CHAPTER 2: MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE IN GENERAL

Tracing the historical values of mosque architecture on certain culture or country is imperative to understand the evolution of religion and cultural paradigm. From trace records, the intensity of adoption and adaptation from external values and changes towards modernization could be responded to. Alsamija (2005), pointed out that this exercise would be able to set a point of reference in overcoming the issues on contemporary mosque art and architecture.

2.1 MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

Study within the boundaries of mosque art and architecture has turned to be an eminent and favourite subject/topic among scholars these days. Various methodologies have been adopted and hence valuable information was captured and used for the enhancement and evolvement of Muslim religious buildings. In almost every research, explanation on the functions and importance of mosques would be above all other contents.

However, this thesis will not be repeating the same explanation on general usage of mosque or its importance to the Muslims but it will emphasize on the components of mosque, their significance in cultural needs and their necessity in the contemporary world. Therefore, “styles” of mosques architecture will not be observed and interpreted as traditional, colonial or hybrid by just observing their built form or physical appearance but rather on their internal and external components with the main focus given to the mosque Mihrab. This will allow extractions to the quality of new mosques and regain the missing values of the past that could be included in the future design of mosques especially in Malaysia.

Kuban’s research in 1974, believed that the original mosque built by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (including its compound) were made up of four main components
namely the entrance, *hujra* (apartments for the prophet’s wives), *suffa* (for the visitors or the poor to rest for the night), *zulla* and the *sahn* (courtyard). *Zulla* is a covered rectangular space where *solah* (prayers) were performed and one of the longer walls in this area is called the Qibla wall.

After the demise of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the administration of the Muslims and Islam in general, including the mosques were taken over by his four companions and then by a number of Islamic dynasties such as the Ummayad, Abbasid, Fatimids, Safavids, Ottoman and many more. Even though the leadership of Islam and the architecture of mosques changed over time, the basic components inside the *zulla* (main prayer hall) remained the same with a few components being added following the needs of the believers during the period of that particular mosque was built.

This thesis determines the basic components of mosques and their liturgical roles similar to the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Then added components are examined in order to understand their roles and functions to the believers, their cultures and their mosques.

### 2.1.1 Reviews on Mosque Components

In his study on early Muslim architecture after the Prophet’s mosque, Kuban, (1974), lists eight important components in mosques namely the *Haram, Qibla* wall, Courtyard, *Riwaq* (arcades), *Mihrab, Mimbar, Minaret* and *Maqsura*. Twenty years later, Frishman (1994) added *Dikka* (a tribunal for the leaders), *Kursi* (Al-Quran holder), and *Maida* (for ablution) and left out *Riwaq* from Kuban’s (1974) list. Frishman (1994) derived the list from his research on mosque throughout the Muslim world including South East Asia. Later, Ashraf (2006) made another list in his book on the study of arts in Islamic civilization: Courtyard, *Sahn, Riwaq, Minaret, Mihrab* and *Qibla* wall, from the two former
scholars of Kuban (1974) and Frishman (1994) were kept whilst other elements such as *Qubbah* (dome), *Aisled*(sanctuary), *Iwan* and Cresting or Crenellations were added to the list.

The study of components is crucial to determine the overall mosque designs as stated by Hasan-uddin, (1994; 247-248) who believes that mosque design in different time and regions, evolves in creating new expressions in various terms and the terms include the national identity.

“Changes in mosque design are an important indicator in understanding Muslim Society today.” He believes that mosque in different time and regions, evolves in creating new expressions in various terms which include national identity.

Hasan-uddin, (1994; 247-248)

2.1.2 Prayer hall

Most of the mosques built in the Middle-east have two sections of prayer hall i.e. a covered area called the *haram* or *zulla* and a courtyard called the *sahn* (Figure 2.1 below). Surrounding the three sides of this courtyard is the arcade called *riwaq* (Frishman 1994;32-41).

![Figure 2.1: The Great Mosque of Damascus - Arieda 2003](image)

Congregational and individual prayers could be performed in all these three areas and thus maximizes the practicality of the mosque or to be more precise, the prayer hall. Therefore it is imperative to take into consideration the three aspects listed below when designing the prayer hall to optimize its daily usage.
1) The prayer hall is best designed to be rectangle where the longer sides lay parallel to the Qibla wall. This designed had been practised in medieval mosques but had not been accepted as a compulsory guideline for mosque design in Malaysia.

2) There should not be any obstruction in the prayer hall especially in the haram. The clarity of the prayer hall will complement the maximum usage of space. This will lead to the continuity of the safs (praying lines in congregation) and maximize the visibility of the makmum (congregation) to see the imam (preacher) presenting the khutba (sermons).

3) The number of worshippers is the major criterion to be considered in determining the size of prayer hall. Prayer halls should be able to expand when the congregation gets larger especially during Friday and Eid prayers. The size of the prayer hall is normally the yardstick of mosque extent.

Most contemporary mosques in Malaysia fail to adapt these aspects in their design. Instead, the roof over prayer hall is always given the most emphasis and strongest personality from the external feature. The prayer halls are often covered by a big dome which has to be supported by series of columns erected in the prayer hall. These columns will cause distraction to safs (praying lines

2.1.3 Qibla Wall, Mihrab and Mimbar

Every prayer hall must include a Qibla wall to show the direction to prostrate upon entering the mosque. Qibla is the direction to face when Muslim pray at all times. Initially, the direction of the Qibla was towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The Qibla was then directed towards Ka’aba in Mecca after about two years after Hijra when the Prophet Muhammad received a revelation from Allah the Almighty (Fehervari 1970; 702-707). The Prophet Muhammad
receives a lot of revelations from Allah the Almighty including the command to perform Friday prayers at the mosque replacing the Zohr prayers every Friday. This command is compulsory for men and is optional for women. Mosques that offer these Friday prayers are sometimes referred to as Jami’. Inside each of these Jami’ mosque is a Mimbar or pulpit, positioned at the right side of the Mihrab. The Mihrab is normally a semi circular niche located at the center of the Qibla wall. The Imam or preacher will stand and deliver the Friday khutba or sermon on the Mimbar (pulpit). The Mimbar (pulpit) is often raised by a staircase of various heights to enhance the congregation’s sight of the imam whilst listening to him delivering the khutba (sermon).

Initially, the Prophet Muhammad would stand and deliver his khutba on the same level where his congregation sat. As his followers increased, the prayer hall was made bigger and he started to preach on top of a platform which was raised by three steps to reach the larger audience. Hence the Mimbar came into existence and became a common feature is all Jami’ mosques. The height of the Mimbar should be proportionate to the size of the prayer hall.

In Malaysia, the Mimbar is ornamented and sometimes its height could reach a single storey regardless to the size of the prayer hall. In some contemporary Malaysian mosques, the Mimbar was designed to be attached to the Qibla wall with the staircase hidden on the other side of the wall.

2.1.4 Dikka and Kursi

Dikka is stationed parallel to the Qibla wall, in line with the Mihrab and raised a single storey in height. Here the respondents (the mosque’s official bearers) repeat the prayer movements and relay the responses of the imam (at the

---

1 For more information on Mihrab and Qibla wall refer to chapter 3

2 For more information on this Mimbar design, refer to Pahang State mosque on chapter 5 and chapter 6.
Mihrab) aloud to be heard by the rest of the congregation at the back of the mosque. *Dikka* can only be found in mosques with a spacious prayer hall. In some mosques the *Dikka* is placed in the exterior praying area or court yard.

*Kursi* normally placed adjacent to a *Dikka*. Similar to the *Dikka*, it is also a raised platform. Here the *muezzin*, the *qadi* or other mosque’s official bearers recite the verses of Al-Quran in between prayer times. The *Dikka* and the *Kursi* were used during the medieval period and in some contemporary Middle East mosques. However, they have become less popular in the overall contemporary Islamic architecture because of the invention of modern technology such as microphones, amplifiers and loud speakers. Subsequently, the use of recorded Al-Quran recitations has diminishes the existence of the *Kursi*.

2.1.5 *Minaret*

*Minaret* usually resembles a tower and is erected on the exterior of mosque buildings. Originally it is used to ensure the *adhan* (call for prayer) could be heard at a maximum radius. Bloom (1991) challenged Creswell’s (1926) theory when he found that there is no evidence indicating that the towers were used by *muezzin* when calling for prayers.

---

3 Historical Cairo (A Walk Through the Islamic City) Antonious, Jim.
Another explanation to the existence of the *minaret* in mosque architecture states that during the Abbasid dynasty it demonstrated power of the religious authority. However, other dynasty that opposed to the Abbasid power like the Fatimids would not build any *minarets* to their mosques\(^4\).

In East Africa, Iran and Arabia calls for prayer were mostly made from the mosque courtyard or the roof top similar to the time of the Prophet Muhammad\(^5\).

In Malaysia, *minaret* is deemed to be an essential element to be built together with the mosque. Unfortunately it only serves as a local landmark especially for the mosques built around and cities and urban areas.

### 2.1.6 Portal (Entrance)

The entrance of mosque built during the medieval period plays the role of concealing the interior from the external view. This gives the feeling of being enclosed in one place free from the hustle and bustle of the outside activities and thus acts as the threshold. Medieval mosques always have tall and monumental main portal and this is in contrast with the entrance to vernacular Malaysian mosques which looks more humble and open.

A study conducted by Salamah (2001), found that the impression made by the entrances of public buildings is more than a mere welcoming space. Building entrances can evoke a strong image that includes non-verbal messages to the visitors on the activities happening inside. Consequently, emotional effect could be felt by the visitors either inviting or repelling. Hence, maximizing the visibility of carefully and appropriately ornamented Mihrab and Qibla wall

---

should be considered in depth as this would imply what ought to happen inside the mosques.

2.1.7 Ablution Pool/Fountain

Performing ablution should be the first activity to take place before a devotee enters a mosque unless he has taken ablution before reaching the mosque. The ablution area is an important component in any mosques and must be placed at a point which could easily be seen and reached. According to the space syntax research made by Aazam, (2007); based on the analysis of the visual points and prostration points segment, the three elements that are considered the most active areas are the entrance, the prayer hall and the courtyard. Therefore, the ablution pool/fountain area has a tendency to have similar spatial syntactic qualities. It is probably the most used space because it is always positioned adjacent to the verandah and the praying area. Investigating the spatial arrangement of all these spaces must be taken into serious consideration as they complement all the important activities in mosques.

2.1.8 Verandah/Corridor

This element is one of the extensions from the basic form of mosque resulting from cultural diversity. In tropical climate buildings, the verandah is always introduced as an out door shaded space to cool off before entering the building. In Malaysian, verandah and corridor is one of the important components in a building design including mosque design. In most of the traditional Malaysian houses, the verandah acts as the transitional space between the public area (the entrance) and the private area (the living room and other parts of the house).
2.1.9 *Sahn or Courtyard*

The *sahn* or courtyard is the most common component found not only in mosques but also in other Islamic buildings. It serves to accommodate large crowd of worshippers during congregational prayers especially Friday prayers and special prayers such as *Eid*. Most of the mosque built in the Middle-East; positioned the ablution pool/fountain in the middle of the *sahn* (courtyard).

From the explanations above, it is quite clear that some of the components of mosques are vital and some are less significant. Components like the *dikka* and the *kursi* used to have some important roles on the overall performance of a mosque but their existence is fading towards extinction.

Apart from the importance of its components, the overall performance of a mosque lies on the devotees to glorify it. The more believers come to prostate and *iqtikaf*, the more glorious the mosque will be. Hence designers should take serious consideration in building a mosque that is most welcoming to the believers and provide the most comfort for them to do *ibadah*.

For example, entering a mosque without a signified Qibla wall will cause confusion to the users especially in complex hypostyle mosques that are extensively built contemporarily. Therefore, the Qibla wall must project itself to the visitors at any point of entry. The axis and clear visibility towards the Qibla wall must also be given serious thought by the designers because prostration and other *ibadah* activities of Muslims rely majorly on orientation and concentration where unity of the religion can be achieved.

2.1.10 **Internal Components of Mosque Architecture**

Civilization does not only concern the modernization or the high technology used, but also the conservation of invaluable historical and artistic values of the tribe. For Muslims, from different cultures and civilization, mosque is the most
important place in portraying the values of civilization that result in the establishment of Muslim architectural identity. Only from the different design and ornamentation in mosques, we will see the different cultures of various tribes in Islam throughout the world.

Contemporary mosque, especially in Malaysia takes up the influences from famous mosques all over the Islamic world. Taking the medieval middle-east as the main basis mosque architecture is assumed to be an unwise decision to be made (Tajuddin 1998). This action, on the other hand, if studied deeper, must be done with extra detail by taking only qualities that are suitable for our climate and culture. Apart from considering practical arrangement of mosque floor plan, this public building must also be erected with great consideration on the appropriate ornamentation to the interior. Using calligraphy and geometrical patterns, Islamic arts need special treatment because they carry certain meanings. From the way the components are designed and materialized, their origin could be determined. Even though the dome of a particular mosque could be from Ottoman generation, the interior might say differently so, is it fair to call it as an Ottoman? Gigantic external look most likely gives complex floor plan leaving the users in confusion when entering the mosques, especially when there is no focal point on where the direction of Qibla wall could be.

Internal aesthetics of mosques that follows the strict regulation of Islamic arts and patterns has the characteristics of “turning off” one’s attention from the outside environment to the inside environment that one is in. This will give all the concentration (khusyu’) that one needs while performing prayers. According to El Gohary (1984),

“Whether consciously or unconsciously, alpha rhythm and unconscious constructs are developed in the one at prayer in a mosque through the influence of architectural forms and decoration”.

El Gohary, 1984; 134
The point mentioned in the study of El Gohary is on the interior part of mosque and this shows how important is the interior composition in comparison with the psychological needs of the exterior, but not to be taken wrongly, external aesthetic should not be overlooked as it still has role of the first impression.

2.2 MOSQUE SCENARIO IN MALAYSIA

Even though the coming of Islam to Malaysia took place sometime in the 14th century, the mosque architectural style in the period of first Islamic embracement in Malaysia has not yet been proven. Until this moment, there is no archeological evidence that clearly shows even the primary shape of mosque dating to that time. This is probably due to the mosques being built in timber construction during that time and according to Hashim (1996) timber has short life span that rarely goes beyond 200 years.

The earliest mosques found in Malaysia are very simple, using single multi functional space which reflects the social and cultural value of the community that have been transformed into a vernacular architecture.

Evidence of the earliest mosque found so far has been agreed to be Masjid Kampung Laut located in the east coast of Malaysia. Mosques during the period were built modestly smaller. These mosques were built in this manner because they were mostly constructed by ulama or religious teachers and not by expert builders or architects. Using available materials and style (following the traditional houses), they erected the sacred buildings with bare necessities. One very important feature of the mosques during that generation is that the design was answerable to the climate of Malaysia that is hot and humid. The layered roof or “atap tumpang” for example, allows air circulation in between the roof layerings.
Malaysian traditional mosques built in the 18th century mostly provided clear and easy circulation to ease the users seeking directions. These positive qualities in spatial arrangement of Malaysian traditional mosque could still be adopted in the modern era to provide comfort and familiarity in the form and spatial arrangements to the users.

Mosque architecture is not a static phenomenon; it evolves from time to time. This shows that mosque architecture act as a symbol of Islam and the Muslim attitude of always thinking, inspiring and far from being static. Similar concept applies to the muslims and mosques in Malaysia specifically and Southeast Asia generally.

In spite of the total change to the facade of mosques during the period of colonization, necessary elements of mosque interior still remained. In the 19th century the British colony influenced a new transformation and elements to the mosques by introducing new architectural styles, materials and construction technologies at the time. Mosque building material was mostly made of concrete and brickwork. Almost all the mosques built during the colonial period were designed by non-Muslim foreign architects. Their design relied so much on European architecture, thus taking little reference from the Middle-east, where Islam originated. As a result, thick concrete structure with fewer openings does not allow much natural ventilation and daylight penetration making it quite impractical for tropical environment.

Over time, changes occur and matters regarding the administration of mosques are no longer under the supervision of the community alone, but mostly in the hands of Islamic rulers and leading political party in the region. The scenario is quite similar to the Middle East during medieval period, where mosques started to become the symbol of power by the ruling government after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his four companions r.a. Nevertheless in the medieval case, in spite of having monumental physical look, the interior organization is still clearly defined with strong axis from the
entrance point to the Mihrab point as shown in the Great Mosque of Damascus during the Umayyad Period.

When Malaysia achieved her independence in 1957, Malaysia had all the freedom to design and built its own mosque style by engaging its own architects and builders. As a result, Masjid Negara or the National Mosque proudly stands with its uniqueness of opened-umbrella shaped roof. The structure is of modern design but the humbleness of Muslim architecture is kept in the mosque design.

After 50 years of independence, Malaysia has become a developing Islamic country. Mosques are now designed in a variety of styles and since the 1980s, distinct Middle-Eastern style with huge domes and multiple minarets were built. Consequently, there are some efforts in reinforcing the design with traditional Malaysian e.g. Masjid Al-Azim (Al-Azim Mosque) in Melaka which was built in the 20th century.

One of the Malaysian pioneers in mosque architectural critiques, Tajuddin (1998) mentioned in his book;

“In creating a place for Muslims to worship, the architect must create a structure that is clearly identifiable as a mosque, but without excessive embellishment”.

Tajuddin (1998)

He also challenged the modern builders who express grandeur in Islam through mosques architecture and take mosques as a fortress of seclusion from the worldly life. He strongly believes that by making the mosque as a community development centre will gather and unite the Muslims through the activities in the mosque, opposed to the luxurious look of a mosque and strictly decided that mosques should be simple and functional. He is true for the part indicating excessive embellishment, simple and functional but has gone a little too far in trying to implement the community centre in mosques when he went on saying,
“...mosque interior should be designed in a manner of an educational or a public place of social-interaction and not as a somber atmosphere fit for meditation”.

Tajuddin (1998)

The above quotation needs further elaboration or it could be misleading to the readers. The prayer hall area that contains Mihrab, Mimbar and Qibla wall should be the very place to be intimate with Allah the Almighty. The place should be quiet and far from being a place of social interaction. Probably the social-interaction could be done in the mosque compound but definitely not in the prayer hall.

Most of the modern and contemporary mosques were built with a beautiful and majestic look that might draw the attention of the believers who would want to perform their prayers and meditation towards Allah the Almighty. Unfortunately in order to achieve this majestic and monumental look, some mosques were built on hilltops, in the middle of a manmade lake or in the worse scenario, on a faraway land with big fenced compound.

These majestic external facades might be an important attracting factor but properly decorated interior will make the visitors want to be intimate with Allah the Almighty inside the mosque with the highest degree of concentration and submission. With proper positioning of ornamentation, more believers will be called in to enlighten the mosques. Mosques will eventually trace back their glory to the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When mosques are visited gradually, the notion of creating them as a community development center will then be adapted without doubt.
2.2.1 Overview on Mosque Components in Malaysia

- **Entrance**

  Unlike medieval mosques which have tall and monumental portal, vernacular Malaysian mosques’ entrance looks humble and open. Its entrance is similar to the traditional house. In colonial mosques, the entrance started to look like a threshold between outside and inside. Whereas in modern and contemporary mosques, there are varieties of entrance styles following the portals from the middle-east mosques such as portal *iwan*, arched entrance gate and raised entrance by gigantic staircase.

![Images of entrance to mosques](image)

*Figure 2.3: Entrance to Traditional, Colonial and Modern Mosques*

- **Verandah, Terrace and Courtyard**

  This element is one of the extensions from the basic form of mosque resulting from cultural diversity. Verandah is always introduced as a provision of shaded space to cool off (whilst still out door) before entering a tropical building. In traditional and vernacular mosque design, verandah mostly functions as a place for informal religious classes or sometimes used as a meeting place for informal discussion before or after congregational prayers.
Verandah will also act as extra praying area and when the need arise, similar to the function of courtyards. In colonial mosques, verandah is almost non-existence as it had been replaced with intermediate terrace between external and internal. Most of the mosques during colonials are made of thick wall concrete and as a result, praying lines (safs) will not be continuous to the terrace area during a full house congregation. This is one of the drawbacks of colonial mosques and the condition is worsen with the application of a mechanical ventilation system.

![Diagram of Kampung Laut Mosque with flexible praying area](image1)

**Figure 2.4: Veranda in Connection with Praying Lines (Safs)**

Contemporary mosque which were normally built with concrete and completed with mechanical ventilation and artificial lighting mostly employ the courtyard in its design. Courtyards in contemporary mosque architecture in Malaysia have two designs; one is to be the extra praying area and the other is meant for landscaping area or courtyard garden. Both designs actually give a cooling effect to the prayer hall adjacent to the courtyards.

- **Ablution Pool, Tapped Ablution and Ablution Fountain**

Traditional Malaysian mosques use ablution pool instead of ablution fountain or water from taps. Most of the old traditional mosque was built by a riverside and
the ablution water is taken from the river and collected in a pool. Some of the traditional and vernacular mosques collected rain water in their pools and thus reduces water wastage from ablution as stated in the Hadith below:

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar narrated that the Messenger of Allah passed by Sa'd while he was performing ablution and said, "What is this extravagance, Sa'd?" He said, "Is there extravagance in the use of water?" He said, "Yes, even if you are at a flowing river."

Related by Ahmad and Ibnu Majah

When mosques started to be designed by British architects, alternative such as tapped water system had been applied. Ablution pool no longer exists as in the traditional and vernacular mosque. In contemporary mosques, tapped ablution water is designed in modern high technology. In some modern mosques, the water is dispensed and stopped automatically using infra-red sensory system.

- Prayer Hall

Traditional mosque in Malaysia is of central pyramidal roof structure and thus the positioning of columns (normally four) inside the mosques is easily controlled. Normally, the shape of its prayer hall is either square or rectangle. If it is rectangle, the sides parallel to the Qibla wall is longer to allow better length of praying line (safs). It is mentioned in the Hadith (below) that performing congregations in the first line/row is the best;

"Did people know the importance of the adhān and of being in the first row, and they had no choice but to draw lots for it, they would draw lots for it."

From Bukhari and Muslim as reported by Abu Hurairah

Therefore, design of prayer halls should allow long safs (praying lines) to allow more believers to be in the front rows.

Colonial architects who designed Malaysian mosques during the time did not think about the praying lines and being closer to the Imam. Their designs are sometimes hybrids between Christian churches and great medieval mosques.
Rectangle prayer halls such as Sultan Ibrahim Mosque, Johor and Muhammadiah Mosque, Kelantan are among the examples that have shorter Qibla wall compared to the side walls (Figure 2.5 below). The Ubudiyah Mosque in Perak is another classic example with its beautiful and picturesque facade promoted as tourist attraction. The main building shape of eight pointed star leaves the prayer hall in octagonal shape which allows the praying lines to be uneven in lengths.

The prayer halls of contemporary mosques vary in shapes and designs. The understanding on prayer line form is no longer an important reminder to the builders. Circular shaped prayer hall such as the Penang State Mosque is not advisable because it does not ensure regularity of prayer lines (Khattab, 2002; 140).

Figure 2.5: Various Shapes of Prayer Hall - Author’s Own Diagrams

- **Mihrab and Qibla Wall**
- **External Features**

Traditional and vernacular Malaysian mosques do not employ domes as their physical feature. The roof is always the traditional pitched roof (as in the traditional Malay houses) or the tiered pyramidal roof or traditionally known as ‘atap tumpang’; shown in Figure 2.6, page 31. Domes covering mosque roofs

---

5 Mihrab and Qibla wall is discussed broadly in the following chapters.
started to appear in Malaysia when the colonials started to build mosques. The domes of colonial architects are always the onion shaped Mughal style. Contemporary mosques in Malaysia feature a handful of roof styles and materials. There are multiple domes, central dome and umbrella dome.

![Layered roof](image1) ![Onion dome](image2) ![Umbrella roof](image3)

**Figure 2.6: Roof Styles**

Overall, *minaret* in Malaysian mosques is normally positioned detached from the main building but Colonial mosque *minaret* is always attached to the mosque main buildings. The top of these *minarets* are normally around two or three storey high and often reachable by a normal sized person via an internal staircase but highly impractical as the staircase is always very slim. Hence the *minarets’* function to call for *Adhan* has been improvised and activated by putting or hanging electrical loud speaker cones at the top.

![Wooden minaret](image4) ![Concrete minaret](image5) ![Specially designed minaret](image6)

**Figure 2.7: Minaret Styles**
2.2.2 Time Chart of Malaysia as part of Nusantara

500 - 1300
Srivijaya (Southern Sumatera) act as a centre of extensive federation of trading network.

1400 - 1511
Melaka followed Srivijaya as major entreports for international trade located in the Straits of Malacca.

1511
Portuguese occupied Melaka and Malay elites moved south to trade.

1550 - 1630
Acheh (Northern Sumatra) becomes leading trade and cultural centre.

From the early 17th Century
Migrations from Minangkabau (East and West coast of Sumatera) into the river valleys south of Melaka. A region known as Negeri Sembilan.

1641
The former court of Melaka re-established in the Johor regions Joins forces with the Dutch from Batavia dislodge Portuguese from Malacca.

1766
First Sultan of Selangor was throne. A relative of the Bugis Sultanate.

1786
Francis Light took possession of Penang.

1794
Melaka was held by the British Empire.

1826
Melaka, Penang and Singapore were administered by the British.

1874
British Resident came to Perak

1896
Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang became Federated Malay States under the rule of the British Resident-General

1909
Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu were transferred from the Kingdom of Siam’s authority to the British Empire.

1941
Japanese occupied Malaysia.

1946
United Malays Nationalist Organisation (UMNO) was formed.

1957 (31st Aug)
Tanah Melayu or Malaya declared Independence from the British

2.3 MIHRAB EXISTENCE

Looking back to the earliest mosque built by the Prophet Muhammad, roofed area consisting the prayer hall, called zulla, open courtyard (sahn) and both the spaces are surrounded by arcades called riwaq and suffa are the only components found in the building. Suffa is a dormitory for travelers (musafir), (Kuban1974).

The mosque was then enlarged and renovated following the expanding number of the believers. The renovation included decorative elements and the existence of Mihrab.

---

6 The time chart is shortlisted from AShort History of Malaysia- Linking East and West by Virginia Matheson Hooker (2003) New South Wales.
which is not recorded to be existed during the Prophet Muhammad’s time. It is believed that the introduction of Mihrab in the Prophet’s mosque was built during the Caliphate of Al-Walid and governorship of Umar bin Abdul Aziz. Umar bin Abdul Aziz is the one responsible in introducing the Mihrab to the Prophet Muhammad’s mosque in Medina (Whelan, 1986).

The first was called Mihrab Mudjawwaf which formed in semicircular and concaved (Figure 2.9 p: 34). A governor as pious and humble as Umar r.a. should have decided all the beneficial aspects towards the good mission of Islam before coming to any decision. With this information the thesis gets the strength to go on saying Mihrab is undoubtedly a functional and vital elements in assisting prayers. According to Iskandar (2005; 77), the innovation and existence of Mihrab is welcomed by Muslim community back in Caliph Umar r.a. time until medieval and contemporary, which he categorized as bid’ah hasanah\(^8\).

---

\(^7\) Refer to chapter 3 for the explanation of Mihrab

\(^8\) The term bid’ah hasanah is given to new innovation that is proven to make improvement so it is not religiously suspect.
Jean Sauveget (1947) made the accusation of Mihrab being borrowed from church apse and Mihrab has no other function then being a “smaller replica of the palace apse” (p 30). Commenting on the function of Mihrab as the indication of Ka’aba direction, Sauveget stressed on saying Mihrab does not act as orientation point but the whole Qibla wall is.

What was said by Sauveget is partly correct when he ridiculed on the indication of Ka’aba direction which role is taken by Mihrab. But he should consider on the real ritual of congregational prayer where the imam or the prayer leader is positioned in the Mihrab which is part of the Qibla wall. By making it as a niche, some practical configuration has been achieved that is a saf (praying line) space is saved and the first row of followers should be next to the Qibla wall (Kuban, 1974).

About forty years after Sauveget’s assumption, El Gohary (1984) who made a research incorporating the psychological effects of the users with the functions of mosque components, such as Mihrab. According to El Gohary (1986), a good curved niche as a Mihrab gives the feeling of being concealed and protected. Those feelings are most conducive to total attention (khusyu’) towards the prayer and achieving khusyu’ in prayer is very much recommended in Islam. So apart from being sutrat al-musalla⁹ (El

---

⁹ The concealment of a person in prayer. A person who performs prayer alone must shield himself from distraction and passersby.
Gohary, 1986; 119), Mihrab also provide a special place deserved by the *imam* in leading the congregation prayers. Obviously Sauveget’s assumption on the function of Mihrab has to be rectified to avoid misinterpretation by the younger generation on the history of Islamic art and architecture. As the indicator of Qibla direction, Mihrab plays a big role in integrating the diversifying cultures of the Islamic believers spiritually and physically. Jean Sauvaget (1947), is among the pioneering group of historians criticizing the existence of Mihrab in mosques

“In practice, it is not the Mihrab that marks the direction of prayer, rather the entire wall at the end of the hall; when this is incorrectly oriented, the faithful cannot position themselves as they should if the imam standing himself before the Mihrab, and having adjusted his position deliberately, does not serve as their model”

Sauvaget 1947; 27

Sauveget also mentioned the word *inutility* and *serves no purpose* in clarifying the Mihrab his article, taking the Mihrab of Great Mosque of Damascus Syria for example. The faithful believers of Islam know that even though Mihrab is said to be the indication of Qibla wall, it does not mark the direction of prayer as per se. As Muslims they have known better that they should perform *solah* with “Qiyyam”. Literally *Qiyyam* means standing straight facing the right path, with both front shoulders parallel to the Qibla direction/wall. As stated in the Al-Quran, Allah the Almighty says:

“Therefore, stand firm (on the straight path) as you are commanded and those who turn in repentance with you. And do not transgress, for He (Allah) sees well all that you do”

Al-Quran, Surah Hud (11): verse 112

If the meaning of the word *Qiyyam* is comprehended, there should not be a problem of positioning ourselves in prayer. Giving benefit of the doubts, Sauveget did make a good point to be taken by modern mosque builders when designing and ornamenting the Mihrab and Qibla wall when he further stated;

“To remedy this inconvenience, care is generally taken to provide multiple Mihrabs by constructing auxiliary niches at different points along the wall…”

Sauvaget 1947; 27
The statement will be investigated further in the research as it helps to identify some ways to achieve successful and meaningful design of Mihrab and Qibla wall.

In finding the origin of the word “Mihrab” somehow took Sergeant (1959) to various scholars’ point of views. In one of his findings, Mihrab in the earlier Islamic period demonstrated that it does not mean for the niche on Qibla wall but rather for the indication where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ normally made the prostration.

In the holy Al-Quran the term Mihrab has been mentioned five times;

1. 3:37 So her Lord (Allâh) accepted her with goodly acceptance. He made her grow in a good manner and put her under the care of Zakariyâ (Zachariya). Every time he entered Al-Mihrâb (visit) her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Maryam (Mary)! From where have you got this?" She said, "This is from Allâh." Verily, Allâh provides sustenance to whom He wills, without limit."

2. 3:39 Then the angels called him, while he was standing in prayer in Al-Mihrâb (a praying place or a private room), (saying): "Allâh gives you glad tidings of Yahya (John), confirming (believing in) the Word from Allâh [i.e. the creation of Iesa (Jesus) a.s. the Word from Allâh ("Be!" - and he was!)], noble, keeping away from sexual relations with women, a Prophet, from among the righteous."

3. 19:11 Then he came forth unto his people from the chamber (Mihrab) and asked them by signs to glorify God in the morning and in the evening.

4. 34:13 They made for him what he desired of Maharib, and statues, and pools of deep reservoirs, and heavy pots. "O family of David, work to show thanks." Only a few of My servants are appreciative.

5. 38:21 And has the news of the litigants reached you? When they climbed over the wall into al-Mihrab;

According to Al-Quran translation by Islamic Foundation United Kingdom (2008), the term Mihrab in the holy book Al-Quran signifies the quarters that were usually built in synagogues and sanctuaries on a raised platform adjacent to the place of congregational worship, which served as the residence of caretakers, servants and beggars. In the first
verse it explains that Mary lived in a quarters of this kind and devoted all her time to worship and prayer\(^{10}\).

Mihrab today is known as a functional space for \textit{imam} and as an orientation device for prayer. Archaeological evidence confirmed the existence of Mihrab which in the form of concaved niche used during Umayyad dynasty and the representation has been interpreted as a prayer niche (Khoury 1998; 2). But Miles (1952) have not confirmed on the real shape of the Mihrab.

Khoury (1998) also elaborated that Mihrab does not show as an architectural element but it is more as a “sign-set of indeterminate meaning”, that comes together with form, function and terminology. These three elements interact dynamically in producing meaning of Mihrab. The true meaning of Mihrab has an essential cultural value and this results Mihrab sets with different forms and functions. Khoury (1988;18) investigated Mihrab in terms of form, function and meaning and found that the answer for the investigation lies in the concave niche of the Prophet Muhammad \(\mu\)’s mosque. Khoury (1998) continued explaining that the Prophet Muhammad \(\mu\)’s Mihrab, either seen as a space or niche, either as \textit{imam}’s (prayer leader) place or symbol of leadership, actually marks the later Mihrabs with meaning and Islamic identity.

According to the Encyclopedia of Islam (Bosworth et. al.1994) there was no evidence that the Mihrab formed a niche on the Qibla wall during the earliest Islamic era. In the very early mosques, after the Prophet Muhammad \(\mu\)’s time, it was only indicated by stripes of paint and sometimes block of stone embedded in Qibla wall. The first and oldest surviving Mihrab, according to Creswell (1932) is the Mihrab of Sulayman under \textit{Qubbat as-Sakhra} (Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem. It is named after the Prophet Sulayman a.s. because it was used to be the place where he prayed. It is made

\(^{10}\) The translation and elaboration are taken from: Towards Understanding the Quran presented online by \url{www.islamic-foundation.com}, with kind permission from \url{Islamic_Foundation_UK}. Retrieved on Saturday 6\textsuperscript{th} February 2010
of marble panel in a rock cut chamber. Further evidence supporting Creswell (1932) is when Miles (1952). George C. Miles found out that image of the Mihrab said above has been repeated on reversed side of coins during the time of Caliph Abd al-Malik r.a.(694-695).

### 2.3.1 Mihrab in Islam and Islamic Architecture

The origin of the word Mihrab is hard to define as it carries vast number of expression. Whatever or however the word been interpreted by whomever scholars, it should be realised that the importance of its existence in Muslim everyday prayers especially when the prayer is performed in congregation. Looking back on its significance during the Prophet Muhammad’s time, a lance which is called ‘harba’, owned by the Prophet Muhammad always planted first to indicate the direction of Qibla and where the safs should be generated (Wijdan Ali 1999).

Although many interpretation were made by scholars, Miles (1952 pp 156-171) found the most accurate explanation on the existence of Mihrab when he identified the “harba” as “‘anazah” and found evidence from a rare silver dirham in 75/695-696. The coins showed the image of ‘anazah, which symbolize authority enclosed by arch similar to a Mihrab. This finding is strengthen by Al- Bukhary in his tafsir of Hadith saying that ‘anazah is a short lance that was carried by the Prophet Muhammad and was placed in front of him every time he led the congregational prayer. The ‘anazah was used as a sutrah or screen as it is necessary for prayer leader or those praying alone to place a screen in front of him to avoid direct disturbances from people (or animal) passing before him (Al-Bukhary and Muslim, 363 & 778). During the time, the prayer hall was empty without any walls or contained in building.
The *tafsir* (translation) gives the indication that the Mihrab and Qibla wall must be clearly defined and should be the first thing to be positioned in mosques as a practical aid for the believers (Ashraf, 2006; 212).

The evidence is proven further when the Muslims in Maghrib or Morocco and Algeria used the term ‘anazah for their Mihrab. Mihrab nowadays exists in all the mosques built all around the world, with variety of design and ornamentation. Even though the Mihrab has variety of shapes and forms, they are all up to one goal: they have an important function towards the prayers as well as carrying the glory and uniqueness of Islamic art and architecture with them.

Evidences have been laid to confirm on the importance of beauty in Islam. Beauty is best portrayed in mosques as the leading symbols of Islamic art and architecture. Interior beauty of mosques should be considered as highly as the exterior design of mosque architecture. One of the ways to achieve this is by designing and ornamenting the Mihrab and Qibla wall appropriately.

Mihrab is often the focus for architectural decoration with its embellishment from the latest architectural techniques. But this modern way of decorations is sometimes too superficial and only taken on the surface. To achieve the design appropriateness of Mihrab, there is a need to turn back in time to look through the history in looking for the historical values of Mihrab from the historians and scholars who unassumingly have studied deeply on the evolution of Islamic art and architecture.

Sauveget (1947; 122-157) believed that Mihrab on mosques actually originated from the *Basilica* churches. In Muslim faith and religion, it is not the niche or the concave that is sacred but the direction it expresses. In Mihrab the direction of the user and *imam* (prayer leader) is facing towards the wall and the
followers come behind him, whilst in churches, the preacher stands by the apse facing the followers. Here lies a great difference in the meaning of the space (be it altar or niche), in Islamic faith, from the devotional purpose of Christian church’s altar. Furthermore the dimension of mosque is normally longer to the side which contains the Qibla wall. Different from a church plan, it is much longer to the side which is perpendicular to the altar. The meaning of Mihrab is far from the apse, altar or temple recess. The accusation for not being totally original in existence may be true at some part, but most of all it does carry some important role in mosques purpose and architecture.

Taking it from the Medieval Islamic art and architecture, the Mihrab is considered as the focal point or the visual peak of any mosque. Just as the Prophet Muhammad stationed by the planted ‘harba’ indicating the Qibla direction and lead the congregational prayer, the Mihrab is where the imam stations himself while leading the congregation prayer. Like what had been stated by Frishman (1994):

“In mosque interiors, the direction of Mecca is indicated by the Qibla wall in which the Mihrab niche is incorporated. As the focal point of the building, the Mihrab is often its most elaborately decorated feature.”

Frishman, 1994; 36

2.4 ISLAMIC ORNAMENTATION AS MOSQUE COMPONENT

At some point this time scholars are still wondering on comprehensive study of the history, function and significance of ornamentation in Islamic architecture especially in mosques. The organizations of the ornamentation, which covers vegetal, geometrical, epigraphic and figural or even a combination of two or more of these elements are in need for some evaluation and elaboration. Most of the time, these ornaments will reflect local traditions with a mixture of foreign influences, subject to the geographical area of the particular Islamic world. Islamic ornamentation is the very element that
sews architecture and religion resulting serene, intelligible, structured and highly
spiritual of Islamic art and architecture.

Mosques, as symbol of Islamic architecture must play an important role in reflecting
the superiority of Allah the Almighty. There are many ways in making it successful and
one of them is through the high quality of aesthetic value. Aesthetic value in Islamic
architecture is normally portrayed by the highest degree of motifs and ornamentation,
that normally done extensively on the exterior and interior sides of the Islamic
buildings, historically.

Study done by El Gohary (1984) has shown that repetitive Islamic geometrical patterns
in mosques give the similar effects as the blank or white walls. Ornamented interior
will give the psychologically “turns off” one’s awareness of the external environment
(El Gohary 1984; 40). This paradoxical statement is studied in his research where the
unconscious constructs are developed at prayer in a mosque through the influence of
architectural forms and Islamic decorations. He brought in the therapeutic dimension
usage of decorative works in bath houses by saying that their functions are not just for
increasing the spirits (taqwiya) but also removing the worries and bad thoughts off the
Muslim minds. These high spirits and positive thoughts are achieved and carried to the
mosques where they would perform their prayers.

Human is regarded as a reflection of the innate beauty of the Almighty who had created
the universe. Beauty in Islamic art and civilisation, to elaborate is a wide scope to be
covered and this includes the appreciation of symmetry, balance, and also the
expressions of sense of all-pervading life force were compatible with Islamic aesthetic
principle (Kerlogue, 2004)

According to Brolin (2000), modernist’s on art and architecture of Islamic or Western
architecture, stressed on design principles, spatial organizations, and the structural and
physical strength of buildings without paying much attention to the quality and usage of
motifs and ornamentation. This situation is deeply regretted by Brolin (2000), with lengthy explanation on the banishment and return of ornamentation in architecture in his book by stating,

“Architects who use ornament today, even those with international reputations, are frequently ridiculed by important architectural opinion-makers”

Brolin, 2000;

The above statement is supported by Trilling (2001) with a strong argument on the twentieth century modernists who systematically excluded ornaments from the mainstream of Western art. ‘Less is more’, an art appreciation by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, is said to be originated from Robert Browning poem titled ‘Andrea del Sarto’ and he was cursed with lack of passion. If the said slogan is actually right, then in effect ornamentation and its study is a waste of time. Whereas in art and architecture aesthetic value, most of all created by ornamentations has made a long journey through all the decades, with brilliant colour sense and inventions on the level of detail promoting the development and civilization of the people.

The importance of the medieval period art and architecture rests not only in the fact it was the time when so many of the ethnic, literary, religious, social and artistic features of traditional Islam was created, but also significant to recognize that the period is more or less contemporary with Romanesque and Gothic Europe. Like most of the problems posed by Islamic art and architecture scholars, the question of the growth and character of Islamic architectural design of ornamentation has never been discussed in entirety and deeply. They are mostly of random thoughts which may trigger wrong perceptions on the nature of Islamic art and is one of the world’s religious architecture that does not only concern the Middle East countries.

Ornamentation in Islamic architecture mentioned by Grube (1978), serves several functions. Among the functions are giving the effect of weightlessness to the structure and creating articulation and non limitation to the space. Here, Grube (1978) looks at
the physical functions of Islamic ornamentation. Seralgedin (1996) though, sees ornamentation as glue in uniting the Muslims with their architectural forms and decorations. Nevertheless, both of the renowned scholars seemed agreeable that the ornamentations which give sense of being inside a place with the articulation and embellishment of the interior are inspiring and notably assets to Islamic art. The former touched on the large amount of decorative treatments of surfaces that show rich development of designs that differentiate Islamic art and architecture from non-Muslim world. Then later, Serageldin (1996), on the other hand is proud of the ornamentation in Islamic art and architecture that turns out to be both a source of artistic expression as well as inspiration.

The concept of decoration in Islamic art is flexible in nature, independent of form, material and scale, transforming the whole space ambience. According to Jones (1978), in order to trace the history of decoration and ornamentation that is being applied to Islamic monumental architecture, examination on the three chronological phases must be done. They are:

1. **The Classical Heritage**: Determine the first phase of Islamic art (7th-8th Century). Techniques of ornamentation still inspired by the late Classical world or earlier Christian architecture. From painted mosaics, came stucco, tiles and bricks by end of the period.

2. **The Eastern Influences**: This is when Persian style of ornamentation took place together with further eastern countries such as Afghanistan and Turkistan. Remarkable decorative effects obtained by geometric bricks and terracotta patterns. This is the time when entrance portals and Mihrabs were heavily emphasized, muqarnas that were deeply recessed until 14th Century when glazed tiles combined with bricks, which result a much simpler look covering large surfaces.
3. **Colour**: Usage of colours in the third phase of Islamic architectural decoration took over the recessed and relieved of three dimensional textures. Sharp contrasts of dark and light coloured ceramic tiles were produced in heavy geometrical and floral patterns. This was at its summit during the Ottoman and Mughal periods.

Even though the three phases covered the entire Muslim world with variety of styles and materials, the goal set to one mission is to achieve a high standard of great psychological and visual impact. This is also answerable to the *Hadith* mentioning beauty as one of Allah the Almighty qualities and He (Allah) loves beauty.

According to D’Azebo (1958), social development and the character of Islamic ornamentation could be recognized by studying the classical heritage, the influences of the east and the illuminations. Psychological study of art has revealed on the close connection between individual style and personality, to some extent has shown a connection between style and mode of individual integration socially.

This notion becomes stronger when supported by Grabar (1983) when he talks about the development of Islamic archaeological research. Significant questions must always be queried, such as how it is developed, how it is spread and how the construction devices develop. The research results should no longer rely on the number of excavations organized looking for objects, or historically important places which sometimes lead to a complex, abstruse and overly abstract. It is important, according to Grabar (1983), before going deeper into certain ornamentation in Islamic art; first the transformations in visual forms from the religion understanding and opinion should be classified. These results of cultural products will be the evidence of civilization with some communal symbolism or motifs in the ornamentation and also the yard stick in measuring the technology level of the Muslim community. The classification will capture the changes appeared in available images and techniques created. In the
medieval mosques, effort had been put so much in beautifying the house of God. The organization of the motif and ornamentation may be vegetal, geometric or epigraphic and most of the time a combination of two or more of these elements. The results of design and ornamentation could be different from one region to another. For example Malaysian way of ornamenting their mosque is different from the Arabs, but there should be a little if not much influence from the origins as they all come from one religion and community that is Islam. This is the main symbolic meaning in Islamic art that explains unity in diversity.

2.4.1 Characteristics of Islamic Ornamentation

One of the motives of Islamic traditional buildings is to make the life of believers and users correspond to their built environment, thus inter-relate strongly and harmoniously (Mortada, 2003). This point should be taken into deep consideration by Muslim authority throughout the world. Preserving Islamic faith and enhancing the application of Syari’ah in mosques should be the major point. With the mosque roles in religious and education, they should come hand in hand with the needs of the society in the effort to maintain an acceptable level of the basic needs of human well-being; that is beauty with the existence of motifs and ornamentation that will welcome anybody who enters the physical environment concerned.

Appreciation of symmetry, balances and also the expressions of universal life force (Kerlogue, 2004) leads to the first characteristic of Islamic ornamentation that put much strength in the infinity of patterns. It includes the intricate geometric patterns which clearly portray the infinity of Allah the Almighty. Geometry in Islamic art and architecture create the basic patterns in design, with its interlaced lines passing over and under carrying various patterns. Still taking geometric principles as the basic guidance, meanders and circles showed the
most amazing imagination and inventiveness. (Baer 1998). The multiplication of any geometric pattern of architectural element on a different scale in one plane also helps avoid sharp contrast and clear definition of scale and surface.

2.4.2 Motifs of Geometrical Figures

Fitted on top of the geometrical basic guidelines, comes the motifs of geometrical figures that would come in floral or vegetal figures. The said figures vary throughout the Islamic regions, differentiate by geography and chronology. It can also be said that the whole of Islamic patterns represents a combination of many different styles. Those styles are sometimes adapted and absorbed from famous classical samples of various cultures (Lee 1987; 182-197). Lee’s statement is much agreeable as far as this thesis is concerned, in the design and ornamentation of Mihrab and Qibla wall in Malaysian context.

Countries in the Middle East would apply motifs such as vine scrolls and other vegetal appeared in the Al-Janna as mentioned in the Al-Quran while Malaysian would use traditional motifs taken from local vegetal such as rice plant and lotus. Nowadays there appear to be adaptations of Middle East motifs and geometrical patterns in Malaysian contemporary mosques.

Both geometrical background and the motifs are mostly produced in two dimensional patterns on the mosque components. Some of the time, the geometrical patterns are in three dimensional non-structural forms which is called arabesques. Almost in all of the cases these geometrical patterns and non-structural components are always subordinated throughout the composition. The existence of the geometrical components seldom emphasized to a certain point in the composition. According to Madden (1975; 423-430), this is done to express that Islam is independent in any historical happenings and occasions happen around the universe. This exhibits the universal character of Allah the
Almighty. Geometry is the most appropriate approach to represent Allah’s unbounded existence (Peker 2007).

2.4.3 Arabic Calligraphy

Second in line of the Islamic art characteristics is the presence of Arabic Calligraphy. This is said to be the ultimate art that transformed the words of the Al-Quran into a visual work of art. In this important discovery in Islamic art, the existence is subject to the overall purpose of Islamic consciousness.

Calligraphy is simply joined letters and became the simplest form of Naskh script, then “plasticized” so that they could be angulated: as in the oldest Kufic script, stretched, prolonged, bent, thickened, overlapped, and complicated as in the Thuluth script. They are sometimes made in three dimensional arabesques on carved wood as screen or stucco decoration on wall complementing the geometric composition.

Kufic script

The term “Kufic” was derived from the word Kufa, representing the place it was developed (Imamuddin, 1983). This type of script is angular and has specific measurement which only reached its perfection in the late 8th century. This earliest script was used in producing Al-Quran for the next three hundred years until 12th Century. Like any other elements of Islamic art, Kufic script was also modified to satisfy different cultural tastes of the universe throughout the centuries.

As a result, the original Arabic Kufic, parented three other Kufic categories, they are squared, Fatimid and modern. Squared Kufic is the most popular script to be found on building walls, especially in the halls of prayer (‘Afifi 1990).
After the 13th century, this type of script lost its popularity when artists became more interested in cursive script. This was the moment when Kufic script modernized and spread without specific rules for the purpose of decoration.

Naskh Script

This elegant script is the most used in reproducing the Quran because it is easily written and read. According to Salameh (2001), naskh means “eradicating” because it took over Kufic script which at that time only used for decoration and not for writing the Quran anymore. The interpretation then made further by Ahmad Ebeed (2005) who said that Naskh also means ‘copy’ because it was used in the copying of Al-Quran, writing back the Hadith, and other religious books. In order to allow Muslims who do not speak Arabic to be able to read the Al-Quran, The diacritical signs are added and this has upgraded its beauty and elegance.

Figure 2.11: Naskh Script

Until now, almost all Muslim around the world are familiar with Naskh script and considered to be the supreme script among all others (Hamzah, 2007).
**Thuluth script**

The script is often looked complicated and hard to be read by someone who does not understand Arabic words. The proportion is complex compared to the two scripts above. In this script, the Arabic letters are often linked, and most of the time intersect and cursive. It started with more simplified basic Thuluth but because basic Thuluth is seen as less ornamental, designers often opt for a more ornamented one, for example *Jalli Thuluth* or *Aynali Thuluth* (*Afifi 1998*).

![Thuluth Script](www.moa.ubc.ca/spiritofislam/unity/thuluth.html)

**Figure 2.12: Thuluth Script**

Thuluth becomes popular for its ornamental quality and the beauty of this script is taken to embellish most of mosque walls. The greatest achievement is when this type of script is used on the *Kiswa of Ka’aba* in Mecca (Hamzah, 2007).

There are many more calligraphy styles used in the Arab countries such as *Diwani, Riq’a, Ta’liq* and *Nasta’liq* but the three above (*Kufic, Naskh and Thuluth*) are the ones mostly used calligraphy styles in decorating mosque walls of Malaysia.

Mahmood (1981) in his scholarly research found out that Islamic calligraphy is not some art pieces that have to be looked at, read and passed. They are tell tale pieces of art that need to be comprehended and remembered because the most popular wordings taken by Muslim across the centuries for the Arabic calligraphy on mosques walls are the ones taken from the Al-Quran. Calligraphy is filled with aesthetic value as well as being a message conveying precise meanings of Al-Quran and *Hadiths*.

---

Ornamentation in Islamic art and architecture, apart from testifying diverse artistic influences incorporated in the architectural statement of buildings, also acts as complements to the architectural statement. So much so, thoughtful ornamentation will affect the behaviour of the users with the sense of interiority accompanying the building users (Seralgedin 1996).

2.5 BEAUTY FROM ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

Before going further on discussing the available ornamentations in Islamic world, let us look at the needs of having proper design and ornamentation on Islamic artifacts and buildings. An exhibition organized by Hood Museum of Art in 1991\(^{14}\), explored the complex imagery of Paradise in Islamic art that elaborates on the extraordinary richness and beauty of Islamic Art. This exhibition was intended for the western scholars to have an access to the splendors of Islamic art and culture. This event is important to mention as there is no such elaboration of information has been done until today.

Wijdan 2004, who believes in Al-Ghazali thoughts on Islam and Aesthetics said that Al-Ghazali is one of the most spiritual philosophers of Islam and his perception of beauty comes from the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, “Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty”.

Every thing appeared in the universe is created by Allah the Almighty, should be beautiful in its own way because every little thing created reflects Allah’s majesty and beauty. The view of Al-Ghazali actually studied earlier by Ettinghausen, (1976) who discovered the two-way meaning of aesthetic in Islam. Ettinghausen (1976) emphasized on the rejection of Al-Ghazali on beauty that is seen on the external, because apart from perceiving beauty with the five common senses, it can also be seen from the sixth

\(^{14}\) There is a book published in conjunction with the exhibition titled, Images of Paradise in Islamic Art. Introductory chapter by Sheila s. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom
sense, which is using the heart, soul, spiritual and moral values. Taking this into the appreciation of art, one could conclude on the two types of art: religious and secular.

Another scholar looked at aesthetic and beauty in Islam in a slightly different way is Gonzalez, (2001; 5-26) when she brought in the story of “King Solomon’s Trap”.

Gonzales again quoted Al-Ghazali saying on the two ways of perceiving beauty:

“The eye perceives the outer and surface of things, but not their inner essences; moreover, it perceives only their shapes and their forms not their real nature”

Al-Ghazali in Gonzalez (2001; 5-26).

Gonzalez explained on the above Al-Ghazali’s saying by giving example on a story in the Al-Quran;

She was invited to enter the court, al-sarh. When she saw it, she took it for a sheet of water, and uncovered her legs. Solomon told her: “This is a court paved with tiles of glass”. She said, “I have wronged myself and I submit to the Lord of all the worlds with Solomon” (Solomon intended to put Balqis into trials to reveal her shortcomings)

Al-Quran, Sura Al-Naml 27: verse 44

The surah shows how high level of aesthetic creation on the interior part of the castle has deceived Balqis, the Queen of Sheba who was well known for her brightness and wealth. The astonishingly beautiful castle of the Prophet Solomon a.s.’ put the Queen into thinking that Allah the Almighty had given Prophet Solomon a.s. more than what had been given by her god and people of Sheba at that time worshipped the sun. She was interested to know more about Islam and then embraced Islam and married the Prophet Solomon a.s.15. Taking this Quranic story into the contemporary world, aesthetic is beautiful, cognitive, and expressive also possess a specific status which go with its functional purpose. Islamic art and architecture as symbol of Islamic civilization must play an important role in reflecting the superiority of Allah the Almighty. One of the many ways of showing this is through the high level of aesthetic

---

15 To fully comprehend the aesthetic function of the story, consultation of the Islamic exegesis is necessary. Here the author’s comprehension and elaboration is all based on Tafsir Al-Maraghi.
value with appropriate design and ornamentation. If the creation in context concern architecture of mosque, attention must also be given to the visual appropriateness of the interior design and ornamentation as important as the rest of the structure and components.

Apart from the Al-Quran and Hadiths, the importance of ornamentation in Islamic art and architecture has also been observed by looking at its purpose and affects to the users. According to Haider (1996) faith means to accept all the ideas that attribute Islamic parameter without demanding any strict evidence. The origin of having ornamentation especially in mosques is the faithful thirst for the cognizance of Allah the Almighty. The feelings are derived in striving to be closer to the One who has no location. So, there is a need for us, the believers of Islam to put forth some ideas on how Islamic faith becoming synonyms with the certitude about Islam. This is the reason why as believed by Haider (1996) that creation of ornaments and artwork especially in prostration places (mosques) are the true symbols that express faith in the religion’s followers. Words from the Al-Quran for example, are known to be the words of Allah the Almighty, become operative in artistic production.

Nasr (1985) stated that the group/groups that ridiculed the beauty and intelligibility of Islamic art do not only include western historians but also a large number of Muslims that called them as modernists or reformers. Nasr (1985) assumed that the statement of those scholars as denials as they should have realized that architecture and art are valued through the depth of aesthetical value. Beautiful Islamic ornamentation evokes certain therapeutic responses. Islam is a beautiful religion, and mosque as a symbol of the religion’s existence, should be built according to this overall guide.

The place to perform prayer is vital to be studied on every scope, as this will lead to the concentration and sincerity of the performers. This is the time when the believers of Allah the Almighty can be intimate with Him. If the prayer is performed alone, the
place may be at home, (houses) and if it is performed in congregation, one of the places should be in the mosques.

2.6 MOSQUE ORNAMENTATION

Appreciating the existence of Islamic art is a global concern especially when there have been many scholarly journals and books centered their scope of studies on. Islamic art includes decorating buildings of Islamic architecture such as mosques and palaces. According to Al Bayati (1983), Islamic ornamentation in terms of calligraphy, geometrical pattern and foliation, when appropriately applied will produce more functional space and give pleasant effect on the ambience. Mosque should portray a special quality of something very sacred and serene on the interior that will invite the believers in Islam to submit to Allah the Almighty without anybody or anything else in between. Beauty in Islam is not a contentious issue to be discussed and it is clear enough if looked through the eyes of classical Islamic philosophers. For instance a famous spiritual philosopher of Islam, Al-Ghazali\textsuperscript{16} relates the artistic creations of Muslims as in close proximity to the existence of God. According to Al-Ghazali, the awareness of beauty as seen by Sufi perception is much related to firstly the Hadith saying God is beautiful and Loves beauty (a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad \textsuperscript{35} in Sahih Muslim 1.93:91.), secondly everything in the universe is created by God and those things will reflect God’s majesty and beauty. Therefore men as one of God’s creation must lead their life revealing God’s way of guiding us (Wijdan Ali 2001).

There is also an indication of aesthetics found in Al-Quran concerning a Prophet-king, Sulaiman a.s. when the Al-Quran describes on the visit of Queen Balqis of Sheba to the

\textsuperscript{16} Al-Ghazâlî (c.1055–1111) was one of the most prominent and influential philosophers, theologians, jurists, and mystics of Sunni Islam. He was active at a time when Sunni theology had just passed through its consolidation and entered a period of intense challenges from Shiite Ismâ’ilîte theology and the Arabic tradition of Aristotelian philosophy (falsafa). (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2007)
Prophet Sulaiman’s a.s. palace (Sura al-Naml of Al-Quran 27:44). The Prophet Sulaiman a.s. is one of the prophets that lived before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Gonzalez (2001), did a thorough research on the said parable from Al-Quran especially on the final incident where aesthetical creation of the Prophet Sulaiman’s a.s. court had actually deceived the intelligent Queen of Sheba. She realized that the Prophet Sulaiman’s a.s. God, Allah the Almighty, had bestowed upon him more than her god, the sun. (Tafsir Al Maraghi). From her research, Gonzalez (2001) found out that the Prophet Sulaiman a.s. is the founder of a powerful artistic paradigm.

Many more guided interpretations could be derived from this particular parable but the gist concerning this thesis taken from Gonzalez paper is that the ornamentation of the Prophet Sulaiman a.s.’ court had made Queen Balqis admitted to the greatness of Allah the Almighty, embraced Islam and married His prophet. None of the sentences in the parable mentioned about how the physical appearance of the palace was like. A lesson should be learnt from this Quranic history in designing the interior of mosques where the aesthetics would invite the faithful, or may be passers-by would catch glimpses of the ornamented Qibla wall and attracted to the beauty of Islamic art and architecture.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The result of modernist movement has always misinterpreted the existence of ornamentation as symbol of luxury. Mosque symbolizes the existence of a beautiful religion that is Islam. Visiting the house of Allah Al-Jameel (the beautiful) or a sacred place where we could spend our time getting intimate with Him we should encounter the joy of beauty at all levels of His existence. Unfortunately, in the modern world, we always provide nice decoration with marble banking halls and agree with so utilitarian and aesthetically poor mosques internal. The prayer hall for example, if it is not for the small niche that demarcated the Qibla wall and dome on top, the mosque could be misapprehended as a multipurpose hall.
Mosques should be categorized under socially inspired type and this type is like residential where it should be studied together with its relationship to social factors such as users’ needs physically and psychologically (Tice 1993). These buildings should give the highest comfort that satisfy the psychological tranquility to the users in different cultural needs. In the Al-Quran, it has been mentioned in about 120 passages describing the paradise (Al Janna) being a beautiful place giving serene sense. As in the following verse;

“For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade; they will recline therein on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on!”

Al-Quran, Surah Al-Kahf 18: verse 107

This is the starting point where most of the medieval mosque, for example the Great Mosque of Damascus, put forward their aesthetics feature of motifs and ornamentation, which portrayed the Paradise garden symbolically.

On the later erections of medieval mosques for example Mosque of Al-Hakim under Fatimids dynasty, those features from paradise are then simplified to be in structured geometrical designs that are pleasing to the eyes of whoever witnessing them. Everyone in this world would not oppose to be in a beautiful place and this is shown clearly when we opted for beautiful houses for us to live in.

This theory is then taken into deep consideration by Abdel Rahman (2002) and he called the scheme of beauty as the grand tradition of Islamic architecture. This so called beauty emerged through the manifestation of floral and geometrical motifs in arabesques and the beautiful Islamic Calligraphy inspired from the meaningful Quranic verses. Where else is the most suitable place to instill all those precious artistic and ornamental values other than in mosques, the very place where all believers come at least once a week or five times a day at the most.