica" after the island of Mallorca, - a key staging post on the maritime route for pottery from al-Andalus- were produced in Venice, Florence and elsewhere. Artisans made their own maiolica wares from the late 1200 onward. From Middle Eastern potters, Italian craftsmen learned a technique known as "sgraffiato"; it consists in scraping out the outer glaze to uncover the darker surface beneath.

[66]   A. Contadini, "Middle-Eastern Objects", in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, London 2006, pp.308-321.
[67]   See M. Verità, "L'influence…", in *Venise et…*, Paris 2006, pp. 276-279.

2.2 Artistic patronage in Italian Seigniorial Courts

During the Middle Ages Italy was broken up into political entities different in size and form of government. The cities of the northern and central Italy had emancipated themselves from central authorities, i.e. the emperor or the pope, and adopted forms of organization as city-states, based on a certain autonomous municipal government. They were under the rule of an individual or a dynasty. The manifestation of communal identity, as shown by recent researches, was represented by civic architecture, whose frescoes bore witness to the communal value and achievements. The landmarks of the town were the space for the display of political power, be it religious or secular. The proliferation of the system of the *commune* in the 11th and 12th centuries was undermined by the factional strife of local oligarchies, fighting for the supremacy over Italian territories.[68] This prolonged unrest brought about the end of the old city-states and their replacement with princely states. The Republics of Venice, Pisa and Genoa were able to conquer their naval empires in the Mediterranean Sea. In Lombardy, Veneto and Tuscany stable states were created at expenses of the neighbouring lordships. In the south of Italy, the kingdom of Naples was first under the Angevin Crown and after under the Aragonese one. It extended on a very large territory, although it was split into a mosaic of feudal enclaves, which were so autonomous to maintain fortifications and build state residences.[69]

The turning point in Italian politics occurred in 1395, when, following to a series of conquest in the Po plain and Tuscany, Gian Galeazzo Visconti purchased the title of Duke of Milan.[70] It was the first time that a lord of urban origin could get a sovereign title without any imperial investiture. Such a title gave full right to Galeazzo to exercise power not only over his communal territory, but he could act as a peer with other European sovereigns. Soon his behaviour was imitated by other Italian lordly dynasties: the rulers of Savoy

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[68]   O. Banti, """Civitas" e "Commune" nelle Fonti Italiane dei Secoli XI e XII", *Critica Storica,* IX, 1972, pp. 568-584.

[69]   V. Mele, F. Senatore, "Baronial Courts", in *Courts and Courtly Arts…*, Milano 2011, p. 401.

[70]   D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan (1351-1402): A Study in the Political Career of an Italian Despot*, Cambridge 1941.

(1416), the Montefeltro (1443), the Gonzaga (marquesal title in 1433; ducal title in 1535), the Este (1452-71), the Da Varano (1515), and the Medici (1532).[71]

The political stability, which followed in the third and fourth decades of the 15th century, was at the base of the flourishing of economy, art and literature. A further reinforcement of this balanced political situation was pursued through the Peace of Lodi (April 1454), as none of the conflicts that followed compromised the territorial arrangement established since then.[72]

Henceforth, the political entities that were formally recognized exceeded the number of one hundred and twenty, but only five major states consisted of many cities and territories. They were the kingdom of Naples, the Duchy of Milan, The Republics of Venice and Florence, and the Papal States. Intermediate powers were the Republics of Genoa and Siena, and the lands of the Marquises of Este. In Piedmont and Emile were based smaller Lordships, followed by city-states of different size and importance. And down the scale rural seigniories often limited to single citadels or very restricted areas.[73] This system of territorial states took place during the 14th and early 15th centuries at expenses of weaker petty states which were absorbed within the boundaries of major powers such as Milan, Florence and Venice. As for the south of Italy, the kingdom of Naples stretched over the whole continental southern area reaching the Abruzzi. In the central area, the Papal states included a number of states formally recognized by other Italian and European powers. Notwithstanding its political weakness, the Papacy, back in Italy from Avignon since 1420, claimed its monarchic authority and spiritual primacy, leading in its role of moral and political guide of the Christian world the anti-Turkish movement.

As the rule of Italian lords was built on unsteady foundations and they themselves represented a new model of sovereignty, new forms of legitimation of the power were needed. The power of such despots should be displayed not only in term of war and diplomacy, but also by celebrating the prince and his monarchic qualities. The ostentation of rich clothing, the pomp

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[71]   M. Folin, "Courts …", in Courts…, Milano 2011, p. 8.
[72]   F. C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, Baltimore and London 1973
[73]   F. Somaini, "The Political Geography of Renaissance Italy", in *Courts and Courtly Arts…*, Milano 2011, p. 40.

of the court, the magnificence of dynastic palaces and the artistic patronage were all weapons of propaganda to legitimate the lords' power. The allure emanating from the courts succeeded in bewitching even cities that had always been attached to their republican tradition such as Florence, Siena and partially Venice.

The result of this feverish life of Italian courts competing each other was the boom of architecture and arts. Different from other European countries, Italian courts did not produce a unified artistic language; as each patron required a different representation of his own authority, artistic products were deeply influenced by the cultural trends and the artistic tastes of each court.

As a consequence, the political scenario gave birth to municipal artistic paradigms.

Even when Rome and Naples hosted the most important courts in Italy and in the second half of the 15th century Florentine-Roman classicism prevailed over the Italian peninsula, various local "idioms" can be detected in the works of art of each court.[74]

Despite the process of political and administrative centralisation, which was developing during the 15th century, the revival of local literary and artistic traditions prevailed on a single unified Italian tradition, which was represented by the universal Latin. The reason for that was a new concept of knowledge, where cultural outputs were mainly intended for legitimising each local political entity, whose role was not often justified from a strict legal point of view. Given that, it appears evident that patronage was a means of self-promotion and, therefore, it was largely practised by the most prominent Italian lords[75]. Arts used to accomplish such a service by representing the courtly world as an ideal space.[76]

An exception for this was the Republic of Venice, where the division of power and the assignment of offices for a short time did not allow that power could be grasped by single personalities. Consequently, it is more appropriate to

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[74]   D.Y. Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility and Style,* New Haven 2014.
[75]   G. Lytle, S. Orgel, *Patronage in the Renaissance*, Princeton 1981.
[76]   R. Rinaldi, "Writing at Court"., in *Courts and Courtly Arts …*, Milano 2011, p. 64.

speak about "state art" than "court art". The cultural and artistic flourishing of Venice was at its heights after the doge Francesco Foscari (1454-1509) signed the Peace of Lodi on April 9, 1454 with Francesco Sforza, who at the death of the last Visconti male had took over the Duchy of Milan. The Aragonese kingdom of Naples, the Duchy of Savoy and the Marquisate of Monferrat, a branch of the Byzantine imperial family of the Palaeologues, supported Venice, while Florence, under the control of Cosimo de' Medici, and the city-states of Mantua and Genoa were allied with Milan.[77] Both parts were willing to stop war, as Venice was menaced by the Ottomans and Francesco Sforza was impatient to establish firmly his power over Milan. The terms of the agreement, which were worked out by Cosimo de' Medici, established that Venice and its allies recognized Sforza as the rightful duke of Milan and, in exchange for this, some northern territories, including Bergamo and Brescia, were granted to Venice.

Unlike the neighbouring Padua, Venice had not been influenced by the Florentine Renaissance art around the mid-fifteenth century. Its art, heavily dependent on Byzantine prototypes, whose style was resistant to change, had been sided with the new International Gothic style.[78] However, two painters, who were in turn commissioned by the Republic of Venice, contributed to the erosion of the Venetian Gothic style: Jacopo Bellini and Antonio Vivarini.[79]

An example of the state art of the Most Serene Republic is given by the Doge's Palace, a portion of which was rebuilt so that could host the gatherings of the Great Council. This last was the most important of the political body of the Republic, which included all the Venetian patricians aged over twenty-five; these members were charged to control over the State authorities, so that the latter could not exceed in the use of their powers. The Hall of the Great Council was decorated by Pisanello and Gentile da Fabriano with an important cycle of late Gothic frescoes. Under doge Niccolò Marcello (1473-74) Jacopo and Giovanni Bellini were appointed to redecorate the Hall, but again the withering of the frescoes made the painters lean to paint on canvas. This

[77]   See G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, New York 1988, pp.71-79.
[78]   R. Longhi, *Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura veneziana*, Firenze 1946.
[79]   A. Galansino, "The Venetian Republic: The Doges 1454-1509", in Courts and Courtly Arts …, Milano 2011, p. 142.

happened during the temporary peace agreement reached between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, when Gentile Bellini was sent as an envoy of the Venetian state to Sultan Mehmet II's (1432-1481) court at Constantinople to work for him. Afterwards, both Vivarini and Carpaccio were appointed to work on this Venetian cycle.[80]

If Giovanni Bellini had been considered the official painter of the Venetian Republic (*Pictor Nostri Domini*)[81], the painter and medallist Antonio Pisano, best known as Pisanello, was the artist that worked for the Gonzaga's court in Mantua, where late Gothic culture outlived up to the first years of 1480s.[82] Mantua was a centre of the humanist culture, which was linked with the Neoplatonic symbolism between the late 15th century and the early 16th century. Many were the artists who worked at the court, from Leonardo da Vinci to Giovanni Bellini, but it was thanks to artists such as Costa, Dosso Dossi and Correggio that the modern manner was introduced.[83] This happened in 1524, when Giulio Romano established in Mantua.[84]

Another important Italian family was the House of Este. Alberto was appointed papal vicar in Ferrara, which was a papal fief, by Pope Boniface IX. This family put into practice what Italian literati theorized about the concept of grandeur or *magnificentia*. The pomp and the munificence were once again a means of propaganda and of preservation of the family's power.[85]

With the reign of Niccolò III (1393-1441), the Este family gained by means of diplomacy an influential role in Italian politics. As a matter of fact, the duke established his role of maintaining the balance in the political and military contests in the Italian peninsula and in the meanwhile extended his domains. His reputation gave reason for the designation of Ferrara to host in 1438 an ecumenical council that represented an attempt to bring together the Eastern and Western Churches in view of a new crusade against the Turks.[86] The Byzantine Emperor John VII Palaeologus, Pope Eugenius IV, the Patriarch of

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[80]   Ivi, p. 148.

[81]   O. Bätschmann, *Giovanni Bellini,* London 2008, p. 24.

[82]   V. Posio, *Pisanello e l'arte delle armature nel Rinascimento*, Mantova 1996.

[83]   B. Berenson, *The study and criticism of Italian art*, London 1903, pp. 39-45.

[84]   G.Pasetti, *Giulio Romano. Genio e Invenzione*, Mantova 2008

[85]   M. Toffanello, "Ferrara: The Este Family (1393-1535)", in *Courts and Courtly Arts…*, Milano 2011, p. 182.

[86]   J. Gill, *Il Concilio di Firenze*, Firenze 1967.

Constantinople Joseph II were accompanied by artists such as Leon Battista Alberti and Pisanello. Having proved a failure, the council was moved to Florence.[87]

Niccolò's chosen successor, his illegitimate son Leonello, made Ferrara a lively centre of culture and art and his court was attended by the major painters and architects, and humanist scholars gravitating around the humanist Guarino Veronese. Pisanello worked at Leonello's medals[88] searching his models in Roman antiquity. Leonello owned a rich library and a reliquary as for a Renaissance prince the possession and displaying of relics, objects and arms was not only an exhibition of religious devotion, but it assumed the same symbolic value of that played by the *pignora imperii* (the pledges of rule) in the Ancient Rome, that is the relics were supposed to guarantee the continuity of rule.[89] The interest and the search for models in antiquity were distinct features of the humanistic culture of that time.

In Rimini, Sigismondo Malatesta's court was among the most important for artistic patronage. Named after him was the *Tempio Malatestiano*, a mausoleum where highly regarded artists like Piero della Francesca and Filippo Lippi worked.[90]

Patronising the art was an activity practised widely by the Medici lords in Florence and we can state that Italian Renaissance art would not have been what it is if such a family had not existed. Lots of artists worked at their court. Among the most famous artists are Gentile da Fabriano, who was called by Cosimo de' Medici, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Filippo Lippi, and Michelozzo.

Cosimo made a valuable contribution to the expansion of the library through the purchase of Greek and Latin manuscripts. It was at the base of the Laurentian library built by Michelangelo, a public library emphasizing that the Medici lords were no longer bankers or mere merchants, but members of the refined elite of the day. The same concept was conveyed by the presence

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[87] G. Alberigo, *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438/9-1989*, Leuven 1991.
[88] R. B. Waddington, "Pisanello's paragoni" in *Perspectives on the Renaissance Medal: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance*, Abingdon 1999, pp. 27-45.
[89] Cf. C. Mosca, G. Scandone, S. Gambacurta, M. Valentini, *I servizi di informazione e il segreto di Stato,* Milano 2008, p.465.
[90] M. Campigli, "Emilia-Romagna", in *Courts and Courtly Arts …*, Milano 2011, pp. 270-273

of Marsilio Ficino, one of the most influential humanist philosophers of Italian Renaissance, at Cosimo's court. Under the rule of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the collection of manuscripts was enlarged as well as that of gems and precious objects.[91] Lorenzo also founded an academy, the so-called school of San Marco, named after the piazza by which stood the building where young artists and patricians met to admire Lorenzo's collection.

Renaissance artists were eager to draw inspiration from both Classical and medieval sources, be they literary or archaeological ones. The history of the Medici family crosses more than once that of papacy, as it gave birth to four popes: Pope Leo X, Pope Clement VII, Pope Pius IV and Pope Leo XI.

A Tuscan town hostile to Florence was Lucca, where Paolo Guinigi, vicar of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg, ruled from 1400 to 1413.[92] Some inventories deal with Paolo's treasure consisting in jewels, goldwork, lavish fabrics and other luxury items. He also owned an extensive library with Latin classics and medieval manuscripts around which many scholars gathered. The presence of transalpine artists at the Guinigi court favoured the engraftment of the International Gothic style. It was Lorenzo Trenta, Guinigi's councillor, who was fond of Franco-Flemish art and, having appreciated the developments of Gothic art during his frequent travels to Paris and Bruges. He commissioned the illumination of a missal still extant in Lucca. Two important masters worked in the town: Gherardo Starnina, who introduced the new International Gothic style in Tuscany[93], and Jacopo della Quercia.

The city of Siena, which had been a self-governing commune in the 12th century, was in permanent conflict with the neighbouring Florence. Having peaked up as a banking centre in the 13th century, the city went through two centuries of political instability and warfare, which included the surrender of Siena to the hands of Giangaleazzo Visconti up to 1404.[94] A new system of government was adopted, that is the *balia*, a sort of executive that developed

[91]   F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo De' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*, Baltimore 2004, p.145.
[92]   C. Altavista, *Lucca e Paolo Guinigi (1400–1430), la costruzione di una corte rinascimentale. Città, architettura, arte*, Pisa 2007.
[93]   G. Fattorini, "Tuscany", in *Courts and Courtly Arts …*, Milano 2011, p. 252.
[94]   J.M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, Oxford 2006.

in a permanent magistracy. This marked the end of the republican system of the "monti" or "ordini". During the pontificate of Pius II (1458-1463), Siena was a papal dependency. In 1487, Pandolfo Petrucci,[95] an exiled aristocrat seized the power and, although he established a seigniory, he never assumed the title of lord, but ruled as a member of the *balia* and acted as a chairman of the coalitions governing Siena. The "signoria of the Petrucci" was a tyrannical regime and was torn by French and Spanish invasions. In spite of this political uncertainty, the city enjoyed a period of cultural prosperity and it was the home of many humanist intellectuals and artists. The leading families competed in building lavish homes and collecting antiquities. An example of this is given by the Camera Bella in the Petrucci Palace in Siena's via dei Pellegrini, the most decorated room in the palace, which contained Greek and Latin inscriptions. The purpose for the decoration was to celebrate the Petrucci dynastic legacy; it also accounts for the refined antiquarian taste of the owner and his entourage. The style of the room has been deeply influenced by Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome. Furthermore, a new ordering of the tile decoration of the floor has disclosed that it echoes Islamic geometric designs based on the star and cross patterns. A decorative pattern that is to be found on Islamic objects and buildings from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries and that, in the Petrucci floor, seems to be associated with the elite culture in Siena.[96]

The Montefeltro family played a key role in bringing the papacy back from Avignone to Rome and in strengthening the Pope's temporal power. All the same, Federico da Montefeltro, a valiant, cultivated prince who patronized arts, was excommunicated by Pope Eugenius IV for his purchase of the town of Fossombrone without the Pope's consent.[97] But, when the next Pope Nicholas V pardoned him, Federico acknowledged the ruling power of Church. Being often absent from court, he could not compete in magnificence with other Italian lords. Even so, thanks to his good relationships with Florence, many Florentine artists went to Urbino to work. At the Urbino court

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[95] C. Shaw, *L'ascesa al potere di Pandolfo Petrucci il Magnifico, signore di Siena (1487-1500)*, Siena 2001.
[96] E. Miller, A. Graves, "Rethinking the Petrucci pavement", in *Re-thinking Renaissance Objects: Design, Function and Meaning*, Oxford 2011, pp. 94-118.
[97] B. Roeck, A. Tönnesmann, *Federico da Montefeltro. Arte, stato e mestiere delle ar*mi, Torino 2009.

an unparalleled fusion of humanist culture, art and mathematics took place and the library, containing about nine hundred codices among Latin, vernacular, Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew ones, was a key factor in the meetings of intellectuals and scholars. The source of such codices were the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci and Lorenzo de' Medici.[98]

The small courts in the Apennines had close relationships with the papal power and enjoyed less independence than the courts we have dealt with so far. One of their peculiar features was that the noble families were closely connected with the urban merchant class.

This fact explains why their emissaries often played both political and commercial roles.

The town of Camerino, in the heart of Marche, became a significant centre of culture and art thanks to the Da Varano family, who in the late 13th century formed a three-century fiefdom. In 1460, Giulio Cesare da Varano built a Ducal Palace, which was one of the most outstanding Renaissance buildings of the time.[99]

The court painter was Giovanni Angelo d'Antonio da Bolognola, a frequent traveller to Medici's Florence, [100] who was active in Camerino. The Da Varano court attracted artists and scholars from across Italy and lately Italian art critics have re-evaluated the role of the Camerino School of painting, as it had original traits reflecting his patrons. In imitation of the Malatesta and Montefeltro families, the policy followed by the De Varano family was based on the promotion of local artists who were sent to master the arts to the Italian most prominent centres such as Florence and Padua, and later Rome, where they tightened political and commercial ties. As a matter of fact, the family had invested in manufacturing activities. Lots of great merchants rose in

[98]   F. P. Fiore, "Urbino: The Montefeltro and Della Rovere Families (1444-1538) in *Courts and Courtly Arts…*, Milano 2011, p. 300.

[99]   S. Corradini, *Il palazzo di Giulio Cesare Varano e l'architetto Baccio Pontelli*, Macerata 1969.

[100]   K. Christiansen, From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Camevde and the Making of a Renaissance Master, New York 2005, p.283.

Camerino, such Paoluccio di Maestro Paolo, who was the agent for Francesco Datini from Prato, an owner of warehouses in Venice and Ancona.[101]

One of the De Varanos' allies was the Trinci family from Foligno, whose residence includes paintings by Gentile da Fabriano[102]. This latter worked from 1414 to 1419 for Pandolfo III Malatesta[103], lord of Brescia, but did not tie to any court in particular for he worked in Milan as well as for the Venetian Republic. It was the lord of Fabriano, Chiavello Chiavelli, who sent Gentile to train in the North, perhaps in Pavia.[104]

Although the popes became the main patrons of the arts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some contributions were given even in the earlier century. Nicholas V founded the Vatican library,[105] employing scholars and copyists to provide the basis for the great collection of manuscripts. A group of artists was summoned by the Pope Sixtus IV to paint the Sistine Chapel. Pope Julius II was the greatest patron of arts, who commissioned work from Michelangelo and Raphael. It was under his rule that Bramante laid the foundation of the new St Peter's Basilica.

While humanist scholars raised doubts about the temporal power of the Church, the intellectuals flocking at the popes' court considered it as a heritage which deserved to be preserved and legitimated. There scholars and artists competed for glory producing masterpieces of painting, sculpture and architecture and thus showing to the world the glory of new-born Rome and its papacy.

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[101]   E. Di Stefano, "Un profilo economico: i mercanti e le arti", in Il *Quattrocento a Camerino. Luce e prospettiva nel cuore della Marca*, Catalogo della mostra (Camerino 2002), Milano 2002, pp. 46-50.
[102]   F. Marcelli, *Gentile Da Fabriano*, Milano 2005, p.123.
[103]   A. Galli, "Presenze veneziane a Brescia nel Quattrocento", *in La pittura e la miniatura del Quattrocento a Brescia*, Milano 2001, p.65.
[104]   A. De Marchi, *Gentile da Fabriano*, Milano 1992, p.11.
[105]   J. E. Sandys, "The printing of the classics in Italy", in *Reader in the history of books and printing*, Englewood 1978, pp.284-285.

Repertoire of inscriptions

3.1 Early period

3.1.1 Introduction

The art historian Gustave Soulier wrote about the spread of pseudo-Kufic writing in Italian art : "*on sait comment l'exemple des caractères coufiques devait aisément et rapidement se répandre en Europe, car il s'introduit avec des objets de petite dimension ou aisément transportables […] qui, dans le commerce de luxe si actif déjà au moyen âge, composaient tout le déballage des marchands orientaux*".[106] According to Soulier, whether its introduction in the markets and in Western cultural gatherings appears to be an obvious consequence of particularly active trade throughout the Middle Ages between the north and southeast basins of the Mediterranean, the affirmation of such evidence in European taste and, especially, in Italy, would be attributed to the peculiar characteristics of Islamic epigraphic ornamentation, expressing a "flexible and inexhaustible[107]" decorative style, lush creative richness and easy adaptation to different media and with different artistic techniques.

Alessandra Bagnera claims that intense trade relations between Pisa and Egypt have been recorded since the first half of the twelfth century[108], while the presence of Sassanid and Persian fabrics has been documented in Italy since the tenth century.[109] Throughout the Middle Ages, large parts of the production of textiles, ceramics and metals decorated with epigraphic ornaments were imported and therefore it was realized that they originated

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[106]   G. Soulier, *Les influences orientales dans la peinture toscane*, Paris 1924, p. 186.
[107]   G. Soulier, *Les influences orientales…*, Paris 1924, p. 2.
[108]   Trade relationship between Pisa and North African countries dated back earlier than XI century. An evidence of this is provided by the presence of 11th century ceramic basins from Egypt. See G. Berti, L. Tongiorgi, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa*, Roma 1981, pp. 19-20 24-25 40-41.
[109]   A. Bagnera, "Tessuti islamici nella pittura medievale toscana", *Islam, Storia e Civiltà*, XXV, 1988, pp.251-265. – Cf. also K.-H. Allmendinger, *Die Beziehungen zwischen der Kommune Pisa und Ägypten im Hohen Mittelalter. Eine rechts- und wirtschaftstheoretische Untersuchung, Vierteljahresschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte. Beihefte* 54, Wiesbaden 1967.

from Muslim workers. Nevertheless, artefacts from local production centres that were manufactured since the early twelfth century testify the gradual integration of Arab elements in the local handicraft. The insertion of decorative elements inspired by the Arabic alphabet appears to be particularly an art feature in Italian paintings the use of which is reflected since the twelfth century in several frescoes in the churches of the Peninsula.[110]

According to Soulier[111], the first example of copy of pseudo-Arabic writings in Italian paintings can be credited to Deodato Orlandi. In 1275, the Tuscan painter created a cycle of paintings devoted to the life of Saints Peter and Paul in the church of San Piero in Grado. In the fresco of St. Peter and St. Paul's burial the saints' bodies are wrapped in shrouds woven with oriental fabrics and decorated with cursive Arabic pseudo-inscriptions; in the 'Vision of Constantine' the epigraphic bands stand out on the curtains and along the edges of the fabrics that cover the bed. As stated by Tanaka, a scholar who identifies the use of Mongols *Phags-pha* characters in Giotto's ornamental inscriptions, the Orlandi's frescoes date around the first decade of the fourteenth century[112]. On the basis of such dating the Japanese art historian identifies the first example of pseudo-inscription in Arabic characters documented in Italian paintings in the crucifix kept at the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, by an unknown artist that he ascribes to the thirteenth century. Alessandra Bagnera argues, instead, that the Crucifix of San Domenico in Arezzo, painted between 1265 and 1268 by Cimabue, is the first Florentine work in which depicted fabrics have an ornamentation of epigraphic bands in pseudo- Arab characters.

Undoubtedly it is difficult to identify the first evidence of pseudo-Arabic inscription in Italian paintings, since the dating of medieval works, especially

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[110]   M.V. Fontana, "L'influsso dell'arte Islamica in Italia", in *Eredità dell'Islam – Arte Islamica in Italia*, Venezia 1993, pp. 455-498.

[111]   G. Soulier, *Les influences*… p.188 : "Il semble bien que les exemples les plus anciens que nous possédions soient, vers 1275 ou peu après, les fresques attribuées à Deodato Orlandi dans la vieille église de S. Pietro a Grado, près de Pise […] C'est ainsi que dans le diverses scènes qui relatent la Sépulture de Saint Pierre et de Saint Paul, nous pouvons voir les corps des saints enveloppés de linceuls faits d'étoffes orientales, à rayures, ornées d'inscriptions cursives. Il en est de même, dans la Vision de Constantin, de la tenture suspendue derrière le lit de l'Empereur, et la bordure de la draperie qui recouvre le lit semble aussi composée de caractères arabes déformés".

[112]   H. Tanaka, "Oriental Scripts in the paintings of Giotto's period", *Gazette des Beaux Arts*,113, 1989, pp.214-226.

those made by unknown artists, is often inaccurate. The very presence of inscriptions or pseudo-inscriptions in a painting may not be commonly agreed upon. In several cases, either the conservation status or the type of decoration used may not allow a proper distinction between a simple composition inspired by abstract, geometric or vegetal motifs and an epigraphic decoration. The *Madonna with Child*, by an anonymous artist of Pisa coming from the Chiesa di Santa Chiara, preserved at the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa and dated between the 12th and 13th centuries[113], is an example. On the frame, an ornamentation that may resemble modular pseudo-inscriptions appears consisting of "a sequence of peacocks facing a stylized palm, according to a motif widespread in Islamic and Byzantine textile art"[114]; we could go back to the original drawing showing that the hooks enclosing the shaft in sequence were winged figures (fig.1).

The *Crucifix*, made by an unknown artist and preserved in the National Museum of Pisa, proposed by Tanaka as the first example of Arabic epigraphic decoration, is among the most convincing.[115] However, the frescoes of the rock churches of Apulia and Basilicata that contain epigraphic ornamentation in Arabic characters belong to the same period.[116]

In contrast with the dating of the *Crucifix* to the early thirteenth century suggested by the Japanese scholar, we would attribute it to the late twelfth century, as reported in recent literature.[117] In this regard, some convincing observations on the influence of Fatimid fabrics in the epigraphic

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[113]   M. Bacci, "Pisa Bizantina: Alle origini del culto delle icone in Toscana", in *Intorno al Sacro Volto. Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (secoli XI-XIV)*, Venezia 2007, p.144.
[114]   Ibid.
[115]   H. Tanaka, "Oriental …", *Gazette…*, 1989, p 214. "I would like to remark also that the first representation of Arabic-like letters had already appeared in the Crucifix in the Museo Nazionale di Pisa, which could be dated to the first half of the XIIIth century. These apparently kufic characters but cannot be read. I do not know why these were written on the edge of the footing board […]".
[116]   See S. Pedone-V. Cantone, "The pseudo-Kufic ornament and the problem of cross-cultural relationship between Byzantium and Islam", *Opuscola Historiae Artium,* 13, Supplementum 62 (2013), pp. 120-137; see also M.V. Fontana, "Un itinerario italiano …", *Grafica*, p. 67; M.V. Fontana, "Kufic Ornamental Motifs in the Wall Paintings of Six Churches in Southern Italy", *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 21, is. 12/2 (2016), pp. 56-73.
[117]   M.Bacci, A. Caleca,"Cruz pintada de la iglesia del Santo Sepolcro de Pisa", *in El romanico y el Mediterráneo: Cataluña, Toulouse y Pisa, 1120–1180*, Barcelona 2008, pp. 396–399.

ornamentation of the crucifix have been recently advanced by Vera-Simone Schulz.[118]

A relevant detail is that the oldest works decorated with epigraphic ornaments inspired by the Arabic alphabet in Tuscany are mainly of Pisan origin. The growth of Pisa's economic and political power, in fact, took place mainly through the acquisition of possessions and commercial rights in the eastern Mediterranean during the period of the Crusades, and through this process, material gains like gold vestments for the Cathedral of Pisa were also achieved. In the seventeenth century, the historian Giuseppe Setaioli, in the *Historie dell'antichissima città di Pisa,* already denotes a similar observation.[119] The presence of Pisa and the other republics was not limited, of course, to supporting the Crusaders, but it also aimed to establish commercial colonies in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

The historical period we refer to is that between the end of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba and the beginning of Mamluk rule in Cairo. Decorative art items such as ceramics, *ṭirāz*, glass objects and carved crystal became widely spread through the trade with the West. This period was characterized by the flourishing of the Islamic arts, whose reflections are also found in the frescoes of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo.[120] From a strictly epigraphic point of view, the decorations that we find in works preceding those of Cimabue, already provide us with extremely valuable information[121].

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[118]   V.S. Schulz, "From Letter…", *The power*…, Munich 2015, pp. 147-149.

[119]   G. Setaioli Dal Portico, *Historie dell'antichissima città di Pisa,* consulted online on September 29, 2017. http://dante.di.unipi.it/ricerca/html/set.html: "Patriarca Pisano qual fece ritorno per allhora alla Patria stette in quel tempo l'armata Pisana quattro anni continui in quelle parti e volendo far ritorno a i patrij lidi ricordevoli di alcune ingiurie ricevute da Colajanni Imperatore di Constantinopoli risolvettero (benché da longhe fatiche indeboliti) volere andare a i danni di detto Imperatore e luoghi e scorrere fino a Costantinopoli del che intimorito mandò sei ambasciatori a chieder paci alli Pisani dalli quali benignamente fulli concessa con alcuni pochi di tributi quali dovesse detto imperatore pagare fra i quali furono cinquanta capi di paramenti per la lor Chiesa del Duomo de i quali ven'era alcuni che per la quantità dell'oro si reggevano ritti" .

[120]   J. Johns, "Iscrizioni arabe nella cappella palatina", in *La Cappella Palatina di Palermo*, Modena 2010, pp. 353-386.

[121]   Kurt Erdmann's catalogue on Arabic lettering provides several examples among which we remember for the 11th century the decoration of the manuscript of the Apocalypse of Saint Sever sur l'Adour (n. 1) and for the 12th century the wall paintings at the Cathedral of Lavaudieu (n.6), the Cathedral of Chartres (n.7), the Cloister in Niedernburg, Passau (n.12). Erdmann K., *Arabische Schriftzeichen…*, pp. 470-473.

The cross painted in the mid-twelfth century by the Roman/Tuscan artist, as we will see, contains a decoration consisting in the rendering of the word *al-mulk* probably copied from a *ṭirāz* that we will try to decipher. It might be the first evidence in Tuscan painting of an epigraphic ornamentation in Arabic inscriptions in which the signs are readable.

Around the mid-thirteenth century, Giunta Pisano added new Arab signs recognizable in its decorations: the word *baraka* and a decorative form of *al-yumn*. The *ductus* of *al-yumn* is also visible in a table by Guido da Siena, of which we will propose a comparison with a fragment of an Islamic ceramic from the site of Calatrava la Vieja.

Cimabue, the great innovator of thirteenth-century painting, also took part in the elaboration and copying of epigraphic ornamentation in Arabic characters, using the encrypted form of the name "Maria".

As will be demonstrated, Duccio di Buoninsegna proposed, at the beginning of his career, the same epigraphic decorations as can be found in Cimabue's works. In one case, the *Madonna Gualino*, the encrypted decorations of the Virgin's name and a modular composition of the high letters are so similar to those painted by Cimabue in the *Maestà* at the Louvre to suggest a possible copy. Duccio contributed to the diffusion of Arabic script using the already known signs of *al-mulk,* but added, perhaps for the first time, a degenerated composition of the word *al-sulṭān*, that was to appear in different works. Here we find isolated letters, but we can identify the ligature between the letters *tā'* and *alif* and the initial *sīn* in a pattern very close to the one that we will find again in some works of fourteenth-century artists and which will be made readable only during the Renaissance.

3.1.2 The Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries

The above-mentioned crucifix, coming from the Church of Santo Sepolcro in Pisa and now preserved at the Museum of San Matteo, shows the *Christus triumphans* surrounded by small scenes of death and resurrection, neatly arranged from the arms of the cross to the lateral boards and the *suppedaneum*, while in the *cymatium* the heavenly vision of Mary among the angels and apostles has been depicted.

The sharply contoured figures show a reiteration of faces and architectural backgrounds found in contemporary miniatures of Umbria and Latium.[122]

The epigraphic decoration is located along the edges of the octagon at Christ's feet (fig.2). It is a gold decoration in an unusual arrangement. The epigraphic elements inscribed in the frame usually follow a single line. In this case, however, an interruption on the text can be observed. The first part of the inscription starts from the top right, extends along the right side and horizontally up to the end on the left. The second part of the inscription starts from the top left and goes down along the sides, stopping on the bottom left at the same point. The inscription in Kufic characters presents high shafts bearing wedge-shaped apexes and squared letters without ornamentation, as it is the case with the Arabic alphabet. The central part of the inscription running along the base line of the octagon is deteriorated, but the rest of the composition is perfectly legible. The high letters occupy the entire length of the line; there are decorative elements on the *mīm* (fig.3).

The inscription is quite interesting because of its variety of a complex *ductus*. The composition is very similar to epigraphic decorations present on contemporary fabrics (XII-XIII century) from Islamic Spain. The *ductus* present in the inscription can be sorted into three groups (fig.4):

A. (in yellow) *mīm* between two high letters decorated with a three-lobed palmette in the middle.

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[122]   See M. Burresi, L. Carletti, C. Giacometti, *I pittori dell'oro. Alla scoperta della pittura a Pisa nel Medioevo*, Pisa 2002, p.16.

B. (black) *mīm* between two high letters with two branches departing from the middle

C. (in purple) A repetition of the signs *lām-kāf*

The ornaments belonging to group A are easily distinguishable and always reproduced in the same way. It is a very frequent type of decoration between the textiles, as documented by a *ṭirāz* coming from Bamberg Cathedral[123] (fig. 5).

The branched forms coming out from the *mīm* belong to group B. This decoration topping the letter *mīm* undergoes alterations in its different occurrences. We find it in a V-shaped form of the Arabic letter *tā'*, which is also detached from the *mīm*. This kind of decoration is particularly significant because it will spread in Italian paintings of the following centuries. But what is the origin of this decoration? It is very likely that we are dealing with inscriptions copied from *ṭirāz* with writing bands. The most common problem in the copy of the inscriptions from fabrics, for a non-Arabic-speaking craftsman, is related to the identification of the shape of the letters. Often, the non-Arabic-speaking observer cannot distinguish the line of writing from its background and can interpret as an alphabetic letter the space left blank by the writing. It follows that in our case the copy did not follow the actual course of the letters, but that of the empty spaces, making a sort of negative of the inscription. This phenomenon is well illustrated by Rosselló Bordoy in cases involving the word *al-mulk* in the epigraphic ornaments of Hispanic ceramics from the tenth- eleventh century.[124]

If we observe the image of an eleventh-century Fatimid tissue (Kevorkian Collection, Paris) with the word *al-mulk* and if we isolate the empty spaces of the Arabic text, we get a drawing similar to that of group B (fig. 6). The more recognizable element becomes just the central branches also present among the Islamic objects dating between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, as the Fatimid Egyptian ring (Metropolitan Museum in New York) and the

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[123]   M. Petzet, *Textile Grabfunde aus der Sepultur des Bamberger Domkapitels*. Internationales Kolloquium, Schloss Seehof, 22/23 April 1985, (Arbeitshefte des Bayerischen Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege, Bd. 33), München 1987, pp. 186-187.
[124]   G. Rosselló Bordoy, *Escrito en el Barro. Notas sobre Epigrafía en Cerámicas de Época Islámica*, Palma de Mallorca 2000, p. 51.

fragment of fabric coming from the Bamberg Cathedral[125] (fig. 7). In both cases, we can assume, through the analysis of the drawing, that it is an alteration of the word *al-mulk*.

Returning to the decoration of the crucifix, the ornamentation of group B would be nothing more than the negative forms of the group A. Proceeding with the comparison of the drawings, from the negative of B decoration we get, indeed, the same decoration of A (fig.8). This form copied in various epigraphic band will undergo changes, but its matrix will always be identifiable.

The signs of *kāf* and *lām* (in two cases are only reported the *kāf*) belong to the group C. In 1,2,3,4,6,9 segments there is a perfect alternation between the *lām* and *kāf* letters (in purple) and the *ductus lām-mīm -lām* (yellow and black). In segments 7 and 8 and in the left-hand part of 5 only the signs in yellow and black are repeated. The presence of high letters alternated to a *lām-mīm-lām ductus*, is very frequent in Western islamicate artefacts such as the *Arca Santa* reliquary preserved in Oviedo, dated to the late 11th century or early 12th century[126] (fig. 9).

The crucifix inscription seems to follow the same patterns as those present in the *Arca Santa* and in an enamel ciborium from Limoges known as 'Master Alpais' ciborium'[127], preserved at the Louvre (fig. 10). From the comparison of the epigraphic patterns, we can note the similarities with those that decorate both the ciborium (fig. 11), and the *Arca Santa* (fig. 12). These are recurrent signs in Arabic epigraphy, which are, however, adapted and re-inserted in Western artefacts decorations between the 10th and 13th century and later transferred to the ornamentations in the paintings.

In the specimen of the Crucifix, we face, therefore, an epigraphic decoration whose signs are still visible and from which we can derive the original Arabic

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[125]   G. Helmecke, Byzantinische und orientalische Seidenstoffe, Grabfunde aus der Sepultur der Bamberger Domherren, Bamberg 2001, p. 46-47; See also *Textile Grabfunde aus der Sepultur des Bamberger Domkapitels*. Internationales Kolloquium, Schloss Seehof, 22./23. April 1985, (Arbeitshefte des Bayerischen Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege 33), München 1987, pp. 170-171; A. Stauffer: *Die mittelalterlichen Textilien von St. Servatius in Maastricht* (Schriften der Abegg-Stiftung Bern 8), Riggisberg 1991, p. 138.
[126]   J. D. Dodds, *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200*, New York 1993, pp.124-125.
[127]   B. Drake Boem, L'Oeuvre de Limoges. Émaux limousins du Moyen Age, Paris 1995.

inscription *al-mulk*. In my opinion, this could be one of the most ancient examples of Arabic inscription, documented in Tuscan painting, that still keeps readability.

The analysis of these signs will allow us to better understand their evolution in the various artists and works of different periods.

Several frescoes in southern Italy Byzantine rock churches are decorated by Arabic epigraphic patterns[128]. The inscriptions painted on the frescoes dating around the thirteenth century and depicting the Saints James the Greatand the Apostle Peter, in the church of San Giovanni in Monterrone in Matera, have been already reported by Gabrieli[129] and more recently by Fontana[130]. Along the frame of the niche of St. Peter, the sequence of *kāfs* is visible between two high elements joined by a vertical U-shaped ligament at the bottom. This kind of epigraphic ornamentation is very often used in Byzantine painting as evidenced by the frescoes of the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Boeotia (fig. 13).

In the frame of St. James, however, appears a more complex decoration consisting of a sign and its mirror image repeated in sequence. Also, this form shows among the epigraphic decorations from the Greek monastery (fig.14 A). In both cases, it is a kind of composition occurring on jars dating from 11th and 12th centuries, such as those kept at the Palazzo della Zisa in Palermo[131] (fig. 14 B). I believe we are dealing with a degeneration of the word *al-mulk* that we can reconstruct thanks to the comparison with jars from Palermo where the Arabic simplified version is still recognizable. These cases may shed light on the role of Byzantine art in transferring the epigraphic decorations in Arabic characters through a gradual transition to the West (Greece, Sicily, Spain, France).

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[128]   M. Falla Castelfranchi, *Pittura monumentale bizantina in Puglia*, Milano 1991, pp.126-133.

[129]   G. Gabrieli, *Inventario topografico e bibliografico delle cripte eremitiche basiliane di Puglia*, Roma 1936, p.49.

[130]   M.V. Fontana, "Kufic Ornamental Motifs …", pp. 56-73.

[131]   F. Ardizzone, "Le anfore recuperate sopra le volte del palazzo della Zisa e la produzione di ceramica comune a Palermo tra la fine dell'XI e il XII secolo", *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age*, n. 111, pp. 7-50, 1999.

Among the oldest known Italian artists in whose works the presence of epigraphic ornamentations in Arabic script is testified, Giunta Pisano has to be mentioned. Born between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, he is one of the few painters prior to Cimabue to use this kind of Arabic epigraphic decoration.

The Arabic signs occur on different Crosses and reredos painted by the Tuscan artist. In the double-faced cross attributed to Giunta and dated to the mid-13th century,[132] from the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, the epigraphic decorations are visible on the *Christus patiens'* white cloth (fig. 15 A). It is a processional crucifix shaped and painted on both sides in tempera and gold on wood, coming from the Opera del Duomo in Pisa. The epigraphic ornaments are in gold in the middle of the cloth band. In the first part of the epigraphic ornamentation it is possible to recognize the strokes of the letters *bā'* and *rā'* lying on the line and followed by an angular letter that would correspond to a *kāf* and the *tā' marbūţa* which takes the shape of the *alif* (fig. 15 B.).[133] Considering this sequence, it might be read as the word *baraka*. In the reredos of *St. Francis and six miracles*, epigraphic decorations are painted in a completely different way. It is a painting in tempera and gold on wood attributed to Giunta dating around 1240[134], preserved in the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa. It was painted for the church of San Francesco in Pisa, a few decades after the canonization of St. Francis (1228). Two symmetrical angels fill the triangular spaces of the cusp. Below them, on both sides of the saint, the six scenes related to the miraculous healings stand out. The epigraphic ornamentation is present in three scenes on the upper part of the tower and in the scene of the miraculous healing of women afflicted with a fistula breast, over the entire length of the wall of the building (Fig. 16).

The pattern in black follows a modular composition, two high letters with terminations bending towards the centre are linked by a ligament surrounded

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[132]   M. Burresi, *Cimabue a Pisa: la pittura pisana del Duecento da Giunta a Giotto,* Pisa 2005, pp. 118-119.
[133]   Very frequent phenomenon seen in the inscriptions of the word *baraka* present on Iranian ceramics.
[134]   E. B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index*, Firenze 1949, pp. 19, 155. M. Boskovits, "G. Pisano: una svolta nella pittura italiana del Duecento", *Arte illustrata,* 1973, nn. 55-56, p. 344. L. Bellosi, *Cimabue*, Milano 1998, pp. 18, 30-34, 61, 116.

by an oval leaf-shaped sign. The foliated style bears leafy endings. Between the beginning and the end of each modular element, we find a high letter topped with a decorative dot. The pattern is similar to that found on the Fatimid amphora of the 11th century in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The decoration can be paralleled with a type of ornamentation present on a fragment of Egyptian *ikat* from the eleventh century preserved at the New York Metropolitan Museum.[135] However, in the last case, the terminations are simpler (fig.17). The round *ductus* with an up-raising tail is a recurring element on the 11th-12th century artefacts circulating in Europe bearing the word *al-yumn*. The decorations of the door of the Bohemond of Hauteville mausoleum in Canosa[136] and a fragment of tissue from the tomb of Bishop Otto II in Bamberg provide examples (fig.18).

A different shape of *al-yumn* is present in the *Coronation of the Virgin* preserved at the Courtauld Gallery in London (fig.19). The table, by Guido da Siena[137], was part of the Dossale di Badia Ardenga, whose panels are now preserved in five different European museums[138]. In the painting, which represents the cusp of the Dossale, two angels are placed next to two shields. In the middle of a long throne, Jesus crowns the Virgin Mary, while keeping open the book of the holy scriptures

The epigraphic element appears on the cuff of Christ: it is a decoration in gold carved in relief, which seems to recall a type of writing style used on fabrics coming from Egypt. In particular, by looking at the epigraphic ornamentation on an eleventh century cloth fragment in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, many similarities can be found (fig.20). The epigraphic pattern is characterized by the presence of curved endings on each letter. The initial *yā'* is formed by a horizontal line followed by a medial *mīm* and the *nūn* with an

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[135]   Inv. 27.170.28.

[136]   E. G. Napolitano, "Le iscrizioni arabe della porta del mausoleo di Boemondo a Canosa", in *SPOLIA. Journal of Medieval Studies*, 2017, pp. 1-14.

[137]   Bellosi L., "I vivi parean vivi: scritti di storia dell'arte italiana del Duecento e del Trecento", *Prospettiva: rivista di storia dell'arte antica e moderna*, n.121-124, 2006, p.57.

[138]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio: alle origini della pittura senese*, Milano 2003, p.66.

up-raising tail bent inwards. A similar type of ornamentation is also found in a ceramic fragment from the archaeological site of Calatrava la Vieja[139] (fig.21).

From the Pisa area is also the *Maestà with Two Angels* (fig.22) by an unknown artist of Pisa, which was stolen in 1970 from the National Gallery in London. The pictorial style is still deeply influenced by Byzantine art. On the golden background stands out in red the Greek inscription MP OY which stands for '*MHTHP ΘEOY* "Mother of God.[140] The pseudo-Kufic element is instead on the fabric that surrounds the shoulder of the Virgin, in gold on a red background. Ascribable to simple Kufic are a series of high letters topped with split arrow-heads arranged in mirroring position that can or cannot be connected.

A key step in the transition from idealized figures, coming from the Byzantine tradition, into true subjects displaying humanity and emotions is due to Cimabue. This achievement would form one of the bases of Western and Italian painting; without a brisk deviation from strictly Byzantine ways, he brought them on the verge of a renewal which was then fully developed by Giotto. The use of Arabic script in Cimabue's paintings takes on a different role and shape. The epigraphic decorations that had hitherto been located in marginal parts of the works are brought into prominence on the thrones and along the frames in Cimabue's works. The Florentine painter used ornamental inscriptions in Arabic characters to decorate thrones and glories in almost all his works. The style of Arabic writing used is exclusively cursive. Here, three illustrative examples taken from the *Maestà of the Louvre*, the *Santa Maria dei Servi* and the later *Maestà of Holy Trinity* are provided.

In the *Maestà* at the Louvre, dated around 1280[141], Cimabue established a new rule for the traditional iconography of the Madonna and Child, with which subsequent painters had to deal: The *Maestà* is the most direct model for the *Rucellai Madonna* by Duccio di Buoninsegna, formerly in Santa Maria Novella

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[139]   M. Retuerce, M. Ángel Hervás, A. De Juan, *La cerámica islámica de Calatrava la Vieja y Alarcos. Nuevos hallazgos*. VIII Congreso Internacional de Cerámica Medieval en el Mediterráneo. Ciudad Real-Almagro 2006, p. 747 pl.30.
[140]   See https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/italian-pisan-the-virgin-and-child-with-two-angels.
[141]   E. Carli, *La pittura a Pisa dalle origini alla bella maniera*, Pisa 1994, p. 22; L. Bellosi, *Cimabue*, Milano 1998, p. 102.

and today at the Uffizi (with a similar throne, and with a frame with very similar saints heads), whose execution is documented a few years later, in 1285.[142]

The painting preserved in the Louvre Museum was previously in the church of San Francesco in Pisa and was then transported to Paris in 1811, during the Napoleonic occupation.[143] The wooden throne is intentionally painted in a three-dimensional rendering, according to the canons of the inverse perspective, where the lines diverge instead of converging towards infinity.

The work is adorned with different bands of writing decorations, placed on the fabric that covers the throne both in the upper part and in a central band and within the halo of the Virgin. The one on the top is particularly rich, consisting of four epigraphic bands, divided into frames that run along the entire length of the fabric. The central frame is wider and is bordered by a red hem, the other two frames on an orange background, are bounded by a black hem the lower frame also contains an epigraphic band. The writing *ductus* is cursive but there are some differences in the drawing of the letters.

In the central part, the cursive style is elaborated, there are wedge-shaped, and sometimes bi-lobed and three-lobed apexes. In the two narrower bands, however, we find a simple cursive writing, devoid of any decorative elements (fig.23). In the third band, the repetition of the epigraphic pattern composed of a *lām-mīm* in ligament followed by *kāf* can be seen: A shape of *al-mulk* that resembles those present on the jars in Palermo (fig.24).

The decorations in the halo of the Virgin are similar to those of the wider central part of the upper band over the throne, but here they are decorated inside with dots. The writings are not always readable, and this holds true in particular for those that are found in small black bands belonging to the top decoration. It is a composition consisting of high letters interspersed with circular characters (fig.25).

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142   E. Sindona, *Cimabue e il momento figurativo pregiottesco*, Milano 1975.
143   G.Magi, *Il grand Louvre e il Museo d'Orsay*, Firenze 1992, p.56.

A second epigraphic decoration is in the central part of the fabric up to the elbow of the Virgin. The pattern is enclosed by two black parallel hems which draw a rectangle containing a floral decoration (fig.26).

The two bands on an orange background present a swan's neck shape crossing two high letters, a sort of stylisation of the *ductus* previously seen. This kind of ornamentation may contain an abbreviated word, a phenomenon particularly popular in Arabic epigraphy on ceramics, as shown on a twelfth-century bowl of Iranian origin, at the Metropolitan Museum in New York[144]. On the evidence provided by Iranian ceramics, we can draw some observations on the *ductus* of the letters. The central element, in this case, is not separated from the high shafts that precedes it, it is a unique sign that corresponds to the isolated form of the *kāf*, a letter which, usually, is the *generatrix* of

the word *baraka*[145]. In this case, however, the layout resembles a simplification of the signs repeated in other parts of the painting, where the similarity with the *ductus al-mulk* present on Sicilian jars is evident (Fig.27).

Returning to Cimabue's painting, the wide band is composed of letters with wedge-shaped apices, in which some Arabic letters in isolated position are identifiable. In the small band, a completely different type of ornamentation is present. The pseudo-Arabic characters appearing here are similar to the other bands, but in the final part we could distinguish the letters A-R-I-A, preceded by a more complex shape of the Gothic M (fig.28). It is a very important ornamental device that will be reused in subsequent centuries by different artists and that has never been thoroughly studied up to now. This attention paid to the execution of "encrypted" Latin decorations testifies to the importance of writing in the decorative assets of works. This is not about random signs dictated by the artist's imagination, but a scheduled and reasoned ornamental pattern. By the late thirteenth century, then, we already find the will to impart a Christian message to the decorative writing programme, without sacrificing the representation of Arabic lettering that was

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[144]   Inv. 27.13.10a

[145]   See V. Grassi, Abbreviations …", *Orientalia…*, Leuven 2013, pp. 503-522.

perceived, most likely, as a reminder of the holy scriptures. It should be noted that in this first phase, several pseudo-inscriptions on thrones and clothes are very similar to those that we find in the holy texts depicted in the paintings. The Arabic signs that artists observed on ceramics and fabrics of Islamic origin were used as a starting point for the composition of a complex decorative system to be included in their works.

In the *Maestà of Santa Maria dei Servi* (fig.29) preserved in the homonymous church of Bologna, the inscriptions in *nashki* style decorate the drapery on the throne behind the Virgin. The work is dated between 1280 and 1285[146]. Like other Majesties from the thirteen century, it was rounded at the top due to the fact that the cusped form was no longer in vogue, in order to give a more modern appearance. The epigraphic ornamentation is divided into four areas. Two epigraphic bands are located behind the Virgin Mary and the other two at her feet. Many are the real words recognizable alternating with pseudo-Arabic signs. The *lām-alif* ligature is repeated several times in the text, often in isolation and also in mirror reflexion. In the composition, high letters appear at intervals with short letters with sublinear terminations like the *rā'* or *wāw*. The same *lām-alif* ligature appears in the epigraphic decorations of frescoes in the Upper Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, where there is a thick sequence of *lām-alif* ligament and *hā'* compositions in the cartouches between the Prophet's hands.

The *Maestà of Saint Trinity* is a work dating between 1301 and 1302[147], preserved in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence (fig.30). It depicts the Madonna with the Child, surrounded by eight angels that present at the bottom, four prophets' half-busts. The table shows the mature style of Cimabue, in which the artist showed the most extreme overcoming of the Byzantine rigidity toward freer and humanized formulas.[148]

Compared to the other two Majesties, the epigraphic decorations still in cursive style are slightly different. The whole composition is less dense, and more linear. Of all the shapes of the letters used in previous works, only the

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[146]   L. Bellosi, *Cimabue,* Milano 1998, pp.128-129.
[147]   Ivi, p. 249.
[148]   A. Tomei, *Cimabu*e, Firenze 1997, p.41.

lām-alif ligature, a tail isolated letter and the *kāf* have been preserved. The type of cursive is much simpler than those used in other works, devoid of ornamentations and apices. It follows an interrupted, but fluid stroke. A sign that we will find in a large part of the epigraphic production in the paintings of the fourteenth century, starting from Duccio, namely, the shaft with a central arc, appears here for the first time.

Duccio, together with Cimabue, is considered the greatest figure of thirteenth-fourteenth-century Italian painting before the rise of Giotto. The art of Duccio was originally strongly influenced by the Byzantine style, to which he added a personal Gothic taste that can be circumscribed as refined chromatic range and transalpine linearity elegance. Compared with epigraphic decorations by Cimabue (probably his teacher in the early years)[149] that are stylistically similar to each other, Duccio used varied forms of the pseudo-Arab characters.

The earliest work attributed to Duccio and therefore heavily studied to understand the beginnings of the founder of the fourteenth-century painting is the *Madonna Gualino*, dating to around 1280-1283[150] and housed in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin. The work recalls the *Maestà* by Cimabue at the Louvre[151]. There are many aspects of this painting which are reminiscent of the Florentine painter: from the drapery of the Child to the physical features, from the reversed perspective of the throne to the use of light and shade.

Even the inscriptions that stand on the epigraphic band on the throne cloth both along the golden edge and in the central part are inspired by those present in the painting of Cimabue. In particular, we find along the hems of the epigraphic decorations in white characters a "copy" of the forms found on the wider epigraphic band present in the *Maestà* of the Louvre (fig.31), although with some differences in style. Moreover, the same pattern made up of an S-shaped letter between two high letters is reused on the edge of the throne to write the name of Mary - another example of a Latin text encrypted in Arabic characters. Figure 32 shows the comparison between Duccio's and Cimabue's inscriptions.

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[149]   L. Bellosi, G. Ragionieri, *Duccio di Buoninsegna*, Firenze 2003, p.10.
[150]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, pp.118, 126.
[151]   Ivi, pp. 123, 126.

The presence of a copy of the epigraphic decoration by Duccio fits into the raging debate over Duccio's ties with Cimabue. This has recently been rehearsed by Ferdinando Bologna in a very careful analysis considering some comparisons between the two artists' epigraphic ornamentations.[152] Decorations that, in the writer's opinion, could reopen the debate on the attribution of the painting, and which, indeed, witness the influence of Cimabue in Duccio's training already before and not, as it has long been debated, later than the *Madonna Rucellai*.

The largest painting of the thirteenth century is the so-called *Madonna Rucellai*, a Maestà with six angels from the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence preserved at the Uffizi Gallery. The work dates 1285 and was inspired by Cimabue's *Maestà* of the Louvre[153]. The theme, however, is represented here with a new more "Gothic" sensitivity, loaded with greater expressiveness in the faces and with chromatic elegance.[154] The epigraphic decorations compared to the rich ones of the Louvre *Maestà*, take an absolutely leading role in the decorative organization of the work. The pseudo-inscriptions are not only present on the throne fabric but also on all the edges of the angels' and Virgin's clothes (fig.33). The more angular style of golden characters differs from the cursive ones used by Cimabue: in this case, we could talk of pseudo-Kufic inscription. In the epigraphic band, which lies behind the throne and on the pillow, the letters have more sharply defined outlines than those on the hems of the clothes, and, in some cases, the signs seem to be inspired by the capital letters of the Latin alphabet. The high letters delimit the height of the written field; the style of the composition is very fragmented since the letters are rarely linked. The most common sign is the high shaft with an arch present in the latest works by Cimabue, where it is the most frequent element in the lettering pattern. The inscription that adorns the edge of the pillow is presented in a more cursive form compared to that of the throne cloth (fig. 34). The letters are loose and show a hooked termination. There are diacritical dots

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[152]   F. Bologna, "Duccio e Assisi, Duccio ad Assisi. Gli esordi di Duccio di Buoninsegna, a proposito della mostra di Siena", in *Confronto. Studi e ricerche di storia dell'arte europea,* Napoli 2002, pp.33-99.
[153]   H. Maginnis, *Duccio's Rucellai Madonna*, Philadelphia 1997, pp. 64-78.
[154]   L. Bellosi, G. Ragionieri, *Duccio…*, Firenze 2003, p.8.

used as fillers of the composition. The type of pseudo-inscriptions seems to be very imaginative and therefore has few readable elements.

In the *Madonna and Child with Saints* (also known as Polyptych n.28), a work of unknown provenance preserved at the National Gallery in Siena[155], the pseudo-inscriptions have loose letters. The shafts are always interrupted by a central arch, both in epigraphic decoration placed on the book and in those on the Saint's collar (fig. 35). However, some stylistic differences can be pinpointed in the two decorative patters: On the collar, the letters show a hooked ending, while those on the book terminate with a horizontal stroke. The former is also more cursive compared to the latter that have a more geometric shape. Once again, we find the artist's wish to show, even in the same work, different epigraphic decorations.

This kind of decorations composed of loose letters with the central arc is also found in the epigraphic ornamentation of the stained-glass window of Siena Cathedral made by Duccio in 1287-1288[156], in particular in the scrolls and in the books depicting the holy scriptures (fig. 36). Different, however, is the epigraphic decoration that runs along the throne of the coronation (fig. 37). In this case, we find the standard *lām- mīm -lām ductus* of *al-mulk* as it appears on the Spanish ceramics and on various Islamic textiles (fig. 38). In the case of the ceramic bowl coming from *Madīnat al-Zahrā'*, we find in the centre the inscription of *al-mulk* with the final *kāf*, while on the edges there is the simplification with the *lām- mīm -lām* shape. The same pattern is visible, for example, in a textile fragment published by Cornu in 1993[157]. As can be seen from the comparison of the patterns, this kind of ornamentation very recurrent is easily recognizable as it consists of the same scheme with small variations in the adventitious elements and in ligatures between the letters (fig. 39). Altarpiece 47 is one of two works attributed with certainty to Duccio after the *Maestà del Duomo*. The work dated between the first and second decade of 1300 was originally intended for the church of the Hospital of Santa Maria della

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[155]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, p.200.
[156]   L. Bellosi, *Cimabue*, Milano 1998, p. 143.
[157]   G. Cornu, *Tissus d'Egypte. Témoins du Monde arabe VIIIe–XVe siècles*, Paris 1993, pp. 150–151 n. 146.

Scala (destroyed) and is now on display at the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena (fig. 40)[158].

The epigraphic decorations are present on the Virgin's veil and on the *ciborium* in the saint's hands (fig.41). Once again, the style of ornamentation is not the same. In the first case, it is a very simple composition of inclined shafts with hook-shaped termination, while in the second the letters with the characteristic central arch, juxtaposed with other signs, form a more complex composition.

In particular, a portion of the pattern could be inspired by the word *al-sulṭān*, subsequently reported by many artists, in a more or less readable way, coming from the Mamluk protocols (fig. 42). The identification of these writing patterns in pre-fourteenth century paintings provides the elements necessary to study the spread of recurring models in the artworks of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century.[159]

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[158]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, p.238.
[159]   E.G. Napolitano, "The transfer of Arabic inscriptions in Italian Gothic and Renaissance painting. A new approach. The words *al-mulk, baraka* and *al-yumn* in the 14th and 15th centuries- Italian paintings", in proceedings of the 28nd UEAI Congress (Palermo 12-16 September 2016) forthcoming.

3.1.3 Summary

The use of Arabic pseudo-inscriptions has been tightly linked to the import of Oriental objects in Europe and its subsequent imitative production, which was aimed at satisfying the increased demand for luxury items from the East. This phenomenon dates back as early as the twelfth century and it is coincident with the intense commercial exchanges existing between European countries and the Islamic world since the Middle Ages. This link is proved by the fact that some of the earliest evidences of Arabic letters appearing in Tuscan paintings are already readable. The *Crucifix* by an unknown Roman is an example; Christ is depicted in the *Maniera Greca* style according to a symbolic image known as Christ Triumphant over death, as he is shown alive on the cross. The Arabic lettering runs along the edge of the footstool, where the word *al-mulk* (abridged form of "Dominion belongs to God") in floriated Kufic script can be detected in the space left empty among the signs. This feature suggests that the inscription might be copied from a textile, as a non-Arab speaking observer can easily mix up the weft and the warp. Islamic *ṭirāzes*, costly fabrics woven with inscriptions, were used for robes of honour granted by Muslim rulers in return for services and are most frequent among the gifts found in European secular and religious treasures. Consequently, they were within easy reach of European traders and monarchs and were practically under the eyes of medieval and renaissance artists.

Al-mulk is not the only Arabic well-wishing expression that gained popularity among Italian painters. In fact, two other words are attested in the first half of the 13th century, namely, *baraka* (blessing) and *al-yumn* (prosperity). In Giunta Pisano's and Guido da Siena's paintings they appear for the first time. At first sight, the repetitive sequence of the word *al-yumn* seems to be a festoon made up of stylized leaves, but the comparison with Spanish glazed pottery dating 13th century, mainly from Calatrava la Vieja, offers the reading of such signs. In both cases, the reference model is no more a fabric, but pottery; a medium that was available to everyday people and not restricted to the court environment. The change of medium also affects the style of writing that is cursive and misleading.

It appears clear that, since the very beginning, both Kufic script and cursive writing are attested in Italian medieval painting and there was not a process of degradation from the well-outlined forms of Kufic letters to the distorted ligatures of cursive writing or highly stylized forms.

In Cimabue's paintings we find, for the first time, a type of decorations that will be widely repeated and elaborated in later centuries: the "encrypted" epigraphic decorations in Latin characters. These signs, based on the appearance of Arabic writing, are altered to such an extent that they assume the forms of Latin letters. In the case of Cimabue, these decorations, which are sometimes inserted between still legible Arabic words, hide the name "Maria".

In the decorative patterns, the *ductus* shape of the *alif* appears with a central arch and the signs of the *lām- alif* ligature in sequence. In some cases, in the frescoes of the Upper Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, for example, the copy of the ligature *lām-alif* and, in particular, a very well-preserved composition of the letter *lām* and *hā*, could lead to the erroneous reading of the word *Allāh*. At the turn of the century, the degraded form of the word *al-sulṭān* (authority, title of Muslim sovereign) is found in most of Duccio da Buoninsegna's paintings. This is the beginning of a large display of forms with whom the inscription will appear on the works by the most fashionable artists of the early Renaissance period. The patterns occurring on Duccio's panel paintings are hardly discernible and the intricacy of the letters becomes clearer only in light of the forms that will appear in the following years. A characteristic that is noticeable since the earliest degraded form is the position of the letter *nūn* at 90°. Moreover, the letter *sīn*, which later assumes the recognizable shape of a horizontal stroke, is drawn like a W. The models of these inscriptions are Mamluk silk fabrics and metalworks.

The reference to Mamluk luxury goods will be emphasized in the next centuries by the titles enclosed in the Sultanic protocol present on objects for usage in courts.

3.2 The Fourteenth Century

3.2.1 Introduction

Until the second half of the thirteenth century the epigraphic ornamentations were restricted to marginal roles in the essential backdrop of medieval painting. They were conceived by the artists as lavish ornaments, part of a decorative set-up that, imitating the Byzantine splendour, contributed to enrich and to give glory to the sacred images of Christianity.

There is sporadic evidence of the presence of fragments of inscriptions, most likely copied from precious Eastern artefacts. In a period that was crucial for the birth of a new Italian painting, when Byzantine influence was gradually abandoned in favour of a representation that introduced a sense of space, volume and colour, works by Cimabue and Duccio represent a turning point also for the spread of Arab writing in Italian art. The epigraphic decorations, far from being simple isolated signs, become themselves elements of the painting.

These artists re-interpreted the use of Arabic script, bending the design of the letters to fit their will and placing them in almost all the works in the same positions: on the throne behind the Majesties and on the precious fabrics of the sacred personages.

The work of their followers was also seminal; they would continue to use and develop this trend, remaining essentially faithful to the styles of the epigraphic ornamentations, but adding new elements from objects circulating on Italian markets and courts (textiles, ceramics and metals).

3.2.2 Early-*Trecento* artists

Among Cimabue's and Duccio 's followers who, from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, developed the use of Arabic decorations, are Segna di Buonaventura, the Master of Varlungo, the Master of Albertini, the Master of San Torpè, Deodato Orlandi and the Master of Città di Castello.

In the *Maestà* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, dated to 1285-1290 and painted by the Master of Varlungo[160], the epigraphic elements are inserted in the manner of Cimabue along the sides of the fabric of the throne. The decoration is very simple, made up of only rough graphic signs and in the shape of broken lines recalling the epigraphic ornamentation on the crucifix by Guida da Siena (fig. 43). More elaborate ornaments that are very similar to Duccio's epigraphic decorations are those present in two polyptychs painted by the Master of Città di Castello kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena, both dating around the beginning of the fourteenth century[161]. In the *Virgin and Child with Saint Francis, John the Evangelist, Stephen and Clare*, St. John the Evangelist's kirtle is decorated with an epigraphic band in Kufic style, braided with a bilobate palmette termination and the typical central arch of the high letters (fig.44). In the other polyptych named *Virgin and Child with Saints Augustine, Paul, Peter and Anthony Abbot*, the characters decorating Saint Augustine's dress are very similar, but even more elaborate and accurate (fig.45). The *ductus* of the letters is very angular. In addition to the high shafts with the central arch, there are also some signs that recall the *lām-mīm* ligature and the letter *kāf*. The terminations are bilobate and trilobate palmettes. In the final part, there is an interesting connection consisting of a high letter, a *lām-mīm* ligature followed by another high letter and an isolated *kāf*: A sequence that may be interpreted as a corrupted form of the word *al-mulk*[162] (fig. 46).

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[160]   A. Tartuferi, M. Scalini, *L'arte a Firenze nell'età di Dante: (1250-1300)*, Firenze 2004, p. 118.

[161]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, pp. 288-289.

[162]   For a more in-depth analysis of these inscriptions see E.G. Napolitano, "Le decorazioni epigrafiche negli affreschi dell'Antico Palazzo dei Vescovi a Pistoia. L'uso dei caratteri arabi nelle arti pistoiesi tra XIV e XV secolo", *Bullettino Storico Pistoiese*, CXVIII, 2016, (terza serie LI), Pistoia 2016, pp. 23-42.

A very impressive form of shaft bearing a central arch is found in the table *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels and Saints Nicholas and John the Evangelist,* painted by the Master of San Torpé and dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, found in the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa[163] (fig.47). At the bottom of St. Nicholas' tunic, there is an inscription in yellow on black background. Also in this case, the epigraphic pattern may have been inspired by the stylized form of the word *al-mulk*. The arrangement is mirror-like, as it happens in the inscriptions on the fabrics.

3.2.2.1 Segna di Buonaventura

Segna's role in the use and understanding of the Arab pseudo-inscriptions has been crucial. He is the joining link between Cimabue's and Duccio's epigraphic decorations and the subsequent ornamentations. He was Duccio's pupil and a faithful follower, who popularised his style[164]. In his works, the mirror-like composition of the word *al-mulk* filling the whole epigraphic band appears plainly for the first time. This kind of decorative set-up denotes the typical *horror vacui* of Islamic influence. Already in 1301, in the altar-frontal signed and dated by Deodato Orlandi, housed in the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, we find a very complex arrangement of *al-mulk* on the book and along the hems of the fabrics of the Saints, where alphabetical signs are altered by rotating parts of the script (figg. 48, 49). But it is thanks to the comparison with the Segna's Crucifix, from the Church of San Giusto in Siena and kept at the Pinacoteca in Siena, that we can understand the process of this alteration of the *ductus*. In the Crucifix[165], there are two epigraphic bands in white on the veil that surrounds Christ's waist (fig. 50). We can identify the word *al-mulk* copied several times throughout the extension of the epigraphic band. The text is framed in all the spaces, taking advantage of 180° rotations. Just as Orlandi did, but remaining more faithful to the original *ductus*, Segna stretches, shrinks and tilts the high letters, especially the first *lām*, to better insert the word in the blanks, using from time to time some broken elements as fillers of

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[163]   G. Vigni, Pittura del Due e Trencento nel Museo di Pisa, Palermo 1950, pp. 75-76.
[164]   J. H. Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna and His School*, Princeton 1979, p.130.
[165]   Ivi, p.132.

the ornamentation (fig.51). This decorative device will be found not only in his works, but it will spread in the Tuscan painting throughout the first half of the fourteenth century, where the word *al-mulk* will often be found with a tilted and lowered shaft, in fact, more similar to a *hā* than a *lām*. In the *Crucifix* kept at the National Gallery of London, dating 1314-1317[166], we have the same kind of decorations on Christ's veil (fig.52). The *Madonna with St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist and St. Romuald* signed by Segna, dated around 1320[167], depicts the same inscription on the book, this time adorned with a bilobate floral termination (fig.53), whereas in the *Virgin and Child with Nine Angels*[168] at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, there is a pseudo-epigraphic decoration on the fabric behind the throne. Among these signs, impossible to read, a recognizable *ductus* of *al-mulk* is inserted, almost as a hint that helps to identify the starting point of the epigraphic decoration (fig.54).

Different decorations are found in the *Saint Magdalene*, a work dating 1316-1318[169] kept at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. Here, along the hem of the Virgin's veil, there are swastikas joined to another type of square decoration, similar to square Kufic inscriptions (fig.55). This kind of epigraphic pattern occurs mainly in monumental epigraphy of Iran and Central Asia[170] (fig.56 A). However, there are also examples from Mamluk Egypt, and a group of textiles from Egypt dated to the 10th-15th centuries provide ornamental bands with swastikas that look like a *chahār ʿAlī* (as shown in the fig. 56 B).

In the *Crucifixion* of the Metropolitan Museum in New York dated around 1315[171], the decorative band is made up of a series of S-shaped palmettes, which might allude to the letters *bāʾ- rāʾ* (fig. 57 A) that can be read as the abridged version of the word *baraka*, as evidenced by a comparison with a textile in the Ashmolean Museum (fig. 57 B). The same pattern had already appeared on the Crucifix of Giunta Pisano (cf. fig. 15).

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[166]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, p.314.
[167]   J. H. Stubblebine, *Duccio …*, Princeton 1979, p.130.
[168]   C. Brandi, *Duccio*, Firenze 1951, p. 152.
[169]   A. Bagnoli, R. Bartalini, L. Bellosi, M. Laclotte, *Duccio…*, Milano 2003, p.315.
[170]   A more detailed definition of the style can be found in V. Grassi, "The Never-ending Story of the Chinese Influence on the Origin of Square Kufic Script" in *Islam and Globalisation: historical and contemporary perspectives*: Proceedings of the 25th Congress of L'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Paris 2013, pp. 555-580.
[171]   J. H. Stubblebine, *Duccio…*, Princeton 1979, p.96.

3.2.2.2 Giotto

According to common art historical periodization, Giotto was the forerunner of the Renaissance. As a matter of fact, he was the first to give body mass and a 'realistic' physiognomic characterization to human figures, surpassing the flattened figures of Byzantine art. Giotto introduced, or better re-introduced space into painting, through the use of an empirical perspective after the Greek-Roman mode. Architectural elements in his paintings tend to establish a more realistic and consistent relationship with the human characters and are no longer just symbolic representations, as it was still the case with Cimabue. On the contrary, Giotto gave a psychological characterization to his figures and started the process of secularization of painting.[172]

Even within the field of epigraphic ornamentations, Giotto has a very innovative approach, as he broadens the range of eastern scripts for decorative purposes, not limiting himself to Arabic script. In the above-mentioned article[173], Tanaka distinguishes different types of "eastern" pseudo-inscriptions in Giotto's painting that are identified on the basis of the dating of his works and the analysis of the lettering. The works that he investigates come from the cycle of frescoes on the life of St. Francis of the homonymous Basilica in Assisi, from the *Maestà of All Saints* in the Uffizi, from the frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua and those of the Bardi Chapel in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence. Therefore, a time span ranging from 1291 to 1330 is under consideration. From the analysis of the pseudo-inscriptions, the Japanese scholar identifies two distinct scripts: the Arabic cursive and the *Phags-pa* characters that were in use in the Mongolian Empire.[174]

Indeed, in the *Ognissanti Madonna*, dated around the first decade of 1300[175], the ornamental lettering on the personages' clothes, the cushion and the casket offered to the Virgin are very different from those found so far (fig.58).

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[172]   A. Crowe, G. B. Cavalcaselle, A. Jameson, *Early Italian Painting*, London 2011, p.96.
[173]   H. Tanaka, "Oriental...", in *Gazette…*, 1989, pp.214-226.
[174]   Ivi, p.220.
[175]   E. Carli, G. A. Dell'Acqua, *Storia dell'arte…*, vol.2, Bergamo 1975, p.106.

The pattern probably imitated in a mirror-like manner the *Phags-pa* seals of the Mongol Empire as reproduced in Matsui's drawings of the "*qutluγ* seals"[176] (fig 59). This type of pseudo-inscriptions continues to be a unique feature of Giotto's decorative set-up, which was used again later, albeit rarely, by some of his followers. In the *Dormitio Virginis*, dated 1315-1325[177], kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, the decoration is quite different. The inscriptions are much more stylized and detached (fig.60). In some parts of the hems of the fabrics, the epigraphic pattern reproduces the shape of a swastika, while in others a V-shaped composition appears. Such a V-shaped decoration is also present in the *Virgin and Child*, dating around 1320[178], kept at the National Gallery in Washington (fig.61). These V-shaped signs look like the ones in the *Dormitio Virginis*, but this time the drawing is more accurate and has been clearly marked on the Child's robe. We also find long shafts with a central arch hinting at the ductus of *al-mulk* (fig.62) accomplished in mirror-like shape, as in the work of the Master of San Torpé (fig. 47). *The Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Descent into Limbo* are three works dating 1322-25[179], kept at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, which provide the lettering patterns imitating the *Phags-pa* seals (fig. 63, 64, 65,66).

In later works, Giotto does not give any more the pseudo-inscriptions that prominent position he used to grant them before. They occupy a marginal place, until they become sketchy and highly stylized signs, losing any reference to alphabetical letter to transform into geometric decorations. An example is given by the *Crucifixion*, dating around 1325 and 1330[180], kept at the Louvre Museum (fig.67). Here, the most interesting inscription element is the one that adorns the personages' belts. It is a stylized form consisting in two shafts with a central circle (fig. 68). This geometric pattern, resembling that on the Egyptian fabric from 12th century preserved in the Metropolitan Museum

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[176]   D. Matsui, "Uigur Administrative Orders Bearing 'Qutluγ-seals'", *Studies on the Inner Asian Languages* 13, 1998, p. 1–62.
[177]   E. Baccheschi, *L'opera completa di Giotto*, Milano 1977, p.112.
[178]   S. Bandera Bistoletti, *Giotto: Catalogo completo*, Firenze 1989, p. 126.
[179]   Ivi, p. 123.
[180]   Ivi, p. 117.

of New York (fig. 69), can also be identified as stylized forms of the word *al-mulk*.

The legacy that Giotto left regarding the use of pseudo-inscriptions was twofold. Compared with the rich Arabic decorations of the thirteenth-century masters, Giotto established a new cultural link, transcending the Semitic context and moving toward the Far East, thereby giving even more exoticism and 'glitz' to his ornamentations. On the other hand, when compared to Cimabue and Duccio, he did not standardize the use of scripts by restricting them to defined places or functions, which makes their identification difficult. In support of this, it is worth noting that his followers, otherwise strongly influenced by the decisive innovations of his painting technique, did apparently not model their lettering on Giotto's decorations, as they were blurred and difficult to copy. Consequently, they preferred to seek their prototypes of Arabic script from other sources, which they might have seen in drawing albums or on imported portable objects especially the Mamluk ones.

3.2.3 Giotto's school

With the intense painting activity of Giotto and his pupils and followers, Florence determined the fortune of painting during the fourteenth century in several regions of Italy. The creation of a new school of painting produced a new language, aimed at the "naturalistic" in the sculptural representation of figure and space. A large number of artists from all over the Peninsula took part in Giotto's school because his travels to different Italian towns gave him the role of a unifier of Italian art, and his works were admired and copied by masters from Naples to Padua and from Rome to Milan.

3.2.3.1 Florence

From the vibrant school established by Giotto in Florence, artists such as Taddeo Gaddi, Bernardo Daddi, Maso di Banco, the Master of San Martino alla Palma and Jacopo del Casentino helped to spread the Oriental script in the fourteenth-century Florentine painting.

A beautiful example of *al-mulk*-type decoration is found in the *Four scenes from the Passion of Christ*, painted by the Master of San Martino alla Palma or his workshop.[181] The work dates back to the middle of the 14th century and is currently kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. The characters' garments are decorated with a simple geometric pseudo-script (fig.70), similar to the V-shaped elements present in Giotto's *Dormitio Virginis*. However, in Christ's halo an entirely different ornamentation is present (fig.71 A). The word *al-mulk* repeated several times and engraved in gold, can be noticed, once again with different rotations (fig. 71 B), as in the case of pre-Giotto painters. The letters are so debased that the motif could even be taken for a distortion of the word "*Muḥammad*" in a square arrangement.

We find a similar treatment of decorations in the *Annunciation* painted by Jacopo del Casentino[182], kept at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan. The robes

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[181]   R. Offner, *Bernardo Daddi and his circle*, Firenze 2001, pp.152-159.
[182]   R. Offner, "Jacopo del Casentino. Integrazione della sua opera", *Bollettino d'Arte*, n.s., 3, 1923-1924, p. 252.

are decorated with the above-mentioned V-shaped motif, in alternate sequence like those accomplished by Giotto and the Master of San Martino alla Palma (fig.72). Quite different are, instead, the signs in the Archangel's golden halo: A cursive writing formed with three disconnected signs that might recall the repetition of the word *baraka* (fig. 73).

Similar ornamental motifs are found in the contemporary work of his master, Taddeo Gaddi, who worked in Giotto's workshop from 1313 to 1337, the year of his death[183]. In Gaddi's triptych of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints* of 1334[184], kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, there are inscribed decorations in gold on the throne and along the hem of the Virgin's kirtle (fig. 74). The angular mirror-like script can be paralleled with some Mamluk textiles shown in figure 75.

In the *Virgin and Child* painted around 1340-45 by Maso di Banco[185] and kept at the Gemäldegalerie, we find on the transparent veil (fig. 76) a pattern recalling those seen in Segna's works. This form of *al-mulk* with the slanting shafts appears anew in contemporary Egyptian fabrics, kept in the Ashmolean Museum (fig.77). Along the Virgin's collar, there is a decoration that might be inspired by letters of the Latin alphabet.

In Bernardo Daddi's largely documented work, we find the same elements that appear in the paintings of the artists of his school, as well as signs previously used by the thirteenth-century masters. In the *Processional Cross*[186] at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, there is a decoration along the hems of the fabrics (fig.78) similar to those seen in fig. 74 and 75. Also, in the *Annunciation*[187] in the Louvre Museum we find epigraphic decoration clearly in Mamluk style in the Archangel's golden halo (fig.79). The decoration copies the *ductus* of *al-mulk* with bilobate terminations in a mirror-like manner, similar to those seen in the works first of the Master of San Torpé and later in those by Giotto.

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[183]   P.P.Donati, *Taddeo Gaddi*, Firenze 1966, p.7.
[184]   Ivi, p.35.
[185]   M.A. Bianchini, *Maso di Banco*, Milano 1966, p 6.
[186]   B. Berenson, *Pitture italiane del Rinascimento*, Milano 1936, p. 144.
[187]   Ibid.

In Daddi's works, we often find inserted pseudo-Latin characters having the function of decorative elements. These elements are present in the *Crucifixion* at the Courtauld Gallery in London[188], in the *Virgin with Saints Thomas and Paul[189]* at the Paul Getty Museum and in the *Assumption[190]* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (fig. 80).

Here we find the repetition of the same stylized patterns. In this case, we witness an involuntary latinization of a sign unknown to the artist, as it takes the form of the letter R rendered next to each other that recalls the signs of the word Maria, as already shown above. The capital letter R is represented as the letter A, because the two arms are sometimes not connected, so that it can be identified with the letter I. In the rendering of the Virgin's name, only the letter M would be missing, which is always depicted with two adjacent Rs. The result is, in fact, a single letter that, slightly modified and repeated for the entire decoration, stands for the Virgin's name. The reference to the Oriental signs remains unchanged, but a well-known Christian reference is added. This ornamental device, born from the artist's observation, would develop through the following centuries and, as we will are going to see, will subsequently be brought to its extreme in the sixteenth century by painters such as Bernardino Bergognone.

Although no longer directly influenced by Giotto's painting, a new generation of artists from the mid-fourteenth century onwards inaugurated a new period of Florentine art that, in the context of epigraphic decorations, proposed again the different genres experienced by previous artists; among these we find the brothers Nardo and Andrea di Cione, the Master of San Lucchese, Puccio di Simone and later Giovanni of Tano Fei.

In the works of the Cione brothers, small angular signs can be distinguished that cannot be attributed to any *ductus* of the Arabic alphabet. Only in a few works by Nardo di Cione, such as the *Saints Giuliano, Benedict, Peter, Nicholas of Bari and Stephan* (ca.1340[191]) from the Alte Pinakothek, more elaborate and

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188   R. Longhi, *Giudizio sul Duecento e ricerche sul Trecento nell'Italia centrale: 1939-1970*, Firenze 1974, p.97.
189   R. Offner, *Bernardo Daddi…*, Firenze 2001, pp.574-575.
190   B. Berenson, *Pitture italiane…*, Milano 1936, p. 144.
191   R. Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, IV, 2, New York 1960, pp.9-10.

unreadable decorations appear, consisting of shafts and arches similar to Maso di Banco's decorations.

In *the Virgin and Child with Eight Angels* dated about 1340,[192] attributed to the Master of San Lucchese kept at the Gemäldegalerie, we find a mirror-like composition of *al-mulk* (fig.81).

Different forms of *al-mulk* are recognizable in the decorations of the *Enthroned Madonna with Saints*, painted by Puccio di Simone and Allegretto Nuzi, currently at the National Gallery in Washington, dating 1354.[193] The work is rich in mirror-like epigraphic ornamentations (fig.82), but the most interesting is the one that decorates the collar of the Virgin. It may be a reproduction of the word *al-ʿizz* (*al-dāʾim*)[194] that we can parallel with some Egyptian fabrics[195]. In the drawing (fig. 83 A), the letters *lām-ʿayn-zāy* in ligature (coloured in dark grey) show the same shapes occurring on the Mamluk specimens, followed by less readable letters that might stand for the rest of the formula (*al-dāʾim*) (fig.83 B).

A new decorative item that arrives in Florence after being consolidated by the Sienese school, and in particular by Simone Martini, as we shall see, is the "seal-like" decoration of the word *al-mulk*. We find it, for example, towards the end of the fourteenth century in *The Coronation of the Virgin and Saints* kept at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and painted by Giovanni di Tano Fei[196]. The seal-like decoration with leafy terminations that start from the *mīm* is repeated along the hems of the characters' clothes.

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[192]   U. Thieme, F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 37, Leipzig 1949.
[193]   A. Tartuferi, *L'eredità di Giotto: arte a Firenze 1340-1375*, Firenze 2008, pp. 128, 132.
[194]   Perpetual glory
[195]   The words are recurrent on portable objects. See E. Atil, *Islamic metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington*, 1985, p. 124, n° 17; R. Ettinghausen, "The Wade Cup in the Cleveland Museum of Art, its origin and decorations", *Ars Orientalis*, II, 1957, pl. 9 figs. 28-30; J. David-Weill, *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire : bois à épigraphes,* Cairo, 1936, p. 27.
[196]   E. Merciai. "Il probabile Giovanni di Tano Fei: un'interprete bizzarro del gotico internazionale a Firenze," *Arte cristiana 91*, Milano 2003, pp. 79–80, 88, 90–91.

3.2.3.2 Lombardy

Giotto lived in Milan between 1335 and 1336, painting a cycle of frescoes in Azzone Visconti's Palace, today lost[197]. The frescoes of the cupola in the abbey of Chiaravalle are the result of the introduction of Tuscan art on Lombard soil. Giotto's art also influenced other northern schools, where it was often further developed, as demonstrated by the works of Giusto de' Menabuoi, an artist of Florentine origins who worked in Padua at the court the Da Carrara's court[198].

The most famous of Giotto's follower in the north of Italy was Giovanni da Milano, active in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Also in his *Virgin and Child with Donors at* the Metropolitan Museum in New York, dating around 1360[199], the lettering patterns are placed along the hems of the fabrics. Long letters in gold cover the entire height of the frame in which they appear. These shafts are sometimes slanting and at times straight with the recurrent little arch in the middle (fig.85).

The epigraphic decoration adorning the *Coronation of the Virgin* painted by Giusto de' Menabuoi, at the National Gallery in London, is more similar to that in Giotto's works. The painting is decorated with angular and clumsy characters, however, on the hem of the tunic we find the same decoration we have already seen on the Mamluk fabric at figure 75 (fig.86).

3.2.3.3 Naples

In Naples, too, Giotto's presence left a lasting mark on the previous French and Sienese influences, as evidenced by the works of artists such as the Master of Franciscan Tempera, active in Naples between 1330 and 1345 and Roberto d'Oderisio (active from the half of the fourteenth century and mentioned up to 1382)[200].

In general, the epigraphic decorations of Giotto's Neapolitan followers are more elaborate. The inscriptions are often readable and copied faithfully in the

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[197]   J. A. Crowe, G. B. Cavalcaselle, A. Jameson, *Early…*, p.107.
[198]   J.B. Delaney, Giusto de' Menabuoi: Iconography and Style, Ann Arbor 1973.
[199]   D. Parenti, *Giovanni da Milano: capolavori del gotico fra Lombardia e Toscana*, Exh. cat., Galleria dell'Accademia. Firenze 2008, pp. 236–237.
[200]   F. Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli 1266-1414*, Roma 1969, pp. 262-282.

backdrops, in the borders of the fabrics. The presence of objects of Islamic origin at the Court of Anjou, in particular, precious textiles and metals mainly required in Naples, is made highly probable by the intense trade that went on across the Mediterranean[201].

In the *Madonna of Humility with Saint Dominic and Donor*, attributed to the Master of Franciscan Tempera, dating around 1352-55[202], at the Museum of Capodimonte in Naples, we find a gold decoration consisting of two rectangular-shaped seal-like inscriptions that are repeated throughout the Virgin's mantle (fig.87). They are reproduced with extreme accuracy and are always clearly distinguishable. This type of inscription is widely documented in works by Simone Martini, whom the Neapolitan artists were able to observe at work, as in 1317 he was called to the Angevin court in Naples for the realization of the *Saint Ludovic of Toulouse Crowning his brother Robert of Anjou*.[203]

In the first part, we find a decoration resembling the Arabic letters *bā'* and *rā'* with the latter bearing a termination that falls inward towards the center of the rectangle. In the second, there is a broken square in which the two ends are joined to form a kind of X.

In the *Madonna of Humility* by Roberto d'Oderisio in the Museum of Capodimonte, dating around 1340-1343[204], the epigraphic decoration running along the hem of the Virgin's mantle is engraved in gold in relief (fig.88). The inscription shows the *ductus* of the word *al-mulk* with a roof-like cover on the letter *mīm* almost lengthwise. In some points, however, the upper part shows a sign that might be identified as a final *kāf*. The U-shaped element lying over the *mīm* is, in reality, the detached form of the X-shaped ligature present on the Roman-Tuscan Master's Crucifix, resulting from the plaiting of two shafts. An earlier step of such a ligature can be observed in the form of a volute on Master Alpais' ciborium of Limoges (fig. 89).

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[201]   G. Vitolo, *Medioevo I caratteri originali di un'età di transizione*, Milano 2000, p. 103.

[202]   F. Basile, *Storia dell'arte in Sicilia*, v.1, Cagliari 1984, p.182.

[203]   M. Pierini, "Martini Simone", in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, Roma 1997, vol. VIII, pp. 242-252.

[204]   P. Leone de Castris, *Arte di corte nella Napoli angioina*, Firenze 1986, pp. 374-407.

The most interesting inscriptions are those found in the Diptych depicting the *Death of Christ with the Virgin and Saints John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene*. The work is currently divided, the part depicting the saints is in the Robert Lehman Collection at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, while the panel with the *Dead Christ and the Virgin* is in the National Gallery in London. The diptych, dating around 1330-40, was painted by a member of Giotto's workshop in Naples, who was active on the frescoes in the Church of Santa Chiara[205]. According to the information on the Metropolitan Museum website, "the diptych may have been commissioned by Queen Sancia of Naples (1286-1345), the wife of King Rene of Anjou, who was particularly devoted to Mary Magdalene and was the founder of Santa Chiara".[206]

We are facing the first cases since the appearance of Arab script in Italian art, in which a composite inscription was faithfully copied from an object bearing a text of Mamluk tradition. The inscription may have been copied from a casket or a metal dish of Egyptian or Syrian origin, like those kept at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, at Courtauld Gallery in London and from the private collection of Comte de Toulouse-Lautrec (fig. 93,94,95).

In the illustration, I have separated the writing from the ornamentation (fig. 90,91), to ease the reading of the Arabic text (fig.92).

The inscription runs along the side hems of the frame of the diptych. It is a work on gold foil, in relief, and this, too, would make it similar to the original, probably a precious metal adorned by an inscription along the hem. The inscription seems copied carefully, and all the high letters are of the same height. In addition, floral ornaments are used as fillers that do not interfere with the *ductus* of the letters, which are fairly recognizable. Only in the New York panel, in the part where St. John the Evangelist's halo and mantle intrude upon the writing field, the signs are simplified. Probably, those parts of the text that had been accurately copied were supplemented with schematized particles, to fill the available space.

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[205]   D. Gordon, *The Italian Paintings Before 1400*, London 2011, pp. 372-379.
[206]   http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459044 consulted online on September 29, 2017.

On the New York panel, on the right side (fig.92 A), we find the inscription:

العا(لي)البر البر (ا)لعا(لي) (ا) لعا(لي)(...)المقر البر المقر

al-ʿā(lī),[207] al-birr,[208] (a)l-ʿā(lī), (a)l-ʿā(lī), (…) al-maqarr,[209] al-birr, al-maqarr.

On the left side (fig. 92 B), we can read:

البر البر(...) المقر البر العالي (...) (ا)لما(لكي) المقر البر العالي (ا)لكريم المالكي البر

al-birr, al-birr, (…) al-maqarr, al-birr, al-ʿālī, (…) (a)l-mā(likī),[210] al-maqarr, al-birr, al-ʿālī, (a)l-karīm,[211] al-mālikī, al-birr.

Two details must be noted that are found in the text and that would confirm the hypothesis of the copy of a Mamluk original, as in the Cambridge casket. The first concerns the word *al-karīm* that, in the original text, has the *yāʾ-mīm* placed above the baseline, in order to fill in the spaces left between the high letters. The same arrangement is also used in the painting. The ductus of *al-maqarr* is another interesting element of comparison. In the elegant *thuluth* writing, the letters *qāf, rāʾ* and the first *alif* of the subsequent word are depicted in such a way that a non-Arabic reader could confuse them with a single sign, similar to a *ṭāʾ* or a round letter followed by an *alif*. In the text of the painting, it appears in a similar shape. Decorative tendrils sometimes affect the strokes of the letters. Some words are incomplete as some forms of *al-ʿālī* and *al-mālikī*. In figure 96, the decorations of the painting are compared with inscriptions on Mamluk metalwork to show the likeliness of the signs.

The state of conservation of the engraved inscription on the panel of the *Dead Christ and the Virgin* is worse than the other panel. Unfortunately, the photographs at my disposal do not allow a comprehensive investigation. The text, however, can be interpreted in some parts and appears to be the same as

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[207] The excellent
[208] The generous. Although the group "al-br" or simply "br" has usually been used on ceramics as an abbreviation of the work *al-baraka*, this reading is not congruent with the sequence of Mamluk titles.
[209] The authority. The words *al-maqarr* and *al-ʿālī* usually followed each other on Mamluk metalworks, as in L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry. A Survey*, Oxford, 1933, p. 233, n° 1.
[210] The royal
[211] The generous

in the other frame of the diptych. In particular, the words *al-ʿālimī*,[212] *al-maqarr* (also in this case reported with the same shape), the first three letters of *al-ʿālī* (fig. 97 A and B) and a probable form of *al-mulk* (fig. 97 C) can be identified. The inscriptions are not only found on the frames but also along the hems of the characters' tunics. The style, although similar, is richer in floral decorations and tendrils, where the shape of the letters is thinner (fig.98).

This type of inscription that brings references to words used in the Mamluk protocol is an important document that will turn up again after more than a century in the works by Cima da Conegliano.

3.2.4 The Sienese school

The Sienese school of painting flourished in Italy between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and was comparable to Florence, with regard to prestige, even though it was more conservative and focused more on the decorative beauty and elegance of the last Gothic period.

Duccio di Buoninsegna can be considered one of the principal founders of the school, and even Simone Martini, who will be regarded as one of its major representatives, was his apprentice.

The school brought together painters with different artistic sensibilities. Although the artists of the Sienese school developed a technique which was distinct from that of Giotto and closer to the transalpine linearity, some of them were influenced by spatial and volumetric innovations of the Florentine master.

In particular, the Lorenzetti brothers, who spent their formative stage in Florence, painted works with majestic and compact figures, enhancing the sculptural plasticity of the bodies. Even the creation of illusory spaces of ever-increasing complexity could not be totally separated from an awareness of the achievements of Giotto.

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[212]   The wise

Other artists remained influenced by the teachings of Duccio, but most of them worked out an artistic language that took its cue from a more thoroughly assimilation of the figurative "vulgar", of its formal solutions and its close relationship with reality, and had a widespread and lasting diffusion within the national boundaries.

3.2.4.1 The followers of Duccio

Ugolino di Nerio was, together with Segna di Bonaventura, among the most loyal followers of Duccio. He contributed to the success of Sienese painting in Florence with prestigious commissions for the altars of the two major basilicas, Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, contemporarily to Giotto's return to the city. His only signed work is an altarpiece dated around 1325-28 for the high altar of the basilica of Santa Croce in Florence[213], which is now dismantled and scattered in various foreign museums. The *Spandrel Angels* kept at the National Gallery in London are part of this altarpiece. The robes of the angels have golden borders decorated with epigraphic decorations (fig.99). The cursive writing accomplished with long strokes shows a possible variety of the word *al-sulṭān*, similar to that seen in the Duccio Madonna.

In particular, on the hem of the angel's robe, thanks to the comparison with the Duccio inscription, several letters can be recognized: The article *al*, the *sīn* with high teeth, the *lām* and the *ṭā'-alif* ligature reproduced in a similar manner to the *lām -alif* ligature, and a final *nūn* (fig.100).

Also, the epigraphic decoration in the works of Ugolino di Nerio is similar to that of his master Duccio. In the *Virgin and Child* now in the New York Metropolitan Museum (dated around 1325) attributed to his workshop[214], the white veil of the Virgin is decorated with an epigraphic pattern containing hooked letters which are very similar to those present in Duccio's paintings. On the collar decorated with gold, we find an entirely different

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[213] D. Gordon, A. Reeve, "Three Newly-Acquired Panels from the Altarpiece for Santa Croce by Ugolino di Nerio", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* Vol 8, London 1984, pp 36–52.
[214] A. Bagnoli, *Duccio: Siena fra tradizione bizantina e mondo gotico*, Milano 2003, p. 375.

ornamentation. Two long shafts surround a central circular decoration, which leads back to the word *al-mulk* (fig.101).

The same hooked and disjointed letters can be found in the *Virgin and Child* in the Louvre, dating around 1315-1320[215]. The white veil of the Virgin is adorned with the same illegible pseudo-inscriptions that might be originated from a copy of the word *al-sulṭān* which lost its original shape in the passages from a copy to the following one (fig.102).

In the Altarpiece of the *Madonna with Child and Saints* of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena dated ca. 1320-25[216], epigraphic decoration can be found in the book and on the vase. The former is of particular interest as it shows the same decorative pattern meaning *al-sulṭān*. In this case, the letters *lām, ṭā'* and *nūn* are detectable (fig.103).

In the other contemporary follower of Duccio, Niccolò di Segna, son of Segna di Buonaventura, we find quite an innovative style. In *St. Benedict and St. Michael the Archangel and St. Bartholomew and St. Nicholas*, dating back to the end of the third decade of the fourteenth century[217], the panels of which are kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena, the decorations are always located along the golden hems of the characters' robes, but instead of the word *al-sulṭān* formed with hooked and disjointed letters, we find the word *al-mulk* arranged alternately upside down in floriated Kufic (fig.104). The term "seal-like" is in order here, referring to this kind of decoration inscribed in rectangles lined with high letters, which we otherwise find frequently in Simone Martini's works.

The Master of the Albertini was a follower of Duccio active between 1290 and 1320. The *Virgin and Child* dated around 1300[218], preserved in the Pinacoteca di Siena, is probably his first piece known to us. It is still very much influenced by the Byzantine style, which is evident even from the golden background and

[215]   E. Foucart-Walter, *Catalogue des peintures italiennes du musée du Louvre. Catalogue sommaire*, Paris 2007, p.53.

[216]   G. Coor-Achenbach, "Contributions to the Study of Ugolino di Nerio's Art", *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 37, No. 3, New York 1955, pp. 162,164.

[217]   B. Franci, "Niccolò di Segna", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* - Volume 78, Roma 2013.

[218]   A. Tartuferi, G. Tormen, *La fortuna dei primitivi. Tesori d'arte dalle collezioni italiane fra Sette e Ottocento*, Firenze 2014, p. 264.

the streaks in the drapery of the gown. Along the hem of the cloak, there are epigraphic ornaments inserted into small diamond-shaped frames. The *ductus* of the letters is angular and very similar to those already seen in the Master of Varlungo and Guido da Siena works, from which a new design of the word *baraka* might be derived (fig.105). The style of decoration recalls that of the Mamluk fabrics in the Ashmolean Museum (fig.106), in which each unit consists of a pair of *bā'* and *rā'* joined by a ligature that could represent a *kāf*. A comparison between the signs is illustrated in figure 107.

3.2.4.2 Simone Martini

Simone Martini's artistic education was influenced by his knowledge of French Gothic art, gained during his short stay at the papal court. Inspirations from the transalpine cultures are manifested in the representation of a new aristocratic ideal, permeated with the spirit of chivalry, which is also reflected in the representations of sacred subjects.[219]

His largest and most complex work is the Altarpiece of St. Catherine of Alexandria[220], dated 1320 and preserved in the National Museum of San Matteo in Pisa. It comes from the main altar of the Dominican church of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Pisa.

The rich epigraphic decoration is found on the hems of the robes of the *Virgin and Saint Mary Magdalene*. There are two completely different styles of ornamentation. In the decorations on the Virgin's veil the *ductus* seems to be inspired by a re-elaboration of the model of the word *al-mulk* as can be seen in the works of Segna di Buonaventura, but in an altered and reinvented form. On the red veil of Mary Magdalene, however, we find a golden border with a decoration displaying a modular organization. While on the veil of the Madonna (fig. 108 A) the signs are random, dissimilar and do not follow a sequential structure, in the ornamentation of the veil of Mary Magdalene (fig. 108 B), the drawing is different. For the whole length of the border, we can see

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[219]   F. S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, Boston 2010, p. 298

[220]   M. Pierini, *Simone Martini*, Milano 2002, pp. 112–119.

a repetition of a golden decoration arranged alternately in an upside-down manner. In this case, the standard *ductus* of *al-mulk* (shaft-circle-shaft type) has been enhanced with two hooks before and after the *mīm*, which should be read as the letters *yā'* and *nūn* (fig.109 A), which allows us to identify the word *al-yumn*. Figure 109 B shows a similar pattern painted by Giunta Pisano in the XIII Century.

In the famous *Annunciation* altarpiece[221], painted in 1333 for the cathedral of Siena, now kept at the Uffizi, the epigraphic decorations that adorn the veil of the Madonna are similar to those in the Virgin's veil in the altarpiece of *Saint Catherine* and in many other subsequent works such as the *Madonna announced* in the Hermitage in St Petersburg, which is among his latest works dating to 1340-44[222]. There are two different epigraphic decorations. The "seal" decoration is situated on the mantle, while the other epigraphic decoration, more compact in design, is inserted along the hems of the dress (on a red background) (fig.110 A). In this case, however, the seal-like inscription is not in an alternate position, but each single seal contains its upturned form on the top. Also in this case, the inscription is identifiable as *al-yumn* patterns (fig. 110 B).

Around 1320, the Sienese artist paints an altarpiece[223], now dispersed in various museums, depicting the *Virgin and Child with the Saints Ansano, Peter, Andrew and Luke the Evangelist*. The five panels are now at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Madrid (St. Peter), the Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (St. Luke) and the Metropolitan Museum in New York (St. Ansano, Madonna with Child and St. Andrew).

In *Saint Luke*, we can see the double shape decorative band (fig.111). On the mantle of the saint in the epigraphic band (in brown), as seen in the *Polyptych of St. Catherine*, we can find some similarities with the elaborations of the word *al-mulk* found in the works of Segna di Buonaventura. On the Saint's collar (in red background), there is the double "seal" decoration (both in standard shape and upside down) lacking, in this case, the distinctive elements of *al-yumn*. It

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[221]   A. Crowe, G.B. Cavalcaselle, A. Jameson, *Early Italian Painting*, London 2011, p.163.
[222]   T. Kustodieva, *Museo Statale Ermitage, La pittura italiana dal XIII al XVI secolo*, Milano 2011, p.226.
[223]   M. Pierini, *Simone…*, Milano 2002, pp. 122, 126, 234–235.

is, in fact, the word *al-mulk* which is also present in Niccolò di Segna's inscription (fig. 112).

Arabic characters are present in almost all the works of Simone Martini, and they refer to the same prototypes. This indicates the will of the artist to use a particular type of decoration and not just a generic imaginative composition. Also in the case of the seal-like decoration, it is possible to find a comparison with portable Islamic objects. A significant example is a dish from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (fig.113).

To support the assumption that the type of "seal" decoration spread from a prototype circulating in the workshop of Simone Martini, we examine the epigraphic decorations of his most important followers: Lippo Memmi and the Master of Palazzo Venezia.

The latter is considered one of his most attentive followers. His artistic personality was highlighted for the first time by Weigelt in 1931[224], with a *Virgin and Child* found in the Museum of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, dated around 1350.

The *St. Peter and Mary Magdalene* in the National Gallery in London and *St. Paul*, in a private collection, have been associated with the Roman Madonna as possible components of a dismantled altarpiece[225]. Along the hems of the clothes of the Saints, we find the kind of *al-mulk* decoration very similar to those painted by Simone Martini (fig.114).

A more angular version, inspired by the seal-like decoration of the *Altarpiece of St. Catherine* by Simone Martini, is found in the *Virgin and Child* by Lippo Memmi and now kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. It is an altarpiece, painted between 1317 and 1333[226] made for the church of San Francesco in San Gimignano with the seven main panels: *Saint Louis of Toulouse and Francis* (Pinacoteca of Siena) Paul (Metropolitan Museum New York), *Saint John the Baptist, Madonna and Child* (Gemäldegalerie), *Saint John the Evangelist* (New

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[224]   C. Weigelt, "Minor Simonesque Masters", *Apollo*, 14, London 1931, pp. 1-13.
[225]   E. Sandberg Vavalà, "Some Partial Reconstructions", - II, *The Burlington Magazine*, 71, 1937, pp. 176-177, 234-235.
[226]   M. Boskovits, *Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: The Collections of the National Gallery of Art, Systematic Catalogue*, Washington 2016, pp.203-214.

Haven Art Gallery) and *Saint Peter* (Louvre Museum). Two types of decorations occur, a cursive pseudo-inscription on the hem of the Virgin's mantle, while a geometric 'seal' appears on the collar in the same style of the Martini altarpiece (fig. 115 A), an arrangement very close to that of a fragment of Egyptian textile from the Ashmolean Museum (fig.115 B).

Lippo Memmi was Simone Martini's brother-in-law and collaborator. In fact, the triptych of the *Annunciation with the Saints Ansano and Margarita*, created for the chapel of Sant'Ansano in Siena's cathedral (Florence, Uffizi), bears the inscription "*Symon Martini et Lippus Memmi de Senis me pinxerunt anno Domini MCCCXXXIII*" on its frame[227].

In general, in all of Lippo Memmi's works, the epigraphic decoration appears to be very similar to that of his brother-in-law. Copies of the seal-like decoration showing a stylized rendering of *al-yumn* can be found in the *Altarpiece of Casciana Alta* preserved in the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa[228] (fig.116) and the *St. Peter* (belonging to the altarpiece of San Francesco in San Gimignano) in the Louvre Museum (fig.117). Besides, in the *Virgin and Child* of the National Gallery in Washington dated around 1340[229], there is a seal that refers to *al-mulk* models (fig.118). In these three cases, we find an epigraphic pattern made in different styles: geometric, foliated and floriated.

The epigraphic decoration of the drapery in the Virgin's hands of the *Virgin and Child* in the Gemäldegalerie (fig.119), attributed to Memmi's shop and dated around 1320-25 by Joseph Poltzer,[230] develops in a different way. As already seen in the works of Simone Martini, here we find models inspired by Segna's decorations, consisting of a condensed and distorted *ductus* of the word *al-mulk*. The same kind of pattern is depicted on the book of *St. Louis of Toulouse* belonging to the altarpiece of San Gimignano preserved in Siena (fig.120). The strong similarity between the decorations in question supports the attribution to Memmi's workshop proposed by Poltzer. Furthermore, this

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[227]   A. Crowe, G.B. Cavalcaselle, A. Jameson, *Early Italian…*, London 2011, p.163.
[228]   L. Bellosi, "Polittico di Casciana Alta", in *Simone Martini e "chompagni"*, Firenze 1985, pp.94-100.
[229]   E. W. Rowlands, *The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Italian Paintings, 1300–1800*, Kansas City 1996, p. 38.
[230]   J. Poltzer, "A Sienese Painting in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin." *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 41, Berlin 1999, pp. 37–45.

suggests that some recurring patterns circulated among artists that, in turn, had been transferred from inscriptions on portable objects, as demonstrated by a comparison with an Egyptian fabric in the Ashmolean Museum (fig.121).

Even among "minor" painters, a massive presence of epigraphic decorations inspired by oriental scripts can be noted. A case in question is Meo da Siena, a painter from Siena whose center of activity was nonetheless Perugia. In the double-faced panel in the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt, dated 1330-33[231], rich epigraphic ornamentations are visible along the hems of the clothes, on the scrolls held in their hands by the Saints and in the halos.

There are three different types of decorations. The ones on the clothes are extremely simple and reminiscent of those that adorn the fabrics painted by Martini and his followers. The decorations on the scrolls are more complicated, but they seem to be inspired by the Hebrew alphabet. Lastly, the inscriptions engraved in the golden background of the halos are more interesting. They reproduce, in elegant Mamluk script, tall shafts with bilobate and trilobate palmette endings; in some cases, it is possible to recognize a simplified version of *al-mulk* (figg. 122, 123, 124, 125).

3.2.4.3 The Lorenzetti

The splendid flourishing of the Sienese school continued with the two Lorenzetti brothers. They proposed a language which was realistic and devoid of excessive grandeur in opposition to the aristocratic, cultural cosmopolitanism of Simone Martini.

The epigraphic decoration seems to move away from the traditional "seal" ornamentation. Motifs from fabrics and carpets were introduced. In the backdrops painted by both brothers, there are carpets and fabrics decorated with decorations in square Kufic, as it is the case of the *Small Maestà*, painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti around the 1340 and kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena[232] (fig. 126 A). The carpet at the foot of the throne bears such rich

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[231]   J. Gardner, "The altarpiece by M. da S. for S. Pietro at Perugia. Tradition versus innovation", *Städel-Jahrbuch, 16*, Frankfurt 1997, pp. 7-34.
[232]   C. De Benedictis, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, Roma 1996, vol. 7, pp. 878-884.

epigraphic motifs in square Kufic style. Among them, the classical hooked cross and a diamond decoration with angular letters stand out. The same decorative patterns can be admired on some Egyptian fabrics, as shown in Figure 126 B.

In the *Pala* coming from the Chiesa del Carmine in Siena painted by Pietro Lorenzetti in 1329[233] (fig. 127 A), kept the in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena, the same type of square Kufic is used (fig.127 B). The crosses stuck in geometric decorations are a clear evidence for a proclivity to Islamic inscriptions, in particular to the panel containing the word *Muḥammad,* with reference to the Prophet's name. An example of this is found on the Süleyman Mosque wall in Hasankeyf (Turkey, 14th century), where the word *Muḥammad* is formed by four units.

The word *al-mulk* is quite often detectable in the decorations of the Lorenzetti brothers as well.

One of the few examples of "seal" ornamentation is the one we find in the Crucifixion attributable to Pietro Lorenzetti[234] and preserved in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. The decoration, inspired by the word *al-mulk*, is depicted roughly, while a pseudo-inscription in cursive can be seen on the scrolls in the hands of the saints (fig. 128).

In the *Virgin and Child and the Saints Magdalene and Martha* painted around 1340 by Ambrogio Lorenzetti,[235] preserved at the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena, the mirror-like copies of the word *al-mulk* with bilobate palmette endings are inserted along the mantle of the Virgin (fig. 129 A). This type of arrangement of the letters, which we have already met in the works of previous painters, is very frequent in inscriptions on textiles. A comparison with a Mamluk textile can be established as the inscription shares the same style and lay-out (fig. 129 B).

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[233]   F. Zeri, "Pietro Lorenzetti: quattro pannelli della pala del 1329 al Carmine", *Arte illustrata* 7, Milano 1974, pp. 146-156.
[234]   B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance - Central Italian and North Italian Schools*, London, 1968, p. 219.
[235]   C. De Benedictis, "Ambrogio…", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, Roma 1996, vol. 7, pp. 878-884.

A similar type of *al-mulk* with a double arc appearing in the *Virgin and Child* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Louvre[236] (fig. 130 A) can be compared with a piece of fabric from the Ashmolean Museum (fig.130 B).

In *the Saints Bartholomew, Cecilia and John the Baptist*, painted by Pietro and dated 1332[237], kept at the Pinacoteca di Siena, a decorative pattern of *al-mulk* is arranged along the hems of the fabrics with a regular position and in reverse, in its plain form without any abbreviations (fig.131). This is another example of a likely direct copy from an Arabic inscription.

The Lorenzettis and Simone Martini deeply influenced the painters of the next generation, born around 1330 and belonging to the Sienese school: Cecco di Pietro, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, Andrea Vanni and Bartolo di Fredi.

Bartolo di Fredi uses the seal-like decoration of *al-mulk* type, in his *Presentation in the Temple*[238] kept at the Louvre. The position of the inscription is unusual. In fact, it is on the wall decorations of the building (fig.132). The same decorations can be seen even in the *Adoration of the Magi*,[239] kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena. In this case, inscribed ornamentations are placed, as it is customary, on the hems of the garments. Two ornamental floral branches depart from the medial *mīm* (fig.133).

A large golden inscription in interlaced Kufic bearing the word *al-mulk* shows along the hem of the veil in the reredos depicting *Cristo in Pietà* by Cecco di Pietro dated 1337[240], which is kept at the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa. Here the branches of the *mīm* assume the form of an A, and in some cases of a V-shaped element (fig.134). It is interesting to note that the collocation of the word, as observed in the works of Segna, is varied. We find it in parallel, perpendicular and oblique positions with respect to the hem of the frame. The decoration in the *Nursing Madonna and Child with Angels*,[241] also preserved at the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa is much simpler. The cuff and collar of the

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[236]   E. S. Skaug, "Two new paintings by Ambrogio Lorenzetti: technical criteria and the complexity of chronology", *Arte cristiana*, 91, 2003, pp. 7-17

[237]   C. Volpe, *Pietro Lorenzetti*, Milano 1989, pp. 151-152.
[238]   M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death*, Princeton 1951, p.19.
[239]   M. Ascheri, *Siena nella storia*, Cinisello Balsamo, 2000, p. 101.
[240]   Burresi M., Carletti L. and Giacometti C., *I pittori dell'oro…*, Pisa 2002, p.64.
[241]   E. Carli, *Pittura pisana del Trecento, la seconda metà del secolo*, Milano 1961, p.74.

musician Angel are adorned with alternate *al-mulk* decorations in mirror-like reverse (fig.135). The same inscription is present in the haloes of the *Annunciation* by Bernardo Daddi (fig.79).

The decoration of a *Virgin and Child* painted by an unknown Sienese artist, dated around 1360[242] and kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin is quite alike, but it is more complex as it shows a connecting line between the two *mīm* (fig.136).

The circulation of this kind of decoration among the Sienese artists is also evident in the *Apostle James the Great* painted by Antonio Veneziano, dated 1380-90[243] and kept at the Gemäldegalerie where we find the same epigraphic pattern (fig.137).

A possible evolution towards a more stylized rendering of the word can be seen in the work of Paolo di Giovanni Fei, the *Nativity of Mary*[244]. On the panel in the Pinacoteca di Siena, dated around 1385-90, a book closed by two straps decorated with pseudo-inscriptions is depicted. The arrangement of reflected shafts with central arch remind, in a very simplified shape, the model of the mirror-like decoration of the word *al-mulk* (fig.138).

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[242]   H. Bock, R. Grosshans, *Gemäldegalerie Berlin: Gesamtverzeichnis*, Berlin 1996, Abb. 2337.

[243]   M. Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, Berlin 1987, pp. 10-14.

[244]   P. Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena. I dipinti dal XII al XV secolo*, Genova 1977, pp. 179-180.

3.2.5 Pisa

In Pisa artists of such a calibre as Francesco Traini and Giovanni di Nicola were trained in workshops that were culturally linked to contemporary Sienese painting. Such was the authority of Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini, and the significant role that their works played in Pisa, too.

In the *Virgin and Child with Saints*, five panels of a dismantled polyptych, all kept at the National Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, painted by Francesco Traini and dating back to the first half of the fourteenth century[245], the border of the Virgin's cloak is densely decorated with close-packed epigraphic decorations. Also, in this case, we find the repetition of the overlaid and interlaced word *al-mulk*, disposed randomly throughout the epigraphic band (fig.139). It is very similar to the decoration painted in the Dossale of Cecco di Pietro (fig.134).

The decorations that enrich the *Altarpiece of St. Martha* painted by Giovanni di Nicola in the mid-fourteenth century[246] for the church of St. Martha and now in the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, belong to a different category. On a closer inspection, we can recognize a correspondence with Giotto's *Phags-pa* characters, in addition to the stylistic trend of *horror vacui* with condensed pseudo-inscriptions. In particular, there is a serpentine sign that previously appeared only in the decorations of the *Ognissanti Madonna* (cf. fig.58) stuck in a similar epigraphic pattern (fig.140).

At the same time, however, the seal-shaped decoration with *al-mulk* does not lose its popularity. In his works, Barnaba da Modena used some very simple pseudo-inscriptions repeated in a pattern consisting of horizontal and vertical strokes. However, in the *Virgin and Child*, dated 1367 and signed by the artist[247], now preserved in the Städel Museum of Frankfurt, an interesting kind of seal occurs.

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[245]   S. Petrocchi, "Traini, Francesco", *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, 11, Roma 2000, pp. 300-303.
[246]   Burresi M., Carletti L. and Giacometti C., *I pittori dell'oro…*, Pisa 2002, p.58.
[247]   M. Davies, *The Early Italian Schools before 1400*, London 1988, pp. 6-8.

As discussed previously, the branches growing from the central arch of the *mīm* have taken different forms ranging from floral or geometric decorations to the ones having some similarities with Latin letters.

In this case, a sort of blending between the *al-mulk* seal and the letter M, repeated on the hems of textiles and in the halo of the Child takes place (fig.141). The homage to the Virgin Mary begins to be established.

3.2.6 Venice

Among the most outstanding exponents of Venetian painting, developing since the fourteenth century, stands Paolo Veneziano, a precursor of this school of painting, in which a balance between the Byzantine themes and the influence of Giotto is attained. His epigraphic decorations are easily recognizable because the type of ornamentation he makes up is recurrent in all his works. While using, basically, the same letters, he depicts them using several epigraphic styles. The study of such inscriptions[248] find a match in the decorations of two Iranian bowls preserved respectively in the Louvre Museum and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, dated between the tenth and the eleventh century. Observing the two artefacts, we can notice the tight ligature between the letters *mīm* and *nūn* and the raising tail of the *nūn* that springs directly from the body of the *mīm* (fig.142 and 145). Both bowls show on the brim two mirroring decorations that are the stylized version of the central inscription (fig. 143, 144 and 146). Likewise, Paolo Veneziano's paintings present an abridged form of *al-yumn* consisting in a mirroring S-shaped element.

The whole inscription present in the decorations of the *Enthroned Madonna with Child,* dated 1335-40[249], from the Church of Sant'Alvise and kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, can be reconstructed as well as other simplifies forms found in other paintings. In particular, we can distinguish the two parallel shafts connected by a sign, readable as the letter *yā',* overspreading the medial *mīm* from which an ascending termination is generated (fig.147). The strokes that link high letters to the medial *mīm* are the main elements that allow a distinction between the simplified form of *al-mulk* and *al-yumn*. While in the case of *al-mulk* the medial *mīm* is linked to the shafts through elongation strokes, in the case of *al-yumn* the teeth of the initial and final letters can be seen.

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[248]   E. Napolitano, "The transfer of Arabic inscriptions...", In Proceedings of…, Palermo 2016, forthcoming.
[249]   S. Moschini Marconi, *Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia. Opere d'arte dei secoli XIV e XV*, Roma 1955, pp. 15-17.

The ornaments of the Altarpiece of the Church of Santa Chiara in Venice now in the Galleria dell'Accademia[250] provide strong support for the reading of the decorations of Paolo Veneziano proposed. The painting, depicting the magnificence of the courteous and worldly splendours, contains various kinds of decorative lettering. Here we find not only the ubiquitous S-shaped element, but two new patterns useful to understand its original model. On the chest of Christ's robe (fig. 148 A) there is a decoration different from those seen previously, but very similar to that of the *Dossale* painted by Giunta Pisano made more than a century earlier (fig.148 B). The similarities lie both in the shape and location of additional signs in the word *al-yumn,* which also occur in the inscriptions coming from the Islamic artefacts (fig.17). On the fabric behind the throne runs the inscription *al-yumn* in sequence with a three-lobed fleuron in the middle, where the presence of the letter *yā'* and the tail of the final *nūn* are clearly rendered (fig.149).

As already seen, the most recurrent epigraphic decoration in the artist's works is the simplified version of the S-shaped element. It is a widespread sign in the works of other artists of his entourage. In fact, it can be seen both in *The Birth of St. Nicholas*, 1340 ca., by Paolo Veneziano[251], kept at the Contini Bonacossi Collection at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence (fig.151) and in the *Coronation of the Virgin* at the Washington National Gallery (fig.150); the latter was first attributed to Paolo Veneziano and recently to the "Master of the Washington Coronation" (probably Paolo's father, Martino da Venezia).[252]

Figures 152, 153, and 154 show the comparison between these signs in the paintings and the inscriptions on the Islamic ceramics of the 9th-12th centuries coming from Syria and Iran, where the word *al-yumn* is highly stylized. Some of these models would be resumed by his follower, Lorenzo Veneziano. Two different versions of *al-yumn* with an interlaced lozenge-shaped decoration in the middle appear in the Lion Polyptych dated 1357-1359[253] in the Galleria

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[250]   F. Flores d'Arcais, "Paolo Veneziano", *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, vol. 9, Rome, 1998, pp.156-160.
[251]   Ivi, pp.156-160.
[252]   F. Rusk Shapley, "Master of the Washington Coronation of the Virgin", *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings, the National Gallery of Washington*, Washington 1979, pp. 326-328.
[253]   F. Flores D'Arcais, "Lorenzo Veneziano", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, vol. 7, Roma 1996, pp. 894-897.

dell'Accademia, on the rectangular decorations of the robes of the Saints in the first compartment to the right of the Virgin (fig.155). The same treatment occurs on the Paolo Veneziano's Polyptych (fig.156). The decorations of the coat appear to be very similar to those of his master, and can be assumed to come from the same prototype (fig. 157). The same applies to the *Madonna of the Humility with the Saints Mark and John the Baptist* kept at the National Gallery in London [254](fig.158) and with greater clarity in the mantle of the Virgin in the altarpiece depicting the *Annunciation and with the Saints* signed and dated in 1371 by the artist (fig.159 and 160).

The transmission of this model among Venetian painters is evident in the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Catarino, dated to 1375[255], now in the Galleria dell'Accademia. Probably inspired by the decorations of the most important Venetian masters, both the ornamentation on Christ's robe and that running along the hems, where the word *al-yumn* has been copied in a very stylized form, have been identified only thanks to the comparison with the readings made on the paintings by Paolo and Lorenzo Veneziano (fig.161).

Different epigraphic decorations show in the works of the Guariento di Arpo, a Paduan follower of Giotto, who more than Giovanni di Nicola was inspired by Giotto's decorative script. In fact, the very motifs inspired by the Mongolian *Phags-pa* characters in Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* are copied in the *Virgin and Child* kept at the Metropolitan Museum of New York[256] (fig.162) and in *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, dated 1360-70[257], kept at the Gemäldegalerie (fig.163). Figure 164 shows a comparison between the epigraphic decorations painted by Guariento di Arpo (164 A) and Giotto (164 B). The correspondence of the models both in style and arrangement demonstrate the propagation of the prototypes, especially within the respective pictorial schools.

[254]   B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance. Venetian School*, vol. 1, London 1957, p. 99.

[255]   F. D'Arcais, "Per il catalogo di Caterino", *Arte veneta* 19, Venezia 1965, pp. 142-144.

[256]   D. Banzato, "Guariento", *Giotto e il suo tempo* (exh. cat., ed. V. Sgarbi; Padua, Mus. Civ), Venezia 2001, pp. 176–185.

[257]   F. Flores D'Arcais, "Guariento di Arpo", in Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale, vol. 7, Roma 1996, pp. 130-131.

3.2.7 Summary

Much of the epigraphic decoration found in fourteenth-century paintings was copied and elaborated in the subsequent centuries.

Al-mulk is the most frequent word in fourteenth-century ornamentations. Reproduced in varied styles, with very significant differences and elaborations and also with different degrees of readability. Among the most important ones, we can distinguish the following forms:

- Mirror-like

- Seal-like

- With a rotating movement

For a clearer understanding of the developments of the phenomenon, a table with the various debased forms of the inscriptions has been conceived (fig.165). The mirror-like form of *al-mulk* (type A in the drawing) is very frequent. The inscription is copied backward, as it often happens on Islamic *ṭirāz*s. This model is already found in the early fourteenth century and subsequent decades and it can be easily identified, as the letters did not undergo considerable alterations, even in its specular copy, with the sole exception of the shafts, whose shape is sometimes approximately drawn.

The second widely diffused model of *al-mulk* is a form where the letters are bent and/or adapted to the filling of a compartment through a 180° rotation movement impressed to the word, with the result of creating a thick weft (type B in the drawing). The readability of this form is more complex than the previous one, because the modifications do not refer only to the bending of the letters but affects the proportion of the letters themselves. The right or left shafts are often lowered and/or bent according to the available space. In the early fourteenth century, Segna di Buonaventura was the first artist who proposed such type of ornamentation on the epigraphic bands on Christ's clothes in the Crucifixes. In subsequent decades, this decoration had a wide diffusion and was also used in combination with other models. Also in this case, correspondences have been found in Islamic textiles from Egypt.

The third form is represented by the "seal-like" *ductus*, a type of ornamentation introduced by Simone Martini around the second decade of the fourteenth century. It is a decoration surrounded by a quadrangular frame looking like a seal (type C in the drawing). *Al-mulk* is rendered with various, mostly floral, decorations. The result is a modular composition that usually decorates the hems of the personages' clothes. It is found in many works of Senese painters, and we can consider it a real distinctive mark of Martini's decoration. Thanks to its modular shape, it is not difficult to recognize this type of decoration among the epigraphic ornamentations. The significant difficulties come from the ornamentation of the script, which often takes on extremely rich scrolls and tendrils. A reference can be found in the inscriptions present on several 13th-century Islamic ceramics.

The "seal-like" decoration will prove particularly versatile from the epigraphic point of view, as it could be based not only on the *ductus* of *al-mulk* but also of other Arabic words such as *al-yumn* and *baraka*. The presence of the debasements of *al-mulk* and *al-yumn* makes a useful reasonable comparison with Islamic artefacts for the identification of the differences, even if minimal, in the execution of the two words. In Figure 166, a drawing shows the debasement of the word *al-yumn*. The condensed *mīm-nūn ductus* is coloured in yellow and the *yā'* in grey.

Epigraphic decoration from Oriental textile imitating squared inscriptions was also common in the 14th century - a practice probably derived from Islamic fabrics.

Giotto's works provide a very varied range of ornamentations taken from different Oriental scripts. They range from the imitation of the Mongol characters *Phags-pa* to some forms of Arabic characters and further to the introduction of Latin elements. The latter can be considered an innovation, although it already flashed up in the works of Cimabue and Duccio and it would consolidate as a long-lasting ornamental trend because of the function of Latin as liturgical language

The Mongol characters, too, were imitated by some of Giotto's followers, such as Giovanni di Nicola and Guariento di Arpo, but, above all, the Latin

characters turned out to be a source of inspiration to Italian artists, not only in the fourteenth century.

Around 1340, we find an encrypted Latin pseudo-inscription inspired by the Virgin's name, and we will find this type of "Marian" decoration with other artists, especially in the fifteenth century. The coding and decoding of the name "Maria" will give the start to a whole series of ornamentations and enigmatic games responding to the educated character of Renaissance humanism.

Contrary to what might be expected, the passing of time did not always coincide with the process of alteration and loss of readability of the Arabic characters. What proves fundamental is the original support on which the inscription was based, together with the artist's will and/or capability to copy a text from an artefact or a prototype. It is not by chance that the most faithful copies of Arabic texts are found in the works of famous artists of the fifteenth century, who show the ability and will to copy that specific genre of ornamentation among their decorative parties.

The word *al-sulṭān* is a clear example of an extremely flawed inscription in fourteenth-century works, that will, instead, become more identifiable in the fifteenth century. It is thanks to the analysis of Renaissance inscriptions that we can recognize the forms of *al-sulṭān* in earlier Medieval paintings. During the entire Middle Ages, starting from the inscriptions of Duccio, the word *al-sulṭān* is represented by high, apicated and disconnected letters.

Still, on the issue of the readability of the Arabic text, I would like to point out a crucial case, namely that of Giotto's Neapolitan follower who, around 1330-40, copied a long Arabic inscription on the frame of a Diptych. The text in gold, reproducing a part of the Mamluk protocol, although slightly deteriorated, is still legible. This kind of epithets was to be replicated in the inscriptions by Gentile da Fabriano and Cima da Conegliano, copied from oriental artefacts, in particular precious metalworks, the existence of which in Italy attested by several sources.

3.3 The Fifteenth century

3.3.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, according to the traditional interpretation, the arts, after the *saeculum obscurum* of the Middle Ages, would be revived to new beauty. At a closer look, in the *Quattrocento*, the admiration of the classical world and the desire for antiquity was one of many manifestations of that intellectual vitality. It did not translate into a clear separation moved by the wish to implement an imitative practice but constituted an impulse to renew the means of expression. As stated by the art historians Enzo Carli and Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, between the new artists of the Renaissance and the previous Gothic Maestros, "there was a very rich medieval figurative tradition […] that could not be abruptly cancelled by the emergence of new formal aspirations and new ideals".[258]

Unlike what happens in Tuscany, especially in Florence, in many parts of Italy particularly in the North, until the mid-fifteenth century, the Florentine Renaissance idealism was still opposed by a medieval naturalism which spoke with a late-Gothic language, in the refined and precious representations of costumes, buildings, and nature.

There is no doubt that in this century a new model of humanity and beauty gains popularity through the perspective of space, proportions and a heroic conception of the man already present in the work of some precursors commonly known as the "Fathers of the Renaissance."

Among the significant achievements of Renaissance art, the primary place is occupied by the invention of linear perspective, to be considered not so much as a set of rules designed to render depth illusively, but as a new filter of the outside world. The art historian Carlo Argan writes that thanks to the new perspective rules of the Renaissance "we no longer see things in themselves,

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[258]   E. Carli, G. A. Dell'Acqua, *Storia dell'arte…*, Bergamo 1975, p.171.

we see everything in proportional relationships; reality no longer presents itself as an inventory of things but as a system of metric relations."[259]

The flourishing of painting, architecture, sculpture paved the way also to the so-called minor arts, active in the production of medals, jewellery, small bronzes, ceramics, fabrics, and weapons that bear witness to refined and lavish lifestyles, when compared to those of the previous periods. This happens in conjunction with the emergence of Seigniories and Principalities: from Lombardy, where the Sforzas replaced the rule of the Visconti, to Ferrara, where the Estes rule, to Mantua, home of the Gonzaga, to Naples and the south, where the Aragonese dynasty continued the splendour of the Angevins, to Florence, where the rule of the Medicis polarized every intellectual initiative and, finally, to the State of the Church that, regarding patronage, was to become the most beautiful of all the Italian courts[260].

A new concept of art will be associated to new social conditions, alien to the medieval mentality, aimed at improving the individual existence and everyday life, which resulted in an enhancement of the artist's personality and his creative activity.

For these reasons, the *Quattrocento* is the century that has greatly enhanced and enriched the use of Arabic epigraphic patterns in painting, which appeared under various shapes and styles.

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[259]   G.C. Argan, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol.2, Firenze 1968, pp.111.
[260]   E. Carli, G. A. Dell'Acqua, *Storia...*, p.172.

3.3.2 International Gothic

In late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, a figurative current spread in Europe which, owing to its cosmopolitanism, became known as "International Gothic."

It had a wide diffusion also in Italy, where it contrasted with the novelties of the Tuscan Renaissance. It was characterized by a fairy-tale and princely tone, hence the term "courteous" that reflects the sumptuous life of the court. The premise to this new taste can be attributed to the activity of Simone Martini and, subsequently, to fourteenth-century Lombard painting.

A prominent place was given to the calligraphic ornamentations influenced by Arabic letters, whose ubiquity intensified the splendour and elegance of the works.

In Florence, the International Gothic affirmed itself with particular characteristics, traditionally strongly linked to classicism. Of great importance was Gherardo Starnina's journey to Valencia in 1380. When he returned to Florence, he modernized on the international taste and novelties, exerting a powerful influence on the new generation of painters such as Masolino da Panicale and Lorenzo Monaco.[261] Among the epigraphic signs that Starnina largely uses, consisting of X-shaped elements, it is possible to detect a recurring element: a form made up of *lām-mīm* letters in ligature, followed by a high letter, possibly readable as *al-mulk*, occur in *Saint Hugh of Lincoln who exorcises a Possessed Man*,[262] held in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum (fig. 167), and in *St. Mary Magdalene, St. Lawrence and donor*[263] at the Gemäldegalerie Berlin (fig. 168), whereas Masolino's decorations are an enriched version of the X-shaped decorations from which some tendrils spring, as in the case of *Virgin and Child*[264] at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (fig. 169).

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[261]   P. De Vecchi, E. Cerchiari, *I Tempi dell'Arte*, vol. 2, Milano 1999.

[262]   J. Van Waadenoijen, *Starnina e il gotico internazionale a Firenze*, Firenze 1983, p. 55.

[263]   J. van Waadenoijen, "A proposal for Starnina: exit the Maestro del Bambino Vispo?", *The Burlington Magazine*, CXVI (1974), pp. 82-91.

[264]   L. Bortolotti, "Masolino da Panicale", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 71, Roma 2008, pp. 647–655.

Differently in Lorenzo Monaco's works, all the forms already devised by the previous Florentine painters appear at the same time. In the *Coronation of the Virgin*[265] (Courtauld Gallery, London), we find an *al-mulk* model alternated with a mirror images (fig. 170). In *the Adoring Saints*[266] belonging to the first decade of the fifteenth century (National Gallery, London), the hems of the clothes are adorned with some stylized signs (fig. 171), also in a reflected duplication, painted with angular strokes that look like Maso di Banco's decorations (fig. 76) and were probably copied from textile inscriptions containing a debased form of *al-mulk* (fig. 77).

A regular presence of *al-mulk* decorations and their reflected images appears in the works of Sienese artists active at the beginning of the fifteenth century. In the *Baptism of Jesus* dating about the end of fourteenth century[267], at the Museum of San Matteo in Pisa, Turino Vanni draws a beautiful composition of *al-mulk* (fig. 172) on the cloth that surrounds Christ's waist. An example of recurring epigraphic patterns, probably drawn from artefacts that were copied on the paintings during the years, is found in the works by Martino di Bartolomeo and Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli. Here the decorations inspired by the word *al-mulk* are placed on the hems of the textile present in the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* dated 1404, in the Polyptychs coming from the Spedale di Santa Chiara dated 1402 and from the Monastery of San Domenico dated 1404, all kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Pisa[268]. In the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (fig. 173) the mirror-shaped *al-mulk* occurs in the same way of early fourteen-century Italian art (see fig. 47). We find the form of *al-mulk*, similar to that seen in the southern Italian churches and Sicilian amphorae (see fig. 14), in the polyptych dated 1402 (fig. 174). In addition, the *al-mulk* slanted mark used by Segna di Buonaventura is visible in the Polyptych of 1404 (fig. 175), where we also find the angular sign present in the thirteenth-century works (fig. 176) that was taken from Mamluk textiles (see Figures 74 and 75). Another evidence for the use of Mamluk

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[265]   M. Eisenberg, *Lorenzo Monaco*, Princeton 1989, p.197.
[266]   Ivi,pp. 138-145.
[267]   G. Neri, "Turino Vanni", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, 2000.
http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/turino-vanni_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale%29/ consulted online on 18 December 2017.
[268]   M. Becchis, "Martino di Bartolomeo" Dizionario biografico degli italiani, vol. 71, Roma 2008, pp.298-300.

cursive writing is given by the Polyptych dated 1403 coming from the Spedale dei Trovatelli[269], only signed by Martino of Bartolomeo, where the word *al-māliki*[270] has been depicted in Mamluk cursive (fig. 177).

From Lombardy, illuminated manuscripts, depicting the aspects of the costumes, the objects of everyday life and many species of plants and animals faithfully spread to Europe. Michelino da Besozzo was a renowned interpreter, painter, and miniaturist active in Pavia and Milan. Michelino painted *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*[271] now at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena. On the hem of Saint Anthony Abbot's black cape, there is an elegant cursive writing decoration (fig. 178). Even in this case we do not meet any new models, but one that already appeared in the previous centuries, which is probably related to the degenerated form of *baraka* (see figures 15, 57, 73, 105).

In the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum in Milan we can see the only work signed by Cristoforo Moretti, an artist who worked at the Sforza court: The Triptych *Enthroned Virgin and Child, St. Genesius and St. Lorenz*[272]. The epigraphic decorations that are embossed in the golden haloes and painted on the hems of the textiles (fig. 179) can be identified with the word *al-mulk* already present in the thirteenth century (see figures 14 and 27).

3.3.2.1 Gentile da Fabriano

Gentile da Fabriano is among the most prominent exponents of the International Gothic. Thanks to his taste for decorative elements, he started a dialogue between the emerging art and humanism, which was part of a conscious transition from the late Gothic to the Renaissance. He exerted a very significant influence "in Tuscany, and in fact in the stronghold of intellectual art, Florence itself."[273] The particular attention to the decorative elements

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[269]   E. Carli, *La pittura a Pisa…*, Pisa 1994, p. 108.
[270]   The Royal.
[271]   P. Torriti, *La Pinacoteca…*, Genova 1977, pp.238-239.
[272]   M. Natale, *Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Dipinti*, Milano 1982, pp.67-70.
[273]   K. Clark, "International Gothic and Italian Painting, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 95, No. 4753, London 1947, p.764.

would allow the artist from the region of Marche to supply an excellent production of epigraphic decoration.

The role that Arabic script played in the works of the Fabriano painter is of paramount importance for the understanding of such a phenomenon in the early fifteenth century and its development in the following centuries. In his work, we find two distinctive features: the copy of Mamluk titles contained in the Sultanic protocol on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the compositions of devices in which "encrypted" Latin characters containing the word "Maria" were disguised under signs mimicking Arabic script.

Both features had already emerged from time to time previously, but in Gentile's work, they are exploited more carefully paying attention to the context.

In the *Madonna of Humility* (ca. 1420)[274] kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Pisa, there is one of the most interesting inscriptions of the early fifteenth century (fig. 180). Vincenza Grassi[275] provides a convincing reading of the inscriptions running along the Child's bedsheet, which confirms the use of Mamluk inscriptions in Italian painting. As is the case of the Neapolitan Follower of Giotto inscriptions, the text contains a series of Mamluk epithets in use in Islamic movable epigraphy.

In the famous *Adoration of the Magi* (Uffizi, Florence), signed and dated 1423[276], there are several inscriptions in *thuluth* style embellishing the scarf (of the woman) and sash of the personages, which contribute to give an Oriental connotation to the setting (fig.181 A). On the knight's sash there is an inscription (fig. 181 B) with the words *al-mālikī*[277] (in dark grey) and *al-ʿādilī*[278] (light grey). On the mantle of the King standing, at the height of his arm, the word *al-ʿādilī* is visible (fig. 182).

The ornamentations that are seen on the haloes in these two works present some important particularities. The signs on both the halo of the *Madonna of*

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[274]   Burresi M., Carletti L. and Giacometti C., *I pittori dell'oro…*, Pisa 2002, p.82.
[275]   V. Grassi, "Rethinking Arabic pseudo-inscriptions in context", 28th UEAI Conference, Palermo 2016, forthcoming.
[276]   K. Christiansen, *Gentile da Fabriano*, Ithaca 1982, p.163.
[277]   The Sovereign
[278]   The Just

Humility and that of the *Virgin in the Adoration of the Magi* are similar to those present on the sheet or on the belt, but not identical. The haloes of St. Joseph (fig.183) is adorned with *thuluth* characters. In the central part, we seem to recognize some epithets of the protocol, albeit with some misspellings. From right to left: *al-karīm, al-mawlawī,*[279] *al-ʿāmilī,*[280] *al-birr* (fig. 184). The decoration in the haloes of the Virgin, in both works, is harmonic, divided into modules separated by rosettes. In the *ductus*, it is possible to identify some signs already used by Gentile. However, if we look at the upside-down image, we find encrypted characters containing the name "Maria". This brain teaser should be interpreted as a tribute to the Madonna.

In the halo of the *Madonna of Humility* (fig. 185) it is possible to identify the extended greeting "*Ave Maria*" (fig.186) as well as in the Virgin's halo in *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 187) we can recognize the name "Maria" repeated twice (fig. 188).

The study of the decoration that in the Adoration is present along the hem of the Virgin's mantle support our hypothesis. Here the ornamentation, consisting in the *al-mulk* type arranged in the seal-like form, bears the overlapping letters M and A in the central part (fig.189). This specimen underscores that the novelty in Gentile's inscriptions lies in such an alternation between Arabic and Latin encrypted texts.

In the light of what discussed above, it is possible to dismiss the reading of the *shahāda* in the haloes of other Virgins painted by Gentile, as it was previously maintained. This is the case of the *Virgin and Child* at the Frick Collection in New York, the *Virgin Enthroned with Child* at the National Gallery of Washington[281] and many others (fig. 190).

The artist's desire to present two different types of epigraphic ornamentations on the halo and on the fabrics, thus also giving a different meaning to the decorations, is clearly evidenced in *Quaratesi Polyptych.*

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[279]   The Lord
[280]   The Diligent
[281]   M. Boskovits, and D. A. Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century. The Systematic Catalogue of the National Gallery of Art*. Washington, D.C. 2003, pp. 288-292.

Painted in 1425 for the chapel of the Quaratesi family in the church of San Niccolò Oltrarno, it has then appeared in several museums[282]. The *Virgin and Child* at the National Gallery in London has a Latin decoration in the halo that reads "*Ave Maria Gratia Plena*" (fig. 191), but on the hem of the mantle there is a long inscription in *thuluth*. Unfortunately, the picture at disposal does not allow a definite reading of the inscription. However, it is possible to recognize some words such as *al-karīm, al-malik* (fig. 192), and *al-kāmil*[283] (fig. 193).

3.3.2.2 Pisanello

An evidence that in those years the Mamluk protocol was known to Italian artists is given by the copy of an inscription on a drawing by Pisanello (with whom Gentile collaborated for a long time) dating 1439,[284] kept at the Louvre in Paris, which portrays John VIII Palaeologus on horseback (fig. 194). The text reads: *ʿIzz Li- Mawlānā al-ṣultān al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Abū al-Naṣr Shaykẖ [ʿAzza] Naṣruhu*[285]. The historian Michael Vickers believes that the inscription was taken from an object owned by John Palaeologus. [286] On the grounds of a letter in Greek sent to the Emperor by the Mamluk sovereign Abū al-Naṣr Barsbāy (1422-1438) that was allegedly accompanied by a *kaniskion*[287], Vickers supposes that such gift might consist in a robe on which there was the inscription reproduced by Pisanello and that the event may have occurred in the years leading to the Council of Florence.

Anyway, this could not be the only Mamluk inscription circulating in the workshops of the Italian artists, given that many of the epithets present in the epigraphic compositions by Giotto's Neapolitan follower first and Gentile's later frequently appear on the objects, and in particular metalworks of Syrian-

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[282]   A. De Marchi, *Gentile da Fabriano*, Firenze 1998, p.36.
[283]   The Perfect
[284]   K. Christiansen, S. Weppelmann, P. Lee Rubin, *The Renaissance Portrait: from Donatello to Bellini*, New York 2011, p.199.
[285]   This is the common protocol used for the rulers of the Mamluk Empire, in this case the sultan Abū al-Naṣr Shaykh (r. 1412-1421).
[286]   M. Vickers, "Some Preparatory Drawings for Pisanello's Medallion of John VIII Paleologus", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 60, 1978, 3, pp. 417-424.
[287]   It is the technical term for a provisioning of a tax-collector. See A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, Cambridge 2003, p. 105.

Egyptian origin. Another evidence that Pisanello copied Arabic inscriptions from Islamic artefacts is shown in his *Annunciation* now in Verona.

In 1426, the Pisan painter painted the frescoes in the Basilica of San Fermo Maggiore[288]. A precious Oriental carpet at the Virgin's feet displays ornamentations in square Kufic. In the lower part of the edge of the carpet the pattern consists of four quadrangular elements (fig.195), while in the upper part a mark looking like the *lām-alif* in ligature seems to take the form of the word *Allāh* (fig. 196).

A comparison between this pattern and a fragment of an Egyptian fabric preserved in the Newberry Collection in the Ashmolean Museum provides clear proof that nothing has been invented as the textile presents both the quadrangular module and the *lām-alif* ligature (fig. 197).

3.3.2.3 Sienese artists

Three other epigraphic elements, already used by fourteenth-century Tuscan painters, are present in the decorations of the fifteenth-century Sienese painters Giovanni di Paolo, Master of the Osservanza and Sano di Pietro.

The decorative patterns that they employ in their works make large use of epigraphic elements, which duplicate some of the trends previously under examination, contributing to their large circulation in the art world of that time. For example, the well-known seal-like arrangement of *al-mulk* enriched with floral terminations (fig. 198) shows in Giovanni di Paolo's *Coronation of the Virgin*[289] kept at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

In the *Birth of the Virgin*, painted around 1445[290] by Master of the Osservanza[291] and kept at the National Gallery in London, the inscription, placed on a white

[288]   R. Brenzoni, "Nicolò de Rangonis de Brenzono e il suo mausoleo in S. Fermo di Verona", *Archivio Veneto*, XII (1932), pp. 242-270.
[289]   A. Ladis. "Sources and Resources: The Lost Sketchbooks of Giovanni di Paolo", *in The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop*, Athens 1995, pp. 70-73.
[290]   C. Brandi, *Tra Medioevo e Rinascimento: scritti sull'arte da Giotto a Jacopo della Quercia*, Milano 2006, p. 113.
[291]   The painter has been recently identified with the early phase of Sano di Pietro. See M. Falcone, "La giovinezza dorata di Sano di Pietro: Un nuovo documento per la 'Natività della Vergine' di Asciano", *Prospettiva*, n. 138, 2010, pp. 28-34.

sheet (fig. 199), is painted in black characters on a white background with a double black line as a frame (fig. 200). It is very similar to the decoration on the white casket in the *Virgin and Child* painted by the Master of 1310[292], also framed with a double black line.[293] In particular, the sequence of the epigraphic elements - a round shaped letter placed between two high letters and preceded by a sort of final *kāf* - as well as the overall design are alike.[294]

In Sano di Pietro's works, there is a recurrent element recalling the triangular shapes of *al-mulk* type, which had appeared for the first time in Segna di Buonaventura's decorations. The epigraphic bands are inserted on the hems of the cloths, but also on the open pages of the Bible, used as a model to represent the Holy Scriptures.

The scripts in the *Virgin Enthroned with Child* (fig. 201) from the Church of San Giovanni Battista dell'Abbadia Nuova di Siena and in the *Coronation of the Virgin with Angels* (fig. 202) kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena may be compared[295]. Those on the plate which come from the Abbadia Nuova are more accurate and reproduce the inscription *al-mulk* under the effect of different rotations, as already seen from Segna onwards.

The symbolic use of these signs, aimed at evoking the language of the Holy Scriptures, explains their perception in the fifteenth century milieu; a reference to the Holy Land and to Christ, as well as an example of elegance in ornamentation.

Sano displays this kind of ornamentation also on the textiles, as witnessed by the decorations on the Virgin's mantle in *the Virgin with Child and Saints[296]* (fig. 203) at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and in the one on the pinnacles depicting Jesus' life in the *Virgin and Child[297]* at the Pinacoteca in Siena (fig. 204).

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[292]   See P.P. Donati, "Per la pittura pistoiese del Trecento I: Il Maestro del 1310", *Paragone,* Firenze 1974, pp. 3-26.
[293]   See E. Napolitano, "Le decorazioni epigrafiche…", Pistoia 2016.
[294]   Ivi, p.27.
[295]   P. Torriti, *La Pinacoteca…,* Genova 1977, p. 273
[296]   T. J. Newbery, *The Robert Lehman Collection: Frames*, Vol. 13, New York 2007, pp. 24-25.
[297]   P. Torriti, *La Pinacoteca nazionale di Siena: i dipinti*, Volume 3, Genova 1990, p.203.

The *Virgin and Child* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York attributed to his workshop[298] is a patent demonstration that artists, within the limits of their skill, intentionally chose to make detailed copies of Arabic letters. The hem of the garments (fig. 205) testifies to the painter's willingness to imitate Arabic writing, even though his workshop disciples made rather rough attempts and this aspect could be a useful cue for the attribution of the work.

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[298]   G. Freuler. "Sano di Pietro, la sua fortuna critica e il "problema" del Maestro dell'Osservanza" in *Sano di Pietro: qualità, devozione e pratica nella pittura senese del Quattrocento*, Milano 2012, p. 38.

3.3.3 Early Renaissance

In the first decades of the fifteenth-century, while the imitation of Giotto's ways became increasingly repetitive and sterile, the modern taste was formed by the influence of international Gothic and its "new confidence in Nature" that is "one of the great discoveries" of the *Tardogotico*.[299]

Meanwhile, the so-called "minor arts" were beginning to have a greater spread among the Renaissance courts. Objects of Italian manufacture inspired to Eastern handicrafts (textiles and metals) will represent the means for transmission of Arabic scripts.

The new pictorial civilization of the Renaissance had as its initiator a young Florentine who died when he was not yet twenty-seven years old. Masaccio arrived in Florence in 1418, when the city was in the midst of a period of economic, social and cultural prosperity. Along with Filippo Brunelleschi in architecture and Donatello in sculpture, he can be considered the founder of Humanism in the art of painting, as man, represented in his reality and his daily feelings, is the protagonist of his art[300].

As for epigraphic decoration, we find in Masaccio works a tendency to use mixed scripts: the word al-*mulk* appears together with several Latin letters, E, V and above all X. In the *Sant'Anna Metterza* (dated c. 1424) kept at the Uffizi in Florence[301], a decorative pattern made up of cursive letters, which might be read as al-*mulk* with rotated characters, high shafts and V-shaped letters (fig.206), appears in the angel's halo at the right-hand top. In the Child's halo and on the hem of the Virgin's robe the ornamentation consists almost exclusively in X-shaped signs (fig.207).

The ornamentations of the dress of the *Madonna Casini*, dated about 1426[302], are a different issue. The small panel, kept at the Uffizi, bears some scripts engraved on the golden hem of the Virgin's dress. Inserted into the collar, it is possible to identify an Arabic word, already presented above, belonging to

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[299]   K. Clark, "*International Gothic...*", London 1947, p.760.
[300]   See C. G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge 2006.
[301]   G. Fossi, *Galleria degli Uffizi: arte, storia, collezioni*, Firenze 2001, p. 93.
[302]   Ivi, p. 94.

the Mamluk Protocol that we will often find in this form: *al-sulṭān*. The part of the word that can be better identified is the final one, with the *nūn* rotated 90° to the right, the *alif*, the *ṭā'-alif* ligature and the first part consisting in a particular *sīn* elongated upwards (fig. 208).

This form of *al-sulṭān* is also found in the decorations in Fra Angelico's paintings, a Florentine painter who knew and appreciated both Gentile da Fabriano's and Masaccio's novelties, showing a movement towards Masaccio and then towards the formal language of the Renaissance.

3.3.3.1 Fra Angelico

Fra Angelico was one of the most important figures of the Renaissance. His pictorial language shows "a gradual move towards the rectangular form, and therefore to the release of the art from the strictures of the traditional form."[303] He was entrusted with painting the frescoes of one of the great works that, during the Council of Florence in 1439, were commissioned by the Medici and which became one of the milestones of the Renaissance: the reconstruction of the Convent of San Mark. It is in the fresco of the *Madonna of Shadows*, dating ca. 1450[304] that we find on the robe worn by San Lorenzo a cursive writing pattern inserted in a rectangular frame. It is an inscription which is fundamental in understanding the many epigraphic patterns not only decorative ones that Angelico painted but those of his contemporaries as well. Just like on the collar of the *Madonna Casini* by Masaccio, we find the word *al-sulṭān*, which here is followed by *al-Malik* (fig. 209 A). The final *nūn* is rotated and takes the form of an E like in the inscription by Masaccio, the *ṭā'* and *alif* are properly designed, and the teeth of the *sīn* are elongated. As we can easily infer from the comparison of the drawings of the two inscriptions by Masaccio and Fra Angelico, they are very similar (fig. 209 B). In *Madonna of the Shadows*, even the strokes of the word *al-Malik* are well traced. The shaft of the *alif* is interrupted by a half-circle arch as it will appear in other ornamentations

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[303]   G. Bartz, *Masters of Italian Art: Fra Angelico*, Köln 1998, p.48.
[304]   Ivi, p.83.

made by Fra Angelico. The word is perfectly legible, although the final *kāf* has been covered in the drawing.

The inscription occurring in the *Madonna of the Shadows*, although distorted in design, may be read as the word *al-sulṭān*. This specimen gives a key of interpretation for other decorations present in other works by Fra Angelico that would otherwise be illegible. In the chart (fig. 210), some examples are provided, taken from the *Lamentation of Christ*, the *Deposition of Christ*, the *San Pietro Martire* Triptych, the *Coronation of the Virgin* and the *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, works which come from the Museo di San Marco in Florence.

As mentioned before, at the beginning of the fifteenth century there was a massive production of precious islamicate objects made in Italy, from which painters drew their lettering. Likewise in painting, craftsmen were inspired by the Islamic inscriptions embellishing fabrics and oriental metals which had been circulating for some centuries in Italy.

This is the case of two contemporary artefacts dating back to the early fifteenth century: a fabric and a partially gilded silver reliquary. The former is preserved in the Textile Museum of Prato and the latter in the museum of San Zeno Cathedral in Pistoia. Two signs part of the decorative program of these artefacts were favoured by several artists in their paintings. The golden Arabic letters, encircled by the polylobate rosettes, show the sequence *lām-mīm-alif* that can be led back to the word *al-mālikī* (fig. 211)*.* As it is often the case, the inscription is followed by a copy in reverse both in the upper and lower parts of the rosette.

The epigraphic bands on the reliquary of St. Albert are also quite interesting (fig. 212 A), as one out of many words is reproduced in the correct direction, all the rest being in reverse. This fact hints at a possible copy from textiles, or that the preparatory drawing was transferred to the object without knowledge of the right direction of the script. As a matter of fact, the letters "*al-mā*" are identical to those of the Prato's textile but, in this case, we also find the words *al-ʿālī* and *al-ʿālimī*, which are recurrent on Mamluk metals (see the quarter 1 and 3). In side 5 there is the complete form of *al-mālikī* and, in side 2, there is the debased form of *al-maqarr.*

Angelico's vast collection of Arabic inscriptions, which we have dealt with before, contains almost all the words met so far, but the most frequent are the *al-maqarr* (that usually precedes *al-mālīkī* in Mamluk titulature)[305] and the abridged form *al-mā*, both present in the reliquary. A comparison among the above-mentioned inscriptions on the textile and those on the reliquary is displayed in fig. 212 B. Some examples of *al-mā,* reproduced in different works, are shown in figure 213; while the comparison with the word *al-maqarr* is visible in figure 214.

Fra Angelico is the author of an extraordinary number of epigraphic decorations that call for a careful study of the use of this kind of ornamentation. The Dominican monk does not limit himself to the copy of what had been seen in the works of previous painters, but experiments and re-elaborates these signs and concepts. If in the decorations of Gentile, we can sense an apparent desire of the artist to include the name of Mary in his decorations, with Angelico the use of encrypted inscriptions takes on an entirely new outlook, a more elaborate vision, with the addition of new Latin words.

On the right-hand part of the hem of the *Madonna di Pontassieve*[306], kept at the Uffizi in Florence, the Latin signs N-A-Z-A-R-E ascribable to the word "Nazarene", occur in the same style of other inscriptions, but here Latin is followed by Arabic letters. Despite the use of two different scripts, the style of the decoration is unvaried. In the middle of the Arabic epigraphic band, we can detect a form of *al-mulk*[307] and *al-muʾayyad*[308]. In the final part on the left, we find the sign with two shafts which could be a possible variation of a*l-maqarr* (fig. 215).

Several epigraphic decorations appear along the hems of the fabrics in the *Virgin and Child with four Angels* in the Museo di San Marco, attributed to Angelico's assistant Zanobi Strozzi around 1434[309]. The word "Maria" is hidden among the Arabic letters on the collar of the Child, followed by the

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[305] See V.Porter, M. Rosser-Owen, *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text,* London 2012, p.206.
[306] B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance,* London 1932, p. 20
[307] This word can also be read as *al-malik*, matching the following *al-muʾayyad*.
[308] The one supported by God
[309] L. B. Kanter, P. Palladino, *Fra Angelico*, New York 2005, p.228.

word *al-mulk* (fig. 216).   In the *Deposition*, dated 1430[310], a dense decoration with tendrils in which we can distinguish the word "Magister" (fig. 217) is depicted on the hem of the cloak of St. Joseph of Arimathea, while on the hem of the Virgin's robe, the name "Maria" (fig. 218) has been placed between the Arabic letters.

An Arabic inscription in *thuluth* (fig. 219) runs on Christ's shoulder in the *Coronation of the Virgin*, painted before 1434[311], preserved in the Museo di San Marco, while three high letters and a final *hāʾ* in mirror-like position are painted on the collar (fig. 220). This pattern, recurrent in Arabic epigraphy, has often been interpreted as the word *Allāh*. As we have already shown, religious formulae do not usually belong to the repertory of Arabic inscription found on Italian paintings. A rare exception, which seems to be convincing, is a resembling form of the *shahāda* on the *Coronation of the Virgin*[312] of the Uffizi (fig. 221).

Angelico's epigraphic decorations represent a crucial point for the circulation of Arabic script among the painters of the early Renaissance. Even though his activities witness his willingness to alternate the real Arabic letters and/or inscriptions with Latin characters and pseudo-Arabic signs, from this moment onward the two scripts will no longer appear at the same time. A group of artists will continue to propose epigraphic ornamentation inspired by the signs of the Arabic alphabet with various levels of legibility, and another will tend to replace those characters with Latin alphabet signs with varying degrees of distortion.

3.3.3.2 Others Florentine painters

Regarding the use of decorative Arabic characters, the fifteenth-century artists, even those considered "minor" ones, could not dissociate themselves from the results achieved by the Maestros of early Renaissance, like Masaccio and Fra Angelico and forerunners such as Gentile da Fabriano.   They

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[310]   G. Bartz, *Masters…*, Köln 1998, p.57.
[311]   Ivi, p.54.
[312]   Ivi, p.56.

continued to be influenced by the decorations present either on the cloths of personages or on precious objects part of the background scene.

This is the case of painters like Francesco d'Antonio di Bartolomeo and Antonio da Firenze, who do not move away from the decorative style used on Tuscan artefacts and copied by Angelico as well. On the collar of the *Singing Angels* by Francesco d'Antonio di Bartolomeo (Academy of Drawing Arts, Florence), dating to around 1420[313], elegant inscriptions in gold copy several words belonging to the Mamluk protocol, which have already been mentioned above. Figure 222 shows a debased inscription where can be read the words: *al-ʿizz*[314] (in blue), *al-ʿā[lī]* (in white), *al-nāṣrī*[315] (in red), *al-mā[likī]* (in yellow), *al-maqarr* (in gray). These signs are also repeated on the collars of other personages.

A golden decoration consisting of a sequence of *mīm-alīf* is shown in the paintings of Antonio da Firenze: The *Crucifixion with Virgin and Saint John* and the *Madonna and Child with a Bishop*, *Saints and Angel*, both kept at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and dating to the mid-fifteenth century (fig. 223)[316]. Among other signs, we find the word *al-mālikī* inserted in the hems, here highlighted in white (figs. 224 and 225). The transmission of the patterns of *al-maqarr* and *al-mā[likī]* is also apparent in the works of Andrea del Castagno. In the *Annunciation of the Virgin* from the Gemäldegalerie[317] we find these words on the Virgin's cuff (figs. 226 and 227), while a version of *al-mālikī*, also upside-down, is set on the hem of the dress (fig. 228).

A compound ornamentation made up of three interconnected round letters found in the *Virgin and Child*[318] of the Contini Collection in Florence can be interpreted as a copy in the light of an Iranian bowl dated 12th-13th c. kept at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, bearing a similar inscription (see fig. 229).

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[313]   L. Bellosi, *I maestri del colore. La pittura tardogotica in Toscana*, Milano 1966, p.5.
[314]   Glory
[315]   the Victorious
[316]   T. Kustodieva, *Museo Statale…*, Milano 2011, p.179.
[317]   A. Zanaoli, *I Maestri del colore. Andrea del Castagno*, Milano 1964, p.5.
[318]   Ivi, p.4.

In the article by Rosamond Mack and Mohamed Zakariya on the Arabic pseudo-inscriptions on the David by Andrea del Verrocchio[319], the authors establish a reasonable and fruitful comparison with Mamluk inscriptions in *thuluth* style on precious metals of Islamic origin. The drawing of the epigraphic bands engraved on the sculpture offer useful data for the study of the decorations painted by the artist. Through the comparison, we can highlight the presence of the words *al-mālikī*, *al-maqarr* and *al-ʿālī* in most of Verrocchio's paintings. In particular, both the words *al-ʿālī* and *al-mālikī* can be identified (fig. 230) on the hem of the cloak in the *Virgin and Child*[320] in the Gemäldegalerie. Here, the shape of the *lām-kāf* in the word *al-mālikī* is similar to that of the Mamluk writing found on metals, as well as to the inscriptions painted by the Gentile and the Neapolitan follower of Giotto. The same model has been copied in *The Virgin and Child* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, assigned to the workshop of Verrocchio and dated 1460.[321] An abridged version of the word *al-mālikī* runs along the hem of the dress (figs. 231 and 232).

Rosamond Mack's reference to Mamluk inscriptions is convincing, especially in the light of the present reading of words that are also present on the Mamluks metals. A further support is offered by the fact that Andrea del Verrocchio was also a goldsmith,[322] so he surely had the opportunity to come across such vessels. In my opinion, we should not look for a model in a complicated re-interpretation of *Allāh* signs (as proposed by M. Zakaria)[323] but, rather, in the recurring patterns transmitted by movable epigraphy.

Domenico Ghirlandaio, another master of the Florentine Renaissance, received his training in Verrocchio's workshop; his epigraphic decorations look like those of his *Maestro*. Arabic letters in *thuluth* style appear on the trims of the clothes, and a wide range of ornamentations are placed on carpets that we will deal with later. The same model of the word *al-mālikī* used by

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[319]   R. E. Mack, M. Zakariya, "*The Pseudo-Arabic…*", *Artibus…*, Vol. 30, No. 60, 2009, pp. 157-172.
[320]   L. Fornasari, C. Starnazzi, M. Pagliai, *Verrocchio e l'atelier del Rinascimento*, Arezzo 2001, p. 26.
[321]   L. Venturini, *Francesco Botticini*, Firenze 1994, p. 21
[322]   L. Fornasari, C. Starnazzi, M. Pagliai, Verrocchio …, pp.12,14.
[323]   R. E. Mack, M. Zakariya, "The Pseudo-Arabic…", *Artibus…*, 2009, p. 160.

Verrocchio is also found in his *Virgin and Child* in the National Gallery in Washington, dated around 1470[324] (fig. 233). A reference to Verrocchio's David is evidenced by the sequence of *lām-mīm-alif* in ligature as well as other common decorations which adorn the hem of the Virgin's robe in the Vallombrosa Altarpiece dated 1485-90 and preserved in the homonymous Abbey[325] (fig. 234).

In the *Virgin and Child* in the Louvre Museum[326], the epigraphic decorations stand out, in handsome *thuluth* style, along the hems of the Virgin's robe. They are interspersed with floral rosettes like the ones found in the compound decoration of Mamluk metals. All epigraphic patterns decorating the paintings of the previous masters occur also in Ghirlandaio's works and those of Verrocchio, included the word *al-sulṭān* depicted in the veil covering the head of the Virgin, according to its established codification (fig. 235).

3.3.3.3 Venetian school

In the first half of the fifteenth century, Venetian painters like Jacobello del Fiore, Nicolò di Pietro, and Michele Giambono remained in the stream of Gothic painting, re-interpreting the Byzantine style of Paolo and Lorenzo Veneziano by means of typical Gothic hyper-decorativism.

In the epigraphic decorations used by these artists, the influence of Gentile da Fabriano, who was in Venice in 1408 to work in the Ducal Palace, can still be noticed.

In the *Triptych* by Jacobello del Fiore kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, dated 1421[327], ornamental inscriptions in cursive style are embossed on gold leaf (fig. 236 A). A high degree of distortion characterizes the writing, but it is, however, possible to identify some known forms that can be

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[324]   M. Boskovits, and D. A. Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings…,* Washington 2003, pp. 300-303.

[325]   C. Caneva, *Il Ghirlandaio di Vallombrosa. Un restauro difficile, un ritorno trionfale*, Firenze 2006.

[326]   F. Ames-Lewis, "Il paesaggio dell'arte nel Ghirlandaio", in *Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1449-1494 Atti del convegno Internazionale*, Firenze 1994, p. 88.

[327]   S. Moschini Marconi, *Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia. Opere d'arte dei secoli XIV e XV*, Venezia 1955, pp. 28-29.

associated with *al-mulk* and *baraka*, where the *bāʾ* and *rāʾ* in ligature, sometimes followed by a final *kāf,* are the only intelligible strokes (fig. 236 B, C). The particular shape of *al-mulk* could belong to a model circulating in Venice, but already present in Florence at the beginning of the fourteenth century. A support for this is given by a detail of the ornament used by Florentine Niccolò di Pietro Gerini in the *Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John* in the Hermitage[328] (fig. 237), whose likeness to that painted by Jacobello del Fiore is easily ascertained.

Another prototype of Tuscan origin circulating in Venice is *al-mā,* the initial part of the Arabic word *al-mālikī,* here copied according to different styles and shapes.

In the *Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 238) by Nicolò di Pietro[329], kept at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, it is repeated on the hems of the fabric and consists of two shafts, in which the *mīm* is always distinguishable, sometimes even reproduced with two round letters.

Following the period of the International Gothic, the first hints of pictorial renewal in Venice appeared around 1440 with the Bellini (Jacopo, Giovanni, and Gentile) and the Vivarini (Antonio, Bartolomeo and Alvise) families, which gradually mitigated the sumptuous and over-ornamented aspects of the floral-Gothic tradition from which their careers started.

In the decorations with Arabic lettering, the style is characterized by a dense weft made up of high shafts bent by a central arch with a round letter in between. Initially, as shown by the decorations of Jacopo Bellini and Antonio Vivarini, the copy of the first part of the word, that is "*al-mā*", is still readable, but over the time it underwent so many substantial distortions that it became almost unrecognizable.

In the *Adoration of the Magi* by Antonio Vivarini dated 1440-50[330] and kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, epigraphic ornamentations recalling Mamluk inscriptions in *thuluth* are present on the textiles, gold foils and flag. They are

[328]   T. Kustodieva, *Museo Statale…*, Milano 2011, p.203.
[329]   O. Ferrari, "Un'opera di Niccolò di Pietro", *Commentari*, IV (1953), pp. 228-230.
[330]   R. Pallucchini, *I Vivarini (Antonio, Bartolomeo, Alvise)*, Venezia 1962, p. 102.

repetitions of the same varieties that we find in a stylized version on the hems of the tissue, but well visible on a heraldic flag (fig.239). It is the whole word *al-mālikī*, which appears in the drawing split into three parts in order to distinguish the strokes representing the letters *alif,* then *lām, mīm, alif* and, finally, *lām-kāf-yā* (fig.240).

In the works of Jacopo Bellini, the word is split into two parts: "*al-mā*" and "*likī*" on the robe of the Virgin (ca. 1430) in the *Virgin and Child* in the New York Metropolitan Museum[331] (fig. 241), on the robe and the halo of the *Madonna and Child with Cherubs*[332] (ca. 1455) in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice (fig. 242), and on the halo of the *Virgin and Child*[333] (ca. 1450) in the Uffizi Gallery (fig. 243).

In the dense and intricate design of the graphic signs of his son Giovanni, the words *al-mālikī* is hardly recognizable. In its place, we find a sequence of *mīm* and *alif* interconnected. While in some cases, as the *Madonna Enthroned Cherishing the Sleeping Child* in the Galleria dell'Accademia[334], signs are still distinct (fig. 244), in others works, like the *Christ Blessing*[335] in the Louvre Museum, we find an intricate network of shafts with rounded elements (fig. 245).

In Padua, Andrea Mantegna adequately represented the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance. His epigraphic decorations are reminiscent of the style of Filippo Lippi (which we will see below), whose presence in Padua in 1434 is proven by the fact that he painted the *Tabernacle of the Relics* in the Basilica del Santo in Padua[336]. Nonetheless, compared with Lippi, Mantegna's ornamentation retains a recognition of the Arabic *ductus*. In *Judith with the head of Holofernes*[337] in the National Gallery in Washington, on the edge of the tent, the *mīm-alīf* letter*s*, followed by a shaft that could represent the *lām-kāf* of *al-mālikī* is recognizable (fig. 246). In the *Virgin and Child* painted around 1453-

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[331]   M. Boskovits. "Per Jacopo Bellini pittore (postilla ad un colloquio)." *Paragone* 36, Firenze 1985, p. 122.
[332]   C. Eisler, *Il genio di Jacopo Bellini. L'opera completa*, Milano 1989, pp. 519-520.
[333]   Ivi, pp. 513.
[334]   R. Ghiotto, T. Pignatti, *L'opera completa di Giovanni Bellini*, Milano 1969, p. 94
[335]   M. Olivari, *Giovanni Bellini*, Firenze 1990, p.15.
[336]   J. Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, Londra 1993, p.515.
[337]   B. B. Fredericksen, F. Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*, Cambridge 1972, p.118.

54[338], kept at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, on the hem of the cloak there is a sequence of letters that calls to mind the *shahāda* (fig. 247). It must be said that his decorations are made up of a long repetition of tall letters imitating the elegant Mamluk style.

In the decoration of the *Holy family with the Saint Mary Magdalen* (ca. 1495-1505)[339] in the Metropolitan Museum, the epigraphic band on St. Joseph's mantle is extremely dense as many signs are repeated several times (fig. 248). Once again, the painter used an already known model as it is shown by the comparison with the inscribed frieze painted more than a century and a half before by the Master of the Città di Castello (fig. 249). A simple repetition of shafts also occurs in the *St. Luke[340]* in the Pinacoteca di Brera (fig. 250).

3.3.3.4 Cima da Conegliano

Undoubtedly, the most significant, comprehensive and faithful case of transfer of Arabic inscriptions to Italian art is represented by the works of Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano. The cultural context in which Cima da Conegliano operated was rich in new ideas that highlighted his work. Once he reached artistic maturity, Cima moved from Conegliano to Venice, where he came into contact with a cosmopolitan world and with famous painters working in the city. He met Giovanni Bellini, Alvise Vivarini and, probably, Albrecht Dürer, who was in Venice during those years[341]. Meeting them gave him the opportunity to confront and improve his talent by concentrating particularly on details, in both figures and ornaments.

It is just this attention given to the remarkably faithful reproduction of the decorative elements, together with the need to represent refinement and elegance, which make the work of Cima the most notable example of faithful reproduction of Arabic texts in Italian paintings.

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[338]   S. Fumian, *Mantegna e Padova, 1445-1460*, Milano 2006, pp. 15, 198–199, 244.

[339]   G. Finaldi, "Mantegna", *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 20, New York 1996, p.313.

[340]   S. Bandera Bistoletti, *Il Polittico di San Luca di Andrea Mantegna (1453-1454): in occasione del suo restauro*, Milano 1989, p.11.

[341]   B. Carpenè, "La biodiversità vegetale nei dipinti di Cima", in *Il paesaggio di Cima: Da Conegliano ai monti di Endimione*, Cornuda 2013, p. 64

At the end of the fifteenth century, Venice was a main trading power, whose wealth was based on and organized around the trade routes with the East, particularly Egypt and Mamluks Syria. Fabrics and metals were among the most appreciated gifts, and these goods were the most widely in demand. Thanks to recent research it is possible to document the gifts sent by the Mamluk Sultanate and by the Ottoman diplomatic missions to the Venetian Seignory[342], among which textiles and precious metals represented the biggest component. It is easy to see why the epigraphic decorations that we find in the works by Cima are copied from Arabic inscriptions in *thuluth* style which are part of the Mamluk protocol.

The works that we consider here were painted in a period that goes from 1490 to 1513 and represents only a part of Cima's massive artistic production.

One of the complete inscriptions is painted on the hem of St. Peter's tunic in the *Virgin and Child with Saints Peter, Romuald, Benedict and Paul*[343], preserved in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, where there is a long golden inscription in Arabic (fig.251).

The text is separated by two rosettes designed in clear Mamluk style. The *ductus* of the letters is extremely faithful to the original *thuluth* writing. The inscription (fig. 252) begins with the end of an undeciphered word and follows with *al-Malik* (interrupted by the tissue fold), *al-mā[likī]*[344], *al-ʿālī, al-nāṣir* (?), *[a]l-mālikī, al-Malik, al-ʿālī, al-mawlawī, al-mālikī, al-ʿāmilī, al-mālikī, al-ʿālī, (…), al-nā[ṣir].*

الملك الما(لكي) العالي الناصر(؟) (ا)لما(لكي) الملك العالي المولوي المالكي العاملي المالكي العالي (...) النا(صر)؟

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342   G. Curatola, "Marin Sanudo, Venezia, i doni diplomatici e le merci orientali islamiche", in *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World*, Venezia 2010, pp.173-181. R. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza…*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 177, 206.

343   G.C.F. Villa, *Cima da Conegliano, poeta del paesaggio*, Venezia 2010, p.27.

344   The following adjectives are the so-called *alqāb al-Tawābiʿ*, which are *nisba*s modelled on the original titles owned by the Sovereing. See G. Gabrieli, *Il nome proprio arabo-musulmano*, Roma 1915, pp. 148-149.

The royal Majesty, the excellent, the victorious (?), the royal Majesty, the excellent, the Lord, the royal, the diligent, the royal, the excellent, the victorious (?).[345]

When we parallel the Arabic inscriptions by Cima and the inscriptions on Islamic metalworks, the similarity is appalling. In particular, the Mamluk tray of the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig.253 A) gives evidence for the word *al-Malik* (fig.253 B). Besides, in figure 254 B, the word *al-ʿālī* occurs in the same way of the Mamluk bowl of the Courtauld Museum (fig. 254 A): there is an exact correspondence of the writing because of the position of the *lām-yāʾ* in ligature where the tail of the *yāʾ* bends backwards on the right. The word *al-nāṣir* is not easy to identify (fig.255 B). In the Mamluk metalworks, the group of letters *ṣād-rāʾ* are placed in the upper register of the epigraphic band and always intertwined between the shafts of the *lām* and *alif* in *al-nā*, as can be seen in figure 255 A, depicting a Mamluk bowl of the Courtauld Museum. Even in Cima's inscription, albeit in a slightly stylized manner, it is possible to identify two shafts with a medial *nūn* and a superimposed serpentine element. Figure 256 shows the comparison of the word *al-mawlawī* as represented in the inscription on the painting (B) and on the box preserved at the V&A Museum (A). A very interesting comparison is that of the word *al-ʿāmilī* occuring in the same way as the Mamluk Plate in the Smithsonian Museum (fig. 257 A).

Given that, we can affirm that Cima copied the stylistic feature with extreme accuracy. Also the presence of central rosette (fig. 258 B), typical of the Mamluk decorative tradition, supports the idea that the reference materials were Mamluk objects, even if some details indicate that copies were not always made directly from artefacts (fig. 258 A). Lastly, in figure 259 B, we can notice that the word *al-mālikī* in the painting corresponds precisely to the inscription of the Mamluk box (fig. 259 A).

Although Cima proved to be accurate in his copy of Arabic inscriptions, twice in his decorative programme the word *al-mālikī* is abbreviated to its first part, that is "*al-mā*", as we have seen previously. It is one of the most common elements in pictorial epigraphic ornamentation during the entire fifteenth

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[345] Note that the ending -ī on most of the epithets points to an inscription in the name of an amīr, with reference to the royal titles of his former lord from the early stage in his career.

century. Such abridgments as well as lacunae in the script seem to confirm that the painter was not aware of the meaningful segments of the script. This also accounts for the absence of many *alif*s in the inscription. In conclusion, although the painter tried to duplicate the original as faithfully as possible, it is reasonable that he did not copy the inscription directly from an object (probably metalworks), but from a sketch. In this case, from the dense texture of Mamluk cursive shafts, some may have escaped the artist's attention.

Since he probably had the possibility to see inscriptions on circular objects such as plates, lamps, candlesticks, the easiest way to bring those decorations in the two-dimensionality of the canvas was, in fact, to separate the epigraphic elements. This explains the presence of "*al-mā*" followed by other Mamluk epithets in other epigraphic ornamentation, where the available space is reduced, for example in the cuffs.

This is the case of the inscription on the collar of the *Madonna dell'Arancio* (ca. 1496-1497)[346] kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice and on the cuff of the *Virgin and Child*, dated around 1499-1502),[347] of the National Gallery in London. In the first case a particular phenomenon occurs: The group "*al-mā*" occurs first in reverse as in textiles and is followed by the word *al-ʿālī* and the abbreviation *al-mā,* this time correctly oriented (fig. 260). In the second painting, the inscription is wholly in reverse and begins with some high letters followed by *al-mā al-ʿālī* and the beginning of a word that is so blurred that does not allow any reading (figs. 261, 262). The inscriptions often start with single meaningless letters, which can probably refer to the end of circular inscriptions and precede the copy of legible words. This fact hints at the inability of the artist to identify the beginning of the text when displayed on a circular surface. A similar ornamentation, also in mirror-like position, is found in the *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and John the Baptist* (1492-1495)[348] in the National Gallery in Washington (fig. 263). The inscriptions are present on both of the Virgin's cuffs. On the right hand, we read "*al-mā*" separated from the rosette (identical to the one included in the inscription of the Saints in the

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[346]   G. C. F. Villa, *Il paesaggio di Cima: Da Conegliano ai monti di Endimione*, Cornuda 2013, p.111.
[347]   P. Humfrey, *Cima da Conegliano*, Cambridge 1983, p. 112.
[348]   G.C.F. Villa, *Cima…*, Venezia 2010, p. 14.

Gemäldegalerie) then *al-maqarr* (fig. 264) drawn in the same way we saw in the personage of the Neapolitan follower of Giotto (fig. 265).

The text that appears more frequently in the works of Cima consists of the words *al-mālikī* and *al-ʿālī*. In addition to what has been seen, the concomitance of these words appears:

- In the *Archangel Raphael with Tobias between Saints Nicholas and James the Major*[349], in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, *al-mā* is followed by a series of shafts (probably indicating *lām-kāf* in ligature), then *al-ʿālī* and again *al-mā* (fig. 266).

- On the cuffs of the *Virgin and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Paul* in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice[350], on the right one (fig. 267) (*al-mawlawī al-mālikī al-ʿālī al-mālikī*), on the left one (fig. 268) (high letters, *al-ʿālī (a)l-mā al-mā*).

- On the collar of the *Virgin and Child* dating around 1513-18 in the National Gallery in London. It is not sure to whom the work should be assigned.[351] However, the epigraphic decoration provides a vital clue in attributing it to Cima. On the collar of the Virgin, a tentative reading of the first word is *al-mālikī,* followed by *al-ʿālī* (fig. 269). These inscriptions appear under such a shape in this period only in the works of Cima. On this account, the attribution of the work to the Venetian painter seems to be confirmed.

The inscriptions that we find in the *Virgin and Child*[352] in the Los Angeles County Museum are more complex: *al-nāṣir al-ʿālī mā (?) al-māl(ikī)?* can be read on the collar (fig. 270). The word *al-nāṣir* has been painted likewise in the St. Peter in Berlin modelled on metalworks, such as the bowl preserved at the Courtauld Gallery in London dated to the mid-fourteenth century. On the Virgin's cuff, the inscription begins with a word that could be read as *al-maqarr* and continues with *al-mālikī al-ʿāmilī al-mālikī* (fig. 271).

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[349]   P. Humfrey, *Cima…*, Cambridge 1983, p.151.
[350]   Ibid.
[351]   See the note of the National Gallery website. https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/probably-by-giovanni-battista-cima-da-conegliano-the-virgin-and-child-with-saints Consulted on line on 21 December 2017.
[352]   G.C.F. Villa, *Cima…*, Venezia 2010, p. 283.

In the epigraphic decoration of the *Three Saints* (dated around 1512-17)[353] in the New York Metropolitan Museum we find, on the Saint Lucia mantle, a series of unconnected shafts followed by *al-ʿādil (?)*, although not rendered in elegant Mamluk style as in the cases presented above, and by a word that, shifted into the right position, might be interpreted as *al-maqarr* (fig .272).

Al-ʿāmilī al-mālikī (fig. 273) occurs on the collar of the *Virgin and Child* dated around 1495-1499[354] in the National Gallery in London. On the collar and on the cuff, among many signs, we can distinguish the words on *al-ʿāmilī* and *al-ʿālī* (fig.274).

The inscriptions of the *Virgin and Child* (ca. 1494)[355] in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna and the *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Mary Magdalene*[356] housed in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich are different. In both cases the inscription is clumsy. The epigraphic decoration found on the collar (fig. 275) and cuff of the Virgin (fig. 276) in Bologna can only be properly interpreted if compared with the inscription in Munich. Here on Mary Magdalene's left cuff (fig. 277) we can distinguish *al-mā* followed by undeciphered signs; after the rosette, it seems possible to read the word *baraka* with the letters *bā'* and *rā'* separated and the *tā' marbūṭa* substituted by the *alif* , as it is customary on Islamic ceramics. On the right cuff (fig. 278), there are simplifications of *baraka* (as found on the decorations the Bologna's painting). Similarly, on the left cuff of the Virgin, we find the repetition of the letter *kāf* (fig. 279).

A very long inscription is present in the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (ca. 1504)[357] in the National Gallery in London. An inscription is depicted on the hem of the tunic of the first Saint on the right-hand side, which is very similar to that of the St. Peter in the Gemäldegalerie; a second epigraphic band is located on St. Thomas' tunic. Unfortunately, the quality of the image at our disposal does not allow an accurate study of the text, but some words like *al-ʿālī* and *al-ʿāmil* can be identified (fig. 280).

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[353]   P. Humfrey, Cima…, Cambridge 1983, p. 131.
[354]   P. Humfrey, Cima…, Cambridge 1983, p. 109.
[355]   G. C. F. Villa, *Il paesaggio…*, Cornuda 2013, p.111.
[356]   P. Humfrey, Cima…, Cambridge 1983, p. 130-131.
[357]   Ivi, p. 110-111.

The analysis of the inscriptions present in the work of Cima allows us to make some reflections on the transmission of inscriptions from the artefacts. As already mentioned, precious metalworks probably have a fundamental role in the copy of Mamluk inscriptions. Most likely, cases where these inscriptions are less accurate can be explained with the copy from the textiles. In fact, because of weaving techniques or the origin of craftsmen many *ṭirāz* bear debased inscription, as already mentioned. In addition, when these *ṭirāz* are worn by personalities it was very difficult for the artists to make an exact copy of the inscription. The script on the *Pala*[358] preserved in the Duomo of Conegliano Veneto can be a useful example for that. The inscribed cartouches on the collars of St. Apollonia and the Virgin contain inscriptions (fig. 281) very similar in shape and style to those on a fragment of Egyptian textile kept at the Ashmolean Museum (fig. 282.). Exactly as on the textile, we find two cartouches having respectively a series of high letters with a final *kāf*, and the letters *alīf-ʿayn- alif* in ligature with a superimposed central sign. Again, we are faced with a possible copy of an artefact of Eastern origin containing degenerate inscriptions.

As already mentioned, this collection of Cima's inscriptions is not meant to be complete. It is a small part of the artistic production of the Venetian painter, but enough to understand the importance of the role of epigraphic decoration in his art.

The omnipresence and the high quality of the Arabic script in his work contrast with a blatantly obvious observation: these inscriptions have never been subject to thorough study because they were regarded, in the same way as the other decorations, as fanciful ornamentation inspired by Arabic characters. This fact is symptomatic of how the phenomenon has been underestimated and what arbitrary terminology has been used to describe the inscriptions.

The paintings by Cima da Conegliano represent the culmination of a process that began in the twelfth century, which evolved and matured through the centuries and which finds its highest expression in the work of this Venetian

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[358]   G. C. F. Villa, *Il paesaggio…*, Cornuda 2013, p.109.

artist. There will be no other artist after him that will recreate Arabic inscriptions in such a faithful manner. On the contrary, we will see a gradual movement away from the Arabic script in favour of Latin and pseudo-Latin compositions.

Latin prayers concealed under the appearance of Islamic motifs manifested the artist's refusal to copy a text he couldn't understand. Cima's inscriptions give evidence for the legibility of the signs. This was due to two essential conditions: the accuracy of the original text and the ability or the desire of the artist to copy it faithfully.

3.3.4 Pseudo-Latin and encrypted Latin inscriptions

As we have explained, the use of pseudo-script ornamentations is based on the creation and re-elaboration of merged alphabetical signs. In this case the overused term "pseudo-inscription" appears appropriate for once.

In Florence, artists active throughout the fifteenth century such as Filippo Lippi, Filippino Lippi (his son), Zanobi Strozzi, Francesco di Stefano (also known as the Pesellino), Jacopo Antonio, Paolo di Stefano, Jacopo del Sellaio, Francesco Botticini, Benvenuto di Giovanni, the Perugino and Sandro Botticelli are interpreters of this new Florentine use of epigraphic decorations.

Sometimes, the original Arabic inscription is detectable, but in most cases, the ornamentation is related to alphabetic compositions in Latin characters and to Latin encrypted inscriptions.

Filippo Lippi joined the process of pseudo-inscriptions creating a personal style of epigraphic decoration inspired by the Latin alphabet but with elements borrowed from the Arabic script containing the letters *lām-mīm*, the shafts and some forms of *kāf*. We can easily detect these Arabic elements in the *Virgin and Child with Saints*, known as the *Pala Barbadori* (dated 1437-38)[359], preserved in the Louvre Museum in Paris (fig. 283).

Lippi's decorations are firmly oriented towards a reproduction of the Latin alphabet through the alteration of the signs he knew, using encrypted Latin forms as it appears in Gentile's and Angelico's works. We can notice it in the decoration on the collar of the *Virgin and Child* at the National Gallery of Washington dated ca. 1440[360](fig. 284) and in *The Adoration of the Child with St. Bernard and St. John* (ca. 1459)[361] (fig. 285), kept at the Gemäldegalerie. In these cases, the signs seem to be almost exclusively inspired by Gothic characters.

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[359] S. Miller, *The Word Made Visible in the Painted Image: Perspective, Proportion, Witness and Threshold in Italian Renaissance Painting*, Cambridge 2016, p.14.
[360] M. Boskovits, and D. A. Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings…*, Washington 2003, pp. 401-405.
[361] R. Grosshans, *Gemaldegalerie Berlin: Gesamtverzeichnis*, Berlin 1996, p.120.

The inscriptions that we find in Pesellino's works are very similar. The decoration in the *Virgin and Child with Saints* by Pesellino[362], kept at the Louvre, can be considered as an example of this similarity (figs. 286, 287).

The blend of Arabic and Latin pseudo-inscriptions becomes apparent in many works. The ornamentations gradually abandon the link with the Arabic characters in place of new enigmatic games such as the introduction of the author's signature. That is the case of the *Annunciation* in the National Gallery of London, painted by Angelico's disciple, Zanobi Strozzi[363]. Within the epigraphic decorations hidden among tendrils, we can detach his signature "Za-nobi" (fig. 288) followed by a *lām-alīf* ductus (fig. 289).

This is a trend that will be found in subsequent periods as in the case of the *Virgin and Child* dated towards the end of the fifteenth century and kept at the National Gallery of London. It was painted by Paolo di San Leocadio, an artist from the Emilia-Romagna[364]. On the hem of the textile, we can recognize his signature "Paulus" between the pseudo-inscriptions (fig. 290).

Decorations by Sandro Botticelli and Perugino paved the way for a new kind of ornamentation that would spread during the entire sixteenth century. Those painted by Botticelli reproduce the *ductus* of the Latin stylized characters overlapping in a dense and intricate composition. We can notice it in the haloes of the *Virgin and Child with Saint John*, at the Louvre, dated around 1470[365] (fig. 291). However, the decorations by Perugino are composed of capital Latin letters adorned by fantasy inventions in an ornamental calligraphic style. We find this kind of decoration in many works of art: in the *Virgin and Child with Angels and Saints* from the Louvre Museum[366] (fig. 292); in the *Crucifixion* at the National Gallery of Washington, in *the Virgin and Child with Two Angels* at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan, and in the *Virgin and Child with Saint Catherine and Saint John the Baptist* at the Louvre[367]. In some of

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[362]   B. Berenson, *Pitture…*, Milano 1936, p. 381.
[363]   A. Leader, *The Badia of Florence: Art and Observance in a Renaissance Monastery*, Bloomington 2012, pp.273-275.
[364]   X. Company, *Il Rinascimento di Paolo da San Leocadio*, Palermo 2009.
[365]   S. Malaguzzi, *Botticelli. L'artista e le opere*, Firenze 2003, p.16.
[366]   J. A. Becherer, Pietro Perugino, *Master of the Italian Renaissance*, New York 1997, p.58.
[367]   For the works mentioned above see: V. Garibaldi, *Perugino: catalogo completo*, Firenze 2000.

these works, the drawings of *al-mulk* in a mirror-like shape are still recognizable.

Pseudo-Latin inscriptions are documented even among the artists of the Sienese school in the fifteenth century. The *Virgin and Child with Angels* by Pietro di Domenico da Montepulciano, exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, dating to 1420[368], shows that epigraphic decorations are inserted on the hem of the robe of the Virgin in gold. These are signs inspired by Latin letters where, in some cases, it is possible to recognize the greeting to the Virgin in the word "AVE" followed by very degenerate signs that might hide the name "Maria" (fig. 293).

In the second half of the fifteenth century in Siena, there was a tendency towards X-shaped decorations. The work by Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi could give a plausible explanation about the origin of this ornamental pattern. A dense epigraphic band with very angular characters decorates the hems of the tissues in the *Virgin and Child with Saints*[369] in the National Gallery in Washington. The pattern consists of intricate X-shaped signs, among which it is possible to detect some Arabic letters like *wāw, lām-alīf, ʿayn* (fig.294). In other works, the Arabic letters disappear almost completely in favour of the X-shaped decorations, such as in the *Virgin with Child and Saints*[370] kept at the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena, dating to the late fifteenth century (fig. 295). This type of pseudo-inscription will be found both in the works by Matteo di Giovanni: *Virgin and Child with Angels and Cherubim*[371] at the National Gallery in Washington (fig.296) and the *Virgin and Child with Saints*[372] at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena.

In central Italy, the gradual introduction of pseudo-Latin is already evident between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Ornamentations that were originally composed of angular and separate forms underwent, during

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[368] A. De Marchi, "Pittori a Camerino nel Quattrocento: le ombre di Gentile e la luce di Piero", in *Pittori a Camerino nel Quattrocento*, Milano 2002, p.90.

[369] M. Boskovits, and D. A. Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings…*, Washington 2003, pp. 540-543.

[370] F. Zeri, *Italian Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Sienese and Central Italian Schools*, Vicenza 1980, p. 56.

[371] M. Boskovits, and D. A. Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings…*, Washington 2003, pp. 505-508.

[372] P. Torriti, *La Pinacoteca…*, Genova 1977, p.372.

the century, gradual transformation into a latticework or cursive forms. Since the end of the fourteenth century, a kind of epigraphic ornamentation inspired by separate Latin alphabetic signs adorned the *Madonna of the Humility* (National Gallery of London) painted by the Bolognese Lippo di Dalmasio around 1390-1410[373] (fig. 297). This change of alphabet suggests a gradual loss of interest in the Islamic world. We found similar pseudo-inscriptions in the *Altarpiece of St. Helena* kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice painted by Michele di Matteo from Bologna around 1437. Here, the name of Virgin can be detected (fig.298). Latin characters are present also in the *Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine* painted by Lorenzo d'Alessandro, from the Italian region of the Marche, in the late fifteenth century and kept at the National Gallery of London. In the painting, the presence of Arabic elements has almost disappeared except for a few round letters (fig. 299).

Vincenzo Foppa was a witness to this trend in the Lombard Renaissance. In both of his works depicting the *Virgin and Child* in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum[374] in Milan and in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, dated about 1465–70,[375] there are some Latin letters combined with fantastic signs and shafts placed side by side (fig. 300).

Contrary to what happened in Central Italy, the artists of the Venetian school used pseudo-inscriptions involving Arabic letters. This demonstrates the diffusion and importance of the inscriptions painted by famous artists as Bellini, Mantegna, and Cima da Conegliano that left an indelible mark and a notable example for the Venetian Renaissance painters. In this regard, we can observe the decorations present in the Carlo Crivelli's painting, on the robes of the *Virgin and Child with Angels[376]* in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan (fig.301).

In the epigraphic decorations by Marco Zoppo and Michele da Verona, even though they are characterized by pseudo-Latin characters, it is possible to trace motifs back to the model of a recurrent inscription: the ductus *al-sulṭān*

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[373]   A. Tartuferi, G. Tormen, *La fortuna…*, Firenze 2014, p. 188.
[374]   G. Agosti, M. Natale, R. Romano, Vincenzo Foppa. *Un protagonista del Rinascimento*, Milano 2002, pp. 246-247.
[375]   M. Natale, *Vincenzo Foppa: un protagonista del Rinascimento*, Milano 2003, pp. 166-167.
[376]   P. Zampetti, *Giovanni Boccati*, Milano 1971, p.208.

as it appears in the *Madonna Casini* by Masaccio[377]. In the ornamentation of Marco Zoppo's work, the *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints*, dated 1471[378] and kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, there is an epigraphic decoration on the hem of the Saints' tunic, interspersed with six rosettes. In the first segment from right, we find an interesting composition of letters. Proceeding with the lecture from the right, there is a portion of a shaft, then two S, then a sign similar to the Arabic *ṭā'* followed by a shaft (fig. 302). We find the same inscription on the Madonna's cuff in the *Virgin with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, dated around 1495 and painted by Michele da Verona[379]. Reading from the right we find the classical W shape followed by the letter that should correspond to Arabic *ṭā'* (in this case with the raised eyelet), a shaft and a kind of reversed B (that corresponds to the E found in the *Madonna Casini*), which represents a rotated *nūn* (fig. 303).

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[377]   Cf. fig. 208.

[378]   C. Schmidt Arcangeli, *Giovanni Bellini e la pittura veneta a Berlino. Le collezioni di James Simon e Edward Solly alla Gemäldegalerie*, Verona 2015, pp. 394-404

[379]   M. Vinco, "Gli inizi di Michele da Verona", Proporzioni, IX-X, Firenze 2008-09, p. 44.

3.3.5 Inscriptions on carpets

In fifteenth-century painting, there is an ever-increasing presence of oriental carpets decorated with Arabic inscriptions. The large number of rugs represented in the Italian and European art, particularly in Venetian paintings, is due to the role that Venice had in importing Oriental carpets between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Those known as "Lotto" or "Holbein" are a kind of Anatolian carpets that were most appreciated in Europe (at least, their presence is most attested)[380]. They owe their name to the sixteenth-century painters who, more than others, documented their presence. However, already in the fifteenth century, many artists reproduced the oriental carpets with patterns of Arabic writing.

Vittore Carpaccio painted carpets with epigraphic ornamentations in Kufic inscriptions of the word *al-mulk* in *Stories of St. Orsula* (*The Departure of the Pilgrims*) dated ca. 1495-96,[381] in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice (fig. 304). We can compare these kinds of inscriptions to those present on oriental textiles, such as the fragment from the Ashmolean Museum (fig. 305). A further support of this hypothesis is the article *Carpets and "Kufesque"*[382] by Julia Bailey offering a detailed investigation of this type of decoration and a convincing hypothesis of its interpretation as *al-mulk*.

A fascinating carpet is painted on the edge of the balcony In the *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* by Carlo Crivelli dated 1486[383], in the National Gallery in London. The decoration is composed of a repetition of a modular element, rotated in various positions and made up of two shafts with round endings and a central element like a letter *mīm* depicted in an open shape (fig. 306). We suggest a comparison of this *ductus* in a fragment of textile, probably from Turkey, dated to the thirteenth-fourteenth century and kept at the Metropolitan Museum of New York (fig. 307).

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[380] See D. Y. Kim, "Lotto's Carpets: Materiality, Textiles, and Composition in Renaissance Painting", *The Art Bulletin* 98.2, 2016, pp. 181–212.
[381] M. Cancogni, G. Perocco, *L'opera completa di Carpaccio*, Milano 1967, pp.89-90.
[382] J. Bailey, "Carpets…"", *DAI*, Kuwait 2010.
[383] C. Harrison, *An Introduction to Art*, New Haven 2010, p.128.

The decorations on the carpet in the *Virgin and Child* (Hermitage Museum) by an anonymous Venetian painter towards the end of the fifteenth century are painted in geometric style, probably of Iranian taste. We can observe angular eyelet letters like the *ductus* of the Arabic *fā'* (fig.308).

The presence of oriental carpet inscriptions, albeit with smaller spread, is attested also in Tuscany. A clear example is detectable in the *Marriage of the Virgin* painted by Gregorio di Cecco di Luca[384], now at the National Gallery of London (fig. 309). A beautiful epigraphic ornamentation in Kufic style runs all along the edge of the carpet, repeating a shape of *al-mulk* as appears on a fragment of an eastern tissue (fig.310).

As already mentioned, a large representation of carpet inscriptions is present in the works of Domenico Ghirlandaio[385]. A very interesting example is the interlaced Kufic pattern that embellishes the fresco of the *Resurrection of the Boy* in the Basilica of *Santa Trinità* in Florence (fig. 311). We find a comparable decoration on a western Anatolian carpet, published by P. R. J. Ford in *Oriental Carpet Design*[386] (fig. 312). More carpet inscriptions are attested in the fresco of *St. Jerome in his study* in the Church of Ognissanti in Florence (fig.313) and in the painting *Ingesuati Sacred Conversation* preserved at the Uffizi (fig.314). In both of these works, the composition consists of the repetition of two interlaced shafts.

Unlike what happens in the decorations of halo and clothing, the inscriptions on the carpets underwent fewer changes in the transmission process because they were copied directly from the original artefacts without any readaptation in the drawing. It is, therefore, a parallel phenomenon that will be more popular in the sixteenth century and which, as we shall see in the next chapter, will represent the latest evidence of Arabic script in Italian art.

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[384]   L. Bellosi, *Come un prato fiorito: studi sull'arte tardogotica*, Milano 2000, pp.18-19.
[385]   For the works mentioned above see: J. K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*, New Haven 2001,
[386]   P.R.J. Ford, *Oriental Carpet Design: A Guide to Traditional Motifs Patterns and Symbols*, London 2007, pp. 172. The author writes that "this carpet has stylistic affinities with the geometric Mamluk carpets woven in Cairo in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries".

3.3.6 Summary

In this summary, we introduce a rapid overview on the trends of Arabic and pseudo-Arabic decorations developed during the fifteenth century. We attempt to highlight the most recurrent texts copied from the Arabic inscriptions and the degeneration of forms already met in previous centuries, transmitted to the works of *Quattrocento*. Consequently, we will trace a comprehensive framework of the phenomenon already explained in this chapter.

Although the presence of Arabic scripts in Italian art can be considered being in a start-up phase at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the tendency to use sketches and prototypes of the original inscriptions, allowing for a greater flexibility in the arrangement of epigraphic decoration in the paintings, began to develop already in the mid-fourteenth century. Soon, this trend generated an expansion of different types and styles of Arabic decorations in the works of the *Quattrocento*. Likewise, the transfer from the objects continues to testify the presence of legible Arabic inscriptions in the paintings as well. This latter phenomenon occurs mostly in the fifteenth century.

At the beginning of the 1400s, when the precept of Renaissance humanism had not yet totally involved the visual arts, a well-established trend was represented by the International Gothic and its accuracy in the reproduction of the decorative elements. The attention to ornamental detail encouraged the development of new forms of epigraphic ornamentation, although, in many of these paintings, reproductions of the epigraphic pattern already introduced in the previous period can frequently be found.

In Tuscany, from the early years of the fifteenth century onwards, a still very common ornament is the inscription of *al-mulk* in a mirror-like position, as it appears in the works of Lorenzo Monaco, Turino Vanni, and Martino di Bartolomeo.

The words *al-maqarr, al-mālikī* and its abridged form "*al-mā*" are mostly re-proposed in the painting decorations. These *ductus* already mentioned for the previous centuries became a very common element in the following years. The

presence of the abridged form "*al-mā*" is also attested on contemporary Italian artefacts as we can see on a silver reliquary kept at the Cathedral Museum of Pistoia and on a fabric preserved at the Textile Museum of Prato.

It seems plausible that the re-elaboration of the Arabic inscriptions during the *Quattrocento* was a stylistic trend that extended over all artistic areas. Therefore, it is easy to realize why Gentile da Fabriano, one of the main representatives of the International Gothic in Italy, used these signs and imbued them with new splendour.

The presence of the sultanic protocol and the use of *thuluth* writing in the in Italian paintings is evidenced by Gentile's Arabic inscriptions, in an even clearer way than with Giotto's Neapolitan followers. In his paintings, we find the words *al-mālikī, al-karīm, al-ʿālī, al-maqarr, al-sulṭān, and al-mawlawī.*

Another element of innovation is represented by the introduction of encrypted Latin inscriptions, especially on the haloes of the Virgins. These decorations are composed of pseudo-Arabic characters containing overturned Latin inscriptions. While we have already presented the Virgin's name intertwined with Arabic characters in previous paintings, these inscriptions are organized in a more reasoned manner in Gentile's works.

For example, in the *Adoration of the Magi*, the epigraphic decorations on the haloes of the Virgin and St. Joseph may seem similar, but those of St. Joseph contain Arabic words, while the inscription in the Virgin's halo are made up with encrypted Latin letters bearing her name. The reference to Mary is clearly expressed, leaving no room for misunderstandings.

Towards the end of the century, Cima da Conegliano gives a relevance to epigraphic ornamentation that it had never experienced before, thanks to his very accurate copies of Mamluk inscriptions. A comparison with 14th-15th century Islamic portable objects from Syria and Egypt has provided evidence for their possible prototypes. As a matter of fact, the circulation of objects of minor arts from these Islamic countries in Venice was not new, as it dated back to the ninth-tenth century. However, trans-Mediterranean trade, particularly through the port of Venice, had now reached much larger dimensions.

In Cima's epigraphic decorations, we find long compositions of Mamluk epithets, usually interspersed with floral rosettes as they appear on metalworks. The writing style is very faithful to *thuluth*, even the most emblematic distinctive trait such as the *kāf-yā'* in ligature where the tail of the *yā'* bends backwards on the right. Furthermore, the abridgments as well as omissions in the script seem to confirm that Cima did not copy the inscription directly from an object, but from a sketch. His works represent the ultimate expression of accuracy in the copy of Arabic inscriptions. In the subsequent period, a progressive abandon from the Arabic characters in favour of better-known decorative patterns, whether composed by alphabetic (Latin), abstract or floral elements, can be noticed in Renaissance art.

Gradually, many artists use almost exclusively Latin characters to embellish their works; nevertheless, Venetian painters continued to represent encrypted-Latin decorations mixed to Arabic letters. That explains the important role played by the pictorial schools in the choice of the epigraphic patterns. Obviously, Venetian artists were largely influenced by the great tradition of Arabic decorations attested by their masters.

A further proof of the circulation of sketches with Arabic inscriptions can be found in the patterns painted by Marco Zoppo and Michele da Verona, where a debased form of the word *al-sulṭān* is still noticeable, even if they used encrypted-Latin characters. In Giovanni and Gentile Bellini's decorations, the letters tend to progressively take a separate shape, they lose the connecting elements, become unrecognizable and leave space for the representation of Latin alphabet signs.

In Florence, Filippo Lippi's decorations were strongly oriented towards the re-elaboration of the Latin letters. In his works, only few Arabic letters are detectable, such as the *lām-mīm* in ligature and some forms of *kāf*. The decorations by Sandro Botticelli and Perugino represent a new kind of ornamentation that would spread during the entire sixteenth century. Botticelli's ornamentations are composed by the overlapping of Latin letters, while Perugino used capital Latin letters in a very calligraphic and ornamental style.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, these artists depicted almost exclusively Latin characters, interspersed with long shafts like *alīf* and *lām*; these would be the last identifiable Arabic signs in the hem of the personages' cloths. Over the years, X-shaped decorations in an increasingly schematic appearance are attested in the Sienese school. However, words such as "Ave" and "Maria" remain often noticeable among the decorations.

Finally, further attention is given to the carpet decorations represented in Italian and, especially, in Venetian painting. In fact, their circulation in Venice is largely attested by artists such as Vittore Carpaccio, Cecco di Pietro and Carlo Crivelli. The recurrent inscription is composed by different variations of the *al-mulk* pattern as it happens in the ornamentation of oriental carpets.

These types of decoration, half the time, did not undergo alterations because they were copied directly from the original. In the sixteenth century, thanks to an increasing import of carpets, a great representation of these patterns is attested also in Northern Renaissance paintings.[387] This phenomenon represents the last evidence of Arabic inscriptions in European visual art before the Colonial period.

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[387] The artistic movement occurred in Europe from the late fifteenth century influenced by Italian Renaissance.

3.4 Last Period

3.4.1 Introduction

As we have previously stated, the gradual abandonment of Arabic inscriptions in favour of more stylised decorations began in the very places where the phenomenon had developed, namely, Florence and Tuscany. In Veneto, instead, we find the last evidences of Arabic inscriptions used in the paintings, however imprecisely or incomplete, before their definitive disappearance.

Furthermore, the development of highly stylised signs is attested in the decorations of Venetian and Tuscan painters already at the beginning of the *Cinquecento*. This started a gradual and unavoidable process towards the complete disappearance of the phenomenon of epigraphic decorations in Italian Art.

We found a stylised pattern on the hem of the cloak in the *Virgin adoring the Child* by Lorenzo di Credi[388] kept at the National Gallery of London. The decoration is made up of a circle combined with a trilobate shaft (fig. 315). The same composition occurs in the *St. Agnes with St. Mary Magdalene and another Saint* (Museum of San Matteo, Pisa) by an unknown Pisan. The band is composed by two lines, one of which is set in the mirror position (fig. 316). Two patterns of stylized shafts decorate the collar of the Madonna in the *Virgin and Child with Two Angels[389]* by Liberale da Verona, and in the *Holy Conversation with Saints* by the Florentine Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio[390] from the Museo Civico in Pistoia. In the work of Liberale da Verona, we find a set of parallel shafts with some oblique elements that recall the shape of *lām-alīf* in ligature (fig. 317). Moreover, an even more stylized composition is observable in the Ghirlandaio's painting (fig. 318). In this case the shafts are neatly

[388]   R. van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, vol. 13, New York 1970, p.285.
[389]   B. Berenson, *Italian…*, London 1968, p. 210.
[390]   Ivi, p. 78.

parallel and more similar to the weft threads of a fabric than to the letters of Arabic script.

3.4.2 Last evidence of Arabic script

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, some sketches of Arabic inscriptions referring to the words *al-maqarr* and *al-mulk* were still in circulation. The same shape of *al-maqarr* as attested in the St. Alberto reliquary and in Fra Angelico's paintingscan be found between the Latin letters on a cuff in *the Holy Family* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) painted at the beginning of the 1500 by Gianfrancesco de Maineri[391] (fig. 319). Likewise, *al-mulk* is depicted in the hem of the *Madonna and Child* by Bernardino Fungai[392] in the Hermitage Museum (fig. 320), in the same shape as handed down by the *trecentescos*[393] Segna di Buonaventura and Maso di Banco (fig. 321).

The writing band on the hem of the dress in the *Half-length figure of a Saint* (fig. 322), painted by Francesco Bonsignori between 1505 and 1510[394] and preserved in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum of Milan, appears corrupted. However, a comparison with an Islamic textile suggests that his could be a debased copy of the letter ʿayn between two shafts, which might belong to the word *alʿālī* or *al-ʿizz* (see figure 323 for a comparison).

Some vertical bands on the drape painted in the *Supper at Emmaus* by Marco Marziale[395], signed and dated 1506 and kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, show an interesting pattern (fig. 324). The decoration is made up of a series of S-shaped diamonds, very recurrent among Islamic textiles (see fig. 325) and a more complex form of interlaced letters that could represent the word *naṣr* (victory), rotated in various positions and connected by a line joined in a single interlaced element (as drawn in fig. 326).

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[391]   For the various versions or copies of this painting cfr: S. Zamboni, *Pittori di Ercole I d'Este*, Milano 1975.
[392]   T. Kustodieva, *Museo Statale…*, Milano 2011, p.200.
[393]   The fourteenth-century painters.
[394]   M. Natale, *Museo Poldi …*, Milano 1982, pp.127-128.
[395]   E. Merkel, *La Cena in Emmaus di San Salvador*, Milan 1999, p.33.

A very particular specimen of *thuluth* writing so recurrent in Venetian painting occurs in the *Reception of a Venetian delegation in Damascus* by an unknown artist, preserved in the Louvre Museum. In this work, dated around 1513-16[396], two circular cartouches are depicted under a central rectangular slab containing Arabic inscriptions (fig. 327). The central writing band has been carefully studied by Malika Bouabdellah-Dorbani in her article *Venise entre Orient et Occident au début du XVIe siècle, La Réception d'une délégation vénitienne à Damas, au musée du Louvre.*[397] We are facing a representation of building inscription embedded in a gate of Damascus. While admitting the difficulties of the interpretation caused by the deterioration of the inscription, Bouabdellah-Dorbani identifies a part of a text related to the construction of the monument. In my opinion, some words do not seem to correspond to the Arabic text but rather to those text fragments present in Italian paintings. This would suggest, probably, a copy by a sketch that was reinterpreted according to the painter's knowledge. For this reason, we find signs similar to a Latin M or oblique shafts, combined with Arabic words.

Probably the most interesting prototype circulating in the sixteenth century is the one identified in the works of Bartolomeo Veneto and Francesco Bissolo. The inscription appears in the rectangular strip of the wise-man's cowl in the *Circumcision* in the Louvre Museum by the Bartolomeo Veneto signed and dated 1506[398] (fig. 328) and on the Christ's collar in the *Salvator Mundi* in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich painted by Francesco Bissolo few years later[399] (fig. 329). The similarity between the two inscriptions appears clear especially in the central part, where the sequence of the letters *lām-shīn-kāf-rā'* is comprehensible. Instead, from the comparison of the first part, we can assume that the *ductus* reproduces a word consisting of three shafts. We found a very similar inscription decorating a bronze oriental censer[400] of 15th century exhibited at the Overseas Chinese Museum in Xiamen (fig. 330) where we can

[396] C. Campell, A. Chong, *Bellini and the East*, London-Boston 2005, p.22.

[397] M. Bouabdellah-Dorbani, "Venise entre Orient et Occident au début du XVIe siècle, La Réception d'une délégation vénitienne à Damas, au musée du Louvre", *La Revue des musées de France*. Revue du Louvre, 1 – 2013, pp. 54 - 65.

[398] L. Pagnotta, *Bartolomeo Veneto, l'opera completa*, Firenze 1997, p.164.

[399] H. F. Schweers, *Gemälde in deutschen Museen. Katalog der ausgestellten und depotgelagerten Werke*, München 2002, p.111.

[400] See C. Da-sheng, L. Kalus, *Corpus d'inscriptions arabes et persanes en Chine, Province de Fu-jian*, Paris 1991, p. 288, n° 196.

read ٱلشكر ˊ (al-shukr lillāh), that means "All thanks is to God". Figure 331 shows a comparison with the word *lillāh* rendered in light colour and the word *al-shukr* in dark. Here, we probably meet the last readable evidence of an Arabic inscription drawn by a sketch in Italian paintings.

3.4.3 Pseudo-Latin and encrypted Latin inscriptions

Like Arabic inscriptions, also Latin ones gradually lost their function in the decorative programme of Italian Art. At a closer look, it appears clear that the use of altered Latin characters did not result from the final stage of debasement of Arabic script in decorations, but that it was rather a parallel phenomenon, which underwent an analogous development.

In the paintings by Ambrogio Bergognone, the hems of the personages' garments are decorated with Latin scripts. These patterns are both composed of pseudo-Latin characters and Latin inscriptions. In the *Virgin and Child with two Angels*[401] in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum of Milan, only a few Latin letters are legible among the degraded signs (fig. 332). On the contrary, in *the Virgin and Child with Saints*[402] in the National Gallery of London, Bergognone uses a clear Latin inscription in the hem of the Madonna's dress. Figure 333 shows a detail of the inscription with the text "MARIA MATER GRATIAE".

His brother, Bernardino Bergognone, experienced a very impressive technique for decorating the hems (fig. 334). He depicted, in the *Virgin and Child with Two Angels*[403] displayed at the National Gallery of London (dated around 1490-95), a long epigraphic band composed of overlapping Latin letters creating a true text. If we isolate the letters we can read the words of the Ave Maria prayer. A part of the inscription is evidenced in the Figure 335,

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[401]   M. G. Balzarini, *Foppa*, Milano 1998, p.177.

[402]   A. Ottino Della Chiesa, "Ambrogio da Fossano", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 2, Roma 1960, p. 716.

[403]   There is no relevant literature on this work. Some scholars attribute it to his brother Ambrogio, cfr: C. Bertelli, *Restituzioni 2002: capolavori restaurati*, Vicenza 2002, p.127; but, the information sheet of the National Gallery attributes it to Bernardino: https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/bernardino-bergognone-the-virgin-and-child-with-two-angels Consulted online on December 26, 2017.

we read "*Maria gratia plena ora pro nobis*". In the lower part of the dress a signature of the painter "Bernardino" (which confirms the attribution of the work) is inserted with the same method (fig. 336). Bernardino's inscription is probably the principal example of encrypted Latin composition. Sixteenth-century painters would reproduce decorations separating the Latin words from the pseudo-Latin characters on the same epigraphic band. This produces an inscription that is legible only in some parts, as it appears in *St. Catherine of Alexandria* (National Gallery, London) painted by Antonio de Solario in 1514[404]. St. Catherine's sleeve is decorated all along the hem with degraded Latin letters but, in the final part, the *salutatio angelica* "Ave Maria" is detectable (fig. 337, in grey). The signs decorating the hem of St. Ursula's dress are inspired by an imaginary Latin alphabet (fig. 338). A probable degraded form of "Maria" may be identified in the *Virgin and Child with St. Sebastian* by Giovanni Cariani at the Louvre Museum (fig. 339).

A multifarious production of pseudo-Latin ornamentations adorns several works by central-Italian artists during the first and the second decades of the 16th century. It is possible to notice some examples in the works of Raffaello, Boccaccio Boccacini, Domenico Panetti, Lodovico Mazzolino and Gerino Gerini.

In the *Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga* by Raffaello[405] at the Uffizi Gallery, two L-shaped inscriptional bands are arranged in a mirror-like position. In the hem of the collar, a repetition of shafts runs all along the band, and among the shafts a sign similar to *lām-mīm* is visible (fig. 340).

Furthermore, the decorations in the *Niccolini-Cowper Madonna[406]* from the National Gallery in Washington, in the *Terranuova Madonna[407]* kept at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin and in *The Holy Family[408]* preserved in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich are made with Latin characters. We find in these works, dated to the first decade of 16th century, Latin letters that are combined

404   B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures…*, London 1957, vol. 1, p. 166.
405   G. Fossi, *Galleria degli Uffizi…*, Firenze 2001, p.320.
406   J. Meyer zur Capellen, *Raphael in Florence*, London 1996, p. 174.
407   P. De Vecchi, *Raffaello: la pittura*, Firenze 1981, p. 242.
408   G. Sgarzini, *Raffaello*, Roma 2006, p. 72.

without an apparent sense, as shown in the *Niccolini-Cowper Madonna* (fig. 341) and in *The Holy Family* (fig. 342).

The epigraphic band on the collar of *Terranuova Madonna* is more elaborate. On the sides, we find the type of motifs that we have just described above, instead, in the central part, a seal-like decoration with M, representing the name of the Virgin, is present. On the sides of the ring containing the M, two elements are depicted in mirrored position, in a shape that seems to reproduce the debased form of *al-mulk* that we found in the previous centuries (fig. 343). In my opinion, these attempts to imitate signs used by the *Trecento* and the *Quattrocento* masters may suggest an awareness of this phenomenon and careful attention to previous decoration details.

In the work by Boccaccio Boccaccino, the *Marriage of St. Catherine with Saints*[409] kept at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, we find capital Latin letters along the collar of the Saint (fig. 344). The signs adorning the hem in *Lamentation of Christ with a Donor* by Domenico Panetti[410] (1505) kept at Gemäldegalerie in Berlin are formed by angular Latin letters and geometric motifs (fig. 345).

Towards the second decade of the 16th century, Latin characters became gradually stylized, as in the case of pseudo-Arabic, losing their relation with the original alphabetical forms. Some examples can be found in the *Holy Conversation with Saints* signed and dated by Gerino Gerini in 1509[411], kept at Museo Civico of Pistoia (fig. 346) and in *Finding in the Temple* by Lodovico Mazzolino[412] from the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (fig. 347), the signs are inspired by imaginary forms whose relations with Latin characters seem to be lost.

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[409]   A. Puerari, *Boccaccino*, Milano 1957, p. 206.
[410]   O. Pujmanová, *Italian painting c. 1330-1550*, Praha 2008, p.166.
[411]   F. Falletti, *Chiostri seicenteschi a pistoia. Le storie di S.Francesco a Giaccherino e gli altri cicli contemporanei*, Pistoia 1992, p.63.
[412]   R. Skwirblies, *Altitalienische Malerei als preußisches Kulturgut. Gemäldesammlungen, Kunsthandel und Museumspolitik 1797-1830*, Berlin 2017, p.540.

3.4.4 Carpet Inscriptions

From the second decade of the 16th century onwards, after the Ottoman conquest of Syria and Egypt that annihilated the Mamluk Empire, Western perception of the Islamic East underwent a change that resulted in a cultural representation of the Orient not through the Arab sultanates, but through the Turkish Empire. Already a few decades earlier, the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had led to a particular integration of the Eastern and Western world. Western art was gradually assimilated by Ottoman Sultans who commissioned their portraits from European painters while maintaining the Islamic tradition of book painting. The representation of the Turkish "other" in Renaissance Art occurred between 1420 and 1620 also because of Ottoman expansionism in Europe. The imagery of the Turk was conveyed through the knowledge of artists who spent time at or near the sultan's court, as diplomats, captives and pilgrims. The exoticism present in European painting featuring Oriental scenes and personages deeply influenced European courtly culture and life[413]. Starting from these years, the Arabic inscriptions were replaced by patterns depicted on the Anatolian rugs. However, the most recurrent motif is still the *al-mulk* repetition as it appears in the Resurrection of the Boy in Domenico Ghirlandaio (see fig. 311). In fact, a similar decoration is visible on the carpet painted in the *Cardinal Bandiello Sauli, His Secretary and Two Geographers* (fig. 348), by Sebastiano del Piombo in the National Gallery of Washington dated 1516. This epigraphic pattern is copied from an Anatolian carpet type as already shown above (see a detail fig. 349) and it was also represented in Lotto's paintings. Nevertheless, not all carpets represented in paintings contain such decorations. Around 1521, Girolamo del Santo reproduced a pseudo-inscription consisting of shafts, teeth, circles and floral elements (fig. 350) in a *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels and St. Benedict*[414], from the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum. A squared pattern is found in Rosso Fiorentino's and Giuli Campi's carpets. In the *Portrait of a young man* by Rosso Fiorentino (ca.

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[413] See R. Born, M. Dziewulski, G. Messling, *The sultan's world. The Ottoman orient in Renaissance art*, Ostfildern, 2015.

[414] M. Natale, *Museo Poldi…*, Milano 1982, p.344.

1524-26)[415], preserved in the Museum of Capodimonte in Naples, a medallion with three-square knots is depicted in the middle of the carpet (fig. 351). In the *Allegory of Vanity* by Giulo Campi, dated around 1521-27 and kept at the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum, we can see the reproduction of an Uşak carpets[416] (fig. 352).

The recurring pattern already presented in del Piombo's work has been identified over the centuries as the Lotto's carpet. This kind of *al-mulk* repetition is found, for example, in the *Portrait of Giovanni della Volta with his Wife and Children,* dated around 1540[417], in the National Gallery of London (fig. 353) and in the *Alms of St. Anthony,* ca. 1542[418], from the Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice (fig. 354). The pattern is made in both shapes with an isolate shaft separating the words (as in *Portrait of Giovanni della Volta)*, and without i (as in the *Alms of St. Anthony).*

A similar Arabic lettering, with the only difference that the second shaft is interlaced with the first one of the following word, is detectable in *the Virgin and Child with Saints* Jacopo da Ponte Bassano, dating around 1542-43[419], in the Alte Pinakothek (fig. 355).

Between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, thanks to the contributions of Masters such as Hans Memling and Hans Holbein the Younger, a large representation of Oriental rugs is witnessed in German Renaissance paintings. The carpet painted by Memling are characterized by the presence of hook decorations as it appears in the *Donne Triptych[420]*, ca. 1478 and preserved in the National Gallery of London (fig. 356). This kind of decoration is probably related to the Quchan rugs as mentioned by P. R. J. Ford[421].

In Holbein's works, we find a correspondence with the patterns depicted in Lotto's carpets as in *The Merchant Georg Gisze* in the Gemäldegalerie[422] (fig.

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[415]   A. Natali, C. Falciani, *Rosso Fiorentino*, Firenze 2014, p. 21.
[416]   L. E. Brancati, *I tappeti dei pittori: testimonianze pittoriche per la storia del tappeto nei dipinti della Pinacoteca di Brera e del Museo Poldi Pezzoli a Milano*, Milano 1999, pp. 74, 92.
[417]   A. Braham, *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*, London 1985, p.36.
[418]   G.C. Argan, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 3, Firenze 2000, p. 153.
[419]   B.L. Brown, P. Marini, *Jacopo Bassano (1510 ca.-1592)*, Bologna 1992, p. 22
[420]   W. B. Denny, *How to Read Islamic Carpets*, New York 2014, pp.62-63.
[421]   P.R.J. Ford, *Oriental…*, pp. 196.
[422]   W. B. Denny, *How to Read…*, New York 2014, pp.58-59.

357) but also s-shaped diamonds and hooked elements as visible in *The Ambassadors* kept at the National Gallery of London[423] (fig.358).

These paintings can count as examples just to outline the kind of Arabic lettering on rugs that continued to be depicted in European Renaissance art.

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[423] D. Carrier, *A World Art History and its Objects*, University Park (PA) 2008, pp.4-5.

3.4.5 Summary

The 16th century witnesses the last stage of the decorations using Arabic letters, before their definitive disappearance. They can be divided in three groups as follows:

- Arabic and pseudo-Arabic inscriptions;

- Encrypted Latin inscriptions and pseudo-Latin inscriptions;

- Arabic lettering on Islamic carpets.

In the first two groups, a gradual stylization of the letters ended up with the loss of the proper features of Arabic letters that went along with the consequent homogenization of the signs and final transformation into geometrical or floral ornaments. The highest occurrence of debased Arabic inscriptions is found in Venetian painters, and the most readable ones belong to the beginning of the 16th century. The works by Bartolomeo Veneto and Francesco Bissolo provide, perhaps, the last evidence for copies from a workshop album. If we compare their decorations with those present on Middle Eastern Islamic artefacts, it can be inferred that they refer to the Arabic invocation al-*shukr li-llāh* (All thanks is for God).

In several works the Arabic words *al-mulk* and *al-maqarr* sporadically occur until they disappear in favour of stylized signs. The writing bands bear the usual sequence: stroke-circle-shaft or a simple juxtaposition of horizontal strokes.

The use of Encrypted Latin inscriptions culminated at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the elaborate writing patterns invented by the Bergognone brothers. The youngest brother, Bernardino, proved his mastery in hiding his signature in the wording of the *Ave Maria* prayer. As a contrast, other Venetian painters limited themselves to the creation of Latin pseudo-inscriptions.

The depiction of Oriental carpets was popular in the 16th century not only among Italian painters. Lorenzo Lotto and Hans Holbein contributed so much to this fashion that their name was closely linked to the type of carpets present

in their paintings. In this case, the painter did not choose to transfer the inscription from an object to the painting, thereby giving it a different function, but simply represented the artefact in his painting as it was. The epigraphic patterns are exactly those occurring on the carpets, arranged in the very same position. Consequently, they cannot have worked as a source of inspiration for the artist who adapted the drawing to serve his own purpose in the decorative programme. His work now aimed at representing home interiors in detail, in order to immortalize the luxury lifestyle of the class to which their patrons belonged (or aspired). Two kinds of decorations are found on these paintings: the most popular one among different painters refers to *al-mulk* in plaited Kufic, while the other one in a geometric arrangement of the letter *mīm* repeated.

In the sixteenth century, we witness a gradual decline in Arabic writing decorative patterns among Italian painters. When Mannerism held sway in the second half of the century - a period characterized by a crisis of artistic ideals that had triumphed in the previous stages - epigraphic decorations were definitively abandoned. The interest in the Arab world, which few years earlier had characterized the ornamentation in Italian painting, changed parallel to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the fall of the Mamluk sultanate. Thanks to the production of precious ceramics, fabrics, and metalwork highly appreciated in European courts of the previous centuries, the art of the Almohad, the Fatimid, and the Mamluk periods had left a clear mark in the aesthetic taste of Italian artists - a taste that was expressed above all by decorations consisting in Arabic inscriptions. Later, the advent of the Ottoman Empire fostered a new taste in European painting which took its inspiration from Oriental carpets and costumes.

The detailed collection of epigraphic ornamentations presented in this study has shed light on a conspicuous amount of Arabic inscriptions made in varied styles and having different origins as well as a number of ornamental pseudo-inscriptions inspired by some Arabic calligraphic styles. Having in mind the key points discussed in the introduction, we will sum up some considerations on the re-definition and perception of the phenomenon in both its historical and epigraphic contexts, clarifying some fields of application of the results. We have broadly addressed the terminology used in the related literature to frame the phenomenon, highlighting the frequent improper use of terms. We have shown that the first step towards the knowledge of the use of Arabic scripts in Western arts has to achieve, firstly, a correct distinction between Arabic lettering and ornamental patterns inspired from Arabic script. The collection of data and their organization in homogeneous groups has highlighted a much clearer distinction between the terms "inscription" and "pseudo-inscription". A crucial step in the processing of data has required the assessment of the styles of the inscriptions, i.e. "Kufic" and "*nashki*", as the term "Kufic", commonly used to cover a set of monumental writing styles sharing common features, has been used without any discrimination in most of the literature. The same can be said for *naskhi,* a type of cursive writing, which is applied to whatever script shows ligatures. Since this term, refers to a writing style that was well defined in Abbasid chancery treatises on penmanship[424] and that can be discerned in our specimens, we should rather refer to Mamluk *naskhi* or *thuluth*. The study and reading of texts allowed the separation of Arabic inscriptions from those written in other languages, that is Latin, Mongolian, Hebrew, which fell in the same category of Arabic/Oriental script.

It is to be noted that prior to this study, Latin inscriptions in disguise passed unnoticed. As a matter of fact, such a difference of scripts had never been clarified, as the so-called "pseudo-Kufic inscriptions" are difficult to read and,

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[424]   A large literature is devoted to the seven pens or styles. A critical synopsis can be read in Chpts 5 and 6, pp. 143-237, spec. § "The standardization of round scripts under Ibn al-Bawwab" in S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy,* Edinburg 2008, pp.160–173.

over time, have acquired an all-encompassing significance that led to a proliferation of generalizations and misunderstandings.

The collection of over a thousand works featuring epigraphic and pseudo-epigraphic decorations related to a period ranging from the middle of the 12th century to the middle of the 16th century has been organized in chronological order for discussion and each of them has been labelled under its proper writing style. The paintings examined come from 30 different international museums and churches, but the collection is far from being exhaustive, as it could be enriched with additional works, making the knowledge of the phenomenon more comprehensive and detailed. Also, the field of enquiry, here limited to Italy, could be expanded to neighbouring countries.

In the absence of any clear reference in the analysis of the epigraphic models, I considered it appropriate to refer to the method followed by other codicologists, such as François Déroche[425], to identify the writing groups in periods where there was no exhaustive literature that would help to identify the existing samples. I used a comparative method that allowed the creation of groups of inscriptions and pseudo-inscriptions, according to stylistic and/or semantic analogies. The subdivision into "families" has led the study towards the research and identification of prototypes used to copy epigraphic decorative patterns into paintings.

Once it was ascertained that these decorative patterns were real Arabic inscriptions, the further step was to browse Islamic collections of art objects to look for the original Arabic inscriptions. Not to proceed randomly, we started with the assumption that epigraphy is based on the presence of formulas that are proper to each class of objects. It was also evident that it was necessary to cross the classes of objects having the given formulas with the historical data referring to the flows of trade between Italy and Islamic countries in order to establish what kind of objects entered Italian market and which ones enjoyed the favour of Italian lords and courts. Although there is evidence that textiles were the most required commodity at the time, metal vessels and ceramics showed to be the most fruitful fields of inquiry. An unexpected result came

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[425]   See F. Déroche- V. Sagaria Rossi, *I manoscritti in caratteri arabi,* Roma 2012, pp. 160-164, 186.

from the search for prototypes, which highlighted that the most recurrent formula *al-mulk (li-llah),* already in use in the 12th century (painting), and, to a lesser extent, *al-yumn*, were modelled on inscriptions found on everyday objects such as amphorae, plates, and pottery. Profitable material of comparison has been found in Sicily and Muslim Spain, dating from the 10th century onwards, where it has been possible to follow the debasement of the decorative inscriptions over the centuries, so that the lettering occurring on Italian paintings could be interpreted in the light of the data coming from material culture. Besides, other texts are more specifically related to Mamluk applied arts, mostly widespread between the mid-14th and late 15th centuries, when precious Mamluk artefacts represented utmost splendour in the taste of the European elite. Contrary to the first set of texts, which were present on objects created for both rich and common people alike, objects of art displaying Sultanic protocols were meant for ruling classes. The third chapter has been completely devoted to the comparison of the copied versions of Arabic inscriptions in Italian painting and their prototypes on the objects circulating in the countries of the Mediterranean basin up to the 16th century. It was at that time that a stylized abbreviation of the word *al-mulk,* present along the edges of the Ottoman rugs, anticipated the gradual abandonment of the use of the Arabic decorations and announced the arrival of the new eastern economic and cultural power: The Ottoman Empire.

If on the one side our study has challenged the idea that Arabic lettering was the result of artists' creativity, on the other side we cannot exclude the attempt of inventing imaginary alphabets by mixing up features of different script. This happens already in the 13th century, when the cryptography of the word "Maria" in the form of pseudo-Arabic signs, and then to the composition of complex texts such as prayers and signatures of the authors in the high Renaissance spread. Although the iconographic sign of the nimbus or halo, symbol of the light coming from God, has a voluminous literature showing that its representation in early Christian art from the 4th century A.D and in Byzantine art later was rooted in the pagan cults of Helios in Greece and of the *Sol Invictus* in the later Roman Empire, the textuality of the halo has not been extensively dealt with. If the Latin prayers or the name of the holy personages give verbal evidence for the divine status or the blissful state of

Madonnas and saints, we do not know if humanist thought has pushed further into speculations on the evocative power of Arabic writing, in addition to providing an iconographic sign of the cradle of Christendom.

Given that no other study hitherto provided such a detailed scrutiny of Arabic texts in Italian art, we should now explain what the substantial utility of the work undertaken is and how the data obtained can be used. Is it important to know that Italian artists copied real inscriptions? What changes for the research to know their content (when it is possible to read them) in consideration of the fact that artists were most likely unaware of their meaning?

It is obvious that if we want to interpret a sign we have to get knowledge about the system and the rules that produced it.[426] Consequently, the difference between inscription and pseudo-inscription responds to the pertinence to a code: that of the language or that of aesthetics. The reading of the text, therefore, is not a demonstration of linguistic dexterity, but the proof that the artist put himself in a dialectical process with a sign taken from the code of the written language, i.e. Arabic script, and did not resort to his creativity.

According to the preceding considerations about the artist's reasons, it holds true that the sign is treated by the interpreter/artist in terms of iconicity rather than symbolic value, as he is unaware of the conventional character the sign owns in the cultural context of reference.

Nevertheless, the value of the interpretation of the inscriptions is undeniable. The identification of inscriptions from Islamic portable epigraphy transferred to Italian paintings provides precious details for the reconstruction of a historical phase of European economy and commerce in the Mediterranean and their perception in the taste of western societies. Furthermore, the identification of textual elements and their borrowing by the Italian schools of painting contributes to establish the trade routes and the circulation of Islamic manufacturing objects. A massive presence of inscriptions from precious metals is encountered in Venetian paintings, as we have seen, for example, in

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[426]   See W. Leeds-Hurwitz, *Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures*, New Jersey 1993, pp. 40, 155.

Cima da Conegliano, while several representations of fabrics (see Fra Angelico) are found in Tuscany. Differently, a general tendency to paint portable objects of Spanish origin is largely witnessed in southern Italy, where, however, also the copy of inscriptions present on luxury items is attested.

Through the recognition of Arabic epigraphic decorations, it has been possible to infer the diversification of parallel markets destined for elites or middle classes. The perception of these artefacts in Italian cities has been the subject of recent studies. In this regard, Rebecca Müller[427] suggests that the relocation and re-use of Islamic objects in Christian context played a pivotal role in the perception of these materials whose religious meaning would not have been a fundamental element. Likewise, in the present study, the transfer of inscriptions from the object to the painting determines the change of function that transformed Arabic characters from Islamic liturgical language into a Christian message about the land of Christ and the people who took part in his life. This is demonstrated by the many Islamic artefacts coming from Oriental trade that are represented in Italian paintings by artists such as Mantegna, Jacopo and Giovanni Bellini to evoke "the exoticism of the Holy Land".[428]

The development of segregated fields of research has prevented, in my opinion, a deeper understanding either of the textual elements or of the spirit of the time. A tendency to hold on to positions that had proved comfortable has led Art historians to ignore or to undervalue the extraordinary amount of information that the exact knowledge of Arabic inscriptions and pseudo-inscriptions could bring for different approaches. We have seen how the study of the transmission of techniques, copies and productions of prototypes varies from an atelier to another. Although the same texts were covered by different authors, the styles used and the application of the prototypes in the paintings were often exclusive. Sometimes a single element or just a detail is sufficient enough to distinguish a painter from another, or the master from his workshop apprentices. These details can work as a trademark or "signature",

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[427] R. Müller, "Riflessioni sulla percezione di artefatti islamici nella Genova medievale", in *Genova, una capitale del Mediterraneo tra Bisanzio e il mondo islamico. Storia, Arte e Cultura*, Milano 2016, pp. 118,119.

[428] C. Schmidt Arcangeli, "La peinture "orientaliste" à Venise du XVe au XVIIe siècle", in *Venice et l'Orient*", Paris 2006, p. 124.

and this aspect can be exploited in cases where the attribution of works of art with regards to authorship, period and geographical location are in doubt. This is the case of the fresco in the Chapel of San Niccolò in Pistoia, where I have advanced a hypothesis of assignment and dating of the work based on palaeographic analysis and comparisons between similar inscriptions in different works[429].

Obviously, the bulk of the material scrutinized is rather broad in view of the purpose of the research, but in reality, it is small when compared to the actual proportions of the phenomenon. New specimens could be analysed and a comprehensive database could be developed. Unfortunately, in several cases, the poor quality of the photographs did not allow a careful study of the texts and many textual elements still await an analytic look. Also, the parallel production of degenerated Arabic inscriptions on Western manufacturing items such as fabrics, ceramics, and metals, requires the attention of a multi-disciplinary team able to provide significant contributions on the identification and the spread of prototypes, adding new details about the use of Arabic lettering in the western arts.

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[429]   See E. G. Napolitano, "Le Decorazioni Epigrafiche…", Pistoia 2016, pp. 22-42.

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PLATES

ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS AND PSEUDO-INSCRIPTIONS IN ITALIAN ART

ENNIO G. NAPOLITANO

PLATES OF FIGURES

Pl. 1

Unknown Pisan, *Virgin and Child*,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.1

Unknown Roman-Pisan, *Crucifix*,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.2

Pl. 2

Detail of the inscription

fig.3

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

Chart of letter shapes used in the inscription on the Crucifix

fig.4

A				
B				
C				

Pl. 3

Comparison between a detail of the painting and the
textile from the Bamberg Cathedral

fig.5
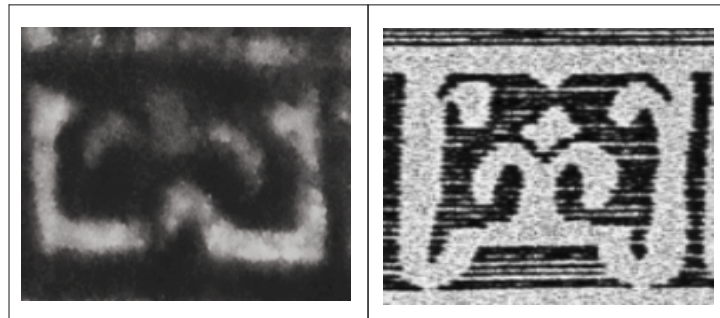
Fragment of Fatimid textile, Egypt,
Kevorkian Collection, Paris

fig.6

Ring, Egypt,
Metropolitan Museum,
New York

Fragment of textile,
Spain,
Bamberg Cathedral

fig.7
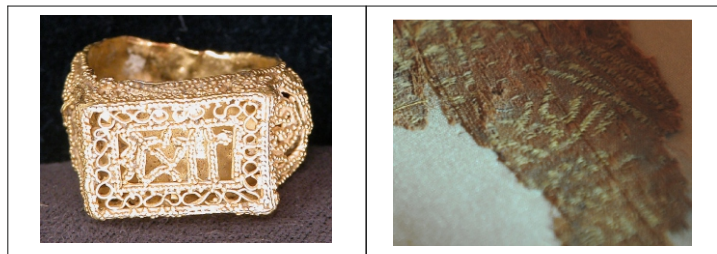
Positive and negative shapes

fig.8

Pl. 4
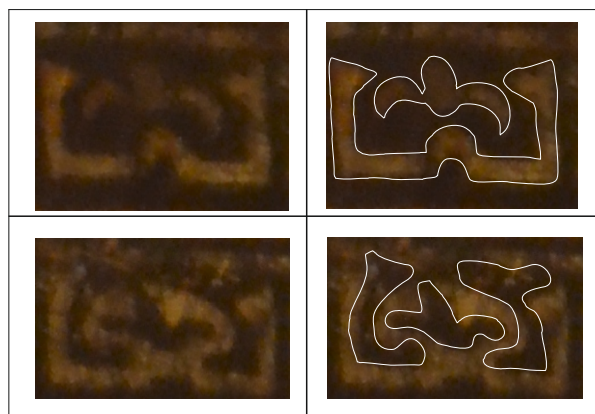
Arca Santa of Oviedo, reliquary casket, Spain,

fig.9

Limoges enamel ciborium with champlevé, France,

fig. 10

Comparison of the inscriptions

Limoges inscription

fig.11

Crucifix inscription

Comparison of the inscriptions

Oviedo inscription

fig.12

Crucifix inscription

Pl. 5
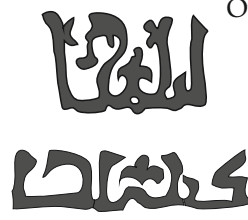
U-shaped form of *al-mulk*

The monastery of Hosios Loukas, Greece

fig.13

The Church of San Giovanni in Monterrone. Matera

A. Mirror image form of *al-mulk*

The monastery of Hosios Loukas. Greece

fig.14

The Church of San Giovanni in Monterrone. Matera

B. Inscriptions on jars
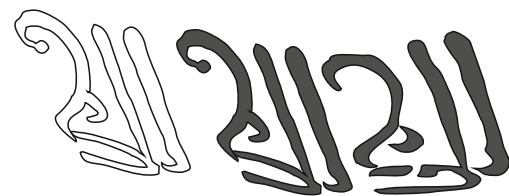
Jar. Zisa Museum, Palermo

Jar. Zisa Museum, Palermo

Pl. 6

A. Giunta Pisano, *Processional Cross*,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.15

B. Reproduction of the inscription
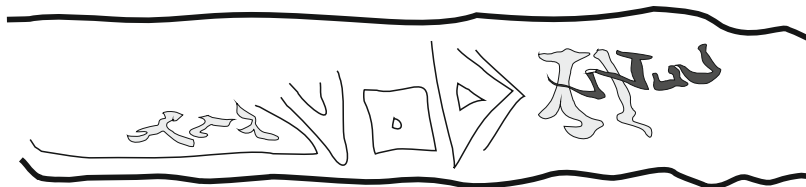
Giunta Pisano, *Dossale of St. Francis and six miracles*,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.16
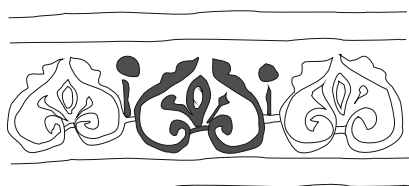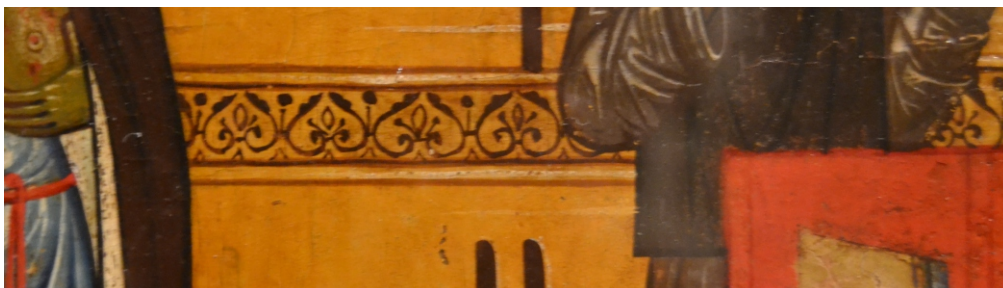
Fatimid jar,
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London

Ikat, Egytp,
Metropolitan Museum,
New York

fig.17

Pl. 7

Mausoleum of Bohemond, Canosa

Fragment of textile, Tomb of Bishop Otto II, Bamberg

fig.18

Guido da Siena, *The Coronation of the Vergin*, Courtauld Gallery, London

fig.19

Fragment of textile, Egypt, Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.20

Fragment of ceramic, Spain, Calatrava la vieja

fig.21

Pl. 8

Unknown Pisan, *Virgin and Child with Two Angels*,
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fig.22

Cimabue, *Maestà,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 23

Comparison between a detail of the painting and the jar

fig. 24

Detail of the *Maestà*

Jar, detail of inscription.
Zisa Museum, Palermo

Pl. 9

Detail of the halo inscription

fig. 25

Detail of the inscription on the throne

fig. 26

Bowl, Iran,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig. 27

Pl. 10
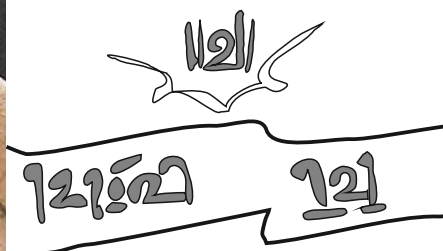
Detail of the enchripted Latin inscription

fig.28

Cimabue, *Maestà of Santa Maria dei Servi*,
Church of Santa Maria dei Servi, Bologna

fig.29

Cimabue, *Madonna di Santa Trinità*,
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.30

Pl. 11

Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna Gualino,*
Galleria Sabaudia, Turin

fig.31

Comparison between Duccio's and Cimabue's inscriptions.

Duccio's «*Maria*» inscription   Cimabue's «*Maria*» inscription

fig.32

Duccio's pseudo-Arabic (*Madonna Gualino*)   Cimabue's pseudo-Arabic (*Maestà*)

Pl. 12
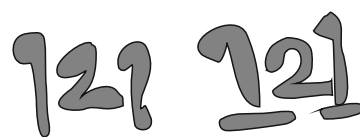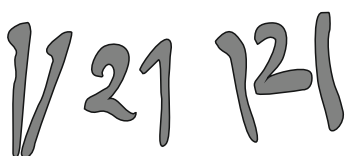
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna Rucellai*,
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.33

Detail of decorations on the pillow

fig.34
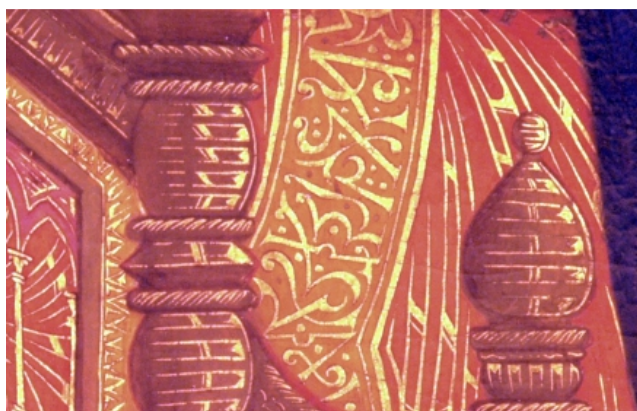
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Virgin and Child with saints*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.35

Pl. 13

Duccio di Buonsinsegna, Stained glass window of Siena Cathedral,

fig.36

Detail of the *Coronation*

fig.37

Fragment of pottery,
Madinat al-Zahra', Spain

Textile,
(Cornu 1993)

fig.37-38
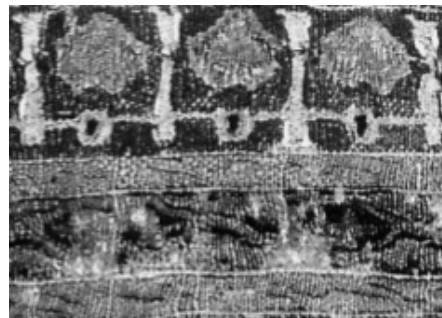
Inscription on Duccio's painting

fig.39

Inscription on pottery

Inscription on textile

Pl. 14
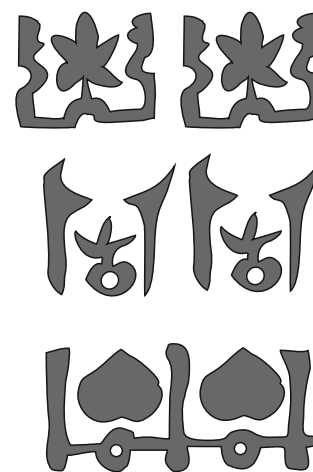
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Virgin and Child and saints*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.40

Detail of the inscription on the *ciborium*

fig.41

Reproduction of the word *al-sulṭān*

fig.42

الـسـلطان

Pl. 15

Master of Varlungo, *Virgin and and Child enthroned with angels*,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.43

Master of Città di Castello, *Virgin and Child with Saints Francis,
John the Baptist,Stephen and Clare*,
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fig.44

Master of Città di Castello, *Virgin and Child with St Augustine,
St. Paul, St. Peter, and Anthony Abbot*,
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fig.45

Drawing of the corrupted form of *al-mulk*

fig.46

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Master of San Torpé, *Virgin and Child with Angels and Saints*,
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fig.47

Deodato Orlandi, *Dossale d'altare*,
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fig.48

Detail of the book

fig.49

Pl. 17

Segna di Buonaventura, *Crucifix*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.50

Segna's inscriptions

Orlandi's inscriptions

fig.51

Segna's condensed
al-mulk type

Orlandi's condensed
al-mulk type

Pl. 18

Segna di Buonaventura, *Crucifix*,
National Gallery, London

fig.52

Segna di Buonaventura, *Madonna with St. Paula, St. John the Evangelist and St. Romuald*,
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fig.53

Segna di Buonaventura, *Madonna and Child with nine Angels*,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.54

Pl. 19

Segna di Buonaventura, *St. Madeleine*,
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.55

A. Daštī mosque
(from V. Grassi, 2010)

B. Textile fragment with swastikas, Egypt,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.56
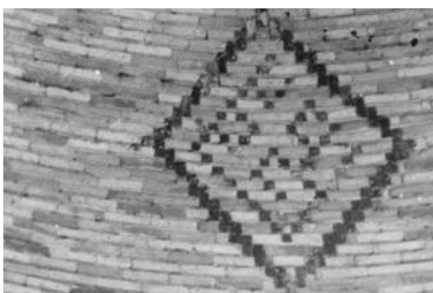
A. Segna di Buonaventura, *the Crucifixion*,
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fig.57

B. Textile, Egypt, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

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Giotto, *Ognissanti Madonna*,
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.58

Drawings of six types of seals on Uyghur documents
(Matsui 1998 Fig. 1)

fig.59
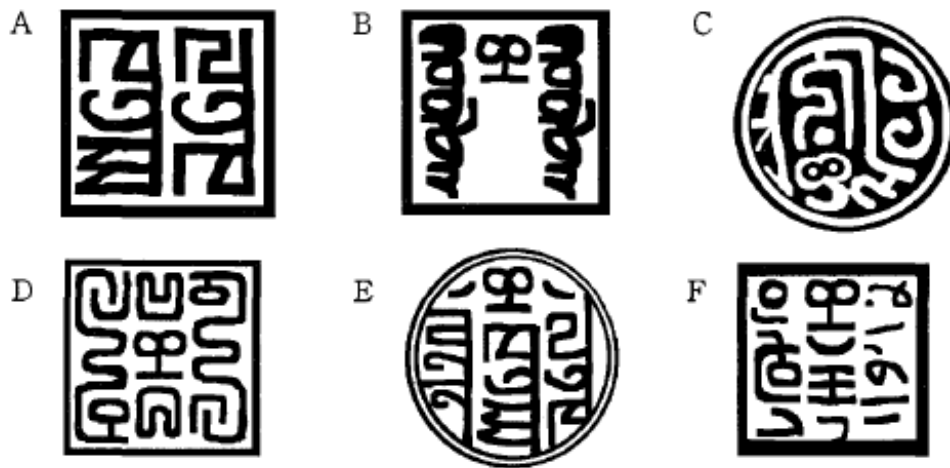
Giotto, *Dormitio Verginis*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.60

Pl. 21
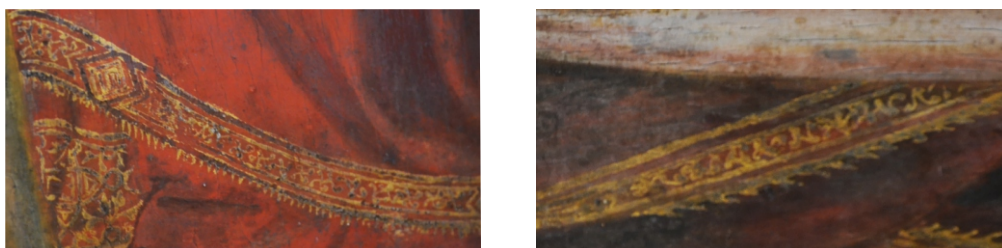
Giotto, *Virgin and Child*,
National Gallery, Washington

fig.61

Detail of long shafts with a central arch

fig.62

Giotto, *Last supper*,
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.63

Pl. 22

Giotto, *Descending into Limbo*, 1328,
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.64
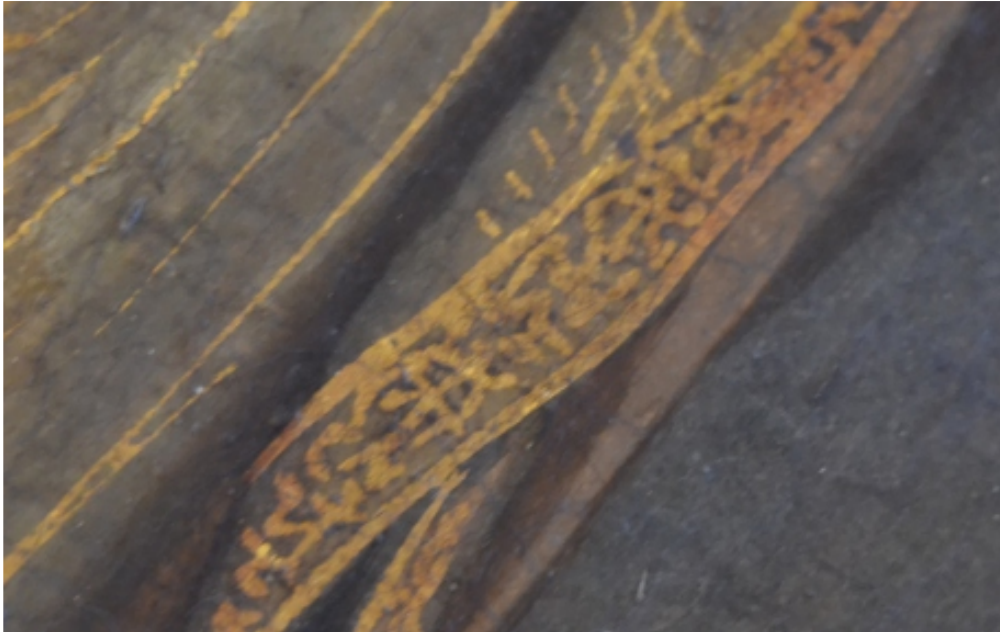
Giotto, Crucifixion, 1328,
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.65

Detail of the hem

fig.66

Pl. 23

Giotto, *Crucifixion*,
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.67

Detail of the belts

fig.68
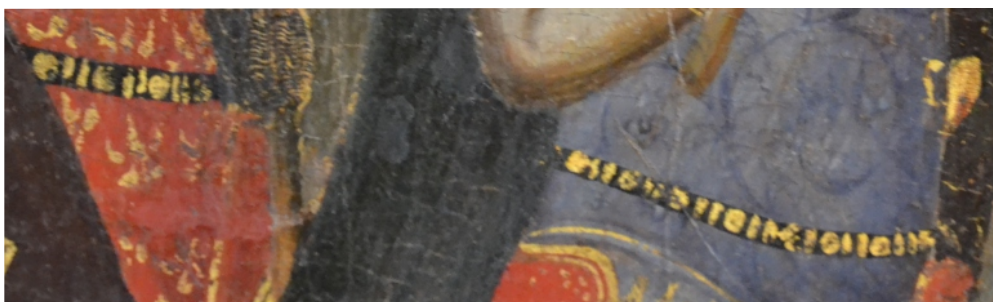
Fragment of textile, Egypt,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.69

Master of San Martino alla Palma, *Scenes from the Passion of Christ*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.70

Pl. 24
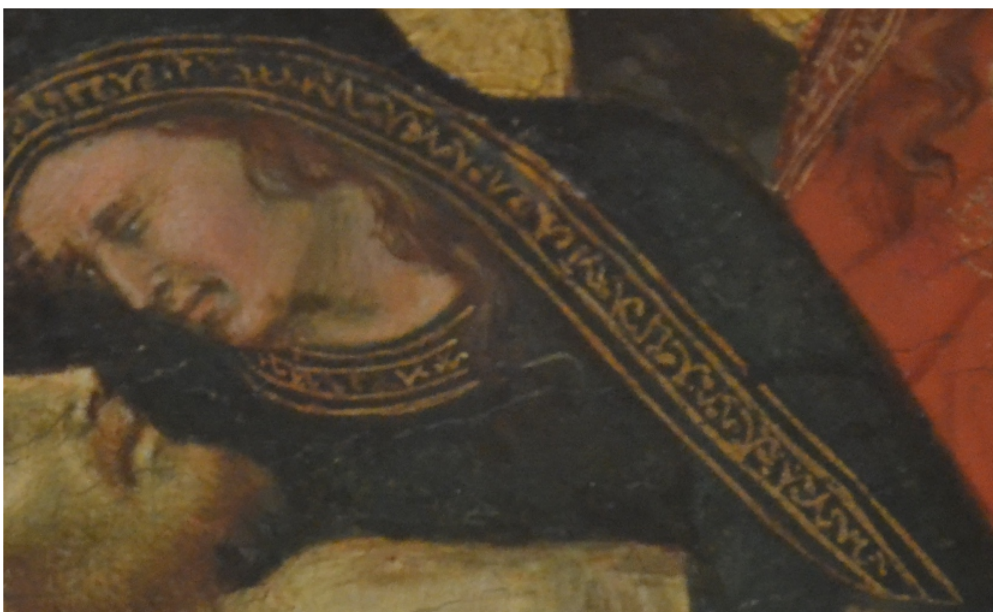
A. Master of San Martino alla Palma, *Scenes from the Passion of Christ*

fig.71

B. Detail of the inscription

Jacopo del Casentino, *The Annunciation*,
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.72

Pl. 25
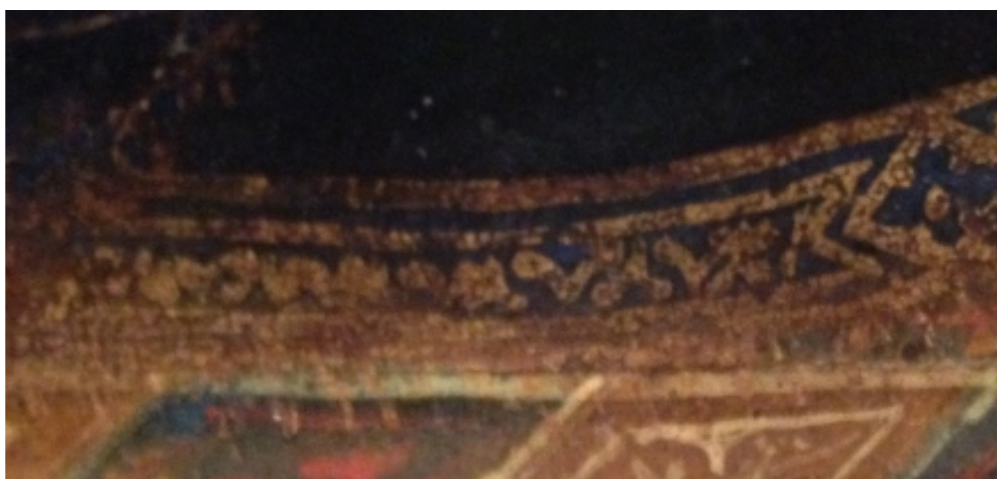
Jacopo del Casentino, *The Annunciation*
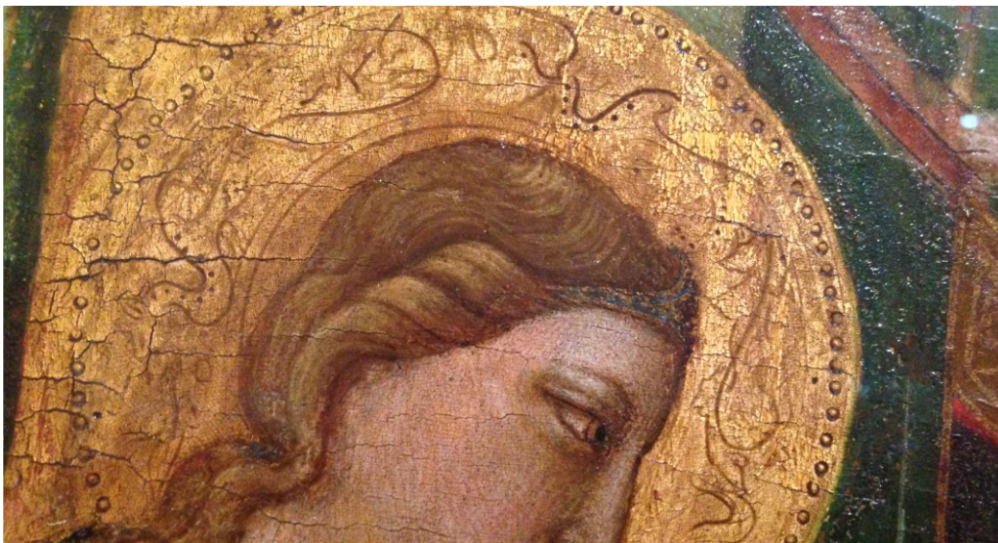
fig. 73

Taddeo Gaddi, *Tryptic*,
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Mamluk textile fragment,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

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Maso di Banco, *Virgin and Child*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig. 76

Egyptian textile fragments,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig. 77

Bernardo Daddi, *Processional Cross*,
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig. 78

Pl. 27
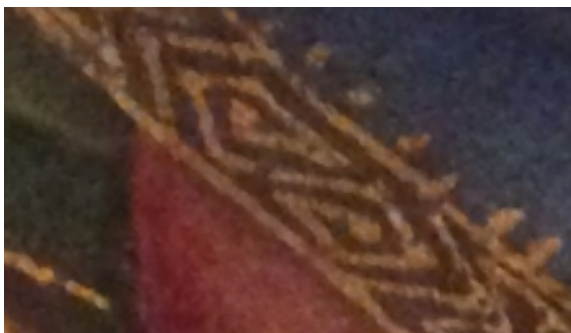
Bernando Daddi, *Annunciation*,
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 79

Pseudo-latin in the Daddi's paintings

Crucifixion with Saints,
Courtauld Gallery, London

fig. 80

*Virgin, St Thomas Aquinas
and St Paul*,
Paul Getty Museum,
Los Angeles

The Assuntion of the Virgin,
Metrpolitan Museum, New York

Pl. 28

Master of San Lucchese, *Virgin and Child with Angels,*
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fig.81

Puccio di Simone and Allegretto Nuzi, *Virgin enthroned with Saints,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig. 82

A. Detail of the inscription

B. Egyptian textile fragments,
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fig. 83

Pl. 29

Giovanni di Tano Fei, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.84

Giovanni da Milano, *Madonna and Child with donors*,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.85
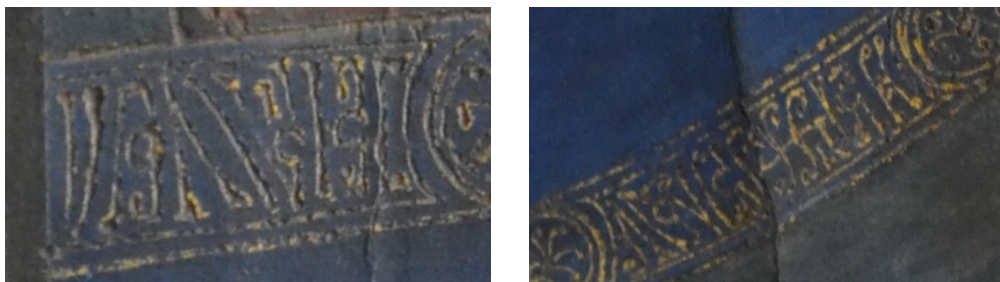
Giovanni da Milano, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
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fig.86

Pl. 30

Master of the Franciscan tempera, *Madonna of the Humility,*
Museum of Capodimonte, Naples

fig.87

Roberto d'Oderisio, *Madonna of the Humility,*
Museum of Capodimonte, Naples

fig.88

Madonna of the Humility

Crucifix XII c.

fig.89

Limoges reliquary

Pl. 31

Neapolitan follower of Giotto, *Saints John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

Right side

fig.90

Left side

fig.91

Pl. 32

Text of the inscription

A. Right side

بغداد · · · · · · · · · · · المالك السلطان الله المعا الله

المقر · · · · · · · · العا البر البر لعا لعا (...) المقر البر

B. Left side

fig.92

البر البر (...) المقر البر العالي (...)

لما المقر البر العالي (ا)لكريم المالكي البر ا

Mamluk casket, Egypt,
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

fig.93

Mamluk Basin, Egypt,
Private Collection Comte de Toulouse-Lautrec

fig.94

Pl. 33

Mamluk Bowl, Egypt,
Courtauld Gallery, London

fig.95

Comparison between the inscriptions on the painting and Mamluk metalworks

fig.96

Mamluk
inscriptions

Painting
inscrptions

المالكي al-mālikī	البر al-birr	لكريم al-karīm	العالي al-ʿālī	المقر al-maqarr

Neapolitan follower of Giotto, *The Dead Christ and the Virgin*,
National Gallery, London

A   B   C
al-ʿālī   al-ʿā(lī)   al-maqarr   al-malik/al-mulk

fig. 97

fig. 98

Pl. 34

Ugolino di Nerio, *Spandrel Angels*,
National Gallery, London

fig.99

Ugolino, *Sprandel Angels*
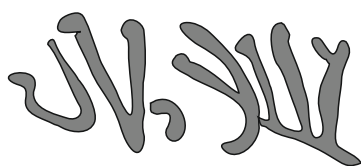
fig.100

Duccio, *Virgin and Child and saints*

Workshop of Ugolino di Nerio,*Virgin and Child*,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.101

Pl. 35

Ugolino di Nerio, *Virgin and Child,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.102

Ugolino di Nerio, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.103
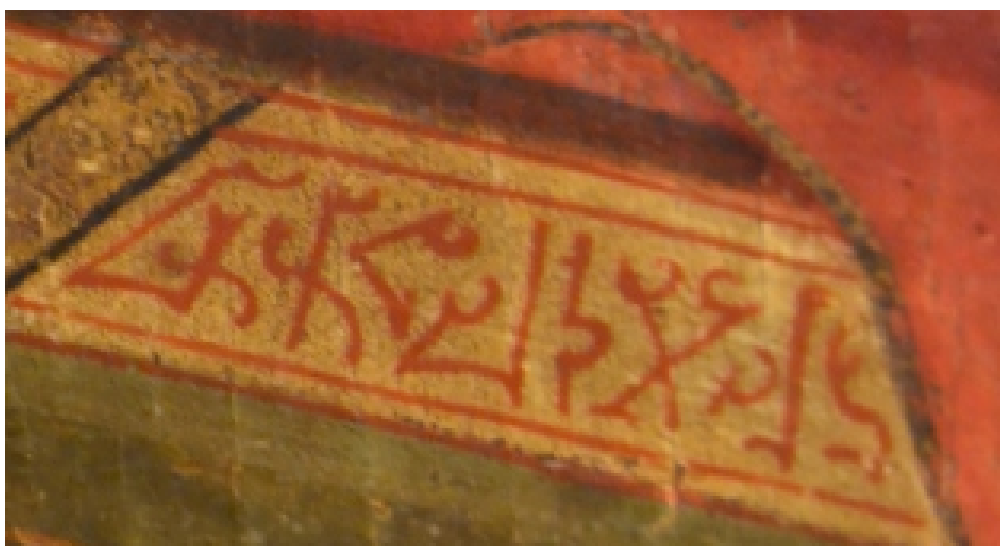
Niccolò di Segna, *Saint Benedict and Saint Nicolas,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.104

Pl. 36

Master of the Albertini, *Virgin and Child with six Angels*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.105

Detail of textiles, Egypt, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.106

Comparison between the inscriptions on the painting and Islamic textiles

Master of the Albertini, *Virgin and Child with six Angels*

fig.107

Textiles, Ashmolean Museum

Pl. 37
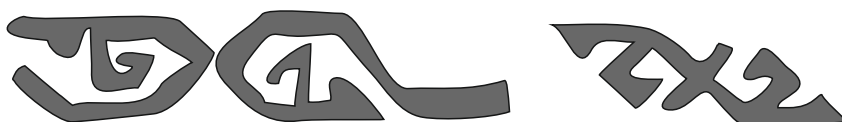
Simone Martini, *Altarpiece of Saint Catherine,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa
A

fig.108

B

A. Simone Martini's inscription

B. Giunta Pisano's inscription

fig.109
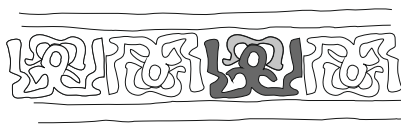
A. Simone Martini, *The Annunciation,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.110

B. Reproduction of the inscription

Pl. 38

Simone Martini, *Saint Luke*,
Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

fig.111

Simone Martini's Inscription
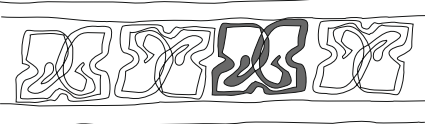
Niccolò di Segna's Inscription

fig.112

Dish, Egypt or Turkey,
Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles

fig.113

Master of the Palazzo Venezia, *St. Peter and St. Mary Magdalene,*
National Gallery, London

fig.114

Pl. 39

A. Lippo Memmi, *Virgin and Child*,
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.115

B. Detail of textile, Egypt, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Lippo Memmi, *Polyptych,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.116

Lippo Memmi, *St. Peter,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.117

Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child with Donor,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig.118

Pl. 40

Workshop of Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.119

Lippo Memmi, *Saint Louis of Toulouse,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.120

Memmi's condensed
al-mulk type

Segna's condensed
al-mulk type

Detail of textile, Egypt,
Ashmolean Museum

fig.121

Meo da Siena, *Retable from S. Pietro in Perugia,*
Städel Museum, Frankfurt

fig.122

Pl. 41

Retable from S. Pietro in Perugia

fig.123

Retable from S. Pietro in Perugia

fig.124

Retable from S. Pietro in Perugia

fig.125

Pl. 42

A. Amborgio Lorenzetti, *Small Maestà*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.126

B. Ashmolean Museum textiles

A. Pietro Lorenzetti, *Pala del Carmine*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

B. Detail of the wall,
Süleyman Mosque, Hasankeyf

fig.127

Pl. 43

Pietro Lorenzetti, *Crucifixion,*
Städel Museum, Frankfurt

fig.128

A. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Virgin and Child with St. Mary Magdalene and St. Marta,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.129

B. Mamluk textile, Egypt,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Pl. 44

A. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Virgin and Child,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 130

B. Textile, Egypt,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Pietro Lorenzetti, *St Bartholomew, St Cecilia and St John the Baptist,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig. 131

Pl. 45

Bartolo di Fredi, *Presentation in the Temple,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 132

Bartolo di Fredi, *Adoration of the Magi,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig. 133

Cecco di Pietro, *Cristo in Pietà*,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig. 134

Pl. 46

Cecco di Pietro, *Nursing Madonna and Child with Angels,*
Museum of San Matteo , Pisa

fig. 135

Unknown Sienese, *Virgin and Child,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig. 136

Antonio Veneziano, *The Apostle James the Great*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig. 137
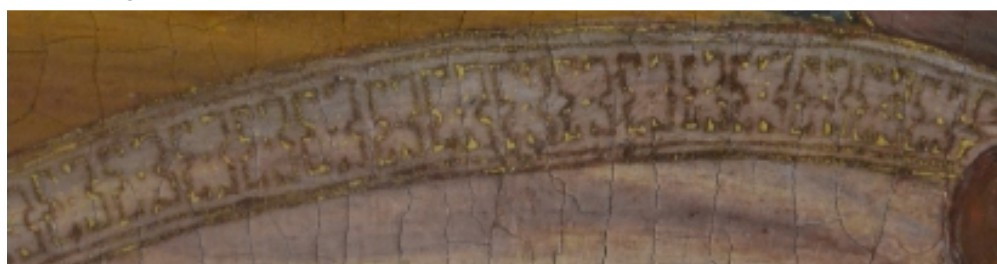
Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *Nativity of Mary*,
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig. 138

Pl. 47

Francesco di Traino, *Virgin and Child,*
Museum of San Matteo , Pisa

fig.139

Giovanni di Nicola, *Polittico di Santa Marta,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.140
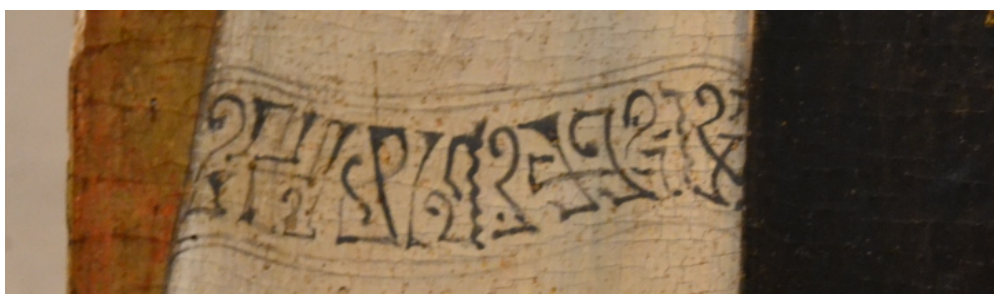
Barnaba da Modena, *Virgin and Child,*
Städel Museum, Frankfurt

fig.141

Pl. 48

Bowls, Iran,
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.142

fig.143

fig.144

Bowls, Iran,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.145

fig.146

Pl. 49
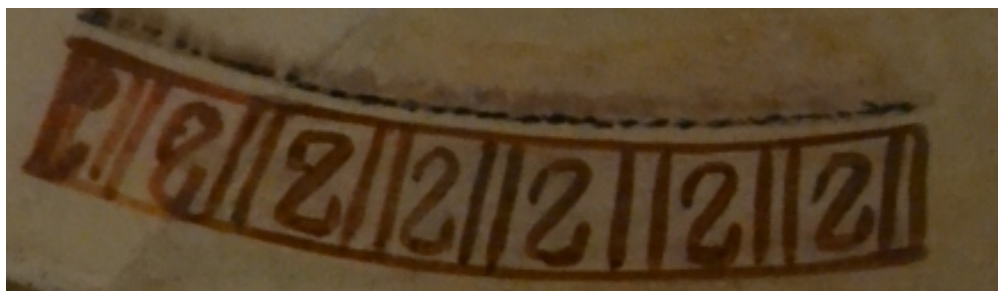
Paolo Veneziano, *Enthroned Madonna and Child*,
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.147

A. Paolo Veneziano, *Polyptych*,
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

B. Giunta Pisano, *Dossale*

fig.148

Detail of fabric behind the throne

fig.149
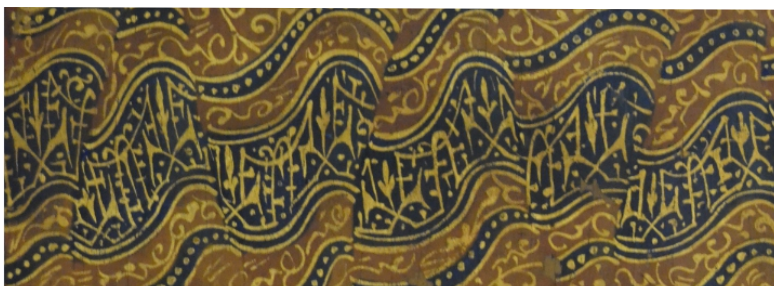
Master of the Washington Coronation, *Coronation of the Virgin*,
National Gallery, Washington

fig.150

Paolo Veneziano, *The Birth of St. Nicholas*,
National Gallery, Washington

fig.151

Pl. 50

Comparison between Paolo Veneziano's decorations and inscriptions on pottery

Paolo Veneziano,
Polyptych

Bowl, Iran,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.152
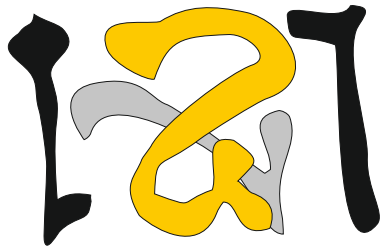
Paolo Veneziano,
Polyptych

Fragment of a Bowl, Syria,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.153

Paolo Veneziano,
*Coronation
of the Virgin*

Bowls, Iran,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.154

Pl. 51
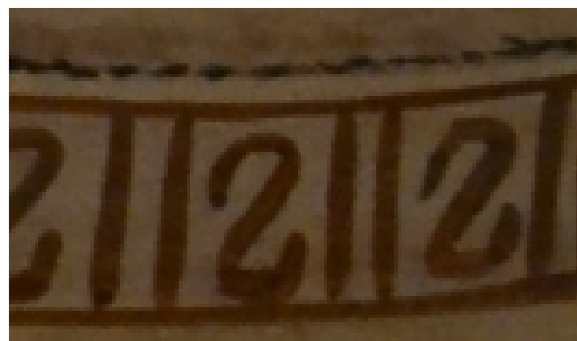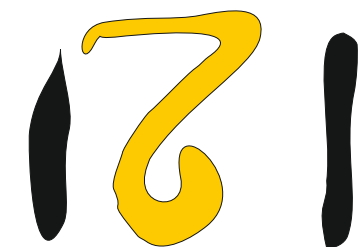
Lorenzo Veneziano, *Lion Polyptyc,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.155

Paolo Veneziano, *Polyptych,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.156

Lorenzo Veneziano,
Lion Polyptych

Paolo Veneziano,
Polyptych

fig.157
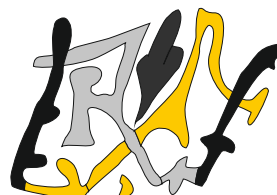
Lorenzo Veneziano, *Madonna of Humility with Saints Mark and John,*
National Gallery, London

fig.158

Pl. 52

Lorenzo Veneziano, *The Annunciation with Saints,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.159

Detail of the hem

fig.160
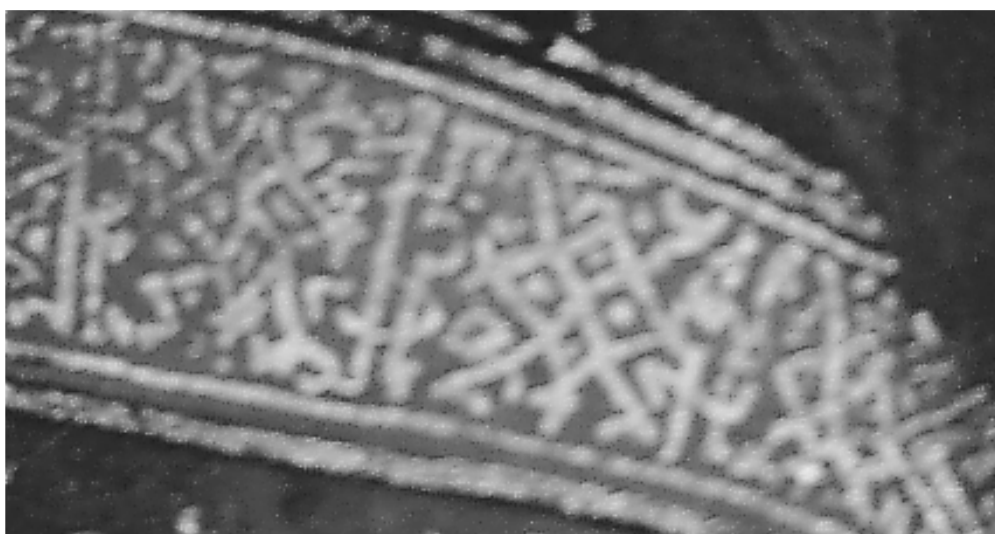
Catarino, *Coronation of the Virgin with Angels,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.161

Pl. 53

Guariento di Arpo, *Virgin and Child,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.162

Guariento di Arpo, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.163

A. Guariento di Arpo, *Virgin and Child*

fig.164

B. Giotto, *Ognissanti Madonna*

Pl. 54

Debasement of the word *al-mulk* in the 14th c. Italian paintings

fig.165

TYPE	PAINT
A	Master of San Martino alla Palma, Four scenes from the Passion of Christ — Antonio Veneziano, the Apostle James the Great — Cecco di Pietro, Madonna nursing the Child with Angels
B	Segna di Buonaventura, Crucifix — Meo da Siena, main retable from S. Pietro in Perugia — Master of the Albertini, Virgin and Child and six angels
C	Simone Martini, Saint Luke — Niccolò di Segna, St. Bartholomew and St. Nicholas — Barnaba da Modena, Virgin and Child

Debasement of the word *al-yumn* in the 14th c. Italian paintings

fig.166

TYPE	PAINT
A	Paolo Veneziano, Coronation of the Virgin — Paolo Veneziano, Polittico di S. Chiara, — Paolo Veneziano, Virgin and Child Enthroned (Sant'Alvise) — 1 2
B	Simone Martini, Virgin and Child with Saints — Simone Martini, Annunciation — Paolo Veneziano, Polyptych
C	Paolo Veneziano, Altarpiece of Santa Chiara — Lorenzo Veneziano, Madonna of the Humility — Lorenzo Veneziano, Lion Polyptych

Pl. 55

Gherardo Starnina, *Saint Hugh of Lincoln who exorcises a Possessed Man,*
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.167

Gherardo Starnina, *St. Mary Magdalene, St. Lawrence and donor,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.168

Masolino da Panicale, *Virgin and Child,*
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.169

Pl. 56
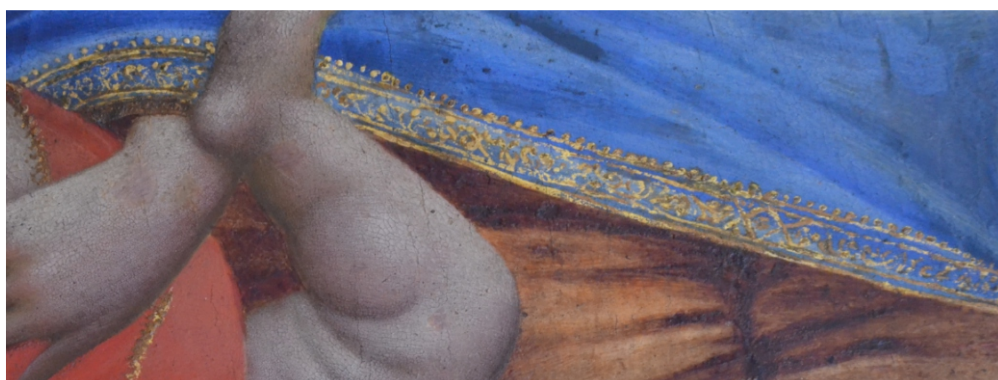
Lorenzo Monaco, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Courtould Gallery, London

fig.170

Lorenzo Monaco, *Adoring Saints,*
National Gallery, London

fig.171

Turino Vanni, *Baptism of Jesus,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.172

Pl. 57

Martino di Bartolomeo and Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli,
Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria,
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.173

Martino di Bartolomeo and Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli, *Polyptich,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig. 174
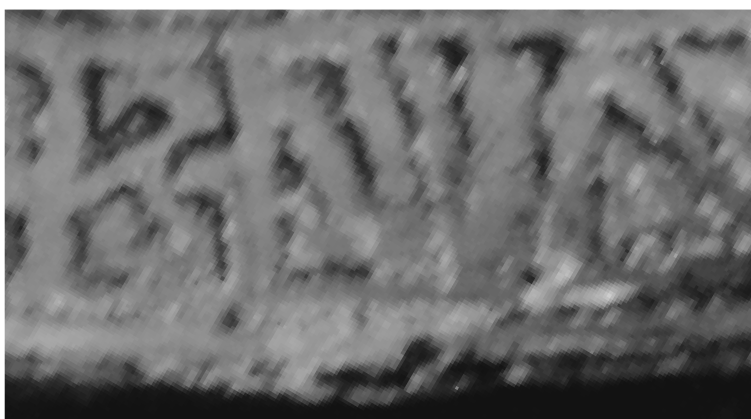
Martino di Bartolomeo and Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli, *Polyptich,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.175
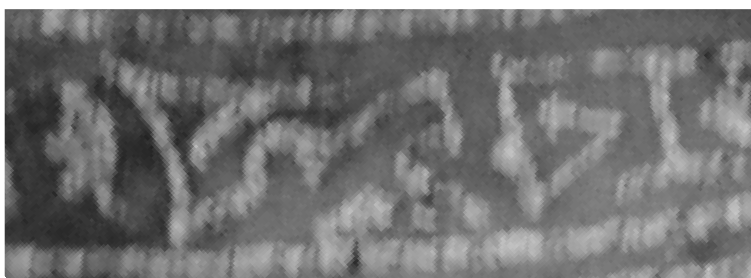
Martino di Bartolomeo and Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli, *Polyptich,*
Detail of *al-mulk*

fig.176

Pl. 58

Martino di Bartolomeo , *Polyptich,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.177
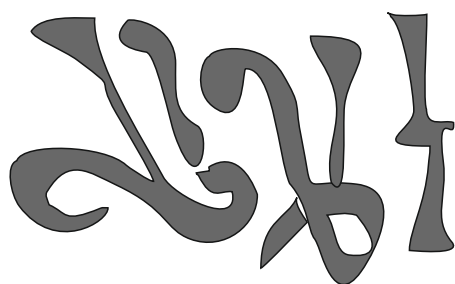
Michelino da Besozzo, *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.178
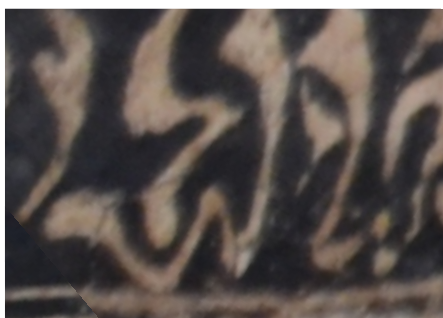
Cristoforo Moretti, *Triptych,*
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.179

Pl. 59

Gentile da Fabriano, *Madonna of the Humility,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig. 180

A. Gentile da Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig. 181

B. Reproduction of the inscription

Detail of the mantle's King

fig. 182

Pl. 60
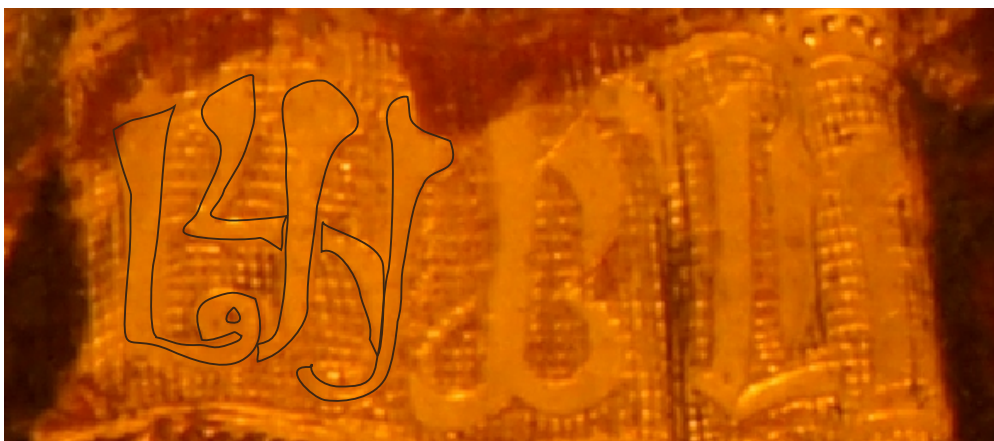
Gentile da Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi*. St. Joseph's halo

fig.183

Reproduction of the inscription

المولوى b

الكريم a

البر d

العامل c

fig.184

Gentile da Fabriano, *Madonna of the Humility*. Madonna's halo

fig.185

Pl. 61

Reproduction of the words «Ave Maria»

fig.186
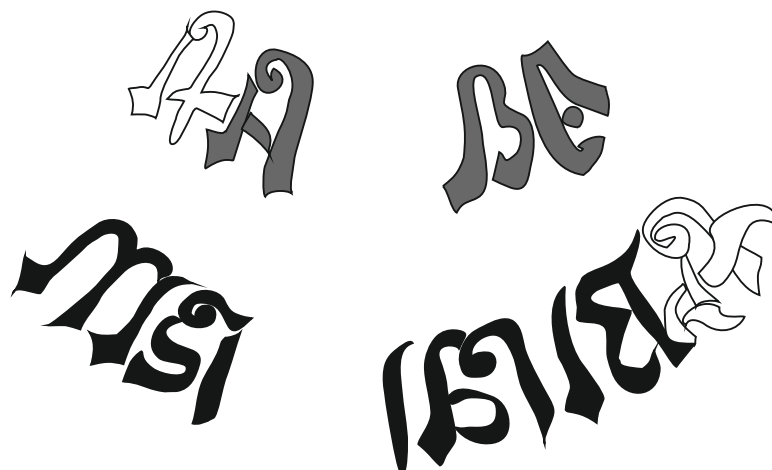
Gentile da Fabriano, Adoration of the Magi, Virgin's halo

fig.187

Reproduction of the word Maria

fig.188

Pl. 62
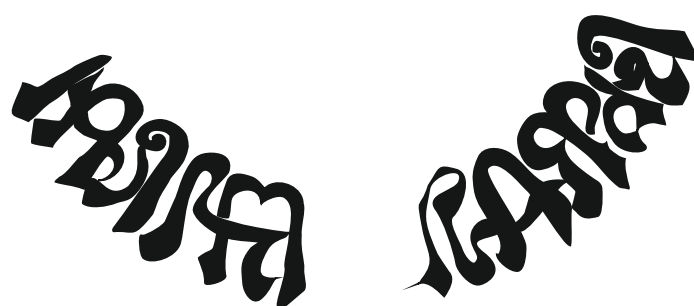
Gentile da Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi,*
Detail of the mantle hem

fig.189
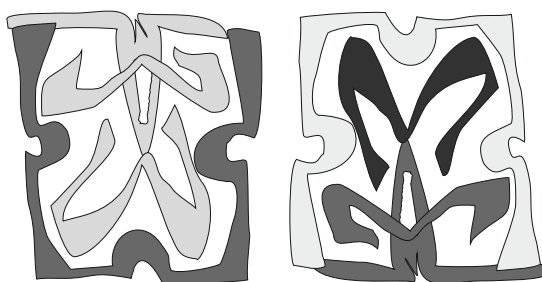
Gentile da Fabriano,
Enthroned Virgin and Child,
Frick Collection, New York

Gentile da Fabriano,
Madonna and Child Entrhoned,
National Gallery, Washington

fig.190

Pl. 63

Gentile, *Enthroned Virgin and Child,*
Frick Collection, New York

fig.191

Inscriptions on the hems: *A. al-malik B. al-karīm*

A.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　B.

fig.192

Inscriptions on the hems: *al-kāmil*

fig.193

Pl. 64

Pisanello, *Sketches of John VIII Palaeologus during his visit at the Council of Florence*,
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.194
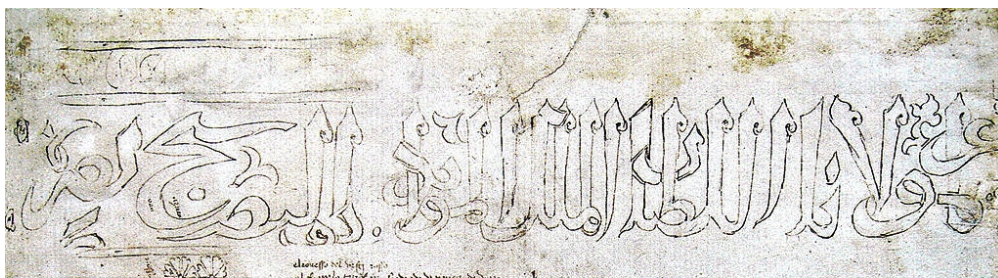
Pisanello, *The Annunciation*,
Basilica di San Fermo Maggiore, Verona. Detail of the lower part of the carpet

fig.195
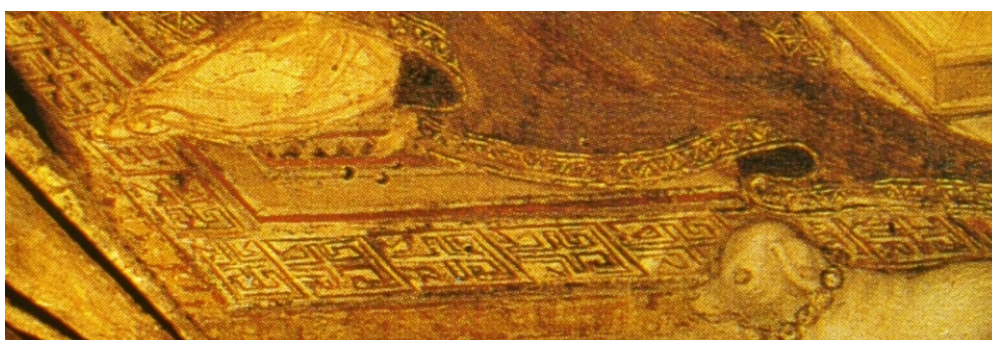
Pisanello, *The Annunciation*. Detail of the upper part of the carpet

fig.196

Detail of textile, Egytp,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.197

Pl. 65

Giovanni di Paolo, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.198

Master of the Osservanza, *The Birth of the Virgin,*
National Gallery, London

fig.199

Master of the 1310, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Museo Civico, Pistoia

fig.200

Pl. 66

Sano di Pietro, *Enthroned Madonna with Child,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig. 201

Sano di Pietro, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig. 202

Pl. 67
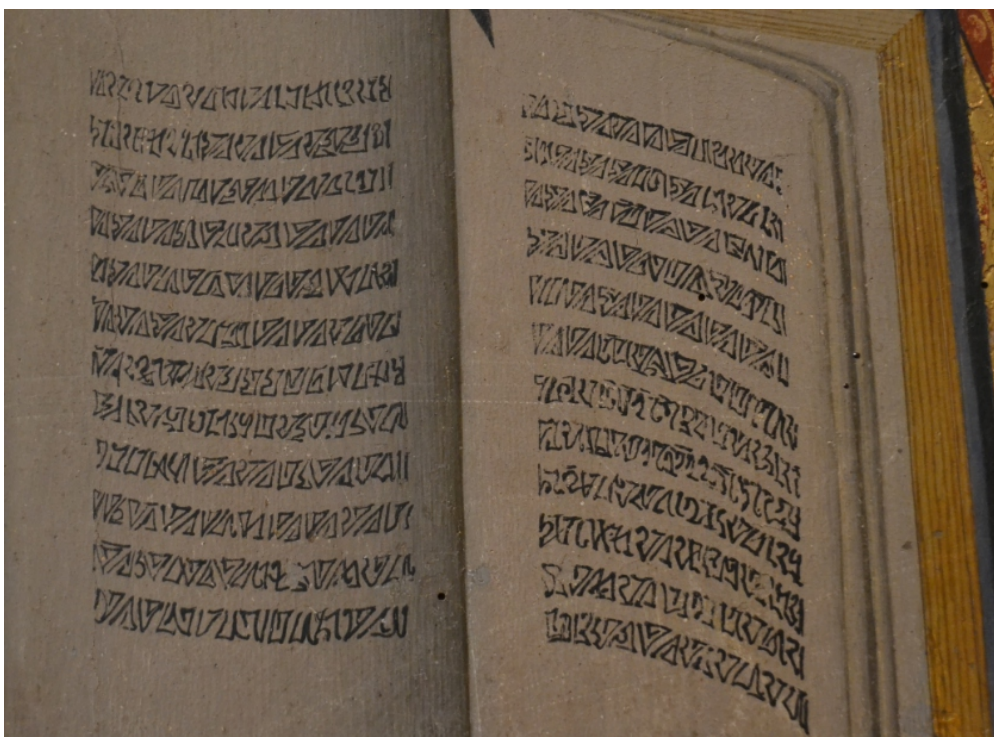
Sano di Pietro, *Madonna and Child with Saints,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.203

Sano di Pietro, *Virgin and Child,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.204

Workshop of Sano di Pietro, *Virgin and Child,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.205

Pl. 68

Masaccio and Masolino, *Sant'Anna Metterza,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Angel's halo
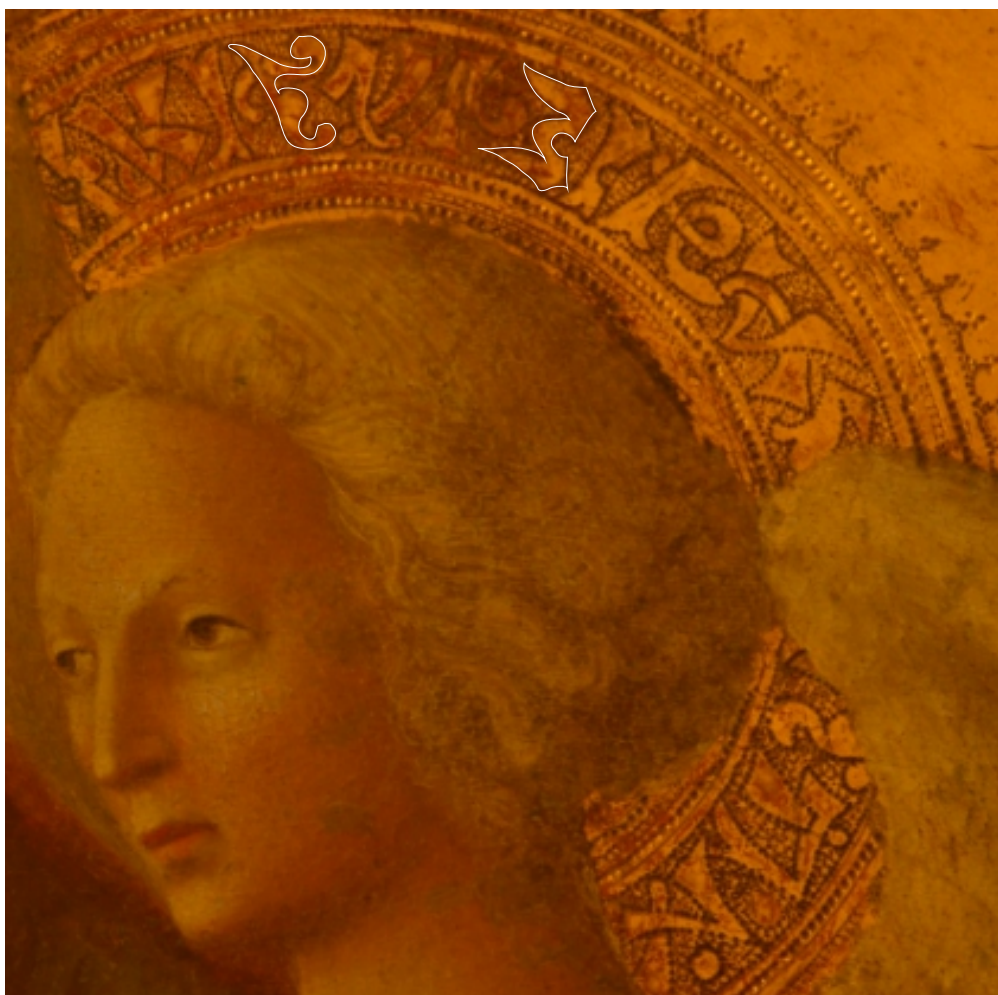
fig.206

Masaccio and Masolino, *Sant'Anna Metterza,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Child's halo

fig.207

Pl. 69
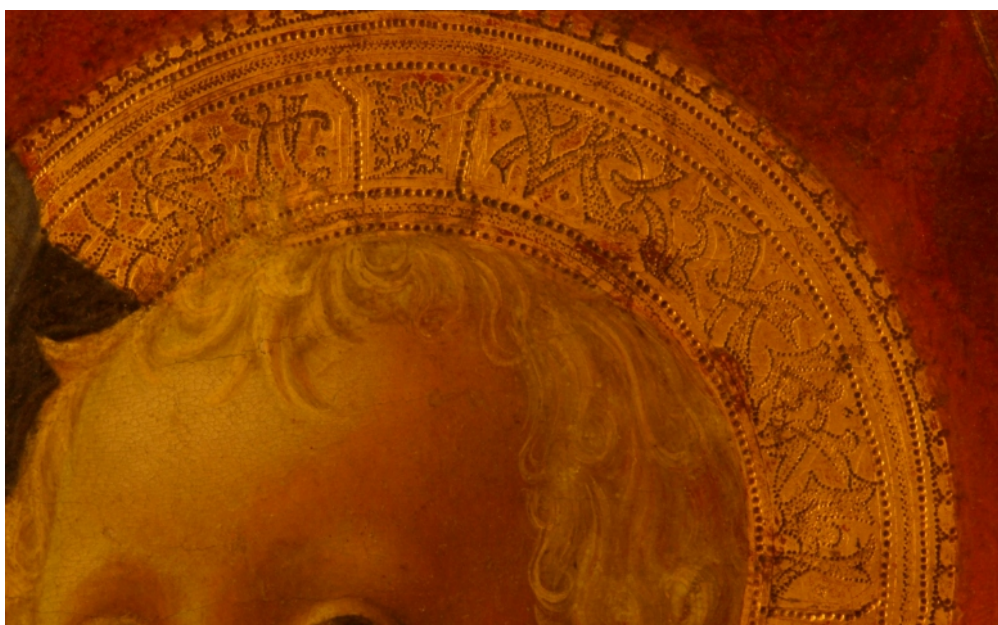
Masaccio, *Madonna Casini,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.208

A. Fra Angelico, *Madonna of the Shadows,*
Museo San Marco, Florence

fig.209

B. Comparison between Masaccio's and Angelico's inscriptions

Masaccio's inscription   Fra Angelico's inscription

Pl. 70

Debasement of the word *al-sulṭān* in Fra Angelico paintings

fig.210		السلطان		السلطان
Madonna of the Shadows				
Lamentation of Christ				
Deposition of Christ				
Coronation of the Virgin				
Virgin and Child Enthroned with Trinity				
San Pietro Martire Triptych				

Detail of textile, Italy,
Museo del Tessuto, Prato

fig.211

Pl. 71

A. Reliquary of Sant'Alberto,
Museo della Cattedrale, Pistoia

fig.212

1	2	3
4	5	6

B. Comparison between Prato and Pistoia artefacts

Textile, Prato

Reliquiary, Pistoia

Examples of *al-mā* in Fra Angelico's paintings

Madonna Strozzi

The Adoration of the Magi

fig.213 *Virgin and Child Enthroned
with Trinity*

Coronation of the Virgin
(Museo di San Marco)

Pl. 72
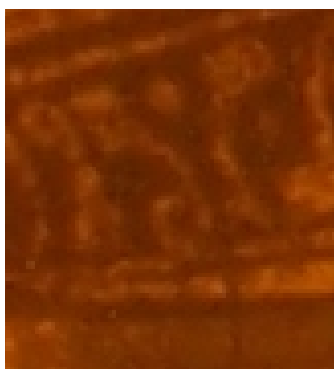
Al-maqarr ductus
Reliquary of Sant'Alberto

Coronation of the Virgin
(Uffizi Gallery)
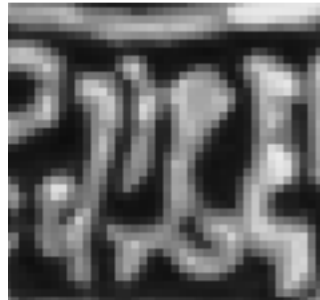
fig.214

Tabernacle of the Linaioli
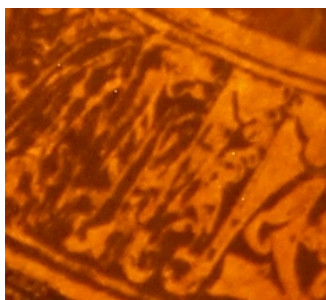
The Madonna of Pontassieve

Fra Angelico, *The Madonna of Pontassieve,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.215

Zanobi Strozzi, *Virgin and Child with four Angels,*
Museo di San Marco, Florence

fig.216

Pl. 73

Fra Angelico, *Deposition of Christ,*
Museo di San Marco, Florence. Detail of «Magister»

fig.217

Fra Angelico, *Deposition of Christ,*
Museo di San Marco, Florence. Detail of «Maria»

fig.218

Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Museo di San Marco, Florence. Detail of the Christ's shoulder

fig.219

Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin.* Detail of the Christ's collar

fig.220

Pl. 74
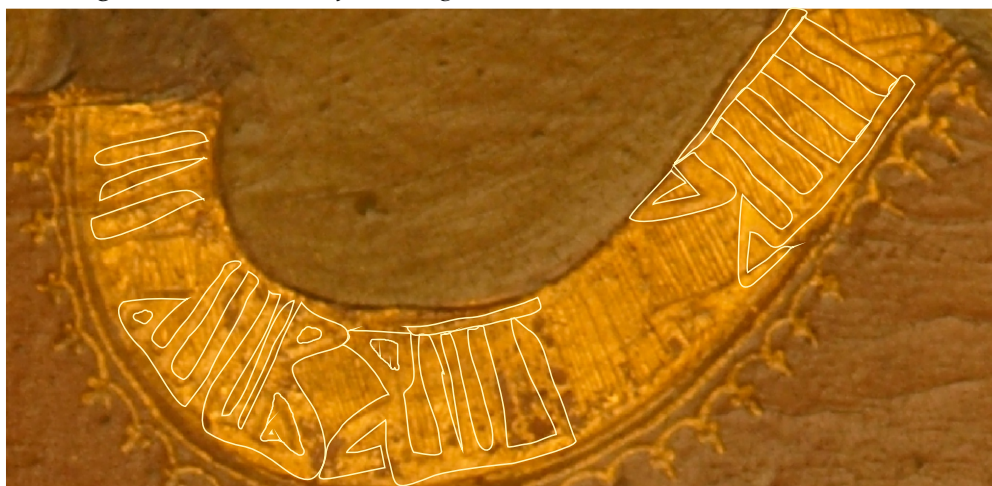
Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.221

Francesco d'Antonio di Bartolomeo, *Singing Angels,*
Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, Florence

fig.222

Antonio da Firenze, *Crucifixion with Virgin and St John,*
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

fig.223

Pl. 75

Antonio da Firenze, *Madonna and Child with a Bishop, Saints and Angel,*
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

fig.224

fig.225

Andrea del Castagno, *Assumption of the Virgin,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

al-mā[likī]   *al-maqarr*   *al-mālikī*

fig.226
fig.227
fig.228

Comparison between ornamentations made up of interconnected letters

Andrea del Castagno,
Virgin and Child,
Collezione Contini Bonacossi,
Florence

fig.229

Bowl, Iran,
Metropolitan Museum,
New York

Pl. 76

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Virgin and Child,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.230

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Virgin and Child,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.231

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Virgin and Child*

fig.232

Pl. 77

Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Virgin and Child,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig.233

Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Pala di Vallombrosa,*
Abbazia di Vallombrosa, Reggello (Florence)

fig.234
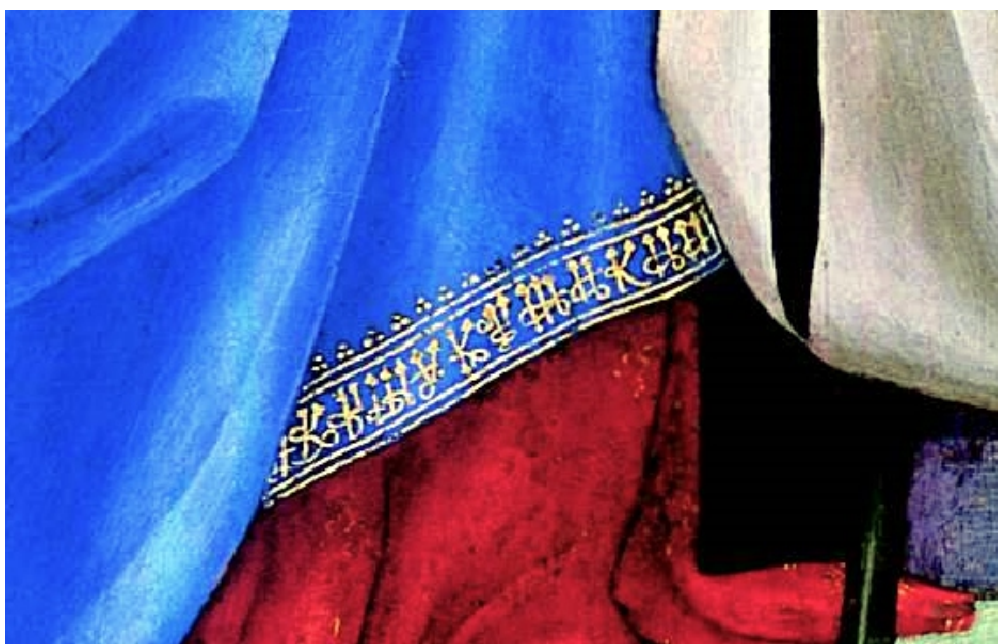
Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Virgin and Child,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.235

Pl. 78

A. Jacobello del Fiore, *Triptych,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.236
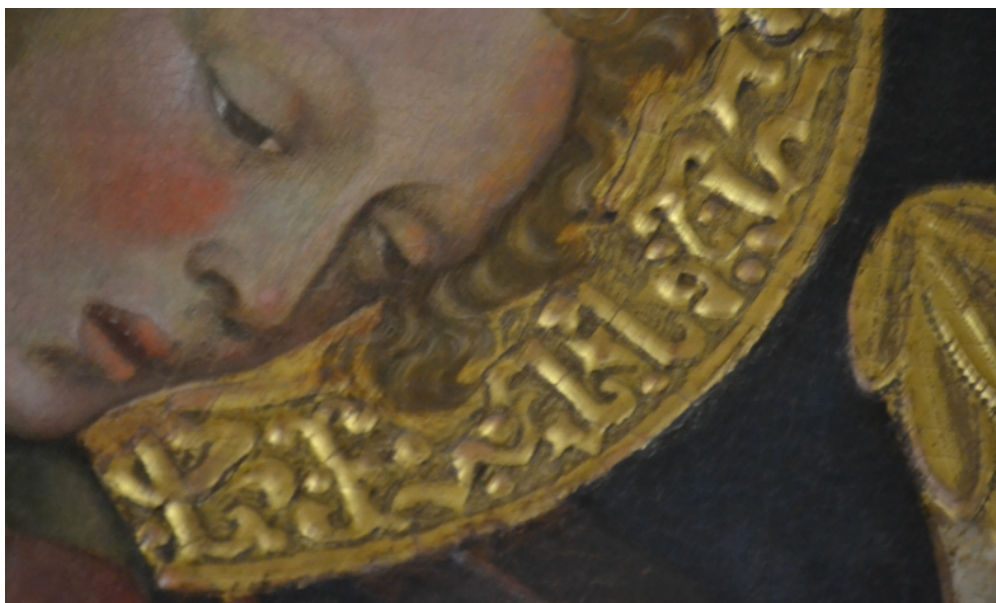
B *baraka*
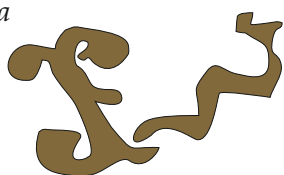
C *al-mulk*
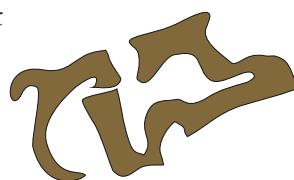
Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, *Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John,*
Hermitage Museum, St.Petersburg

fig.237
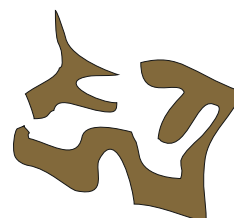
Niccolò di Pietro, *Coronation of the Virgin,*
Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

fig. 238

Pl. 79
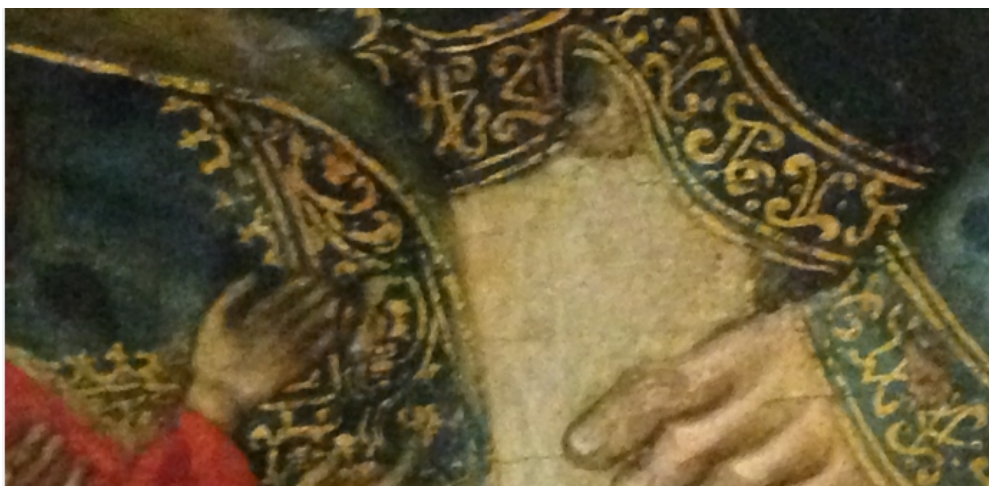
Antonio Vivarini, *The Adoration of the Magi,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.239

Reproduction of the inscription

fig.240
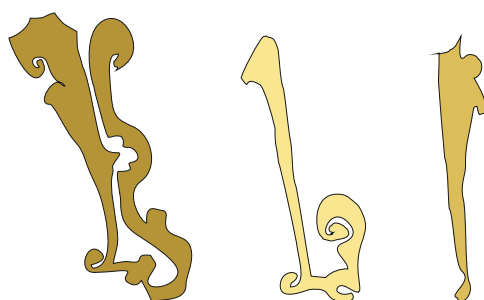
Jacopo Bellini, *Virgin and Child,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.241

Pl. 80

Jacopo Belini, *Madonna and Child with Cherubs,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig. 242

Jacopo Bellini, *Virgin and Child,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig. 243

Giovanni Bellini, Madonna *Enthroned Cherishing the Sleeping Child,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig. 244

Giovanni Bellini, *Christ Blessing,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 245

Pl. 81

Andrea Mantegna, *Judith with the head of Holofernes,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig. 246

Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna and Child with Seraphim and Cherubim,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig. 247
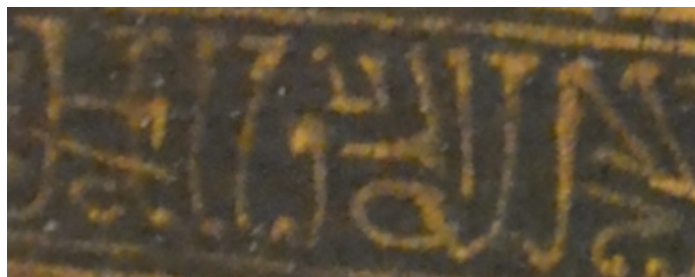
Andrea Mantegna, *The Holy family with the Saint Mary Magdalen,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig. 248
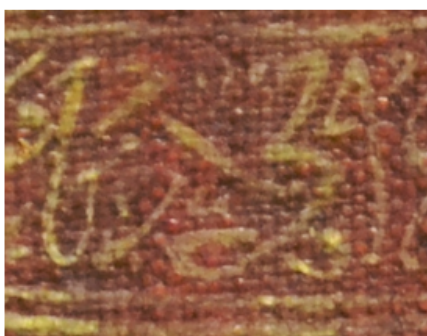
Comparison between inscriptions

fig. 249

Master of Città di Castello	Andrea Mantegna
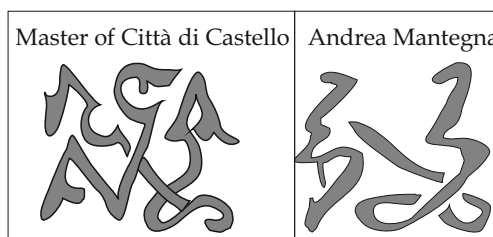
Andrea Mantegna, *St. Luke,*
Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

fig.250

Pl. 82

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter, Romualdo, Paul and Benedict,* Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.251

fig.252
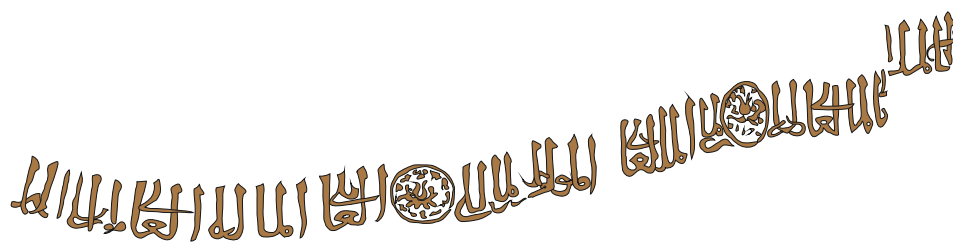
الملك الما(لكي) العالي الناصر(؟) (ا)لما(لكي) الملك العالي المولوي المالكي العام المالكي العالي (...) النا(صري)؟

Detail of the word *al-malik*

A. Mamluk tray, Egypt or Syria
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

B. Cima's Inscription

fig.253

Detail of the word *al-ʿālī*

A. Mamluk bowl, Egypt,
Courtauld Gallery, London

B. Cima's Inscription

fig.254

Pl. 83
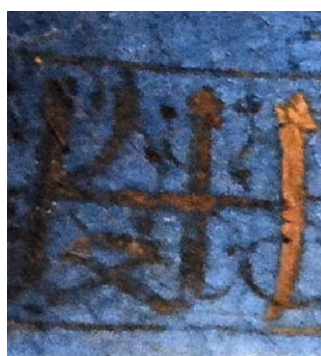
Detail of the word *al-nāṣir* (?)

A. Box, Egypt,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

B.Cima's Inscription

fig.255

Detail of the word *al-mawlawī*

A. Box, Egypt,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

B.Cima's Inscription

fig.256

Detail of the word *al-ʿāmilī*

A.Basin, Egypt,
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo

B.Cima's Inscription

fig.257

Pl. 84

Detail of the flowers decoration

A. Mamluk Plate, Egypt,
Smithsonian Museum,
Washington
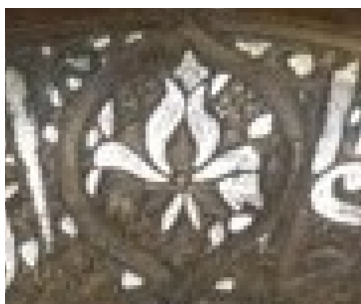
B. Cima's decoration

fig.258

Detail of the word *al-mālīkī*

A. Box, Egypt,
V&A Museum, London

B. Cima's Inscription

fig.259

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna dell'Arancio,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.260

Pl. 85

Cima da Conegliano, *Virgin and Child,*
National Gallery London

fig.261

Mirror image reproduction

fig.262

Pl. 86

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome and St. John the Baptist,* National Gallery, Washington

fig.263

Mirror image reproduction

fig.264
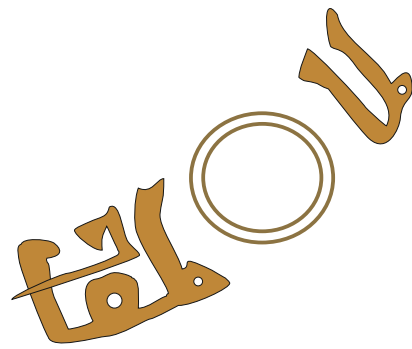
Neapolitan Follower of Giotto's detail of *al-maqarr*

fig.265

Pl. 87
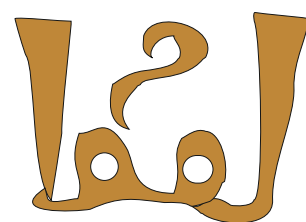
Cima da Conegliano, *Tobias and the Angel and two Saints*,
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.266

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and child with St. John the Baptist and St. Paul*,
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.267

Left side inscription

fig.268

Pl. 88

Probably by Cima da Conegliano, *The Virgin and Child with Saints*,
National Gallery, London

fig.269

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child in a Landscape*,
County Museum, Los Angeles

fig.270

Iscription on the cuff

fig.271

Pl. 89

Cima da Conegliano, *Three Saints*,
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig. 272

Cima da Conegliano, *Virgin and Child,*
National Gallery, London

fig. 273

Iscription on the cuff

fig. 274

Pl. 90

Cima da Conegliano, *Virgin and Child,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna

fig.275

Iscription on the cuff

fig.276

Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child with Sts Jerome and
Mary Magdalen,* Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.277

Pl. 91

Inscription on the right cuff

fig. 278

Inscription on the collar

fig. 279

Cima da Conegliano, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas,*
National Gallery, London

fig. 280

Cima da Conegliano, *Pala di Conegliano,*
Conegliano Cathedral, Conegliano Veneto

fig. 281

Textile fragment, Egypt, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.282

Pl. 92

Filippo Lippi, *Pala Barbadori,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 283

Filippi Lippi, *Virgin and Child,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig. 284

Filippo Lippi, *The Adoration of the Child,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig. 285

Pl. 93

Pesellino, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig. 286

Decoration of the collar

fig. 287

Zanobi Strozzi, *Annunciation,*
National Gallery, London

fig.288

Detail of «NOBI»

fig.289

Pl. 94

Paolo di San Leocadio, *Virgin and Child,*
National Gallery, London

fig.290

Sandro Botticelli, *Virgin and Child with the Young St John the Baptist,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.291

Pietro Perugino, *Virgin and Child with Angels and Saints,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.292

Pl. 95

Pietro di Domenico da Montepulciano, *Virgin and Child with Angels,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.293

Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig.294

Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

fig.295

Matteo di Giovanni, *Madonna and Child with Angels and Cherubim,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig.296

Pl. 96

Lippo di Dalmasio, *The Madonna of the Humility,*
National Gallery,London

fig.297
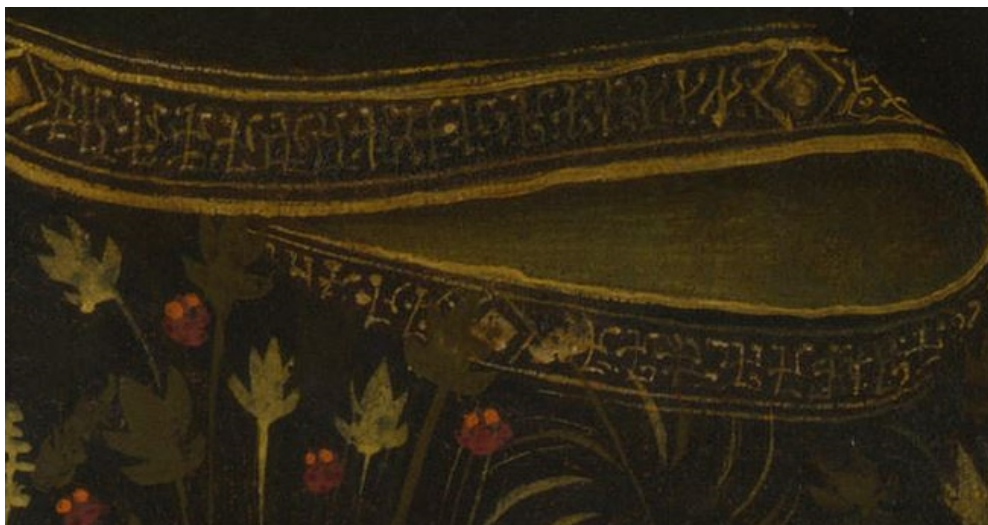
Michele di Matteo, *Polyptych,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.298

Lorenzo d'Alessandro, *The mystical marriage of Saint Catherine,*
National Gallery, London

fig.299

Pl. 97

Vincenzo Foppa, *Madonna and Child,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.300

Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

fig.301

Marco Zoppo, *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.302

Michele da Verona, *Madonna and Child with the infant St john the Baptist,*
Metropolitan Museum, New York

fig.303

Pl. 98

Vittore Carpaccio, *The Stories of St. Orsola*,
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.304

Textile fragment,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.305

Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with Saint Emidius*,
National Gallery, London

fig.306

Textile fragment, Turkey,
Metropolitan Museum. New York

fig.307

Pl. 99

Unknown Venetian, *Virgin and Child,*
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

fig.308

Gregorio Cecco di Luca, *The Marriage of the Virgin,*
National Gallery, London

fig.309

Textile fragment,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.310

Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Resurrection of the Boy,*
Basilica di Santa Trinità, Florence
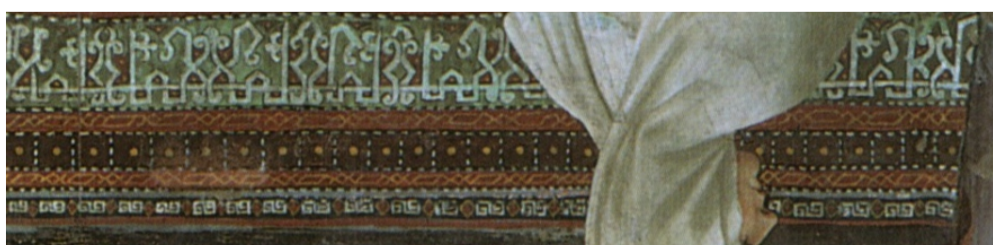
fig.311

Western Anatolian Carpet, from *Oriental Carpet Design* fig. 390

fig.312

Pl. 100

Domenico Ghirlandaio, *St Jerome in his study,*
Chiesa di Ognissanti, Florence

fig.313

Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Ingesuati Sacred Conversation,*
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

fig.314

Pl. 101

Lorenzo di Credi, *Virgin adoring the Child,*
National Gallery, London

fig.315

Unknown Pisan, *St. Agnes with St. Mary Magdalene and another Saint,*
Museum of San Matteo, Pisa

fig.316
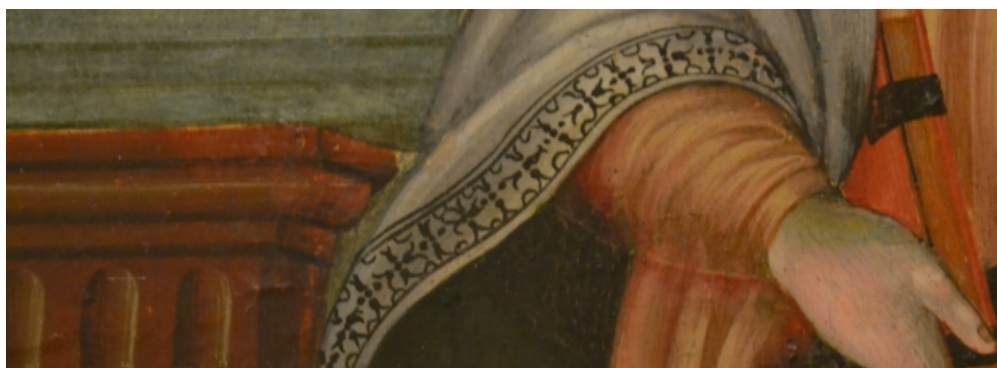
Liberale da Verona, *Virgin and Child with Two Angels,*
National Gallery, London

fig. 317

Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, *Holy Conversation with Saints,*
Museo Civico, Pistoia

fig. 318

Pl. 102

Gianfresco de Maineri, *The Holy Family,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Fra Angelico's inscription

fig.319

Bernardino Fungai, *Madonna and Child,*
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

fig.320

Maso di Banco's inscription, 1335-36

fig.321

Francesco Bonsignori, *Half-length figure of a Saint,*
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.322

Pl. 103
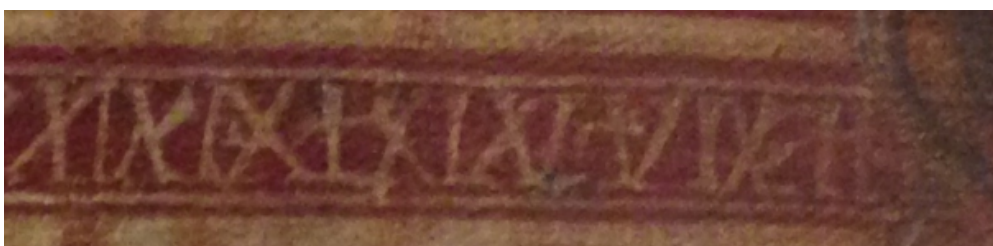
Fragment of textiles, Egypt,
Ahsmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.323

Marco Marziale, *Supper at Emmaus,*
Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.324

Detail of textiles, Egypt,
Ahsmolean Museum, Oxford

fig.325

Reproduction of the inscription

fig.326
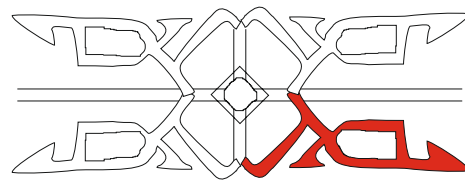
Unknown, *Reception of a Venetian delegation in Damascus,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.327

Pl. 104

Bartolomeo Veneto, *Circumcision,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.328

Francesco Bissolo, *Salvator Mundi,*
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.329

Censer, Bronze,
Overseas Chinese Museum, Xiamen

fig.330

Veneto's
inscription

Bissolo's
inscription

fig.331

Censer's inscrption

Pl. 105

Ambrogio Bergognone, *Virgin and Child with two Angels,*
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.332

Ambrogio Bergognone, *The Virgin and Child with Saints,*
National Gallery, London

fig.333

Bernardino Bergognone, *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels,*
National Gallery, London

fig.334
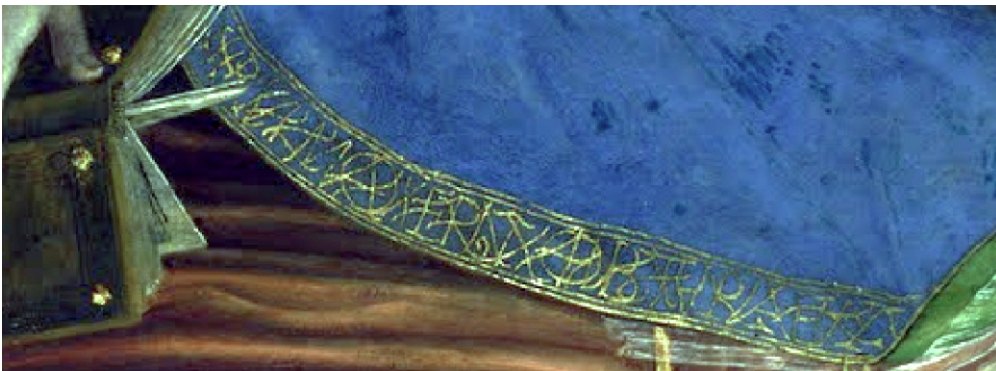
White highlighted inscription on the hem

fig.335
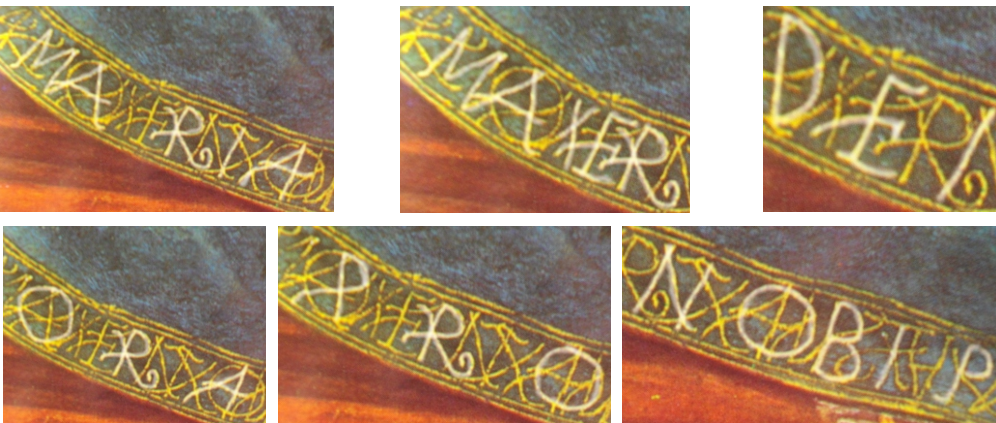
Encrypted signature

fig.336

Pl. 106

Antonio de Solario, *St.Catherine of Alexandria,*
National Gallery, London

fig.337

Antonio de Solario, *St. Ursula,*
National Gallery, London

fig.338

Giovanni Cariani, *Virgin and Child with St. Sebastian,*
Louvre Museum, Paris

fig.339

Pl. 107
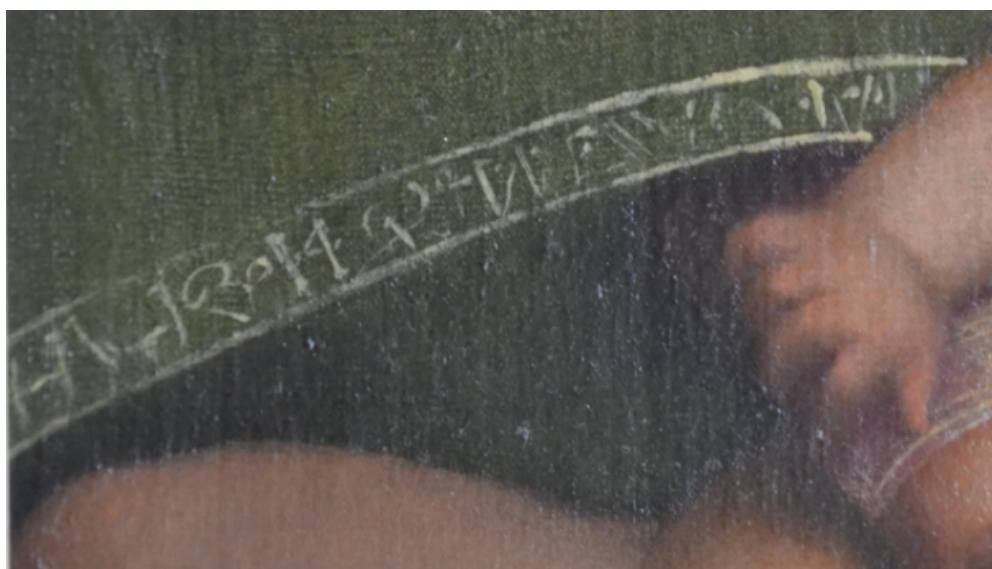
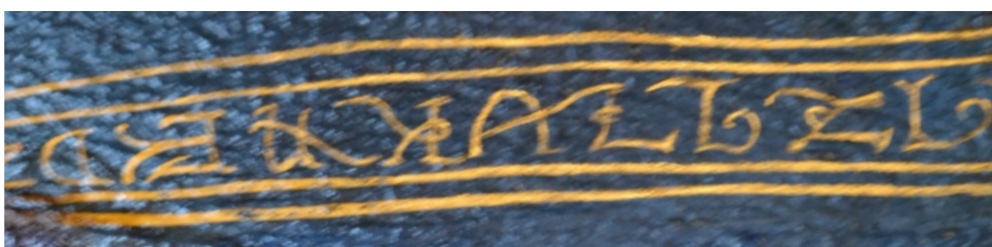Raffaello, *Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga,*
Uffizi Gallery , Florence

fig.340

Raffaello, *The Niccolini-Cowper Madonna,*
National Gallery, Washington

fig.341
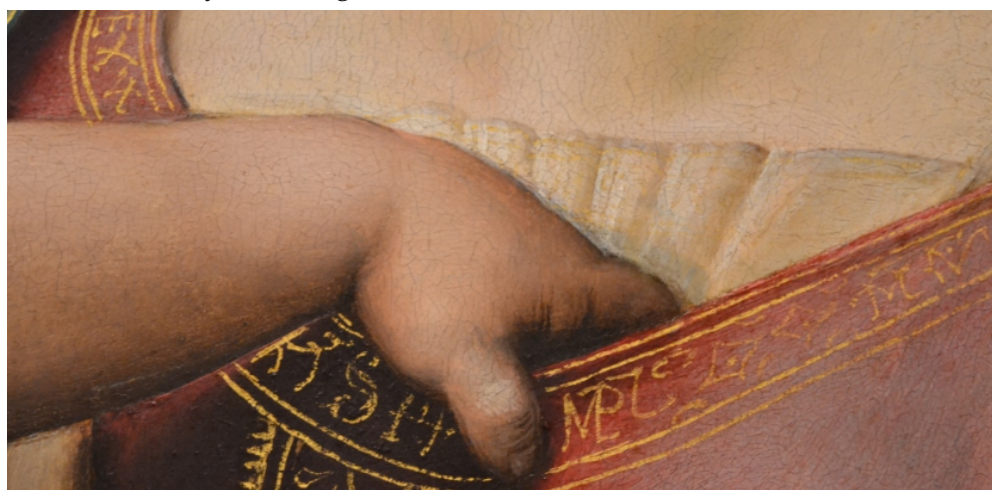
Raffaello, *The Holy Family,*
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.342

Raffaello, *Terranuova Madonna,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.343

Pl. 108

Boccaccio Boccaccino, *Marriage of St. Catherine with Saints*,
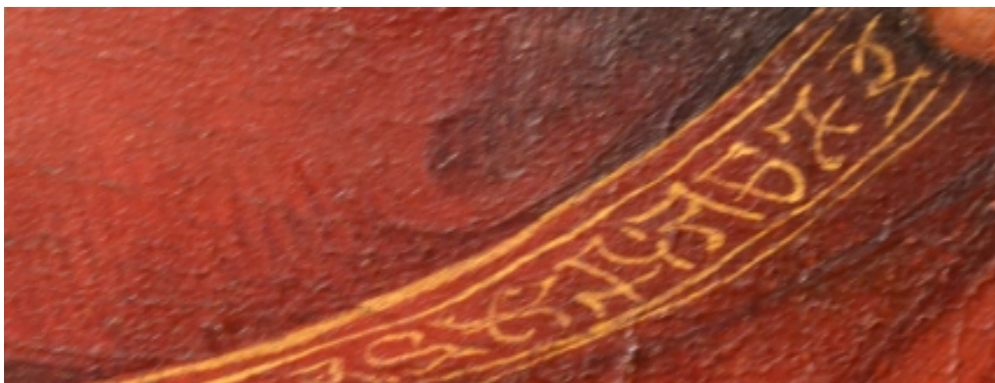Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

fig.344

Domenico Panetti, *Lamentation of Christ with a Donor*,
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.345

Gerino Gerini, *Holy Conversation with Saints*,
Museo Civico, Pistoia

fig.346

Lodovico Mazzolino, *Finding in the Temple,*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.347

Pl. 109

Sebastiano del Piombo, *Cardinal Bandiello Sauli, His Secretary and Two Geographers,* National Gallery, Washington

fig.348

Detail of Western Anatolian Carpet, from *Oriental Carpet Design*, fig. 390

fig.349

Girolamo del Santo, *Virgin and Childs Enthroned with Angels and St. Benedict,* Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.350

Rosso Fiorentino, *Portrait of a young man,* Museo of Capodimonte, Naples

fig.351

Pl. 110

Giulio Campi, *Allegory of Vanity,*
Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan

fig.352

Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of Giovanni della Volta with his Wife and Children,*
National Gallery, London

fig.353

Lorenzo Lotto, *The Alms of St. Anthony,*
Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo, Venice

fig.354

Pl. 111

Jacopo da Ponte Bassano, *Virgin and Child with Saints,*
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

fig.355

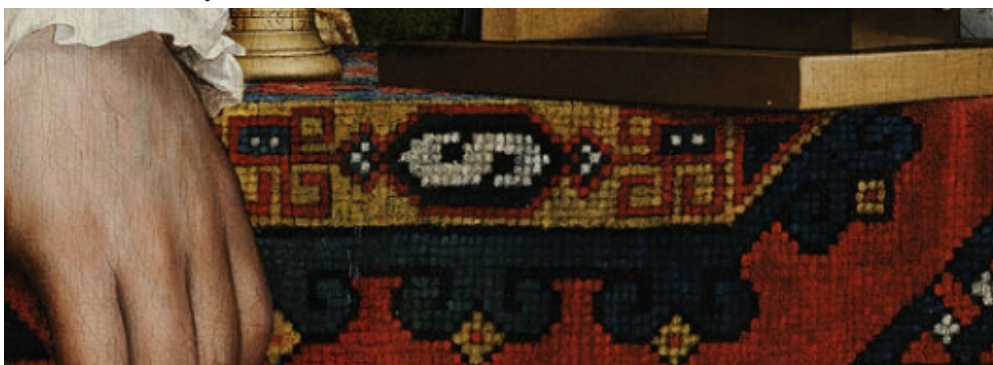Hans Memling, *Donne Triptych*, National Gallery, London.

fig.356

Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Merchant Georg Gisze*,
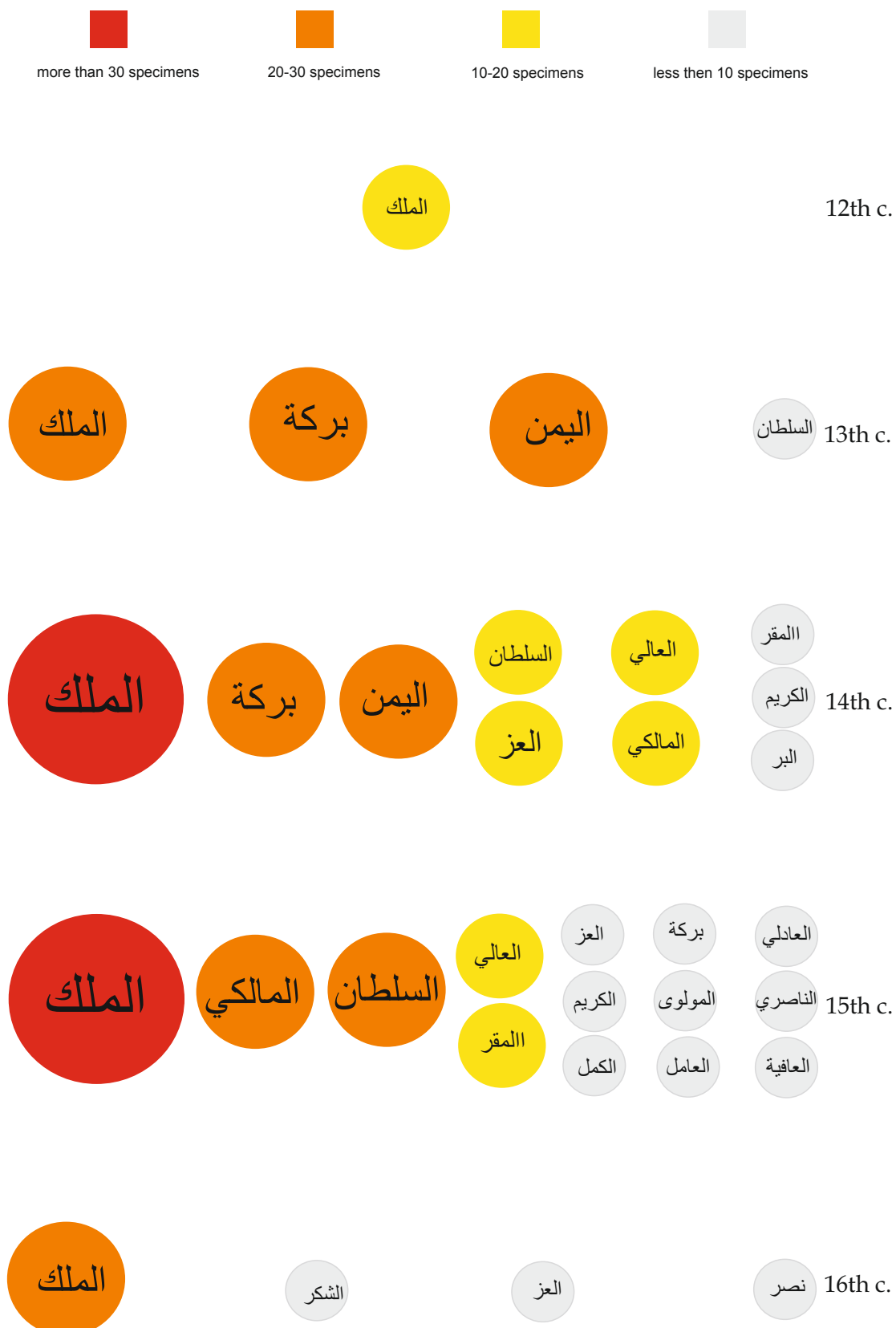Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

fig.357

Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors,*
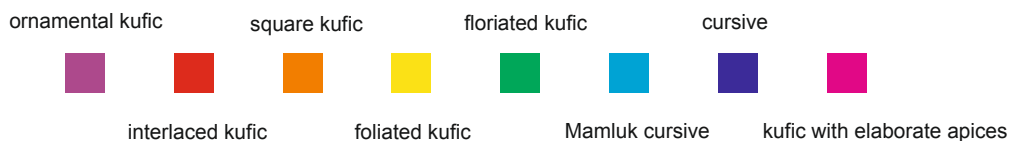National Gallery, London

fig.358

Pl. 112

Appendices:
Formulas and epigraphical patterns:

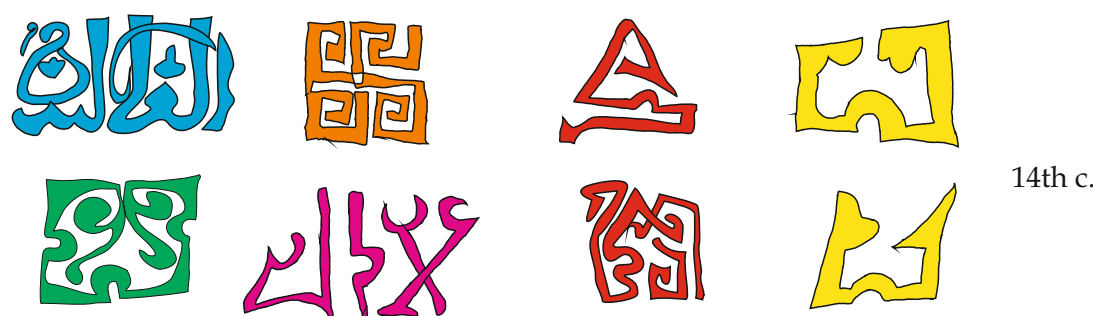The spread of the Arabic formulas during the centuries in the examined paintings

| more than 30 specimens | 20-30 specimens | 10-20 specimens | less then 10 specimens |

12th c.

الملك

13th c.

الملك — بركة — اليمن — السلطان

14th c.

الملك — بركة — اليمن — السلطان / العز — العالي / المالكي — المقر / الكريم / البر

15th c.

الملك — المالكي — السلطان — العالي / المقر — العز / الكريم / الكمل — بركة / المولى / العامل — العادلي / الناصري / العافية

16th c.

الملك — الشكر — العز — نصر

Pl. 113

Formulas and epigraphical patterns:

Kufic and Cursive writings during the centuries

ornamental kufic   square kufic   floriated kufic   cursive

interlaced kufic   foliated kufic   Mamluk cursive   kufic with elaborate apices
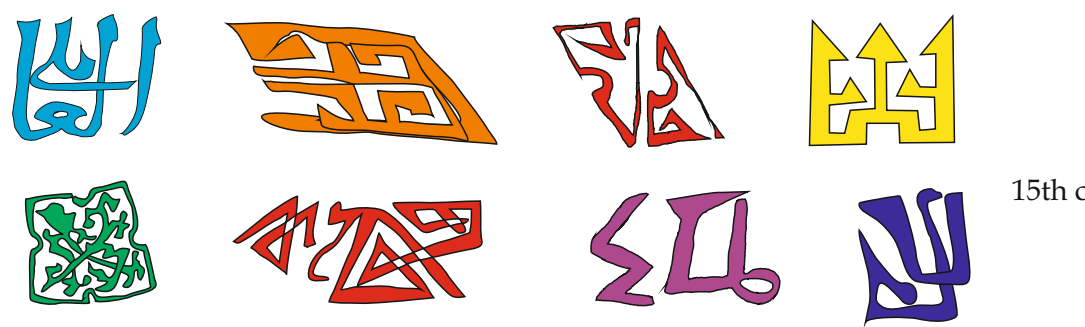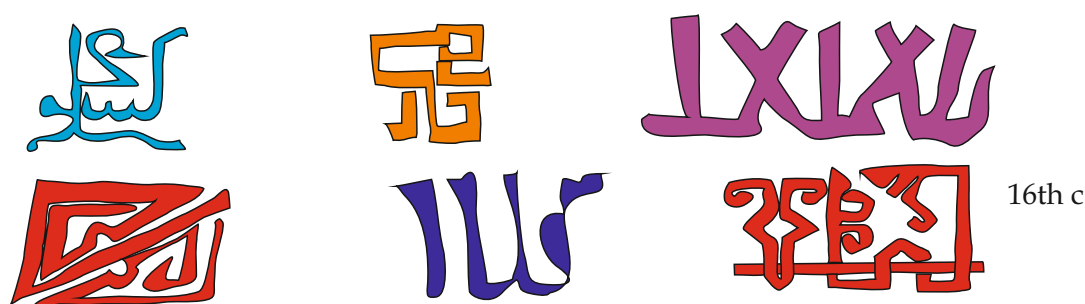

12th c.

13th c.

14th c.

15th c.

16th c.

Pl. 114

Formulas and epigraphical patterns:

Debasement of the word *al-mulk* during the centuries

12th c.

13th c.

14th c.

15th c.

16th c.