

THE FORMATION AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE ISLAMIC MUSEUM OF JERUSALEM IN PALESTINE



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Abstract. *This article examines the historical formation, architectural significance, and interior design strategies of the Islamic Museum of Jerusalem, located within the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex in Palestine. Founded in 1923 by the Supreme Muslim Council and shaped under the vision of Palestinian architect Shadiya Yusuf Touqan, the museum represents a vital institution for safeguarding Islamic cultural heritage. The study analyzes the museum's spatial organization, detailing how historical Mamluk architectural structures have been adapted into modern exhibition spaces. Special attention is given to the museum's unique collection, including over 600 rare Quranic manuscripts spanning six major Islamic dynasties, highlighted by the 14th-century Moroccan *rab'ah* of Sultan Abu al-Hasan Ali I and the monumental manuscript of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay. Furthermore, the paper investigates the curatorial techniques employed within the galleries, particularly the harmonious balance between ancient stone elements, neutral color palettes, contemporary lighting fixtures, and glass features.*

Keywords: *Islamic Museum of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, Shadiya Yusuf Touqan, Palestinian cultural heritage, Islamic architecture, Quranic manuscripts, museum interior design, spatial narration, curatorial practice, Mamluk architecture.*

Introduction. The museum was established in 1923 by the Supreme Muslim Council, with Shadiya Yusuf Touqan serving as its chief planner. By 1927, the Maghariba Mosque was converted into the Islamic Museum. Yusuf Touqan—a Palestinian architect and a leading expert in cultural heritage preservation—served as the Director of the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Programme. She has collaborated with international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank, and is a recipient of the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture. She earned her Ph.D. in Urban Development and Planning from the Bartlett School of Architecture in London. She is an internationally recognized architect and scholar specializing in the preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage and the restoration of historic cities.

Khader Salameh served as the head director of the museum. He is a Palestinian scholar, librarian, and manuscript researcher. For many years, he served as the Director of the Al-Aqsa

Mosque Library and the Islamic Museum, and currently works as a librarian at the Al-Khalidiya Library in Jerusalem.

The museum houses 600 copies of the Qur'an gifted to the Al-Aqsa Mosque by caliphs, sultans, emirs, scholars, and other prominent figures throughout the Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. These manuscripts vary in size, calligraphic script, and illumination. Among them is a handwritten Qur'an whose transcription is attributed to the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Another copy, written in Kufic script, dates back to the 8th–9th centuries. A 30-part Moroccan *rab'ah* (a multi-volume manuscript) was bequeathed in 1344 by the Moroccan Sultan Abu al-Hasan Ali I; this is the sole surviving manuscript from the three sets sent by the Sultan to the mosques in the three holiest cities of Islam—Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem [1].

Furthermore, a monumental Qur'an manuscript created during the reign of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay (1422–1437) is preserved in the museum. Measuring 110 × 85 cm, its pages are richly embellished with gold leaf and polychrome ink.

Situated within the Old City of Jerusalem, the museum features exhibits spanning ten periods of Islamic history—from the era of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the contemporary period—encompassing multiple Islamic regions. Located on the western side of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, across the courtyard, the museum's interior design predominantly utilizes natural stone, neutral color palettes, and historic building materials, seamlessly integrated with modern lighting and minimalist design elements. This curatorial and architectural approach preserves the ancient ambiance while enhancing the visual presentation of the artifacts.

Regarding the interior color scheme, a neutral palette is extensively employed, including white, beige, light brown, and natural stone hues. In certain galleries, contrasting shades of gray and black are strategically utilized. The architectural elements—specifically the arches and domes—evoke the authentic atmosphere of their respective historical eras [2]. The spatial layout features spacious exhibition halls and high ceilings, imparting a sense of monumental grandeur to the interior. Similar lighting concepts can be observed in other Jerusalem institutions, such as the Tower of David Museum, the Terra Sancta Museum, and the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum. The museum interiors in Jerusalem strike a refined balance between preserving the historic environment and implementing modern display techniques. While stone textures and neutral tones embody antiquity, glass structures and advanced lighting technologies provide a contemporary aesthetic interpretation.

The strategic implementation of lighting fixtures plays a crucial role in the spatial perception. Spotlights effectively highlight individual artifacts while casting a soft illumination over the stone walls.

In her analysis of the institution, scholar Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler writes: *"In designing the Palestine Archaeological Museum, the British architect Austen Saint Barbe Harrison implemented new concepts of museum planning and a new architecture intended for archaeological research"* [3]. Gitler, an academic educated in Europe who has dedicated her research to museum studies, has analyzed the political and cultural contexts of Jerusalem's museum architecture and exhibits.

An additional structure within the museum complex originally served as the assembly hall of the Fakhr al-Din Muhammad School (Madrasa al-Fakhriyya), built in 1282 CE during the Mamluk period by Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun. Considered an integral part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, most of the other buildings comprising the Al-Fakhriyya Madrasa complex were demolished by the Israeli military in 1969.



Ancient Qur'an manuscripts, XII–XIV century
Paper, ink, metal.



Ivory, XI–XIII centuries.
Wood, clay, metal.

Conclusion: The Islamic Museum in Jerusalem is an important part of the Al-Aqsa complex, housing the religious, scientific, and artistic heritage of the Muslim world. The museum's display cases feature ancient Quranic manuscripts, treatises on Islamic jurisprudence, ivory caskets, wooden and clay plaques, and fragments of ornamental decoration.

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