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The Impact of the Eras and Varieties of Kufic art, on the Placement of Kufic in Architectural Design

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Abstract

Kufic script is a form of calligraphy that has been in existence since the earliest years of Islam. A glance at arts in Islamic states reveals that calligraphy and a number of other art forms fared well, as painting was considered objectionable on religious grounds. The introduction of different versions of calligraphy for use in such buildings produces a wealth of images, enhancing the aesthetics of the buildings. Kufic reached its zenith in the Ottoman state, and the most glamorous examples of Kufic in architecture of Turkish states can be found in Ottoman structures. Kufic exhibits certain variations in terms of the forms used and the spots occupied in structures. This study is a comparative analysis of the types of Kufic and spots used in architectural design, and an analysis of the important examples, for a more complete picture of the varieties of Kufic used in various periods.

Keywords: Kufic, Kufic in Ottoman state, Kufic and architecture, Kufic and mosques.

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1. Introduction

Mankind has used various methods to express itself from the past up till today. The forms created in the architecture are also examples of these methods. The architect or user has transferred society's beliefs, culture, religion, lifestyle and traditions to the architectural structure through signs and certain indicators. Thus, the indicators in the constructions shed light on that community. In Turkey's geography, mosques have been the constructions where this symbolism is most used. Since these constructions are places of worship, they have maintained their importance since the acceptance of Islam by Turks. For this reason, while artistic art of painting and sculpture in churches were developing, arts such as calligraphy, ornamentation, paper marbling and miniature were becoming popular and advanced among Muslims for whom paintings of living beings and sculptures were never allowed. Among these branches of art, especially the use of calligraphy in mosque ornamentation, writing of verses and hadiths resulted in many verses and hadiths written in dozens of types of fonts which decorated the walls as an artwork in houses. Muslims chose to decorate their temples with abstract embroidery both to express their feelings and emotions for Allah and to ensure that their prayers are more prevalent in a spiritual atmosphere. These ornaments can be both architectural ornamentation and writings on walls or plaster. Over time, these writings have become art and eventually a writing art has emerged with the glory we have not seen in any other religion and civilisation. Muslim masters usually knew how to create a new field of activity by avoiding figurative paintings (<http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/egitimvetoplum/article/viewFile/5000119690/5000110440>). For this reason, the illumination, miniature, calligraphy arts have been enriched enormously and some other handicrafts have almost become art forms. Especially, the act of writing has been scrutinised and developed, among all civilisations, mostly by Muslim artists to the very finest detail perhaps. One of the branches of calligraphy, the 'Kufic' writing form, composes the writing style of the beginning years of Islam. In particular, Muslim artists that were guided by religious scholars who declared that the figure depiction, that is, painting, is contrary to Islam, had to limit their God-given motive of production by drawing nature in abstract form.

Kufic is defined as a vertical, rigid, angular font which is an ancient form of Arabic writing with straight and angular lines, or formed with a change in the writing of 'Himyeri' in the first centuries of Islam. It is a type of writing commonly used in Arabic calligraphy. Kufic writing, with more rounded lines especially in the early period, was frequently used in Quran writings and on the facades of structures. The Kufic writing character was used when the Quran was written for the first time. The Kufic writing form has also become the visual symbol of God and His New Religion in the period when Islam first emerged. During the time when Islam began to grow as an Arab-Islamic Religion state and expansion of Islam's influence, Kufic became the official writing form. It was presented as a sacred script to newly joined nations in Islam and, as a result of its use by these societies, the Kufic form gained a visual meaning that symbolises the glory of the new religion. It is also possible to say that in these early periods of Islam, especially with the influence of the ban on the portrayal, the Kufic writing style became an important artistic design unit as well as representing the holiness of religion. It is also possible to say that in these early periods of Islam, especially with the influence of the ban on portrayal, Kufic writing became an important aesthetic design unit due to the superiority of its application on all kinds of materials as well as representing the holiness of religion. Kufic style reached perfection in the second half of the eighth century and maintained its presence for 300 years. Especially in the period of Fatimid Caliph Abdulmecid (909–1171), Muslim artists in Egypt and Syria generally used Kufic writing on metal, glass and textile extensively. The Kufic writing form was used in a style that was stretched horizontally so that its height was less than its width. Early period Kufic writings are explicitly plain. However, this simplicity gradually disappeared with the rich picturesque ornaments of (art of painting with words) gravestones of Fatimid, Seljuks and Ghaznevid. Especially, these decorative Kufic ornaments reach the peak in the 11th century in the Seljuks. One of the important features of decorative works made with Kufic writing is that they do not depend on strict design rules. This irregularity freed the artists while using materials in their work. Starting from the early 11th century, the motifs (locks) of the knitting started to appear. The vertical corners of some

letters are joined together and the designs are stacked to form a square. This simplest square form of Kufic is called the 'checkered Kufic'. In other words, it is created with a rectangular arrangement. Checkered Kufic, which is especially suitable for applying on all surfaces and materials such as tiles, glass, marble, ceramics, wood, stone, metal, ivory, fabric and parchment, was often used in mosques, minarets, ceramics, books and some tombs. The best examples of these can be found in Afghanistan, Egypt, Tunisia, Spain Granada and Turkey. Kufic writing style, with the rich geometric variations that it offers, until the last days of the Seljuks in the 12th century, has been used in architecture, woodworking, weaving and of course calligraphy in an extremely widespread and admirable way. In the West as it is in the East, Kufic varieties with very similarities to Kufic style are known (Tan, 2013).

In Islamic worship structures, the art of Kufic has been used frequently in many architectural building elements for a long time. From doors to windows, there are many varieties of these architectural elements. The use of Kufic art is also seen in the worship places of Seljuk and Ottoman, which accepted the Islamic religion.

1.1. Kufic writing styles

Knotted Kufic: In the knotted Kufic, hooks and knots are added to the long-legged letters. In more ornate examples of writing, long-legged letters are interlaced or knotted together. Increasingly, the texts and nodes integrate with each other to form an intricate layout. In addition to this, botanical items added to the edges or to the ends of the letters make it possible to fill the background without leaving it plain. In the knotted Kufic design, there is a horizontal strip on which the text is placed, and there is a second horizontal strip on which the knots are located.

Plaited Kufic: Another arrangement in which Kufic writing is combined with similar knot elements can be described as plaited Kufic. This distinction is an important difference between the knotted and the plaited Kufic in terms of perception.

Square Kufic: Kufic type, which is defined as square Kufic is the last stage of plain Kufic developed specifically for architecture. This writing is different from the others in the sense that all of its letters are angled without exception and arranged to be placed in a geometric frame designed without ornamental style. Usually it is organised as a single religious word in a square frame and concentrically spread with four repetitions by changing direction and turning; or it is arranged as a word or a sentence extending horizontally in a rectangular frame in one or more than one line.

1.2. Kufic in the Ottoman

Kufic writing has shown changes throughout history. The use of Kufic writing in architectural works continued until the Anatolian Seljuks, and it has been used as an ornamental element from time to time in the Ottoman Empire until the Fatih period. After the reign of Fatih, Kufic writing left its place in this area to Aklam-i sitte.

Aklam-i sitte writings consist of reyhan or reyhani, sulus, naskh, tevki and rik'a and it means six types of writings (<http://www.turkislamsanatleri.com/Main/Home/Content/5336f185be1ebd09a8e8fdb1>). The most important development of the Aklam-i sitte was in the period of Mustasim Billah, the last Abbasid Khalifa. The innovations seen in science and art were also reflected in the art of calligraphy in parallel to the political and economic power obtained during the period of Umayyads and, especially, Abbasids. Vizir Ibn Mukle, along with his brother Abu Abdullah Hasan b. Ali determined the ratio of letters in the circle system by sorting and classifying in the clean lines. He made the most important development in writing aesthetics and led the birth of Aklam-i sitte. The classical measures and rules of Aklam-i sitte were later revealed by Yakut al-Musta'simi, so that a significant progression has been reached in the historical course of the writing. Following these developments, the field of Kufic writing began to narrow. The style of Yakut, which spread to Iran, Metropolitan, Egypt, Syria and Anatolia, was adopted and continued in these countries through the students he trained until the reign of Bayezid

II, when the Ottoman *ecole* in *Aklam-i sitte* emerged. Aesthetic rules of calligraphy reached with Yakut enjoyed the most brilliant and long-lasting maturity period in the Ottoman *ecole*. It is known that the Yakut style was adopted and taught in the science and culture centres of Seljuk such as Konya, Sivas and Amasya in the century when the Ottoman Empire began to be established and developed (<http://www.turkulkusu.com/osmanli-devletinde-hat-sanati>).

Awakening in *Aklam-i sit*, which had its foundation in Amasya during the governing period of Bayezid II, after the reign of Fatih, was accelerated when Bayezid II became a sultan and Sheikh Hamdullah came to Istanbul. Sheikh Hamdullah established friendship with Bayezid II, while Bayezid was a governor in Amasya and gave him calligraphy lessons. In this period, especially the *sulus* and *Naskh* writing entered into a period of great development. Sheikh Hamdullah, born in 1429 in Amasya, learned *Aklam-i sitte* from Hayreddin Mar'asi in the way of Yakut. He did studies on the writings of Yakut el Musta for a long time. Due to his leadership in the Ottoman *ecole* he was given the titles 'Kibbetti'l-kuttab, the leader of calligraphers'; 'Kdduu'lehlil-hatt, the head of calligraphers'.

As a result, Kufic writing has been widely used in various fields in various forms by changing in the historical process since the beginning of Islam. In the 11th century, the use of Kufic writing reached the peak with the Seljuks and later decreased with the widespread use of *Akkam-i sitte* in the reign of Bayezid II. After the reign of Fatih in the Ottoman period, it was seen less in constructions.

2. Methodology

The examples of Kufic writing used in the early period of the Ottoman state until its decline during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and the widespread use of *Aklam-i sitte* during the reign of Bayezid were examined on the table. In Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul, which were the capital of the Ottoman state, the mosques which were built in the early Ottoman period, during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and the reign of Bayezid II, were detected. This period was examined according to the types of writing used in the ornaments. The mosques, on which Kufic writing was used, are grouped by being tabulated according to the years they were built and to the Kufic periods. According to this table, the types of Kufic art that was used and the places it was used will be determined. With the help of the obtained data, it will be examined whether there is a relation between the type of Kufic used and in the type of construction element that was used in the structure and the construction period. The mosques to be examined were identified and grouped according to the periods and places of their construction. Mosques, their construction places and periods are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Examined mosques and their periods

Place of construction	Period		
	The early period	Fatih Sultan Mehmet period	Bayezit II period
Bursa	Orhan Mosque Ulu	Kefensuzen Mosque Bascı	
	Mosque Yıldırım Mosque	Ibrahim Mosque Dusturhan	
	Yesil Mosque Muradiye	Mosque	Mucellidi Mosque Arab
	Mosque	Fenari Ahmet Pasa Mosque	Mehmet Efendi Mosque
	Iznik Yesil Mosque	Hamza Bey Mosque Kaygan	Davut Pasa Mosque
	Hudavendigar Mosque	Mosque	
	Timurtas Mosque	Tuz Pazarı Mosque	
	Eski Mosque Sah Melek		Bayezit II. Mosque Sitti Sah
Edirne	Mosque Beylerbeyi	Cakıraga Mosque Kilise	Sultan Mosque
	Mosque Muradiye Mosque	Mosques	Hersekzade Ahmet Pasa
	Uc Serefeli Mosque	Evliya Celebi Pasa Mosque	Mosque Gazi Hoca Mosque
			Ismail Aga Mosque

Istanbul	Eyup Sultan Mosque Fatih
	Mosque Mahmut Pasa
	Mosque Rumeli Hisarı
	Mosque Sarı Beyazit Mosque
	Fetih Mosque
	Agalar Mosque Murat Pasa Mosque
	Rumi Mehmet Pasa Mosque
Bayezit II. Mosque	
Davutpasa Mosque Firuzaga	
Mosque Atik Ali Pasa	
Mosque Sehzade Mosque	
Vasat Atik Ali Pasa Mosque	

The determined mosque structures were examined. As a result of the examination, general information about the mosque in which Kufic art was used and the types of Kufic used and the construction elements in which Kufic was used were tabulated.

Table 2. Mosques, Kufic types and places of their usage

Period	Name of the structure	Year and place	Kufic type			The place where Kufic was used				
			Angled	Plaited	Knotted	Mihrab	Minaret	Door window	Wall Dome	Minbar
The early period	Hudavendigâr Mosque	1365–1366 Bursa			+	+				
The early period	Iznik Yesil Mosque	1378–1391 Iznik			+	+			+	
	Timurtas Mosque	1390 Bursa			+	+				
The early period	Bursa Ulu Mosque	1396–1400 + Bursa							+	
The early period	Yıldırım Mosque	1399–1400 + Bursa							+	
The early period	Bursa Yesil Mosque	1419–1424 Bursa			+	+			+	
The early period	Eski Mosque	1413 Edirne			+					+
The early period	Sah Melek Mosque	1429 + Edirne							+	
The early period	Muradiye Mosque	1436 Edirne			+	+				
The early period	Uc Serefeli Mosque	1145 Edirne			+				+	
Fatih sultan mehmet period	Fatih Mosque	1470 Istanbul			+				+	

3. Discussion and Conclusion

When we look at the mosques according to the periods, it is seen that the art of Kufic was replaced by the art of Aklam-i sitte in the mosques built in the Fatih period. It is seen that the art of Kufic was abandoned in the Ottoman Empire with the Fatih Mosque, and it was not used in the Ottoman architectural periods although it was encountered in some structures. In the mosques of the Bayezit II period that were examined, Aklam-ı sitte is seen but Kufic art is not seen.

Especially in the early period when the Kufic art was used heavily in the mosques of the Ottoman State, we mostly see knotted Kufic. The square Kufic was also found from time to time. Plaited Kufic was not preferred.

The art of Kufic was used in the mihrab and door–window elements in the mosques. In addition, it is also seen to have been used in the minbar. They were not seen in the research that was done on minarets, wall surfaces and dome. Knotted Kufic art was seen in the altar, door–indow and minbar. Square Kufic was seen only on door–window elements.

It can be said that the knotted type of Kufic had a general usage in the Ottoman Empire, considering that it was used extensively besides the mihrab, door, window and minbar. Square Kufic art is the type of Kufic that was seen on the door–window in the Ottomon State.

At the beginning of the early period of the Ottoman state, knotted Kufic was widely used on mihrab. In the middle of the early period, transition to square Kufic was made and it was used on the doors and windows. At the end of the early period, there was a return to the knotted Kufic, but the places of its use remained the same and it was used on doors and windows.

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