Several of the bands on the minaret at Sava are epigraphic. Two bands in bordered Kufic name the rulers of the time, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir bi'llahi and the Saljuq sultan Muhammad b. Malikshah. A large band at the bottom contains bricks set in relief to outline letters in square Kufic spelling out the phrase la nabi bi'd muhammad ('there is no prophet after Muhammad'), which is repeated three times around the minaret. This is the first extant example of square Kufic written out as a single line of text, and this experiment was rarely repeated.

A far more popular method of writing on brick buildings in square Kufic was to exploit the spaces between the bricks. The earliest dated example to survive occurs on the minaret built in 515/1122–3 at Car, a few kilometres east of Isfahan. The minaret shaft (see Figure 7.37) is decorated with a diagonal diaper of square Kufic letters that spell out the phrase al-mahdi al-rasul bi'man ilah ('power [belongs] to God'). The pattern is created by the spaces between the rising brick joints.

It was a short step for designers to fill the spaces between bricks with glazed elements so that the words were spelled out not by the dark shadows created by the recessed interstices between the bricks but by glittering surfaces that were flush with the brick bonds and contrasted with the matte surface around them. The shaft of the thirteenth-century minaret of the congregational mosque at Nishabur (R. Hillenbrand 1976) for example, is decorated with the phrase 'knowledge is with God' (al-hikma fi'd-din al-malik) spelled out in square Kufic letters made of bricks glazed light blue. This became the most popular technique for covering large wall areas in the later period in Iran and adjacent areas, as on the shrine ordered by Timur for Ahmad Yasavi in Turkestan (Blair and Bloom 1984, fig. 46) or on the façade of the Madrasa al-Ghiyathiyah at Khurj, completed in 646/1248–9 (O'Kane 1976).

Square Kufic clearly developed out of brick construction and was most popular in areas like Iran where baked brick was the main medium of construction. Ghouchani (1983) gives many examples from the region of Isfahan. The style could be adapted, however, to other materials.

Inscriptions in square Kufic could be executed in the stucco revetment that increasingly came to dominate interior decoration in Iran in later times. Carved stucco, of course, allowed for longer and more complicated texts. It also allowed for more latitude in design, so that the texts could be fitted to triangular spaces, muqarnas elements and the like.

Some of the most elaborate examples of square Kufic inscriptions in stucco are found in the interior of the shrine built outside Isfahan in the opening decades of the fourteenth century for the Sufi shaykh known as Pir-i Bakram (Hunfar 1977: 353–66). The side walls (see Figure 7.38) are decorated with the names of the four Orthodox Caliphs written out in square Kufic letters created by endplugs set between the baked bricks. Some of the endplugs are stamped with geometric designs, but a few are epigraphic, with the names 'Ali and Muhammad written in square Kufic. The north piers supporting the iwans are further decorated with large stucco plaques of square Kufic. The one on the east side has the names of the Fourteen Innocent Oyres (Muhammad, Fatima and the Twelve Imams); the one on the west has some of the ninety-nine names of God given in Koran 59:23. These inscriptions are juxtaposed to other horizontal bands and panels with other varieties of scripts that make this building a tour-de-force of epigraphic decoration.

Stucco inscriptions in square Kufic were particularly popular in Iran during the period of Mongol rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is not surprising, for the script resembles the square box-like script known as Phagpa introduced in 1269 by the great Yuan ruler Qubilay for writing Mongolian. This new script was quite cumbersome and was most important for insignia and seals. Yuan seals in Phagpa script were quickly distributed to the Ilkhanids in Iran, and several farman, or decrees, preserved in Tehran and elsewhere, are stamped in red at the end of the document and at the junction of the individual sections with the
7.38 Interior of the shrine constructed for Piri Bakran at Luniun, near Isfahan in the early fourteenth century, showing the north wall with several kinds of square Kufic inscriptions.

7.39 Interior of the Ka'atuz madrasa at Konya built in 649/1251–2, with sacred names in square Kufic in the Turkish triangles and a Koranic inscription (2:255) in Kufic with interlaced stems around the base of the dome.
impression of a seal sent by Qubays from Khorâbâq. This style of Chisean calligraphy was also imitated in Iran, when Mongol rulers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries ordered similar seals containing Koranic phrases and religious invocations in Arabic written in square Kufic. Indeed, the resemblance between the two scripts is so close that square Kufic is sometimes called seal script and its origins are sometimes (wrongly) thought to derive from Chinese seals, although it was clearly used in architecture before the introduction of Phlappa for seals.

The popularity of square Kufic in Iran also meant that it was adapted for use in other materials elsewhere. The minaret of the Great Mosque at Mardin built in 573/1176–7 (Creswell 1933–40 [1979], vol. 3, fig. 135), for example, has a large text in square Kufic carved on the square stone base. Square Kufic was also used to decorate the shaft of the minaret built at Sinjar in Muharram 598/ October 1201. These examples in stone and brick in the Jazira were imitations of the techniques that had evolved in Iran. Designers often played with square Kufic by repeating a sacred name four times in a circle to create a wheel-like pattern. The most common names were Muhammad and 'Ali, and the initial mim of Muhammad or 'ain of 'Ali was often the pivot for a fourfold repetition of the name in a swastika shape. Barghoorn and Abul-Haij (1979) give examples from the Levant. A particularly wide, and somewhat eclectic, repertory of sacred names is written in square Kufic on the Turkish triangles supporting the dome in the Karatay Madrasa built at Konya in 655/1255–2 (see Figure 7.30). Eight names are included there: Da'ud, Isa, Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Musa, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali (Meinecke 1976, no. 76).

The style also passed to Egypt, where it was also adapted to other materials. The earliest example of square Kufic in Cairo occurs in the interior of the mausoleum of Qal'atun (see Figure 7.40), where a panel of differently coloured marbles spells out the name Muhammad four times at the top and four times below. The technique of inlaid marble is Syrian in origin (Meinecke 1971), and colour is used to enhance the message. The letters of the name Muhammad are done in white. Red is used to fill the hole of the letter mim, which occurs twice in each repetition of the name. The rest of the ground is composed of small pieces of differently coloured marble set in a diamond pattern.

Ultimately the desire for readability overcame the trend towards increasingly complex decoration, and floriated and interfaced Kufic scripts were abandoned in favour of cursive ones. Cursive had been used alongside Kufic for chancellery documents since Unayyad times. In the 'Abbâsid period, famous calligraphers such as Ibn Mişqla (d. 940) and Ibn al-Bawwâb (d. 1023) refined and elevated cursive script to a rank suitable for copying manuscripts of the Koran. Cursive script first appears in monumental epigraphy in the eleventh century. It was used initially for religious inscriptions, such as the Koranic verses across the façade of the south dome added to the congregational mosque in Baghdad in the winter of 1086–7 (Blair 1992b, no. 61). The band is executed in carved stucco, which lends itself readily to curved lines.

Since cursive script was more readable, it was quickly adopted for historical texts. In the eastern Islamic lands this was a gradual process. The first examples to survive there are stucco panels in the tomb of al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhi in the name of the Qarakhanid Ahmed (d. 1089) and stone fragments from Ghazna in the name of the Ghurizid sultan 'Abd al-Malik (d. 1050). These inscriptions in cursive were consciously juxtaposed on the same building to other inscriptions in complex Kufic scripts. The minarets at Dâwlatabad (see Figure 6.37) and Ghazna (see Figure 7.35) show good examples of this wilful combination of different styles on the same building.

In other areas, the change from angular to cursive was more abrupt. In Syria, for example, the Zangâd ruler Nur al-Dîn (5 1146–72) ordered the adoption of cursive scripts in monumental inscriptions. The transition was effected in less than a decade, and cursive inscriptions bearing his name grace many of the buildings that he ordered there. The foundation inscription for his hospital in Damascus, for example (see Figure 7.40) Marble mosaic panel in square Kufic from the mausoleum of Qal'atun, Cairo.
7.41 was inscribed in naskh on a slab of white marble, with the cursive letters encrusted with black stucco to enhance legibility. The outside band says that the work was completed in 540/1154-5, while the four lines in the center give Nur al-Din’s name and titles (RCEA 3164, corrected in RCEA IX, pp. 371-3).

Kufic gradually lost its pre-eminence in monumental epigraphy and from the thirteenth century became stereotyped and repetitive. This was particularly true in the western Islamic lands. In the Alhambra palace at Granada, for example (see Figure 7.42), Kufic with interlaced stems was used for cartouches in which the words are virtually illegible. These inscriptions in stylised Kufic are often played off against other cartouches with the slogan of the Nasrid ruler Muhammad I, wa l-ghalib sallallah ‘alayhi (‘there is no victor save God’), written in an equally stylised cursive.

In the central Islamic lands, designers reserved their greatest artistic efforts for elaborating cursive scripts. Most inscriptions were carved in stone, but stucco was also used. One of the most beautiful [see Figure 7.43] is this stucco band on the western wall of the courtyard in the tomb complex for the amirs Salar and Sanjar in Cairo, begun in 703/1303. The two cartouches contain Koran 3:185, a typical funerary inscription that every soul shall taste of death, that the good will achieve Paradise and that the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception. The text is superposed on a background of arabo-musci, typical of the Iranian world.

To balance the inscription and fill the upper zone, designers dropped the rigid base line characteristic of Kufic and divided words into short groups of letters suspended on the diagonal. A good example is the construction text dated 610/1213-14 on the citadel of Jerusalem in the name of the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Mu’azzam ’Isa (MCIA Jerusalem, no. 43 and plate XL). The phrases became more crowded as texts became
longer and incorporated administrative decrees written in several lines within rectangular frames, as in the decree in the name of the Mamluk sultan Jaqmaq added to the mosque of Princess Aslulayn in the Faiyum in 843/1437-8 (MOTA Egipte 1, no. 373, plate IX, no. 6).

Stucco carvers and tile workers in Iran gradually elongated the stems of the letters and filled the upper zone with various decorative motifs. Those could be flowers, as on the Saljuq minaret at Dawlatabad (see Figure 6.37). They could be arabesque scrolls, as on the bands ringing the walls of the domed sanctuary added to the mosque at Ardistan in 553/1158 (Eppinghausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 398) and the contemporary tomb at Sangbast in eastern Iran (ibid., fig. 300).

A second inscription could even be inserted among the stems of the main text. One of the earliest examples to survive is found on the tomb for the Ilkhanid sultan Ujayr at Sultanbeyl, finished in 715/1315, and in succeeding centuries this two-tiered inscription band became increasingly popular. Single words or even phrases could be piled above the basic inscription, and the tail of a final `f’ could be drawn back to the right across the text to serve as a sort of dividing line. The interior of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah (see Figure 4.19) contains spectacular examples in tile mosaic from the seventeenth century.

The introduction of tile mosaic also made colour an important feature in inscriptions. Designers juxtaposed white letters against a dark blue ground, adding vocalisation in accent colours and setting off the name of the ruler in gold, as in the restoration text in the name of the Aq Qoyunaq ruler Uzbek Hasan added to the qibla iwan of the congregational mosque at Isfahan in 860/1455-6.

Ottoman tile workers adapted and refined many of these techniques. The lunette panels done by the ‘Master of Tabriz’ for the windows of the court to the Üç Şerefeli Mosque at Edirne, for example, are underglaze-painted with two contrasting texts (Dijkema 1977, nos 163-4). The larger band in cursive invokes the name of the patron, the Ottoman sultan Murad II. The pious invocation reads: ‘O Lord, accept [this pious work] from the sultan, son of the sultan, Murad

b. Muhammad Khar. A smaller text in a stylised Kufic is inserted in the stems of the first. It reads al-jannat al-dar al-asfâl (‘Paradise is the abode of the musâfficent’). It alludes to the pious nature of the endowment, for only things that are pleasing to God may be endowed. Colour was used to enhance the message, and the earlier palette of blue and white was expanded to include purple and two shades of blue. In one of the surviving lunettes, the tile makers emphasised the distinction between the two styles of script by using different colours for the two texts (see Figure 7.44).

In the later period, particularly in Iran, Turkey and India, as poetic inscriptions became more frequent, cartouches often replaced rectangular frames. Like the Selimiye (see Figure 2.8), the Üç Şerefeli Mosque has such poetic inscriptions over the doorways leading from the courtyard to the mosque. The texts are painted on white marble in rectangular cartouches with rounded corners. They contain chronograms with the years that the mosque was ordered [843/1437-8] and completed [853/1447-8], but the inscriptions have been restored and the texts are now corrupt (Dijkema 1977, nos 11-15).