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# The Role of Qur'anic Calligraphy and Epigraphy in Contemporary Mosque Architecture:
**Cases from Australia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom**

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وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ

And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember;
then is there any that will remember? (Q 54:22)

## Copyright Statement

## List of Publications and Presentations

Several working papers and presentations originating from the current study have been published and/or presented at various conferences and symposiums. The following list provides details of these contributions:

### Conference Proceedings

Noha Hussein, "Architectural Qur'anic Inscriptions and The Dilemma of Interpretation," *Art, Craft and Architecture, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements* (The International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments, 2021), 1-18.

Noha Hussein and Mohamed Abdelmonem, "A Universal Art: The Qur'anic Inscriptions of Cambridge Central Mosque," in *The Mosque: A Cross-Cultural Building*, ed. Mashary A. Al Naim et al. (Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture and College of Architecture at Kuwait University, 2020), 207–22.

### Conference Presentations

Noha Hussein, "Encountering Modernity: Qur'anic Epigraphy in Contemporary Mosque Architecture in the West," presented at *The British Association for Islamic Studies: BRAIS 2022* (Edinburgh, 2022).

Noha Hussein, "Rereading The Dome of The Rock's Earliest Qur'anic Inscriptions in Light of the Objectives Theory," presented at *The British Association for Islamic Studies: BRAIS 2023* (London, 2023).

Noha Hussein, "The Shifting References of Mosque Architecture: From the '*Booth of Moses*' to Le Corbusier," to be presented at *The British Association for Islamic Studies: BRAIS 2024* (Leeds, 2024).

### Symposium / Book Series

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**Dedication**

*To My Father and Mother,*

*&*

*To Mohammed Kechouh*

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Last and most significantly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God, from whom I continually seek guidance, support, acceptance, and forgiveness.

**Abstract**

This research investigates the enduring presence of Qur'anic epigraphy in contemporary mosque architecture, particularly within Western contexts, despite evident departure from traditional design styles. With the support of Jules Prown's introductory theory of material culture, it asserts that the persistence and diversity of Qur'anic epigraphy throughout history indicate a continued significance and relevance in fulfilling a deliberate role within its context.

To examine this role, this research employs both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. It highlights the importance of comprehending the nature of the text and its perception within contemporary Muslim communities, while taking into account the particularities of different people at various times and places. This approach suggests a more integrative and interpretive paradigm that seeks to provide a framework for perceiving Qur'anic epigraphy and its multifaceted aspects within mosque architecture, rooted in its culture.

The study, therefore, explores the religious and historical contexts that have influenced the evolution and integration of Qur'anic epigraphy, shedding light on the underlying motivations for its continued presence in mosque architecture. Then through a qualitative case study method, the three contemporary case studies are selected through conducting a pilot study, a survey of contemporary mosques in Europe and Australia, and an exploration of the Turkish and Ottoman calligraphic context. Based on a close reading of the calligraphic and architectural programs and contexts of these mosques, while examining their design process and references and emphasizing the trilogy of architects, clients, and calligraphers, this study reveals how these Qur'anic inscriptions play a pivotal role in redefining mosque design amidst Western modernity and secularism.

Finally, through examining the ideological implications of Qur'anic inscriptions in the studied mosques, this study has demonstrated how these inscriptions were carefully chosen to counter stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. It has drawn attention to the possible attribution of the continuous use of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture over centuries to the notion of *daʿwah* and its alignment with the objectives of the Qur'an.

# Table of Contents

## Notes on Transliteration, Translation, and Dates

The transliteration of Arabic words in this study follows the style of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES), a widely accepted standard.[1] Arabic terms are transliterated and italicized, except when they have become widely used or have entered into common English, such as Qur'an,[2] Muslim, and Mohammad. Terms in Turkish are rendered in modern Romanised Turkish orthography. Translations and meanings of frequently used terms are included in a glossary, while those less frequently used are included within the text between brackets or in footnotes. Translations of Qur'anic verses are italicized and extracted from both the translation of Andrew Rippin, previously utilized by some Islamic art scholars, and the translation by Abdel Haleem in his book *The Qur'an. A New translation.* The choice of M. Abdel Haleem's translation is based on its original contextual approach in translating the Qur'an.[3] Consequently, offering easy understanding and further information on the Qur'anic text used in the Qur'anic epigraphy. All dates in this study are given according to the Gregorian calendar. Lastly, echoing Christopher Darius Stonebanks in the Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies, following Hasan's (2005) *Why I Am a Muslim;* "after invoking the name of God or the Prophet Mohammad, Muslims usually say a blessing. For God, Muslims say '*Subhanahu wa ta'ala,'* which means 'Praise the Lord.' For Muhammad, Muslims say, '*Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam,'* which means 'Peace be upon him.' I have left these blessings out in the text […] in order to prevent the non-Muslim reader from becoming confused […] I encourage Muslim readers to say these blessings to themselves as they read along".[4]

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[1] Brinkley Messick, "Notes on Transliteration," in *Translating Cultures Perspectives on Translation and Anthropology*, ed. Paula G. Rubel and Abraham Rosman (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 183.

[2] There are variations of using the words "Qur'an", "Quran" or "Koran," I will opt for "Qur'an" since it accurately reflects the proper Arabic transliteration and pronunciation of the word. See M AbdelHaleem, *The Qur'an : A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xxvi.

[3] Unlike most of his predecessors who followed a literal translation using the King James idiom, Abdel Haleem used an approach that helps determine meaning and achieve accurate and effective translation, while avoiding "cryptic language or archaism that tend to obscure meaning". See ibid., p. xxix.

[4] Christopher Darius Stonebanks, "Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies" (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), p. 294, doi:10.4135/9781483385686.

| Constants | | Long vowels | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ء | ʾ | ـَا | ā |
| ب | b | ـُو | ū |
| ت | t | ـِي | ī |
| ث | th | | |
| ج | j | **Short vowels** (ḥarakāt) | |
| ح | ḥ | ◌َ (fatḥah) | a |
| خ | kh | ◌ِ (kasrah) | i |
| د | d | ◌ُ (ḍammah) | u |
| ذ | dh | | |
| ر | r | **Diphthongs** | |
| ز | z | ـَو | aw |
| س | s | ـَي | ay |
| ش | sh | | |
| ص | ṣ | | |
| ض | ḍ | | |
| ط | ṭ | | |
| ظ | ẓ | | |
| ع | ʿ | | |
| غ | gh | | |
| ف | f | | |
| ق | q | | |
| ك | k | | |
| ل | l | | |
| م | m | | |
| ن | n | | |
| ه | h | | |
| و | w | | |
| ي | y | | |

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ahl al-Kitāb* | People of the Book (referring to Jews and Christians) |
| Caliph | The successor to Prophet Muhammad in political and religious leadership |
| *Fiqh* | The Islamic jurisprudential framework that encompasses the understanding, interpretation, and application of Islamic law |
| *Ḥadīth* | Sayings of Prophet Mohammad |
| *Ijāzah* | A traditional formal certification of expertise or permission. |
| *Imām* | A religious leader in Islam |
| *Jāmiʿ* | A congregational mosque |
| *Kaʿbah* | Holiest site in Islam, located in Mecca |
| *Khuṭbah* | The sermon delivered during the Friday congregational prayer |
| *Madrasah* | Islamic educational institution |
| *Miḥrāb* | Niche indicating *qiblah* direction in a mosque |
| Minaret | Tower used for the call to prayer in a mosque |
| *Minbar* | Raised platform in a mosque for sermons |
| *Muqarnas* | Architectural ornamentation in Islamic art, often resembling stalactites or honeycombs |
| *Qiblah* | Direction Muslims face during prayer, towards *Kaʿbah* |
| *Shahādah* | The Islamic declaration of faith, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger" |
| *Shariʿah* | Islamic law and jurisprudence |
| *Sunnah* | The practices and teachings of Prophet Muhammad |
| *Sūrah* | A chapter of the Qur'an |
| *Tawḥīd* | The Islamic concept of the oneness and unity of God |
| *Ummah* | The global community of Muslims |

## List of Figures

# CHAPTER 1:        INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Preface

The inception of this research can be traced back to 2017, when I joined a research project in Cairo. The project aimed at compiling an urban, architectural, and jurisprudential guide for planning and designing mosques. Against the backdrop of this project, I attended various discussions between professional architects, and researchers in urban planning, architecture, and Islamic jurisprudence, in which many issues related to contemporary mosque design and its elements were tackled. Some of these discussions centred around Qur'anic inscriptions, with most of the debate revolving around their permissibility and the regulations that govern their use. Notably absent from these discussions, however, was a thorough consideration of the process underpinning the selection of specific Qur'anic verses, their relation and relevance to various architectural contexts. It thus became evident that these inscriptions, akin to various other elements within mosque architecture, were left to the designer's creativity in responding to the needs of the Muslim congregation and their environment. Nevertheless, the pressing inquiries of what content should be inscribed, the rationale underpinning such selections and the methodological approaches guiding the actual inscription process remained conspicuously unaddressed.

Prompted by these inquiries, coupled with a standing appreciation for beauty and art, I developed an interest in Islamic calligraphy. In 2018 I joined a traditional school for calligraphy, and within a year I was granted my *ijazah* for one of its scripts. Over the course of that year, I encountered a world of prolific creativity, yet unknown to most architects I knew. What appeared to me then as a disconnect between the two realms; architecture and calligraphy, in fact, contrasted with my experience of growing up in Cairo and navigating its Old City where calligraphy pervades most of its buildings, extending beyond the confines of its sacred mosques

(Figure 1-1). However, despite this 'modern' break[1] and transformation of mosque architecture, calligraphy remained one of the most recurring features in its architecture around the world.[2] This is particularly true in the contemporary 'Western' context, where despite being far removed in time and distance from the 'Muslim world', their mosques continue to privilege inscriptional programmes.[3]



Figure 1-1 Photographs showing Qur'anic Epigraphy taken from several mosques in Cairo (Author 2019)

Indeed, most studies of Qur'anic inscriptions were undertaken by historians of Islamic art, who directed their efforts towards studying an overwhelmingly great

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[1] By modern break, I am generally referring to changes in design aesthetics, materials used, construction techniques, and the underlying philosophy of architecture, which are influenced by the broader context of modernization and modernity.

[2] In the introduction of a book Gharipour and Schick edited in 2013, they assert that: there can be little doubt that calligraphy is a ubiquitous feature of art and architecture throughout the Muslim world. It is, in other words, one of the most persistent 'Islamic' or 'Islamicate' elements in art and architecture.' See Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Schick, "Introduction," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Schick (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), i.

[3] *Ann Shafer, "Cairo to Canton and Back: Tradition in the Islamic Vernacular," in Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Schick (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 499.

corpus of historical mosques and buildings.[4] Nevertheless, Gharipour and Schick posit that *"calligraphy remains one of the least understood and most neglected of the arts of the Muslim world".* This sentiment rings especially true in the context of architectural inscriptions, often relegated to a role as sources of factual data, lacking boarder appreciation and consideration.[5] This became evident to me in 2019, prior to my academic pursuit, when I had the chance to attend a conference titled *Inscriptions from the Islamic World* hosted by the American University in Cairo.

The conference, as announced, has "brought together leading scholars in the fields of Islamic history, art, and architecture from all over the world to Cairo to celebrate the different disciplines of Islamic epigraphy."[6] During that conference, I had the privilege of being introduced to esteemed scholar Robert Hillenbrand and his wife, Carole. Hillenbrand graciously provided valuable advice and invited me to explore a gallery showcasing the architectural heritage of Islamic Cairo, which was organized in conjunction with the conference. As we walked through the gallery, his attention was drawn to a photograph featuring a minaret. Intriguingly, Hillenbrand posed the question why do you think an inscription was placed at such a height around the minaret where it cannot be read? Finding myself at a loss for an immediate answer, I offered a thoughtful pause, wondering about the rationale behind such placement. Hillenbrand suggested that it was intended for God to read. While I remained unconvinced, I admitted my uncertainty. In turn, Hillenbrand directed my attention to another photograph and posed the same question. This time, my response was anchored in my personal beliefs. I openly shared my stance that although still lacking a definitive answer, as a Muslim I am prompted to uphold the notion that God comprehends the innermost contents of our hearts. Consequently, the act of inscribing words on a minaret for divine reading seemed, in my view, unnecessary. This interaction called my attention to the different

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[4] Like those collected in the *Repertoire chronologique d'epigraphie arabe*, the *Materiaux pour un corpus* by Max van Berchem, or later by Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah in their book *The Image of the Word* which collated some 4,000 Qur'anic verses inscribed on Islamic buildings, mostly taken from Egypt, Levant and India.

[5] Gharipour and Schick, "Introduction" 6.

[6] Participants and attendances of the three-day conference included Bernard O'Kane, Sheila Blair, Jonathan Bloom, Carole Hillenbrand, Robert Hillenbrand, and Doris Abouseif.

paradigms and the inherent interpretive challenges in the field, that I will later explore more closely through my study. These were, in fact, heightened by the limited availability of information pertaining to the makers and the making processes of these inscriptions.[7]

Such experiences, and the gap they highlighted in the literature, added to my old inquiries that have since developed into inquiries surrounding the function of Qur'anic inscriptions within mosque architecture. The persistence, invention, and variety of calligraphy's use in mosque architecture appear to reflect an enduring relevance and a sustained pertinence in fulfilling a deliberate purpose within its context. This has provided enough momentum to embark upon this research with the main aim of *examining the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in contemporary mosque architecture,* taking advantage of the availability of resources and members of the design process of both mosque design and inscriptions.

## 1.2. Overview of Research Context

Since the early epochs of Islam, most remarkably since the construction of the Dome of the Rock, and until the present day, Qur'anic verses have maintained their presence in mosque architecture. This enduring tradition of Qur'anic epigraphy has persisted,[8] even in mosques constructed in the 'West' that exhibit a distinct departure from traditional elements and styles within their contemporary architecture.[9] The profound significance and complexity of this tradition can be attributed to three key facets. Firstly, its content, i.e., the Qur'an, or words of God, which was considered the cornerstone of Muslim civilisation. The need to meticulously preserve the Qur'an, was the Muslims' significant drive to take interest in writing and reforming their script to become worthy of inscribing the

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[7] Yasser Tabbaa, "The Transformation Of Arabic Writing: Part 2, The Public Text," *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994): 119.

[8] Talal Asad defines tradition as consisting of "discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice". For more see Talal Asad, Towards an Anthropology of Islam, (Georgetown University Press, 1986), 14.

[9] By the term 'traditional', I refer to definitions by contemporary mosque critics, who describe it as a performance that is simply imitative of what has been before. See Oskar Verkaaik, 'Designing the 'Anti-Mosque': Identity, Religion and Affect in Contemporary European Mosque Design,' *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 161–76.

words of God.[10] The second facet pertains to its form, with Islamic calligraphy being considered the highest expression of Islamic art, distinguishing its main visual theme from all other cultures.[11] It is argued that Islamic culture has adopted a cognitive approach towards calligraphy that has always involved structural and communicative functions. This implies that even the calligraphic design could imply an additional meaning and significance that arise from the understanding of the script.[12] Lastly, an architectural facet, that links the *Words of God*, the Qur'an, with the *Houses of God*, the mosques. The importance of mosques lies not only in their centrality within Islamic architecture,[13] but also, in their historical supreme representations of sovereignty and religion in different contexts.[14]

In the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, epigraphy is defined as "the study or science of inscriptions, i.e. texts traced upon some hard substance for the sake of durability, as on a monument, building, stone, tablet, medal, coin, vase, etc."[15] When these texts are beautifully and artistically written, they are known as calligraphy. Thus, calligraphy can be considered a form of inscription, as it involves the artful arrangement of letters and symbols within different scripts Each script, (Figure 1-2), possesses its own unique characteristics and historical significance. Epigraphy, then, encompasses the study of these calligraphic inscriptions, providing valuable insights into history, culture, and society.[16]

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[10] Yasin H. Safadi, Islamic Calligraphy (Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1978), 9.

[11] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (2003), 168, doi:10.1080/00043079.2003.10787065.

[12] Idham Mohammed Hanash, The Theory of Islamic Art: Aesthetic Concepts And Epistemic Structure (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2017), 70.

[13] Robert Hillenbrand, "Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture," in *Mélanges Dominique Sourdel*, Ed.L.Kalus: Revue Des Etudes Islamiques LIV (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1986), 172.

[14] Gülru Necipoğlu, "Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with Their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts," in *Word of God – Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69–104.

[15] Robert Hoyland and Venetia Porter, "Epigraphy," in Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2002), 25.

[16] Throughout this study, these terms - calligraphy, epigraphy, and inscriptions - are used interchangeably based on the specific context in which they are discussed.
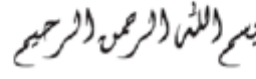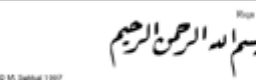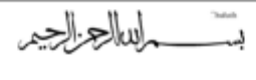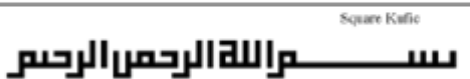
| Naskh | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم | Early Kufic | Early Kufic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Diwani | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم | Eastern Kufic | Eastern Kufic |
| Riqa'a | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم | Foliate Kufic | Foliate Kufic |
| Thuluth | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم | Knotted Kufic | Knotted Kufic |
| Muhaqaaq | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم | Square Kufic | Square Kufic |

Figure 1-2 Some of the key scripts in Islamic Calligraphy (Sakkal 1993)

Arabic epigraphy, as a discipline, was among the Islamic art studies that started at the end of the nineteenth century by orientalists.[17] It was part of the efforts the West made to study Islam and Muslims, which started in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,[18] under the 'Enlightenment project'.[19] Swiss orientalist Max Van Berchem was considered the first to declare the value of inscriptions in the context of Islamic civilization, and to prepare a comprehensive plan for their collection.[20] He established, in the early years of the twentieth century, the first corpora of Arabic inscriptions, *Materiaux pour un corpus*. The value of these inscriptions was considered numerous, as they did not only present a source for paleographic studies but also a way into the internal history of Islamic communities which was often absent from the literal works of historians and chronologists.[21]

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[17] J. Sourdel-Thomine et al., "KITABAT," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, 1986), 211-213, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kitabat-COM_0525.
[18] Ali Thueiny, "Islamic Architecture: Controversy over Differences and Agreements on Concepts," 2010, https://www.medinanet.org/arabic/2010/10/2010-10-23-19-05-47/.
[19] Oleg Grabar, "Half a Century in the Study of Islamic Art," 2005.
[20] Richard Gottheil, " Arabic Epigraphy, Mémoires Publiés Par Les Membres de L'institut Français D'archéologie Orientale Du Caire  by Max Van Berchem," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 28, no. 1 (1911), 77.
[21] Ibid., 78.

Architectural inscriptions, in particular, were regarded as the largest source of examples of Arabic writing and its development. Given the significance of the words of God in Islamic civilization, the verses of the Qur'an dominated the inscriptions on buildings like mosques, mausoleums, and *madrasahs*.[22] *Ḥadīth*, or the narrations of the prophet, were also used for inscriptions. These religious inscriptions were not exclusive to building walls but were also found on structures like minarets, and items of mosque furniture. Other types of inscriptions were present in both religious and secular buildings. These were regarded as historical inscriptions, which mainly provided historians and archaeologists with historical evidence and information of archaeological and historical value about the social, economic, and intellectual history of the Islamic world.[23]

Despite the great predominance of Qur'anic inscriptions found over historical ones, early orientalist scholarship tended to overlook, or briefly mention them.[24] Early scholars considered Qur'anic verses to be haphazardly chosen, formulaic, and seldom constituted a coherent epigraphic programme. Richard Ettinghausen, amongst others, has, in fact, argued that these inscriptions were usually not meant to be read.[25] However, more recently, art and architectural history studies started to recognize their role and significance in the history of Islamic civilization and to move beyond mere documentation to examining their meaning.[26] Though, the interpretation of these inscriptions was faced with various challenges. This included culture and language barriers, as well as the vastness of inscriptions around the Muslim world and the absence or scarcity of data about the makers of these inscriptions. Many of these studies have given more emphasis to historical, political, and visual aspects of the scripts, at the expense of the content and its nature

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[22] Shaukat Mahmood, "Historical Background To Islamic Epigraphy," *Islamic Studies* 22, no. 2 (1983): 46.

[23] Sourdel-Thomine et al., "KITABAT" 213.

[24] Robert Hillenbrand, "Islamic Monumental Inscriptions Contextualized: Location, Content, Legibility and Aesthetics," in *Beiträge Zur Islamischen Kunst Und Archäologie*, ed. Lorenz Korn and Anja Heidenreich, 1st ed., vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2012), 19, www.reichert-verlag.de.

[25] Gharipour and Schick, "Introduction" 2.

[26] Dina Montasser, "Monumental Qur'anic Inscriptions On Cairene Religious Monuments" (The American University in Cairo, 2000), 1.

in Islamic tradition and Muslim culture. Besides, the historical nature of the field of Qur'anic epigraphy has resulted in a large overlook of contemporary practices. Even when contemporary practices of traditional calligraphy were studied, they were usually addressed within the field of Islamic art history, in isolation of contemporary architecture and context.[27]

### 1.2.1.   Why the West?[28]

The West, unlike contexts with Muslim majorities, presents a challenging environment for mosque architecture. This is due to the fact that the West is fraught with tensions towards Islam's presence and the foreignness of its mosque-form, despite its "boastful claim to pluralism".[29] In some European countries, over the past two decades, right-wing political protests and special planning regulations were introduced to limit some of the predominant traditional features of mosque architecture.[30] Islamophobia has widely spread, and local mobilization against the

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[27] In 2017, Francesco Stermotich Cappellari and Bilal Badat wrote their PhD dissertations about the traditional Turkish and Ottoman calligraphic practice. See Francesco Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition" (University of Edinburgh, 2017), and  https://princes-foundation.org/school-of-traditional-arts/news/bilal-badat-completes-phd-research-on-pedagogy-in-ottoman-calligraphy.

[28] The term 'West' can pose challenges as it is often employed in a broad and at times oversimplified manner to encapsulate a diverse array of cultures, societies, and geographical regions. Works by seminal scholars such as Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, within the realms of postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and decolonial studies, offer significant insights into the complexities surrounding the term 'West' and its implications for the comprehension of power dynamics, identity formation, and knowledge production. However, I use the term based on the perspective presented by Talal Asad. Asad contends that the term has valid applications, stating, "if there are governments, if there are generals, politicians, bankers, and even ordinary individuals like us, who reference "the West" within the European and North American context, then indeed, there exists a West. Our actions and discourse presuppose its existence, thereby contributing to its construction, for better or for worse." See Hasan Azad, "Do Muslims Belong in the West? An Interview with Talal Asad," *Jadaliyya* (2015), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31747. Consequently, I employ the term in alignment with numerous scholars who have employed it to characterize contexts predominantly inhabited by non-Muslim majorities in Europe, North America, and Australia.

[29] Nebahat Avcıoğlu, "The Mosque and the European City," in *Islam and Public Controversy in Europe,* ed. Nilüfer Göle, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2013), 57.

[30] See Martin Baumann, 'Anxieties, Banning Minarets and Populist Politics in Switzerland–a Preliminary Analysis,' *Pluralism Project. Erişim Tarihi* 1 (Lucerne: University of Lucerne, 2009); Oskar Verkaaik, 'Designing the 'Anti-Mosque': Identity, Religion and Affect in Contemporary European Mosque Design,' *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 161–76.

construction of new mosques was the most noticeable form of "non-violent opposition to Islam".[31]

In response to these challenges, a notable pattern has emerged wherein local non-Muslim architects are commissioned to design these communities' new mosques. As *modern*, local, and far from 'Islamic', the designs of these mosques are commonly intended, to a greater or lesser degree, as an attempt to fit the urban political Western context and, integrate these Muslim communities. Despite the contemporary architecture adopted by these mosques, the inclusion of 'traditional' calligraphy remains a recurring element. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the Qur'anic epigraphy present in these mosque designs, despite the emerging body of research on mosque architecture as a whole.[32] Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding the intentions and experiences of the individuals involved in the decision-making process regarding both their architecture and inscriptions.[33]

## 1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

Hence, this research aims to examine the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture in the West as an attempt to contribute to both historical and contemporary literature on mosque architecture and Qur'anic inscriptions. It does so by raising the following primary questions:

- Why do Qur'anic inscriptions continue to appear to this day in mosque architecture?

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[31] Vincent F. Biondo III, "The Architecture of Mosques in the US and Britain," Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 26, no. 3 (2006): 416, doi:10.1080/13602000601141414.

[32] See for example Eray Erkoçu and Cihan Bugdaci, The Mosque: Political, Architectural and Social Transformations (NAI Publishers, 2009); Shahed Saleem, "The Mosque and the Nation," *National Identities* 22, no. 4 (2020): 463–70, doi:10.1080/14608944.2020.1811515; Nebahat Avcıoğlu, "The Modern and Contemporary Mosque in Europe," in *The Religious Architecture of Islam Volume II: Africa, Europe, and the Americas*, ed. Karen Moore and Hamid-Ul Khan (Brepols Publishers, 2022), 253–273; Oskar Verkaaik, "The Anticipated Mosque: The Political Affect of a Planned Building," *City & Society* 32, no. 1 (2020): 118–136; Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jonathan Birt, "A Mosque Too Far? Islam and the Limits of British Multiculturalism," in *Mosques in Europe: Why a Solution Has Become a Problem*, ed. Stefano Allievi (Alliance Publishing Trust, 2010), 135–52.

[33] See Oskar Verkaaik, 'Designing the 'Anti-Mosque': Identity, Religion and Affect in Contemporary European Mosque Design,' *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 161–76.

- What role do Qur'anic inscriptions assume in mosque architecture in the West?

- How do Qur'anic inscriptions fulfil this role within mosque architecture?

- How do these Qur'anic inscriptions reflect Muslim ideologies and the way they represent themselves and Islam in their contexts?

A comprehensive examination of these questions requires putting forward a number of objectives aimed at understanding the subsequent aspects:

- Qur'anic epigraphy, encompassing its religious context, historical genesis, and development.

- Muslim communities of selected case studies in the West, encompassing their backgrounds, challenges, ideologies, and needs.

- Mosque architecture of these selected cases, encompassing the references and positions of their architects.

- Meanings, interpretations, and choices of the Qur'anic inscriptions of these mosques.

- The interplay between calligraphy and architecture, through understanding the design process, as well as the intricate relations between calligraphers, architects, and clients.[34]

### 1.4. Methodology

In light of the above context and objectives, this research argues for a more integrative and interpretive paradigm, challenging the limited approach of previous studies. The proposed paradigm considers the reflection and production of meaning by considering theologically informed parameters, acknowledging the material culture of Muslim communities and the inherent values of Qur'anic inscriptions while negotiating between different sources. Accordingly, the research adopts a qualitative case study method to explore Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. A pilot study was conducted to identify cases for investigation, while

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[34] By clients, I mainly refer to mosque committee or representatives as I will show later through the study.

historical investigations focused on the earliest inscriptions of The Dome of the Rock.

Two additional studies were carried out to explore the Western context: a survey of contemporary mosques in Europe and Australia and an exploration of the Turkish and Ottoman context. Three mosques were then selected as main case studies, and data collection included contextual information, historical backgrounds, architectural details, and interviews with key actors. My insider-outsider position as a female Muslim researcher with architectural and calligraphic background has, indeed, influenced the research process. Therefore, reflexivity played an important role in acknowledging and critically evaluating my subjectivities and their impact on interactions with participants. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns of meaning in the collected data. Initially, the analysis focused on understanding each case individually, examining explicit meanings related to calligraphic programs. As the analysis progressed, a cross-case analysis was conducted to explore major themes, the design process, relationships between actors, and the larger context of the phenomenon.

### 1.5. Key Concepts

Through this research, the pre-eminence of the Qur'an is considered as the core of cultural elaboration, transformation, and reproduction within Muslim communities. Consequently, the research adopts, within its paradigm, a number of key concepts that aspire to faithfully adhere to the Qur'an itself.

#### 1.5.1. Sacred Space

The concept of sacred space has been discussed frequently in studies of religion, especially since Mircea Eliade's religious theories in the 1950s and 1960s.[35] The idea of rituals and their relation and role in producing sacred space

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[35] S. R. Burge, "Angels, Ritual and Sacred Space in Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 221.

has been highlighted by several studies,[36] especially those that address the production and definition of sacred space in Islam.  Through close inspection of the concept of sacred space within a hermeneutical model that focuses on the Qur'an (for its normative status in the Islamic tradition), Farouk-Alli argues that sacred space is created through performing rituals of worship, or, in other words, through the cultural labour of rituals as expressed by David Chidester. According to Farouk, unlike other traditions' substantial definition of sacred spaces, in Islam "space in itself is neutral and serves as a conduit for ritual."[37] Hence, in Islam, sacralization of space is understood in terms of its functional purpose, i.e., serving as a means for ritual practice. He considers the *Kaʿbah*, which is immediately synonymous with sacred space for Muslims, as the strongest example. It is a symbol of pure Monotheism, whose function is the establishment of rituals of Islamic worship. Considering the act of prayer as a locative strategy for the consecration of space, he contends that mosques, of which the *Kaʿbah* is the most significant, are sacred spaces that serve as strong centers of Islamic identity. This is derived from the exclusivity of the *Kaʿbah* to the Muslim community as a *qiblah,* and of the Muslim community as responsible for maintaining the mosques, in the Qur'anic sense of the term.[38]

### 1.5.2.   Al-ghayb

Islam, like other religious worldviews, presupposes an axiomatic premise of the existence of both physical and metaphysical realities, of visible and invisible entities.[39] In Islam, these inseparable worlds: the visible world (*ālam ash-*

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[36] See Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place Toward Theory in Ritual* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Lily Kong, "Mapping 'New' Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity," *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1191/030913201678580485* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 211–34, doi:10.1191/030913201678580485.

[37] Aslam Farouk-Alli, "A Qur'anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15, no. 1 (2002): 76.

[38] Ibid., 71-72.

[39] See Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (State University of New York Press, 2012), 29.

*shahādah*) and the invisible world (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) constitute Muslims' ontological view of the universe. *Al-ghayb,* or the unseen, is a fundamental and dominant theme in Islam, for it is essentially grounded in the Muslims' belief in God. Its concept rises above any specific Muslim sect and is associated with overarching Muslim worldviews.[40] While it is not the place to elaborate, it is important to mention that there are different types of *Al-ghayb,*[41] and that it relates to a wide range of perceived realities, some of which are unfolded by God in the Qur'an. These include references to the angels, holy books, prophets, and unseen entities as well as references to past and future events.

### 1.5.3.    Identity: A Qur'anic Concept

The concept of *ummah*, according to Gardet, lies at the heart of the Muslim's identity.[42] *Ummah* is simply identified as a community of faith, that is defined neither racially nor ethnically. Its definition is instead firmly rooted in the religion that group has sought or voluntarily followed, transcending all other markers of belonging. Therefore, *ummah* has an actionalist dimension that requires a conscious act of identification. It is treated as a source of identification rather than a given identity. It is "a meta-community constantly in the making but clearly defined", that includes past followers of earlier revelations, as well as present and future members.[43] While acknowledging local cultural contexts, and even claiming universality, the concept of *ummah*, had to have "an immutable statement of the

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[40] El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Al-Ghaib: The Invisible/Unknowable," in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. David A. Leeming (Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2019), 1–4, doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-27771-9_200245-1.

[41] For a further elaboration see previous resource. For more about the concept and different types of *al-ghayb* see Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh Al-Ghanīmān, *ʿIlm Al-Ghayb Fī Al-Sharīʿah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Al Madina al-Monawarra: Al-Jāmiʿah al-Islāmiyyah, 2010).

[42] Regarding the concept of *ummah*, Louis Gardet would explain Muslim identity as follows: "There is a notion that for centuries has made the heart of the Muslim people beat. We need to transcribe it from Arabic because it carries resonances that a European language cannot easily express. This is the *ummah*, or more precisely, the *ummaht al-nabi*. The most probable root of *ummah* is *umm*, which means 'mother'. The *ummah* is the community - in the sense of both people and nation - those who want to 'live together' ... Through the differences of countries, races, cultures, and languages, there is always an underlying vocation of unity that emerges and marks even daily behaviour." Translated from French, see Maysam J. al Faruqi, "Ummah: The Orientalists and the QurʾĀnic Concept of Identity," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2005): 1–34, doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/16.1.1.

[43] Ibid., 33.

core, of religious and ethical principles, which everybody can refer to as the ultimate basis of all legislation. Such a statement is precisely what the Qur'an purported itself to be."[44] In other words, the Qur'an[45] becomes the sole and ultimate authority in Islam, which provides both continuity and identity.

There are multiple ways through which Islamic identity, sometimes referred to as Qur'anic identity,[46] and its dimensions, have been defined in Muslim literature.[47] In this research, I choose the main three recurring elements shared between all members of the *ummah*, described sometimes as the core elements. These are Islamic belief and doctrine; history; and language. Islamic doctrine is considered the main pillar of Islamic identity, it is rigorously monotheistic: God is one and unique; He has no partner and no equal.[48] This belief in one God is represented in the principle of divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), which is also incorporated in the Muslim testimony of faith (*al-shahādah*).[49]

In terms of language, Arabic has always been integral to Islam due to its epistemological relation. The Quran was revealed in Arabic, and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad was also transmitted in Arabic. These two sources are foundational to Islam, leading scholars to consider mastery of the Arabic language a prerequisite for understanding the faith.[50] As a result, Arabic has become the religious language of approximately one billion Muslims worldwide, recited by them in their daily rituals. Additionally, it has become the vernacular language for

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[44] Lois Lamya Al Faruqi and Isma'Il Raji Al Faruqi, *The Qur'an and the Sunnah* (Occasional Papers Series), ed. anas s. Al-shaikh-ali and Shiraz Khan (London: IIIT, 2015), 20.

[45] The Sunnah occupies a place second to the Qur'an. Its function is to clarify the Qur'an's pronouncements, to exemplify and illustrate its purposes. For more about Sunnah and its relation to Qur'an see the following reference.

[46] See Osman Bakar, "The Qur'anic Identity of the Muslim Ummah: Tawhidic Epistemology as Its Foundation and Sustainer," *Islam and Civilisation Renewal Journal*, 2012, 438–54.

[47] For example see Muhammad Shaker, *Hawiyyat Al-Ummahh Al-Muslimah* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1994).

[48] "Islam." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed April 18, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam/Doctrines-of-the-Qur-an.

[49] Muslims bear witness that there is no God but God (Allah – i.e., there is none worthy of worship but Allah), and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

[50] Mat, H., and W. M. U. W. Abas. "The Relevance of Arabic Language in Islamic Studies Program: A Case Study of Open University Malaysia (OUM)." *Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2016)

around 150 million people in West Asia and North Africa, encompassing 22 countries. Influenced by Islam, Arabic has shaped the Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, Hausa, and Swahili languages, contributing significantly to their vocabularies and leaving an indelible mark on their grammar, syntax, and literature.[51] Despite issues of legibility among non-Arabic speaking Muslim societies, Arabic remains an intrinsic part of Islamic identity due to its association with the Quran. While not every Muslim may learn to read Arabic text, it is often expected that they undertake this pursuit at some point in their lives to gain a deeper understanding of the Quran, as translations are not considered words of God, only human interpretations of the text.

### 1.5.4.   Daʿwah

*Daʿwah* in the Arabic language literally means 'invitation'. The act of *daʿwah* is a special kind of communication, that refers to inviting or calling all people to the faithful practice of Islam, as written down in the Qur'an. Qur'an, consequently, is perceived as an eminent document of *daʿwah* and its main source over the history of Islam.[52] It is not primarily political in purpose. Instead, it is meant as a way to invite all, and non-Muslims in particular, to better understand Islam, taking the forms of dialogue, didactic tactics, and debates.[53] Ultimately, responding positively and accepting this call would result in joining the aforementioned *ummah* and further spreading the Truth as perceived by Muslims. Therefore, it is widely conceived as a religious duty of all Muslims, and not merely of a certain class or group.

### 1.6. Thesis Structure

In order to address the research questions and objectives outlined above, this thesis comprises eight chapters. The next chapter examines the work of prominent

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[51] Isma`il R. Al-Faruqi, and Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi. "The Cultural Atlas of Islam". New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1986.

[52] Jacques Waardenburg, "The Call (Da'wa) of Islamic Movements," in *Islam : Historical, Social, and Political Perspectives* (De Gruyter, 2015), 305.

[53] Ken Chitwood, "Da'wah," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions* (Springer, 2017), 1, doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08956-0_254-1.

authors in the field of Qur'anic epigraphy, especially within the field of Islamic art and architecture in Western scholarship, identifying their key concepts, approaches, and the roles they have suggested to Qur'anic inscriptions. It also points to the shortcomings of these studies, and how the disconnect between the content of these inscriptions and its interpretation in many of these studies highlights an ongoing dilemma of interpretation.

Chapter Three introduces a more integrative and interpretive paradigm for studying Qur'anic epigraphy and provides an overview of the research methodology employed. The chapter argues for a shift away from secular readings of Qur'anic epigraphy and emphasizes the need for an approach that considers religious interpretive tools and theories. It discusses the selection of case studies, the challenges and limitations faced during data collection, and the ethics involved in conducting interviews. It presents the data analysis process involving thematic analysis of individual cases and cross-case analysis to identify patterns and develop major themes.

Chapter Four delves into the religious and historical contexts that shaped the formation, use, and development of Qur'anic epigraphy. Divided into three sections, the chapter first examines some legal opinions and religious sources that shed light on the reasoning behind Muslims' decisions to incorporate or abstain from using Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. It introduces the Objectives Theory as a suggested framework from within Islamic tradition for comprehending their selection and placement. The second section focuses on the Dome of the Rock, which accommodates some of the earliest surviving Qur'anic inscriptions, and explores their connection to the objectives ascribed to the early Muslim generations, influencing subsequent Muslim communities. Lastly, the chapter explores the Ottoman and Turkish contexts, highlighting its significance as an 'Islamic' hub for calligraphy. It briefly reviews key events and figures that have influenced contemporary calligraphic practices, especially those related to mosque architecture in the West.

Chapter Five examines the Qur'anic epigraphic tradition in three contemporary mosque projects in the West: Cambridge Central Mosque (CCM) in the UK, Ljubljana Islamic Religious and Culture Center in Slovenia, and Punchbowl Mosque in Australia. It investigates the presence of Muslim communities in each country, their history, institutions, and organizations, exploring the construction of Islam and the development of mosques in the respective cities. The analysis then shifts towards the architectural design and Qur'anic inscriptions in the mosque projects, including the considerations and choices behind their selection and placement. Lastly, the chapter reflects on the architectural limitations of these mosques in defining their image and identity, emphasizing the need to (re)define mosque architecture amidst the influences of Western Modernity.

Chapter Six extends its exploration beyond the architecture of these mosques, investigating the references used by architects of the studied mosques, exploring their influences on mosque architecture and revealing the architects' approaches. It also reflects on the mosque design process, considering the interactions between architects, clients, and calligraphers, and how they shape the architectural features and inscriptions of these mosques.

Chapter Seven attempts to answer the main enquiry of this thesis and introduce the role of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture in the West and its suggested means, using evidence from the examined cases. Subsequently, the chapter explores the ideological implications of these inscriptions. Drawing on insights from the case of the Dome of the Rock, it suggests how these inscriptions serve as a medium for the representation of Muslim communities and Islam within their respective contexts. Lastly, the chapter concludes by revisiting the objectives theory, reflecting on its potential manifestation through the analysed cases.

The last Chapter serves as the conclusion to the thesis, providing a summary and reflection on the findings presented in each chapter. It reiterates the main research questions and the key arguments put forth throughout the study. It further highlights the contributions made in comprehending how Qur'anic inscriptions play

a crucial role in (re)defining mosque architecture amidst Western modernity. The importance of considering the dynamic identity of Muslim communities in the design process is also underscored as the research calls for a more nuanced understanding of the intentions and ideologies behind Qur'anic inscriptions in contemporary mosque architecture. Lastly, the chapter acknowledges the study's limitations, offers prospects for future research, and encourages architects and researchers to comprehend the broader complexities encompassing the process, dynamics, and references of mosque architecture, and the role Qur'anic epigraphy plays within its context.

## CHAPTER 2:        QUR'ANIC EPIGRAPHY AND THE DILEMMA OF INTERPRETATION

### 2.1. Introduction

Despite what Gharipour and Schick reported, in the introduction of the volume they co-edited in 2013, about calligraphy as "one of the least understood and most neglected of the arts of the Muslim world, (which) is all the more true of architectural inscriptions",[1] there have been considerable efforts in the field of Islamic inscriptions since early twentieth century. These efforts, especially those of the last decades, have introduced various concepts within disparate approaches aimed at interpreting the meaning and use of a vast corpus of Qur'anic inscriptions. This methodological pluralism towards understanding the field, mostly in a historical fashion, has primarily focused on formal issues and political interpretations, highlighting an ongoing dilemma of interpretation, heightened by the absence of the makers of the studied inscriptions. Nevertheless, these studies have provided valuable insights into the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture and their ideological implications in different historical contexts, thereby paving the way for further discussions and advancements in the field.

Hence, the aim of this chapter extends beyond providing a mere overview of existing literature. Rather, it seeks to compile and evaluate the main body of literature, especially within the field of Islamic art and architecture in Western scholarship. Organised by the key concepts, each section of this literature review chapter, both historical and contemporary, presents discussions on the concepts, their respective authors, their backgrounds and relevant publications, and the overarching aims and objectives explored within these works. Additionally, the research design, methodologies employed, data collection procedures, analytical approaches, proposed evidence, and findings are examined. It also points to the shortcomings of these studies, and how the disconnect between the content of these

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[1] Gharipour and Schick, "Introduction," 6.

inscriptions and its interpretation in many of these studies highlights this aforementioned dilemma.

## 2.2. Historical Studies on Qur'anic Epigraphy

### 2.2.1.    Divine Readership

One of the earliest attempts to interpret the use of Qur'anic inscriptions in Mosque architecture, since Max Van Berchem's documentation efforts in *Materiaux pour un corpus,* was made by Robert Hillenbrand.[2] His first article in the field entitled, *Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture*, was first published in the year 1986 in the French journal *Revue des Etudes Islamiques,* which was once considered a leading journal in modern Islamic sociology.[3] This study aimed to address the question of: "whether the Qur'anic texts used in architectural inscriptions were chosen somewhat casually or, on the contrary, with the utmost deliberation".[4] To answer this question Hillenbrand has chosen to undertake a preliminary investigation into the place of Qur'anic epigraphy in Islamic monuments, through a quantitative statistical review of Qur'anic inscriptions on mosques, recorded in the indices created by Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah in their book *The Image of the Word*. Along with closely looking at some examples of Qur'anic epigraphy and the relevancy of their content to specific mosque architecture, Hillenbrand would argue that:

> […] the findings which emerge from the foregoing (and admittedly brief) survey
> are somewhat low-key and are liable to disappoint champions of the theory that
> epigraphy has a significantly iconographic role in Islamic art. These findings
> suggest that, in the case of the quintessential and most popular Islamic building -
> the mosque - no attempt was made on a regular and methodical basis to make the
> inscription a commentary on the architecture which it decorated. There seems to
> have been very little desire to dovetail Qur'anic inscriptions and appropriate

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[2] Robert Hillenbrand is a British historian of Islamic art, and is currently a professorial fellow of the universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews. He started his career work long ago through his doctorate at Oxford on the tomb towers of Iran. Some of his developed work and concepts drew on Richard Ettinghausen's writings especially those related to iconography. See Bernard O'Kane, ed., *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Robert Irwin, "Islamic Art and Architecture by Robert Hillenbrand Review," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no. 2 (2000): 220–22.

[3] H. A. R. Gibb, "Revue Des Études Islamiques . Tome III , IV Review," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* , University of London 6, no. 4 (1932).

[4] Hillenbrand, "Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture," 171.

architectural features, select and conflate relevant quotations from a given *sūrah*,
or restrict the inscriptions' content to passages which bear closely on the purpose
of the building. In short, the selection of the inscriptions was - it seems -
surprisingly undirected.[5]

These preliminary findings were challenged by succeeding scholars including
Gülru Necipoğlu, who argued that these assumptions needed sensitive contextual
reconsiderations. According to Necipoğlu, such indices are useful only for
exploring the selection frequency of certain verses but not for drawing ahistorical
generalized conclusions. She argued that a methodology that adopts a statistical
approach towards studying Islamic epigraphy will probably fail to show the
nuanced implications of Qur'anic epigraphy in specific contexts and that even
'clichés' can be filled with potent contextual meaning.[6]

Consequently, in another attempt to study Qur'anic inscription, this time
through contextualising inscriptions within wider historical, geographical, and
cultural contexts, Hillenbrand published another study entitled *Islamic Monumental
Inscriptions Contextualized: Location, Content, Legibility and Aesthetics* in 2012.
In this paper, he aimed to briefly examine the characteristic features of Islamic
inscriptions on Islamic architecture through cultural encounters and cross-cultural
influences. According to Hillenbrand, this required focusing on earlier non-Islamic
traditions while trying to understand how Islamic inscriptions relate to and differ
from the epigraphic traditions of other cultures.[7]

One of the cultural references Hillebrand used to understand Qur'anic
inscriptions in Mosque architecture was an inscription on a foundation brick from
an Early Bronze Age temple at Mari in eastern Syria, which was hidden from the
public by being placed inwards. According to Hillenbrand's reference, the
inscription was meant to be visible only to the gods. He would, therefore, suggest
that "this appeal to divine readership recalls inscriptions of the Muslim creed

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[5] Ibid., 183-184.
[6] Necipoğlu, "Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with Their
Safavid and Mughal Counterparts." 98.
[7] Hillenbrand, "Islamic Monumental Inscriptions Contextualized: Location, Content, Legibility
and Aesthetics." 13.

located far beyond human sight at the top of minarets."[8] This attempt to explain the placing of Islamic inscriptions too high in architecture was not the first. In his previously mentioned study, he would suggest that Islamic inscriptions could be of similar role as Christian sculptures which were carved to glorify God. He would go on saying "but common sense forbids the notion that the inscriptions in particular held a specific message aimed at those who used the building."[9] Emphasizing his divine leadership theory, Hillenbrand would indicate that "the higher ones were for God; the lower ones for man",[10] while later adding that these high inscriptions instituted a message from man to God, and served as a bridge between the two.[11]

These repeated attempts of interpreting inscriptions mainly through other cultures, or using mere common sense, recall concerns of Grabar about explaining a culture through the lens of another.[12] Understandably, there have been cultural influences on Islamic art and architecture. According to Hillenbrand, there are vast areas of common ground between Islamic and Western traditions that make bringing some intuitive understanding to the study of Islamic architecture by Western scholars possible.[13] But the question is, would that *alone* be enough to understand Islamic art and architecture? What if some material of Islamic culture is brought into the picture?

The perception of God in Islam and the communication between Him and man is discussed in many books of Muslim written heritage. One example is a book of eight volumes written by Husayn b. Mas'ud al-Baghawi. It is classified as a narration-based exegesis of the Qur'an relying on eleven chains of narrations, which Al-Baghawi mentioned in the introduction of his work.[14] On the exegesis of

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[8] Ibid., 14.

[9] Hillenbrand, "Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture," 178.

[10] Ibid., 179.

[11] Hillenbrand, "Islamic Monumental Inscriptions Contextualized: Location, Content, Legibility and Aesthetics." 21.

[12] Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on The Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 1–14, doi:10.1080/00049536108255985.

[13] Robert Hillenbrand, "Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives," Architectural History 46 (2003): 1–18, http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp.

[14] Husayn b. Masud al-Baghawī, Tafsīr Al-Baghawī (Maʿālim Al-Tanzīl) (Al Riyad: Dar Tiba, 1989).

one of the verses,[15] Al-Baghawi mentioned two narrations[16] through which the Prophet Mohammad teaches his companions not to raise their voices in supplication, and that God is near and all hearing. Such understandings of Islamic heritage and faith might put Hillenbrand's attempts and theory of divine readership into question.

Despite these approach-related challenges, these studies highlighted important information about Qur'anic epigraphy and Islamic inscriptions in general. Hillenbrand pointed out that Islamic culture is, after all, unique in the way it has given epigraphy such prominence in its architecture. According to Hillenbrand, this unparalleled quality has no match in the sacred buildings of any other culture, not in Judaism or Zoroastrianism, Christianity, or the paganism of the classical or Arabian world. It wasn't also a practice limited to the early centuries of Islam. This has emphasised its architecture's role in directly addressing its viewers, as well as its role as a repository of scripture, or "a Sacred Book in brick or stone" in cases in which very long Qur'anic inscriptions were used.[17]

### 2.2.2.    Rote Choice and Multivalent Meanings

While dismissing the theory of divine leadership, many contemporary scholars to Hillenbrand, including Sheila Blair,[18] approached the study of Qur'anic inscriptions with a similar question of whether these inscriptions were chosen deliberately or not. Through the first book she wrote about the subject in 1992, *The*

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[15]  Qur'an 2:186, which its first part is translated: *'[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me'*.

[16] One of these narrations precisely mentions the Muslim creed, or *shahadah*, stating that: 'When the Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, went to Khaybar, people came across a valley and raised their voices saying: God is Greater, God is Greater, there is no god but God, so the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "Be gentle on yourselves, you are not calling who is deaf or absent. You are calling Who is All-Hearing and Close, and He is with you."

[17] Hillenbrand, "Islamic Monumental Inscriptions Contextualized: Location, Content, Legibility and Aesthetics." 20.

[18] Sheila Blair is co-holder of the Norma Jean Calderwood University Professorship of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College and the Hamad bin Khalifa Endowed Chair of Islamic Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, which she both shares with her husband Jonathan Bloom. Blair and Bloom also share dozens of publications, including books and articles on Islamic art, architecture, and inscriptions.

*Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, Blair focused mainly on compiling inscriptions on the lines of RCEA (*Repertoire chronologique d'epigraphie arabe*) while covering a wide range of source material on Greater Iran and areas in Central Asia. Despite its taxonomic nature, the book provided commentaries with attempts to historically contextualize and explain those inscriptions. Those attempts, which considered inscriptions more as historical documents than written words, generally ignored some of their formal characteristics and provided unjustified assumptions, which according to Rogers requires both the study of Qur'anic exegesis and the conventional employment of mystical meanings to the studied structure.[19] Six years later in her book *Islamic Inscriptions,* Blair tried to further direct her expertise in epigraphy towards analysis and synthesis. Through this book, she aimed to introduce the subject to a wide range of audiences, including beginners in Islamic civilisation and history. She also aimed at providing historians, curators, archaeologists, and researchers with basic information and tools on how inscriptions could be recorded and utilized in their professions.[20] She offered to the field an important summary of the history of studying epigraphy, with names of associated scholars, their institutions, and the aims and contexts of each.

While discussing Qur'anic epigraphy, in *Islamic inscriptions*, Blair argued that in many cases the choice of the verses seemed quite rote and was based on the verse's general popularity. However, in a few cases, according to Blair, they might have been chosen deliberately and were inscribed to hold a specific meaning. To find that out, she suggested, "it is essential to show that the verses chosen are different from what one would expect. Only then can one attempt to explain that they are meaningful."[21] In other pages, and again in the three-volume-set book she edited with her husband in 2009 entitled *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art &*

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[19] J. M. Rogers, "Sheila S. Blair: The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Iran and Transoxiana. (Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture. Supplement to Muqarnas, v.) Xv, 306 Pp. Leiden, Etc.: E. J. Brill, 1992. Guilders 185, $108.75.," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 56, no. 1 (1993): 148–50.
[20] Sheila Blair, Islamic Inscriptions (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 15.
[21] Ibid., 216.

*Architecture,* Blair pointed out that even "the most stereotyped formulas" and longer Qur'anic texts "were often chosen with reference to contemporary events".[22] Regarding form and style, Blair expressed her rejection of associating stylistic and formative changes in inscriptions and public texts with political transformation. According to Tabbaa, Blair's disregard for the significance and intentionality of the calligraphic form of inscriptions and their dramatic change followed her general positivist approach and her primary focus on the iconographic interpretation that is "rigorously based on specific case studies she had already published".[23]

In 2006 with her husband Jonathan Bloom, Blair published a book chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, which was dedicated specifically to Qur'anic inscriptions and the principles of their selection. Despite the incomprehensible and sometimes insufficient explanations provided by the authors on each principle, which could be of no interest to a non-specialist, the chapter suggested sensible principles, based on both authors' vast knowledge and experience with Qur'anic inscriptions from material found across the Islamic world over the centuries. They illustrated their suggested principles with what they described as, "few representative examples".[24] They introduced six principles, which, according to Blair and Bloom, were not used exclusively but simultaneously. These principles were: space, glorification of the faith, function, sectarian, political, and current events, and finally puns and slogans. While trying to put forward multiple alternative explanations for the choice of an inscription found on a congregational mosque erected in 726 near Tehran, Blair and Bloom concluded that it was difficult to figure out and offer the way these verses were chosen. They argued that one of the most significant characteristics of Qur'anic

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[22] Ibid., 19.Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, eds., *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art & Architecture: Three-Volume Set* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

[23] Yasser Tabbaa, "Review: Islamic Inscriptions by Sheila S . Blair : Writing Signs : The Fatimid Public Text by Irene A . Bierman : Islamic Ornament by Eva Baer," Ars Orientalis 29 (1999): 180–82.

[24] Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, "Inscriptions in Art and Architecture," in The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 167.

inscriptions is "their multivalent meanings and the different ways that they could be interpreted by different audiences".[25]

### 2.2.3.   *Intermediary Notion of Writing*

Another intricate study about calligraphy and inscriptions in Islamic art, was Oleg Grabar's book *The Mediation of Ornament.* During his almost sixty years in the field of Islamic art, Grabar's scholarship and publications went through several phases of different nature.[26] The first phase, which started in the middle of the twentieth century, was of traditional research nature. It was based on publications and excavations of new documents whose "scientific quality (or weakness) tends to remain steady over the years".[27] His next phase of scholarship was rather more interpretive and *liberating*, through which he tried to "interpret works or periods of Islamic art as historical, aesthetic, social, or cultural models whose meanings extend beyond their specific context" and deal "with issues like new forms, ornament, and aesthetics". A key notion of this phase, which seemed to continue towards the rest of his career, was that there exist some broad and universal approaches, conclusions, and principles of art,[28] that can extend from one culture to the other. This phase included his influential book *The Formation of Islamic Art* in 1973, revised and re-issued in 1987, as well as his book *The Mediation of Ornament,* in which he discussed writing, not just through the culture of Islamic art, but also through the Western and Far Eastern cultures. His attempt to introduce and follow a *multi-historical multicultural* perspective through which he tried to "formulate a general perceptual theory" has sometimes led to conclusions that have disregarded historical and geographical parameters.[29]

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[25] Ibid., 167.

[26] Oleg Grabar was known as an Islamic art historian and archaeologist. He was considered a leading figure in the field of Islamic art and architecture in the United States, where he spent most of his career. He worked as a professor emeritus of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, and Aga Khan Professor, emeritus, at Harvard University.

[27] Oleg Grabar, "Sixty Years of Scholarship in the History of Art," The Institute Letter Fall 2010 (Princeton, 2010).

[28] Oleg Grabar, "Speech by Oleg Grabar, Recipient of the 2010 Chairman's Award," AKDN, 2010, http://www.akdn.org/Content/1037.

[29] Yasser Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival (University of Washington Press, 2001), 7.

In his book *The Mediation of Ornament,* Grabar has set his main conceptual framework through his choice of both the book and chapter titles, which he respectively named *The Mediation of Ornament* and *The Intermediary of Writing*. Grabar defined ornament as "any decoration that has no referent outside of the object on which it is found, except in technical manuals".[30] This distinction between the terms *ornament* and *decoration*, which Grabar has given as part of his preface and introduction, hasn't in fact made much difference, for he alternatively used both words throughout his book.[31] What could be more controversial indeed is the use of these terms, when discussing Islamic art, and Islamic calligraphy in particular. These terms seem to determine that the acquired meanings of Islamic art end at their aesthetic forms, without paying much attention to their actual theoretical and comprehensive content.[32] In his chapter about writing, disinclined to use the word calligraphy, Grabar aimed to "draw up a broader hypothesis on the uses of writing in the visual arts".[33] His central idea was that writing in visual arts was not necessarily meant to be legible and that various specimens seemed to have been made to be only contemplated.[34] According to Grabar, writing has "a primarily aesthetic purpose", and a minor effect from religious background. As for Islamic societies, Grabar disregarded "a revelation through a book or the mysticism of the pen" as true reasons or answers to his questions regarding the place of writing in Islamic society. Instead, he suggested that there should be a sociocultural interpretation "within the fabric of classical Muslim life". However, this secular perspective has overlooked the idea that Islamic art has emerged "in a social ethos deeply rooted in religious belief and practice".[35]

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[30] Oleg Grabar, The Mediation of Ornament (Princeton University Press, 1992), 7.

[31] Barbara Brend, "Oleg Grabar: The Mediation of Ornament. The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1989, The National Gallery Washington, D. C. Princeton University Press, 1992," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 58, no. 2 (1995): 361–63.

[32] Fredrick Matoq, Sūsiyūlūjīyā Al-Fann Al-Islāmī [Sociology of Islamic Art] (Beirut: Montada Alma'ref, 2017).

[33] Grabar, The Mediation of Ornament, 61.

[34] Brend, "Oleg Grabar: The Mediation of Ornament. The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1989, The National Gallery Washington, D. C. Princeton University Press, 1992."

[35] Tehnyat Majeed, "Islamic Art and Beyond: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art, Volume III.By Oleg Grabar," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 2 (May 15, 2009): 277–80, doi:10.1093/jis/etp014.

Through his chapter on writing, Grabar first presented writing on a very theoretical level using Jacques Derrida's statements. Then through historical overview, examples, and cross-cultural comparisons, he introduced the intermediary notion of writing, or in other words the role of writing in creating different experiences between writing and its viewer. Grabar argued that there are three different experiences of writing that "must be carefully separated". Briefly, these were, first, the experience of reading a text, its literal and visual perception. The second experience is glancing at a text or what Grabar called '*monoptic*', and its immediate perception, which he regarded as the opposite of the first. Through this experience, Grabar argued that the written words' exact meanings are "within limits yet to be determined, secondary to the composition of parts." According to Grabar, in this case, the experience is a visual rather than a textual experience, that has been turned away from the text to be projected onto the viewer, involving his own mediation in a somehow *narcissistic* experience.[36] The third experience is created, according to Grabar, when writing is mixed with other *designs*, subordinated to it. He argued, without giving further explanation, that "the contemporary eye excerpts writing immediately after figural representations" which makes writing "one of the means of access to the surface of an object, a way to understand it rather than to feel it."[37] He mentioned other experiences within the Islamic tradition including the experience of power, authority and of sovereignty.

Grabar's attempt to put, within a single essay, a broad hypothesis that explained writing in the arts of several cultures and traditions, including Islamic, was quite ambitious and raised more questions than answers. However, it included concentrated pages and references of multilevel interpretations and dialogues between objects of art and their viewers; historic Islamic and modern Western art; and art of the past and present scholarship.[38] These dialogues clearly spoke of Grabar's main approaches and concepts towards Islamic art, or visual arts in

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[36] Grabar, The Mediation of Ornament, 107.
[37] Ibid., 109.
[38] Margaret Olin, "Reviewed Work: The Mediation of Ornament by Oleg Grabar," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (1993): 728–31.

general. It showed his preference to move beyond a single subject, culture, and even field, and highlighted his main conceptions and remarks about the field of Islamic art, which included: communicating with all scholarship in all fields of the humanities and the social sciences while learning from its contemporary theories; avoiding the dominance of Western paradigms, yet benefiting from the more developed methods of dealing with its art; using comparative understanding, which he considered a key feature of learned scholarship; and finally examining the existence of broad and universal principles behind our understanding of arts.[39]

### 2.2.4.    *Public Text: Socio-Political and Urban Phenomenon*

Public Text was a concept Irene Bierman introduced in 1989 through a journal article entitled: *The Art of Public Text: Medieval Islamic Rule*.[40] While taking up Islamic epigraphy as a socio-political and urban phenomenon, Beirman defined Public Text as "a particular mode of writing in Arabic in a public setting which because of its striking calligraphic form or because of the way in which it is displayed, or both, came to have important connotations of its own."[41]. She later discussed it in a more circumscribed manner while devoting the term solely to the Fatimids in her book *Writing Signs The Fatimid Public Text* published in 1998. In this book she mainly argued that Fatimids have left a lasting legacy in the way they have used Arabic as writing signs. Fatimid public texts, she argued, involved a number of key terms or concepts, that included: "officially sponsored writing," "group audience or beholders," and "sectarian" and "public spaces". According to Bierman, these terms point out the contextual characteristics through which the

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[39] Grabar, "Speech by Oleg Grabar, Recipient of the 2010 Chairman's Award."

[40] Irene Bierman was a Professor of Art History at University of California Los Angeles. She started her career with an MA in Middle East Studies at Harvard and a certificate in Arabic language from the American University in Cairo. She has undertaken a four-year research project while being the Co-Director of the American Research Center (ARCE) and Institut francais d'arch´eologie orientale (IFAO) in Cairo. Her publications have shown major interest in Cairo and Fatimid art/text and history. She was known for her divergent thinking, acquaintance with theory, critical understanding of cities, and for her historical and interpretive scholarship. See  Nasser Rabbat, "Announcement - Irene 'Renie' Bierman (1940 - 2015)," 2015, https://networks.h-net.org/node/7636/discussions/63628/announcement-irene-renie-bierman-1940-2015.

[41] Irene Bierman, "The Art of Public Text: Medieval Islamic Rule," in *World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity. Acts of the XXVIth International Congress of the History of Art*. Vol 2, ed. Irving Lavin (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 283–90.

Fatimid rulers of Egypt have conveyed intended messages and addressed a group or sometimes several groups of audience by writing on the exterior of buildings in the public spaces of Cairo.[42]

In her article, she tried to understand the intentions of the patrons, in writing those public texts, through the history of those patrons, their historical actions, and situations. She used multiple historical records written by Muslim historians like *Al-Maqrizi*, and travellers like *Ibn Jubayr* and *Naser-e khosraw*. She also used archaeological references and books by more recent scholars like *The Muslim architecture of Egypt* by Cresswell, *the Encyclopedia of Islam*, and Martin Lings's book *The Qur'anic art of calligraphy and illumination,* among many others. In her case studies, she collected as much data as she could need or find to reconstruct the context of the studied inscription. Her collected data included information about the inscription; its location and placement with reference to the public and architectural features; the form of writing and its embellishment; the development of the script and its legibility; and the Qur'anic chapters from which the verses were chosen, their preceding verses and their relation to building types. As for the buildings, she included data about their urban context and their proximity to other buildings, the date of the building construction, and their relation to the contemporary ruling. She also incorporated data regarding the audience, their literacy, and beliefs; the patrons, their ruling strategies, beliefs, and aims.

Bierman also tried to apply orthographic analysis to some of the inscription's words and letters, while reviewing their history, and how they match certain beliefs of the patron's doctrine. She suggested that "a close examination of the orthographic details of the public text in Medieval Islam can begin to illuminate important aspects of the political, religious and social history of Islam".[43] Through her data analysis, she has shown that calligraphy in public texts was more than just mere decoration. According to Bierman's conclusions, it presented the complex and subtle religious developments, as well as the social and political history, which

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[42] Irene A. Bierman, Writing Signs The Fatimid Public Text (Berkeley/ Los Angeles /London: , 1998), xiii.

[43] Bierman, "The Art of Public Text :Medieval Islamic Rule."

calligraphic art has taken part in shaping. Islamic epigraphy on buildings, or public text, played a significant role within Fatimid society through both its content and appearance. Through one of Bierman's examples, she argued that public text was used by the Fatimid *shi'i* patron, Imām Al-Hafiz, to keep the social order in balance. She argued that both the words and formal qualities of the inscriptions have shown the patron's intentions and strategies in addressing all Muslim communities in Cairo, which had a Sunni Muslim majority, to sustain the support of Fatimid regime.

In her book, almost a decade later, Bierman tried to construct a model for studying public writing in societies, through a comprehensive analytical study that starts from the writing practices of various groups in the eastern Mediterranean since the sixth century, and through the twelfth century, focusing on Fatimid public text in Cairo. Through her book chapter, she attempted to show how "Fatimid writing practices interacted in the social networks in the capital of Cairo, playing a visually significant role in the spatial hierarchies within the city."[44] She argued that some aspects of the Fatimid Public Text were particularly effective because they addressed the entire Muslim population, sometimes creating distances, sometimes bridging differences, and at other times assisting in the formation of new alliances within a population whose composition changed over the two centuries of Fatimid rule, as did the nature of the ruling group. Other newly introduced elements of the public text addressed the entire urban community - Jews, Christians, and Muslims - in the later Fatimid period.[45] Bierman's book has provided a rich repertoire of ideas, concepts, and theories to a field with very few dedicated researchers. Despite her contribution in providing an original work that drifts away from the positivist and essentialist approaches previously applied to the study of Arabic writing,[46] Bierman's main focus on the meaning embodied in the writing forms still came at the expense of these inscriptions' content.

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[44] Bierman, Writing Signs The Fatimid Public Text, xiv.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Tabbaa, "Review: Islamic Inscriptions by Sheila S . Blair : Writing Signs : The Fatimid Public Text by Irene A . Bierman : Islamic Ornament by Eva Baer."

## 2.2.5.  *Transformation and Political Expression*

Considered by some as an important step in the 'right direction',[47] Yasser Tabbaa's book *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* attempted to answer the question of meaning regarding Islamic art forms, through investigating the cultural processes that produced them.[48] Tabbaa's main concept lies clear in his book's title 'the transformation' of Islamic art. Beside its reference to Grabar's *The Formation of Islamic Art* of 1973, which Tabbaa considered, at that time, the most influential book in its field so far, the book title suggested the historically and culturally changeable and developmental implications of Islamic art, which argued against the essentialist and positivist's approaches.[49] According to Tabbaa, focusing on the theological and political transformations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries would explain the dissemination of artistic forms, that developed two to three hundred years after the period of the formation of Islamic art covered by Grabar.[50]

According to Tabbaa, the question of the transformation of Arabic writing from angular to cursive, its formal and semiological aspects, required a new course of analysis. This course drew on the methods and findings of epigraphy and palaeography, while investigating the historical and ontological questions neglected by both. Through his analysis of Qur'anic calligraphy, he adopted a methodology similar to Nabia Abbott's, where palaeographic analysis was matched against

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[47] Madhuri Desai, "Review: The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival by Yasser Tabbaa," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 4 (2002): 563–565, doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/991878.

[48] Yasser Tabbaa is known as an Islamic art and architecture scholar. Through his PhD in Islamic art and architecture at New York University, he was supervised by two well-known scholars of Islamic art in the United States, Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grab. They both influenced Tabbaa's academic career, especially Grabar whose work and insights have guided not just Tabbaa's thesis, but his following publications. Tabbaa's academic work and interests were occupied by two main research areas: the architecture of Syria and the Jazira between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and the question of meaning in medieval Islamic calligraphic, ornamental, and architectural forms Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival.*. His knowledge of several languages, including Arabic, French, and German, as s well as his travel to Syria and Iraq despite the ongoing conflicts in the region during the late 1970s, has provided him with access to first-hand substantial archeological and textual resources.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Finbarr Flood, "Review of The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival by Yasser Tabbaa.," *Caa.Reviews*, 2002, doi:10.3202/caa.reviews.2002.76.

various textual sources, including biographical dictionaries, chancerial and secretarial manuals, and treatises on calligraphy and calligraphers. This method has been rejected by scholars like Déroche who, according to Tabbaa, adopted a purely positivist method relying solely on the close examination of Qur'an manuscripts. Besides Grabar's historical-contextual approach influence on Tabbaa's work, appreciating the importance of texts, treatises and documents and introducing sociological, theological, perceptual, and semiotic modes of interpretation have all illuminated Tabbaa's journey. However, by placing questions of complexity and historical change at the center of his discussion, Tabbaa, similar to Bierman, overlooks the content of these inscriptions as he places more emphasis on the role of formal aspects and transformation of scripts from angular to cursive.

Through the key findings of his book, particularly related to the Sunni revival in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Tabbaa would argue that whether religious or secular in content, most monumental inscriptions were public and official, thus reflecting some of the ruling dynasty's concerns, which were always theocratic in nature. In a largely aniconic artistic culture, these public inscriptions were by necessity one of the primary visual means for political expression (often tied up with religious concepts) and one of the few effective ways for a dynasty to distinguish its reign from that of its predecessor.[51]

He pointed out four main forces that he considered to have contributed to the transformation or formation of new forms and formal structures in Islamic calligraphy and their spreading through much of the Muslim world. These forces were theology, politics, technology, and patronage. These new forms of art represented what he described as the religiopolitical, social, and technological contexts that shaped medieval Islamic culture. According to Tabbaa, they were produced in a period of intense political and sectarian conflict with highly skilled artisans and calligraphers.

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[51] Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival, 54.

## 2.2.6.    *Cultural Phenomenon*

A more holistic approach towards understanding Islamic art in general, which has influenced the work Tabbaa and in fact continues to influence a whole generation of Islamic art scholars, was advocated through the widely celebrated work *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture,* by Gulru Necipoglu.[52] In her book, she expressed her rejection of the idea of a timeless essence of Islamic culture, as well as both the positivist and essentialist approaches of Western Orientalism towards Islamic ornament. According to Necipoglu, these approaches have either treated Islamic ornament as ahistorical and static unit, having no meaning or context, or have associated it with some religio-spiritual or cosmological meaning. Necipoglu showed that such claims had no visual or literal evidence, instead, she claimed clear linkages to historical meanings and contexts that she used to discuss some of the fundamental aesthetic principles of Islamic art.[53]

Necipoglu's approach towards Islamic ornament, and Islamic art and architecture in general, challenged pre-modern and modern approaches and recent debates on the field of Islamic art. Necipoglu considered Islamic art and its visual communication to be too complex to fit in the inherited frameworks of traditional methods that tend to marginalize new interpretive and theoretical approaches.[54] She critiqued "the fear of fragmentation" sensed through recent writings of Blair and Bloom, due to the growing scope and diversity of the disciplines of Islamic art, which they believe, "threatens to pull our field apart so that there will be nothing left at all".[55] Instead, Necipoglu found no growing danger in the fragmentation and

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[52] Gulru Necipoglu is an Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art, and the Director of the Aga Khan Program of Islamic Architecture at the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University.

[53] See Gülru Necipoğlu, The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture (Getty Publications, 1996).

[54] Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches," *Journal of Art Historiography*, vol. 6, 2012, 10.

[55] See Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, 'The mirage of Islamic art: Reflections on the study of an unwieldy field', *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (2003): 152–184.

expansion of the field, which she believed, similar to Western art, have never been unified.[56]

Necipoglu's tendency towards a more holistic approach, which examines Islamic art as a cultural phenomenon extending outside its regional and historical boundaries, is clearly shown through her study of Qur'anic epigraphy in a book chapter entitled: *Qur'anic inscriptions on Sinan's imperial mosques: a comparison with their Safavid and Mughul counterpart.* The aim of Necipoglu's article was to interpret the predominancy of Qur'anic epigraphy that took place with the rise of imperial mosques construction in the Ottoman empire and its counterparts of Safavid and Mughal empires. Her comparative historical approach, through examining the formal and referential functions of Qur'anic epigraphy in the imperial mosques of these three late Islamic empires that were "generally studied in isolation", has, according to Necipoglu, highlighted the imperial sovereignty expressed by these empires through constructing official religious identities. It has also revealed some methodological questions and concerns related to studying Qur'anic epigraphy as a whole.[57]

In her study, Necipoglu used a wide range of data and references to support her arguments. These data references covered autobiographies of calligraphers and architects of these mosques, imperial decrees and accounts of mosques; and supporting historical documents including commentaries of travellers and a census of the number of elementary schools in Istanbul, showing, what Necipoglu deduced as, the relatively high degree of basic literacy among the urban masses. She also used *fatwas*[58] of a contemporary Ḥanafi jurist, a treatise of Grand Vizier,[59] and writings of 14th-century scholar Ibn Khaldun and the 16th-century Ottoman scholar Mustafa Ali, among other contextual and historical references about the studied

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[56] Necipoğlu, "The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches," 11.

[57] Necipoğlu, "Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with Their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts," 69.

[58] *Fatwa* is a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar.

[59] *Vizier* is originally the chief minister or representative of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs and later a high administrative officer in various Muslim countries, among Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mongols, and other eastern peoples.

mosques, their urban locations, and the non-Qur'anic inscriptions present in these mosques.

Through her study's findings, Necipoglu showed how the choice of the content of these Qur'anic inscriptions was controlled by capital, while aesthetic decisions were left to the architect. She argued that the epigraphic programmes of Sinan's major imperial mosques reflected the religious climates of the patron's sovereignty and the "individualised architectural iconography of each mosque".[60] These Qur'anic inscriptions were far from random and were chosen with care in varied combinations offering several layers of reading on both the personal and public levels. According to Necipoglu, the transformation of religious orientation and the political visions of these patrons, as well as the aesthetic preferences, played significant roles in the choice of the inscriptions of these mosques.

Necipoglu also discussed the issue regarding the absence of Qur'anic epigraphy in one of Mughal Emperor's Mosques. She tracked this complete omission of Qur'anic text to the Emperor's ruling and personal biography, and his keenness on implying *Ḥanafī* jurisprudence on state administration. Necipoglu suggested that it might have been the austere Sunni orthodoxy of the Emperor and his ruling that has motivated such absence. She noted that there were certain legal opinions that regarded Qur'anic inscriptions in mosques as inappropriate, among them was a *fatwa* produced by Central Asian *Ḥanafī* jurist, Fakhr al-Din Qadi Khan. These observations, along with other prohibitions and orders given by the emperor after his accession to power, including the compiling of authoritative rulings of former *Ḥanafī* jurists, justified Necipoglu's suggestion.[61]

Necipoglu's comparative study showed the rich diversity within the autonomous polities of three concurrent dynasties. This diversity, according to Necipoglu, is not compliant with the ahistorical generalization that some studies have tended to do. The cultural, ideological variations among these rulings, which

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[60] Necipoğlu, "Qur'anic Inscriptions on Sinan's Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with Their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts," 88.
[61] Ibid., 96.

were reflected through the criteria of choosing Qur'anic epigraphy, require a contextual investigation and understanding of those times. According to Necipoglu, the writings of prominent scholars can be of considerable significance, revealing some of the 'contemporary religious attitudes and specific readings of Qur'anic verses open to varying interpretations.'[62]

### 2.2.7.   Synecdoche

A more inclusive approach towards Islamic perspectives and resources, while studying Qur'anic epigraphy was adopted by Carole Hillenbrand.[63] Hillenbrand's general approach towards Islamic history, especially her book '*The crusades: Islamic perspective'* was considered a move away from traditional Western historiography, which has presented the history of the Crusades solely from the crusaders' own perspective and chroniclers.[64] In her book, which explored a period of history shared between Crusaders and Muslims, she stated that 'it is, of course, vital to avoid viewing Islamic history, or for that matter any other kind of history, exclusively from the Western perspective.'[65]

Carole Hillenbrand has approached the study of Qur'anic epigraphy with similar convictions and skills. Her experience with languages and Arabic chronicles can be marked through the methodology of her single work on the subject, entitled '*Some Reflections on the use of the Qur'an in monumental inscriptions in Syria and Palestine in the 12th and 13th centuries',* which was published in 2004, within a book of fifteen essays entitled *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Alan Jones*. These essays were seen as interpretive articles, challenging Orientalist perspectives in their fields of inquiry and suggesting new approaches

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[62] Ibid., 98.
[63] Carole Hillenbrand is a British academic and an Islamic historian. Her scholarly work and interests, not just cover historical topics related to the Middle East and medieval Muslim empires, but also include topics related to Sufism and Islamic political thought.
[64] Robert Houghton and Damien Peters, An Analysis of Carole Hillenbrand's The Crusades Islamic Perspectives (London: Routledge, 2017).
[65] Carole Hillenbrand, The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 4.

towards well-known material.[66] Subsequently, this was seen in C. Hillenbrand's study, in which she aimed to answer a similar question to Robert Hillenbrand, yet in a different way. In her article, she discussed in detail four cases, which she closely evaluated in order to discover whether Qur'anic quotations were chosen "with a specific agenda or was the repertoire of Qur'anic quotations on buildings long fixed throughout the Islamic world, thus rendering specific contextual analyses inappropriate and ultimately fruitless".[67] Unlike Robert, C. Hillenbrand has specified a certain area, Syria and Palestine; and a period of study, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. She made an extensive search through the corpus of extant monumental Muslim inscriptions recorded for that specific time and place, as well as other indices like Dodd and Khairallah's to see where else these inscriptions were used. For each inscription, she would describe its monument and the monument's location in the city. She would also gather information on who built the monument, his/her personal character, role, and the nature of his /her relationship with others; when was it built; what was the content of the inscription, its material, and color. Furthermore, she would describe related historical events using narrations from local chroniclers, like Ibn- Al Qalanisi and Ibn Wasil, and biographers like Bahaa-eldin Bin Shaddad.

When investigating the Qur'anic verses used, C. Hillenbrand would not just review the verses themselves, but she would also look at the preceding and following verses, in an attempt to find a link between them. She would also examine the chapters, from which the verses were selected, and what semantics did they have among Muslims at that time. She would closely observe the choice of words and how they related to the historical context. She would also look at other historical inscriptions present on the monument and relate to their used terms. Finally, C. Hillenbrand would review these verses in books of Muslim commentators of the

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[66] Mark Pettigrew, "Review: Islamic Reflections , Arabic Musings : Studies in Honour of Alan Jones by Robert G . Hoyland and Philip F . Kennedy," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 36, no. 2 (2005): 232–34.
[67] Carole Hillenbrand, "Some Reflections on the Use of the Qur'an in Monumental Inscriptions in Syria and Palestine in the Twelfth Centuries," in *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Alan Jones* (Gibb Memorial Trust Arabic Studies), ed. Robert G. Hoyland and Philip F. Kennedy (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004).

Qur'an, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries like al-Bayḍāwī and Ibn Kathīr to see how these verses were interpreted. Only a scholar who is knowledgeable of the language in which these sources were written, can undertake these methods of investigation.

Through her studied cases, C. Hillenbrand reached some notable findings. For the inscription on the tomb of Safwat Al-Mulk, she stated that the choice of the Qur'anic quotation is a clear example of synecdoche.[68] She argued that sometimes, for reasons related to space and positioning, short verses were used. However, these verses, when well-chosen, presented a whole story, or "the tip of an iceberg", that contemporary readers have been well aware of. For another inscription on Madrasah of Salah El-Din in Jerusalem, she argued that it was a clear example of using Qur'anic quotation as a trademark for the ruler. In a third case, she found that Qur'anic verses used on the Cenotaph of Barakat Khan "were chosen with utmost care and didactic purpose to serve as a warning, not just to the person commemorated but also to humanity at large."[69]

This valuable contextual Qur'anic investigation and findings, C. Hillenbrand argued, is most likely to be lost when the inquiry is limited to the actual words of the inscriptions. She views the investigation of the physical characteristics of the inscription, as only the first step of the inquiry. She argued that "It is only when the entire range of meanings traditionally associated with a given verse, and indeed its parent *sūrah*, are investigated that such inscriptions are liable to yield their full value." She concluded, advising that Qur'anic epigraphy scholarship should shift from mere epigraphy to include Qur'anic studies.[70]

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[68] Refers to a word or phrase in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole of it (Cambridge Dictionary).
[69] Hillenbrand, "Some Reflections on the Use of the Qur'an in Monumental Inscriptions in Syria and Palestine in the Twelfth Centuries."
[70] Ibid.

*2.2.8.    Architext*

Among the few who placed emphasis on the content's nature within the cultural tradition of architectural inscriptions was Holly Edwards.[71] In her essay *Text, Context, Architext: The Qur'an as Architectural Inscription*, she built her arguments based on the consideration that the scripture from which architectural inscriptions were drawn is in fact the heart of an emergent religion, and "its visual declamation was already important for Islamic architectural expression". She critiqued what she described as the prior tendency of Western scholars "to dismiss (unread) the Qur'anic inscriptions on buildings as inconsequential religious formulae", and called attention to the necessity to "divest ourselves of the notion of the Qur'an being a book like any other, for it is not read or treated in the same manner as other books."[72] Instead Edwards argued that Qur'an has a multivocalic nature which suggests similar interpretive techniques between the three forms of art: sermons, recitation, and epigraphy, two of which are in fact oral.

According to Edwards, this oral Qur'anic tradition forms a part of a nested context, that includes the conventional, the architectural, the epigraphic, the exegetical, the socio-political, and the personal, around the text which she then suggested as an architext. For architext, according to Edwards is "a rendition of the archetype whose architectural contexts affect its meaning and convey its intonation". Despite being written on a wall, the architext derives its emotive impact from the oral Qur'anic tradition. However, it is its written form that gives it another key attribute – power. For "the force inherent in divine revelation and reinforced by its written rendition", is further amplified by "the sociopolitical implications of building elaborate monuments." Therefore, Edwards recommended subjecting the inscriptions understudy to "a multipronged exegesis designed to uncover the

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[71] Holly Edwards is a historian of Islamic art and a professor of art history. Her interests include the formation of new cultural traditions and interactions on the margins of cultures. Her work includes research ranges from studies of Indus Valley architecture to the history of photography in the Middle East, to Orientalism.

[72] Holly Edwards, "Text, Context, Architext: The Qur'an as Architectural Inscription," in *Brocade of the Pen: Art of Islamic Writing,* ed. Carrol Garrett Fisher (University of Michigan Press, 1991), 64–73.

circumstance of the quotation – its place in the building, its place in the society, its place in contemporaneous theological or political dispute." [73] She concludes that:

> Qur'anic epigraphy is more than formalized, pious graffiti. Writing scripture on a wall is at once a simple act for the patron, akin to the commonplace forms of devotion that animate Muslim society, and a complex one, in which part of the immutable revelation is permanently and mundanely contextualized. Written on a wall, the text becomes something different; it has been transposed into architext, grounded in a particular time and place, and emblazoned on a particular structure. If stone or brick defines the building, the words determine the ambiance, linking the patron/viewer with carefully chosen archetypes from the past or reiterating a familiar truth in timely ways. In the guise of architext, then, the words are a constructive part of the building that they enhance.[74]

## 2.3. Qur'anic Epigraphy in Contemporary Studies

### 2.3.1. *Devotional Theme and Emotional Device*

One of, if not, the first attempt to address the use of Qur'anic inscriptions in a contemporary rather than a historical fashion, was Akel Kahera's work on mosques in America.[75] In his book *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics,* along with other preceding and later publications,[76] Kahera "deftly combines a study of Islamic art and architecture in America with an introduction to some of the basic aesthetic principles of the faith that have characterized its long and fruitful development."[77] He uniquely approaches the study of the genesis of Muslim religious aesthetics in North America, focusing

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Akel Kahera is a Professor of Islamic Architecture and Urbanism, He is a broadly educated and highly qualified scholar of architectural history and application, as well as a historical and cultural theorist. He completed graduate studies (M. Arch) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and obtained a PhD with honors from Princeton University.

[76] See Akel I. Kahera, "A Mosque Between Significance and Style," *ISIM Review*, no. 16 (2005): 56–57; Akel Kahera, "Image Text and Form : Complexities of Aesthetics in an American Masjid," *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 1, no. 2 (1999): 73–84.

[77] J. I. Smith, "Review: Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics, Akel Ismail Kahera: Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (May 1, 2004): 274–76, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/15.2.274.

mainly on the Islamic Culture Centre in Washington completed in the 1950s, and drawing on the classical philosopher-theologian's theory of deconstruction.[78]

In his attempts to codify the aesthetic complexities of the American mosque, Kahera identified *text* along with *image*, and *form* as aesthetic features of an anachronistic language of mosque architecture that corresponds to ornament, inscription, and architectural form. However, according to Kahera, the occurrence of these features prompts an inquiry that must address pivotal thematic assumptions. The first assumption he expressed is the primacy of prayer as "a necessary criterion in studying the characteristics of a devotional space".[79] The second is that rituals, including prayer, are independent of the aesthetic language of the mosque, which according to Kahera, includes not just inscriptions but also ornamentation and architectural form. In other words, the rituals of worship do not require for their performance the existence of any of these features in the architecture of the mosque. As for the last, which directly relates to inscriptions, he expressed the concern that many of the Muslim congregations in the West, including the communities of the studied mosques, are not adept in reading the Arabic language or recognising the complexities of its scripts.[80] These latter two not only challenge the legibility of these mosque inscriptions but, even more, question their necessity in mosque designs in the West. Therefore, according to Kahera, designers who take on an entirely rational position would tend to de-emphasize the role of inscriptions in mosque architecture and may even find them "extraneous to a masjid's overall aesthetic condition".[81]

However, Kahera argued that, through the phenomenon of a Muslim Diaspora, the community often ascribes emotional value to utilising "a well-known convention or an influencing custom from the Muslim world" when building a mosque. According to Kahera, memory can be used by these communities as a

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[78] Kahera mainly draws on the work of Ibn 'Arabī, beside contemporary theories of philosophical deconstruction. See Akel Ismail Kahera, *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
[79] Kahera, "Image Text and Form : Complexities of Aesthetics in an American Masjid."
[80] Kahera, "A Mosque Between Significance and Style."
[81] Kahera, "Image Text and Form : Complexities of Aesthetics in an American Masjid."

mechanism to keep certain cultural habits and customs alive in an alien environment.[82] Regardless of time or context, the appropriation of a familiar image is usually done in an anachronistic manner, strongly evoking "a mental picture or an apparition that closely resembles an extant form, object, or likeness emanating from the past",[83] i.e., a specific memory of relevant significance. Kahera extends this plausible argument to include inscriptions in mosque architecture. While still uncertain about the necessity of their use in Western communities, mainly due to issues of legibility and language amongst a majority of non-Arabic speakers, which will be further addressed through this thesis, he perceives Qur'anic epigraphy as, no more than, a devotional theme and an emotional device.

Generally, Kahera views the American masjid as "an edifice in evolution." In his book, he makes the point that Muslim religious aesthetics may well stem from the confluence of two primary modes of aesthetic reasoning: one universal and the other particular. Regarding the American mosque he would argue that "in the very act of attempting to define its ordering principle, we are searching for a definition of a new but enduring regional identity—an identity with a sense of historical continuity". For him postmodern architecture generally fails to include in its design and planning the significance of the divine dimension, "and has thus left its users with a secular orientation in which beauty lacks a reflection of God and the divine". He regards the new Muslim mosques he described in his book as multidimensional, in the ways they were designed to acknowledge past and present, individual and community, human and divine.

### 2.3.2.   Modernist Component

Another relevant, yet more recent effort in the study of contemporary inscriptions, was made by Sumayah al-Solaiman and Ann Shafer. Their essays, discussed below, were part of the aforementioned edited volume by Gharipour and Schick, *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, which they considered "the most wide-ranging investigation into calligraphy and architecture in the

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[82] Kahera, "A Mosque Between Significance and Style."
[83] Kahera, "Image Text and Form : Complexities of Aesthetics in an American Masjid."

Muslim world published to date".[84] Despite the editors' over-interest in form,[85] and the dominantly historic nature of its essays, the sixth and last section of the book, constituted the following intriguing explorations of architectural calligraphy in the modern period, under the rubric *Modernity*. Just like in al-Solaiman's essay under review, entitled *The Absence and Emergence of Calligraphy in Najd: Calligraphy as a Modernist Component of Architecture in Riyadh,* one finds unwarranted ease by both the editors and the author in using terms like *Modernity and Modernist* to describe calligraphy or one of its aspects.[86] However, as this review shall reveal, the use of the term Modernist, at least, in the article might not necessarily be accurate.

Through her essay and in rather isolated snapshots, the author, Sumayah al-Solaiman, aimed to address how calligraphy came to feature in architecture during the modernisation of Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century. While focusing on the region of Najd and employing a combination of an interpretive historical approach and archival research, al-Solaiman tried to argue that calligraphy was introduced as a response to change in the type of government and the city's transition to modern architecture. According to al-Solaiman, around the 1980s, the architects of most buildings, who were mainly European and American, started to face a dilemma. As they deviated from the international style, which increased in Riyadh since the late 1950s, these architects felt unable to design buildings that can relate to the local context, due to what they felt as little inspiration from the vernacular under-documented architecture of Najd. As a result, many architects have looked beyond Saudi Arabia to seek precedents from the larger Islamic world. Viewing their work as an extension of Islamic architecture, these architects started featuring

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[84] Gharipour and Schick, "Introduction."

[85] And 'the ways in which script, composition, colour, material, dimensions, placement and myriad other characteristics contribute to the functioning of architectural inscriptions'.

[86] This, in fact, necessitates ground for common understanding, as Modernity continues to serve as the predominant theoretical framework and narrative for long-term global processes. This remains the case despite ongoing debates over its spatiotemporal definition, the inherent contradictions within its purported emancipatory potential, and allegations of association with Eurocentrism." See Gennaro Ascione, "Unthinking Modernity: Historical-Sociological, Epistemological and Logical Pathways," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 27, no. 4 (December 2014): 463–89, doi:10.1111/johs.12042.

calligraphy, a recurring component of Islamic architecture, mainly for briefs requesting designs based on Islamic values.[87]

A given example was the HOK 's design for King Khaled Airport in Riyadh. Completed in 1981, the architects intentionally drew inspiration from the wider Islamic context for the airport and mosque. With the help of the art historian Oleg Grabar, they studied Islamic architecture from Spain to China and extracted a number of elements, and reassembled them to create a modern mosque. Given its inspiration by the best of traditional Islamic architecture, calligraphy was therefore featured extensively. This given example, in fact, renders calligraphy as an integral part of Islamic architecture; a traditional component rather than a modernist one as the essay title suggests.

Regardless of the modernist term issue, this essay, according to al-Solaiman, shows how Islamic inscriptions were ultimately used as a component of modernist architectural practice that came from the West, yet in ways not so different from its application to Islamic traditional architecture. By this means, traditional Islamic calligraphy was anchored in Riyadh, and mosques like that of King Khaled Airport became a precedent that imagined calligraphy as a local component of architecture. In that sense, the Islamic became an imagined local, and the local was made part of the wider Islamic.

### 2.3.3.   A Common Culture of Inscriptions

The second essay is Ann Shafer's *Cairo to Canton and Back: Tradition in the Islamic Vernacular*. Similar to Kahera, Shafer explored inscriptions in mosque architecture of contemporary diasporic Muslim communities in the United States, yet through a very different approach. By comparing contemporary present practices to 'old world' models from Cairo, Shafer advocated a new methodology through her essay and argued that such an approach might help fill the gap in traditional academic narratives of historical architectural practices. According to

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[87] Sumayah Al- Solaiman, "The Absence and Emergence of Calligraphy in Najd:  Calligraphy as a Modernist Component of Architecture  in Riyadh," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Schick (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 484–98.

Shafer, "the observations of contemporary Muslim life can illuminate performative practices of the past,"[88] i.e., practices characterised by the performance of a social and a cultural role. Accordingly, Shafer would start by examining the role of text in Western Islamic spaces. She noted that "although far removed in time and distance from the Islamic homelands, new Muslim spaces in the West continue to privilege inscriptional programmes. Whether in architect-built mega-mosques or adapted 'storefront'- type prayer rooms, the written word plays a central role in constructing ritual movement and communal meaning." Therefore, while giving attention to the content, location, language, and form of both formal and informal inscriptions in contemporary mosques, Shafer tried to imagine what she described as "the experimental qualities of historical mosque spaces and their inscriptions, especially that of Al Sutan Hassan Mosque, by examining contemporary inscriptional practices vis-à-vis performances of the faithful, in both the United States and prayer spaces in contemporary Cairo."[89]

Through this whirlwind tour back and forth between past and present, and using three categories of analysis – the directive, prescriptive and contemplative – Shafer comes to exhibit unique features particular to the scale and surroundings of both past and present, East and West. Yet she asserts that essential intentions of inscriptions remain similar if not fundamentally the same. According to Shafer, there is an important link between contemporary spaces in the West and those of history; a similar culture of inscriptions that brings about the continuity of vernacular inscriptional forms and their intentions and roles into new worship spaces. These roles included defining spaces and their parameters, and negotiating between public and private, and between individual and divine; creating spatial orientation, aesthetics, and message.

While discussing the particularities of the Western context, Shafer would address the issue of legibility and language amongst a majority of non-Arabic speakers in a similar yet more elaborate way than Kahera. According to Shafer,

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[88] Shafer, "Cairo to Canton and Back: Tradition in the Islamic Vernacular."
[89] Ibid.

members of the congregation whose majority probably do not know Arabic, 'share a basic knowledge of certain religious semantic content that renders them what Brian Stock calls a 'textual community'. As such, they recognise the basic content of the inscription as well as its centrality to their presence here in this space'. In a different part of the essay, emphasising the use of Arabic language, she added:

> Although English translations do sometimes occur, these traditional inscriptions are almost always in Qur'anic Arabic in traditional scripts, and are always given a majestic presentation. The reason for using Arabic is noted by Benedict Anderson, who recognises Muslims as one of the 'great classical communities' that are united primarily through their link to sacred, and therefore untranslatable, language. As the language of the Qur'an – Allah's revealed truth – Arabic is thus a privileged system of representation, and is the only conceivable language to engender membership in this community, as well as to convey reality itself. The beautiful calligraphic presentation of these passages is both functional, in the sense that it attracts the viewer, and also symbolic, for in Islam, beauty is a divine attribute.[90]

## 2.4. Concluding Remarks

This seemingly exhaustive, yet certainly incomplete, review of the literature on Qur'anic epigraphy, reflects a number of challenges in this field of inquiry. One main challenge, that is paralleled in the study of Islamic art in general, resides in problematising the relationship between Islamic art and the religion of Islam.[91] Qur'anic epigraphy as a field of inquiry is considered a subfield of Islamic art, and most of its contributions were made by its historians. Since its early twentieth-century beginnings, when extensive chronological documentation of Islamic inscriptions started,[92] and through mid and late-twentieth-century experimental interpretive efforts, the field of Qur'anic epigraphy has mainly developed through Western scholarship as a historical study. This had two main implications. First, although these studies have examined art from societies dominated by Islam, their epistemological structures were grounded in Western modes of perception.[93] In Grabar's words:

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[90] Shafer, "Cairo to Canton and Back: Tradition in the Islamic  Vernacular."
[91] Blair and Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field."
[92] Montasser, "Monumental Qur'anic Inscriptions On Cairene Religious Monuments."
[93] Wendy Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse," *Journal of Art Historiography 6 (June 2012): 1–34.*

> The views and opinions which are expressed [by Grabar himself] were developed as a Western observer sought to understand an art. They do not derive from a Muslim experience, and it is indeed a problem faced by nearly all scholars in the field […].[94]

This context is evident not only in the approaches through which these scholars have studied the inscriptions but also in some of the concepts they have put forth as interpretations of their use. This was most apparent through Robert Hillenbrand's limited cross-cultural approach and his concept of divine readership, which undermined the complex networks of literary, philosophical, or theological culture that served the classical Islamic world. Even later efforts that attempted to consider more culturally specific aspects, had in many cases addressed formal, political, and sociological questions that hardly touched upon issues of perception and meaning. Such epistemological structures and disregard of religious contexts refracted Islam through a secular lens and weakened the capability of Islamic art to bespeak intellectual processes of religion as expressed through art.[95] It is evident, through the above review, that scholars with further knowledge of languages, Islamic culture(s), and its religious parameters were able to provide more nuanced findings and conclusions. Scholars, like Carole Hillenbrand, who urged the need to perceive Islam as both a religion and a civilisation and realised that these studies cannot but be language-based, had wider access to the culture-specific concepts and original resources.

The second implication lies in the field's dominant historicity. Islamic art as a field in Western scholarship was considered a field that is mainly historical. It mainly addressed the art of a civilisation that prevailed from the seventh century until the eighteenth century, which according to these studies, has marked the end of Islamic civilization, its architecture, and arts.[96] Therefore contemporary arts and practices had a limited place within the field. It can be argued that it was mainly the

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[94] Oleg Grabar, "'What Makes Islamic Art Islamic?,'" in *Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, vol. volume III (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 247–51.
[95] Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse."
[96] Idham Mohamed Hanash, "Theories of Islamic Art: Interdisciplinarity and Epistemological Integration," in *Islamic Knowledge: Journal of Contemporary Islamic Thought - Volume 98*, ed. Raed Jameel Okasha (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2019), 85–122..

interest in Muslim communities as migrants in the West that fostered studies of their contemporary spaces and art practices. Whether for that reason or another, the result is a scarcity of studies that address contemporary Qur'anic inscriptions compared to historical efforts, despite the continuity of practice in the context of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

On the other hand, towards the twenty-first century, broadly so called 'faith-based' approaches attempted to reunite Islam and art through generalized, mostly through de-historicised understandings of Islam and Sufism. It was mainly initiated by Muslim scholars, whose observations of Islamic art as expressions of Islam have mainly emerged from formal observations, with still no consideration given "to the extensive theological, literary, and philosophical legacy of the Islamic world that could have potentially supported those assertions or given them nuance."[97] Despite the limitations of such approaches, their critiques of Islamic art history were valid. Besides, they managed to suggest various sources about the nature of material cultures of the Islamic world that added to the field's repertoire.

Generally, the overwhelming data of the field which is still at a very rudimentary stage,[98] its complex nature, and its interwoven culture in which intellectual activity was not partitioned off between worldly and sacred spheres, all pose various challenges as well as chances of discussions and development. The above attempts, seemingly not necessarily successful in all aspects, which no single work is, have in fact provided a sum of valuable concepts that have highlighted various roles of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. They have asserted the ideological dimensions of the choices of these inscriptions and underpinned the importance of understanding the nature of the text and how it is perceived by contemporary Muslim communities.

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[97] Shaw, "The Islam in Islamic Art History: Secularism and Public Discourse."
[98] Hillenbrand, "Some Reflections on the Use of the Qur'an in Monumental Inscriptions in Syria and Palestine in the Twelfth Centuries."

# CHAPTER 3: RETHINKING QUR'ANIC EPIGRAPHY: TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATIVE AND INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

## 3.1. Introduction

By throwing into relief some of the methodological limitations of previous studies on the topic in the previous chapter, a case is made for a more integrative and interpretive paradigm, which is critical of the over-enfranchisement of secular readings of Qur'anic epigraphy,[1] and Islamic art in general. Hence, this chapter presents the introduction of the suggested paradigm and provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology employed. Specifically, it emphasizes three key components of the research framework: research design, data collection methods, and data analysis and synthesis.

## 3.2. Towards a More Integrative and Interpretive Paradigm

As the earlier discussion of the field's challenges has shown, due to its limited, selective, and partial approaches, the epistemological structure within the paradigm adopted by many of its scholars, has on its own failed to provide an interpretive understanding of the field. Therefore, it has become apparent that a more integrative paradigm, which considers the reflection and production of meaning through theologically informed parameters, is needed. Within the study of Islamic art, theologically informed parameters would refer to the guidelines, principles, or boundaries that are shaped by religious beliefs, teachings, and values within the context of Islam. When examining art, researchers would, therefore, consider how religious concepts, cultural norms and spiritual dimensions influence the creation, aesthetics, and symbolism of artworks. Consequently, these parameters help to understand the deeper meanings and connections between Islamic theology and artistic expressions found within the Muslim culture.

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[1] A reading that disregards the literal content and its embodied meaning, and therefore results in abstract and conceptual interpretations that are usually phrased in an absolutist 'either-or' framework.

This consideration for religious interpretive tools (like Qur'anic exegeses) and theories (like Objectives theory) for analysis does not necessarily mean that art is viewed through a single theological perspective, nor that art is purely 'Islamic' in an essentialist or the literal Western religious sense. Instead, a more interpretive and integrative paradigm draws from a diverse array of sources and methodologies that might further explain the field, including those that belong to other paradigms, while acknowledging the negotiation between them.

As this thesis mainly aims to explore the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture, the ontological position of the proposed paradigm would accordingly consider the ontological and epistemological viewpoints of the Muslims involved in the art production, i.e., to follow an intrinsic approach towards understanding the artwork which considers its inherent qualities and the intent of its elements.[2] In the case of Qur'anic inscriptions, this would include both the Qur'anic and calligraphic qualities of the inscriptions[3] and their meanings as established through the eyes of their designers and patrons.[4] This approach consciously favours an insider bias in addressing the topic and therefore warrants some justification.

In his foundational essay about material culture, the art historian Jules Prown describes the discipline as "the study through artifacts of the beliefs -values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions- of a particular community or society at a given time".[5] The underlying premise is that "objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who

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[2] Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, "A Theory of Mosque Architecture with Special Emphasis on the Problems of Designing Mosques for the Modern Sunni Muslim Society" (University of Edinburgh, 1995). Terms like ontology and epistemology can be defined through Crotty's introduction: "Ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such. Were we to introduce it into our framework, it would sit alongside epistemology informing the theoretical perspective, for each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means* to *know* (epistemology)." See Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspectives in the Research Process*, Third (London: SAGE Publications, 2003).
[3] Incorporating both Qur'an and calligraphy.
[4] Rasdi, "A Theory of Mosque Architecture with Special Emphasis on the Problems of Designing Mosques for the Modern Sunni Muslim Society."
[5] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," Winterthur Portfolio 17, no. 1 (1982): 1–19.

made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged."[6]  According to Prown, the most common cultural belief is related to value. These material objects carry inherent values that are intrinsic in the nature of the object itself, which also makes them quite persistent. They also carry more variable or transient values that have been attached by the people who originally made or used the object, both in past and present moments. Whether inherent or attached, these values can be spiritual, communicative, or even utilitarian, which could explain why certain objects will inhere in certain communities as long as they continue to be useful to their members (In the case of this research it can explain why Qur'anic inscriptions continue to appear in mosque architecture for more than fourteen centuries). Therefore, Prown recommends interpreting objects in terms of the beliefs of the individuals and the society that produced them. This exploration of patterns of belief and behaviour requires openness to other methodologies, including those of history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, cultural geography, and linguistics.

If we now look at understanding the role of Qur'anic inscriptions through the lens posited by the field of material culture, one can make various ontological and epistemological assumptions. These start with the assumption that this research takes Muslims' beliefs including that about the Qur'an and its nature -as the eternal words of God revealed in the Arabic language- seriously as the starting point for analysis. Instead of reducing Muslims' articulation to mere "cultural perspectives" or 'worldviews', and to "put ourselves figuratively speaking, inside the skins of individuals who commissioned, made, used, or enjoyed these objects, to see with their eyes and touch with their hands, to identify with them empathetically" as Prown suggests, one can conceive those articulations as enunciations of different 'worlds', as suggested by Henare et al. in their *Thinking Through Things*.[7]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Instead of the epistemological approach in anthropology that suggests that there is one world with many parts or worldviews, they suggest an ontological approach where there are many worlds. In order to conceive these different worlds, as suggested by Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell in their *Thinking Through Things*, one has to think them into being. In other words, these different worlds can be seen through a mode of disclosure or a metaphysical

Accordingly, rather than assuming the existence or non-existence of these worlds or realities, such question is suspended in order to understand a phenomenon as experienced and interpreted by a human being through his own world of reference and meanings.[8]

Another pivotal assumption is that one must distinguish between the inherent values of the Qur'an and those values attached to it by Muslims at a given time and space. However, one has also to acknowledge how the former affects the latter, and not vice versa. Muslims regard the Qur'an as the ultimate source of guidance and divine knowledge. It is believed to be free of any distortion and protected by God to remain as such. Historical narratives and those about the hereafter in the Qur'an (or worlds of the unseen, as further explained later in this thesis), are accepted as factual rather than mythical. This is of direct relevance to this study, as it shapes the worlds of Muslims and the way they should act. In fact, this relationship between Muslims and the sacred words, and the centrality of the Qur'an, which is unquestionable amongst scholars of Qur'anic studies,[9] are quite overlooked by many art historians.[10] This has resulted in little contribution, by many of these scholars, to our understanding of the dynamics of the Qur'an's manifestation in the lives of contemporary Muslims, which are most obvious in the art of writing and

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vision that creates its objects. So instead of just trying to determine how informants think about the world, Henare et al. suggest that researchers must think in ways that help them conceive the world the way their informants do. And if their informants think through things, as they argue, then researchers might think of doing the same. See Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, "Introduction: Thinking through Things," in *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, ed. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (London/New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–32.

[8] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

[9] A discernible contrast can be observed between the viewpoints and arguments put forth in publications such as the Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Encyclopaedia of Qur'an by Brill, and those made by many Islamic art historians. In the former, discussions regarding Qur'anic epigraphy usually take further into account the centrality of the Qur'an to Muslim communities and Islamic doctrine. See Robert Hoyland and Venetia Porter, "Epigraphy," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2002), 25; and [9] J. Sourdel-Thomine et al., "KITABAT," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, 1986), 210.

[10] Qur'anic epigraphy, as a field of study, falls mainly in Western scholarship between two disciplines: Islamic art history and Qur'anic studies, whose scholars mostly work in isolation, commonly leading to dilemmas of interpretation discussed in Chapter 2.

reciting the Qur'an.[11] As a consequence, studies about Muslim societies that address their arts and spaces are usually the types of studies that grasp such rudiments and dynamics.

For example, in the introduction of her book of essays that focus on the private and public use of spaces of new Muslim communities in the West, Metcalf argues that sacred words, mainly words of the Qur'an, are found to be the focus of Muslim worship and moral behaviour. In her own words "over and over, in context after context, we find elaborations of practice -in the very specific sense of ritual centred on sacred words- coupled with attempts to organize everyday life in the light of those words." Accordingly, Arabic words are considered "the most recurrent visual clue" to Muslim presence in multiple settings. For example, in Muslim home making, or for both a Muslim and a non-Muslim to recognise a Muslim space, the presence of written or spoken Arabic words is most telling. This link between the Qur'an, and the life and practice of Muslims is also clear in Architecture, where "Islamic buildings", according to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, are considered primarily as "spaces where the faithful engage with sacred words, whether in prayer (the mosque), education (the *madrasah*), or meditation (the *khanaqah*)". Hence, according to Metcalf's book, the pre-eminence of sacred words and normatively enjoined practices are considered the core of cultural elaboration, transformation, and reproduction within Muslim communities.[12] This account is not only evident in studies about new Muslim societies in the West, but also in many Muslim societies along history, since as early as the first community of Muslims that formed around the message of the Qur'an. Therefore, the paradigm adopted for this research and its emerged concepts aim to be as faithful as possible to the Qur'an itself.

A final assumption is that despite the need for a more integrative paradigm that includes both secular and religious ones, as suggested above, this paradigm does not purport to present a 'grand theory'; that gives a final explanation, with

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[11] For more about similar challenges encountered in the study field of Qur'anic recitation, see Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).
[12] See Barbara D. Metcalf, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities," in *Making Muslim Space In North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf, vol. 22 (California: University of California Press, 1996), 1–27.

absolute certainty, for a single humanity[13] or a single Muslim community. Instead, it takes into account the particularities of different people in various times and places, by considering an extrinsic approach that examines meaning through external aspects.[14] It, thus, aspires to develop into a more interpretive or a "more explanatory"[15] open-ended paradigm that strives to provide a framework that would facilitate the perception of Qur'anic epigraphy for those who are outside the culture, while claiming no universality nor complete objectivity. It acknowledges the subjective dimension of human knowledge, i.e., the inevitability of bias,[16] yet still affirms that it can be seen and tested objectively against a reality external to it. Interpretivism is explicitly subjectivist, and since this research inductively works with qualitative data, allowing meanings to emerge while actively using them, the researcher cannot detach oneself from one's values.[17] Therefore, I openly acknowledge and actively reflect on my values and positionality, through incorporating reflexive practice in the proposed methodology.

## 3.3. Research Design and Methods

### 3.3.1.  *Qualitative Case Study Method*

Exploring such a complicated long-standing phenomenon, like the Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture, while assuming a deliberate role they play in

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[13] Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri has coined the term "common humanity," as distinct from the "one humanity" advocated by the Enlightenment. Common humanity is the human intrinsic potential. However, when it is realized, its realization differs from one individual to another, from one group to another, from one period to another, and from one civilization to another, both in form and content. Hence, both potential unity and the inevitable rich variation that does not negate people's common humanity. See Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri, "The Gate of Ijtihad: An Introduction to the Study of Epistemological Bias," in *Epistemological Bias in the Physical and Social Sciences* (London/ Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 1–77.

[14] For more about extrinsic approach in art history see Rasdi, "A Theory of Mosque Architecture with Special Emphasis on the Problems of Designing Mosques for the Modern Sunni Muslim Society."

[15] As Elmessiri has coined it, yet I favour the word interpretive, connoting interpretive paradigm in qualitative research methods and what it entails about epistemology and methodology.

[16] "Bias is inevitable, but not ultimate." According to Elmessiri, bias can be re-defined as the inevitability of human uniqueness and the possibility of freedom of choice. It is as paradoxical as human life itself. This paradox, he framed through the above coined term "common humanity". See earlier reference by Elmessiri.

[17] Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, Research Methods for Business Students, Seventh (Pearson, 2015).

different contexts, apparently involves the bringing together of different types of data and evidence, from different sources, that must be woven together to form a coherent narrative.[18] Adopting qualitative case study as a research strategy allows such a venture, as it can provide explanations for links between phenomena and real-life situations within a set of procedures,[19] which has also guided the structure of this research. Consequently, a pilot enquiry was first conducted to identify cases for investigation, enabling an empirical exploration of the field and enhancing the conceptualization before undertaking a more extensive and intricate project.[20]

### 3.3.2.    Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted in Egypt,[21] where field visits and early interviews took place with three mosque architects and one mosque calligrapher. The main aim of the study was to explore concepts, processes, and roles associated with Qur'anic inscriptions, especially examining how decisions regarding these inscriptions were made. Through primary observation of gathered data, I have gained three initial insights. First is that contemporary Muslim architects hold varying conceptual and doctrinal perspectives on the permissibility of incorporating Qur'anic verses into mosque architecture. As similarly evident through the literature review, these differing views still have a discernible impact on the visual representation of Qur'anic inscriptions within mosques. These disparities stem from the diverse juristic opinions of Islamic legal scholars, adopted by these architects. Therefore, a review of the jurisprudential debate among legal scholars was made (chapter 4) to understand not only the religious context around this phenomenon, but more importantly the underpinning rationality and moral reasoning behind it.

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[18] David Proverbs and Rod Gameson, "Case Study Research," in *Advanced Research Methods in the Built Environment*, ed. Andrew Knight and Les Ruddock, First (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 99–111.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] The choice of Egypt was based on accessibility and network of the researcher in the country, especially with the limitations of the pandemic.

A second noteworthy insight, emerging from both the pilot study and review of jurisprudential debate, is the need to historicise,[22] i.e., the review, with further scrutiny, the earliest Qur'anic inscriptions in the initial centuries of Islam, or the formation period of Islamic art. Consequently, a focused investigation into the earliest inscriptions of The Dome of the Rock has ensued, as they present one of the earliest examples of Qur'anic inscriptions surviving to this day in a way close to its original state.[23] However its main significance lies in their profound association with the earliest Muslim generations; *at-tābi'ūn*,[24] whose interpreted intentions and objectives toward Islamic art could be regarded as influential for subsequent Muslim generations.

Finally, through both the pilot study and the historical study of the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, it became evident that cultural encounters tend to stimulate expressions and affirmations of identity.[25] Unlike the case studies in Egypt, where the contextual factors did not elicit a drive to construct representations or make explicit statements, the intricate milieu surrounding the Dome of the Rock, characterized by ideological struggles, has stirred a highly responsive calligraphic program and reminded of the contemporary context of Muslim minorities residing in the non-Muslim majority contexts in the West. As a

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[22] In the introduction of his edited book *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Michael Pickering would argue the need to "attend to contemporary issues by all means and insist on the impossibility of understanding the past except within the present." For him, history is both a topic and a tool, it is "a broad set of techniques for thinking about historical experience and representation in the present." However, he warns against imagining that researchers "can think about the present or the past wholly on contemporary grounds, only on what seems urgently relevant now". Yet he insists that researchers of cultural studies should "always, always, historicise." See Michael Pickering, "Introduction," in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1–17.

[23] Alain George, "Paradise Or Empire? On A Paradox Of Umayyad Art," In *Power, Patronage, And Memory In Early Islam: Perspectives On Umayyad Elites*, Ed. Alain George And Andrew Marsham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39–67.

[24] *At-tābi'ūn* (followers, successors) are the generation that followed that of the companions of the prophet, and thus received his teachings at second hand. Those who succeeded them are *tābi'ī at-tābi'ūn*, whose authority in religious opinions is superior to that of the succeeding generations, proximity to Prophetic times being taken as an index of authority. See Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, third (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

[25] See Katherine Bartsch, "Re-Thinking Islamic Architecture: A Critique of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture Through the Paradigm of Encounter" (The University of Adelaide, 2005).

result, I decided to primarily focus on the Western context for investigating the Qur'anic inscriptions in contemporary mosque architecture.

### 3.3.3.   Exploring Two Contexts

While embarking upon the research of non-Muslim majority contexts in the West, particularly the mosque architecture and Muslim communities within it, and identifying the main cases for study, I also found it necessary to understand the current situation of calligraphic practice, especially those that extend to the mosque architecture in the West. Therefore, two different studies were conducted. First was a brief survey of contemporary mosques, that were purposely built[26] in the last four decades[27] in the West, mainly in Europe and Australia (Figure 3-1).[28] According to Fethi, "a contemporary international style vocabulary predominates in usually abstracted forms and streamlined geometry, using modern structural construction techniques, services, and materials. Consequently, they do not necessarily attempt to attain a specific local identity architecturally. They are perhaps more innovative than the previous categories and some show a remarkable degree of originality and purist simplicity."[29] Indeed, an important criterion of the selected mosques was that they should incorporate Qur'anic inscriptions within the mosque architecture. The survey has yielded several observations and reflections about the nature of these mosques and their epigraphy. Most important of which is that many if not most of the recently constructed or completed contemporary mosques in the West were designed by locally based non-Muslim architects. Despite the contemporary or far-

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[26] A purpose-built mosque is a building "that has been built from the ground as a new mosque" and not converted from a previously existing, residential or non-residential, building. See Shahed Saleem, "The Mosque in Britain Finding Its Place," in *Religious Architecture Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Oskar Verkaaik (Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

[27] The four-decades time span was chosen to ensure access to architects and calligraphers who are likely to still be reachable. Additionally, this period aligns with the establishment of the Aga Khan Architectural Award, which marks a significant milestone in recognizing and documenting contemporary mosques. The surveyed mosques included in its repertoire, along with the Mosqpedia of Al Fozan Award, served as the primary sources of information for this survey, supplemented by other individual studies focusing on specific mosques and cities.

[28] Multicultural approaches adopted by both Europe and Australia and the legal framework that is different from the United States.

[29] See Ihsan Fethi, "The Mosque Today," in *Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today*, ed. Sherban Cantacuzino (New York, 1985), 53–62.

from-traditional architecture of these mosques, 'traditional' calligraphy seemed indispensable in their architecture. These Qur'anic inscriptions were inscribed by traditional Muslim calligraphers, who either came from or were trained in Turkey.
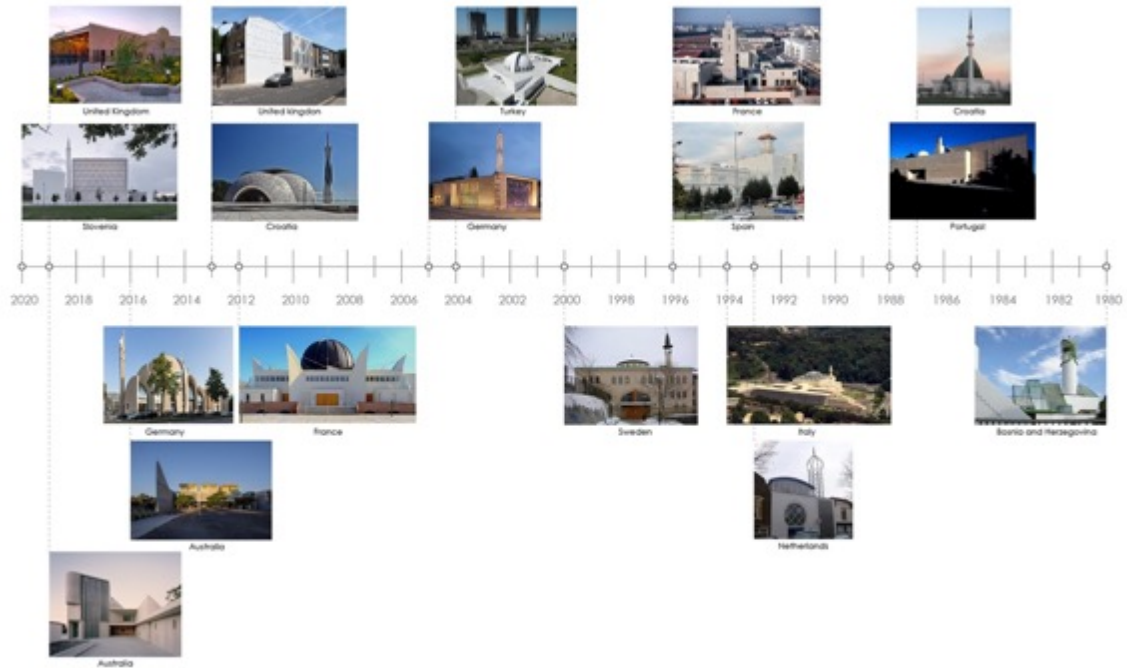


Figure 3-1 Timeline of Contemporary mosques built in the West based on data gathered (1980-2020) (Author 2020)

Turkey, and before it the Ottoman Empire, has in fact long been playing a significant role in developing Islamic calligraphy. Indeed, to many minds, Islamic calligraphy has achieved its ever-finest form, by the calligraphers of the Ottoman Empire, as well as by those of the current Turkish Republic.[30] To this day, Istanbul is considered an international prominent center for Islamic calligraphy and its study.[31] This has underlined the significance of realizing and understanding the Ottoman and Turkish contexts, practices, and roles that are still influencing the epigraphy of mosque architecture in the West to this day. Therefore, the second

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[30] Zoe Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic," *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 3 (2011): 601–14, doi:10.1215/1089201X-1426764.
[31] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

study aimed at exploring the Turkish and Ottoman context, in which calligraphy and its relation to mosque architecture have developed. The study included field visits as well as interviews with prominent Turkish calligraphy masters, and their students (Figure 3-2). The field visits covered historical as well as contemporary mosques showing the changes in architecture and use of Qur'anic epigraphy. Other calligraphy-related venues were also visited. These included museums, graveyards, calligraphy centers, and libraries. Visits to prominent Turkish calligraphers included three of the last students of the last Ottoman calligraphy master Hamid Aytaç, as well as calligraphers involved in inscribing calligraphy in two of the selected mosques.
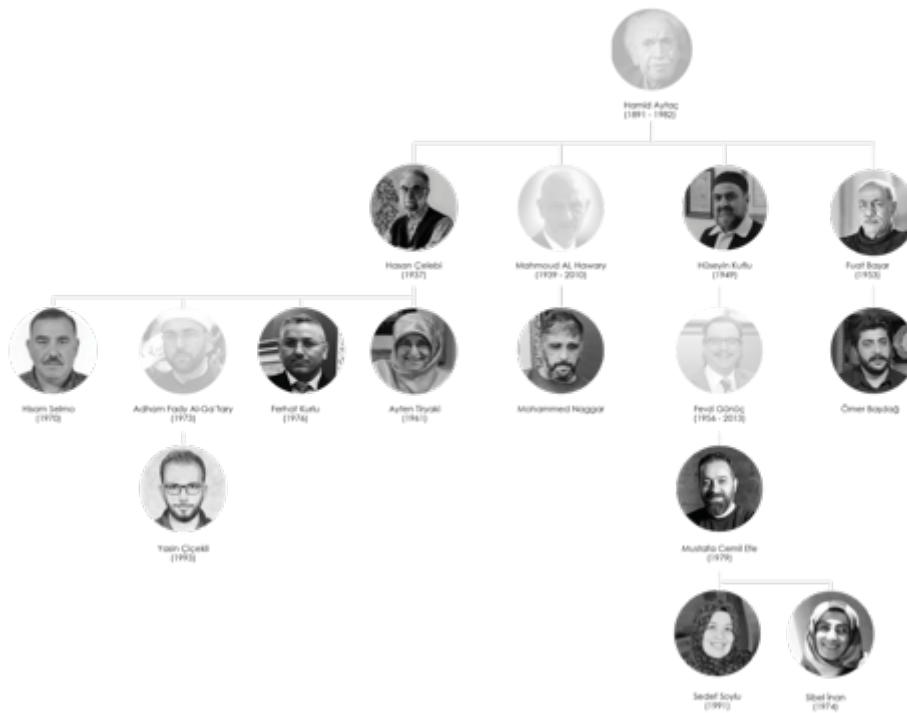


Figure 3-2 Tree depicting the calligraphers met or interviewed during the trip to Turkey, and their connection to Hamid Aytaç (Author 2022)

### 3.3.4.  Choosing Case Studies

Based on the above criteria, three mosques in the West were selected as main case studies. These were Cambridge Central Mosque in the UK; Ljubljana Mosque

in Slovenia; and Punchbowl Mosque in Australia. For each case, an attempt to collect a whole set of data was made. This included contextual data regarding the countries involved, their policies towards Muslims, and mosque construction.[32] Additionally, historical information pertaining to Muslim communities, their organizations, and mosque architecture was collected. Furthermore, an emphasis was placed on obtaining data related to the selected mosque projects, including physical architectural and calligraphic details. Considering that interviews play a pivotal role in case study research, providing a substantial source of comprehensive and in-depth information,[33] access to key decision-makers was deemed critical in determining the research's main case studies, especially with the main research question addressing the intents and objectives of those involved in the design and production of Qur'anic inscriptions and architecture. Therefore, data collected throughout the research process concerning other mosques, like Penzberg Mosque in Germany, was employed as supplementary evidence and not considered central to the thesis.

### 3.3.5.    Conducting Interviews: Challenges, Limitations, and Ethics

As already mentioned above, interviews were considered a key method for collecting data. According to Jacquette, having insight into the artist's intentions and motives, an advantage many art historians don't have, could contribute to interpreting the artwork and to understanding the artist's expressed ideas.[34] Therefore, interviews were conducted with key actors involved in the design and production of the Qur'anic inscriptions and architecture of the selected mosques. These were mainly the community leaders or representatives, calligraphers, and

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[32] Contextual studies have been conducted, covering not only the architectural schools and influences prevalent in the West, but also the political and socio-religious aspects of Western cities where Muslim communities reside. This comprehensive examination involved an exploration of Western ideologies advocated and implemented, the presence of Islamophobic and Mosquophobic discourses, and an analysis of the ideologies embraced by Western Muslims, shedding light on their self-perception and perceptions of others. These contextual studies have been instrumental in comprehending the nuanced aspects to which mosque architecture and inscriptions have been intricately responding, addressing, or encountering through their distinctive designs.

[33] Proverbs and Gameson, "Case Study Research."

[34] Dale Jacquette, "Art, Expression, Perception and Intentionality," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 1, no. 1 (2014): 63–90, doi:10.2752/20539339XX14005942183973.

architects. Like other social actors, these key actors interpret their contexts and draw meanings differently as a consequence of their own view of the world. Therefore, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, to make sense of and understand their motives, decisions, and objectives in a way that is meaningful, I aimed to understand not only their articulations but also their different realities.[35] This entailed designing open, semi-structured interviews, according to each category of participants, with the aim of letting their views and understandings emerge.

This undertaking posed notable challenges, especially considering that data collection started during COVID-19 Pandemic. Chances of visiting the mosques and conducting face-to-face interviews were limited due to lockdown and travel restrictions. Moreover, due to the variety of interviewed participants, language was also a challenge. Interviewed architects, clients, and calligraphers, represented a diverse range of nine nationalities,[36] and I had to find a common language to communicate in ways in which meanings were not lost in translation. According to Squires, in such cross-cultural studies, it is not only the literal meaning of the word that matters but also its 'conceptual equivalence' i.e., how the word relates conceptually and technically in the context.[37] On account of these challenges, triangulation methods,[38] and different modes of interviews were used, mainly VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) interviews. Email interviews were also used based on one participant's preference.

Email interviews, unlike email surveys, are more in-depth and semi-structured in nature. However, its one-dimensional nature, as only based on text, has made non-verbal and visual cues absent, thus not allowing reading of expressions and hearing voice tones. This required multiple exchanges of emails

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[35] Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, Research Methods for Business Students.

[36] This included participants from the UK, Turkey, Bosnia, Macedonia, Slovenia, UAE, Germany, Australia, and Syria.

[37] Allison Squires, "Methodological Challenges in Cross-Language Qualitative Research: A Research Review," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 46, no. 2 (2009): 277–287, doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2008.08.006.

[38] Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methodological resources or practices to obtain a fuller picture of the situation being investigated. It is particularly important in research that involves elite interviews when researching areas that are politically sensitive.

between myself and the participant over an extended period of time. This period has, in fact, allowed the participant to take their time in responses that are more considered. It also allowed revisiting the answers, reformulating probes or follow-up questions that can help elicit additional information and depth while reflecting and re-interpreting meanings.[39] VoIP, or video call interviews, on the other hand, allowed a chance of mirroring "physical co-present conversations with two-way real-time communication comprising both audio and video elements."[40] Owing to the legal restrictions and safety measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people, including researchers, have become accustomed to utilising VoIP in their day-to-day lives.[41] As a result, more willingness was found from participants, who are usually not easily accessible or geographically far apart, to respond to remote communication and take part in the research. Furthermore, lockdowns have fostered the streaming and recording of extended online lectures, live videos, and radio talks by different institutions, with the aim of encouraging social connectivity during the period of physical isolation. These included architectural, educational, and local institutions that conducted interviews with some of the research participants. Such video or audio-recorded, publicly available, material allowed for triangulation, as well as further access to data about the projects and participants in various, and more spontaneous and comprehensive

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[39] Lokman I. Meho, "E-Mail Interviewing in Qualitative Research: A Methodological Discussion," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 10 (2006): 1284–95, doi:http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/asi.20416.

[40] Susie Weller, "Using Internet Video Calls in Qualitative (Longitudinal) Interviews: Some Implications for Rapport," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 20, no. 6 (2017): 613–625, doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1269505.

[41] Becky Self, "Conducting Interviews during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 22, no. 3 (2021), doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3741.

settings[42] than those in more formal settings of elite interviews and published articles.[43]

With regard to language, interviews were conducted in either Arabic, English, or Turkish. Given my proficiency in both English and Arabic, a Turkish interpreter was assigned for interpreting, transcribing, and translating interviews conducted in Turkish. The aforementioned configuration of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) has indeed facilitated a flexible environment for the interpreter, researcher, and participants to partake in interviews regardless of their respective locations. This allowed easier arrangement and scheduling of interviews and saved a considerable amount of research time and costs. Before each interview, an information sheet about the research was sent to participants, and their consent to the study was obtained  either prior (written) or during the interview (oral). A set of different interview questions were designed for each category of participants (Appendix B). Each project also required specific inquiries based on its context and details. However, they all reflected shared areas of investigation that included the project, the architecture, and calligraphy. Therefore, questions were not necessarily raised in the exact way or order as shown in Appendix B. They acted more as guidelines for the interviews.

### 3.3.6.   Reflexivity: The Insider-Outsider Positionality of the Researcher

Considering the complex multiplicity involved in the research paradigm, and its recognition of the subjectivist qualitative approach that challenges an axiological assumption of value-freedom carried with dominant objectivist paradigms, this research recognises the need to center reflexivity.[44] According to Berger, reflexivity

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[42] An example is the emergence of series of online discussions and talks by Architects on YouTube about their practice and the pursuit of excellence. The series, called architects' bookshop that started during the Australian Covid-19 lockdown in an attempt to bring the architectural profession together. They feature mainly Australian Architects, from diverse backgrounds, experience, and built work.

[43] For more about triangulation and the challenges of conducting elite interviews. See Rebecca S. Natow, "The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Studies Employing Elite Interviews," *Qualitative Research* 20, no. 2 (2020): 160– 173, doi:DOI: 10.1177/1468794119830077.

[44] Egon G. Guba and YvonnaS. Lincoln, Effective Evaluation Improving the Usefulness of Evaluation Results Through Responsive and Naturalistic Approaches (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981).

is commonly viewed as "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome".[45] Reflexivity, in so doing, leads to improved quality and validity of the research, not in pursuit of an objective standing, but through careful interrogation of one's subjectivities.[46]

Relevant researcher's positioning includes various personal characteristics such as gender, belief, and personal experiences, which determine the insider, or outsider position of the researcher in relation to participants.[47] With regards to this research, my profile as a female, Muslim, student, and once practitioner of both architecture and calligraphy, being born and raised outside the West, has positioned me in fluid roles between both the 'insider' and 'outsider'. These roles have had diverse implications for the research.

Being a young calligrapher has provided me access to the 'field', or an easier *entrée* to the world of calligraphers. It allowed me to approach the study with some knowledge about the subject and to address certain topics more easily or even to be aware of their significance. According to Berger, respondents may be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher whom they receive as sympathetic to their situation.[48] Calligraphers, who usually do not get enough, if any, recognition for their work in the field of architecture especially in the West, showed substantial appreciation of and interest in the research topic, and a pronounced willingness to openly disclose all relevant data and files. Similarly, clients, who were usually *imāms*, or Muslim community leaders, with whom I share common beliefs and sometimes language, were also both receptive and cooperative. Yet, having lived

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[45] Roni Berger, "Now I See It, Now I Don't: Researcher's Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 2 (2015): 219–34, doi:10.1177/1468794112468475.
[46] According to Rose "there is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing." See Jeremiah Adebolajo, "Reading an Islamic Epistemology into Research: Muslim Converts and Contemporary Religion in Britain," *Journal of Religious Education* 70 (2022): 397–411, doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-022-00183-9.
[47] Berger, "Now I See It, Now I Don't: Researcher's Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research."
[48] Ibid.

outside the West almost all my life has set me in the outsider position to Muslims in the West. Despite the relevantly short period I have lived in the UK during conducting this research which has provided me with some familiarity and first-hand experience of living as part of a minority group, I still considered myself a stranger to the experience and culture. Therefore, while aware of their politically sensitive positions as active representatives of minority groups, I knew that further probing questions had to be asked to Muslim clients during their interviews.

Finally, interviewing architects seemed the most challenging. Gaining access to award-winning high-profile architects was not always easy. Sometimes it took a whole year to get the right contact or receive a reply. Building rapport with architects was even more challenging. Cross-cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication can easily lead to misunderstandings,[49] especially through VoIP. My background as a Muslim, which makes me a potential user or a critic of their designs has affected the relationship between the researcher and architect, which in turn affected the data architects were willing to share.[50] Therefore, I had to be open and straightforward about my personal involvement, while making the goals and conditions for the research clear at the very beginning of the interview. Additionally, I kept a reflexive journal for capturing reflections on my position or any further insights or challenges encountered during these interviews (Figure 3-3).[51] Being an architecture student myself, I have also benefitted from an insider position towards the architects, many of whom have shown a willingness to engage in knowledge sharing. Interviewing these three main involved actors in the process of design of mosque calligraphy and architecture has in fact allowed access to three different perspectives of the same processes, allowing for triangulation of data while checking for validity and elaboration from different sources.

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[49] Robert Mikecz, "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues," *Qualitative Inquiry* 18, no. 6 (2012): 482–93, doi:DOI: 10.1177/1077800412442818.

[50] I would also supplement the interviews with other forms of data collection; bringing together different sources and forms of evidence, which were much easier to find about architects than calligraphers and clients, due to their high profiles.

[51] I also used voice memos whenever necessary.
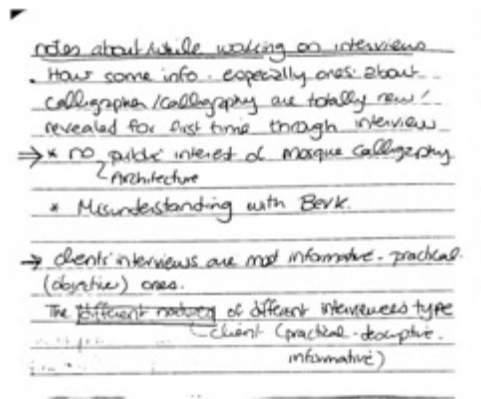
Figure 3-3 Example of a reflexive memo written during the interviews' phase (Author 2023)

### 3.4. Data Analysis: Individual Cases and Cross-case Analysis

Following the process of collecting and organising data, including transcribing, and translating interviews, the subsequent and final phase of the research commenced, encompassing two intersecting stages: iterative thematic coding and analysis of individual cases, and a cross-case analysis. A computer-assisted data analysis tool (Nvivo) was used during the analysis phase, yet it was more utilised in the cross-case analysis, as it facilitated the management of larger data and more interviews across the cases (Figure 3-4). It assisted in looking at patterns of code in a more systematic fashion as retrieval of data is made far easier.[52]

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[52] Gareth Terry et al., "Thematic Analysis," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, ed. Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton Rogers, 2nd ed. (SAGE Publications, 2017), 17–37.
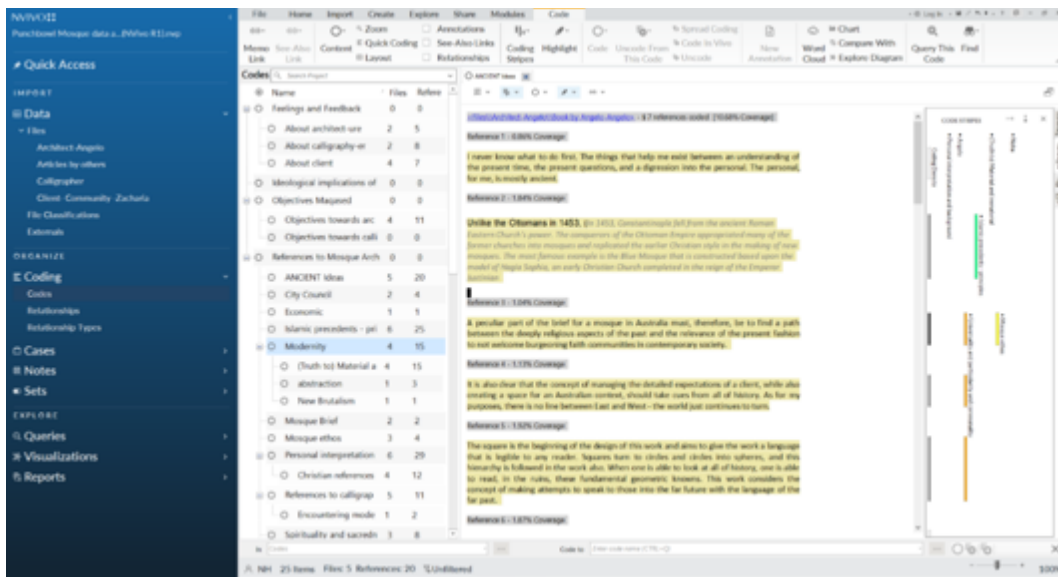
Figure 3-4 A screenshot from Nvivo showing coding process (Author 2023)

### 3.4.1.  Thematic Analysis

A theme, according to Joffe, refers to "a specific pattern of meaning found in the data."[53] Thematic analysis (TA) is, therefore, considered a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a set of data. The term 'thematic analysis' has appeared since the early years of the twentieth century, however, it was only in 2006 and since the publication of Braun and Clarke's landmark paper,[54] that the thematic analysis method "has gained hugely in popularity and has entered the qualitative canon as a recognisable and reputable method of analysis."[55] Despite various approaches to TA that were consequently developed, Braun and Clarke's approach has become the most widely used. Their approach advocates for a more qualitative flexible approach, that considers the subjectivity of the researcher as integral to the process of analysis. Within such approach, themes are mainly drawn from the collected raw data through an inductive approach, that involves working 'bottom up' from the data. This requires a detailed and repeated engagement with

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[53] Helene Joffe, "Thematic Analysis," in *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners*, ed. David Harper and Andrew R. Thompson (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011), 209–25, doi:https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch15.
[54] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
[55] Terry et al., "Thematic Analysis."

the data and codes, developing themes that are not imagined or anticipated early on, but are rather the outcome of the analytic process. Accordingly, coding and theme development are assumed to be subjective and interpretative processes, as the analysis is "seen as something created by the researcher, at the intersection of the data, their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, disciplinary knowledge, and research skills and experience; it is not seen as something waiting 'in' the data to be found."[56]

Following this thematic method and approach of analysis by Braun and Clarke, this research's analytical process has involved six phases. Like most approaches to qualitative data, thematic analysis is not a strictly linear process. It is rather iterative and recursive; therefore, I would move back and forth between these phases. These phases were: familiarisation with the data; generating codes; constructing themes; reviewing potential themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. In the early stages of coding, in order to get a wider and initial understanding of each mosque, its inscriptions, architecture, and context, analysis was more semantic. At this phase, more emphasis was put on comprehending each calligraphic program within its architectural, cultural, and religious contexts (Chapter 5). This emphasis prioritized addressing the question of 'what' rather than delving into the specifics of 'how'.

As I became more experienced with further 'immersing in the data', analysis developed towards a more latent orientation, capturing implicit meanings which were not explicitly stated. This latter and deeper level of analysis was conducted on various data gathered and correlated from different sources and across different study cases.

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[56] Ibid.

### 3.4.2.   *Cross-case Analysis and Synthesis*[57]

At this phase of analysis, while compiling data from individual case studies, I tried to develop major themes that can now answer the question of 'how'. The design process and the various relationships between different actors (the client, architect, and calligrapher) and elements (context, architecture, and calligraphy) of each case study were further explored. Further reflections on the process, the architecture, and the inscriptions were made in relation to each other (Chapter 6). While considering the complexity of the subject and the dualities of its nature, this level of analysis allowed situating these major themes in the larger context of the larger landscape of the phenomenon and providing reflections and discussions of relationships beyond inscriptions and mosque architecture. Using conceptual parameters that are informed by a wide range of sources, these discussions and reflections aimed to contribute to a wider discourse within academia about the ability of Islamic art to engage with a broader understanding of Islamic culture in the contemporary world (Chapter 7).

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[57] In qualitative data analysis processes, in qualitative case study methodology (QCSM), synthesising refers to the merging of perceptions and cases to describe typical, composite patterns. This is usually followed by a stage of theorising: building a comprehensive and coherent account of the data by examining the relationships between the identified categories of data; and recontextualizing: the development of propositions that may be applicable to settings and populations. For more see Catherine Houghton et al., "Qualitative Case Study Data Analysis: An Example from Practice," *Nurse Researcher* 22, no. 5 (2015): 8–12.

## CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING RELIGIOUS CONTEXT, HISTORICAL GENESIS, AND DEVELOPMENT OF QUR'ANIC INSCRIPTIONS

### 4.1. Introduction

Drawing on previous discussions on material culture, and the significance of understanding the inherent qualities of Qur'anic epigraphy and its attached values in the proposed paradigm, this chapter explores the religious and historical contexts that influenced the formation, development, and use of these inscriptions. Divided into three sections, the chapter starts by examining some legal opinions and religious sources that address the use of Qur'anic epigraphy, revealing how Muslims rationalised the use (or non-use) of these inscriptions in mosque architecture. The second section investigates one of the earliest Qur'anic inscriptions surviving to this day in the Dome of the Rock. These inscriptions were associated with the earliest Muslim generations, whose interpreted objectives are regarded as influential for subsequent Muslim generations. The third section moves to Ottoman and subsequent Turkish context and history, the perceived 'Islamic' centre for calligraphy, and briefly reviews significant events and figures that have shaped contemporary calligraphic practice, especially that which extends to the mosque architecture in the West.

### 4.2. Examining Qur'anic Epigraphy in Some Religious Sources

Epigraphy, in the Arabic language, is referred to by the term *naqsh.* Linguistically, the word *naqsh* originates from the act of applying multiple colours to embellish an object or surface.[1] It also refers to writing or inscription, as mentioned in a narration of Anas b. Mālik in *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn*[2] that the Messenger of God took a seal of silver and inscribed (*naqash*) on it: "Muhammad is the Messenger of God […] Let no one engrave on its inscription". One of the earliest recorded incidents of the use of inscriptions in mosque architecture was described

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[1] Al-Fīrūz Ābādī, Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ, ed. Muhammed Al-Arqasosy (Al Resala institute, 2005).
[2] Books of collected *ḥadīth* by the two scholars *Al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*.

in the narration of Imām al-Bukhārī,[3] where he mentioned that 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, the third Caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, made changes to the construction of the Prophet's Mosque. He made numerous additions to it, built its walls with engraved (*manqūshah* adj of *naqsh*) stones and gypsum, used carved stones for its pillars, and covered its roof with teak.

Due to the absence of explicit references in primary Islamic sources specifically addressing the incorporation of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture or Islamic art in general, a contentious discussion has emerged among Islamic jurists regarding the permissibility of employing inscriptions and ornamentation. Supporters of the permissibility of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture, including Egypt's fatwa office (*Dar al-Ifta*),[4] often cite the above narration regarding Uthman's modifications as evidence. This is because none of the Prophet's companions, who were present during the expansion of the mosque, objected to these changes.[5] Furthermore, a sermon by the Prophet himself included the statement: "… so you must keep to my *sunnah* and to *sunnahtu al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn* (the tradition of the rightly guided caliphs), those who guide to the right way."[6] 'Uthmān b. 'Affān was recognized as one of these rightly guided caliphs. However, when Uthman expressed his intention to enhance the mosque, some individuals expressed disapproval, preferring to maintain its original state. In response, Uthman recalled hearing the Prophet say: "Whoever builds a mosque for the sake of Allah, Allah will build for them a similar house in Paradise."[7]

In spite the fact that this incident doesn't explicitly mention Qur'anic epigraphy, it shows the earliest introduction of inscriptions in mosque architecture. It also shows remarkable changes in the construction materials employed for the

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[3] An Islamic scholar from the ninth century, who authored the *ḥadīth* collection known as Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari, regarded by Sunni Muslims as the most authentic *ḥadīth* collections.
[4] *Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah* is an Egyptian Islamic advisory, justiciary and governmental body established as a centre for Islam and Islamic legal research in Egypt in 1313 AH / 1895 CE.
[5] Dar Al Iftaa, "Al Fatawa - Hukm Kitabat Al Qur'an 'Ala Judran Al Masjid - The Islamic Ruling of Inscribing the Qur'an on the Walls of the Mosque," 2017, https://www.dar-alifta.org/ar/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=13900&LangID=1.
[6] *Ḥadīth* 28 In 40 *Ḥadīth* Nawawi.
[7] *Ḥadīth* 30 In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Book 5.

Prophet's Mosque and sheds light on the early objectives of Muslim rulings. According to one source, when 'Uthmān b. 'Affān expressed his intention to reconstruct the Prophet's Mosque around the year 650 CE, the Muslim community experienced urban development as a result of interactions with Persians and Romans, along with increased financial resources. Consequently, Muslims began using various types of stones, plaster, colours, and wood in their residential constructions. In line with this progress, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān believed that the mosque should keep up with these advancements.[8] Additionally, it was reported that upon assuming the caliphate, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān received complaints about the limited capacity of the mosque to accommodate the growing number of worshippers.[9] This justifies 'Uthmān's initial intention to rebuild the mosque, which had deteriorated since its previous expansion by the second Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.

In a more epigraphically relevant event during the early eighth century CE, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who was widely regarded as the fifth rightly Guided Caliph, received an order from *Walid bin Abdul Malik* to expand the Prophet's Mosque. It is recorded that ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz instructed the inscription of the first chapter of the Qur'an (*Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*), as well as chapter number 91 (*Sūrat ash-Shams*) through to the final chapter of the Qur'an, number 114.[10] These inscriptions, inscribed in gold, were placed on the *qiblah* wall of the mosque. Some sources attribute this work to a renowned calligrapher named Khaled b. Abi al-Hayyaj, renowned for his beautiful writing. It was reported by Ibn al-Nadim that ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was so impressed with the inscriptions that he requested Khaled b. Abi al-Hayyaj to write a Qur'anic manuscript resembling the one found in the mosque.[11] This incident has been cited by jurists to support the argument that the inscription of the Qur'an in mosques, using gold, can be an act of veneration as commanded by God in Qur'an 24:36. Al-Qurṭubī, in his commentary on this verse,

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[8] Musa Lasheen, Fath Al Mun'em Sharh Saheeh Muslim - Part 3 (Dar Al Shuruk, 2002).
[9] Muḥammad ibn Al-Najjār, *Al-Durrat Al-Thamīnah Fī Akhbār Al-Madīnah*, ed. Hussein Shokry (Al Madinah Al Munawarah: Dar al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah, 1996).
[10] Ibn-Rustah, Al-A'laq Al-Nafisah (Brill, 1892).
[11] Ibn al-Nadim, Al-Fihrist (Beirut: Dar Al Ma'rifah, 1997).

noted that Abū Ḥanīfah,[12] permitted such inscriptions, and there was no objection to ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's actions at that time, despite him being a governor (*wali*) rather than a caliph.

In another significant episode involving ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, upon his initial encounter with the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, he considered removing its mosaics and gold embellishments, intending to sell them and contribute the proceeds to the Muslims' treasury, known as *Bayt al-Māl* (the Muslims' treasury). However, he was informed of the extensive time and effort invested in acquiring and constructing these adornments for the mosque. Consequently, he opted to cover them with curtains to prevent any distractions to the worshippers. Subsequently, upon learning that a Patriarch from a Roman land was astounded by the mosque's ornamentation and architectural magnificence, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ordered the removal of the curtains and remarked, "I only see the mosque of Damascus as something that enrages the disbelievers." This subsequent incident highlights two primary reasons cited by some jurists to discourage the incorporation of inscriptions and decorations in mosque architecture: concerns of extravagance and potential distractions during prayer. Conversely, it also reveals how ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, as a caliph, recognized the religious and political message conveyed by the mosque's architecture, particularly to the surrounding nations. This realization prompted him to reassess his earlier intentions and reconsider the architectural significance of the mosque. Other legal opinions of disapproving the inscribing of verses in mosques have included potential risks of them falling or being subject to disrespect.

These divergent legal opinions and the above narrations have highlighted some of the generally perceived nature of Qur'anic epigraphy, and the careful considerations for its use and impact in the early history of Islam. These included veneration of the words of God, as well as His houses (mosques) by embellishing

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[12] An eighth century Sunni Muslim theologian and jurist of a Persian origin, who became the eponymous founder of the *Ḥanafī* school of *Sunni* jurisprudence, which has remained the most widely practiced law school in the *Sunni* tradition.

and elevating them, especially at times when these embellishments become symbols of sanctity and reverence.

Yet, despite the considerably long debate over the Qur'anic inscriptions among jurists and various schools of thought,[13] and the guidelines they have set over their use, there are hardly any references to choices of these verses, or details on the objectives of their specific use in mosques. Nevertheless, there is considerable literature in Islamic tradition about the objectives of the Qur'an itself, which may provide insights into the purposes of incorporating Qur'anic inscriptions in architectural settings. The following section will, therefore, provide a concise overview of these objectives. Subsequently, the case of the Dome of the Rock will be presented, analyzed, and discussed in light of some of these objectives.

### 4.2.1. Objectives Theory: A Review of Maqasid Al-Qur'an

Objectives theory is a term that generally refers to a theory that aims at elucidating the objectives of Islam, the causes behind Islamic legal rulings as well as the intentions and goals which underlie the *Shariʿah*, or Islamic Law. These objectives or *maqasid* are defined as the purposes which the Law was established

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[13] Each of the major Islamic schools of thought holds its own perspective on this matter. The *Ḥanafi* school emphasizes that inscriptions should not be distracting to worshippers and should be securely and skillfully executed to avoid any risk of falling or disrespect. The *Maliki* school considers the permissibility of inscriptions based on whether they distract worshippers from their prayers, while the *Shafi'i* school emphasizes the intention behind the inscriptions and permits them as long as they serve the purpose of enhancing Islamic rituals. The *Hanbali* school expresses a general disapproval of adorning mosques with engravings, paintings, and inscriptions that distract worshippers. However, if the inscriptions do not distract worshippers, they are not considered disapproved. Despite these differences, all schools seem to recognize the historical significance of inscriptions in Islamic practice and acknowledge that adherence to specific guidelines determines the permissibility or disapproval of such inscriptions. See the long article on Iftaa, "Al Fatawa - Hukm Kitabat Al Qur'an 'Ala Judran Al Masjid - The Islamic Ruling of Inscribing the Qur'an on the Walls of the Mosque." Further to these opinions, during the nineteenth century, the fatwa office at the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islamate ruled that writing upon places of worship is not licit. However, given that this is an old custom, abandoning it at this point may adversely affect the faith of visitors. This contravenes common usage (*örf*), and therefore allowing inscriptions in place of worship amounts to choosing the lesser evil. See Hilal Kazan, "On the Renewal of the Calligraphy at the Mosque of the Prophet (Al-Masjid Al-Nabawī) under the Reign of Sultan Abdülmecid," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 253–74.

to fulfil for the benefit of humankind.[14] According to Islamic scholars, Qur'an is considered the primary source of all *maqasid.* It is considered a prerequisite for understanding different types of objectives including *maqasid al ḥukm* (the higher objectives of governance), and *maqasid al-Shari'ah* which is usually the most commonly studied, researched, and classified by scholars. Therefore, according to Islam, *maqasid al-Qur'an* has the potential to be a broad Islamic objectives theory as it expresses the goals of the entire Islamic discourse.[15]

Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, a fourteenth century Andalusian Islamic legal scholar regarded as the pioneer of objectives-based jurisprudence, classified higher objectives into two overarching categories: those of the Lawgiver (God), and human objectives. Both categories share a common consideration for objectives and intentions and the refusal to stop at outward appearances and forms. Hence, they constitute a common approach and perspective. According to al-Shāṭibī the higher objectives of the Lawgiver can only be fulfilled by correcting human objectives. Therefore, as put by al-Shāṭibī, "the Lawgiver's aim for human beings is for their intention in what they do to be in agreement with His intention in laying down legislation."[16]

The term *maqasid al-Qur'an* can be traced back to the eleventh century CE, when it first gained prominence through the works of Al-Ghazali (d.1111 CE), particularly his book *Jawahir al-Qur'an*. Since then, there has been a substantial body of literature produced by esteemed Muslim scholars on this subject, spanning from that time to the present day.[17] This field has developed into a discipline used

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[14] Ahmad Al-Raysuni, *Imam Al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2005). The terms 'benefit' and 'harm,' as elucidated within the framework of the objectives of Islamic Law, encompass a distinct concept characterized by its distinctive attributes. In this context, the notion of 'benefit' does not merely encompass the momentary fulfilment of fleeting desires or passing whims. Instead, the Islamic concept of 'benefit' or 'interest' transcends the superficial and insufficient interpretations that commonly prevail today, embodying a more profound and elevated significance.

[15] Tazul Islam, "Expansion Of Maqasid Thought Beyond Maqasid Al-Shariah: Maqasid Al-Qur'an As A New Paradigm," *Hamdard Islamicus* 45, no. 4 (December 31, 2022), doi:10.57144/hi.v45i4.514.

[16] Al-Raysuni, *Imam Al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law*.

[17] Tazul Islam, "Maqāṣid Āl-Qur'an: A Search For A Scholarly Definition," *Al-Bayān – Journal of Qurʾān and Ḥadīth Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 26, 2011): 189–207, doi:10.1163/22321969-90000026.

for interpretating and studying the Qur'an along with the objectives for which it was revealed. While it is difficult to cover this extensive area, the following brief overview aims to provide an insight into some of the main objectives of the Qur'an, which, in turn, could shed light on the objectives underlying its use in mosque inscriptions.

The Qur'an holds supreme authority in Islam, which stems from the belief that it is the divine words of God, revealed to his prophet Muhammad, and intended for all times and all places.[18] Ibn Ashūr (d.1973C.E.), a prominent figure in the field of objectives theory, identified eight fundamental objectives of the Qur'an in the introduction of his renowned Qur'anic exegesis *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*. In his work, he also endeavoured to ascertain the specific objectives of each chapter and verse. According to Ibn Ashūr, the first and main objective of the Qur'an is the reformation of belief, addressing misconceptions concerning God, His nature and attributes, worldly life and the hereafter, as well as prophets, angels, and other related matters.[19] While God's words address all of humanity, certain nations, sects, and even individuals are specifically addressed in His book. Notably, Jews and Christians, referred to as *Ahl al-Kitāb*, are mentioned in several verses.[20] The remaining objectives, as outlined by Ibn Ashūr, include rectifying morals; legislation; maintaining *ummatic* policy; education and lessons through stories of previous nations; admonitions, warnings, and glad tidings; and the exposition of the Qur'an's inimitability as a sign of the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad.[21] Considering these objectives, their details and the virtues of the inscribed verses within their respective context, this research argues that wider and

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[18] AbdelHaleem, The Qurʻan : A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.

[19] Tazul Islam, "Ibn Ashur's Views on Maqasid Al-Qur'an: An Analysis," *Journal of Ma'alim Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah* 14, no. 2 (2018): 132–46.

[20] Khaled Al Basiouni, Al Nida'at Al Ilaheyya Fy Al Qur'an Al Kareem- Divine Calls in the Holy Qur'an (Al Azhar University, 2016).

[21] Muhammed Al-Tahir Ibn-Ashur, Tafsir Al Tahrir Wal Tanweer (Tunis: Dar Al Tuniseya for publishing, 1984).

more comprehensive explanations can be reached regarding their use in mosque architecture.[22]

### 4.3. The Early inscriptions of The Dome of the Rock

*4.3.1. About the Dome of the Rock: Reconstructing Its Historical Context*

Since as early as the time of the second Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb,[23] early Muslim leaders paid much attention to writing and calligraphy and considered it essential to preserving their doctrine. At the time of the Umayyads, it received specific attention and support from the ruling power, consequently marking their time, especially the time of Abdul Malik b. Marwan and the construction of the Dome of the Rock, as the technical-artistic beginning, in the development timeline of Arabic calligraphy.[24]

The Dome of the Rock (Figure 4-1), was, and still is, considered one of the greatest structures in Muslim architectural history.[25] As historical records mention, it was built by Abdul Malik b. Marwan, the fifth Umayyad Caliph in Jerusalem in the year 692.[26] It has become a subject of controversy for several decades, attracting many scholars and researchers, who produced a vast literature on its history, architecture, inscriptions and ornamentation. The debate over the Dome of the Rock has incorporated many aspects, including the nature of the building itself. Some have considered it as a monument with a commemorative function, while others defined it as a mosque, where prayer is still established. According to Grabar, and

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[22] One of the first contributions in the exploration of the intersection between art and objectives theory was made through three scholarly symposia titled "The Arts in Light of the Objectives of Islamic Law," organized by the Centre for the Study of the Philosophy of Islamic Law at Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation. These symposia aimed to develop a comprehensive, foundational conception rooted in Islamic law objectives regarding the role of the arts in Muslim society.

[23] He condemned speed writing and reading and stated that the best among calligraphy scripts is the clearest.

[24] Yūsuf Zānūn, "Filasṭīn Mawtan Walādat Al-Khaṭṭ Al-ʿArabī," *Al Majala Al Arabeya Lel Thaqafah* 2, no. 1 (1982): 117–23.

[25] Sheila Blair, "What Is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?," in Bayt Al-Maqdis, Part 1: `Abd Al-Malik's Jerusalem, ed. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[26] It is still a subject of debate whether this date marks the beginning or the end of construction. For more information on this, See Blair, S. (1993) 'What Is The Date Of The Dome Of The Rock?', In Raby, J. And Johns, J. (Eds) *Bayt Al-Maqdis, Part 1: `Abd Al-Malik's Jerusalem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

before him J. Sauvaget, such buildings "must be considered in their historical context".[27] However, the problem with reconstructing the nature of this structure is that there has been a lack of contemporary Umayyad text, as far as scholars have found. As a result, scholars have been trying to critically put together the disparate information they found in the primary sources they had.[28]



Figure 4-1 General view of the Dome of the Rock. Photograph courtesy of Sheila Blair and
Jonathan Bloom (Milwright 2016)

To understand the nature of this building, it is important to understand why it was built and how it was used at the time of its construction. In an early source by Ibn Ishaq, the site of the Dome of the Rock was connected to an event in the life of the prophet Muhammad, through his *isra'* (the night journey) from Mecca to Jerusalem, and his subsequent *miʿraj* (ascension) from the Rock to Heaven. This early Arabic source has shaped the belief of many Muslims of today about the Rock above which Abdul Malik b. Marwan has built its Dome. However, Ibn Ishaq's chronicle about the life of the prophet, which was collected by Ibn Hisham, wasn't

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[27] Oleg Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 33–62.
[28] Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 12–26.

early enough. It was dated from the beginning of the eighth century,[29] which is after
the death of both Abdul Malik b. Marwan and his successor al-Walid.

Based on another early source by al-Yaʿqubi, other scholars, like Goldziher,
have suggested that the Dome was built as a counter-*Kaʿbah* in order to divert the
pilgrimage and centre of ruling from Mecca to Jerusalem, at the time of the political
tension between Abdul Malik b. Marwan and Abdullah bin al-Zubaur who
established a rival caliphate in Mecca.[30] However, many scholars have refuted such
suggestion, arguing that sources that were dated from the time of the Abbasids,
were known for their anti-Umayyad tendency.[31] Furthermore, according to Uthman,
based on al-Suyuti and other sources, Abdul Malik b. Marwan was raised in
Madinah in a religious environment where he received religious education and was
known for his piousness. When he became Caliph "many Muslim authorities of his
time seem to have recognized his gift for rule",[32] which makes it hard to believe
that he built the Dome of the Rock for such purpose, which is not only against his
faith but would also make him lose the support of many Muslims at the time he
needed it most.[33]

Aside from the characters of al-Yaʿqubi and Abdul Malik b. Marwan,
scholars also mentioned Rajaa b. Haywa, who was assigned by Abdul Malik b.
Marwan to build the Dome of the Rock with Yazid b. Sallam. Rajaa was a well-
known *tabiʿi*, transmitter of *Ḥadīth*, jurist and also a calligrapher.[34] He was also the
advisor of two later Caliphs, including ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.[35] According to

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Blair, "What Is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?"
[31] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."
[32] Ibid.
[33] Muhammed Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel
Malik Bin Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel
Malek Bin Marwan," *Al 'Osur* 4, no. 1 (1989): 33–114.
[34] Abdel-Razzak Al-Omrany, Safinat Al Omrany - Ma'ref Wa Lata'ef (Sana'a: Dar Al Nashr Lel
Jame'at, 2013).
[35] M. Anwarul Islam and Zaid F. Al-Hamad, "The Dome of the Rock: Origin of Its Octagonal
Plan," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 139, no. 2 (2007): 109–28.

Uthman, a man with such background would not involve himself in such an
unfaithful act.[36]

Other attempts to interpret the religious purpose of building the Dome of the
Rock included associations with Temple Mount, the site where the Dome is
constructed. According to a study by Uthman and a number of early Arabic
manuscripts collected, analyzed and verified in a book by Mahmoud Ibrahim, the
virtue of the Rock was described through *aḥadīth* of the prophet about its site (Al
Masjid Al Aqsa) and its history as the former *qiblah,* before it changed towards the
*Kaʿbah* in Mecca during the life of the prophet.[37] The whole site or platform, upon
which the Dome of the Rock was built along with other structures including Al
Aqsa mosque, was referred to in these texts as *Bayt al-Maqdis* or *Bayt al-Muqaddas*
(the Holy House) or *Haram al-Sharif* (Noble Sanctuary) which similarly refers to
Muslim sacred places in Makkah and Madinah.[38] According to these texts, it is a
blessed site where a single prayer is equal to at least five hundred prayers in any
other mosque.[39] This gives the whole site, including the Rock, a special mosque
feature and religious significance which explains the Muslim's interest in the Rock,
including Abdul Malik b. Marwan and the *tabiʿīn* in Jerusalem, who used to sit by
the Rock, as some sources mention.[40]

### 4.3.2.    The Objectives of Construction: Architectural and Epigraphic Evidence

Reading through the exhaustive literature about the Dome of the Rock, one is
left with many differing interpretations and sources, including the Christian and

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[36] Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel Malik Bin
Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel Malek Bin
Marwan."

[37] Mahmoud Ibrahim, Fadail Baut Al-Maqdis Fi Makhtotat Arabia Qadima - The Virtues of
Jerusalem in Old Arabic Manuscripts- Analytical Study and Verified Selected Texts (Institute of
Arab Manuscripts - Arab League Educational Cultural & Scientific Organization, 1985).

[38] Islam and Al-Hamad, "The Dome of the Rock: Origin of Its Octagonal Plan."

[39] The *ḥadīths* differed regarding the virtue of praying in Al-Aqsa Mosque, for the religious
sources regarding this issue check the books of Ibn Hajar, Al Shawkany, Ibn Al 'Iraqy and Saleh
Al Rafe'y.

[40] Ibrahim, Fadail Baut Al-Maqdis Fi Makhtotat Arabia Qadima - The Virtues of Jerusalem in Old
Arabic Manuscripts- Analytical Study and Verified Selected Texts.

Jewish accounts.[41] Covering all the literature written about the Dome of the Rock through around six decades would indeed seem an impossible task, especially within the time frame of this study. Consequently, some studies were deliberately excluded, especially those that discuss the post- Umayyad era. Alternatively, I focused mainly on relevant well-known studies, including those by Oleg Grabar, Sheila Blair and Nasser Rabbat, as many studies have either built on or criticized their work, along with some more recent studies, especially the book by Marcus Milwright which he has specifically dedicated to the building's mosaic inscriptions. Regarding Arabic literature, I have focused on Muhammed Uthman's study in which he comprehensively compiled, presented and critiqued previous studies, like Grabar's and Fekry's, as well as primary sources, that constitute collected and verified early Arabic manuscripts. These manuscripts, including al-Wasiti's, which Rabbat has well studied, were highly significant to this research, since they were essential in reconstructing the history of Abdel Malik and his Dome; and setting the Qur'anic epigraphy in its context.

However there is one available source that all scholars have agreed on its contemporariness and authenticity, and that is the building itself, with its epigraphic and ornamental details. As repeatedly described in its literature, the Dome of the Rock is a single-story building with an octagonal plan, each side is 20.6 m. It is

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[41] For more about the Jewish and Christian accounts check Grabar, O. (1959) 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', ars Orientalis, 3, pp. 33–62, which includes associations of the rock in particular and mount Moriah in general with series of Jewish legends involving major figures of the biblical tradition specially Abraham and Isaac. Regarding both Jewish and Christian traditions, he added "during the Roman and Byzantine, the whole *haram* area was left unoccupied, but under Christian rule the holy city itself witnessed a new and remarkable development. This development took place in the 'new Jerusalem', and no Christian sanctuary appears to have been built on the area of the haram, since the prophecy of the destruction of the temple had to be fulfilled. There is some evidence in the patristic literature that the Jewish associations were accepted by some Christians […] such then appears to have been the situation at the time of the Muslim conquest: the Jewish tradition considered the *haram* area as the site of the temple and the place of Abraham sacrifice and Adam's creation and death, while the Christian tradition had moved the latter two to a new site". He ends his discussion with the statement " we can see that the evidence which can be gathered from the mosaics the inscriptions and the location of the dome of the rock shows that the first major Muslim attempt at monumental architecture can only be understood in all its complexity and uniqueness when seen in its Umayyad context […] political and religious directed to the Muslim as well as the Jew and specially the Christian, symbol of a state and of a mission, the dome of the rock reflected the centuries of traditions and beliefs which has accumulated on mount Moriah, just as it was intimately tied to the specific historical situation of the time".

covered with a dome of 20.44 m in diameter, resting on a cylindrical drum and reaching a height of about 36 m. The structure consists of two octagonal ambulatories separated by an octagon made of twenty-four arches resting on eight piers and sixteen columns (Figure 4-2). In the centre lies the Rock in a circular area under the dome and its supporting arcade made of sixteen arches, resting on four piers and twelve columns.[42]
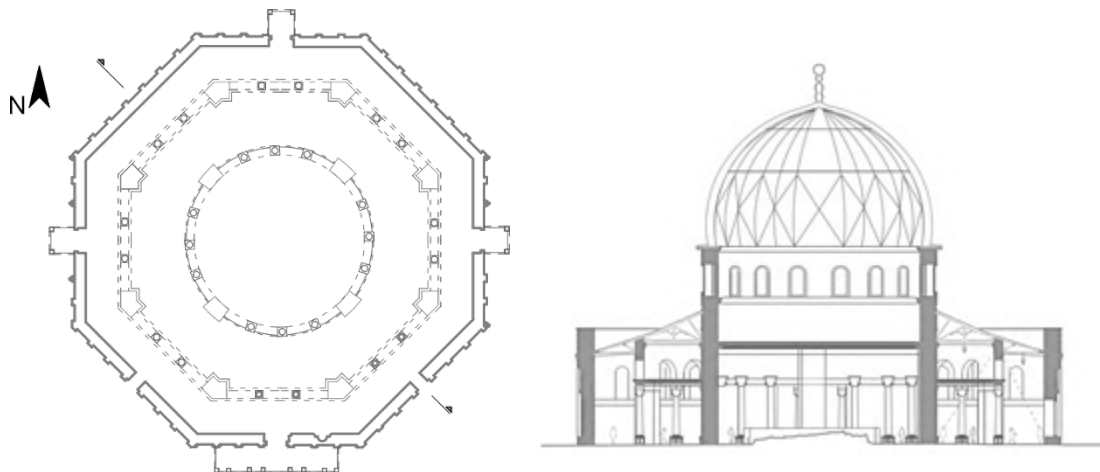


Figure 4-2 Plan and interior section of the Dome of the Rock by Munazzah Akhtar, simplified after Richmond (Milwright 2016)

The Dome has incorporated many inscriptions along the different Muslim ruling eras. According to scholars, only three were dated at the time of the Umayyads and were contemporary to the time of its construction. The major surviving inscription, (Figures 4-3 and 4-4), is around 240 m in length and was executed in gold mosaics over a dark green-blue ground. It is found on both sides of the inner octagonal arcade between the two ambulatories.[43] The other two were inscribed on copper plaques which once stood above the entrances (Figure 4-5). The mosaic inscription bands were exclusively religious, mainly Qur'anic, except where the name of the builder and the date were inscribed. It is important to mention that the name of Abdul Malik b. Marwan was substituted at the time of Abbasids by the name of the Caliph Al Ma'mun, which still exists to this day beside the original date of the building.

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[42] Islam and Al-Hamad, "The Dome of the Rock: Origin of Its Octagonal Plan."
[43] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

Figure 4-3 Interior views of the Dome of the Rock. Interior ambulatory and inner face of the octagonal arcade. Photographs courtesy of Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom (Milwright 2016)



Figure 4-4 Mosaic panel with inscriptions on the inner face of the octagonal arcade. Photograph by Said Nuseibeh (Milwright 2016)

Figure 4-5 Squeeze from a section of the blue and gold copper panel carrying repoussé
inscriptions, originally from the east entrance of the Dome of the Rock. After: Max van
Berchem (Milwright 2016)

According to Grabar, these mosaic inscriptions are considered the earliest
surviving Qur'anic ones scholars know. Their importance lies in their relevance to
the purpose of its structure which, he argued, was common in Islamic times.[44] From
the outer ambulatory, the outer face inscription is read in a clockwise direction
starting from the south face. Moving to the inner ambulatory, again at the south
face, the inner inscription is read in an anti-clockwise direction.[45] The content of
the inscriptions have been translated by a number of scholars including Sheila Blair,
Oleg Grabar and Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah in their book *Image of the
Word: A Study of Qur'anic Verses in Islamic Architecture*. For this research, a full
translation of these inscriptions (Appendix C) is excerpted from both the translation
of Andrew Rippin, which was previously used by some scholars of Islamic art,
along with the translation by Abdel Haleem in his book *The Qur'an. A New
translation.*

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Marcus Milwright, The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions (Edinburgh
University Press, 2016).

According to Milwright, the two surviving copper plaques, previously mentioned, complete the Umayyad inscription programme, however, they do not all necessarily belong to the period of Abdul Malik. They originally stood at the door lintels of the east and north entrances of the building. Similar to the mosaic inscriptions, these inscriptions were gilded in *Kufic* script on blue ground. Despite the differences, all inscriptions share similar themes, particularly the ones dealing with the faith, the oneness, eternal nature and omnipotence of God, the prophet and his people. However, according to Grabar, the northern gate inscription is more important as it constitutes 'the prophetic mission', Grabar argued, which has become the standard inscription on all Muslim coins. It also includes a quotation which appears in the Qur'an after the enumeration of other prophets, referring to their position in "the theology of the new faith".[46]

Looking more closely at the whole Qur'anic programme most certainly inscribed at the time of Abdul Malik b. Marwan, especially the mosaic inscription bands, one can extract the emphasis on a number of main themes. First, they all point out the fundamental notion of *Tawḥīd* (the oneness of God),[47] the greatness of the One true God, and the extent of His dominion.[48] Second, they highlight the position of the prophet Muhammad according to Islam, while communicating the universality and significance of his mission.[49] Finally, they assert the human nature of Jesus, his position as a prophet, and his role on the day of judgement, while denying the Christian concept of the Trinity and warning the consequences of failing to adhere to God's truth and message.[50]

After this brief description of the Dome of the Rock and its Qur'anic epigraphy, attributed to the time of Abdul Malik b. Marwan, the following section will present the arguments around the objectives of building the Dome based on

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[46] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

[47] Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel Malik Bin Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel Malek Bin Marwan."

[48] Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, The Image of the Word : A Study of Qur'anic Verses in Islamic Architecture (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981).

[49] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

[50] Milwright, The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions.

evidence the building and its epigraphy provide. In other words, it will attempt to answer the question: what did the architecture and Qur'anic epigraphy of the Dome of the Rock say about its role and purpose, in light of its historical context and available contemporary accounts?

Responding to the idea that the Dome of the Rock was built as a counter-*Kaʿbah*, which some scholars have refuted based on doubts about the biases of al-Yaʿqubi's account, Fekry argued that the architectural design and plan of the Dome reveals a building typology that does not suit the flow of pilgrims' mass, circumambulating around the rock as they do around the *Kaʿbah*. According to Fekry, the space inside the structure is confined within thick walls (1.3 m thick), with four narrow entrances (2.6 m in width) that wouldn't allow the easy entry and exit of pilgrims' mass. Aside from that, the design of two ambulatories (the inner ambulatory is 10 m wide while the outer one is 4 m) doesn't support such counter-*Kaʿbah* claim. If it was set up as a pilgrimage site, Fekry argued, a design of a single wider ambulatory would have made much more sense than the design of two ambulatories that are unequal in width and relatively narrow.[51]

Looking at the epigraphic direction and content, one can also find supporting evidence. Although the mosaic inscriptions were "deliberately designed to encircle the space", reading the continuous inscription bands, or at least following their direction, would mean that it is necessary to make a clockwise circuit through the outer ambulatory, followed by a counter-clockwise circuit through the inner one. According to Milwright, if there was only one inscription band around the outer face of the octagonal arcade, there might have been a possibility that it was meant to facilitate a clockwise circumambulation around the rock. Instead, the unusual use of two bands encourages moving around in two different directions.[52] Beside that, none of the inscribed Qur'anic verses' content or statements refers, in any way, to the act of pilgrimage or circumambulation.

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[51] Ahmed Fekry, "Qubbat Al Sakhra - The Dome of the Rock," *'Alam Al Fekr Al Kuwayteya* 11, no. 1 (1980): 13–31.
[52] Milwright, The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions.

As for the widely common opinion among today's Muslims that the Dome was built to commemorate the memory of prophet Muhammad's *isra'*, there is also no evidence or reference in the building's inscription programme reflecting such an incident. According to Fekry, if Abdul Malik b. Marwan perceived the incident of *isra'* as the main motive behind building the Dome of the Rock, he wouldn't have missed incorporating the verse (Q 17:1), which has a direct reference to the incident, from the inscription programme, especially given that he included a verse from the same *sūrah*.[53]

There is no doubt, among scholars, that the Rock must have had a religious significance for Muslims at that time, and especially for Abdul Malik b. Marwan. In the earliest book that compiled the merits of the city of Jerusalem, the Jerusalemite preacher Abu Bakr al-Wasiti simply explains the reason for building the Dome of the Rock by describing a letter sent by Abdul Malik b. Marwan to all his deputies stating that "*Abd alMalik plans to build a dome (qubba) over the Rock to shelter the Muslims from cold and heat, and to construct the masjid*".[54] According to Rabbat, this simple functional explanation suggests that the significance of the Rock was already known to the Muslims who used to meet around it even before the Dome was constructed, including Abdul Malik b. Marwan himself. Rabbat argued that whatever significance the Rock had back then, Abdul Malik seemed to have considered it by honouring the Rock and building his Dome.[55] But this act, within its historical context, must have comprised other political connotations related to Abdul Malik b. Marwan's political and geographical position as the proclaimed Caliph in Jerusalem. This can be seen through the rest of al-Wasiti's narrative where he added:

> But before he starts he wants to know his subjects' opinion'. With their approval, the deputies wrote back, 'May God permit the completion of this enterprise, and

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[53] Fekry, "Qubbat Al Sakhra - The Dome of the Rock."
[54] Nasser Rabbat, "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on Al-Wasiti's Accounts," *Muqarnas, Essays in Honor of Oleg Grabar* 10 (1993): 66–75, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1523173.
[55] Ibid.

may He count the building of the dome and the masjid a good deed for Abd al-Malik and his predecessors.'[56]

In light of the contemporary political environment and competition between Abdul Malik b. Marwan and bin al-Zubair, according to Uthman, the above letter suggests that constructing the Dome of the Rock and the mosque was part of an architectural complex plan that intended to gain the attention and sympathy of Muslims back towards the Umayyad ruling, especially after the incidents that occurred at the time of his predecessor Yazid which have raised the feelings of opposition against their caliphate. Sheltering the people; venerating and protecting the Rock; and involving the deputies in the construction decision and details, were all part of Abdul Malik b. Marwan's political propaganda.[57] This is reflected through the building's inscription programme which contained the inscription of Abdul Malik b. Marwan's name with golden mosaics. This indicates Abdul Malik b. Marwan's desire to promote his rule and be remembered as the builder of such a magnificent structure, which honors the Rock and the whole *masjed al-Aqsa*, the first *qiblah* and third holy mosque.[58] This also seemed the desire of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun, who replaced Abdul Malik b. Marwan's name with his, which further proves the political propagandistic nature of the building.[59]

According to the historical records, Abdullah bin al-Zubair wasn't the only threat to Abdul Malik's rule. In fact, when Abdul Malik came to power, there was an ongoing civil war and a Byzantine army at the borders.[60] Jerusalem itself had an overwhelming majority of Christians which heightened and complicated the psychological climate of Christian-Muslim relations, which were, on one hand, relations between two neighbouring faiths, and on the other, between two hostile empires. Beside that, the architecture of the region witnessed a spectacular display

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[56] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."
[57] Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel Malik Bin Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel Malek Bin Marwan."
[58] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."
[59] Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel Malik Bin Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel Malek Bin Marwan."
[60] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."

of riches in Byzantine monuments and Christian churches, which must have influenced the Umayyads' evolving attitude towards architecture, since the first Umayyad Caliph's palace known as *Qubba al-Khadra*. This attitude which continued through the Dome of the Rock and later in the Great Mosque in Damascus, built by al-Walid, Abdul Malik's successor, demonstrates their awareness of "the psychological role that the magnificence of architecture plays in winning over believers and awing opponents", addressing both audiences, Muslim and Christians. According to Rabbat, this can be further supported by a narrative by al-Maqdisi,[61] where he mentioned a conversation with his uncle, who explained al-Walid's justification for building his mosque of Damascus, while referring to the Dome of the Rock, saying:

> For he (al-Walid) beheld Syria to be a country that had long been occupied by the Christians, and he noted there the beautiful churches still belonging to them, so enchantingly fair, and so renowned for their splendour, as are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the churches of Lydda and Edessa. So, he sought to build for the Muslims a mosque that should be unique and a wonder to the world. And in like manner is it not evident that 'Abd al-Malik, seeing the greatness of the martyrium (*qubbah*) of the Holy Sepulchre and its magnificence was moved lest it should dazzle the minds of the Muslims and hence erected above the Rock the Dome which is now seen there.[62]

This ideological struggle with Christians is highly apparent through the Qur'anic epigraphy inside the Dome of the Rock, which reflects Abdul Malik's mixed attitude of hegemony, sternness, and invitation. In fact, it is the most sensible explanation for choosing the Christological verses within the inscriptions programme of Abdul Malik's Dome. The building, with its inscriptions, was declaring Islam as the final faith and statement of what was true in Christianity,[63] arguing against the deification of Christ,[64] comprising a confirmation of the Umayyad doctrine, and reminding its audiences, of both Muslims and Christians,

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[61] A well-known Jerusalemite geographer (985 CE).
[62] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."
[63] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."
[64] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."

of the Umayyad's mission of spreading prophet Muhammad's message, which Abdul Malik has similarly introduced on his new Arabized coinage.[65]

The building on the other hand reflected the economic condition of the Umayyad rule, which sponsored the project and provided the necessary funds to build such a magnificent structure. That was due to Umayyad sovereignty over Egypt and the Levant, which were the richest territories on the Muslim world's political map of that time, in terms of their paid taxes and resources.[66] According to al-Wasiti's narrative, when Abdul Malik assigned Rajaa bin Haywa and Yazid bin Sallam to build the Dome of the Rock, he ordered them "to spend generously on its construction". In their letter back to him after the completion of the Dome construction, they ended with the statement "There is nothing in the building that leaves room for criticism".[67] This anticipation for criticism further indicates Abdul Malik's realization of the effect of such a structure, in terms of its unusual architecture with an octagonal plan that differs from the usual rectangular or square plans, as well as its style and details that had no precedent within the buildings of the first Muslim generation. This further supports the communicative aspect of this building, which the Qur'anic inscriptions have attempted to deliver.

### 4.3.3. In Light of the Objectives Theory

Looking at the gathered literature, in light of the objective theory, would probably not reveal new information. But, as I argue, it could change the way we perceive what we have. The choice of studying the Dome of the Rock wasn't necessarily based on the fact that it is one of the greatest structures in the history of Islamic architecture. However, it was mainly chosen for its association with the earliest Muslim generations, as they started building and developing their

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[65] Uthman, "Dilalat Siasia Dieayiya Lil Athar Al'iislamia Fi 'Ahd Al Khalifa Abdel Malik Bin Marwan - Political Connotations of the Islamic Monuments in the Era of Caliph Abdel Malek Bin Marwan."
[66] Ibid.
[67] Rabbat, "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on Al-Wasiti's Accounts."

civilization based on what they have learned from their first generation.[68] Those
early times, according to Matoq, have witnessed the integration of technical and
intellectual knowledge, which applied to all kinds of practical fields within a society
that shared an epistemic space of both knowledge and belief.[69]

This can be closely observed through the history and character of Rajaa bin
Haywa, whom Rabbat has described as the most likely candidate for the role of
choosing the verses inscribed on the mosaic bands of the inner octagonal arcade of
the Dome. According to Rabbat, he was an official of the Umayyad court, informed
of its policies and aims, as well as a scholar, a theologian and a *muhaddith* (*ḥadīth*
scholar) well versed in the Qur'an and its interpretation.[70] Further to that, he was
mentioned as a calligrapher, a great political influencer and a primary religious
advisor to the Umayyads. Rajaa, whose titles were al-Filastini, al-Urduni and al-
Kindi (from Kinda, which was an important Arabic tribe that controlled the area
between Jordan and Palestine), has long been associated with Palestine and its
people. He was known for his expertise and knowledge of the sacred sites of
Jerusalem, and the transmission of a number of traditions about the virtues of the
city, recorded in the manuscripts of al-Wasiti. A man with this background of all
these qualities must have lived and worked in an environment that echoes Matoq's
description of the early Muslim times where politics, theology, science, and art
integrally contributed to the architecture and civilization of Muslim lands.

Rajaa's background, skills and position in Abdul Malik's court must have
made him mindful of Abdul Malik's objectives as a caliph, and his desire "to govern
according to the principles advanced by the Muslim religious authorities" whom he

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[68] According to a *ḥadīth* in Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhari: 'The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked: "Which
people are the best?" He replied: "My generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow
them." In the narration, there is an indication of the importance of adhering to the path of the first
three generations (of Islam). For whoever lives in a time close to the time of prophethood is more
deserving of virtue, knowledge, emulating, and following the guidance of the Prophet. See Aldorar
Alsaniyyah. *Ḥadīth Encyclopaedia*. Retrieved August 14, 2023, from
https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/23230. However, it should be noted that this doesn't imply that
everyone living during those times fits within the description provided by the Ḥadīth. Therefore,
understanding the biographies of the individuals involved becomes crucial.
[69] Matoq, Sūsiyūlūjīyā Al-Fann Al-Islāmī [Sociology of Islamic Art].
[70] Rabbat, "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on Al-Wasiti's Accounts."

delegated as his councillors. Abdul Malik, as described by unprejudiced accounts, was known for his adherence to Islamic tradition and veneration of the Qur'an, accepting only what it dictates.[71] It was reported that he once said:

> You are the people most entitled to adhere to this original thing [i.e., original Islam]. Many traditions have come to us from the East which we cannot verify. We are only sure of the reading of the Qur'an. Be faithful to what is contained in your Qur'an: the one that the unjustly treated Imam ['Uthman] gathered for you, and follow the obligations he specified for you, for in that he consulted Zayd ibn Thabit, who was a most respected scholar. Thus, accept what they have accepted, and reject what deviates from their interpretation.[72]

This goes in line with the idea that Abdul Malik must have been aware of the higher objectives of the Qur'an, as well as of being a Caliph or a Commander of the believers, a title that was associated with his name in the mosaic inscriptions of the outer band. As Milwright has once suggested, "one can imagine Abdul Malik wishing to communicate through his monument the most important qualities of caliphal authority". Caliph comes from the word *Khalifah*, which means successor. According to al-Mawardi,[73] the objectives of the caliph are succeeding prophecy in preserving the faith and administrating the world.[74] Preserving the faith means preserving its facts and meanings and spreading them among the people as the prophet conveyed them, while administration is based on managing the affairs of the state and the people in a way that achieves the benefit (*maslaha*) and avoids corruption.

This can set Abdul Malik or Rajaa's choice of Qur'anic inscriptions in the framework of the higher objectives of governance in Islam. The inscriptions, as well as the coins, informed the Muslims of that time, that the caliph's role was to establish true religion, guiding them to proper percept and practice of Islam in preparation for the end of days, following the model of the Prophet.[75] And with a

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[71] Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock."
[72] Ibid.
[73] An Islamic jurist of the Shafi'i school most remembered for his works on religion, government, the caliphate, and public and constitutional law during a time of political turmoil.
[74] Abu-Hassan Al-Mawardi, Al Ahkam Al Sultaneya -Sulatanic Ruling, ed. Ahmed Gad (Dar Al Hadith, 2006).
[75] Milwright, The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions.

dominant Christian context and local conflicts, Abdul Malik seemed to have used art, and especially epigraphy, as a communicative tool through which he wished to engage in a theological discourse with different groups, correcting false doctrinal beliefs regarding ideas about God, His Self and attributes; world life and hereafter; and prophets and angels. This communication was done on a basis of both moral and aesthetic principles. Moral principles were manifested through the responsibility to communicate these messages. As for aesthetic principles, they were reflected through the style of communication.[76]

The fact that calligraphy is not a total abstract art and needs a choice of words, creates this link between art and politics,[77] and more distinctly religion. In fact, according to Behrens-Abouseif, Islam has been traditionally conceived "as an all-pervasive worldly and religious system that seems to deny a separation between the secular and religious aspects of life". This was seen through Muslim rulers adapting a dual role in the early Islamic history, that integrated both political and religious authority.[78] The Umayyads, as scholars have argued, have established a symbolic language through which they have communicated religiopolitical concepts, increasingly relying on script, besides the ornaments programme.[79] All this highlights the role of Qur'anic epigraphy in early Islamic architecture, as well as the environment which has produced it. It was an integrated environment, highly sensitive to its context, and responsive to its contemporary concerns.

However, it seems that this dynamic environment of calligraphic and religiopolitical context was not exclusive to the Umayyads. According to Tabbaa,

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[76] Hanash, The Theory of Islamic Art: Aesthetic Concepts And Epistemic Structure.

[77] Vlad Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use," in *Studies in Architecture, History and Culture. Papers by the 2003–2004 AKPIA@MIT Visiting Fellows*. (Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006), 7–21.

[78] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Beyond the Secular and the Sacred: Qur'anic Inscriptions in Medieval Islamic Art and Material Culture," in Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions, ed. F. Suleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[79] Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions*. For more studies on the Dome of the Rock's ornaments, See Grabar, O. (1959) 'The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Ars Orientalis*, 3, pp. 33–62. and George, A. (2018) 'Paradise or Empire? On a Paradox of Umayyad Art', in George, A. and Marsham, A. (eds) *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 39–67.

since its classical phase, calligraphy's development, shaped by a complex interplay of theological, dynastic, and scientific influences, has witnessed periods of intense political and sectarian conflict.[80] Baghdad, the centre of the Abbasid and later Ikhanid rule, has witnessed the development of calligraphic scripts by the hands of high officials like the vizier B. Muqla in its early period, and later by scribes including Ibn al-Bawwab, and Yaqut al-Musta'simi who was an Ottoman calligrapher that served as the secretary (in other sources as a slave) to the last Abbasid Caliph Al Musta'sim.[81]

The subsequent section provides an exploration of the development of calligraphy, particularly during the Ottoman era and its continuity up to the present day in Turkey. It will highlight various challenges during the emergence of the Turkish Republic, and factors that have contributed to the preservation of this tradition over time.

## 4.4. The Development of the Ottoman and Turkish Calligraphic Tradition

As referring to the pre-eminence of Islamic calligraphy in the Ottoman times, a traditional saying goes "the Qur'an was revealed in the Hijaz, best recited in Egypt, and best written in Istanbul". Indeed, to many minds, Islamic calligraphy has achieved its ever-finest form, by the calligraphers of the Ottoman Empire, as well as by those of the current Turkish Republic.[82] Turkey, and before it the Ottoman Empire, has long been playing significant role, not only in developing Islamic calligraphy, but also in maintaining and securing its position as a vital centre for this long living art. To this day, Istanbul is considered an international prominent centre for Islamic calligraphy and its study.[83]

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[80] Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival.

[81] Nabil Saidi, "Yaqut Al-Mustaʿsimi" (Oxford University Press, 2003), doi:10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T092698; Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival.

[82] Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic."

[83] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

Since the fifteenth century, the first Ottoman reign under Mehmet II (1451-
1481) ensured that this city would soon develop into a centre for Islamic art within
the Muslim world. Mehmet II, like many other later Ottoman Sultans, gave
significant attention to fine arts, especially the art of writing.[84] During his time, Al-
Fatih mosque was built, where monumental inscriptions were added by Yahya al-
Sufi. Yahya's son, Ali b. Yahya al-Sufi, was the calligrapher assigned to inscribe
the Qur'anic verses (Q. 15:45-8) on the gate of the Topkapi Palace (Figure 4-6).[85]
These two calligraphers were known to be active masters of calligraphy at the time
of Mehmed II. They were considered the most masterful artists in *Jali Thuluth*, a
script mainly used for monumental inscriptions till this day.



Figure 4-6 The imperial gate of the Topkapi Palace, the calligraphic panel displayed in Jeli
Thuluth executed by Ali Sofi (left) source: https://romeartlover.tripod.com/Istanb14.html.

The strategic location of Istanbul at the juncture of two continents (Europe
and Asia) and two seas (Black Sea and Mediterranean) made it an ideal centre for
a universal empire of Perso-Islamic, Turco-Mongol, and Roman-Byzantine
traditions. Through this construction of what Necipoğlu described as multifaceted

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[84] M. Uğur Derman, "The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire," *Foundation for Science
Technology and Civilisation,* 2007, 1–15; Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A
Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."
[85] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The
Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

cultural self-identification, Mehmed II engaged with diverse architectural styles selectively integrating Byzantine, Italian Renaissance, and Timurid-Turkmen elements into the Ottoman tradition.[86] During the fifteenth century, a Persian script called *Nast'liq* entered the Ottoman lands through correspondence. It affected the emergence of two significant Turkish scripts called *Diwani* and *Ta'liq*.[87]

At the time of Bayezid II (reigned 1481-1512), the son of Mehmet II, Sheyh Hamdullah and his students moved to the new capital. Sheyh Hamdullah was considered the founder of the scripts of *Thuluth* and *Naskh* that are used today which he developed as new original styles from that of earlier Yaqut al-Musta'simi. Sheyh Hamdullah was known as the spiritual father of Ottoman calligraphy (Figure 4-7). It was believed that he achieved this development after a period of spiritual seclusion.[88]

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[86] Gülru Necipoğlu, "From Byzantine Constantinople To Ottoman Kostantiniyye: Creation Of A Cosmopolitan Capital And Visual Culture Under Sultan Mehmed II," in *From Byzantion to Istanbul 8000 Years of a Capital*, ed. Nazan Ölçer (Istanbul: Sakip Sabanci Muzesi, 2010), 262–78.

[87] Derman, "The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire."

[88] Ibid.

Figure 4-7 Calligraphy work by Sheyh Hamdullah (The Metropolitan Museum of Art
collection)

The calligrapher Ahmed Karahisarî came shortly after Sheyh Hamdullah,
during the time of Süleyman (reigned 1520–1566). He worked on reviving the style
of Yaqut in a monumental scale and stacked compositions, transferring Ottoman
calligraphy from the pages of the Qur'an to its architecture.[89] His school influenced
the inscriptions of hundreds of mosques at that time. Some of his most prominent
epigraphic works and compositions are displayed in the Süleymaniye Mosque
Complex (Figure 4-8).[90]

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[89] Talip Mert, "Archival Evidence on the Commissioning of Architectural Calligraphy in the
Ottoman Empire," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad
Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 230–52.
[90] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The
Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."
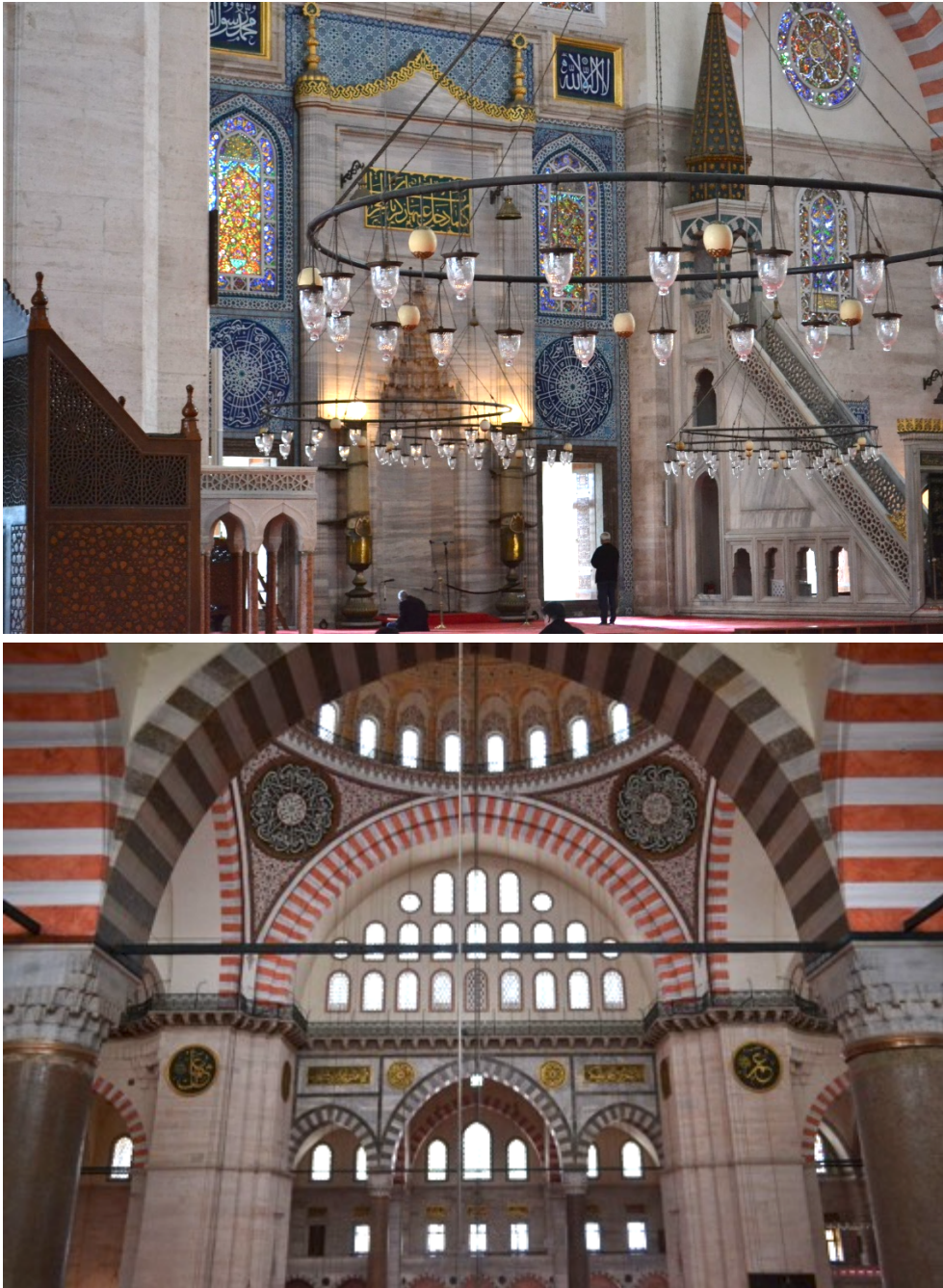
Figure 4-8 Inscriptions in Süleymaniye Mosque by calligrapher Ahmed Karahisarî (Author 2021)

After Sheyh Hamdullah, and over the following four centuries, Ottomans practiced and developed calligraphy and epigraphy, reaching the highest level of expertise and production as time progressed.[91] By the nineteenth and twentieth

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[91] Derman, "The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire."

centuries, architectural inscriptions reached their zenith becoming an indispensable element in buildings of different types, most notably mosques. These buildings incorporated inscriptions both inside and out, mainly by monumental scripts of *Jeli Thuluth*, secondarily by *ta'liq*, and more rarely by other scripts like *Kufi*.[92] Studies about the calligraphy and inscriptions of the Ottoman times include several names of calligraphers and their contributions to different scripts. However, one of the renowned names, and significantly influential schools of calligraphy of that time, which was described as revolutionary, was Mustafa Râkım Efendi. Râkım achieved better proportions and forms of letters both in *Jeli thuluth* and the sultanic *tughra,*[93] (Figure 4-9), which shook off the work of previous calligraphers. The aesthetic dimensions and proportions for *Jeli thuluth* script, which he discovered appropriate to the height of architectural inscriptions on the building, allowed more visibility of the text. He also created different calligraphic compositions that when inscribed on architecture and seen from a distance would look right and not deformed.[94] Through the hands of Rakim's students, especially Sami Efindi (1838–1912), *Jeli thuluth* reached its pinnacle.[95]

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[92] Mert, "Archival Evidence on the Commissioning of Architectural Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire."

[93] A tughra is the official stamp used by sultans, particularly those of the Mamluk and Seljuq eras, and ending with the Ottoman state, see Hanash, *The Theory of Islamic Art: Aesthetic Concepts And Epistemic Structure*. It was first adopted on documents, then its use extended to inscriptions of coins, seals, and even buildings.

[94] Süleyman Berk, "Mustafa Râkım Efendi's Architectural Calligraphy," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 306–25.

[95] Derman, "The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire."

Figure 4-9 *Tughra* of Sultan Mahmud II by Mustafa Râkım, Bâbı Hümâyûn (Imperial Gate), Topkapı Palace. Photograph by Mustafa Yılmaz (Berk 2013)

Another exponent of the school of Râkım is Kâdiasker Mustafa İzzet Efendi (1801–1876). He was not only a reciter of the Qur'an and a *ney* player but also a member of the Naqshbandī Sufi school. He enjoyed the patronage of sultans Mahmud II (reigned 1808–1839) and Abdülmecid (reigned 1839–1861), and his calligraphic works, which are the largest panels of their kind in the Islamic world, are prominently displayed in the Hagia Sophia Mosque (Figure 4-10). In 1915, an institution of great importance, the Medresetü'l-Hattâtîn (Calligraphers' School), was established by the chief religious official of the empire. The teachers who served at this school played a crucial role in transmitting the art of calligraphy to the masters of the masters of present-day tradition, including Hamid Aytaç (Figure 4-11) who was considered the last Ottoman calligrapher and the direct master of some calligraphers interviewed during this research.[96]

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[96] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

Figure 4-10 Two of Mustafa İzzet Efendi's calligraphic panels in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
(Author 2021)

Figure 4-11 Calligraphers in Istanbul (10 June 1932), Hamid Aytaç marked with an arrow
(Cappellari 2017)

### 4.4.1.   Calligraphy and Sufism

Due to its integral role in the preservation and dissemination of the Qurʾan, as well as its ability to enhance the visual prominence of the Arabic language, Islamic calligraphy has served as both a devotional practice and an artistic endeavour. The elevated status of Arabic as the language of divine revelation, coupled with the Qurʾan being the most widely copied book in Arabic, led calligraphers to frequently inscribe scriptures and religious texts. It was most likely the continuous interaction among different disciplinary communities in the medieval Islamic world that contributed to the calligraphers sharing backgrounds with religious specialists such as Qurʾan reciters, scholars of *fiqh* and *Ḥadīth* sciences, as well as Sufism. In fact, many ritual practices of Sufis and calligraphers have overlapped or bore similarities to one another. This is most significantly evident through the rituals associated with formal passing down of calligraphic

tradition which has mirrored the shaykh-disciple relationship and initiation rites in Sufi traditions.[97]

Sufi orders, known as *turuq*, were prevalent throughout the Ottoman Empire and have continued to maintain popularity and influence in the modern Turkish Republic.[98] Many accomplished calligraphy masters and their students were affiliated with various Sufi *turuq*, such as Halvetî, Celvetî, Nakşıbendî, and Mevlevî.[99] In fact, various Sufi orders, such as the Mevleviyya, Naqshabandiyya, and Qadiriyya, played a direct role in advocating for the study of calligraphy and actively contributed to its distinct development.[100] It was rare to find a calligraphy student during the Ottoman times who had no connection, whether direct or indirect, with a *ṭarīqa*. Consequently, the calligraphic tradition in Turkey inherited numerous Sufi concepts, values, and postitions within sufi orders (Figure 4-12), even when practiced by individuals who were not themselves Sufis.[101]

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[97] Manuela Ceballos, "Calligraphy as a Sufi Practice," in *Cultural Fusion of Sufi Islam Alternative Paths to Mystical Faith*, ed. Sarwar Alam (Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 149–60. One particularly significant ritual entails the teacher bestowing upon the student a formal certificate known as *ijāza*. This certificate serves as a testament to the student's proficiency and qualifies them to teach a specific style of calligraphy or a particular calligraphic script.

[98] Kim Shively, "Sufism in Modern Turkey," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 435–48.

[99] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

[100] Ceballos, "Calligraphy as a Sufi Practice."

[101] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition." For more about the relationship between calligraphy and Sufism see Snježana Buzov, "Wall-Less Walls: The Calligraphy at the Hadži Sinanova Tekija in Sarajevo," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 67–82; Annemarie Schimmel, "Calligraphy and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey," in *The Dervish Lodge : Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 242–52.

Figure 4-12 Inscriptions located inside of a part of the dervish lodge (Tekke) of the Mevlevi
order, now the Mevlâna Museum that houses the mausoleum of Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Konya
(Author 2021)

### 4.4.2.   Calligraphy and The Kemalist Radical Reform

Despite the enduring nature of the calligraphic tradition over centuries, it has
encountered significant challenges, especially during the emergence of the Turkish
Republic. In 1924 the Caliphate was abolished, putting an end to centuries of
Ottoman rule.[102] Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938)
which aimed at the modernisation and secularizing of Turkish society, a set of
Kemalist reforms were introduced. These reforms included the rejection of Islamic
law (*Shariʿah*) in favour of European codes, the closure of religious institutions and
dervish lodges (Figure 4-13), and the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin
alphabet.[103]

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[102] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The
Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."
[103] Shively, "Sufism in Modern Turkey."

Figure 4-13 The Kadi Haci Ali Efendi Darul Kurrasi, a Qur'an Madrasah built in 1428, it was closed after the establishment of the republic and turned into health museum, town hall supplement, library and police station, among other things (Author 2021)

The cartoon depicted in (Figure 4-14), which was published in 1926, carries the caption: "Off with you! Go join the ruins of the Monarchy!". The handlebar moustache sported by the depicted figure was likely intended to symbolize outdated and unfashionable 'oriental' grooming, referencing the Arab origins of Arabic script, in contrast to the contemporary clean-shaven Western look.[104] The elimination of the Arabic script had a profound impact on the art of calligraphy. It virtually disappeared along with the usage of the Arabic script in Turkish society. Medresetü'l-Hattâtîn, the renowned calligraphic school, was closed and reopened multiple times with different names and eventually closed permanently in 1936. Many calligraphers lost their jobs, and their artwork was limited to expressing religious sentiments.[105]

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[104] İrvin Cemil Schick, "The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 53/54 (2008): 211–24.
[105] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

Figure 4-14 Cartoon published in 1926 in the humor magazine Akbaba. Reproduced from
Cuneyd Emiroglu (Schick 2008)

Despite these obstacles, Sufi practices and turuq, where calligraphy was still practiced, persisted in underground settings. During the period of one-party Republican rule (1923–1946), many Sufi *turuq* continued their activities in modified forms, with followers spread across various sectors of society.[106] The transmission of calligraphic knowledge, with its long lineage (Figure 4-15), persisted through the direct teaching of masters to their students. Masters who had received their licenses from nineteenth-century calligraphers carried on the tradition by teaching the art using the same tools, media, and textual content. This lineage of master and student continued uninterrupted, ensuring the preservation of calligraphy. The relationship between calligraphers and the state underwent a significant transformation. While calligraphers had previously been patronized by the Ottoman state and held prestigious positions, they found no space in the social life of the Republic. However, the calligraphic tradition persevered in private settings. Sadly, many calligraphers, including Hamid Aytaç, one of the last masters

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[106] Shively, "Sufism in Modern Turkey."

from the Ottoman era, lived in poverty and did not witness the resurgence of Islamic
calligraphy in contemporary Turkey.[107]
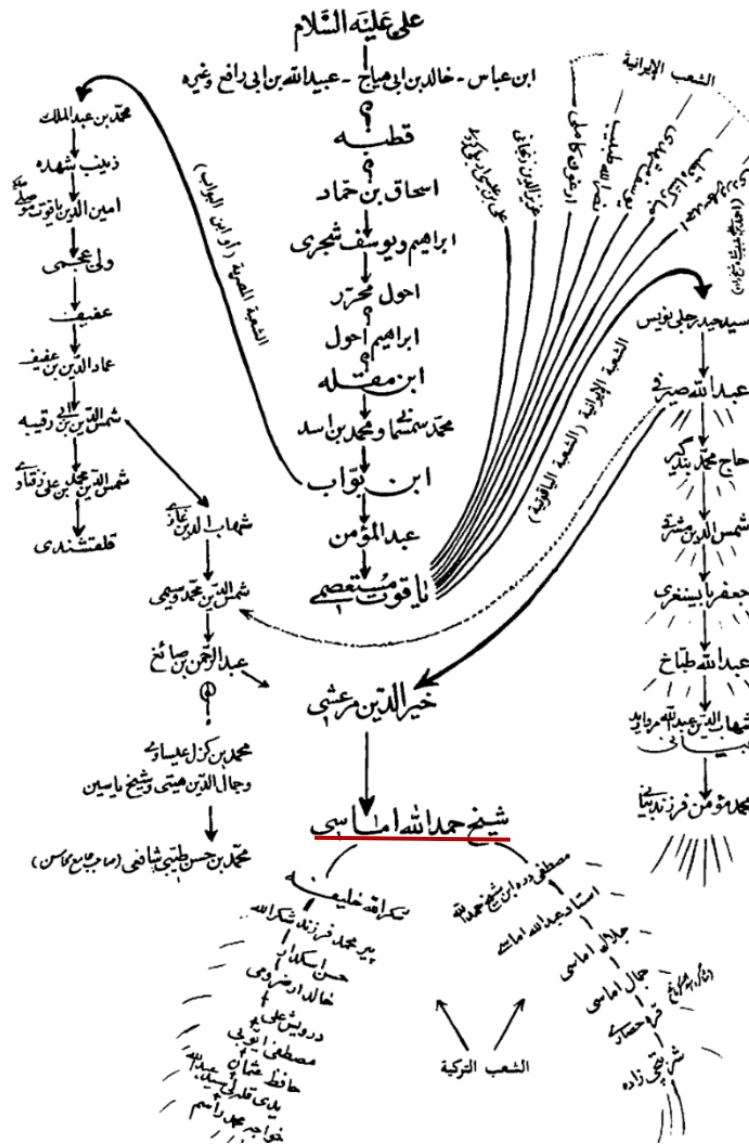


Figure 4-15 Calligraphy Tree showing the cousin of the Prophet (Ali b. abi Talib) at the top,
and the subsequent branching of Turkish, Persian and Egyptian masters and their schools of
calligraphy, Sheyh Hamdullah's name is underlined in red (Anon n.d.)

### 4.4.3.  Calligraphic Practice in Contemporary Turkey

In 1980, the situation of calligraphy in Turkey started to change, especially
with the opening of institutions and schools which stimulated the revival of Islamic

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[107] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The
Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

calligraphy. In particular, the establishment of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), which has been founded not only by the Turkish government but also by the International Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). IRCICA has brought attention back to the Turkish traditional artistic heritage, both nationally and internationally through a number of activities which included organising international competitions attracting an average attendance of hundreds of calligraphers. Additionally, educational institutions have been established, supported by religious endowments, including the Caferağa Medrese (Figure 4-16), the Klasik Sanatlar Merkezi, and the Klasik Türk Sanatları Vakıf.



Figure 4-16 The Caferağa Medrese accommodating classes of traditional calligraphy and handcrafts, Istanbul (Author 2021)

Today traditional calligraphers and their work are receiving appreciation and support from both the government as well as collectors who continued to value calligraphy as well as other arts inherited from the Ottoman period.[108] Contemporary calligraphers have preserved the rich heritage of their art, while also

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[108]  In 2017, a Kurdish calligrapher was awarded for his work by the Turkish president in Istanbul and offered Turkish citizenship. See https://www.rudaw.net/english/culture/050620171

embracing their own creative expressions in the present. Many of them hold positions as *imāms* or have pursued theological studies, while others have gained international recognition as esteemed scholars in the field of art history. Calligraphers like Hüseyin Kutlu, one of the most prominent calligraphers in Turkey and a prominent recipient of the Turkish Presidency's Culture and Arts Award, spent his life advocating for the revival of traditional Islamic-Ottoman arts, unearthing the spiritual aspects of these arts in the struggle of modern life. Kutlu,[109] among other traditional calligraphers interviewed in Turkey during this study, perceive themselves as fundamental components of a living tradition, establishing a profound link between their artistic endeavours and the enduring legacy of esteemed calligraphers from the past.

### 4.5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed to explore the perspectives and practices of Muslims, including scholars, rulers, and calligraphers, regarding Qur'anic epigraphy and its role. The attempt of historical exploration made by this chapter, which can never fully capture the history of Islamic calligraphy, mainly focused on the events and contexts that have influenced the formation, development, and use of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. Examination of Qur'anic epigraphy in religious sources has introduced Qur'anic epigraphy's multifaceted nature, highlighting the aesthetic and decorative aspects of Qur'anic inscriptions, as well as their spiritual and religious significance, symbolizing veneration for the words of God and the sanctity of His houses (mosques). The chapter highlighted the historical and contextual factors that influenced the incorporation of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture. This included urban development, financial resources, and advancements in construction materials during the early history of Islam which

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[109] Kutlu was recently rewarded in 2022 for the "Istanbul Mushaf", a handwritten Qur'an with "*nakkaşhane*" tradition. The seven-year project which involved a team of sixty-six experts with Kutlu was patroned by Turkish president. See
https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/istanbul/istanbul-mushaf-handwritten-Qur'an-tradition-returns-to-the-city.

provided a backdrop for the use of inscriptions and ornamentation. Furthermore, it introduced the objectives theory, or Maqasid al-Qur'an from the field of Qur'anic studies, as a framework for understanding the selection and placement of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. Applying it to the earliest Qur'anic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, the chapter highlighted Qur'anic epigraphy's role in preserving and spreading the faith while administrating the affairs of the state. It showed how the Dome of the Rock, with its inscriptions, aimed to communicate theological discourse, correct doctrinal beliefs, and engage in a moral and aesthetic dialogue with different groups.

Finally, this chapter highlighted the significant role of the Ottoman and Turkish calligraphic tradition in the preservation and evolution of Islamic calligraphy. Istanbul has emerged as a prominent center, attracting skilled calligraphers, and fostering artistic excellence. Renowned calligraphers like Yahya al-Sufi, Sheyh Hamdullah, Ahmed Karahisarî, and Mustafa Râkım Efendi, who developed and refined various calligraphic scripts, made valuable contributions during the Ottoman Empire. Their association, and many other calligraphers, with Sufi orders, has revealed the profound influence of Sufism and religion in general on the practice of calligraphy which has incorporated Sufi concepts, as well as on its preservation during the emergence of the Turkish Republic. Despite the challenges posed on calligraphy during that time which involved the rejection of Islamic heritage and the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, calligraphy continued through underground Sufi practices and direct teaching and transmission system. In recent decades, there has been a revival of Islamic calligraphy in Turkey. This revival has been supported by the establishment of institutions, educational programs, and international competitions, contributing to Turkey's renowned status as a hub for Islamic calligraphy. This is further underscored by its link to the calligraphers involved in the mosques in the West, that were examined within this research.

# CHAPTER 5:        THE ARCHITECTURE AND INSCRIPTIONS OF THREE CONTEMPORARY MOSQUES IN THE WEST

## 5.1. Introduction

Having examined the backdrop of the tradition of inscribing Qur'anic verses on mosques in the previous chapter, from its formation in the early years of Islam to its development throughout the centuries, reaching its peak during the Ottoman times, and then challenges during the period of Kemalist reform, and finally, its resurgence in present-day Turkey, the focus of this chapter shifts to investigating the manifestation of this tradition within the context of contemporary mosques in the West. It specifically focuses on three mosque projects: Cambridge Central Mosque (CCM) in the United Kingdom, Ljubljana Islamic Religious and Culture Center in Slovenia, and Punchbowl Mosque in Australia.

Aiming to contextualize the understanding of Qur'anic epigraphy within its contemporary Western context, this chapter investigates the presence of Muslim communities within their respective countries, encompassing their history, background, and representative institutions and organizations. For each of the studied mosques, it explores the constructions of Islam and the historical development of mosques, especially in the respective cities. Attention is then directed towards the mosque projects themselves, encompassing their architectural design and the incorporation of Qur'anic epigraphy. The chapter discusses the considerations and choices made regarding the selection and placement of these inscriptions within the architecture of each mosque, taking into account the interpretations and meanings of these verses as well as insights gathered from interviews primarily conducted with the architects, calligraphers, and clients involved in these mosque projects. Finally, the chapter reflects on the limitations of the architecture of these mosques in adequately referencing and defining the mosque's image and identity, highlighting the pressing need to (re)define mosque architecture amidst the influences of Western Modernity.

## 5.2. Cambridge Central Mosque in Cambridge, United Kingdom



Figure 5-1 Cambridge Central Mosque (Author 2021)

### 5.2.1.    *"British and Muslim?"*

Until the 19th century, perceptions of Islam within the British society largely relied on the accounts of travellers and missionaries who had encountered Muslim-majority societies. This understanding was often filtered through the lens of Christianity. However, a significant shift occurred in the mid-19th century, when seafarers, recruited for colonial empire steamship routes, began creating boarding houses in key port cities like London, South Shields, Cardiff, and Liverpool. These boarding houses became pivotal in fostering early Muslim community development and facilitating the establishment of the first British mosques, with the earliest recorded example located in Liverpool in 1887.[1]

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[1] Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Islam and Muslims in Britain," *Obo in Islamic Studies*, n.d., https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0244.xml.

The post-World War II era witnessed the recruitment of numerous single men from the Indian subcontinent to aid in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged society. The surge in manufacturing industries and the imperative to stimulate the economy led to a surge in unskilled and semi-skilled job opportunities. Similar to their maritime counterparts, these men shared accommodations and provided mutual employment support. The subsequent arrival of women and extended family members during the 1960s and 1970s marked a transition from temporary male labour migration to enduring family settlement.[2]

In his research on mosques in Britain, Saleem associates mosques of these first-generation migrants with the reconstruction of their traditions and cultures, which have fed concerns about altering the physical landscape of the 'English' suburbia and its 'English' identity.[3] Discussions related to identity remain open and warrant further examination, as will be explored in a subsequent section of this research. However, it is important to provide a brief overview of the term and its use, particularly in relation to the issues surrounding perceptions of mosque art and architecture in current literature.

The concept of identity can be traced back to its origins in Medieval Latin, where the term '*identitatem*' denoted 'sameness.' In the realm of identity politics, Neofotistos defines identity as "a tool to frame political claims, promote political ideologies, or stimulate and orientate social and political action, usually in a larger context of inequality or injustice and with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness and belonging and gaining power and recognition."[4] Within the British Muslim context Kabir referred to identity as the condition of being oneself and 'not another'. He recalled Gilroy's words about the diaspora and identity stating that:

> Identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging
> […] Identity can help us to comprehend the formation of the fateful pronoun 'we'
> and to reckon with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that it cannot help but
> to create. This may be one of the most troubling aspects of all: the fact that the

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Saleem, "The Mosque in Britain Finding Its Place."
[4] Vasiliki Neofotistos, "Identity Politics," in Oxford Bibliographies: Anthropology (Oxford University Press, 2013).

formation of every 'we' must leave out or exclude a 'they', that identities depend on the marking of difference.[5]

British identity, like any other, comprises a complex web of identities and perspectives. When considering the identities of Muslims in Britain, this complexity is further heightened, reflecting diverse realities, factors, and experiences related to social exclusion, foreign policy, and Islamophobia. According to Sardar, cited by Saleem, "there is still a dominant view that Britishness depends on a shared sense of (post)-Christian cultural, racial unity, and imperial history. British Muslims, therefore, have had to think about themselves in reaction to being rejected and constructed as the 'infidel within.'"[6]

An extensive body of scholarly literature and media articles has been dedicated to exploring the concerns held by members of the British population towards British Muslims, with a particular focus on practicing Muslim communities and individuals. These concerns, along with the distinctive character and historical background of British Muslim communities, manifest in the various issues associated with mosques in Britain.[7] Areas with high Muslim populations, where Mosques emerged, attracted more Muslims to the area as a typical mobility pull factor of minority groups. Early generation members of these groups, who were mostly migrants experiencing racism and exclusion were "suspended between a home culture they were disconnected from and in danger of losing, and a host society that excluded them completely."[8] As a result, mosques built by those generations were described as "homesickness mosques", that were built to 'defend' those groups' existence within, in many cases, a hostile or apathetic community.

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[5] Nahid Kabir, "The Identity Debate," in *Young British Muslims* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 6–28.

[6] Humayun Ansari, "The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800," (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2018).

[7] Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jonathan Birt, "A Mosque Too Far? Islam and the Limits of British Multiculturalism," in *Mosques in Europe: Why a Solution Has Become a Problem*, ed. Stefano Allievi (Alliance Publishing Trust, 2010), 135–52.

[8] Saleem, "The Mosque in Britain Finding Its Place."

This "defensive diasporic response" adopted a visibly 'Islamic' style in mosque architecture, which was according to Arafa, nothing but a misinformed historicism.[9]

In most cases, these mosques have caused many concerns to local neighbours. The concerns comprised practical factors including parking facilities, traffic congestion and potential decrease in property value, as well as cultural factors relating to architectural heritage, urban conservation, and the image of the city. However, it is the view of mosque building as a "symbolic appropriation of territory" by a religion that is not British, that was considered "the most fundamental concern [...] which blows any other concerns out of proportion".[10] As time passed, the Muslim population in Britain increased in number, becoming multi-ethnic, highly diverse, and increasingly British-born, creating a pan-Muslim diasporic identity as Saleem describes it.[11] These later generations adopted a more deliberate architecture of Islamic history that has moved away from "the impromptu hybridity of the earlier examples". However, this has fuelled the already established criticism of mosques in Britain as representing a culture incompatible and alien to Britishness.[12]

Studies of British Muslim identities and mosques had all emphasized the striking diversity of Muslims living in Britain, focusing mainly on the Muslim diaspora, while limitedly relating to the identity of English or 'White' Muslim 'converts'. The first opportunity to estimate the approximate number of 'converts' to Islam was through the 2001 Census.[13] Based on Census 2001 and Census 2011, the Muslim Council of Britain recorded that the number of White British Muslims increased from 63,042 to 77,272 between those 10 years.[14] Despite the prevailing assumptions regarding the perceived inaccuracies of these figures, there is a

[9] Waleed Arafa, "The Mosque in Britain: British Heritage?" 2015.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Shahed Saleem, "The Mosque and the Nation," *National Identities* 22, no. 4 (2020): 463–70, doi:10.1080/14608944.2020.1811515.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Birt, "A Mosque Too Far? Islam and the Limits of British Multiculturalism."
[14] Sundas Ali, "British Muslims in Numbers A Demographic, Socio-Economic and Health Profile of Muslims in Britain Drawing on the 2011 Census" (London, 2015).

consensus among scholars and interested organizations that there exists a significant dearth of research concerning the identities of White British converts. This lack of research can be attributed to the perception that this particular group is numerically insignificant and presents challenges in identification when compared to other communities such as Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslim communities.[15]

In 1997, Abdul Hakim Murad, a British convert to Islam and the founder and leader of the Cambridge Central Mosque project, delivered a significant lecture titled "British and Muslim?" to British converts. Through this lecture, later as an article, Murad tried to discuss this British Muslim identity and its related challenges. He describes the so-called 'convert' or 'revert' or 'Anglo-Muslim' community as highly disparate, that no meaningful generalization can apply to it. This is also the case with the rest of the Muslim communities, but in the British convert's case, it is more problematic due to their 'confusing' patterns of conversion that have rarely anything in common.[16] A main observed theme in Murad's lecture on defining the British Muslim convert's identity was his attempt to point out the similarities between Islam and the English mind, values and even temper that according to Murad exemplified in English intellectuals like Henry Stubbe, John Locke and Thomas Carlyle. Britain, Murad argued, was for several hundred years "the home of individuals whose religious and moral temper is very close to that of Islam". He referred to Islam as "the most suitable faith for the British. Its values are our values. Its moderate, undemonstrative style of piety, still waters running deep; its insistence on modesty and a certain reserve, and its insistence on common sense and pragmatism, combine to furnish the most natural and easy religious option for our people".[17]

Through his lecture, Murad also emphasised the universality of Islam that "has consistently nurtured a particularist provincial culture". According to Murad, it is the endless diversity of mosques around the world that reflects such universality

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[15] M. A. Kevin Brice, "An English Muslim in Search of an Identity," in *Englishness: Diversity, Differences & Identity*, ed. Chris Hart (Kingswinford: Midrash Publishing, 2008), 184–93.

[16] AbdalHakim Murad, "British and Muslim?," Based on a Lecture given to a Conference of British Converts on September 17, 1997, 1997, http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/british.htm.

[17] Ibid.

and local particularity. He referred to a mosque in China that looks very similar to traditional Chinese garden temples, with two differences: it has a prayer hall that has no idols and incorporates Qur'anic calligraphy.[18]

### 5.2.2.    The City of Cambridge, its Muslim Community and Mosques

As already mentioned, since the Second World War, the United Kingdom has undergone significant demographic changes due to increased immigration, leading to the establishment of a multicultural society.[19] The city of Cambridge, situated within a university town, exemplifies this transformative trend by demonstrating an exceptionally diverse ethnic makeup within its own Muslim community.[20] However, scholarly investigations concerning the history and mosques of the Muslim community in Cambridge remain scarce. Existing research, albeit limited in number, suggests that this community has maintained a presence within the city for several centuries, primarily as students and academics affiliated with the esteemed university. The inception of the Cambridge Muslim Association can be traced back to its origins as a society based within the university, thereby fostering a unique connection that has played a pivotal role in shaping its global perspective and demographic composition.[21] Parallel to the broader national landscape, the Muslim community in Cambridge has experienced significant growth in terms of population size, representation, and societal influence, thereby becoming an integral component of the city's cultural fabric.

Studies classify mosques in Britain into four types: converted buildings, purpose-built community mosques, Islamic centers, and service mosques (found in airports, prisons, and sports facilities). Converted buildings refer to residential or non-residential buildings repurposed as mosques, often called house mosques.[22]

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir, "Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain: Policy, Law and Theory," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2018): 1_21, doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2017.1398443.

[20] Timothy Insoll, "The Cambridge Mosque and Muslim Community," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, no. 150 (2001): 127–32.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Arafa, "The Mosque in Britain: British Heritage?"

Cambridge's early Muslim prayers were held in converted buildings, first in the City Guildhall and later in a Victorian terraced house. The Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Islamic Centre on Mawson Road (Figure 5-2) was similarly established by converting a Gospel Hall into a mosque.[23]



Figure 5-2 Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Islamic Centre, Cambridge (Insoll 2001)

Before the Cambridge Mosque was established, there was no (purpose-built) mosque specifically constructed to meet the needs of the Muslim community in Cambridge. Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Mosque, along with three other converted mosques in Cambridge, namely Omar Al Farouk Mosque, Shah Jalal Mosque, and al-Ikhlāṣ Mosque, has faced various issues. These include the lack of separate praying spaces for men and women, improper alignment with the *qiblah*, and inadequate ablution areas.[24] Additionally, most of these mosques, like others in Britain, are associated with specific themes related to certain sects or ethnic groups, making them in some ways exclusive in nature.

### 5.2.3.   *A Mosque Design Based on Universal Principles*

In 2008, the Muslim Academic Trust decided to put a bid for land at Mill Road, as a key step forward for the Cambridge Muslim community to have their first purpose-built mosque within Cambridge city.[25] The trustees of the Muslim

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[23] Insoll, "The Cambridge Mosque and Muslim Community."
[24] Ibid.
[25] AlAnsaar, "Cambridge New Mosque Project Update - by Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad," 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOd9yFVX74U.

Academic Trust charity behind this project are two English converts to Islam. These are Yusuf Islam (a British singer-songwriter previously known as Cat Stevens) and the previously mentioned Abdul Hakim Murad (an academic, theologian and Islamic scholar also known as Timothy Winter).[26]

Evident from his initial lecture in 1997 and his subsequent writings on Muslim culture, Murad consistently maintained a distinct perception, yet without a precise portrayal, of the role and significance of mosques within Islamic culture. In a long essay entitled '*What is a mosque?*' on Cambridge Central mosque's website, which is meant to reflect the mosque's vision, Murad presented his thoughts about the mosque's nature and function. Starting from the Arabic name for a mosque as a *jāmiʿ* which he translated as "that which includes", Murad presented the mosque's aspects of inclusivity as well as diversity. He elaborated on those two points throughout the interview, stating:

> Islam has a strong Abrahamic and primordial dimension, emerging in a place with no architectural culture, so mosques have historically varied to suit local cultures' manner of perceiving the sacred. So, it is a universalism expressed in diversity, which nonetheless points back to the principle that diversity indicates its divine source.[27]

According to Murad, any mosque is an extension of the *Kaʿbah*, and its *miḥrāb* is Marian (relating to Virgin Mary). The *miḥrāb* is often "surmounted by a Qur'anic verse (Q 3:37) evoking the Virgin Mary's devotion in her own niche *miḥrāb",* Murad explained.

As an English Muslim convert, who had long suffered from sectarianism and ethnically specific mosques in Britain, Murad wanted a mosque that is *Jamiʿ* or universal[28] in the literal sense of the word, that welcomes and brings together every Muslim and non-Muslim, men and women of all ages and ethnicities. According to

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[26] Saleem, "The Mosque in Britain Finding Its Place."

[27] A.H. Murad, Email interview, January 31, 2021.

[28] For more about the definition of the term universal in the context of this thesis, and the context of Islamic art in general, see Noha Hussein and Mohamed Abdelmonem, "A Universal Art: The Qur'anic Inscriptions of Cambridge Central Mosque," in *The Mosque: A Cross-Cultural Building*, ed. Mashary A. Al Naim et al. (Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture and College of Architecture at Kuwait University, 2020), 207–22.

Murad, in a meeting held with the Cambridge Muslim community in 2017, Cambridge Mosque intends to make a very positive grand statement about Islam among non-Muslims in a city like Cambridge with its magnificent architecture, like St Mary's church, Trinity College and King's College Chapel. He also emphasised the intention, *niyyah,* upon which the mosque is built, which includes sincerity, piety and reliance on *Allah* 'God'. According to Murad, this is "the unshakable rock on which this building will be built".[29]

In 2010, an international design competition was held, and eleven design proposals were submitted for Cambridge Central Mosque. A jury was created, and four designs were chosen for a later meeting, where the Muslim community, as well as local residents, were consulted. Marks Barfield Architects' design won the competition. According to Murad, it was "the design that everybody liked the most".[30]  Marks Barfield Architects is led by the prominent architect David Marks and his partner Julia Barfield, two architects who designed avant-garde structures such as the London Eye. They also designed the first Islamic school in London with Yusuf Islam,[31] who invited them to the mosque design competition.[32] Marks Barfield Architects work across many sectors. They, according to Julia Barfield, don't follow a certain style through all their projects. Instead, they respond specifically to each project with solutions tailored to the client's needs and aspirations. However, what could be considered common among all their projects is their attempt to design projects which are as sustainable as possible in the widest sense, i.e., environmentally, socially and economically.[33]

The mosque design brief called for a mosque that would accommodate 1000 congregants, both men and women, announcing Islam's presence in Cambridge as both a spiritual and cultural asset for the wider community, including Muslims. Embracing universal principles, the mosque should be sustainable, socially and

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[29] Millroadtv, "Abdal Hakim Murad Talks about The Cambridge Mosque Project," 2017.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Saleem, "The Mosque in Britain Finding Its Place."
[32]J. Barfield, Video interview, October 13, 2021.
[33] Julia Barfield, "Julia Barfield's Presentation at GAGA 2019" (GAGA Awards, 2019), https://vimeopro.com/galvanizers/gaga-awards/video/402573492.

architecturally integrated into the wider local community and respectful of the surrounding built environment.[34] Murad insisted that they didn't want a "barn with a dome," but a piece of contemporary yet sacred architecture, which the brief described as "may require a totally different appreciation from that of modern architecture, one that is not necessarily centred on architecture as the work of the individual, but […] on the architect's particular expression of a universal principle".[35]

While trying to *"work out what it means to have an English mosque"* based on universal principles,[36] the architects tried to synthesize the application of geometry, nature and forms inspired by both English and Islamic heritage in the mosque design. The Gothic fan vaulting in King's College Chapel in Cambridge (Figure 5-3), the transition from column to roof in the Chapter House at Westminster Abbey England, the early Islamic Mosque of Juma Khiva in Uzbekistan, and the Cordoba Mosque in Spain have all inspired a mosque design of a calm oasis or grove of trees made of timber columns. The link between the local and the Islamic, according to Marks Barfield Architects, was expressed through the natural world as its point of connection.[37]

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[34] Amanda Kristine Skadberg, "Marks Barfield Architects 'Cambridge Mosque,'" 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLdSvP1u2_I.
[35] Rob Wilson, "Defining the English Mosque: Marks Barfield's Cambridge Central Mosque," Architects Journal, 2019, https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/defining-the-english-mosque-marks-barfields-cambridge-central-mosque.
[36] David Marks words as they appear in Marks Barfield website https://marksbarfield.com/projects/cambridge-mosque/
[37] Skadberg, "Marks Barfield Architects 'Cambridge Mosque.'"

Figure 5-3 The Gothic fan vaulting in King's College Chapel, Cambridge (Author 2021)

An expert in sacred architecture and Islamic geometry, Keith Critchlow, was contacted in a very early stage of the design. He worked closely with the design team, proposing a guiding geometric pattern known as "the breath of the compassionate" (Figure 5-4), based on octagons and symbolizing the rhythm of life. These developed patterns provided "an abstract sacred ordering device for the architecture reworked for a contemporary context" (Figure 5-5).[38] Emma Clark, a garden designer, specializing in the design and symbolism of Islamic Gardens, was also part of the team, working with landscape designer Urquhart & Hunt. They designed an Islamic Garden with a water fountain, referencing Paradise in Islamic tradition. It is publicly accessible for contemplation and rest, providing a welcoming environment "encouraging community engagement and involvement".[39]

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[38] Wilson, "Defining the English Mosque: Marks Barfield's Cambridge Central Mosque."
[39] Skadberg, "Marks Barfield Architects 'Cambridge Mosque.'"
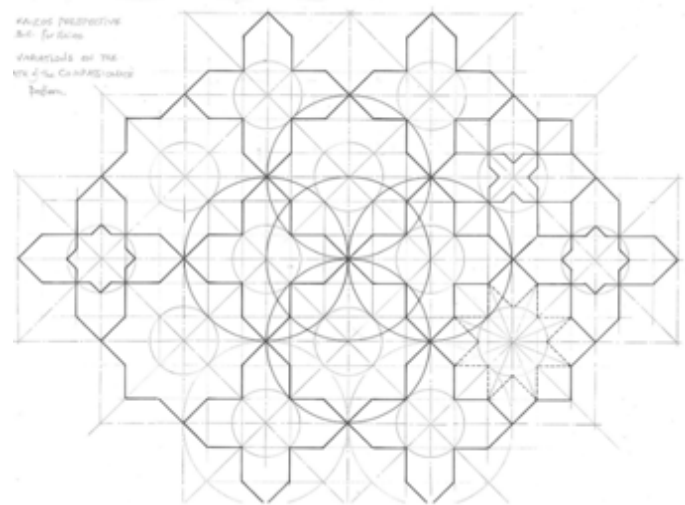
Figure 5-4 The Breath of the Compassionate Pattern by Keith Critchlow (Marks Barfield 2020)
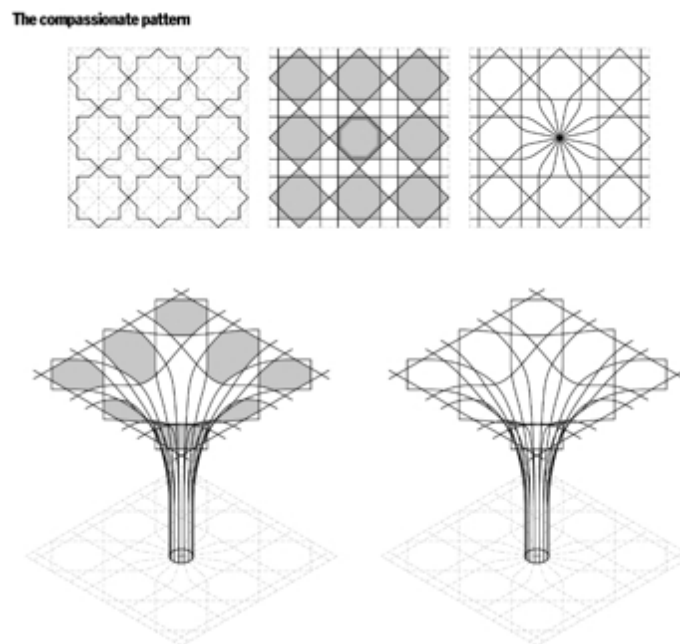


Figure 5-5 Diagrams illustrating the progression from the Breath of the Compassionate pattern into the vaulted 3D form (Marks Barfield 2020)

The mosque is located in a traditionally working-class neighbourhood in Cambridge. It is primarily residential with two to two-and-a-half stories buildings. The character appraisal showed a few typical building features and details of mainly nineteenth and twentieth centuries Terrace housing with facades of polychromatic brickwork, mainly yellow or white quartz brick enlivened with distinctive use of

red bricks.[40] This inspired the mosque's external wall designs, which are made of cross-laminated timber, cladded in brick tiles of these traditional Cambridge Gault and red brick colours they intend to "reflect the residential architecture of the surrounding".[41] The brick pattern forms *Kufic* calligraphy inscriptions, which are also incorporated in the mosque's portico and atrium. The architects' non-denominational design, which according to Julia Barfield, was very respectful of its area, only rose with the massing of the building deep into the site. The highest feature of the building is its dome, seven and a half meters in diameter and reaching sixteen meters above the ground. It is centred at a point 70 m back from the main road frontage. Looking from the main road (Figure 5-6), only the upper part of the dome is visible to passers-by.[42] This, in fact, responds to one of the local community's concerns towards the size of a golden dome that might be an overly provocative statement.[43]



Figure 5-6 The front view of Cambridge Central Mosque from the main road (Author 2021)

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Barfield, "Julia Barfield's Presentation at GAGA 2019."

[43] It appeared in one of the community representations objecting the mosque proposal discussed through planning committee meeting on the 22nd of August 2012, which can be accessed through https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk

Upon examining the architectural plan of the mosque (Figure 5-7), one would notice a small community garden that sits at the front of the mosque site facing Mill Road. The site then extends northwards, creating a series of spaces from the main south entrance to the prayer hall. Passing through the railings beyond the community garden and through the 'Islamic' garden designed by Clarks, one reaches the 'lofty' entrance to the mosque with a rectangular calligraphic panel. This leads to a portico with a glazed wall that fronts a square-set atrium before the lobby leading to the prayer hall of the mosque. The prayer hall is also square-set but twisted on the plan to face Mecca on its eastern side. The mosque also incorporates a car park in an underground basement,[44] responding to one of the most common concerns of communities living around mosques in the UK.



Figure 5-7 Ground floor plan of Cambridge central mosque (Marks Barfield 2020)

Marks Barfield also designed the mosque to be highly sustainable, with a low carbon footprint and high reliance on green energy. The most promoted sustainable feature of the mosque is its timber structure, which is, as a matter of fact, not completely unique. The Nine Bridges Golf Club House in South Korea, which was

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[44] Wilson, "Defining the English Mosque: Marks Barfield's Cambridge Central Mosque."

designed by Shigeru Ban and Kaci Architects and completed in 2009, has a distinguishably similar structure.[45] This similarity of outlook and structure between a Mosque in Britain and a clubhouse in Seoul (Figure 5-8) prompts contemplation regarding the notion of universality. In essence, it triggers inquiries that delve into the boundaries of universal design principles. Central to this exploration is a pivotal question: how can such a 'universal' design distinguish itself as a mosque from a clubhouse constructed on the opposite side of the globe, while still providing the whole diverse Muslim community with a sense of identity and belonging?



Figure 5-8 The atrium of Cambridge Central Mosque (left) (Author 2021). (On the right) The Nine Bridges Golf Club House in South Korea. Photograph by Hiroyuki Hirai (right) (Archnet 2014)

### 5.2.4.  *Qur'anic Epigraphy of Cambridge Central Mosque*

There are three types of Qur'anic epigraphy designed for Cambridge central mosque. These are:

- The exterior, portico, and atrium simple (*Kufic*) inscriptions,
- The fascia (monumental *Kufic*) inscription,
- and the prayer hall (*Jeli Thuluth*) inscriptions.

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[45] H. Derya Arslan, "Ecological Design Approaches in Mosque Architecture," *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 10, no. 12 (2019): 1374–77.

*The Exterior, Portico and Atrium Simple (Kufic) Inscriptions*

*'Say, 'He is God the One (Q 112:1)*

When the mosque was first opened in 2019, the mosque featured solely *Kufic* inscriptions that were set out by the brickwork on the mosque's exterior façade, portico, and atrium. Soraya Syed, a traditionally trained calligrapher, artist, and filmmaker who is based in London, was invited as an independent consultant to Keith Critchlow and Marks Barfield Architects in order to design the *Kufic* inscriptions embedded within the brickwork. The design (Figure 5-9) incorporates two geometric modules (A & B) within a diamond-like pattern. The main module (A) constitutes four submodules each spelling out the Qur'anic verse 'Say, 'He is God the One'' (Q 112:1), grouped and rotated creating a central diamond with the word '*Allah'* in simple *Kufic* rotating four times around its centre. The submodules were also used separately in areas on the wall that are too small for the main module. The *Kufic* script is the oldest type of script that prevailed in the mosques of the early Islamic centuries. Inspirations for the *Kufic* bricks in Cambridge Central Mosque can be seen in the Gar minaret and mosque in Iran (Figure 5-10). The method for installing this brickwork was inspired by a historic construction method used widely in East Anglia in the United Kingdom, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where mathematical tiles were installed on timber-frame structures.[46] According to Murad, the choice of the verse indicated "the Divine unity, being the essential principle of a Muslim sacred structure" (Figure 5-11).[47]

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[46] Skadberg, "Marks Barfield Architects 'Cambridge Mosque.'"
[47] A.H. Murad, Email interview, January 31, 2021.
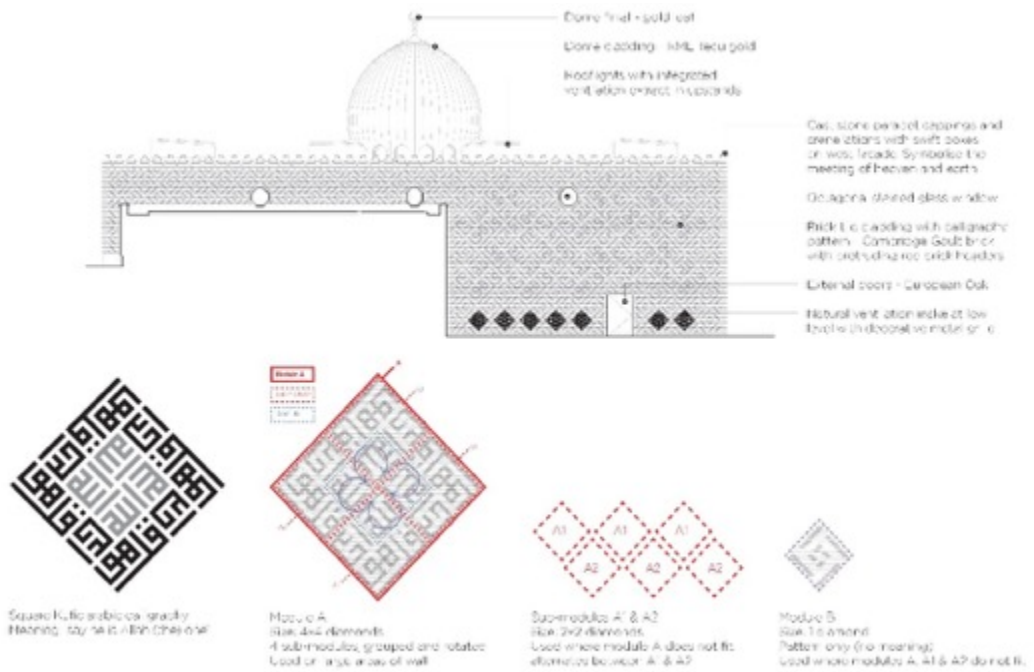
Figure 5-9 Cambridge Central Mosque brick design modules (Marks Barfield 2019)



Figure 5-10 Inspirations for Cambridge Kufic Brickwork from Gar Mosque in Iran.
http://www.kufic.info/architecture/gar/gar.htm
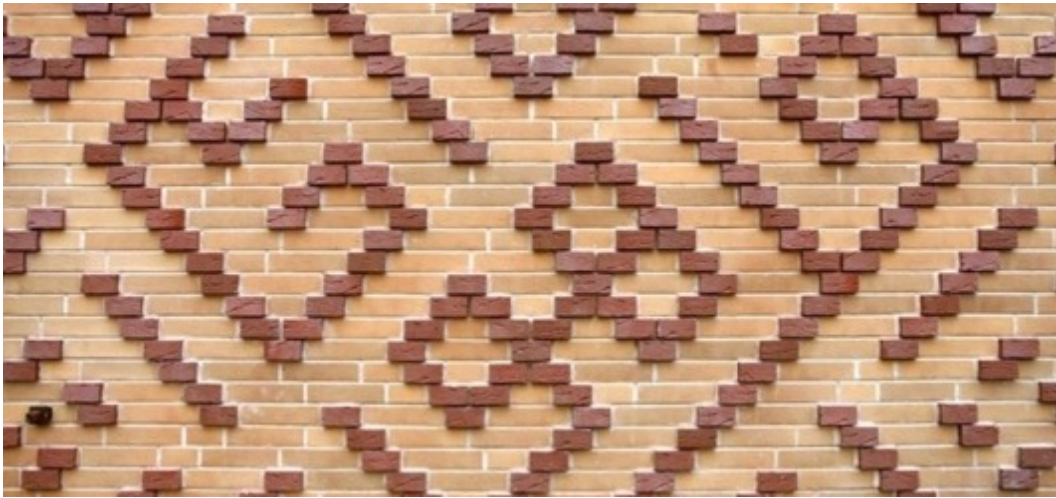
Figure 5-11 Cambridge Central Mosque brickwork reading 'Say, "He is God the One"' (Q 112:1) source: https://cambridgecentralmosque.org/

*The Fascia (Monumental Kufic) Inscriptions*

*I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me. (Q 20:14)*

The fascia, as well as the prayer hall, inscriptions were installed almost a year after the mosque opening in 2019. The Qur'anic verse on the fascia, (Q 20:14), was rendered in gold over a brown ground, visible to passers-by. The choice of the verse and the type of script of the fascia inscription were made by Abdul Hakim Murad himself. He wanted "something that would suit a major building but maintain a certain discretion about the building's Islamic identity to casual passers-by".[48] According to Murad, the Qur'anic epigraphy on the fascia should reference a theme that is also present in the Bible. Explaining his choice, Murad added:

> The text is God's words to Moses spoken from the 'Burning Bush'. 'Truly I, I am God, there is no deity but Me, so establish the Prayer to remember Me'. The text was chosen because (1) the mosque is informally known as 'Masjid al-Tawḥīd,' (2) the monotheistic principle is common to Cambridge's three Abrahamic religions, and is not divisive, (3) the verse indicates the presence of a holy place in virgin nature, (4) it references Moses, again a figure recognized by the three Abrahamic religions. So, the verse is welcoming to local people, is uncontroversial, and indicates Islam's belongingness to the monotheistic narrative which already exists in the UK.[49]

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[48] A.H. Murad, Email interview, February 05, 2021.
[49] Ibid.

The inscription was transcribed by the Turkish calligrapher Hüseyin Kutlu, who is based in Turkey. Kutlu was chosen for the project by the trustees for "his extensive track record in working in mosques".[50] He transcribed Qur'anic verses for several mosques around the world, such as the United States, Japan, Chechnya, Germany, Russia, as well as Turkey.[51]

*The Prayer Hall Inscriptions*

The prayer hall includes inscriptions on all its four walls, as well as on the *miḥrāb, minbar,* and women's prayer area on the mezzanine level. The inscriptions are presented and numbered, starting from the main hall *qiblah* wall (South-East wall) in an anti-clockwise direction.

Main Hall SE Wall Inscriptions:

*Panel 1: In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy! Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, Master of the Day of Judgement. It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path, (Q 1:1-6)*

*Panel 2: the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray. (Q 1:6-7) Allah Almighty is Truthful.*
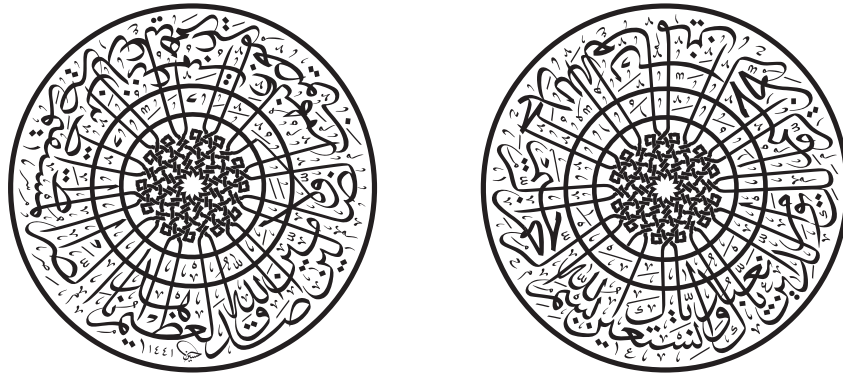


Main Hall NE Wall Inscriptions:

[50] A.H. Murad, Email interview, January 31, 2021
[51] Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition."

*Panel 3: And Do good to others as God has done good to you. (Part of Q 28:77)*

*Panel 4: In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet], and remove the burden, that weighed so heavily on your back, and raise your reputation high? 5 So truly where there is hardship there is also ease; truly where there is hardship there is also ease. The moment you are freed [of one task] work on, and turn to your Lord for everything. (Q 94:1-8)*

*Panel 5: that man will only have what he has worked towards. (Q 53:39*



Main Hall NW Wall Inscriptions:

*Panel 6: Allah the most high said: In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him. (Part of Q 49:13)*

*Panel 7: Allah the most high said: So remember Me; I will remember you. (part of Q 2:152)*

*\*Panel 11[52]: The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Mecca. It is a blessed place; a source of guidance for all people. (Q 3:96)*

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[52] A framed original tapestry which formerly hung upon the Holy *Kaʾbah* in Mecca as part of the *Kiswah*, gifted by Turkish engineering firm Yapı Merkezi and its CEO, Ersin Arıoğlu.
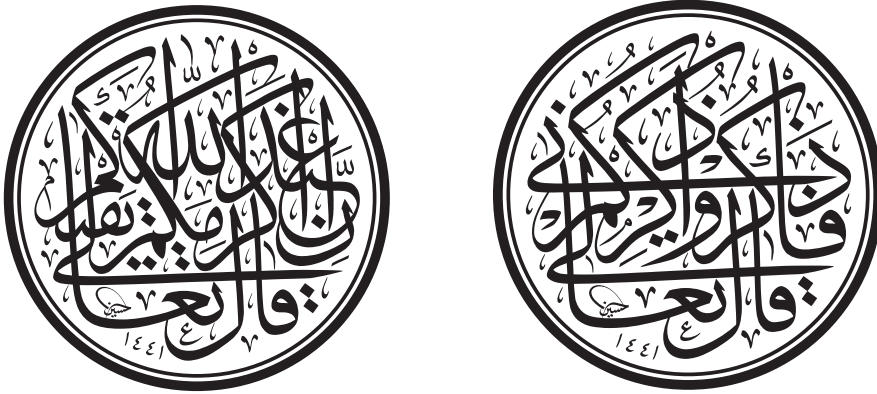
Main Hall SW Wall Inscriptions:

*Panel 8: It is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of God. (Part of Q35:28)*

*Panel 9: In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, Say, 'He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him. (Q 112:1-4)*

*Panel 10: Glory be to God, the best of creators. (Part of Q:23:14)*
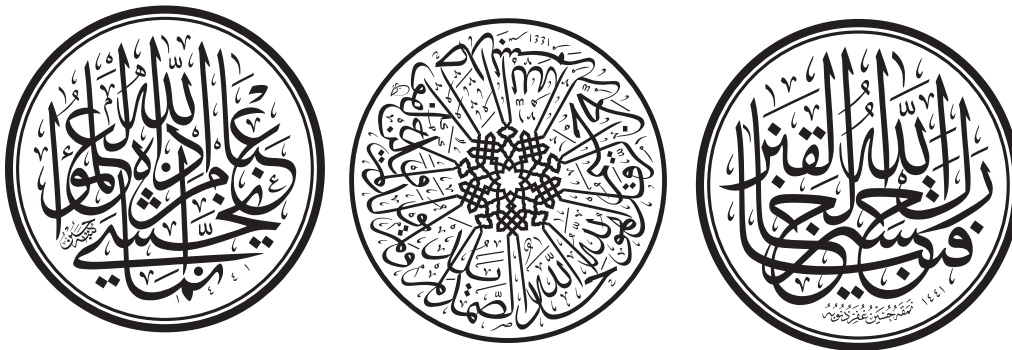
The *Miḥrāb*

*The linear border frame: Allah the most high said in His book: In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy: God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it– light upon light– God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge*

*of everything. Shining out in houses of worship. God has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His glory, morning and evening. (Q 24:35-36)*

*The circular panel: There is no god but Allah, Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah.*

*Rectangular panel: Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (Part of Q 2:144)*
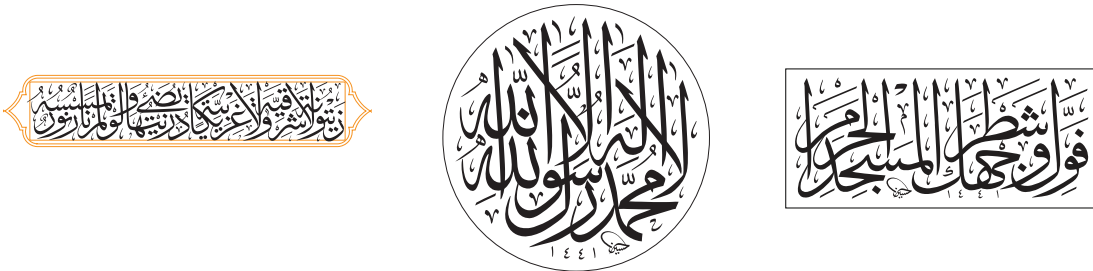
The *Minbar*

*Circular Panel: mirrored 'Huwa'[53]*

Women Prayer Mezzanine (Barakah Khan)

*Smaller copies of panels 3, 5, 8, and 10*

### 5.2.5.   Reflections on the Choices and Interpretations of the Mosque Qur'anic Inscriptions

The core objective of Cambridge Central Mosque revolved around fostering inclusivity for all individuals. In alignment with this aspiration, the committee opted to abstain from incorporating any elements on the walls that could potentially evoke feelings of exclusion within specific groups. This was particularly significant in

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[53] A mirrored *Huwa* (translated He [is]) is a theme displayed in numerous Ottoman mosques. It expresses a unique Sufi practice of meditation, in which the practitioner chants the pronoun *Huwa* in a rhythmic way, "emphasising the total and complete transcendence of God, Who can be better described in His Essence with no attributes – or beyond all attributes – and Who can be indicated in that way with the third person pronoun only" Cappellari, "The Spiritual In Islamic Calligraphy: A Phenomenological Approach To The Contemporary Turkish Calligraphic Tradition.".

regard to what Murad characterized as 'certain sectarian symbols,' which possessed an inherent potential to project an ethnicity-specific identity, consequently engendering discomfort among certain members of the Muslim community.[54] Alternatively, the Mosque committee wanted an inclusive building, with a 'sufficiently evident' yet beautiful Islamic identity.[55] For them, this meant that only Arabic copies of the Qur'an were made present on the mosque shelves, and only Qur'anic calligraphy was inscribed on the walls.

The Qur'anic epigraphy of Cambridge Mosque conveys a multitude of perceptions that are derived not solely from the intentions of the artist, calligrapher, or the community driving the project. Rather, these perceptions also draw from the intrinsic meanings embedded within the Qur'anic verses themselves, encompassing their form, content, and placement within the architecture of the mosque. Based on Irene Bierman's concept of 'Public text', one can see that the message of Divine unity or *Tawḥīd*: *'Say, He is God the One'* was chosen and inscribed through brickwork on the mosque exterior facades, in order to be conveyed as a public message of Cambridge central mosque, or '*Masjid al-Tawḥīd*' as it is informally known to be.[56] Murad and the architect tried to choose a mode of writing, through the brickwork, relatively familiar to the urban context to include every group of audience, either through the message content for the Muslim audience or through its familiar form for the local residents. Similarly, the fascia inscription, visible from the public community garden and semi-public Islamic Garden, emphasizes the message of Divine unity: *'I am God; there is no god but Me'*. It also addresses the practical implications of Divine unity related to the function of the mosque, which is worship, remembrance, and prayer to the only God.

Written in what looks like Fatimid *Kufic*, the public message conveyed by the Qur'anic epigraphy possesses a pronounced inclusivity. It appeals not solely to the sensibilities of many Muslims who comprehend and resonate with its essence, but

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[54] Ramadan FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad," 2020, https://youtu.be/_x0mleDj7eE.

[55] A.H. Murad, Email interview, January 31, 2021.

[56] The inscribed verse is the first verse of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*, which is also called Sūrat al-Tawḥīd, See al-tahīr Ibn-Ashūr, *tafsīr al-tahrīr wal tanwīr* (Tunis: Dar Al Tuniseya for publishing, 1984).

also to non-Muslim observers who find familiarity within its distinctive form. This is emphasized by the fact that the *Kufic* inscription on the fascia echoes the style of scripts known as pseudo-*Kufic*, which had been employed ornamentally in Western Christendom during the Middle Ages.[57] The chosen verse itself carries profound significance as presents God's words to Moses, thereby recalling the story of an important figure in both Islam and Christianity. As both a Qur'anic and biblical character, Moses is considered a prophet in the succession of messengers sent by God.[58] This reflects Murad's wish to include Christian neighbours from the outset and to show them, as he described, that Islam is the inclusive religion that is part of the same Abrahamic family, and that Muslims believe in their prophets who share the same commandments.[59]

On account of the architects' inconsiderable knowledge of Arabic and the depth of the nuances of the religion, as Julia Barfield has expressed, they found themselves taking the lead, regarding calligraphy from their client, whom they considered an expert.[60] The interviews with Soraya Syed, Julia Barfield, Shaheda Rahman (a Cambridge Central Mosque Trustee), and Hüseyin Kutlu have all revealed the role the funding had in Hüseyin Kutlu's participation in the project. Through most of his previous mosque projects, Kutlu worked with the mosque architects since the early stages of design, thereby decisions regarding mosque calligraphy were considered in advance, and architecture developed accordingly.[61] This didn't seem to be the case in Cambridge Central Mosque. Unlike Critchlow and Soraya Syed, Kutlu was contacted at a late stage of the mosque design and construction, apparently when the funding from Turkey poured into the project.[62]

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[57] Pseudo-*Kufic* or *Kufesque* or *pseudo-inscriptions* was a result of the interaction between the Islamic world and Latin West during the Middle during cross-cultural exchange, which became significant during Abbasid period. For more see Ennio G. Napolitano, 'Arabic Inscriptions and Pseudo-Inscriptions in Italian Art' (Fakultät Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften: Abschlussarbeiten, 2018).

[58] C. Umhau Wolf, "Moses in Christian and Islamic Tradition," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 27, no. 2 (1959): 102–8, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1459969.

[59] FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad."

[60] J. Barfield, Video interview, October 13, 2021.

[61] H. Kutlu, Videocall interview, January 24, 2021.

[62] Kutlu's involvement was offered as a component of the Turkish contribution to the mosque project.

However, while the influence of funding on the selection of the calligrapher is noteworthy, it would be challenging to attribute the design philosophy and calligraphy choice to a solitary factor. Irrespective of the calligrapher chosen, Murad consistently emphasized that:

> We wanted to choose some of the Qur'an verses that are […] about creation, and about care for the creation. One of the beautiful things about the Qur'an is that it is the book of creation and inferring the reality and the power, […] the mercy of the Creator from the signs of Allah in creation.[63]

Accordingly, the verses were selected by the calligrapher and samples of inscriptions from previous mosque projects were sent for a final selection. Chosen verses were then adjusted according to mosque architecture in terms of ratio and design. As Cambridge city is known for its university, a verse (Q 35:28) about knowledge and scholars was included and repeated in a smaller-sized panel in the women's prayer area. The other verses included themes about benevolence, piety, *Tawḥīd* 'God's unity' and remembrance of God.

The *miḥrāb* and the calligraphy on the *qiblah* wall appeared to be the elements that Kutlu deliberately selected (Figure 5-12). The two circular panels at the sides of the *miḥrāb* encompass '*Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*,' The Opening or The Opener chapter. According to Abdul Haleem, this chapter is "very important in Islamic worship" since it is a pillar and an obligatory part of the daily prayer, which is repeated several times during the day.[64] Moving to the *miḥrāb*, the middle circular panel contains the '*shahādah*', the Islamic creed or the Islamic confession of faith: "*There is no god but Allah, Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah*". In Islamic tradition, it is also known as *al-Kalimah al-Ṭayyibah* (The good/virtuous word), for it is the formulation of *Tawḥīd* or Divine Unity.[65] It is considered the first pillar of Islam and another expression of its core message emphasized through the mosque calligraphic program.

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[63] FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad."
[64] AbdelHaleem, The Qur'an : A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.
[65] Musahadi, "The Dimension Of Tawḥīd In The Development Of Islamic Law Institution: Qur'anic Exegesis Perspective," *Al-Ahkam* 27, no. 2 (2017): 179–94.

Figure 5-12 The Qiblah wall showing the miḥrāb inscriptions, the minbar and the two panels on their right and left encompassing Sūrat al-Fātiḥah (Author 2022)

Underneath it lies a rectangular panel, located in the middle of the *miḥrāb*, holding part of verse 144: '*Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque'.* Through this verse God has commanded the prophet, as well as the believers, to change the direction of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to the *Kaʿbah*, which is located in the middle of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. Commenting on this verse, Ibn Ashūr recalls Fakhr el-Dīn al-Rāzī's words about the human rational and imaginative powers. If a person wants to evoke a rational, abstract entity, he will have to assign a sensible image that would help him perceive those rational meanings. In the case of prayer, where a man faces the *qiblah*, according to al-Rāzī, it resembles a servant in the presence of his King, where the servant faces his Lord (i.e., through facing the *qiblah*), praises Him (through reciting the Qur'an), and serves Him (through prayer).[66]

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[66] This matches the tradition of the prophet about benevolence in Islam, where benevolence is described as: 'worshipping God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then He will see you'. Ibn-Ashur, *Tafsir Al Tahrir Wal Tanweer*.

Around the borders of the *miḥrāb*, two verses from chapter 24 in the Qur'an are inscribed: verses 35 and 36. Verse 35 is widely known as the Light verse (*Āyat al-Nūr),* taking its name from its chapter, *Sūrat al-Nūr*. According to Böwering, the Light verse is a simile that has remarkable imagery conveyed through its keywords.[67] The main lines about this verse in traditional Muslim exegesis of the Qur'an, noted by al-Ṭabarī, describe God as the light of the heavens and the earth in three ways. First as a guide for the inhabitants of heaven and earth, second as the world's ruler who adorns the cosmos with light by day and night, and third as the one who illuminates the hearts of believers.[68] After comparing the believer's heart to a lamp lit with good oil shining in a clear glass, the next verse 36 goes on to mention where it belongs, which is in the mosques, Allah's most beloved places on earth. According to Ibn-Kathīr, these are God's houses where He is worshipped, remembered, and glorified in the mornings and evenings.[69] The verses' association with the knowledge of God and their relation to the mosque has made them a common verse inscribed in mosques' architectural elements, including the *miḥrāb*, which according to R. Hillenbrand, has been repeatedly listed in relation to several historical mosques.[70]

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[67] Gerhard Böwering, "The Light Verse: Qurʾānic Text and Sūfī Interpretation," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 113–44, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1580478.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibn-Kathir, "Tafsir Ibn Kathir in English," *Tafsir Surat Al-Nur*, accessed March 14, 2021, http://www.Qur'anwebsite.com/tafsir ibn kathir/ibn_024_al_noor.html.
[70] Robert Hillenbrand, "Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture," *Mélanges Dominique Sourdel*, Ed.L.Kalus: Revue Des Etudes Islamiques LIV (1989).

## 5.3. Punchbowl Mosque in Sydney, Australia



Figure 5-13  Punchbowl Mosque (Rory Gardiner 2017)

### 5.3.1.    Contextual Understanding of Islam and Muslims in Australia

Awaiting the release of the most recent Australian census data from 2021, the latest count of self-identified Muslims in Australia, as known since the 2016 Census, is 604,240. This represents 2.6% of the total Australian population, signifying a remarkable surge of over 18% compared to the preceding population census of 2011, making Islam the second largest religion in Australia after Christianity.[71] While these statistics hold significance for researchers studying Islam and the Muslim communities in Australia, they alone fall short of fully contextualizing the underlying dynamics that drive these numerical expansions.

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[71] Riaz Hassan et al., "Australian Muslims: The Challenge Of Islamophobia And Social Distance" (Adelaide, South Australia, 2018), www.unisa.edu.au/Research/International-Centrefor-%0DMuslim-and-non-Muslim-Understanding/.

The trajectory of Islam's expansion within Australia's demographic landscape runs parallel to a concurrent rise in Australians identifying as having no religious affiliation—an increase of 22%—now comprising a third of the total population. Conversely, there has been a decline of 9% in Christian affiliation since 2011, currently accounting for 52%.[72] These shifts are notably shaped by diverse population movements and cultural exchanges across Australia. These trace back to the time of European colonisation, during which Christianity's dominance reached a pinnacle at 88% in 1966. Subsequently, the relaxation of Australia's immigration policies around the same period brought about a gradual shift, with an influx of migrants from non-European countries introducing religious variations. By the time of the 2016 Census, it was noted that nearly half of those who moved to Australia had an affiliation with a Christian religion (47%), while there were more Australian-born reporting no religion (34%) compared to those born overseas (27%).[73] The semantics and significance of these numbers will show later throughout the chapter to help resolve the cultural dynamics around constructing mosques in Australia.

According to historical and geographical studies, the interactions between Muslims and Australia trace back as early as the 1750s, when Indonesian Muslims migrated seasonally for fishing. As the Europeans arrived in the nineteenth century and the colony grew, Afghan Muslims arrived as economic migrants working as cameleers, helping with the early infrastructure of Australia. They, along with Indians who worked as farmers and hawkers, and Malays who worked in the pearl industry, constituted the early Muslim settlers. Subsequently, during the 1920s, Albanian Muslims joined the demographic landscape, primarily finding employment in the agricultural sector.[74]

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[72] "2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016," *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed March 3, 2022, https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by Subject/2071.0~2016~Main Features~Religion Data Summahry~70.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Halim Rane et al., "Islam in Australia: A National Survey of Muslim Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents," *Religions* 11, no. 419 (2020): 23–61, doi:10.3390/rel11080419.

With the relaxation of immigration policies, the transition to multiculturalism as an official policy, and the agreement signed with Turkey in 1967 in order to fill the labour gap, more Muslims migrated to Australia mainly from Turkey and Bosnia. However, it was since the White Australia Policy abolishment in 1973 that the Muslim population increased markedly.[75] Notably, in 1976 and 1977, a significant number of Lebanese Muslim refugees sought refuge in Australia amidst the civil war, while the subsequent years of 1986 to 1991 witnessed the arrival of thousands more Muslims, largely from the 'Middle East'.[76] At the present, the Muslim population in Australia constitutes one of the most ethnically heterogeneous religious communities in Australia, with Muslims coming from 183 countries. Most of them (78.3% of the total Muslim population in 2016), have settled in the states of New South Wales and Victoria.[77] Having the highest population of Muslims, Sydney in NSW has been witnessing the highest pressing needs for mosques and school construction (having 45.1% of the total Muslim population), and to a lesser extent Melbourne in Victoria (having 33.2%).[78]

*Constructions of Islam and the History of Mosques in Sydney*

According to Kevin Dunn, Muslims as a minority group in Australia were constructed as 'Other' through the two central discourses of deviance and absence.[79] Through the reproduction and circulation of the stereotypes about Muslims, historically developed in the *West* through the accumulated heritage of Islamophobia, Muslims in Australia have been portrayed as culturally inferior.

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[75] Husnia Underabi, "Mosques Of Sydney And New South Wales Research Report 2014" (Australia, 2014); Hassan et al., "Australian Muslims: The Challenge Of Islamophobia And Social Distance."

[76] Rane et al., "Islam in Australia: A National Survey of Muslim Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents."

[77] Hassan et al., "Australian Muslims: The Challenge Of Islamophobia And Social Distance."

[78] Ibid., For more about Islam in Australia and its history, see: Abdullah Saeed, "*Islam in Australia*," (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2002); Gary Bouma, "*Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*," (Canberra: Burreau of Immigration and Population esearch, 1994); Katharine Bartsch, Peter Scriver, Md. Mizanur Rashid, "The First Aussie Mosques: Mediating Boundaries despite the White Australia' Policy," in *The Making of Modern Muslim Selves*, eds. Farhan Karim and Patricia Blessing, 77-110 (University of Chicago Press, 2024)

[79] Kevin M. Dunn, "Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence," *Australian Geographer* 35, no. 3 (2004): 333–53.

Since the early Muslim fishers, pearlers, and cameleers who were excluded, seen as unclean, treacherous, brutal and non-British, till later Lebanese and Arab Muslims whose negative constructions as violent and barbaric drew on old and new orientalisms, every Muslim group in Australia has witnessed a history of alienation while perceived as foreign to the Western society.[80] Through analysing Council archives in Sydney, which included Mosque Development Applications and property files among other documentary materials, Dunn assured that these stereotypes were utilised by mosque opponents in Sydney, misinforming the development of Council's consent decisions. Yet, according to Dunn, it was the discourse of Islam's cultural absence and non-recognition that has created the common theme in anti-mosque politics in Sydney.[81]

After the 1970s and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, development consents for mosques were repeatedly refused by local authorities on the account that mosque proposals were out of character with the surrounding development. Anti-mosque arguments would stress that mosques are entirely different to a Christian church and would make references to the 'odd hours' of worship and the different prayer regime. Worries influencing City Councils would assert that mosques would change the cultural character of areas and overwhelm neighbourhoods. They were conceived as against the public interest, where locals would make no use. According to Dunn, the discourse of absence was not just generally stirred, but was used in these mosque oppositions. Muslims were considered absent from a locality defined religiously as not Islamic, where their citizenship as well as their right to the city were undermined.[82] However, despite the problems faced by Muslims in Sydney in establishing their mosques, which continued into the late 1990s, the number of mosques started to grow afterwards. Between 1990 and 2010, around 64% of mosques in NSW were built. In 2016,

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[80] Kevin Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 3 (n.d.): 291–308.
[81] Dunn, "Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence."
[82] Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney"; Dunn, "Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence."

Sixty-two percent of NSW's mosques were based in the Western suburbs of Sydney (Figures 5-14 and 5-15).[83]
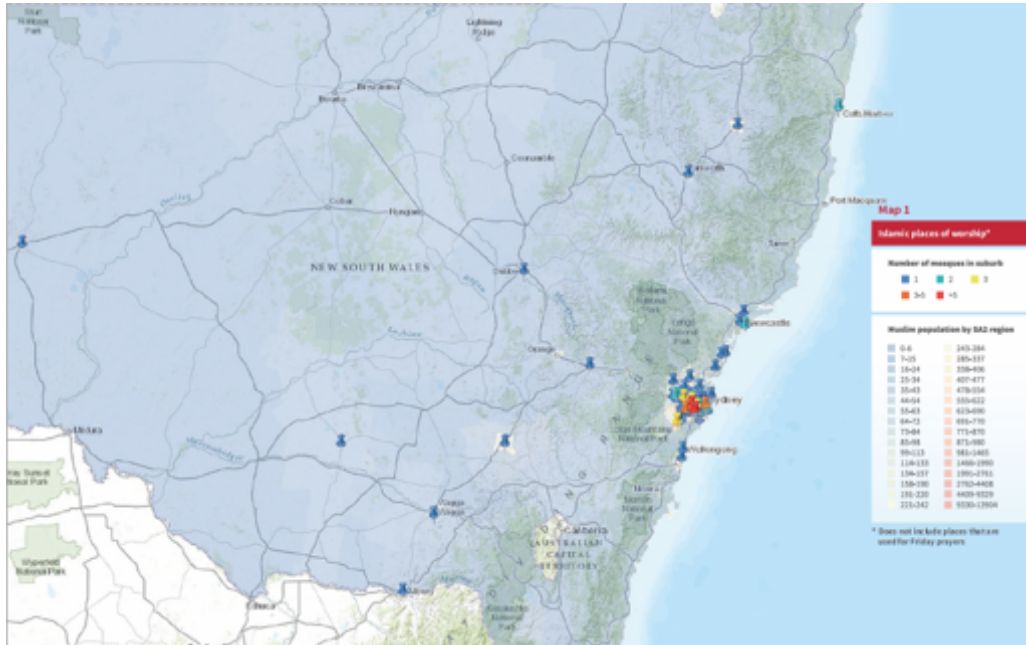


Figure 5-14 Map showing the location of mosques in New South Wales (Underabi 2016)
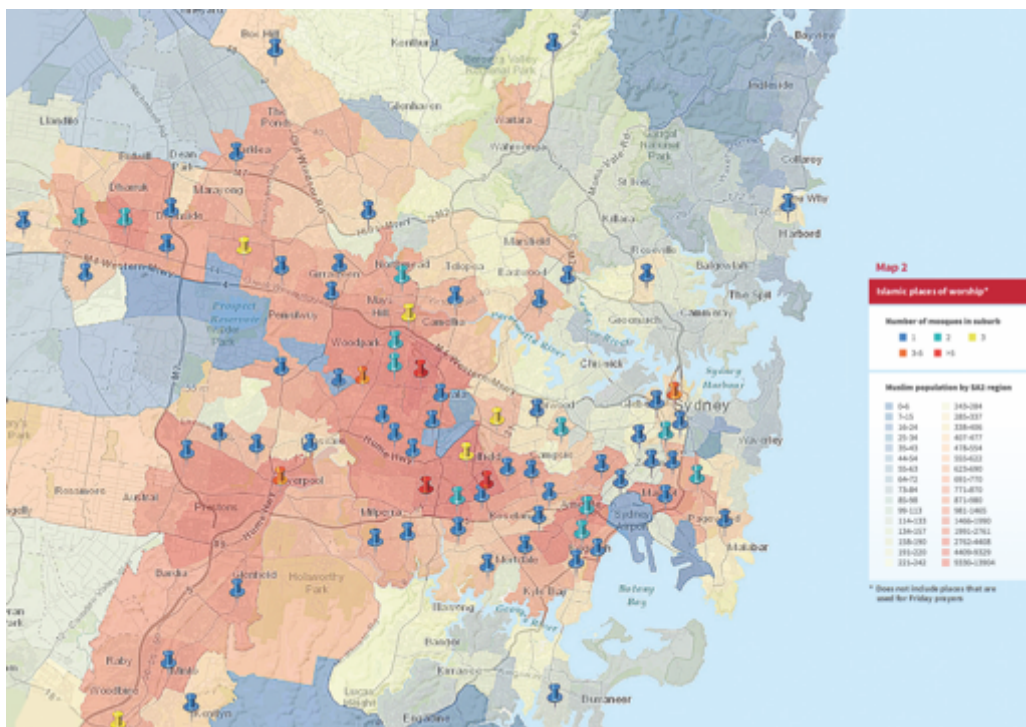


Figure 5-15 Map showing the location of mosques in Sydney (Underabi 2016)

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[83] Underabi, "Mosques Of Sydney And New South Wales Research Report 2014."

Unlike many Muslim countries whose governments have been gradually taking control over religious buildings and affairs, Mosques in the West, and in this case Australia, are usually established by religious institutions which are mostly independent and locally accountable. These institutions are either based on ethnicity or locality. A very common example of ethnic-based Islamic institutions are the Turkish-based institutions established in many Western countries, including Australia where many of them were established in Victoria.[84] Another Australian-specific example is the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA) which was established as early as the 1960s by a group of Lebanese immigrants.[85] In 1972 the association constructed Lakemba mosque, also known as Imām Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque, the largest mosque in Australia and the first purpose-built mosque in Sydney. The mosque is considered by LMA as a defining establishment of the Australian Muslim Community.[86] This is not surprising as most Lebanese Australasians in NSW were reported to reside in Western Sydney council areas like the City of Canterbury Bankstown where suburbs like Lakemba, Revesby Heights and Punchbowl are located.[87] As for locality, the second organizing principle of Islamic institutions and mosques in Australia, locality-based institutions are formed when a large number of Muslims of whatever ethnicities are present in one locality, get together to form an institution, and therefore a place of worship.[88] That was the case for the Australian Islamic Mission (AIM).

*The Australian Islamic Mission (AIM) and the Punchbowl Community*

The Australian Islamic Mission was established in 1973 in Sydney as a Muslim Community Organization (MCO). It is described as a non-profit religious, charitable, and educational organization committed to promoting faith, virtue and integration. Its mission is to "be the premier organisation in Australia, with a uniquely balanced Islamic ideology that professionally trains future leaders and

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[84] Dunn, "Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence."
[85] "About Us - Lebanese Muslim Association," n.d.
[86] Ibid.
[87] "About the Profile Areas | City of Canterbury Bankstown | Profile.Id," n.d.
[88] Dunn, "Islam in Sydney: Contesting the Discourse of Absence."

selflessly serves the community."[89] When first established, the organization used a rented premises in Lakemba and then moved to another one in Canterbury Road in Revesby. In 1994, the organization moved to Punchbowl, establishing its Centre and *Musallah* (Prayer Hall) in a property that it purchased from another Muslim association, which has previously used it as a place of worship. Beside prayer services, the centre was used for different activities that included religious and language classes, youth, and family activities, as well as community outreach and interfaith programs. During the following years until 2007, in order to serve a growing community in Punchbowl and the areas around it, AIM started expanding, acquiring the properties around and consolidating them into one lot, with a vision of building a purpose-built mosque, school and community centre.[90]

The community in Punchbowl constituted a very diverse community, with Lebanese (as ancestry) Arabic (as spoken at home language)[91] and Muslim (as a religious group) dominance. In the 2016 census, Islam was considered the largest religious group in Punchbowl with 35.6%.[92] Lebanese (30.6%), Australian (10.2%), and Vietnamese (7.2%) were the three largest ancestries there.[93] The community also had people born in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iraq, Egypt, and Syria, and fewer from Jordan, Malaysia, and other countries. In fact, people in Punchbowl born overseas formed 47.4% of all its people.[94]

Before Punchbowl Mosque, the area of Punchbowl was often reported negatively in Australian media. The densely populated area has been besieged by internal incidents and international events that have tended to overgeneralize and represent the community, especially members with a "Middle Eastern Appearance",[95] as potentially violent, unruly, and treasonous. These events

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[89] "About Us – AIM," n.d.

[90] Zachariah Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief," in Angelo *Candalepas: Australian Islamic Mission*, ed. Mackenzie (Uro Publications, 2019), 4–5.

[91] "Language Spoken at Home | City of Canterbury Bankstown | Community Profile," n.d.

[92] "Religion | City of Canterbury Bankstown | Community Profile," n.d.

[93] "Ancestry | City of Canterbury Bankstown | Community Profile," n.d.

[94] "Birthplace | City of Canterbury Bankstown | Community Profile," accessed March 4, 2022, https://profile.id.com.au/canterbury-bankstown/birthplace?WebID=330.

[95] Resulting in the creation of the Middle Eastern Crime Squad (MECS).

included the Gulf War (1990-1991), the Australian Navy interception of Islamic asylum seekers and the US–Afghan war, as well as a series of gang rapes by a minority of Lebanese in Sydney, the 2005 Cronulla riot,[96] the radicalisation of students at Punchbowl Boys High School and other tragic events that were first highlighted to the public through an Australian public service broadcaster's four-part documentary series *Once Upon a Time in Punchbowl.*[97]

### 5.3.2.  The Punchbowl Mosque Project: The Counter-Constructions

Australian Islamic Mission, like most MCOs in Australia, was compelled to deal with these representations of Muslims, especially when it came to constructing a mosque. Responses to mosque oppositions and media constructions of Islam came through the deployment of counter-constructions. Examples of these are in cases like South Western Sydney Turkish Islamic Culture & Mosque Association, which would stress in its mosques' Development Applications, that mosques were "educational places where children are taught responsibility", "respect" and "moral and community values". Islamic institutions like the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) and other Muslim groups would attempt to construct a sense of sameness with an assumed Christian mainstream by asserting, in their letters and applications before councils, the similarities between Islam and Christianity. In this, they try to set themselves within the 'us' or 'self', rather than the 'other', and counter-construct the stereotypes of the 'alien Islam', which assumes Muslims are incompatible with other Australians.[98] However, it is not the non-Christian practices or identity that primarily marginalize Islam in Australia or the Western context. Rather, as per Ozyurek's analysis, it is the notion that Islam encompass "a culture that promotes extreme submission to religion and, hence does

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[96] A confrontation between 5000 non-Muslims and a few Muslims arising from months of hostility over the Lebanese presence at this city ocean beach suburb.

[97] Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney"; Andi Miftahul Maulidil Mursyid, "Media Representations: Radicalisation And Education In Australia Of Education" (The University of Adelaide, 2019); Andrew Jakubowicz, "'Once upon a Time in … Ethnocratic Australia: Migration, Refugees, Diversity and Contested Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion,'" Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal 8, no. 3 (2016): 144–67.

[98] Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney."

not allow individuals to subscribe to the secularist",[99] or in this case Australian values.

Australian Islamic Mission, and its President at that time Zachariah Matthews, engaged with these constructions through their own discourse, which is similar to many cases, yet seemed focused towards addressing the Punchbowl-specific concerns. In 2007, and since the very early stages of the project, Matthews, who has been working with the AIM since 1991, was assigned the mosque project manager. Through the mosque project which gained a lot of publicity, he would address the two central discourses of deviance and absence against the Muslim community. Matthews would emphasize the role the mosque will play in promoting "universal values that Islam emphasizes", as well as in "producing a balanced personality that can live cohesively and contribute positively to the contemporary world". He, as well as AIM, believed that the mosque will be "an important place where individuals are nourished with the key ingredients required for their personal development; that is to say, faith, spirituality and intellect".[100] The mosque would acknowledge the presence of Muslims as a faithful community,[101] by "becoming an icon in the city of Sydney", "a powerful statement for future generations" and "a lasting legacy".[102] These attempts at re-recognition within a presumed Christian Australian mainstream and a claimed Multicultural society, were further manifested by announcing the involvement of a well-known Australian architect of Greek-orthodox faith, and a construction company whose two main directors are of Lebanese Christian and Greek orthodox ancestry.[103]

The initial design brief to the architect outlined a contemporary approach, that reflects the local Australian environment through the amalgamation of two

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[99] Esra Ozyurek, "The Politics of Cultural Unification, Secularism, and the Place of Islam in the New Europe," *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 3 (2008): 509–12.
[100] Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief."
[101] Sydney Architecture Festival, "Meet the Aussie Mosque - Punchbowl Mosque, Candalepas Associates," 2017.
[102] Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief."
[103] Ibid.

components: key traditional elements of a mosque,[104] and a modern interpretation. According to Matthews "this was important for us to reflect Islam's faith tradition as a lived experience in the current modern era and projecting into the future."[105] This "in character" approach has proven accepted by planners, council committees and court assessors in Australia, who have been responding favourably to designs and alterations that de-Islamise the mosque's appearance and counter the image of the historical 'massive' mosque.[106] Getting approval was AIM's initial main concern since other mosque projects have reportedly faced many obstacles to obtaining planning permissions. Commissioning a contemporary design was then a response to those reported difficulties.[107] Still, the Punchbowl mosque project faced objections from the Canterbury City Council, leading to a case in the High Court in Canberra.[108] After fourteen months of deliberations, in 2009, the City Council voted unanimously to approve the mosque Development Application, with a primary school which was later reviewed and replaced by a Community Building in 2016.[109]

The project, with the architect now on board, faced further constrictions. 'Planning issues' of traffic and parking congestion and noise emission, according to Dunn, were the other face of the stereotype of fanatic Muslims and the 'unusual' Muslim prayer performance.[110] This seemed the case with the Punchbowl Mosque project, when the Canterbury Council issued a stipulation to have one car parking space per two people, meaning a space for 150 cars. The council later reduced the requirement and accepted a two-storey underground car park with 109 spaces, draining more than $7 million from the budget, and shelving the rest of the site program.[111] Another obstacle and source of delay arose from the belated issuance

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[104] These traditional elements included mainly: the dome, minaret, Crescent-star symbols and *qiblah*. Note that calligraphy wasn't stated in the initial design brief as a key traditional element.

[105] Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief."

[106] Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney."

[107] Jessica Mudditt, "Inside Australia's Stunning 99-Domed Mosque," *CNN*, January 2018.

[108] Siobhan Hegarty, "Ramadan Opening Still Possible for Mosque 23 Years in the Making - ABC News," 2018, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-20/the-australian-mosque-that-overcame-all-the-odds/9772880.

[109] "Punchbowl Mosque Construction Project – AIM," accessed March 7, 2022, https://aim.org.au/events/projects/.

[110] Dunn, "Representations of Islam in the Politics of Mosque Development in Sydney."

[111] Hegarty, "Ramadan Opening Still Possible for Mosque 23 Years in the Making - ABC News."

of the Turkish calligrapher's visa and the unfortunate denial of a visa for his master calligrapher, both of whom were intended to inscribe the project's calligraphy. Eventually, the calligrapher's papers were accepted, and he spent two months working alone on the project.[112]

### 5.3.3.    Mosque Architecture: A Contemporary Approach?

In 2007, when Matthews and the AIM were seeking an architect to design the mosque, they were eager to choose one based on specific criteria, including relevant expertise, familiarity with the local city council, and a perspective informed by faith.[113] At this point, Angelo Candalepas was recommended to AIM. As they reviewed his work, and discussed the mosque project with him, an agreement was signed, and Angelo Candalepas joined the team in the same year.

Candalepas is recognized for his strong affiliation to the Greek-Orthodox faith. He has remained actively involved in a number of faith-based projects, mainly relevant to Christian Churches.[114] Notably, his work in All Saints Primary School, affiliated with the Greek Orthodox All Saints Church in Sydney, played a pivotal role in his selection for the Punchbowl Mosque project.[115] A key priority for the Muslim community, according to Horton, was to engage a religious architect. Although it was challenging for AIM to convince the community to entrust the mosque's design to a non-Muslim, having faith, albeit different, gave them confidence that the mosque would imply the meanings that belong to sacred spaces.[116]

With the "radical pluralism of cultural forms and tastes and their pervasive hybridization",[117] it is hard to determine an architectural style or school to which

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief."
[114] Candalepas has designed the redevelopment of St Peter Julian's Catholic Church in NSW, and is currently leading the redevelopment of the Greek Orthodox Church's Archdiocesan site in inner Sydney.
[115] Matthews, "The History of Australian Islamic Mission and Design Brief."
[116] Mudditt, "Inside Australia's Stunning 99-Domed Mosque."
[117] The characteristics of liquid modernity; a concept that was coined by the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, through which he has described and analyzed the condition of

Candalepas' projects belong. However, there are multiple distinguishable influences, cultural sources, and reference points that Candalepas has been actively negotiating throughout his architecture. One of his main architectural influences, like many other contemporary Australian architects, is the Modern movement within Australian Architectural history. Rooted in, yet critically received from Western (European and American) Modernism, Goad argues that Australian Architecture has developed multiple strands of Modern Architecture which have constituted its local idioms.[118] Publication and education were considered two important mediums for the reception of Modernism in Australia. Glen Murcutt, Australia's most internationally recognised contemporary architect, the designer of a celebrated Australian Islamic Centre in Melbourne, and a local influencer on Candalepas would, in fact, share how his father used to import architectural magazines from the United States and how architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra and Mies van der Rohe were incredibly influential for him as he, growing up, had to read about them.[119]

Having graduated from Sydney's University of Technology in 1992, Candalepas embarked on a professional journey that included collaborations with architects like Colin Madigan[120] and Graham Jahn.[121] Subsequently, he established his own architectural studio, where he synthesized influences from these architects alongside renowned international figures such as Louis I. Kahn, Carlo Scarpa, and

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constant change he sees in a contemporary world of late modernity. On Liquid Modernity, see: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). For more about the discussion of Bauman's Liquid Modernity with relevance Architecture, check; Vladimir Kulić, "Edvard Ravnikar's Liquid Modernism: Architectural Identity in a Network of Shifting References," in *ACSA 101: New Constellations, New Ecologies* (Washington DC: Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 2013).

[118] Philip Goad, "Modernism and Australian Architecture: Part of the Critical Filter.," *Docomomo Journal*, no. 29 (2003): 61–68, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=vth&AN=40740274&site=eds-live.

[119] Catherine Hunter, *Glenn Murcutt: Spirit Of Place*, 2017.

[120] An Australian architect, best known for designing the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

[121] A chartered Australian architect and former president of NSW Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. Before founding his Jahn Associates, of which he is principal, he worked with Harry Seidler, one of the leading exponents of Modernism's methodology in Australia, as well a number of architects including Glenn Murcutt and Zaha Hadid.

Le Corbusier.[122] Notably, his work seems to further reference work that inventively reincorporates typically classic principles within mainstream modernism, especially that of Kahn.[123] During my interview with Candalepas, as well as through other interviews about Punchbowl Mosque and his work in general, he repeatedly referred to the word ruins, a term employed by Vincent Scully as a suggestive analogy of Kahn's historic allusion and creative engagement with the past. Scully's usage of the term takes two distinct avenues, both of which hold relevance to Candalepas's conceptual framework. Firstly, it acts as a metaphor for the classical, typically ancient Roman monuments, that Kahn encountered as present-day ruins serving as sources of inspiration for his design process. Secondly, it alludes to the thoroughly modern and continuously evolving process by which ancient monuments and classical principles are transformed and represented as abstract artefacts.[124]

A physical application of Kahn's reference in Candalepas' work, including Punchbowl Mosque, is the juxtaposition of old and new materials, mainly concrete with timber. His off-form concrete, which has become Candalepas Associates' signature, has put his work, by commentators, under Brutalist architecture style. In fact, Punchbowl Mosque was featured in the Sydney Architecture Festival program among the celebrated "The Bold and the Brutalist" buildings and their role in Sydney's Brutalist history and its "future heritage".[125] However, during his interview, Candalepas has been always keen to point out that the Punchbowl project was never intended as a reference to Brutalism nor to be retrogressive. The only

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[122] Angelo Candalepas, *Angelo Candalepas - Buildings and Projects* (Park Books, 2021).

[123] Maryam Gusheh, "From Prayer Hall to a Contemporary Mosque," in *Angelo Candalepas: Australian Islamic Mission*, ed. Mackenzie (Uro Publications, 2019), 19–23.

[124] For more about the metaphor of ruin in Louis Kahn's work, see: Maryam Gusheh, "Louis Kahn in Dhaka: Ruin as Method" (University of New South Wales, 2013).

[125] Nicholas Carolan, "The Bold and the Brutalist," 2017, https://graziamagazine.com/articles/sydney-architecture-festival-2017/#.WdcVSLYscb8.facebook.

common between the two is the preference for *Béton brut,*[126] i.e., the use of raw concrete poured and cast in situ.[127]

On numerous occasions, particularly during a presentation he entitled "The Absence of Things",[128] Candalepas has recurrently cited various sources and points of reference that he deliberately turned to while shaping the design of the Punchbowl project. His emphasis consistently centers on history, as he turns to "the history of the Jewish faith, the Christian Church and the consequent history of ideas of Islam […]", in order to develop a further understanding of the Muslim faith. In his presentation, where he more comprehensively unveiled the Punchbowl project's influences to an audience with specific architectural interest,[129] Candalepas revisited historical events like the second Council of Nicaea.[130] He utilized such instances to highlight what numerous scholars suggest as Christianity's influence on Islam.[131] Throughout his discourse, he drew significant attention to Christian structures like the Basilica of San Vitale, Saint Mark's Basilica, St. Peter's Basilica, and notably, Hagia Sophia—a reference that frequently emerges in interviews discussing the project. These examples were interspersed with some examples of mosques, including the early mosque of the Prophet in Madinah, which its architecture, he commented, was based on the style of typical 7th-century Arabian houses.[132]

This approach, towards understanding Islamic faith and architecture is, in many ways, similar to the 20th-century Western school of Islamic art and architectural history. The plan of the Prophet's Mosque, Candalepas has used in his

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[126] Béton brut is a French term meaning raw concrete; concrete surface intentionally left unfinished or roughly-finished after casting, to remain exposed visually often deliberately showing imprinted surface of the formwork. Béton brut is the source of the term brutalism, which is a style that emerged from the 1950s and grew out of the early-20th century modernist movement.

[127] Jason Dibbs, "Punchbowl Mosque," *ARCHITECTURE BULLETIN* 76, no. 2 (2019): 22–23.

[128] He explains his choice of the title by reminding himself of "the absence of knowledge that is always the burden of all architectural beginnings."[128]

[129] Even more than through the interview conducted for this research. For more about this presentation, watch: Adam Haddow, "The Architect's Bookshop - Isolation Talk 1: Angelo Candalepas," 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4Nkur4eOjw.

[130] The Second Council of Nicaea is recognized as the last of the first seven ecumenical councils by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church.

[131] Haddow, "The Architect's Bookshop - Isolation Talk 1: Angelo Candalepas."

[132] Ibid.

presentation and his comment on it are, in fact, Creswell's interpretation and theory that were challenged and refuted by later scholars.[133] This *absence,* similar to, the underestimation and sometimes total dismissal in, especially early Western scholarship, of references to Islamic religious context has led to the attribution of "trivial facts" to the mosque's introduction and construction. Later, better-grounded arguments have shown that the mosque was, instead, an organic evolution "that welded together various aspects of early Islam." Its form and many of its elements were prompted by Islamic devotional and ritual imperatives that continued to govern the mosque architecture even after variable influences of architectural styles of conquered territories.[134]

However, in overlooking aspects of the Islamic faith,[135] and rejecting a blind appropriation of historic symbols taken from the past and coupled with the scarcity of contemporary religious architecture in Australia that could offer inspiration,[136] Candalepas found himself compelled to search for influences elsewhere. In a recent interview, he would clearly state: "*In creating that building (Punchbowl Mosque), what I sought was those things that were essential about my own faith to be embodied in the building.*"[137] This disposition finds further explanation in his statements on another occasion, where he stated:

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[133] For more about this, check: Oleg Grabar (ed.), The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven:Yale University Press,1987), 104; Jeremy Johns (ed.), 'The'' House of the Prophet'' and the Concept of the Mosque', Bayt al Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam (1999): ii. 59–112, at 64–9; Robert Hillenbrand, Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning (New York: Columbia University Press,1994), and for more about the discussion of this and similar theories about the Mosque of the Prophet, see: Essam Ayyad, *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2019).

[134] Essam Ayyad, "The 'House Of The Prophet' Or The 'Mosque Of The Prophet'?," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24, no. 3 (2013): 273–334.

[135] Introducing Islamic faith is often a role lead by the client (the Islamic institution or Muslim community) in designing mosques in the West. In his interview, Candalepas has mentioned that before designing he actually needed to learn about the things Muslim do, in terms of prayer, ablution, and other rituals. These ritual's related aspects, which are technical in a sense, were in fact reflected in the design program. However, it is the philosophical, inspirational references that are discussed in this part of the study.

[136] Angelo Candalepas, "Architect's Statement: Angelo Candalepas," in *Angelo Candalepas: Australian Islamic Mission*, ed. Mackenzie (Uro Publications, 2019), 6–17.

[137] Mary Sinanidis, "From Punchbowl Mosque to Greek Archdiocese: Greek Australian Angelo Candalepas Tightrope Walks across the Architecture of Many Faiths," 2021, https://omny.fm/shows/the-interview/angelo-candalepas.

> I don't see a distinction between their God and my God. […] if you look at the
> buildings, I don't think of them as mosques. I regard them as buildings where
> people worship God, actually, and they do it in a certain way, which is extremely
> important to me. […] And so, I had a lot of things that I could share in my
> experience with these people.[138]

Punchbowl mosque does, in many ways, depart from the typical or traditional mosque architecture.[139] The mosque, which is only part of the site program that will constitute other community buildings, is situated at a rear square corner of the site. According to Candalepas, its location was chosen as a response to constraints from the local government, while seeking a point where the direction towards Mekkah is respected.[140] The site plan shows the mosque's main prayer hall accessed directly from the street through a forecourt, that also leads to the women's prayer hall staircase and separate entrance, as well as a second courtyard, around which the rest of the site program buildings are arranged. These buildings aren't yet constructed, however, according to Candalepas, their architectural expression will be different from that of the mosque, providing the mosque with a distinct character.[141] A minaret-like structure, the same height as the building, screened and holds a star and a crescent, provides access, and accommodates the women's prayer gallery on a level raised above the main prayer hall. A dome sits above all this on a thin band of linear windows at the top of a square. The square is supported from two sides on a 45-degree angled roof, as a result of a local council condition of a 1.8 m height limit on the side boundaries (Figures 5-16, 5-17 and 5-18).[142]

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[138] A. Candalepas, Video interview, August 24, 2021.
[139] Dibbs, "Punchbowl Mosque."
[140] Candalepas, "Architect's Statement: Angelo Candalepas."
[141] "Punchbowl Mosque Construction Project – AIM."
[142] Candalepas, "Architect's Statement: Angelo Candalepas."
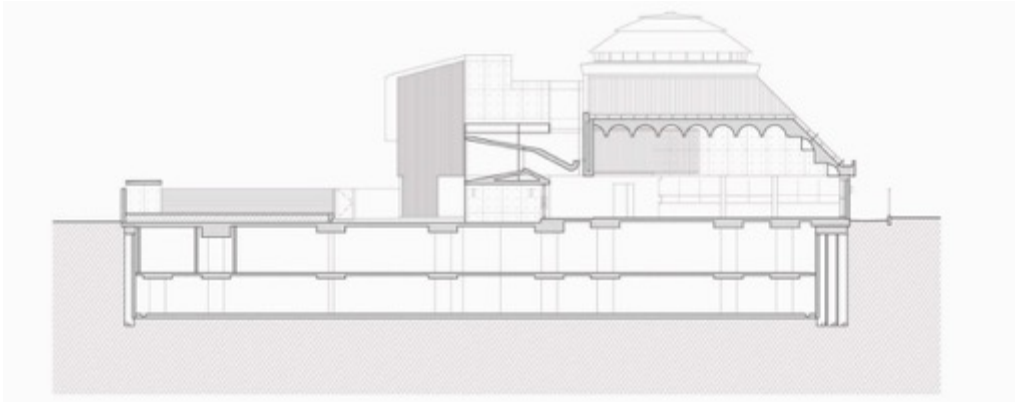
Figure 5-16 A section in Punchbowl Mosque, showing the two-storey underground parking, the main prayer hall and women's prayer gallery (Archdaily 2022)
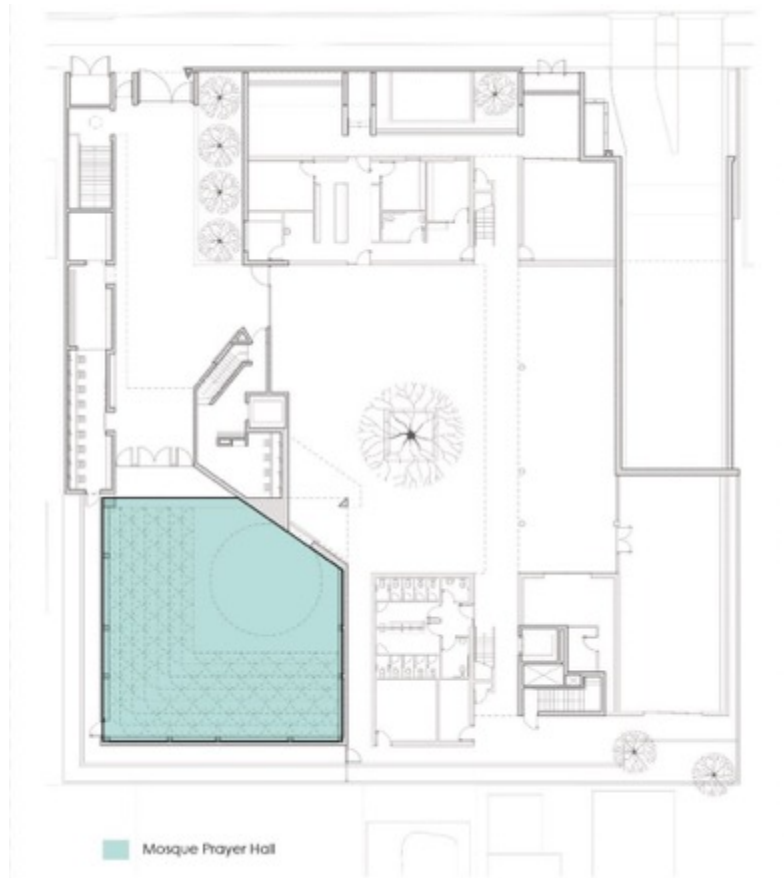


Figure 5-17 Punchbowl Mosque (marked in green by the author) and Site Ground Floor Plan (Archdaily 2022)

Figure 5-18 Photograph showing the mosque entrance (top) (Waled Shehata 2021). The women prayer gallery exterior and the dome (bottom left) (Sydney Architecture Festival 2017). The minaret by Rory Gardiner (bottom right) (Archdaily 2022)

Accessed through a paneled glass door, an entry space with a lowered ceiling of 2.05 m high leads to wide timber doors that open into the main prayer hall. Inside the hall, 102 mini-domes or muqarnases, made of poured concrete covering the two-sided 45-degree angled roof dominate the scene. Each of these domes incorporates a small hole that penetrates light into the space, as well as an Islamic script inscribed on its concrete surface, in gold colour. The muqarnas-ed roof sits on walls covered in timber and black marble, with an upper band of linear windows (Figure 5-19). Over the bare concrete walls lie three calligraphic framed panels made of linen and framed in timber, one of them is placed upstairs in the women's gallery. An upper wooden screen separates the women's gallery from the main hall, creating a sense of privacy for women in the gallery, and breaking the light coming from behind it. The floor is covered with red carpet, made of Turkish and New Zealand wool. The *miḥrāb* and *minbar* are made of wood and curved golden-plated panels and are placed at the Northwestern corner (Figure 5-20). This layout positions the prayer rows diagonally across the square space, oriented towards *Makkah*. As a consequence of this arrangement, the prayer rows display varying lengths, with the longest rows situated in the center. This design departs from typical geometric forms, such as square or rectangular prayer halls aligned with the *qiblah*, which ensure uniform prayer rows (Figure 5-21).[143]

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[143] The religious obligation that congregants arrange themselves in straight lines during prayer, along with their need to listen to sermons on Fridays and see the imam has put more emphasis on width than on depth in mosque architecture. The virtue of praying in the first line and its promised reward to worshippers, according to a Prophetic tradition, has also highlighted such feature. See Ayyad, *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives*.

Figure 5-19 Photograph showing the interior of Punchbowl Mosque before carpet and calligraphy are added (Brett Boardman 2018)



Figure 5-20 A photograph from inside Punchbowl mosque main prayer hall, showing the *miḥrāb*, *minbar* and calligraphy (Waled Shehata 2021)
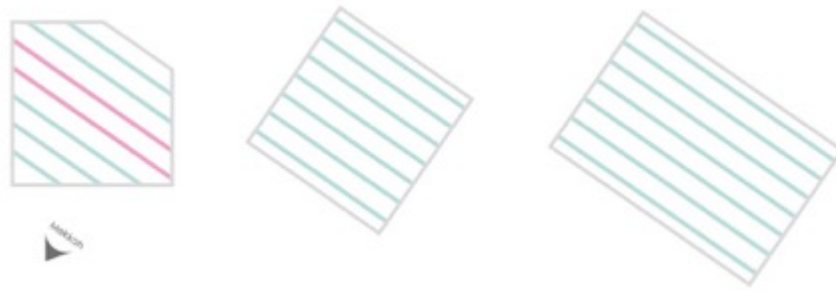
Figure 5-21 Illustrations of prayer rows oriented towards Makkah in Punchbowl prayer hall, to the left, showing the longest prayer lines in red, and the two typical mosque plans (square and rectangle), each having equal prayer rows (Author 2022)

### 5.3.4.   Qur'anic Epigraphy of Punchbowl Mosque

According to Matthews, the idea of including calligraphy in the mosque design introduced itself to the AIM executive committee once they saw the mosque completed. As they saw the *muqarnas* and the bare walls, they knew they could take advantage of them to add Qur'anic inscriptions. At this point, they didn't have a calligrapher among the mosque design team yet, but they already decided what to inscribe, at least inside the *muqarnas*. Having 102 muqarnas, a count of more than ninety-nine, according to Matthews, made the decision of inscribing the ninety-nine names of Allah (*Asma' Allah al-Husna)*[144] easy.[145]

The initial step by the committee involved a search for a local calligrapher within Sydney or Australia to undertake the task. Some of the committee members started looking at other mosques in Australia, including Sydney and Melbourne, to see the kind of inscriptions they have and their quality. Recognizing the absence of a suitable local calligrapher, Matthews involved Peter Gould, renowned for pioneering contemporary Islamic design in Australia, seeking his recommendation. Gould suggested a contemporary calligrapher based in the UK, who submitted a proposal for the mosque that was, for some reason, turned down. The president at that time, Bashar El-Gammal, who had been frequently travelling to Turkey due to his work, reached out to his contacts there, especially in Istanbul, for another

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[144] One of the virtues of *'asma' Allah al-Husna* appears in one of the narrations of The Prophet, where he said, "Allah has ninety-nine Names, one hundred less one; and he who memorized them all by heart will enter Paradise."
[145] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

recommendation. It was then that he was directed to the Syrian calligrapher Hisam Selmo, currently residing and practicing calligraphy in Istanbul. Following El-Gammal's visit to Selmo's Istanbul studio and his first hand observation of the quality of Selmo's work, combined with the knowledge of Selmo being a student of the esteemed Turkish calligrapher Hasan Çelebi, Selmo was selected to join the project team. The initial intention encompassed the collaboration of both Hisam Selmo and his master Hasan Çelebi, aiming to bring them both to Australia to work on the mosque' calligraphy. However, despite these plans, Çelebi's visa application was declined, ultimately leading to Selmo's solitary arrival in Australia.[146]

Selmo is a traditional calligrapher, also known for working in the restoration of historical manuscripts and making ink using the old traditional methods. He inscribed two kinds of calligraphy inside Punchbowl Mosque. Each of these kinds incorporated a different content, made in a different colour and script type, and applied on a different material. These inscriptions were:

- Inscriptions inside the mini-domes,
- and calligraphic panels on the mosque walls.

*Inscriptions Inside the Mini Domes*

As mentioned earlier, the choice of inscribing '*asma' Allah al-Husna* inside the mini-domes was made by the AIM committee, even before the calligrapher joined the team. When the calligrapher came, he only had to decide how to do that, and that was the biggest challenge. Selmo had to inscribe on a curved surface, something that he had never tried before. A common technique of implementing architectural epigraphy, since the Ottoman times, usually starts with the calligrapher inscribing the words on paper with a reed pen. After that, corrections and finetuning are made before creating a stencil that is used in applying the calligraph to the surface.[147] However, with a curved spherical surface, a new

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[146] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.
[147] M. Uğur Derman, "Yesârîzâde Mustafa İzzet Efendi and His Contributions to Ottoman Architectural Calligraphy," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 326–45.

technique had to be figured out to respond to the changing ratio inside the dome. Selmo created a grid inside each mini-dome that divides its base diameter with vertical lines, every 10 cm, that meet at a single point at the top middle centre of the sphere. Quite similar to single point perspective, the farther the lines from the centre of the diameter, the more inclined they are. Selmo used a grid similar to the one in (Figure 5-22), to directly write on the dome, a method known as improvisational writing or *Khat Al Mashq* in Calligraphy. This direct writing required adjusting each word and standardizing the measurements to make all domes look similar while having different words inside.[148] Selmo spent almost two weeks prototyping on three or four domes, that were built as a model prototype of the domes until they all were satisfied, and he started writing on the mosque itself.[149]
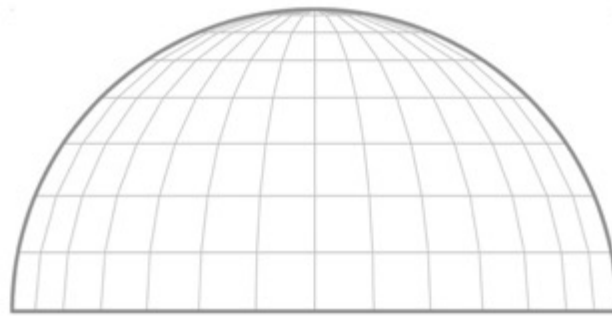
Figure 5-22 An illustration of the grid the calligrapher used to write inside the mini-domes. (Author 2022)

Ninety-nine different names were inscribed inside the domes in *Thuluth* script, the sultan of the scripts (Figure 5-23),[150] which is common for writing in Mosques and Islamic monuments. Selmo used another script type, *Diwani*, to complement his pyramid-shaped calligraphic composition, and write the phrase *Jalla Jalāluhu*[151] above each name on almost 30% of the space. The architect,

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[148] H. Selmo, Audio interview, June 09, 2021.
[149] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.
[150] H. Selmo, Audio interview, June 09, 2021.
[151] An Islamic phrase translating to `may his glory be glorified` The phrase appears often after the name of Allah.

Candalepas, was consulted at this point for the choice of colour and type of paint used. They tested different brands of gold paint until a final tint of gold was decided.



Figure 5-23 Photograph showing calligraphy inside the mini-domes of Punchbowl (Boral Australia)

*The Qur'anic Calligraphic Panels*

Once the calligrapher completed the ninety-nine names, filling the rest of the domes with words of *dhikr* to complete the 102 domes, the committee started to discuss the verses selected for three rectangular panels. Two of these panels are

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located in the main prayer hall, with one in the women's prayer gallery. The architect was involved in the design of the panel boards. They were made of linen fabric, on which Selmo wrote the selected verses with black ink. Then these boards were framed with wood, which was left to the architect to design. The verses and their translation are numbered and presented below as they appear on the mosque plans in (Figure 5-24).

The Prayer Hall Panels Inscriptions

*Panel 1: And Do good to others as God has done good to you. (Part of Q 28:77)*

*Panel 2: Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those "devoted to God" (Muslims)'? (Q 41:33)*

Women's Prayer Gallery Inscription

*Panel 3: 'Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray.' (Q 3:43)*
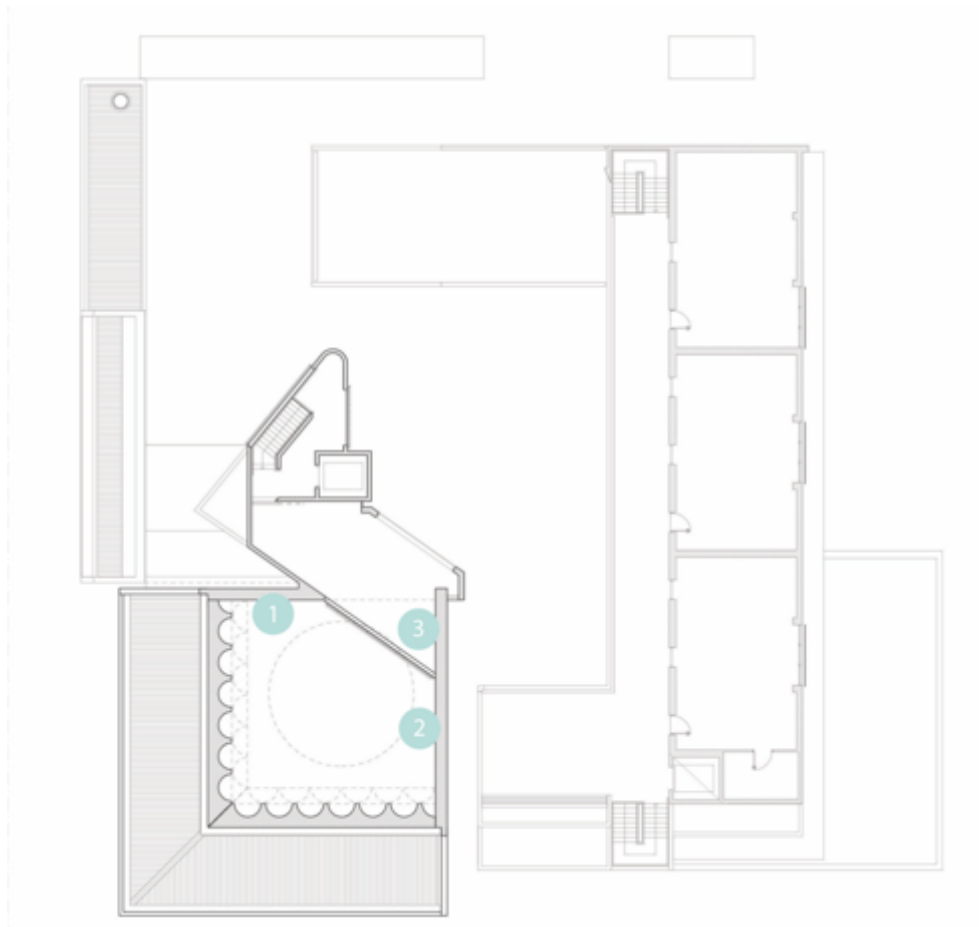
Figure 5-24 Plan of Punchbowl Mosque first floor, showing the locations of calligraphic panel marked by author (Archdaily 2022)

### 5.3.5.  Reflections on the Choices and Interpretations of the Mosque Qur'anic Inscriptions

By inscribing these verses, as well as the ninety names of God, inside the mosque, the committee wanted to showcase the Islamic script and its beauty. They wanted to present the Qur'an to those who visit the mosque and connect them with the meaning of its verses through a form of art, i.e., Islamic calligraphy. According to Matthews, the verses were selected by the committee through consultation with the community. Their choice was discussed with the calligrapher to ensure that the dimensions of the frame will fit the verses' letters in terms of number and scale.[152]

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[152] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

The first verse inscribed on panel 1 just above the main entrance and exit door from inside the mosque, was meant to serve as advice to congregational and community members to engage in virtuous deeds. According to Matthews, it serves as a last reminder as they leave the mosque into the world. The inscription is, in fact, part of a verse that states a number of relevant advices: *'Seek the life to come by means of what God has granted you, but do not neglect your rightful share in this world, do good to others as God has done good to you, do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for God does not love those who do this.'* (Q 28:77). These commandments seemed to simulate the counter constructions about Islam and Muslims in Australia, and especially in Punchbowl, who were accused of radicalization and corruption. The verse presents Islam's approach through which humans could achieve balance and harmony in life, enabling the achievement of continuous spiritual elevation through their balanced natural life, in which there is no deprivation, nor waste of the simple natural life elements.[153]

The verse inscribed on the second panel within the main prayer hall (Figure 5-25 left), which also appears in Cambridge Central Mosque, is considered by Matthews to be the main verse.[154] It is found within a sequence of verses in the Qur'an[155] that draws an image of those who call people to God, describing their souls, speech and moral principles.[156] It reminds Muslims how they should be living their lives, letting the Qur'an be their guide. The third panel in the women's prayer gallery includes a verse that refers to Mary, a figure that resonates not only with women,[157] but also with Christians, as noted by Candalepas.[158]

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[153] Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an Vol. 13 (Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an): Sūrah 26 Al-Sur'ara' - Sūrah 32 Al-Sajdah* (The Islamic Foundation, 2015).

[154] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

[155] Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those "devoted to God"(Muslims)'? Good and evil cannot be equal.[Prophet] repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness. If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing (Q 41:33-36).

[156] Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an* (The Islamic Foundation, 2015).

[157] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

[158] A. Candalepas, Video interview, August 24, 2021.

Figure 5-25 A photograph showing the calligraphic panel above the main entrance door (left). A photograph with the main calligraphic panel in the main prayer hall. Waled Shehata 2021 (right) (Waled Shehata 2021)

Although the calligrapher came later on after the mosque was designed and constructed, unlike Kutlu the main calligrapher of Cambridge Central Mosque, Selmo didn't seem upset by this fact. He, instead, through his interview, seemed content and proud that he took part in the mosque. He regarded that fact that it was designed by a Christian as something positive for Muslims, as now more non-Muslims are interested in the mosque. During the time working on its calligraphy, Selmo has witnessed many visitors and students of art and Architecture, arriving at the mosque, taking tours around it and exploring a new design that differs from all the mosques in the rest of the world. According to Selmo, the majority of mosques in Turkey and other countries of the world, incorporate the names of God, but they all appear in one dome. Punchbowl mosque is designed with ninety-nine domes, in each dome is one of God's names. Therefore, Selmo believed, as much as Candalepas, that the mosque was designed to incorporate the names and words of God.[159]

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[159] H. Selmo, Audio interview, June 09, 2021; A. Candalepas, Video interview, August 24, 2021.

The decision to incorporate the golden color on the mini domes was informed by a consensus reached due to the esteemed historical significance of gold within both Islamic and Christian artistic traditions. An illustrative instance is Hagia Sophia, an edifice that evolved from a church to a mosque in Istanbul, where gold-adorned icons coexist with calligraphic panels inked in golden colour. Another factor influencing the choice of gold pertains to its nuanced impact on the concrete surface. This effect is characterized by a subtlety that mitigates potential visual dominance, an aspect that assumes prominence when contemplating the prospect of repeated black hues spanning a vast ceiling expanse and viewed from a distance beneath.

Before adding the golden colour, Selmo used yellow as a foundation, since yellow is the closest colour to gold. These steps would come after he would use chalk or pencil to define the borders of the letter (Figures 5-26), moving from right to left, as the Arabic language is always written.[160] Candalepas was present at this stage to make sure that the outline of the calligraphy stayed far enough from the hole in each mini-dome. He also made sure that enough coats of golden paint were used to give the desired colour intensity.[161]



Figure 5-26 Hisam Selmo's trials of the paint (left) (Candalepas Associates 2021) Selmo's trials of layout using chalk (right) (Facebook page)

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[160] H. Selmo, Audio interview, June 09, 2021.
[161] A. Candalepas, Video interview, September 09, 2021.

Unlike Kutlu who never met the architect of CCM, Selmo and Candalepas developed a good relationship during Selmo's two months of working on the mosque, along with Matthews who joined Selmo every day on site, seven days a week for long hours.[162] Candalepas has shown high regard to Selmo's calligraphy as much as Selmo has shown to his design, for both have expressed an understanding and experience with the relation between calligraphy and architecture. As for Candalepas, although the visualization of calligraphy was not clearly visible in his initial design renders; he also didn't mention it either in his book or in his early public interviews, his early experience with mosques, more specifically in Hagia Sophia, was related to the presence of Islamic calligraphy. For him, Hagia Sophia is a building with calligraphy because that's how he learnt it in Greek school.[163]

The decision to invite a calligrapher from Turkey to Punchbowl Mosque was not financially motivated, like the case of CCM where the calligrapher's work was offered as part of the mosque funding. Punchbowl mosque was mostly funded by the community, through grants, donations and non-interest-bearing loans.[164] The decision regarding the choice of the calligrapher was then, since the beginning, led by a necessity of proficiency, that would match the architect's reputation. The absence of a local calligrapher made searching outside Australia, especially in Turkey with its reputation regarding calligraphy, a sensible choice. Nonetheless, Selmo's skills and expertise, don't match Kutlu's mastery and long experience with writing in mosques. This explains the difference in opinions, regarding mosque architecture, between Selmo and Kutlu who is a generation older than Selmo. Up to this time, Punchbowl is considered among Selmo's first experiences with mosque inscriptions, at least outside his home country, which could explain along with the hard work he did for this mosque and its public celebration Selmo's satisfaction with the whole project.

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[162] Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.
[163] A. Candalepas, Video interview, September 09, 2021.
[164] Hegarty, "Ramadan Opening Still Possible for Mosque 23 Years in the Making - ABC News."

## 5.4. Ljubljana Islamic Religious and Cultural Center in Ljubljana, Slovenia



Figure 5-27 slamic Religious and Cultural Center in Ljubljana (David Schreyer 2020)

### 5.4.1. *Introduction: Some Historical Background*

Muslims in Slovenia, like in most Eastern European countries, have seen far less investigation and research compared to Muslim communities in Western Europe; resulting, by extension, in much fewer studies on Islamic institutions and mosques. This is due to a number of reasons associated with the area's historical dynamics, which include what was called 'the Iron Curtain' behind which most of Eastern Europe was made inaccessible for research. The communist period's policies and censorship, which sought to deemphasize and discourage, if not altogether abolish religious practices of local communities, made scholars' fieldwork research difficult, especially in areas related to such fields of study. Even after the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the pull-down of the Iron Curtain, research in these areas remained on the periphery of scholarly interest due to language constraints.[165] However, more recently in the last decade, research has

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[165] Egdunas Racius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

relatively increased and two significant books, that address the Muslim communities' situation in most of this post-communist Eastern region, along with others that focus on the South-eastern and former Yugoslav countries, were published in English.[166] These studies often address the various areas of this region together for they share complex histories that influence the current situation and relations. Therefore, some historical background about the history of the region, especially concerning Islam and Muslims, is necessary to contextualise and understand the Muslim minority in Slovenia.

The presence of Muslims in Slovenia is, in fact, part of the centuries-old presence of Islam in the continent of Europe, almost as old as the history of Islam itself. According to Nielsen, before the recent establishment of Muslim communities that has been taking place mostly in Western Europe, there were three prior distinct phases of large-scale Muslim communities' presence. The first phase was the period of Islamic Spain and Muslim rule in Sicily. In the eleventh century, the rule in Sicily ended, and the Spanish *Reconquista* left no Muslims behind in Spain by 1492. The two other phases, which have, on the other hand, left permanent Muslim communities, were the spread of Mongol armies during the thirteenth century and the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans and central Europe by the second part of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The successor states of the former became Muslims, and one of them, the Khanate of the Golden Horde, left permanent Muslim populations who later travelled around the Russian empire, establishing colonies in areas in Finland and the borders between today's Poland and Ukraine. The latter constituted the Muslim communities that still survive today in parts of Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia (which included Slovenia), Romania and Greece. They included the Ottoman populations

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[166] See: Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (Warsaw, Poland: Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, 2011), and Ibid.

who settled in those areas, beside the indigenous ethnic populations, both Slavic and Albanian speaking, who form the majority of today's Balkan Muslims.[167]

The Muslim political and religious supremacy lasted in the Balkans and wider Southeast Europe for several centuries, up until the nineteenth century and in certain areas even till the beginning of the twentieth century, affecting the development of the societies there. During that time there was a high contrast in the distribution of Muslims in the region. Some areas showed Muslims as the overwhelming majority of the local inhabitants, while other areas showed barely a few Muslim presence. However, by the secession of former Ottoman provinces, the established interreligious relations, social and political geographies, as well as the areas' demographics, all have witnessed huge transformations. Muslims, who once were the dominant faith group in some of these areas, and enjoyed high social and political positions, turned overnight into a religious minority trying to find its place within Christian majority states, which were in a process of nation-building. During that period, hundreds of thousands of Muslims fled out of fear, while other tens of thousands lost their lives. With the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, several nation-states emerged which included Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (which was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until 1929). These still had fairly large Muslim communities which they had to find a way to deal with as citizens of their new nation-states. By the end of the Second World War, all of South-eastern Europe came under communist rule. The fate of Muslims under the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was regarded as more favourable when compared to the fate of the rest of the Muslims in Albania, Bulgaria or under the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), where practicing Islam was severely banned, and its followers were persecuted.[168]

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[167] Jorgen S. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam*, ed. Zig Layton-Henry and Daniele Joly (Hampshire, England: PALGRAVEMACMILLAN, 1999);  Racius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)*.
[168] Racius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)*.

During the period of Yugoslavia and even after its disintegration in 1990, the position of Muslim communities and Islamic institutionalisation around the region differed significantly from one country to the other.[169] While the main focus of the chapter is on the Muslims in Slovenia and their specific experiences, Bosnian Muslims (or Bosniaks) are also relevant since they now constitute the majority of Muslims in Slovenia. Since the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans, Slovenia had its share of Ottoman incursions. However, unlike the case in Bosnia and other areas in Central and Eastern Balkans, the Ottomans did not stay long enough in Slovenia for Islam to settle. These incursions, according to Zalta, represent a dark period in the collective memory of Slovenia.[170] After that period, especially between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, there was almost an absence of Muslim communities in Slovenia, which had, and still does, a Catholic majority.[171] It was only during the First World War when Muslim communities started to form in Slovenia by Bosniaks, who came to fight on the side of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During that time, the first mosque, and the only mosque in Slovenian history until the twenty-first century, was built near the village of Log pod Mangartom. The mosque of Log pod Mangartom (Figure 5-28), was soon demolished after the war, most probably by Italians. Later, more Muslim populations migrated to Slovenia, during the 1960s under the period of Yugoslavia, as workers. Consequently, in 1967, the first Islamic community (*jama'ah*) in Slovenia was founded. This community grew further, especially by 1994, as refugees from the Bosnian war arrived.[172]

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[169] Egdunas Racius, "Successor States of Yugoslavia," in *Muslims in Eastern Europe*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 78–113.
[170] Anja Zalta, "Muslims in Slovenia," *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2005): 93–112.
[171] Racius, "Successor States of Yugoslavia."
[172] Zalta, "Muslims in Slovenia."

Figure 5-28 Mosque in Log pod Mangartom in Slovenia built by Bosniak soldiers in 1916
(Collection of Vinko Avsenak)

According to the latest available census of 2002 in Slovenia, 47,488 people or 2.4 percent of religious affiliation respondents chose Islamic faith. This puts Islam as the second largest religion in Slovenia, a country of about two million people, after Roman Catholic with 58 percent. Islam, according to the number of its followers in Slovenia, is closely followed by Orthodox Church and Evangelical Church.[173] However, these numbers may reflect only part of a possibly larger community. It is noteworthy to mention that choosing to respond to religious or ethnic affiliation was not a requirement in the census. According to Bajt, it was left solely to the respondents' personal preferences.[174] The actual Muslim population in Slovenia was estimated at 100,000 Muslims,[175] according to Nevzet Poric, the former secretary-general of the Islamic Community, and the current *Mufti*,[176] after

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[173] Andraž Teršek, "Cosntitution and the Clash of Cultures: Is There a Constitutional Right to Erect a Mosque?," *Oñati Journal of Emergent Socio-Legal Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 30–42.

[174] Veronika Bajt, "The Muslim Other in Slovenia: Intersections of a Religious and Ethnic Minority," in *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam*, ed. Katarzyna GórakSosnowska (Warsaw, Poland: Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, 2011), 307–27.

[175] "Slovenia 2020 International Religious Freedom Report" (Washington, D.C., 2021).

[176] Mufti is an Islamic jurist and the leader of Islamic community in Slovenia.

Nedžad Grabus. These numbers are still hard to grasp, as counting, and thus identifying Muslims has been challenging, especially in this region. 'Muslim' in Eastern European history, had been placed between both ethnicity and religious belonging. In fact, with the emergence of independent states in former Yugoslavia, the category 'Muslim' was added to the national affiliation, beside Slovene, Croatian and Bosniak, denoting ethnic affiliation rather than religious.[177] The question of who counts as a Muslim, as elsewhere in the West, extends not only to self-identification, but also to the assigned identity, and whether in fact, the person practices the religion or not. Therefore, the estimate provided by the Muslim community, though significantly higher and questionable, at least, according to Racius, provides the upper limit of people with Muslim backgrounds in the country.[178]

*The Slovenian Muslims, their Organizations and Constructions*

The first significant influx of Bosniaks and some Albanian Muslims to Slovenia in the 1970s, brought in people from 'less-developed' areas who were attracted to the fast-developing industry of the country. These labour migrants were mostly low-skilled labourers who settled in the industrialised areas in and around the capital Ljubljana.[179] Another significant influx happened during the 1990s, when Muslims arrived as refugees from war-torn Yugoslavia, mostly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and some from Kosovo. As they arrived, they were received with high solidarity and were offered humanitarian help by Slovenians. However, by time, these refugees were constructed not only as economic burden, but more importantly, as an undesired reminder of its old Slavic connections, and the Balkan skin which Slovenia, as an independent state, was keen to shed while on its road to 'Europe'.[180]

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[177] Zalta, "Muslims in Slovenia."
[178] Racius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)*.
[179] Racius, "Successor States of Yugoslavia."
[180] Bajt, "The Muslim Other in Slovenia: Intersections of a Religious and Ethnic Minority."

In spite of their temporary protection status,[181] many of these Muslim refugees stayed and brought their families, and a 'second generation' was born. Beside that, there were Muslims from African and Middle Eastern countries, who came as students in Slovenia since Yugoslavia and decided to settle. More recently, though in small numbers, asylum seekers from countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and some former Soviet republics became part of the Muslim population in Slovenia. Looking more closely at the results of the 2002 Census, Bajt found that a majority of 74 percent of those affiliated with Islam in Slovenia share a Bosnian background, while 11 percent have an Albanian background.[182] Despite the lack of surveys on the peculiarities of the Slovenian Muslim population and the fact that researchers have no doubt that some ethnic Slovenians have converted to Islam, constituting part of the six percent of Muslims describing themselves as Slovenians, they assume that the rest are only descendants of other Slavic-speaking ethnicities.[183]

The first local community (*jam 'ah*) that was established in 1967 in Ljubljana, became an organized institution and was named the Slovenian Islamic Community in 1991. Despite its functioning according to Slovene law, the institution lies under the formal hierarchical framework of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, called the *Rijaset* and located in Sarajevo. The *Rijaset* of Bosnia is regarded as the supreme spiritual body, for not just Slovenia, but also for Islamic Communities in Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbian Sandžak.[184] Consequently, Islamic Communities in these countries hold the status of *meshihat* as subordinate Islamic administrations of the *Rijaset* of Bosnia. Each of these *meshihat* consists of five members, who are elected by the Council of the Muslim community in each of these states.[185] In Slovenia, Nedžad Grabus was appointed

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[181] These refugees were not expected to stay permanently by the Slovenian authorities, therefore the Office for Immigration and Refugees focused merely on their temporary protection as "forced migrants" rather than "refugees".

[182] Bajt, "The Muslim Other in Slovenia: Intersections of a Religious and Ethnic Minority."

[183] Racius, "Successor States of Yugoslavia."

[184] Zalta, "Muslims in Slovenia."

[185] In 2006, another organization emerged due to a conflict in the Slovene Islamic community. The new organization, which was led by a Mufti who had been dismissed by the *Rijaset* of Bosnia and

chairman of the *meshihat* in 2006.[186] He was also the grand *Mufti* of Slovenia, which made him both the administrative and religious leader of the community.

Nedžad Grabus, like a few other scholars, has been addressing the position and constructions of Muslims in Slovenia through various articles and publications. As the case in Western European and the global trend of the evolution of Muslim populations into a 'minority', it is the discourse of 'Other' and how Muslims are perceived that developed the primary academic interest in Islam in Slovenia. Yet, in addition to the Western perceptions of Muslims burdened by Orientalist misconceptions, the position of Muslims in Slovenia is further loaded with ethnic prejudice, that draws multiple discrimination and intersectionality.[187] So beside the influence of past and recent global events that stirred Islamophobia in the West, Slovenian Islamophobia holds a longer history, that has not only been reproduced through media but has also been conveyed through "biased and Eurocentric teachings of history" in school curricula.[188] Muslims in Slovenia have, in fact, always been ethnicized, either as 'Turks' or Ottomans in the past or as 'Bosnians' in more recent history.[189] They continue to be presented as opposite to the Slovene society, which is democratic, developed, free, and even tolerant. Often tied to low social class, Muslims are treated as "a non-educated and replaceable workforce", needed only for economic benefit, therefore "any regard for their religious needs is absent from practice and public discussion," regardless of the fact that most of these Muslims have Slovenian citizenship which supposedly means that they should be

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is reported to have negligible membership, wanted independence from the Bosnian spiritual and legal supremacy with a more "Slovene-European" character. The older organization "the Islamic Community in Slovenia" remained the acknowledged Islamic organization by the state, with whom an agreement was signed in 2007, stipulating the rights of the Muslims and the country and regarding the Islamic Community in Slovenia as the designated custodian and representative of Islam in the country. For more see: Ibid.; Racius, "Successor States of Yugoslavia."

[186] According to interview conducted with Mufti N. Grabus, his role ended in June 2021.

[187] Bajt, "The Muslim Other in Slovenia: Intersections of a Religious and Ethnic Minority."

[188] One of the novels that was part of the Slovene compulsory primary school reading material, is a novel by Josip Jurcic (1844-1881) entitled "Jurij Kozjak, slovenski janicar". This author is known for his disapproving writings about Islam. In this novel, he wrote a story of a boy who was taken by 'Muhammadans' (Muslims) who uprooted his Christianity that teaches to love our neighbours. Instead, 'Muhammadanism' (Islam), that teaches hate towards Christians and their religion,was inculcated in him.

[189] Bajt, "The Muslim Other in Slovenia: Intersections of a Religious and Ethnic Minority."

treated as equal.[190] This discrimination and intolerance towards Muslims was distinctly evident in the public debate about constructing a mosque in Ljubljana.[191]

### 5.4.2.    *Half a Century Struggle of Building a First Mosque*

Before constructing the Ljubljana Mosque, Muslims in Ljubljana, and the rest of Slovenia, did not have a purpose-built mosque. They used mixed-use premises, rented sports centres, private apartments, garages and even industrial plants for their religious gatherings.[192] The filing of the first request to build a mosque in Slovenia goes back to 1969. During this period, which lasted over more than two decades of communist rule and the first decade of the independent Slovene, the mosque request was passively obstructed and constantly rejected for opaque reasons related to mosque location. From 2001 to 2003, a second period of more active and more publicly pronounced opposition continued. While some top leaders of political parties sympathised with the Muslim initiative, including the Ljubljana Mayor"s Office spokesperson, who declared the constitutional right of Muslims in having a mosque, [193] the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia (RCC), remained reserved. In a 2002 public opinion poll on the building of a mosque, 42.3 percent of people polled were against constructing a mosque. A similar percent of (42.3) were in favour of the idea, while 5.3 percent were in favour of the condition that "the mosque be not in their immediate environment."[194] Since 2003, a third period of rejection continued, witnessing an escalating Islamophobic opposition from the Slovene public, more dangerous than before. The public was presented with arguments and warnings regarding the potential risks associated with the construction of a mosque. These were made by opposition political parties, as well as by the Ruling Christian Slovene Popular Party (SLS) and the most distinct

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[190] Ibid.
[191] Zalta, "Muslims in Slovenia."
[192] Teršek, "Cosntitution and the Clash of Cultures: Is There a Constitutional Right to Erect a Mosque?"
[193] Anja Zalta, "Islam As A European Religion: Some Views On Islam In The Territory Of The Ex Yugoslavia - The Cases Of Slovenia And Bosnia And Herzegovina," n.d.
[194] Ibid.

theologians of the RCC.[195] Even though most Slovenians do not know much about Islam, many have shown an intense Islamophobia and opposition towards the idea.[196] Arguments against the mosque construction went through a phase of radicalisation in the third period, acquiring an institutionalised form and calling for a referendum.[197]

The legal story of the referendum was concluded by the court, dismissing the referendum on the grounds that its purpose i.e., preventing the construction of a mosque thus limiting the rights of others, is unconstitutional. Therefore, the court stated that "decisions which would be inconsistent with the Constitution may not be put to a referendum."[198] What is more revealing about the constructions of Islam in Slovenia, than the referendum itself which has already expressed high levels of nationalism and cultural racism, are the reasons and campaigns that were used to attract the signatories. "The referendum against the mosque" was stated and announced through different media channels, all in the streets, on television and internet. Fear against Muslims was raised at that time through arguments that would include problems of terrorism, deviance, mistrust, and unaccustomedness towards mosques. Similar to constructions experienced in Australia and other countries in the West, Muslim religious rituals as a "troubling factor", and conservatism of the Slovenian way of life and traditional milieu were also mentioned. In fact, the initiative of the referendum has shown that the issue of location and logistics, which has long been used as an objection motive, was only marginal. The written explanation of the referendum stated that:

> […] there was no need for the erection of a mosque and big religious centre, because Muslims can satisfy their religious needs in a simpler manner […] Islamic religious cultural centre is not just any kind of building […] It is the

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[195] Only two church functionaries have publicly expressed their support to the mosque project request.

[196] A public opinion survey in 2003, showed that 78 percent of respondents replied negatively to the question "Do you want to know more about Islam?" See Teršek, "Cosntitution and the Clash of Cultures: Is There a Constitutional Right to Erect a Mosque?".

[197] Srecˇo Dragos, "Islamophobia in Slovenia: Politically Produced Intolerance," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 13, no. 3 (2005): 299–315.

[198] Teršek, "Cosntitution and the Clash of Cultures: Is There a Constitutional Right to Erect a Mosque?"

religious-cultural house of God of nearly ten thousand people, the followers of the Islamic way of life.[199]

Despite the politicians' and Catholic theologians' attempts,[200] having a secular state with a constitutional democracy in the Republic of Slovenia, made dismissing the referendum, and the whole idea of opposing mosque construction, in the end, an inevitable matter. In 2008, the Islamic Community was enabled the purchase of real estate, at a public auction, where finally a mosque could be built.[201]

### 5.4.3.   The Mosque Project: A Call for a Modern Design

In their long struggle for a mosque, the Islamic Community have shown tolerance, persistence and patience in seeking their rights,[202] countering the constructions expressed above by those who supported the referendum. According to Mufti Grabus, all they wanted through the Mosque project is:

> […] not only to profess the religiosity or to practice, but also to have some kind of a centre, where they can actually express their cultural identity. Additionally, it aims to strengthen some other parts of their lives, social, educational, and so on. That was the idea from the great beginning.[203]

Regarding the mosque design and construction, the Islamic Community, according to Slovene law, was obliged to have a public competition, announced in both local and international newspapers. So, in 2011, an announcement of an international anonymous competition for Ljubljana Muslim Culture Centre was published in a Slovenian newspaper as well as the British daily newspaper Financial Times.[204] The jury of the competition constituted international members, encompassing prominent architects from Slovenia, a representative committee of

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[199] Ibid.
[200] For more details see Dragos, "Islamophobia in Slovenia: Politically Produced Intolerance."
[201] Teršek, "Cosntitution and the Clash of Cultures: Is There a Constitutional Right to Erect a Mosque?"
[202] Dragos, "Islamophobia in Slovenia: Politically Produced Intolerance."
[203] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.
[204] Ibid.

the Muslim community, and a representative from the main funding body which was from Qatar.[205]

The Ljubljana City Council played a notably significant role compared to other city councils mentioned in this thesis.  This is understandable considering it was their first-ever experience with Mosque projects, following a long history marked by fear and opposition against its construction. According to Mufti Grabus, the City Council:

> Defined what kind of objects will be allowed to be built in this plot of the land where we have now the Islamic cultural centre, and also, they defined all proportions of the mosque, height of the minaret and so on. So, architects they had full information about the possibility, what kind of project they need to present. [206]

The committee, of which Mufti Grabus was a member, had to select from forty-four different proposals. These proposals included detailed descriptions of each project, followed by an exhibition showcasing them at the municipality hall of Ljubljana. Recognizing the contextual sensitivities, the committee was well-aware that adopting an Ottoman architectural style with overt Islamic identity would not be suitable within the Slovene context. Mufti Grabus noted that Muslims didn't have a primary concern regarding the specific design details. Their main priority was having a mosque, given the long struggle they had undergone. This struggle led them to be more accommodating in terms of their expectations and aspirations. However, despite this understanding, the committee insisted that a minaret should be incorporated into the mosque design. A minaret, especially to Muslims in Slovenia and South Slavic countries, held a certain significance regarding not just the mosque's identity, but also its typology. According to Mufti Grabus:

> The minaret was very important symbol for community. Because the minaret actually represents some kind of identity. In our region, we used to call the place of worship as *jami'*, *Jami'* in our traditions always means a mosque with a minaret,

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[205] M. Bevk, Video interview, April 07, 2022.
[206] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

> Masjid is always a small building without minaret, in our cultural traditions. So, we wanted to have a minaret.[207]

This explains why the committee was quite disappointed with the proposed designs, as most of them did not include minarets. The proposal by the office of Bevk Perović Arhitekti, whose design was as 'modern', yet included a minaret, was then selected to develop the drawings for the project.

*The Mosque Architecture*

Bevk Perović Arhitekti is a design office based in Slovenia. The office was founded in 1997 and run by two architects: Matija Bevk and Vasa Perović. Like the rest of the architects in this thesis, it is hard to name a single style or a specific school of architecture that describes Bevk and Perović's work. Instead, there happens to be a series of anticipated influences and references that correspond to the complex history of these architects' countries and the whole region. The presumed 'localization' of today's Mosque Architecture in the West, or, at least, the wish for that direction, always brings up the question of: what is the local architecture, or in this case, what does Slovenian architecture look like? In many cases, it is the answer to this question which reveals a great deal of those influences or at least their main sources. The historical events mentioned in the introduction of this section, which include breaking away from Yugoslavia in 1991, and later joining the European Union in 2004, have led to profound changes in the country which were reflected respectively in architecture.

At the time of Yugoslavia, under its leader President Tito, Russian influences from the USSR were restricted, while influences from the West were considered politically incorrect. Contacts with countries that were neutral during World War II, i.e., Switzerland and Scandinavia, were encouraged, influencing architects who had an official role at this time of building a new country.[208] The architecture during this period was featured with an in-between state resulting from so many

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[207] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.
[208] Andrej Hrausky, "Slovenian Architecture Today," *Architektur Steiermark*, 2006, http://www.gat.st/news/slovenian-architecture-today.

overlapping geopolitical and cultural conditions. It was suspended between a number of shifting reference points that included different versions of modernity and tradition, between both past and future; and east and west.[209] A well-known figure of that time, also internationally acknowledged, and a profound influencer of architecture in Slovenia was the architect Jože Plečnik (1872-1957). He played a major role in shaping the city of Ljubljana to the extent that it was often named 'Plečnik's Ljubljana'.[210]

A significant portion of the literature concerning Slovenian architecture, an architecture that has received limited scholarly attention, examines Plečnik's work and its premises. What captures attention in the literature about Plečnik is the influence of Otto Wagner and his school in Vienna, where Plečnik spent his early career. Of particular interest is the concept of tectonics, with Gottfried Semper's *Bekleidung* theory frequently mentioned in the writings of Kenneth Frampton, who taught at the Berlage Institute, where Perović pursued his master's degree. This theory serves as a consistent point of reference to the school of Wagner.[211] This influence may be evident, to some extent, in the work of Bevk Perović, especially in Ljubljana mosque as it will be shown later, in two ways. First, in the constitutive elements of the mosque,[212] and second, in the use of textiles both for its lightness and architectural symbolism.

After the Second World War, another architect, Edvard Ravnikar (1907-1993), took on the role Plečnik played during the interwar period as the national architect of Slovenia. He shaped Ljubljana as extensively as his teacher, Plečnik. He was considered the most important representative of Slovene modern

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[209] Wolfgang Thaler, Maroje Mrduljas, and Vladimir Kulic, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (JOVIS Verlag, 2019).

[210] Vladimir Kulić, "Edvard Ravnikar's Eclecticism of Taste and the Politics of Appropriation," in *Terms of Appropriation: Modern Architecture and Global Exchange*, ed. Amanda Reeser Lawrence and Ana Miljački, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 75–93.

[211] Magdalena Garmaz, "Digital Plecnik: Vienna Years," in *DIGITAL APTITUDES + OTHER OPENINGS - ACSA 100th Annual Meeting* (Boston, 2012), 312–16.

[212] As argued by Vladimir Kulic through a personal email conversation about the architecture of Bevk Perović office, he stated: some of the ideas from that book (Studies in Tectonic Culture by Kenneth Frampton) can also be recognized in the way the Ljubljana Mosque "deconstructs" the building into constitutive elements, not unlike Gottfried Semper's theories (the frame, the screen, the layering of the facade, the floating symbolic dome, etc.).

architecture,[213] teaching generations of architects during his thirty-six years at the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana and giving rise to 'Ravnikar School',[214] where Bevk also graduated. Ravnikar, who worked for Le Corbusier and was exposed to a diversity of experiences during a period of rapid modernization, was seen as a committed modern architect. Like the architects of his generation, Carlo Scarpa in Italy and Luis Barragan in Mexico, Ravnikar tried to translate what he inherited from the Modern masters of architecture to construct his local version of modernity and develop a regional variety of international style.[215]

Bevk and Perović's generation of Slovene architects emerged at another changing political and social circumstances in the country. As Slovenia joined the EU, attention and interest increased in its architecture. The scope of its architects became more international and ambitious. Many of these architects, like Perović, continued their studies abroad, returning with fresh architectural ideas, while soon receiving both awards and recognition.[216] Working in different European countries on a diverse range of projects, Bevk Perović office has won numerous national and international prizes, including European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture, Mies van der Rohe Emerging Architect Award, and two most recent awards for Ljubljana Muslim Cultural Center in 2020.[217]

After this contextual and historical architectural brief, which has become quite a necessity in understanding a wider atmosphere of architectural influence on Bevk Perović office, the following details of Ljubljana Mosque would reveal further particular circles of influence. It shall also position its architecture within the above context. Maybe more than the other architects of the mosque projects introduced in this research, due to the status of Islam in Slovenia, the architects of Ljubljana Mosque had no precedent knowledge about the religion they were facing.

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[213] Ales Vodopivec and Rok Znidariic, "Introduction," in *Edvard Ravnikar: Architect and Teacher*, ed. Fr ied r ich Achleitner et al. (Slovenia: SpringerWien NewYork, 2010), 11–12.
[214] Kulić, "Edvard Ravnikar's Eclecticism of Taste and the Politics of Appropriation."
[215] William f. R. Curtis, "Preface. Overlapping Territories: On Situating Edvard Ravnikar," in *Edvard Ravnikar: Architect and Teacher*, ed. Fr ied r ich Achleitner et al. (Slovenia: SpringerWien NewYork, 2010), 7–10.
[216] Hrausky, "Slovenian Architecture Today."
[217] Plečnik Prize and the Golden Pencil award.

According to Perović, they were "*the complete tabula rasa in that sense*". Therefore, they had to learn about a lot of things in a very short time, especially at the beginning and before winning the competition, which was for them more of a learning process as they did not expect to win.[218] So as they won, they had to start learning everything including the terms used to describe the spaces and elements of the mosque. Perović would mention that:

> […] basically, we had to learn everything more or less about everything, and then also to understand the spirituality of it in order to be able to provide some sort of response, it is not only a fact-finding mission, but it is also an attempt to understand the kind of spiritual notions of a religion in order to interpret them with our own words.[219]

The mosque site was another challenge. The land approved for the mosque construction was located near the city centre, yet the area was abandoned, underdeveloped and infrastructurally isolated. It was caught between a railway junction and an industrial complex.[220] The project program which included not just a mosque but also a religious school building, apartments for the employees, a lecture hall, an office programme and a restaurant, all supported by car parking in the basement, appeared more like a small city to the architects, who looked for inspirations in the city plan of Sarajevo from the nineteenth century. Much similar to the spatial organization of 'oriental' Sarajevo's 'mahala',[221] "where mosques were built as some sort of urban generators,"[222] the buildings of the project were built and positioned as separate entities with the mosque in its center. Unlike the case of Punchbowl Mosque, where the mosque is located in the corner of the land

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[218] Vasa Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020," *Reflexie Architektúry*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9pUwCCpDb4&t=6s.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Miloš Kosec, "Beacon of Reflection: Islamic Religious and Cultural Centre in Ljubljana, Slovenia by Bevk Perović Arhitekti," *The Architectural Review*, 2021, https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/beacon-of-reflection-islamic-religious-and-cultural-centre-in-ljubljana-slovenia-by-bevk-perovic-arhitekti.

[221] Ottomans established a type of city organization of residential zones called *mahala*. It was separate from the crafts and trade center and organized around mosques. Its spatial organization reflected the religious lifestyle and customs of that time as well as the public-private relationships. For more see: Jasenka Cakaric and Aida Idrizbegovic Zgonic, "Mahale Of Sarajevo - Between Public And Private," in *Proceeding of the 5th International Conference S.ARCH-2018* (Venice, Italy, 2018), 279–89.

[222] Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020."

plot aligned with its edges rather than to the direction of the Makkah, Ljubljana Mosque which took the form of a cube was rotated, in the triangular land plot, in order to align with the direction of the *qiblah* towards Makkah. It is surrounded by simple forms, oriented towards the 'outside' world, with in-between gaps that allow views from all sides (Figure 5-29). A piazza is created at the center, where the mosque sits and opens, allowing for the extension of the prayer space during large gatherings.[223]



VIEWS FROM SURROUNDINGS - MOSQUE AS A CENTRE OF THE PROJECT
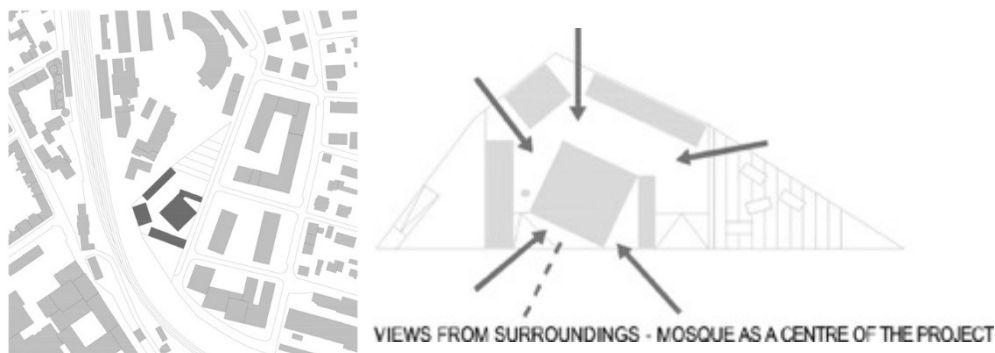
Figure 5-29 The site plan of Ljubljana Muslim Culture Center, and its building appearing in dark grey (left) The arrangement of the project program (right) (ArchDaily 2020)

With the lack of mosque architectural heritage in Slovenia, the architects again sought the heritage of its closest Muslim neighbour, Bosnia. In a presentation where Perović introduces the influences that brought them to design Ljubljana Mosque architecture and its elements, he shows pictures of Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque in Sarajevo (Figure 5-30). The 16th-century mosque, also the largest in Bosnia's history, is considered one of the most representative Ottoman architectural structures and masterpieces in the region.[224] According to Perović:

> Were much looking into construction of these kinds of […] circular little domes, especially the ones that you see in front of the main mosque space. [225]

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[223] ArchDaily, "Islamic Religious and Cultural Center in Ljubljana / Bevk Perović Arhitekti," 2020, https://www.archdaily.com/952019/islamic-religious-and-cultural-center-in-ljubljana-bevk-perovic-arhitekti.
[224] Haris Dervisevic, "Ottoman Masterpiece in Sarajevo," *Islamic Arts Magazine*, 2020, http://islamicartsmagazine.com/magazine/view/the_ottoman_masterpiece_in_sarajevo/.
[225] Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020."

Consequently, Perović and Bevk employed a series of small domes, each with a diameter of around three and a half meters, suspended from the ceiling. These domes serve as acoustic elements as they sit above a larger textile dome which is suspended underneath. In his presentation, Perović would also reference the first Slovenian mosque, the mosque of Log pod Mangartom, where he described its architecture as an attempt to "*bridge the kind of cultural divide in between the Ottoman traditions meeting the European traditions*."[226] He would also mention Le Corbusier, but in relation to Islamic architecture in the writings of the Slovene architect Dušan Grabrijan who tried to compare the two.[227] This mention of Grabrijan's approach, which attempted to demonstrate a *modernity* inherent in traditional Bosnian architecture,[228] appeared more like a 'justification for relevance' within the framework of the *Modern* outlook of Ljubljana Mosque within the discourse of Islamic architecture.
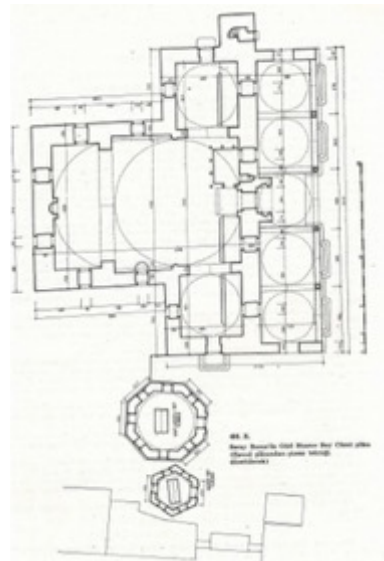


Figure 5-30 Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque, with its domes and pencil-like minaret (left) The plan of Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque (right) Source: https://www.islamicarchitecturalheritage.com/listings/gazi-husrev-begs-mosque

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[226] Ibid.

[227] In his article "Le Corbusier and Sarajevo", Grabrijan would argue that there were shared values between Le Corbusier's architecture and the Bosnian house tradition in aspects including the treatment of materials, plasticity of forms, construction and lighting.

[228] Dijana Alic, "Transformations of the Oriental in the Architectural Work of Juraj Neidhardt and Dusan Grabrija" (The University of South Wales, 2010).

Ljubljana Mosque, as part of a multifunctional complex, takes a simple form of a white cube made of white concrete. Adjacent to it stands a separate, pencil-like minaret. The decision to not directly attach the minaret to the mosque is attributed by Perović and Bevk to a height restriction of forty meters for the minaret and twenty-four meters for the mosque. They believe that a minaret of such height, if connected to the mosque, would appear excessively similar to a chimney. Another consequence of this height constraint is the unconventional incorporation of a primary dome within the Mosque's prayer hall, instead of placing it atop the structure. Bevk suggests that with a height limitation of twenty-four meters, positioning a dome atop the mosque would lead to the mosque or the dome appearing disproportionately small. Nonetheless, there were additional considerations that influenced the placement of the dome inside the mosque. Bevk's explanation of their design choice implies a thoughtful examination of both the urban and political context of Islam's presence. The mosque's simple design (Figure 5-31) and its surrounding, according to Bevk, would not support a golden dome placed outside the mosque. However, their design concept also wouldn't support discarding the dome altogether. Instead, the idea of the dome being a 'hidden' or 'secret' element, gradually revealed within the mosque's interior, presented an intriguing solution for Bevk and Perović (Figure 5-32).[229]

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[229] M. Bevk, Video interview, April 07, 2022.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | mosque |
| 2 | ablution space |
| 3 | public square |
| 4 | minaret |
| 5 | nursery |
| 6 | auditorium |
| 7 | library |
| 8 | park |

section AA

ground floor plan
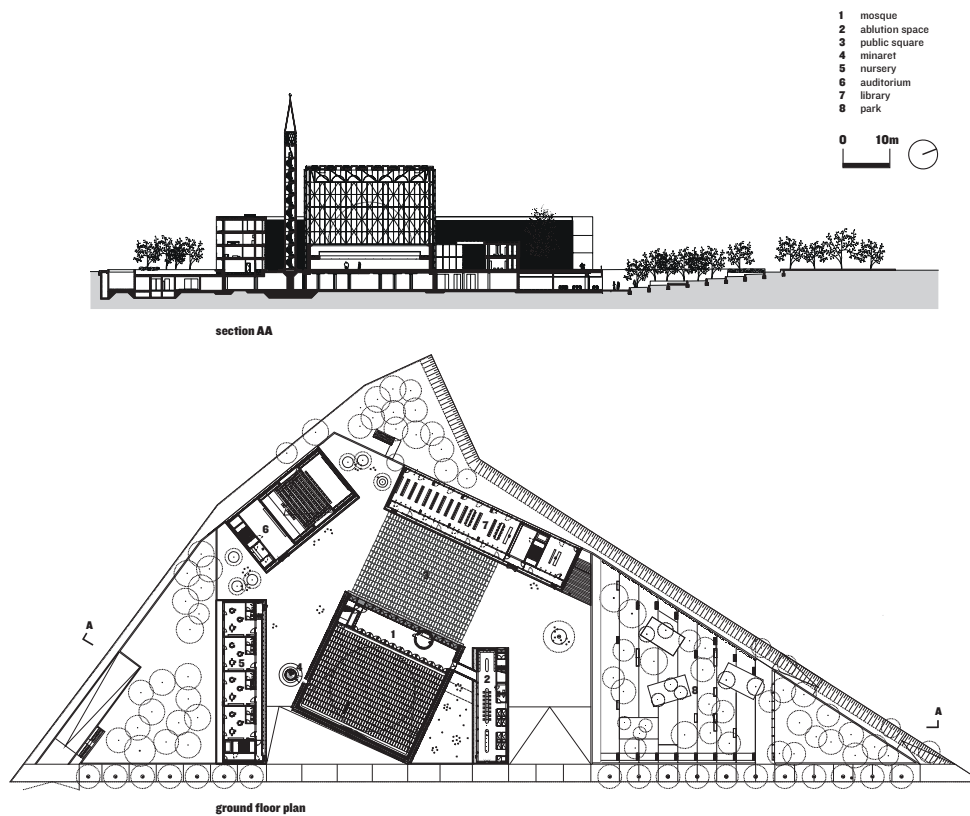
Figure 5-31 Ljubljana Mosque Section and Plan (The Architectural Review)



Figure 5-32 The minaret of Ljubljana Mosque standing between the mosque and the educational building (left) The small cupolas above the suspended main blue dome (right). Photographs by David Schreyer (The Architectural Review)

In designing the main dome, Perović and Bevk would use a number of diverse references that belong to varying traditions. According to Bevk, the dome which is made of blue silk over a suspended structure, recalls representations of the sky or heaven, in historical mosques like the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. The use of textile finds parallels in what Perović would describe as the long association of Islam with

textile, in examples like the *Kiswah* of the *Kaʿbah* and a miniature that show Mongol warriors in tents as 'portable mosques' (Figure 5-33). It also finds parallels in contemporary art, especially in the work of a Korean artist Do Ho Suh who uses textiles to construct all the spaces where he has lived. For Perović and Bevk, the use of textiles would also attain a desirable design aim, which is creating the most important element of the mosque as its lightest element.[230] According to Bevk, this reflects an immaterial religious feature.[231]
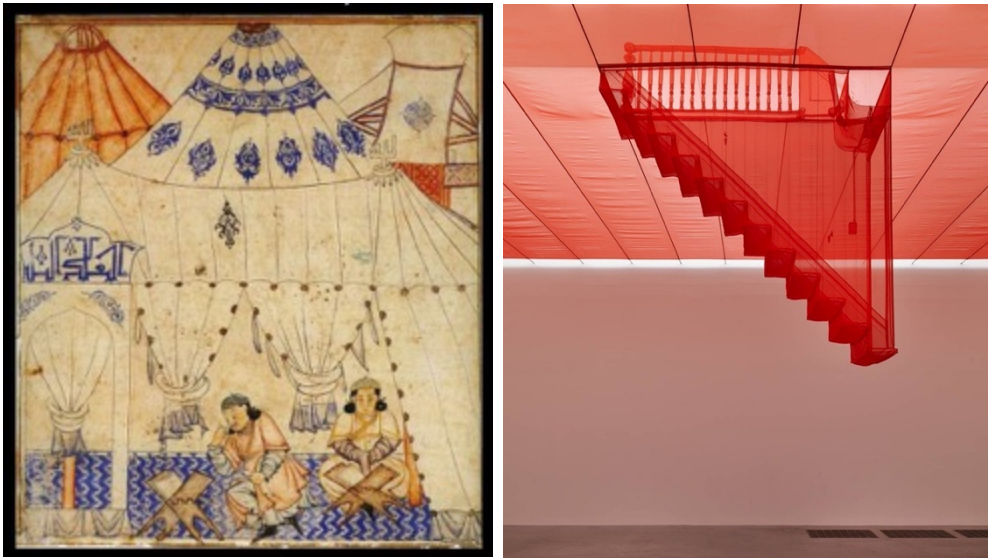


Figure 5-33 A14th century illustration of a Mongol prince studying the Qur'an in what seems to be a tent mosque (left) (Dschingis Khan und seine Erben 2005) A fabric sculpture of staircase designed by Do Ho Suh (right) (Lehmann Maupin Gallery 2010)

The Mosque façade (Figure 5-34) which constitute a layer of glazed façade with a white repeated ceramic print and a steel diamond mesh covering it from the outside, offers the deployment of both light and privacy. In his article about Ljubljana Mosque, Kosec traces down the influences of the local tradition of Jože Plečnik and Edvard Ravnikar, with their lifelong reinterpretations of the facade in the work of Gottfried Semper, in the mosque façade. According to Bevk:

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[230] According to Perović, the weight of the textile is only around 65 kilos. While its structure is around six or seven hundred kilos.
[231] M. Bevk, Video interview, April 07, 2022.

The architecture refers to the heritage of Ljubljana's 1960s Modernist regionalism and to the attention to detail of the earlier Plečnik school as much as to the vernacular asceticism of Bosnia's small urban settlements […].[232]
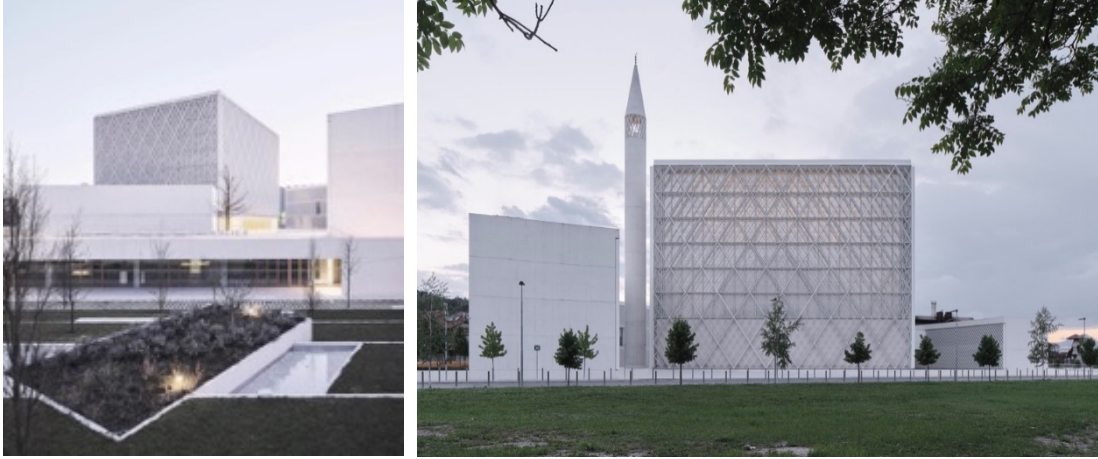


Figure 5-34 Ljubljana Mosque Façade by David Schreyer (The Architectural Review)

### 5.4.4.   Qur'anic Epigraphy of Ljubljana Mosque

Much like the architects of CCM and Punchbowl Mosque, the architects of Ljubljana Mosque lacked prior experience and sufficient knowledge in the realm of calligraphy. Consequently, the Islamic Community, as agreed with the architects since the start of the project, took on the responsibility of determining both the calligrapher and the content for the mosque epigraphy. Following discussions with several masters of calligraphy, Cazim Hadžimejlić from Bosnia-Herzegovina was chosen for the task for his experience in the field.[233]

For Ljubljana Mosque, calligrapher Hadžimejlić inscribed three types of calligraphy on its *qiblah* wall (Figure 5-35). These were:

- Linear calligraphic composition on the *qiblah* wall
- Circular calligraphic compositions on the sides of the *miḥrāb*
- Inscription on the *miḥrāb*

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[232] Kosec, "Beacon of Reflection: Islamic Religious and Cultural Centre in Ljubljana, Slovenia by Bevk Perović Arhitekti."
[233] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

*Linear Calligraphic Composition on the Qiblah Wall*

> *God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous. (Q 2:255)*

*Circular Calligraphic Compositions on the Sides of the Miḥrāb*

> *Allah, May his glory be glorified. (To the right of the miḥrāb)*

> *Mohammad, Peace be upon Him. (To the left of the miḥrāb)*

*Inscription on the Miḥrāb*

> *Whenever Zachariah went in to see her in her sanctuary/miḥrāb. (Part of Q 3:37) (Mirrored)*



Figure 5-35 The interior of Ljubljana Mosque and its inscriptions by David Schreyer (The Architectural Review)

### 5.4.5.    Reflections on the Choices and Interpretations of the Mosque Qur'anic Inscriptions

One of the main significant objectives behind the construction of the Ljubljana Mosque, as previously mentioned, was to convey the cultural identity of the Muslim community in Slovenia. This intention is reflected in the alteration of the complex's title from 'Ljubljana Islamic Religious and Cultural Center' to 'Muslim Cultural Center of Ljubljana'. The community, which has plans to incorporate a small museum or gallery space within the complex, aimed to emphasize a broader cultural characteristic to the buildings rather than a mere religious one, and further develop the cultural impact of the whole complex.[234] However, while not explicitly stated by all the interviewed individuals, this cultural emphasis could potentially contribute to the alternative narratives regarding the position of Islam in Slovenia. This context is particularly relevant to the 'mosque case,' which has faced challenges for decades. Subsequent evidence of this will come to light when the selection of verses, especially the one located on the *miḥrāb*, is discussed below.

Grabus and Hadžimejlić, who both come from Bosnia-Herzegovina, were regarded in that context the main architects of the mosque calligraphy.[235] According to Grabus, in their tradition i.e., the South Slavic tradition that includes all the European countries of Bosnia, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, and some parts of Bulgaria, there are:

> […] two or three messages from the Qur'an in specific [that are used in the] decoration of the mosques. In our tradition, we, almost like in Al Hussein Mosque in Cairo, we used to mention the names, of course, of Allah *Subhanahu wa ta'ala*, Muhammed peace be upon Him and some *sahabas* (companions of the prophet). But we actually reduced here just to write the name of Allah *jal sha'nuho*, and the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon Him.[236]

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[234] M. Bevk, Video interview, April 07, 2022.
[235] According to Bevk, discussions were also made with the project architects, especially about the frequency, and location of the calligraphy.
[236] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

Indeed, a parallel can be seen between the use of the circular calligraphic panels and their relationship to the *miḥrāb* within the interior of the Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque in Bosnia and Ljubljana Mosque (Figure 5-36). However, there is a difference in their respective placements in terms of height; the height of the concrete wall in Ljubljana Mosque contrasts with the height of the utilized *miḥrāb*. Another parallel between the two is evident in the design of the minbar (pulpit). Ljubljana's minbar bears a resemblance to an abstracted interpretation of Gazi Husrev-beg's minbar, potentially described as a modernized version, or rather, a version that has been streamlined by omitting many of its intricate details.



Figure 5-36 The interior of Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque w (left) Source: https://shershegoes.com/gazi-husrev-bey-mosque-sarajevo/  The interior of Ljubljana Mosque (right) Source: https://www.worshipavl.com/details/65797-ljubljana-mosque-makes-sound-a-priority

According to Grabus, the verse used in the linear calligraphic composition, the verse of the Throne (*Ayat al-Kursi*), was chosen as it is:

> The most important regarding the understanding of the Islamic beliefs, especially when we speak about almighty God. So, this actually reflects Islamic beliefs, belief in God, Prophet Muhammad and also spiritual connections with other monotheistic traditions. [237]

Another reason for selecting this verse in the mosque, pertaining to the mosque function, is elucidated by the words of the imām, Benjamin Idriz, of Penzberg Mosque in Germany. In this mosque the verse is inscribed on the exterior façade. According to Idriz, the rationale behind this choice is:

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[237] N. Grabus.

> It is one of the most famous verses, and it is the verse that is read daily. It is related to the five daily prayers, as it is read after each prayer.[238]

The location of the inscribed *Ayat al-Kursi*, especially its height held an important connotation in the Bosnian, and whole Ottoman tradition. Inside Ljubljana Mosque, like most of the other mosques, there is a prayer area for women, located on a mezzanine level floor called *mahfel*. In their tradition, according to Grabus, calligraphy cannot be inscribed on a level that is below the face of the congregants or users of the mosque or space. Therefore, when inscribing *Ayat al-Kursi*, the calligrapher had to make sure that the inscription is placed above the level of the women's mezzanine prayer area.

Regarding the *miḥrāb*, which was made in inox (stainless steel), a traditionally used verse was inscribed in golden *Jeli Thuluth* script, just like the rest of the inscriptions in the mosque. According to Hadžimejlić, the architects wanted a more geometric script like *Kufic* to be used for the mosque inscriptions since the mosque has a cubic or geometric form. Hadžimejlić had to convince them of the use of *Jeli Thuluth*. He also proposed the mirrored design which they approved. Looking at the meaning and references of the verse used on the *miḥrāb*, Grabus would explain how the verse:

> […] referred to Sayeda Mariam (Mary), and Mary is important, not only for Muslims. She is very important for Christians and therefore Jews, of course. So, this is a very big story.[239]

Grabus would further explain the use of *miḥrāb* in the mosque, with reference to its symbolism and the etymological meaning of the word, while stating that:

> We have also symbolic meaning of *miḥrāb*. *Miḥrāb* is the place where a person actually is in *harb* (war), why is in a *harb*, because this is *harb* between Spiritual, positive and negative powers, like Angels, Gins, negative, you know, and when you enter the mosque, You have to be very strong to change your understanding of the life, to change your actually relationship with the people, of course, for the better. So, *Miḥrāb* refers also on the spiritual understanding of the life of Mary, *Hadret* Mariam, because she is a very important person for all believers. And

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[238] B. Idriz, Video interview, July 14, 2021.
[239] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

when we actually explain this message from our *miḥrāb*, even our colleagues from Christian churches they do understand what does it mean.[240]

An explicit reason for employing this verse on the *miḥrāb*, traditionally, is the literal reference to the word *miḥrāb* in the verse. Nevertheless, Grabus, who, in collaboration with the calligrapher translated the inscriptions into Slovene language and made them available in booklets for distribution to mosque visitors, seemed to have opted for the verse's reference to Mary in order to establish a sense of familiarity and create opportunities for dialogue with the public, who has a long history of Christian tradition. The calligrapher inscribed the verse onto the *miḥrāb* using a bilaterally symmetrical calligraphic style known as *muthanna* or mirrored (Figure 5-37). In her book about the tradition of mirror writing in Islamic calligraphy, Akin presents the distinct nature of mirror writing and its calligraphers' Sufi profiles, through its history and till this the present day. Like Hadžimejlić who is also a member of a Sufi order, *muthanna* calligraphers had remarkable conceptualizations of art that attempt to enhance the visual effect of the inscribed words, recharge its meaning in order to revivify a perceived relationship between the divine and the contemplator.[241] Whether Hadžimejlić intentionally chose the muthanna style for the reasons mentioned above or merely adhered to an established tradition, the available space, letter size, and his experience enabled him to execute it.[242]

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[240] N. Grabus.

[241] For more about *muthana* in Islamic calligraphy see: Esra Akin-Kivanc, *Muthanna / Mirror Writing in Islamic Calligraphy : History, Theory, and Aesthetics* (Indiana University Press, 2020).

[242] C. Hadžimejlić, Video interview, July 07, 2021.

Figure 5-37 Shows the mirrored inscription on the *miḥrāb* in Ljubljana Mosque (Ley Fazl)
Illustration by author

Hadžimejlić was invited after the mosque was constructed to visit the mosque and take on the job. Through his interview, he expressed a disappointment, mirroring Kutlu's experience, as both perceived their invitations as arriving rather late in the process. He conveyed:

> Unfortunately, the architects invite the calligrapher when they are almost finished. In fact, they had to talk to the calligrapher while the project was being drawn, but unfortunately, I was invited when it was almost finished ... I wish you had told me earlier, maybe it could have been different, but now we said that we will apply calligraphy on the things you have done, and we implemented it. [243]

During his involvement with the project, Hadžimejlić made multiple visits to the mosque, during which he met the architects and the Mufti. Grabus, acting as a mediator between various involved and interested parties such as the Islamic community and the city council, also took on a similar role between the architect and the calligrapher, serving as the primary conduit for discussions. One of these discussions included the inscriptions on the sides of the *miḥrāb*. Initially, the architects were hesitant about their inclusion, and they did not initially envision

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[243] C. Hadžimejlić, Video interview, July 07, 2021.

them in a circular frames. They anticipated that the calligraphy would be executed in a simple and delicate manner. To address this, Hadžimejlić presented them with several samples, and the current calligraphic program and format were eventually approved. Both the linear and circular calligraphic compositions were inscribed directly onto the wall and painted in a golden hue, a colour that was selected in collaboration with the architects. Since the *miḥrāb* was manufactured at a factory, its calligraphy, inscribed by Hadžimejlić, was sent to the factory where it was applied on the inox and later erected in the mosque (Figure 5-38).[244]



Figure 5-38 Shows work on the miḥrāb, with the textile of the dome not yet installed by David Schreyer (The Architectural Review)

## 5.5. Concluding Remarks: Redefining Mosque Architecture Amidst Western Modernity

Looking more holistically at the three cases within the Western context, it is important to remember that the three mosques, like many of those in the West, were built for Muslim communities that represent excluded minorities within secular countries of Christian histories and (post) Christian majorities. Despite the differences and particularities of each case and each community, there exists a shared heritage of constructions towards Islam, an inheritance of Western

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[244] C. Hadžimejlić.

islamophobia, mobilized through globalized mass media, fed with misconceptions and stereotypes. As a response to such challenges, in the case of CCM, Marks Barfield architects were commissioned to design what has been termed an "English mosque". This approach not only aligned with Murad's aspirations towards British Muslim identity but also the architects' reading of mosque architectural history i.e., mosque designs following the local architecture and culture.

However, the concept of an 'English mosque' inherently raises questions about the definition of 'English architecture' in Contemporary Britain. Concerning Marks Barfield architects, based in London, labelling their work as definitively English is intricate. As a matter of fact, since Modernism, "the Englishness of English architecture" has become a subject of debate. This discourse, particularly concerning the Englishness of modern architecture, has shown that the nationality of architecture, and thus the nationality of the architect, mattered.[245] Having English architects designing Cambridge Mosque might have, in some respect, mitigated the alienness of the mosque's character. However, these English architects, whose design approach does not necessarily align with a specific architectural style and instead follow the requirements of each individual brief, still had to "*work out what it means to have an English mosque"*.

Much like earlier proponents of 'English' modern architecture who sought validation by looking into history instead of contemporary architecture,[246] Marks Barfield architects have invoked English heritage, notably the structure of fan vaults found in Perpendicular Gothic architecture—a quintessentially English style[247]— for their timber columns. These columns, which form the mosque's defining visual impression, also incorporate geometric patterns, serving as a bridge between the natural world and a symbolic link between English and Islamic elements. But despite all the frames of reference disclosed by the architects, it is yet evident that

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[245] William Whyte, "The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1957," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 441–65.
[246] Ibid. p. 452
[247] William Whyte, "Building the Nation in the Town: Architecture and Identity in Britain," in *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities in Europe, 1848-1914*, ed. William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer, 1st ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan London, 2011), 204–33.

there exists a pronounced resemblance between the structures of Cambridge Mosque and a building that is neither English nor Islamic. A straightforward explanation lies in the fact that both structures were technically developed and constructed by Blumer Lehmann, a Swiss-based timber construction company widely known for its 'modern' wood construction tools and approaches.

Irrespective of the determinants that led to the choice of the structure and its construction company, which likely included economic viability and quality, and regardless of whether the architects succeeded in their attempts towards an English design or not (which merits further examination), the mosque design necessitated a clear differentiation and definition. As traditional architectural styles for mosque definition were dismissed, despite the incorporation of some traditional elements such as a receded golden dome, the mosque's typology, identity, visual authenticity, and sanctity needed to be architecturally communicated through alternative means.

Geometry, therefore, was adopted as a principal means by the architects. And one can see early phase design visualisations (Figure 5-39) resting fundamentally on the use of geometric patterns, not just as a guiding principle but also as artistic motifs for both internal spaces and external facades. However, despite the appropriateness of utilizing geometry in mosque art and architecture due to its abstract and non-representational nature that is Islamic and universal in principle, the Muslim community was still of the opinion that without calligraphy, the Islamic identity of the building was not sufficiently evident.

Figure 5-39 Early Visualization of Cambridge Central Mosque by Guilherme Ressel (World-Architects)

A parallel can be observed within the Australian context. The Punchbowl Muslim community who called for a mosque that would last three hundred years, was given a concrete structure that would live a thousand, as Candalepas proposed. Concrete, which has been an essential part of Modernism[248] and Brutalism in Australia since the 1970s, was used in this mosque in a way contrary to the values these movements symbolize.[249] However, despite Candalepas' attempts, his design continued to be associated in the public's perception, including the Muslim community's, with Modernism and, more persistently, with Brutalism. This might explain the abundance of the use of calligraphy inside the mosque, as one of the mosque visitors, who is also an architect, expressed. In his words, the subsequent integration of calligraphy, particularly the calligraphic boards introduced after the mosque construction, "seemed as an attempt to 'Islamize' a space that was actually designed as a mosque."[250]

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[248] In his book Concrete and Culture, the architectural historian Adrian Forty argued that "To talk about concrete means talking about modernity".
[249] Penny Craswell, "Concrete Paradoxes," *CONCRETE: Art Design Architecture*, 2019.
[250] W. Shehata, Voice message, June 14, 2021.

This might lead us to speculate that the concept of the *muqarnas* created by the mini-domes[251] has not evidently established an 'Islamic' identity for the mosque, which could offer an explanation for the committee's initial hesitance towards the final product. Matthews attributed this to the architect being granted a certain degree of creative freedom at a specific stage, when there was limited oversight from the committee to comprehensively grasp the architect's design intentions and the projected outcome.[252] However, it wasn't solely the form that played a role, but also the choice of material.

Bare concrete is, in fact, not very familiar in mosque architecture. The concrete detailing and the interplay between light and darkness, which Candalepas mastered throughout the mosque, drew more reference to the works of Tadao Ando, Louis Kahn, Le Corbusier and Carlo Scarpa in the architecture of churches and museums.[253] Interestingly, concrete has been recently adopted in another contemporary mosque in Melbourne Australia by the Australian Pritzker Prize-winning architect, Glen Murcutt. Yet, the mosque has faced similar impressions. As expressed by Hakan Elevli, a Muslim architect who worked with Murcutt on the project, a lot of people find their design a contemporary building and not something normally associated with Islamic architecture. However, upon entering the mosque they recognize "that it's Islamic, with Arabic lettering and the minbar."[254]

Similarly, in the case of the Muslim Cultural Center of Ljubljana, the community was genuinely concerned about the design of the mosque,[255]

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[251] Or the concept of a night sky with stars from the Arabian or Islamic tradition of navigation, which Candalepas has simulated through the small skylights inside the domes. See: Candalepas, "Architect's Statement: Angelo Candalepas."

[252] Matthews was the president of AIM from 2007 and up until 2011 when he left AIM for four years. During his time as a president, he was involved with the architect in the preliminary design of the mosque. It was mainly coordinated by the executive committee and the members of the association. So, members of the association were consulted, and they were shown the preliminary designs and floor plans for their feedback. In 2011, when he left the design was different than that was built. As he rejoined back in 2015 and took on the project a supervision role in 2016, the idea of the Muqarnas was already there and construction has already started. Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

[253] Candalepas mentions some of them in a talk entitled 'Wonder', which was given by himself at the Australian Institute of Architects - Tusculum, Potts Point.

[254] Mudditt, "Inside Australia's Stunning 99-Domed Mosque."

[255] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

particularly during the initial years of design development and construction. According to the architect Perovic:

> The Islamic community thought our building was far too modern, and we were trying to convince them that our building is far too traditional, so there was this kind of the lack of understanding or as if we were speaking two different languages or languages in parallel, where we thought that we were extremely traditional, of course, with the modern or contemporary idiomatic format, and they thought that […] it was just far too modern and that nothing really means anything […].[256]

This sentiment of potential meaning loss, or the apprehension thereof, emanates from a community whose perception of mosque architecture predominantly stems from the Bosnian or Ottoman architectural archetype. This apprehension is indeed comprehensible, especially in light of being presented with a simple cubic mosque design. Ultimately, the mosque was erected and garnered favorable reception from both the public and the Muslim community. Notably, Mufti Grabus highlighted a significant aspect of the community's acceptance—the cube was regarded as a nod to the *Kaʿbah*. In Mufti Grabus' words:

> […] our architects were very smart, they projected mosque like a *Kaʿbah*. So, we were very worried about that in the beginning. But now we are very satisfied because we have returned to our identity, the first mosque is the *Kaʿbah*. So, our mosque, Al Jami' in Ljubljana is like a *Kaʿbah*. But the minaret is more like the minarets within the Ottoman traditions.[257]

This attempt to derive architectural reference and *symbolism* for a modern *simple* form may hint at a perceived lack of substantial *Islamic identity*, within the mosque's form, particularly with the inclusion of a concealed dome. Unlike the other case studies, where the mosques either had calligraphy on their exterior (in the case of CCM), or at least a crescent and a star (in the case of Punchbowl Mosque), the cubic form of Ljubljana Mosque, covered with dense steel diamond mesh, has seemed to lack clear *symbolic* or *spiritual* connotations, which might have possibly led the community to draw such analogy.

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[256] Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020."
[257] N. Grabus, Video interview, July 15, 2021.

All these facets lead back to the core investigation of this research, which revolves around the role of Qur'anic epigraphy. Given the contemporary transformations and shifting references of Islamic architecture, as further examined in the following chapter, which have constituted a network of diverse architectural cultures in which the Islamic has been liquified, the importance of Qur'anic epigraphy in (re)defining mosque architecture has gained increased prominence. Calligraphy has emerged as the Islamic 'ambassador', as Selmo articulates,[258] amid the backdrop of Western Modernity and diverse cultures.

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[258] H. Selmo, Audio interview, June 09, 2021. Ambassador in the way it represents Islam and Islamic culture amongst various cultures.

# CHAPTER 6: BEYOND CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN THE WEST

## 6.1. Introduction

In the early years of Islam, when there was no architectural precedent for mosque architecture in Madinah, the Prophet, according to tradition, insisted on '*the booth of Moses*' as an architectural reference for his mosque's design, while refusing to (re)build it after the style of Syrian edifices.[1] Since then, this mosque itself has become an architectural precedent or prototype for many subsequent mosques around the world, including recently constructed ones in the West whose architects would assume a similar context of almost no, or rather poor, local architectural precedents for mosque architecture, which, they in turn, try to create.

However, unlike the position of the prophet and his vast tradition on devotional essentials that, are argued to, have prompted the mosque's architectural evolution,[2] the collections of references of these architects usually pertain to their personal interpretation and design culture which substantially influence the way mosques are produced. These references are mostly overlooked by studies on mosque architecture in the West which give more emphasis to the ideological discourse-either colonial or diasporic. These discourses are typically associated with visions of mosques' patrons or clients rather than architects; a matter this thesis looks more closely at in the following chapter.

Thus, this chapter extends its exploration beyond the architecture of these mosques and explores these collections of references as expressed by their architects. It investigates the various forms of influence at play while questioning the relationship between these references and mosque architecture, and what they tell us about the architects' approaches towards mosque architecture. The chapter also reflects on the mosque design process, particularly the dynamics between

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[1] Ayyad, *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives*.
[2] Ibid.

architects, clients, and calligraphers, and how they influence the architectural features and inscriptions found within these mosques.

### 6.2. The Shifting References of Mosque Architecture in The West

References, according to Goldschmidt, represent "known instances of design that can serve as arguments to be used in design reasoning".[3] Consequently, these references encompass sources of knowledge, both architectural and non-architectural, that architects deem relevant to their design task. More often than not, these references are examined in fragments, without exerting efforts to understand the frames through which these references are used and presented. Since design is fundamentally worldview-dependent,[4] architects not only approach references differently, but also employ them in diverse manners. A pertinent example is the aforementioned Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, which architects frequently cite as an influence or a reference for their mosque designs, even when it is hard to find any direct relevance. That is because, beside the fact that references expressed by architects usually tell us more about their aspirations and pretensions than what they actually build, architects identify different clues in references and use them depending on various parameters. These parameters encompass the architects' objectives, agendas, personal history, and taste,[5] all of which define distinct architects' positions towards the same phenomenon or visual displays.

The three studied mosque projects, as discussed below, have revealed the varied positions adopted by their respective architects towards mosque architecture. By drawing upon architects' allusions and expressions, along with a comprehension of the aforementioned parameters within the contexts of their projects, three positions have been identified and discussed under the headings: *Nature*, *Antique*, and *(Religious) Modernism*. Through one of these positions, explicitly or implicitly

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[3] Gabriela Goldschmidt, "Creative Architectural Design: Reference Versus Precedence," *Journal of Architecture and Planning Research* 15, no. 3 (1998): 258–70.
[4] Daniel Wahl and Seaton Baxter, "The Designer's Role in Facilitating Sustainable Solutions," *Design Issues* 24, no. 2 (2008): 72–83.
[5] Goldschmidt, "Creative Architectural Design: Reference Versus Precedence."

adopted, each project's architect(s) has tried not only to rationalise their design references but also argue for their universality.

### 6.2.1.  Nature

When exploring nearly any publicly available material about the architecture of Cambridge Mosque, it is not difficult to grasp the prevailing influence of the discourse of Nature. From the concepts of the grove of trees, the calm oasis, and the garden of paradise (Figure 6-1), to the emphasis on social and environmental sustainability and regenerative practice,[6] it becomes evident that the architects of Cambridge Mosque have taken Nature as a source for their social, structural, and spiritual aspirations.
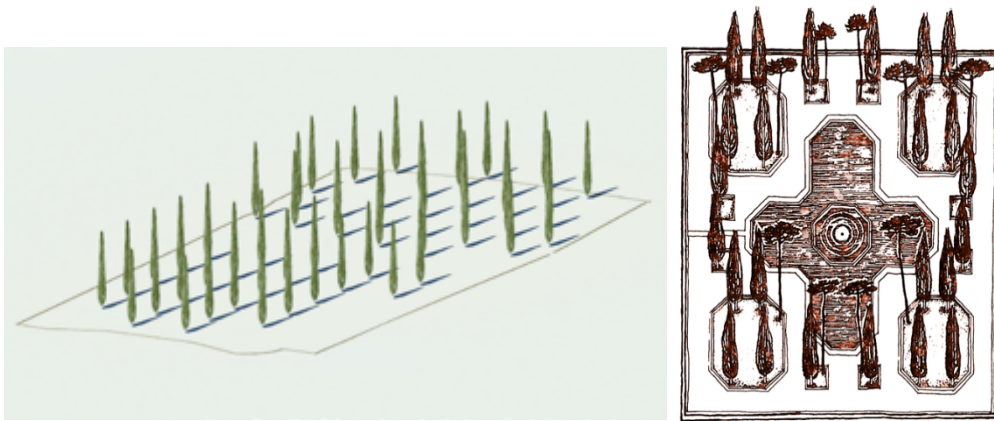


Figure 6-1 The mosque site as a calm oasis with a grove of trees (left), Garden of Paradise (right) (Marks Barfield Architects 2020)

As Julia Barfield describes it:

> We imagined the site planted with a grove of trees, bringing the community together for gentle discourse under the shade of the trees. The trees then became the main structure of the mosque, joined to form an interwoven octagonal canopy – a lattice vault structure - which supports the roof. This is then surrounded by

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[6] Regenerative architecture is defined as the practice of engaging the natural world as the medium for, and generator of the architecture. For more see: Jacob Littman, "Regenerative Architecture: A Pathway Beyond Sustainability" (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009). See Marks Barfield's official website, and their previous and current active roles in both social and environmental movements related to architecture.

structural timber walls (Cross laminated timber) clad in masonry tiles topped with a castellated parapet to symbolise the meeting of heaven and earth.[7]

Geometry, as they argue, was incorporated into the design as a representation of Nature. Serving as both a perennial common language and an 'objective' truth,[8] geometry emerged as the fitting narrative for the design, reinforced by the client's pursuit of universal principles. Given its application in nearly all traditional architecture, including both Islamic and English, the application and reference to geometry within Cambridge Mosque seemed to provide the architects an easy way out of the predicament of dealing with specific cultural representations, especially with regard to Muslim culture. It would not be inaccurate to state that the application of geometry was "inspired by Islamic principles"; after all, geometry is abstract which is "consistent with Islamic tradition against representation." According to Mark Barfield Architects:

> Throughout the history of Islamic art and architecture, patterns have been used to represent nature and objects by their spiritual qualities, rather than their physical or material qualities. Geometric art is symbolic rather than literal, so is therefore consistent with the Islamic traditions against representation. Tessellating geometric patterns symbolise the infinite, and mathematical perfection, both qualities of God.[9]

Thus, in the architects' perspective, geometry, as an expression of Nature, becomes the link between the local context and the Islamic heritage.

Expanding the view beyond the scope of Cambridge Mosque project, an overarching affinity for and enthusiasm about Nature is apparent within the profile of Mark Barfield Architects. The architects' practice statement, which underscores a shift towards regenerative and self-sustaining solutions, along with their environmental commitment as signatories and founders of the Architects Declare,[10] suggests a general architectural agenda. In addition to their individual

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[7] J. Barfield, Video interview, October 13, 2021

[8] As expressed by the geometer Keith Critchlow who was involved as early as the competition stage, see his book Keith Critchlow, *The Hidden Geometry of Flowers: Living Rhythms, Form and Number* (Floris Books, 2011). For him nature is the teacher of geometry, therefore its source.

[9] Marks Barfield Architects, "Cambridge Central Mosque Media Pack," 2020.

[10] See Marks Barfield official website practice statement at https://marksbarfield.com/practice/

backgrounds,[11] and, notably, Julia Barfield's strong commitment to sustainability,[12] all invoke both the priority and authority of Nature, which might highly, in turn, account for the architects' approach towards mosque architecture.

### 6.2.2.   Antique

Within the context of the Punchbowl Mosque project, Angelo Candalepas appears to adopt a different position towards mosque architecture, evident in his explicit statement "*The personal, for me, is mostly ancient.*"[13] Consequently, he frequently seeks to trace many references in the mosque project back to earlier or ancient concepts, which he subsequently argues for their universality. For instance, unlike Marks Barfield's perspective of geometry as a universal language of Nature, Candalepas instead associates its universality with its historical roots:

> The square is the beginning of the design of this work and aims to give the work a language that is legible to any reader. Squares turn to circles and circles into spheres, and this hierarchy is followed in the work also. When one is able to look at all of history, one is able to read, in the ruins, these fundamental geometric knowns. This work considers the concept of making attempts to speak to those into the far future with the language of the far past.[14]

Similarly, Candalepas often traces mosque architecture and history back to earlier or ancient sources. However, the set forth reasoning becomes more complex when considering Christian and Jewish faiths. Candalepas would proclaim using his existing knowledge of history to develop a further understanding of the Muslim faith, yet "*through the history of the Jewish faith, the Christian church and the consequent history of ideas of Islam [...]*" This approach appears quite puzzling,

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[11] During the interview, Julia Barfield introduced herself as a humanist, and David Marks as originating from a Jewish tradition, yet, did not actively practice the faith.

[12] Julia Barfield is widely presented across channels as an architect who has interest in vernacular architecture and whose inspiration is drawn from the way nature "designs and organizes itself so efficiently". According to Barfield: I've become madly obsessed with this issue in the last nine months as you may have realized and mainly because if I'm honest it scares me this is something that we all need to consider not just in our professional lives but in our personal and political lives … what I can including sitting on Lambeth bridge last November with extinction rebellion.. See Julia Barfield, 'Julia Barfield's Presentation at GAGA 2019' (GAGA Awards, 2019), https://vimeopro.com/galvanizers/gaga-awards/video/402573492.

[13] Angelo Candalepas, "Punchbowl Mosque Construction Project," *Australian Islamic Mission*, accessed March 13, 2022, https://aim.org.au/events/projects/.

[14] Ibid.

particularly given his assertions of his position on the universality of God and history,[15] while he implicitly draws from his personal history and preference. It is in fact not less puzzling than presenting an image of the second council of Nicaea and its discussion of the second commandment (Figure 6-2), as an "*example to show what could be understood as an idea that affects what one can do in a mosque.*"



Figure 6-2 An icon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' (Wikimedia Commons)

Despite claims of universality, the recurring pattern of referencing ancient or Christian architecture, ideas and doctrines, while recalling Islamic instances, cautiously reminds us of orientalist approaches towards Islamic architecture. This is particularly evident when Candalepas echoes certain assertions made by orientalists regarding Islamic architecture in his presentations.[16] The influence of

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[15] According to Candalepas: 'Respected colleagues of a generation earlier than mine discussed with fervour, on many occasions, their disdain for my position on the universality of God, yet they strangely would understand my acceptance of the commission to design a mosque and Muslim school for non-spiritual, social reasons.' See Ibid.
[16] Orientalists were frequently biased against the recognition of Islamic art's authenticity and richness as a source of new knowledge which tended to be biased in favour of Sassanid,

Christianity or Judaism on Islam has long been addressed by orientalists, yet, their arguments of such influence, similar to the architect's, often overlook two key aspects. Firstly, referring to prior religions and cultures is not uncommon in Islamic history and tradition, as seen through early references such as the 'Booth of Moses', whom the prophet referred to as 'my brother.'[17] However, the prophet assured that he did not want his mosque to be built after the fashion of the Syrian edifices. That is because, based on traditions, the prophet was keen to link himself to earlier prophets and their immediate followers as to distance from the practices of their later followers.[18]

Secondly, linking to the first point, Islamic tradition asserts that the Qur'an, alongside the Gospel and Torah, is a revelation from the same God. Consequently, even if the previous scriptures were subject to some distortion according to Islamic traditions, similarities between them and the Qur'an -and thus between Christianity and Islam- naturally remain significant.[19] Accordingly, the main divergence between orientalists' positions and that of Muslims is that orientalists tend to bring an intuitive understanding to the interpretation of Islamic architecture often through superficial formal similarities, without establishing meaningful connections. While Muslims' position, exemplified through the prophet's approach, recognises nuances

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Byzantine, Coptic, Ethiopian and other art forms at the expense of the Islamic. In his book, the architect writes: 'In 1453, Constantinople fell from the ancient Roman Eastern Church's power. The conquerors of the Ottoman Empire appropriated many of the former churches into mosques and replicated the earlier Christian style in the making of new mosques. The most famous example is the Blue Mosque that is constructed based upon the model of Hagia Sophia, an early Christian Church completed in the reign of the emperor Justinian'. See Ibid. In his presentation, the absence of things, like many other architects he uses the plan of prophet's mosque by Creswell and recalls his argument about it the house of the prophet. In another instance he would add 'Whilst many scholars claim that the Islamic architecture does not depict images of people as a consequence of a reading of the second commandment, it is obvious to me that this influential debate that torn the early Christian apart was one which was most present at the minds of the new faith that was emerging (Islam).'

[17] Ayyad, *The Making of the Mosque: A Survey of Religious Imperatives*.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibrahim Al-sukran, *The Modernist Interpretation Of Heritage - Techniques And Derivations* (Dar Al Ma'rifah, 2014).

of shared elements while emphasising distinctiveness,[20] which Candalepas appears to overlook.[21]

Hence, even in the most specific elements of the mosque, such as the ceiling muqarnas, a widely known element of Islamic architecture now celebrated in Punchbowl Mosque, references to antiquity remain evident. While abstaining from explicit mosque references, Candalepas notes:

> In this case, the elemental and concave concrete forms repeated 102 times in the work are intended to showcase the subtle gradation of light at different intensities and concurrently. The interior-form is able to be seen both as a singular, complex experience and one that is simple, a characteristic that is found in some ancient work, making it both understandable and un-measurable. History has shown that, once things become overly complex, their ability to be understood is lessened.[22]

Similar reasoning is mirrored in the explanation of the minaret: "*This is the minaret. Surprisingly, it comes down with to greet you. It's an arm that opens and one stands here and calls to prayer, as is the case in minarets of ancient time*." This approach is also evident in the women's prayer space: "*[...] in the ancient world, they were called the [...], and it"s the place where women would worship*'. Even the choice of the material, i.e., concrete, is recognised by Candalepas as the material of the ages, as "*It has an almost transcendental significance. The Punchbowl Mosque is almost entirely cast in situ – like an ancient building*."[23]

### 6.2.3.    *(Religious) Modernism*

As a result of the above-argued position of Punchbowl Mosque's architect towards mosque architecture -referring to ancestral ideas, religion and history, along with the client's desire for a contemporary mosque with a modern

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[20] According to Eyyad after tradition: the prophet rejected proposals to use the Christian semantron or the Jewish shofar for summoning the believers to prayer.
[21] Especially when he said, "And if you look at the buildings, I don't think of them as mosques. I regard them as buildings where people worship God," dismissing the specificity of the mosque typology.
[22] Candalepas, "Punchbowl Mosque Construction Project." p. 15.
[23] Mark Raggatt, "A 'Modern Architectural Masterpiece': Punchbowl Mosque," *ARCHITECTUREAU Project*, May 2019.

interpretation-[24] it becomes only natural that modern Christian architecture is considered among the references for the design of Punchbowl Mosque.[25] According to Eris Roose, modern Christian and Jewish architecture were regarded as "standards of modern religious architecture to which all non-Western religious architecture had to measure up."[26] Yet, with regard to Modernism as an architect's position or approach towards mosque architecture, rather than mere formal references, the case of Ljubljana Mosque appears more relevant. Through a close examination of the mosque design details and their disclosed references, one can argue that the architects have taken a modernist approach towards the architecture of Ljubljana Mosque, mainly through their Slovene modernist architectural heritage and figures.

Fortunately, on account of Le Corbusier's encounter with the 'Orient' through his *Voyage d'Orient,* this modernist architectural heritage has recognition for Islamic architecture and urbanism (Figure 6-3).[27] A book like *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way to Modernity*[28] authored by Slovene architect Dušan Grabrijan and his colleague Juraj Neidhardt, with a preface by Le Corbusier himself (Figure 6-4) has seemingly offered a pathway for Ljubljana's architect to navigate between both the modern and the Islamic.

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[24] The initial brief to Angelo was to design a contemporary mosque, primary school and basement car park, providing a design that amalgamated the key traditional elements of a mosque with a modern interpretation that reflected the local Australian environment." We see no mentions or allusions from neither the architect nor the client to Muslim communities in Australia, their history and mosque architecture.

[25] Amongst various instances of references to modern Christian architecture or modern architecture in general was what Candalepas mentioned in his book about the mosque: The few local examples of influential modern work include such extraordinary work by Don Gazzard in his Wentworth Memorial Church in Vaucluse and the well-documented Cox and Mackay St Andrew Presbyterian Church in Leppington. he also repeatedly mentioned the work of louis Khan and his concept of ruins. For more about the concept of ruins according to louis Khan see Gusheh, Maryam. "Louis Kahn in Dhaka: Ruin as Method." University of New South Wales, 2013.

[26] Eric Roose, "IIAS Fellow in the Spotlight: Eric Roose," *THE NEWSLETTER 89 SUMMER 2021*, 2021, https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/iias-fellow-spotlight-eric-roose.

[27] Zeynep Çelik, "Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism," *Assemblage* 17 (1992): 58–77.

[28] Based on two decades of ethnographic and architectural research, the book argued that the traditional architecture of Bosnia bore striking formal, spatial, and functional similarities to Corbusian modernism, only requiring a degree of technological modernization to serve as the basis for local modern architecture.

According to Perovic:

> […] there was also a Slovene architect who was also, I think, at the time of studying in Prague in Czechoslovakia whose name was Dušan Grabrijan, who was researching a lot of this Islamic architecture and comparing it very much to Le Corbusier to the approach of construction of space of Corbusian modernist projects.[29]

An important urban concept outlined in the above-mentioned book, later adopted by Neidhardt[30] and subsequently by the architects of Ljubljana Mosque, was the *mahala* (Figure 6-5). A *mahala* is a traditional Bosnian layout for a small residential neighbourhood characterised by a considerate arrangement of mosques, which inspired the Ljubljana Mosque site plan.
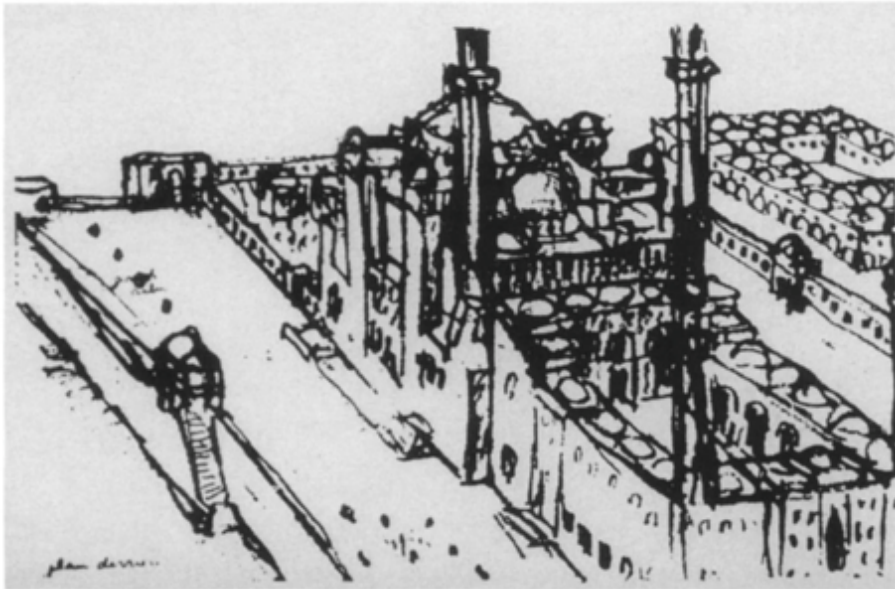


Figure 6-3 Le Corbusier, sketch of Suleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul (Çelik 1992)

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[29] Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020."
[30] Dijana Simonović, "Neidhardt's Vernacular-Modernist Glossary Of Bosnia And Herzegovina's Architecture And Urbanism," in *STEPGRAD2022 - Contemporary Theory and Practice in Construction XV* (Banja Luka: University of Banja Luka, 2022), 256–66.
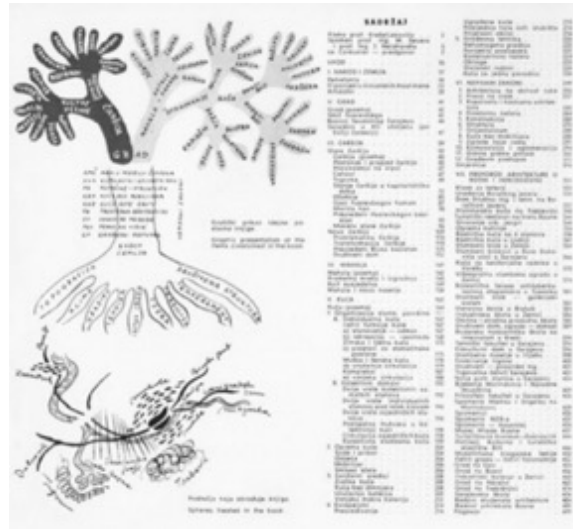
Figure 6-4 Architecture of Bosnia and the Way to Modernity; Index of the book by Neidhardt and Grabrijan, 1957 scan from the book (Architectuul 2014)



Figure 6-5 Mahala (Simonović 2022)

Explaining the *mahala* and its implication in the mosque project Perovic stated:

> […] this is a plan of Sarajevo from the 19th century where basically mosques were built as some sort of urban generators 'mahala', so-called area of 'mahala' in Sarajevo was built around a series of mosques, […] they constructed the mosque in the open land and then all of a sudden around it there was a kind of accumulation of so-called mahala: a kind of area where people traded and people lived to be near the mosque.[31]

In a later interview with Bevk, he further elaborated:

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[31] Perović, "06 Vasa Perović / REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE 2020."

> So, all the buildings are, in a way, separated from the mosque. And this is really intentional. I think we were the only ones that did this because everybody else put all the program in one building, but we separated them. That means that all buildings can work and function separately, but they have, all the, time relation to the city and to the surrounding. They make space in between them and the mosque; the mosque is in the centre and all the buildings relate to the mosque. So, you see that the mosque is a kind of the heart of the complex, but at the same time, you feel that everything makes the city and is part of it.[32]

This negotiation between references, particularly in the post-Yugoslavia context, remarkably points towards the design experience of Šerefuddin White Mosque in Visoko (Figure 6-6) – an Aga Khan award-winning mosque completed in 1979, recognised decades later by the Museum of Modern Art as one of the exceptional examples of modern architecture. Notably, this mosque, which shares conceptual similarities with a substantial portion of Le Corbusier's religious architectural works, was designed by Zlatko Ugljen, who shared a close connection with Le Corbusier's work through Juraj Neidhardt.[33]

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[32] M. Bevk, Video interview, April 07, 2022.

[33] Jelena Bogdanović and Vladimir Kulić, "The Šerefudin White Mosque," in *The Religious Architecture of Islam Volume II: Africa, Europe, and the Americas*, ed. Kathryn Moore and Hasan-Uddin Khan, 2022, 244–51. Neidhardt (1901-71) was Ugljen's family friend, teacher and formative authority, one of the most powerful voices at the faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo who had worked at Le Corbusier's Paris office in the 1930s. Seen through the lens of Neidhardt's theory, the complex interlocking shells that Ugljen developed for the white mosque reference a connection to Ottoman architectural tradition while using a formal language of explicitly Corbusian origin.

Figure 6-6 Šerefuddin White Mosque Visoko, Bosnia & Herzegovina (AKTC)

In general, there is a strong modernist presence in the region's architectural memoirs. Beyond the above-mentioned architects; Jože Plečnik, the preeminent 'national' architect of Slovenia; and his student Edvard Ravinkar who also worked for Le Corbusier, were implicitly responsible for some significant details of the mosque design. The works of the two architects, which ranged from a distinct Central European modernist tradition (Plečnik) to international modernism and postmodernism (Ravinkar), have incorporated references to the Semperian tectonic tradition.[34] Semper's theories were highly influential to early modernists like Otto Wagner, and later his student and heir Plečnik. In the first volume of his uncompleted work, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts,* Semper devoted his discussion entirely to textile arts.[35] He generally emphasized the relationship, problematised by Modernism, between surface and structure, ornament and form, surface-play and formal-truth.[36] These themes were revisited by Kenneth Frampton

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[34] Kulić, "Edvard Ravnikar's Liquid Modernism: Architectural Identity in a Network of Shifting References."

[35] Magdalena Garmaz, "The City as a Weaving Process: Plecnik's Ljubljana," in *A Cidade* (Lisboa : Universidade Lusíada, 2011), 73–78.

[36] Seyed Yahya Islami, "Surficial Architecture: Gottfried Semper and Contemporary Surface-Play," *Edinburgh Architecture Research* 30 (2011): 56–62.

in his *Studies in Tectonic Culture,* who happened to mentor Perovic during his studies at Berlage Institute of Architecture, Netherlands in 1994. These threads interweave, possibly tracing complex modernist influences in the design of Ljubljana Mosque. One can argue that the Mosque architects established a connection between modernism – through the white colour, formal simplicity, and structural honesty – and Semper's concepts of textile, ornament and surface play – manifested through the mosque's suspended textile dome, layered façade and patterned screens.[37]

Ultimately, within the context of mosque design, these links and elements needed to find reference in Islamic architecture and history, even if without a meaningful setting. Hence, unlike the concept of *mahala,* which had been previously studied and adopted by earlier modern architects of the region, providing a relevant regional narrative and function for the site plan, the blue textile dome draws inspiration from the broader history of textile in Islam "*starting from the Kiswah of Kaʿbah to the portable tent-mosques of Iran.*"[38]

### 6.3. The Design Process and Relations: The Trilogy of the Architect, Client, and Calligrapher

#### 6.3.1.  *The Architect-Client Dynamics*

One of the main relationships that concern researchers and professional architects in the field of architectural design is the architect-client relationship, often described as the social dimension of architectural practice.[39] Despite the various contributions and interplays of different participants and stakeholders - including consultants, contractors, planners and municipalities - the architect-client relationship often emerges as a critical factor for project success, particularly in projects of private dwellings where clients constitute the end-users of the designs. In the context of mosque architecture, perceived by Muslims as a 'House of God',

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[37] These insights were initiated through an email conversation with the architectural historian and critic Vladimir Kulić who wrote extensively on the modernist architectural history of the region.

[38] As expressed by the architects, published through several online platforms including Archdaily.

[39] Jessica Siva and Kerry London, "Client Learning for Successful Architect-Client Relationships," *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management* 19, no. 3 (2012): 253–68, doi:10.1108/09699981211219599/FULL/PDF.

the concept or role of the client can differ. As referred to earlier in Chapter 4, for Muslims, building a mosque or contributing to its construction is considered an act of worship, which acquires a specific reward. Given the mosque's recurrent association with God in Islamic tradition,[40] a Muslim architect might perceive God as the most significant entity in this relationship, considering the Muslim community are mere users, and accommodating their needs as a means to please and worship God. This imparts an additional dimension, a transcendental one, to the architect-client relationship – a dimension often missed in the experiences of non-Muslim architects, whose personal ambitions, accepting a challenge or, at best, serving a minority of Muslims, constitute their primary motives. However, this is not universally true for all non-Muslim architects. Angelo Candalepas, a religious Greek Orthodox architect, has put much emphasis during his interview on the transcendental dimension of the mosque design process. And it was, as studies have shown, on such basis that the Australian Islamic Mission chose him for Punchbowl Mosque project.

The architect-client dynamics can be highly diverse, depending on various aspects including the diverse nature of participants with different backgrounds, beliefs and worldviews, especially with regard to the built environment. These differences often lead to gaps between expectations, realisations and even measures of success throughout the design process.[41] They can also lead to challenges in achieving an integrated or collective identity for the project. Each Muslim community leader involved in these projects comes from a distinct background and hold unique visions and ambitions towards their Muslim communities. Architects, on the other hand, who are typically trained in institutions that prioritise individual creativity, unconfined by clients' demand, often derive a sense of self-identity from their design concepts.[42] Moreover, their focus on the contemporary in sacred

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[40]Mosques are referred to as Houses of God, Mosques of God, Mosques for God "and that the masjids are for Allah, so do not invoke with Allah anyone." (Q 72: 18)

[41] Siva and London, "Client Learning for Successful Architect-Client Relationships."

[42] Sumati Ahuja, Natalia Nikolova, and Stewart Clegg, "Professional Identity and Anxiety in Architect-Client Interactions," *Construction Management and Economics* 38, no. 7 (2020): 589–602, doi:10.1080/01446193.2019.1703019.

architecture can add complexity to the existing modern tensions within religious architecture—navigating between a design approach rooted in preindustrial age expressing transcendental realities and one geared toward mass production.[43] Mosque architecture in the west is additionally burdened by the complexities of cultural identity. Muslim communities in the West were mostly formed as a result of mobility: economic or non-economic migration, both voluntary and involuntary. But while the first generations of these migrant communities have tried to hold tight to their home cultures, subsequent generations and Muslim converts aimed to reimagine their own, often unburdened by the ancestral cultures that their predecessors had to navigate alongside the culture of the current reality.[44] This variance in identity and representation perspectives is evident in the discourse surrounding the three mosque clients, which do not necessarily mirror the identities of their communities, but rather the aspirations of their representatives.

Despite these differences, the drive for integration was prevalent and prominent across all three mosque design briefs. The shared history of Western Islamophobia, amplified through globalized mass media and fuelled by misconceptions and stereotypes, fostered a collective intention—for varying degrees—among the mosques to harmonize with the Western context and integrate their Muslim communities. These intentions are widely observed among not just the clients, but also the architects of mosques in the West as Erkocu and et.al [45] have introduced in studies about mosques in a number of Western countries. For example, it was evident through the interview with Mufti Grabus that the need to build a mosque within a history of long struggles, like that of Ljubljana, has shifted the communities design priorities and standards. In this context, Tarik Ramadan asserts the importance of prioritizing faith principles over outward traditions. However, a persistent question remains: how can the principles of faith and identity

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[43] Steven J. Schloeder, "The Architecture Of The Mystical Body How To Build Churches After The Second Vatican Council," in *Between Concept and Identity*, ed. Esteban Dernandesz-Cobian (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 3–27.

[44] "Riding the Tiger of Modernity – Abdal Hakim Murad," *Cambridge Muslim College*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07Ien1qo_qI.

[45] Ergün Erkoçu and Cihan Buğdaci, "Mosquide Outro," in *The Mosque: Political, Architectural and Social Transformations* (NAi Publishers, 2009), 163–82.

be effectively delineated and embodied in the design process of mosque architecture?

In earlier times, when the architect and the client, often a patron, shared the same value system, issues of identity and representation were less intricate. Principles of faith shaped the identities and traditions of Muslim communities, maintaining harmony between arts, crafts, sciences, and societal members operating within a dynamic synergy infused with both knowledge and belief.[46] In that context, clients were more reliant upon the expertise of the architects to deliver their vision and typically did not presume to have project oversight.[47] Today, non-Muslim architects in the West often lack initial knowledge and experience in mosque design, necessitating greater client engagement throughout the process. Interviews with architects, particularly Julia Barfield and Matija Bevk, reveal the extent of client involvement and their consequential role during the design process.

### 6.3.2.   The Architect-Calligrapher Dynamics and the Intermediary Role of the Client

Historically, it is possible that the architect and the calligrapher were the same person, as assumed in the case of the Dome of the Rock. Alternatively, when separate, one can imagine that both architects and calligraphers typically shared the same cultural and religious backdrop, collaborating from the projects' earliest phases.[48] In contemporary times, calligraphers involved in mosque projects may come not only from diverse religious backgrounds but also from entirely different countries and cultures. Typically chosen by clients who share a common religious understanding,[49] these calligraphers often encounter challenges. Traditional calligraphers are generally rooted in their own cultural milieu and profession, hailing from Muslim-majority countries. This can result in limited awareness about

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[46] Matoq, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā Al-Fann Al-Islāmī [Sociology of Islamic Art]*.

[47] Ahuja, Nikolova, and Clegg, "Professional Identity and Anxiety in Architect-Client Interactions."

[48] This dynamic is well manifested in the relationship between architect Mimar Sinan and calligrapher Karahisari Ahmed Effendi in the Süleymaniye Complex.

[49] Which was the case in Ljubljana, Punchbowl and even Penzberg Mosques. The case of Cambridge Mosque is more complicated since two calligraphers were involved at different stages and were chosen by different parties.

the specific context within which these mosque projects in the west are unfolding, creating a notable disparity between calligraphers and architects.

Given the cultural and epistemic gaps between them, often compounded by language barriers preventing effective communication, a crucial question emerges: how can architects and calligraphers manage to collaborate successfully on mosque projects, if at all? The answer lies in the involvement of the client, who assumes the role of facilitating the meeting, communication, and establishment of a working relationship between the architect and calligrapher. The client acts as a crucial intermediary, fostering an environment where both parties can communicate and collaborate through the mosque project.

As observed in all the cases studied, the incorporation of calligraphy into mosque design begins with an initial decision made by the client. Paradoxically, in most instances, this decision occurs later in the process, often following the completion of the mosque's physical structure.[50] This phenomenon appears to stem not only from prioritizing architectural decisions over calligraphy but also from a lack of awareness among both clients and architects regarding the role that calligraphers play in shaping architectural design decisions. Punchbowl Mosque's calligraphy, for instance, was inspired by the mosque's form—concrete mini domes sufficient to contain the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God. Despite this inspiration, the actual calligraphic program was decided later, choosing a calligrapher to inscribe the verses. The intricacies of such decisions can be discerned by examining the sequence of events related to the mosque's calligraphy.

The sense of mutual recognition between the architect and the calligrapher, evident in both the interviews with Selmo and Candalepas, could potentially stem from effective collaboration guided by the client's vision of mosque calligraphy. Yet, upon deeper reflection, it appears that their roles during the design process were quite clearly defined, likely by the client. This clarity enabled both the

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[50] Aside from Soraya Syed, who became involved in the Cambridge Central Mosque project in its early stages through Keith Critchlow, the Sacred Geometer, her contribution led to the integration of calligraphy directly into the physical structure of the building.

calligrapher and the architect to understand the type and scope of work required from them. This delineation was not necessarily the outcome of extensive experience on the part of the client, architect, or calligrapher. Interestingly, none of them, to the best of my knowledge, had prior practical experience with mosque construction projects; the opposite was true.

The relative inexperience of both the architect and the calligrapher in this collaborative relationship led them to focus solely on their respective technical domains of expertise. Candalepas, for instance, focused on the architectural-related aspects and elements of calligraphy, while Selmo concentrated on its scriptural and compositional forms. When it came to coordinating these disciplines and making decisions about content, the client took the lead. The client or committee had a clear conception of the type of calligraphy they desired, a clarity that had not been achieved with regard to mosque architecture. In the realm of calligraphy, the client selected the verses, the calligrapher inscribed them, and the architect devised the wooden frames to complement them.

Nevertheless, in the case of more seasoned calligraphers in mosque architecture, such as Kutlu and Hadzimejlic, one can observe a mixture of disappointment and a desire to contribute to mosque architecture. This is rooted in their distinctive visions, perceptions, and expectations concerning their roles in mosque projects. It's worth noting that Kutlu, unlike Hadzimejlic, did not have the opportunity to meet the architect or visit the mosque. On the other hand, Hadzimejlic was invited to the mosque site, where he had the chance to meet both the architect and the client. These interactions facilitated discussions about mosque inscriptions, including details like their placement, height, composition, frequency of use, and other elements. According to Hadzimejlic, these meetings created space for negotiations, allowing for potential adjustments and modifications to be considered.

### 6.4. Concluding Remarks

The exploration of contemporary mosque architecture in the West has shed light on the diverse approaches and influences that architects bring to these projects.

The traditional reference of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, as an architectural prototype, has been reimagined by architects in the West who seek to create unique and contextually relevant designs. However, the sources of inspiration for these architects vary greatly, and their interpretations of references can be highly subjective and personal. Consequently, three distinct positions have been identified among the architects of the studied mosques: Nature, Antique, and (Religious) Modernism. The Cambridge Mosque project exemplifies a Naturalistic position, drawing inspiration from the natural world and incorporating geometric patterns as a universal language. The Punchbowl Mosque project, on the other hand, takes reference in Antique, looking to ancient ideas and architectural references from preceding religions and cultures. Finally, the Ljubljana Mosque project adopts a (Religious) Modernism approach, bridging modernist architectural heritage with Islamic architectural traditions.

Throughout these projects, the architect-client-calligrapher trilogy and its dynamics play a critical role in shaping the design process. The clients' visions and aspirations for their Muslim communities influence the architects' decisions, and the need for integration in the Western context drives the design priorities. The collaboration between architects and calligraphers in mosque projects has proven essential for incorporating well-integrated inscriptions into the design, and the role of the client as an intermediary becomes crucial in fostering effective communication between these two, especially when there are cultural and epistemic gaps. Examining these dynamics and relations, it becomes evident that the early participation of calligraphers in mosque projects is mostly dependent on the clients, but more on the architect's level of knowledge and awareness of the calligrapher's role in the mosque architectural design process. This knowledge seems to have become in one way or another exclusive to calligraphers or those specialized in Islamic art and architecture, such as Critchlow. This highlights the necessity for architects involved in mosque architectural projects to comprehend the broader complexities encompassing the process, dynamics, and references of mosque architecture, and the role Qur'anic epigraphy plays within that.

# CHAPTER 7:        THE ROLE OF QUR'ANIC EPIGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN THE WEST

## 7.1. Introduction

Understanding the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture is contingent upon recognising, as I argue in this thesis, the nature of the text and its religious and socio-cultural significance in Muslims' perception. This involves understanding their mosque architecture and context in the West. Therefore, after examining the architects' positions and approaches towards mosque architecture in the previous two chapters, the following discussion on the role of Qur'anic inscriptions will draw mainly on interviews conducted with Muslim patrons and calligraphers. This discussion will take into account the architectural, religious, political and socio-cultural realities and contexts of studied mosques.

Considering the significance of the Qur'an to Muslims and the transforming existence of their communities in new contexts in the West, within the architecture of their new mosque designs and its modernities, I have proposed that Qur'anic inscriptions assume a pivotal role in (re)defining the architecture of these mosques. Drawing evidence from the examined cases, the subsequent sections aim to clarify how these inscriptions undertake such a role. The suggested means of (re)definition, outlined as section titles, are significantly linked to one another, therefore some of them are discussed together or recurrently referred to under more than one title. This is followed by a discussion on the ideological implications of these inscriptions. Reflecting on the case of the Dome of the Rock, the chapter suggests how these inscriptions reveal the way Muslim communities represent themselves and Islam in their contexts. Finally, the chapter concludes by revisiting the objectives theory while contemplating its suggested manifestation through the studied cases.

## 7.2. The Sacrality of the Mosque and its Architectural Elements

Understanding the concept of sacred space in Islam, one would realize that Muslim rituals, in fact, do not inherently require a 'sacred space',[1] at least in the same sense as other religions necessitate the consecration of their worship sites.[2] Paradoxically, the establishment of sacred spaces in Islam, as introduced in Chapter 1, is argued to be achieved through the practice of worship rituals.[3] This explains both the direct and indirect references to prayer and worship present in external inscriptions on mosques, when applicable.[4]

Reflecting on the choice of external inscriptions, particularly the facia inscription of Cambridge Central Mosque, one can see attempts to define the sacrality of the mosque, not only based on Muslim's perception of the 'sacred' but also through that of the local culture as well. As such, the fascia inscription includes references to the mosque's functional purpose, specifically worship and prayer, while also incorporating an allusion to a biblical theme, inscribed in a script known as monumental *Kufic*, signifying the character of sacred space in (post)Christian culture (Figure 7-1).[5]

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[1] Metcalf, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities."

[2] For an elaborative discussion of the sacred in Islam and the works of two influential scholars, Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, see Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*.

[3] Farouk-Alli, "A Qur'anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam."

[4] But how can we understand the sacrality of the mosque in terms of its relation to worship, when the mosque is not merely a space for prayer -despite prayer's pre-eminence over other activities in the mosque- as the history of mosques has shown? One way to understand it is by observing the atmosphere within the Mosque before and during prayers. As prayer starts, free movement and conversation are not anymore commonplace, as "the atmosphere is transformed to one of sanctity and respect". This, in fact, illustrates why rituals of prayer are independent of the mosque inscriptions. However, it also suggests that when rituals of prayer end, the congregation now have the chance to perform dhikr, and engage with the mosque's Qur'anic epigraphy, which might strongly suggest the emphasis on the use of Qur'anic inscriptions inside the prayer halls of the studied mosques.

[5] As the form of the fascia's *Kufic* inscription is similar to scripts known as pseudo-*Kufic,* which were used for decorative purposes in Western Christendom during the Middle Ages.

Figure 7-1 Arabic style lettering, known as pseudo-Kufic, in the halo of the Virgin. (left) (Uffizi Gallery) detail from Madonna and Child with Angels (right) (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)

A parallel attempt to define the mosque's sacrality within a Western city context can be observed through the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions on the exterior of Penzberg Mosque in Germany. The mosque's external entrance, resembling an open book and nearly the same height as the mosque building, features verses from the opening chapter of the Qur'an inscribed in both Arabic and German (Figure 7-2). According to the mosque's Imām and project patron, these inscriptions were selected for their relevance and significance in Islamic worship, serving as required recitations during prayer, as well as their relevance in principle "*to the most important prayer for Christians: Vaterunser."* As the imām notes, much like *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* in Muslim prayer, "In the Christian faith, the Holy Communion cannot take place without reciting this prayer."[6] This highlights attempts to define the mosque's sacrality in ways perceivable to both the Muslim and local communities.

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[6] He added 'We chose *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* for two reasons: firstly, it is required for prayer and secondly, it is similar to the Holy Communion in Christianity in terms of recitation and melody. We recite *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* just as Christians recite their prayer.' B. Idriz, Video call interview, July 14, 2021.

Figure 7-2 The main entrance door of Penzberg Mosque showing inscriptions in both Arabic and German (Mosqpedia)

Another implication of this centrality of the worship-act in Islam and its relation to the concept of sacred can also be seen in the choice of the locations of Qur'anic inscriptions. These inscriptions are more commonly found on architectural elements that either directly or symbolically relate to rituals of worship and prayer. Inscriptions appearing on entrances (the gateway to prayer); minarets (the call for prayer); *miḥrābs and qiblah walls* (the orientation towards *Mekka* and the location of the *Imām* in prayer); and *minbars* (where Friday Prayer *Khutbas* or sermons are made by the *Imām*), all tend to define and entitle these elements within the mosque architecture and emphasize their relation to worship and prayer. Consequently, inscriptions are occasionally employed as the primary or principal indicators of these elements (Figure 7-3).

Figure 7-3 Qur'anic inscriptions on the *qiblah* wall of the Australian Islamic Centre in Melbourne. Photograph by Piers Taylor (The Architectural Review 2017)

## 7.3. The Metaphysical Dimension and Continuous Memory of Space

In the discourse of memory, especially within the context of Muslims in the West, Akel's examination of the phenomenon of the Muslim diaspora and his concerns about the issues of legibility of mosque inscriptions emerges as noteworthy.[7] However, despite its significance, one has to remember that Akel's study mainly focused on the Islamic Centre of Washington DC; a mosque that was designed and opened for Muslim communities in Washington DC in the late 1950s. Muslim communities in the West have transformed over succeeding generations, and one can see that issues of legibility and language in Qur'anic inscriptions were in fact addressed in more recently designed mosques. In the studied mosques of this

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[7] According to Akel, memory plays a crucial role in the lives of migrant, diasporic, and minority communities, providing continuity to their individual and social identities. In the context of building mosques, these communities often attach emotional value to incorporating familiar conventions and customs from the Muslim world, even in an anachronistic manner, evoking significant memories from the past. Akel extends this argument to include inscriptions in mosque architecture, perceiving Qur'anic epigraphy as a devotional theme and an emotional device, though its necessity in Western communities remains uncertain due to issues of legibility and language for non-Arabic speakers. See chapter 2.

research, translations of inscriptions in local languages were considered and made available either on the architectural elements along with the Arabic inscriptions (in Penzberg Mosque), or in distributable brochures (in Ljubljana Mosque), or on mosque official websites (as the case for Cambridge Mosque), showing the necessity found by these communities in making these inscriptions conveyable to most of their audience. With that in mind, while returning to the question of memory, one can fairly ask what kinds of memories these Qur'anic inscriptions suggest, not just as a mere *image,* as Akel would suggest, but also in terms of the choice of their content.

To answer this question, one might need to give a brief introduction to the term memory in relation to religion, and how it might apply to the nature of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. In her major work *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Danièle Hervieu-Léger introduces the concept of memory as a kind of chain of shared experiences rooted in tradition, that in turn shape the lives of individuals and their community. She argues that religion might be practically defined as "an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled".[8] In other words, religion can be perceived as a chain of memory, "a form of collective memory and imagination based on the sanctity of tradition.[9] According to Hervieu-Leger, this chain is challenged by the changing characteristics of modernity, which are in fact highly corrosive to memory, tradition and religion. On that account, arguably as a response, we see some Muslim communities in the West, like in past tradition-based societies, reinforcing their religious memory not just through practicing their beliefs in rituals, but also through defining their identity as a living lineage of belief.

On the subject of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture, one can make similar assumptions through what might be called the Muslim communities'

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[8] Thomas C. Langham, " Review: Religion as a Chain of Memory by Danièle Hervieu-Léger," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 3 (September 2003): 693–95.
[9] Jakub Urbaniak, "Religion as Memory: How Has the Continuity of Tradition Produced Collective Meanings? – Part One," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (March 11, 2015): 1–8, doi:10.4102/hts.v71i3.2815.

calligraphic memory. Through the choice of certain regional-specific script like the *Toghra* in Penzberg mosque (Figure 7-4);[10] or certain calligraphic compositions and settings like the circular panels on the sides of the *miḥrāb* in Cambridge and Ljubljana mosques; or through the choice of commonly inscribed names and verses like the ninety-nine names in punchbowl mosque,[11] and the verse on the *miḥrāb*[12] with the names of Mohammad and Allah on its side in Ljubljana mosque,[13] we can see the Muslim communities' reconstructions of calligraphic memories that tie them with larger regional (Bosnian, Balkan and Ottoman), and global Muslim community (*ummah*).[14] So despite the fact that these inscriptions, and other traditional elements in mosque architecture that Muslim communities hold on to, are perceived as unessential to the rituals and worship, their mere presence in the space might be considered as a definition of its continuous memory.[15] This recurring calligraphic memory of Mosque spaces is in fact maintained by the living lineage of a calligraphic tradition, and its chain of transmission and authority that produced the traditional calligraphers of these mosques (Figure 7-5).

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[10] According to Imam of Penzberg Mosque: 'We chose the "Tughra" as the design for the mosque because there is a Turkish or Bosnian community present here, who come from the Balkan region where the Ottomans once ruled. This mosque is considered unique in terms of its architecture in Germany. We wanted to give the impression to Muslims from the Balkans and Turkey that we have a relationship with the Ottoman legacy. We abandoned the Ottoman architecture and design for the mosque, but we took the least we could from the Ottomans, which is the Tughra, a calligraphic emblem that is considered an Ottoman symbol.' B. Idriz, Video call interview, July 14, 2021.

[11] According to the calligrapher of Punchbowl Mosque: 'The majority of mosques here in Turkey and in the countries of the world write the names of God al-Hasani in one dome, but this mosque is designed with 99 domes and in each dome is one of the names of God.' H. Selmo, Video call interview, June 09, 2021.

[12] According to the calligrapher of Ljubljana: 'I chose the verse because this verse is written in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, in our culture.' K. Hadzimejlic, Video call interview, June 09, 2021.

[13] According to Grabus: In our tradition, we almost like in in Al Hussein Mosque in Cairo, in others, we used to mention the names. Of course, *Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*, Muhammed *PBUH* and some *Sahabas*, but we actually reduced here just to write the name of *Allah Jal Sha'nuho*, and the Prophet Muhammad *PBUH*, and also to have this message concerning the mihrab." N. Grabus, Video call interview, July 15, 2021.

[14] For more about the concept of *ummah*, see Chapter 1, and EJAZ AKRAM, "Muslim Ummahh and Its Link with Transnational Muslim Politics," *Islamic Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007): 381–415.; and Abdullah Al-Ahsan, "The Qur'anic Concept of Ummahh," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 7, no. 2 (2007): 606–16, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13602008608716004.

[15] *"Because we always have calligraphy in our mosques"* N. Grabus, Video call interview, July 15, 2021.

Figure 7-4 *Toghra* used in Penzberg Mosque, Germany (The Aga Khan Trust for Culture 2011)



Figure 7-5 Tree depicting the calligraphers of the studied mosques and their connection to Hamid Aytaç (Author 2022)

Now moving from the calligraphic memory, that binds together the spaces of these Muslim communities in the West with those of larger regional or global communities in the Muslim world, there seem to be farther memories that lie

beyond the mere existence of these inscriptions. Considering the concept *al-ghayb* while looking at the content of the verses inscribed in mosques, especially those associated with certain architectural elements and spaces, like doors,[16] the *miḥrāb,*[17] and women's prayer spaces,[18] it is plausible to suggest that these were meant to transcend those elements' physical definition while constructing a continuous memory[19] and a chain towards the Muslims' perceived realities of *'ālam al-ghayb.* Thus, through their inscriptions, these elements acquire metaphysical dimensions and transcendental meanings far beyond their immediate form. These link the element's physical characteristics, such as a door or entrance (Figure 7-6), or a niche in the wall (such as the verses commonly inscribed on the *miḥrāb*) to events or entities in the Muslim's memory, that shape both their shared identity and destiny.[20]

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[16] According to a prominent Turkish calligrapher visited during a field trip to Istanbul: "also, there are some verses, for example: for doors, like the doors of the Jannah, …. like our mosque is a mosque of Jannah .. So the angels of the Jannah will say this to the believers, same as in the mosque, we tell the believers : Salam, for example I wrote this verse one time in a mosque on the wall opposite to the Qiblah wall, so as people have finished their prayers and are now leaving they shall see this verse, so as to tell them don't be scared (to comfort them), you prayed and made supplications, and here you are leaving don't be afraid, peace be upon you. These are examples for doors." F. Kurlu, interview, October 15, 2021.

[17] A past event is recalled in the mihrab verse in Cambridge Mosque. In the mihrab of Ljubljana Mosque, the mihrab of Mary is also recalled as expressed by Grabus: 'So, Mihrab refers also on the spiritual understanding of the life of Mariam, Hadret Mariam.' N. Grabus, Video call interview, July 15, 2021.

[18] In the women's prayer gallery in Punchbowl Mosque, a verse recalling the prayer of Mary is inscribed.

[19] Or dzikr, according to the calligrapher Kutlu: 'The first role of the calligraphy in the mosque is to announce some sentences from the divine message to those who come to the mosque in accordance with the place where they are located.' H. Kutlu, Videocall interview, January 24, 2021.

[20] Either through literal or indirect reference to the element, the verses tell stories of characters and events (historical, biblical… prophets.) in the Hereafter to remind the Muslims of the inter-reality of this universe (realities of the worlds of the seen and unseen). See interpretations and meanings of verses in Chapter 5.

Figure 7-6 Part of a verse '*Peace be upon you. Enter Paradise as a reward for your deeds'* Q 16:32 above an entrance in Süleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul (top) (Author 2022) Part of a verse '*Enter in peace and security'* Q 15:46 above entrance in Penzberg Mosque, Germany (bottom) (Anon)

### 7.4. Islamic Identity and Doctrine

Assuming that Qur'anic epigraphy takes on a role in (re)defining contemporary Mosque architecture in the West, one has to return to the oft-debated term, identity.[21] This discussion of identity, intentionally placed after the two

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[21] Identity has been recognised as a challenging subject to conceptualise, given its elusive and complex nature. Cultural theorists like Stuart Hall and others, have discussed identity as constantly changing and "increasingly fragmented and fractured", especially in late modern times. Identities therefore according to Hall are "never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic,

previous titles, considers all aspects and means previously discussed in this chapter in a way that will be further specified below. However, before moving on to that, it is necessary to explain why in this context, has 'Islamic' been precisely stated with identity, and how does this put the present research amongst other scholarly endeavours that address identity and representation in architecture, especially in relation to Islam and Muslims.[22]

One way to explain such emphasis on Islamic identity in the context of Muslim minorities can be taken up by sociological studies of immigration and religion. There is a considerable body of literature on identity construction among Muslims in the West, which argues that religion can be a key factor in the development of the individual and collective identity of Muslims, both in the sense of believing and belonging.[23] Especially in environments perceived as exclusive, discriminatory or with conflicting cultural values and practices, the religious identity of Muslims serves as an anchor, usually predominating above all other components of their identity. Further to that, especially in a liquid modernity where stable orientation points that individuals look at and be guided by are lost,[24] there has become an increasing and persisting demand for tradition and belonging, as Hervieu-Leger has previously argued.[25] Consequently, Muslims entering a community in the West, find a need to materialize their Islamic identity, which

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discourses, practices and positions." According to Nebahat and before her Edward Said, identity "is not a coherent path through unproblematic instances, but a contingent and precarious sense of constructions produced by sets of mediations and discourses, "opposed essences," and a "whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things". These conceptualisations have mostly come as responses to Orientalism, postmodern Orientalism, colonialism and even post-colonial discourses of identity claims, which constitute the context of Muslim minorities in the West and aim at "a homogeneous order by marginalizing and alienating one another". While this research recognizes such definitions, it mainly considers definitions from within the Muslim or Islamic culture.

[22] Studies mostly address culture rather than religion while understanding the identity within architecture. See Bartsch, "Re-Thinking Islamic Architecture: A Critique of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture Through the Paradigm of Encounter."

[23] Adis Duderija, "Factors Determining Religious Identity Construction among Western-Born Muslims: Towards a Theoretical Framework," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2008): 371–400.

[24] Nicholas Gane, "Zygmunt Bauman: Liquid Modernity and Beyond," *Acta Sociologica* 44, no. 3 (2001): 267–75.

[25] I also find the words of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy very much resonating: 'In this ever-changing world of things, man is in need of relating himself to some fixed point of reference to get out of chaos into cosmos. He has ever been seeking to situate himself in space, time and the world of the spirit and the mind […] The architect has to remember that wisdom does not belong to a unique epoch, it belongs to all times. It is present today as it was yesterday, and can be realized by anyone who desires it and who deserves it.'

according to Khan, is most clearly expressed through the mosques that they commission.[26] Yet questions persist: in what ways do Muslims express their Islamic identity in mosque architecture? and how does that challenge arguments that refute the application of the adjective 'Islamic' to architecture?[27] or at best politicise it?[28]

Qur'anic epigraphy, in light of arguments made through this study, becomes a suggested answer to these questions. According to Muslim community leaders who oversaw the mosques of this study, especially Murad: *without calligraphy, the Islamic identity of the building would not be sufficiently evident*.[29] This emphasis on Islamic identity within Qur'anic epigraphy in Mosque architecture can be understood, I would argue, through considering the Qur'anic concept of identity, i.e., *umma*, and the role the Qur'an plays as its ultimate core, authority and reference. Inscribing its verses within the architecture of the mosque, therefore, becomes a means for Muslims to externalise their Islamic identity in the mosque, especially with the absence of traditional image in the architecture of contemporary mosques in the West.

Now looking more closely at the constituents of Islamic identity (Islamic belief and doctrine; history; and language) one can practically see how each of these inscribed verses reflects an aspect or more of the communities' Islamic identity. As a significant identification of Muslims, verses and calligraphic compositions that reflect Islamic belief and doctrine can be found in almost all studied mosques of this research. In the brickwork calligraphy in Cambridge Mosque, its fascia and *qiblah* wall inscriptions; in Ljubljana Mosque's linear calligraphy in the *qiblah* wall, as well as its circular panels with the name of *Allah* and *Mohammad*; in Punchbowl Mosque's mini domes inscriptions; and finally, in Penzberg Mosque's diverse collection of inscriptions, one can in fact see various expressions of faith

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[26] Hasan-Uddin Khan, "Expressing an Islamic Identity," in *Building for Tomorrow*, ed. Azim Nanji (London: Academy Group Ltd., 1994), 64–73.

[27] For example the writings of Mohamed Arkoun about Islamic in architecture and the Agha Khan, see Bartsch, "Re-Thinking Islamic Architecture: A Critique of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture Through the Paradigm of Encounter."

[28] See Nasser Rabbat in his response article to Nebahat Avcioglu, "Identity-as-Form: The Mosque in the West," *Cultural Analysis*, no. 6 (2007): 91–112.

[29] A.H. Murad, Email interview, February 05, 2021.

and Divine unity. According to Islamic tradition, this belief in God is a prerequisite that would require believing in *'ālam al-ghayb* (metaphysical truths) and conducting worship (prayer), which are, in consequence, further components of the Muslim identity.[30]

As for history, the second component of Islamic identity can be explained through the earlier concept of *ummah* which includes not only current-day Muslims but also all earlier believers and prophets since the beginning of creation, including Adam, Moses, Mary, Jesus and Mohamed, till the Hereafter. This history is shared between all members of the *ummah* and is continuously shaped by present and future members. Thereby we understand the prophet's earlier reference to the booth of Moses while building his mosque (Chapter 6), as well as recalling memories of incidents and characters from the history of the *ummah* in the mosques of Cambridge, Ljubljana and Punchbowl, which I have elaborately referred to in previous section. According to Al-Masri, this relation between Islamic doctrine and the social collective is key to understanding the diversities of Muslim societies, and "the richness of individual expressions of behaviour, outlook and architecture, among other cultural forms."[31] Therefore, unlike some assumptions that Islamic identity is an isolating and reductive expression, according to Murad "it is a universalism expressed in diversity, which nonetheless points back to the principle that diversity indicates its divine source".[32] It is this concept and reality of *ummah* and its continuous memory that demonstrates, as Al Masi would argue, the expression of this diversity.[33]

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[30] The Qur'an states that clearly: "*This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God , who believe in the unseen keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them; those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter. Such people are following their Lord's guidance and it is they who will prosper*" (Q 2:1-6). See also Cambridge Mosque's facias inscription which holds similar meanings: *I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me.* (Q 20:14)

[31] Wael M. Al-Masri, "Architecture and the Question of Identity: Issues of Self-Representation in Islamic Community Centers in America" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993).

[32] A.H. Murad, Email interview, January 31, 2021.

[33] Al-Masri, "Architecture and the Question of Identity: Issues of Self-Representation in Islamic Community Centers in America."

Finally, regarding language, a relevant body of literature has already been covered in Chapters 1 & 2. Therefore, it might be enough here to refer to how this seemingly cultural aspect was utilised in the inscriptions of studied mosques. It really is self-evident that the most apparent shared aspect amongst all inscriptions is their language. Verses in all mosques, whether in the UK, Slovenia, Australia or Germany, were inscribed in Arabic. This is despite the necessity found by each community to translate these inscriptions. This insistence on Arabic language can be explained through this secured relation between Qur'an and Arabic, and the assumption that it is an apt expression of Islamic identity, even when it is different from the local language spoken by most of the Muslim community itself.[34]

In short, it could be contended that a significant part of understanding the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in expressing Islamic identity in mosque architecture as explained above, lies in acknowledging and exploring the close relation between the Qur'an, language and history in the various cultures of Muslim societies, a usually overlooked side in mosque architectural studies. This, along with how these communities express their Islamic identity in their own way, i.e., their ideologies, are what contextualises these explorations, while avoiding fear of unfounded generalisations.

## 7.5. Ideological Implications of Qur'anic inscriptions in Mosque architecture in the West[35]

Despite the relationship possibly highlighted by the use of Qur'anic epigraphy between Islamic identity and Mosque architecture, this research concurs that

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[34] Understanding the difference between Arabic as the language of the universal message of the Qur'an, rather than an ethnic distinction, can be understood by the explanation and example given by Maysam: The recipients of the Qur'an are not an ethnically defined group, not Arabs as such, but a people without scripture. Nonetheless, it explicitly refers to itself as clear Arabic speech, and maintains that line consistently. But this too is not an ethnic appeal. The Qur'an is addressed to a cultural context, the reality of which it straightforwardly acknowledges. It is sent to Arabic speaking people, so it is in Arabic. This recognition of local context is not the same as an ethnic restriction. One could, for example, being French, conceive and issue a 'universal' declaration of human rights that is, though in French, not billed as French, nor requires allegiance to any sort of French 'tribalism'. The given local context is simply a necessary constraint that cannot be negated." Maysam J. al Faruqi, "Ummah: The Orientalists and the Qurʾānic Concept of Identity."
[35] Ideology is a highly flexible conceptual tool. Though many Muslims scholars themselves have questioned the use of ideology within religion in Islam, I abstain from this discussion and use the word rather as a generic term in its simplest definition: a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it.

positing architecture as a mere essential representation of Islam may overlook the nuances and contingencies of different communities in changing times and places. However, it similarly challenges the complete disregard of Islam's essential presence in the architectural aspects and elements by many studies. Considering the *qiblah* in the architecture of the mosque, for example, different studies have shown that it is a "central symbol of Islam",[36] an "assertion of Islamic distinction",[37] and an "ontological rule and axis",[38] that every single mosque in the world adheres to in a universal expression and affirmation of belief. This Islamic devotional and ritual imperative that continues to govern the mosque architecture over its history has in fact inspired variant creative architectural and aesthetic solutions over many aspects of the mosque. The ways these solutions were applied in turn also reflect how Muslims interacted with their perceived challenges. Therefore, while attempting to stand on a middle ground between these two aforementioned discourses, this section will look into how the studied mosque inscriptions reflect the ways Muslims (mainly Muslim leaders) represent their communities and Islam in their contemporary contexts.

As investigation in chapters 5 have shown, Muslim communities in the West still face challenges in designing their mosques as a result of a common heritage of constructions towards Islam. These communities, which represent excluded minorities within secular countries of Christian histories and post-Christian culture, naturally respond to all these challenges when designing new mosques, including, as I argue, choosing these mosques' Qur'anic inscriptions.

There is a widely observed tendency amongst mosque clients, or Muslim community leaders, to show, while constructing a sense of sameness with an assumed Christian or post-Christian mainstream, that Islam is an inclusive

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[36] Angelika Neuwirth, "Face of God—Face of Man: The Significance of the Direction of Prayer in Islam," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, 1998, 298–312, doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004379008_018.

[37] Metcalf, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities."

[38] Kahera, "Image Text and Form : Complexities of Aesthetics in an American Masjid."

religion.[39] Therefore beside their architectural decisions mainly expressed through mosque design briefs and profiles of chosen architects, when choosing the inscribed verses or at least explaining their choice, clients would, as mentioned earlier, ensure to reference a theme present in the Bible. This is occurrent in all of Cambridge, Ljubljana, Punchbowl and Penzberg mosques. From recalling biblical characters, like Moses and Mary, to alluding to a Christian prayer while explaining the choice of the mosque door inscription, there seem to be attempts made by Muslims to set themselves within the 'us' or 'self', rather than the 'other'.

Attempts made by these mosques, which were not built for the mere purpose of prayer,[40] to make their own statements within their politically charged contexts are in fact self-evident. As a consequence, Qur'anic epigraphy as a textual means of communication was also meant to play a role in counter-constructing stereotypes of the 'Alien Islam', which assumes Muslims as: incompatible with local cultures,[41] and isolated from contemporary global issues.[42] Difference, according to Murad, "entails a vulnerability, particularly in these times of growing xenophobia", therefore chosen verses in Cambridge mosque for example were particularly described as both "welcoming" and "noncontroversial".[43]

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[39]While discussing Cambridge Mosque design process, Murad would explain: 'we've tried to include them from the outset and to show that you know Islam is the inclusive religion we believe in their prophets and we have the same Commandments and we're part of the same Abrahamic family and we care about the neighbours and they're not sort of zealots or fundamentalists or suicide bombers but we're kind of decent neighbours and we want to do religion in general a favour, so hopefully this is going to up the stakes for the discourse of religion against atheism which is the big argument in modern Britain it's not religions against each other I think we're all we've all that our backs against the same wall and we all have to cooperate not just in dialogue but in practical things like feeding the poor and dealing with the covid homeless and so forth and there's of collaboration that can be done in an increasingly secular and selfish UK.' FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad."

[40] Most of the mosques in the West prefer the title Islamic centre and sometimes even Islamic Religious and cultural centre as the case of Ljubljana.

[41] For example, in Punchbowl mosque, whose Muslim community were accused of radicalization and corruption, the verse chosen above the exit door and the commandments it had, seemed to simulate the counter constructions about Islam and Muslims in Australia and present Islam's approach through which humans could achieve balance and harmony in life, enabling the achievement of permanent spiritual advancement through a natural, balanced life with no deprivation, nor waste of the basic elements of a simple innate life.

[42] In Cambridge Mosque, Murad wanted to address and engage with climate change issues, therefore he wanted 'to choose some of the ayahs that are kind of about creation and about care for the creation. it's so immediately threatened by climate change that we have to be at least symbolically doing a lot and to show that religion is actually a solution and modernity and consumerism is the problem.' FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad."

[43] A.H. Murad, Email interview, February 05, 2021.

The position taken by these mosques is, seemingly from the outset, contrasting to that taken by Abdul Malik b. Marwan in the choice of verses of the Dome of the Rock, which seemed to rather emphasize difference, and challenge Christian perceptions. In the language and framework of power, it can be argued that unlike the victorious position of Muslims and "the realization by the Umayyad leadership of its own position with respect to the traditional heir of the Roman empire" which interprets the building's inscriptions as "an assertion of the superiority and of the strength of the new faith and of the state based on it",[44] the position of current Muslims in the West only entails a discourse of integration.

However, approaching it from a different perspective, one can also see it as a similar position taken by Muslims in differing circumstances. That is when approached through the Islamic perspective of *daʿwah*. Mosque clients, mainly represented by Muslim community leaders who also mostly happen to be their religious leaders, have been all taking roles in interacting with the local communities, and participating in interreligious programmes and dialogues. Out of a sense of responsibility towards both their Muslim and local communities,[45] these leaders usually engage in correcting misconceptions and misrepresentations of Islam in the West. These efforts are usually perceived as part of a political integrationalist ideology, overlooking a presumed religious act of *daʿwah*. It cannot be denied that *daʿwah*, in modern-day notions, has been at least partly political. That is because the two realms of religion and politics in Islam are inseparable.[46] However, still, as Waardenburg would argue "the ideological content of the *daʿwah*, important as it may be, is only one aspect and in most cases insufficient to explain the force of the appeal and its effects. To give such an explanation, the total

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[44] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

[45] Abdel Haki Murad would argue that "Islam is in its theology and its historical practice a missionary faith - one of the great missionary faiths, along with Christianity and Buddhism. And yet while Christianity and Buddhism are today brilliantly organised for conversion, Islam has no such operation, at least to my knowledge, (Convey my message, even though a single verse) is a Prophetic commandment that binds us all." See the following reference.

[46] Egdunas Racius, "The Multiple Nature Of The Islamic Da'Wa" (University of Helsinki, 2004).

context within which a particular *daʿwah* is proclaimed must be taken into consideration."[47]

Recognizing the context is vital when inviting people to Islam in line with the Qur'anic concept of daʿwah.[48] Qur'an commentators emphasize the importance of considering the intelligence, capabilities, and circumstances of the audience. This implies that the approach to conveying the message should be adapted to suit the specific situation. Therefore, it's understood that a uniform method should not be applied to all individuals.[49] One would anticipate the need for varied discourse when inviting people to Islam, especially considering the differences between today's Westerners and seventh-century Christians. According to Murad:

> Westerners are in the first instance seeking not a moral path, or a political ideology, or a sense of special identity - these being the three commodities on offer among the established Islamic movements. They lack one thing, and they know it – the spiritual life. Thus, handing the average educated Westerner a book by Sayyid Qutb, for instance, or Mawdudi, is likely to have no effect, and may even provoke a revulsion. But hand him or her a collection of Islamic spiritual poetry, and the reaction will be immediately more positive. It is an extraordinary fact that the best-selling religious poet in modern America is our very own Jalal al-Din Rumi. Despite the immeasurably different time and place of his origin, he outsells every Christian religious poet.[50]

Accordingly, it can be argued that similar to what Oleg Grabar saw as a missionary invitation to accept the new faith expressed through the dome of the Rock's inscription,[51] Cambridge Mosque inscriptions and the rest can be perceived

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[47] Waardenburg, "The Call (Da'wa) of Islamic Movements." He adds: There have been *daʿwah*s accompanied by violent action and others that later led to violence. Many *daʿwah* s, however, have led to peaceful conversions. Whenever a *daʿwah* refers to Islam, it will have its impact on a Muslim audience to which Islam represents the highest norm and value.

[48] In Qur'anic commentators, this is referred to as wisdom, mentioned in one of many verses which address the concept of *daʿwah h* and its methods, here I refer to the verse: (*O Prophet), call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner possible. Surely your Lord knows best who has strayed away from His path, and He also knows well those who are guided to the Right Way.*" (Q16:125)

[49] "Surah An-Nahl 16:120-128 - Towards Understanding the Qur'an - Qur'an Translation Commentary - Tafheem Ul Qur'an," accessed April 18, 2023,
https://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=16&verse=125&to=128.

[50] Racius, "The Multiple Nature Of The Islamic Daʿwah ." For more about Abdulhakim Murad's position in *daʿwah* among non-Muslims in the West, see Murad, Khurram. *Daʿwah among Non-Muslims in the West: Some Conceptual and Methodological Aspects*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986.

[51] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

as a *da'wah* gesture,[52] meant to introduce people in the West to the message of Islam, through ways that best address both the political and spiritual contexts.[53] This requires both wisdom (being well aware of the context while conveying the message with discretion) and beauty.[54] In that sense, what Grabar has observed over the inscriptions of the dome of the rock as "quite revealing in showing the extent to which the nature of an inscription in a religious sanctuary is related to the circumstances of the time",[55] can similarly be contended and applied to inscriptions of these contemporary mosques. Both cases and messages reflect Muslims' representations and positions towards their circumstances.

## 7.6. Concluding Remarks: Revisiting Objectives Theory

Revisiting the defining characteristics of Qur'anic epigraphy outlined earlier, along with their potential relevance to other religious monuments throughout the history of Islamic architecture's encounter with different cultures and contexts,[56] provides insight into the enduring utilization of Qur'anic inscriptions over the past fourteen centuries. This enduring use can be attributed to the ongoing functionality of these characteristics throughout the centuries. Despite changes in time and space,

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[52] About Cambridge Mosque design, as an eco-mosque, Murad would comment: 'the mosque really has to be a symbol of this  alot of Muslim countries actively supporting green mosques … so it gives I think visitors Muslims and non-Muslim a sense that religion is a source of hope and that it's where one should look for answers to the problems that materialistic man has created. So Alhamdullah (Thanks to God) it's a *da'wah* gesture as well as something that practically helps to save the a created infrastructure on which a human life depends.' FM, "Get Iftar Ready Show with Irfhan & Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad."

[53] The intended message and image of welcoming, inclusive Islam can also be widely observed through Penzberg inscriptions. Commenting on the entrance verse in Benjamin Idriz would elaborate: 'The goal of the mosque is not just to establish prayer, but to convey the message of Islam to others...The verse from Sūrah Al-Hujurat is considered a message of our mosque, a message of our center, and it is a message that consists of the fact that all people are Allah's creation and all people are equal. There is no superiority of a woman over a man, or of one nationality over another, because Allah created humans equally. And from among us, there are many men and women of different nationalities, races, colors, and languages, which means that Muslims in this city, regardless of their nationalities, races, or languages, are all one nation. The purpose of this diversity, whether it is racial, ethnic, or religious, is to get to know one another. Therefore, we have chosen these verses.' B. Idriz, Video call interview, July 14, 2021.

[54] Qur'an itself is regarded and referred to in Muslim scholarship as wisdom. Both its content and calligraphic form are also considered of great beauty for Muslims. According to Matthews, while explaining the use of calligraphy in Punchbowl mosque he would say: 'It's to showcase the Islamic script and the beauty of the script, the meaning of the of the Koran, the meaning of the verses, to connect the Musalahs (congregation) when they come to the *masjid* to the Qur'an. So there are multiple reasons for it. And also it's art.' Z, Matthews, Video interview, July 16, 2021.

[55] Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."

[56] According to Bartsch encounters provoke assertions of cultural identity – of 'self' and 'other'. Paradoxically, encounters enable coexistence, interaction and transformation. See Bartsch, "Re-Thinking Islamic Architecture: A Critique of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture Through the Paradigm of Encounter."

Muslims through engagement with and creation of Qur'anic epigraphy could still form a dynamic identity of themselves, that is formed and reflected upon in its designing process. [57] This identity which was meant to fit within Western societies consults Islamic tradition and constitutes "an element of transcending the political debate by creating a place of piety that only indirectly engages with the political debate".[58]

Once again, this leads back to the nature and objectives of the Qur'an, which resonate with the aspects discussed earlier. The Qur'an, as advocated not only by theorists of *maqasid* but also as believed by Muslims, was revealed with specific objectives, extensively outlined within its verses. The main objective remains to guide mankind. This remains in function in different times and contexts, as man remains in need of guidance, especially as circumstances (whether socially, economically, and politically) change. Therefore, reformation of belief, as a proposed objective, applies to all times under the act of *daʿwah* for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Verses about Islamic doctrine and belief are recurrently present in all mosques, not just as a source of identity, but also as an introduction and invitation for the reader. Educating people according to their time and rectifying morals, reminding them of past nations; bringing glad tidings, admonitions, and warnings; and showing Qur'an's inimitability and beauty, are all objectives related to the main purpose of the message. They are based on shared humanistic values, that create a pool of means and meanings that Muslims can recall according to their current needs.

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[57] Verkaaik, "Designing the 'Anti-Mosque': Identity, Religion and Affect in Contemporary European Mosque Design."
[58] Ibid.

# CHAPTER 8:     CONCLUSION

This thesis was inspired by an architectural inquiry aimed at exploring mosque architecture and one of its enduring elements, namely, Qur'anic epigraphy. The inquiry sought to address why Qur'anic inscriptions continue to appear in contemporary mosque architecture, particularly in Western contexts, despite the evident departure from traditional styles and other traditional elements typically associated with it. With the support of Jules Prown's introductory theory of material culture, I have argued that the persistence, invention, and variety evident in the literature and history of Qur'anic epigraphy suggest an enduring significance and relevance in fulfilling a deliberate role within surrounding environment. Accordingly, the role of Qur'anic inscriptions has taken centre stage in this research, examined across all chapters of the thesis.

Despite the methodological limitations highlighted through the literature review and its key concepts, which have consequently informed the methodological rationalization for the paradigm suggested in this thesis, previous studies on Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture have revealed a variety of roles for its use in different contexts. In historical contexts, these roles included: the glorification of faith, providing meaning and political statements (Sheila Blair); having an aesthetic purpose, creating visual experiences between the writing and its viewer (Oleg Grabar); conveying intended messages to groups of audience, maintaining social order, sustaining support of the regime, and playing a visually significant role in spatial hierarchies within the city (Irene Bierman); serving as a means for political expression (Yasser Tabbaa); constructing official religious identity (Gülru Necipoğlu); serving as a warning and becoming a trademark for the ruler (Carole Hillenbrand); determining the ambience of the building, and linking the patron/viewer with archetypes from the past or reiterating a familiar truth in timely ways (Holly Edwards).

While in contemporary contexts, according to these studies, Qur'anic epigraphy is used for keeping certain habits and customs alive in an alien

environment; as a devotional theme and emotional device (Akel Kahera), and as a traditional component in modernist architecture (Sumayah al-Solaiman). It also plays a role in constructing ritual movement and communal meaning, defining space and its parameters, negotiating between public and private, and between individual and divine, and creating spatial orientation and aesthetics (Ann Shafer).

Despite the valuable insights offered by these studies, most of them, especially the historical ones, remain primarily focused on the socio-political contexts of Qur'anic inscriptions, emphasizing their ideological implications while overlooking the significant religious dimension that interconnects calligraphy, architecture, and their respective communities. This dimension, as argued through this research, is closely linked to the role and objectives of the Qur'an within Muslim communities, which in modern-day notions can be considered partly political. Hence, the role of Qur'anic epigraphy and its ideological implications were separately addressed, signifying deliberate separation for research purposes rather than a true disconnection observed in practical settings.

To understand the role of Qur'anic epigraphy, this study has employed both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. By emphasising the significance of comprehending the nature of the text and its perception within contemporary Muslim communities, while also taking into account the particularities of different people at various times and places, a more integrative and interpretive paradigm has been suggested. This paradigm has aimed to provide a framework that facilitates the perception of Qur'anic epigraphy and its complexities in mosque architecture from within its culture.

Key concepts derived from perspectives that remain faithful to the content of these inscriptions, i.e. the Qur'an, have, therefore, been introduced as a way to help researchers conceive the world the way Muslims do.[1] Additionally, the theory of

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[1] See Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, "Introduction: Thinking through Things." Through introducing concepts such as *ummah*, *daʿwah* , and *al-ghayb,* expressed, either implicitly or explicitly, through interviews conducted during this study, I have sought to provide a general religious context through which meanings are established through the eyes of Muslim calligraphers and patrons.

higher objectives, particularly *Maqasid Al-Qur'an,* which concerns the understanding of the objectives of the Qur'anic discourse was reviewed as a suggested framework from within the Islamic tradition for comprehending the selection and placement of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture. Further religious and historical contexts that influenced the formation, development, and use of Qur'anic epigraphy have been explored, providing valuable insights into Muslims' reasoning regarding the role of Qur'anic epigraphy. This has included insights from early Muslims and jurists who are regarded as references for religious Muslim communities as well as their leadership, who typically lead mosque construction projects and play a crucial role in decisions regarding their inscriptions.

While contributing to its existing literature, the investigation of the Dome of the Rock case has shed light on various significant aspects related to the understanding and exploration of the broader phenomenon of inscribing Qur'anic verses on religious buildings. Among these aspects, particular emphasis has been placed on the significance of the individuals involved, especially considering their intentions, positions, and beliefs, as a means to better comprehend the approaches and objectives towards the use of Qur'anic epigraphy. The religiosity of figures like Rajaa bin Haywa and Abdul Malik, and their understanding of their contexts, are evidently related to their perceived intentions towards this art. Thus, proposing the use of *maqasid Al-Qur'an* as a framework to comprehend the interaction of these individuals with the Qur'an and its objectives in different historical contexts seems not at all irrelevant. Another aspect pertains to the Dome of the Rock's context, characterized by the encounter of Islam with other cultures which, according to Bartsch, motivates assertions of identity and reminds of the Western context.

Through the examination of three mosque projects in the West, I have argued that in response to challenges Muslim communities face in the West, especially Islamophobia and anti-mosque policies, local yet prominent non-Muslim architects are being commissioned to design these communities' new mosques. As *modern*, local, and far from 'Islamic', the designs of these mosques are commonly intended,

to a greater or lesser degree, as an attempt to fit the urban political Western context and integrate these Muslim communities. Nonetheless, the need to define and distinguish the mosque typology persists, especially with the shifting references of mosque architecture.

These mosque structures, reminiscent of the architectural innovation in Islamic architecture seen in the Dome of the Rock during its time and the unmistakable influences of surrounding cultures, required the incorporation of calligraphy to establish their identity as Islamic architecture in differing contexts. Muslim communities in the West continue to hold the opinion that "without calligraphy, the Islamic identity of the building [is] not sufficiently evident."[2] This viewpoint forms the central premise of this research, where Qur'anic epigraphy appears to play a considerable role in (re)defining mosque architecture amidst Western modernity, secularism, and the breaking chains of memory.

Therefore, based on a close reading of the calligraphic programs of these mosques, along with interviews conducted with Muslim patrons and calligraphers, and a contextual understanding of architectural, religious, political, and sociocultural realities, this study has revealed the diverse ways in which Qur'anic epigraphy plays such a role, and contributes to the (re)definition of mosque architecture in the West. These encompass defining the sacrality of mosque architecture, and its architectural elements. By uncovering the deliberate choice of content and placement of these inscriptions in relation to the urban and cultural context, I have contended that they play a role in establishing the mosque as a sacred space, not only for the Muslim community but also for non-Muslim local communities. This sense of sacredness, rooted in the practice of rituals and worship in the Islamic paradigm, is further achieved through the frequent use of inscriptions on mosque architectural elements, particularly within the prayer hall, which are closely tied to prayer and worship.

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[2] A.H. Murad, Email interview, February 05, 2021.

Additionally, I have shown that specific calligraphic qualities, encompassing common script types, compositions, frequently inscribed names, verses, and their deliberate placements, enable Muslim communities in the West to recreate certain "calligraphic memories." These memories establish a profound connection between their spaces and those of the larger regional (Bosnian, Balkan, and Ottoman) and global Muslim community (*ummah*). Looking further into the content of some of these inscriptions and exploring how their interpretations and meanings relate to the specific architectural elements and spaces, within the metaphysical realities of Islam (*'ālam al-ghaib*), I have proposed that these inscriptions aim to transcend the mere physical definition of these elements. They construct a continuous memory and a chain that links these elements to various entities within those realities.

At the heart of this exploration lies the notion of Islamic identity, positioning this research within the wider discourse surrounding identity in Islamic architecture. As such, this study actively contributes to the ongoing debate on this subject matter. The emphasis on Islamic identity within Qur'anic epigraphy finds grounding in sociological studies of immigration and religion, which highlight the centrality of religion in shaping the individual and collective identities of Muslim communities in the West. In environments where exclusion and cultural conflicts are prevalent, religion serves as a stabilizing anchor, reinforcing the Muslim identity amidst the challenges of a liquid modernity.

Given this context, and while exploring the constituents of Islamic identity, I have argued that Qur'anic epigraphy emerges as a potential response to the inquiry of how Muslims express their Islamic identity in mosque architecture. The concept of *ummah*, transcending racial and ethnic boundaries and centered on a community of shared faith, plays a fundamental role in this understanding. As an identification rooted in conscious choice, the concept of *ummah* necessitates an immutable statement of its core principles, which everyone can refer to. The Qur'an itself serves this purpose, representing the ultimate authority in Islam. Consequently, the inscriptions of Qur'anic verses within mosque architecture become a suggested means for Muslims to materialize, externalize, and assert their Islamic identity,

particularly with the absence of strong traditional visual representations in contemporary Western mosques.

However, while acknowledging the potential relationship between Qur'anic epigraphy, Islamic identity, and mosque architecture, challenging the complete disregard of Islam's essential presence in architectural aspects and elements observed in some research, this research cautions against regarding architecture as a mere representation of Islam, as it oversimplifies the complexities of both art and diverse Muslim communities in different contexts. Therefore, seeking to strike a balance between two prevalent discourses, I have intended to highlight how Qur'anic inscriptions in the studied mosques reflect the ideologies of Muslim communities, particularly their Muslim leaders, and how they represent themselves and Islam in their contemporary contexts.

Examining the ideological implications of Qur'anic inscriptions in the studied mosques, I have demonstrated how the inscriptions in these mosques in the West were carefully chosen to counter stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. In contrast to historical instances like the Dome of the Rock, which emphasized difference and challenged local religious perceptions, these mosques of the West aimed to establish a sense of sameness with the local culture and emphasize Islam's inclusive nature. Nevertheless, I have argued that these seemingly contrasting positions can be reconciled when viewed from the perspective of *da'wah*.

Finally, I have drawn attention to the possible attribution of the continuous use of Qur'anic epigraphy in mosque architecture over centuries to its alignment with the objectives of the Qur'an. This sacred text, and its universality, which aims to guide humanity through diverse means, remain relevant to changing circumstances and their particularities, shaping the dynamic identity of Muslims. Qur'anic inscriptions, in that sense, provide an enduring means and source for expression, that transcends political debates, yet still engages in them while embodying the essence of Islamic beliefs and values.

It is worth reminding the reader that the aim of this study is not to assert that the role of Qur'anic inscriptions in mosque architecture is, or has always been,

consistently evident. Rather, the study seeks to investigate their presence and diverse manifestations, which may vary from one mosque to another. As evident through studied mosques, Qur'anic inscriptions can assume various forms in one mosque and only a few forms in another. Their conscious implementation may be influenced by contextual disparities, or they could exist in similar ways across different contexts due to traditional decisions that were transmitted and subsequently incorporated in subsequent mosques for various reasons and under different circumstances.

Overall, this research reveals the complexity of the phenomenon of inscribing Qur'anic verses on mosque architecture. It provides insights into the process of mosque architecture and calligraphic design and the various factors that influence them, which have received minor if any attention in the literature of mosque architecture. It sheds light on the trilogy of the architect, client and calligrapher, their disparate worlds, and the role each of them plays in the design process. Its comprehensive nature, which has aimed to put together previous efforts in the field while introducing novel perspectives, ensures its relevance in both academic and practical contexts. It contributes to the literature on mosque architecture, Muslims in the West, Qur'anic epigraphy, and the theory of *Maqasid*, highlighting the interplay between them.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, particularly with regard to the number of mosques that were examined. Given the constraints of time and the challenges faced during the research process, I chose to prioritize a more comprehensive and contextually grounded analysis of each case. Consequently, the focus on three mosques in the study allowed for a deeper understanding of their individual characteristics and complexities within the Western context. While this approach yielded valuable insights, it may have limited the scope for a better representation of mosque architecture in the West. A larger number of cases might have provided a broader perspective, yet it could have potentially led to oversimplified generalizations and compromised the thoroughness of the analysis for each individual case. Thus, the choice to focus on

three contemporary cases in the West allowed for a more detailed and nuanced examination, which contributed to the depth and comprehensiveness of the study allowing for transferability.[3]

These limitations, in fact, offer opportunities for future research to enhance the scope and representation of this study. Future investigations could consider expanding the study, incorporating a wider range of mosque designs and communities in different Western contexts. Notably, the United States, with its distinct histories and policies towards Muslims and mosque construction, was excluded from the current research. Its inclusion in future studies could provide valuable insights and assess the transferability of this study's methodology and findings. Additionally, while acknowledging that the user groups – Muslims, non-Muslims, the wider communities etc – are important they are not the prime concern of the thesis, therefore they could be the focus of a next stage of research where the impact of the messages of the calligraphy are explored.

In conclusion, the present research, and the intricate interplay it shows between calligraphy and architecture, tradition and modernity, Islam and the West, past and present, universality and particularity, serve as a valuable lesson for researchers and architects involved in the design and construction of contemporary mosques. It brings further to light the role of the Qur'an in understanding the arts and architecture of religious Muslim communities and how it continues to inspire and influence the design of their sacred spaces. It reflects Muslims' self-representation and expression in Western societies and highlights the necessity for architects involved in such projects to comprehend the broader complexities encompassing the process, dynamics, and references of mosque architecture, and the role Qur'anic epigraphy plays within its context.

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[3] Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 1985). Pg298.

## Appendix A

### Biographies

The following compiled biographies are sourced from various references, including personal profiles available online. They aim at providing insights into the background, experiences and cultural contexts of figures involved in this research.

**Julia Barfield**[1] is the founding director of Marks Barfield Architects (MBA) 1989 together with husband and partner David Marks (1952 - 2017). They are both the originators and creative Entrepreneurs behind the design, funding, development and realisation of the London Eye and British Airways i360 in Brighton. Barfield is actively involved in efforts to address the Climate and environmental Emergency and joined the Steering group of Architect Declare in April 2019, and the umbrella Construction Declares. Barfield studied at the Architectural Association (AA), spent year out in South America working in barriada's of Lima, Peru. She worked for Richard Rogers & Partners and Foster Associates for nine years; was project architect for the Sackler Galleries in the Royal Academy, Piccadilly, responsible for developing the early design strategy. She is immediate ex Chair of National RIBA Awards Panel and chaired the Stirling panel 2019; she is on the LLDC Quality Review Panel and the Lambeth Design Panel. She is an external examiner at Bath University. Previously was on CABE Design Review Panel for five years, Vice President of the AA and an external examiner for Architecture at Queens University Belfast. Jointly with David Marks, she has received an MBE, the Prince Philip Designers Prize, special commendation and winner of 'Queens Award for Enterprise, Innovation '2003. MBA has been short-listed for the Stirling Prize; won The Building 'Architectural Practice of the Year' Award & BD Sports and Leisure 'Architects of the Year'. MBA has won more than 100 awards for Design, Innovation and Sustainability. MBA has diverse experience across many sectors, from culture, education and workplace to bridges and transport, sports and leisure. Michael Tippett Secondary School won the award for Best design of a new school 2008. The Lightbox, cultural centre in Woking, won the National Arts Prize 2008; and Clapham Old Town won the NLA Award for Public Space in 2015. Greenwich Gateway Pavilions won an RIBA National award 2016 and in 2017, Cambridge Primary school won an RIBA award; British Airways i360 won 18 awards. Their design for Cambridge Central Mosque won RIBA Stirling Prize People's Vote 2021.

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[1] Julia Barfield, "Julia Barfield | LinkedIn," *LinkedIn*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/julia-barfield-b819115/?originalSubdomain=uk.

**Angelo Candalepas**[2] is a Greek Australian architect born in Sydney 1967. His parents migrated to Australia from central Greece in the 1960s.[3] He graduated from the University of Technology, Sydney in 1992. He was made a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Architects in 2012. In 1994 he established his own architecture studio which, in its first months of practice, won an international competition for housing in 'The Point', Pyrmont. The project was the recipient of several awards and in the following five years Candalepas won and was shortlisted on several national and international competitions. In 1999 he established Candalepas Associates. Since 1999 the company, under his leadership, has won a significant number of awards, including the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) Sulman Medal for Public Architecture in 2009 and the Frederick Romberg National Architecture Award in 2011, the Seidler Award for Commercial Architecture in 2016 and the Aaron Bolot Award for Residential Architecture in 2011 and 2017. In 2016 he was also awarded the Premier's Award for Architecture in NSW. Angelo's work has been acknowledged both in Australian and in international exhibitions, journals and books. The work of the firm is published in New York Phaidon Press as the work of one of the 100 most interesting emerging architectural offices in the world. In 2003 he was appointed Visiting Professor of Architecture at UNSW and since then has taught architectural design and theory for the final year Master of Architecture course. Since 1996, Angelo has lectured regularly at various universities across Australia including UTS and UNSW in Sydney, as well as universities in Newcastle, Queensland, and Tasmania. Between 2008 and 2012 he was appointed by the Premier of NSW as an expert on the Design Excellence Review Panel for 'Barangaroo' and has sat on various advisory panels for the City of Sydney on other significant projects. He is presently appointed as an advisor to the University of Sydney on a building procurement panel.

**Vasa J. Perović**[4] was born in Belgrade (Serbia) in 1965 and graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade in 1992. In 1994 he earned a master's degree from the Berlage Institute in Amsterdam, and in 1997 he established Bevk Perović Arhitekti, in partnership with Matija Bevk. **Matija Bevk** was born in Ljubljana in 1972 and graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana in 1999. Their portfolio includes a variety of projects in different scales – large housing projects, both social and commercial, public, and cultural buildings, university buildings, museums, office buildings, congress facilities as well as

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[2] Angelo Candalepas, "Angelo Candalepas | LinkedIn," *LinkedIn*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/angelo-candalepas/?originalSubdomain=au.

[3] Sinanidis, "From Punchbowl Mosque to Greek Archdiocese: Greek Australian Angelo Candalepas Tightrope Walks across the Architecture of Many Faiths."

[4] Vasa Perovic, "Vasa J. Perovic | ReSITE Speaker," *ReSITE*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.resite.org/speakers/vasa-j-perovic.

individual houses. Their office, Bevk Perović Arhitekti, has been awarded numerous international prizes  European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award in 2007 (for Faculty of Mathematics of the University of Ljubljana), Kunstpreis Berlin in 2006, Piranesi Award in 2005, as well as national prizes – four Plečnik Prizes for best building of the year in Slovenia, Golden Pencil awards by the Chamber of Architects, as well as Prešeren Prize, the highest national prize for culture, awarded by the President of the Republic of Slovenia in 2005.

**Hüseyin Kutlu**[5] was born in 1949 in Konya. During his undergraduate education at the Philosophy Department of Istanbul University, he started to work as a *vaiz* (preacher) at the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Eskişehir Mihaliççık. In 1974, Hüseyin Kutlu received his certificate in *thuluth-naskh* from **Hamid Aytaç**. Besides, he studied *ta'liq* under the supervision of Uğur Derman. He worked as Imām-Preacher at Hekimoglu Ali Pasha Mosque between 1976-2002. He made every effort to restore the central role that this mosque played in the Turkish Islamic civilization. To this end he worked on the revival and reconstruction of the tomb, the fountain, the library, the cemetery and the destroyed areas of the mosque. After his retirement, with constant effort and endeavour he continued to teach the art of calligraphy and Ottoman Turkish at the Biksad Art Atelier. Producing more than a thousand calligraphic works including *qitas* and various original stacks, the works of the artist have been published in various albums and have made its way into the collections. He has written calligraphies for many mosques in and outside Turkey including Ashgabat Mosque, Sabancı Central Mosque, Şakirin Mosque and Tokyo Mosque. Since 1975 he has educated eighty-one students and these students are currently working in the field of calligraphy and guiding other students. In 2022 he was rewarded for the 'Istanbul Mushaf', a handwritten Qur'an with '*nakkaşhane*' tradition.

**Soraya Syed**[6] is a classically trained calligrapher, artist and filmmaker of growing international renown. In 2005, Soraya was awarded calligraphy licence from Istanbul, Turkey. Among mong her teachers were the Turkish masters Efdaluddin Kilic and **Hasan Çelebi**. She continually works to push the boundaries of what is expected from this traditional art form. She takes the written word off the page into film, dance and VR and has worked with the likes of Google, the British Museum and Royal Shakespeare Company. She is based in London.

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[5] "Hüseyin Kutlu," *Ketebe*, n.d.
[6] Art of the Pen. "Biography." Art of the Pen. Accessed August 9, 2023. https://www.artofthepen.com/about/biography.

**Hisam Selmo**[7] is a Syrian-Turkish calligrapher who curently lives in Istanbul and specializes in *Muhaqiq* and *Thuluth* scripts. He is the first calligrapher from Aleppo to receive license from Master Calligrapher **Hasan Çelebi**. He founded the Association of Arabic Calligraphy in Syria in 2010 and has become a member of many Arabic calligraphy associations since 2006. He participated in writing parts of the Holy Qur'an from 2011 to 2017 and has staged exhibitions in Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to participating in many calligraphy festivals and receiving numerous prizes.

**Cazim Hadžimejlić**[8] was born in 1964 in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is a practicing calligrapher who studied and was granted the *Ijazah* (traditional degree) from the traditional Turkish calligrapher master **Hasan Çelebi** in Istanbul. He also studied other traditional Islamic arts, including the art of bookbinding and Ebru. Beside his academic career in the universities of Mimar Sinan in Istanbul and Sarajevo in Bosnia, Hadžimejlić has been active in the field of art, opening several exhibitions and founding a private museum where he presents Bosnia-Herzegovina's historic, cultural and artistic heritage.

**Hasan Çelebi**[9] was born in 1937 in Erzurum. He worked as an imām *hatip* in various mosques. In 1964, he started studying calligraphy with *Khattat* Halim Özyazıcı, **Hamid Aytaç** and Kemal Batanay. He took his *thuluth* and *naskh* license from Hamit Bey in 1975, and his *ta'liq* and *ruq'ah* license from Kemal Bey in 1981. In 1977, he was commissioned to write the scriptures of Atatürk University Theology Mosque in Erzurum; in 1981, to write the scriptures of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Jeddah; and in 1983, to do the restoration of the scriptures of Masjid al-Nabi. Çelebi, who took part in many projects both at home and abroad, opened his first solo exhibition in Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) in Istanbul in 1982. He held exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in 1984; and in Amman, where he went with an invitation from Hasan B. Talla, Prince of Jordan, in 1985. In 1987, Çelebi stayed in Medina for a year to write the scriptures of the Quba Masjid. In 1994, he held the '30 Years in the Art of Khatt' exhibition in IRCICA. Çelebi also participated in many classical Turkish

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[7] "Artist 76," *Khawla Art and Culture*, n.d.; "Heisam Salmo," *International Art Exhibition - Gallery of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://gallery.irunesco.org/en/heisam-salmo/; "Culturally Infused Calligraphy at Western Sydney University Art Gallery," *Western Sydney University News Centre*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/newscentre/news_centre/art_gallery_news/culturally_infused_calligraphy_at_western.
[8] "Cazim Hadzimejlic," *LinkedIn*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/cazim-hadzimejlic-855853104/?originalSubdomain=ba.
[9] Hasan Çelebi, "The Art of Khatt," *Türkiye'nin Ustaları*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.turkiyeninustalari.org/en/ustalar/the-art-of-khatt/hasan-celebi.

handicrafts' exhibitions both in Turkey and abroad. He has been giving calligraphy classes since 1976 and has given licenses to fifty-two of his students so far, both from Turkey and abroad. He was awarded with the Silver Tulip Award in 'Khatt Meeting' organized by the Association of Traditional Arts in 2007 for his contributions to the art of calligraphy.

**Hamid Aytaç**[10] (1891-1982), the most celebrated Turkish calligrapher of the 20th century, made an outstanding contribution to the revival and revitalization of the Ottoman School of Calligraphy. He was born in Diyarbakir in Ottoman Turkey and learned the Thuluth calligraphic style from Mehmed Nazif (1846-1913), *thuluth* and *naskh* from Kamil Akdic (1862-1941) and *ta'liq* from Mehmed Hulusi (1869-1940). His calligraphic masterpieces, which are of exceptionally high quality and represent the splendid tradition of the Ottoman School of Calligraphy, are reflected in the copies of the Qur'an written by him and in calligraphic panels at the Sisli Mosque in Istanbul as well as in many public buildings in Istanbul and Ankara. His most famous pupil is **Hasan Çelebi**.

**Abdul Hakim Murad**[11] (Timothy Winter) is an English academic born in 1960. He is currently the Sheikh Zayed Lecturer of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University and Director of Studies in Theology at Wolfson College. He has published and contributed to numerous academic works on Islam and among his best-known works are translations from Imām Ghazali's *Ihya*, a series of aphorisms (Commentary on the Eleventh Contentions) and his most recent book, Travelling Home: Essays on Islam in Europe. He is the founder of the Cambridge Muslim College, which has offered Diploma courses for British Darul Uloom graduates and now has an accredited BA programme which promises to graduate religious leaders who are confident, competent and conversant with the issues of the age. He is a much sought after speaker and contributes regularly to the media. Hundreds of YouTube videos of his lectures and talks form an important source of knowledge for English-speaking Muslims. His ongoing research interests include Sufism and the development of the Ottoman learned institution, computerized Ḥadīthdatabases, and Muslim-Christian relations. His book Bombing without Moonlight (2008) won the King Abdullah I Prize for Islamic Thought in 2007. He was editor of The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology (2008).

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[10] "THE CALLIGRAPHIC WORLD OF HUSEYIN OKSUZ," *The Iosminaret*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.iosminaret.org/vol-11/issue17/Huseyin_Oksuz.php.
[11] Lamya Al-Khraisha et al., *The Muslim 500: World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2022*, ed. Tarek Elgawhary (Amman: Mabda, 2021).

**Zachariah Matthews**[12] is a Muslim educator and community advocate in Sydney. He was born in South Africa, where he studied Qur'an, Islamic studies, as well as Pharmacy, in which he pursued higher education in both South Africa and the United States before migrating to Australia. Matthews is an active Australian Muslim, widely engaged with the Australian community, both Muslims and non-Muslims. He lectured at the University of Sydney's Pharmacy Faculty for seven years and managed a government hospital pharmacy department for more than eight years. Beside that, he is also involved in Islamic studies and education, focusing mainly on leadership mentoring, development, and education for more than twenty years. He has also been taking on advocacy roles and leadership positions in independent Islamic schools and institutions.

**Nedžad Grabus**[13] was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He graduated from the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Sarajevo, where he earned his master's degree. Before being appointed the Mufti of Ljubljana, Mufti Grabus worked in the religious-educational service in the *Riyaset* of Bosnia. He is both a professor of theology at the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Sarajevo and a visiting professor at the University of Ljubljana. He is a well-known mediator between and integrator of Christian and Islamic thought and philosophy and had multiple roles and activities regarding interreligious programmes and dialogues.

**Benjamin Idriz**[14] was born in Skopje, Macedonia, finished training as *Hafiz* (Qur'an scholar) at the age of 11 years, and continued to recite the Qur'an regularly at the Aladscha Mosque in Skopje. He attended Al-Furqan Institute for Islamic Law and Arabic Literature in Damascus, Syria. At the European Faculty of Islamic Studies (IESH) in Château Chinon in France he received his diploma in Islamic theology and religious principles in 1998. He received his Master 'Contemporary Islamic Thought' at Al-Ouzai University in Beirut, Lebanon in 2014. Since 1995 he been the imām of the mosque in Penzberg, Germany.

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[12] Zachariah Matthews, "Dr. Zachariah Matthews," *LinkedIn*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-zachariah-matthews-3176892b/?originalSubdomain=au.
[13] Community Spirit, "Grabus, Nedzad Mufti," *Teilnehmer*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://comunityspirit.com/teilnehmer/grabus-nedzad-mufti/.
[14] Baraza NGO, "Benjamin Idriz - Germany," *Baraza*, accessed August 5, 2023, https://www.baraza.ngo/en/activities/current-projects/speakers-bureau/benjamin-idriz-germany/.

# Appendix B

**Participant Information Sheet**

In this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview to explore the role of Qur'anic epigraphy in the architecture of mosques, examining the philosophies, as well the factors that are involved in the process of creating contemporary Islamic art and architecture. The study is being conducted by Noha Hussein. The researcher and PhD student is part of the Centre of Architecture, Urbanism and Global Heritage (CAUGH) team, which is part of the school of Architecture, Design and Built Environment Department at Nottingham Trent University. The research is funded by NTU studentship.

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study has been approved by Research Ethics committee.

Further information can be found at: https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/research-environment-and-governance/governance-and-integrity

Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you would prefer not to take part, you do not have to give any reason. If you change your mind you should contact up to 7 days after the interview date. If you withdraw after this point your data may be retained as part of the study.

The interview will take between 60 and 90 min and will be audio recorded. Extracts from the interview transcript may be published as part of the study. You may, at your discretion, also share photographs/documents of items you have made or add to your responses in writing subsequently. If you also wish to give a question more consideration or expand on any answers you have given following the interview you will have the opportunity to follow up in writing.

We do not anticipate that there are any risks in taking part. You will not be under any pressure to answer questions or talk about topics that you prefer not to discuss and you

can choose to halt or withdraw from the interview at any point. There are no direct benefits of taking part.

Nottingham Trent University is committed to respecting the ethical codes of conduct of the United Kingdom Research Councils (RCUK) and EU GDPR. Thus, in accordance with procedures for transparency and scientific verification, the University will conserve all information and data collected during your interview in line with University Policy, consistent with both RCUK, and the EU GDPR, (https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/gdpr-and-research-an-overview-for-researchers/).

We will use data from your interview to inform our final reports/ thesis/ journal articles/ presentations which will be publicly available. If you are interested, copies of any resulting publications will be available on request.

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, please ask the researcher before the study begins.

**Lead researcher:** Noha Hussein, School of Architecture, Design and Built Environment, Nottingham Trent University, noha.hussein2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, Chair in School of Architecture, Design and Built Environment, m.gamal@ntu.ac.uk | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU**: Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk

**Consent Form**

**Please read and confirm your consent to participating in this project by ticking the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form.**

1. I have read the project description and had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and these have been answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw by informing the researcher of this decision up to one week after the interview without giving any reason and without any negative implications. ☐

3. I give permission for the interview to be audio recorded. ☐

4. I have been informed that the data I provide will be safeguarded. ☐

5. I understand that quotations from the interview or responses given in writing, may be included in material published from this research. ☐

6. I understand that any photographs/ documents I share of items that I have made may be included in material published from this research. ☐

7. I am willing to participate in an interview as part of this research project. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Participant's name                  Date                           Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher's name                  Date                           Signature

**Lead researcher:** Noha Hussein, School of Architecture, Design and Built Environment, Nottingham Trent University, noha.hussein2019@my.ntu.ac.uk | **Director of Studies:** Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, Chair in School of Architecture, Design and Built Environment, NTU, m.gamal@ntu.ac.uk | **Chair of the College of Art, Architecture Design and Humanities (CAADH) Research Ethics Committee, NTU**: Professor Michael White, michael.white@ntu.ac.uk

**Interview Questions**

Example of Template Used for Interviewing Architects

*Mosque Architecture*

- Why did you decide to participate in the competition, and what was the initial motive behind it?

- What kind of design brief was provided for the competition? Did it specify a preference for something modern or contemporary?

- While researching Islamic architecture (if you call it that), what kind of references did you have?

- How would you define Islamic or Mosque architecture based on your research and design experience?

- How would you describe the architecture of the mosque? Does it fall under the category of modern architecture, and if so, what specific school does it align with?

- Can you explain the design process and how you collaborated with the Mufti? What role did the Mufti play throughout the process?

*Calligraphy:*

- Was the incorporation of calligraphy and the Qiblah wall part of your initial design concept?

- When did the idea of using calligraphy in the design emerge? Was it mentioned in the design brief or during the early renders?

- When did the calligrapher join the project? Who chose the calligrapher, and were there any specific preferences?

- How did you work with the calligrapher? Were you involved in any decisions regarding the calligraphy's form, location, or content?

- What is your feedback about the calligraphy used in the design?

- From your perspective, what role does calligraphy play in the overall design and meaning of the mosque?

*Influencing factors*

- Were there any restrictions imposed by the city council or government during the design process? For example, was there any particular reason for having a dome inside the mosque due to external restrictions?

- What factors and stakeholders influenced the architecture and calligraphic design decisions, including potential involvement from funding institutes, etc.?

*Personal Experience*

- How was the experience of designing and constructing a building of a different belief system than your own?

Example of Template Used for Interviewing Calligraphers

*About the Mosque*

- Can you tell us the story behind the construction of this mosque, including the reasons for its building and the process involved?

- Who approached you to write the calligraphy for the mosque? Was it the architect or the community? With whom did you collaborate, and what were their perceptions and ideas about calligraphy?

- What kind of information were you given about the mosque and the specific calligraphy requirements?

- When were you approached to work on the calligraphy for the mosque during its construction phase?

- Did you have the opportunity to visit the mosque before working on the calligraphy?

- What was the reason behind including calligraphy in the mosque's design?

- Who selected the Qur'anic verses to be included, and what was the reasoning behind their choices?

- Who made decisions regarding the design, including the script (*jeli thuluth*), composition, location, and colour of the calligraphy on the walls and *miḥrāb*? Were there any other inscriptions in the mosque?

- How would you describe your technical and spiritual experiences while designing the calligraphy for this mosque?

- Why was the *miḥrāb* inscription mirrored? What significance does it hold?

- Can you explain how you calculated the thickness of the pen for each writing in the calligraphy?

- Based on your experience, what is your opinion about a non-Muslim architect designing a mosque?

*General Questions*

- What role does Qur'anic calligraphy play in mosque architecture, and what is the relationship between the two?

- What are the factors that influence the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions, including the selection of verses and their design?

- At what stage should a calligrapher get involved in a mosque project?

- Could you share your calligraphy learning experience, and what influenced your decision to study calligraphy in Turkey?

- How do you perceive the role of the Ottoman and current Turkish culture in the development of calligraphy?

- What relationship, if any, do you see between calligraphy and Sufism?

- How do you define Islamic art, and do you consider it to be universal?

- What skills do you believe are essential for a calligrapher to write in mosques?

*Additional Notes:*

The interviewer expresses an interest in receiving contact information for the architects and the Muslim community related to the mosque. They also mention their appreciation for any shared working files or sketches related to the mosque's calligraphy.

Example of Template Used for Interviewing Clients

- Why was there no mosque in the city for so many years?

- Can you provide more information about the architectural competition, such as when it was announced and what was requested in the design brief?

- What were the other proposals submitted for the competition?

- What criteria led to architect's design winning the competition, and who made the final decision?

- What was the role of the funding body in the design decision-making process?

- How does the community view the mosque, and what are their opinions about it?

- Who made the decision to include calligraphy in the mosque's design?

- How does the community perceive the calligraphy, and what are your own perceptions about it?

- Why aren't there any calligraphy elements on the exterior of the mosque?

# Appendix C

The Dome of the Rock's Early Inscriptions' Translation

### Outer Face Inscription

**S**: *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. *Say, 'He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him'* (Q 112:1-4). Muhammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him.

**SW**: *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone, He has no partner. Muhammad is God's messenger. *God and His angels bless the Prophet;*

**W**: *O you who believe, bless him and give him greetings of peace*. (Q 33:56). *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone. *Praise*

**NW**: *belongs to God, who has not taken a son and who does not have any partner in dominion nor any protector out of humbleness. Magnify Him greatly*. (from Q 17:111) Muhammed is the messenger of God

**N**: May God, His angels and His messengers bless him and may the peace and mercy of God be upon him. *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone, He has no partner.

**NE**: *All control and all praise belong to Him* (from Q 64:1). *He gives life and death; He has power over all things.* (from Q 57:2) Muhammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of resurrection for his community.

**E**: *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. Muhammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him. Having built this dome the servant of God

**SE**: Ab[d al- Malik, the commander] of the believers, in the year 72, asks that God accept [it] from him and be pleased with him. Amen. The Lord of the Worlds (from Q 1:2). To God belongs praise[1].

Inner face inscription:

**S**: *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy*. There is no god but God alone; He has no partner. *All control and all praise belong to Him* (from Q 64:1). *He gives life and death; He has power over all things*. (from Q 57:2) Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger.

**SE**: *God and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe, bless him and give him greetings of peace.* (Q 33:56). May God bless him and may the peace and mercy of God be upon him. *O People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion,*

**E**: *and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a 'Trinity'– stop [this],*

**NE**: *that is better for you– God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust.* (Q 4:171) *The Messiah would never disdain to be*

**N**: *a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him. He will gather before Him all those who disdain His worship and are arrogant* (Q 4:172) O God, bless your messenger and servant, Jesus

**NW**: son of Mary. *May peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive* (paraphrasing of Q 19:33, similar to Q 19:15 which refers to John) *Such was Jesus, son of Mary. [This is] a statement of the Truth about which they are in doubt* (Q 19:34) *it would not befit God to have a child. Glory be to Him!*

**W**: *When He decrees something, He says only, 'Be,' and it is* (Q 19:35). *God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him: that is a straight path* (Q 19:36). *God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him,*

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[1] Rippin has replaced the passage referring to Abd Allah Abd Allah al- Imam al- Ma'mun which appears now, with its probable original wording, Abd Allah 'Abd al- Malik (servant of God 'Abd al- Malik) Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions*..

**SW**: *the Almighty, the All Wise* (Q 3:18) *True Religion, in God's eyes, is Islam: [devotion to Him alone]. Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge– if anyone denies God's revelations, God is swift to take account* (Q 3:19).

The upper part of the east entrance plaque, which Max van Berchem attributes to the time of construction, held the following inscription:

In the name of God, the All- merciful, the All- compassionate. *Praise be to God except whom there is no god, the Living, the Everlasting, the Creator of Heaven and of earth, and the light of Heaven and of earth* (Q 2:255, in part, or parts of 3:1; 2:112 or part of 6:101), the Upholder of Heaven and earth, *One, Eternal, He does not beget nor is He begotten and there is none like him* (Q 112, missing one word), One, *Lord of power, You give power to whom You please and You take away power from whomever You please* (Q 3:26). All power is to You and comes from You, our Master, and it returns to You, Master of power, Merciful, Compassionate. *He has written mercy for Himself, His Mercy extends to all things* (Q 6:12 and 7:156, adapted). Glory to Him and He may be exalted over what polytheists associate [to Him]. We ask you, our God, by Your mercy, by Your beautiful names, by Your noble face, by Your immense power, by Your perfect word by which Heaven and earth stand together and by which, and with Your mercy, we are preserved from the devil and we are saved from Your punishment on the day of resurrection (*yawm al- qiy*[*å*]*ma*), by Your abundant grace, by Your great nobility, by Your clemency, Your power, Your forgiveness, and Your kindness, that You bless Muhammad, Your servant and Your Prophet, and that You accept his intercession (*shaf'ahu*) for his community. May God bless him and give him peace and the mercy of God.[2]

While the northern gate inscription reads:

In the name of God, the All- merciful, the All- compassionate, *praise be to God except whom there is no god, the Living, the Everlasting* (Q 2:255, in part, or 3:1). There is no partner to Him, One, *Eternal, He does not beget nor is He begotten and there is none like Him* (Q 112, missing opening words). Muhammad is the servant of God and His

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[2] 'Based on the translation in van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, pp. 248–9. Also, Estelle Whelan, 'Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'an', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118(1) (1998): 6–7; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 61; Heribert Busse, 'Monotheismus und islam-ische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981): 171–2.'

messenger, *Whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religion, even though the polytheists hate it* (Q 9:33 or 61:927). Let us believe in God and what was revealed to Muhammad and *in what was given to the prophets from their Lord; we made no difference between one and the other and we are Muslims to Him* (Q 2:136 or 3:84, slightly adapted). God bless Muhammad, His servant and His prophet, and peace be upon him and the mercy of God, His forgive-ness, and His pleasure.[3]

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[3] van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicum*, p. 250; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, p. 61.

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