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Formative Traits, Guiding Principles, and Artistic Components in Islamic Art

Samir ZETAREN [1*] Atmane MEFTAH [2]
[1] University of Algiers 2 - samir.zetaren@univ-alger2.dz
[2] University of Algiers 2 - atmane.meftah@univ-alger2.dz

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ABSTRACT:
The artistic legacy of Islamic civilisation, a cultural tapestry woven by the teachings of Islam, stretched from the distant shores of East Asia to the distant shores of Western Europe and from the Caucasus and Russia well into the heart of sub-Saharan Africa. This impact has been witnessed in scientific, religious, and architectural domains ; the arts, in particular, absorbed and reflected these trends.
Because scripture forbids sculpted or painted likenesses of living beings, Muslim artists turned elsewhere for beauty. Geometry, stylized foliage, and, above all, Arabic script became their palette. By shifting attention away from direct portraiture, they crafted an art that balances fidelity to tradition with a constant pulse of creativity.
Ethnic and cultural diversity within Muslim societies further enriched artistic practice, especially in ornamentation and calligraphic design. Artists produced highly precise decorative and epigraphic compositions that remain exemplary.
This article offers a concise, academically minded overview of Islamic art. It homes in on the features, principles, and fundamental elements that long ago stamped it with a singular identity.
Key words: heritage; Arabic calligraphy; historic monuments; arts ; architecture.

الملخص:

شكلت التعاليم الإسلامية حضارة فنية امتدت آفاقها من شرق آسيا إلى غرب أوروبا، ومن منطقة القوقاز وروسيا حتى أعماق إفريقيا جنوب الصحراء. تظهر أثار هذا التأثير في مجالات متعددة تشمل العلوم والدين والعمارة؛ حيث استوعبت الفنون بشكل خاص هذه التيارات وانعكست فيها .نظرًا لتحريم النصوص الدينية تصوير أو نحت صور الكائنات الحية، توجه الفنانون المسلمون نحو مصادر أخرى للجمال. فكانت الهندسة، والنبات المجرد، وخطوط الكتابة العربية هي لوحتهم الفنية. وبالابتعاد عن تصوير البورتريه المباشر، ابتكروا نوعًا من الفن يجمع بين الالتزام بالتقاليد والنبض المستمر للابتكار .أسهم التنوع العرقي والثقافي داخل المجتمعات الإسلامية في إثراء الممارسة الفنية، لا سيما في مجالات الزخرفة وتصميم الخطوط. حيث أنتج الفنانون تركيبات زخرفية ونقوش خطية فائقة الدقة لا تزال مثالاً يُحتذى به .تقدم هذه المقالة نظرة مختصرة ذات طابع أكاديمي حول الفن الإسلامي، مع التركيز على سماته ومبادئه وعناصره الأساسية التي منحت هذا الفن هويته الفريدة منذ زمن بعيد.
الكلمات المفتاحية: التراث؛ الخط العربي؛ المعالم التاريخية؛ الفنون . العمارة.

* *Corresponding author*

Introduction :

Islamic art grew out of a chain that began centuries earlier. Humans have long carved stone, brushed color, cast metal. Even so, the surviving works of those ancient cultures rarely match the refinement, or the humane resonance, found in later Muslim pieces. A Muslim artisan integrated technical mastery with cultural and civilizational intent; this integration remains a defining feature that distinguishes Islamic art and sustains its unique identity within the history of world art.

Islamic art among Arabs, specifically, reflects a vision of cosmos and truth unique to its milieu. It forms part of the broader Islamic outlook, itself rooted in religious life which is an outlook that the modern world often fences off, though signs of renewed interest occasionally appear. Islamic art therefore stands first as identity, second as a source of collective pride ; returning to it is both warranted and worthwhile.

These arts possess a singular authenticity. They reached both their peak and coherence during the period Western scholars call the "Middle Ages" ; within the Islamic context, the same centuries stand as an era of true renaissance and development. That period produced a spectrum of forms, from the sinuous precision of calligraphy to exquisitely crafted hand-made objects. Tracing every thread would mean sounding an ocean of creativity. This study, necessarily briefer, highlights selected works that bear witness to a civilization's enduring contribution to human history—an imprint time has neither erased nor reduced.

1. Essence of Islamic Art

Art, in its broad classical sense, refers to variety, to shaping things into distinct kinds, and to the skill of switching among different expressive modes. It can describe grading people into categories, decorating cloth with contrasting bands, or moving through

diverse registers of speech. Hence the term "artist" naturally covers poets, writers, musicians, painters, and actors alike [(1)].

Another definition frames art as the deliberate will that lets human beings meet one another, share experience, and exchange ideas without limit [(2)]. Because every artistic current converses with the literature, music, and philosophy of its era, the fine arts form a reliable lens on the ruling ideas of any historical moment. They mirror how thought develops and how it negotiates its cultural surroundings [(3)].

Precise definitions of "Islamic art" are not plentiful. Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib proposes that Islamic art "is not necessarily art that speaks about Islam; rather, it is art that sketches an image of existence" [(4)]. In this view, Islamic art reconciles beauty with truth. Beauty stands as the substance and summit of being; truth meets it on a higher plane that gathers every meaning of existence. The artist's task is therefore not limited to pleasing the eye. Artistic creation reveals universal values and allows the divine reality to shimmer through form. Beauty reflects cosmic truth, and artistic practice aims at harmony between the aesthetic and the spiritual. Islamic art thus becomes a declaration of the unity and coherence of the universe in its most radiant guise [(5)].

From this perspective, art is the graceful expression of cosmos, life, and humankind, filtered through the Islamic conception of all three.

1) Kuhnel, Ernst. *Al-Fann al-Islami* [Islamic Art], trans. Ahmad Musa. Beirut : Dar Sader, 1966, p. 78
2) Ibid, p. 80
3) Marcais, Georges. *Nashaat wa-Tatavvur al-Funun al-Islamiyya* [The Origin and Development of Islamic Arts], trans. Ahmad Musa. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organisation, 1962.
4) Ibid, p.16
5) Ibid, p.16

2. Distinctive Features of Islamic Art

Like other civilizations, Islamic art developed features that reflected its underlying worldview. According to researcher Hamid Said in his book *Al-Funun al-Islamiyya*, Islamic art is characterized by the following : (6)

2.1. Tanzīh (Transcendence). Non-representational art is used to uphold the Islamic belief that nothing is like unto God, as it avoids depicting the divine in physical form, the deliberate refusal to depict the absolute or the finite.

2.2. Universality. It addresses all people and steers clear of regional, ethnic, or racial partisanship.

2.3. Comprehensiveness. It accompanies life from cradle to grave, engages with visions of paradise and hell, and points toward the journey to God.

2.4. Measured Cosmology. Everything in creation obeys a balanced design (reward and penalty, angels and jinn) each according to measure.

2.5. Innovation and Variety. One set of principles supports many techniques. Diverse lands and cultures generated multiple schools, enriching the shared heritage.

3. Contemplation of Nature :

The artist views nature as God's workmanship, as stated in the verses "He who perfected all things" "Surah An-Naml, verse 88" and "There is not a thing but hymns His praise." "Surah Al-Isra, verse 44".

Zaki Muhammad Hasan identifies additional characteristics: (7)

3.1. Distance from Naturalism. Muslim artists did not chase strict naturalism; they depicted objects as imagination proposed, relying on invented conventions.

6) Kuhnel, Ernst op, cit... p.81

7) Zaki, Muhammad Hasan. *Fi al-Funun al-Islamiyya* [On Islamic Arts]. Cairo : Matbaat Ittihad Asatidhat al-Rasm, n.d.p.19

3.2. Flat Ornament. Surface decoration blankets whole areas. Relief is rare, yet color supplies energy and visual depth, bringing motifs to life in two dimensions.

3.3. *Horror vacui*. Geometric or vegetal patterns, sometimes coupled with script, crowd the surface. Western writers label this trait *horror vacui*, "fear of void".

3.4. Repetition. Patterns in Islamic architecture and applied arts frequently repeat and vary. This is especially noticeable in Persian manuscripts and Mamluk woodwork. Arabesque units are among the most common elements, built from complex sequences of interlocking vegetal and geometric shapes. Birds depicted in symmetrical or mirrored positions are also a recurring motif, especially on wooden objects and functional art, contributing to balance and vitality in the overall design.

3.5. Illustration and Miniature. Persians, Indians, and later Turks excelled in illuminating literary works and poetry collections. The earliest surviving cycles, from the twelfth century, often accompany *Kalīla wa Dimna*.

4. Fundamental Principles of Islamic Art

Islamic life rests on a triad : the Qurʾān, the Prophetic Sunnah, and ijtihād (independent reasoning). Law, culture, and, by extension, aesthetics emerges from their continuous interplay. The Qurʾān and the Sunnah supply the primary texts ; ijtihād keeps the legal-intellectual machine turning, adapting judgments to new circumstances while staying rooted in revelation. This dynamic has shaped the intellectual history of Muslim societies and left clear marks on every cultural field, including the arts.

Qurʾānic discourse repeatedly urges contemplation of the created order. Such reflection is not pursued for abstract curiosity alone ; it is meant to tighten the bond between human beings and their Lord, drawing ethical guidance from cosmic signs. One oft-cited passage reads :

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day lie signs for people of insight—those who remember God while standing, sitting,

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and on their sides, and who reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth : 'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You ; shield us, therefore, from the torment of the Fire. " (Āl ʿImrān 190–191)

Islam also advances a principle vital to artistic practice : excellence in workmanship. The Prophet ﷺdeclared, "God loves that when one of you performs a task, he perfects it." The wording appears in several transmissions ; al-Ṭabarānī and Abū Yaʿlā report it from ʿĀʾishah (may God be pleased with her), and al-Albānī deemed the chain sound. A parallel phrasing adds, "God loves the worker who, when he works, does so with ihsān (doing a thing well)." In short, meticulous execution is a religious value, not a mere professional ideal.

Because Islam brought together diverse peoples, Arab and non-Arab alike, the faith's unifying vision, centered on tawḥīd (oneness) and tanzīh (divine transcendence), became a common cultural denominator. Communities absorbed its simplicity and its stress on seeing God's signs "in the horizons and in themselves." The result was an art that speaks a shared symbolic language even while local idioms proliferated.

Islamic aesthetics did not, however, unfold in a cultural vacuum. Earlier Near-Eastern dynasties had filled their artistic repertories with royal and religious iconography, often magnifying the ruler until he or she assumed semi-divine stature. Greek and Roman periods continued the trend, albeit with greater technical finesse, producing works that seemed to breathe the power of the gods [(8)]. A second phase began once Christianity gained footing in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) sphere where pagan imagery receded, and themes drawn from the Gospels (centered on Christ's person and passion) took its place. Artists even borrowed poses once reserved for deities such as Zeus, re-casting them in a Christian key [(9)].

8) Marcais, Georges. op, cit... p.83
9) Ibid, p.19

5. The earliest origins of the arts in Islamic civilisation

As stated earlier, religion and earlier civilizations played a major role in the emergence and development of Islamic arts. The arts were influenced in particular by two sources : Byzantine art and Sasanian art, that was particularly in architectural sculpture (capitals, columns) and architectural ornamentation (mosaic). Borrowed artistic expressions from these two sources appear side by side in the earliest Islamic remains, such as the façade of Qasr al-Meshtta from the eighth century CE and the painted scenes at Qusayr ʿAmra, around 712 CE [(10)]. Coptic Christian art also had a significant influence on Islamic arts [(11)].

Islamic art, however, differed from what preceded it. There was no place for depicting deities, and Muslims regarded the ancient arts as expressions of the old religions. This aversion to depiction appears in the hadith of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated from ʿAʾisha that the Messenger of God said: "The people who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection are those who imitate the creation of God."

After the Umayyads moved the Islamic capital to Damascus and matters stabilized following the upheavals in the early period—namely the wars of apostasy and the conflict between ʿAli and Muaawiya—major changes occurred at the economic, social, and political levels. This is evident from the beginning of the rule of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan (65–86 AH / 685–705 CE). One of the earliest and most important examples in which Islamic art appeared in complete form is the Dome of the Rock, also called the Mosque of ʿUmar, because Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab first established a prayer space on the Rock, and then Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan built the current structure in (66 AH / 691 CE). It is octagonal in plan, topped by a high dome covered with mosaics bearing green and gold ornament. The dome stands on a ring of large green-marble columns with pointed capitals.

10) Qutb, Muhammad. *Manhaj al-Fann al-Islami* [The Islamic Method in Art], 6th ed. Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1983.p18

11) Ibid, p.19

Accordingly, the Dome of the Rock included three models that represented the aesthetics of Islamic art and defined its character and specificity among other arts. From the time of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan, the basic frameworks of Islamic arts were set, namely:

- Islamic Arabic calligraphy in its various types;
- Ornament in its various types.

6. Structural Foundations of Islamic Art

Earlier discussion identified the Dome of the Rock as the first fully formed example of Islamic art. Its design introduced artistic components that distinguished the new style from preceding traditions and established standards of precision seldom matched elsewhere. The principal components are as follows:

A. Ornamentation :

Ornamentation is an art that conveys content visually. It renders a subject through the disciplined use of lines, shapes, and shading. Classified as a secondary or complementary art, it gives a work aesthetic value, reflects the artist's taste, and engages the viewer's visual sense. Ornament translates tangible elements into a visual language marked by a specific stylistic signature ; its aim is to deliver the idea through clearly perceived aesthetic forms that facilitate comprehension [(12)].

In Islamic ornament the subjects may be images, shapes, or scaled renderings of living beings, calligraphic texts, vegetal motifs, or geometric patterns. These appear on materials such as pottery, ceramics, textiles, and various artefacts. Also in archiitectural decoration.

During the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺand the rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Muslim society was characterized by simplicity : Focus lay on military campaigns and

12) Bahnasi, Afif. *Jamaliyyat al-Fann al-Islami* [The Aesthetics of Islamic Art]. *Alam al-Marifa* series, no. 14. Kuwait : National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1990.p.28

the propagation of the faith, not on luxury or the fine arts [13]. Ibn Khaldūn notes that religion initially restrained excessive construction and unnecessary display [14].

Islamic art avoided representations of animate beings. The prohibition rests on rulings that likenesses compete with divine creation, whether on buildings, vessels, or garments. One report transmits that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Those who fashion these images will be punished on the Day of Resurrection; it will be said to them, 'Give life to what you have created,'" narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of ʿUmar [15].

Most Orientalists maintain that Islam does not absolutely prohibit imagery, attributing the ban to later strict interpretations. A German Orientalist "Gerd Rüdiger Puin, Research on the Sana'a Quran Manuscripts" holds that the Qurʾān does not forbid depiction, that numerous prophetic reports are insufficient for a categorical ban, and that a permanent, unequivocal prohibition on portraying human figures never existed.

Islamic architecture, especially in the Maghreb and al-Andalus, developed vegetal and geometric ornament as a direct outcome of the religious avoidance of figural representation. Ornament became standard in objects of every scale, from small vessels to major structures; for that reason, many writers define Islamic art as predominantly ornamental.

In early phases, Muslim artists adopted—then adapted—techniques from Byzantine and Sasanian sources. These influences are visible in early monuments such as the Dome of the Rock mosaics (72 AH / 692 CE) and the façade of Qasr al-Meshtta. The evidence demonstrates that early Islamic art remained open to earlier artistic legacies while shaping its own distinctive aesthetic.

13) Qutb, Muhammad, op, cit... p.20
14) Ibid, p.21
15) Hamdush, Zuhayra. *Al-Balatat al-Khazafiyya bi-Madina Qusantina khilal al-Ahd al-Uthmani: Dirasat Athariyya Fanniyya Namudhajiyya* [Ottoman-Period Ceramic Tiles in Constantine: An Archaeological–Artistic Model Study]. Algiers: University of Algiers 2, Institute of Archaeology, 2009.p98

Thus decoration, the most prominent element in Islamic art, originated in the Umayyad period and developed further in subsequent eras.

- **Vegetal Ornament**

Vegetal ornament, also called *tawrīq*, employs stylized leaves and varied flowers. Artists present these motifs through single forms, paired forms, mirrored arrangements, or interwoven units. In many cases one unit consists of several intertwined, symmetrical vegetal elements that repeat in a regular sequence. Such motifs appear on walls, domes, and a wide range of artefacts—metal, glass, ceramic, textile—and in manuscript illumination and bindings. They can run along two axes, as on walls, doors, ceilings, carpets, furniture, and book covers, or along three axes, as on columns, arches, muqarnas, and the upper zones of portals and domes [(16)].

Pre-Islamic cultures knew comparable foliage motifs, yet, according to non-Muslim art historians, Islamic expansion introduced variation, serial composition, and transformation of earlier patterns. A related type, the arabesque, is built from bent, interlaced, and continuous branches and stems. It first appeared in the ninth century CE on objects and on the stucco ornament that covered walls in Sāmarrāʾ, Iraq, and in Egypt under the Ṭūlūnids, whose founder Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn had lived in Sāmarrāʾ. Numerous wooden artefacts from Sāmarrāʾ and from the Ṭūlūnid period display arabesque carving. The motif expanded markedly under the Fāṭimids and reached a high level of refinement in that era [(17)].

- **Geometric Ornament**

Earlier civilizations used geometric shapes in decoration, but mainly as framing bands Greek and Roman art features compositions of central geometric motifs, particularly in mosaics and wood marquetry. Forms such as squares, circles, pentagons, hexagons, broken lines, and double plaits are documented in Byzantine and Sasanian work. Under Islam geometry became a primary decorative system. Mamlūk Egypt (seventh–

16) Bahnasi, Afif, op, cit... p.30
17) Kuhnel, Ernst op, cit... p.88

tenth AH / thirteenth–sixteenth CE) developed complex star patterns, varied polygons, and interlaced circles that appear on buildings, wooden furnishings, brass vessels, and the opening pages of manuscripts and Qurʾāns. Geometric ornament ranks with vegetal ornament in importance because it meets the Islamic principle of avoiding direct representation of living beings.

Muslim craftsmen derived numerous polygons from the circle—hexagon, octagon, decagon—filling some spaces and leaving others empty. This method produced an unlimited array of patterns that guide the eye from part to whole and from one segment to the larger composition [(18)].

B. Arabic Calligraphy

Arabic calligraphy is among the arts most carefully cultivated by Muslims. The term "*khaṭṭ*" denotes line or writing and applies to everything traced with a pen. In technical usage, it is the art of refining script; its practitioner is a *calligrapher*. Earlier designations included *kātib*, *kuttāb*, *warrāq*, and *muḥarrir* [(19)].

Scholars debate the script's origin, yet an early Arabian form called Nabataean is undisputed. The Nabataeans ruled parts of Jordan, Palestine, and northern Ḥijāz until the second century CE; their writing continued among northern Arabian tribes. Fifth- and sixth-century Ḥijāz adopted two variants: *muqawwar* (rounded, flexible) for everyday use and mabsūṭ (straight, angular) for inscriptions on miḥrābs, mosque doors, building façades, and Qurʾāns [(20)].

After Kūfa's foundation in 18 AH, people from al-Ḥīra and al-Anbār settled there, bringing their script; each major town acquired its own style—Kūfan, Madinan, Makkan, and so on.

18) Zaki, Muhammad Hasan, op, cit... p.122

19) Tabbah, Khalid Ayad. *Al-Makhtut al-Arabi: Dirasat fi Abad al-Zaman wa-al-Makan* [The Arabic Manuscript: A Study in Temporal and Spatial Dimensions]. Damascus: Syrian General Authority for Books, Ministry of Culture, 2011, p 45

20) Ibid, p.46

Several leading Companions, including Abū Bakr, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Abū Sufyān and his son Muʿāwiya, Zayd ibn Thābit, Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ and his sons, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, and Khālid ibn al-Walīd, served as scribes of revelation. Their activity shows the high competence early Arabs achieved in calligraphy, a prestige reinforced by the cultural value accorded to eloquence [21].

The community valued beautiful script, especially for writing the Qurʾān. Sayings attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib—"Beauty clarifies truth"—and to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās—"Script is the tongue of the hand"—express this view. Aesthetic care in writing paralleled the care taken in recitation [22].

Calligraphy draws its artistic quality from the sounds and forms of Arabic words. Sources such as Ibn Kathīr's *Al-Kāmil fī al-Taʾrīkh* and al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* agree that no civilization valued script as highly as the Islamic one. What began as a practical tool gained sacred significance once chosen to record the Qurʾān.

Major scripts developed with the growth of Islamic arts. Early forms include Kufic and Naskh; later centuries added a wide range that became a marker of Islamic culture and appeared in architectural decoration and independent panels. Principal styles are:

- *Kufic* (the earliest Qurʾānic hand, refined in Kūfa and derived from earlier Arabian scripts [23]
- *Thuluth*
- *Naskh*
- Maghribi–Andalusian
- *Taʿlīq*

21) Salihiyya, Isa Muhammad. *Al-Mujam al-Shamil li-Turath al-Arabi al-Matbu* [Comprehensive Dictionary of Printed Arab Heritage], vol. 1. Cairo: Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, 1992.p.49

22) Ibid, p.50

23) Tabbah, Khalid Ayad, op, cit... p.46

- *Dīwānī*
- *Ruqaʿ*
- *Ijāzah*

Each of these generated sub-styles. *Kufic*, for example, branched into *muthahhar*, *munḥaṣir, muʿashshaḳ* (or *muẓaffar*), *muwashshaḥ*, and *muwarraq* forms.

C. Architecture

Islamic civilization is among the few in history to have integrated architecture as both a functional and artistic medium. Islamic architecture is distinguished by its deliberate use of structural elements to create aesthetic impact. Among the most characteristic components developed by Muslim architects is the following:

1. Arches

The arch is a curved architectural element built around one or more points of support. It is often employed to form or frame structural openings. An arch typically consists of several shaped stones or bricks, each referred to as a *voussoir* [24].

Researchers trace the origins of the arch to the Mesopotamian civilization, where environmental constraints—namely the scarcity of timber and limited access to natural stone—led builders to rely on available materials such as mudbrick and baked brick. This necessity drove innovation in structural design, enabling builders to move beyond the limitations of traditional wooden or stone frameworks. Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest examples of arches date back to around 900 BCE, in sites located in present-day Iraq [25].

24) Laraba, Nawal. *Al-Zukharaf al-Nabatiyya wa-al-Handasiyya al-Kitabiyya fi al-Maalim al-Mariniyya bi-Tilimsan al-Ziyaniyya* [Vegetal, Geometric, and Epigraphic Ornament in the Marinid Monuments of Ziyanid Tlemcen]. M.A. thesis, University of Algiers 2, Department of Archaeology, 2016.p.55

25) Ibid, p.59

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Figure 1. Examples of Arch Types in Ottoman Architecture in the City of Constantine

In Islamic architecture, arches diversified in form and function across regions and historical periods. Among the most recognized types are:

- The *muqarnas* arch, ornamented with stalactite-like decorations, common in the Hispano-Maghrebi style.
- The semi-circular arch, widespread in early Islamic buildings.
- The pointed horseshoe arch, often seen in the architecture of the Levant and the Maghreb.

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- The lobed arch, which may feature three or more lobes, such as the three-lobed arch and the polylobed Persian arch [26].

2. Muqarnas

Muqarnas is a distinctive decorative system devised by Muslim masons within the field of Islamic architecture. The method employs small, regular geometric cells set out with exact calculation. These cells connect by interlocking or by stepped assembly, either in vertical tiers or in contiguous horizontal rows, within a rigorously planned mathematical grid. The technique demonstrates a high degree of precision and inventiveness in using geometry for the articulation of domes, squinches, and cornices, and it establishes an architectural language that combines aesthetic refinement with structural articulation [27].

To prevent undue load on the underlying masonry, craftsmen executed muqarnas in four lightweight media: baked brick, cast gypsum, carved wood, and cut stone [28].

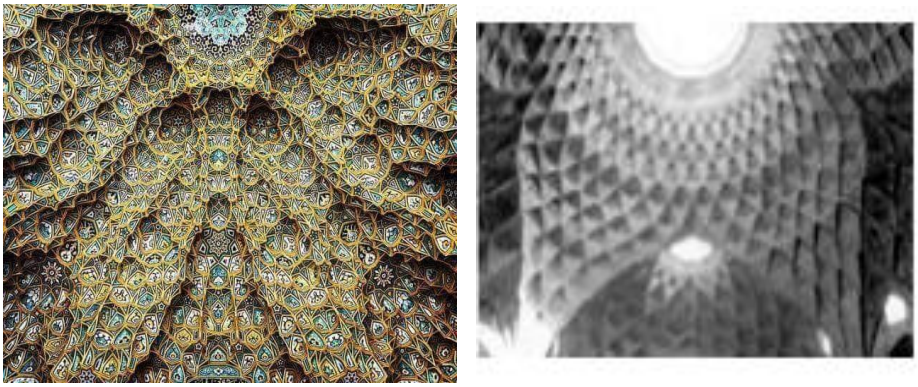

Figure 2. Examples of Muqarnas in Ottoman Architectural Art
From the ceiling of Shah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran

26) Laraba, Nawal, op, cit... p.60
27) Shafi'i, Farid. *Al-Imara al-Arabiyya fi Misr al-Islamiyya*, vol. 1: *Asr al-Wulat* [Arab Architecture in Islamic Egypt, vol. 1: The Governors' Period]. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organisation, 1970, p. 51
28) Shahabi, Qutayba. *Zukhruf al-Imara al-Islamiyya fi Dimashq* [Architectural Ornament in Damascus]. Damascus: Ministry of Culture, 1996, p 93

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3. **Columns**

Columns serve two functions: they carry the roof structure and they supply a measured visual rhythm to the interior and exterior of a building. As columns used to be an important architectural element for ancient civilisations that preceded Islamic civilisation ; the earliest Muslim example is the Prophet's Mosque, where palm-trunk shafts supported the roof. Subsequent reconstruction introduced fired brick and later stone. Over time both materials and profiles multiplied. In Egypt, particularly under the Ṭūlūnid dynasty, the system reached an advanced stage: octagonal shafts and marble columns with vegetal carving became standard. Examples remain in Cairo's walls and gates and in congregational mosques such as that of al-Ẓāhir Baybars [(29)].



Figure 3. Examples of Column Types in Ottoman Architecture in Constantine

29) Hasan, Zaki Muhammad. *Al-Fann al-Islami fi Misr* [Islamic Art in Egypt]. Beirut: Dar al-Raid al-Arabi, 1981.p 265

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4.Capitals

A capital is a decorative architectural element set at the head of a column; it completes the shaft's form and introduces an aesthetic accent. Capitals have been employed since antiquity and constitute a core component of the architectural vocabulary of many civilizations. Each cultural style produced its own variant, one that expressed local artistic practice and encoded specific symbolic content. The Pharaonic capital typifies ancient Egyptian building, the Greek capital belongs to classical Greek art, and the Roman capital displays the formal preferences of Roman construction. This range underlines the diversity of capital designs across historical contexts.

Muslim builders developed distinctive capitals of their own. Characteristic forms include cup-shaped designs, rings and volutes, and fan-like units that became common throughout Islamic decorative work and eventually served as one of its recognized markers [30].



Figure 4. Examples of Capitals in Ottoman Architecture in the City of Constantine

30) Laraba, Nawal, op, cit... p.03

Conclusion :

The study of Islamic art is a broad, multi-layered field that requires an equally multidimensional analytical approach; its richness cannot be captured by narrowly framed investigations. Because Islamic art is closely interwoven with the religious, social, environmental, and cultural systems of Muslim communities, any serious inquiry must address the civilization in which it emerged.

Geographical and cultural diversity is a defining trait of Islamic art. Provinces and peoples brought under Islamic rule contributed local inflections while enlarging the shared corpus. Archaeological and stylistic evidence shows that Islamic art is not confined to a single region, ethnicity, or faith community; rather, it is a global cultural project shaped by numerous societies.

Academic debate on the Islamic legacy has sometimes been colored by partisan interpretations advanced in certain Western studies. Other scholars have countered those readings with empirically grounded research that underscores the artistic and civilizational value of the material. Continued, in-depth investigation is essential for a fuller understanding of Islamic cultural identity and for substantiating its place in human history.

The growing attention Islamic art receives in contemporary archaeological scholarship signals a need to revisit the corpus with current methodologies. Such work can clarify its historical significance and illuminate broader patterns in the evolution of art and architecture.

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