THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUR’ANIC QUOTATION ‘MĀ SHĀ’ ALLĀH’ ON BOTH OTTOMAN AND GREEK HERITAGES IN THE BALKANS

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Abstract
Mā shā’ Allāh is an Arabic expression used as a spoken amulet in Arabian culture prior Islam, and continued in Islamic heritage, to protect from the evil eye or to bring well luck even. This paper surveys the ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ and related inscriptions Yā Ḥāfīz’ and Yā Ḥafīz in the Balkans. It focuses on the extant writings on ottoman buildings in Greece. In this regard, it publishes a group of new inscription. The study also investigates the visual impact of such inscriptions. It analyses these inscriptions considering functional, regional, chronological and calligraphic stylistic criteria. The paper characterises the meaning of the ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ inscription either as a direct message or as a mirror reflects some aspects of the period and society to which belongs. Moreover, it examines the significance of writing the Mā shā’ Allāh in Greek alphabet ‘Μάσαλα and Μασαλαχ’ on Christian buildings and objects. The paper concludes that the Mā shā’ Allāh acquired over centuries a popular folkloric cultural concept as a talisman to protect from the evil eye rather than its own original religious expression.

Keywords:
Qur’anic inscription
Ottoman architecture
Greece
Balkans
Evil eye

1. Introduction
Cultural Heritage, including the language provides a context for historical knowledge. It also depicts the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from era to era, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. This paper sheds light on Islamic cultural influence on the Balkans’ heritage that resulted from the Ottoman’s dominance centuries. In this regard, the Arabic expression ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ along with its Islamic meaning is a distinguished example. In an encounter with a Mytilenean lady in Lesvos, the author heard the Qu’ranic idiom ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ pronounced in its Greek pronunciation masalah with the same concept as the expression used in Islamic culture. Therefore, after research, I found that the ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ still used in Greek –as in all areas ruled by the Ottoman Empire until early 20th century– especially by the elderly villagers, who use this expression frequently to protect from the evil eye. Previous studies that have dealt with using the expression 'Mā shā’ Allāh' by Greeks were superficial and restricted to a specific village [1] or object [2]. But this paper is studying the ‘Mā shā’ Allāh' and similar conceptual inscriptions Yā Ḥāfīz’ and Yā Ḥafīz in the Balkans. It focused specifically on the extant inscriptions on ottoman buildings in Greece. From the historic perspective, dating these inscriptions is crucial. This paper surveys these inscriptions in Greece and analyses them considering functional, regional, and chronological factors. The paper shows the adoption of Mā shā’ Allāh in Greek language and heritage and its comparable imitation in Greek alphabet ‘Μάσαλα and Μασαλαχ’ on Christian legacy.
2. ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ on Ottoman heritage in the Balkans with a special reference to Ottoman building inscriptions in Greece

2.1. Meaning of Mā shā’ Allāh

The Arabic expression ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ (ما شاء الله) means literally “what Allah wills” [3,4]. In Islamic culture, ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ is known as a Qur’anic expression, which occurred regularly in the Qur’an. Among these, only the formula “Mā shā’ Allāh Lā Qūwata ‘Illā Billāh” (ما شاء الله لا قوة إلا بالله) [Q.18:39:6-12], has an additional meaning that expresses one’s astonishment and admiration of the beautiful things or beloved possessions which either belong to himself or others, by attributing those “gifts” to the will and power of Allah. The Qur’anic verse [18:39:6-12], where this last formula appears, is the main concern of this paper, as it refers to a story that happened before Islamic times. This overall suggests that it was used similarly and in the same context in Arabic culture prior Islam. This Qur’anic expression “Mā shā’ Allāh Lā Qūwata ‘Illā Billāh” (ما شاء الله لا قوة إلا بالله), which appears mostly abridged ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ (ما شاء الله), is used to express the admiration of something or an appreciation towards someone, as well as to protect from the envy and the evil eye, in both spoken and written contexts. This concept of ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ is rooted in Islamic culture, as confirmed by the Qur’anic verses and the Prophet’s sayings. Indeed, a saying “hadith” attributed to the Prophet Muhammad “Whoever sees something, he admires it, to say ‘Mā shā’ Allāh Lā Qūwata ‘Illā Billāh’ (It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power except in Allah) [5]. Another hadith cites the formula “Mā shā’ Allāh Kān wa mā lam yasha’ lam yakun” which means what Allah wills, happens and what Allah does not will, not happens [6]. This hadith concludes that whoever says it including these words in the morning protected by Allāh until the evening and vice versa. Al-Baihaqei wrote a full chapter on this prophet’s saying “Mā shā’ Allāh Kān wa mā lam yasha’ lam yakun” to explain its different meanings upon the related Qur’anic verses and Prophet’s sayings [6]. The Islamic concept ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ appears to have been transferred also to non–Arab Islamic cultures, including the Turks. Considering its meaning, it was inscribed on beautiful possessions or works such as jewellery, buildings [4], coins etc., as a charm to protect from the effect of the evil eye. Such amulets are still used in Arabic Islamic countries side by side with other talismans as the hand ‘khamsa’ and, to a lesser extent, the eye-shaped objects.

2.2. Mā shā’ Allāh inscriptions on Ottoman buildings in Greece

As far as the author knows, there are 24 examples preserved on Ottoman architectural heritage in Greece. There were other Mā shā’ Allāh inscriptions but they are demolished or have disappeared [7]. Among these 24 examples only one cited the full Qur’anic quotation “Mā shā’ Allāh Lā Qūwata ‘Illā Billāh,” [18:39:6-12] above the minaret’s door, fig. (1-a) of the Defterdar Mosque at Kos (1137 H/1724-25). Another inscription cited a different formula “Mā shā’ Allāh Kān” (ما شاء الله كان) means what Allah wills, happens in a unique example which flanks the restoration inscription, fig. (1-b) of Murad Reis Mosque (1212 H/1797-98) at Rhodes [7,8]. The remaining 22 examples cite the short form ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ (ما شاء الله). Among the 22 inscriptions of ‘Mā shā’ Allāh’ on Ottoman buildings in Greece, there are 16 Mā shā’ Allāh inscriptions, including a date or without; in five inscriptions Mā shā’ Allāh comes as a preamble of the foundation or restoration inscriptions, figs. (1-c,d,e,f,g), whether the inscription is written in Arabic or in Ottoman, and one inscription comprises the Mā shā’ Allāh with another religious phrase in a bilingual inscription in Arabic and Greek, figs. (1-h) [9,10].
Geographically, the majority of the 24 Māšāʾ Allāh building inscriptions are preserved in the Greek islands: five in Mytilini, figs. (2-a,b,c,d,e), five in Crete (three in Rethymno, figs. (1-e,h, 2-f), and one in Heraklio, fig. (2-g) and one in Chania above the exterior gate of Shaker Bey Aghazade mansion19th c.?) [11], four in Rhodes, figs. (1-b,c, 2-h,i), two in Kos, figs. (1-a,g), and one inscription in Chios, fig. (1-d). The other seven are found in mainland Greece: two in Komotini (Eski Mosque at Komotini, fig. (2-j), and on an interior pier inside the Kir Mahalle Mosque at Komotini, no date [12], two in Kavala, figs. (2-k,l), and one inscription in each city of Athens (Fethiye Mosque at Athens, 17th c.) [13], Serres, fig. (1-f), and Veria (on the exterior façade of the ‘Beka’ mansion at Veroia, mid 18th c. restored in 1997-99, fig. (2-m). Chronologically, two inscriptions date to the 16th
century, one to the 17th century, and 16 of the 24 inscriptions to the Late Ottoman period (18th - early 20th century). Five inscriptions have no date; the stylistic features of these would suggest a 19th century date. The extant Mā shāʾ Allāh inscriptions on Ottoman buildings in Greece are seen on different materials: stone, figs. (1-a, 2-b, c,e,g) [14,15], marble, figs. (1-a,b,c,d,f, h, 2-a, 2-l), stucco, figs. (2-d,k), iron, fig. (2-f) [16] and copper, fig. (2-j). These inscriptions were executed using several techniques: engraved in stone or marble, carved with stucco mouldings, fig. (2-i), painted on stucco-covered surfaces, fig. (2-k) or on iron board (inscription of Shaker Bey Aghazade mansion at Chania), and pierced in metallic surfaces, fig. (2-j). The perfect design of some Mā shāʾ Allāh inscriptions suggests the use of qalib (Turkish Kalıp) for their execution. Qalib, or stencil implies that a mould or matrix was used to transfer the calligraphic composition to another material [17]. Such use of the qalib – especially for those placed at a high position and executed perfectly in a dif-ficult material as the one topping the dome of the Eski Mosque at Komotini, fig (2-j) – may be used to execute the wanted calligraphic composition ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ then placed in its final destination, figs. (2-j,e,f,h This technique was valid for malleable materials such as metals, figs. (2-f,j) or stucco, figs. (2-b,d,h). But engraving or using imprint technique was used for solid and hard materials like marble or stone. Some stone or marble calligraphic panels were executed separately then placed in their places as the inscribed ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ panel of the Kavala house suggests, fig. (2-l). The Ottomans used both round and hanging scripts [17]. The bulk of these Mā shāʾ Allāh inscriptions were executed –with one exception of the inscription of Murad Reis Mosque at Rhodes in riq’a script—with jali thulth (Turkish: celi sülüs) script, a typical Ottoman pattern in Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Eastern Mediterranean from the 16th century onwards. Two inscriptions were carved in jali ta’liq (Tur-kish: celi ta’lik) script, figs. (1-d,f), and one inscription was in primitive handwriting style (inscription of Shaker Bey Aghazade mansion at Chania) with the thulth script. In terms of building’s function, Mā shāʾ Allāh inscriptions are found on 11 mosques, figs. (1-a,c,e, and 2-a, d,h,j), seven houses, figs. (1-h, and 2-b,e,f,m), three fountains, figs. (1-d,g), one madresse (Mehmed ‘Ali Com-plex, fig. (2-k), one tekke, fig. (2-g), and one shop, fig. (2-c).
2.3. Má shā’ Allāh concept and cultural use considering inscriptions in the Balkans

Má shā’ Allāh in Islamic culture has two meanings: it is used to express appreciation, admiration, praise, or thankfulness regarding an event, building, object, talent or person that was just mentioned. Moreover, it is a popular expression to protect something or someone from the evil eye. Furthermore, both interpretations appear together; the person who says ‘Má shā’ Allāh’ in a given situation, implies ‘I appreciate and praise your (son, career, car, movie, etc.) and wish it protection from the evil eye, even mine’\(^{\text{n}}\). The inscription Má shā’ Allāh on religious buildings is more likely to be connected with the first meaning. But its engraving and writing on houses and shops refer mostly to the second interpretation, and perhaps both meanings. The use of Má shā’ Allāh as a charm to protect against the evil eye mainly characterises closed and small communities, in which everyone knows each other well. May one links the writing or engraving of the phrase Má shā’ Allāh on buildings, specifically houses and commercial structures, at first glance, with the rising of Islamic culture in the corresponding society. In reality, an in-depth examination of this phenomenon may indicate an opposite result; it reflects the predominance of social diseases in these societies. They resulted from the lack of social justice and high variations in income between people within the same community, as rare were the citizens with high income. Moreover, this fear from the evil eye may refer to the lack of true Islamic practices, such as not giving the...
Zakat and charities, by refusing to give the poor people their rights. This practice would increase the poor’s suffering and create a community crippled by social diseases, such as envy and hatred. There is no evidence to prove the aforementioned hypothesis, but some indications may support it. All the inscriptions of the Mā shā’ Allāh on houses and shops date to the last period of the Ottoman rule in Greece, and generally in the Balkans, a time of war and conflicts. The Ottoman state itself was in its worst state of decay, especially in the Balkans, at that time [18]. An Ottoman inscription (1270H/1854) of a house in an Albanian village (Bastar near Tirana) [19] declares clearly that the Mā shā’ Allāh was used to protect from the evil eye, fig. (3). This inscription consists of two parts; the first part, fig. (3-a) was designed as an amulet in a hexagram within a square. This hexagram was known in Arabic literature as “seal of Solomon” i.e. ring of Sulaymān (خاتم سليمان) and also known as star of David and “magen” shield of David [20]. This pattern was used in Islamic culture as an amulet and as a decorative motif –and in medieval Christian churches as well– many centuries before its first known use in a Jewish synagogue [21]. Its talismanic meaning was used to protect not only from the evil eye but also from the demons and jinn “genies” (جني) considering the power given to Solomon as certified in Islamic “Qur’anic” culture. In the central hexagon is engraved Mā shā’ Allāh on stone in jalīthulūth (cei sūliis) script, and in the six outer equilateral triangles were written “Yā Allāh” (O God) and ‘Yā Ḥafīz’ (O Preserver) – one of the 99 Names of Allāh meaning the Preserver, the All-Heedful and All-Protecting – alternated. In the four corners between the hexagram and the square, crescents and six-leaves rosettes are interchangeably engraved. In the bottom right corner, the date 21 Jumādā al-Awwal 1270 H (19 Feb. 1854) is included. In this regard, we can consider this inscription as an iconographic piece; where the hexagram “seal of Solomon” used in a symbolic form as an amulet against the evil eye. The second part, fig. (3-b) of the inscription comprises a 7-lines text. It is a bilingual inscription in Arabic and Ottoman represents a distinguished piece of symbolic amulet epigraphy confirms the meaning of the first iconographic part cited above. It reads:

1. يا الله ما شاء الله يا حفظ / 2. الحسود لا يسود / 3. فتحماً فتحماً / 4. بِحَمِّ الْأَنَّ / 5. لا سيئ الاذكار / 6. بودنيادة / 7. ترابلاً بنانا أولمش بدندر بو سنة ۱۲۷۰


Translation: 1. O Allāh, what Allāh wills, O Preserver / 2. [when] opening [this door] deactivates the evil eye / 3. and blinds the eyes of the enemies / 4. with sanctity of [Qur’anic quotation] O Allāh has given the victory, there is no hero like ‘Ali, / 5. There is no sword like dhu al-Faqār in this world / 6. my sorrow never disappears / 7. in this body made from earth, in the year 1270.

The content of this part, fig. (3-b) is completely an inscriptive amulet against the evil eye. It begins with a repetition of the content of the aforementioned “amulet” of the first part “Yā Allāh, Mā shā’ Allāh, Yā Ḥafīz” which considers an incantation from which mentioned after. The text refers obviously that this inscription was placed above the house’s main door; it says that thanks to this charm-invocation when opens this door it deactivates the evil eye and disables the eyes of the enemies. The next sentences “bihormat Innā fataḥnā lā fatā illā ‘alai / 5. lā saif illā dhu alfaqār” suggest the strong effect of the Sufi “Naqshbandi” Order in linking the explanation of the influence of Qur’an as an amulet against the evil eye. A final not in this inscription, is its content was written in
the so-called “kitābah sam‘aia” i.e. audio-writing; as for instance the word “فَتَا” instead of the correct dictate “فَتِى”.

2.4. Related inscriptions: ‘Yā Ḥāfiẓ’ and ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’

Corresponding to this culture of fear from the evil eye, and from the future considering the wars of that period, another Arabic inscription placed above doors or on facades of houses and shops dating to the late Ottoman period in Greece and the Balkans, reads ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ and ‘Yā Ḥafiz’. Both are Arabic adjectives meaning the Preserver, the All-Heedful and All-Protecting—as noted in the previous inscription from Albania—the second format is the superlative formula of the first, and the one cited in the most beautiful 99 Names of Allāh. Four inscriptions with the phrase ‘Yā Ḥafiz’ belong to houses: two are in Rethymno at Crete. The earliest is above the door of the house no. 9 at Vospourou Street, fig. (4-a), dated 1207 H / 1792-93, and the second belongs to the house no. 5 Eustratious Fotake [22] Street, fig. (4-b) dated 1324 R/1909. The latter is recorded with both calendars, the Rumi and the Gregorian (Miladi).

The third one belongs to the palatial house of ‘Beka’ at Verioa. The house itself dates to the 18th century, but the painted inscriptions and ornaments may be from the 19th century. The fourth inscription is placed on the exterior façade of a Turkish house near the citadel in the city of Kavala [23], designed in the same amulet shape of the Māshā Allāh as shown in the fig. (2-d,l). The last example expresses the same culture of fear from the evil eye, and upcoming variables of the island of Crete—considering the difficult political events and the critical situation of the Ottomans at that time—and is one—in terms of form and script—of the most beautiful and extraordinary preserved inscriptions in Greece. It is the Arabic inscription of the ‘Bon Marché’ commercial building at Irakleio [24,25], Crete. This inscription is designed as an amulet in a lozenge within an oval shape, and the main text forms a circle which fills the lozenge. Seven textual spaces are formed, which read according to the order in the fig. (4-d):

Figure (3) Shows a. & b. inscription on house in the village of Bastar near Tirana, Albania, 1270 H/1854

Translation: 1) Allah is the best Keeper, 2) He is the most Merciful of the merciful ones (the year 1309H [1891] / written by ... / 5) O Preserver / 6&7) Ḥafīẓ [mufrada; Turkish: müfreda].

The first two texts comprise the Qur’anic quotation [12: 64: 12-17] from Sūrat Yūsuf. The core central textual circle, fig. (4-c) is formed by the 2-letters of the Yā, beneath which are the two dots of the letter ya’. Ḥafiz is engraved here twice: the first in the aforementioned textual circle in jalithulth (celi sülüs) script in separate (mufrada) intersected
letters. This composition is flanked with the second Ḥafīẓ, which is also engraved in single (mufrada) letters: two on the right and the other two on the left. It is noteworthy that there are no extant examples of such inscriptions – Mā shāʾ Allāh, ‘Yā Ḥāfīẓ’ and ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ specifically those of the houses and shops – dating to the first centuries of the Ottoman rule in Greece and the Balkans. During that early Ottoman period, almost all the wealth of the commanders and the statesmen was directed to build and work effectively many charitable structures for the general benefit of the local community. The most important among these structures was the imaret [26].

In our examples, the owner of the house or shop that has the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh,’ ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ inscriptions forced who sees his beloved possession to read the inscription ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ to protect himself and his house or trade from the evil eye, or asking Allah to preserve it or them. To achieve this result, the patron would then select a remarkable and visible place for ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’, ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ inscriptions on the exterior of the structures.

2.5. ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ inscriptions and the visual influence

Considering the aim of the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ – and ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ or ‘Yā Ḥafīẓ’ inscriptions, the patron or the possessor was keen to give the inscription the utmost point of visibility. There are ten factors influencing the extent of the visual distinguishability of the inscriptions; seven themes connect with the inscription itself, and three were based on the relation between the inscription and the building on which it was placed. The factors concerning the inscription itself comprise: 1) dimensions, 2) colours, 3) the outline of the inscription, 4) the design of the content, 5) the material(s) used, 6) the technique applied in the execution, and 7) the ornaments or signs included in, or around, the inscription. The second group affecting the visibility, concerns the relation between the inscription and the building: 1) the urban context; the routes either around the building or leading to its entrance cons-
considering the position of the inscription, 2) the ratio between the dimensions of the inscription and the building or façade on which it is placed. 3) the position of the inscription on the exterior of the building. Evaluating to what extent the visual impact of the inscription is achieved by considering the abovementioned factors. The original state of the inscription and the building has to be taken into account equally. The paper further details two inscriptions among the examples presented above, considering the aforementioned factors, the ‘Beka’ mansion at Veroia, fig. (2-m, 5), and the two-storey house located in Ermou Street at Mytilini, fig. (2-e). The ‘Beka’ mansion at Veroia, fig. (2-m, 5) now houses the Institute of the Balkan Traditional Architecture and the Archive of Professor Nikolao Moutsopoulos. Thanks to the perfect restoration project undertaken in 1997-99, some of the house’s inscriptions and decorations were preserved, two especially are of interest. The first is the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ which is placed at the top centre of the façade overlooking the river, visible from all the corners. The second inscription is the phrase ‘Yā Ḥāfiẓ’, fig. (5) that is repeated twice within a rectangle, placed at the top centre of the main façade above the main door of the building from the courtyard, and visible clearly from the exterior at a distance, figs. (2-m, 5).

Figure (5) Shows the mansion of ‘Beka’ at Veroia (mid 18th c.; restored in 1997-99).

Thus, almost all the factors that influence the visual impact based on the relation between the inscription and its support, are achieved in both inscriptions. Regarding the factors concerning the inscription itself, the calligrapher—and the painter—succeeded to achieve the utmost visibility for both inscriptions by applying four of the seven factors (1, 2, 3 & 7). The dimensions of both inscriptions are suitable, readable obviously with the mere eye, and match the whole dimensions of the façades. The calligrapher used blue colour, in both inscriptions, for the text and decoration rendering a colourful contrast with the light background. Each inscription is delineated with an external shape, a circle for the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ and a rectangle for the ‘Yā Ḥāfiẓ’, distinguishing it from the other ornaments. Moreover, these colourful wall painting ornaments attracted the eyes of the passers-by. The second example here is the two-storey house located at the end of Ermou Street at Mytilini, fig. (2-e). On its main façade, the date “1319 H” [1901-1902] and the inscription ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ are engraved. Both inscriptions are symmetrically placed at the top centre of the main façade above built-in piers delineating vertically its mid-section, fig. (2-e). Both inscriptions were painted using the same dark grey colour of the built-in decorative piers, on which the date and inscriptions ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ placed. Except for the rather small dimensions of the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ inscription in relation to the façade dimensions, the other two factors influencing the visual impact thanks to the placement of the inscription are achieved. Concerning the factors connected with the inscription itself, three aspects are detected here (3, 4 & 6). The inscription is indeed visually distinct thanks to the outline of the inscription, the design of the ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ and the high relief engraving technique. Whereas it is unclear whether the colourful distinction is a result of the renovation, the inscription was painted with the same colour and material than the background. Therefore, the visual distinguishability was only achieved through some of the factors influencing the visual impact. The most important may be the remarkable height of the inscription, making it easily visible and readable. On the contrary, in
some cases, such as the Mā shāʾ Allāh inscription placed high above the portal of Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Rhodes, the painting motifs surrounding the inscription negatively affect the visual distinguishability of the inscription, fig. (2-h). The same result may be due to deterioration factors, fig. (2-d, 4-b) or renovation works, fig. (2-e).

3. ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ in both spoken and epigraphic Greek heritage

The Mā shāʾ Allāh expression used as a charm blessing and protecting from the evil eye, transferred to some non-Islamic cultures, among which the Greek culture. Someone can detect the Mā shāʾ Allāh expression within the contextual culture of both verbal and written Greek literature. The online Triantafillidi Greek dictionary matches ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh’ with the Greek ‘μάσαλα’ and further explains its meanings and use: ‘It is an exclamation, rustic, and ancient expression, to express the admiration, praise, thankfulness, or to protect from the evil eye: ex. Wow! (s)he grew up so fast! [Turkish: maşallah (derived from Arabic)]’ The Greek text: [27] [Αλεξικό]. μάσαλα [másala] εφημ. : (λαίκότρ., παρωχ.) για να εκφράσουμε θαυμασμό, επιδοκιμασία, επιβράβευση ή για αποτροπή βασκανίας: ~ το παιδί, πόσο φηλώσα! [τουρκ. Maşallah (από τα αραβ.)]. Using Mā shāʾ Allāh in spoken Modern Greek language is still noticed specifically in the villages of Lesvos, Rhodes, and Crete Islands. I heard it in 2016, during my last visit to Mytilini, from a Greek grandmother who praised the beauty of her granddaughter then said ‘masallax.’ An earlier study of Herzfeld (1981) on the semiotic approach to evil eye accusations in the Greek village of Pefko at Rhodes, concluded that, according to the Pefkiot concepts, the person who did not say Mā shāʾ Allāh ‘masallax’ is envious and green-eyed (γυρουσώδης [grousizis]) [1]. He commented on the Pefkiot using the Mā shāʾ Allāh expression: Note that while villagers are aware that [Mā shāʾ Allāh] this is a Turkish word, as perhaps befits a prophylactic against grusuzia, they mostly do not understand it as an invocation to Allah, but describe it simply as a word that brings protection [1]. The Mā shāʾ Allāh differs from the other words borrowed from Turkish, as it is a religious expression and not the name or adjective of something or someone. It is used in the Greek spoken dictionary with its Islamic ‘Turkish’ cultural concept. Furthermore, a Greek alphabet of Mā shāʾ Allāh ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ is used in non-Muslim epigraphic heritage on buildings and objects with its Islamic cultural meaning, to protect from the evil eye. The Karamanlides (Karamanians) [28] or Orthodox Christians wrote ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ on their houses in Anatolia following this Turkish tradition. There is an extant distinguished example above a house in İncesu, fig. (6-a), a district of Kayseri province in Central Anatolia [29]. The inscription combines ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ with the date September 1871. Another inscription placed above the door of a house, fig. (6-b) in Güzelyurt—Gelveri or Karvali—, a town and district of Aksaray province in Central Anatolia [28]. The inscription comprises two lines: 1) an engraved cross and the ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’—with the typography of two L ‘Λ’—, and 2) the second line comprises the capital letters ‘X. I. Κ’ with the date 1900. A gospel book attributed to Armenia, stored in the Morgan Library and Museum (MS M. 1149), holds an interesting example of Mā shāʾ Allāh in Greek letters ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ as a charm, among other talismans from different cultures and religions, protecting from the evil eye [2,30]. Though the manuscript itself was made between 1675 and 1725, the wide assortment of priceless objects adorning its cover reflects various regions, cultures, and time periods. Indeed, this ‘treasure-binding’ comprises two 13th century Seljuk silver coins connected with a circular blue, red and white enamelled medallion, engraved mother-of-pearl plaques, a gilded metal cross, fragments of ornamental jewellery, and 30 engraved seal stones, fig. (6-c,d) [2,30]. Most of these objects, added or attached to the book’s cover, functioned as talismans to protect from the evil eye or to bring good luck as a result of their materials or engravings [2,30]. As far as the Mā shāʾ Allāh inscription is concerned, one of
the 30 seal stones attached to the manuscript's back cover, was engraved with the Mā shāʾ Allāh in a Greek alphabet ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ fig. (6-d). It is read in four lines: 1) Cross, 2) Μαοα, 3) ιαρ and 4) 1759. This Greek seal including the Mā shāʾ Allāh ‘ΜΑΣΑΛΑΧ’ is active thanks to its borrowed concept from the Islamic ‘Turkish’ culture.


4. Discussion
In this paper, we analyse the use of Islamic expression ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh' an amulet to protect from the evil eye by Muslims and Christians together. It discusses the alike conceptual expressions Yā Ḥāfiẓ and Yā Ḥafiz. It detects the Ottoman building inscriptions characterising these expressions in the Balkans, focusing on those survive in Greece. The Islamic expression ‘Mā shāʾ Allāh' transferred through the Ottomans to Christian "Byzantine" culture, heritage and language. This Christian acceptance of Mā shāʾ Allāh as a talisman to protect from the evil eye accompanied with its transformation into a popular folkloric significance exceeded its original religious context. This folkloric taste appeared in its use on Islamic and Christian buildings, belongings and daily language with the same concept; to protect from the evil eye. However, we cannot define all patterns including customs, practises, places, objects, artistic expressions and values that transferred from Ottoman "Islamic" legacy to Balkan "Christian" culture, and vice versa. Future research will explore more examples of this pattern which may include Sufi rituals and practises, cult of trees, tekke (dervish or Sufi lodge) community… Based on geographically and chronologically analysis of the surveyed inscriptions in Greece; the study suggests that the extensive use of the calligraphic amulets such as Mā shāʾ Allāh and Yā Ḥafiz in the Ottoman Balkans declares the decay and war periods. The paper discusses the relation between attaining the message(s) of such inscriptions Mā shāʾ Allāh and Yā Ḥafiz in the Ottoman Balkans declares the decay and war periods. The paper discusses the relation between attaining the message(s) of such inscriptions Mā shāʾ Allāh and Yā Ḥafiz (or Yā Ḥafiz) and their visibility. It suggests a group of factors that influencing the visual impact of those writings; some connect with the calligraphic panels themselves, and other through the relation between the inscriptions and the buildings comprise them.

5. Conclusion
This paper surveyed and analysed the Qur'anic quotation Mā shāʾ Allāh on both Ottoman and Greek heritages in the Balkans. Its main focus is the existing inscriptions on Ottoman buildings
in Greece. There is a considerable number of such Mā shāʾ Allāh writings survived on varying functional ottoman architectural works in Greece. The main motive of this study is the continuation of using the Mā shāʾ Allāh in Greek language until now. This paper proposes an analysis of the extant inscriptions in Greece considering functional, regional, and chronological categories, and concludes that the preserved examples mainly found in the islands and Northern Greece; territories were under the Ottoman rule until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of these inscriptions date to the Late Ottoman period 18-20th century. The paper suggests that the engraving of the Mā shāʾ Allāh and the relevant inscription of Ya Ḥafīz, in its both formulas, specifically on private residential and commercial buildings had two meanings: 1) A direct message of protecting from the evil eye, 2) The fear from upcoming variables considering the difficult political events and the critical situation of the Ottomans at that time of their producing as was in the island of Crete. Mā shāʾ Allāh was engraved also in Greek alphabet ‘Mάσαλα’ and ‘Μασαλάχ’ on Christian buildings, and objects as in Islamic cultural context. Thus the Qur’anic Arabic expression Mā shāʾ Allāh (Turkish: Maşallah; Greek: Mάσαλα and Μασαλαχ) carries cultural meaning across different religions, cultures and regions. It was a mascot and a talisman on properties, including houses and belongings of both Muslims and Christians.

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