

Analysis of the Ottoman Kiswa and the Saudi Kiswa Designs (A Comparative Study)

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an analytical study of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) design. This is a wonderful, creative fabric in the Sacred House of God, located in Mecca Al-Mukarramah, that represents various artistic aspects with beautiful decorations. The Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) is a cloth curtain embroidered with gold, silver, green, and red threads. It covers the entire Kaaba; it is renewed every year as an Islamic tradition that was established in ancient times. The design changes according to social, cultural, and religious contexts as it reflects the period in which it is designed. This study aims to analyse three patterns of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) during the Ottoman Turkish period and one in the Saudi period in terms of design. The Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) is an ever-changing archaeological woven fabric and reflects a wide range of influences and issues related to artistic care, the Hajj season, and political authority.

Keywords

Art analysis, Kaaba, Sitara, Shahada, Thuluth

Introduction

The Kiswa is the black silk covering of the Holy Kaaba at Mecca al-Mukarrama (Saudi Arabia). Kiswa (كسوة) is an Arabic word derived from the word Kasa (كساء) which means 'to be dressed' (Shawki, 2005: 788) and refers to the covering of the Kaaba, the shrine at Mecca. The Kaaba, set in the middle of the Haram Mosque, is the most important monument of Islam. It is the spiritual centre of the Islamic world and is the direction of prayer (*qibla*) for all Muslims across the world. (Quran, Al-Imran, verse 97) The production of the Kiswa is the most important of all Islamic textile manufacturing, and it has held this role since the beginning of Islam in the 1st century AH/7th century AD (al-Azraqi, 1983: 249).

This textile, which covers the door of the Kaaba, is effectively a curtain embroidered with gold, silver, red, and green thread. It is also known as *Sitara* (ستارة) or *Burqa* (برقع) in Arabic. Inside the Kaaba are other textiles: a curtain used for the interior of the Kaaba door (Mojan, 2010), which is known as the *Bab al-Tawba* (باب التوبة), and red

and green textiles with chevron designs. The ceiling inside the Kaaba is covered with special textiles in colours that are different from that of the outer Kiswa (Mojan, 2010). The Kiswa is used to cover Abraham's station, the *Magam* (Nasser, 2013:178), which is a large stone block located close to the Kaaba but not part of the circumambulation of the *Mataf*. This is the stone that the Prophet Abraham used to stand on as he built the Kaaba, and it is considered a sacred place (Rutter, 1928: 260). The stone is 50 cm in width and height, and in the middle of the stone, the stamp of Abraham's feet can be observed (Burckhardt, 1829: 146). A room was built in it, and it used to be covered with a special Kiswa, but it was demolished to widen the circumambulation and substituted by a cabin of brass that is covered with a layer of gold that still exists today (Mirza & Shawoosh, 2011: 216). As can be seen, many textiles were used on the holy shrines and places in Mecca, and all of them have been understood under the general term 'Kiswa' (Makkah Museum, visited in 2013).

The custom of covering the Holy Kaaba with the Kiswa is ancient and has been recorded

throughout history by different travellers that have seen the Kiswa and described it. The Muslim historian of Mecca in the 3rd century AH/9th century AD, al-Azraqî, records that King Tub'a As'as Kamil, who ruled Yemen (AD 390–420), was the first person to offer textiles to the Kaaba in AD 400 (al-Azraqî, 1983: 249). He is said to have hung it with Ma'afir cloth (Porter, 2012: 257). Ma'afir refers to the tribe of people who wove a special cloth for the Kaaba, and they made the prophet's cloth in Ta'izz, the capital city of Yemen at that time.

The people of Quraysh followed this custom and put a Kiswa on the Kaaba before the advent of Islam (al-Azraqî, 1983: 252). The Prophet Muhammad himself witnessed the ceremony for covering the Kaaba as a six-year-old child, and during the time of his farewell pilgrimage, it is said that 'the Yemeni cloths were at this time used for the covering the Kaaba' (Shoshan, 1993:71). During the Islamic period, the Prophet Muhammad permitted this practice to continue with the advent of Islamic rule in Mecca. Al-Azraqî records that the Prophet Muhammad and the first Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar b. al-Khattab, added new Kiswas to the Kaaba (al-Azraqî, 1983: 253). Egypt was already an important centre of textile production before Islam. Caliph Umer b. al-Khattab clothed the Kaaba with Qubati cloths (meaning Coptic/Egyptian) from the treasury. He attributed it to Egypt [Misr], where they were woven for him; Caliph Uthman followed this practice (Baker, 1995: 36).

In early Islamic times, the Kiswa was not removed yearly; rather, a new one was added on top of the previous one with each new pilgrimage. Eventually, the accumulated weight of these heavy textiles threatened the stability of the Kaaba's structure, and the old ones were removed by the Banu Shayba, the tribe in charge of the sanctuary in the pre-Islamic period (al-Fasi, 2007: 203). Sources from the early Islamic period, from the 7th century under the Umayyads (AD 661–750/AH 40–132) and the early Abbasids (AD 750–1517/AH 132–922), report that two or even three Kiswas were sent at different times of the

year and in different colours. Under the Ottoman Sultans from AD 1299–1922/AH 1517–1342 onwards, their manufacturing continued to be based in Egypt. By this time, the colour of the Kiswa was consistently black with inscriptions embroidered in gold and silver brocade as it is today. The Sitara, which is the curtain over the door, continued to be coloured brightly. This general design of the Kiswa (colour, calligraphy, and zigzag) continues to the present day. After the end of the Ottoman period (AD 1299–1923/AH 1517–1342), the responsibility for making the Kiswa was taken on by the Saudi government in AD 1927, and it continues to be produced in Saudi Arabia today (Attar, 1977: 171).

The research aims to discover the relationship between the Quranic verses and motifs and their location with the canopy of the Holy Kaaba. Are the Quranic verses, lines, and decorations in the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) of the Saudi era inspired by the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) of the Ottoman Turkish era in terms of design and motifs? Why were these particular Quranic verses chosen to be included in the Kaaba Dressing? The authors performed an analytical study of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) from the Turkish Ottoman and Saudi eras. Changes may have occurred in the type of lines and their locations on the Kaaba Dressing or in the design of its subdivisions. These changes can be in the verses of the Quran and where they are located on the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) or in the lines used in the design of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa).

Comparing the Turkish Ottoman Kiswa with the contemporary Kiswa in the Saudi era helps us to understand the roots of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) design and from where its lines and decorations are derived. This research provides the opportunity to study the details of the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa), as the continuous crowding around the Kaaba generally does not allow for a scrutiny of the Quranic verses and the details of design aesthetics. It is important to learn about the aesthetics of Islamic motifs that were used in the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) for artistic teachers to educate future generations because this is considered an integral part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's historical heritage. It is helpful for

the non-Arabic connoisseur to read and understand the Quranic verses stated on the Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa). Finally, it is important for transferring the aesthetics of the Islamic Kaaba Dressing (Kiswa) design to Islamic culture in other civilizations and will be useful in its future development.



Figure 1. A model of the Kaaba and Kiswa during Ottoman period (author's photograph). The model in the Topkapı Museum shows the design of a curtain dating from the Ottoman period.

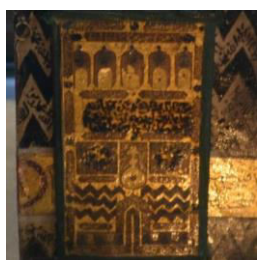


Figure 2. A closer look at the design of the curtain model dating from the Ottoman period.

The Kaaba Door Curtain During the Ottoman Period

The Kaaba door is covered with a special curtain which is heavily embroidered and thicker

than the black textile covering the Kaaba. No images of the curtain had been published prior to the Ottoman period, although at that time, the embroidery was in different colours, including red, green, gold, and silver. However, today, the Kaaba door curtain is made in gold and silver with a black background. This curtain is known as the Burqa. Its length and width are a little larger than the size of the door in order to cover it completely when opened. It is not clear when the first curtain appeared on the Kaaba door; however, Nassiri Khosrau provided a written account in AD 1050/AH 442 when he described the opening of the Kaaba door. He says:

After him (the head of the guards), two men went up, opened the curtain Sitara and the yellow silk, with each carrying an end covering the Sheikh as he opened the lock and took it off. The Sheikh entered with the two men holding the curtains. (Nassiri, 1993: 151)

Fig 1 shows a model of the Kaaba door. This model was probably produced before the curtain of the Kaaba door was weaved, but its provenance and use are unclear. The curtain design is a golden colour and is divided into four registers. It can be seen in Fig 2 that the *shahada* is written together with the names 'Muhammad' and 'Allah' in the zigzag pattern.

Analysis of the Kaaba Door Curtain from the Reign of Sultan Sulaiman Al-Qanouni

This is the oldest Kaaba curtain that has ever been found (Fig 3). It dates from the reign of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanouni (AD 1544–1550) and is made of woven natural silk embroidered with gold and silver threads. Scholars consider it to be a continuance of the Mamluk tiraz and a representation of the first Ottoman tiraz of the Kaaba door curtain. Compositionally, the curtain is divided into three registers, notably missing the lower floral register found on later curtains also discussed in this study (Fig 4) (Mojan, 2010: 192).



Figure 3. This Kaaba curtain dates from the reign of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi (AD 1544–1550) and is currently in the Topkapi Museum. It measures 5.08 x 2.43. (Mojan, 2010:193)

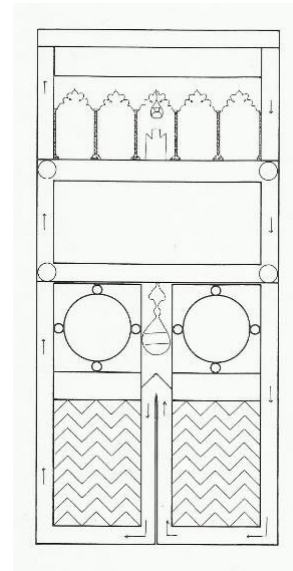
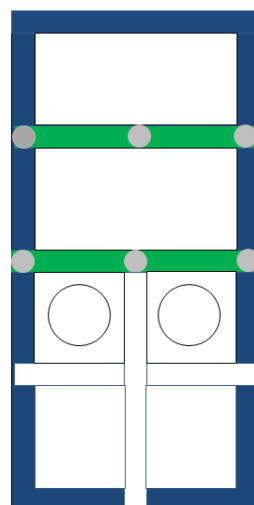


Figure 4. Designs of the Kaaba curtain and the Sitara during the reign of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi

First register

The first strip of the border is thin and contains the inscription of the Basmala in the upper right-hand corner. Following this is Surat al-Ikhlās. All four sides of the border contain the Surat al-Ikhlās, and it is important to note that the border lacks the ornamentation of leaves found in other examples. It is solely decorated with inscriptions and floral circles which do not contain any inscriptions inside them. The second layer of the border is thicker than the first. Written inside is Surat al-Naml (27:30): ‘Indeed, it is from Solomon ...’. Contained within the same strip is Surat al-Isra (17:80–81): ‘My Lord, cause me to enter...’.

Below the second layer of the border is the Mihrab, which contains five arches, six columns, and a single lamp. Each of the five parts created by the arches are of equal size. The arches have a floral style, formed



- Ayat- AlKursi
- Surat al-Fatiha
- Flowers

with continuous semicircle shapes. There is a semicircle at the apex of each arch, followed by sets of three semicircles of similar size on either side. The spike between the following two semicircles is extended. The columns feature a simple spiral design, relatively plain capitals, and bases of a trapezoidal shape. The lamp is in the central section, hanging from the apex of the arch. Its support wire divides into two pieces as it extends around the sides of the lamp to connect with the lower portion of the lamp body. The lamp is a silhouetted vase shape made up of two parts. The upper part is a wide mouth which narrows at the neck, and the lower part is a bulging oval-shaped body which is wider than the mouth at the top.

Underneath the first arch on the right side, floral patterns are juxtaposed. The same ornament is copied underneath the second arch from the left. The ornament underneath the second arch from the right contains Surat al-Hijr (59:46): 'Enter it in peace, safe [and secure]'. This same ornament also appears underneath the first arch on the left. These ornaments are created with outlines, as the plain background of the Mihrab can be seen through them. In contrast, the ornament underneath the central arch is heavily embroidered and can be divided into five horizontal registers. The upper register is a small square containing the single word 'Allah'. The second register contains the small inscription, 'There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. The third register contains a floral design rather than an inscription, while the fourth and fifth registers contain another small inscription from Surat al-Tawbah (9:33)

Second register

This register contains three horizontal sections. The first contains the inscription Ayat al-Kursi (2:255), which is completed in the third section. In the corners and middle of the first and third registers, there are floral circles dividing the text. The second section between these two is the thickest and contains the inscription of the Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27): 'Certainly has Allah ...'.

Third register

This final register is divided into three horizontal sub-registers. One of these sub-registers is made up of inscriptions alone while the other two contain inscriptions within a geometric design. The upper portion consists of two square-shaped areas divided by a vertical strip running down the middle of the entire register. This central strip contains a pear shape against an ornamental vine-like background. The inscription 'There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' is inside the pear shape.

Each of the squares contains a medallion that sits upon a highly ornamented background. In the centre of each medallion is a floral ornament. The single word 'Allah' in the left-hand side medallion, and 'Muhammed' is in the right-hand side medallion. Surrounding the floral centre in each medallion is a circular inscription of the *shahada*: 'There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' and 'His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it'. At the top, bottom, left, and right extremities of the medallions are four small circles that contain a small inscription, either 'There is no god but Allah' or 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'.

The second sub-register is perpendicular to the central strip, creating a cross-like shape across the register and dividing it into four square-shaped sections which include those containing the medallions. Across this sub-register are inscriptions of the name of the sultan who ordered the Kiswa, in this case, Muzaffar Suleiman Shah.

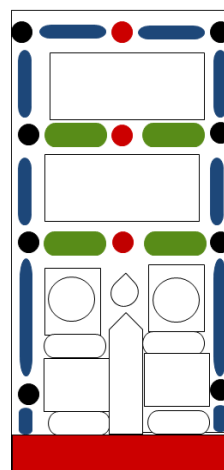
Underneath this is the final sub-register which contains the final two square-shaped sections on either side of the vertical divide which now finally opens into a door. The opening section of the vertical divide contains inscriptions of the Basmala and the Surat al-Ikhlās. The two square-shaped sections are made up of a zigzag design which alternates layers of inscription and floral design. There are four zigzags with the inscription ‘There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. In the triangles formed between the upper and lowermost zigzags and the border is the repeated inscription ‘Great truth of God’.

Analysis of the Kaaba Door Curtain from the Reign of Sultan Selim III



Figure 5. A curtain from Al- Kabah Al-Musharrafah’s door (Bab Altawba). This

curtain dates to the reign of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204). Toub Kabi Museum in Istanbul. (Mojan, 2010:193)



- Surat al-Ikhlās
- Ayat al-Kursi
- Allahu Rabbi in the circles
- Allahu Hasbi

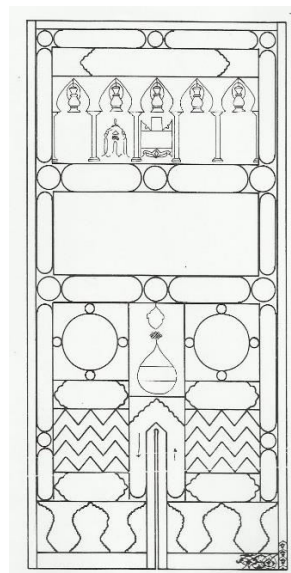


Figure 6. The design of the Sitara during the reign of Sultan Selim III

Figure 5 shows a Kaaba door curtain dating from the reign of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204). It is woven of black silk and decorated with embroidery of red, green, silver, and gold silk. The composition of this embroidery divides the curtain into four registers.

First register

This register is similar to the profuse images representing the Mihrab, with its lamps, arches, and columns. Arches and support columns divide this register into five parts, with the middle section larger than the two on either side. The columns are plain, having no decoration along the shaft and only minimal attempts at aesthetic appeal in the shaping of the capitals and bases. The arches are in the usual style of Ottoman domes, and lamps hang from the middle of each of the five arches. The lamps have a simple shape and style, divided into five parts from top to bottom. The shape of the lamps discussed in this section has changed over time to become significantly more detailed and ornate. They hang from a chain that is attached to a simple curved handle on the lip of the lamp. Midway down the chain, two wire handles emerge, extend out around the mouth of the lamp on either side, and attach to the lamp's body where they terminate in an upward curl. The lamp has a flaring mouth at the top, a bulging body in the middle that is shaped like the lower portion of a beaker, and a ring foot at the bottom. These three parts are connected by two simple ring shapes. Overall, the register is detailed in golden thread while red and green threads are used to colour some of the elements. Each of the five sections of the Mihrab contains an inscription between the columns and below the lamps. The Basmala and the Surat al-Ikhlās are repeated on the four sides of the borders throughout the curtain.

The right and left vertical sections of the curtain are the same, with the same inscription of Surat al-Ikhlās. Centred underneath the top border section, under the gold circles and above the Mihrab, is an additional inscription. This inscription is from Surat al-Naml (27:30), which is the same quotation as discussed in the section above.

Underneath the lamps and between the columns of the Mihrab, more elements of inscription appear. The elements under the arches, first from the right and second from the left, are identical. They are both red and contain the Basmala inscription. The arches second from the right and first from the left are green and both contain Surat al-Hijr (59:46), the name of 'Allah', in a golden block below the lamp. Above, a second inscription is placed that appears in a red oblong shape surrounded by more inscriptions in gold. From Surat al-Saf, the inscription in the oblong reads: 'Victory from Allah and an imminent conquest'. Around the oblong, the decorative golden inscription has two parts. It states, 'There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' and includes Surat Al-Tawbah (9:33).

Second register

Beneath the first register of the Mihrab lies a very different second register with a geometric theme. It consists of a large golden rectangle in the middle that has inscriptions both inside and surrounding it. The inscriptions surrounding it form a border, much like the border in the first register where different pieces of the text are separated by golden circles. There are six of these circles—four at the corners and two in the middle of the horizontal sections.

The circles in the four corners contain the inscription ‘Allahu Rabbi’ and sit on a golden background. In contrast, the two middle circles read ‘Allahu Hasbi’ and sit on a red background. In the four sections between the corner and middle circles of the horizontal sections of the border, there are four rounded bars which contain inscriptions of Surat al-Kursi (2:255).

On the right and left sides, there are two more black bars running vertically between the corner circles. These bars contain Surat al-Ikhlās. Inside the large rectangle is the Basmala and Surat al-Fath (48:27).

Third register

This large register is also geometric in design. It is much larger than the other registers, taking up about a third of the length of the curtain. Black and gold bars containing inscriptions and geometric shapes divide the register into four squares. The uppermost squares sit around the middle of the curtain along its length. They each feature a large gold medallion against a red background with inscriptions throughout. Inside the circles, a script is embroidered, centred around a central axis, which reads ‘There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’, followed by ‘His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it’.

The lower two squares are different from the two upper squares with medallions. These lower squares feature a zigzag design of alternating red and green, both with golden inscriptions. The uppermost zigzag is green and the inscription reads from the far right to the far left: ‘May Allah be pleased with Abu Bakr, Omar, and Osman’. The

following three zigzags have the names of the Caliphs embroidered into them and read, ‘There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. The fifth and lowermost zigzag completes the first with the names of the caliphs, Ali, and friends of Muhammad.

The vertical section of the cross, dividing the squares, is a black bar divided into two registers. In the upper register there are three golden motifs. The upper piece is solid gold, the middle piece consists of a knot-like design, and the lower piece contains an inscription with a green stripe through its middle. There is also a golden inscription against the black background surrounding the pear shape. In the upper portion of the background, the names ‘Allah’ and ‘Muhammad’ are followed by the names of Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, and all of the friends of Muhammad below. There is also inscription within two of the golden shapes. The topmost motif contains the inscription ‘May Allah be pleased to’. The pear shape contains an inscription from Surat al-Araf within its green stripe. The upper portion of the pear shape has an inscription. The final section of the pear shape includes ‘Sadak Allah al-Azim’, meaning ‘Allah the Magnificent is truthful’.

The lower register, below the pear shape, has an arch and open door in black and gold with green triangles in the upper right- and left-hand corners. The arch contains more golden inscriptions while the door is ornamented in a gold, Ottoman-style floral design, which is the same design featured on the border of the Kiswa. The inscription in the upper portion of the arch is the Basmala. The inscriptions on the right and left sides of the arch complete each other, containing Surat al-Ikhlās.

Fourth register

The fourth and final register of the curtain is divided into two horizontal sections containing no inscriptions. The upper section is floral in design and contains alternating vase shapes. There are four upward facing black vases, two on each side of a centre divide. The centre divider is an extension of the door from the third register, still containing the Ottoman-style floral decoration. The vases are also decorated in the Ottoman style, but these flowers are much more fluid and less geometric than those in the door. Between the four black vases are background pieces, identical in shape to the vases but upside-down. They alternate in red and green colours and contain Ottoman-style flowers. The second section below the vases is also floral in design. On either side of the central door are three ball shapes; the central one is green, and the two on the outside are red. Around the outside edge is a continuation of the Ottoman-style floral design from the door.

Analysis of the Kaaba Curtain from the Reign of Sultan Abdul Majid



Figure 7. The curtain of the Kaaba door, which dates from the reign of Sultan Abdul

Majid and wali Muhammad Sai-d Pasha (AD 1857/AH 1273). It is currently located in the Topkapi Museum of Istanbul. (Mojan, 2010:282)

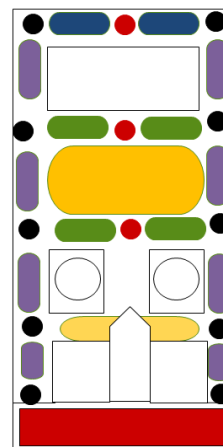


Figure 8. The design of the Sitara shows the oval shapes where the Quran is written.

- Surat al-Ikhlās
- Ayat al-Kursi
- Allahu Rabbi in the circles
- Allahu Hasbi
- Surat al-Fatiha

This curtain is woven with black silk, adorned with a green silk, and embroidered with threads of silver and gold (Fig 7). Compositionally, this curtain is divided into four registers with a single border of intertwining branches uniting the entire piece (Fig 8). Inside this outer border is a thicker border that contains round ornaments in the corners of the registers and in the middle of the horizontal bars dividing the registers. These ornaments are the same golden colour as the background, and between the ornaments are black ovals which contain golden inscriptions. These inscriptions begin in the upper right with the Basmala and continue around the curtain from right to left with Surat al-Fatiha. In Fig 7, the Surat al-Fatiha can be seen clearly in the borders.

First register

The first register has three oval shapes of different sizes which all contain inscriptions. The two at the top of the curtain in the first horizontal strip are symmetrical on either side of the centre of the strip. The one on the right contains the Basmala and Surat al-Ikhlās. This text is completed in the oval to the left. Between the two ovals and to either side of them on the far right and left of the strip are three of the previously mentioned golden circles. The middle circle contains the inscription 'Allahu Hasbi' while the two outer circles contain 'Allahu Rabbi'. In the second strip directly underneath the first is a larger black oval which contains Surat al-Naml (27:30) and Surat al-Isra (17:80).

The third strip of this register is decorative and features four lamp shapes. The lamp shapes appear in an identical keyhole-like manner with the same inscription. The lamps hang within keyholes of an identical lamp shape. The lamps are made of a dense, twisting line design, through which the black background can be seen. There is a small flower at the top of the lamps and a small bowl at the bottom. They contain the Basmala, uniting the lamps with the rest of the curtain which is a progression from the Mihrabs in the previously discussed tiraz. Between the lamps is a golden flower and palm design on a golden background. The design adapts to and fills the entire space around the lamp shapes and the border. Surat al-Fatiha is written in the black strips from the right side and completed on the left side of the borders.

Second register

This register contains another border of golden circles and black ovals with inscriptions. There are two ovals on the

upper and lower portions and one on each side. The circles appear in the corners and in the middle of the horizontal sections. The two upper ovals contain Surah al-Kursi, which is completed within the proceeding ovals. The golden circles in the corners contain 'Allahu Rabbi' just like those in the first register, while those in the middle of the horizontal sections contain 'Allahu Hasbi.' Inside of this border is a large golden oval with inscriptions containing the Basmala and Surat al-Fath (48:27): 'Certainly has Allah showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Haram, if Allah wills in safety'.

Third register

The first strip of this section contains two golden medallions within golden squares, separated by a black rectangle full of golden inscriptions. In the second strip, a long black oval full of inscriptions passes behind the top of the door opening. In the third strip, lamp shapes containing inscriptions are positioned on either side of the opening. Finally, the fourth strip consists of two black ovals filled with inscriptions. Like the medallions on other curtains, four smaller circles surround them at the top, bottom, left, and right. The right-hand medallion contains the inscription 'Allah' surrounded with the Basmala and Surat al-Ikhlās. The left-hand medallion contains the inscription 'Muhammed', the Basmala, and Surat al-Ikhlās. In the central rectangle dividing the medallions is an inscription of six lines describing the history of the curtain:

Maulana Sultan Maghazi Abdul Majid Khan, son of Sultan Mahmud / Khan, son of Sultan Abdul Majid Khan, son of Sultan Ahmed Khan may god keep him king for long / Renew this curtain

Maulana who is the minster / great excellency Wali.

The long oval of the second strip which passes behind the top of the door opening contains the Basmala and Surat al-Quraysh:

For the accustomed security of the Quraysh / Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer / Let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear.

Underneath this in the third strip are two flat lamps divided into two parts and separated by the door opening. The upper portion of the lamp contains the words 'There is no god but Allah' and the lower portion contains 'Muhammad is his prophet'. On either side of the black lamp shapes is a floral design filling out the rest of the block. The black area around the door opening, between the lamps, contains the Basmala and the Surat al-Ikhlās, beginning in the lower right and working its way around the opening to the lower left.

Fourth register

This final register of the curtain is divided into six parts. These parts are divided by arches and columns, and there are large stylised trees located below each arch and between the columns. The arches and columns are golden with embroidered designs and details. The column bases are shaped like a foot ring, and the columns bulge at the bottom just above them before narrowing and meeting the arch at a rounded point. Vines are hung across the openings of the arches, attaching at the apex of the arch and behind the top of the columns. The trees consist of a thin trunk with thick palm-like

leaves which do not overlap. Towards the middle of the trunk, four pepper-like shapes are included among the leaves. There are two on either side of the trunk, and the upper two are larger than the lower two.



Figure 9. The Kaaba curtain during the reign of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, dating back to King Fahd's reign (AD 1982–2005). Photograph by the author.

Analysis of the Kaaba Curtain from the Reign of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz

First register

This curtain is divided into four horizontal rectangular shapes with borders (Fig 9). The first register contains the Basmala. Following this is a quote from Surat al-Imran (3:133): 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous'. Four simple lamps contain 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth' from Surat al-Noor (24:34). This is a popular text that was often written on lamps

during the Fatimid period. Fig 10 shows an example of the mosque lamps dating back to AD 1320–1330, with simple, embroidered, abstract designs of the lamps made for the Kaaba curtain.

In addition, the style of the lamp in the Kaaba door curtain during the Ottoman period appeared in a normal shape figure (see Fig 11), showing part of the Ottoman curtain in the inscription below the lamps. However, this lamp style has become abstract in the contemporary period.



Figure 10. Lamps, Sultan Al-Nasser, Egypt, 1386, Louvre Museum in Paris. Photo by autho



Figure 11. A close look at the detailing of the Kiswa.

Second register

The second register beneath the first contains a large inscription, including the Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27): ‘Certainly has Allah showed to His

Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Haram, if Allah wills, in safety’. The strips in the arches on the left and right sides are decorative. Ayat al-Kursi (2:255) is written in four oval strips across the top and down the opening of the door embroidered from this register, which is in the little triangle between the two overall strips. In four circles in the four corners and one in the middle are written ‘Allahu Hasbi’ and ‘Allahu Rabbi’.

Third register

A beautiful silver medallion on a black background with inscriptions throughout is shown on the right side, including a quote from Surat al-Ikhlās: ‘He is Allah, [who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent’. On the left side of the medallion, another quote from Surat al-Fath (48:28) is written: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure’. Inside the two medallions, the Basmala is written in gold embroidery, and between the two medallions, in the vertical strip, it is possible to see an aya from Surat al-Zumar (39:53): ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful’.

In the third register of the curtain, which is underneath the two medallions, there are three strips. The first strip contains the shahada, and the second and third sections contain the Basmala and a quotation from the Surat al-Quraysh: ‘For the

accustomed security of the Quraysh version of Quran? Let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear’.

Fourth register

The last register is composed of a leaf ornamentation in rectangular shapes embroidered in gold. They are filled with writing inside two small rectangles, showing the words: ‘This Kiswa was made in Mecca Al-Mkarramah, and it was presented to Al-Ka’ba Al-Musharrafah by the Custodian of the two Holy Harams Fahd bin Abdulaziz, may Allah accept it from him’.

Conclusion

The contemporary Saudi Kiswa is a little different from the Ottoman curtains. The only colour used in the modern Kiswa is black silk, with the two embroidery threads of gold and silver. In contrast, the Ottoman curtains have several colours. The Quranic inscriptions are also different from those on the Ottoman curtains. Surat al-Noor (24:34) is written in the first register in the four lamps, while the Ottoman inscription was Surat al-Isra (17:80–81). The Arabic calligraphy style used on the Saudi curtain is the same as that of the Ottoman curtain, namely, *Thuluth* ثلث. Different verses of the Quran are represented here, including the Surat al-Noor (24:34) and Surat al-Baqarah (2:144). The Ottomans embroidered different verses of the Quran on the first register. The inscription discussed on the Saudi Kiswa and the inscription written in the first register on the Ottoman Kiswas are completely different. In the little circles in the borders is written ‘Allahu Hasbi’ and ‘Allahu Rabbi’, representing the Ottoman and Saudi Kiswas. In the second register, inscriptions and designs are the same. The Ottoman Kiswa curtain inscriptions, the

largest strip on the curtains, is Surat al-Fath (48:27), and the four small oval strips around the largest strip mention Ayat al-Kursi (2:255). The opening for the door in the Saudi curtain is longer and divides it in two at the second register. However, in the Ottoman curtains, the design for the door opening starts in the third register between two medallions. In the third register, the design of the medallion can be found in both periods, but the decoration changes within the medallions. The signatures of the Sultan and the years of the Ottoman period are in the third register between the two medallions or underneath them, while in the modern period, the Kiswa signatures of the King are written in the fourth register. The Saudi curtain has little similarity to the Ottoman Kiswa.

In terms of the first register, as shown in Table 2, the style of the lamps and Mihrab progresses over time, beginning with one simple lamp in the middle. Then the lamp embroidery appears underneath each Mihrab and is decorated with different background colours of red and green. Finally, the lamps appear in a more abstract shape. Surat al-Hijr (59:46) is mentioned with the lamps and Mihrab in the two oldest curtains: ‘Enter it in peace, safe [and secure]’. This verse refers to entry to heaven. However, the artist used the meaning of this particular verse from the Quran in the Kaaba door curtain to also represent entry to the Holy Kaaba. The contemporary Saudi curtain mentions the Basmala, which is the beginning of each Surat from the Quran. They are decorated in the first register of the curtains all the Quranic verses that are mentioned.

All of the first registers are the sections over the lamps. An inscription in the large strip mentions Surat al-Isra (17:80–

81) and the words *Sultan Al naser* سلطان النصر in Arabic, meaning ‘supporting authority’. The artist used these words from the Quran in this first register to represent the supporting authority of the Ottoman Sultan. I suggest it also represents the Surat al-Naml (27:30) word ‘Solomon’. The verses describe the Prophet Solomon, but the artist probably used this word to represent Ottoman Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi, or it could be because the Basmala is mentioned in this Surat twice in the beginning with the Quran. These verses of Surat al-Tawbah (9:33) are mentioned in this curtain to explain why God sent the Prophet Muhammad to the people, and the artist mentions this underneath the lamp in the middle representing the Prophet Muhammad.

The second register is similar in all curtains as it contains the largest inscription of the Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27). The words of al-Masjid al-Haram are quoted: ‘You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Haram’, which is confirmation from God to the prophet to enter al-Masjid al-Haram as well as the unification of polytheism. This verse is probably used here because it mentions al-Masjid al-Haram in the Quran. As can be seen in Table 3, above and below this large strip in the first curtain, there are two strips with little circle designs with flowers, while next two are similar with small strips and the inscriptions ‘Allahu Hasbi’ and ‘Allahu Rabbi’. All are written in Ayat al-Kursi (2:255).

In Table 1, it is shown that the borders of the first curtain are ornamented with inscriptions taken from the Quran, particularly the Basmala and Surat al-Ikhlas embroidered in the second and third curtains, while the Surat al-Fatiha is

mentioned in the border of the contemporary curtain. Surat is defined as the name of God,

and this meaning is the same as what the artist used in the borders.

In the third register (Table 4) of two of the curtains, the design contains medallion shapes and zigzags, whereas in the final curtain, the design develops into the flat lamps divided into two parts. Similarly, in the final design, the floral patterns do not appear in the oldest curtain. The name of the Sultan who ordered the piece is written on all three of the Ottoman curtains. In the first curtain, it is written in the third register beneath the medallions; in the second, it is written underneath the zigzag strips; and in the third curtain, the name is written between the two medallions in the third register. The fourth and last register (Table 5) represents three flowers and leaves as it appears in last two curtains. The oldest curtain was not embroidered in the fourth register.




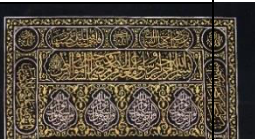
The Kiswa is an ever-changing artefact, central to the act of pilgrimage and one which has reflected a wide variety of influences, issues regarding artistic patronage, and political power. It is not, however, the only such textile that is central to the material culture of the Kaaba and the Hajj.

Table 1: Comparison of the borders

Curtain of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi (AD 1544–1550)	Curtain of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204)	Curtain of Sultan Abdul Majid (AD 1857/AH 1273)	Curtain of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (Contemporary)
Fig 3	Fig 5	Fig 7	Fig 9

Three registers	Four registers	Four registers	Four registers	Embroidered gold & silver threads	Embroidered gold & silver threads	Embroidered gold & silver threads	Embroidered gold & silver threads
Circle contains flower	Circle with inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'	Circle with inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'	Circle with inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'				
All four sides contain Surat al-Ikhlâs	All four sides contain Surat al-Ikhlâs	All four sides contain Surat al-Fatiha	All four sides contain Surat al-Fatiha				
	Decorated with flowers	Decorated with flowers	Ornamentation in delicate leaves				
Natural silk	Red and green silk	Green and gold silk	Black silk				

Table 2. Comparison of the first registers

	Curtain of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanouni (AD 1544-1550)	Curtain of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790 /AH 1204)	Curtain of Sultan Abdul Majid (AD 1857/AH 1273)	Curtain of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (Contemporary)
				
Design	One lamp	Five lamps	Four lamps in abstract shape	Four lamps in abstract shape
Inscription	Five Mihrabs Surat al-Isra (17:80-81)	Five Mihrabs Surat al-Isra (17:80-81)	Surat al-Isra (17:80) written inside the lamps	Surat al-Noor (24:34) written inside the lamps
Written in the first horizontal strip	Basmala and Surat al-Naml (27:30)	Basmala and Surat al-Naml (27:30)	Basmala and Surat al-Hijr (59:46) and al-Naml (27:30)	Basmala and Surat al-Imran (3:133)








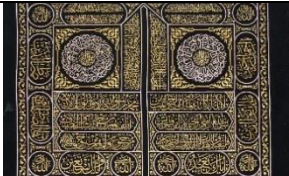



	Curtain of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi (AD 1544–1550)	Curtain of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204)	Curtain of Sultan Abdul Majid (AD 1857/AH 1273)	Curtain of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (Contemporary)
				
Inscription	Ayat al-Kursi (2:255) In two horizontal strips	Ayat al-Kursi (2:255) In four horizontal oval strips	Ayat al-Kursi (2:255) In four horizontal oval strips	Surat al-Fath (48:27) Ayat al-Kursi (2:255) In four horizontal oval strips
	Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27); big inscription in the middle	Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27); big inscription in the middle	Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27); big inscription in the middle	Basmala and a quote from Surat al-Fath (48:27); big inscription in the middle
Design	Six circles contain the flowers	Six circles contain inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'	Six circles contain inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'	Six circles contain inscriptions 'Allahu Hasbi' and 'Allahu Rabbi'

Table 4. Comparison of the third registers

	Curtain of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoumi (AD 1544–1550)	Curtain of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204)	Curtain of Sultan Abdul Majid (AD 1857/AH 1273)	Curtain of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (Contemporary)
				
Design	Two medallions	Two medallions	Two medallions	Two medallions
	Pear shape in the middle	Pear shape in the middle	Square in the middle	Vertical strip between the two medallions
	Two square-shaped sections in a zigzag design	Two square-shaped sections in two colours of zigzag design	Two square sections made in lamp-shaped design	Two square shapes divided in six oval shapes
Inscription	The shahada	The shahada	The shahada	The shahada

	The shahada repeated in the two zigzag scripts with flower designs	The shahada repeated in two colours of zigzag design	The shahada written in the two lamps in the two squares	Surat Quraysh 106 Surat al-Fath (48:28) and Surat al-Zumar (39:53)
Inscription	The Ottoman Sultan's name written in the strip between the two square medallions and zigzags	The Ottoman Sultan's name written in last strip of this register	The Ottoman Sultan's name written in the little square between the two medallions	Only the Quran written in this section
		The names of Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, and all friends of Muhammad		
Design	The opening door strips inscribed with Surat al-Ikhlâs	The opening door strips inscribed with Surat al-Ikhlâs	The opening door strips inscribed with Surat al-Ikhlâs	The opening door strips inscribed with Surat al-Zumar (39:53)

Table 5. Comparison of the fourth registers

Curtain of Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanouni (AD 1544–1550)	Curtain of Sultan Selim III (AD 1790/AH 1204)	Curtain of Sultan Abdul Majid AD (AD 1857/AH 1273)	Curtain of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (Contemporary)
			
	Flowers and leaves Red and green	Six trees with eight columns	Two small rectangles embroidered in silver
	Contains two strips	Contains one strip	Contains two strips
	No inscription	No inscription	This Kiswa was made in Mecca Al-Mkarramah, and it was presented to Al-Ka'ba MI-Musharrafah by the Custodian of the two Holy Harams Fahd bin Abdulaziz, may Allah accept it from him

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