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DECORATION IN THE INTERIOR OF MOSQUE: A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

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Abstract

Mosques are decorated with either high or less decoration. The most part which decorated normally with decorative pattern especially on the kiblah wall. The decoration in the interior of mosque gives both negative and positive impacts to the mosque user. Some scholars are agreed with the ornamentation in the interior mosque through Islamic art concept and some are not based on the prophet's mentioned tradition. Therefore this paper will present an overview of current literatures on the discussion about the ornamentation in interior mosque. This paper will cover the function of ornamentation and decorative pattern in interior mosque as well the advantages and disadvantages of using it.

Keywords: Mosque ornamentation, mosque decoration, decorative pattern

1. Introduction

Generally before look over to the focus of study, the understanding of the important of mosque in Islam is very important. Mosque is a building place where Muslim people can perform their prayers, listening to the religious speech, discussion, study and such thing which related to God. In Malaysia, the word called 'mosque' is a place or a building which involves with Friday prayer (Abdul Halim, 1984). While the places are not involved with Friday prayer called 'surau'. The role of mosque in Islam is like people unification. The word 'mosque' derives from the Arabic masjid means literally the place of sujud or prostration, that is the third position in the Islamic ritual prayers (shalat or namaz) in which forehead of the worshipper touches the ground in the supreme act of submission and surrender to God (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). In addition to performing the five daily prayers, the mosque is a place to read, study, center of learning and discussion, the council of peace and judiciary, support center and a place to view and meet. (Shaikh Ali, 2003)

Generally mosque in Malaysia was built or decorated are getting fund either from government sponsored, institutional mosques, community funded mosque or individually sponsored. Mosques are adapting the Muslim architecture concept where the function, arrangement and design are base on Islamic way. Apart of that, the decorations of the mosque are giving several function and roles in Islamic architecture. Therefore, mostly of mosque not just in Malaysia are obsessed in decorating their mosque inside and outside of the mosque. The difference is either they are decorating with heavy or less decoration. One of the elements in interior decoration of the mosque is decorative pattern. The patterns can be seen in various form and media such as pattern on tiles or pattern on carving panel. Some of decorative pattern bring the several function and meaning. Some of them were applied without any meaning or function.

Currently, some of the modern mosques are applying the decorative pattern almost everywhere on its interior surfaces. It can be on the wall, ceiling, column and even structure of the mosque. Consequently, this study will make an attempt to examine the application of decorative pattern in the interior of mosque are excessive done or moderately done. Furthermore, this research also will investigate user of mosque perception towards the heavily and less application of decorative pattern in the interior of modern mosque. Weather this situation give bad or good impact to them.

1.1 *History of Ornamentation in Interior of Mosque*

The mosque built by the prophet, peace be upon him, in Madinah was extremely simple in its form. It consisted of an enclosure with wall made of mud bricks and arcade on the qiblah side made of palm trunks used as column to support a roof of palm-leaves mud. There was no ornamentation whatsoever within or without it (Omer, 2002). Then the decorations in the interior of mosque started in Umayyad Dynasty where Walid bin Abdul Malik bin Marwan started to decorate the mosque.

2. Mosque Definition

As in Malaysia, the word gives the meaning as building mosques or prayer place Friday (Abdul Halim, 1984). In addition to performing the five daily prayers, the mosque is a place to read, study, center of learning and discussion, the council of peace and judiciary, support center and a place to view and meet. (Shaikh Ali, 2003).

(Nasoha, 2001) said that:

'Masjid ditakrifkan sebagai suatu tempat yang telah diwakafkan untuk mengingati dan mengagungkan Allah s.w.t.'

The word mosque, which in Arabic means “*tempat menyembah*” (Rahman, 1998). The very word ‘mosque’ derives from the Arabic masjid meaning literally the place of sujud or prostration, that is the third position in the Islamic ritual prayers (shalat or namaz) in which forehead of the worshipper touches the ground in the supreme act of submission and surrender to God (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). A mosque is a Holy place for worshipping. The word “mosque” in English refers to all types of buildings dedicated for Islamic worshipping. The mosque serves as a place where Muslims can come together for congregations (صلاة, *ṣalāt*) as well as a centre for information, education, and dispute settlements (Afridi, 2011).

3. Ornamentations and decoration in the interior of mosque

Decoration is commonly used for specific function. In the Malay arts, the decoration is formed to fit the spiritual demand such as to symbolize individual status, aesthetic appreciation and in commemoration to any person, events and occasion (Norzalifa, 2003). The characteristics of the decor as the system repeatedly uses motifs of plants are not all in the form of Islamic buildings, but was changed to follow the area or place to suit the level of culture, the people, the climate and local target material (Ariffin, 1992). Ornament should carry a symbolic meaning, which means the culture and way of life that are very much related with the soul of the locals. Manifestation of art and Islamic region should be well adapted with our identity, not just merely an imitation. (Utuberta, Sojak, Surat, & Tahir, 2012). Nonetheless, the prophet (pbuh) in the mentioned traditions of his did not mean to prohibit mosque decoration altogether. The whole things must be studied carefully taking into consideration a number of religious and socio-economic factors (Omer, 2009).

4. Elements of the decoration in Mosque

The application of decorative pattern in the interior of mosque are quite similar to the pattern that was applied in the interior of the house. Some elements such as calligraphy can be a different element between house and worship area. Normally elements that can be found in the interior of mosque are geometric, arabesque pattern and calligraphy. Three patterns are commonly found used in the traditional mosque are Calligraphy, Geometric pattern and Arabesque pattern (Norzalifa, 2003). Not only are structural elements such as the arch and column transformed on one plane as motifs for surface decoration or design exchanged with the minor arts, but certain techniques and materials used to simulate others are applied, confusing the eye (Jones, 1995). Some of the basic types of mosque and palace destined to recur repeatedly in later generations, which established the sovereign importance of applied ornament- geometric, floral and epigraphic- in Islamic art, and finally which showed that a distinctive new style could be welded together from the most disparate elements (Hillenbrand, 1999). The multitude of decorative treatments of surfaces in Islamic architecture, the use of almost every conceivable technique and the development of the rich repertory of design- from geometric abstract shape to full-scale floral pattern, from minutely executed inscriptions in a full variety of calligraphic styles (Ernst J. Grube, 1995)

4.1 Geometric

As with many other decorative motifs in Islamic art, the incidence of geometry grew during the 7th and 8th centuries, and from the 9th century onwards it was a standard feature of Islamic ornament (Canby, 2006). From the simple polygons and rectangles used as framing devices to the highly complex interlaces of stars and irregular polygons, geometry functions as an organizing principle on the surfaces of the whole range of media (Canby, 2006). Geometrically organized two dimensional decorative pattern consisted not only of abstract geometric shape, but included inscription and vegetal designs organized according to rules of regular geometry, and the relatively ambiguous term ‘arabesque’ can be used to describe the various forms of two dimensional geometric designs (Al-Asad, 2002).

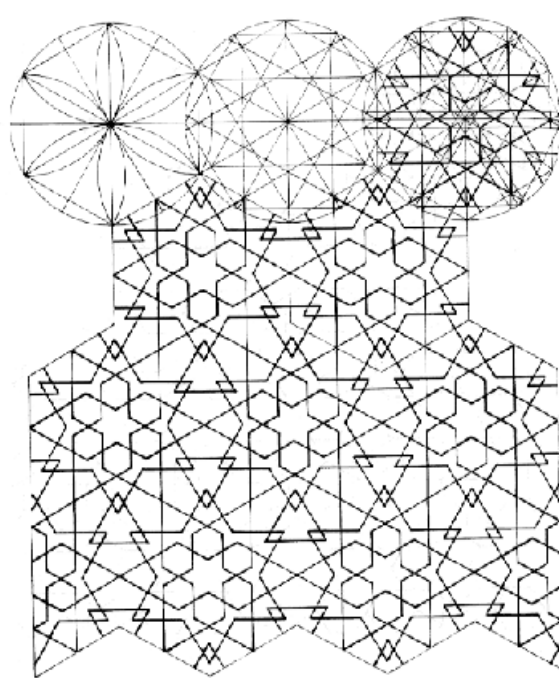


Plate 1: Geometric Concept in Islamic Art
(Source: <http://www.dartmouth.edu>)

Geometric pattern clearly demonstrate the fascination of Islamic artists with the visual principles of repetition, symmetry and continuous generation of pattern (Jones, 1995). In the Islamic context these infinitely extensible designs have been interpreted as visual demonstrations of the singleness of God and His presence everywhere. They represent ‘unity in multiplicity’ and ‘multiplicity in unity’ (Jones, 1995).

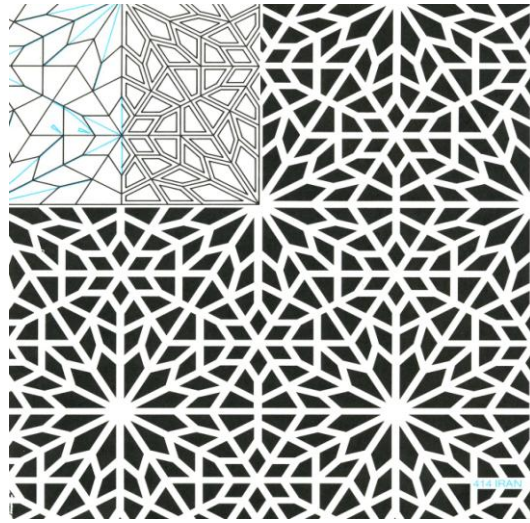


Plate 2: Geometric Pattern and Borders
(Source: <http://www.patterninislamicart.com>)

4.2 Arabesque

The arabesque is characterized by a continuous stem which splits regularly, producing a series of counterpoised, leafy, secondary stems which can in turn split again or return to be reintegrated into the main stem. This limitless, rhythmical alternation of movement, conveyed by the reciprocal repetition of curved lines, produces a design that is balanced and free from tension. (Jones, 1995). Like geometric ornament, the arabesque, a scroll with repeating and reciprocating leaf and floral elements attached to a vine- serves as a framing and filler device in Islamic art (Canby, 2006). One of the contributing factors to the infinite pattern of the arabesque is the growth of leaves, flowers or other motifs from one another rather from a single stem (Canby, 2006).

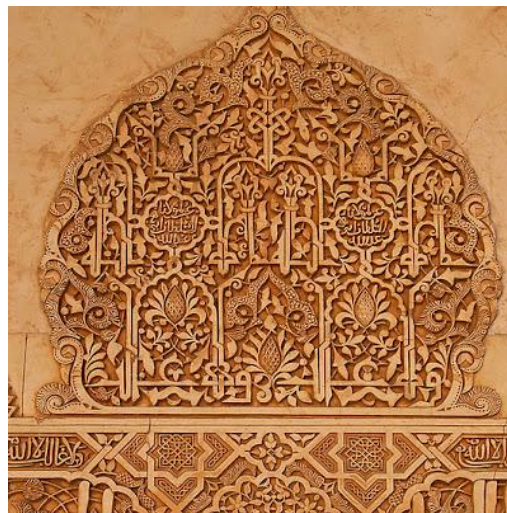


Plate 3: Arabesque Pattern
(Source: <http://islamic-arts.org>)



Plate 4: Arabesque Pattern
(Source: <http://www.dartmouth.edu>)

4.3 Calligraphy

Since the early days writing verses of the Quran a source of interior mosques. Thus, the passage of the Quran written in beautiful shape (Rahman, 1998). An abstract curving shape can be read as a bird; calligraphy is decorative as well as being a message conveying a precise meaning (Jones, 1995). In general, Qur'anic texts are selected for inscription in mosques, but quotations from the hadith and other pious phrases are also found, and whereas inscription are always in some sense appropriate to the locations in which they are found, relatively few passage consistently occur in specific location (Thackston., 2002). Inscription on buildings are generally written in an angular, sober and monumental script, kufi' or in later more cursive styles, naskhi and thuluth (Jones, 1995). In the first instance , those styles of Arabic script are *naskh*, *thuluth*, *muhaqqaq*, *raihan*, *tawqi'* and *riqa'* - were intended to match the beauty of khufic and thus suitable for copying the Qur'an (Canby, 2006).

Quranic calligraphy issues at once from the Islamic revelation and represents the response of the soul of the Islamic peoples to the Divine message (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). Square and highly stylized letter shapes were employed in early Qur'an and on coins in a script called kufic (Canby, 2006). Texts from the hadith also feature in mosque inscription, and those used almost always have to do with mosques (Thackston, 2002). Religious inscription make visible the word of God. As such they are not only a powerful visual sign containing specific religious message, but they also act as a sort of talisman for the whole building or object upon which they are inscribed (Jones, 1995). The Qur'an, or any part thereof, in and on a mosque provides the viewer with a message and focus of meditation. It may accidentally be ornamental or decorative but a Qur'anic inscription has value in and of itself (Thackston, 2002). In no sense, however, are they all immediately readable: some are placed in obscured areas; others are too high and too far away to be read; others are so intertwined and convoluted that it is beyond the ability of the average person to puzzle them out (Thackston, 2002).

الحظ لسان اليد

Old Kufi

الحظ لسان اليد

Ornamented Kufi

الحظ لسان اليد

Thuluth

الحظ لسان اليد

Diwani

الحظ لسان اليد

Diwani Djeli

الحظ لسان اليد

Naskh

الحظ لسان اليد

Persan

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Ruqaa

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Maghrébi

Plate 5: Types of calligraphy
(Source: <http://29letters.wordpress.com>)

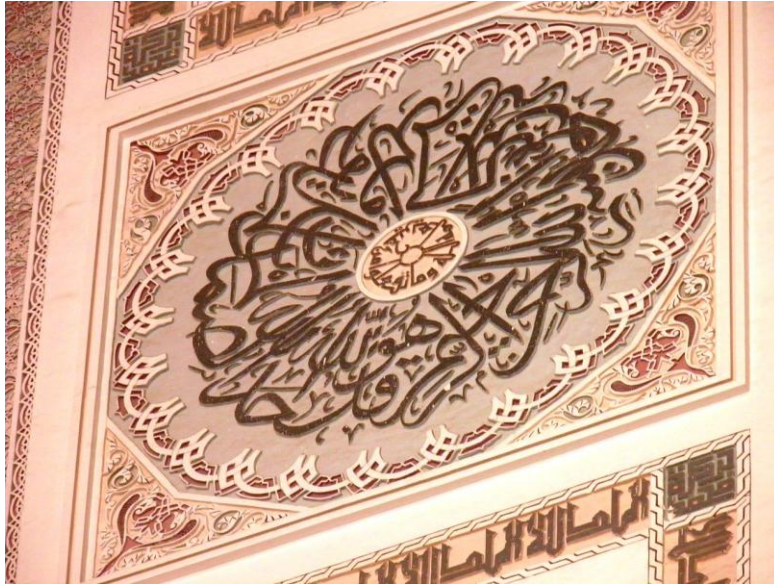


Plate 6: Inscription of calligraphy on interior of mosque wall
(Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)



Plate 7: Khufi calligraphy on wall
(Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

5. Function of ornamentation in the interior of mosque

5.1 *Tawhid*

Ornamentation and decorations in the interior of mosque as mentioned before has some effects and function of using it. One of the functions is to accentuate the feeling of Tawhid of prayers or users. Ornamentation is a way of expressing Islamic message of “Tawhid” and generating feeling of remembering Allah (Omer, 2002, Norzalifa, 2003, Othman, 2011, Omer, 2005). In order for his building to function as a man-made visible “sign” of Allah’s will

and goodness, the Muslim builder applies heavy calligraphy, containing relevant Qur'anic passages (ayat, verses or signs), Prophet's statement, and other enlightening pious elements (Omer, 2005). The aim of any Islamic artwork is to accentuate this feeling of "tawhid" or remembrance towards Allah (Norzalifa, 2003). It is the incentive behind every Islamic architectural practice, most prevalent in the cosmic, rhythmic structures of the arabesque and *muqarnas* that reverberate with the mathematical of the creator (Moustafa, 2008). As with other artistic expression in Islam, the practices of mosque ornamentation embraced both aesthetic and utilitarian ends. Both its contents and form were infused with the Islamic message of *Tawhid*, attempting as such as possible to generate intuition of the real essence of the Transcendent (Omer, 2002).

The main reason of having ornamentation especially in mosques is to feel the existence of Allah the Almighty. The feelings are derived in striving to be closer to the One (Allah the almighty) (Norzalifa, 2003). Without the two fountains and sources of the Quran and the Prophetic barakah there would be no Islamic art. The art of Islam is Islamic art not only because it was created by Muslims but because it issues forth from the Islamic revelation as do the Divine Law and the Way (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). Islamic spirituality is of course also related to Islamic art through the manner in which the Islamic rites mould the mind and soul of all Muslims including the artist or artisan (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). Islamic spirituality has influenced Islamic Art directly through the inculcation of certain attitudes and the elimination of other possibilities within the mind and soul of those men and women who have created this art (Seyyed Hossein, 1987). If Islamic art leads to the inner chamber of the Islamic tradition, it is because this art is message from that inner chamber sent to those qualified to harken to its liberating message and also to provide a climate of peace and equilibrium for society as a whole in conformity with the nature of Islam, to create an ambience in which God is remembered wherever one turns (Seyyed Hossein, 1987).

5.2 Structural

Decoration in Islamic architecture serves several functions. Among the functions, they appear to be creation of non-tectonic values, the dissolution of all those elements that in other architectural traditions emphasize the structure, the balance and counter balance of loads and stresses- the actual mechanics of building. The various means by which the effect of weightlessness is created, the effect of unlimited space, of non-substantiality of walls, pillars and vaults are well known (Ernst, 1995). In Islamic architecture, decorations is a constitutive element, not an accident, and adjunct of structure, a help in the additional but not necessary art of beautification (Omer, 2005). Islamic ornamentation is the very element that sews architecture and religion resulting serene, intelligible, structured and highly spiritual of Islamic art and architecture (Norzalifa, 2003). They perfected a type of decoration whose purpose was first and foremost that of providing buildings and objects with an intricate and complex overlay, covering their structural cores (often of a different material) as with an outer skin or 'mantle' (Jones, 1995).

5.3 Aesthetic

The aesthetical values of ornamentation help in attracting people to the mosque. Aesthetical quality gives the welcoming ambience that invites the believers of Islam into its space (Othman, 2011, Omer, 2002). Majestic physical look of buildings is without denial an attraction for people to come and enjoy the beauty (Othman & Zainal-Abidin, 2011) Whereas geometric pattern may strike the modern eye as an emotionally neutral artistic medium which communicates with the viewer in an intellectual manner, it is impossible to ascertain retrospectively the extent to which this would have been true of pre-modern period, for according to the principles of Jungian psychology, certain traditional geometric pattern such as mandalas can have strong emotional and symbolic significances (Mohammad Al-Asad, 2002). The majestic external look might be important for attraction, but properly ornamented interior will keep the people inside the mosque with the highest degree of concentration and submission towards Allah the Almighty (Norzalifa, 2003). Calligraphy carry meaningful roles as tell tale pieces of art that need to be read, understood and remembered, because there are hidden stories and histories in between the lines of decorative inscriptions. Therefore, copying the inscriptions and paste it on any mosque wall/walls is not a wise action because the inscription might contain certain story suitable for one particular mosque in its own history (Norzalifa, 2003).

5.4 Transform

Decoration in Islamic architecture is not limited to the covering of surfaces, it also helps to transform the space (Jones, 1995). The tendency is for surface to fluid: a decoration helps to make the transition, imperceptibly, from one plane to another (Jones, 1995). The lines in a primary grid of façade, as in certain arabesque or in 'Abbasid woodcarving, transform a decorative element into the contour of a form.

6. Advantages and disadvantages of ornamentation in the interior of mosque

It has been experienced that as the ornamentation and decoration of mosque is getting popular the attendance of the people for prayer is correspondingly decreasing. Even the few people who do attend the mosque do not seem to hear the devotion and fear of God which was the characteristic of the early Muslims who did not decorate their mosques (Miftahi, 1996). Without a doubt, Islam prohibits extravagant mosque beautification and decoration, more so when the same is done for advancing certain people's personal interest, or for any other reason that may cause even slightest harm to well-being of Muslims and their community. This verdict can easily be deduced from the Islamic strict and unequivocal prohibition of wastefulness, injustice, causing harm, wealth misappropriation, haughtiness, ostentation and so on (Omer, 2009).

7. Hadith Regarding Decorations of Mosque

'Umar ordered mosques to be built and would say:

"Protect the people from the rain. Beware of red and yellow decorations for they distract people."

This is related by Ibn Khuzaimah in his sahih and by al-Bukhari in muallaq form. Abu Dawud's version adds: "Ibn 'Abbas said:

'You will certainly embellish them as the Jews and Christians embellished [their places of worship].'

Besides, decorating mosques excessively may be contrary to the feeling of mortality and modesty, and another reason of it may be because it attracts the attention and affects the awe of the worshippers. The issue is dealt with from this aspect in Fiqh (Islamic law) books. In the Qur'an, only the reconstruction (the Qur'an, Al-Tauba, 9/18) and foundation (the Qur'an, Al-Tauba, 9/108) of the mosques is mentioned. Some Hadiths give more detailed information about decoration:

"It is not convenient for me to enter a home which is decorated excessively." (Abu Dawud, At'ima 8; Ibn Majah, At'ima 56; Musnad, V/221, 222) (Abu Dawud, Salat, 12) .

According to the narration of Ebu Davud, Ibn Abbas said that:

"However, you are going to decorate your mosques like Jews and Christians. That is to say, you are going to give up sincerity, imitate them and boast about the mosques." (Abu Dawud, Salat, 12)

Another hadith that shows that decorating mosques is the result of failing to practise the necessities of the religion, is as follows:

"Whichever nation fell down, they started to decorate their mosques." (Ibn Majah, Masajid 2) .

Volume 2, Page 70b: Embellishing the Mosques Anas reports that the Messenger of Allah said:

"The Hour will not come to pass until the people vie with each other in (building) the mosques."

This is related by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, anNasa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Hibban who calls it sahih. Ibn Khuzaimah's wording is:

"A time will come when the people will vie with each other in (building) the mosques but very few will attend (the mosques)."

Ibn 'Abbas reports that the Messenger of Allah said:

"I have not been ordered to build high and lofty mosques." Abu Dawud's version adds: "Ibn 'Abbas said: 'You will certainly embellish them as the Jews and Christians embellished [their places of worship].'"

The preceding hadith was related by Abu Dawud and by Ibn Hibban who calls it sahih. Umar ordered mosques to be built and would say:

"Protect the people from the rain. Beware of red and yellow decorations for they distract people."

CONCLUSION

The paper starts with a look at the history of the ornamentation and decorations in the mosque. Decorations and ornamentation in the interior of mosque normally were emphasize with using decorative pattern such as geometry, arabesque (floral) and calligraphy. The application of using the ornamentation and decoration in the mosque have serves several functions. There are to help accentuate the feeling of *Tawhid*, for aesthetic value, structural functions and also to transform the space. However this phenomenon has left some effects to the mosque users either bad or good effects. Therefore there are some *hadith* were mentioned about it as a guideline to the people who want to built or decorate the mosque.

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