

**The Meaning of the Arabic Dedicatory  
Inscriptions of the Ottoman Monuments of Greece**

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## The Meaning of the Arabic Dedicatory Inscriptions of the Ottoman Monuments of Greece

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The Ottoman existence in the present-day Greece began in November 1361 AD, when the Ottomans took possession of Didymoteichon. The Ottomans ruled the present-day Greek territories for periods almost ranging between three and five centuries as the case in Thrace, Macedonia and Thessaly.

During these centuries, the Ottomans erected few towns, an enormous number of variant categories of buildings. From which, fortunately, a large number still exists up till now<sup>1</sup>. The total number of the existed Ottoman monuments in Greece, according to my survey 2006-2010, is around 300 buildings<sup>2</sup>. According to this survey, the Ottoman mosques –that have an archaeological value– are around 80 mosques.

Only about fifteen of the Ottoman monuments in Greece, as far as I know, where preserved<sup>3</sup> Arabic dedicatory inscriptions exist. These inscriptions mention diverse types of Ottoman structures like mosques, complexes, fortifications, welfare foundations and tomb-stones. The founders of the monuments, where these inscriptions are found, belong to the higher class of the Ottoman Empire, including the Ottoman sultans<sup>4</sup> themselves and the high ranking class<sup>5</sup>. One of these inscriptions mentions a mosque founded by a woman.

Also these inscriptions record political events, a unique example of engineer's name and modifications on the Byzantine buildings. They also represent epigraphically abundant material of historical events, titles, positions and different systems of dating (see further on this article).

In the Ottoman monuments of Greece, inscriptions are written in two languages Arabic and Turkish<sup>6</sup>. Turkish Language (Ottoman script<sup>7</sup>) was written in

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<sup>1</sup>) During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the liberation of the Greek lands from the Turks, the ottoman monuments were suffered widely from destruction, unsuitable usage and negligence.

<sup>2</sup>) In a recent book published by the Hellenic ministry of culture, mentioned 191 ottoman monuments in Greece, *Ottoman Architecture in Greece*, (Hellenic Ministry of Culture-Directorate of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Antiquities), E. Brouskari (ed.), Athens 2008.

<sup>3</sup>) There is another group of Arabic inscription kept in the literature books, see further on this article.

<sup>4</sup>) Sultan Bayezid I and Sultan Murad II.

<sup>5</sup>) Includes the sultan relatives, the Grand Vezirs, Vezirs and commanders, such as Mohamed Bey Mosque at Serres, a foundation of the son of the Grand Vezir Ahmad Paşa and husband of Princess Selçuk Hatun, daughter of Sultan Bayazid II.

<sup>6</sup>) There are found Turkish inscription in both scripts Arabic and Latin.

<sup>7</sup>) It was used for the Ottoman Turkish language during the time of the Ottoman Empire and till the adoption of the new Turkish alphabet, derived from the Latin script, in 1928, as one of Atatürk's

Perso-Arabic<sup>8</sup> alphabet. As a result, the inscriptions in both Arabic and Turkish took the same appearance (letters). In fact, the Qur'anic quotations, Prophet Muhammad's sayings, wise or poetic phrases are written in Arabic language throughout the Ottoman Empire's era.

It is noticed that the **dedicatory inscriptions' language was Arabic**, in general, till the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when it was replaced by the Ottoman script. This phenomenon will be discussed through the answer of three questions related to the dedicatory inscriptions' language as follows; 1. Why was Arabic Language adopted by the Ottomans as a formal language or the dedicatory inscriptions' language? 2. When did the dedicatory inscriptions' language of the Ottoman monuments in Greece<sup>9</sup> change from Arabic into Turkish "Ottoman script"? 3. Why was Arabic language replaced by Turkish "Ottoman script"?

In order to answer the first question; why did the Ottomans adopt Arabic Language firstly as a formal language or the dedicatory inscriptions' language? The answer simply can be found in the history of the origin of the Ottomans. They were the heirs of the Seljuks "the old Seljuk state of Rum" culturally, politically and religiously. Consequently the Ottomans, probably, acquired all the characteristics of the Seljuk state; among which was using Arabic as a dedicatory inscriptions' language<sup>10</sup>. In addition to their high enthusiasm to Islam and in sequence to Arabic the language of the Holy Quran. It is certainly that they were Arabs<sup>11</sup> who lived among the Turkish principalities of Anatolia, but about their number, influence or their rule we have no clear idea.

In fact, Arabic was the dominant language in the official state transactions and records<sup>12</sup>. Using Arabic in this way suggests that the first Ottoman Sultans knew Arabic either partially or perfectly. Mohamed II "the conqueror" knew fluently Turkish, Arabic and Persian.

The second query relates to the time when the dedicatory inscriptions' language of the Ottoman monuments changed from Arabic into Turkish "Ottoman script". Approximately, from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the

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Reforms in the early years of the Republic of Turkey, when the ottoman script was replaced with a phonetic variant of the Latin alphabet.

<sup>8)</sup> The Arabic alphabet was adapted to the Persian language, adding four letters.

<sup>9)</sup> If this rule can be acceptable to all the territories under the Ottoman Empire it needs more accurate research.

<sup>10)</sup> Almost all the Seljuk and the Ottoman inscriptions in Anatolia are in Arabic, see: J. M. Rogers, "Waqf and Patronage in Seljuk Anatolia: The Epigraphic Evidence", *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. 26 (1976), pp. 69-103; L. Yılmaz – K. Tuzcu, *Antalya'da Türk Dönemi kitabeleri*, Netherlands, 2010.

<sup>11)</sup> This view supported also by the story mentioned by Aşık Paşa in 1330s as follows: "An Arab, a Persian, a Tukur and an Armenian set off on a trip together. Somewhere they want to buy the grapes, ..." H. Inalcik, « The "Ottoman Civilization" and Palace Patronage », in *Ottoman Civilization*, H. Inalcik – Günsel Renda (ed.), vol. 1, Ankara 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2009, p. 17.

<sup>12)</sup> M. F. Köprülü, « Anadolu selçuklularının yerli kaynakları », *Belleten* 7, 1943, p.379 ff; G. A. TEKİN, « Turkish Literature: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries », in *Ottoman Civilization*, H. Inalcik – Günsel Renda (ed.), vol. 2, Ankara 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2009, p. 496.

dedicatory inscriptions' language has been changed into Turkish "Ottoman script", with rare exceptions<sup>13</sup>.

The preserved Ottoman dedicatory inscriptions from the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, declare undoubtedly that using Arabic in dedicatory inscriptions was the rule, while the Turkish ones were exceptions, during this period of the Ottoman state. The case was not only in Greece but also in all the Balkans<sup>14</sup>.

The preserved Arabic inscription of Greece could be categorized into two categories; the first that are preserved within the monuments. The second are those inscriptions which their texts are kept in the literary works; the most distinguished among them is the work of Evliya Çelebi; in which are preserved the texts of the Arabic inscriptions of the Eski Mosque<sup>15</sup> (1385 AD) in Serres, Omer<sup>16</sup> Bey Mosque

<sup>13</sup>) The content of these rare exceptions mostly includes Qur'anic quotations, Prophet Muhammad's sayings, or common expressions that could be understood almost in both languages Arabic and Turkish.

<sup>14</sup>) Nearly most of the buildings built in the Balkans up to end of the 15<sup>th</sup> c. have Arabic inscriptions, the valuable work (E. H. Ayverdi, *Fatih devri mimarisi*, Istanbul, 1953.) studied the monuments of the Mohamed II's region, and mentioned the following buildings that have Arabic inscriptions as follows: Hoca Hubyar Bey Mescidi H. 878 (1474) in İstanbul, p.16; Azepe Bey Camii H. 860 (1456) in Bursa, p. 57; Düsturhan Camii H. 884 (1479) in Bursa, p. 58; Ebu İshak Camii H. 884 (1479) in Bursa, p. 58; Selçuk Hâtun Camii H. 854 (1450) in Bursa, p. 60; Azepe Bey Türbesi H. 854 (1450) in Bursa, p. 65; Fatma Hâtun Camii H. 872 (1468) in Adirne, p. 66; Selçuk Hâtun Mescidi H. 860 (1456) in Adirne, p. 67; Fâtih Sultan Mehmed Kale in İzmir, p. 76; Şeyh Çoban Künbedi H. 862 (1459) in Sivas, p. 81; Hayrüddin Paşa Çeşmesi H. 871 (1466) in Trabzon, p. 83; Şadırvan H. 875 (1470) in Trabzon, p. 83; İsa Bey Camii circa H. 880 (1475) in Uskub, p. 84; Hacı İshak Camii H. 880 (1475) in Zile, p. 86; Üçşerefeli Camii H. 849 (1445) in Adirne, p. 100; Davud Paşa Camii H. 890 (1485) in İstanbul, p. 119, resim 40; Fâtih Camii H. 867-875 (1462-1470) in İstanbul, p. 146, 150, resim 65-67; Mahmut Paşa Camii in İstanbul, p. 179; Mahmut Paşa Türbesi H. 878 (1473) in İstanbul, p. 185; Murad Paşa Camii in İstanbul, p. 190; Rum Mehmed Paşa Camii H. 876 (1471) in İstanbul, p. 219; Ahmed Daî Camii H. 876 (1471) in Bursa, p. 223; Sitti Hâtun Camii H. 864 (1459) in Kanberler, p. 232; Ayşekadın Camii H. 873 (1468) in Adirne, p. 245; Kasım Paşa Camii H. 883 (1478) in Adirne, p. 248; İshak Paşa Camii and Medrese H. 887 (1482) in İnegöl, p. 262; Karaca Bey Camii H. 861(1458) near Bursa, p. 270; Çeşnigir Camii H. 879 (1474) in Manisa, p. 274; Bâb Hümâyün H. 883 (1478) in İstanbul, p. 310, resim 298-299; Edirne Sarayı, Cihannümâ, p. 378; Sekizinci bab, Rumelihisarı H. 856 (1453), p. 415, 417, 421, resim 443a.

<sup>15</sup>) The Eski Mosque of Kara Halil Çandralı –the first ottoman Grand Vezir– built in H. 787 (1385) in Serres (Greece). The content of its Arabic inscription remains preserved in the work of Evliya Çelebi as follows:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لله تعالي خالصاً بني وعمر هذا المسجد  
المبارك في زمان السلطان مراد خان بن اورخان خلد ملكه  
المحتاج إلي الباري خليل بن علي الجندري عفو عنهم سنة  
سبع وثمانين وسبع مائة

It gives us the name of the founder "Khalil bin Ali al Gandari", the date of building (787 H.) and says further that was in the region of the Sultan Murad Khan bin Orkhan Khan, see, E. Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, Istanbul, 10 Books, Book nu. 8, p. 218; M. Kiel, « Observations on the History of Northern Greece during the Turkish Rule: Historical and Architectural Description of the Turkish Monuments of Komotini and Serres, their Place in the Development of Ottoman Turkish Architecture and their Present Condition », *BSt* 12/2, (1971), 426-456, p. 431; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, vol. IV, Istanbul, 1982, p. 293.

<sup>16</sup>) A three lines inscription gives the founder's name "Omer bin Torkhan" and its date (878 H.) and it reads:

عمر الأمير الكبير عبد المولي الجبار المتكبر الأمير عمر بن طورخان  
جزاه الله بالرضوان جامعاً مسجداً كبيراً لوجه الله تعالي علوا تم  
بناؤها بعون الله تعالي في شهر شعبان ثمان وسبعين وثمانمائه

E. Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, p. 194; E. H. Ayverdi, *Fatih devri mimarisi*, p. 85; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 326.

(1473 AD) in Larisa<sup>17</sup> and Yusuf<sup>18</sup> Aga Mosque (1582 AD) in Ioannina.



**Pl. 1. Faik Pasha Imaret (1493) in Arta, the inscription above the main portal.**



**Pl. 2. Zincirli Mosque (16<sup>th</sup> c.) in Serres, An inscribed plaque in the portico.**

As of the first category, there are around fifteen Arabic inscriptions, which are preserved in Greece; and I will study here ten of them, those which enjoy a historical-archaeological value<sup>19</sup> (plates 1-2). To the same category but in the Balkans outside Greece, belong the Arabic inscriptions of Hamza<sup>20</sup> Bey Mosque (1409 AD) in Stara Zagora, Sarabdar Hasan<sup>21</sup> Bey Mosque in the old castle of Vizye –Vize, in the present day Turkish Thrace and Hacı Husseyin<sup>22</sup> Mosque (1476-1477 AD) in Prilep.

<sup>17</sup>) Larisa or Yeni Şehir (New City) represents one of the few cases that the Ottomans erected new towns in the Balkans. Larisa was in ruins when the Ottomans captured it and its inhabitants had abandoned it. The ruined town developed into an ottoman town since most of its byzantine inhabitants had fled away. The population of the town was created by successive waves of Ottoman colonization and in this way its name was changed to Yeni Şehir (New City) by the new founder who is considered to have been Barak Bey, a son of Evrenos, see: I. Mélikoff, « Evrenos », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. II, B. Lewis, CH. Pellat and J. Schacht (eds.), Leiden, 1991, p.720; B. Σφυρόερας, « Λάρισσα », in *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Πάπυρος Λαρούς Μπριτάννικα* 37, Αθήνα, 1996, p. 341-243.

<sup>18</sup>) A double-lines simple inscription gives the founder's name "Yousef bin Qulig Aslan" and its date (990 H.) and it reads:

قد بني هذا الجامع في سبيل الله يوسف بن  
قلج اصلان في سنة تسعين وتسعمائة

E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 311.

<sup>19</sup>) Some inscriptions have only Qur'anic verses or religious writings without historical meaning like the inscription of Faik Pasha Imaret (1493, plate 1) in Arta (Epirus) and Zincirli Mosque (16th c. plate 2) in Serres (Macedonia). For instance the first one reads:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله

Its transliteration as follows:

Bismillāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm  
Lā ilaha illa Al-Lāh, Muhammad rasūl Al-Lāh

Its translation as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful  
There is no God but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God

<sup>20</sup>) It is the oldest mosque of Bulgaria, and its Arabic inscription is one of the most important early ottoman inscriptions with its style and its titles, for its reading and translation see: M. Kiel, « some early ottoman monuments in Bulgarian Thrace Stara Zagora (Eski Zağra), Jambol and Nova Zagora (Zağra Yenicesi) », *Belleten Türk Tarih Kurumu* 38, Ankara, 1974, p. 639-640. The mosque is used today as a church.

<sup>21</sup>) It is an simple Arabic inscription in two verses give the date of the mosque and informs that it has been built during the region of Sultan Murad, it is published with a photo and translation, see: M. Kiel,

Then the language of the Ottoman dedicatory inscriptions in Greece changed from Arabic into Turkish “Ottoman script” during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, this change occurred gradually and without political decisions. The matter that leads to the third query: why Turkish “Ottoman script” used instead of Arabic?

This change corresponds to the sudden change<sup>23</sup> in the expansion policy of the Ottoman state under the reign of Sultan Selim I (1512 – 1520 AD). This policy which was working mostly against the West and the Beyliks before his reign transformed towards the Islamic world in the East, in order to be the unique Islamic power in the world and the largest and the greatest empire at that time. So, the war was waged against Persia and Mesopotamia, in sequence against the Mamluk state in Syria, Egypt and Palestine, followed by the domination over the holy cities of Islam and soon to Yemen<sup>24</sup>.

The Ottoman Empire rose to its zenith during the 16<sup>th</sup> century; and in parallel with its zenith in expansion, there was another apogee in the Turkish literature<sup>25</sup>, art and architecture<sup>26</sup>. One of its aspects was the high interest in Turkish heritage in general, and language in particular, the matter which was reflected automatically on the language of the dedicatory inscriptions. As a result, the Ottoman dedicatory inscriptions in Greece have been written in Turkish “Ottoman script” during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This action occurred spontaneously without formal order or governmental policy, but came as a feature that reflected the interest of Turkish culture as a symbol of greatness “of being Ottoman”. In view of this context, this change of the language of the dedicatory inscriptions can be explained. Doubtlessly, any artist expresses his art in a certain culture within the framework of the political, intellectual and social atmosphere dominant in the society.

The second topic is the content of the preserved Arabic dedicatory inscriptions of Greece. However, it is better to review these inscriptions chronologically at first, and then to analyze their content. Here, I will examine only the unpublished inscriptions or those that have been published but have errors in their reading, in addition to referring to the published inscriptions.

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« A note on the history of the frontiers of the Byzantine Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century », *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66, München, 1973, p. 353.

<sup>22)</sup> It is the oldest preserved mosque of the town, also known as Çarsi Cami, see; M. Kiel, « Some little-known Monuments of Ottoman Turkish Architecture in the Macedonia Province: Štip, Kumanovo, Prilep, Strumista », *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4-5, İstanbul, 1976, p. 168-169.

<sup>23)</sup> H. Inalcik, « SELİM I », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IX, C. E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and the late G. Lecomte (eds.), Leiden, 1997, p. 127-131.

<sup>24)</sup> J.H. Kramers, « ‘OTHMĀNLĪ », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VIII, C. E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (eds.), Leiden, 1995, p. 195.

<sup>25)</sup> G. A. TEKIN, « ‘OTHMĀNLĪ ; III. LITERATURE », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VIII, p. 210-214; G. Kut, « The Classical Period in Turkish Literature », in *Ottoman Civilization*, H. Inalcik – Günsel Renda (ed.), vol. 2, Ankara 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2009, p. 526-567.

<sup>26)</sup> D. Kuban, « Ottoman Architecture », in *Ottoman Civilization*, vol. 2, p. 626-697, esp. p. 663-682.

**Inscription No. 1:** (plate 3)

**Description:** A tomb-stone<sup>27</sup> of the mausoleum of Gazi Evrenos<sup>28</sup> Bey, dates back to 7/10/820 H (Tuesday 16 /11/1417 AD), and discovered in the mausoleum in Giannitsa by the Greek scholar Demetriades<sup>29</sup> in 1974. It is in two parts of marble, the upper (67.5 high x 58.5 wide cm.) containing three lines, each line is 12 cm. tall. While the lower part (104.5 high x 53.5 wide cm.) containing four lines, each line is 11 cm. tall. The script is in thuluth font type. According to Demetriades, traces of red and gold coloring can be detected under the existing coats of whitewash.



Pl. 3. The mausoleum of Gazi Evrenos Bey in Giannitsa, A tomb-stone inscription, V. Demetriades, « The Tomb of Ghāzī Evrenos ... », plate 2331.

**Inscription No. 2:** (plate 4)

**Description:** The main dedicatory inscription of Sultan Bayezid's Mosque in Didymoteichon, dates back to 823 H (1420-1421 AD). It is a rectangular stone plaque (80 high x 185 wide cm.) containing three lines, delineated and separated by red lines. The script is in thuluth font type in complicated manner, especially the third line. The writings are in relief with black letters on pale-yellow background. The inscriptive rectangular is enclosed by a decorative one with arrows in red. Ayverdi has been

<sup>27)</sup> For the reading and the translation of this inscription see; V. Demetriades, « The Tomb of Ghāzī Evrenos Bey at Yenitsa and Its Inscription », *BSOAS* 39, No. 2. (1976), 328-332, p. 331-332.

<sup>28)</sup> One of the most famous commanders of the early ottoman state (14<sup>th</sup> c.) who has played an important role especially in Greece, see further, I. Mélikoff, « Ewrenos », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. II, p. 720.

<sup>29)</sup> V. Demetriades, « The Tomb of Ghāzī Evrenos ... », p. 331.

published this inscription in Arabic<sup>30</sup> without translation. Ayverdi's reading is not accurate, so my following reading has few differences in reading, to which I will refer in **Bold** as follows:

أمر بعمارة هذا المسجد المبارك والمعبد المنزل السلطان الأعظم والخاصان المعظم المؤيد من السماء  
وبالدولة الباهرة المظفر علي  
الاعدا بالسلطنة القاهرة ظل الله في الأرضين غياث لدولة الدنيا والدين ومغيث الإسلام والمسلمين السلطان  
ابن السلطان ابو  
الفتح محمد ابن بايزيد ابن مراد ابن اورخان ابن عثمان قرن الله في الدنيا احسانه بالقبول واسكنه في  
الآخرة جنات الخير واحياه وصدر في المتمم من ربيع الأولي سنت ثلث عشرين ثمانمائه

He gave orders for the construction of this blessed Mosque and sacred temenos, the Greatest Sultan and the Glorified Sovereign (Khaqan), the supported by heaven (i.e. the God), and the prosperous State, who conquered the enemies by the victorious Sultanate, the Shadow of God on earth, (Ghiyath al-Dunya wa'l-Din) the Savior of the world and the religion, The Savior of Islam and Muslims, the Sultan and the son of the Sultan Abu'l-Fath Mohamed bin Bayazid bin Murad bin Orkhan bin 'Othman, May Allah join between the acceptance of his beneficence in this worldly life and rest his soul in His paradise in the hereafter It was issued on last day of Rabae Al-oula, 823 AH (in words)



Pl. 4. Sultan Bayezid's Mosque in Didymoteichon, The main dedicatory inscription.

### Inscription No. 3: (plate 5)

**Description:** The second dedicatory inscription of Sultan Bayezid's Mosque in Didymoteichon, dates back to 824 H (1421-1422 AD). It is located above the western entrance of the SW façade, a rectangular stone plaque (60 high x 75 wide cm.) containing three lines, delineated and separated by red lines. The script is thuluth in complicated manner. The writings are in relief with black letters on pale-yellow

<sup>30</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 209, R. 43.



background. Ayverdi has been published this inscription in Arabic<sup>31</sup> without translation, with few differences in reading, to which I will refer in **Bold** as follows:

أسند الداعيه الفقير أضعف عباد الله علي سيد حسن القاضي بديمتوقات وبن[ت] عبد الله طوغان ال[ل] عبد  
الضعيف

سلي الشهر الجاثلي أصلح الله شأنها وصانها وقد فرغ بنايت وتشبيد اركانه افتخار

المهندسين واختيار المعامرين الاستاذ الماهر في صنعه عوض بن بايزيد في اربع عشرين ثمانمايه

Under the authority of the poor and the weakest slave of Allah, ‘Ali Sayed Hassan, the Kādī (the judge) of “Didymoteichon” and the son of ‘Abdullah 'Toghan; the weak slave

The Descendant of the famous Al-djatheli, May Allah bless and protect it; the building and construction of its pillars has been accomplished with the pride

and dignity of architects; and the choice of the best planner and the professor, who enjoys the expertise in his profession 'Awad bin Bayazid, in 824 AH (in words)



Pl. 5. Sultan Bayezid’s Mosque in Didymoteichon, The second dedicatory inscription.

**Inscription No. 4:** (plate 6)

**Description:** It is above the entrance of the main tower of the Eptapirgion<sup>32</sup> byzantine fort of Thessaloniki, dates back to 834 H (1431 AD). It memorializes the second ottoman conquest of Thessaloniki in 833 H (1430 AD) by Sultan Murad II. It is a rectangular marble plaque (100 high x 220 wide cm.) containing five lines, delineated and separated by lines. The script is thuluth in relief. There is an intermediate rectangular within the upper two lines and has the toghra of Sultan Murad II. The script of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> lines starts leaving a space from the right.

<sup>31)</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 209, R. 43.

<sup>32)</sup> E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 285, R. 180.

Ayverdi has been published this inscription in Arabic without translation.<sup>33</sup> The reading was not accurate, and dated the inscription in 833 H. (1430 AD) while the correct date is 834 H. (1431). The date 833 H. (1430 AD) belongs to the conquest of Thessaloniki and not to the inscription. I will refer to the reading's differences in **Bold** as follows:

هذه القلعة	طغراء السلطان	فتوح وأخذ عنوة
سلطان سلاطين العرب	مراد الثاني	بعون الله ونصره وقهره

والعجم ومعز الله لنا من الاعداء سلطان مراد بن سلطان محمد لازالت طراز النصر لوانه والهزيمة من لوازم أعدائه  
من يد الافرنج والنصاري وقتل بعضهم وأسروا بعضهم وأولادهم وأموالهم ومضى بعد ما انتصر امر الله  
وبني وعمر هذه القلعة بيد ملك الأمراء والأكابر جاوش بك في شهر رمضان المبارك لسنة اربع وتلاثين وثمانماية

Conquered and took by force	toghra of	this citadel
with the help, victory and triumph of Allah	Sultan Murad II	Sultan of Sultans of the Arabs

and the non-Arabs, and Allah's savior for us from the enemies, Sultan Murad b. Sultan Mohamed, who has still had the victory flag, and the defeat belongs his enemies

From the hands of the Europeans<sup>34</sup> and the Christians<sup>35</sup>, killed some of them, and captured other some as well as their children and their money, and continued after Allah's will had succeed

Then built and construct this citadel by king of princes and high-rank-people Jawish Bey on the blessed month of Ramadan of the year 834 (in words)



Pl. 6 The Eptapirgion fort of Thessaloniki, The dedicatory inscription.

<sup>33</sup>) about the Eptapyrgion fort "Yedi Kule", see: Β. Κονιόρδος – Φ. Ωραιόπουλος, « Επταπυργίου. Θεσσαλονίκη, Ελλάς », in *Κοσμική Μεσαιωνική Αρχιτεκτονική στα Βαλκάνια, 1300-1500, και η διατήρησή της*, (επιμ.) Χατζητρύφωνος, Ε. και Ξυρξιάς, Σλ., Θεσσαλονίκη, 1997, (3η εκδ. 1999), p. 192-195.

<sup>34</sup>) Venetians

<sup>35</sup>) Greeks

**Inscription No. 5:** (plate 7)

**Description:** It is above the main entrance of Sultan Murad II bath in Thessaloniki, dates back to Jumada Al-aoula 848 H. (August-Sep./1444 AD)<sup>36</sup>. It commemorates the biggest Turkish bath and the only preserved one built by Sultan in Greece. It is a rectangular stone plaque with a protrusion intermediates it from the right, reminds with the tomb-stone shape but stands vertically, containing three lines. The script is thuluth in relief blackish letters on pale background.



Pl. 7 Sultan Murad II bath in Thessaloniki, the dedicatory inscription.

**Inscription No. 6:** (plate 8)

**Description:** It is located inside the mosque, memorializes the original mosque of Hafsa the daughter of Hamza Bey, and dates back to 872 H (1467/1468)<sup>37</sup>. It is a rectangular stone plaque (50 high x 69 wide cm.) containing three lines, each line is 14 cm. high. The script is thuluth in relief, delineated and separated by lines.



Pl. 8 Hamza Bey Mosque in Thessaloniki, the dedicatory inscription Hafsa.

**Inscription No. 7:** (plate 9)

**Description:** It is above the main entrance of Ishak Paşa Mosque of Thessaloniki, dates back to 889 H (1484 AD). It is a rectangular stone plaque (65 high x 125 wide cm.) containing four lines, delineated and separated by lines, each line is in two verses separated by a decorative pattern. The script is thuluth in relief. Ayverdi has been published this inscription in Arabic<sup>38</sup> without translation. It reads as follows:

<sup>36</sup>) For the reading and the translation of this inscription see; M. Kiel, « Notes on the History of Some Turkish Monuments in Thessaloniki and their Founders », *BSt* 11 (1970), 122-156, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup>) For the reading and the translation of this inscription see; M. Kiel, « Notes on the History ... », p. 133.

<sup>38</sup>) E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 272, 368, R. 140.

دار خير قد بني دستور خاقان المعين  
 تم في شهر المحرم يسر الله اجرها  
 حبذا دار المعلي نصره للناظرين  
 انظروا يا معشر الأبرار الي تاريخها  
 اعني اسحق بن ابراهيم للحق المبين  
 في رياض الخلد طبتم فادخلوها خالدين  
 روضة عين مصفي لذة للشاربين  
 اعملوا بالزهد فيها نعم أجر العاملين

The house of charity has been built by the decree of the Glorified Sovereign (Khaqan) and the patron, I mean Ishak Bin Ebrahim for The Truth and The Most Clear (two of the attributes of Allah)

It was accomplished in Al-Muharram (month), May Allah accept it and reward (the founder), in the eternal Paradise, as you have done well, so enter here "Paradise" to abide therein eternally.

How perfect the house of the poor is; and a beauty for the beholders, a clear and purified river, so delicious for those who drink.

Look! Pious People to its history (chronogram), Work with asceticism for this paradise, how perfect the reward of the (pious good) workers is!



Pl. 9 Ishak Paşa Mosque of Thessaloniki, the dedicatory inscription.

**Inscription No. 8:** (plate 10)

**Description:** It is above the main entrance of Mohamed Bey Mosque of Serres, dates back to 898 H (1492-93 AD<sup>39</sup>). It is a rectangular marble plaque, containing three lines; each line is in two verses, each verse lies within a delineated and decorative frame. The script is thuluth in relief. The inscriptive plaque is enclosed by rectangular green fine marble frame.



Pl. 10 Mohamed Bey Mosque of Serres, the dedicatory inscription.

<sup>39</sup>) It has been published many times, only one with the transliteration, see; M. Kiel, « Observations on the History of Northern Greece ... », 426-456, p. 435, note 44, Plate IX, for its Arabic text see; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 294.



**Inscription No. 9:** (plate 11)

**Description:** It is located inside the portico of Mustafa Bey Mosque of Serres, dates back to 925 H (1519 AD<sup>40</sup>). It is a rectangular white marble plaque, containing three lines; each line is in two verses, each verse lies within a delineated and decorative frame. The script is thuluth in relief.



Pl. 11 Mustafa Bey Mosque of Serres, the dedicatory inscription.

**Inscription No. 10:** (plate 12)

**Description:** It is located above the main entrance of the prayer hall of Hamza Bey Mosque of Thessaloniki, dates back to 1028 H (1619 AD<sup>41</sup>). It is a rectangular marble plaque, containing two lines; each line is in two verses, each verse lies within a delineated and decorative frame. The four verses are interlocked forming a lozenge in the middle, containing the date of the inscription in numerals. The script is thuluth in relief with gilded letters on dark background.



Pl. 12 Hamza Bey Mosque in Thessaloniki, the dedicatory inscription of the renovation.

<sup>40</sup>) It has been published many times, for its Arabic text see; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 296; for its transliteration and translation, see; M. Kiel, « Observations on the History of Northern Greece ... », p. 438, Plate XIII.

<sup>41</sup>) It has been published many times, for its Arabic reading see; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 276; for its transliteration and translation, see; M. Kiel, « Notes on the History ... », p. 134.

The content of these preserved Arabic inscriptions, as mentioned above, represents epigraphically rich material of historical events, titles, positions, different systems of dating, writing style and decorations. I will examine the most important among them.

The Arabic inscriptions of Greece comprise unique characteristics, which we can extract in the following (8) points:

1. Two inscriptions memorialize two monuments –unparallel examples of early Ottoman architecture– that belong to the Ottoman Sultans; Sultan Bayezid I<sup>42</sup> (1389-1402 AD) Mosque in Didymoteichon (Inscription No. 2) and Sultan Murad II (1421-1444, 1446-1451 AD) Bath in Thessaloniki (Inscription No. 5).
2. Commemorating the second conquest of Thessaloniki in 1430 AD<sup>43</sup>, describing its type namely by force and the results caused by this conquest by the Sultan Murad II in the Arabic inscription of the Eptapirgion Byzantine fort of Thessaloniki (Inscription No. 4).
3. Memorializing the grand commanders of the early Ottoman state like Gazi Evrenos Bey (Inscription No. 1) and Kara Halil Çandralı.
4. Containing the unique case in Greece –and one of the rare examples in all Islamic architecture– that the inscription including the name of the architect accompanied with exceptional adjectives that praise him in the inscription of the Great Mosque in Didymoteichon (Inscription No. 3). He is Hacı 'Awad Paşa, the most famous architect of his epoch.
5. The same inscription (No. 3) gives, as a rare case also, the name of the person responsible for the building: Sayed 'Ali Hassan the Kadi (the judge) of Didymoteichon and 'Toghan, son of Abdallah.
6. Commemorating one of the few monuments erected by women<sup>44</sup>, in the inscription of Hamza Bey Mosque; it was built –according to its Arabic inscription (Inscription No. 6)– by order of Hafsa, the daughter of Hamza Bey.
7. Including the earliest toghra –as far as I know– engraved in marble. It is the toghra of the Sultan Murad II in the inscription of the Eptapirgion of Thessaloniki (Inscription No. 4).

**Titles:** It is difficult here to examine all the titles in details. So I will discuss in general the exceptional titles that mentioned in the Arabic inscriptions of Greece, as follows:

- The Arabic inscriptions of Greece kept three forms of the title “Ghazi<sup>45</sup>”, the most lovable title to the Ottoman sultans and commanders, as follows; the first

<sup>42</sup>) The mosque was completed under the Sultan *Çelebi Mohamed*, known as *Mohamed I* (1402-1421).

<sup>43</sup>) There is another fine inscription memorizes the same event is relived on a column in a circular shape inside the Agia Paraskevi Church, known also as the "Acheiropoietos" (e.g. not made by human hand) and Virgin, was converted into a Friday-mosque after this conquest. (p. 217) it reads as follows: « فتح 832 سلطان مراد خان شهر سلانیک », E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri*, p. 272 ; L. Sambanopoulou, « Thessaloniki in the ottoman period (15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> c.) », in *Ottoman Architecture in Greece*, E. Brouskari (ed.), Athens, 2008, p. 217.

<sup>44</sup>) As far as I know, it is the only preserved one in Greece belongs to a woman as the founder.

is “king of the ghazis and the warriors<sup>46</sup>” (Inscription No. 1, line 2), the second is “Sultan of the ghazis and warriors” (Inscription No. 5, line 1) the third is “Sultan of the ghazis” (Inscription No. 8, line 2, verse 1). These titles reflect the extreme significance of this title for the first Ottoman sultans, and also the great commanders, reflecting the general spirit, policy and vision of that era.

- It is remarkable that the title “Sultan of the ghazis and warriors” of the Sultan Murad II, is found in the inscription of his bath (Inscription No. 5), while it disappeared from the inscription that belongs to the same sultan of the fortress of Thessaloniki, the most acceptable place to this title which memorializes the conquest of city.
- The title “king of the ghazis” (Inscription No. 1, line 2) is a unique one –I have not seen it elsewhere– dedicated to Gazi Evrenos Bey.
- The title “of magnificent rank جلي القدر” is also an uncommon one (Inscription No. 9, line 1).

**Different types of dating:** The preserved Arabic inscriptions of Greece have three types of dating; in words, (hisab aldjumual)<sup>47</sup> and in numbers, sometimes one inscription includes two types together. The date at all times is stated in Hijra<sup>48</sup> calendar (also known as lunar “qamari” or Islamic calendar).

The first type is the oldest one, in which the date is written in words as in the inscriptions from 1 up to 6. In some cases the date is followed by words refer that it is in Hijri calendar (inscriptions No. 1 and 5).

In the second type, hisab aldjumual, the date is not written clearly, but it is an extract, generally, from the last rhyme or phrase (chronogram) of the inscription, through the numerical equivalents of its letters, added together to provide the date. This type is used in the inscriptions Nos. 7, 8, 9 and 10.

For instance, the date of the inscription (No. 10) could be extracted as follows: the last line reads as follows;

<sup>45</sup>) An Arabic active means those who took part in a raid “razzia” against the infidels. It became the preferred title of certain Muslim princes, such as the Emirs of Anatolia and more particularly the first Ottoman sultans and their grand commanders. The poet Ahmedi Tadj Al-Din Ibrahim (the greatest Ottoman poet of the 8<sup>th</sup> H./14<sup>th</sup> c. AD) gives a detailed definition of the ghazi as follows: "A ghazi is the instrument of the religion of God, a servant of God who cleans the earth from the defilement of polytheism; a ghazi is the sword of God, he is the protector and the refuge of the Believers; if he becomes a martyr while following the paths of God, do not think him dead, he lives with God as one of the blessed, he has Eternal Life", see: I. MELIKOFF, « GHAĀZĪ », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. II, p. 1043-1045.

<sup>46</sup>) Warriors meaning here means the fighters of the jihad, it almost means the Ghazi.

<sup>47</sup>) Method of recording dates by chronogram. For more see, G. S. COLIN, « HISAB AL-DJUMMAL », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III, p. 468.

<sup>48</sup>) Muslim dates are normally given according to the era of the *hidira* which may be distinguished by the initials either H for Hijra or A.H. for the Latin anno Hegirae. This era does not begin on the date of Prophet Muhammad's arrival at Medina, but on the first day of the lunar year in which that event took place, which is reckoned to coincide with 16 July 622. see, F.C. DE BLOIS, « TA'RIKH », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. X, PJ. Bearman, TH. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. V. Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (eds.), p. 258; W. M. WATT, « HIDJRA », *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III, 367

قال تاريخا له عبدالحميد ادخلوا بالبر يا أهل السجود

Which means:

Abdulhamid has said its date (chronogram) **Enter in piety ye people of prayer**, the shadowy last rhyme gives us the date which equals the sum of the numerical values of its letters, as shown in the following table from right to left:

	السجود					اهل		يا	بالبر					ادخلوا					Word				
<b>Total</b>	د	و	ج	س	ل	ا	ل	هـ	ا	ا	ي	ر	ب	ل	ا	ب	ا	و	ل	خ	د	ا	<b>Letter</b>
	d	wāw	jīm	sīn	l	ā'	l	hā'	ā'	ā'	y/ī	r	b	l	ā'	b	ā'	wāw	l	ḥā'	d	ā'	sound
<b>1028</b>	4	6	3	60	30	1	30	5	1	1	10	200	2	30	1	2	1	6	30	600	4	1	<b>Value</b>
	104					36		11	235					642									

This operation gives us the same date written in the inscription in numbers (plate 12). This inscription has been published twice<sup>49</sup>, but without any indication to its date through hisab aldjumual method.

The third type of dating is found in one inscription (No.10), which has also hisab aldjumual method, as mentioned above.

### Conclusion

Arabic was the dominant language in the Ottoman official state's inscriptions during the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. It was replaced gradually during the 16th century by Turkish, which became the prevailing language in the Ottoman official state within the imperial framework it created. The preserved Ottoman Arabic inscriptions in Greece provide us with epigraphically abundant material not only in Greece but also in all the Balkans such as unique characteristics, exceptional titles, including three types or systems of dating. Finally, this all-inclusive view of the Arabic inscription of Greece is unprecedented. The paper also publishes new translations of some inscriptions and corrects the Arabic reading for some others.

<sup>49</sup> M. Kiel, « Notes on the History ... », p. 134; E. H. Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanli Mimari Eserleri*, p. 276.



## تفسير جديد للنقوش التأسيسية المكتوبة باللغة العربية بالعمائر العثمانية باليونان

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### ملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة عشرة نقوش من بين نحو خمسة عشر نقشاً تأسيسياً باللغة العربية لا زالت محفوظة بالعمائر العثمانية الباقية باليونان. وتؤرخ النقوش المدروسة لعمائر متباينة الوظيفة تشمل جوامع، وتحصينات دفاعية، ومجموعات معمارية، ومنشآت رعاية اجتماعية، بالإضافة إلى شاهد قبر يؤرخ لضريح. تعكس هذه النقوش كذلك فئات مختلفة للمنشئين تبدأ من السلاطين أنفسهم، والأمراء وكبار رجال الدولة، كما يسجل أحد هذه النقوش نسبة البناء إلى سيدة.

وتركز الدراسة هنا على تحليل دلالة لغة هذه النقوش وكتابتها باللغة العربية، وإلقاء الضوء على أهم خصائص هذه النقوش وما تتفرد به دون غيرها، ويتجاوز هدف البحث دراسة تفصيلية لشكل ومضمون هذه النقوش؛ والتي يحتاج كل منها لبحث مستقل على حدى، وهو الأمر الذى لا يتيسر فى هذه الأبحاث.

تنتهي الورقة البحثية إلى أن اللغة العربية كانت لغة رئيسة رسمية فى الدولة العثمانية فى كتابة النقوش التأسيسية للعمائر -وأغلب الظن أيضاً للتوثيق والمراسلات والمعاملات الرسمية- خاصة خلال القرنين الثامن والتاسع الهجريين/ الثالث عشر والرابع عشر الميلاديين. وفى فترة ما خلال القرن العاشر الهجري/ السادس عشر الميلادي أخذت اللغة التركية بالخط العثماني تحل تدريجياً محل اللغة العربية، حتى صارت اللغة السائدة فى النقوش التأسيسية للعمائر المشيدة من قبل العثمانيين فى كافة أرجاء الإمبراطورية العثمانية.

البحث فى هذا السياق الشمولي لدراسة النقوش العربية للعمائر العثمانية باليونان، ودلالة لغة النقش، وأهم ما تتفرد به مضامين هذه النقوش، يمثل دراسة غير مسبوقة، كما تنشر الورقة البحثية ترجمة جديدة لبعض النقوش فضلاً عن تصحيح لبعض القراءات وترجمتها.