

## THE QUALITIES AND MEANINGS OF THE ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY PLACEMENT IN AL-AZEM PALACE

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### ABSTRACT

*While Islamic calligraphy is one of the essential and aesthetical elements to establish Islamic architectural design, it is significant to recognize the beautiful scripts' placement and understand their diverging messages and visual qualities. The objective of this research is to determine the visual qualities and principal meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement of the building's interior spaces. The qualitative analysis was conducted on the selected case study, Al-Azem, Syria, followed by interviews with three master calligraphers to verify the visual attributes and the Islamic calligraphy placement in the palace. The analysis revealed that inscription position, contents, compositional category, materials used, and calligraphy patterns are essential attributes in calligraphy placement. The research also revealed different cursive styles, namely Thuluth, Nastalik, and Diwani, which are prevalent in the interior spaces of Al-Azem palace. Also, greatly emphasize the usage of the Thuluth style in many areas suggesting the aesthetical significance of the script. The presence of the calligraphy works gives aesthetics and meaning to the palace interior that fulfills the inhabitants' visual and spiritual needs. The findings of the research show the placement of the calligraphy was not mere ornamentation done afterthought but had become part of interior components with deep meaning behind the inscriptions. The placement of Islamic calligraphy has had a profound effect on Muslim communities' architecture, whether there be royal, religious, or institutional buildings. It is, therefore, essential that the design of these buildings meet the needs of the spiritual meanings apart from the practical functions. Therefore, the findings of this study would be a significant reference that benefits many groups of people in Muslim communities, including local authorities, designers, and calligraphers. Furthermore, the principles and meanings of calligraphy placement, especially for the interior spaces, could be used to develop a guideline for applying calligraphy in Islamic buildings. Expansion of investigation is necessary to include other Ottoman palaces or Islamic buildings as case studies and through rigorous qualitative case studies afford researchers opportunities to explore the phenomenon in the context using various data sources leading to more comprehensive research findings.*

Keywords: Islamic calligraphy, Al-Azem palace, calligraphy placement, cursive scripts.

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### INTRODUCTION

Calligraphy is the primary art form of Arabic letters that decorate items ranging from bowls to buildings (Othman et al., 2015). Islamic calligraphy is strongly presented in many Islamic buildings, for example, mosques, palaces, institutional buildings, and dwellings. Palace is among the prominent Islamic architecture types, showcasing the art of calligraphic inscription in the interior and exterior spaces. Islamic architecture refers to buildings that belong to Muslims and represents their identity and symbols. Islamic architecture can include buildings used by Muslims for religious purposes or secular buildings built in a predominately Islamic region (Saoud, 2002; Yahya & Embi, 2013). In Islamic buildings, the presence of calligraphy is not only for entertainment or aesthetic purpose but also an essential part of the buildings and their architectural components. Most researchers (e.g. Saberi, 2016; Ahmad et al., 2018; Alashari et al., 2020) have stated calligraphy uses in the various Islamic buildings and with a comprehensive explanation of styles of scripts. However, these researchers do not emphasise the principles and meanings of calligraphy placement in the built environment, especially the interior fabrics of the building. Moreover, there are different styles of Islamic calligraphy in general, which concerns the proper selection of calligraphy scripts for application in public buildings. In general, calligraphy can be mainly categorized into four major styles: regular script, angular script, cursive script, and official script. The varieties of scripts lead to the wide open for selection, although they are in different categories. Therefore, there was little consideration of how to suit the specific building's new technology, building materials, and ornamentation patterns. Instead, the application of the calligraphy should be adjusted and molded to fit the architectural conventions.

Furthermore, the calligraphy placement should be rooted in the Muslim communities' religious principles and social values. Thus, the selection of the inscriptions, whether of Islamic or Arabic calligraphy, should follow the practical placement directions. But unfortunately, there is no specific authorized guideline for the related agencies and professionals on how to apply the calligraphy in the buildings and what should be practiced for ease of implementation. While Islamic calligraphy is one of the essential elements to establishing Islamic architectural design, it is significant to recognize the principles of placement of scripts and to understand their visual attributes and diverge messages with implicit and explicit meanings. As such, the objective of this research is to determine the visual attributes and principal meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement, especially in the building's interior spaces.

### FOCUSES AND TRENDS OF STUDIES ON ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY

The overall literature dealing with Arabic or Islamic calligraphy is generally abundant. However, the current body of published materials on calligraphy focuses on a specific subject area, including different definitions, roles, trends and practices, styles of scripts, and applications. Nevertheless, several good established studies cover Islamic calligraphy in general purposes and contexts (Ahuja & Loeb, 1995; Alashari et al., 2020; Blair, 2006; George, 2017; Hamzah & Bayomi, 2020; Ahamed Zubair, 2022). Also,

several studies have covered Islamic calligraphy in terms of styles and scripts, particularly in religious buildings such as mosques (Alashari et al., 2020). Furthermore, other authors covered some parts of their study by investigating how a font can respect Islamic calligraphy's essential role as a recitation of the visual expansion of divine words (Burckhardt, 2009; Saberi, 2016).

Abd. Rahman Hamzah (2012) studied Islamic calligraphy's history and origin, including Arabic scripts during the Abbasid era. The study mentions the styles of scripts and the history of calligraphy. However, the study does not focus on the placement of calligraphy scripts. Meanwhile, Nor Azlin and Ishak (2015) have stated through their research about style categorizations of Islamic calligraphy in modern paintings, focusing on the styles of scripts and the history of calligraphy. Likewise, Saberi (2016) focuses on ornamental calligraphy features and decorative Arabic scripts in a single mosque using the soft-computing hybrid algorithm method for evaluation. Seyedi et al. (2017) researched the Islamic calligraphy painting technique in Malaysia and Iran with a visual analysis approach. Her study closely looked at the significant works in each country, examining elements of form, context, content, and Islamic unity. Adam et al. (2018) conducted their research with an emphasis on Arabic scripts and Letter-based classification in ancient Arabic manuscripts using segmented letters from Arabic manuscripts to recognize the style of the calligraphy. Utaberta et al. (2012), in their study on the traditional mosque ornamentation in Malaysia, gave focus on the analyses of typology and classification of ornaments as a channel to the community towards an understanding of the identity.

In short, Arabic, or Islamic calligraphy is highly considered in Islamic objects, especially in ornamental inscriptions. However, based on the literature reviews, the related studies dealing with Islamic calligraphy placement in the interior fabrics of public buildings still need to be improved. Therefore, further studies in this area are vital to further expanding the Islamic calligraphy and architecture field.

### ATTRIBUTES AND MEANINGS OF CALLIGRAPHY IN ISLAMIC ART

There is the distinctiveness of visual language in the Islamic built environment, in which the emphasis is on avoiding naturalistic realism in all techniques and representations. Many religious buildings, for example, are adorned with flourishes of Arabic calligraphy, delicate tilework, and layers of ornamental and intricate floral decorations. This might be partially attributed to the fact that the term calligraphy is associated with beautiful writing. As such, Islamic calligraphy is a rich decoration and religious element even though it does not relate to any figurative art. Islamic content establishes the building character with a distinctive character (Utaberta et al., 2012). The title Islamic is added to the word calligraphy due to the tremendous development of calligraphy by Muslims and the value the Muslim religion gave calligraphy in encrypting the Qur'an. Even though Islamic calligraphy is a religious art of writing, it is not limited to strictly religious subjects, objects, or spaces (Alashari et al., 2020).

In Islamic art, Arabic calligraphy is one of the primary elements that decorate items ranging from utilitarian objects to monuments with comprehensive styles of scripts. Alyafeai et al. (2021) refer to calligraphy as the tongue of the hand, the ambassador of minds, the brain, and the weapon of knowledge. Meanwhile, Behrens-Abouseif (2018) posits that calligraphy represents a combination of charges and literal forms indicating the spoken words that refer to what is in the soul. According to Burckhardt (2009), Islamic calligraphy is the essential art created by several civilizations, and it is not a form of entertainment or purely aesthetics. In addition, Islamic calligraphy is a wide-ranging art that represents various dimensions such as style and scripts, design elements, principles, and attributes (Alashari et al., 2020). Baydoun and Kamarudin (2021) posit that the overall calligraphy style used in the decoration of the interior of dwelling spaces is the Thuluth calligraphy, which is considered as one of the soft types of calligraphy. Meanwhile, the Kufic calligraphy, which is a solid type of calligraphy, is the main inscription for interior and exterior decoration.

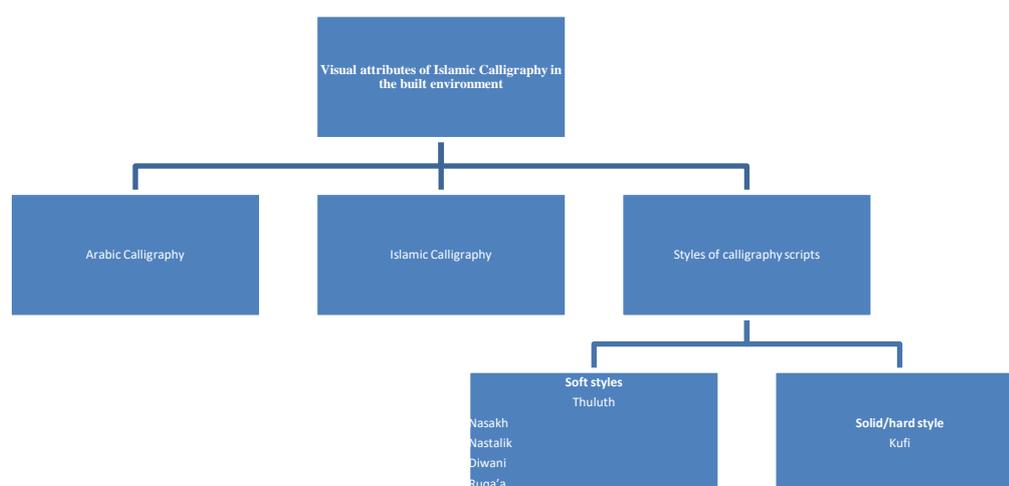


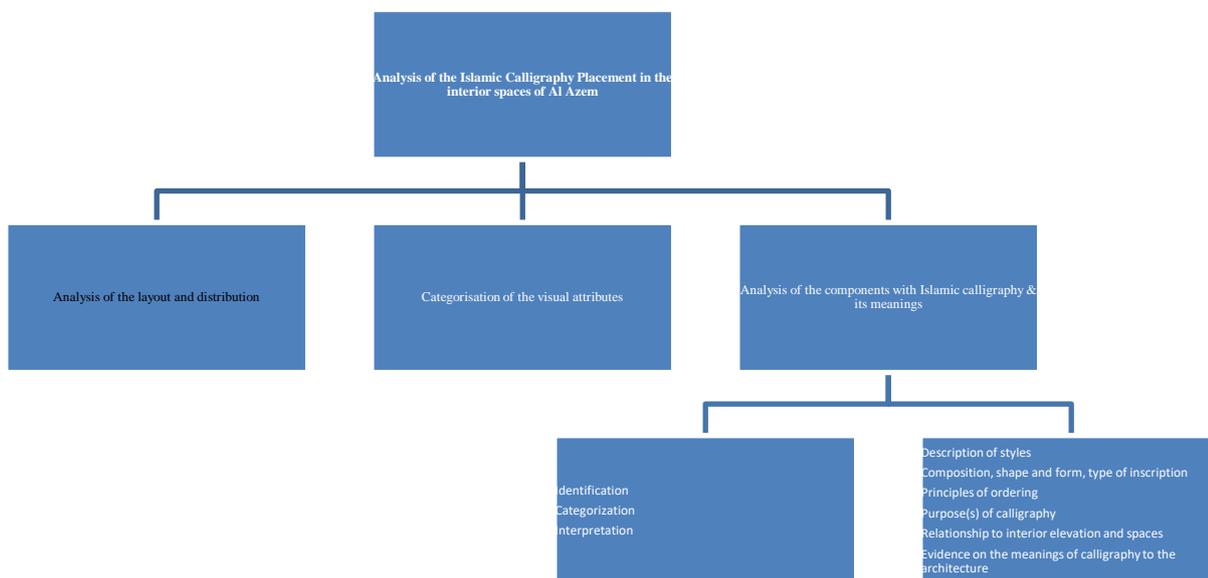
Figure 1: Major attributes of calligraphy in the built environment

The use of calligraphy in monumental inscriptions manifested the most distinctive features of Islamic architecture. Islamic art gave crucial religious significance to applying calligraphy in architecture. Besides religious buildings like mosques, Islamic calligraphy is inscribed on public, institutional, residential, and commercial buildings to reflect traditions and culture. Alashari (2022) discovered that Arabic calligraphy in the covering of the Kaaba, which is in a linear composition, is governed by characteristics, methods, systems, elements, and technical design foundations. Thuluth letters give aesthetic logic to the linear arrangement because of their regularity and consistency according to the characteristics and techniques of the linear composition. Thus, the elements and foundations of artistic design in calligraphy give a sense of beauty. Osama and Rossana (2020) posit that geometry, calligraphy, and arabesque are the widespread forms of creative expression in the Islamic world, and calligraphy is probably the most important for Arabs. The importance of calligraphy is linked to the past, its developments in space and time, and its future potential.

In short, the renderings of Arabic calligraphy in the Islamic built forms are more than just a tool for communication. Depiction of calligraphy in the built environment is practiced in many styles of expression and mainly in the Arabic language. Therefore, understanding the attributes and meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement is vital because applying the calligraphic scripts is one of the essential elements to establishing Islamic architectural design for the building’s interior and exterior spaces.

**METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS AND THE SELECTED CASE STUDY**

This research used a qualitative data collection and analysis method because of the importance of getting reliable data from the selected case study. The case study is documented and analysed to achieve the objective of this study. Furthermore, this exploratory research is relevant that facilitates the exploration of phenomena within their context. Moreover, this study involved a collection of large samples for qualitative analysis. In this study, the researcher applied the single case study method to determine the visual attributes and principal meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement in the building’s interior spaces. Thus, it is prudent to conduct holistic single case study research to understand better the Islamic calligraphy placement in the selected building, particularly in its interior spaces. First, the researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of the chosen case study, Al-Azem, in Syria. Within the context of this study, the visual analysis of the photographic documents that served as determinative evidence began with a careful inventory of the selected calligraphy samples found in the palace museum. The first significant work during the analysis stage involved reviewing the documents to identify the relevant data to be investigated pertaining to the visual attributes and meanings of calligraphy placement. Since the primary data collection method is through an analytical review of a case study, the selected palace was appropriate for the visual descriptive and interpretive analysis. Al-Azem was equipped with relevant Islamic calligraphy to analyze and determine the essential attributes, including inscription position and contents, compositional category, materials used, and calligraphy styles and patterns in calligraphy placement. In addition, a pertinent and significant collection of differing components found in the building were relevant for visual analysis.



**Figure 2: A flow diagramme of the analysis**

Next, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the selected three master calligraphers to verify the visual attributes and the Islamic calligraphy placement in the palace. The interview also provided further data to achieve the research objective, which is to determine the visual attributes and principal meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement, especially in the building’s interior spaces. The interview technique was considered an operational assessment since it permits the calligraphers to interpret their experiences and elicit their views according to the interview guide. Although traditional face-to-face interviews remain prominent, the research opted for innovative communication technologies like Google-meet for the online interview. This approach to data collection has facilitated another academic way of communication. Using this online interview can replace the

physical face-to-face meeting, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic, whereby the researcher had to follow the rules of social distancing and restrictions imposed by the Malaysian government.

Al-Azem palace is a relevant case study that showcases a wealth of Arabic calligraphy decoration on the many architectural elements. One of the dominant decorations is an Islamic design of 'Ajami work. The palace was built in the year 1740 in Hamah, Syria. It was named after its patron, As'ad Basha al-Azem, who was the Ottoman governor of the region and resided there until being transferred to Damascus. At the beginning of the 17th century, the ancient town of Hamah was a strategic location for the sultan Asaad Basha Al-Azem to build his palace and take over his nation's rule (Burns, 2005). As a result, interior architecture was significantly developed, especially in public buildings. While Hamah palace is essential in structure, its beauty lies in its interior, internal stylish, exclusive gardens, and Arabic calligraphy for decoration. The palace remains intact today with a few restorations and was turned into a museum in 1956 and became a tourist destination worldwide. The researchers chose these case studies due to the importance, heritage value, richness of Islamic calligraphy, and the beauty of using Islamic calligraphy in those buildings.



Figure 3: An entrance view of Al-Azem

#### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The objective of this research is to determine the visual attributes and principal meanings of Islamic calligraphy placement in the building's interior spaces of Al-Azem palace in Syria. The palace was selected as the case study because it is one of the famous Syrian palaces and the beauty of the palace concentrates more in its halls' interiors with a wealth of decorative calligraphy. Al-Azem consists of a double volume with Rawaq or an entrance, central to the public and semi-public rooms (Figure 4). These include east (طرز) Tazar and west Tazar (طرز), north Tazar (طرز), east Shurfa (شرفة), west Shurfa, and north Shurfa (شرفة) as shown in Figure 2. The word Tazar (طرز) refers to rooms one step higher than the entrance. The rooms are similar in characters in terms of wall arrangement and design, with few differences in the calligraphy contents and the ceiling layout and design. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, each Tazar (طرز) has three sides of the walls: middle, right, and left. Each wall has three windows, while the middle wall has two windows and one door in the middle. The central door connects the Tazar (طرز) to the middle room of the east and west wing. The north Tazar is another room that also exhibits a wealth of calligraphy, and this room is located next to north Shurfa. The east Shurfa and west Shurfa are small areas connected to the east Tazar and west Tazar, respectively.



Figure 4: Entrances and accessibility to the rooms  
Source: (Zen, 2010)



Figure 5: East Tazar (طزر) and West Tazar (طزر) with three sides of interior walls

### Visual Attributes and Placement of Islamic Calligraphy in the Interior Spaces

Table 1 shows the selected halls/rooms in Al-Azem palace and their respective interior spaces with the placement of Arabic calligraphy. The analysis focuses on the selected interior spaces because Arabic calligraphy predominated in these areas. In these wings, the calligraphy placement becomes one of the principal elements of the palace's interior decoration. The division of the wings is based on the names of the halls as they exist. The table reveals the halls and their respective names with some description of their functions and contents of calligraphy found in the interior spaces.

Table 1: The placement of calligraphy at the halls of Al-Azem

Hall name	Function	Photo	Placement of calligraphy
NORTH TAZAR (طزر)	The primary public selamlik area where the sultan used to host his guests		Depiction of Hadith (حديث) and descriptive poetry in Thuluth scripts in 3D low relief technique exists at the decorative panel above the window (DPW) at the main central hall.
NORTH SHURFA (شرفة)	The last part of the north side, where the walls got the high and low windows for exterior views		The calligraphy appears on the decorative panel on top of windows and the upper cornice directly under the ceiling. Depiction of religious phrases in Nastalik scripts in 3D low-relief technique
EAST TAZAR (طزر)	The public area where the sultan used to host his guests		The calligraphy is prevalent at the decorative panel above the doors and windows and the upper and lower cornice of the wall, which is directly under the ceiling of repeated squares type. Depiction of religious poetry about the prophet in Nastalik scripts in 3D low-relief technique
EAST ROOM	Semi-public Middle area between east Tazar (طزر) and east Shurfa (شرفة)		The calligraphy is found at the decorative panel above the doors and windows and the upper and lower cornice of the wall, which is directly under the ceiling of repeated squares type. Depiction of Duaa (دعاء), poetry about Allah, and descriptive poetry about the sultan in Nastalik scripts were pleasantly made in the 3D low-relief technique of 'Ajami.
EAST SHURFA (شرفة)	Male area -The last part of the east side, where the walls got the high and low windows for exterior views		The calligraphy is found on the ceiling, the decorative panel above the window, and the upper cornice of the wall. Depiction of Duaa (دعاء), religious poetry, Basmalah, and Hadith in Thuluth, Nastalik ad Diwani scripts in the 3D low-relief technique of 'Ajami become the theme.

Hall name	Function	Photo	Placement of calligraphy
WEST TAZAR (طزر)	The public area where the sultan used to host his guests		The calligraphy is prevalent at the decorative panel above the windows and the upper and lower cornice of the three sides wall. Depiction of Duaa (دعاء) and poetry in Nastalik and Thuluth scripts in the 3D low-relief technique of 'Ajami become the theme.
WEST ROOM	The semi-public middle area between west Tazar (طزر) and west Shurfa (شرفة)		The calligraphy is seen on the decorative panel above the windows and doors and the upper and lower cornice of the three sides wall. Depiction of religious poetry about the prophet in Nastalik and Thuluth scripts in the 3D low-relief technique of 'Ajami becomes the theme.
WEST SHURFA (شرفة)	Haramlik (حرمك)- The last part of the west side and the walls with high and low windows are common here.		The calligraphy is seen on the ceiling, decorative panels above windows, and the upper cornice of the walls. Depiction of Quranic verses, Duaa (دعاء), Zikir (ذكر), Hadith, and Basmalah in Thuluth and Nastalik scripts in the 3D low-relief technique of 'Ajami

The case study analysis reveals that inscription position, forms and technique, contents, compositional category, materials used, and calligraphy patterns are essential attributes in calligraphy placement. The results suggest that Islamic calligraphy represents the richness and creativity of Muslim calligraphers and the exclusive signature of their identity as reflected in the Al-Azem palace. Alashari et al. (2020b) posit that establishing Islamic calligraphy follows two criteria. First, depicting a full range of letters, sizes, and shapes allows compositional flexibility. Second, the demonstration of an artistic tradition that relies heavily on calligraphy, geometrical and floral patterns due to the prohibition of figurative art in Islam.

The analysis also reveals different cursive styles, namely Thuluth, Nastalik, and Diwani, which are mainly found in the public spaces of Al-Azem, and the great emphasis on the usage of Thuluth style in many areas suggests the aesthetical significance of the script. In contrast to the angular script, the cursive and curvy lines in the Nasakh and Thuluth calligraphy give uniqueness and beauty to the script (Mansour, 2011). Thuluth script is uniquely characterized by its legibility, spacing, and diacritical signs, making it beautiful. The research finding suggests that the aesthetic of the large and soft Thuluth has been used for inscribing decorations in Al-Azem for grand architectural settings, especially in the public interior spaces of the palace.

### The Meaning of Calligraphy Placement in the Palace Interiors

The analysis of the case study also reveals that the placement of Islamic calligraphy in the decorations of Al-Azem conveys Islamic values while adding aesthetic value. As found in the palace museum, the contents of calligraphy can be classified as Quranic verses, Hadith (حديث), Duaa (دعاء), Zikir (ذكر), religious poetry, descriptive poetry, and symbol as shown in Table 2. Calligraphy inscriptions of Quranic verses are placed at the top of the room and mostly found on the ceilings, while most works have legible inscriptions. This Arabic calligraphy is principally present as a medium to transmit the words of Allah, albeit in a decorative form to bring an aesthetic appeal. However, the intentional focus is on the words and phrases inspired by the Quran.

**Table 2: The categories of contents of calligraphy components found in the palace interiors**

No	Category of Contents	Description of the placement	Interior components
1.	Quranic Verses	All verses will be at the top of the room, which is at the ceiling cornice and sometimes inside the Ceiling (C) design.	Ceilings
2.	Hadith (حديث)	Usually, Hadith (حديث) and quotes are always under the Quran, which is the highest part of the wall and is primarily depicted on the upper border of the cornice.	The decorative panel above the windows
3.	Zikir (ذكر)	Allah's name, glorifying Allah	Ceiling
4.	Duaa (دعاء) poetry to Allah	Poems will be on the wall most of the time and under the Cornice of the Hadith (حديث)	Upper and lower cornices, the decorative panel above windows

No	Category of Contents	Description of the placement	Interior components
5.	Religious poetry about the prophet	It will be lower than the poetry about Allah, so it can be at the lower level where it describes the prophet Muhammad PBUH.	Upper and lower cornices, the decorative panel above windows and doors
6.	Descriptive poetry	Poetry about owner, documentary, meditation, and this type of calligraphy is usually placed at the lowest level, which is still high to read and preserved in value, as well as closer to eye level.	The decorative panel above windows and doors
7.	Symbol	One word that refers to the blessing of the place. Names of people are added on many levels, but when the names are holy, most names will appear in the design of the highest part of the Ceiling (C).	Ceiling

In some cases of decoration, the placement of calligraphy of Hadith (حديث) becomes dominant in the interior decoration of Al-Azem. Usually, calligraphy of Hadith (حديث) and Islamic quotes are always under those with the Quranic verses, which is always at the highest part of the space. The inscriptions of Hadith are primarily seen on the upper part of the interior walls, including the upper and lower cornice, and above doors and windows. For example, at the North Tazar (طرز), plenty of Hadith calligraphy is found, as shown in Figure 6. This room is the primary public selamlik area where the sultan used to host his guests. Since the North Tazar is a particular room, the placement of Arabic calligraphy becomes exclusive, and the inscriptions are made from quality material. The engraving of the inscription on marble varies because it was rooted in the mamluk time and was developed during the Ottoman time. Later, the Syrian artisans made the marble engraving flourish with a distinctive style. The calligraphy of the rectangular marble engraving in the room is mainly about Hadith (حديث) and sacred religious content. These inscriptions found on the wall are either applied without colour or partially covered with golden paint.



Figure 6: Marble engraved panels with calligraphy on the right-side wall of the North Tazar (طرز) (Ziad, 2019)



Figure 7: Basmalah calligraphy and Hadith (حديث) of the Prophet on a marble panel (Ziad, 2019)

The role of calligraphy as a decorative element at the North Tazar (طزر) is essential, and emphasis is given more to the content of the inscription than the beautification. As shown in Figure 7, the calligraphy content of rectangular panels is Basmalah and Hadith (حديث) of the prophet Muhammad saying in Thuluth scripts, which means “actions are judged by intentions (niyyah)” [Bukhari & Muslim]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

The horizontal marble panels are placed above windows in a continuous arrangement on a wall. The purpose of the religious calligraphy content is for the remembrance of Allah and fearing him in actions and thinking. The contrasting colour scheme in the panels makes the calligraphy scripts stand out.



Figure 8: “Worship God as if you see him” and “If you don't see Him, He sees you” (Ziad, 2019)

Viewers can distinguish calligraphy inscriptions of poetry, including religious poetry about the prophet and Duaa for the sultan, from other groups of calligraphy contents. Poetry becomes the recurrent theme for most spaces and can be found at the upper and lower cornices and decorative panels above windows and doors. The calligraphy of poetry is about Allah, the prophet Muhammad PBUH, the palace's owner, documentary, and meditation. The calligraphy of poetry about Duaa (دعاء) to Allah is placed at the highest level as compared to the other calligraphies. The Arabic calligraphy script of Allah is the most highly regarded; hence the calligraphy poetry that contains this script usually appears at the upper part of the wall, cornices, and above doors and windows. In comparison, the calligraphy of religious poetry about the prophet Muhammad PBUH is found at the lower level.

In Al-Azem, an example of religious poetry is found in the semi-public room adjacent to the public Tazar (طزر), namely the east and west rooms. The east and west rooms are similar in their characteristics, especially in the interior ceiling design. As shown in Figure 9, the Nastalik calligraphy of poetry found in the east and west rooms is applied on the upper cornice in a continuous row of 'Ajami. The content of the Arabic calligraphy is poetry by Al Bousiri describing the greatness of Allah.

كيف ترقى رقيك الأنبياء يا سماء ما طاولتها سماء (البوصيري)



**Figure 9: Upper cornice with calligraphy at the east and west wing of Al-Azem Palace (Ziad, 2019)**

This study analysed the placement of the various scripts as decorative calligraphy for the palace interior, and they are found in different arrangements with different styles. For example, Figure 10 shows the upper window panel consisting of four parts of descriptive poetry, which have a contrasting background colour and the golden colour paint applied on the high relief 'Ajami art calligraphy. In harmony with the function of the room as a semi-public middle area between east Tazar (طرز) and east Shurfa (شرفة), the poetry portrays the subtle use of cursive calligraphy inscription, namely Nastaliq in its traditional style. Nastaliq script was formalized in the fourteen century and is characterised by long horizontal strokes, exaggerated rounded forms, and flowing lines. The placement of poetry with the traditional scripts blends harmoniously with the Damascene traditional-styled architecture of the palace and its highly sophisticated and expensive decorative elements like the 'Ajami. The cursive script is also used for other parts of descriptive poetry inscriptions found on the top part of the 'Ajami panel. Thus, the placement of Nastaliq calligraphy poetry is in a suitable style of the script in its response to the linguistic needs, which are clarity of the letters for ease of reading.



**Figure 10: The calligraphy of poetry in the East Room (Ziad, 2019)**

This research realized that the Arabic calligraphy works give aesthetics and meaning to the palace interior that fulfills not only the visual needs of inhabitants but also their spiritual needs. The research findings show that the calligraphy placement was not mere ornamentation done afterthought but had become part of interior components with deep meaning behind the inscriptions. Therefore, calligraphy represents an original feature of Islamic art. The authenticity of the Islamic script lies not only in the endless creative thinking and flexibility but also in the balance of expressing the meaning of calligraphy through a formal aesthetic. In Al-Azem, Islamic calligraphy has been employed throughout the interior spaces, from 'Ajami to marble engraving design, while avoiding portrayals of figurative painting. During the semi-structured interview session, the calligrapher 1 gave his verification on this aspect of decorative calligraphy and he states that "Arabic calligraphy is the tool of Muslims to represent their religion in a visual decorative, and descriptive method. That is why Islamic calligraphy can be in Arabic or any other type of calligraphy. The Islamic calligraphy, in its term, refers to the Islamic content visually by writing the Hadith and Quran and decorating and filling up the gaps between the pattern in a complete artistic composition." He also posits that the purposes of using calligraphy in the decoration and design are doctrinal, spiritual, and decorative, which deepens the Islamic identity. It connects the design to the wonderful artistic dimension that is meant to elevate the value of form and content.

Today, Al-Azem has been recognized as a Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions, which serves as a palace museum but still showcases a wealth of Islamic calligraphy inscriptions and decorations. This palace museum is a place that showcases its beautiful walls of interior stemming from the richness of decorative calligraphy that promotes a calm atmosphere. The long-standing heritage palace, with the placement of calligraphy, continues its legacy for the new function of the building. This phenomenon reflects the

sustainability of the Islamic calligraphy scripts, which are versatile for application in different building types. The calligraphy carries specific meanings which are suitable for any Islamic architectural space.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The detailed analysis shows that the calligraphy placement in the central interior spaces of Al-Azem follows certain styles of script, the contents of the inscription, and the materials used. The beautiful calligraphy inscriptions are found at the 'Ajami decorative panel above windows and doors and the upper and lower cornice of the three sides wall. Depiction of Quranic verses, Hadiths, Duaa (دعاء), and Islamic poetry in Nastalikh and Thuluth scripts are prevalent in the interior public spaces, namely Tazar and Shurfa. The research findings show that the calligraphy placement was not mere ornamentation done afterthought but had become part of internal components with the deep religious and spiritual meaning behind the inscriptions. As such, Hadith (حديث) and religious quotes are always placed below Quranic verses, and this calligraphy is found at the upper part of the interior walls. Calligraphy is the primary decorative form that decorates many architectural elements found in Islamic buildings, for example, mosques, palaces, institutional structures, and dwellings. Palace is among the prominent Islamic architecture types, showcasing the art of calligraphic inscription in the interior and exterior spaces. In Al-Azem, since the interior spaces are the most habitable areas, the presence of calligraphy is good for the spiritual values to the inhabitants. However, the company of the calligraphy must be in line with the correct principles of placements that can give significant meanings, both in a spiritual and aesthetical sense. There is evidence of a good selection of calligraphy to suit the building materials and ornamentation patterns for the palace interiors. The application of calligraphy is suitable for the architectural conventions of the building. Moreover, the placement of the Arabic calligraphy inscription within the interior spaces follows certain principles of arrangement, which could be developed as a guideline for applying calligraphy in Islamic buildings. The guideline could also help the related authorities to approve the script apart from proofreading the inscriptions, especially those with the Quranic verses and Hadiths. It is vital to have the right selection of calligraphy scripts with the precise placement of the inscriptions. Thus, a guideline with the principles of placement would ensure good practice and implementation by the related agencies and practitioners so that ornamentation of the building is not done unnecessarily, unreasonably, and excessively. The guideline is crucial for non-Muslim architects or designers to use calligraphy appropriately for ornamental elements other than geometry and floral design. In a nutshell, this research helps to identify the principles of Islamic calligraphy placement for the Islamic building and may open a new paradigm in the Islamic architecture field. Many related professionals involved with Islamic building design may benefit from this study. The results and findings of the study reveal the visual attributes and principles of placement of Islamic calligraphy, which can be used to develop a guideline for the placement of Islamic calligraphy in public buildings.

In addition, this research will significantly benefit the researchers inclined to enrich their research on the same field by expanding the research scope related to the application of Islamic calligraphy in different types of architecture to benefit Muslim communities. The findings of this study should lead to a new investigation, which is necessary to include other prominent Ottoman palaces and different types of buildings as descriptive case studies to explore differences in Islamic calligraphy placement. The objective of the study can be achieved through rigorous qualitative analysis, which affords researchers opportunities to explore a different phenomenon of calligraphy placement in the interior and exterior context of the buildings using a variety of data sources leading to more comprehensive research findings.

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