

CLASSICAL ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

Classical Islamic art and architecture have profound and functional characteristics, and are heavily influenced by the spiritual and aesthetic values contained in the teachings of Islam. This article aims to explore the evolution of classical Islamic art and architecture with a focus on geometric design, calligraphy, and the cultural influences that shape both aspects. Using a literature review method, this article reviews references to relevant articles from the literature in recent years. The findings of the study show that classical Islamic architecture and art are not only representations of beauty but also the deepest Islamic beliefs and philosophies. Future generations will continue to be inspired by Islamic art and architecture, which are silent witnesses to the splendor of Islamic civilization.

Keywords: Islamic Art, Islamic Architecture, Geometry, Calligraphy, Aesthetics, Cultural Influences, Classical.

INTRODUCTION

The arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia occurred between the 11th and 12th centuries and Islam entered Indonesia in the 11th century, until the 13th century, when classical art began to spread along the northern coast of Java, to the island of Java (Saleh, Azizudin & Tenri, 2016). Because artifacts are found with the aim of directing and understanding what happened in the past to offer a framework for moving from the present to the future, the

history of Islamic culture is always evolving. Understanding the significance of classical art from the past is intended to help people internalize its meaning so that it can be transformed into a tradition and passed down as a desire to keep up with the rapid development of the times and create a new culture (Umi, 2014). Since the 7th century, classical Islamic art and architecture have significantly shaped the evolution of visual culture and global architectural practices. Islamic art primarily focuses on visual representation by combining geometric patterns, calligraphy, and various decorative elements. Islamic architecture, especially mosques, functions not only as a place of worship but also as a means to build a spiritual bond with God.

Traditional Islamic architecture features elements such as large domes, minarets, and expansive courtyards, along with calligraphy and geometric designs as its main decoration. This style flourished in the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman empires, spreading to areas such as Andalusia, Persia, and Southeast Asia. For example, the world's grand mosques, including the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, were built not only to adhere to aesthetic principles, but also to instill deep Islamic symbolism. This article attempts to offer a detailed examination of classical Islamic art and architecture and to investigate how religious, cultural, and historical values influenced these aspects.

METHODS

This study uses a literature review method, which collects and examines various articles, journals, and recent books related to classical Islamic art and architecture. This study aims to provide an analysis of references published in the last five years, both from local and international scholars, that explore various perspectives on classical Islamic art and architecture.

Creswell (2014) emphasized that a literature review is a necessary initial step to build a theoretical framework that supports research. He emphasized that a literature review helps researchers understand current developments in the field being studied and identify gaps in research that need to be addressed.

Hasibuan (2007) describes a literature review as a detailed examination of theories, findings, and various research references obtained from source materials that are intended to be used as a basis for conducting research. The description in this literature review attempts to build a coherent framework of understanding regarding the solution to the problems that have been previously described in the problem formulation.

Art in Islamic architecture does not only function as decoration, but also has spiritual and philosophical meanings. The application of geometric and calligraphic designs aims to foster a reflective environment and eliminate figurative depictions, in accordance with

Islamic teachings. For example, geometric designs such as the eight-pointed star are commonly seen in architectural styles and decorative arts throughout the Islamic world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Classical Islamic Art: Aesthetics and Philosophy

Classical art encompasses various art forms developed by individuals that reflect the culture of each region from generation to generation, becoming deeply rooted and resistant to substantial changes over time. In Indonesia, various art forms have been passed down from ancestors to the present generation; these traditional art forms are categorized into two styles: primitive style and classical style.

Primitive style includes mystical, semiotic, and expressive religious rituals, while classical style displays everything that is perfectly depicted, glamorous, attractive, and that conveys atmosphere. Various forms of classical art include architectural art, design art, and fine art. Architectural art originated when humans began to be interested in living in locations outside of caves, and various forms of architectural art consist of (1) Greek and Roman architectural art; (2) Gothic architectural art; (3) Baroque architectural art; (4) Neoclassical architectural art; (5) Victorian architectural art; (6) Modern architectural art; and (7) Neo-Futuristic architectural art. Design art seeks to produce new items, by combining aspects such as aesthetics, techniques, and more.

The principles of artistic design consist of unity, balance, rhythm, emphasis, proportion, and harmony. Although fine art differs from architecture and design, especially in its relevance to everyday life, the scope of fine art includes (1) Drawing; (2) Painting; (3) Graphic arts; (4) Sculpture; (5) Ceramics; and (6) Crafts. Classical art is not only concerned with historical events; its values will vary over time as the era changes (Umi, 2014). Classical Islamic aesthetics are based on the idea of *ilm al-jamal* (the science of beauty), which highlights that true beauty comes from God and is evident in His creation. Al-Ghazali, in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, asserts that beauty offers profound joy, which includes not only physical pleasure but also inner fulfillment. Religious architecture and various wall decorations are largely characteristic of classical art, so it is not surprising that Islamic culture and its places of worship are decorated with rich architectural details on their wall decorations. Classical art is often seen in sacred buildings, which are considered by the community as places of worship or embody mystical and traditional symbols relevant to the particular location where the community lives. Pre-Islamic decorative art is rich in local characteristics, featuring batik designs and Indian influences, with the origins of batik craft being traced back to prehistoric times. The impact of Islam on Indonesian classical art emerged as a result of trading activities that began in the 11th century. Islamic cultural centers were gradually established in Demak and Jepara. Islam has had a major impact on

the cultural landscape of art in Indonesia, presenting a retrospective perspective on influences from the pre-classical period to prehistoric times, leading to a gradual decline in animal motifs and elements associated with pre-Islamic beliefs, such as gods, which were replaced by designs featuring natural forms. Important factors that influenced the role of classical art in Islamic culture include (1) Natural ornamental patterns; (2) Tomb carvings; (3) Islamic building designs; (4) Script art; and (5) Islamic batik.

Decorative art motifs were drawn from various geometric and botanical designs, while the Islamic era saw a shift towards a retrospective appreciation of cultures deemed more Islamic. During the Islamic period, geometric decorative patterns evolved into more defined and clear batik designs. The presence of ornamental plant motifs in Indonesia serves as an indication of the country's fertile natural environment filled with flora and resources. Furthermore, plants carry symbolic meanings, and these values were preserved and developed to form creative ornamental designs. Early tombstones were found in North Aceh and Gresik, with carvings that developed to distinguish themselves from earlier designs, featuring natural form patterns alongside the incorporation of Islamic calligraphy. Calligraphy is a hallmark of Islam, especially Arabic calligraphy, where various objects are decorated with calligraphic features. This includes weapons, objects used in traditional ceremonies, dolls, and more, all enriched with calligraphic details to elevate the beauty and essence of Islam itself (Jinan, 2010).

The design of mosques in Indonesia differs significantly from those in other Islamic countries; Traditional art elements in Indonesian mosques feature a variety of natural, geometric, and calligraphic designs that serve as distinctive features that are passed down from generation to generation, as if deeply embedded. The development of Islamic batik has also progressed; historically, traditional batik decorative patterns such as banji, tumpal, meander, swastika, and pilin have begun to shift and be replaced by natural designs, including flowers, fruits, and leaves.

Classical Islamic art consists of at least three important components: (1) Classical Islamic art reflects religious principles, ensuring there is no separation between horizontal and vertical aspects; (2) Classical Islamic art embodies Sufi mystical attributes; and (3) There is a relationship between the mosque and the palace, which serves to enhance protection, functionality, and beauty. The function of art in Islamic culture has attributes such as (1) Embodying the values of monotheism that enhance faith; (2) Stating and expressing noble ethics in everyday life; (3) Offering meanings related to the principles of Islamic law; (4) Providing freedom of creativity while adhering to correct morals; and (5) Art in Islam should be produced by individuals who are Muslim (Sofiana, 2018). Islamic art stands alongside other art forms, incorporating unique aspects such as invoking blessings, reminding individuals of Allah SWT, serving as a representation of horizontal movements that convey

Islamic symbols to achieve vertical goals or vice versa, and acting as a bridge between reason and conscience, intellect and spirituality. Traditional Islamic art is known for features such as calligraphy, geometric patterns, and arabesque designs. The main principle of Islamic art is to avoid depicting living beings, which leads to the creation of intricate and beautiful geometric ornaments. Two important aspects of classical Islamic art are beauty and philosophy. The beauty of Islamic art seeks to connect with spirituality, while the philosophy behind it delves into the deeper meaning of each element contained in a work of art. Beauty in classical Islamic art is centered on ideas that transcend worldly and material understanding. Beauty is not only perceived through form and design, but also as a reflection of the divine order and man's relationship with God as follows:

Geometric Patterns and Symbolism: A characteristic of Islamic art is the incorporation of geometric patterns that represent the divine order and the cosmos. Sadeghi & Roushan (2021) stated that these geometric designs not only function as decoration but also have a philosophical meaning regarding the order and harmony of the universe as determined by God. These geometric patterns depict the structure of the universe and the close relationship with God the Supreme Creator. Geometry is seen as a depiction of the order of the universe, which is seen in various types of Islamic art, from mosaics in mosques to patterns in calligraphy manuscripts. This beauty invites art lovers to reflect and feel their connection with God through the perfect order in the universe. Geometric designs consist of basic shapes such as circles, triangles, squares, and lines that are arranged systematically. The use of these patterns produces organization, harmony, and visual appeal in a work of art. In Islamic art, geometric designs symbolize the organization of God's creation and are incorporated into architecture, typography, and pottery. In Islamic art, the circle signifies tawhid or unity, the square symbolizes the world, and the triangle depicts harmony or consciousness. The combination of these forms produces a stunning symmetrical design that is rich in philosophical meaning as follows:

Calligraphy in Islamic Art: Calligraphy is the most valued art form in Islamic tradition, and is even considered the most superior art. In Islamic art, calligraphy not only functions as a means of conveying messages, but also as a manifestation of devotion to God. Nasr (2020) states that calligraphy is an intellectual and spiritual expression that reflects the relationship between humans and God's revelation. Calligraphy is not only used to write verses of the Qur'an, but also to decorate mosques and other buildings. Arabic calligraphy plays a crucial role in Islamic art, not only as the art of letters, but also as a spiritual expression. The beauty of the writing in the verses of the Qur'an is considered a manifestation of God's word, which provides grace and tranquility to those who pay attention to it. Traditional Islamic art combines deep aesthetics with strong philosophy, producing works that are not only visually stunning, but also rich in spiritual and theological

meaning. Geometry, calligraphy, and arabesques are artistic expressions that connect individuals with God, encouraging contemplation of the order of the universe and the infinity of God. Classical Islamic art goes beyond simple ornamentation or decoration; it reflects the spiritual richness and beauty inherent in the lives of Muslims.

In Islamic architecture, design principles are used to create a serene and divine environment. Ibn Rushd highlighted the importance of order (tartib), proportion (tanاسب), and harmony (nizam) in artistic creation, reflecting the organization of God's created cosmos. Arabesques, intricate geometric designs, exemplify the use of these concepts. These repeating patterns depict the infinite nature and perfection of God, showcasing the designed order of the universe.

Ismail (2025) states that the integration of art, science, and spirituality views classical Islamic art as interconnected with science and spirituality. Ismail al-Faruqi asserts that art is an integrated Islamic perspective, embodying the principle of tawhid (the oneness of God). He argues that art, science, and culture share the same divine purpose. Classical Islamic art illustrates that beauty encompasses not only external appearance but also deeper meaning and spiritual connection with God. Through art, we are encouraged to contemplate, understand, and appreciate His creation with gratitude.

2. Classical Islamic Architecture: Characteristics and Cultural Influences

Classical Islamic architecture emerged from a fusion of religious beliefs, artistic styles, and regional cultural influences that have developed rapidly since the 7th century AD. This architectural style reflects spiritual beliefs while also showing adaptation to local customs and geographical features. Islamic architecture is a fusion of human culture and acts of devotion to God, reflecting the relationship between humans, their environment, and the Creator. Islamic architecture conveys complex geometric relationships, hierarchies of form and decoration, and profound symbolic interpretations. Islamic architecture is one solution that can contribute to the advancement of civilization.

Islamic architecture embodies the essence and values of Islam, which can be utilized without hindering its application. The evolution of Islamic architecture from the 7th to the 15th century includes the advancement of structures, ornamental art, decorative design, and types of architecture. The area of its development covers a wide scope, including Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. As a result, its growth varies in different regions and has been modified to be in harmony with local customs and traditions, along with geographical factors. This cannot be separated from the natural factors that influence the development of human culture. Architecture as one component of culture continues to develop along with the advancement of human civilization.

Thus, Islam which has influenced human civilization has an architectural heritage. Islamic architectural culture began with the construction of the Kaaba by Prophet Adam as a focal point of human devotion to Allah SWT (Saoud, 2002: 1). The Kaaba is also the first building built on earth. This tradition was continued by Prophet Ibrahim AS with his son, Prophet Ismail AS. They both restored the Kaaba building. After that, Prophet Muhammad SAW continued the mission of building the Kaaba as a building that was intended as a place of worship to Allah. From here, the architectural culture in Islam continued to develop and had an unprecedented driving force, and achieved functional and symbolic meaning.

Classical Islamic architecture has unique characteristics that set it apart from other architectural styles. The main features of Islamic architectural design include domes, minarets, mihrabs, mosaics, and geometric designs. Each of these components not only serves a practical purpose but is also designed to embody the religious and philosophical principles of Islam. The dome represents heaven and the infinity of God, commonly seen in mosques and tombs. The minaret is a tall tower used to announce the call to prayer and is one of the most distinctive elements of mosque design. Horseshoe arches and ogive arches are often incorporated into the design of doors, windows, and various structural components. Massive pillars and columns support the framework of the building, giving it a sense of strength and grandeur. Classical Islamic architecture flourished in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, where it is distinguished by its large domes, mihrabs, pulpits, and minarets. Mosques are among the most recognizable designs in architecture.

Mosques as Centers of Religious Life: Mosques serve as places of worship and community centers for Muslims, with designs that incorporate not only practical elements but also beauty and meaning. Seyed Mohamad (2018) stated that mosques were built to foster a calm and solemn environment, allowing Muslims to connect with God. The addition of the mihrab to indicate the direction of the Qibla and the pulpit to deliver sermons are important features in mosque architecture. Mosques play an important role in the lives of Muslims, not only serving as places of worship but also as centers of spirituality, community, education, and empowerment. This position is evident in the various activities of the mosque that have taken place since the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW until today. Mosques serve as the main location for Muslims to perform the five daily prayers, Friday prayers, and additional sunnah prayers. In addition, mosques serve as a place to remember Allah, worship, and improve one's relationship with Allah. These spiritual practices strengthen relationships between individuals and groups, and build the moral and ethical foundations of Muslim society.

Cultural Influence in Islamic Architecture: The impact of local culture is very significant in shaping classical Islamic architecture. In the Andalusia region, Islamic architecture combines aspects of Christian culture, while in India, Hindu and Mughal styles are evident

in the design of mosques and palaces. Hasan (2021) notes that Andalusian mosques have architectural components that combine arches with intricate designs inspired by Roman and Byzantine styles. Islamic architecture in the archipelago reflects a deep process of cultural fusion between Islamic traditions and customs. This method creates buildings that not only serve religious purposes but also embody local cultural identity. Classical Islamic architecture is a blend of religious principles and deep aesthetic values. The hallmarks of Islamic architecture such as domes, minarets, mihrabs, and geometric patterns are not only functional but also loaded with deep symbolism about God's order and beauty. In addition, Islamic architecture is also heavily influenced by local culture, resulting in varied and unique designs according to local traditions. Persian, Byzantine, Indian, and Spanish influences have contributed greatly to the formation of Islamic architectural forms and styles that are widely known throughout the world.

Even since the time of Prophet Solomon, an architectural work has been built that displays beauty and splendor. This is stated in the Quran, Surah an Naml 44: "It was said to him: "Enter the palace". So when he saw the floor of the palace, he thought it was a large pool of water, and he uncovered his two legs. Solomon said: "Indeed, it is a smooth palace made of glass". Balqis said: "My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds".

Amidst its beauty, splendor, and richness of meaning, Islamic architecture that once developed and became a milestone of world civilization, holds various potentials that can revive the glory of Islam that has been lost for the past few centuries. These potentials are not only intended to counter the impact of globalizing Western culture and seek a uniform identity among various cultures, but also to enhance the development of Islamic architecture itself. In addition, if examined more deeply, Islamic architecture contains more universal principles found in Islamic teachings. These values can then be expressed in the language of architecture and take different forms based on their context while still maintaining the essence the core of architecture itself, and remains true to the primary purpose of the architectural process, which is to serve as an act of worship to God.

3. The Influence of Cultural Interaction in Islamic Art and Architecture

Islamic art emerged in a very diverse environment, shaped by various cultural influences from various regions. The impact of foreign cultures on Islamic art encouraged a broader and more adaptive approach to design elements, methods, and materials. Architecture is considered part of the spatial arts in the core of art in Islam, because it is a visual art that drives the development of Islamic civilization (Al Faruqi, 1999: 158). In spatial art, there are additional branches that complement it, especially fine arts. The presence of spatial art, including architecture, plays an important role. It is also rooted in art according

to the Qur'an, ensuring that the real progress of this civilization consistently reflects the principles of Islam found in the Qur'an, which also serves as a basis for the progress of civilization in terms of ethics and behavior. It is very important to reintegrate Islamic values into the framework of the growth of global civilization, which not only builds civilization at the physical level but also forms a mentality, mindset, spirit, ethics, and behavioral patterns rooted in Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an. Classical Islamic art and architecture reflect the influence of the various cultures that existed in the regions under Islamic rule. Persian, Byzantine, Indian, and African influences shaped the evolution of Islamic architectural styles and buildings. Traditional Islamic architecture draws inspiration from a variety of cultures, resulting in designs that combine regional artistic techniques and styles with Islamic ideals that emphasize simplicity, purity, and the infinite nature of God. Here are some examples of the impact of these cultures on Islamic architecture:

Persian Influence in Islamic Architecture: Ancient Persian architecture, characterized by its magnificent domes and columns, had a significant impact on the architectural style of Islamic buildings in the Middle East. A prime example is the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, which features the large dome style known in Persian architecture. Gombrich (2019) observes that Persian domes, used in mosques and palaces, symbolize the connection between the earthly and the heavenly, indicating God's supremacy over all. The influence of Persian culture is evident in the design of gardens and pools, which are important features of many mosques and palaces throughout the Islamic world.

Byzantine Influence on Islamic Architecture: Similar to art, the Byzantines had a significant impact on Islamic architecture, particularly in their incorporation of domes and extensive mosaics. The Hagia Sophia Mosque is an example of Byzantine architecture that influenced the design of mosques in the area. Although converted into a mosque by the Ottomans, the extensive dome structures and Byzantine mosaic patterns continued to influence the architectural design of mosques. Seyed Mohamad (2018) asserts that the Byzantine impact on the dome structures of mosques and the layout of interior spaces set the basic principles of mosque architecture throughout the Islamic world, including Istanbul and the Middle East.

Indian Influence on Islamic Architecture: Indian architecture, particularly during the Mughal Empire, had a significant impact on Islamic architectural design, particularly in its incorporation of arches, gardens, and ornamental materials. This impact is most visible in the Taj Mahal, which combines Islamic design concepts with Indian architectural traditions, such as the incorporation of white marble and elaborate decorative features. Hasan (2021) states that the incorporation of structured gardens and natural features in Mughal

architecture highlights the importance of the relationship between humans, nature, and God in Islam, symbolizing the beauty and order found in God's creation.

Andalusian Influence on Islamic Architecture: In Andalusia, Islamic art and architecture was shaped by existing Roman and Visigothic traditions, resulting in a unique and recognizable style. The Alhambra stands out as the most prominent example, whose interior design combines Islamic architectural features such as arches and ornate calligraphy with Roman and Visigothic influences. Blair & Bloom (2020) propose that the Alhambra emerged from a cultural exchange between Islam and native Spanish traditions, resulting in a highly intricate yet cohesive design. Impact from East and West: As Islam spread to the West, Islamic art and architecture incorporated features from native cultures. Blair & Bloom (2020) note that mosque designs in Spain incorporate Islamic features with Gothic and Romanesque styles. In contrast, mosques in India, including the Taj Mahal, show significant influence from Mughal architecture, which blended local features with Islamic designs.

Cultural exchanges throughout the history of Islamic art and architecture significantly influenced the evolution of the visual style that is now known as classical Islamic art and architecture. Persian, Byzantine, Indian, and Andalusian influences reinforced the Islamic tradition with new elements that deepened the symbolism and aesthetics in the design of mosques, palaces, gardens, and works of art. This process shows that Islamic art and architecture did not develop in isolation; rather, they were shaped and refined by the local cultures found in the areas under Islamic rule.

CONCLUSION

Classical Islamic art and architecture not only embody aesthetic appeal but also depict the philosophy and spiritual principles of Islamic teachings. Islamic geometric patterns and calligraphy depict harmony and the relationship between man and God. The designs of mosques and other places of worship feature symbolism, which fosters a deep spiritual and religious atmosphere. Cultural interactions and influences between civilizations significantly shaped the styles and forms of Islamic art and architecture that emerged in various regions. Classical Islamic art and architecture not only represent cultural assets but also reflect a society that values beauty, harmony and spirituality. Islamic art and architectural structures silently bear witness to the splendor of Islamic civilization and continue to inspire future generations.

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