

Arabesque and its Misunderstood Contemporary Applications Historical, Cultural and Aesthetic Underpinning

Amna Anwaar Khan¹ 

¹In-Charge/Assistant Professor, Fine Arts Department, GC University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Correspondence: amna.anwaar@gcu.edu.pk¹

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The aims of this research include a brief investigation in the history and evolution of the arabesque in traditional and contemporary visual culture; a semiotic and visual inquiry in the meaning of the arabesque; the application of the arabesque in contemporary art, design and architecture. Specifically, the aim of this research paper is to find about the misunderstood utilisation of arabesque as a cultural confluence in contemporary art and design communication in a local as well as globalised environment.

Methodology: This paper underwent a qualitative inquiry on hermeneutic exploratory and descriptive research using the technique of innate expressionism by using secondary data furnished additionally with interviews.

Findings: It appears that no research has been fully carried out as to its contemporary development and application in the Pakistani art, design and architecture. This may be because Arabesques have traditionally been considered Islamic surface decoration and not an active visual language able to communicate culture specific meaning through contemporary advertising.

Conclusion: The art of Arabesque is gradually being replaced by its brash and thoughtless imitations which not only damage its relationship with its cultural context but also leads this unique element of ornamentation towards deformation and distortion with reference to its scale and proportions, thus paving way for extinction in future. Arabesque has also lost its place in contemporary Islamic art and architecture due to the absence or decreasing number of masters or traditionally skilled craftsmen practising this genuine artistic craft.

Keywords: Arabesque, Visual Culture, Semiotic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ornamentation and decorative motifs have always played a symbolic role in every religion, culture and history. From the prehistoric time, ornamental symbolic representations provided the rich source of visual language of specific time, era, aesthetics and region. After the advent of Islam around 700 A.D and this monotheistic religion spread in the Middle east region; iconography was forbidden in Islamic Art and Architecture and specifically the depiction of any living creatures including animals and humans was

Article History

Received:
December 14, 2025

Revised:
February 13, 2026

Accepted:
February 17, 2026

Online:
February 25, 2026

greatly discouraged due to the Islamic rules. Thus, Islamic artists intended to create abstract decorative motifs with innate meanings and had based their imagery on Calligraphy (the art of beautiful writing), geometry and Arabesque. They put an extreme importance on the purity of form and formation of Arabesque motifs and all three decorative elements frequently tied up together. Arabesque is one of the most prominent ornamental elements in Islamic Art and Architecture and the reflection of Islamic theology, philosophy and religious context. The core idea of these embellished motifs was; they did not have noticeable living creatures and could be conveniently used to beautify sacred places and spaces. It was a unique idea to decorate any artefact or architectural surface without relying on human imagery, in contrary; figural decorations like grotesque and zoomorphic motifs were widely practised in western culture at that time (www.merriamwebster.com). Therefore, by digging deeper we came to know that the aesthetics of Islamic art and architecture is solely different from art of any other religion in the world. Arabesque has infused in every decorative facet of Islamic art; like geometry and calligraphy it is also regarded as the highest symbol of Islamic aesthetics. It is suggested that Arabesque motifs as symbol; are subjective interfaces due to its harmonious nature, as they represent a greater reality than its physical formation and cause believers to concentrate on the eternal rewards and God-fearing way of life. Although many scholars categorised the traditional Arabesque motif as a basic measure of social, intellectual and religious expressions of Islamic aesthetics and widely expressed in every genre of art and architecture including textiles and visual designs. Thus, the main objective of this research paper is to find the comprehensive awareness of ornamental Arabesque style and its application in contemporary visual mediums in art, architecture and design. By examining the development of Arabesque in its historical context during Islamic era, tracings help us to explore its tendency towards both aesthetically and spiritually. These historical codified messages help to redefine its importance in contemporary time and its visual representation in local art, architecture and design. The biomorphic or vegetal Arabesque curving forms in an infinitely repeated, usually symmetrical in pattern was an important medium of Islamic expression, but currently it mutilates form are being adapted in different mediums in our local art, architecture and design (www.moma.org).

This is achieved during the investigation that the development and evolution of Arabesque Motif in Islamic world and its expansion can also be related with the growth of science and technology in Central Asia, Middle East and Iran, during the 8th and 9th centuries. The contribution of Muslim in the field of science and research became significant by 10th century and the transformation in Arabesque and geometrical designs can be traced from remaining artifacts of Islamic world. The Arabesque motif has a glorious history due to its delicate structure and harmonised expression; but currently its misunderstood usage in vernacular culture has continuously deteriorated its mysticism, spirituality and originality.

Hence, few examples for the discussion of Arabesque motif have been selected from contemporary Pakistani art, design and architecture. Therefore, the research focused on to find out the comparative and descriptive analysis of the contemporary local Arabesque as a symbol and its misunderstood application.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on Arabesque is descriptive, historically comprehensive and scholarly. Many online books, sites and articles have been examined in order to analyse and comprehend the current study project, Arabesque- and its misunderstood contemporary Applications. In addition, many renowned art historians and scholars of Pakistan and officials from the Modern Mosques were interviewed, as well as some international advertising campaigns were also examined in 2024 for data collection. These interviews also add valuable insights to the research paper. Moreover, Frequent sites visit and Online sources have also been instrumental in supporting the development of this research paper.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

However, scholars and researchers typically use a range of research techniques whether analysing art, architecture, or trends. These might consist of: An analysis of the literature. To learn more about the history of the *Arabesque and the misunderstood contemporary applications*, researchers can conduct a

comprehensive review of the body of extant literature, academic papers, books, exhibition catalogues, and other relevant publications. In order to find out more about the historical importance of the subject, researcher interacts with Graphic Designers, artists, educators, and other experts in the field. Data and opinions from a broader range of participants and specialists can also be gathered through interviews with art historians and creative heads of advertising agency (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The relevant literature was reviewed to ascertain the most effective method to collect data for the study using a qualitative approach.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Component of Arabesque

Arabesque is a western word and *Islimi* is an Arabic/Turkish word, *Islimi* and *Nebati*, (means vegetal in Turkish language) divided by three distinct disciplines, Floral (Rumi, Tepelik and Kapali) Geometric, Stylized Forms (Flora and Fauna). Forms of Arabesque based on the main system of formation are the two-branch forms with the curvy and soft nature (see figure 1 and 2).

Rumi Motifs (Turkish and Persian term) was developed by Seljuks from central Asia. The word Rumi is derived from the Rum, the Turks of Asiatic Rome, Byzantium.

As Seljuks moved to Anatolia in 10th century and embraced Islam, they stylized the wings and beak and developed the Rumi motif. This motif was then replicated and developed around the Islamic world. Positioned at the heart of the Rumi motif is the Pivotal circle. Tepelik means points or hilltops, it is the other major motif in the Rumi style.

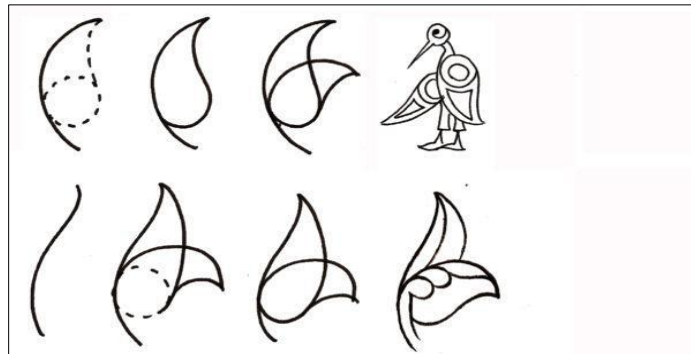


Figure 1: Arabesque floral Rumi Motif Formation, developed by Seljuks, 10th CE
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>. (Accessed October 2021)

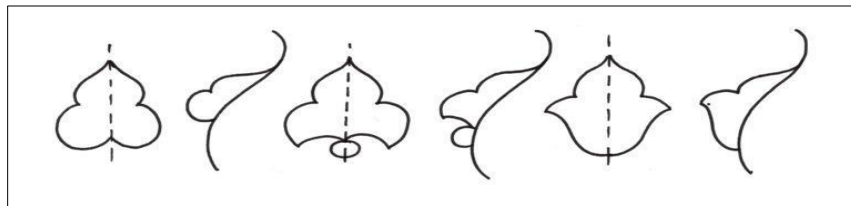


Figure II: Arabesque floral Tepelik Motif Formation, developed by Seljuks, 10th CE
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>. (Accessed October 2021)

It is used both as a symmetrical freestanding. Kapali means ‘closed’. Kapali forms are linear structural lines (see figure 3), which are usually based on an underlying geometric grid ensuring they reflect or tessellate correctly (www.artofislamicpattern.com). True Arabesque motif is a combination of floral,

vegetal and geometrical forms with the amalgamation of Radial (Rumi) and symmetrical balance (Tepelik and Kapali).



Figure III: Arabesque floral Kapali Motif Formation, developed by Seljuks 10th CE <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>. (Accessed October 2021)

This research Paper is based upon the insights of Riegl, Kuhnel, Ettinghausen, Jonathan Bloom, Sheila S. Blair, Grabar, Ali wijdan, and Burckhardt, renowned art historians, who contributed greatly in Islamic art and architecture heritage through their countless efforts in the field of research.

4.2 Early development of Arabesque Motif

Although, many Art historians has documented that the early Islamic aesthetics were greatly influenced by earlier cultures like Sasanian, Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman (Lowry, 1999). In chronological historical time, the adoption of Graeco-Roman and Sassanid artistic percepts and concepts had an immense contribution in the early formation of Arabesque motif, the influences not only brought through the trade routes but also because the rapid spread of Islam. Thus, the origin and early development of the Arabesque motif is inspired by Sassanid (226-642 AD) wing motif, adorned with palmetto and tendril leaves (figure 4).



Figure IV. Stucco wall panel with Pahlavi device encircled by pearls, found near the great palace of Khusro I, Dimensions: (40 × 41.5 × 5.3 cm), Dated tentatively to the 6th century CE. (Accessed October 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

The pre-Islamic scrollwork from the Roman Empire of a late antique cornice dated 5th century BCE, decorated with acanthus leaves and the motif discovered a natural arrangement of sharp curvy leaves branching off from a central vine and curls back on itself in a linear symmetry at regular intervals (www.drewidhistory.wordpress.com) see figure 5.



Figure V: Late Antique Cornice, C.5th century BCE, (Accessed December 2021) <https://drewidhistory.wordpress.com/2011/04/18/rome-symbols-and-motifs>

Arabesque is a feminine name in arts, ornamentation, or sculpture applied to the decorations. Literal meaning of Arabesque is a French term derived from the Italian word *arabesco*, from *arabo* (Arab), meaning “in the Arabic style.” (www.merriamwebsetter.com) Late middle English (as a noun denoting Arabesque ornament), from Italian *morisco*, from Moro (Black) “Moor” (www.oxforddictionary.com). Arabesque motif inspired by the movement of reptiles (Curvilinear) and described as a “vegetal design” consisting of full and half palmettes, as an unending continuous pattern. The repetitive geometric patterns often make use of floral embellishments and plant motifs with interlock features is a pure form of Arabesque. In German; the word Arabesque known as the foliage ornament of Islamic art; in a wider sense since the Baroque period (www.britannica.com), it is applied to the ornament of that art in general. Arabesque, is also known as *Tauriq* in the Gulf state, which means foliage and also a form of artistic ornamentation and composed of surface decorations establish on rhythmic linear patterns of scrolling and interlacing foliage, tendrils and other elements(www.kolibri.teacherinbox.org). The Italian Renaissance originated the term Arabesque around 1600 AD. and scholars documented that Renaissance artists used Islamic designs for book ornament and decorative bookbinding (see figure 6).



Figure VI: Woodcut Book Illustrated in Renaissance Italy C.15 century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed October 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

Therefore, art historians documented that Arabesque as a conglomeration of many cultures and regions specifically Sassanian, Byzantine, Hellenistic, Coptic and Islam, along with additional influences that came from diverse places and times helps to evolve its formation. Consequently, without these contributions; the development of the Arabesque would not be furnished the way it is. Arabesque has an important place as a religious and cultural signifier in Islamic aesthetics.

4.3 Historical Significance of Arabesque in Islamic Aesthetics

To Muslims, Visual ideology of the Arabesque motif symbolises the infinite nature of Allah and defines spirituality without any iconography. In the absence of figural representation, Calligraphy, geometry and Arabesque played a central role as an abstract means of representation in the religious art and architecture of Islam, as Islamic art and architecture emphasize on Surface decoration. Muslim's scholars, scientists and polymaths acknowledged that the highest form of love is Divine beauty. Most of former Muslim philosophers including Ibn-e- Sina, Razi, Khawarzami, Sohrevardi, Khajeh Nasir Tusi, Ibn Arabi, Ghazali, and Mulla Sadra have regarded God as the ultimate beauty and the source of all beautiful things in this physical world (Seifalipour & Radmanesh, 2020). Muslim artists developed images of vines, flowers and lines into an intricate, spectacular art form.

“The Arabesque motif with their helices, vertical and horizontal lines balance borders and contexts of the ornaments. They create harmony between the whole and the components of the artwork, that is what makes beauty among lines”(www.architecture4design.com).

Almost 22 identifiable plants belonging to 17 plant families are cited in the Holy Quran. Thus, the Islamic Arabesque Motifs have also been inspired by leaves of vine, palm leaves, figs, pomegranates, acanthus and other plant organs mentioned in the Holy Quran. Pomegranates were a symbol of blessings and fertility in ancient Persia and some of the Arabesque forms were inspired by the tree of life. The terminological advancements of various families of Arabesque motifs and styles developed by the Seljuks and ottomans. Moreover, Astronomy and cosmological interpretation also play a vital role in the development and formation of Arabesque and geometrical patterns. *“It is described as containing date palms, grapevines, pomegranates and copious amounts of other kinds of fruit.”* (Quran 23:19, 55:68)

This rhythmic Motif is found in a wide variety of media such as manuscripts, mosques, tombs, stuccowork, stonework, ceramics, tiles, metalwork, paintings, textiles, carpets, etc. Arabesque has been evolved in different time periods during Muslim dynasties, according to the regional influences and demographics.

During Umayyads reign 660–750 CE Dome of the Rock, 688-691CE lavishly decorated with vegetal motifs and geometrical patterns. In 705 CE, the Great Mosque of Damascus was adorned with beautiful Arabesque motifs with floral patterns inspired by the rich natural landscape of Damascus. Moreover, the filigree Arabesque work on the frieze of Mshatta palace, are the combination of Classical and Sassanid influences but also the early development of full-fledged Islamic Art. During Umayyad's reign both religious and secular buildings, manuscripts and paintings were decorated with lyrical vegetal and figural motifs. Therefore, the use of sacred geometry with Kapali Arabesque tendrils were excessively used in Umayyad art and architecture (see figure 7).



Figure VII: Stone relief with arabesques of tendrils Umayyad Mosque, Umayyad Dynasty, Damascus, Syria.705-715 CE. Built by Al-Walid. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed October 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

Ernst Kuhnel¹ traces the origins of the Arabesque and points that it had acquired its typical shape in the 9th century under the ‘Abbasids (749-1258 AD), becoming more fully developed in the 11th century (www.britannica.com). During the Abbasid reign in the middle of the 9th century, the Islamic character of the Arabesque became more noticeable and pronounced apart from foreign forms (see figure 8).



Figure VIII: Mshatta Palace, Jordan; 743-744 CE. Umayyad Dynasty, Built by Al-Walid II, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

The Great Mosque of Kairouan Tunisia, constructed in 670 CE and rebuilt in 836 CE, is an exceptional example of Abbasid aesthetics. The decorative features were designed primarily with vegetal and floral motifs, but some intricate 6-, 8- and 12-point geometrical shapes are also observed. Carved stucco work from Samarra in Iraq are well known splendours of Abbasids aesthetics and Tepelik Arabesque is a key decorative feature found in embellishing many artefacts during this era (see figure 9).



Figure IX: Ibn e Tulun Mosque, Cairo, Egypt;876 CE. Abbasid Dynasty, Built by Ahmed Ibn e Tulun, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December, 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

The Mosque of Ibn-Tulun is another milestone in terms of Arabesque application with geometrical patterns to Islamic architecture. By the end of the 9th century, geometrical patterns and Arabesque received a warm welcome from Muslim artisans and architects. The extensive impact of Arabesque with

¹ Ernst Kühnel was a German art historian who specialized in Islamic art. He was notable for his research on the connection between Islamic and Coptic art, particularly in textiles. www.britannica.com

geometry and Calligraphy, significantly affected other features of Islamic art and architecture as basic 6- and 8-point geometrical patterns, developed during the late 9th century, are the most common Islamic ornaments throughout Islamic art history. The Abbasid Palace in Baghdad, 1230 CE and the Madrasa of Mustansiriyyah 1233 CE are beautifully adorned with Muqarnas decorations and detailed Arabesque and geometrical patterns of carved brickwork and terracotta. These buildings are an excellent example of decorative techniques and traditions of the late Abbasid and Seljuk period (Blair et al., 1991).

The splendid buildings of Spain's Muslims are the Great Mosque of Cordoba 785–987 CE, Aljaferia Palace in Zaragoza mid-11th century, and Great Mosque of Seville, owe the true glory of Arabesque filigree work with finest geometrical patterns and Calligraphy. The Alhambra Palace 1338–1390 CE in Granada is considered one of the most remarkable masterpieces made by Muslims. Geometrical and mixed Arabesque filigree forms were extensively used with lavish colored and intricate renders in highly complex patterns (see figure 10).

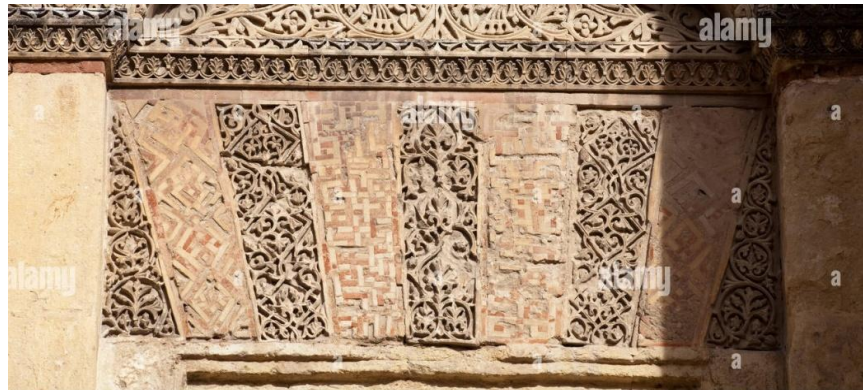


Figure X: Great Mosque of Cordoba, Andalusia, Spain, built in 787 CE enlarged in 848, 966 and 988. Abbasid Dynasty, Built by: ‘Abd ar-Rahmān I. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

During the Fatimids period 909–1171 CE, decorative ornaments were frequently in the form of isolated elements, instead of entire surface-covering with Arabesque motifs. Geometrical patterns became prevalent because of the heavy influence of Seljuk architecture in the late Fatimid era. Finest ornamentation examples including, *Al-Azhar* Mosque 970–972 CE, in Cairo, *Al-Juyushi* Mosque 1085 CE and *Al-Aqmar* Mosque 1125 CE, in Cairo are remarkable examples of mature Fatimid architecture. Most of the decorations are elaborately filled with calligraphic, Arabesque, and geometrical decorations. Although, the Arabesque motifs are a replication of previously evolved patterns.

The Seljuks 1038–1194 CE, put tremendous efforts in transforming their ornaments from floral and figural into geometrical decorations, and their art and architecture is strongly characterised by geometrical patterns. As Rumi Motifs (Turkish and Persian term) was developed by Seljuks from central Asia, the extensive use of sophisticated Tepelik motifs with geometry were highly practised during this artistic movement. Tomb Towers of Kharaqan built from 1067 to 1093 CE in the Qazvin province of Iran, Madrasa Al-Firdaws 1236 CE in Aleppo, Syria, features a Mihrab crown over which rosette petals adorn the star patterns and The Friday Mosque of Isfahan was developed largely during the Seljuk era (Bloom et al., 2009). Islimi or Arabesque motifs gradually evolved and emerged in geometrical patterns during this period (Tabbaa, 2002) see figure 11.



Figure XI: Mihrab of carved stucco Arabesque decoration Jameh Mosque of Ardestan, Iran, built in 1160, CE.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021)
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

Mamluk art and architecture 1250–1517 CE, the second Islamic artistic movement excessively applied Tepelik motif with 12-point geometrical patterns found in Kharaqan tombs in Iran. Highly advanced forms of Tepelik and Kapali motifs were used with the earliest examples of 16-point rare geometrical pattern. The Mosque of Al-Nasir Mohammad 1318–1334 CE and The Sultan Hassan Complex 1356–1361 CE, brilliantly adorned with Rosette and Arabesque motifs. Besides the development of Arabesque motifs, other decorative elements are the replicas of Fatimid and Seljuk styles (see figure 12).



Figure XII: The tomb of Sufi Sheikh, Cairo, Egypt Dimensions: 18.6 x 12.8 inches, built in 1298, CE.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021)
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

Early Ottoman art and Architecture (1290–1923 CE), such as the Yesil Mosque of Iznik 1378–1392 CE and Ulu-Cami or the Great Mosque of Bursa 1396–1400 CE), shows that the early Ottoman ornamentation were described by moderately decorative patterns and by the end of the 14th century, geometrical patterns were not popular among Ottoman artistic activities. Use of Rumi and Tepelik Arabesque massively applied in their art and architecture. Some other famous buildings such as the

Suleymaniye Complex 1551–1558 CE, Sokollu-Mehmet-Pasha in Luleburgaz 1560–1565 CE, Haseki-Hurrem Baths 1556 CE, and Sokollu-Mehmet-Pasha in Istanbul 1571–1574 CE, these structures massively decorative with Iznik tiles Arabesque motifs, whereas; geometrical patterns and Calligraphy were only secondary in these buildings. The Rustam Pasha mosque 1560–1563 CE, in Istanbul is the finest example for its exquisite Iznik tiles with Arabesque motifs. Ottoman artists and artisans admired floral and lyrical vegetal designs over geometrical patterns (see figure 13).



Figure XIII: Iznik tile Arabesque from Rustam Pasha Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey, built in 1561-1563, CE.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021)
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

During the Safavid period 1501–1736 CE the development in Arabesque, geometrical patterns and Calligraphy was established and new delicacy and refinement had begun to replace the established style of decoration. The best-known illustrations and illumination of Shahnameh involved many decorative motifs such as Tapalik and Kapali Arabesque, animals, geometrical motifs, decorations of inscriptions and other architectural elements with detailed drawings and decorative patterns. Safavid artists and architects used arabesque shapes to create movement, rhythm, radial and symmetrical balance, emotion, and space to represent the beauty of objects. Famous examples include Ali-Qapu Palace in Isfahan 1598 CE, Chehel Sutun Palace 1645–1647 CE, also located in Isfahan and remarkable example of rich ornamentation are Sheikh Lotfollah mosque 1603-1619 CE. Mosaic Arabesque and Hakim Mosque of Isfahan 1651-1662 CE. are the phenomenal art works of Safavid period (see figure 14).



Figure XIV: Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Arabesque decoration Isfahan, Iran, built in 1160, CE.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021)
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

Qutub minar and Alai Drawaza 1199-1220 CE, during the Sultanate period are the finest examples of calligraphy and Arabesque lattice work. The stylized stems and leaves blend together and bend to the left and right, with a gentle harmony. A curvilinear branches and floral motif with the text blend together and fill the exterior symmetrically, and lattice carved Arabesque appears as a marvel of finest aesthetics.

The Mughal period marked the significant advancements in art and architecture, adapting foreign structural aesthetics along with their traditional decorative styles. Specifically, Miniature paintings and architectural monuments both religious and secular, richly embellished with the finest form of Kapali Arabesque motif, geometry and Calligraphy. Number of marvels created by artisans during Mughal period including Mausoleum of Humayun in Delhi 1566 CE, Red Fort of Agra 1580 CE, Friday Mosque of Fatehpur-Sikri (1596 CE), The Tomb of Akbar (1612 CE), the Itimad-ud -Daulah Tomb 1628 CE, in Agra, and application of Arabesque motif in pietra dura and inlay work in Taj Mahal in Agra 1632–53 CE are the best-known examples of early Arabesque applications with variety of materials. Later is the Lahore Fort Complex, Badshahi mosque, Wazir khan mosque and number of renowned buildings built during the 16th and 17th centuries under Mughal period, considered as the best examples of Arabesque inlay work with the amalgamation of geometry and Calligraphy. Unlike their predecessors, Mughal artisans and architects avoided highly detailed geometrical arrangements, such as 12- and 16-point patterns. Instead, they exerted great effort to create perfect proportions of Arabesque application in accurate patterns and angle (Michell & Currim, 2007) see figure 15 and 16.

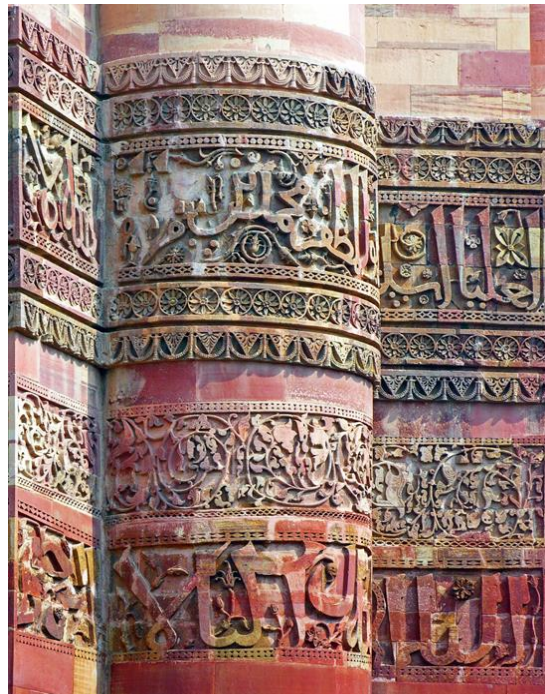


Figure XV: Qutub Minar Complex, wall panel Filigree Arabesque and calligraphy carving in sandstone Sultanate period. Delhi, India. built in 1193, CE.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021)
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322675>

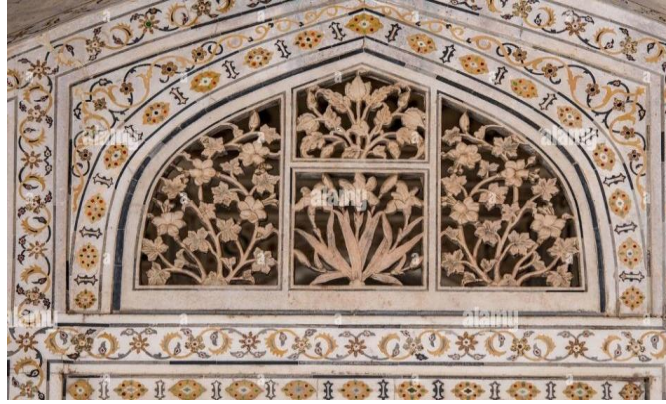


Figure XVI: Arabesque inlay decoration in Marble, Agra Fort, India. Mughal Dynasty, built in 1565–1573, CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accessed December 2021) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/32267>

As a result, the study has contributed that the Islam without question has become the foremost contributor in the establishment of an individual visual culture in the world of art and architecture. The beauty and glory of many masterpieces of Islamic art and particularly architecture owe their splendour and grace to Arabesque and other decorative patterns.

4.4 Arabesque identity and misunderstood contemporary Applications

After a brief historical underpinning; the evolution and formation of Arabesque motif through different Muslim dynasties and its massive applications in Islamic art and architecture reflects and symbolizes the transcendent, indivisible, and infinite nature of God.

In recent decades due to globalisation, digitalization and western influences, the visual formation and application of Arabesque motifs have been changed. Furthermore, the expert craftsmen of this delicate art are not available, so the skill could not be transferred to another generation. From architectural decorations to packaging design, Arabesque motifs are affected due to its common and rough usage in various forms. Common decorative motifs juxtaposed with architectural details and exquisitely crafted artefacts define the aesthetic traditions of these motifs. Modern architecture in Pakistan includes religious and secular buildings decorated with glazed tile works and other architectural decorative materials, but the delicacy and originality of this motif has been missing in our vernacular culture. Very rare examples of Arabesque application can be found in contemporary visual culture (see figure 17).



Figure XVII: Arabesque formation in modern era. Pakistani local tiles, Accessed December, 2023

Currently, the lack of cultural specificity in Arabesque design makes regional aesthetics disappear. The tile manufacturing companies claimed that they are designing their tiles and other decorative materials by using regional Arabesque, geometrical and other Islamic patterns. But in contrast, the structural formation of the Arabesque motif is badly recreated and redesigned as it has lost its visual aesthetics. We find that the arabesque typically consists of regular shapes of vegetal and geometric forms arranged in an endless, repeating pattern. The continuation in vegetal and floral lyrical lines has no longer interlock in local Arabesque design formation, these are common floral geometrical patterns rather than Arabesque and we can witness their excessive applications specially in local mosques and other modern buildings. Famous tiles manufacturing companies in Pakistan claimed that they are experimenting new methods and techniques to enhance and retain Islamic aesthetics in all decorative materials but in reality, the floral (Rumi, Tepelik and Kapali) stylized Arabesque motifs have lost its spiritual meaning and combination of radial and symmetrical balance and harmony badly affected due to its common usage. Pakistani local designers, architects and craftsmen massively use this motif without considering its sophistication and true essence of visual expression. The example of local mosques in two different areas in Lahore, Pakistan, study reveals that decorative geometrical and floral patterns are extensively used with the integration of local artistic expression but lack Arabesque identity. These floral and geometrical motifs applied in tessellation mode with perforated geometric patterned *jail* and polychromic mosaic work (see figure 18).

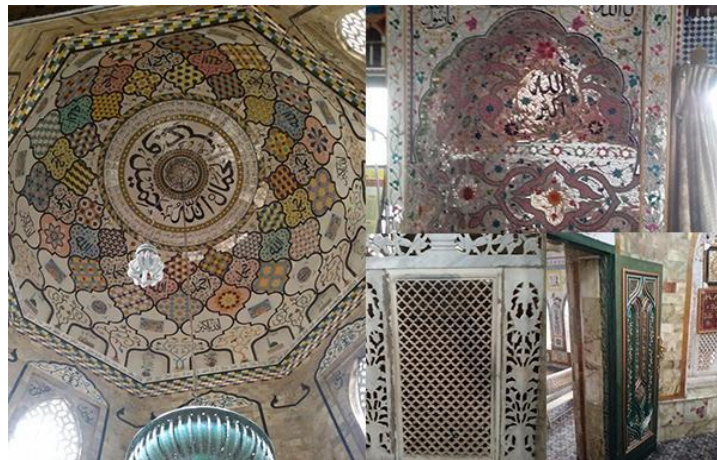


Figure XVIII: Arabesque tile and mosaic work in Hazrāt Saif Sūf mosque, Location: Shāhi Lahore: 1265.40 sq.ft
Photograph taken by author, December 1, 2023

These floral and geometrical patterns are the combination of different influences like Persian Mughals and Sikhs but not an exact Arabesque motif. Similarly, another example of vernacular architectural decoration is adorned with multicoloured floral pattern in glass mosaic *Ainakari*, Thuluth Calligraphic script and Geometrical pattern *Kashkari*. The ambiance embellished in local ornamentation and excessive use of patterns and other decoration does not serve the true spiritual meaning and grandeur of Islam. It is observed that it is our cultural tendency to apply decorative patterns and motifs without deep understanding and planning in both secular and religious buildings (see figure 19).

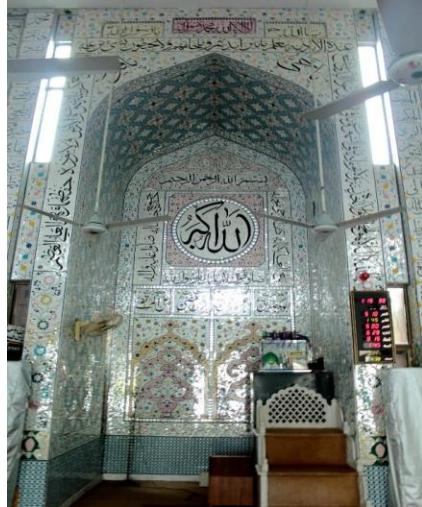


Figure XIX: Arabesque in Mirror Mosaic (*Ainakari*) in Bilal Mosque, Location: Johar town Lahore, 1265.40 sq.ft
 Photograph taken by author, December 1, 2023

At the same time, the visual communication in the Pakistan has changed in recent decades due to globalisation and the subsequent Western influence in the region. One of the primary places to be affected by this global phenomenon has been the local supermarket. The graphic designs used on packaging labels and other advertising devices contain visual messages which may not take into account the shared lifestyle, values or beliefs of the local Pakistani community. Temporal variation of Arabesque motifs is observed during Ramadan campaigns in the last few decades. Every local brand applied floral and Geometrical patterns for their product and services promotion. One of the most leading beverage company Coca Cola used deformed Arabesque motif in it packaging and promotion campaign (Buschgens, 2011). As such, there exists a disconnect between what has been designed on labels and the audience it intends to attract. Yet despite its global brand recognition, it is evident the Coca-Cola Company found it beneficial to take their packaging to the next level so as to attract and engage certain cultural markets, as Ramadan is the month for consumerism in the world. So, companies used strategies to promote their products through traditional Islamic motifs. When applied to global brand labels, the arabesque no longer takes on a dominating role as on traditional objects, but is merged within a composite of seemingly dissimilar signifiers of no apparent relationship. The text, typography, colours, images, branding and shape of a given label, irrespective of traditional motifs, all contribute to the visual communication process (see figure 20).



Figure XX: Arabesque, Deform application on Coke packaging. Case study Coca-Cola celebrate Ramadan (2017),
 Accessed in December 1, 2023

Use of arabesque in the form of geometric star patterns and vegetal motif amongst other elements pertaining to Ramadan, Coca-Cola packaging. On the surface, the motif is made up of a basic five-pointed star, surrounded by petals that expand outward into a type of contemporary rosette. This design is then replicated and placed above, below and on either side of each other to appear as a continuous but incomplete pattern. The placement and rotation of crescent slivers into this geometrical framework creates a faint perception of an intertwining vine lattice and unnatural flowering effect of infinite correspondence, following the criterion set forth by Kuhnel and Riegl (www.jstor.org). But, whether or not its physical construction of decorative patterns does not match that of traditional Arabesque motifs.

However, it appears that no research has been fully carried out as to its contemporary development and application in the Pakistani art, design and architecture. This may be because Arabesques have traditionally been considered Islamic surface decoration and not an active visual language able to communicate culture specific meaning through contemporary advertising.

Therefore, the misunderstood application of Arabesque motif is examined in many artefacts and architectural ornamentation in Pakistan, including miniature borders, textiles, metal work, wood carvings etc. and has lost its spiritual identity.

5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research paper is to emphasise the relevance of Arabesque as a universal element of ornamentation in Islamic Art and Architecture, which was defined by religious beliefs and cultural values prohibiting the depiction of living creatures including humans. The belief that science is an integral part of Islam led to many discoveries and advancements in the field of mathematics by Muslims. Arabesque had a very rich influence in Islamic Art which beautifully combined artistic foliage designs with geometric principles to create exquisite works of art unique only to the Islamic Cultural Heritage.

Arabesque designs themselves varied throughout different regions because of religious and social conditions, local influence, availability of material, and temporal alteration in techniques of original Motifs.

In today's context, the art of Arabesque is gradually being replaced by its brash and thoughtless imitations which not only damage its relationship with its cultural context but also leads this unique element of ornamentation towards deformation and distortion with reference to its scale and proportions, thus paving way for extinction in future. Arabesque has also lost its place in contemporary Islamic art and architecture due to the absence or decreasing number of masters or traditionally skilled craftsmen practising this genuine artistic craft.

Acknowledgements

None.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding Source

The author received No funding to conduct this study.

ORCID's

Amna Anwaar Khan ¹  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6276-5818>

REFERENCES

- Architecture for design (2020) Arabesque and Islimi Motifs, Definitions, History and Patterns
<https://architecture4design.com/arabesque-and-islimi-motifs-definitions-history-and-patterns>
- Blair, S., Bloom, J., & Reinhart, A. K. (1991). *Images of paradise in Islamic art*. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.
- Bloom, J., & Blair, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art & Architecture: Three-Volume Set* (Vol. 2). Oxford University Press.
- Buschgens, M. A. (2011). *The arabesque as a cultural interface for contemporary packaging design in the Arabian Gulf* (Doctoral dissertation, Master's dissertation, UNSW, Sydney).
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Lowry, G. D. (1999). Wijdan Ali, Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997). *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31(1), 154-156.
- Michell, G., & Currim, M. (2007). *The majesty of Mughal decoration: The art and architecture of Islamic India*. **Thames & Hudson**
- Seifalipour, M., Ramin, F., & Radmanesh, F. (2020). An Analysis of Beauty from Islamic Perspective. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and social Sciences*, 1(5), 57-63.
- Tabbaa, Y. (2011). *The transformation of Islamic art during the Sunni revival*. University of Washington Press.
- <https://www.merriamwebster.com>
- <https://www.moma.org>
- <https://artofislamicpattern.com>
- <https://drewidhistory.wordpress.com/2011/04/18/rome-symbols--motifs>
- <https://www.merriamwebster.com>
- <https://www.oxforddictionary.com>
- <https://www.britannica.com>
- <http://kolibri.teacherinabox.org>.
- <https://www.jstor.org>