

MAGIC BOWLS, COSMOLOGY AND DIVINATION

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The Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait possesses a number of magic bowls which can be dated to different periods. From this collection the description of one object (Photos 1 a,b,c,d) will be presented in the following. Its interest lies in the fact that its structure betrays a definitely cosmologically oriented composition – a rather neglected aspect in studies dealing with magic bowls.

On the other hand, this artefact offers scriptural evidence for its use in divination because its inscription contains a direct request for a dream vision. This is particularly worth of attention since related studies – even if they refer to divination among the different uses of the bowls – do not elaborate on this particular point. On the basis of the lack of textual proof for the use of magic bowls in divinatory practices, Savage-Smith rightly doubts the soundness of opinions which take this self-evident¹.

A third element to be stressed is the manifest Sufi and the partly concealed Shiite background which is noticeable both in the inscriptions and in the decoration of the bowl. Putting it in another way, the bowl can be considered to be the product of Sufi scholarship and craftsmanship.

A further aim of the study is to shed light on a possible connection between Islamic and Jewish cosmological-magical mysticism which may offer a new perspective for research on magical bowls.

DESCRIPTION OF MET2178TSR

Dimensions:

Diameter: 184mm

Height: 50mm

The brass, cast and engraved bowl with curving sides has an everted rim, a central boss and rests on a low foot-ring.

The rim and the band below it are covered by a continuous *nashī* inscription. In the cavetto, enclosed between two framing bands a strapwork of interlacing twin fillets forms roundels alternating with lobed quatrefoils. The roundels end in half

¹ Savage-Smith 1997:76. Oman 1981:217f mentions divination among the possible uses of the magic bowls as self-evident. For a magical recipe, however, how to inscribe a copper bowl to be used in a divinatory procedure, see Fodor 1994:77-82.

roundels above and below, the quatrefoils are topped by cusped arches. The half roundels and every second cusped arch are filled with leaf and bud motifs. The rest of the cusped arches with the cloud like compartments on their right are inscribed with magical signs. The arrangement of the inscription gives the impression of a meandering line which can be divided into six sections. Each of them is composed of four differently shaped elements the schematic appearance of which may evoke the figure of the letter *rā'* repeated six times. The writing of the text starts in an upper compartment, continues to the left, at first downwards then upwards. The symbolically composed figures of the letter *rā'* may stand for the divine attributes *rahmān*, 'Merciful' and *rahīm*, "Compassionate", each of them repeated three times. It is certainly worth mentioning that these attributes occur in the inscription around the boss in the same arrangement.

This epigraphic frieze in the well around the boss is divided into six trilobed cartouches with a *nashī* inscription following the direction from right to left.

The boss is topped by a cusped lobed quatrefoil composed of split half palmettes. The cusped arches end in small trefoils, carry similar trefoils in between and enclose lotus blossoms. The rest of the boss is decorated by foliate motifs.

On the exterior, under the rim a *nashī* inscription frieze divided into twelve cartouches with trilobed ends is enclosed between two border lines made of twin fillets. The layout of the rest of the exterior is dominated by six roundels inscribed in *nashī* and joined together by a horizontal band of *nashī* inscription written between two plain border bands. The six roundels intersect two friezes below and above which are covered by the motifs of the magical signs.

The footing surrounds a circular band divided into six sections by three roundels. The latter are filled with the magical motifs, the concave, rhomboidal cartouches between them are decorated with the leaf and bud motifs. The underside of the boss is left plain.

Inscriptions

ARABIC TEXT

MET2178TSR

RIM

اللهم يا حنان يا ديان يا سبحان يا سلطان يا ذو الجلال والأكرام أشهد أن كا (انك) معبود من دون عرشك إلى منتهى قرار الأرضين (السن صل عبا طلايم؟) غير وجهك الكريم امنت بك رب يا غياث المستغيثين قدير وأزر في حفظ العلم والقران وخلصني بربي (يا ربي؟) ويحمي (واحمني؟) ولا تكلني الا (إلى) نفسي طُرفته (طرفة) عين انك على ما تشاء قدير ولا حول ولا (قوة) الا بالله العلى والعظيم

UNDER RIM

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم بسم الله باسمه المبتدي رب الآخرة والأولى لا غاية له ولا منتهى له ما في السموات العلى (Q 20,4) الرحمن على العرش استوى (Q 20,5) له ما في السموات وما في الأرض وما بينهما وما تحت الثرى (Q 20,6) وإن تجهر بالقول فإنه يعلم السر واخفى (Q 20,7) (Q) الله لا اله الا هو له الاسماء الحسنى (Q 20,8) الله العظيم عظيم الالاء دائم البقاء القاهر على الاعداء على خلقه حافظ الرحمن عاطف قادر على اهلاك القاهر

CAVETTO

- ١ هو الاول والاخر والظاهر والباطن الفاتح
الدائم رازق الخلايق (مر)بى البهائم صاحب العطايا ومانع البلايا ويشفي السقيم
ويغفر الذنوب [sic!] الخاطئين ويعفو عن الهاربين ويجب ا
لصاحين ويبرك النادمين المذنبين ويؤمن الخائفين ويهلك
٢ الخائنين هو الرحمن الرحيم سبحانه
يا لا اله الا انت (Q 21,87) الكريم المعبود غافر الخطايا وسائر العيوب مذهب الهموم انت
الذ
ي سجد لك سواد الليل ونور النهار وضئ القمر وشعاع الشمس
وخفيف السحر ودوى الماء اللهم انت الذي كل شيء خلقته (شطر؟) واليك با
٣ لنشور اللهم اغفر لي خطيئتي وذنوبي يا رب اقض
حاجتي كما قلت ادعوني استجب لكم (Q 40,60) وانت بوعدك مصدق نجني من الكرب والغم
والهم والدين والضيق والشدة والعرض انت غياث كل
مكروب ومظلوم ومضروب اللهم انت الذي قلت لا تقنطوا من الرحمن (Q 49,53) وا
٤ نت بقولك صادق لست بمكذوب احفظني مو
لاي من افات الدنيا والآخرة ولا تقضحني سري على رؤوس الخلايق خا
صة في يوم الموعود الله اكبر الله اكبر كبيرا والحمد
لله كثيرا سبحانه الله بكرة واصيلا (Q 48,9) لا ضد له ولا ند له ولا كفو
٥ ذه معروف بلطفه عادل في حكمه عالم في
ملكه الرحمن الرحيم رحيم الرحماء عليم العلماء حكيم الحكماء نصير النصراء غفور
القراء
صاحب الانبياء سبحانه قادر على (ما) يشاء سبحانه الله الملك
القدير الحميد ذي العرش المجيد (Q 85,15) فعال لما يريد (Q 85,16) رب الارباب صاحب
الاحزاب مسيب
٦ الاسباب وسابق الاسباق ورازق الارزاق وخا
لق الاخلاق ومفتح الابواب قادر المقدور وقاهر المقهور وعادل يوم الو
اقعة والحشر والنشور الا له الخلق والامر (Q 7,54) لا اله الا هو (Q 2,255) جامع
الناس (Q 3,9) اله الالهة يوم القيمة رب رحيم غفور حلیم شكور والحمد لله العظيم

WELL

- ١ يا رحمن يا رحمن يا رحيم يا رحيم يا رحيم ان تر
- ٢ بنى في منامى ما رجوت منك يا ستار واكر

- ٢ مني يمغفرة من خطيئتي انك على كل شيء (قديراً؟) (Q 42,9) (ولا ند؟)
 ٤ له ولا حد له ولا حدود له ولا مثل له ولا
 ٥ سنة له ولا شريك له ولا وزير له اسئلك يا عز
 ٦ يز يا عزيز يا عزيز يا الله يا الله يا الله يا رحمن

EXTERIOR UNDER RIM

- ١ بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢ الله لا اله الا هو الحي
 ٣ القيوم لا تأخذه سنة
 ٤ ولا نوم له ما في السم
 ٥ وات وما في الارض من
 ٦ ذي الذي يشفع عنده
 ٧ (لا كلرد على مي يا رحمن ما بين؟)
 ٨ (ايديهم وما خلقهم و
 ٩ لا يحيطون بشيء (على اسمي؟)
 ١٠ علمه الا بما شاء وسع
 ١١ كرسيه السموات و
 ١٢ الارض قيوده [sic?] خفظهما وهو الكريم [sic?] العظيم (Q 2,255)

MAIN BAND

- ١ بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم قل يا ايها الكا
 ٢ فرون لا اعبد ما تعبدون ولا انتم عابدون ما اعبد. ولا انا عا
 ٣ بد ما عبدتم ولا انتم عابدون ما اعبد
 ٤ لكم دينكم ولي دين (Q 109) بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم قل هو
 ٥ الله احد الله الصمد لم يلد ولم يولد
 ٦ ولم يكن له كفوا احد (Q 112) بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم قل ا
 ٧ عوذ برب الفلق من شر ما خلق ومن شر
 ٨ غاسق غداً وقب (ومن شر النقيث في العقد) ومن شر حاسد اذا حسد. (Q 113) بسم
 ٩ الله الرحمن الرحيم قل اعوذ برب النا
 ١٠ س ملك الناس من شر الوسواس الخناس
 ١١ الذي يوسوس في صدور الناس من
 ١٢ الجنة والناس (Q 114) لا فتا الا على لا سيف الا ذو الفقار على

Translation²

RIM

O God, O Affectionate, O Judge, O Praised, O Ruler, O Possessor of Glory and Generosity! I testify that You are adored from beneath Your Throne to the innermost depth of the earthes (...) except Your generous face. I beleive in You, Lord, O Relief of those who call for relief, All-powerful and help (me) in memorizing the science and the Koran! And save me O Lord and protect me and do not entrust me to myself for a moment! Whatever You wish You are powerful (to do it). And there is no power and no (strength) save in God, the Most High, the Exalted!

UNDER RIM

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, in the Name of God, in His Name, the Originator, Lord of the hereafter and this world! He has no end and no furthest limit. "To Him belongs all that is in" (Q 20,6) "the high heavens, the All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and all that is underneath the soil. Be thou loud in thy speech, yet surely He knows the secret and that yet more hidden. God - there is no God but He. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful" (Q 20,4-8). God, the Exalted, the Possessor of Exalted Blessings, of Everlasting Existence, the Victorious over the enemies, Guardian of His creatures, the Merciful, Benevolent, Powerful to emaciate the victorious!

CAVETTO

- 1 He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Conqueror, the Everlasting, the Maintainer of creatures, the Breeder of livestock, the Originator of gifts, the Protector against misfortunes and He heals the sick and He forgives the sins of the offenders, He relieves the fugitives and He likes the pious and He blesses the guilty repentants and He safeguards the frightened and he destroys
- 2 the traitors. He is the Merciful, the Compassionate! Praise be to You! O there is no god but You, the Generous, the Adored, the Forgiver of sins and other vices, the Remover of griefs! You are the One to Whom prostrated the blackness of the night and the light of the day and the shining of the Moon and the rays of the Sun and the growing light of the dawn and the sound of the water! O God! You are the One Who created everything (...) and to You is
- 3 the resurrection! O God! Forgive me my faults and sins! O Lord fulfill my request as You said: "Call upon Me and I will answer you" (Q 40,6). And You are

² In the numbering of the Koranic verses I followed the standard Egyptian edition, for their translation I used Arberry 1983.

confirming Your promise! Save me from distress and grief and sorrow and debt and poverty and misfortune and sickness! You are the Relief of every distressed and tyrannized and afflicted! O God! You are the One Who said: "do not despair of the Merciful (correctly: God's mercy)" (Q 39,53). And

- 4 You are trustworthy in Your word and cannot be untrue! Save me, O Lord from the evils of this world and the hereafter and do not divulge my secret to the heads of the creatures particularly on the Promised Day! God is the Greatest! God is the Greatest absolutely! Praise be to God abundantly! Praise be to God "at the dawn and in the evening" (Q 48,9). There is no adversary to Him and there is no rival to Him and there is no equal to
- 5 Him! Well-known by His kindness, Just in His judgement, Wise in His kingship, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Compassionate of the Compassionate Ones, the Omniscient of the Omniscient Ones, the Wise of the Wise Ones, the Victorious of the Victorious Ones, the Much-forgiving of the Forgiving Ones, the Master of Prophets, Praise be to Him! Powerful (to do what) He wants, Praise be to God, the King, the Omnipotent, the Praiseworthy, "the Possessor of the Throne, the All-glorious, Performer of what He desires" (Q 85,15-16), the Lord of Lords, the Master of troops, the Causer
- 6 of causes, the Preceder of the preceding ones, the Provider of daily bread, the Creator of creatures, the Opener of doors, the Powerful over fate, the Defeater of the defeated, Just on the Day of the Event, the Congregation and the Resurrection! "Verily, His are the creation and the command" (Q 7,54). "There is no god but He" (Q 2,255). He "shall gather mankind" (Q 3.9), the God of gods on the Day of Resurrection, Lord, Compassionate, Much-forgiving, Gentle, Praiseworthy and Praise be to God, the All-glorious!

WELL

- 1 O Merciful, O Merciful, O Compassionate, O Compassionate, O Compassionate, to show
- 2 me in my dream what I have requested from You, O Coverer and confer
- 3 upon me the forgiveness of my offenses! You are (powerful) (to do) everything! (And there is no rival?)
- 4 to Him and there is no boundary for Him and there are no borders for Him and there is no similar to Him and there is no
- 5 slumber for Him and there is no partner for Him and there is no vizier for Him! I ask You, O All-
- 6 mighty, O All-mighty, o All-mighty, O God, O God, O God, O Merciful,

EXTERIOR

UNDER RIM

- 1 "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

- 2 God, there is no god but He, the Living,
 3 the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not,
 4 neither sleep, to Him belongs all that is in the hea/
 5 vens and the earth. Who is there
 6 that shall intercede with Him"
 7 (... on wine?. O Merciful "what lies before?)
 8 them and what is after them, and
 9 they comprehend not anything" ('Ali is my name?)
 10 "of His knowledge save such He wills.
 11 His Throne comprises the heavens and
 12 the earth, the preserving of them oppresses Him (not?), He is the Generous(?)
 (instead of "the All-high), the All-glorious" (Q 2,255).

MAIN BAND

- 1 "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: O un/
 2 believers, I serve not what you serve and you are not serving what I serve, nor
 am I ser/
 3 ving what you have served, neither are you serving what I serve.
 4 To you your religion, and to me my religion" (Q 109). "In the name of God, the
 Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: He is
 5 God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been
 begotten,
 6 and equal to Him is not any one" (Q 112). "In the name of God, the Merciful,
 the Compassionate. Say: I
 7 take refuge with the Lord of Daybreak from the evil of what He has created,
 from the evil
 8 of darkness when it gathers, (from the evil of the women who blow on knots),
 from the evil of an envier when he envies" (Q 113). "In the name
 9 of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: I take refuge with the Lord of
 men,
 10 the King of men, from the evil of the slinking whisperer
 11 who whispers in the breasts of men
 12 of jinn and men" (Q 114) There is no hero like 'Ali and there is no sword like
 Dū l-Faqr! 'Ali

Commentary

1. As we shall see in the following, the bowl can be attributed to the Safavid period. Savage-Smith divided Safavid magic bowls into three groups: one with astrological figures, another with magic squares and a third with magical inscriptions (Savage-Smith 2003:241).

Accordingly, our bowl belongs to the last group. In spite of the lack of overt astrological motifs, the structure betrays the same cosmologically conceived pattern which is reflected in the case of the bowls which carry the figures or names of the zodiacal signs and the planets.

The division of the upper bands in the interior and on the exterior into 12 sections and of the lower bands into 6 compartments surrounding a central rosette corresponds to the numerical equivalents of the 12 zodiacal signs and of the 7 planets and their structural arrangement in similar bowls³. In the row of the 7 planets (Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) the Sun takes a central position, consequently it is logical that in a construction imposed by geometrical considerations it is placed in the centre of a circular band. The other evident solution sets Saturn, the last planet in the centre (Savage-Smith 2003:244).

The circular bands of these celestial bodies reflect the germ of the basic idea of Islamic cosmology. As al-Būnī, the author of the most famous Islamic encyclopaedia on magic put it *al-‘ālam kulluhu dawā’ir* “the whole world is (composed of) circles” (al-Būnī, *Sams* IV, 78). This notion goes back to the cosmological doctrines of the Late Antiquity and is based on the idea of concentrically arranged spheres or circles⁴.

The central boss of the bowl with its fourfold division may symbolize the four cardinal points, so, it makes part of the whole cosmological structure. Understandably, the bowls due to their circular shape are perfectly destined to represent this spherical universe.

Practically, such bowls are the products of the same ‘scientific’ world view which invented the astrolabes, the horoscopes or the so called talismanic plaques. The only difference is that these pieces represent the cosmos in a two dimensional way while the bowls may offer the effect of a three dimensional world. If we project the astrologically conceived bowls on a flat surface we get the geometrical structures of the rounded horoscopes or talismanic plaques. For this world view the main exponents of which became the Sufis, cosmology became almost an obsession.

To cite but a few examples of this attitude from the period preceding the Safavids, we may refer to the representation of the Zodiac and the planets in the observatory of Ulugh begh or to the famous horoscope of Iskandar Sultan from the year 1411 (Lentz & Lowry 1989:145-147, 151). Its circular bands show the zodiacal signs and several planets surrounding a flowerhead-like composition which is very similar to the decoration of the boss of our bowl. A similar geometric arrangement is shown by a 15th century Persian manuscript illumination, a *Weltspiegel* which places the Sun in the central roundel surrounded by the six roundels of the six other planets

³ Canaan 1936:98 was of the same opinion.

⁴ For the cosmological ideas of the Antiquity, see e.g. Simek 1992:16-32, Leisegang 1939:163f and *passim*. For their reception in Islam, see *EP* s.v. “*falak*”, Nasr 1968:92-97.

encircled by the band of the zodiacal signs. The outermost bands on both representations are surrounded by four angels. Another Persian manuscript illustration presents the four angels holding a circular band which symbolizes God's Throne encircling the Universe (Kühnel 1923:Abb. 41, 55, Sotheby's 2000:Lot 59, 80).

The presence of the Throne Verse (Q 2,255) on the outermost band of the bowl visualizes perfectly its literal content and serves to islamize the ancient concept of the spherical cosmos. The ardent wish to represent visually the unity of this spherical universe which suggests the supposed interrelationship and mutual influence between the celestial bodies and the earthly world fits in well with the basic idea of Islamic *tawhid* ('the unity of God').

In addition to the Throne Verse, another passage of the inscription with Q 20,4-6 speaking about God as He sits on the all-encompassing Throne and to Whom everything in this universe belongs also contributes to the islamization of this cosmological world-view. The unity of the world is further emphasized by certain divine names. When God is addressed as *al-Awwal*, *al-Āḥir* ('the First', 'the Last'), the appellations may refer to the unity of the world in time while the names *az-Zāhir*, *al-Bāṭin* ('the Manifest', 'the Hidden') may reflect its unity in space (Nasr 1968:93).

Naturally, the question arises why this cosmological structure was so fundamental for the magic bowls. Canaan and Reich thought that there was a relationship between the astrological figures and the instructions which prescribed the observance of certain constellations before using the bowls. Spoer supposed that this cosmological structure was meant to assure the protection for the practitioner from every possible direction (Canaan 1936:98, 116, Reich 1938:169, Spoer 1938:377).

The answer in our view, however, must be looked for in other factors. If we start from the text of the invocation it becomes evident that it is centered upon the emphasis on the exclusiveness of God's power, His omnipotence in governing the universe because, as the Koran expresses it, He is '*Ālim al-ḡayb wa-ṣ-ṣaḥāda* ('the Knower of the Hidden and the Manifest') (Q 6,73) and He has *maḥatib al-ḡayb* ('the keys of the hidden') (Q 6,59). So, even from the most orthodox Islamic point of view it is evident that the petitioner wants to reach this God who abides over the spheres as if journeying to Him symbolically through the spheres. The bowl with its structure and texts offers the practitioner the idea of the presence of the whole universe at his disposal. Apart from this, a divinatory procedure in itself necessitates the symbolic representation of the universe since its totality guarantees that any possible future happening that may have a potential bearing on the response to the supplicant's question is taken into consideration.

On the other hand, we may refer to Ibn Sīnā's view according to which the invocation is in fact directed to the cosmic spheres because there is a mutual relationship between the *du'ā'* and the spheres which are thought to assure the fulfilment of the request (*El² s.v. "du'ā'"* 618). In contrast, however, to Ibn Sīnā's somewhat too philosophical contemplations about the mechanism of the *du'ā'*, a more current and more

comprehensible opinion is expressed by a 16th century work of Shiite colouring, the *Kitāb al-ġawāhir al-ḥams* [sic!] by Ibn Ḥatīr ad-Dīn. The author who lived in Gujarat in India exposed the idea that the different angels who acted as the agents of the spheres were expected to appear at the petitioner to listen to his wish (Ibn Ḥatīr ad-Dīn, *Ġawāhir* 330ff)⁵.

Summing up the different aspects of the particular group of magical bowls to which our bowl also belongs we may rightly state that form, text, structure and representations are in a perfect harmony in their case.

If we disregard the religious colouring in the case of the Islamic bowls, we may also refer to earlier and non-Islamic divinatory practices in which bowls as the symbols of the universe played an important role. The *phialae* of Classical Antiquity with an *omphalos* in the centre were regarded as representing the cosmos (Leisegang 1939:227, Barb 1953: 233, n.235). A plate from the 3rd-4th century attributed to Šāpūr II carries the picture of Paradise and contains cosmological symbols (Ringbom 1951:Abb. 110, 111, 382ff). Legends have it that the bowls of Ġamsīd, Kai Hosrow and Alexander hid all the secrets of the world and all future events could be foretold with the help of these bowls (Melikian-Chirvani 1982:332, 1992:42, 47f, 53, Thackston 1982:13).

2. Proceeding in time and to show the wide currency of this general cosmological scheme it is worth presenting here the description of a talismanic plaque which clearly demonstrates that the 12 fold and 6 fold geometrical design is closely connected to the representation of the zodiacal signs and the planets. The plaque in question (Photos 2 a,b) was bought by me in the London Antique Market. The circular, cast, incised and punched brass plaque is 97mm in diameter and is inscribed and decorated on both sides.

The obverse is divided into three main sections. A border band containing magical numbers and letters encircles a second band enclosed between twin fillets. This shows 12 trilobed cartouches separated by lozenge-like motifs with a punched ground between the cartouches. The cartouches carry the Arabic names of the zodiacal signs written in *nashī*. The central field presents 6 roundels formed by twin fillets surrounding a seventh in the centre. Each of these is divided by twin fillets into six bands which are inscribed by magical numbers and letters. None of the roundels or the bands is identical with another one. Between the roundels the Arabic names of the planets are incised in *nashī*. The names of Jupiter and Saturn share the same compartment. Under the names of the planets six small arrows point to the centre. As we have seen, both the Sun and Saturn could have been placed in the central

⁵ According to *GALS* II, 616 the work was published in Fez in 1318 AH. About the author, see *Et* s.v. "Muhammad Gawṭ Gwāliyārī".

position but in this case, I think, it was meant for the Sun. Namely, there are six decorative elements looking like beams of rays protruding from this roundel which may indicate that it stands for the Sun.

The reverse shows a circular band between incised fillets which contains 12 roundels made by twin fillets. Every second is divided into six bands inscribed with magical numbers and letters. The other roundels are decorated by what seems to be six zodiacal signs in a rather peculiar arrangement. The sign of Gemini stands in opposition to Aries (its name is written in Persian as *Gusfand*), Leo (?) is in opposition to Sagittarius (the figure is obliterated but its name is written as *Qarw*) while Capricorn (?) is opposed to Taurus (designated as *Baqar*). Gemini are represented by a couple flanking a tree topped by a 2x2 magical square. Interestingly, the figure on the left could be a female since her head with the raised hair (?) is different from the male figure wearing a turban. Curiously, the selection of the other zodiacal signs was seemingly determined by the fact that each of them is related to a quadruped. Among these, however, only three are named and all of them are placed in a clockwise direction starting to the right from Gemini.

In the spaces between the 12 roundels the Shiite invocation asking God to bless the 'Fourteen Innocents' (Muhammad, Fāṭima and the 12 Imams) which frequently appears on Safavid metalwork is inscribed. The text starts to the left of Aries in the upper section and continuing in an anti-clockwise direction ends with the name of al-Mahdi to the right of Aries in the lower section.

The central circular field is divided by twin fillets into eight bands inscribed with the *Basmala* and the Throne Verse (Q 2,255) to complete the cosmological construction.

We cannot say with certainty for what purpose this particular plaque was used but it probably comes from Mughal India where these plaques were very popular (Savage-Smith 1997:124f) and it can be dated to the 16th-17th century. Its resemblance, however, to an astrolabic disc may point to its use in divinatory practices as the *Gawāhir* seems to confirm this assumption. An interesting passage (Ibn Ḥaṭīr ad-Dīn, *Gawāhir* 233) describes the procedure which must be performed by a practitioner (*ʿāmil*) who wants to be admitted to the divine presence and wants to have the revelation of the realities of things. After the necessary preparations he is supposed to visit nine *ḥanqāhs*, Sufi monasteries (here symbols of the nine spheres) in the company of the spirits of the prophets who interrogate the sheikhs of the *ḥanqāhs* about the acceptability of the practitioner. The sheikh of the first building is a one-eyed figure with an astrolabe placed in front of him. Upon the question of the prophets he answers that he found in the *ʿilm al-ḡayb* ('the science of the hidden') that the practitioner would be given the admission. It seems to be logical to suppose that he must have arrived at this conclusion through the help of the astrolabe, his 'scientific' instrument which could practically have been a talismanic plaque.

3. The structure and contents of the texts on the bowl show the characteristics of a typical Sufi *du'ā'*. The predominant part of the invocation shows a bustling zeal in the glorification of God and finally closes by asking blessings on the Prophet. The reason for this scheme is offered by a tradition which says that the Prophet himself encouraged his followers to start their invocations with a prayer on him and to ask something from God only after this because He will definitely not refuse the first wish and so He will be more inclined to fulfil the more personal requests (al-Makkī, *Qūt* I, 10).

Accordingly, on the rim, that is on the outermost part of the bowl comes the wish – a most laudable one from the orthodox point of view – expressing the petitioner's desire to be helped by God in memorizing the Koran. This must have been a permanent wish of the pious Sufi since the *Qūt al-qulūb* mentions that the recitation of a Koranic verse before sleeping will help in the memorization of the Koran. It also says that he who loves the Koran, loves God and loving God is the sign of belief while loving the Koran means loving the Prophet. At the same time, the Koran comprises thousands of the sciences, consequently anybody versed in the Koran will be imbued by these sciences (al-Makkī, *Qūt* I, 13, 41, 69).

The text in the cavetto contains such personal supplications as the plea for deliverance from everyday misfortunes and the forgiveness of sins. Proceeding towards the innermost part of the bowl, the inscription in the well around the boss contains the final goal of the *du'ā'*, the request for a dream vision in which the practitioner receives a response to the question posed by him. This procedure can belong to the practices which are grouped under the term *istihāra*, a favourite form of Islamic divination⁶. The structural arrangement of these goals suggesting a movement directed towards the inner centre of the bowl implies the conscious intent of the engraver to place the main request in the central position. The direction of this movement from the outermost to the innermost is in perfect harmony with the view of the cosmos composed of concentric spheres around a central point.

This evident effort is further emphasized by the form of the composition. The text is inscribed in a circular band made up of cartouches in which nothing marks off the beginning from the end. On the other hand, this structure highlights the idea of whirling which may lead to the loss of senses or consciousness, a most natural disposition to receive a dream vision. The magical character of the procedure is completed by the triple repetition of God's names, a well-known characteristic of both pre-Islamic and Islamic magic⁷.

⁶ For the *istihāra*, see Fadlallah 1996:91-137, *EP*, s.v. "*istihāra*".

⁷ The Prophet invoked God three times during the procedure of the *istisqā'*: al-Buhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* II, 341 (*Kitāb al-ḡum'a, Bāb al-istisqā'*).

Although the text on the bowl does not give instructions as to the preparations to be made before the sleeping position, we may have an idea about them on the basis of other written sources. The *Qūt al-qulūb* prescribes for the petitioner to sleep on the right side with the face turned to the direction of the *qibla*. It is not incidental that this is the position of the corpse in the tomb since this source itself says that sleeping is practically equal to death (al-Makkī, *Qūt* I, 37, 42f). This may suggest that the expected answer to the question also comes from a sphere outside this world.

4. Looking for possible manuscript sources or parallels for this *duʿāʾ*, I have succeeded in tracing down a text which shows a surprising similarity with at least the general part of our invocation. Two Sunni Arabic-Turkish prayer books in the Tareq Rajab Museum (not yet catalogued, one is dated to AH 1164/AD 1750, the other can also be dated to the 18th-19th century) contain a prayer called *Duʿāʾ qadah* ('Invocation of the Bowl') which, as we shall see in the following, turned out to be a more or less literal version or occasionally a paraphrase of the text on our bowl.

هَذَا دُعَاءُ قَدَحٍ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَبِاسْمِ الْمَبْتَدَأِ رَبِّ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى لَا غَايَةَ لَهُ وَلَا مُنْتَهَى *
لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَى (Q 20,6) * وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ
فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى (Q 20,7) اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى (Q 20,8) * الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى
الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى (Q 20,5) * لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَى (Q 20,6)
(Q) * اللَّهُ عَظِيمُ الْإِلَاءِ دَائِمُ النِّعَمَاءِ * قَاهِرُ الْأَعْدَاءِ * الرَّحْمَنُ عَاطِفٌ بِلَطْفِهِ عَادِلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ بَعِزُّهُ
* عَزِيزٌ بَرَزَقُهُ * مَعْرُوفٌ بِلَطْفِهِ * عَادِلٌ فِي حُكْمِهِ عَالِمٌ فِي خَلْقِهِ * رَحِيمُ الرَّحْمَاءِ * عَلِيمُ
السُّلَمَاءِ * غَفُورُ الْغَفَرَاءِ صَاحِبُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ قَادِرٌ عَلَى مَا يَشَاءُ * سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ الْمَلِكِ الْحَمِيدِ * ذِي
الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدِ (Q 85,15) * فَعَالٌ لِمَا يَرِيدُ (Q 85,16) رَبُّ الْأَرْيَابِ * وَمَسِيبُ الْأَسْيَابِ * وَرَازِقُ
الْأَرْزَاقِ * وَخَالِقُ الْإِخْلَاقِ * قَادِرُ الْمَقْدُورِ * وَقَاهِرُ الْمَقْهُورِ * عَادِلُ يَوْمِ النُّشُورِ * إِلَهُ الْإِلَهِةِ
يَوْمِ الْوَاقِعَةِ * رَحِيمٌ حَلِيمٌ وَدُودٌ غَفُورٌ شُكُورُ الْحَمْدِ لِلَّهِ الْمَلِكِ الْحَمِيدِ الرَّحِيمِ الْقَدِيمِ * خَالِقُ
عَرْشِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ * قَابِلُ التَّوْبِ الشُّكُورِ الْحَلِيمُ * الْأَوَّلُ الْآخِرُ الظَّاهِرُ الْبَاطِنُ
الدَّائِمُ * الرَّازِقُ التَّوَابُ * صَاحِبُ الْعَطَايَا وَيَعْفُو وَيُثَبِّتُ النَّادِمِينَ * وَيُؤْمِنُ الْخَائِفِينَ * سُبْحَانَكَ
يَا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ (Q 21,87) ذُو الْعَطَايَا يَا شُكُورُ يَا حَلِيمُ يَا عَالِمُ يَا رَحِيمُ * لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ
(Q 42,11) فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ * وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (Q 42,9) يَا
شَاهِدُ أَنْتَ تَعْلَمُ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَمَا تُخْفِي الْقُلُوبُ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ وَأَنْتَ أَصْدَقُ السَّائِلِينَ * ادْعُونِي
أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ (Q 40,60) لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ (Q 39,53) * أَحْفَظْتَنِي مِنْ أَفَاتِ الزَّمَانِ وَالْفَضِيحَةِ
وَلَا تَقْضَنِي فِي الْمَوْعُودِ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ حَقًّا حَقًّا * لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ إِيْمَانًا
وَصِدْقًا * لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ * تَعِيدَا وَرَقًا * لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ * مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ أَعِذْ نَفْسِي بِاللَّهِ الَّذِي
لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ خَالِقُ عَالَمٍ قَادِرٌ وَشَعْرِي وَبَشْرِي وَدِينِي وَدُنْيَايَ وَآهْلِي وَمَالِي * وَوَلَدِي وَزُرِّيَّتِي
مِنْ كُلِّ ذِي شَرٍّ يُؤْذِنِي * وَأَعِذْ نَفْسِي وَجَمِيعَ مَا رَزَقْتَنِي مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ وَاحْسَانٍ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ * بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ * وَفَضْلَ كِتَابِهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَبِلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ * وَعِزَّةَ اللَّهِ وَقُدْرَةَ

الله وعظمة الله * وقوة الله * وسعة الله * وسلطان الله * وغفران الله * وانبياء الله *
 وكتب الله * ورسل الله * واعوذ بالله * من غضب الله * وعقاب الله * وسخط الله * ونكال
 الله * وكتاب الله * وبما قد سبق من زوال نعمة وموجبات الهلكة والقضيحة في الدنيا
 والاخرة * واعوذ بالله العظيم ومن شر الاتس والجن ومن الشياطين ومن شر فسقة العرب
 والعجم * ومن شر ابليس وجنوده ومن شر السلاطين ومن شر ما ينزل من السماء وما يعرج
 منها ومن شر كل دابة انت اخذ بناصيتها ان ربي على صراط مستقيم (Q 11,56) * اللهم اني
 احتجبت بك من كل شئ خلقتة واحترز بك منهم واعوذ بالله العظيم * من الغرق والحرق
 والهدم والخسف والحجارة والزلازل والصيحة والقهقهة والصواعق والجنون * وجميع انواع
 البلاء في الدنيا والاخرة يا عياذي من كل كربتي ويا صاحبي في كل شدتي ويا الهي واله
 ابائي ابراهيم واسماعيل واسحق ويعقوب والاسباط وموسى وهرون ويا شاهد كل نجوي الله
 ربي لا شريك له (Q 6,163) له الملك واليه ترجعون (Q 28,70) * ولا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي
 العظيم * وصلى الله على سيدنا ونبينا وشفيعا محمد. واله وصحبه اجمعين برحمتك يا ارحم
 الراحمين والحمد لله رب العالمين (Q 10,10) *

TRANSLATION

"THIS IS THE INVOCATION OF THE BOWL

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

In the Name of God, in the Name of the Origin, Lord of the hereafter and this world! He has no end and no furthest limit. "To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and all that is underneath the soil. Be thou loud in thy speech, yet surely He knows the secret and yet more hidden. God - there is no God but He. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful" (Q 20,6-8). "The All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and all that is underneath the soil" (Q 20,5-6). God is the Possessor of Glorious Blessings, of Everlasting Grace, the Victorious over the enemies, the Merciful, Benevolent by His kindness, Just, Well-known by His glory, All-mighty by His providing the daily bread, Well-known by His kindness, Just in His judgement, Wise in His creation, the Compassionate of the Compassionate Ones, the Omniscient of the Omniscient Ones, the Much-forgiving of the Much-forgiving Ones, the Master of the Prophets, Powerful (to do) what He wants. Praise be to God, the King, the Praiseworthy, "the Possessor of the Throne, the All-glorious, Performer of what He desires" (Q 85,15-16), the Lord of Lords, the Causer of Causes, the Provider of daily bread, the Creator of the creatures, the Powerful over fate, the Defeater of the defeated, Just on the Day of the Resurrection, the God of gods on the Day of the Event, Compassionate, Gentle, All-loving, All-forgiving, All-thankful! Praise be to God, the King, the Praiseworthy, the Compassionate, the Eternal, the Creator of the Throne of the heavens and He is the

All-hearing, the All-knowing, the Acceptor of repentance, the All-thankful, the Gentle, the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden, the Everlasting, the Provider, the Forgiving, the Master of gifts, He forgives and relieves and strengthens the repentant and He secures the frightened! Praise be to You! O "there is no god but Thou" (Q 21,87), Owner of the gifts, O All-thankful, O Gentle, O Omniscient O Compassionate! "Like Him there is naught" (Q 42,11) on the earth or in the heaven and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing and "He is Powerful over everything" (Q 42,9). O Witness You know (what is done) in secret and (what is done) in public and what the hearts conceal. You have said and You are the Most Sincere of those who speak, "Call upon Me and I will answer you" (Q 40,60). "Do not despair of God's mercy" (Q 39,53). Protect me against the plagues of the time and the disgrace and do not judge (me) on the Promised (Day)! God is the Greatest! God is the Greatest! There is no god but God, verily, verily! There is no god but God, in faith and in truth! There is no god but God, in worship and in compassion(?)! There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God! I seek refuge for myself with God - who there is no god but He, Creator, Omniscient, Powerful - and for my hair and my skin and my religion and my world(ly life) and my family and my wealth and my son and my descendants against every evil that may harm me. And I seek refuge for myself and for every favor and beneficence He offered me through the faithful men and women with God, the Most-high, the Exalted and with the superiority of His Book, the Most High, the All-glorious and with 'There is no god but God!' and with the Glory of God and with the Omnipotence of God and with the Majesty of God and with the Strength of God and with the Power of God and with the Might of God and with the Forgiveness of God and with the Prophets of God and with the Books of God and with the Messengers of God and I seek refuge with God against the anger of God and the punishment of God and the wrath of God and the warning of God and with the Book of God against what has happened (in the form of) the cessation of favor and (against) the causes of destruction and disgrace in this world and in the hereafter. And I seek refuge with God, the All-glorious against the evil of men and jinn and against the devils and against the evil of the offenders from among the Arabs and non-Arabs and against the evil of Iblis and his armies and against the evil of the sultans and against the evil of what descends from the sky and what ascends from it and against the evil of every "creature that crawls and You (instead of 'He') take it by the forelock. Surely my Lord is on a straight path" (Q 11,56). O God I hid myself by You against everything You have created and I protect myself by You against them and I seek refuge with God, the All-glorious against sinking and burning and destruction and eclipse and detention and earthquakes and crying and guffowing and thunderbolts and madness and every kind of misfortunes in this world and in the hereafter. O my Refuge against every grief and O my Master in every affliction, O my God and God of my Fathers, Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac and Jacob and of the Tribes and Moses and Aron, O Witness of every secret! God is my Lord! "No

associate has He" (Q 6,163). "His is the kingdom (instead of 'Judgement'), and unto Him you shall be returned" (Q 28,70). And there is no power and no strength save in God, the Most-high, the All-glorious! And may God bless our Master and Prophet and Intercessor, Muhammad and His Family and all His Companions by Your mercy, O Most Merciful of the Merciful Ones and "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being" (Q 10,10).

Evidently, due to lack of space only a part of this text is inscribed on the bowl. On the other hand, it is also understandable that the reference to the request for a dream vision is missing in the manuscript sources since the bowl was supposed to play a basic role in the procedure. A commentary (*ṣarḥ*) on this *du'ā* written in Turkish⁸ in both manuscripts reveal the special connection between the title of the invocation and the occurrence of this particular text on a bowl. This commentary relates that during the *Mi'rāğ*, the Nocturnal Journey, the Prophet saw a green bowl⁹ inscribed with this invocation in green letters. The commentator enumerates the miraculous properties of this bowl claiming that it was instrumental in preserving the universe while the invocation was useful for a number of purposes like healing, protection in war, etc.

5. Examining some divine attributes occurring in the invocation inscribed on our bowl we find that they belong to a special group called *al-asmā' al-'izām*, 'The Great Names' the uses of which are amply treated by Ibn Ḥaṭir ad-Dīn (*Ġawāhir* 130-152, 202-284)¹⁰. These are *subḥānak lā ilāha illā anta*, 'Praise be to You, there is no god but You' (Name 1 among the 'Great Names'), *ilāh al-āliha*, 'God of Gods' (Name 2), *mannān*, 'Benefactor' (Name 16), *ḥannān*, 'Affectionate' (Name 17), *dayyān*, 'Judge' (Name 18). The notion of these 'Great Names' can further be traced back to an earlier source entitled *Hawāṣṣ al-arba'ina isman*, 'Uses of the Forty Names' attributed to as-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl¹¹ who is frequently mentioned in the *Ġawāhir*. Seemingly, these names are different from the well-known *al-asmā' al-husnā*, 'The Most Beautiful Names'. The *Qūt al-qulūb* states upon the authority of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that God revealed these 40 names to Idrīs when He sent him to his people and instructed him to recite the names in secret. Later the names were disclosed to Moses and then to Muhammad (al-Makkī, *Qūt* I, 85f).

There are also some other formulae which must have enjoyed a wide acceptance among the pious. So, the *Ġawāhir* contains *mufattiḥ al-abwāb*, *musabbib al-asbāb*, *ḡiyāt*

⁸ For its interpretation I am obliged to Prof. Géza Dávid.

⁹ In modern Arabic usage *aḥḍar* 'green' in connection with a bowl means 'new', 'not used'.

¹⁰ The work mentions 41 and 42 names respectively.

¹¹ For a popular edition of this work, see as-Suhrawardī, *Hawāṣṣ*.

al-mustagīn, fa-lā say' kufu'uhu, la wazīra laka (Ibn Ḥaṭīr ad-Dīn, *Ġawāhir* 70, 86, 114, 219, 293). Other phrases like *wa-lā takilnī ilā nafsī tarfata 'ayn, allāhu akbar kabīran wa-l-hamdu li-l-lāhi kaṭīran wa-subhāna l-lāh bukratan wa-asīlan* also occur in the *Qūt al-qulūb* (al-Makkī, *Qūt* I, 12, 18, 44).

Among the 'Great Names' the phrase *ilāh al-āliha*, 'God of gods' may look the strangest or even abhorring from the Islamic point of view. In spite of this, it must have reflected a deeply rooted tradition as the bowl published by Spoer shows this since it is inscribed with this attribute together with other names chosen from *al-asmā' al-'izām* (Spoer 1938:368). Another example is offered by a jade pendant dated to the 16th-17th century engraved with the first names of the 'Fourty' including the 2nd, *ilāh al-āliha* (Spink 1986:No. 28, 42).

Devotional zeal could have easily accepted this expression or other similar compounds like *rabb al-arbāb*, 'Lord of the Lords' or *arḥam ar-rāhimīn*, 'Most Compassionate of the Compassionate Ones' etc because these expressions of religious piety are in conformity with everyday linguistic usage manifested in such titles as *ḥalīfat al-ḥulafā'*, 'Caliph of the Caliphs' by which the heads of the Sufis were called during the early Safavids (Savory 1965:497ff), *ṣayḥ aš-ṣuyūḥ*, 'the sheikh of sheikhs' by which the *Ġawāhir* referred frequently to as-Suhrawardī or even *šāhanšāh*, 'king of the kings', a favorite attribute of Persian rulers in different periods (*El² s.v. "shāhanšāh"*). So at the first sight, within this framework we seem to have a case of rhetoric.

There is, however, a more specific religious aspect concealed behind this linguistic explanation. Namely, a cosmological treatise of Jewish mysticism which forms part of the famous magical work, *Sefer Raziel* but can be traced back to the 2th-5th centuries AD contains a prayer addressing God in the following way: *elohenu elohē abotenu elohē ha-elohim wa-adone ha-adonim elohē Abraham elohē Yitzḥaq w-elohē Ya'aqob ha-el ha-gadol.....melek melake ha-melakim*, "Our God, the God of our fathers, God of gods and Lord of Lords, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob, the Great God....King of the Kings of Kings" (Séd 1965:91). There is of course a Biblical background behind these attributes: *elohē ha-elohim wa-adone ha-adonim* goes back to Deut. 10,17 while *elohē Abraham elohē Yitzḥaq elohē Ya'aqob* can be found in Ex. 3,6. After this long glorification of God the prayer ends with a personal request asking God to send a certain person to the petitioner.

The parallel between these phrases and the expressions used in the invocation of our bowl and particularly in its longer version as it appears in the *Du'ā' qadah* cannot be a mere coincidence. Besides, the structure of both pieces reveal the same attitude on the part of the practitioner: only after a long prelude composed of something like a divine liturgy comes the expression of the personal wish.

The very same formulae can be found in other pieces of Jewish mystical literature of cosmological character, the *Hekhalot* (Schäfer 1988:144, 146). These works also reveal that the main concern for the Jewish petitioner was the mastering of the Torah

(Schäfer 1988:30, 282f). As we have seen, one of the first requests of our invocation was the memorization of the Koran and with this the picture becomes complete.

A further proof pointing to the Jewish connection is offered by another motif occurring in the text of one of the magical bowls published by Reich. Written in Arabic but in Hebrew characters the passage in question asks for protection against the evil acts of people belonging to different religions (Muslims, Jews, Christians) (Reich 1937-38:164, 166). The same preoccupation characterizes the author of the *Du'ā' qadah* when he seeks refuge with God against the evil of the Arabs and non-Arabs.

6. In the text of the Throne Verse the otherwise continuous and intelligible inscription shows some strange and not explicable mistakes which deserve a closer look. At first, there is a lacuna after the words *yašfa'u 'indahu* which seems to contain *yā rahmān*, "O Merciful" and the letters *my*. These could be read as *mey*, the Persian word for "wine". If this interpretation is correct the word could be taken as a kind of instruction concerning the liquid with which the bowl was supposed to be filled for the request of the dream vision. Wine had a long tradition in Sufi practice and symbolism and it was looked upon as a means of illumination, a key to true revelation or to the perception of God (Melikian-Chirvani 1992: 32, 53).

The second lacuna after *lā yuhitūna bi-šay'* presents two words which could be deciphered as *'Alī ismī*, "my name is 'Alī", referring perhaps to the engraver's name. The last word in the text, "Alī" may also contain this allusion to the engraver's person.

The third alteration concerns the omission of the negative from the expression *fa-lā ya'uduhu* and the replacement of *fa-* by *wa-*.

It is highly difficult to accept these mistakes as simple signs of negligence on the part of the engraver. On the other hand, if he did these alterations on purpose he probably wanted to desecralize the holy text the use of which in connection with wine and during the course of a divinatory procedure could have been abhorring for the pious.

7. Summing up all that has been expounded previously we may conclude that the bowl can be related to the Safavid period. The layout of the bowl based on a 12 fold and 6 fold division reveals the key number system which was a characteristic of Safavid metalwork (Melikian-Chirvani 1982:No. 167a, 354). Other decorative elements like the quatrefoil on the boss also appear on Safavid objects (Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 166, 288, 349). This particular motif can also be found on Timurid pieces as we have seen in the case of Iskandar Sultan's horoscope. For the sake of further comparison another object, a jug dated to AD 1467 is worth mentioning because it shows the same, similarly composed, four petalled arabesque and an interlacing strapwork

(Lentz & Lowry 1989:161). All these would point to the early Safavid period as a possible date for our bowl.

There is another aspect which seems to support this dating. Namely, it is striking that the only textual reference to a Shiite background occurs at the end of the inscription which mentions 'Ali and his famous sword by name. A certain Shiite connection can be discerned in the use of some particular divine attributes chosen ultimately from as-Suhrawardī's 'Fourty Names' and which, as we have seen, were one of the major subjects treated by the Shiite *Ġawāhir*. The grouping of the four Koranic suras starting with the word *qul* (*al-qawāqil*) at the end of the invocation may also indicate a Shiite colouring (Ibn Ḥaṭir ad-Dīn, *Ġawāhir* 306).

The absence of the overt reference to a Shiite background may be explained by the fact that the bowl could have been produced in a region which lay outside the direct Safavid political rule but within its artistic influence that is to the East of the Safavid political centre.

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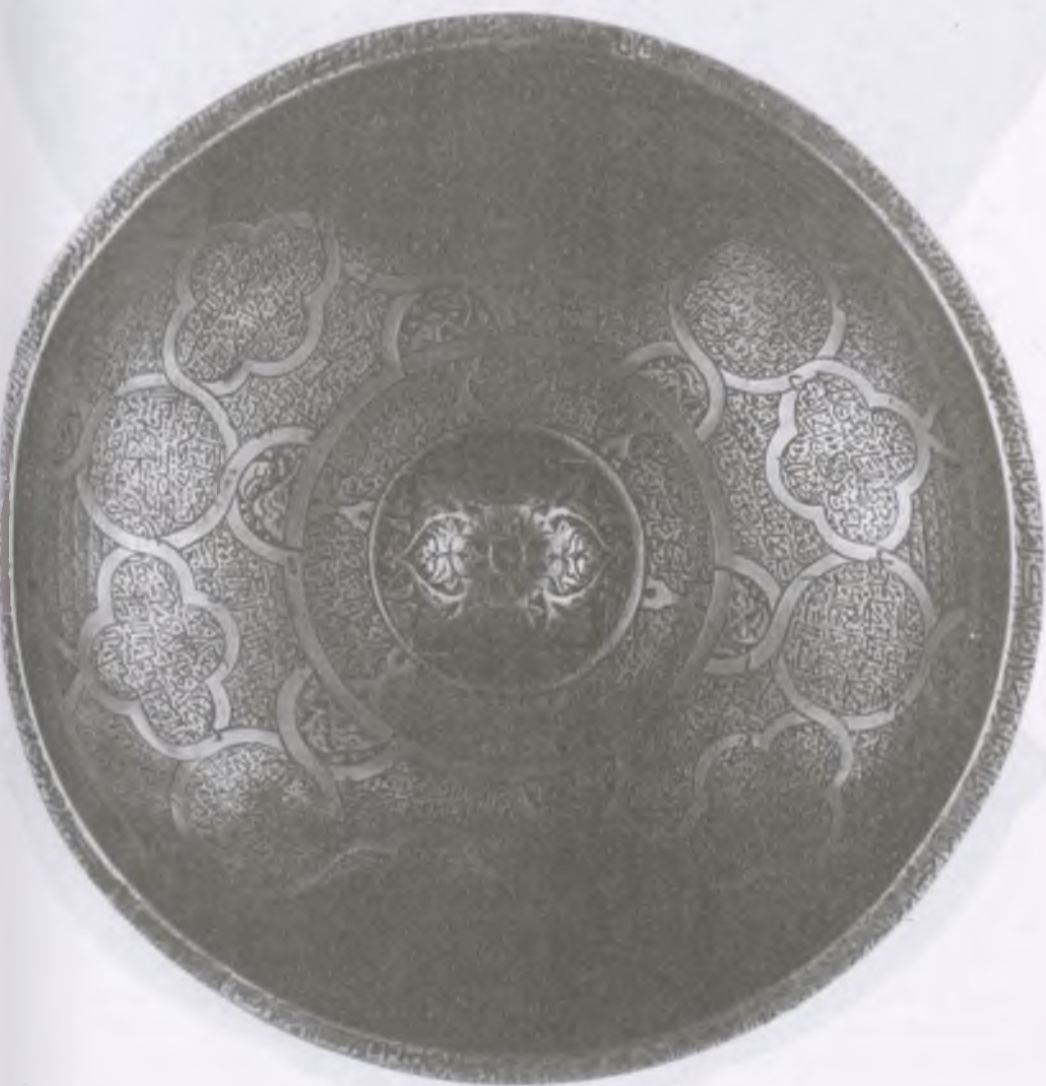


Photo 1a



Photo 1b



Photo 1c



Photo 1d



Photo 2a



Photo 2b