

Action sheet A

How is a prayer niche designed?

DOES ANYTHING STRIKE YOU? WHAT INTERESTS YOU?

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THE TWO NICHEs AND WHERE DO THEY RESEMBLE EACH OTHER?

Take a careful look at both prayer niches and endeavour to draw them in their outlines.

There could potentially be something that irritates or surprises you. Refer to it by silently writing down a question about the object for your eyes only.

Then search for answers together in the group.



Object **Prayer niche of Konya**
 Historic period second half of the 7th century A.H.
 (Anno Hegirae (Islamic calendar) /
 13th century A.D. (Christian calendar)
 Location Konya, Turkey
 Material Faïence mosaic
 Dimensions Height 3.95 m, Width 2.8 m

Object **Prayer niche of Kashan**
 Historic period 623 A.H./1226 A.D.
 Location Kashan, Iran
 Material Quartz ceramic with underglaze
 and lustre painting
 Dimensions Height 2.8 m

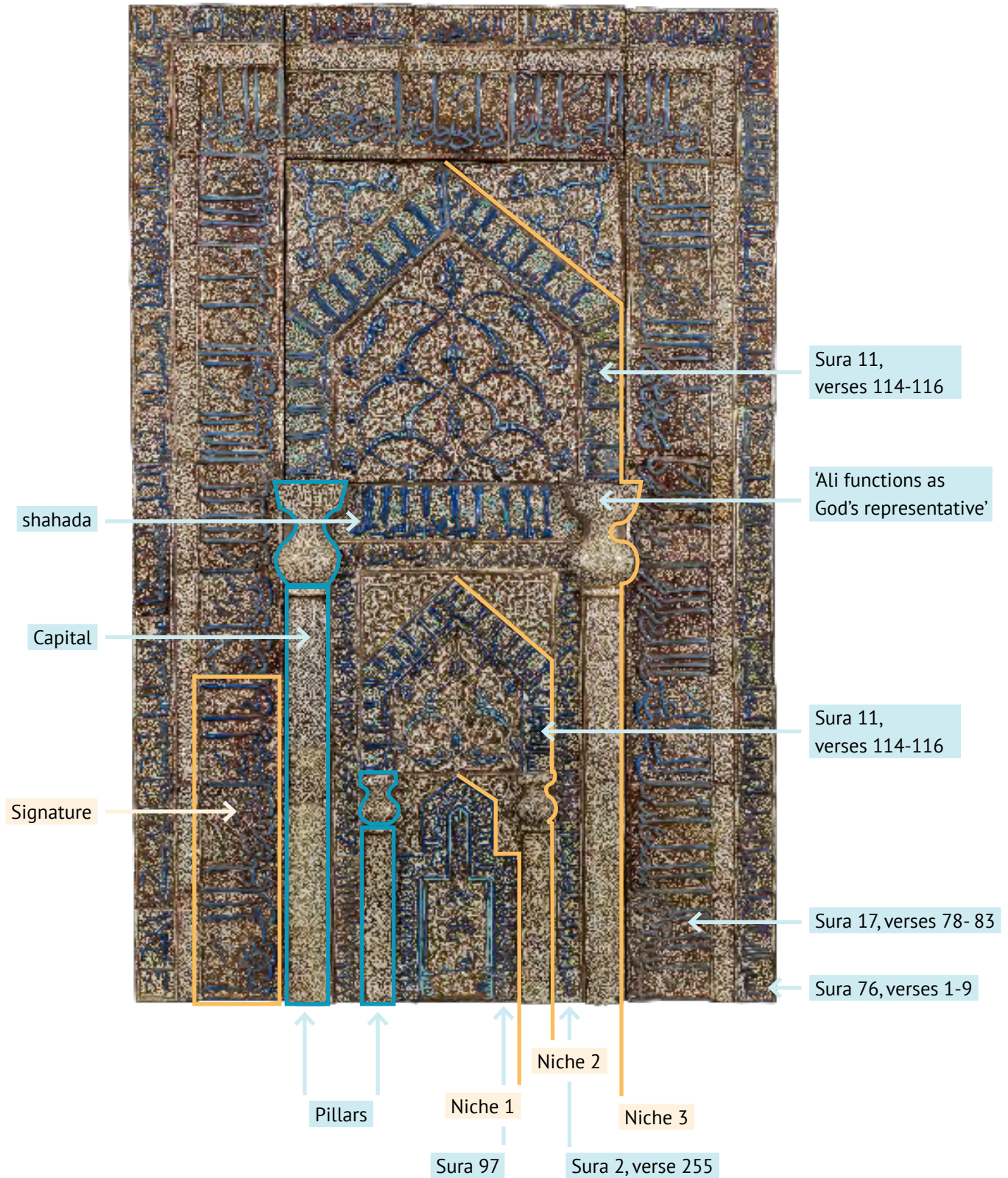
Information sheet

Prayer niche of Konya



Information sheet

Prayer niche of Kashan



Information sheet

Prayer niches

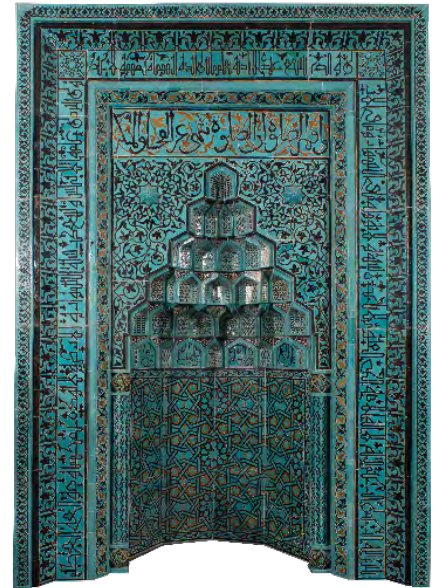
EMERGENCE OF PRAYER NICHES

Prayer niches indicate the Qibla wall of the mosque, i.e. the direction of prayer. They are often designed very beautifully.

During the days of the Prophet, the direction of prayer was only marked by a stone. This was Jerusalem until 2 A.H. / 624 A.D. Since then, the Qibla direction was changed to direct towards Mecca.

Prayer niches emerged towards the end of the first century A.H./beginning of the 8th century A.D.

The form of the prayer niche dates back to a Christian Coptic tradition, which in turn stems from the Romans.



THE TWO PRAYER NICHES FROM THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART

are both high rectangular niches. The brown prayer niche of in Kashan with blue and white detail is carved in relief - the individual areas, the scripture, the ornaments and above all the four pillars with their capitals protrude, otherwise it is flat.

In contrast, the prayer niche of Konya is actually a turquoise coloured niche with two pillars with dice capitals on the sides. The muqarnas, a stalactite vault, closes the niche upwards at the top. A frieze with a ribbon is tied around the entire prayer niche.

Different fonts are used for the two prayer niches: While there are two types of rectilinear scripture and two circular scriptures (the great thuluth and naskhi) in the niche of Kashan, a rectilinear style and thuluth can be viewed at the niche of Konya. (Refer to Information sheet Calligraphy)

Information sheet

Ornamentation and aesthetics



ORNAMENTATION

The prayer niche of Kashan is designed in two shades of blue, brown and white. All forms and the floral ornaments with leaf and flower shapes are symmetrical, hence are mirrored along the central axis. Even the inscriptions appear symmetrical: There are more 'Hasten' (the vertical lines) than would be linguistically required in particular in the middle of the linear fonts. At first glance, it looks as if they are mirroring each other. The prayer niche of Konya is also symmetrical. It is primarily designed in turquoise and black, with details in yellowish ochre. In contrast to the Kashan niche, geometric ornaments are more likely to be on view here, and even floral ornamentation is more geometrically shaped. No plant motifs appear at all in particular in the muqarnas, the tiered small niches above the primary niche.

AESTHETICS

Both niches feature ornaments and calligraphy. They refer to faith through their design and highlight the direction of prayer as something special. This can be seen in particular in the two objects of the museum: The niche of Kashan is one of the world's best examples. It combines brilliant lustre and harmonious colours in appealing proportions. Even the Konya niche boasts an exceptional feature with its extraordinary colour. The artistically executed ornamentation of both niches can be regarded as an indication of the divine order. As concerns ornaments, it is important that they can in principle be freely changed, but always remain subject to geometry and thus follow an order of sequence. It also applies that the beauty of the design makes the beauty of creation tangible (Sura 2, verse 164). The ability to write is described in the Koran as being taught by God (Sura 96, verses 3-5). Thus, the beautiful design of scripture in religious culture also symbolises reverence for God. Various verses, such as the Al-Baqara 255: Throne Verse (Sura 2, verse 255), are even understood as a demonstration of the omnipresence of God, as it expresses that his throne extends beyond heaven and earth. Only the Shiite belief 'Ali functions as God's representative' on the right-hand capital of the Kashan niche conveys a confessional attribution. Otherwise, none of the components can be reduced to a particular denomination. Finally, it should be noted that the verses on the niches are hardly legible for the mosque visitors as they are scripted in very embellished fonts. The entire 'work of art' only becomes complete through the ritual execution of prayer. The recitation of the texts is highlighted in Sura 17, verse 78. It is expressed in the verse that it should be read out loud (recited).

Action sheet B

Plant ornament in the Prayer niche of Kashan

Here, there is a detail with pillar and capital of the Kashan prayer niche.
Simplification in black and white makes the structures easier to recognise.

PLACE TRACING PAPER ON THE IMAGE AND TRY TO TRACE A
PLANT ORNAMENT - WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

HOW DO YOU INTERPRET THE ORNAMENTS?



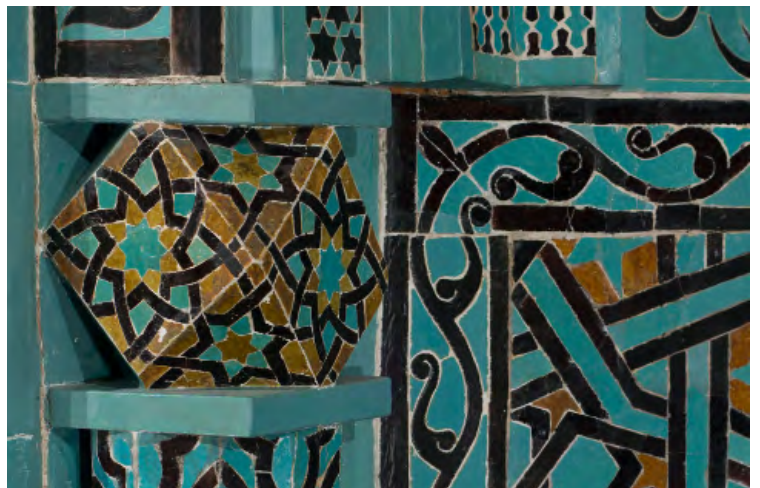
Action sheet C Part 1

Star ornament in the Prayer niche of Konya

Here, there is a detail with pillar and capital of the Kashan prayer niche.
Simplification in black and white makes the structures easier to recognise.



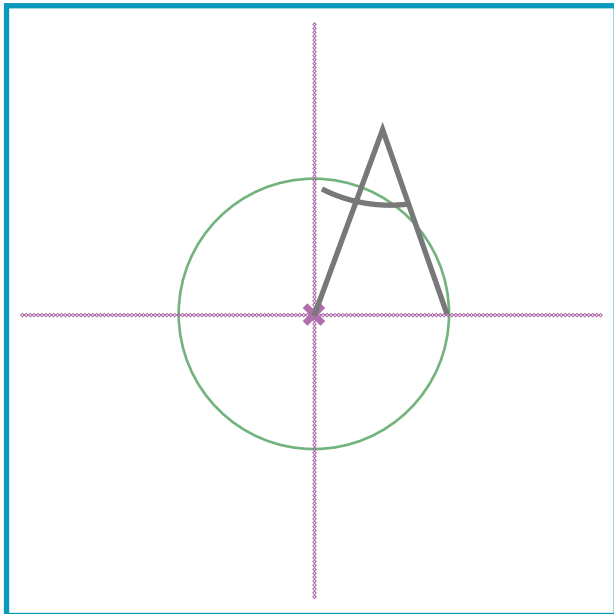
DRAW A STAR ORNAMENT JUST AS IT APPEARS IN THE DICE CAPITAL!



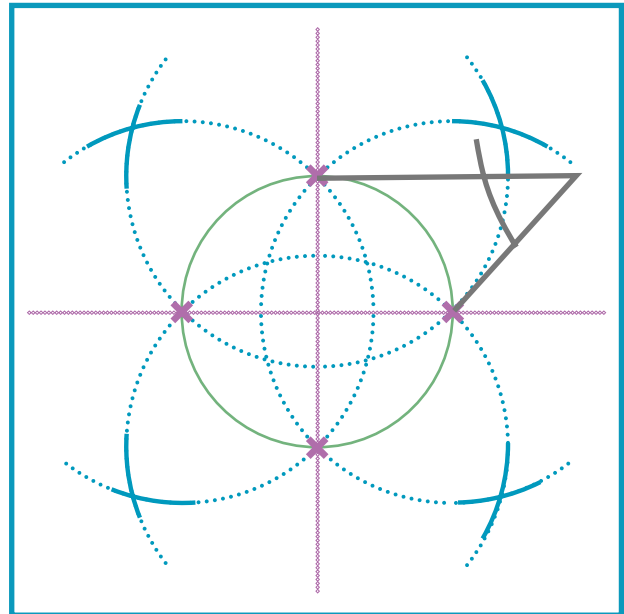
Action sheet C Part 2

CREATING THE STAR ORNAMENT

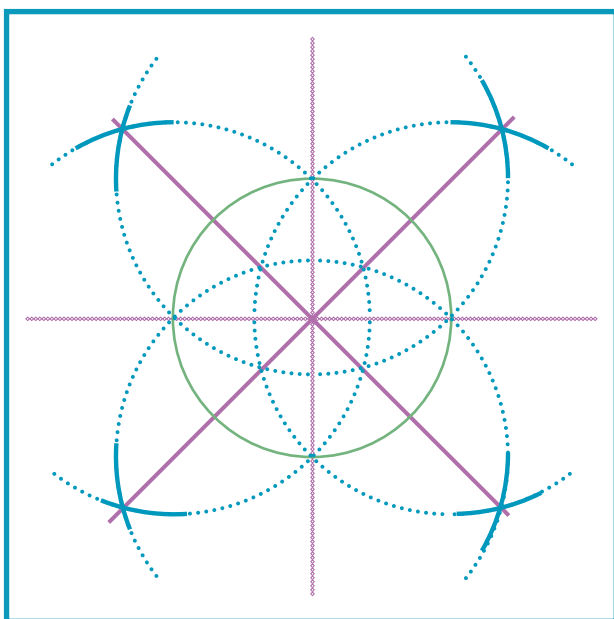
This is a short tutorial which demonstrates how to use a compass and a ruler to move from one circle to several overlapping circles and finally to a star ornament.



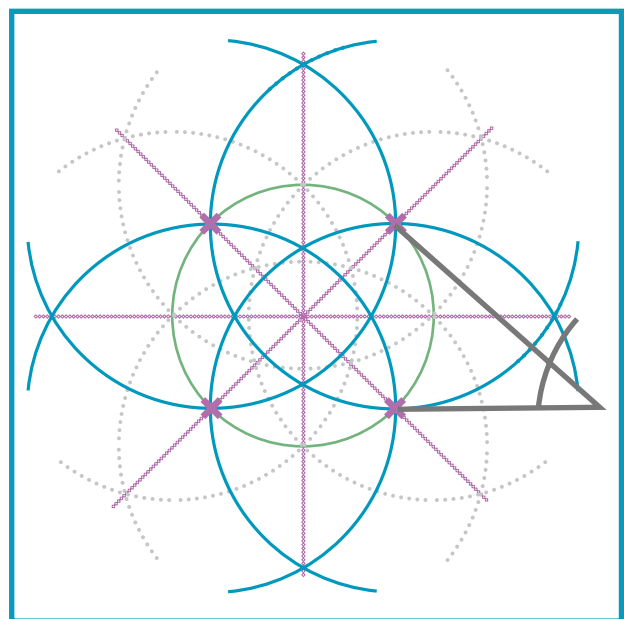
1. First draw a cross with right angles. Then draw an arbitrarily large circle around the centre point.



2. Draw another circle that each intersects the two adjacent intersection points at the four intersection points of the cross and the first circle. This results in the first star and four new intersections for a second cross.

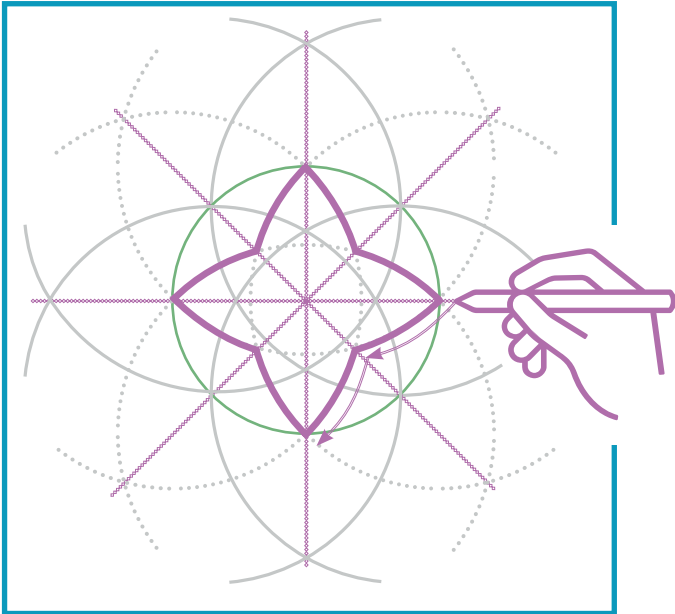


3. Use the ruler to draw the diagonal cross. The centre points are formed for four wide circles at the intersections of the first circle and the second cross.

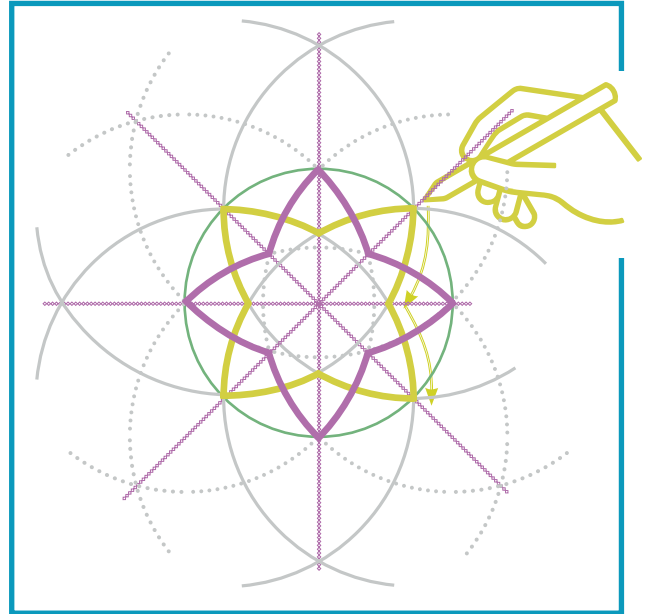


4. Drag the last four circles around the centre points.

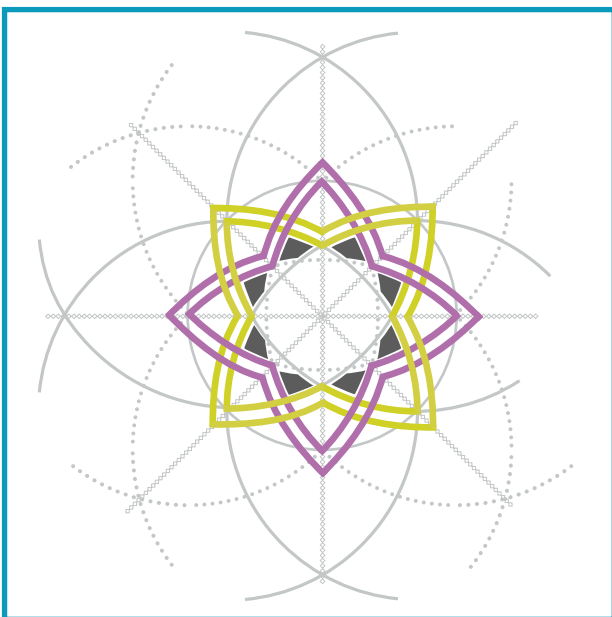
Action sheet C Part 3



5. Trace the first of the two stars.



6. Repeat the same with the second star. The star ornament is now complete!



7. You can now apply further details to the star ornament.

Action sheet C Part 4



DRAW YOUR OWN STAR ORNAMENT HERE:

Action sheet D

Write your name using Arabic letters

1. The Arabic characters are juxtaposed here with the Latin alphabet.

TRY TO WRITE YOUR NAME USING ARABIC CHARACTERS.
NOTE THAT ARABIC IS WRITTEN FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.



2. The Arabic script has several variants, some appear in the prayer niches and are also illustrated on the Information sheet Calligraphy.

WHICH ONES DO YOU LIKE?
TRY TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF WITH IT AND TO DISTORT YOUR NAME LETTERING!

الحروف الأبجدية

THE ALPHABET

Name of the letter	Transliteration	Isolated position	End position	Centre position	Initial position
Alif	ā	ا	ا	ا	ا
Bā'	b	ب	بـ	ب	ب
Tā'	t	ت	تـ	ت	ت
Ṭā'	ṭ	ٹ	ٹـ	ٹ	ٹ
Ġīm	ğ	ج	جـ	ج	ج
Hā'	h	ح	حـ	ح	ح
Ḥā'	ḥ	خ	خـ	خ	خ
Dāl	d	د	دـ	د	د
Ḍāl	ḍ	ذ	ذـ	ذ	ذ
Rā'	r	ر	رـ	ر	ر
Zāy	z	ز	زـ	ز	ز
Sīn	s	س	سـ	س	س
Ṣīn	ṣ	س	سـ	س	س
Ṣād	ṣ	ص	صـ	ص	ص
Ḍād	ḍ	ض	ضـ	ض	ض
Tā'	t	ط	طـ	ط	ط
Zā'	z	ظ	ظـ	ظ	ظ
'Ain	ʿ	ع	عـ	ع	ع
Ġain	ğ	غ	غـ	غ	غ
Fā'	f	ف	فـ	ف	ف
Qāf	q	ق	قـ	ق	ق
Kāf	k	ك	كـ	ك	ك
Lām	l	ل	لـ	ل	ل
Mīm	m	م	مـ	م	م
Nūn	n	ن	نـ	ن	ن
Hā'	h	ه	هـ	ه	ه
Wāw	w, ū	و	وـ	و	و
Yā'	y, ī	ي	يـ	ي	ي

Information sheet

Calligraphy

KONYA



KUFIC



THULUTH

KASHAN



KUFIC



NASKHI



THULUTH

SCRIPTURE AT THE NICHE

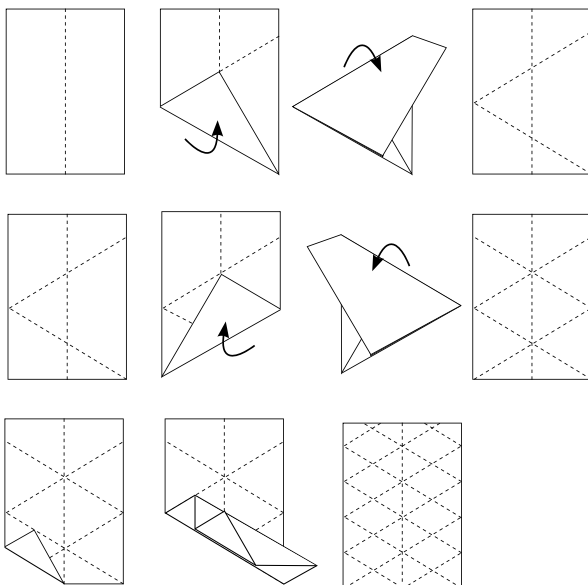
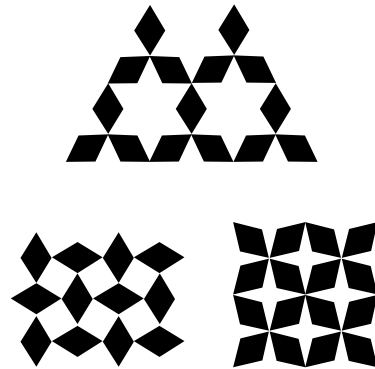
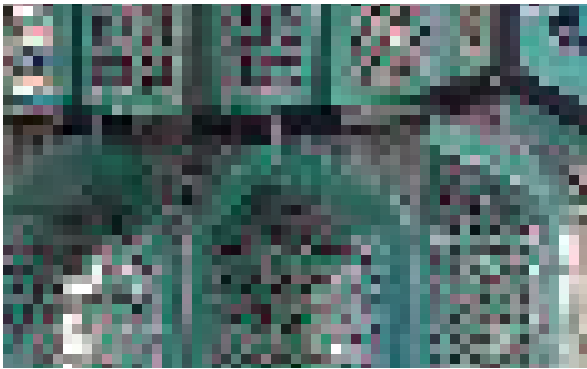
Both niches are calligraphically ornamented and display suras from the Koran. A common verse also exists: The Throne Verse: Al-Baqara 255 (Sura 2, verse 255). In the Kashan Niche, it is placed in the rounded naskhi font between the pillars and runs under the shahada between the capitals of the large pillars. At the prayer niche in Konya, the Al-Baqara 255: Throne Verse is scripted around the actual niche and was written with an angular, stylized kufic with flora embellishments. Although the other verses differ from the Koran, there are two common features: A verse related to Prayer was added to both niches and in both cases it was written in thuluth, a script variety of Islamic calligraphy, which is more legible than the kufic. Four verses of the Koran, which are directly or indirectly related to prayer were selected for the Kashan Niche.

Action sheet E

Diamond shaped ornament in the Prayer niche of Konya

1. Here, there is a detail of the muqarnas of the Konya prayer niche.

The geometric ornament is made of glazed tiles in diamond form, which are fitted together differently every time.



ORNAMENT MADE OF DIAMOND FORMS

This tutorial enables you to fold 12 diamond shapes from one DIN A4 sheet and cut them out.

Use the diamond shapes to create your own ornament!

1. FOLD THE SHEET INTO AN EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE
2. REPEAT THE HORIZONTALLY MIRRORED FOLDING
3. EXPAND A SMALL WEB ON ENTIRE PAGE BY FOLDING PARALLEL
4. CUT OUT DIAMOND SHAPES, PLACE THEM TO FORM ORNAMENTS

