

توظيف الخط العربي في التصميم الداخلي الإسلامي: دراسة مبنية على نماذج مختارة
من المساجد التقليدية والمعاصر

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الملخص

استخدم المعمارى المسلم عبر العصور عدة أنماط من الزخرفة، الزخارف الهندسية والتوريقية والخط العربي، وذلك لإظهار التصميم الداخلي للمباني الدينية والمساجد بأحسن صورة ممكنة. ولكن أخذ الخط العربي مكانة مميزة جدا بين كل اشكال الزخارف لما يمتلك من خصائص شكلية وقيمة جوهريّة كونه يرسم ويصور كلام الخالق عز وجل والأحاديث النبوية الشريفة، إضافة الى توثيق بعض الأحداث والمواقف في التاريخ الإسلامي.

هذه الورقة البحثية بدأت باستعراض تاريخي لاستخدام الخطوط والكتابات في التصميم الداخلي لحضارات ما قبل الإسلام مع توضيح الأغراض والفوائد لذلك الاستخدام. ثم قام الباحث باستعراض تاريخي لتوظيف الخط العربي في التصميم الداخلي للمباني والمساجد في مختلف العهود الإسلامية بداية من العصر الأموي ومرورا بالعصر العباسي والمملوكي والعثماني وحتى العصر الحديث. وفيما بعد ناقشت هذه الورقة مستقبل التصميم الداخلي الإسلامي وأهمية الخط العربي كنمط زخرفي في المحافظة على التراث الإسلامي واستمراره عند الأجيال القادمة. وأخيرا خلصت الدراسة إلى النتائج والتوصيات.

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Employing Arabic Calligraphy in Islamic Interior Design: A Study Based on Selected Examples of Traditional and Contemporary Mosques

ABSTRACT

Throughout the Islamic ages, Muslim architects devised several methods of interior decoration and stylization, during which they employed several types of decoration, such as geometric and floral ornaments and Arabic calligraphy, so as to show the interior design of religious buildings in the best possible way. In particular, Arabic calligraphy occupied a very special place among alZi forms of ornamentation because of its intrinsic value, as it draws the words of the Almighty Creator and the honorable hadiths on the walls of buildings with great flexibility and a unique architectural style, in addition to documenting important events in Islamic history.

This paper began with a historical review of the use of scripts in the interior design of pre-Islamic civilizations with an explanation of the purposes and benefits of that use. Then the researcher made a historical review of the use of Arabic calligraphy in the interior design of mosques in the various Islamic eras, starting from the Umayyad era and passing through the Abbasid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman eras until the present time. Later, this paper discussed the future of Islamic interior design and the importance of Arabic calligraphy as a decorative element in preserving Islamic heritage and its continuity for future generations. Finally, the study concluded with the results and recommendations.

Key words: Arabic calligraphy, Decorative elements, Islamic interior design.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic calligraphy was exploited as a distinctive decorative element in Islamic architecture, from the borders of China in the east to southern Spain in the west. The interior surfaces and exterior facades of traditional buildings across the Muslim World were decorated with wonderful types of Arabic calligraphy, which reflect spiritual, cultural, and artistic aspects of Islam. Across centuries, Arabic calligraphy designs engraved on the inner facades of mosques, which are mainly verses from the Holy Qur'an, give an atmosphere of sacredness, spirituality, and tranquility to the interior space of the building.

The mosque (Arabic: *masjid* or *Jami'*), the most prestigious building in Muslim communities, literally means the place where Muslims worship and pray to God. Mosques were built all over the Islamic regions, and it was decorated with the major decorative art forms: geometric patterns, floral motifs and mainly Arabic calligraphy. In central or grand mosques, a large number of people come to perform prayer together, and the mosque usually includes a courtyard where worshipers meet and perform ablution before entering the cubic-shaped prayer hall. The courtyard is not without some inscriptions and calligraphy to remind believers of the teachings of the Muhammadan message. A minaret rises in one corner of the mosque's courtyard in great resemblance to the letter *Alif*, which is a tower from which believers are called to pray five times a day. Inside the mosque, a mihrab rich in calligraphic decoration was placed in the center of the qibla wall, indicating the direction of Mecca. (Raimi, 2013: 9 – 19)

1,1Research problem:

Islamic architecture began with a variety of buildings and architectural styles, but the mosque was the most important building since its inception in the Umayyad era, and then it went through great developments and differences through the Abbasid era and the Mamluk era, up to the Ottoman style of mosque architecture. The shape of the Ottoman mosque evolved with time and affected the architecture of many mosques that were built in the modern style in many countries.

These successive architectural developments adopted a set of decorative elements, such as geometric and floral motifs and Arabic calligraphy in order to improve the shape of the interior spaces of the mosque, which were completely devoid of human or animal decorations. This means that the decorative program was not stereoscopic in its appearance, but rather relied on a two-dimensional flat decorative system.

Arabic calligraphy was one of the most important elements in the decorative program in Islamic architecture from the Umayyad period (661-750) until the present time, so this study will discuss the development of the employment of Arabic calligraphy in Islamic interior design and its impact on the interior space in Islamic architecture.

To clarify the idea, the researcher would like to ask the following questions: ١- How did the idea of employing Arabic calligraphy in Islamic interior design arise, and what is the significance of Arabic calligraphy in Islamic interior design? ٢- How did the Muslim architect succeed in coordinating between Arabic calligraphy and other forms of decoration

when working on the interior design of the mosque from the Umayyad era to the present? 3- Is it possible to imagine contemporary Islamic architecture, especially mosques, without the decoration of Arabic calligraphy?

1.2 Research Objectives:

Based on the foregoing research problem and questions, a set of objectives were formed, which can be summarized as follows:

1- Follow up on the historical development of the employment of calligraphic decorations in the mosque, and show the extent of its harmony and proportionality with the geometry of mosque architecture.

2- Show the value that Arabic calligraphy adds as a major decorative element to contemporary Islamic interior design.

1.3 Research Methodology:

This study will adopt the historical approach as the main method to trace the artistic evolution of employing Arabic calligraphy in Islamic interior design, accompanying the historical development of decorative arts in Islamic interior design. This is done by collecting information from various sources, including references, books, scientific papers, and international websites related to Arabic calligraphy and the history of Islamic art and architecture. After collecting the information, it is analyzed, and the useful ones are chosen to build this study and produce it in the best possible way.

1.4 Objective Limits of Research:

The subject of this study falls within the framework of reviewing the historical development of the use of Arabic calligraphy as a major decorative element within the program of the interior decoration of mosques in particular and Islamic architecture in general.

2. ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY AS A MAJOR DECORATIVE ELEMENT IN ISLAMIC INTERIOR DESIGN

Ancient civilizations before Islam used inscriptions to decorate their buildings, such as Sumerian and Akkadian, who used Cuneiform writing, which was done by engraving. It is one of the oldest writing techniques in the world, dating back to at least 3000 BC, originally developed to write the letters of the Sumerian language in ancient Mesopotamia, in the area that is modern-day Iraq. (Feldherr, 2011: 5) In Egypt, a writing method based on soft lines appeared and is called Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, dating from approximately 3200 to 3000 BC. The walls of the interior spaces in temples, tombs and Egyptian dwellings are almost completely covered with decorations and various symbols, which has the great merit of knowing a lot about the life of the human being of those ages. (Hoffmann, 2012: 543–562) The Nabateans emerged as a distinct civilization and political entity between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC, (Taylor, 2001: 14-30) and the Nabataean alphabet is one of the branches of the Aramaic alphabet used by the Nabataeans in the second century BC. It consisted of twenty-two letters that the Nabataeans used to codify their Arabic Nabataean language. A large group of these inscriptions are

found in southern Jordan, the capital of which is Rakim (Petra). (Al-Salameen, 2014: 43-49)



Figure (2-1) 1- Cuneiform writing 2- Hieroglyphic Writing 3- Nabataean alphabet

(www.ancientwritings.com)

Many scholars believe that Arabic script was derived from Nabataean, and the first form of the Arabic script was not liberated from its Nabataean image until two centuries later when it reached its well-known Arabic image. (Juma, 1981: 9-20) After that, Arabs initially knew two types of script: Angular and Round, the angular Kufic, which tends to be square, and the naskhi round, which tends to rotate and curvature. The two scripts arose together and did not derive one from the other. (Saad, 1997: 9 -24)

During successive Islamic eras, Arabic calligraphy took a distinguished position as a major ornamental element in adorning Islamic buildings because it reflected the Word of God. Arabic calligraphy traveled outside the Arabian Peninsula with Muslim conquerors, travelers, and merchants. According to the author Mansour, the use of Arabic calligraphy began

during the era of Caliph Othman Ibn Affan in Madena, but the work of calligraphers flourished during the time of Caliph Ali Ibn Talib in Kufa, and later spread to the rest of the Islamic cities and capitals. And when Arabic calligraphy reached its highest levels of quality and mastery, it became a manifestation of beauty in the Islamic art and architecture, and calligraphers raced to improve the letter forms and master their proportions. (Mansour, 2011: 3-20)

2.1 ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE Umayyad

The Arabic calligraphy in the Umayyad era had clear and tangible progress from the era of the previous caliphs. The calligrapher profession appeared for the first time, although the letters were without dots, as Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali (603 - 689) put the inflectional vowels. He also put dots on letters to distinguish similar letters from each other, so the dot became part of the Arabic letter. (Leaman, 2006: 131) A number of calligraphers who were famous for the beauty of their calligraphy appeared, led by Qtbah Al-Muharrir, second century AH, who combined the Kufic and Hijazi scripts in a new script called Al-Jaleel (Majestic) because of its Large scale, it was used in decoration and writing on the doors of mosques and mihrabs. (Al-Hashimi, 2018: 342)

Arabic calligraphy has a sacred character; in almost all Islamic religious buildings the Quranic inscription is above the heads of believers, a symbol of God's absolute power. Gold letters on a blue background were often used as symbols of the divine light descending from heaven. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, in its iconic form, as one of the oldest surviving

Islamic monuments, includes an early calligraphic masterpiece in the form of a fine mosaic stripe of calligraphy dating from 691 that extends around the walls, both internally and externally. By this early date, calligraphy had already jumped off the page onto the walls of mosques and other religious buildings, conferring on them an atmosphere of Islamic meaning and sentiment and marking them as specifically sacred spaces. (Necipoğlu, 2008: 17–105)



Figure (2-2): Dome of the Rock, Exterior Decorations (www.domeoftherock.com)

In fact, the calligraphic decorations of the Dome of the Rock are among the most important examples of the early use of Arabic calligraphy by Muslim architects on the walls of religious buildings and mosques. Ayat al-Kursi (Quran 2:255), meaning the ‘Verse of the Throne’ is written in the interior of the dome in the form of a circular ring at the top of the dome. Another decorative band of Arabic calligraphy is at the lower

circumference of the dome, documenting some political events and the name of Sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi.



Figure (2-3) Dome of the Rock, Interior Decorations (www.domeoftherock.com)

For eight consecutive centuries, Arabic calligraphy was a model for the scientific renaissance led by the Arabs in Andalusia, 711-1492, which became a model for expressive art in Islamic society. Calligraphers decorated palaces and mosques with exquisite decorations of beautiful Arabic calligraphy. The great Mosque of Cordoba, built in the context of the new Umayyad principality in Andalusia and founded by Abd al-Rahman I, 756 - 788, indicates the growth of Islamic architecture in the Iberian Peninsula due to the implementation of new structural systems with a large area and beauty of the body, in the form of a real architectural masterpiece that embodies Islamic architecture in the medieval era. The mosque witnessed successive expansions until it became known today. (Khoury, 1996: 80–98)

The use of Arabic calligraphy in the mosaic of the *mihrab* in the Great Mosque of Cordoba shows the splendor and elegance of the building. The mosque's *mihrab* was not traditional in its design; it is an eight-sided plan, thus creating a small space within the qibla wall at the front of the mosque. A horseshoe arch rises above the facade of the *mihrab* and is surrounded by a calligraphic decoration of Kufic script on three sides to enhance the *mihrab*'s unique architectural form.

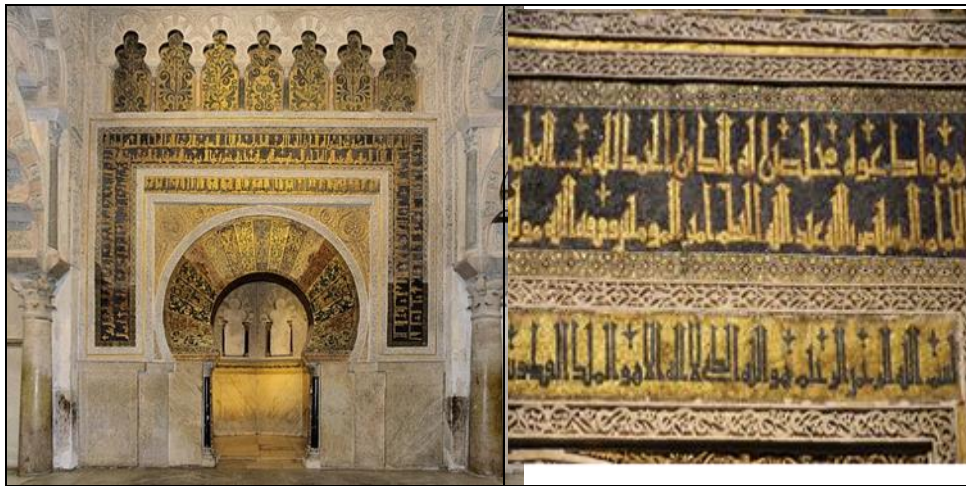


Figure (2-4) Arabic calligraphy in the mosaic niche in the Great Mosque of Cordoba (www.flickr.com)

2.2 ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ABBASID

While the Umayyad era was the era of building and establishing in Islamic history, the Abbasid era, between 750 and 1258, was the era of prosperity, so it was necessary for the arts to flourish, including Arabic calligraphy. Scholars moved to Baghdad, the city of the great caliphs such as al-Mansur r. 754-775 al-Rashid r. 786-809 and al-Mamun r. 813-833, artists and calligraphers also traveled there to become closer to the caliphs and important statesmen. Calligraphers competed in improving scripts,

and the calligrapher Ibrahim Al-Shujari , or Al-Sijzi invented the one-third and two-thirds scripts, and he is considered one of the best calligraphers in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. (Al-Jubouri, 2011: 33) In this period also, Al-Khalil bin Ahmed Al-Farahidi (718 – 786) excelled in improving the form of writing using an ink that is different from the color of the writing ink, and he placed small letters above and below the letters to indicate the movements of the fatha, kasra, dammah, tanween and sukoon, thus enabling the calligraphers and writers to combine the letter and its form and punctuation with one ink. (Al-Rifai, 1990: 67)

After that, Abu Ali Muhammad bin Muqla al-Wazir (886–940) came and set the Arabic script and set standards and excelled for it in the *thuluth* script until it reached its climax and the proverb was struck. The great calligrapher Abu Ali Muhammad ibn Muqla set the standards for Arabic calligraphy, as he was the first to arrange the format of letters, set their right proportions and dimensions in points, and estimated their measurements and controlled them tightly, as he took the letter “alif” as a basis for drawing the rest of the letters and took the point as a unit of measurement. The Thuluth script was improved by him until it reached its climax and became an example. (Grabar, 1992: 38)

Based on the foregoing, Ibn Muqla established the principles of calligraphy. To this day, Muslim calligraphers use his theory of proportion based on three sets of measurements: the dot, “*alif*”, and circle. The relationship among all letters of a script is determined by the width of the rhomboid dot produced by the pen nib. The letter “*alif*” can then be drawn

based on a specified number of rhomboid dots determined by the type of script being used. Once the letter “*alif*” is formed, an invisible circle is drawn around the letter (the height of the “*alif*” is the diameter of the circle), serving as the basis from which all letters of the font can be calculated. (Stephanie, 2010: 78)

Based on the theory of Ibn Muqla, the letter “*alif*” consists of seven rhomboid dots, and the letter “*ba*” is drawn based on the circle with a diameter of seven rhomboid dots, as shown in the following figure.

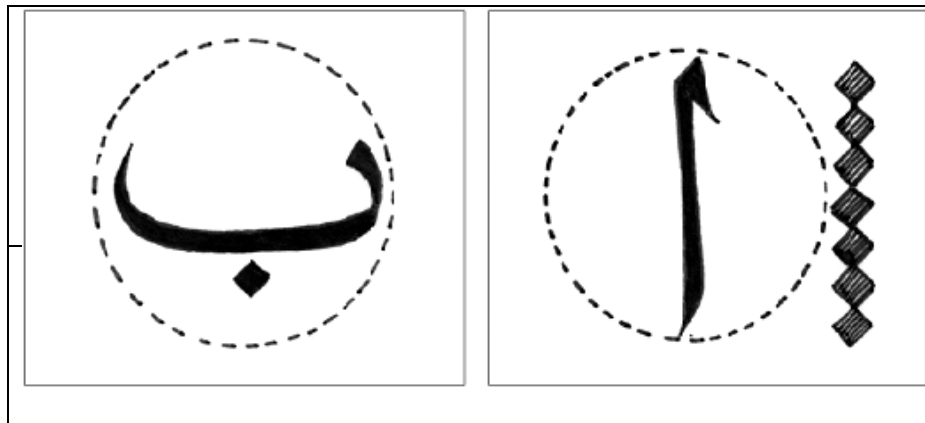


Figure (2-5) Ibn Muqla Proportional letters, alif and ba (from Stephanie)

A very famous example of Abbasid art and architecture is the Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo. The mosque was built by the ruler of the Tulunid dynasty ,Ahmad ibn Tulun (835 – 884), the Abbasid ruler of Egypt from 868 to 884. The historian al-Maqrizi states that the date of construction of the mosque was 876 CE, and the mosque's original inscription identifies the completion date as 879. (al-Maqrīzī, 1908: 265). The mosque was built in the Samarra style common with Abbasid buildings. It was constructed around a square nave, with one covered hall on each of the

four sides, the largest of which is on the qibla side, or direction of Mecca. (Yeomans, 2006: 34)

Ibn Tulun Mosque, the oldest mosque in Egypt, has preserved its original architectural condition compared to other historical mosques. The prayer hall consists of five galleries interspersed with four series of arches and pillars covered with floral stucco decoration. The windows of the mosque are designed in the form of pointed arched openings with engraved stucco geometric and floral motifs. (Farghaly, 1991: 88-96)

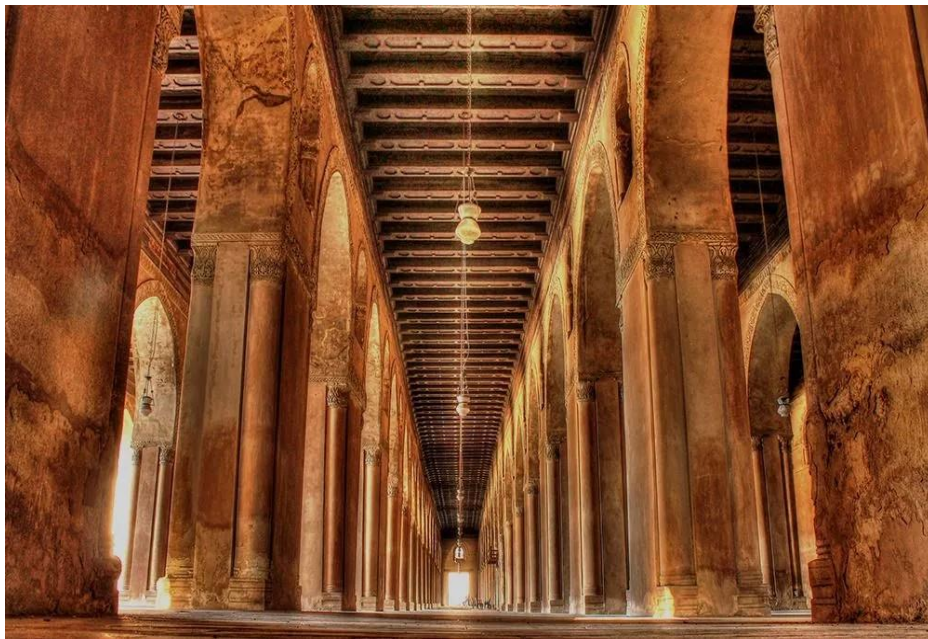


Figure (2-6) Ibn Tulun Mosque, Interior (www.marefa.org)

There are six *mihirabs* inside the prayer hall of Ibn Tulun Mosque, five of which are flat against the main concave *mihrab* in the middle of the qibla wall. It refers to the qibla in which expressions of faith are engraved in Kufic script. The main *mihrab* is made of marble, plaster, brick and

colored mosaic. The hood of the *mihrab* has the date of the completed construction inscribed in Kufic script, and the shahada is also engraved in Kufic script. The columns are made of gray marble. The *minbar* is made of Indian teak wood inlaid with ivory and decorated with geometric and floral star shapes. (Behrens-Abouseif, 1989: 344-346)



Figure (2-7) Ibn Tulun Mosque, Interior (commons.wikimedia.org)

As it was previously explained, in this period the use of geometric and floral motifs on arches, windows and walls increased, but the decorations of Arabic calligraphy adorned the interior space of the mosque with beauty and spirituality, and were placed in appropriate places in the mosque, especially on the *mihrab* and the qibla wall.

2.3 ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE AYYUBIDS AND MAMLUKS

During the Ayyubid era (1171–1250) and their rule in Cairo, Thuluth script spread remarkably, and the more flowing script, the Naskhi style,

began to replace the Fatimid Kufic script in calligraphic decoration on buildings and palaces. (Williams, 2018: 27) One of the most important examples of the use of Arabic calligraphy in decorating interior spaces from this period is the Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi' (767-820), which was built between the years 1176-1178, known locally as the Dome of Imam Shafi. It is a funerary monument dedicated to Imam Al-Shafi'i, one of the four Sunni Imams who founded the Shafi'i Sunni Islamic school of jurisprudence. Located at Imam Shafi'i Street in the City of the Cairo, the mausoleum is a hallmark of Ayyubid style architecture and historical significance. (Behrens-Abouseif, 1989: 78-93)



Figure (2-8) Imam Shafi'i Mausoleum, Exterior & Interior (<https://madainproject.com>)

The base of the mausoleum is a 15-meter stone square supporting a wooden dome covered with lead. The construction of the dome was completed during the reign of the fourth Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Kamil (1218-38). The decorative elements that were used to beautify the mausoleum from the inside varied; while the dome was filled with

geometric and plant motifs, we find that the Arabic calligraphy decorations from the Thuluth script were drawn in the form of decorative stripes that rotate with the rotation of the drum beneath the dome and surround the structural elements that bridge the corners of the square over which the dome smoothly rotates. The top of the walls on the ground level is decorated with a wide, dark decorative stripe of the same type as the line used on the higher levels. Also, wooden shrines, made with a variety of wood craftsmanship, were decorated with wonderful relief panels and stripes from the Thuluth script. (Creswell, 1994: 319)

An important aesthetic achievement that can be observed here that we did not see in the previous Umayyad and Abbasid schools is the state of great harmony between the design of the structural elements and the Arabic calligraphic decorations surrounding them so that they took the same shape as the pointed arches distributed in the vicinity of the dome.

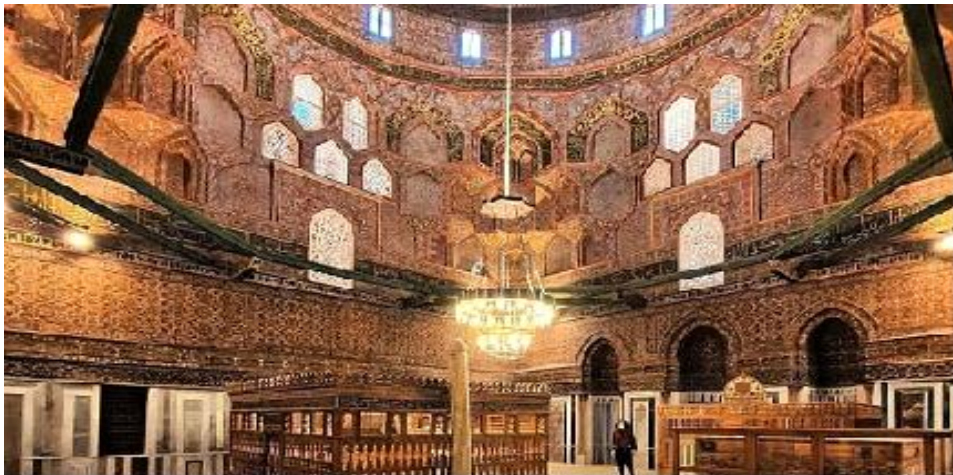


Figure (2-9) Imam Shafi'i Mausoleum, Interior (<https://madainproject.com>)

The Mamluks (1250-1517) used Kufic and Thuluth scripts extensively to decorate major Mamluk mosques, such as the Great Mosque built by Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (r. 1260-77) (Blair & Bloom, 1996: 344-346). Although nothing remained of its architecture except its external walls, some arches of the qibla portico, and some of its decorative details, whether stucco or engraved in stone, this mosque is considered an architectural masterpiece that testifies to the splendor and beauty of Islamic architecture. While the exterior of the mosque is made up of stone, the interior is decorated with carved stucco, including stucco grilles in arched windows in the upper wall, and a band of Kufic script that does run around the entire interior. The following figure shows an elegant band of calligraphic decorations carved on one of the remaining walls of the mosque. (Marzouk, 1950: 91-102)



Figure (2-10) Sultan al-Zahir Baybars Mosque, Calligraphic Decorations (www.lebanon24.com)

A Remarkable architectural model of Mamluk art and architecture is the Sultan Hassan Mosque, built in 1363, located in Cairo, Egypt. The mosque is distinguished by its very beautiful and coordinated interior design, especially the qibla wall, which is rich in materials, decorations and colors. Arab calligraphic decorations appeared in many places on the qibla wall, at the top of the wall, the fourth verse of Surat Al-Fath is engraved in the form of a wide stripe in Kufic script. Calligraphic decorations were also extensively used in gold color in the form of a rectangular stripe in Thluth script surrounding the pointed arch of the *mihrab* on all sides, and with great flexibility, the Arabic calligraphy stripe passed inside the *mihrab* and curved deeply with the semicircular arch. Inscriptions of Arabic calligraphy were also engraved above the gate of the stone *minbar* and were written on the Glass Mosque Lamps hanging from the ceiling of the mosque like stars. (Williams, 2018: 137).



Figure (2-11) Sultan Hassan Mosque, Interior (<https://en.wikipedia.org/>)

2.4 ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE OTTOMAN:

The era of the Ottoman Empire, 1299 - 1923, is considered as the golden period of Arabic calligraphy, and Turkish calligraphers showed their great artistic ability in Arabic calligraphy for many reasons: The country had a very large and wide geographical area, bringing together many different nationalities of human beings under the umbrella of Islam. The Sultans in the Ottoman era encouraged writers, scholars and innovators, bestowed upon them various grants and gifts, and brought them closer to them in the capital of the Caliphate. (Hassanein, 2015: 41)

The Ottomans inherited the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphy mainly from the Mamluks School in Egypt and Tabriz School, which flourished in calligraphy and in the book industry with all its production requirements, including papermaking, binding, calligraphy, ornamentation, drawings, and gilding. Later on, the Ottomans became a famous independent school in the Thuluth script, and many Ottoman calligraphers became known until now with many copies of the Holy Qur'an preserved in Turkish museums in Istanbul, where they added elegant ornamentations and binding to the beautiful Arabic calligraphy. (Shohan, 2001: 35)

One of the early examples of Ottoman architecture and arts is the great mosque Bursa, ordered by Sultan Bayezid I and built by architect Ali Neccar in 1396–1399. The mosque is considered one of the most outstanding architectural examples of employing Arabic calligraphy in religious interior design. Some researchers and historians called Bursa Mosque the title "Museum of Arabic Calligraphy" because of that it

contains many distinctive decorations of Arabic calligraphy, which were abundantly spread on the pillars and walls of the mosque, in addition to the *mihrab* and the *minbar*. Calligraphic ornamentations were of a variety of geometric shapes like square, circular and rectangular combinations. (Hassanein, 2015: 42-44)



Figure (2-12) The Great Mosque of Bursa (Ulu Cami), Interior views (www.mustafacambaz.com)

With the entry of Mehmed II to Constantinople in 1453 and its transformation into the capital of the state, a new era began in the development of architecture and arts in the Ottoman Empire. Construction and architectural decoration were active in all Ottoman cities and states, especially religious arts and architecture. (Blair & Bloom, 1996: 344-346). Turkish and non-Turkish calligraphers who were attracted to work in the new capital of the state, Istanbul, decorated sultan mosques with wonderful Arabic calligraphy and beautiful geometric ornamentations, among the most prominent of them is the

calligrapher Ahmed Karahisari (1468-1556), who is known for his use of chain script, in which the letters are joined as though the pen had never been lifted from the page. (Blair, 2006: 492-496)

From the sixteenth century, Ottoman calligraphers perfected the large form of Thuluth (Arabic *jali*, Turkish *celi*), it was the major and grand script used for inscriptions and ornamentations in decorating the prestigious interiors of the Ottoman architecture. (Blair, 2006: 492-496) An appropriate example of the interior employment of the Thuluth script in Ottoman architecture is the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul, which is an icon of Ottoman architecture and one of the most famous architectural monuments in the world. It was designed by architect Mehmed Agha in 1609 and completed in 1617. In the mosque's prayer hall, the central dome is surrounded by four half-domes, as well as additional half-domes that open from each larger half-dome. The beautiful decorations of Arabic calligraphy from the Thuluth script was distributed in certain areas in the ceiling of the mosque. At the top of the central dome there is a blue circle on which precious verses are painted in gold. Above the drum of the dome, which is interspersed with windows, a blue circular stripe is wrapped, on which Quranic verses are written in golden color. The four main half-domes and the smaller ones branching off of them all ended at their top with a curved black stripe on which were written dignified verses in golden color. The four corner triangles surrounding the half-domes and the central dome contained blue circles on which prayers or Quranic verses were written in gold in a distinctive geometric manner that

connected the triangle to the circle inside. The lower walls were lavishly decorated with Iznik tiles, and from their bluish color, the mosque took its famous nickname (The Blue Mosque). The walls of the mosque had only a very few ornamentations of Arabic calligraphy and in certain places, such as the *mihrab* and the *minbar*, in addition to a narrow blue decorative stripe that wraps around the pillars in high places decorated with Quranic verses written in golden color. (Goodwin, 2003: 343)



Figure (2-13) Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Interior (www.mustafacambaz.com)

At this particular stage, the Ottoman architects and calligraphers cleverly managed to coordinate their efforts and achieve the highest possible harmony between the Arabic calligraphy decorations and the

complex architectural design of the mosque. The domed shape of the Ottoman mosque combines the domed ceiling with its central formation rising towards the dome at the top and the ground cube with its straight lines and decorated walls, covered with ceramic tiles and perforated with wide and high windows. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is the flexibility that the Thuluth script is characterized by, as it rotates, turns, extends, curves, and takes a geometrical shape proportional to the shape of the architectural elements.

3. EMPLOYING ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN DECORATING THE INTERIOR SPACE OF CONTEMPORARY MOSQUES:

In light of the efforts of Muslim architects around the world to adopt contemporary architectural styles in mosque architecture, the researcher wishes to raise the following questions: Is there a contemporary style of mosque architecture that is recognized in the Islamic world? And if there is a contemporary style, what are its features, and what are the decorative elements in its aesthetic arrangement? Will it be possible to use the classical decorative elements of geometry, plants, and Arabic calligraphy in harmony with the contemporary architectural style? Knowing that there are many architectural achievements, locally and globally, that have adopted a modern concept in Islamic architecture, such as Al-Hamshari Mosque in Jordan, built in 2012, which distinguished by its light white color and its modern and simple decorative scheme. The inscriptions of Arabic calligraphy from the Kufic script in this contemporary mosque are generally characterized by an attractive appearance that harmonizes with

the interior and exterior elements of contemporary mosque architecture and does not cause anxiety, but rather makes it easier for the beholder to feel the harmony, compatibility and unity between its structural and architectural parts. (Al-Mughrabi, 2021: 1921-1939)



Figure (3-1) Al-Hamshari Mosque, Exterior view & Interior view (<https://www.bing.com>)

A very distinctive example of contemporary mosque architecture is the Cologne Central Mosque, built between 2009 and 2017 and designed by German architects Paul and Gottfried Böhm. (Böhm, 2007) The mosque contains elements of Ottoman architectural style, and it has a concrete and glass dome with two cylindrical minarets. The interior space is central, unified and completely open without any structural obstacles. The prayer hall consists of several shell-like walls, in the center these walls build a light-flooded dome. The mosque also has glass walls which allow visitors to feel an impression of openness.

Although the mosque, as mentioned previously, contains connotations of Ottoman architecture, it is contemporary in its architecture and has very western design features, through the concrete walls and wide glass spaces that surround the large prayer hall and the wide and high dome. These formal characteristics combined make the mosque style very close to the modern styles of architecture that spread in many well-known European cities after World War II. (Tietz, 1999: 6-10)

The interior space of the mosque and its decorative scheme are lively; the walls of the mosque seemed full of geometric ornamentations as well as ornaments of Arabic calligraphy from the Thuluth script. The glass top of the dome in the center is surrounded by a decorative stripe that contains Ayat al-Kursi. (Qur'an 2:255) Then the beautiful names of God are spread on the interior face of the dome like the stars in the sky; another decorative stripe that draws the lower frame of the dome contains the two last verses of Surat Al-Baqarah. (Qur'an 2:285-286)

The name of God *Allah* is drawn on the right of the mihrab, the name of the Prophet Muhammad is drawn on the left of the mihrab. Above the mihrab, the two testimonies were drawn within a circular space. Verses from the Holy Qur'an drawn surround the mihrab in the form of a decorative stripe. The names of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali) are drawn on the wall opposite the qibla wall. The preferred color for drawing Arabic calligraphy in this mosque is the golden color, which is preferred in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque as it was previously

explained, and the Thuluth script is adopted aesthetically here for the Arabic calligraphy decoration.



Figure (3-2) Prayer Hall and Mihrab of Cologne Mosque (<https://www.pinterest.com>)

If contemporary architecture is known to adopt simplicity as a design methodology largely devoid of ornamentations, how can one imagine the adoption of highly classical decorative elements such as Arabic calligraphy as a major component in the interior design scheme of the Great Mosque of Cologne? Architecturally, the mosque is designed in a contemporary style in keeping with the architectural style of Cologne, the modern economic capital of the Rhineland and one of the main inland ports in Europe. The answer to this question lies in the close “formal and essential”

relationship between Arabic calligraphy and Islamic art that expresses the Muslim faith, especially when designing and decorating the interior space of mosques. As for the form, it means that the Arabic letters are the ones through which the surahs and verses of the Noble Qur'an are written, and the reader cannot read the Qur'an unless he masters reading and writing in the letters and Arabic language, so all Muslims strive to master writing and reading in Arabic. As for the essence, it lies in the meaning carried by the noble verses and expressed by writing in Arabic letters and words. Arabic writing is also characterized by interconnected letters that may express the culture of unity and integration of Muslims from all countries, and many Islamic peoples still use the Arabic letters to the present day, and because it is closely related to the Qur'an, it has come to represent Islamic societies all over the world. All this is in addition to the design and technical features that Arabic calligraphy possesses, the most important of which is flexibility.

4. DISCUSSION: ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY AND THE FUTURE OF ISLAMIC INTERIOR DESIGN:

After this historical review of the employment of Arabic calligraphy in Islamic interior design, the question that arises now is: How can the decorative compositions of Arabic calligraphy be used in contemporary and future Islamic interior design? And to what extent can it be related to the cultural and architectural heritage? In fact, many modern interiors of Islamic architecture contain models of contemporary art formations closely related to the authenticity of Islamic society and its cultural

heritage. The decorative compositions of Arabic calligraphy on the walls of mosques and contemporary religious buildings represent an aspect of heritage and its cultural values that can make the new Muslim generations strongly connected to their culture and civilization.

The decorations of Arabic calligraphy shined through many examples of mosque architecture in the twenty-first century, and many modern models that were affected by industrial development and modern production methods emerged. One of the most important contemporary examples of the use of Arabic calligraphy in modern Islamic interior design is the Şakirin Mosque, located in the Üsküdar district on the Asian side of Istanbul and was opened for worship in 2009 (CSMonitor, 2009). The mosque is far from everything that is traditional or classical, as modernity has dominated all aspects of architectural design, both externally and internally. The *minbar* is made of glossy acrylic and has a crescent moon-inspired design. The verses of the Noble Qur'an were drawn on the *mihrab* by using the technique of gilding. The walls of the Şakirin mosque were designed from glass, contrary to what is commonly used in the design of the walls of the mosque, whether they were made of bricks, concrete or stone, they came in the form of pages from the Qur'an drawn in gold. Therefore, the interior space of the mosque is characterized by wonderful and harmonious natural lighting.



Figure (4-1) Şakirin Mosque, Interior (www.Şakirinmosque.com)

The decorations of the Arabic calligraphy in the Şakirin Mosque were like a bridge between the contemporary design of the mosque and the traditional decorative form of Arabic calligraphy and its religious essence as sacred Qur'anic texts. While the Arabic calligraphy texts in the center and lower frame of the dome were traditional and clear in the Thuluth script, they were of an abstract shape, resembling the pages of the Qur'an on the glass walls of the prayer hall as well as on the *minbar*. (Figure 4-2)



Figure (4-2) Şakirin Mosque, Interior, Glass Walls (www.Şakirinmosque.com)

The abstract decorative shapes or cloud lines drawn on the glass walls and *minbar* are actually modern works of decoration inspired by the golden clouds that usually surround Arabic calligraphy texts in the traditional page design of the Naskh Qur'an manuscripts of verses or prayers. A good example here is the Thuluth manuscript, dated to 8th century AH. This manuscript was copied by Shaykh Hamdullah al-Amasi (d. 1520), the master calligrapher at the Imperial Palace in the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II. Shown is the first surah (Qur'an 1:1-7) and the beginning of the second surah (Qur'an 2:1-4) surrounded by cloud lines with the rich decoration common in Ottoman manuscripts. (Uğur Derman, 1998: 46) (Figure 4-3)



Figure (4-3) Thuluth Manuscript (www.justislam.co.uk)

The unconventional shape of the abstract decorations on the glass in the walls of the Şakirin Mosque is a clear example of the interference of modern technology in the manufacture of Arabic calligraphy decorations in contemporary mosque architecture. Many examples of this type are expected to appear in the future, but what is important is that these modern examples remain relevant to the historical heritage of designing Arabic calligraphy decorations.

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Findings

First: The significance of Arabic calligraphy emerges as a distinctive decorative element in Islamic interior design because of its intrinsic values as a sacred religious text related to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. This continued through successive historical stages from the real beginning of Islamic arts in the Umayyad era until the present time.

Second: Historically, it is not possible to imagine the Islamic interior design without the ornamentations of the Arabic calligraphy, which gave it uniqueness as a religious interior space distinct from the rest of the religious interior spaces in the world, which may depict or anthropomorphize living figures.

Third: The great harmony between the decorations of Arabic calligraphy and the architectural elements in most of the mosques and buildings presented during this study, whether traditional or contemporary, is due to the joint work and coordination between the architect and the calligrapher, both of whom possess sufficient knowledge of geometric proportions.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

First: Controlling the contemporary technological development in the manufacture and formation of Arabic calligraphy decorations so that the decorations of Arabic calligraphy do not lose their historical identity through which Quranic verses and Prophetic tradition are manifested on the domes, piers, arches and walls of mosques and Islamic places of

worship. This control will not be possible unless this development is accompanied by the presence of academies specialized in teaching Arabic calligraphy, whether using traditional methods or through modern computer programs.

Second: Arabic Calligraphy decorations, despite their aesthetic and functional value in Islamic interior design, cannot continue on their own to decorate mosques and modern Islamic architecture without the use of well-known Islamic decorative elements such as geometric and floral ornamentations. Therefore, it is important that the development in Islamic interior design includes all kinds of Islamic decoration. Here, it should be noted that the decorations of Arabic calligraphy at the present time are of greater interest to artists and researchers at the expense of the geometric and floral ornamentations.

Third: Contemporary technology can have a positive impact on the future of Islamic interior design, so it is incumbent on artists and researchers to anticipate what technology can offer to Arabic calligraphy in the future so that it can keep pace with contemporary religious interior design in the world.

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