



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA  
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**THE APPLICATION OF CALLIGRAPHY IN  
MOSQUES: CASE STUDIES IN EGYPT, TURKEY  
AND MALAYSIA**

**BY**

**ABD RAHMAN BIN HJ HAMZAH**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of Doctor Of Philosophy**

**Kulliyah Of Architecture & Environmental Design  
International Islamic University  
Malaysia**

**FEBRUARY 2007**

## ABSTRACT

In most of the mosques in the Islamic world, calligraphy is part and parcel of their interior design. The art of calligraphy that developed from Semitic alphabet reached the golden age during the Abbasid period. Besides calligraphy, the art of mosques' decoration also combines the arabesque, geometry and vegetal patterns. Based on that there is no clear prohibition to decorate mosques, calligraphy and other ornamentation is allowed on condition that it is done with the intention of enhancing the respects and dignity of the mosque. Adopting the historical and descriptive research method, three mosques from Egypt and Turkey respectively and five mosques from Malaysia were chosen via purposive sampling. Cairo offers a fair overview of mosque styles since they have been influenced from many different ruling empires. In Turkey, a very important role in the calligraphy development was undoubtedly played by the encouragement and protection given by the Sultāns as verified by their magnificent mosques. In Malaysia, the interiors and exteriors of mosques also have wonderful examples of Islamic calligraphy, with local calligraphers sometimes working side by side with foreign calligraphers to ensure the best results. The Islamic Arts Museum (IAMM) Kuala Lumpur displays a special role in Islamic Arts and Architecture in Malaysia as there is a gallery dedicated to calligraphy and architecture. *Jāwi* script is considered to be an endangered script although there are still enthusiasts who exercise *Jāwi* for a limited purpose. The findings had answered all the research questions. The study that across a thousand years reveal that the *Thulth* script is evergreen and the most preferable style in mosques followed by *Kūfī* and *Nasta'liq*. The most common theme of Qur'ānic inscriptions in mosques is the *Shahādah*, followed by themes that illustrate the relationship between man and the Creator, Muslim's responsibilities and the role of mosque in their life.

## ملخص البحث

## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Abd Rahman bin Hamzah has been approved by the following:

---

Shaukat Mahmood  
Supervisor

---

Amir H. Zekrgoo  
Internal Examiner

---

Othman bin Md. Yatim  
External Examiner

---

Ibrahim M. Zein  
Chairman

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Abd Rahman bin Hj Hamzah

Signature: .....

Date:.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA  
**DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT AND AFFIRMATION  
OF FAIR USE OF UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH**

Copyright © 2006 by Abd Rahman bin Hj Hamzah. All rights reserved

**THE APPLICATION OF CALLIGRAPHY IN MOSQUES: CASE  
STUDIES IN EGYPT, TURKEY AND MALAYSIA**

No part of this unpublished research may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright holder except as provided below.

1. Any material contained in or derived from this unpublished research may only be used by others in their writing with due acknowledgement.
2. IIUM or its library will have the right to make and transmit copies (print or electronic) for institutional and academic purposes.
3. The IIUM Library will have the right to make, store in a retrieval system and supply copies of this unpublished research if requested by other universities and research libraries.

Affirmed by Abd Rahman bin Hj Hamzah

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise be to the Almighty Allah, The Most Beloved, The Cherisher and Sustainer of the world, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.

This study would not succeed without the intellectual contributions, work and support of many individuals to whom I am most grateful and indebted. First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Shaukat Mahmood for his guidance, support, patience and useful advice throughout the course of my research work. He has been a very dedicated supervisor, meticulous in examining ideas and arguments and never tired of reading drafts after drafts. His endurance is very much appreciated. I would also like to thank the external advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bukhari Lubis, for his valuable advice and his willingness to share useful information and knowledge about my study.

My appreciation goes to all the lecturers in the Kulliyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, especially Prof Dr Amir Zekrgoo, Datuk Dr Kamarul Baharin, Assoc. Prof Dr Spahic Omer, Assoc. Prof Dr Maisarah and others who had taught and shared with me useful knowledge and memorable learning experiences in the four year period I studied in the Kulliyah.

I also like to acknowledge my heartiest gratitude to all the local and international calligraphers, their families, also the staff of the chosen mosques who had cooperated with me in the core process of this research. All pictures in this thesis are my own collection and taken under permission, except where otherwise stated. May Allah gather them among the pious and the forgiven ones for their good actions.

I am very grateful to my parents, Hjh Fatimah Zainal and Hj Hamzah Sukar@Sukah, my wife Hafizah Nordin, my daughters, my siblings and all my beloved friends for their continuous support. Thank you for those who had directly or indirectly involved in the completion of my research. May Allah bless all of them with bountiful love in this world and the Hereafter.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Abstract in Arabic.....	iii
Approval Page .....	iv
Declaration .....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
List of Tables .....	xii
List of Figures .....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0 Background of Study .....	1
1.1 Statement of Problem .....	2
1.2 Aims of Study (Purpose).....	4
1.3 Research Questions .....	4
1.4 Scope of Research .....	5
1.5 Limitation of the Study .....	6
1.6 Objective of Study .....	7
1.7 Expected Findings .....	7
1.8 Significance of Study .....	7
1.9 Implication of the Research .....	10
1.10 Review of Literature .....	11
1.11 Research Methodology .....	15
1.11.0 Introduction .....	15
1.11.1 Research Design.....	15
1.11.2 Data Collection Procedure.....	19
1.11.2.1 Library Research.....	19
1.11.2.2 Study Trip.....	20
1.11.2.3 Interview.....	21
1.11.3 Validity and Reliability of Research.....	21
1.11.4 Population and Sample.....	22
1.11.5 Sampling Procedure.....	23
1.11.6 Data Analysis Procedure.....	25
<b>CHAPTER TWO: ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.0 Introduction .....	27
2.1 The Origin of Islamic Calligraphy .....	29
2.2 Arabic Calligraphy Development .....	33
2.3 Arabic Letters And Writing Method .....	34
2.4 Early Architectural Inscription Styles .....	36
2.5 The Period of Precision .....	37
2.6 The Classification of Calligraphy .....	39
2.7 The Scripts .....	41
2.8 The Major Styles of Calligraphy .....	41
2.8.1 <i>Kūfī</i> .....	42



2.8.2	<i>Naskh</i>	47
2.8.3	<i>Thulth</i>	49
2.8.4	<i>Dīwānī</i>	51
2.8.5	<i>Riqa`</i>	52
2.8.6	<i>Ta`līq</i> and <i>Nasta`līq</i>	53
2.9	Calligraphy's Unit of Proportion	59
2.10	Some Renowned Calligraphers	62
2.10.1	Abū `Ali Muḥammad ibn Muqlah	62
2.10.2	Ibn al-Bawwāb	64
2.10.3	Yāqūt al-Musta`simi	64
2.11	The Tools Of The Calligrapher	65
2.11.1	Reed Pens	65
2.11.2	Ink	67
2.11.3	<i>Makta</i>	68
2.11.4	Knife	68
<b>CHAPTER THREE: CALLIGRAPHY IN MOSQUES</b>		69
3.0	Introduction	69
3.1	Types of Mosques	71
3.2	Decoration In Mosques	72
3.2.1	Arabesque	76
3.2.2	Floral Patterns	79
3.2.3	Geometry	82
3.3	Decorating Mosque From The View of <i>Sharī`ah</i>	84
3.4	On The Prohibition Of Images In Mosques	87
3.5	Calligraphy in Islamic Architecture	91
3.6	Common Calligraphic Inscription Materials	95
3.6.1	Stone Carving	95
3.6.2	Tile Decoration	97
3.6.3	Wood Carving	100
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: MOSQUES OF CAIRO, EGYPT</b>		103
4.0	Introduction	103
4.0.1	Foundation of Cairo	103
4.0.2	Cairo Under Different Ruling Empires	104
4.1	Al-Azhar Mosque	106
4.1.0	Introduction	106
4.1.1	Architecture	108
4.1.2	Inscriptions	117
4.2	Sulṭān Ḥassan Mosque	126
4.2.0	Introduction	126
4.2.1	Architecture	128
4.2.2	Inscriptions	133
4.3	Muḥammad `Ali al-Kabīr Mosque	140
4.3.0	Introduction	140
4.3.1	Architecture	143
4.3.2	Inscriptions	146

<b>CHAPTER FIVE: MOSQUES OF TURKEY</b> .....	152
5.0 Introduction .....	152
5.0.1 The Ottoman Empire .....	152
5.0.2 Ottoman Art of Calligraphy .....	153
5.1 Sultān Aḥmed Mosque (Blue Mosque), Istanbul.....	157
5.1.0 Introduction .....	157
5.1.1 Architecture .....	159
5.1.2 Inscriptions .....	161
5.2 The Suleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul.....	169
5.2.1 Architecture .....	171
5.2.2 Inscriptions .....	173
5.3 Ulu Cami, Bursa.....	178
5.3.0 Introduction .....	178
5.3.1 Architecture .....	179
5.3.2 Inscriptions .....	181
<b>CHAPTER SIX: MOSQUES OF MALAYSIA</b> .....	194
6.0 Introduction .....	194
6.0.1 Introduction of Islam to Malaysia.....	195
6.0.2 The Colonization Impact .....	198
6.0.3 Islamic Arts in Malaysia .....	199
6.0.4 Calligraphy in the Malay Archipelago .....	201
6.0.5 The Origin of the Term <i>Jāwi</i> .....	202
6.0.6 <i>Jāwi</i> and Calligraphy at Present .....	204
6.0.7 Calligraphy in Malaysian Mosques .....	206
6.1 Putra Mosque, Putra Jaya.....	209
6.1.0 Introduction .....	209
6.1.1 Architecture .....	210
6.1.2 Inscriptions .....	210
6.2 National Mosque, Kuala Lumpur .....	216
6.2.0 Introduction .....	216
6.2.1 Architecture .....	217
6.2.2 Inscriptions .....	219
6.3 Sultan Abdul Samad Mosque (KLIA Mosque) .....	224
6.3.0 Introduction .....	224
6.3.1 Architecture .....	225
6.3.2 Inscriptions .....	227
6.4 Wilayah Persekutuan Mosque, Kuala Lumpur.....	232
6.4.0 Introduction .....	232
6.4.1 Architecture .....	233
6.4.2 Inscriptions .....	234
6.5 Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque, Selangor.....	241
6.5.0 Introduction .....	241
6.5.1 Architecture .....	242
6.5.2 Inscriptions .....	243
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS</b> .....	254
7.0 Introduction .....	254

7.1	The Calligraphy Styles and Materials .....	256
7.2	The Frequent Inscription and Themes in Mosques .....	261
7.3	Frequently Used Inscriptions and Their Meaning .....	263
7.3.1	The Confession of Faith ( <i>Shahādah</i> ) .....	264
7.3.2	<i>Sūrah</i> 2, <i>al-Baqarah</i> , verses 139-144 .....	268
7.3.3	<i>Sūrah</i> 2, <i>al-Baqarah</i> , verse 256 .....	272
7.3.4	The Attributes of Allah .....	276
7.3.5	<i>Sūrah</i> 112, <i>al-Iklās</i> .....	280
7.3.6	<i>Sūrah</i> 9, <i>al-Tawbah</i> , verses 18-22 .....	283
7.3.7	<i>Sūrah</i> 1, <i>al-Fātiḥah</i> .....	286
7.3.8	<i>Sūrah</i> 62, <i>al-Jum'ah</i> , verses 9-11. ....	290
7.3.9	<i>Sūrah</i> 24, <i>al-Nūr</i> , verses 35-38. ....	293
7.3.10	<i>Sūrah</i> 48, <i>al-Fath</i> .....	296
7.3.11	<i>Sūrah</i> 36, <i>Yā Sīn</i> .....	299
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND</b>		
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>		<b>302</b>
8.0	Introduction.....	302
8.1	Summary and Conclusion .....	302
8.2	Recommendations for Further Research .....	304
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>		<b>306</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>		<b>315</b>
Appendix I	: Letters for Research Purposes.....	315
Appendix II	: Calligraphy Course at Islamic Arts Museum Kuala Lumpur.....	320
Appendix III	: Calligraphy and the Calligraphers.....	324

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Title No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
7.1	Calligraphy Styles and Materials	255
7.2	Themes Frequently Employed for Inscriptions	260

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Title No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
2.1	Two manuscripts of Qur'ānic verses from the early period	32
2.2	Comparison between the Archaic <i>Kūfī</i> and a developed <i>Kūfī</i>	37
2.3	<i>Kūfī</i> letters, plaited <i>Kūfī</i> and floriated <i>Kūfī</i>	45
2.4	Two examples of Squared <i>Kūfī</i>	46
2.5	<i>Sūrah al-Fātiḥah</i> written in <i>Naskh</i> script.	48
2.6	The <i>Aynali Thulth</i>	50
2.7	<i>Āyat al-Kursi</i> in merged <i>Thulth</i>	51
2.8	<i>Āyat al-Kursi</i> written in <i>Nasta'liq</i> script	55
2.9	Calligraphy unit of proportion in <i>Nasta'liq</i> and <i>Thulth</i>	61
3.1	An arabesque combined with calligraphy	77
3.2	Floral patterns employed in combination with calligraphy	80
3.3	Geometric patterns	83
3.4	Carved-stone decoration in the form of calligraphy at al-Azhar Mosque	96
3.5	Inscriptions on tiles at Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Istanbul	99
3.6	Carved in low relief design at the Imām <i>Shāfi'i</i> Mosque	101
3.7	A 'cut-out' design at the Putih Mosque, Terengganu	101
4.1	Cairo, al-Azhar Mosque	107
4.2	The stucco-decorated <i>mīhrāb</i> in al-Azhar	109
4.3	The interior of the eastern aisle dome, al-Azhar	110
4.4	The <i>Bāb al-Muzāyini</i> (Barber's Gate), al-Azhar	112
4.5	Al-Azhar Mosque's plan	113

4.6	Floriated <i>Kūfī</i> letters in al-Azhar Mosque	119
4.7	An inscription at the main entrance (Barbers Gate), al-Azhar	120
4.8	The blind arches with Qur'ānic verses, al-Azhar	121
4.9	Calligraphy from the Fatimid period, al-Azhar	122
4.10	The golden inscriptions at the <i>mihrāb</i> , al-Azhar	123
4.11	The names of the ten blessed companions, al-Azhar	124
4.12	The southern <i>mihrāb</i>	125
4.13	Sulṭān Ḥassan Mosque	127
4.14	The plan of the Sulṭān Ḥassan Mosque	128
4.15	The main entrance of Sulṭān Ḥassan Mosque	130
4.16	The wooden ablution fountain and the <i>qiblah</i> wall	131
4.17	The innovative design of Sulṭān Ḥassan Mosque	132
4.18	Prophet Muḥammad and the names of the four caliphs in squared <i>Kūfī</i>	134
4.19	Sketches of two squared <i>Kūfī</i>	135
4.20	The <i>qiblah iwan</i> surrounded by <i>Sūrah al-Fath</i> in foliated <i>Kūfī</i>	136
4.21	The letters of foliated <i>Kūfī</i>	137
4.22	The foliated <i>Kūfī</i> inscription in Sulṭān Ḥassan	138
4.23	Muḥammad 'Ali al-Kabīr Mosque	141
4.24	The information board and plan of the Muḥammad 'Ali al-Kabīr Mosque	143
4.25	The southern entrance to the main prayer hall	144
4.26	The alabaster ablution tank and fountain	146
4.27	The southern entrance written with <i>Sūrah 72, al-Jinn</i> verse 18 in <i>Thulth</i>	147
4.28	Praises to Prophet Muḥammad written in <i>Nasta'liq</i>	149
4.29	Qur'ānic inscription encircles the ablution tank written in <i>Nasta'liq</i>	151

5.1	Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts	154
5.2	Koca Mustafa Pasha Calligraphy School	156
5.3	The main entrance to the Sultān Aḥmed Mosque	158
5.4	The Plan of Sultān Aḥmed Mosque	159
5.5	The bluish haze given to the mosque by the tiles.	161
5.6	The eastern entrance to main prayer hall	162
5.7	The interior of the Blue Mosque	163
5.8	Frequent Attributes of Allah ( <i>Ya Hannān Ya Mannān</i> )	166
5.9	The four huge pillars in the main prayer hall	168
5.10	Inscriptions inscribed at the western entrance	169
5.11	The Suleymaniye Mosque	170
5.12	The Plan of Suleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul	171
5.13	Four minarets at the corners of the courtyard	172
5.14	Ḥassan and Ḥussain highlighted in respected discs	175
5.15	Inscriptions in <i>Thulth</i> at the <i>mihrāb</i> of the Suleymaniye Mosque	176
5.16	The <i>Sūrah al-Fātiḥah</i> located besides the <i>mihrāb</i>	177
5.17	The view of Ulu Cami in Bursa from the western wall	178
5.18	Plan of Ulu Cami, Bursa	179
5.19	The ablution fountain	180
5.20	<i>Surah al-Shams</i> in combination of <i>Thulth</i> and <i>Kūfī</i>	181
5.21	The Attributes of Allah in <i>Aynali Thulth</i> style	183
5.22	The Attribute of Allah- <i>al-Razzāq</i>	184
5.23	The Ulu Cami interior adorned with calligraphy	186
5.24	The wooden (walnut) <i>mihrāb</i> of Ulu Cami	187
5.25	Qur'ānic inscription from <i>Sūrah 63, al-Munāfiqūn</i> , verse 8	189

5.26	<i>Ḥadīth</i> of the Prophet Muḥammad in <i>Thulth</i>	190
5.27	Inscription on the northern wall, <i>Sūrah 22, al-Hajj</i> , verse 27	191
5.28	A <i>ḥadīth</i> of Prophet in <i>Tughra</i> style	193
6.1	Terengganu inscription on a stone	196
6.2	Sayyed Mahdar al-Shahab during a calligraphy course	206
6.3	The main entrance to Putra Mosque	209
6.4	Three quarter of the mosque floats on Putra Jaya man- made lake.	210
6.5	The main entrance decorated with <i>Sūrah al-Jum'ah</i> in <i>Thulth</i>	211
6.6	The <i>qibla</i> wall	213
6.7	<i>Sūrah al- Ḥujrāt</i> encircling the main prayer hall	214
6.8	Two types of foliated <i>Kūfī</i> at the <i>mihṛāb</i>	215
6.9	National Mosque of Kuala Lumpur	216
6.10	The <i>mihṛāb</i> panel	218
6.11	Qur'ānic inscription at the <i>qibla</i> wall	220
6.12	Muhammad Yusuf Bakar, the President of National Calligraphy Association	222
6.13	Two inscriptions from the <i>qibla</i> wall	223
6.14	Sultan Abdul Samad Mosque (KLIA Mosque)	224
6.15	The motif of flower and leaf at the dome and the capitals.	225
6.16	The white interior embellished with inscriptions	226
6.17	<i>Sūrah 23, al-Mu'minūn</i> encircling the inner rotunda	227
6.18	Ninety-nine Attributes of Allah at the <i>qibla</i> wall	229
6.19	The white <i>mihṛāb</i> of KLIA Mosque	231
6.20	The view of Wilayah Persekutuan Mosque from inner courtyard.	232
6.21	Plan of the main prayer hall floor of the Wilayah Mosque	234



6.22	<i>Sūrah 9, al-Tawbah</i> , verses 18-22 encircles the entrance to main prayer hall	235
6.23	The two passages inscribed with <i>Sūrah 108, al-Kauthar</i> , verses 1-3	237
6.24	The <i>mihṛāb</i> panel made of white marble.	238
6.25	All five inscriptions on <i>mihṛāb</i> written in <i>Thulth</i>	239
6.26	Ninety-nine Attributes of Allah encircling the inner rotunda	240
6.27	Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque	241
6.28	First floor plan of the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque	243
6.29	The calligraphy of <u>Shaikh</u> al-Sharqāwi assisted by local calligraphers.	244
6.30	The inner rotunda of the dome written with <i>Sūrah 36, Yā Sīn</i>	245
6.31	The marble <i>mihṛāb</i>	247
6.32	<i>Sūrah al-Nās</i> in <i>Nasta'liq</i> at the <i>qibla</i> wall	249
6.33	<i>Sūrah 1, al-Fātiḥah</i> , written in <i>Thulth</i> .	251
7.1	<i>Shahadah</i> inside the main prayer hall of Nurosmaniye Mosque, Istanbul	265
7.2	<i>Shahadah</i> on the gateway of the Badshahi Mosque, Lahore.	266
7.3	<i>Shahādah</i> over the main arch of Gulabi Bagh, Lahore	267
7.4	The <i>Qibla</i> verses at the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque	270
7.5	The <i>Qibla</i> verses at the <i>mihṛābs</i>	271
7.6	The <i>Throne</i> Verse	273
7.7	<i>Ya Fattāh</i> in Wazīr Khān Mosque, Lahore	277
7.8	The attributes of Allah in Ulu Cami and Nurosmaniye Mosque	280
7.9	<i>Sūrah 112, al-Ikhlāṣ</i> at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque	281
7.10	<i>Sūrah 9, al-Tawbah</i> , verses 18-22	285
7.11	<i>Sūrah al-Fātiḥah</i> in the Suleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul and in al-Azhar, Cairo	288

7.12	<i>Sūrah al-Jum'ah</i> at al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo and Putra Mosque, Putra Jaya	291
7.13	The <i>Light</i> Chapter in al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo and <i>al-Nūr</i> Mosque, Cairo	295
7.14	<i>Sūrah al-Fath</i> at Sultān Ḥassan Mosque, Cairo and al-Azhar, Cairo	298
7.15	<i>Sūrah Yā Sīn</i> at the inner rotunda of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque	300

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Islamic calligraphy is regarded as one of the most unique art and has a special place in the hearts of Muslims. Dating back to the time the Qur'ān was revealed, history has proven that Allah S.W.T.'s messages in it had remarkably brought about a paradigm shift in people's tendency to learn reading and appreciate Arabic writings (*Sūrah* 96, *al-'Alaq*, verses 1-5). It spread out across continents, developed and gradually systematized along with the advent of Islam- from simple readable symbols to beautiful curved letters.

Since the role and position of calligraphy have strong relationship with religious philosophy, they are always reflected in the way Muslim design their buildings in general and the mosques in particular. Isma`il and Lois Lamy al-Faruqi (1921) wrote: "Qur'ānic influence of calligraphy is the most important art form of Islamic culture. Its effect and importance are found in every area of the Muslim world, in every century of Islamic history, in every branch of aesthetic production of media, and in every type of art object imaginable. Of all the categories of Islamic art, calligraphy is the most prevalent, the most significant, the most widely appreciated, and the most revered by Muslims."

As far as Islamic architecture is concerned, calligraphy is decorative as well as spiritual in nature calling people to the remembrance of Allah S.W.T. and promoting local culture simultaneously. During the pre Islamic times, the selected ethnic poems and regulations were hung on the walls of *Ka`bah*. With the coming of Islam, the

shallow and less beneficial poems were replaced with meaningful Qur'ānic verses. Until today, the guardian of *Ka`bah* and the Saudi government spent a sum of money yearly to hang beautifully knitted calligraphy on *Ka`bah* called the “*Kiswa*”.

In most of the mosques in the Islamic world, calligraphy is part and parcel of their interior design. The use of inscriptions is one of the distinguishing features of Islamic architecture. The early Islamic architecture- The Dome of The Rock, which built in Jerusalem in 72/692 was decorated in the interior with religious and historical texts inscribed in bands that emphasized architectural forms. Throughout the course of Islamic civilization, religious and historical inscriptions on buildings proliferated, becoming more elaborate in content and style, Islamic calligraphy is still a major decorative feature of modern buildings.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Sheila Blair in her book *Islamic Inscriptions* notes;

“There is no single survey covering the historical and religious inscriptions used in mosques in different places and times throughout the Islamic lands. However, there are compilations of brief survey of mosque inscriptions up to certain period” (Sheila S Blair, 1998)

As calligraphy is the ‘most prevalent, the most significant, the most widely appreciated and the most revered’ art of the Muslims, it can shed light on many aspects of Muslim’s life. The corpus of calligraphy or inscriptions in mosques is vast, and it can be analysed in many ways:

1. The religious inscriptions are often dismissed as mere banalities. Most of the traditional Western scholars focus on historical inscriptions and underscore the changing nature of Islamic civilization. Despite this lack of

study, these religious texts are noteworthy as they can shed light on the function of building, even reflected sectarian beliefs.

2. It can be examined in many aspects. It includes the aspects of language, history, religious, culture of art, development of style and other information presented in the texts. In general, most scholars have divided Islamic inscriptions into historical and religious categories (Sheila S Blair, 1998). These two categories contain a lot of valuable information.
3. The issue of preserving calligraphy in the Muslim modern world and appreciating the works of previous calligraphers. Researchers of all time have been talking about the importance of analysing the rise and expansion of applied calligraphy so as to preserve its originality across history. The issue of preserving calligraphy in the Muslim modern world is now an obligation to this generation because it is related to the Qur'ān. Special calligraphy styles like *Thulth*, *Aynali* (*ma'kūs* or mirrored image) and *Mutarākibah* (merged writing) are some of their representative product of artworks. Realizing the fact that little efforts were done especially in Malaysia, this study looks deeply into the history of mosques calligraphy in Malaysia and other Muslim countries namely Egypt and Turkey; in terms of the forms, contents and the meanings.
4. How to balance between the intention in beauty perfection and Islamic guidelines towards arts. There is an opinion that inserting calligraphy into mosque interior design is a waste and not recommended in Islam. They referred to the complicated and the indefinable writing that none of the Muslim can read except the professionals. For them, it is expensive and unbeneficial. In this case, researcher attempts to find the relationship

between calligraphy and mosque architecture since the earlier era. It is also to understand the Islamic standpoint to the present phenomenon of applied calligraphy in mosque architecture.

5. The lack of enthusiasm, experience and choice of calligraphy in the present Muslim world. This study is expected to share experiences and choices in decorating mosques. Calligraphy in mosques has its own uniqueness and background. Questions on calligraphy inscriptions that relate to the previous mosques need to be discussed and explained- the forms, contents and meanings so that it can contribute new information- about culture, beliefs, politics, etc.

## **1.2 AIMS OF STUDY (PURPOSE)**

The aims of the study are to:

1. Discover the form, content and meaning of mosque calligraphy in Malaysia, Egypt and Turkey
2. Ascertain the development of calligraphy styles in the Islamic world.
3. Realize Islamic standpoint towards arts and designs in mosques.
4. Determine the prevalent calligraphy inscriptions in mosques and the significance of these inscriptions.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study is to answer the following questions:

1. How calligraphy and its styles were developed in the Muslim society?
2. Which style or form of calligraphy is applied in Malaysian, Egyptian and Turkish mosques?

3. What is the standpoint of Islam towards arts and decorations in mosques.
4. What are the contents of inscriptions that are applied in Malaysian, Egyptian and Turkish mosques?
5. Are there any significant relationships or background meanings between the respective mosques and the calligraphy?

#### **1.4 SCOPE OF RESEARCH**

Scholars who studied inscriptions have traditionally grouped them geographically- by country, city or region. Of all regions, the rich epigraphic material from the Middle East has been the subject of the most wide-ranging investigations. Among the reasons are that many inscriptions from this area were well documented. The intensive study of the inscriptions from this region is also due to their materials: many are finely carved in stones, and their well-preserved state makes them easier to study and to appreciate their elegant epigraphic style.

Supported by earlier studies as well as other sources, this research focuses on inscriptions and calligraphy in selected mosques in Egypt, Turkey and Malaysia. Researcher also sees varieties of calligraphy that exist in these inscriptions as the result of cultural diversity which still adhere to the principles of Islam in its application. The scope focuses on:

1. Calligraphy and mosque background and development.
2. Applied calligraphy in the selected Malaysian mosques that have their own uniqueness and significant meanings.
3. Selected mosques in Egypt and Turkey that become the focus of world attention to dig into these residual pieces of work that are preserved until today.

## **1.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

It is important to highlight that sampling strategies may have affected evaluation findings. The mosques were purposely chosen because of their calligraphic significance. Consequently, these mosques reveal the notions of ideal styles of calligraphy decoration and the themes in mosques are based on their history, background and location. The researcher has to select these mosques because not all mosques in the Muslim world and particularly in these three countries are decorated with Islamic inscriptions. Furthermore, there are other grounds, including the financial and time constrains.

The two week study trips to Turkey and Egypt respectively were not exhaustive. This was due to some constrains such as duration of study, energy, language and communication problem (most Egyptians only speak Arabic language with Egyptian accent while most Turkish couldn't speak other than Turkish language). The researcher was also lack of quality equipment, especially camera to take quality pictures and inscriptions inside the mosques. Though the people who are related to this area of study such as the Egyptian and Turkish professional calligraphers were too occupied, the researcher managed to interview them only but in a limited session.

Once the data was gathered, the researcher had a very limited choice but to collate, transcribe, analyse, synthesize, discuss and conclude the study by using the collected information supported by secondary references. It was difficult for the researcher to make another trip to the prime source if there were any shortcomings. Therefore, the synthesis derived was insufficient to meet the expectation of professional practitioners in this field. However, the findings were interestingly unique, fresh and could enrich our understanding.