

CATEGORISATION OF ISLAMIC WALL DECORATIONS IN FOUR BUILDINGS: VISUAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR STYLISTIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Islamic decoration on buildings boasts a rich cultural tradition often characterised by intricate finesse and stunning artistry. This paper delves into categorising Islamic wall decorations, including Muqarnas, tile work, glass work, and other crafts, prevalent within the architectural spaces of four historically significant mosques. The study uses a visual analysis methodology to centre on The Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace, and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. The primary objective is to comprehensively analyse these Islamic wall decorations using visual data such as photographs and artistic representations. While Islamic art has been extensively studied, there is a need for rigorous documentation of wall decorations at prominent buildings as it will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the field. Executing a search strategy across various databases and sources gathers an extensive collection of visual materials. Each mosque receives meticulous scrutiny, unveiling its historical context, architectural intricacies, and the presence of diverse artistic embellishments inherent in Islamic traditions. Through comparative analysis, it is evident that the four majestic buildings exhibit a variety of designs, each showcasing unique intricacies and stylistic variations. While some structures feature muqarnas and tilework predominantly in their dome interiors, others incorporate them extensively along the walls and columns, indicating diverse approaches to architectural embellishment across Islamic heritage sites.

Keywords: Islamic wall decorations, Islamic crafts, Islamic art, visual analysis, Islamic historical mosques.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The decorations adorning walls hold immense cultural and artistic significance within Islamic architecture (Shafiq, 2014). These intricate designs and skilled craftsmanship reflect the rich heritage of Islamic artistry, offering a deeper understanding of the intersection between art, culture, and architectural traditions in the Islamic world (Mohammad et al., 2023). Investigating Islamic wall decorations is essential for their visual appeal and the cultural and religious identities they embody within mosque architecture (Zahra & Shahir, 2022). This study delves into the detailed designs of Islamic wall decorations in four historically significant mosques: the Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace, and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. Each of these mosques represents a unique era, cultural context, and architectural significance, providing a comprehensive platform to examine the diverse manifestations of Islamic wall decorations. These selected buildings are architectural marvels and cultural heritage sites that invite scholarly exploration into the intricate details of Islamic decorative traditions.

The Dome of the Rock, blending Byzantine and early Islamic influences, is an early example of

Islamic decorative artistry. The Umayyad Mosque stands as a testament to the artistic and cultural synthesis of the Umayyad dynasty. The Alhambra Palace, a pinnacle of Nasrid craftsmanship, showcases the zenith of Islamic decorative arts in medieval Spain. The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque epitomises Safavid architectural innovation and the rich tradition of Persian Islamic art. Together, these buildings encapsulate a broad spectrum of historical periods, architectural styles, and cultural blends within the Islamic world.

The chosen mosques represent various historical periods, architectural styles, and cultural blends within the Islamic world. Their architectural grandeur and ornate decorations serve as both design marvels and cultural heritage preservers. This study aims to explore Islamic wall decorations, emphasising their artistic and architectural significance within the context of these selected mosques. While Islamic wall decorations have been studied extensively, this paper's novelty lies in its focused visual analysis and comparative study of these four historic buildings, providing unique insights into their stylistic and historical contexts.

While Islamic wall decorations have been studied extensively, this paper's novelty lies in its focused visual analysis and comparative study of these four historical buildings, providing unique insights into their stylistic and historical contexts. By examining these decorations in detail, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Islamic architecture's artistic traditions and cultural significance, ultimately enriching the broader discourse on Islamic art and heritage.

2.0 ISLAMIC ART AND CRAFT

Islamic decorative crafts encompass a wide range, ranging from loose adornments like textiles, carpets, pottery, and embroidery to structured wall decorations comprising ceramic, metalwork, glasswork, and the distinctive muqarnas incorporating calligraphic, floral, and geometrical motifs (Blair & Bloom, 2003). Integrating decorative elements in Islamic buildings shows a symbiotic interaction between artisanal craftsmanship and the architectural domain. Fine handicrafts artistry, including tiling, woodcarving, painting, and other art forms, is essential in enhancing Islamic architectural structures' aesthetic appeal and cultural quality. Typically, such architectural decors exist in four areas: exterior adornments, embellishments within entrance spaces, interior ornamentations, and decorative elements meant to bridge the inner and outer realms of a building. The primary aim of this research is to meticulously categorise Islamic wall decorations that exist both as the interior and exterior architectural designs of the four selected mosques. This categorisation is based on a thorough visual analysis, aiming to discern, classify, and categorise the diverse decorative elements in these sacred spaces.

This research aims to compare the wall decorations of the selected mosques, evaluating similarities and differences in terms of materials, techniques, and design styles.

2.1 Four prominent Islamic buildings

Islamic decorative crafts encompass a wide range, ranging from loose adornments like textiles, carpets, pottery, and embroidery to structured wall decorations comprising ceramic, metalwork, glasswork, and the distinctive muqarnas incorporating calligraphic, floral, and geometrical motifs (Blair & Bloom, 2003; Malik Omaid, 2015). Integrating decorative elements in Islamic buildings shows a symbiotic interaction between artisanal craftsmanship

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This study meticulously encompasses four prominent buildings: the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad Mosque, the Alhambra Palace, and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

As shown in Figure 1, The construction of the Dome of the Rock in 691 CE during the Umayyad caliphate marks its significance as one of the oldest Islamic monuments. Its architectural style, blending Byzantine and early Islamic influences, features intricate mosaic artworks, with calligraphy as its most prominent Islamic wall decoration, conveying spiritual inscriptions (Abo-Diyyeh, 2017).



Fig. 1: The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Palestine

(Source: García, 2018)

Secondly, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria is chosen for this study. In 705 CE, substantial parts of the Damascus Christian temple were converted into the Great Mosque of Damascus, which currently represents an architectural blend of diverse cultural influences (Abdullahi & Embi, 2013; Flood, 2021). Characterised by its grand courtyard and stunning mosaics, its most prevalent Islamic wall decorations encompass elaborate floral and geometric patterns, reflecting the Umayyad dynasty's artistic ability and cultural amalgamation, as shown in Figure 2.

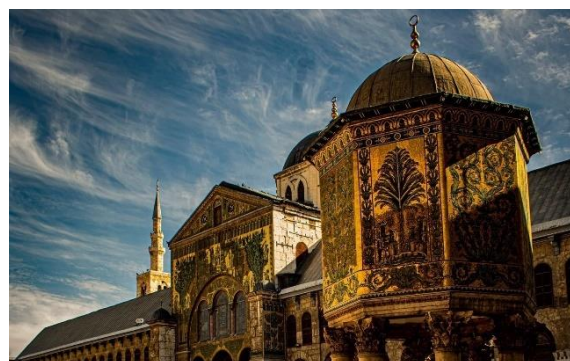


Fig 2: Umayyad masjid in Damascus, Syria

Source: (r/islam, 2021)

As shown in Figure 3, the fourth studied building is Alhambra Palace. Constructed during the

Nasrid dynasty in the 13th and 14th centuries in Granada, Spain, it represents the peak of Nasrid artistry (Bush, 2009; Eggleton, 2012). Its elaborate muqarnas, showcasing three-dimensional designs, intricate tile work, and arabesques, denote its architectural magnificence and cultural significance in preserving Islamic art.



Fig. 3: Alhambra Palace
Source: (Mirmobiny, 2015)

Fourth, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran, built during the Safavid dynasty in the early 17th century, stands as a masterpiece of Safavid architecture, as shown in Figure 4. Adorned with mesmerising tile work and inscriptions in calligraphy, the mosque symbolises the epitome of Persian Islamic heritage and architectural excellence.



Fig. 4: The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, Iran
Source: (Aprochi, 2024)

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this study involves a structured approach to gather, analyse, and categorise visual data concerning Islamic wall decorations within the selected mosques. To achieve the objectives of this paper, the study adopts a robust visual analysis methodology, emphasising the scrutiny of visual data encompassing photographs, artistic representations, and visual documentation of the chosen mosques. This entails leveraging various databases and sources and employing specific search terms tailored to procure a comprehensive collection of visual materials (Gast & Spriggs, 2014; Oliveira et al., 2001). The visual analysis method conducted the research on the wall decorations in the four selected buildings. The data was collected through library documents, a literature review of direct observation, and photography of predetermined cases (Mohammadi & Azamzadeh, 2021). The visual analysis method is useful in architecture and design for analysing visual material, including art, design, and architecture (Barbour, 2014; Gast & Spriggs, 2014). It can help increase understanding of how visual material communicates and functions, whether generating meaning, eliciting emotion, or creating a mood. Visual analysis can be applied to any visual material, including photographs, films, videos, paintings, drawings, collages, and graphics (Salour et al., 2021).

Multiple databases, including scholarly repositories and digital archives, have been accessed to accumulate a diverse array of visual data. This includes academic journals and renowned architectural databases offering a wealth of visual resources. The methodology emphasises identifying, documenting, and categorising the intricate motifs, designs, and craftsmanship evident in the wall decorations adorning these mosques' interior and exterior spaces.

Each building has been specifically selected in this study for two criteria: architectural significance through different Islamic eras and historical significance and prominence within Islamic heritage. Selection and analysis criteria have been tailored to explore Islamic wall decorations comprehensively. These criteria prioritise a meticulous examination of interior and exterior designs, emphasising geometric patterns, calligraphy, arabesques, Muqarnas, tile work, glass work, and other ornamental motifs.

4.0 RESULTS

The meticulous Islamic wall decorations across the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad Mosque, the Alhambra Palace, and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque portray an array of exquisite adornments intrinsic to Islamic architectural heritage. The Dome of the Rock is adorned with a striking array of Faience tile work, incorporating intricate patterns and colours that radiate cultural richness (Abo-Diyyeh, 2017; Muhammad, 2004; Qurain, 2021). The decoration of the Dome of the Rock embodies a rich semantic and symbolic feature that reflects profound spiritual significance within Islamic tradition. Central to its design are elements such as qur'anic verses and vegetal and geometric decoration meticulously chosen to evoke the divine presence and illustrate the magnificence of Allah's creation (Elizabeth Macaulay, 2015; Muhammad, 2004). Figure 5 shows Arabic calligraphy in the Thuluth script adorns the surface, lending an air of elegance and sophistication to the overall composition. Horizontal consecutive floral designs and repeated geometrical patterns featuring six-pointed hexagons and stars enhance the aesthetic appeal of the exterior of the Masjid.



Fig. 5: Faience tilework at the exterior of the dome of the rock in Palestine

Source: (Erik, 2020)

At the heart of the dome's symbolism is the sacred word of Allah, proclaiming the oneness of God and His supremacy. This inscription, along with intricate floral motifs, including depictions of flowers and fruit trees such as palms, olives, pomegranates, figs, and almonds, serves to evoke the imagery of paradise, symbolising the eternal bliss promised to the faithful

in the afterlife (García, 2018; Muhammad, 2004). The choice of golden, green, and blue hues further reinforces this celestial motif, evoking the splendour of heaven itself, as shown in Figure 6.

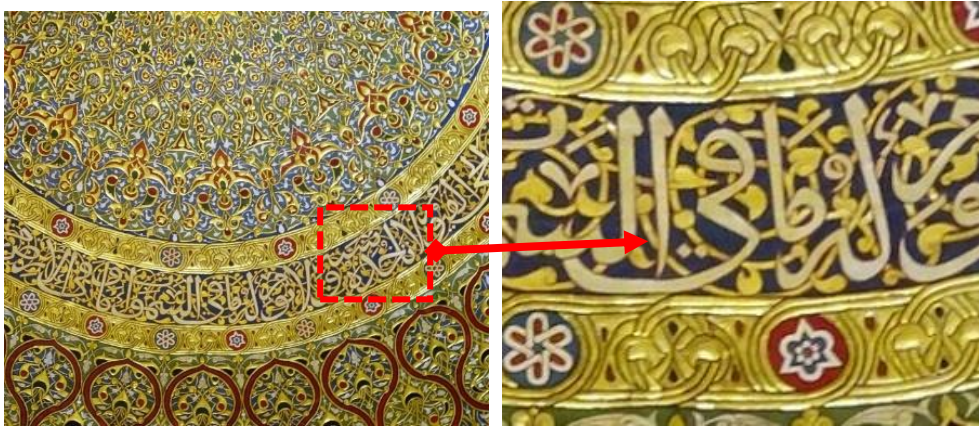


Fig 6: Ajami art at the dome of the rock interior

Source: (Erik, 2020)

Inscribed upon the ceiling is also the throne verse from the Quran, a passage of profound significance within Islamic scripture. This verse is a potent reminder of divine sovereignty and instils reverence and awe in those who behold it (Khoury, 1993; Mazidi et al., 2023). The technique employed in crafting the ceiling reflects the artistic prowess of the Umayyad dynasty, utilising intricate Ajami art and Ablaq art, alternating rows of black and white stone to create a visually stunning masterpiece, as shown in Figure 7.



Fig 7: Ablaq artwork at columns

Source: (Erik, 2020)

The choice of materials, including wood, pastiglia (raised gesso), natural marble stones, golden glass, and stone, speaks to the skilled craftsmanship of the artisans involved in its creation. Mosaic work adds a layer of intricacy and detail, with floral patterns meticulously rendered in vibrant hues. This hue magnifies this ancient monument's visual appeal and spiritual resonance, as shown in Figure 8.



Fig. 8: The interior space of the Dome of the Rock
(Source: Elizabeth Macaulay, 2015)

Secondly, the Umayyad Mosque in the capital of Syria, Damascus, exhibits a blend of decoration crafts such as mosaic, stained glass windows, muqarnas, carved stucco, Ablaq, Ajami art, and Fresco painting (Flood, 2021). This amalgamation portrays diverse artistic techniques and cultural influences; it is dominated by Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and some Persian and Assyrian influences, while in some decorations are inspired by local flowers and gardens and peacock feathers enriching the mosque's visual narrative. Figure 9 shows the rich golden colour and floral decoration representing the rich history of the golden age and the Umayyad time; the dome of Bayt Al-Mal is the place where Muslims collect the zakat, that was one of the main rituals practised by rich Muslims to help the poor (Enab, 2020; Schibille et al., 2022).



Fig 9: Mosaic art in the courtyard of Umayyad Masjid
(Source: Badat, 2022)

The architectural elements and decorative features of the Umayyad Mosque in Syria exemplify a profound integration of geometric patterns inspired by natural forms, reflecting a concept deeply rooted in Islamic symbolism and spirituality where the flowers and gardens in the decorations are the representation of the heaven or the local nature of Damascus. Beyond its utilitarian function, Geometry assumes a symbolic significance within the context of the mosque's design, embodying supernatural concepts and allusions. The intricate vegetal motifs, such as the acanthus leaves symbolising eternal life and the afterlife in Islamic belief, are meticulously incorporated into various elements like woodwork, stained glass windows, and fresco paintings. These motifs, reminiscent of paradisiacal gardens, echo the celestial imagery evoked in Islamic scripture, as shown in Figure 10.



Fig. 10: Fresco painting on the dome interior at Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria
(Source: Yagh, 2024)

Moreover, the geometric arabesque designs adorning woodwork and inlaid patterns, alongside the calligraphic inscriptions and floral ornamentation, imbue the space with a sense of divine order and harmony. The diverse mediums utilised, including stone, wood, glass, and marble, further enrich the architectural vocabulary, each material meticulously crafted to manifest geometric complexity and aesthetic beauty, as shown in Figure 11.



Fig 11: woodwork and decorated Ablaq and marblework
(Source: Yagh, 2024)

Through decoration crafts like Ajami art, muqarnas, stucco carving, and mosaic tilework, geometric and floral patterns are meticulously rendered, celebrating the divine unity and perfection inherent in natural forms, as shown in Figure 12.



Fig. 12: A close of the mihrab in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus
(Source: Ali, 2022)

Also, the stained-glass windows containing floral and calligraphy of sacred names and Zikir create a colourful light penetration over the interior ambience. Thus, the Umayyad Mosque stands not only as a testament to architectural ingenuity but also as a sacred space where the interplay of geometry and natural symbolism elevates the spiritual experience of worshippers, as shown in Figures 13 and 14.



Fig 13: Ajami Art on the ceiling of the prayer hall, Umayyad Mosque
(Source: Heiske, 2004)

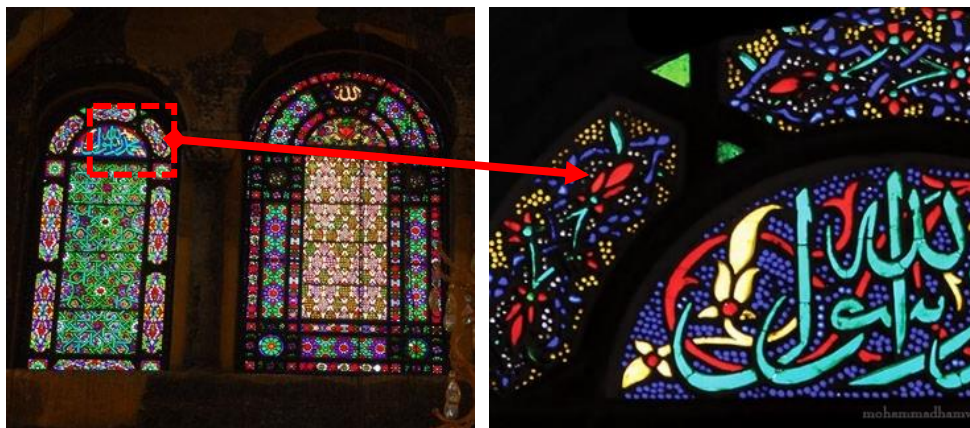


Fig. 14: Stained glass window in the Umayyad Mosque
(Source: Brian et al., 2007)

The Alhambra Palace in Spain is a distinctive example of Islamic architecture, characterised by its intricate decorative elements, profound symbolic significance, and historical context. Symbolism plays a central role in the palace's design, emphasising symmetry as a manifestation of unity (Kamarudin et al., 2020; Salour et al., 2021). This emphasis on balance and harmony reflects the Islamic concept of tawhid, or Allah's oneness, underscoring the architectural endeavour's spiritual underpinnings (Irwin, 2004; Willmert, 2011). Furthermore, the geometric decorations adorning the walls and ceilings of the Alhambra Palace evoke a sense of grandeur and beauty, inviting viewers to contemplate the divine order inherent in the universe. These geometric patterns, such as the muqarnas, meticulously crafted with precision and attention to detail, serve as ornamental embellishments and visual representations of cosmic principles and metaphysical realities, as shown in Figure 15.



Fig. 15: Muqarnas art at Alhambra Palace
(Source: Mirmobiny, 2015)

Historically, the Alhambra Palace holds significance as a testament to Islamic civilisation's cultural and artistic flourishing during the Nasrid dynasty in Spain. Built amidst a backdrop of political and cultural upheaval, the palace emerged as a supreme of cultural synthesis and artistic innovation (Bombalova, 2021; Bush, 2009; Irwin, 2004). Figure 16 shows the richness and beauty of the decoration crafts used in Alhambra Palace, such as the carved stucco of the Arabic calligraphy of no victorious but Allah and the Faience tilework in geometrical and tessellation patterns.



Fig.16: Stucco carving and ceramic tessellation tiles at Alhambra Palace
(Source: Mirmobiny, 2015)

The architectural marvels of the Alhambra Palace, such as the Hall of Ambassadors, embody the cosmological aspirations of its creators. The celestial symbolism embedded within the palace's design, particularly evident in the representation of the seven heavens and stars of paradise on the ceiling of the Hall of Ambassadors, speaks to a worldview rooted in spiritual transcendence and metaphysical contemplation, as shown in Figure 17.



Fig. 17: Intricate wooden ceiling at the hall of the throne in Alhambra palace
(Source: lea, 2016)

As shown in Figure 18, the decorative techniques employed in constructing the Alhambra Palace showcase the mastery of Islamic craftsmanship and artistic ingenuity. From lattice wooden screens and plaster windows to tessellated ceramic tilework and muqarnas vaulting, each element is executed with meticulous precision and attention to detail, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and architectural sophistication of Islamic Spain (Bush, 2009; Eggleton, 2012).

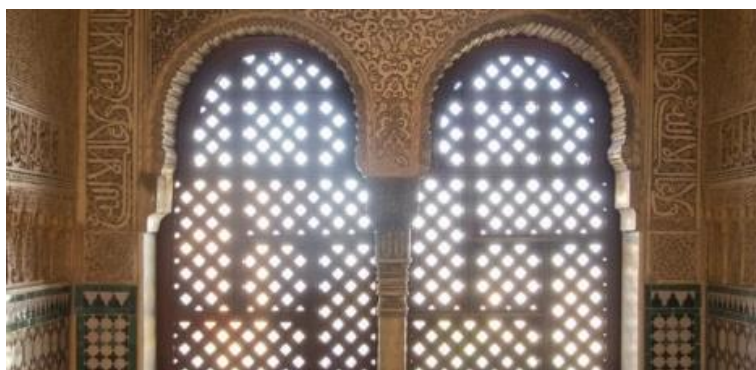


Fig. 18: Wooden lattice window at Alhambra palace
(Source: Bombalova, 2021)

Stucco carving, with its intricate calligraphy and floral design motifs, adds a layer of elegance and sophistication to the palace's interior spaces, while the Artesonado woodwork, characterized by its assembly of small wooden panels to fabricate ceilings, contributes to the palace's distinctive aesthetic charm.

The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Iran is a captivating testament to the Safavid era's architectural prowess, replete with semantic depth, symbolic richness, and historical context. Its decorative elements serve as a canvas for conveying spiritual messages and cultural identity, interwoven with intricate patterns and symbolism (Mohammadi & Azamzadeh, 2021; Vaziri et al., 2021; Vogel, 2019). The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Iran stands adorned with Haft Rangi, Mosaic tiles, Ceramic tiles, Muqarnas, and Lattice Windows. The unique Haft Rangi tilework in Muqarnas, walls, domes and archways showcases the finesse of Persian Islamic decorative traditions. As shown in Figure 19, the Haft Rangi covers all the masjid parts from inside and outside, representing the powerful decoration craft of Iran (Ghazarian & Ousterhout, 2001; Mousavi, 2021).



Fig. 19: Calligraphy and perforated windows in Haft Rangi Mosaic tile work
(Source: Vogel, 2019)

Upon entering the prayer chamber, visitors are greeted by walls adorned with a mesmerising array of blue, yellow, turquoise, and white tiles, meticulously arranged in elaborate arabesque patterns (Mazidi et al., 2023; Mohammadi & Azamzadeh, 2021). These tiles not only captivate the eye but also serve as a visual representation of the divine beauty and harmony celebrated within Islamic art and architecture.



Fig. 20: Haft Rangi art at the interior of the dome of blue mosque in Iran
(Source: Iran Paradise, 2019)

As shown in Figures 20, one of the mosque's most unique features is the peacock motif adorning the centre of the interior dome's side. This intricate design, featuring the peacock's tail extending towards the entrance gate, cleverly incorporates the natural light filtering

through the hole in the ceiling, creating the illusion of sunrays and imparting a sense of celestial radiance to the space (Mazidi et al., 2023; Mohammadi & Azamzadeh, 2021). Moreover, the peacock motif symbolises beauty, resurrection, and immortality, adding layers of symbolic significance to the architectural composition.



Fig. 21: The interwoven patterns of lights and shadows of lattice windows and tile works
(Source: Persia advisor travel, 2017)

The Safavid artisans employed various techniques and mediums to embellish the mosque's interior. Haft Rangi mosaic tilework, characterised by its vibrant colours and intricate patterns, adorns the walls with Nasakh calligraphy and tiny floral designs, exemplifying Safavid art's meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail.

The muqarnas, multi-layered and heavily adorned with floral motifs in Haft Rangi, contribute to the mosque's aesthetic grandeur while showcasing the Safavid era's architectural innovation (Mazidi et al., 2023; Mohammadi & Azamzadeh, 2021). Similarly, the lattice windows, crafted from gypsum and featuring perforated geometric designs, serve both functional and decorative purposes, allowing natural light to filter into the prayer hall while adding a touch of elegance to the architectural ensemble, as shown in Figure 22.










Fig. 22: Muqarnas tilework
(Source: Persia advisor travel, 2017)

5.0 DISCUSSIONS










The decoration of the Dome of the Rock stands as a testament to the ingenuity of Islamic artistry and the profound spiritual significance imbued within its design. Through a harmonious blend of symbolic motifs, intricate craftsmanship, and meticulous attention to detail, it serves as a visual expression of the divine majesty and eternal truths enshrined within Islamic tradition. Table 2 shows the various decoration crafts listed and found by observing the rock interior and exterior dome.

Table 1: Analytical table of the Dome of the Rock

Semantic and symbolic features	Decoration Craft	Medium	Decoration type	Illustration
Sacred word of Allah referring to the oneness of Allah Golden, green and blue colors representing the heaven fruit trees, such as palms, olives, pomegranates, figs, and almonds, in addition to various vegetable trees and their types, such as acanthus leaves that represent enduring life or the hereafter in Muslim beliefs.	Faience tilework	a glazed ceramic material that is made from crushed quartz or sand, lime, and either natron or plant ash	Arabic Calligraphy in Thuluth script	
			Horizontal Consecutive Floral Design	
			Repeated Geometrical six-pointed hexagon and stars Design	
	Ajami Art	Wood and pastiglia (Raised gesso)	Repeated floral pattern	
			Thuluth calligraphy	
	Mosaic	natural marble stones and golden glass	Floral pattern	
	Ablaq	Stone	Alternating rows of black and white stone.	





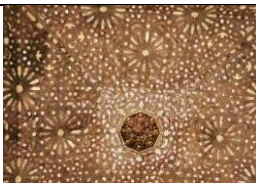


The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria, showcases a remarkable fusion of decorative crafts, including mosaic, stained glass, muqarnas, stucco carving, Ablaq, Ajami art, and Fresco painting. These elements, influenced by Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, and Assyrian styles, alongside local motifs like flowers and peacock feathers, create a visually captivating narrative. The architectural features, such as geometric patterns inspired by nature, reflect Islamic symbolism, with motifs symbolising eternal life and paradisiacal gardens. Calligraphic inscriptions, arabesque designs, and diverse materials like stone, wood, and marble further enhance the mosque's aesthetic and spiritual significance. Through meticulous craftsmanship, the Umayyad Mosque becomes not just a marvel of architecture but also a sacred space where the interplay of geometry and natural symbolism enriches the spiritual journey of worshippers. Table 3 shows the various decoration crafts listed and found in the observation of the Umayyad Mosque in Syria.

Table 2: Analytical table for the Umayyad Mosque, Syria

Semantic and symbolic features	Decoration Craft	Medium	Decoration type	Illustration
<p>Geometry has a symbolic meaning and refers to supernatural concepts and subjects vegetable trees of acanthus leaves that represent enduring life or the hereafter in Muslim beliefs the fruits and floral plants refer to heaven and gardens similar to the patters used in the dome of the rock</p>	Arabesque Woodwork (inlaid)	Wood and shells	Geometric arabesque design	
	Stained Glass Window	powdered glass, iron oxide, and ground copper	Calligraphy and floral ornamentation	
	Ablaq	Stone	Geometrical designs in different patterns and sizes	
	Ajami Art	Wood and pastiglia (Raised gesso)	Floral and geometrical patterns	
	Stucco carving	A mixture of marble powder and plaster	Calligraphy painted with golden colour	
	Fresco Painting	water-based paint directly onto wet plaster	Thuluth Calligraphy in geometrical shapes and floral ornamentation	
	Muqarnas	White marble	Simple double layer design	
	Lattice Windows (plaster)	A mixture of marble powder and plaster	Geometrical perforated design	
	mosaic tilework	natural marble stones and golden glass	Floral design of acanthus leaves	




The Alhambra Palace is a testament to the enduring legacy of Islamic art and architecture, embodying medieval Spain's cultural richness, spiritual depth, and artistic brilliance. Through its symbolic motifs, historical context, and masterful execution, the palace invites visitors to explore the intersection of art, spirituality, and culture, offering insights into the complexities of Islamic civilisation and its enduring contributions to global heritage. Table 5 shows the rich decoration crafts used in the Alhambra Palace to make it a living masterpiece.

Table 3: Analytical table of Alhambra Palace

Semantic and symbolic features	Decoration Craft	Medium	Decoration type	Illustration
<p>symmetry can be considered a manifestation of unity</p> <p>geometrical decorations induce a sense of grandeur and beauty in the viewer. this method was used in order to craft the cosmological significance of the Hall of Ambassadors. The ceiling was originally meant to represent the seven heavens of the Islamic faith, depict the stars of paradise, and symbolize the “four trees of life” with its diagonal structures</p> <p>The Muqarnas, in particular, stand out with their intricate honeycomb-like vaulting, epitomizing the palace's architectural magnificence and ornamental craftsmanship.</p>	Lattice wooden window	Wood	geometrical patterns	
	Lattice plaster windows	Plaster	geometrical patterns	
	Faience tilework	Ceramic	Tessellation and geometrical patterns	
	Muqarnas	Plaster	intricate honeycomb-like vaulting	
	Artesonado Woodwork	Wood	Geometric arabesque design	
	Arabesque Wooden doors	Wood	Geometric arabesque design	
	Stucco carving	A mixture of marble powder and plaster,	Calligraphy and floral design	

The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque is a masterpiece of Safavid architecture, rich in symbolic meaning, historical significance, and artistic splendour. Through its intricate decorative elements and thematic resonance, the mosque invites visitors to explore the intersection of spirituality, culture, and architectural innovation, offering insights into the rich crafts of Iran's cultural heritage. Table 6 shows the summary of the decoration crafts found in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

Table 4: Analytical table of masjid Lotfollah decorations craft

Semantic and symbolic features	Decoration Craft	Medium	Decoration type	Illustration
<p>The suras emphasize the rightness of a pure soul and the fate in hell of those who reject God's way, most likely referring to the Ottoman Turks.</p> <p>Entering the prayer chamber, one is confronted with walls covered with blue, yellow, turquoise, and white tiles with intricate arabesque patterns.</p> <p>One unique feature of the mosque is a peacock in the centre of the interior dome's side.</p>	Haft Rangi mosaic tilework	Persian polychrome mosaics of overglaze polychrome ceramics	Nasakh calligraphy and tiny intricate floral design	
	Muqarnas	Ceramic	Heavy floral pattern over multi-layered muqarnas	
	Lattice Windows	Gypsum	Perforated geometrics	

The identification of sixteen distinct decoration crafts within four iconic architectural landmarks, namely the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad Mosque, the Alhambra Palace, the and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, sparks a compelling discussion on the rich tapestry of artistic techniques and cultural influences embedded within Islamic architecture. Firstly, the diversity of decoration crafts observed across these landmarks underscores the intricate craftsmanship and artistic sophistication prevalent within Islamic architectural traditions. From the intricate Faience tilework adorning the Dome of the Rock to the vibrant Stained-Glass windows of the Umayyad Mosque, each decoration craft represents a distinct artistic tradition contributing to these structures' overall visual splendour.

Moreover, decoration crafts such as Ajami Art, Muqarnas, and Mosaic highlight the cross-cultural influences and exchanges that have shaped Islamic architecture over centuries. Ajami Art, for instance, reflects the fusion of Persian decorative motifs with Islamic Umayyad architectural forms. At the same time, Muqarnas showcases the integration of complex geometric designs inspired by Islamic mathematics and aesthetics. Similarly, mosaics came into different forms throughout history and regions; mosaics in Iran came into the form of Haft Rangi tilework to represent the pure Safavid Iranian talent. Also, mosaics came into the Faience tilework in the Dome of the Rock and Alhambra Palace in various tessellation patterns.

Furthermore, the symbolic significance of these decoration crafts must be considered. Floral motifs, for example, symbolise themes of growth, regeneration, and paradise in Islamic culture, while the alternating light and dark patterns of Ablaq evoke notions of harmony and balance. Such symbolic associations imbue these architectural elements with deeper layers of meaning, enriching visitors' and worshippers' spiritual and cultural experiences.

Overall, the most predominant decoration craft found in the four chosen buildings is Mosaic Tilework in the usual form of mosaic made of golden coloured stones and in the form of Haft Rangi mosaic tilework (Persian) and Faience tilework (Mesopotamian); also, Muqarnas and Ablaq are mostly found in all the four buildings in different colours and materials and finishing. Other decoration crafts are Stucco carving, Lattice Windows (plaster, wood), Ajami Art, Arabesque Woodwork (inlaid), Stained Glass Window, Fresco Painting, and Artesonado woodwork, which were found in some of the buildings chosen for the study. Identifying and exploring these ten decoration crafts within the studied landmarks offer valuable insights into the complexity, diversity, and significance of Islamic architectural ornamentation. They underscore the enduring legacy of Islamic artistic traditions and the profound impact of cultural exchange and innovation on the built environment. As such, they invite further inquiry and appreciation of these iconic structures' rich heritage and architectural ingenuity.

Table 8 presents a detailed breakdown of the decoration crafts within the four prominent architectural landmarks, including the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad Mosque, the Alhambra Palace, and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. Each decoration craft is accompanied by its count and the specific buildings where it is prevalent.

Table 5: Summary of Decoration Crafts in Studied Buildings

No	Decoration Craft	Buildings	Count
1.	Mosaic Tilework: Haft Rangi mosaic tilework (Persian) Iznik mosaic tilework (Ottoman) Faience tilework (Mesopotamian)	Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Alhambra palace	4
2.	Muqarnas	Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque	3
3.	Lattice Windows (plaster, wood)	Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace, Masjid Lotfollah	3
4.	Ablaq	Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque	2
5.	Stucco carving	Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace,	2
6.	Ajami Art	Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque	2
7.	Arabesque Woodwork (inlaid)	Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace	2
8.	Stained Glass Window	Umayyad Mosque	1
9.	Fresco Painting	Umayyad Mosque	1
10.	Artesonado woodwork	Alhambra Palace	1

This classification accentuates the complex nature of Islamic wall decorations within the selected buildings, emphasising the convergence and diversity of artistic crafts. Such a thoughtful presentation underscores the individual significance of each decorative form, collectively contributing to the overarching visual brilliance and cultural significance of these architectural masterpieces. The direct visual analysis revealed a spectrum of Islamic wall decorations, encompassing mosaic art and intricate tilework among the predominant forms using calligraphic inscriptions, geometric patterns, and floral patterns as main elements.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Through visual analysis, the thorough examination of Islamic wall decorations across four historically significant buildings, the Dome of the Rock, Umayyad Mosque, Alhambra Palace, and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, offers profound insights into the diversity and cultural significance of these adornments. This study has unveiled a mosaic of intricate decorative arts illuminating Islamic heritage's architectural grandeur and cultural depth. The analysis

highlighted prevalent artistic forms such as mosaic tilework, muqarnas, black, stucco carving, lattice windows, Ajami art, arabesque woodwork, stained glass windows, fresco painting, and Artesonado woodwork.

The intricate mosaic patterns depicted religious symbols and geometric designs, while elaborate tilework featured ornate floral motifs, reflecting influences from various cultures. Muqarnas demonstrated stylistic and regional variations, and Ablaq decorations enriched walls with vibrant colours. This detailed categorisation underscores the multifaceted nature of Islamic wall decorations and their collective contribution to these architectural masterpieces' visual brilliance and cultural significance. This research enhances the understanding of Islamic art and architecture by providing a detailed categorisation and analysis of decorative elements in mosques, highlighting their stylistic and historical significance. The comparative study emphasised unique features and shared artistic themes in Islamic wall decorations. However, it also acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on photo analysis and suggests that future on-site examinations would complement and enrich these findings. This research lays the groundwork for further exploration and preservation efforts, fostering a deeper understanding of Islamic decorative traditions within mosque architecture. By highlighting their enduring importance, this study contributes significantly to the broader discourse on Islamic art and architectural history, advocating for preserving these cultural treasures for future generations.

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GLOSSARY

Muqarnas: A form of ornamental vaulting in Islamic architecture, often resembling a honeycomb structure, used to decorate domes, entrances, and half-domes.

Tile Work: Decorative ceramic tiles used in Islamic architecture, often featuring intricate patterns and calligraphy.

Mosaic: Art consisting of a design made by cementing small pieces of coloured stone, glass, or other materials in patterns or images.

Stucco Carving: The process of carving into stucco, a type of plaster, to create intricate decorative designs on walls and ceilings.

Lattice Windows: Windows featuring an interlaced, often geometric, design made from wood or metal, used to allow light while providing privacy and decoration.

Ajami Art: A decorative art style involving painted wood, often incorporating intricate patterns and calligraphic elements.

Arabesque Woodwork: A form of decorative art using intricate patterns of interlacing foliage, tendrils, and geometric designs, often found in Islamic woodwork.

Stained Glass Window: Windows made of colored glass pieces arranged to form patterns or images, used for decorative and narrative purposes.

Fresco Painting: A technique of mural painting on freshly laid lime plaster, allowing the paint to become an integral part of the wall surface as it dries.

Artesonado Woodwork: A form of ceiling decoration using interlocking wooden panels or beams, often richly carved and painted, commonly found in Islamic and Mudéjar architecture.

Calligraphy: Artistic, stylised, or elegant handwriting or lettering, particularly in the context of Arabic script used extensively in Islamic art.

Arabesque: A type of ornamental design featuring intertwined flowing lines, often used in Islamic art to symbolise the infinite nature of creation.

Geometric Patterns: Repetitive, abstract shapes and designs that are a hallmark of Islamic art, used to create complex and intricate decorative schemes.

Ablaq: An architectural technique involving alternating or layered stones of contrasting colours, typically used in Islamic masonry