

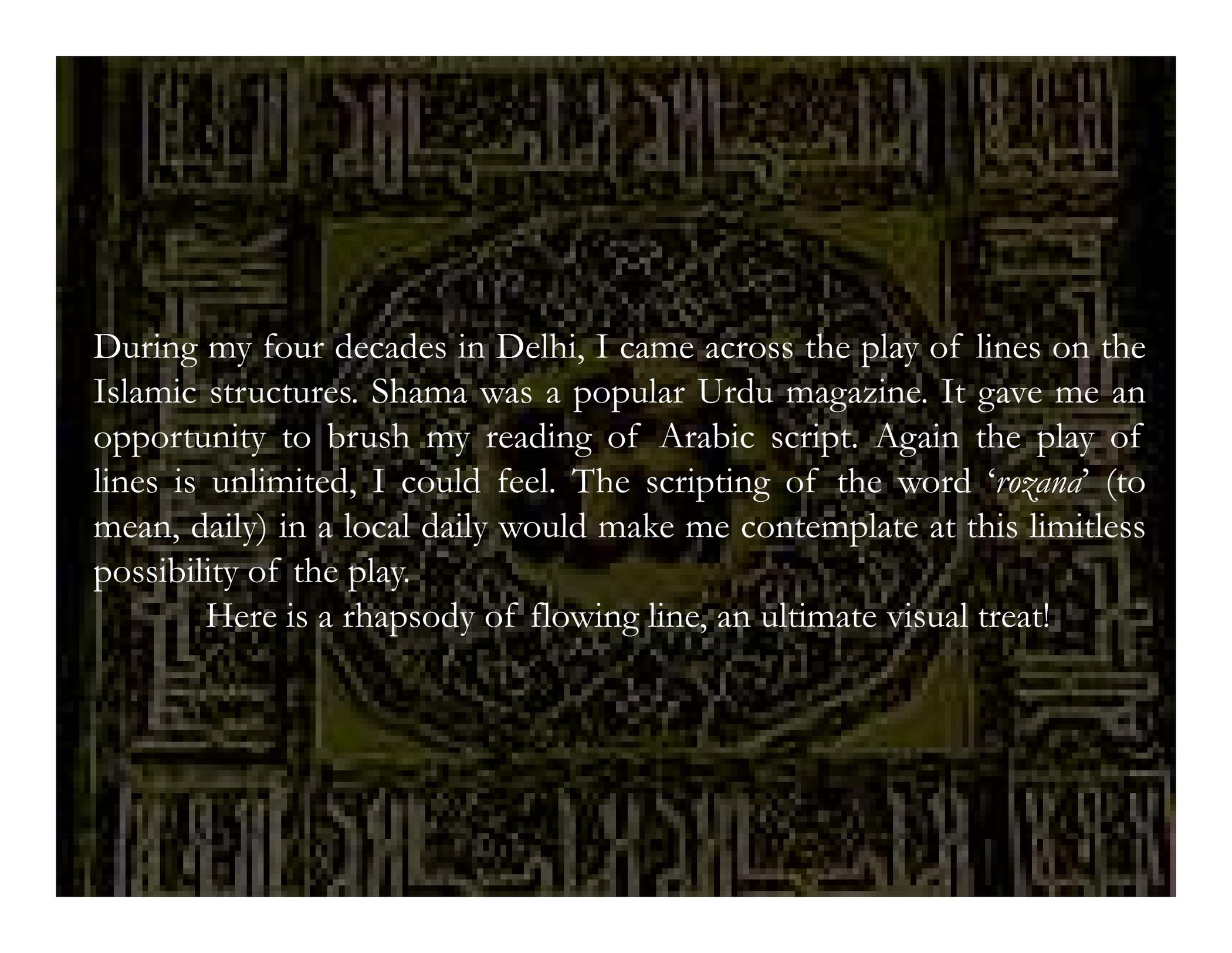


Power and Rhythm of flowing Lines:

In Praise of Arabic Calligraphy

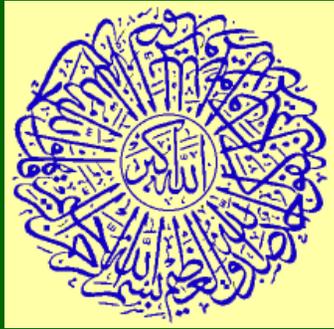
SYED IKRAMULLA was my classmate. He is a Bohra. We were together in most of the laboratory sessions. Once I played some harmless pranks on him. I scribbled some thing on paper, making a number of shallow 'u's, scattering a few dots, single, double and triple, above and below, and a few downward strokes, all from right to left. I presented my gibberish to him and asked him to read my Urdu. He took me seriously and attempted to read. He mumbled a few sounds, but finally gave up. I was exposed! But his trying to read my '*kirukkal*' was revealing. It brings out the personality of the Arabic script, which perhaps no other script possesses.

Later I took lessons from him reading Urdu. He gave me instructions how to mark vowel marks, but added that they are not really necessary. This is another revelation. A script without vowels written?



During my four decades in Delhi, I came across the play of lines on the Islamic structures. Shama was a popular Urdu magazine. It gave me an opportunity to brush my reading of Arabic script. Again the play of lines is unlimited, I could feel. The scripting of the word '*rozana*' (to mean, daily) in a local daily would make me contemplate at this limitless possibility of the play.

Here is a rhapsody of flowing line, an ultimate visual treat!



Arabic Script

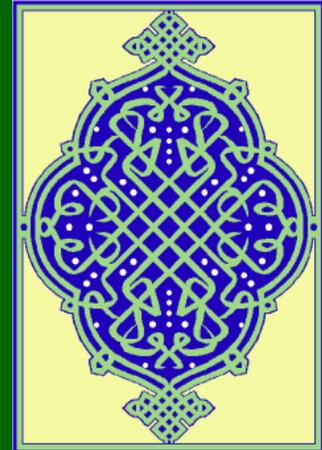
The Arabic script is the script of
Arabic that universalized religious
and scientific thoughts,
Persian that expressed in the highest possible
form the values of art and beauty,
Turkish that institutionalized earthly laws and
social organizations, and
the language in which the Holy Qur'an is written.



Arabic Script

In India, Arabic is the script of Urdu, the language of confluence of Indian and Islamic culture, Sindhi and Kashmiri.

Origin



The earliest Arabic document is dated 512 AD.
But the script was in use from the 3rd century AD.
The Roman and the Arabic alphabet are cousins.
Their origin can be traced to the Phoenician script.

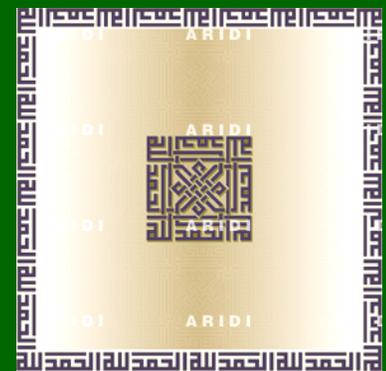


Arabic for Calligraphy

There are two main reasons for Arabic's great strides in ornamental writing.

Islam disapproved of representing natural forms.
This channeled creative endeavor in the Islamic world into other arts, the chief of which has always been calligraphy.

Arabic for Calligraphy



Consisting mainly of consonants and omitting most vowels, the letters being stripped to the minimum and a cursive style, the script lends itself to calligraphy.

Arabic for Calligraphy

Another special feature is that most letters change form depending on their position within a word.

For example, the letter 'th' (ث) would appear

on its own



in the beginning



in the middle



at the end of a word





Arabic Calligraphy

Arabic calligraphy is a primary form of art for Islamic visual expression and creativity, seen all over the religious shrines and objects of everyday use

We shall first have a preview of this art form of astonishing beauty, elevated to a noble art form higher than even painting.

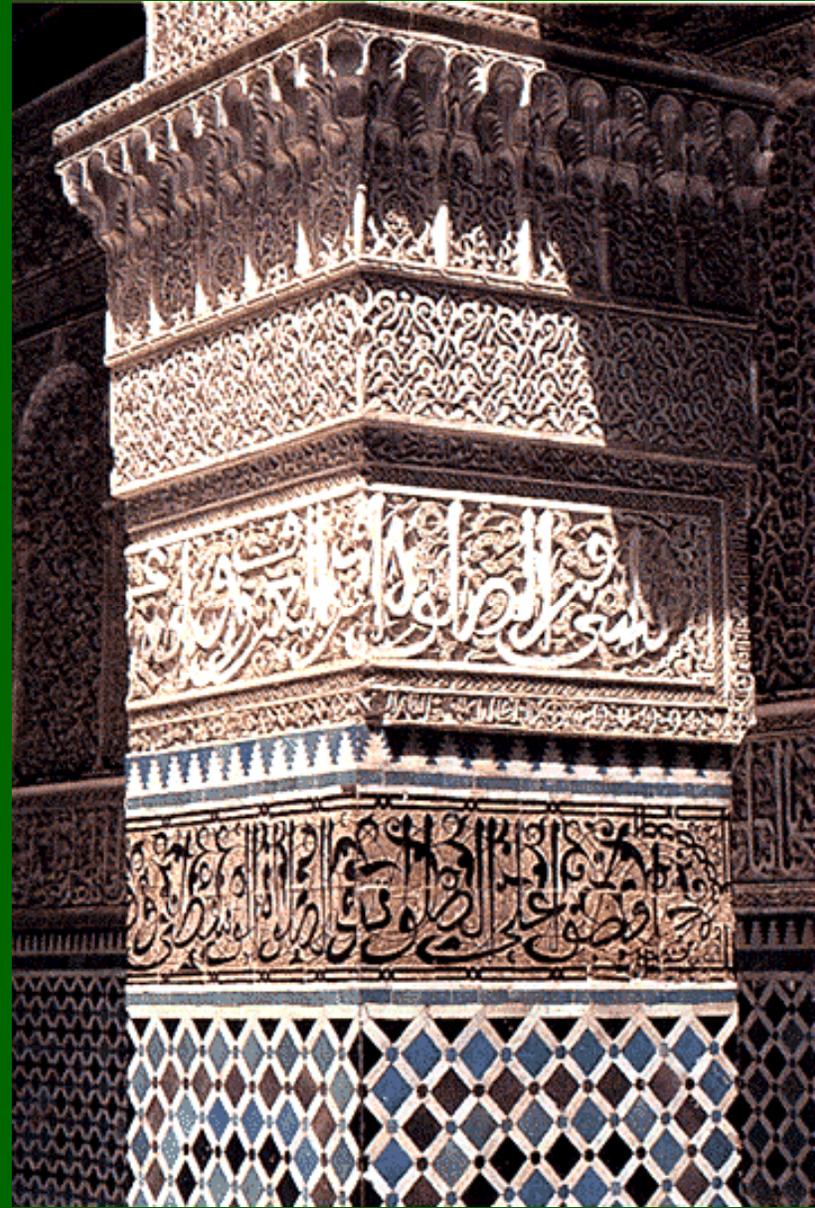


The Taj Mahal



Detail of Bibi Khanum Friday Mosque,
Samarqand (1399-1404 AD)

A detail of
Attarin Madrasa (1323-1325 AD)
in Morocco





Calligraphic Styles

A number of styles of calligraphy developed.
We may mention some of them.



Calligraphic Styles - Kufic

Kufi was the dominant priestly script in early times, created in the 8th century AD, and had a profound effect on all Islamic calligraphy.

The script has specific proportional measurements, with pronounced angularity and squareness.

With its geometrical construction, it could be adapted to any space and material, from silk squares to architectural monuments.

Kufic Style



Calligraphic rendering of 'ALLAH'

Kufic Style



Calligraphic rendering of 'MOHAMMAD'

Kufic Style



Calligraphic Styles - Naskhi



Naskh, which gained popularity in the 10th century, displays very rhythmic lines.

More Qur'ans have been written in Naskh than in all the other scripts together.

It is usually written with short horizontal stems, and with almost equal vertical depth above and below the medial line.

Naskhi Style



Islamic Arts and Architecture Organization

Calligraphic rendering of 'Basmala'

Calligraphic Styles - Deewani



Deewani script was an Ottoman development in the late 15th century and reached its zenith in the 17th century. It is excessively cursive and highly structured and it also developed an ornamental variety called Deewani Jali



Calligraphic Styles - Thuluth

Thuluth script developed fully in the 9th century;
though rarely used for writing the Holy Qur'an,
it is still the most popular style.

It is characterized by curved letters
written with barbed heads.

The letters are linked and sometimes intersecting,
and are of complex proportions.

This style is known for its elaborate graphics and
remarkable plasticity.

Islamic Arts and Architecture Organization

Thuluth

Calligraphic Styles – Tughra



Tughra is a unique style for royal seal,
particularly by the Ottoman royalty.

There were scribes specialized in writing Tughra.

Tughra Style



Basmala

Bismi Allahi al-Rahmani al-Rahimi.

“In the name of God, the Mercy-giving, the Merciful”

Almost all the Suras of Qur'an begin with the above invocation, called Basmala.

The invocation would be written as

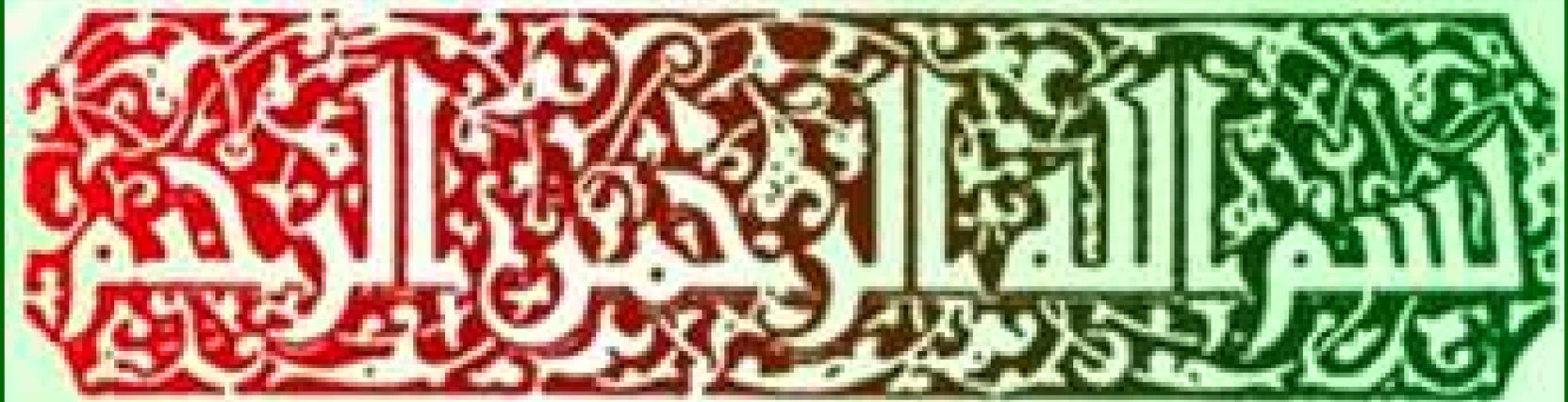
بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Witness the power and rhythm of
the flowing lines of Arabic

Basmala

in different forms

Foliated Kufic



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

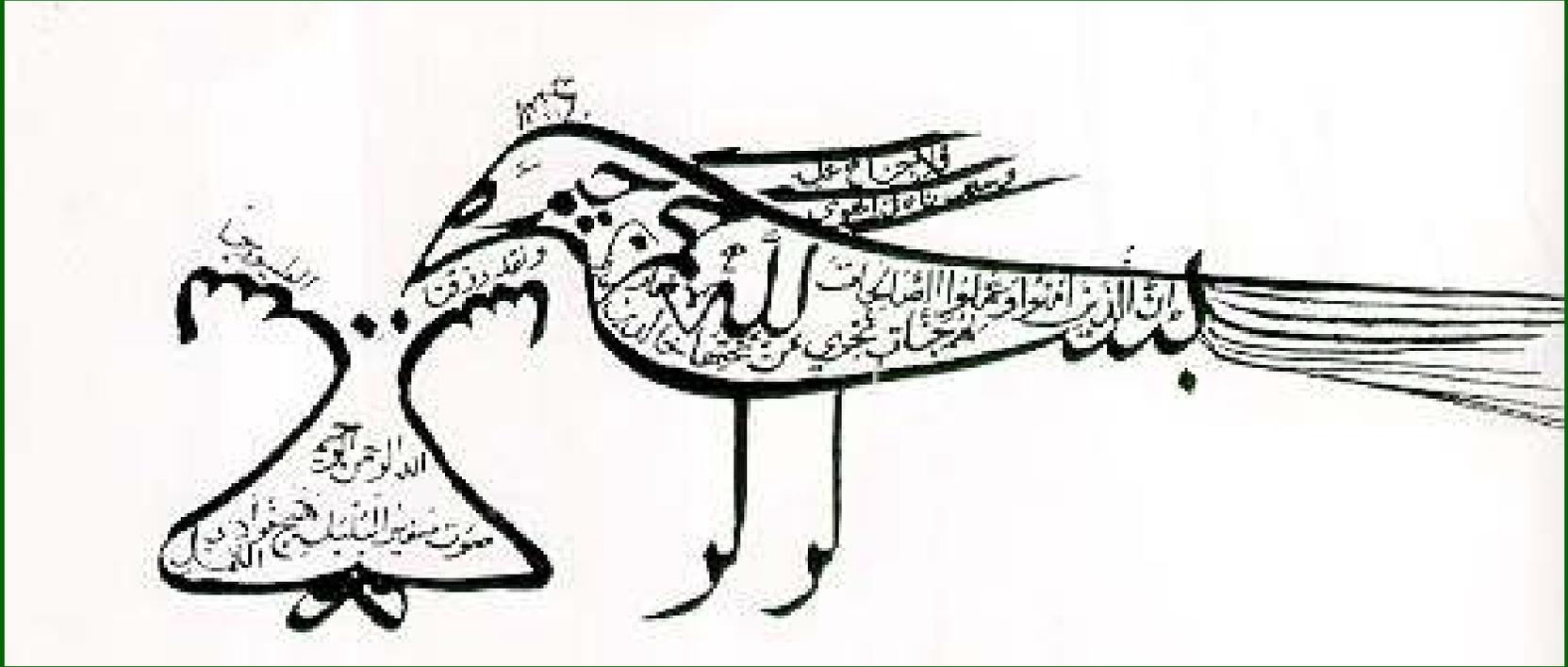
Plaited Kufic

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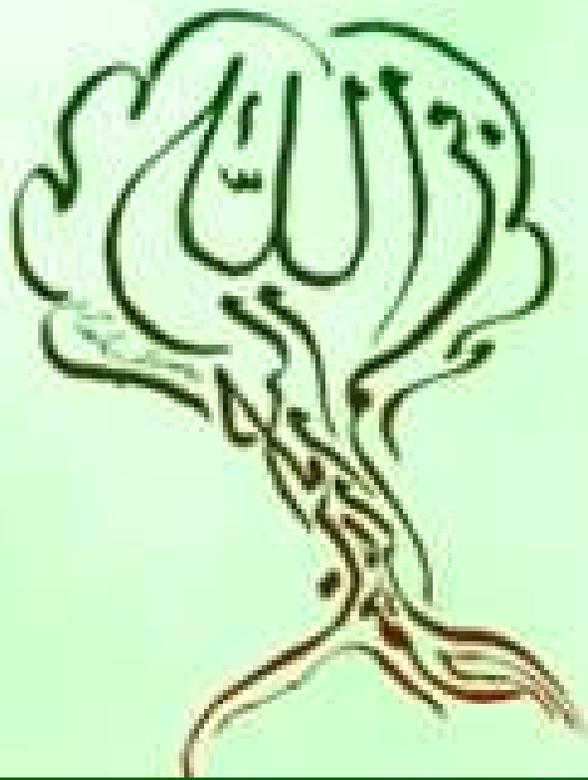
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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



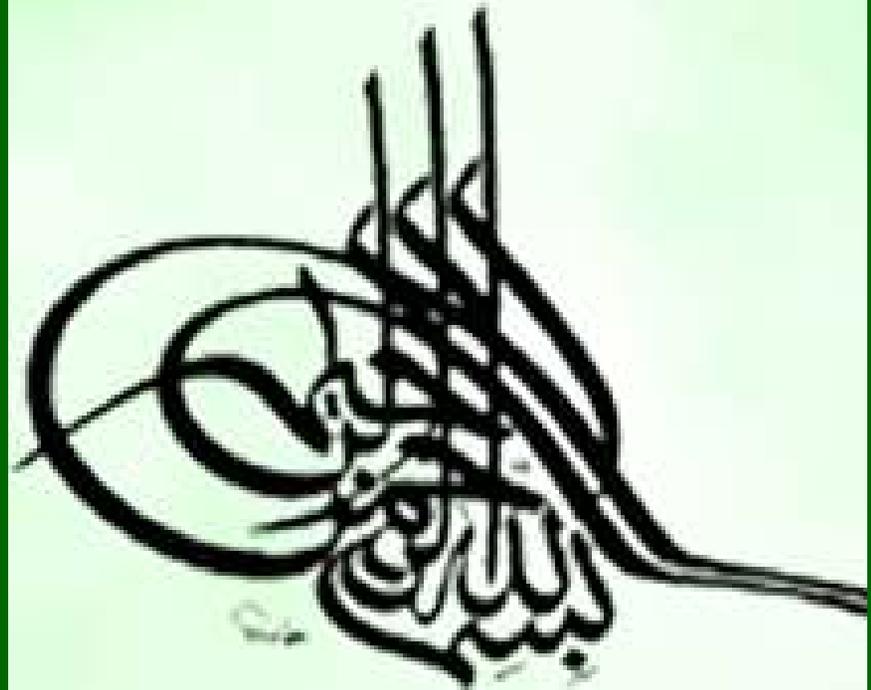
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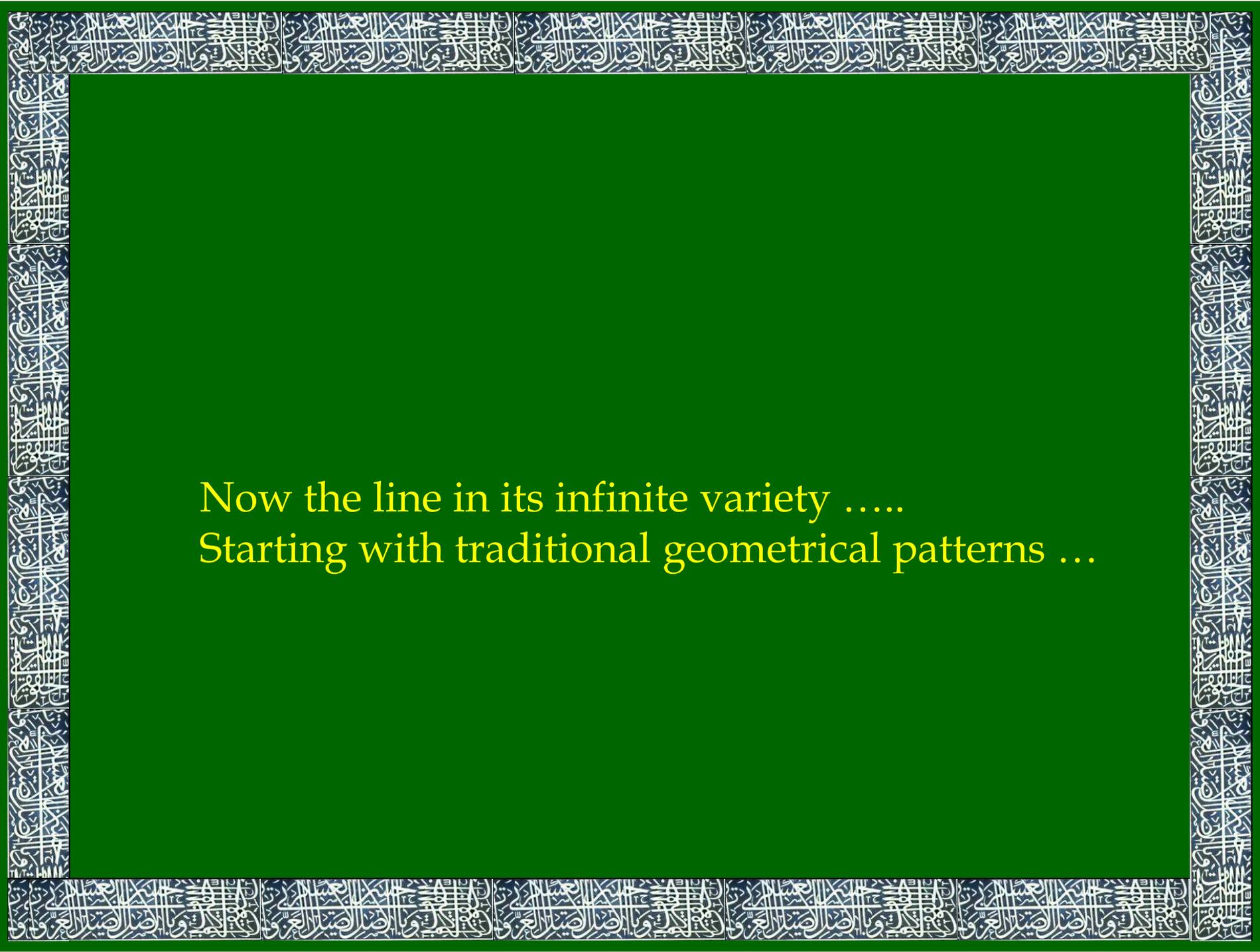


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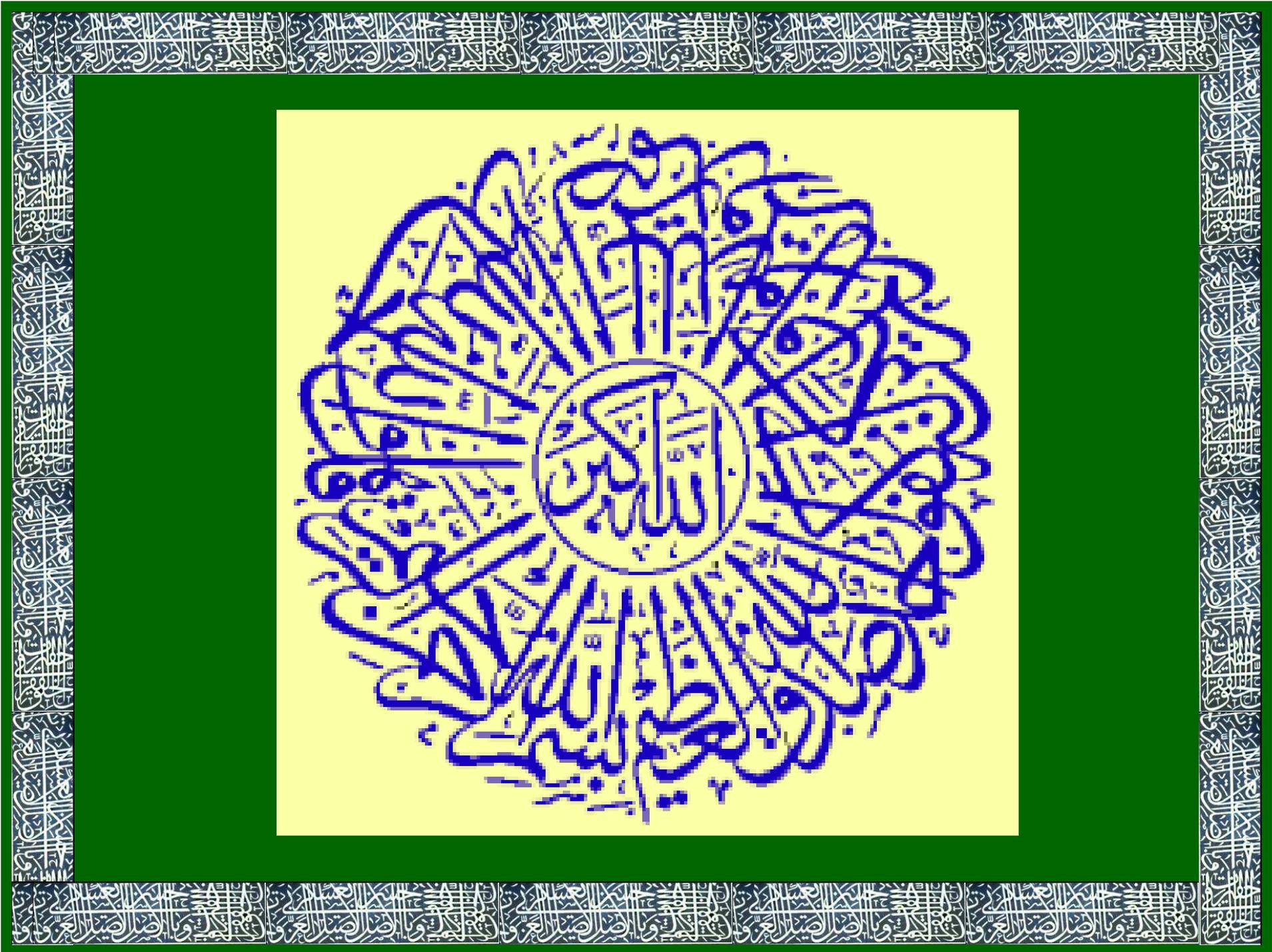


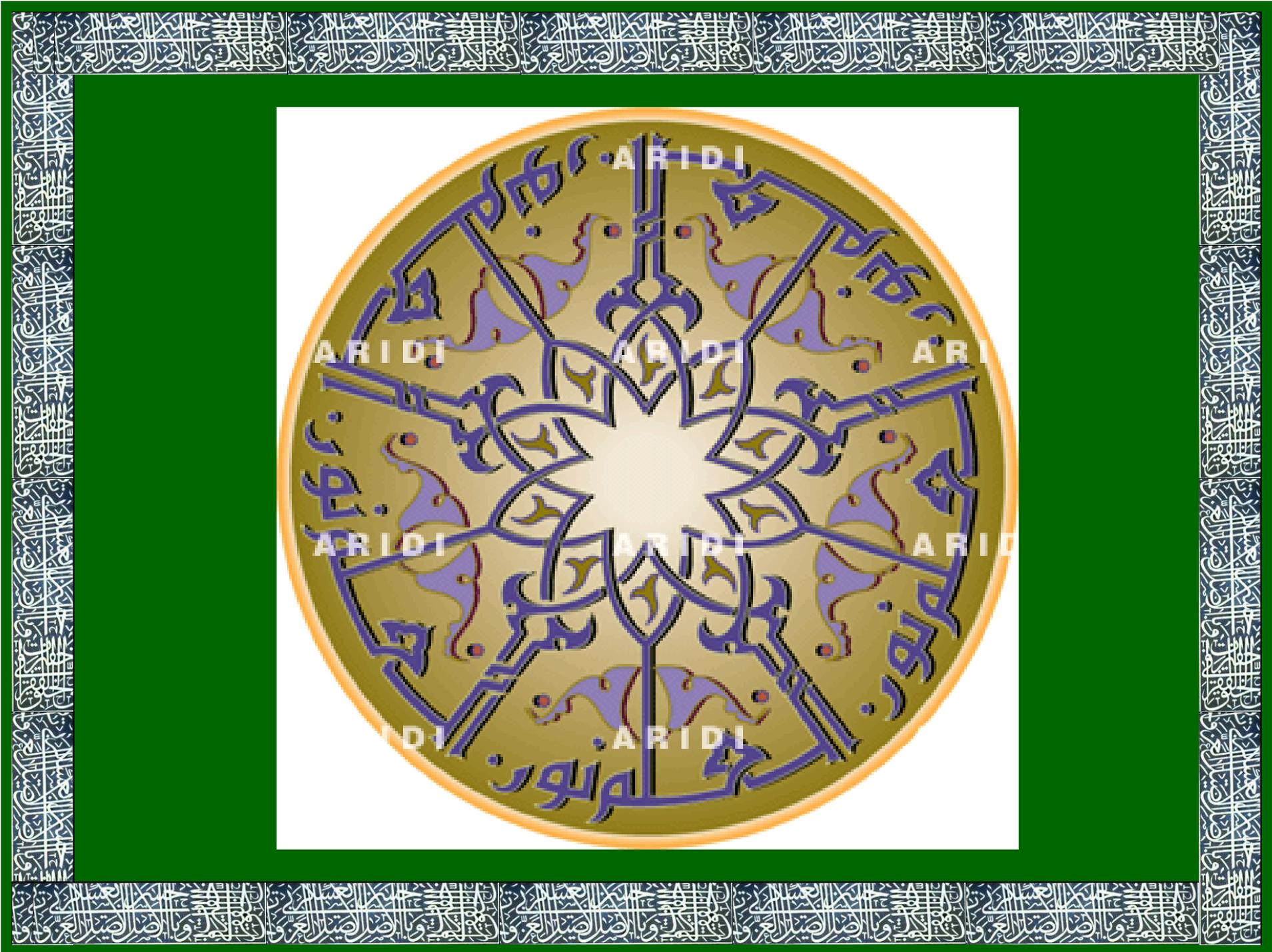
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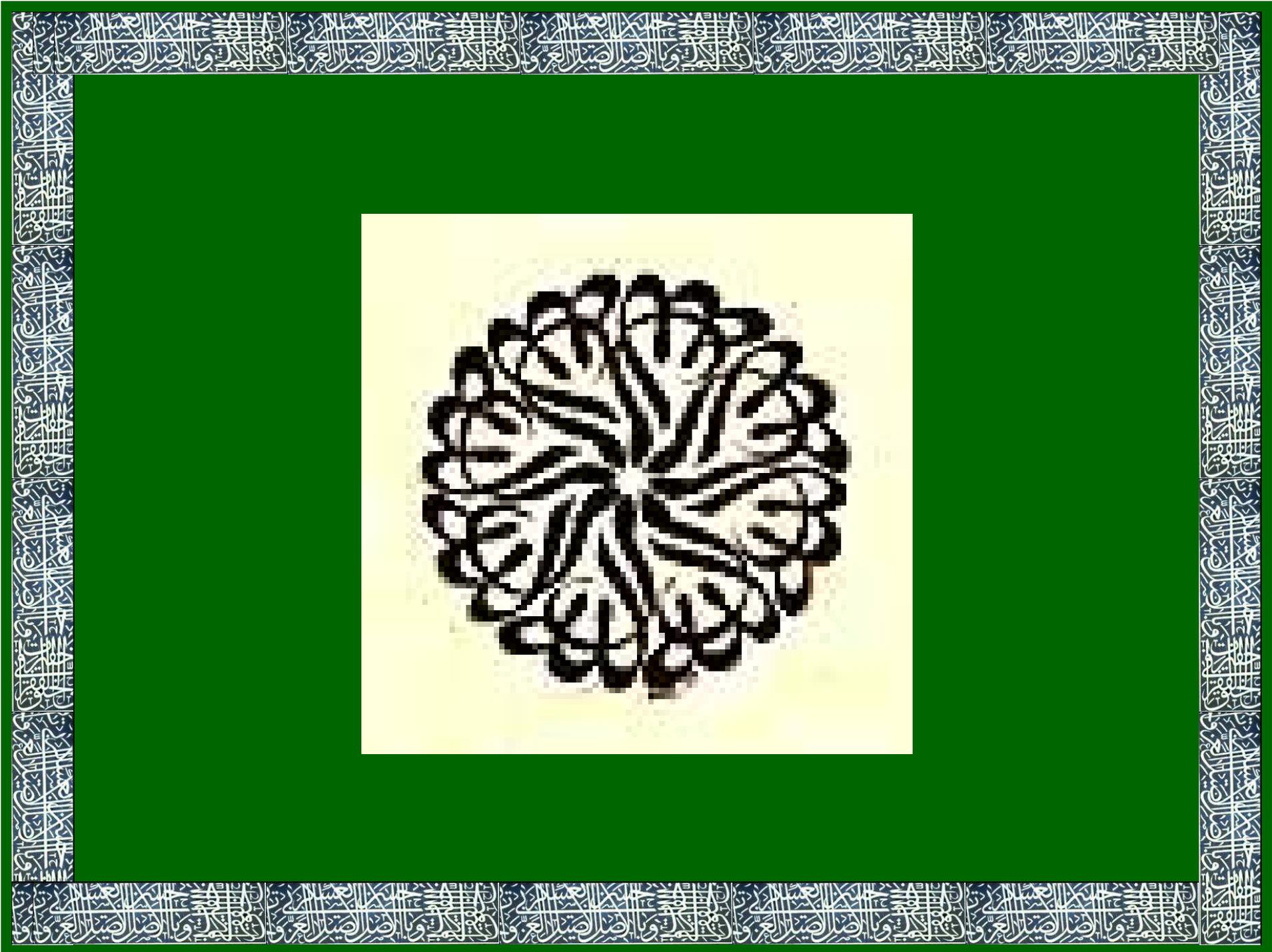


A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white and gold, surrounding a central green area. The calligraphy is dense and repetitive, forming a frame around the text.

Now the line in its infinite variety
Starting with traditional geometrical patterns ...

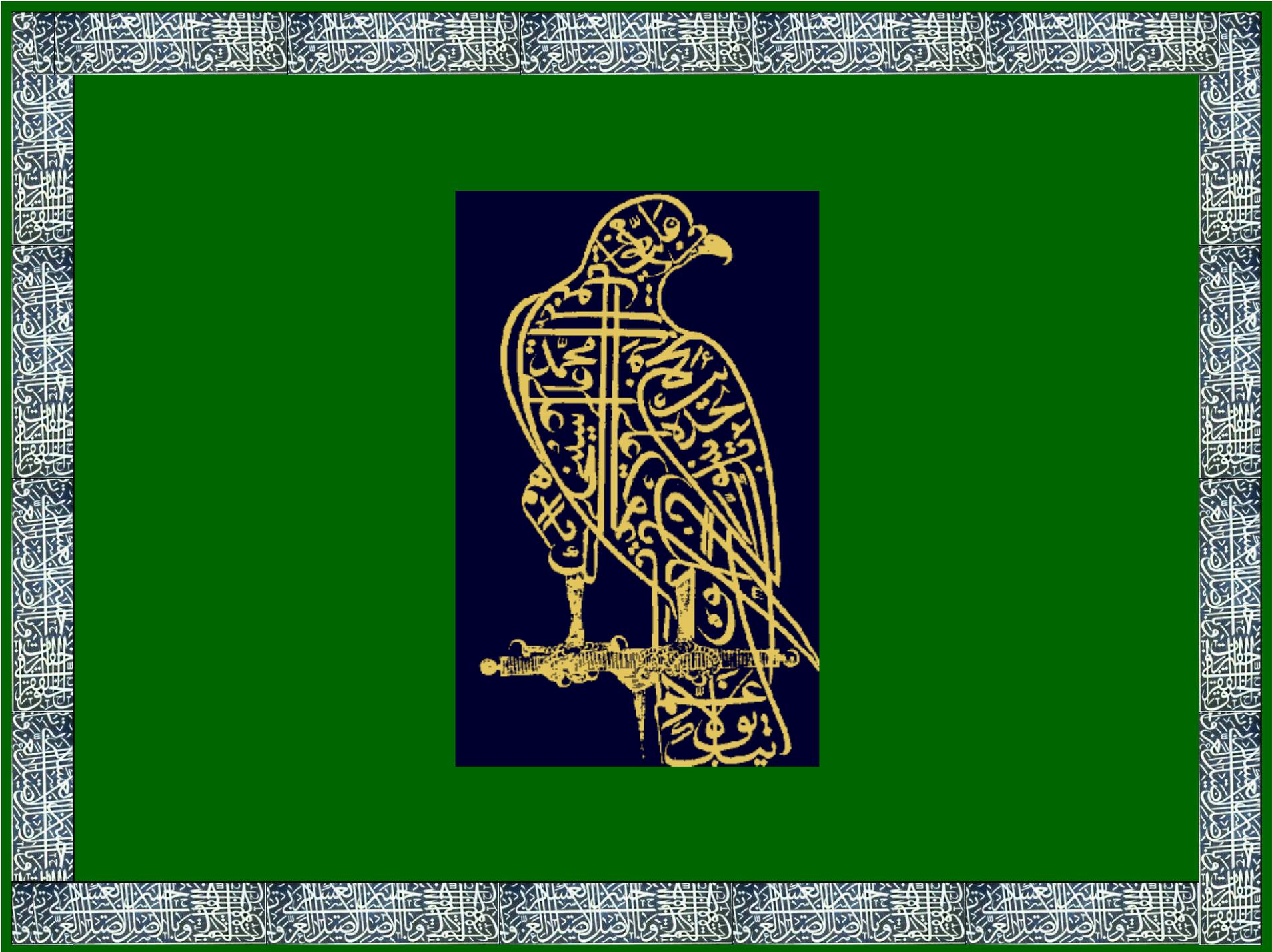


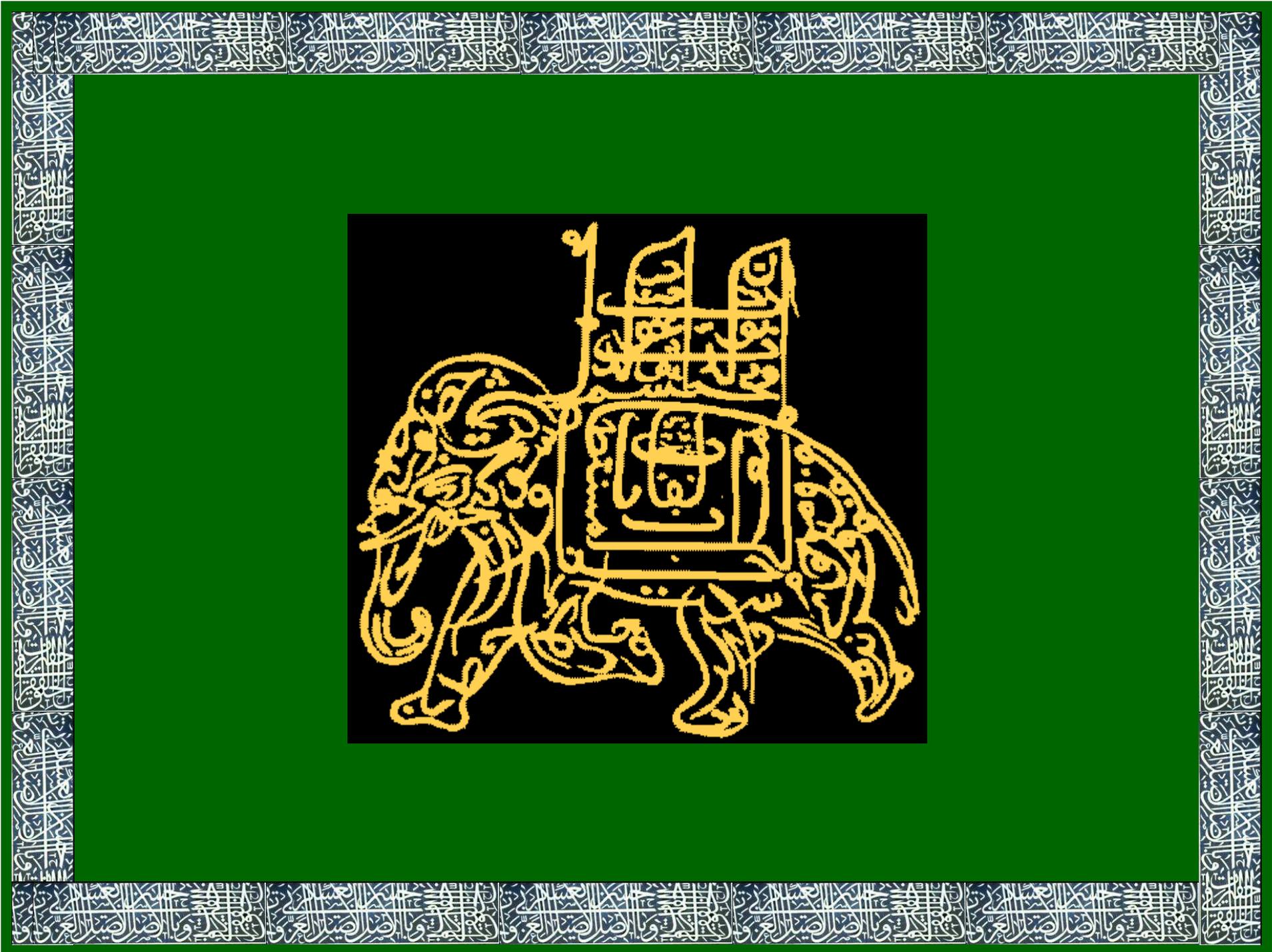


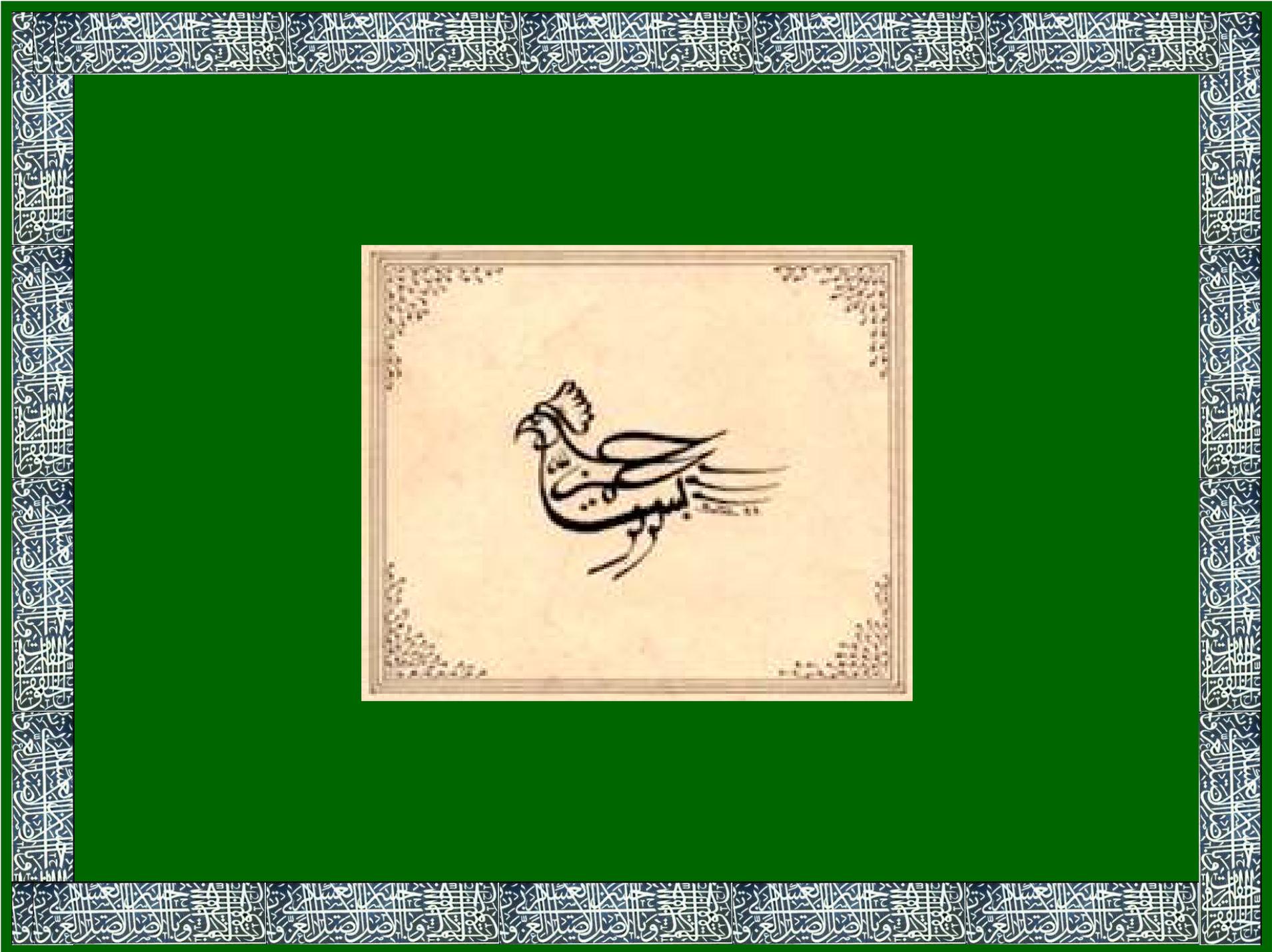


A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white on a dark blue background, framing a central green area. The calligraphy consists of repeating phrases in a stylized script.

Now some fauna



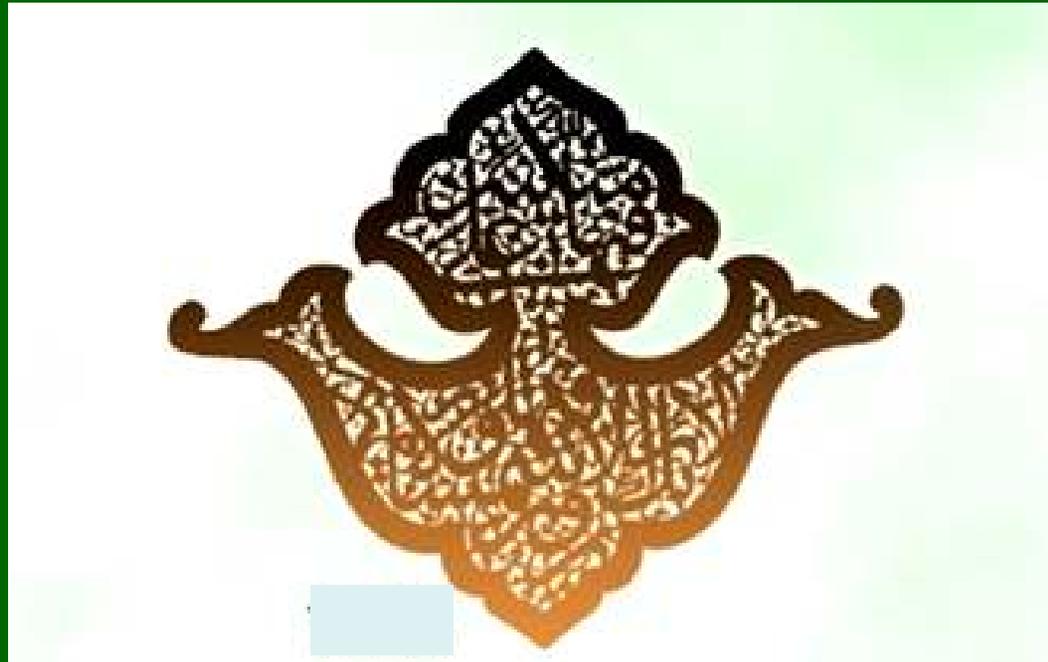






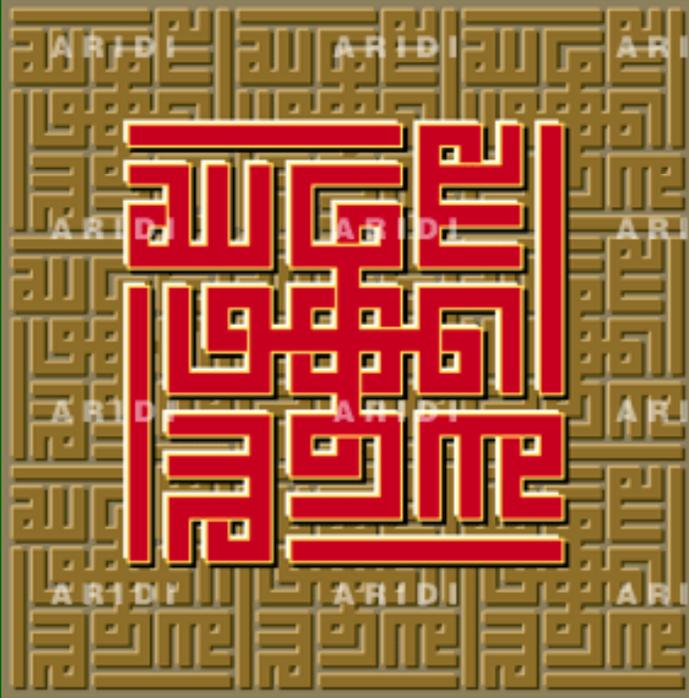
Some architectural motifs



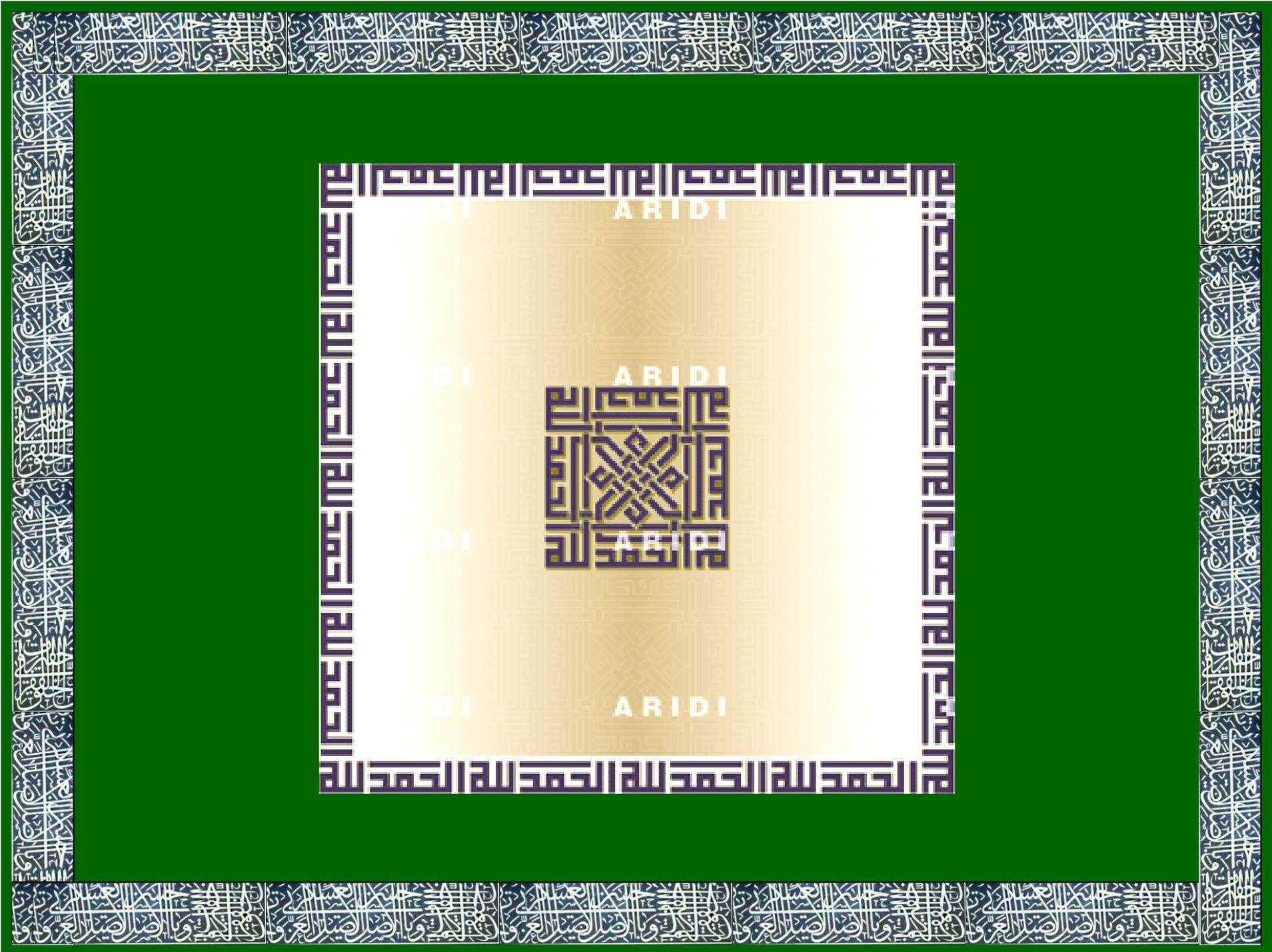


Allah

Some geometric patterns



Allah



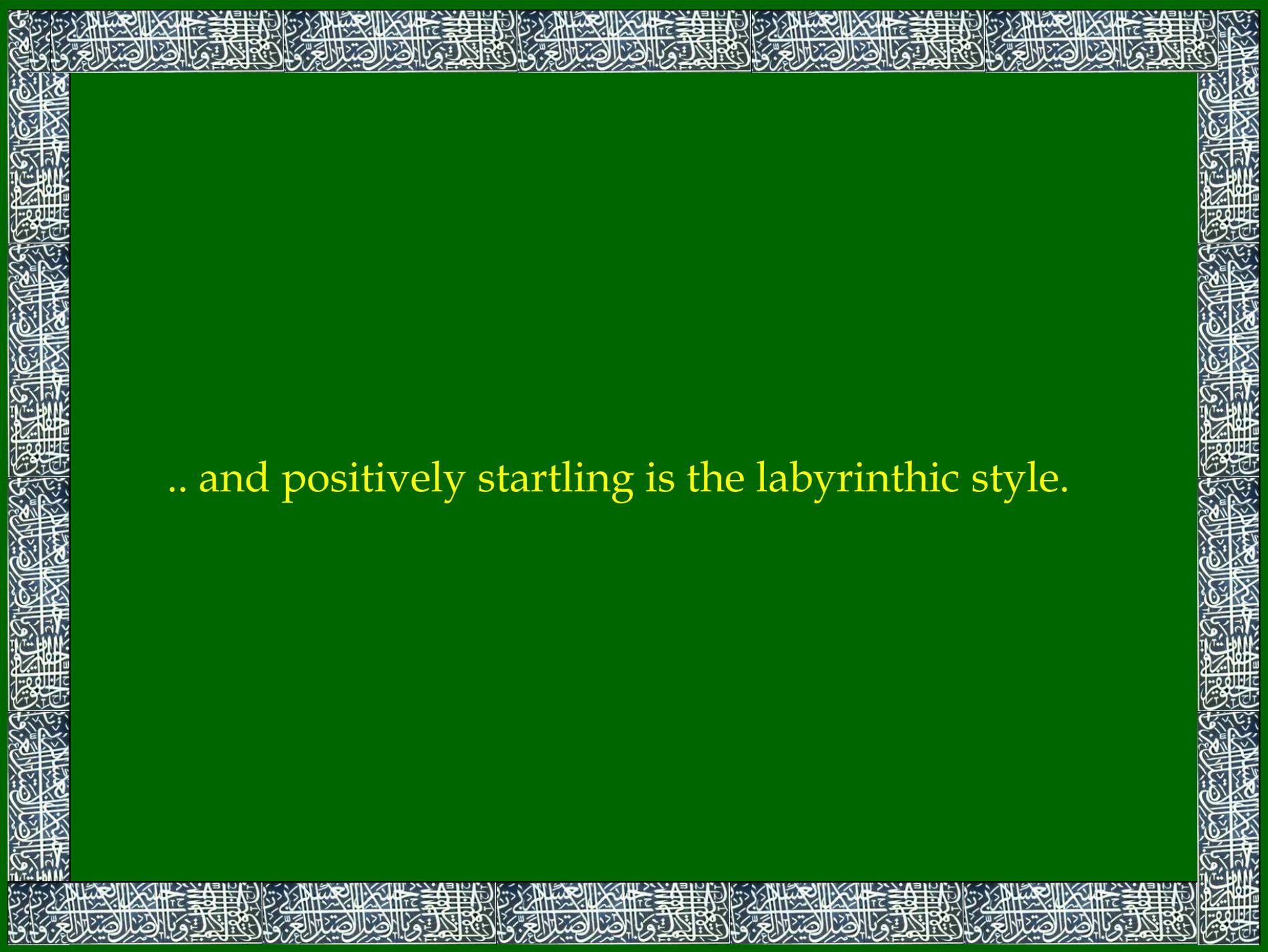
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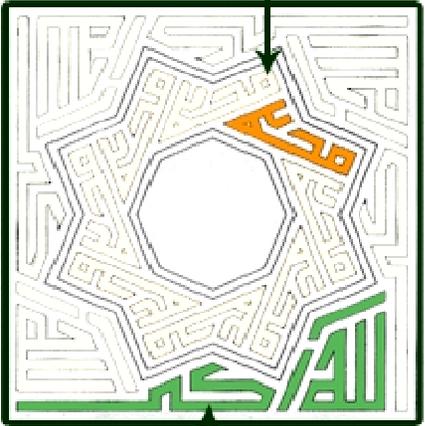
A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white on a dark blue background, framing a central green area. The calligraphy is dense and repetitive, featuring stylized letters and geometric patterns.

.. and positively startling is the labyrinthic style.



محمد

Mohammed

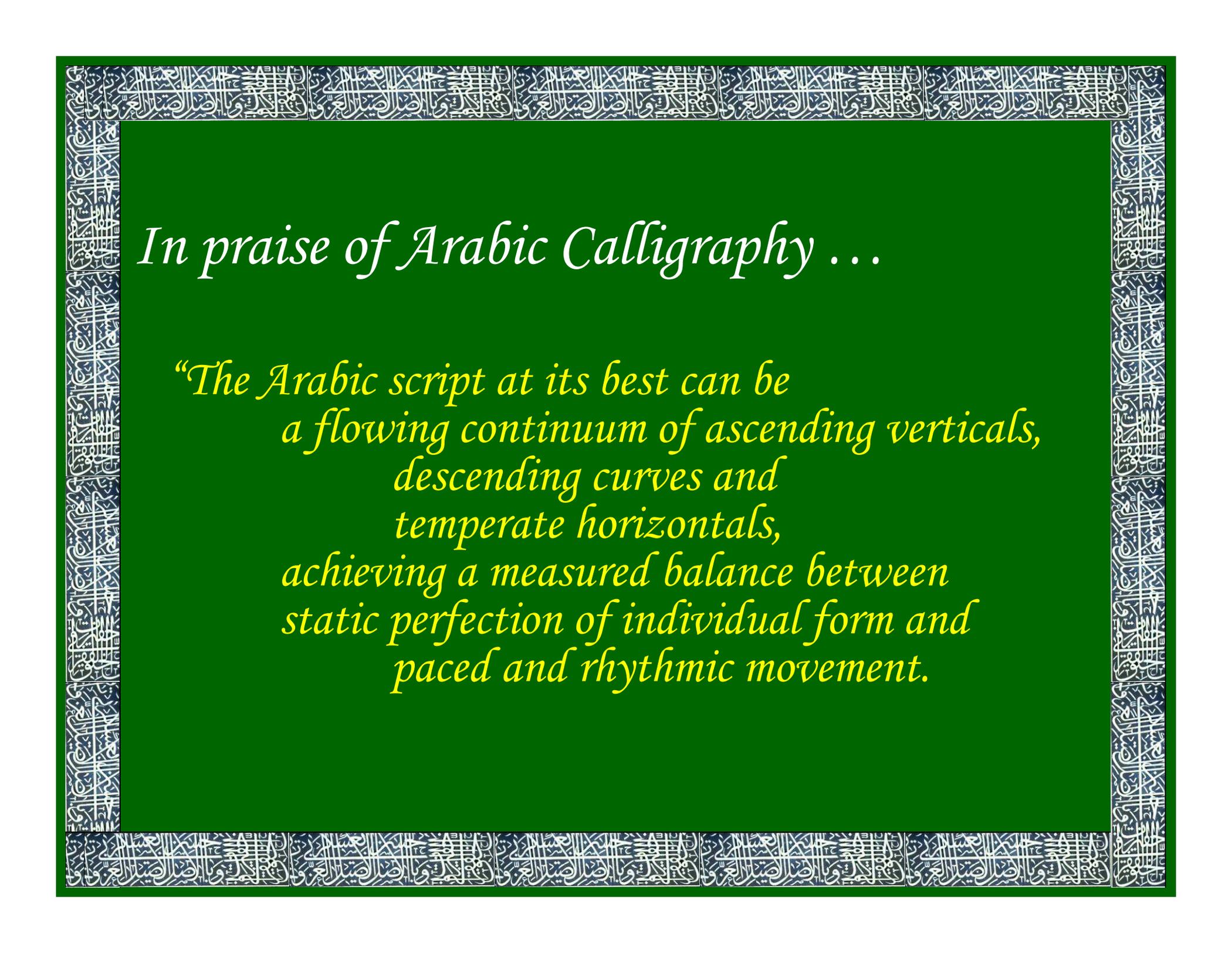


اللهو أكبر

Allahu Akbar

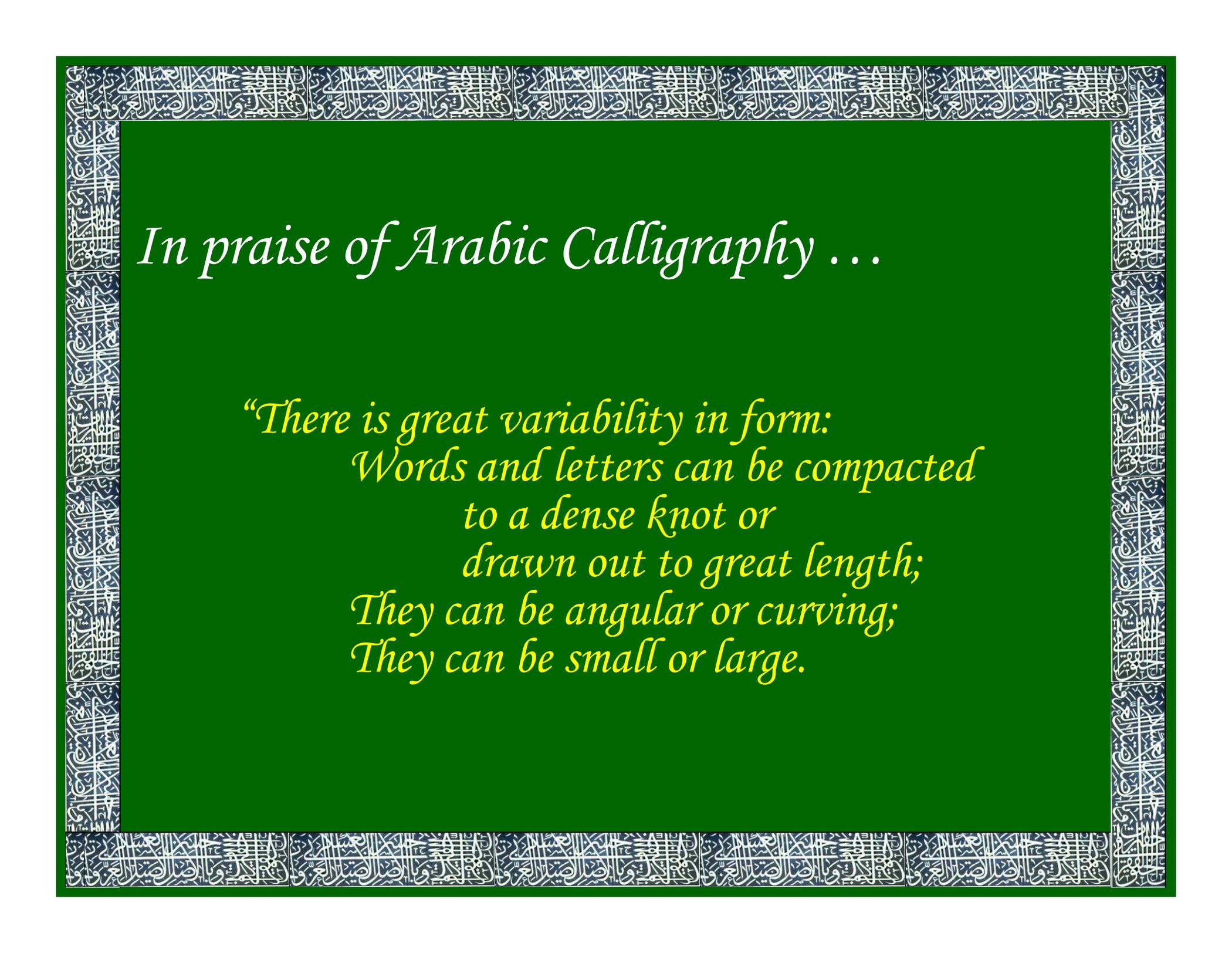


لا إلهَ إلا اللهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسولُ اللهِ
La allah illa Allahu mohamad rasool Allah

A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white and gold, set against a dark green background. The border is composed of repeating geometric and floral patterns, typical of Islamic art.

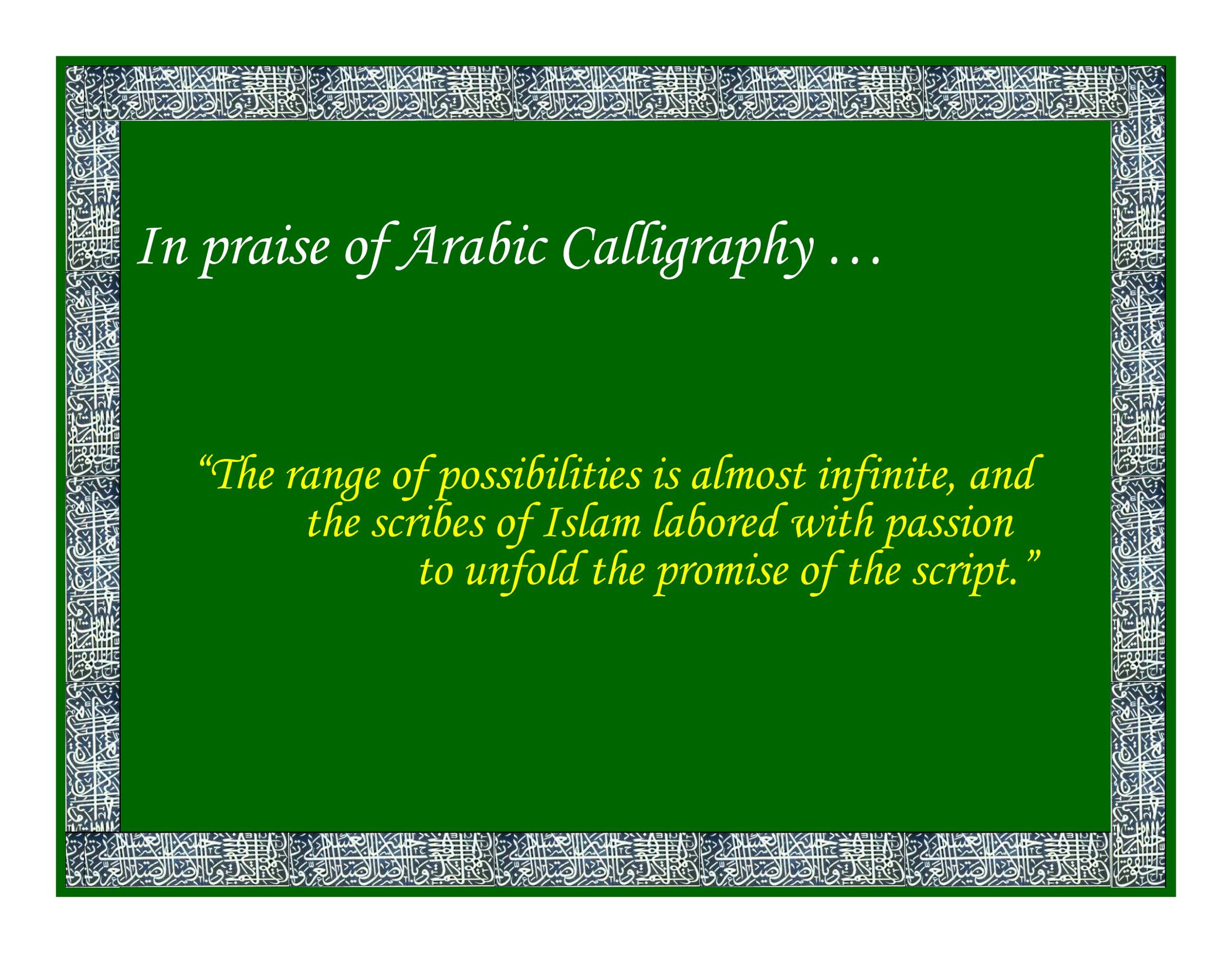
In praise of Arabic Calligraphy ...

“The Arabic script at its best can be a flowing continuum of ascending verticals, descending curves and temperate horizontals, achieving a measured balance between static perfection of individual form and paced and rhythmic movement.”

A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white and gold, set against a dark green background. The border is composed of repeating geometric and floral patterns.

In praise of Arabic Calligraphy ...

*“There is great variability in form:
Words and letters can be compacted
to a dense knot or
drawn out to great length;
They can be angular or curving;
They can be small or large.*”

A decorative border with intricate Arabic calligraphy in white and gold, framing the central green area. The calligraphy consists of repeating phrases in a stylized script.

In praise of Arabic Calligraphy ...

“The range of possibilities is almost infinite, and the scribes of Islam labored with passion to unfold the promise of the script.”

Thank you



Swaminathan