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Islamic Art: The Aesthetics of Worship, Calligraphy, Architecture, and Sacred Geometry

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Abstract

This article discusses Islamic art as an aesthetics of worship, understood not merely as an expression of visual beauty but also as a theological manifestation of the principle of Tawhid. The background of the study stems from the tendency of reductionist readings of Islamic art, which often regard it merely as decorative ornamentation or as a historical artifact that has lost its existential relevance. This research aims to demonstrate that calligraphy, mosque architecture, and sacred geometry are artistic forms that integrate the dimensions of bayani, irfani, and burhani within a unified visual-spiritual framework. The methodology employed is qualitative library research with a multidisciplinary approach, utilizing content analysis and critical hermeneutics of relevant classical and contemporary literature. The findings indicate that calligraphy functions as a visualization of revelation, mosque architecture as a space of spiritual pedagogy, and sacred geometry as a divine mathematical language representing the order of the cosmos. These findings affirm that Islamic art is not merely an aesthetic medium but also a means of existential transformation that guides human beings from sensory experience toward transcendental consciousness. This article concludes that amid a digital era characterized by shallowness and spiritual exhaustion, Islamic art continues to hold significant relevance as a contemplative oasis, a source of aesthetic education, and a medium for reconnecting material beauty with spiritual truth.

Keywords: Architecture, Calligraphy, Islamic Art, Sacred Geometry, Spirituality, Tawhid.

1. Introduction

In contemporary aesthetic discourse, Islamic art is often trapped within two forms of reductionism that narrow its meaning. The first reduction views Islamic art merely as an element of *ornamentation*, namely a visual device for beautifying space without ontological depth. The second places it as a completed historical artifact, attractive as a museum object but having lost its existential relevance for modern humanity. These two tendencies give rise to what Burckhardt (1976) describes as a mode of reading

that stops at sensory forms yet fails to penetrate the metaphysical meanings behind them. In the context of modernity, characterized by the desacralization of knowledge and beauty, this condition indicates that art is no longer understood as a path toward wisdom but is instead detached from its spiritual roots (Nasr, 1981).

In fact, Islamic art did not emerge as a value-neutral cultural product. It is the aesthetic implication of *Tawhid*, the principle of

Divine Unity that animates the entire structure of the Islamic worldview (Al Faruqi, 1986). On this basis, calligraphy cannot be understood merely as beautified writing but rather as a visual manifestation of revelation that brings the Divine Word into a visible form. Likewise, mosque architecture is not simply the construction of a place of worship but a symbolic spatial order designed to harmonize the cosmos and metacosmos through the experience of Divine Presence (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Nasr, 2002). Sacred geometry, too, does not merely display mathematical sophistication but presents a visual argument concerning the infinitude of God through modular, repetitive, and non-naturalistic patterns (Al-Faruqi, 1999; Lu & Steinhart, 2007).

Within a broader horizon, Islamic art may be understood as a form of *silent theology*, a non-verbal medium that communicates the metaphysical vision of Islam through line, space, light, proportion, and visual rhythm (Nasr, 2002). Consequently, beauty in Islamic art does not end at the level of taste but is connected to the process of purifying human perception so that it may grasp the relationship between material forms and spiritual realities. This perspective accords with the Islamic intellectual tradition, which does not separate truth, goodness, and beauty into three independent domains but understands them as a unified whole rooted in the Absolute (Kartanegara, 2006; Nasr, 2002). Therefore, the study of Islamic art requires an approach that goes beyond purely formalistic analysis.

The academic concern of this article arises from the gap between the richness of Islamic artistic tradition as a theological expression and the still superficial ways in which it is commonly interpreted. Many studies stop at cataloguing forms, styles, or historical influences without explaining why Islamic art has consistently maintained its aniconic and abstract character for centuries. Yet these characteristics are precisely the most fundamental features distinguishing Islamic art from other visual traditions, while simultaneously indicating that it operates under a particular theological discipline (Al Faruqi, 1986; Burckhardt, 1976). In this sense, Islamic art is not an imitation of nature but a creative human expression tasked with beautifying the world within the framework of servitude to God (Iqbal, 1930).

Moreover, the urgency of this study becomes even greater when situated within the context of the fast-paced, superficial, and visually saturated digital age. Digital modernity presents an abundance of images but does not necessarily provide depth of meaning. In such circumstances, Islamic art may be revisited as an aesthetic proposition that teaches slowness, contemplation, order, and transcendental orientation. What Han (2015) refers to as the *burnout society* demonstrates that contemporary humanity requires forms of aesthetic experience that do not merely entertain but also restore the inner dimensions eroded by the logic of acceleration. At this point, Islamic art acquires renewed relevance as a spiritual oasis capable of reconnecting material beauty with spiritual truth (Han, 2015; Nasr, 2010).

Previous research indicates that the study of Islamic art has evolved from predominantly descriptive Orientalist approaches toward metaphysical, historical-critical, and integrative approaches. Grabar (1987) highlights the historical processes through which Islamic art developed through cross-civilizational interactions. Burckhardt (1976) and Nasr (2002) emphasize the metaphysical foundations of Islamic art in the doctrine of *Tawhid*. Al-Faruqi (1986, 1999) clarifies that aniconism, abstraction, and modularity are not expressive deficiencies but aesthetic

consequences of Islam's theological vision. Meanwhile, Iqbal (1930) contributes an existential dimension by viewing art as a creative energy that must awaken the human ego, and Inayat Khan (1923) adds an ethical-spiritual dimension by affirming that beauty should serve as a path toward God rather than a trap of attachment to form.

Nevertheless, there remains room for a more comprehensive synthesis of the *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani* dimensions in the interpretation of Islamic art. Many studies discuss these dimensions separately but have not fully demonstrated how revealed text, spiritual intuition, and mathematical rationality work together within calligraphy, architecture, and sacred geometry. Therefore, this article aims to explain Islamic art as an integrative visual methodology that transforms theological principles into lived existential experiences. The discussion focuses on three primary questions: why Islamic art maintains its aniconic and abstract character; how Islamic art functions as an awakener of human spiritual consciousness; and why this visual tradition remains relevant amid the crisis of meaning in the digital age (Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

Accordingly, this article aims not only to describe the forms of Islamic art but also to explain the epistemological and teleological logic that underlies them. Through a synthesis of the thought of Hazrat Inayat Khan, Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Muhammad Iqbal, this article seeks to rebuild the bridge between material beauty and spiritual truth that has been severed in many modern readings. Within this framework, Islamic art is understood not as a residue of the past but as an ongoing civilizational project that guides humanity from sensory experience toward transcendental awareness (Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

2. Research Method

This study is a qualitative *library research* that adopts a multidisciplinary approach to examine the philosophical dimensions of Islamic art. The choice of a library research method is based on the nature of the research object, which does not focus on laboratory experiments or field surveys but rather on the exploration, critical reading, and conceptual synthesis of texts discussing Islamic art as an aesthetic, theological, and epistemological phenomenon. Accordingly, this study positions primary and secondary works as the main materials for constructing scholarly arguments concerning calligraphy, mosque architecture, and sacred geometry from an Islamic perspective (Supriyanto, 2023).

To produce an in-depth analysis, this study employs *content analysis* and critical hermeneutics as its principal analytical instruments. Content analysis is used to identify major themes, patterns of argumentation, key concepts, and relationships among ideas appearing in the literature under examination. Meanwhile, critical hermeneutics is employed to understand texts and visual objects within their original historical contexts while extracting their existential relevance for modern humanity in the digital era (Supriyanto, 2023). This approach is important because Islamic art exists not only as a visual form but also as an expression of meaning emerging from a particular theological and civilizational horizon (Burckhardt, 1976; Nasr, 2002).

Epistemologically, this study is grounded in the synthesis of three paradigms of Islamic thought as formulated by Abed al-Jabiri (1991), namely *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani*. These three paradigms

are not positioned as mutually exclusive frameworks but as complementary modes of knowing that enable a more comprehensive reading of Islamic art. The selection of this framework is based on the assumption that Islamic art cannot be adequately understood through a single approach, since it simultaneously relates to revelation, inner experience, and rational order (Abed al-Jabiri, 1991; Abdullah, 2006).

The bayani approach is employed to examine aspects of Islamic art grounded in the authority of revealed texts and tradition, particularly in analyzing calligraphy as the visual embodiment of the Divine Word or the process of “in-libration” (Nasr, 2002, p. 208). Through this approach, attention is directed toward how Qur’anic verses, the principle of *Tawhid*, and the prohibition of figurative representation in the context of worship shape the aesthetic logic of Islamic art. In other words, *bayani* helps trace the relationship between religious textual structures and the visual forms that emerge from them (Al Faruqi, 1986; Nasr, 2002).

The irfani approach is employed to explore the intuitive and inner experiential dimensions of art, in which works of art are viewed as *silent theology* capable of guiding their beholders toward purification of the soul and spiritual presence (Nasr, 2002, p. 127). Through this framework, the study examines how calligraphy, mosque space, and sacred geometry operate not only at the level of visual perception but also at the level of existential experience. This perspective is significant because, within the Islamic tradition, beauty does not end as an aesthetic impression but functions as a *wasilah* connecting humanity with the Transcendent (Inayat Khan, 1923; Schimmel, 1975).

The burhani approach is employed to analyze the rational foundations and mathematical demonstrations present in Islamic art, such as the sophistication of *quasi-crystalline* patterns in sacred geometry that reveal the order of the universe (Lu & Steinhardt, 2007, p. 1106). Through this perspective, Islamic art is interpreted as the result of a rationality of form, proportion, pattern, structure, and visual logic that can be explained intellectually. The *burhani* framework is also relevant in demonstrating that, within the Islamic tradition, art and science are not sharply separated but appear as two expressions of the same divine order (Nasr, 1993; Bonner, 2017).

These three epistemologies are applied in an integrative-interconnective manner (Abdullah, 2006, p. 1), given that Islamic art is an entity that simultaneously combines text, feeling, and reason. This integrative approach prevents the study from becoming trapped in formalistic reductionism, pure mysticism, or narrow rationalism. Instead, it opens space for a more comprehensive reading in which visual forms are understood as the result of the encounter between doctrine, spiritual intuition, and intellectual construction within Islamic civilization (Kartanegara, 2006; Nasr, 2002).

The materials of this study consist of library sources relevant to the theme of Islamic art, both classical and contemporary. These sources include works on the metaphysics of Islamic art, the history of Islamic art and architecture, calligraphy, sacred geometry, Sufism, as well as studies of modernity and the digital era. Among the principal references are the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, Titus Burckhardt, Muhammad Iqbal, Hazrat Inayat Khan, along with several contemporary academic studies such as those of Lu and Steinhardt

(2007) and Supriyanto (2023) (Nasr, 2002; Al-Faruqi, 1999; Burckhardt, 1976; Iqbal, 1930; Lu & Steinhardt, 2007).

The analytical procedure was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher identified and inventoried literature relevant to the main theme of the study. Second, the researcher carried out critical readings to discover core concepts, patterns of meaning, and relationships among ideas within the texts. Third, the conceptual data were classified into three principal domains of discussion: calligraphy, mosque architecture, and sacred geometry. Fourth, each domain was analyzed using a synthesis of *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani* approaches to generate an understanding that is not only descriptive but also interpretive and argumentative. Throughout this process, the data were analyzed through systematic stages that move understanding from the sensory level (*misakat*) toward the transcendental level (*syajarah mubarakah*) (Supriyanto, 2023).

Through this methodological design, the study seeks to maintain a balance between academic rigor and philosophical depth. The methods employed allow Islamic art to be read not merely as an object of art history but also as a field of knowledge that unites theology, aesthetics, spirituality, and rationality. Therefore, this methodological section serves as an important foundation for the subsequent discussion, particularly when the article examines how calligraphy, mosque architecture, and sacred geometry function as concrete manifestations of the aesthetics of worship within Islamic civilization (Nasr, 2002; Abdullah, 2006).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Calligraphy: When the Divine Word Takes Form

Why does calligraphy, rather than painting or sculpture, occupy the highest position in the ontology of Islamic art? The answer lies not merely in aesthetic preference but in the theological structure of Islam itself. In Islam, revelation is not understood as a historical event completed in the distant past, but as the eternal *Kalam Allah* that remains continuously present in the life of faith. Therefore, every stroke of a letter in calligraphy is not merely an artistic act but an effort to re-present the Divine Presence within the material world. Calligraphy becomes the visual form most worthy of honoring the Word of God because it works directly with the text of revelation rather than with figurative representations that may shift human attention from the Transcendent to created forms (Nasr, 2002; Al-Faruqi, 1986; Supriyanto, 2023).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a crucial theological reading for understanding the status of calligraphy in Islam. If the Christian tradition is characterized by the doctrine of incarnation, in which the Logos becomes flesh, then Islam is characterized by what Nasr calls *inlibration*: the Divine Word does not take bodily form but becomes text. Within this context, calligraphy cannot be regarded merely as decoration. It is the “visual body” of revelation, a medium through which the sacred assumes a visible form without losing its transcendent nature. Calligraphy, therefore, is a sacred art that preserves the direct relationship between beauty and revelation (Nasr, 2002).

From a historical perspective, the development of calligraphic styles demonstrates that this tradition is neither static nor frozen, but alive and creative. The early Kufic style, characterized by firmness, rigidity, and geometric precision, reflected an authoritative, stable, and monumental character, making it particularly suitable for early Qur’anic manuscripts and

architectural inscriptions. In later periods, styles such as Naskh, Thuluth, and Nastaliq emerged, displaying greater flexibility, fluidity, and expressiveness. This shift does not signify the weakening of tradition but rather the maturation of the Muslim artistic consciousness in translating *Tawhid* into diverse visual forms. As argued by Blair, Schimmel, and Al-Faruqi, the evolution of calligraphic styles reflects a combination of fidelity to established principles and creative courage in bringing letters to life as both aesthetic and spiritual experiences (Blair, 2006; Schimmel, 1984; Al-Faruqi, 1999).

At this point, the thought of Muhammad Iqbal becomes highly relevant. Iqbal rejected art that merely serves as passive imitation of nature. For him, genuine art is the creative expression of a strong, productive, and awakening Ego (*Khudi*). Within this framework, Islamic calligraphy does not arise from copying organic forms already available in nature but from creating new forms that transform letters into living visual energy. A calligrapher does not merely write; he disciplines the soul, cultivating precision, patience, rhythm, and inner vision. Thus, the practice of calligraphy may be understood as both spiritual training and the development of a creative personality, consistent with Iqbal's conception of humanity as a partner in God's creative activity (Iqbal, 1930; Supriyanto, 2023).

The metaphysical depth of calligraphy is most clearly visible in the concept of the *nuqtah* (point or dot). In the Islamic calligraphic tradition, the dot is not merely a technical instrument for determining the proportions of letters but also a cosmological symbol. Titus Burckhardt emphasizes that the dot serves as a visual analogy of *Tawhid*: from the dot all letters originate, just as all existence emanates from God. Islamic intellectual tradition even preserves the saying that the entirety of the Qur'an is contained within the *Basmalah*, the *Basmalah* within the letter *ba*, and the secret of the letter *ba* within the dot beneath it. This symbolism demonstrates that the formal structure of calligraphy is never purely technical; it contains a metaphysical horizon linking the smallest form to the greatest reality (Burckhardt, 1976; Nasr, 2002).

For this reason, Islamic calligraphy occupies a unique position as the meeting point of *bayani* and *irfani* epistemologies. From the *bayani* perspective, calligraphy carries a text that can be read, interpreted, and connected to the authority of revelation. From the *irfani* perspective, calligraphy transcends literal readability and evokes an experience of spiritual presence that cannot be fully articulated in words. Herein lies the fundamental distinction between calligraphy and ordinary typography. Typography prioritizes the transmission of information, whereas Islamic calligraphy seeks to unite textual meaning with spiritual resonance. Letters become not only vehicles of language but also spaces of contemplation (Schimmel, 1984; Nasr, 2002).

However, the aesthetic dimension of calligraphy is not without risk. Hazrat Inayat Khan reminds us that beauty is *barokah* (blessing), yet it can become a veil (*hijab*) if human beings stop at the charm of its outward form. This warning is especially important in the interpretation of Islamic calligraphy. An observer may be captivated by the symmetry of letters, the richness of colors, and the complexity of composition, yet fail to penetrate the spiritual meaning toward which these forms are intended to point. When this occurs, calligraphy loses its sacred function and is reduced to a mere decorative object. In other words, the success of Islamic calligraphy lies not only in its visual beauty but in its

capacity to direct consciousness from the letters to the Divine Word, and from the Divine Word to Allah (Inayat Khan, 1923; Nasr, 2002).

In this context, Islamic calligraphy may be understood as the clearest expression of what this article terms "silent theology." It does not preach through sound but teaches through line, rhythm, proportion, and composition. It connects the senses with the intellect, aesthetics with spirituality, and material form with transcendent meaning. Calligraphy teaches that within Islamic civilization, beauty is not an autonomous domain but part of the path of devotion. Therefore, calligraphy is not a peripheral art in Islam but the very heart of the aesthetics of worship itself: the place where the Divine Word takes form, and where that form ultimately points back to the One Who Speaks (Nasr, 2002; Al-Faruqi, 1986; Burckhardt, 1976).

3.2. Mosque Architecture: Space That Teaches

Mosque architecture in the Islamic tradition never stops at its utilitarian function as a gathering place or a location for ritual performance. It is designed as a pedagogical space that subtly shapes consciousness, directs the body, orders vision, and educates the soul to become sensitive to the transcendental dimension. For this reason, entering a mosque built with a high degree of aesthetic awareness often produces a distinctive phenomenological experience: the rhythm of breathing changes, sounds feel different, the body becomes calmer, and consciousness seems to be drawn away from the noise of the world toward a more silent presence. In the perspective of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, this experience is not an accidental psychological effect but the result of a design that intentionally seeks to harmonize the cosmos and the metacosmos within a space that can be spiritually experienced (Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

One of the most important concepts for understanding the ontology of mosque architecture is *al-khala' al-mamlu'*, or "filled emptiness." This term indicates that emptiness within a mosque is not the absence of meaning but rather an aesthetic and spiritual strategy for cultivating awareness of the Ever-Present. Unlike religious architectural traditions that fill space with figures, visual narratives, or representations of sacred personalities, mosque architecture tends to restrain itself from figurative density. This emptiness provides room for the heart to perceive the Divine Presence without the distraction of worldly images. In this sense, emptiness is not a poverty of form but a symbolic spaciousness that prepares the soul to receive transcendence (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Nasr, 2002).

This principle is closely related to Islamic aniconism as explained by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi. The rejection of naturalistic representation within the context of worship does not imply that Islam is opposed to beauty; rather, Islamic art is directed toward protecting human consciousness from the possibility of idolizing forms. Mosque architecture, therefore, is not intended to captivate people through particular visual objects but to guide vision toward more universal meanings. Beauty within the mosque functions not by drawing attention to itself but by directing attention beyond itself. Here, architecture becomes a means of *tazkiyah*, the purification of perception from attachment to forms toward awareness of the Infinite (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Nasr, 2002).

Each major element of mosque architecture contains a rich symbolic function. The central courtyard, or *sahn*, for example, is not merely an element of circulation and ventilation but a

transitional space that opens human beings to the sky, reminding them that worship always takes place beneath the horizon of divinity. The *mihrab* is not simply a niche marking the direction of prayer but a center of spiritual orientation that organizes the entire space toward a single direction. Meanwhile, the dome presents a cosmological metaphor of the heavens sheltering the earth, the macrocosm encompassing the microcosm. In this way, mosque architecture organizes spatial experience in accordance with the principle of *Tawhid*: from multiplicity toward unity, from dispersed movement toward a centered orientation (Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

Al-Faruqi also notes a highly intriguing aesthetic paradox within the Islamic “art of space”: the exterior of a building often appears simple, yet it contains an interior of extraordinary complexity, refinement, and depth. This paradox may be interpreted as a reflection of the ethic of *taqwa* in Islam. True beauty does not always need to be displayed on the surface; rather, it finds its highest expression in inner depth. Thus, the mosque teaches a visual ethic: what appears externally does not necessarily represent the deepest weight of a reality. Like the ideal believer, the mosque often maintains outward simplicity while nurturing spiritual richness within (Al-Faruqi, 1999).

From a *burhani* perspective, mosque architecture also demonstrates a high level of rationality and technical sophistication. One of the clearest examples is the use of *muqarnas*, a transitional element that enables the transformation from a square plan to a circular dome. Structurally, *muqarnas* functions to distribute the weight of the building effectively. Philosophically, however, it is more than a technical solution. Its layered and repetitive patterns create a visual illusion in which heavy materials such as stone and mortar seem to lose their coarse mass and become luminous, weightless structures. In symbolic interpretation, *muqarnas* represents the journey from the limited material world toward a higher spiritual realm, allowing construction technique and metaphysical symbolism to merge into a single form (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Nasr, 2002).

The experience of space within a mosque is also profoundly shaped by the management of light. In many traditional mosques, light is not allowed to enter harshly and directly but is filtered through windows, screens, and *qamriyyah*, producing an atmosphere that is gentle, rhythmic, and contemplative. Here, light is not merely a functional element for illumination but part of the symbolic language of Islamic architecture. It recalls the Qur’anic metaphor of Allah as the Light of the heavens and the earth, making the visual experience within the mosque a reminder of the connection between physical light and spiritual light. By employing optical principles with great care, mosque architecture transforms space into a silent lesson about order, purity, and Divine Presence (Nasr, 2002; Hisham, 2010).

At this point, it becomes clear that mosque architecture operates simultaneously within the domains of *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani*. It is *bayani* because the entire orientation of its space is structured according to principles derived from revelation, particularly the *qiblah*, purity, and aniconism. It is *irfani* because its spaces are designed to shape inner experiences: tranquility, devotion, a sense of smallness before the Almighty, and awareness of the Divine Presence. It is also *burhani* because its beauty and structural integrity emerge from the logic of structure, geometry, acoustics, and the manipulation of light, all of which can be rationally explained. Therefore, the mosque is not merely a religious building but a civilizational synthesis that demonstrates how Islam unites

text, intuition, and reason in the form of living space (Abdullah, 2006; Nasr, 2002).

The perspective of Hazrat Inayat Khan provides an important reminder that the grandeur of mosque architecture should not end as mere visual fascination. The beauty of a place of worship can indeed become *barokah* (blessing), bringing psychological tranquility and inner peace, but only if the observer does not become trapped in material admiration. A magnificent mosque can serve as a *wasilah* leading to Allah, yet it can also become a *hijab* if people stop at admiration for stone, ornamentation, domes, and light without moving beyond them toward the spiritual meanings they signify. Therefore, aesthetic experience within the mosque should be understood as an invitation to ascend, not as a reason to remain on the surface of beauty (Inayat Khan, 1923; Nasr, 2002).

Muhammad Iqbal adds a dynamic layer of interpretation to mosque architecture. For Iqbal, art should not produce a spiritual passivity that lulls people into complacency; rather, it must awaken the human Ego (*Khudi*) so that it may live creatively, courageously, and with dignity. Within this framework, the construction of a mosque is not a conservative act that merely repeats old forms but a creative act of humanity as a partner in God’s creation, beautifying the earth. A good mosque not only enables people to attain devotion in stillness but also provides ethical energy when they return to the social world. It becomes a space for forging consciousness: a place where human beings learn to balance contemplation and action, remembrance and struggle, silence and historical responsibility (Iqbal, 1930; Supriyanto, 2023).

Thus, mosque architecture may be understood as “silent theology” in spatial form. It does not speak through sermons but through proportion, light, direction, emptiness, rhythm, and structure. It teaches human beings by shaping both bodily and spiritual experience simultaneously. Within the space of the mosque, aesthetics is not an additional ornament to worship but part of spiritual pedagogy itself. Therefore, mosque architecture in the Islamic tradition should be understood not merely as a technical achievement but as a form of existential education that teaches humanity how to live harmoniously between earth and heaven, between matter and meaning, between the world and God (Nasr, 2002; Al-Faruqi, 1986; Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973).

3.3. Sacred Geometry: Mathematics as the Language of Divinity

Sacred geometry in Islamic art cannot be understood merely as a play of patterns or decorative sophistication. Behind the networks of lines, angles, and repeated forms that appear highly technical lies a worldview that connects mathematics, metaphysics, and spiritual experience into a unified whole. Therefore, when one gazes upon the geometric patterns on the walls of the Alhambra, the domes of Persia, or the *girih* panels found in various classical Islamic buildings, one is actually encountering a visual language that seeks to say something about a reality that transcends words. In this sense, Islamic geometry may be called mathematics that has been sacralized, or conversely, spirituality that has taken mathematical form (Critchlow, 1976; Nasr, 2002).

At its most fundamental level, Islamic geometry operates through order. Yet this order is not intended merely to please the eye but to reflect the cosmic principle that the universe was created in measure, proportion, and harmony. Geometry becomes important in Islamic art because it is capable of presenting an impersonal, non-figurative, and universal order. It does not depend upon

representations of living beings and thus avoids the danger of visual idolatry, while at the same time remaining capable of producing an intense and profound beauty. Consequently, geometry is not an impoverished substitute for figuration but an aesthetic choice that is actually more consistent with the principle of *Tawhid*, since it directs attention toward the order of the Creator rather than toward images of created beings (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Burckhardt, 1976).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr views sacred geometry as a form of visible theology. By this, he means that the mathematical patterns found in Islamic art are not merely the products of technical calculation but symbolic media that communicate metaphysical truths. When a pattern develops from a single center and spreads evenly in all directions, it may be interpreted as a visual representation of unity giving rise to multiplicity without losing its center. Here, the principle of *Tawhid* is translated into visual structure: from the One emerges the many, and the many remain bound together in harmony originating from the One. Therefore, sacred geometry is not neutral ornamentation but an intellectual expression of the Islamic vision of reality (Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

One of the most important expressions of this logic is the arabesque, a sprawling pattern that appears endless and perpetually expandable. In metaphysical interpretation, this endless quality is not an aesthetic accident but a visual effort to evoke a sense of Divine infinitude. Burckhardt and Al-Faruqi both emphasize that the modular, successive, and combinatorial character of Islamic art is a deliberate strategy for expressing the fact that ultimate reality can never be fully grasped by human sensory perception. Patterns that continue to unfold without finality compel the eye to move, follow the rhythm, and at the same time realize that there is no absolute endpoint other than Allah Himself. The arabesque, therefore, is a metaphysics of *al-Baqi* manifested in visual rhythm (Burckhardt, 1976; Al-Faruqi, 1999).

It is here that Islamic aniconism plays a highly productive role. The prohibition of figurative representation in the context of worship is often viewed from the outside as an artistic limitation, whereas it is precisely this theological pressure that generated extraordinary visual innovation within Islamic civilization. When the path toward figuration was closed, Muslim artists did not cease creating; instead, they developed a language of forms that was more abstract, more universal, and more capable of expressing transcendence. Sacred geometry emerged as a response to aesthetic needs while remaining faithful to *Tawhid*. It demonstrates that theological restrictions do not necessarily impoverish art; in many cases, such restrictions refine vision and encourage the search for deeper forms (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Burckhardt, 1976).

From the perspective of the history of science, Islamic geometry also demonstrates a remarkably high degree of rationality. One of the most frequently discussed examples is the discovery by Peter J. Lu and Paul J. Steinhardt concerning the use of quasi-crystalline patterns in medieval Islamic architecture. Through their study of *girih* panels in buildings throughout Iran and Central Asia, they showed that fifteenth-century Muslim artisans employed complex pattern systems possessing local symmetry without periodic repetition. This finding is significant not only because it predates modern mathematical formalization by centuries, but also because it demonstrates that Islamic art cannot be separated from the intellectual sophistication of its creators. In Islamic art, visual beauty stands upon an exceptionally rigorous mathematical foundation (Lu & Steinhardt, 2007; Bonner, 2017).

This discovery carries profound philosophical implications. It confirms that within the Islamic tradition, art and science are not two mutually alien domains. An artist of geometric patterns is not merely a decorative craftsman but also a visual intellectual who understands proportion, modularity, repetition, and formal transformation. In Nasr's terminology, this is a manifestation of *scientia sacra*, sacred knowledge that does not separate reason from spirituality. Mathematics in this context is not a cold secular instrument but a language of cosmic order through which one may witness Divine wisdom in creation. Thus, sacred geometry becomes concrete evidence that reason (*burhani*) and spiritual intuition (*irfani*) can meet within the same aesthetic form (Nasr, 1993; Lu & Steinhardt, 2007).

The relationship between geometry and harmony has long been recognized within the Islamic intellectual tradition. The Ikhwan al-Safa, for example, connected geometric proportion with musical proportion, viewing both as expressions of the same order. Just as music arranges sounds into audible harmony, geometry arranges forms into visible harmony. This analogy is important because it helps explain why Islamic geometric patterns often produce an impression that is rhythmic, tranquil, and yet profound. The eye not only sees forms but also inwardly "hears" the order behind them. Geometry becomes a kind of music frozen into lines and planes, and for this reason it can move the soul without requiring any narrative representation whatsoever (Ikhwan al-Safa, 1999; Nasr, 1993).

Within the thought of Muhammad Iqbal, sacred geometry acquires a more dynamic meaning. Iqbal rejected art that is merely passive, decorative, or spiritually paralyzing. Authentic art, in his view, must awaken, activate, and strengthen the human *Khudi* or creative Ego. Viewed from this perspective, Islamic geometry not only calms the soul but also challenges the intellect. The complexity of its patterns, the precision of its construction, and the discipline of its repetitions demand concentration, perseverance, and creativity from both creator and observer. A geometric artist is not mechanically repeating motifs; rather, he is participating in a creative act that seeks to translate the order of the universe into living visual forms. Here, art becomes both spiritual training and intellectual training for humanity as a partner in God's creation (Iqbal, 1930; Supriyanto, 2023).

Nevertheless, Hazrat Inayat Khan reminds us that the beauty of geometry, like all beauty in Islamic art, retains a spiritual ambiguity. It can become *barokah* if it leads the soul toward tranquility, contemplation, and closeness to Allah, but it can also become a *hijab* if one remains fixated upon its outward form alone. A person may admire an intricate pattern, photograph its beauty, memorize its mathematical structure, and yet fail to realize that all of it merely points toward the Supreme Orderer. Therefore, the spiritual value of sacred geometry lies not only in its form but also in the manner in which it is read. In a proper reading, these patterns are not the final object of attention but a path toward awareness of the source of order itself (Inayat Khan, 1923; Nasr, 2002).

It is at this point that sacred geometry reveals itself as a complete synthesis of the three epistemologies that form the framework of this article. It is *bayani* because it emerges within the theological horizon of Islam shaped by revelation, particularly the principles of *Tawhid* and aniconism. It is *irfani* because its visual harmony can generate inner experiences that transcend conceptual explanation. And it is *burhani* because its entire construction can be analyzed, explained, and verified through mathematical logic. Few artistic

forms are capable of accommodating these three dimensions simultaneously and in such balance. For this very reason, sacred geometry may be regarded as one of the most perfect expressions of Islamic civilization, a civilization that at its height did not separate beauty from truth, nor reason from transcendence (Nasr, 2002; Abdullah, 2006; Supriyanto, 2023).

When read through the framework of Zaki Naguib Mahmud as adapted in this article, the experience of sacred geometry also unfolds in stages. At the level of *misykat*, one is merely captivated by the beauty of the patterns. At the level of *misbah*, one begins to become curious about the mathematical logic that structures them. At the level of *zujajah*, one understands the symbolic and philosophical meanings of those structures. At the level of *kauskab durri*, one realizes the unity of mathematics, metaphysics, and spiritual experience. And at the level of *syajarah mubarakah*, geometry is no longer viewed merely as a visual object but becomes a medium of presence, a means through which the soul experiences Divine order more intimately. Thus, sacred geometry is not merely something to be seen but an epistemological path capable of guiding human consciousness from surface to depth (Supriyanto, 2023; Nasr, 2002).

With all these dimensions, sacred geometry in Islamic art must be understood as a language of divinity that employs lines, angles, and proportions to communicate truths too vast to be confined within words alone. It is evidence that Islamic art never stands within the realm of pure decoration. It always moves along the boundary between form and meaning, between reason and feeling, between beauty and worship. Therefore, to regard Islamic geometry merely as ornamentation is to reduce one of the greatest intellectual-spiritual achievements in the history of human civilization. Conversely, to read it as a manifestation of *Tawhid* opens the possibility of recognizing that even mathematics, within the Islamic tradition, can become a path toward the Most Beautiful (Critchlow, 1976; Nasr, 2002; Al-Faruqi, 1999).

3.4. Reading Islamic Art Through an Epistemological Framework: From *Misykat* to *Syajarah Mubarakah*

To understand Islamic art comprehensively, it is not enough merely to describe its forms or admire its visual beauty. A framework of interpretation is required that can explain how Islamic art functions as a sensory experience, an intellectual reflection, a metaphysical symbol, and even a spiritual path. It is within this context that the epistemological framework inspired by the metaphor of light in QS. An-Nur verse 35—and mapped by Supriyanto through five stages of consciousness: *misykat*, *misbah*, *zujajah*, *kauskab durri*, and *syajarah mubarakah*—becomes highly useful as a hermeneutical model. This framework allows Islamic art to be read not as a static object, but as a layered reality that gradually reveals its depths according to the intellectual and spiritual readiness of its observer (Supriyanto, 2023; Al-Ghazali, 1998).

At the first stage, namely *misykat* or the niche, Islamic art appears as a purely sensory experience. A person is captivated by the beauty of calligraphic letters, the orderliness of geometric patterns, or the vastness and serenity of mosque spaces, even though he or she may not yet understand the symbolic meanings contained within them. This stage is extremely important because it constitutes the most open and most human gateway into aesthetic experience. Not everyone enters art through philosophy; many enter through a simple sense of wonder. In this regard, the visual beauty of Islamic art functions as an initial attraction that awakens

attention and prepares the soul for a deeper journey of understanding (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Nasr, 2002).

Although it may seem elementary, *misykat* should not be underestimated. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes that sensory experience of beauty is a legitimate part of spiritual experience because material beauty can become a *tajalli*, a manifestation of Divine Beauty. At this stage, one has not yet arrived at conceptual understanding, but one has already been touched by something that transcends the utility of objects. In other words, the eyes perceive forms, yet the heart begins to sense that those forms are more than mere forms. Muhammad Iqbal likewise acknowledged that art must first attract the senses before it can awaken the soul; without this initial fascination, art loses its pedagogical potential (Nasr, 2002; Iqbal, 1930).

The second stage is *misbah* or the lamp, when sensory admiration develops into intellectual curiosity. At this level, the observer begins to ask: how is balance achieved in calligraphy, why does a mosque dome produce a particular acoustic experience, or how can geometric patterns become so intricate while remaining harmonious? Here, Islamic art is no longer merely enjoyed but begins to be investigated. The question of “how beautiful” changes into “how does this work?” This stage marks the entrance of the *burhani* dimension, namely demonstrative reason, into aesthetic experience (Supriyanto, 2023; Lu & Steinhardt, 2007).

At the *misbah* stage, Islamic art reveals itself as a meeting ground between art and science. Analysis of calligraphy uncovers theories of proportion; mosque architecture opens discussions about structure, light, and acoustics; while sacred geometry demonstrates astonishing mathematical complexity. The findings of Lu and Steinhardt regarding quasi-crystalline patterns in Islamic architecture provide strong evidence that Islamic art rests upon an exceptionally advanced intellectual foundation. Therefore, this stage is important for dismantling the prejudice that Islamic art operates solely within the realm of feeling or decoration. On the contrary, it demonstrates that beauty in the Islamic tradition often emerges from highly rigorous rational order (Lu & Steinhardt, 2007; Bonner, 2017).

The third stage is *zujajah* or glass, the level at which understanding moves from technical questions to philosophical ones. If at the *misbah* level one asks how a pattern or space is constructed, then at the *zujajah* level one begins to ask why those forms were chosen. Why is Islamic art so consistently committed to abstraction? Why does calligraphy occupy such a privileged position? Why does mosque space prefer filled emptiness over figurative density? At this level, Islamic art is read as an intellectual text that symbolically communicates the Islamic worldview (Supriyanto, 2023; Al-Faruqi, 1986).

The answers to these questions lead us to the principle of *Tawhid*. Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi asserts that Islamic art is the aesthetic implication of *Tawhid*; in other words, the forms of Islamic art cannot be separated from Islam’s understanding of the relationship between God, humanity, and nature. Since Allah is the Absolute and cannot be reduced to created forms, Islamic art avoids figurative tendencies that may lead people toward the idolatry of form. In their place emerge calligraphy, symbolic architecture, and sacred geometry as visual languages capable of expressing transcendence without imprisoning it within images. At the *zujajah* stage, the observer begins to realize that what stands before him is

not merely a beautiful work, but the embodiment of a coherent cosmology and theology (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Nasr, 2002).

The fourth stage is *kaukab durri*, the shining star, the point at which different modes of knowing no longer appear fragmented. At this level, *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani* meet within a single horizon of integrated understanding. Calligraphy can simultaneously be seen as revealed text, a discipline of proportion, and a spiritual experience. Mosque architecture can simultaneously be understood as a building, a cosmological symbol, and a space for the transformation of the soul. Sacred geometry appears simultaneously as a mathematical pattern, a language of metaphysics, and a contemplative exercise. At this stage, Islamic art begins to appear as a civilizational project that unites beauty, truth, and devotion within an inseparable framework (Nasr, 2002; Abdullah, 2006).

The *kaukab durri* stage is especially important because it is here that one transcends the modern dichotomies that often separate art from science, spirituality from rationality, and religion from aesthetic experience. From the integral Islamic perspective, such separations are artificial. If the source of truth is one, then authentic forms of knowledge must ultimately illuminate one another rather than negate one another. Islamic art becomes one of the clearest media through which this integration can be witnessed, for it combines revelation, intuition, and reason in concrete forms. In Iqbal's language, at this stage art is no longer understood merely as a beautiful object but as a creative energy that shapes the way human beings perceive and live in the world (Iqbal, 1930; Al-Faruqi, 1986).

The fifth stage is *syajarah mubarakah*, the blessed tree, the highest level at which art is no longer experienced primarily as an object of knowledge but as a medium of spiritual presence. This is the most difficult stage to explain academically because what occurs is no longer merely a process of understanding but of experiencing. At this point, one no longer sees calligraphy simply as beautiful letters or geometry as intricate arrangements of patterns, but senses that through these forms there is a presence of meaning that transcends representation. Form does not disappear, but it becomes transparent; it no longer conceals but reveals. This is what enables Islamic art, at its highest level, to become a path of contemplation (Nasr, 2002; Schimmel, 1975).

However, the *syajarah mubarakah* stage is not an emotional leap that occurs spontaneously. It is the culmination of a journey that passes through the senses, reason, and symbolic reflection step by step. Without *misykat*, there is no initial fascination; without *misbah*, there is no intellectual depth; without *zujajah*, there is no philosophical awareness; without *kaukab durri*, there is no integration of knowledge. Therefore, the spiritual experience at this highest stage should not be understood as anti-intellectual. On the contrary, it is the fruit of intellectual maturation and the purification of perception progressing together. Hazrat Inayat Khan reminds us that beauty becomes *barokah* only when human beings do not become trapped in its outward forms but use it as a *wasilah* toward Allah (Inayat Khan, 1923; Nasr, 2002).

Through this framework, Islamic art may be understood as a complete epistemological journey. It begins with the most common sensory experience, develops into rational inquiry, is deepened through symbolic interpretation, integrated into a comprehensive vision of knowledge, and ultimately may culminate in a transformative spiritual presence. This framework also helps

modern readers avoid two extremes: a formalistic reduction that sees only ornamentation, or a mystical romanticism that neglects intellectual labor. Islamic art requires both: the rigor of reason and the refinement of the soul. This is why it is particularly appropriate to read it through the synthesis of *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani* that forms the foundation of this article (Supriyanto, 2023; Abdullah, 2006; Nasr, 2002).

Ultimately, reading Islamic art from *misykat* to *syajarah mubarakah* means acknowledging that this art is not a flat reality. It is layered, hierarchical, and continually unfolds its meanings according to the quality of attention given to it. The shallower the attention, the shallower the art appears. Yet the more patient and profound the reading, the more evident it becomes that calligraphy, architecture, and geometry in the Islamic tradition are not merely cultural expressions but subtle forms of spiritual pedagogy. Islamic art does not merely seek to be seen; it seeks to transform the way one sees. And when that happens, art ceases to remain merely an object of beauty and becomes a light that guides consciousness toward the Most Beautiful (Al-Ghazali, 1998; Nasr, 2002; Supriyanto, 2023).

3.5. Islamic Art and the Digital Era: An Increasingly Urgent Relevance

a The digital era presents a sharp paradox: humanity lives in a condition of *hyperconnectivity*, yet at the same time experiences an increasingly profound spiritual alienation. Byung-Chul Han describes this situation as the *burnout society*, a society exhausted by an overflow of stimuli, the acceleration of life, and the loss of spaces for contemplation. Within such a landscape, Islamic art becomes relevant not as a romanticization of the past but as an epistemological and spiritual proposition for restoring the depth of human experience.

Islamic art operates according to a logic that runs counter to the fast-paced nature of digital culture. Calligraphy demands slow and attentive presence; mosque architecture offers spaces that teach silence, verticality, and order; while sacred geometry trains the eye and the intellect to enter into a harmony that cannot be exhausted by a fleeting glance. Together, these forms embody a discipline of perception that is urgently needed by modern individuals accustomed to a culture of scrolling, fragmentation, and distraction.

In this context, Islamic art can function as an antithesis to the shallowness of digital logic. If digital culture tends to fragment attention, Islamic art gathers attention; if digital spaces encourage rapid consumption, Islamic art demands slowing down; and if social media often amplifies the ego, profound aesthetic experiences can instead generate awe, humility, and a sense of connection with a reality greater than oneself. It is here that Islamic art emerges as a spiritual oasis, offering pause, orientation, and inner restoration.

However, this relevance is accompanied by a significant risk: desacralization. Within digital culture, calligraphic motifs and Islamic geometric patterns can easily be reduced to visual commodities, social media decorations, or lifestyle ornaments devoid of any understanding of their theological and philosophical meanings. The forms remain, but their spirit is drained away. Hazrat Inayat Khan's warning becomes especially important here: beauty becomes *barokah* only when it functions as a *wasilah* leading to Allah, not as a new object of attachment that imprisons the soul on the surface of appearances.

Therefore, the primary challenge is not merely preserving the forms of Islamic art within digital spaces but safeguarding the depth of their meanings. Islamic aesthetic education must be capable of guiding readers, students, and society from sensory admiration toward philosophical and spiritual awareness, as illustrated in the journey from *misykat* to *syajarah mubarakah*. An integrative-interconnective approach becomes essential so that Islamic art is not understood as peripheral decoration but as a medium of knowledge that unites text, intuition, and reason.

On the other hand, the digital era also opens new creative possibilities. Islamic geometry possesses a structural affinity with *parametric design*, *generative art*, and contemporary computational design practices, making this tradition not only spiritually relevant but also technically productive. Findings concerning quasi-crystalline patterns in Islamic architecture demonstrate that the aesthetic heritage of Islam possesses immense potential to continue inspiring contemporary visual innovation without losing its metaphysical roots.

Thus, Islamic art in the digital era should not be positioned as a museum artifact preserved through nostalgia. It should instead be understood as a living civilizational resource: capable of correcting the acceleration of modernity, reorganizing sensory experience, and reopening the possibility of a more complete relationship between humanity, beauty, and God. When presented with adequate epistemological and spiritual awareness, Islamic art may become one of the most important responses to the spiritual barrenness of contemporary digital humanity.

4. Conclusion

This article affirms that Islamic art is not merely an aesthetic category or a cultural product but an integrative visual methodology rooted in *Tawhid* and operating through the synthesis of *bayani*, *irfani*, and *burhani*. Calligraphy, mosque architecture, and sacred geometry are not simply forms of beauty; they are the ways in which Islamic civilization translates theological principles into existential experiences that can be seen, felt, contemplated, and lived.

Calligraphy demonstrates how the Divine Word takes visual form without losing its sacredness; mosque architecture shows that space can be designed as spiritual pedagogy; and sacred geometry proves that mathematics, symbolism, and contemplation can converge within a single language of divinity. All three reject the reduction of art into passive entertainment or empty decoration because Islamic art is fundamentally directed toward awakening human consciousness of the Oneness of Allah and the order of the universe.

Through the epistemological framework extending from *misykat* to *syajarah mubarakah*, this article also demonstrates that Islamic art should be understood as a graduated journey of consciousness. Sensory experience is merely the point of entry; from there, Islamic art invites humanity to move toward rational understanding, symbolic interpretation, the integration of knowledge, and ultimately the possibility of transformative spiritual presence. Thus, Islamic art never stops at “what appears,” but always points toward “that which transcends appearance.”

Within the context of the digital era, the relevance of Islamic art becomes even greater. As modern human beings live within a culture that is fast, shallow, fragmented, and exhausting, Islamic art offers the slowing down, depth, order, and transcendental

orientation that are urgently needed. It can function as a spiritual oasis, provided that it is not reduced to visual simulation devoid of spirit and aesthetic education.

Therefore, the most important implication of this study is the necessity of rebuilding a serious, integrative, and living engagement with Islamic art. Islamic art must be taught, researched, and developed not merely as an artistic heritage but as part of the reconstruction of sacred knowledge capable of bridging beauty, wisdom, and devotion. In this sense, Islamic art remains a light: not merely to be admired, but to guide humanity back to the Most Beautiful.

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