



The Art of Decorative Domes in Islamic Architecture

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Abstract

Islamic architecture is a magnificent heritage. It began with simple structures and gradually evolved throughout Islamic civilization. Architectural works, including houses, schools, mosques, forts and walls, vary in their building materials and architectural elements, such as columns, arches, minarets, domes, muqarnas, and decorative patterns, as well as the materials used to cover the walls. These works have left behind outstanding achievements in the field of Islamic architecture.

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1. *Introduction*

The Muslim artist excelled in Islamic art, particularly in decorative art, which became a fundamental element of Islamic architecture, carrying with it an ancient artistic style that reflects the aesthetics of Islamic culture. In contrast, Islamic civilization did not focus extensively on pictorial arts that depict living beings, in adherence to religious teachings and to avoid idolatrous implications. The primary goal of Islamic art was to combine beauty and truth, so that art becomes a means to enrich and beautify life after fulfilling basic necessities. The dome played an important role as one of the elements of Islamic architecture in decorating and designing various structures and took on a distinctive character in each region, indicating its time of construction.

From the above, the following main problem emerged in our minds:

What are the methods used by the Muslim artist to apply decoration in the domes of Islamic architecture?

From this, several sub-questions were derived:

- What are the techniques used in designing the domes in the mosque?
- What is the role of decoration in the aesthetic value of domes?
- What are the main features of architectural art in Islamic architecture?
- What are the materials used in decorating the elements of the mosque (domes)?

Based on these questions, we rely on the following hypotheses:

- The innovation of the Muslim artist in decorative art and the use and creativity in ornamental muqarnas resulted from his avoidance of depictions of humans and animals, as these contradict the teachings of Islam.

- The secret of the beauty of religious architecture lies in the way decorative units are designed through the selection of plant and geometric forms, the use of various types of Arabic calligraphy, and muqarnas in decoration.

The importance of the research lies in addressing the different stages of the development of Islamic architecture, attempting to delve into the types and architectural styles it went through over the ages, and identifying the various decorative forms used in adorning mosque elements and the importance of ornamental muqarnas in beautifying domes in Islamic architecture. The study also aims to explore the different materials used in aesthetic decoration and the techniques employed in various Islamic architectural designs.

Accordingly, through this study, we aim to achieve the following objectives:

- Clarify the role of decorative art in adorning and beautifying elements of Islamic architecture, especially domes.
- Identify the different techniques and materials used in design and aesthetic innovation in Islamic architecture (the mosque dome).

Methodology of the Study

In this research, I will rely on the descriptive method to describe the architectural and decorative art in the domes of Islamic architecture (the mosque) and to explain the decorative forms (geometric, floral, etc.). I will also rely on the analytical method by examining the impact of the types of decorative designs, colors, and raw materials (plaster, stone, wood, etc.) on the aesthetic perception of the elements of Islamic architecture, as well as attempting to identify the influences and artistic styles that affected the Muslim artist.

2. Stages of Development in Islamic Architecture:

Islamic architecture went through several distinct styles, each characterized by a particular and unique identity.

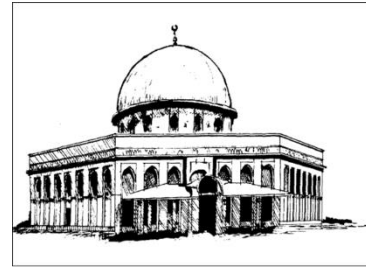
2.1 The Umayyad Style:

Umayyad architecture is a style that is considered the first distinctive architectural form in Islamic history. It prevailed during the Umayyad Caliphate from the year 40 to 132 AH (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 48). After the Umayyads took over the caliphate and moved the capital of the Islamic state from Medina and Kufa to Damascus marking the end of the Rashidun era the Umayyads lived in the Levant, where Islamic architecture flourished. Muslims in Syria and Palestine were influenced by Christian architecture and began constructing mosques that rivaled Christian churches in beauty and grandeur (Nazif, 1988, p. 12). They also built palaces in the Syrian desert, such as Qusayr Amra, Qasr al-Mshatta, and Qasr al-Tuba. Initially, Muslims relied on craftsmen and artists from among Christians and Syrians, from whom they learned, and together they established the Umayyad style in Islamic art (Samih, 1982, p. 11).

Mosque architecture saw significant development during the Umayyad period after exposure to Christian architecture in the Levant. This change became apparent during the reign of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (65–86 AH) and flourished during the rule of al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik (86–96 AH). During this period, magnificent mosques were built that still stand today, the most important of which are the Dome of the Rock (Figure 01) and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. In North Africa, the Mosque of Sidi Uqba was built by the Umayyad commander Uqba ibn Nafi al-Fihri, and the Al-Zaytuna Mosque in Tunisia was established by the Umayyad commander Hassan ibn al-Nu'man. The Umayyad rulers also renovated mosques constructed during the early Islamic period,

such as the mosques of Basra and Kufa, and the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 49).

Figure 01: The Dome of the Rock Mosque

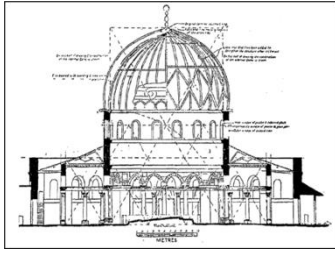


(Nazif, 1988, p. 13)

Umayyad architecture was also characterized by a diversity of decorative elements; geometric decorations were used, along with a design layout based on tripartite division, as seen in Qasr al-Mshatta. As for luxurious ornamentation, split marble was used to create symmetrical patterns based on its natural veining and to clad the walls. The interior walls were extensively decorated with mosaics on a scale never seen before. Additionally, vegetal stucco decorations were discovered, forming half-columns shaped like palm trunks, along with animal motifs remnants of which suggest they were birds. The Umayyads also used stucco decorations and the stucco carvings, forming half-columns resembling palm trunks (Al-Siraj, 2015, pp. 75-76).

The addition of Arabic inscriptions from the Holy Qur'an or Hadith in mosque decoration added a magnificent touch. The following mosques the Dome of the Rock, Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the Mosque of Kairouan (Sidi Uqba Mosque), and Al-Zaytuna Mosque stand as eloquent examples of the Umayyad style. However, the Dome of the Rock remains a unique example worthy of admiration and is considered to be the least influenced by Christian (Byzantine) architecture (Plan 01)(Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 20).

Plan 01: The Dome of the Rock



(Samih, 1982, p. 14)

There is no doubt that the great success of the Umayyads in developing the previous artistic styles in the region, along with the Arab-Islamic style, paved the way for the establishment of magnificent Islamic architectural art.

2.2 The Abbasid Style

The fall of the Umayyad state in Damascus marked the beginning of the Abbasid era, during which the state was ruled from Baghdad one of the richest Islamic cities. The prosperity of the Abbasids was influenced by the simplicity of Islam and the distinctive architectural style of Abbasid buildings throughout the Islamic world. This style was characterized by various features that emerged as a result of moving the caliphate from the Levant to Iraq, bringing about new environmental influences that were prevalent in Iraq at the time of this transition (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 58).

Islamic architecture in the Abbasid style was distinguished by the use of brick instead of stone (which had been used during the Umayyad era), especially in arches, iwans, and domes. It was also influenced by Sassanian styles, as seen in the construction of large iwans with tall openings in Qasr al-Ukhaidir, the preference for using piers and supports instead of columns, the pointed arches in Ibn Tulun Mosque, the appearance of spiral entrances like the gates of the city of Baghdad, the establishment of two domes over the prayer hall beginning with the Aghlabid expansion of the Great Mosque of

Kairouan, and the spiral minarets shaped like exterior ramps such as the Samarra Minaret (Al-Hadi, 2018, pp. 60-61).

In terms of decoration, in addition to using plain brick with metallic luster, the most important revival of Sassanian traditions was the use of stucco and its panels originally derived from wood, which gave the architecture a sense of delicacy. The decorations of Samarra were distinguished by three types of stucco ornamentation:

- a. Carved wall decorations using beveled or slanted carving techniques.
- b. Stucco panels fixed on the walls containing abstract motifs, vase shapes, and geometric cut-outs.
- c. Molded stucco decorations designed for faster production instead of knife carving, appearing as grape cluster patterns, pinecones, and palm leaf fans within geometric divisions (Al-Siraj, 2015, p. 107).

The most important examples of Abbasid architecture include the Great Mosque of Samarra, the mosques of Raqqa and Abu Dulaf in Iraq, and the Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque in Egypt. The Great Mosque of Samarra was built between the years (234 AH–237 AH) (849–852 CE), but only the outer wall remains today. It featured a large prayer hall facing the qibla and smaller surrounding arcades on the other sides of the courtyard. The mosque had a spiral minaret known as al-Malwiya, which closely resembles the minaret of Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque.

The Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque was completed in the year 265 AH (878 CE). It consists of a square open courtyard surrounded by arcades on all four sides, with the qibla located in the largest of these arcades. The mosque was built with arches supported by piers, and these piers had engaged columns at their four corners to enhance the architectural appearance. The weight rested on the piers, while the

columns served to complete the aesthetic form (Nazif, 1988, p. 14).

The Abbasid style was marked by the use of mud brick and fired brick instead of stone, the use of rectangular and square brick-built piers instead of stone columns, the implementation of pointed arches which allowed for greater ceiling height and the use of a type of ceramic with a metallic luster.

2.3. The Fatimid Style:

The Fatimids entered Egypt in the year 929 CE, where they founded the city of Cairo, which from that date became the capital of the Fatimid Caliphate. Their influence extended to Syria, the Hijaz, parts of North Africa, and Sicily, reaching a high level of wealth and civilization. This had a significant impact on the flourishing of architecture in Egypt, and the Fatimids paid great attention to building mosques (Basha, 1999, p. 311).

The most prominent surviving examples of Islamic architecture from the Fatimid era include Al-Azhar Mosque, Al-Hakim Mosque, Al-Aqmar Mosque, and Al-Salih Mosque, in addition to the walls of Cairo and some Islamic-style buildings in North Africa and the island of Sicily. The mosques of Cairo during the Fatimid period retained the layouts of early congregational mosques, with roofed prayer halls whose aisles ran parallel to the qibla wall, divided into bays and surrounding open courtyards with arcades on all sides.

There are similarities between the Fatimid mosques in Cairo and the Ibn Tulun Mosque, and also between them and the Sidi Uqba Mosque in certain architectural features, particularly the central section leading to the mihrab in the qibla arcade. These mosques were distinguished by special attention to their façades. Al-Azhar Mosque was the first mosque built in Cairo in the year 361 AH (973 CE), and its area was later expanded to double its original

size. Additions were made to it over time, making its various sections a display of contemporary Islamic architecture from the Fatimid era to the present day. The most important parts dating back to the Fatimid period are the arches surrounding the courtyard and the minaret with its twin domes found in Al-Azhar Mosque.

While the mosque still retains some decorative features and ornamental Kufic inscriptions, and pointed Persian arches that are considered among the hallmarks of Fatimid architecture, most of its current parts date from later periods. Nevertheless, Al-Azhar has continued to hold a distinguished place in the Islamic world.

The most significant Fatimid decorations in Al-Azhar Mosque are found on the façades of the courtyard, where flat decorative arches are interspersed with circular rosettes inlaid with colored materials. The edges of the central arcade in the prayer hall are adorned with flourishing Kufic inscriptions, characteristic of the Fatimid era. The intrados of the arches are decorated with various leafy vegetal motifs. The oldest carved decorations appear in the maqṣūra and the qibla wall, which are adorned with palm-leaf patterns in openwork designs that obscure the background surface. These decorative elements are derived from the Abbasid-Tulunid style (the Samarra style) (Al-Siraj, 2015, p. 148).

One of the distinctive features of the Fatimid period was the use of portable wooden mihrābs carved in flourishing Kufic script. Although the Fatimid style was influenced by some Persian artistic methods, the art of the Fatimid period flourished, and the Fatimid palaces were rich in artistic treasures.

2.4. The Ayyubid Style:

The rise of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi to power in Egypt marked the beginning of a new era in its history, during which two key elements of Islamic architecture flourished:

- First: The construction of schools (madrasas) during his reign to promote the Sunni doctrine and combat Shiite beliefs.
- Second: The development of walls and fortifications. Fearing a Fatimid resurgence in Egypt, Salah al-Din sought to establish a stronghold for himself and his family, and in the year 1100 he ordered the construction of a wall surrounding Cairo and the building of the Citadel of the Mountain.

The Ayyubid architectural style was heavily influenced by warfare and its requirements. The Ayyubid period was characterized by a high degree of preparedness and storage for war. The wealth of the Ayyubid era was reflected in military arenas, the construction of palaces and fortified castles, city walls, fortifications and renovations, as well as the rebuilding of mosques and shrines destroyed by the Crusaders.

Large domes also appeared during the Ayyubid period, along with multi-tiered muqarnas in their corners. Stucco decoration and woodwork continued to flourish. Naskhi script appeared alongside Kufic script, and both deep and shallow carving techniques were favored.

Among the features of the Ayyubid style were the development of the minaret, the emergence of a distinct dome style, the use of multi-tiered muqarnas, and the construction of single iwans over tombs instead of domes. During this period, artists abandoned depictions of humans and animals, excelling instead in vegetal and geometric ornamentation. They succeeded so well in this domain that the decorative elements they created became a hallmark of their artistic legacy.(Al-Siraj, 2015, p. 156).

2.5. The Mamluk Style:

The Mamluks originated from two main ethnic groups: the Turks and the Circassians. The Turks were nomads who lived in the deserts and the vast Turkish plains between China and Persia, known as Turkestan. The Circassians were inhabitants

of the Caucasus Mountains, comprising various ethnic groups collectively referred to as Circassians. They were highlanders known for their resilience(Al-Siraj, 2015, p. 165) . The Mamluk era is considered the golden age in the history of Islamic principalities. There was a great enthusiasm for building mosques, madrasas, mausoleums, and other structures with a remarkable variety and mastery across all architectural elements, including minarets, domes, and decorations. In constructing mosques, madrasas and mausoleums were often built adjacent to mosques featuring iwans, columns, and piers. One example is the Sultan al-Zahir Baybars Mosque, with the northern side measuring 111.33 meters, the southern side 110.93 meters, the eastern side 108.5 meters, and the western side 109.46 meters. Its external walls were constructed using a carved technique known as mashhar, resulting from alternating layers of yellow and red stones. The walls reached nearly 11 meters in height and were topped with crenellated battlements. The outer walls of the mosque also featured four hidden towers and were adorned with seventy-two windows.

During this period, more attention was given to mosque façades. This was achieved through successive horizontal courses of alternating yellow and dark red stones, or through the use of vertical recesses or niches, sometimes containing tie-beams and often ending in decorative architectural elements like muqarnas. Floral bands could be seen within Qur'anic or historical inscriptions, and crenellated parapets crowned the façade (Samih, 1982, p. 78).

Mamluk minarets were distinguished by their elegance and beauty. Most featured a square base surmounted by a shaft and then a cylindrical upper gallery. Mosque doors were known for their artistic decoration and craftsmanship. This era also saw the widespread use of colored marble in wall panels and flooring. Some mihrabs were decorated with marble mosaics and mother-

of-pearl, as seen in al-Marathani Mosque and the madrasas of Sultan Hassan. Among the most notable remaining civil buildings and residences are the entrance of Amir Qawsun's Waqf, the entrance of Qaytbay's Waqf at Bab al-Nasr, and the Mamai seat, also known as Bint al-Qadi, in Cairo.

Mamluk decorative arts flourished, especially in the technique of inlaying panels with fine materials. This involved inserting thin strips of ivory or precious wood into doors, pulpits, and other wooden artifacts. Additionally, the manufacture of turned-wood latticework thrived, used in creating mashrabiyyas, benches, and chairs (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 78).

2.6. The Seljuk Style:

The Seljuks were nomadic Turkmen tribes who came from Central Asia and settled on the Iranian plateau. The Turkish element entered the Middle East, and Seljuk princes supported the arts and employed the local populations of Islamic regions, encouraging them. As a result, a distinct style emerged, characterized by the grandeur and spaciousness of buildings and their solid appearance. Sculptural decorations were used, especially on building façades. It is notable that Seljuk religious architecture was not limited to mosques; tombs were frequently built in the form of cylindrical towers or polygonal structures with domes.

Architectural structures during the Seljuk period were marked by their vastness and monumental scale. Special importance was given to decorated entrances, gates, domes, and vaults. The Seljuk style featured sculpted and colored stucco decorations, some of which depicted modified human or animal forms, in addition to blue and black kashani tiles and mosaics. Under the Seljuks, religious schools (madrasas) were established and attached to mosques. Their architectural layout included an open courtyard with a fountain (fasqiyah) surrounded by small trees and flowers, overlooked by domed halls, each consisting

of two levels. Some of these halls were designated as living quarters for students and teachers (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 48).

The most famous Seljuk architectural structures include:

1. The Friday Mosque of Isfahan.
2. Khan al-Sultan.
3. Ince Minaret Madrasa and the Anahoniya Mosque (Al-Aranda Mosque).

2.7. The Mongol-Iranian Style:

The Seljuk era came to an end at the hands of the Mongols, who arrived from the far eastern part of Central Asia. The Mongol-Iranian style is distinguished by its strong infusion of Chinese artistic elements, which spread throughout Iran and the neighboring countries that were influenced by its arts. As for Islamic architecture, especially in mosques, it gained more elegance and balance although the basic design was the same as that known in the Seljuk period. One of the most exquisite mosques of this era is the Jawhar Shah Mosque in the city of Mashhad, Iran, built in 1418 CE. The decoration of buildings in this heritage naturally evolved from what was seen in the Seljuk period, except for the decoration of stone façades, which featured geometric ornamental elements of various shapes placed within rectangular frames, as known from the study of Seljuk architecture. Artists of that time also paid special attention to the use of muqarnas in decorating buildings. The Iranians succeeded in applying these muqarnas tastefully, without excess, resulting in harmonious and well-proportioned compositions.

2.8. The Safavid Style:

The Safavid state began its rule in Persia in 1502 CE. The Safavids devoted great attention to developing the rich artistic history of Iran in all fields, especially architecture. Thus, the Safavid architectural style emerged. It was influenced by the Persian style in the construction of domes

and minarets, with the addition of colors and decorative elements. It is particularly known for its interior ornamentation, especially in decorating marble ceilings (Al-Hadi, 2018, p. 48). The Safavid style also focused on palaces, city planning, and the construction of public facilities. This is clearly evident in Isfahan, which was distinguished by its grand buildings and architecture, in addition to gardens and tree-lined, paved roads. One of the most magnificent Safavid mosques is the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, known for its vast scale, monumental size, beautiful layout, and rich interior decoration.

2.9. The Indo-Mughal Style:

Architecture in the Indo-Mughal style was influenced by the Mongol civilizations of Persia and Central Asia, as well as by Indian architecture, culture, and lifestyle. Islamic architecture in India was particularly known for its grand mausoleums, such as the Taj Mahal in the city of Agra, which is characterized by architectural and decorative details bearing a beautiful Indian character. As for Indian mosques within this style, they were marked by their expansive layout and the separation of their structural components to the extent that this sometimes detracted from their unity and cohesion. Among the most famous examples is the Great Mosque in Bijapur (Nazif, 1988, p. 30).

2.10. The Maghrebi-Andalusian Style:

This style emerged in the Maghreb and Andalusia under the Almohad dynasty in the 12th century CE. It is known that the unification of the Maghreb and Andalusia under one ruler occurred under the Almoravids. Leadership in this Maghrebi-Andalusian architectural art was held by Marrakesh and Spain, while Algeria and Tunisia did not play a major role (Hasan, 2013, p. 17).

Architecture in this style is characterized by horseshoe-shaped arches that rest on

circular columns with leafy capitals and simple bases. Some buildings abandoned the use of columns in favor of piers with chamfered corners non-circular and horseshoe-shaped arches. As for minarets, their structure was typically square-shaped with crenellated balconies above, followed by a smaller square shaft. A notable example is the Koutoubia Minaret in Marrakesh. Regarding arches and columns, a representative example is the courtyard of Generalife Palace in Granada. This courtyard is a large garden featuring cascading water and terraced gardens, each with a large pool surrounded by fountains. Overlooking the garden is an iwan and a small palace for the harem. Its architectural elements are similar to those of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, featuring vegetal ornamentation, Arabic inscriptions, and muqarnas (Nazif, 1988, p. 26).

The Maghrebi-Andalusian style is considered an independent architectural and artistic school, due to the abundance of its artistic features, its broad geographical scope, and the various historical periods it spanned.

2.11. The Ottoman Style:

The Seljuk state collapsed in the 14th century, and power in Asia Minor passed to the Ottomans, who succeeded in capturing Constantinople in 1453 CE. Their rule extended by the 16th century to Hungary, Egypt, and Iraq. A distinct Islamic artistic style emerged among them, characterized by influences from Byzantine architectural methods on one hand, and from Persian style and Seljuk artistic techniques on the other (Hasan, 2013, p. 23).

Ottoman Islamic architecture was distinguished by its unique character and new style, setting it apart from earlier Islamic architectures. This was especially evident in the form of its large and lofty domes and its tall, pointed minarets. The use of domes was widespread, and distinctive configurations appeared, incorporating

domes and semi-domes sometimes up to four of them with domes of various sizes. The Ottoman style is known for its slender, pen-shaped minarets, often repeated in multiples. The Ottoman design often includes a courtyard surrounded by vaulted arcades, transitioning worshippers from the enclosed prayer hall to the semi-open arcade and finally to the open courtyard. The Ottoman era witnessed the emergence of a large number of architects who excelled in this field, most notably the architect Sinan, who built numerous mosques in Turkey.

The Ottoman style was also characterized by calligraphic decoration. Ceramic tilework reigned supreme in interior ornamentation, particularly in the Green Mosque built in the early 15th century in Bursa, with its beautiful mihrab featuring vegetal decorations (Al-Siraj, 2015, p. 193). The use of ceramic mosaics known from the Seljuk period disappeared. Ottoman ceramic tiles were distinguished by their blue, green, red, and gold colors, forming a newly developed type of multi-colored ceramic tile. Some of the most famous examples of this can be found in the buildings of the city of Bursa.

In terms of Arabic calligraphy, Turkish artists excelled in its development and visual refinement. The most widely used and carefully crafted scripts were Thuluth, Ruq'ah, Diwani, Ghubari, Siyakat, Ijazah, and Sughra scripts.

One of the main distinguishing features of mosques in this architectural school is that they were built as part of large architectural complexes, reminiscent of the waqf complexes that appeared in Egypt and the Levant during the Mamluk era. However, the Ottoman complexes were known as kulliyahs a term referring to an architectural complex comprising a school, mausoleum, fountain, hospital, and other independent units, all enclosed within a large wall.

3. Domes in Islamic Architecture:

The dome is a circular-based structure, concave on the inside and domed on the outside. It is one of the distinctive forms used to cover the roofs of many buildings throughout the ages. It is believed that the earliest domes originated in Mesopotamia and the Near East. Roman and Byzantine architecture also knew and used domes in their buildings. In Islamic architecture, however, the dome had a unique vision it was not merely a climatic, structural, or functional solution, but also held spiritual significance, symbolizing the heavens, especially over the pierced or open areas of the mosque (Waziry, 2005, p. 79).

Its use was not limited to mosques but extended to all Islamic buildings including palaces, madrasas, mausoleums, caravanserais, baths, markets, and others.

As a result of the Islamic vision of the dome, its uses became distinctive and unique compared to those of previous civilizations. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built in the year 72 AH, is considered the oldest example of a dome in the history of Islamic architecture (Waziry, 2005, p. 79).

Domes take various forms: hemispherical, pointed segments of a sphere, conical, bulbous, or polygonal. Some domes have a drum with windows, and sometimes a lantern crowns the dome.

The domes also varied in size, building materials, and decorative style depending on the geographical environment and the era in which they were constructed. Often, multiple domes appeared in a single building, with smaller domes accompanying the main dome. Semi-domes may form a significant portion of the roof and align with the main dome. This type became prominent during the Ottoman period, giving the Turkish style a distinguished character and prestige among all architectural styles, particularly Islamic ones (Al-Maliki, 2011, p. 160).

As for domes in the Maghreb region, they were mostly hemispherical in shape and rarely featured external decorations. In Algeria, a type of oval-shaped dome was known. In the Islamic era, domes became closely associated with mosques as they represented the vast sky and conveyed spiritual meanings. Their arched, hollow form also helped to gather and project sound during prayer. The concept of domes later spread to mausoleums and palaces until it became a hallmark of Islamic architecture. Among the most famous domes are:

- The Taj Mahal Dome in India (Image 01).
- The Dome of the Rock at Al-Aqsa Mosque (Image 02).
- The Dome of the Mihrab in the Umayyad Mosque, Damascus (Image 03).
- The Dome of the Sacred Chamber in Al-Masjid al-Nabawi, Medina (Image 04) (Hasan, 1980, p. 246).

Image 01: The Dome of the Taj Mahal in India



(mozzati, islamic art, 2019, p. 68)

Image 02: The Dome of the Rock



(mozzati, islamic art, 2019, p. 68)

Image 03: The Dome of the Umayyad



(Daher, 2025)

Image 04: The Dome of the Sacred Chamber
(Rawdah al-Sharifah)



(Wikipedia., 2024)

4. Decorative Ornaments of Domes:

The dome took on various shapes depending on the type of arch upon which it was constructed. These included spherical or conical domes, as well as the bulbous shape commonly found in Mamluk architecture. The first structure in Islam to feature a dome was the Dome of the Rock (73 AH – 685/705 CE), which has a height of 9.5 meters and a diameter of 20.44 meters. It rests on a drum supported by four piers and twelve columns that form the structural composition surrounding the sacred rock. The drum contains twelve windows (Image 05). (Hasan N. M., 2010, p. 96)

Mosaic decoration adorned many parts of the interior of the dome. Human, animal, and bird figures were omitted, and the mosaic decoration was limited to trees, palm trees, vases from which vegetal branches emerge, certain types of fruit, and depictions of crescents and stars. The Kufic inscriptions made in mosaic are considered one of the most prominent features of this dome. The length of the inscription band that surrounds the interior of the dome and its walls reaches approximately 240 meters. These inscriptions were created using gilded mosaics on a dark blue background, and the text consists of verses from the Noble Qur'an. (Al-Qaisi, 2009, p. 150) (Image 06)

Image 05: Decorations of the Dome of the Rock



(wiktionary, 2024)

Image 06: Interior Decoration of the Dome of the Rock



(Lil-Anba., 2024)

This form (the bulbous shape) spread across all Arab regions due to the elegance of its upper portion, which is distinguished by a pointed profile at its peak, enhancing the height and majesty of the dome. Its descending outer lines also made the use of minarets alongside domes a harmonious and balanced architectural feature. The Muslim artist paid great attention to decorating the dome both inside and outside. This attention was especially evident in the ornamentation of the transitional zone, the drum, and the dome itself, using various types of decorative motifs that reached high levels of beauty and precision. These decorations included diverse vegetal and geometric patterns forming the kushas of the drum windows' arches and decorative circles containing inscription bands in Naskh script.

As for the exterior of the drum, it too was adorned with exquisite vegetal and geometric ornaments that formed kushas over the drum windows and their external frames. These windows were topped by an inscription band in Naskh script (Al-Haddad, 1993, pp. 149-151-154).

The Muslim artist also paid great attention to decorating the dome's exterior surface,

adding to its beauty by varying its ornamentation. This attention began during the Fatimid period, in which the technique of convex ribbing on the exterior was introduced, matched by concavity on the interior. This technique is characterized by decorative rhythm and gives the structure a great degree of balance and stability (Al-Haddad, 1993, p. 160).

The circular-based dome resting on only four points of a square chamber leaves four triangular voids at the dome's base. This prompted the Muslim artist to creatively employ the use of pendentives, subdividing them into smaller pendentives.

From this emerged the concept of muqarnas. In Islamic architecture, domes were decorated with interior muqarnas, and their tiered vertical arrangement achieved an effect of transcendence. The gradation of muqarnas cavities allowed the dome's physical weight to ascend into the upper space the dome's interior void carrying with it the worshippers' sentiments and spiritual consciousness.

In addition to muqarnas, other structural techniques were used to transition from a square base to a circular plan capable of supporting a dome. These included corner niches or spherical triangles both considered Islamic architectural innovations or a combination of corner niches and muqarnas (Waziry, 2005, p. 79).

To demonstrate the development added by Muslim architects to the design and construction concepts of earlier domes, the architect Sinan Pasha (896–996 AH / 1491–1588 CE) designed the dome of the Sultan Selim II Mosque in Edirne (Turkey) with exceptional intelligence and imagination. He succeeded in constructing a dome with a diameter of 31 meters and raised the base of the main dome atop eight piers, thus avoiding the obstruction of space in the four corners unlike Byzantine design. He achieved this by building four semi-domes at the corners to bear the weight of the

dome. As a result, the interior space became vast and continuous, matching the traditional layout of Islamic mosques (Hasan N. M., 2010, p. 100).

The use of stone in dome construction enabled creative ornamentation of the external dome surfaces due to stone's capacity for fine carving. Additionally, Muslim architects used brick (ajur) a building material lighter than stone for the construction of some domes.

5. CONCLUSION:

The Muslim artist devoted great attention to decorative art, which represented the most important element in Islamic architecture. Ornamentation became a prominent feature expressing the identity of Islamic civilization, aiming to add a unique beauty to life and to embellish its various aspects, after human beings had fulfilled their basic needs. Islamic architecture innovated many decorative and architectural elements known for their high precision, artistic diversity, and human beauty. These innovations were the result of human interaction with both self and the surrounding natural environment, producing artworks that reflect multiple aesthetic visions.

Islamic architecture succeeded in introducing systems previously unknown to the artistic heritage. From this study, it became clear that decorative art in Islamic architecture was the result of the Muslim artist's innovation of beautiful, functional ornamental units for architectural elements especially domes to cover existing voids. This also represented an avoidance of depicting living beings and humans, which contradicts the principles of noble Islam.

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