



## The Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings of Istanbul After the Classical Period of Mimar Sinan Until the Republic Era

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### Abstract

Since the dissemination of Islamic art in Central Asia, square kufic calligraphy has held a significant place in the identity of Islamic architecture. Despite its earlier usage in Anatolia, it was rarely employed in Ottoman structures. Consequently, the square kufic script failed to become a prominent feature in mainstream calligraphy education or certification culture. Due to the lack of an education tradition and the abstract nature of the script, square kufic calligraphy poses challenges to readability. Nonetheless, there has been a growing interest in square kufic calligraphy in contemporary times, owing to its compatibility with modern aesthetics.

The absence of a formalized education system has resulted in erroneous works during restoration or new designs. Consequently, there is a pressing need for scholarly research, documentation of historical examples, and detailed analysis of readings and compositions in this field. This article examines historical square kufic script examples

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in Istanbul's historical buildings from the post-Mimar Sinan period to the beginning of the republic era. It provides detailed readings of the compositions, identifies any spelling errors, including missing or superfluous parts, and aims to offer corrective suggestions to prevent the recurrence of erroneous compositions in the future.

**Keywords:** Square kufi, calligraphy, Islamic art and architecture, Ottoman, Istanbul.

## Mimar Sinan'ın Klasik Dönemi Sonrasından Cumhuriyete Kadar İstanbul'daki Tarihi Yapıların Ma'kılî Hatlarının Analizi

### Öz

İslam sanatının Orta Asya'da yayılmasından itibaren özellikle İslam mimarisinin kimliğinde önemli bir yere sahip olan ma'kılî hat sanatı, Osmanlı öncesinde Anadolu'da kullanılmasına rağmen, Osmanlı yapılarında nadiren kullanılmıştır. Dolayısıyla ma'kılî yazı yaygın hat sanatı eğitiminde ve icazet kültüründe yer alamamıştır. Soyut karakteri okunmasında zorlukları da beraberinde getirmektedir. Modern estetikle uyum derecesi yüksek olan ma'kılî hat sanatının günümüzde gittikçe artan bir teveccühe mazhar olduğu gözlenmektedir. Geleneksel eğitim sisteminde yer alması sebebiyle kullanımı genelde kişisel ilgiler doğrultusunda gelişmektedir. Henüz sistemleşmiş bir eğitime kavuşmamış olmasından ötürü, restorasyon esnasında veya yeni tasarımlarda hatalı çalışmalarla karşılaşmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu alandaki bilimsel çalışmalara, tarihi örneklerin belgelenmesine, okunuşlarının ve kompozisyonlarının detaylı analizine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

Bu makalede Mimar Sinan sonrasında günümüze ulaşan tarihi İstanbul yapılarındaki ma'kılî örnekler detaylıca incelenmektedir. Kompozisyonlardaki yazıların okunuşu detaylıca verilmiş, yazım hatalarıyla birlikte eksik veya fazla olan kısımlara işaret edilmiştir. Düzeltme önerileri ile gelecekte tekrarlanabilecek hatalı kompozisyonların engellenmesi hedeflenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Makılî, hat sanatı, İslam sanatı ve mimarisi, Osmanlı mimarisi, İstanbul.

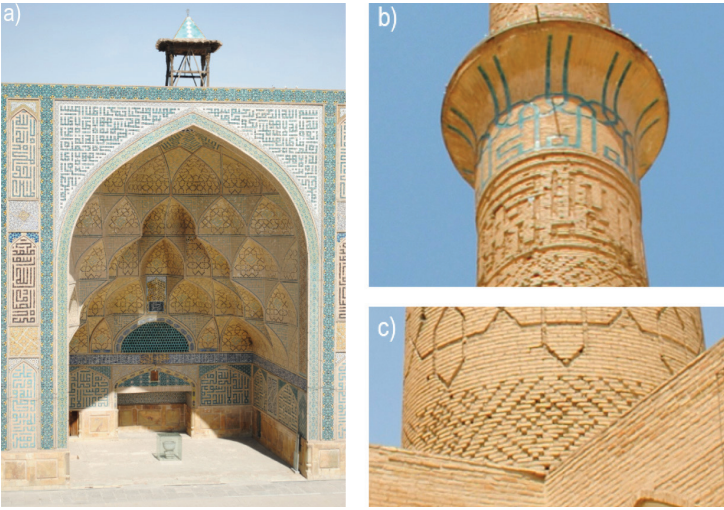
## Introduction

A derivative of kufic script named after the city of Kufa and used since the nascent years of Islam, square kufic script emerges prominently across diverse realms of Islamic art, particularly in architectural contexts.<sup>1</sup> Known by various appellations such as al-Kûfî al-murabba', bennâî, and satrancî (chess), square kufic calligraphy entails letters rotated at ninety-degree angles, reminiscent of squares representing dots.<sup>2</sup> In the classical rendition of square kufic calligraphy, the thickness of letters and the spacing between them adhere to the dimensions of the unit square, symbolizing a dot. Notably, contemporary interpretations may witness variations in letter thickness or spacing to craft distinct compositions or accentuate specific letters. Across the rich Islamic artistic heritage, a copiousness of square kufic calligraphy compositions is discernible, capable of being inscribed linearly or rotated clockwise to fill the contours of squares, rectangles, or polygons. Such compositions may comprise stratified layers, incorporating words of varying scales that intertwine within a single artistic creation. Additionally, the four-directional motif, commonly recognized as the swastika, represents a prevalent design approach within square kufic calligraphy compositions.

Remaining as enduring relics from the early twelfth century, the Sharaban Minaret, Friday Mosque, and Ali Mosque showcase square kufic scripts, serving as some of the oldest surviving exemplars.<sup>3</sup> Originating from Central Asia and introduced to Anatolia by the Seljuks, square kufic calligraphy has found application across diverse materials and techniques. Its prominence is particularly notable in the madrasas of Konya, the erstwhile capital of the Anatolian Seljuks.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 Onur Şimşek, "Courtyard Identity within the Architecture of the Great and Anatolian Seljuks", *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 5, Spring 2015, p. 454-479; Metin Akar, "Eski Mimar Yazısı Sanatı Metinlerinin Restorasyonu", *Aydın Türklük Bilgisi Dergisi*, Year 7, Vol. 12, Spring – 2021; Zübeyde Cihan Özsayiner, "Mimar Sinan'ın İstanbul'daki Camii ve Türbelerindeki Yazı Düzeni ve Anlamı", (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sanat Tarihi Bilim Dalı, İstanbul, 1993, p. 5.
- 2 Yûsuf Zennûn – Muhiittin Serin, "Kûfî", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume XXVI, Ankara, TDV, 1999, p. 342-345; Mahmud Bedrettin Yazır, *Medeniyet Âleminde Yazı ve İslam Medeniyetinde Kalem Güzeli I*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, p. 75-79; Ali Alparslan, *Osmanlı Hat Sanatı Tarihi*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayını, 1999, p. 20.
- 3 Onur Şimşek, "Courtyard Identity within the Architecture of the Great and Anatolian Seljuks", *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 5, Spring 2015, p. 454-479; Metin Akar, "Eski Mimar Yazısı Sanatı Metinlerinin Restorasyonu", *Aydın Türklük Bilgisi Dergisi*, Year 7, Vol. 12 Spring – 2021.
- 4 Onur Şimşek, "Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in Istanbul",

As the Ottoman era unfolded, the utilization of square kufic calligraphy witnessed a diminishing trend, partly due to the ascendance of the painting style in ornamental arts and the widespread adoption of thuluth script during the classical period. Among the scarce examples of square kufic writing from the Ottoman period, the decorative elements adorning the Old Mosque in Edirne, the empire's secondary capital, stand out. Characterized by compositions that evoke the city's silhouette, these adornments represent distinctive instances of square kufic writing within the milieu of Ottoman artistic expression.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1.** Square kufic examples before Anatolia a) square kufic scripts at the eyvan of the Isfahan Friday Mosque b) square kufic script detail beneath the sherefe (balcony) of the minaret of the Ali Mosque in Isfahan c) square kufic script detail at the basis of the minaret of the Ali Mosque in Isfahan

*FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring 2023; M. Uğur Derman, “Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Hat Sanatı”, *1.Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbullu Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı*, ed. Feridun Emecen - Emrah Safa Gürkan, 29 Mayıs– 1 Haziran, İstanbul, İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi İstanbul, 2013, p. 2013; M. Hattstein - P. Delius, *Islam Art and Architecture*, İstanbul, Literatür, 2017, p. 373; Mamoun Sakkal, “Square Kufic Tesselations”, *Abgadiyat*, 14 (1), 2019, p. 50; Zübeyde Cihan Özsayiner, “Makili Calligraphy in the Ottoman Architecture in the Context of Calligraphy in Ishak Pasa Mosque”, *2. International Symposium of Mount Ararat and Noah’s Ark. Conference book*, Oct. 8th-10th 2008, ed. Oktay Belli, Ağrı Valiliği Kültür Yayınları, 2009, p. 278.

- 5 Hüsamettin Aksu, *İstanbul Yapılarındaki Bazı Dekoratif Küfî Hatlar*, İstanbul, 2001, p. 38; Onur Şimşek, “Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in İstanbul”, *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring, 2023.

In Istanbul, square kufic calligraphy in architectural embellishments remained sparse. Following the city's conquest and its designation as the Ottoman Empire's third capital, the earliest surviving instance of square kufic calligraphy in Istanbul is found in the Çinili Köşk<sup>6</sup> (The Pavilion with Mosaics), commissioned during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed. Within the mosaics, one can discern compositions featuring the names of Muhammad and Ali arranged in a swastika motif alongside another composition bearing the inscription 'Allahu Akbar'.<sup>7</sup>

Near the subsequent Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the Firuzaga Mosque, built in 1491, features a portal adorned with muqarnas ornamentation.<sup>8</sup> Noteworthy is a finely crafted composition of intertwined swastikas between the muqarnas and the portal arch, featuring four repetitions of the name Muhammad. This intricate design signifies a harmonious fusion, where the interstices within the letters of the word "Muhammad" also form the name "Ali", indicative of the script's sophistication.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Firuzaga Mosque in 1505, the Beyazıt Mosque's completion brought two intricate square kufic calligraphy compositions onto the minaret bases. Beneath the left minaret, a braided Kufic pattern encircling an octagonal design features the inscription "Elhamdulillah" (Praise to Allah). In contrast, beneath the right minaret, a square composition displays the entirety of Surah Al-Ikhlâs.<sup>10</sup>

In the complex of the Istanbul Selimiye Mosque, dating back to 1522, the wooden door of the tomb of Sultan Selim I<sup>11</sup> features two exquisite examples of square kufic calligraphy embellished with mother-of-pearl. From the beautiful calligraphic renderings, the divine attributes "Hannan" (Merciful to His servants)

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6 Semavi Eyice, "Çinili Köşk", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 8, Istanbul, TDV, 1993, p. 338-340.

7 For detailed analysis: Onur, Şimşek, "Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in Istanbul", *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring 2023, p. 415-416.

8 Semavi Eyice, "Firuzağa Camii", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 13, Istanbul, TDV, 1996, p. 135-137.

9 For detailed analysis: Ibid., p. 417-418.

10 For detailed analysis: Onur Şimşek, "Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in Istanbul", *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring 2023, p. 424.

11 İ. Aydın Yüksel, "Sultan Selim Camii ve Külliyesi", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 37, Istanbul, TDV, 2009, p. 513-516.

and “*Mannan*” (Tremendous in giving) are inscribed, drawn from the beautiful names of Allah.

Between 1538 and 1539, two inscriptions crafted from küfeki stone adorn the entrance of the Haseki Complex, commissioned by Haseki Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Sultan Süleyman.<sup>12</sup> On the right wall, the declaration of the Word of Tawhid is inscribed, while on the left wall, a composition features the name of “*Muhammad*” alongside the interstitial spaces between the letters, allowing for the reading of “*Ali*”.

In 1542, during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, Defterdar (Provincial Treasurer) Nazlı Mahmud Çelebi commissioned the construction of the Defterdar Mosque.<sup>13</sup> On its marble door, a modest yet original design features the inscription of the name of *Muhammad*.

In the Mosque and Tomb of the Şehzade Complex, constructed between 1544 and 1548 by Mimar Sinan for Şehzade Mehmed<sup>14</sup>, the son of Sultan Süleyman who passed away at a young age, square Kufic calligraphy adorns the architectural elements. On the tomb’s door, a mosaic composition featuring the muthenna motif displays the inscription of the name of Muhammad alongside its mirrored version. Additionally, inside the mosque, a braided square Kufic calligraphy in a square format spells out “*Subhanallah*” (Glory to God).

The final examples of square Kufic calligraphy from the era of Mimar Sinan emerge in the Rüstem Pasha Mosque. Built-in 1555 by Rüstem Pasha<sup>15</sup>, the son-in-law of Sultan Süleyman, this mosque is renowned for its lavish mosaic decorations. Unlike traditional mosaic work, the mosque’s interior features the inscription of the phrase “*Kalima-i Tawhid*” (the Islamic declaration of faith) rendered not in mosaic but in the painting technique, using the muthenna composition.

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12 M. Baha Tanman, “İstanbul Haseki Camii’ne İlişkin Bazı Gözlemler”, *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, 3, 2021, p. 16; Mamoun Sakkal, “Square Kufic Tessellations”, *Abgadiyat*, 14 (1), 2019, p. 52.

13 Semavi Eyice, “Defterdar Camii ve Türbesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 9, İstanbul, TDV, 1994, p. 97.

14 İsmail Orman, “Şehzade Külliyesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 38, İstanbul, TDV, 2010.

15 Z. Hale Tokay, “Rüstempaşa Külliyesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 35, İstanbul, TDV, 2008, p. 291-292.



**Figure 2.** Examples of kufic calligraphy used in Istanbul in classical Ottoman architecture and before.<sup>16</sup> (a) Muthenna *Muhammad* composition at the Şehzade Mehmed Tomb (b) *Muhammad* composition at the Firuzağa Mosque (c) *Word of Tawhid* at the Haseki Mosque (d) *Subhanallah* composition at the Şehzade Mosque (e) composition at the Wooden door of the Yavuz Sultan Selim Tomb (f) Surah Ikhlas at the Beyazit Mosque (g) *Muhammad* composition at the Haseki Mosque (h) mosaic with *Muhammad* and *Ali* composition at Çinili Köşk (i) *Word of Shahada* at the Rustempasha Mosque (j) *Elhamdulillah* composition at the Beyazit Mosque (k) *Muhammad* Inscription at the portal of the Defterdar Mosque (l) Mosaic with the words *Allahu* and *Akbar* at the entrance of the Çinili Köşk<sup>17</sup>

16 Onur Şimşek, “Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in Istanbul”, *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring 2023, p. 424.

17 Onur Şimşek, “Analysis of Square Kufic Calligraphy at Some Historical Buildings in Istanbul”, *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 22, Spring 2023.

### **Square Kufic Calligraphy at the Tomb of Sultan Murad III., 1599**

Following the demise of Sultan Murad III in 1595 and his interment in the courtyard of Hagia Sophia, his tomb was constructed under the supervision of Chief Architect Davud Ađa. The endeavour was initiated posthumously, and it was completed in 1599 under the oversight of Chief Architect Dalgıç Ahmed Ađa.

The tomb features a hexagonal plan with chamfered corners and is crowned by a dome. Its entire facade is clad in marble, lending it a distinguished appearance reminiscent of the tombs designed by Architect Sinan during the classical period.<sup>18</sup>

Adorning the tomb are four square Kufic calligraphic compositions, two of which share identical designs. Positioned above the portal eyvan, the first composition comprises the word “tawhid” (the oneness of God). Adjacent to the portal eyvan, two elongated renditions of the word “tawhid” are inscribed in square Kufic calligraphy on the ceilings. The fourth composition, arranged in a ring formation, adorns the dome with the names of *Allah* and *Muhammad*. Each of these compositions employs painting decoration techniques on stucco, contributing to the ornate ambience of the tomb.

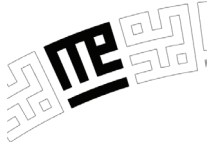

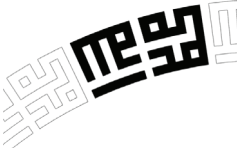
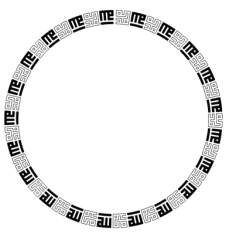
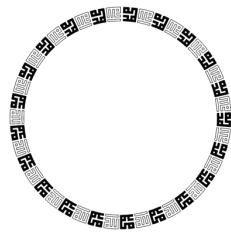
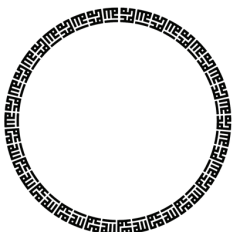
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18 İsmail Orman, “Murad III Türbesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 31, İstanbul, TDV, 2008, p. 176.


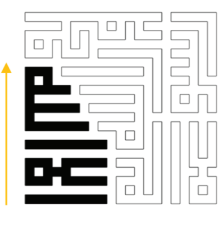
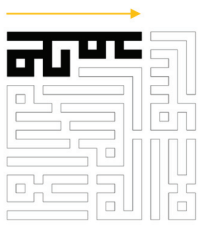





**Figure 3.** a) Interior of the tomb of Murad III. b) square kufic ring around the centre of the dome c) Kufic word of tawhid composition above the portal eyvan d) Detail of the Kufic composition above the portal eyvan e) Kufic composition on the side ceilings next to the portal-eyvan f) Detail of the kufic composition on the side ceilings next to the portal-eyvan













**Table 1.** Analysis of the square kufic calligraphy around the centre of the dome of the tomb of Murad III

		
<i>Allah detail of the ring</i>	<i>Muhammad detail of the ring</i>	<i>Allah and Muhammad composition</i>
		
21 repetitions of <i>Allah</i>	21 repetitions of <i>Muhammad</i>	Composition of <i>Allah</i> and <i>Muhammad</i> together

**Table 2.** Analysis of the square kufic calligraphy composition above the portal eyvan of the tomb of Murad III. (Figure 3. c-d)

		
La ilaha	Illallah	Muhammedun
		
Rasul	Allah	La ilahe illallah Muhammedun Rasulallah

**Table 3.** Analysis of the square kufic calligraphy composition on the side ceilings next to the portal eyvan of the tomb of Murad III.

		
La ilaha	Illa Allah	Wahdehu
		
La sharika lahu	Lahul mulku	Wa lahul hamdu (Letter Alif is missing)
		
Wa huwa	Ala kulli shayin qadir	La ilahe illa Allahu wahdehu la sharika lahu lahul mulku wa lahul hamdu wa huwa ala kulli shayin qadir.
		
Superfluous lines within the composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ here are two <i>Lam</i> letters connected, and the red square shows the suggested division.</li> <li>◆ position where the letter Alif of “Alhamdu” is missing</li> <li>■ the square shows the suggested link of the superfluous line to the letter <i>dal</i></li> </ul>	Composition detail with the suggested corrections for the missing and superfluous parts.

### Square Kufic Calligraphy at the Tomb of Sultan Mehmed III., 1608

Sultan Ahmed I. ordered the construction of his father, Sultan Mehmed III.’s tomb after he died in 1604. The court architect Dalgıç Ahmed Ağa started the construction in the courtyard of the Hagia Sophia Mosque, which the next court architect Sedefkâr Mehmed Ağa completed in 1609-1608.<sup>19</sup> The mausoleum, constructed with marble outer facades, exhibits an octagonal layout crowned by a dome. Its dome is intricately embellished with motifs typical of Ottoman calligraphy. Within the dome’s central motif, a verse is elegantly inscribed in the centre, with a square kufic ring composition around its circumference.

19 Ahmet Vefa Çobanoğlu, “Mehmet III Türbesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 28, Istanbul, TDV, 1997, p. 413-414.

a)



b)



**Figure 4.** a) Interior of the tomb of Mehmed III.

b) Kufic calligraphy at the dome of the tomb of Sultan Mehmed III

**Table 4.** Text Analysis of the square kufic calligraphy composition kufic calligraphy at the dome of the tomb of Sultan Mehmed III

<p><i>Allah</i> detail of the ring</p>	<p><i>Rabbi</i> detail of the ring</p>	<p><i>Allahu Rabbi</i> (Allah is my lord) composition</p>
<p>21 repetitions of <i>Allah</i></p>	<p>21 repetitions of <i>Rabbi</i></p>	<p>Composition of <i>Allah</i> and <i>Rabbi</i> together</p>

## Square Kufic Calligraphy at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, 1617

In 1609, during the reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), the eminent architect Sedefkâr Mehmed Ağa (d.1617) was commissioned to construct a comprehensive complex in his honour. By 1620, the ensemble was completed, encompassing a mosque, imperial lodge, primary school, madrasa, bazaar, bathhouse, hospital (inclusive of a mosque and bath), communal kitchen (comprising a kitchen, oven, pantry, and dining hall), stables, darulkurra, tomb, fountains, shops, rooms, cellars, coffeehouse, and residences.<sup>20</sup>

Distinguished by its six minarets, strategic view facing the Hagia Sophia Mosque, and the intricate blue tiles adorning its structure, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque held a singular status among Ottoman mosques, lending its name to the historic Hippodrome square in the heart of the city. Following a classical courtyard plan, the mosque is capped by a dome supported by four half-domes. Intricately adorned with tilework, calligraphy, woodwork, and stonemasonry, the mosque uses square kufic script sparingly, appearing in three locations.

The first inscription, an octagonal composition on the left side of the mihrab, depicts the names of the ashara i mubeshshara (ten companions of Prophet Muhammad to whom paradise was promised). Our analysis points to the inclusion of Abdullah b. Mes'ud, though an alternative narration mentions Abu Ubaydah b. Jarrah.

A variant of the *ashara i mubeshshara* composition, which we also see in the Al-Azhar Mosque and Burdeyni Mosque, is executed in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in marble using the meticulous technique of coloured stone inlay. The quest for geometric precision in shaping letters and names adds a layer of intricacy to the design. Furthermore, the letter “waw” and various shapes have been strategically incorporated to fill certain voids.

The second kufic composition is an inscription of “*Alhamdulillah*”, somewhat concealed in proximity to the tension bars of the elephant feet. The inscription, accompanied by a woven geometric pattern at its center, is uniformly written in gold colour on a dark blue background across two columns.

Finally, within the Sultan's Lodge, there is a *Basmala* inscription. This inscription is intricately crafted using the technique of inlaying black stone into white stone.

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20 Ahmet Vefa Çobanoğlu, “Sultan Ahmed Camii ve Külliyesi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 37, Istanbul, TDV, 1997, p. 497, 498.









**Figure 5.** Kufic calligraphy at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque a) octagonal composition on the left side of the mihrab b) Square kufic “*Alhamdulillah*” composition with geometric pattern c) square kufic “*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*” at the Sultan’s loge of the the Sultan Ahmed Mosque


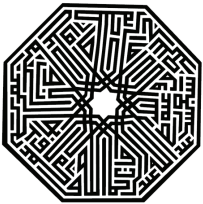

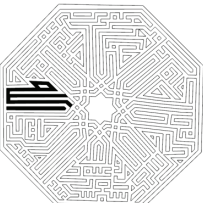
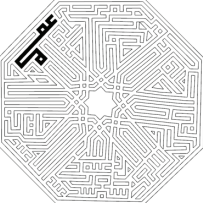

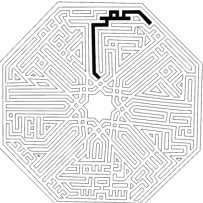

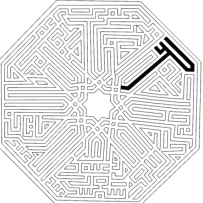
**Table 5.** Text analysis of the geometrically patterned square kufic composition on the column of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

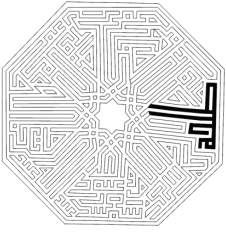
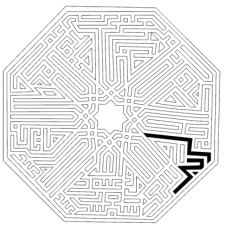

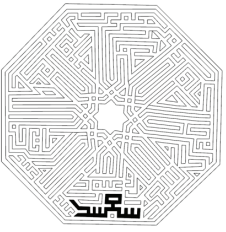
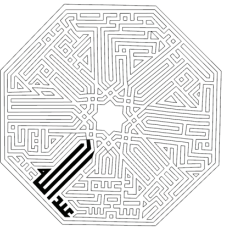
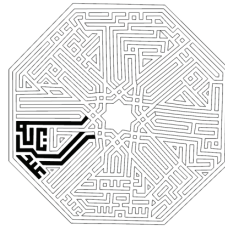


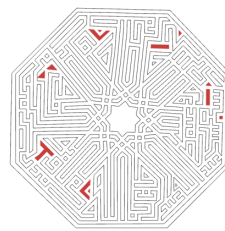
Elhamdulillah	Elhamdulillah	Elhamdulillah
Elhamdulillah	Elhamdulillah four times	Elhamdulillah, including the octagonal pattern

**Table 6.** Analysis of the square kufic “*Basmala*” composition at Sultan’s Loge of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

		
Bismillah	Errahman	Errahim
		
Entire composition	The red line is superfluous; by adding the orange point, this line can be linked to the letter <i>Ha</i>	Another possible suggestion for the word <i>Errahim</i> .

**Table 7.** Text analysis of the geometrically patterned square kufic composition on the mihrab Wall of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

		
The inscription within the octagonal pattern on the mihrab wall of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque.	The version was drawn without considering deviations, adhering faithfully to the original design.	When efforts are made to draw it with precise geometry and letter spacing, the gaps and letters tend to deviate from the original.
		
Allah	Muhammad	Ebu Bakr
		
Omar	Uthman	Ali

		
Talha	Zubeyr	Sad
		
Said	Abdullah	Abdurrahman
		
Radiyallahu Anh	The “waw” letters may be considered as conjunctions between names.	Shapes are placed to fill the spaces between letters.

### Square Kufic at the Sadabad Mosque, 1862

From the era of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Kağıthane region, renowned as a promenade and recreational area, was adorned with Sultan Ahmed III’s Sadabad Palace, accompanied by a mosque named Hayrabad.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, this mosque underwent renovations. The surviving Sadabad Mosque that we encounter today was constructed during the period of Sultan Abdulaziz between the years 1862-1863, in conjunction with the Sadabad Palace. Diverging from classical Ottoman architecture under

21 Banu Bilgicioğlu, “Sâdâbâd”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 35, Istanbul, TDV, 1997, p. 379-381.

the influence of western elements, the sole-domed mosque's architect is Sarkis Balyan Kalfa.<sup>22</sup>

As for the square kufic inscriptions, we observe them in four different locations as part of the decorative elements surrounding the mosque's mihrab. Primarily, attention is drawn to the gold-coloured kufic calligraphy border on a green background that encircles the mihrab niche. Just above the pointed arch where the muqarnas of the mihrab concludes, there is a second pointed composition of the word "Tawhid". In the upper right corner of the mihrab decorations, the inscription reads "Ya Allah". In contrast, "Ya Muhammad" is written in the upper left corner. It should be noted that there might be some minor errors in the inscriptions, either during their original creation or subsequent restoration efforts, which will be addressed below.



**Figure 6.** a) Mihrab of the Sadabad Mosque b) detail of the square kufic border around the mihrab c) *Ya Allah* at the upper right corner of the mihrab d) *Ya Muhammad* at the left upper corner e) *Word of tawhid* above the pointed arch

22 Semavi Eyice, "Çağlayan Camii", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 8, Istanbul, TDV, 1992, p. 97.







**Table 8.** Analysis of the square kufic composition around the mihrab of the Sadabad Mosque.

La ilaha	Illa Allah	Muhamedun
Rasul	Allah	La Ilahe Illa Allah Muhammedun Rasulullah
Superfluous points in the existing composition	The orange point shows a suggestion to link superfluous points with the letter <i>He</i>	Composition with suggested corrections

**Table 9.** Analysis of the square kufic *Word of tawhid* composition above the pointed arch at the Sadabad Mosque.

La ilaha	Illa Allah	Muhamedun
Rasul	Allah	La Ilahe Illa Allah Muhammedun Rasulullah
Superfluous line	The orange point shows a suggestion to link superfluous lines with the letter <i>He</i>	Composition with the suggested correction

**Table 10.** Analysis of the square kufic *Ya Allah* and *Ya Muhammad* composition at the upper corners of the Mihrab niche of the Sadabad Mosque.

		
<i>Ya Allah</i> (as it is in the Sadabad Mosque)	<i>Ya Allah</i> suggested corrections: addition of the missing letter <i>Alif</i> , correction of the proportion of letter <i>Ya</i> , deletion of the unnecessary line of letter <i>He</i>	<i>Ya Allah</i> , with the suggested corrections
		
<i>Ya Muhammad</i> , as it is written in the Sadabad Mosque	<i>Ya Muhammad</i> , with correction of the proportion of the letter <i>Ya</i> and the classical position of its points	<i>Ya Muhammad</i> , with the suggested corrections

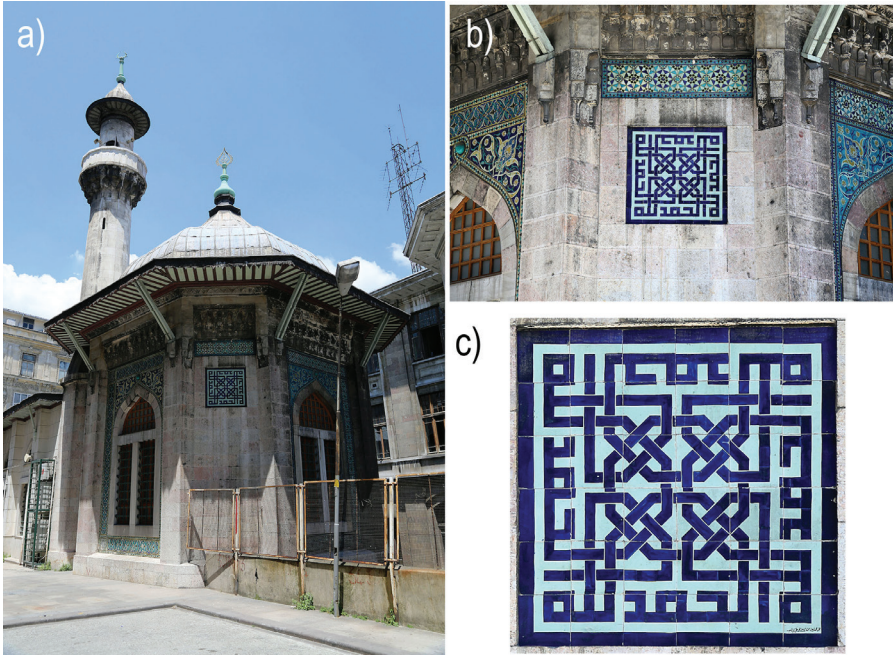
### Square Kufic Calligraphy at the Hobyar Mosque, 1909

The mosque derives its name from Mir Hoca Hubyar, who built a small mosque here in 1473-1474. The mosque was demolished over time in the Sirkeci district of Eminönü. Renowned architect Vedat Tek, a key figure in the national architectural movement, redesigned the mosque along with the Grand Post Office building. The reconstruction took place between 1905 and 1909.<sup>23</sup>

The mosque features a squared plan with chamfered corners, displaying Orientalist influences through its onion dome. Its eaves and tiles are clear references to Ottoman tradition. The quest for national identity in architecture influenced the square kufic script outside the Hubyar Mosque. Around the centre of a geometric patterned composition, the phrase “Elhamdulillah” (Praise be to Allah) rotates four times clockwise. We can assume that the tablet was probably written by Ebüzziya Tevfik Bey, who wrote the ornamental Kufic script on the Great Post Office building. The tile is perhaps the work of Hafız Mehmed Emin Efendi, who lived between 1872 and 1922 and made significant contributions to the art of Kütahya tiles of the period and prepared the tiles of the Great Post Office Building.<sup>24</sup>

23 Sema Doğan, “Hubyar Mescidi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, Volume 18, İstanbul, TDV, 1998, p. 271-272.

24 Hüsâmettin Aksu, *İstanbul Yapılarındaki Bazı Dekoratif Küfî Hatlar*, İstanbul, 2001, p. 38; Erdem Göktepe, “Osmanlı Döneminin Son Yüzyılında İmar Edilen Yapılardaki Tezyini Küfî Yazılar”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, 59, 2023, p. 1451-1482.



**Figure 7.** a) Hobyar Mosque b) detail of the facade with square kufic calligraphy c) square kufic calligraphy with geometric composition at the centre

**Table 11.** Analysis of the square kufic composition at the Hobyar Mosque.

<p>Elhamdulillah, to the left</p>	<p>Elhamdulillah to the top</p>	<p>Elhamdulillah, to the right</p>
<p>Elhamdulillah to bottom</p>	<p>Swastica with four times Elhamdulillah</p>	<p>Elhamdulillah, with a geometric pattern</p>

## Conclusion

Upon examining square kufic calligraphy in the post-Sinan period, we observe that only a few examples were applied for nearly five centuries. Notably, square kufic calligraphy was not utilized in architecture between the Sultan Ahmed Mosque and the Sadabad Mosque, spanning 250 years. Remarkably, the influence of Western art on Ottoman architecture in the 18th century can be considered one of the significant reasons for this. The Hobyar Mosque is a singular example from the first half of the 20th century.

From a compositional perspective, the geometric frameworks within the writings are particularly striking. The repeated writings within the rings in the tombs of Sultan Murad III and Mehmed III, the names placed within the octagonal framework in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, and the compositions of the Kalima-i Tawhid surrounding the mihrab in the Sadabad Mosque are noteworthy for their originality.

Among these, the composition of the Ashara i Mubashara in the mihrab of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is the most remarkable. Although the letters in square kufic art have a foundation with their simplicity, the effort to place them within geometric shapes complicates the reading order along with the shapes of the letters. While attempting to put names within the octagon, numerous gaps emerged, sometimes filled by extending the geometric pattern at the centre, and using additional letters and shapes at other times. In addition, the shapes of the letters had to be adapted to the angles of the octagon. The difficulty in reading the words has become so open to interpretation that there are different views on which names are included in the composition of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque based on two different narrations that have reached us regarding the Ashara i Mubashara. For example, one narration includes Abdullah b. Mas'ud, while in the other, Abu Ubaydah b. Jarrah is mentioned.

It is also observed that the square kufic compositions used after the classical period bear similarities to those of the classical Ottoman period. For instance, the central geometric-patterned "*Elhamdulillah*" writing in the Hobyar Mosque resembles the "*Subhanallah*" writing in the Şehzade Mosque. A composition similar to the writing in the tomb of Sultan Murad III, the Kalima i Tawhid, was applied in the Haseki Mosque.

When examined in terms of construction techniques and materials, it is observed that square kufic compositions were created using wood, tiles, natural stone, and stucco painting materials and techniques during the classical period and before. In the post-classical period, painting was mainly preferred. At the same

time, natural stone inlay was used in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, and tiles were used in the Hobyar Mosque, which was influenced by the national architectural movement. There are no examples of wood.

Some errors observed in the writings, especially those in stucco paintings, appear to have happened during restoration works. The loss of some letters and line colours and the lack of widespread understanding of square kufic writing likely led to errors in interpreting the letters during restoration. The recommendations presented in the article will not only prevent new errors in future restoration works but also facilitate the correction of past mistakes.

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