

The Aesthetics and Greatness of the Kiswah of the Kaaba in the Saudi Era

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Abstract

The Kaaba has a long history and considered as praising and sacredness for Muslim all over the Islamic world. The Kaaba garment (kiswah) received during the Saudi era meticulous attention in terms of quality of artistry, implementation and manufacture. The most important feature that distinguished the Kaaba dress and added to its aesthetic value is the Arabic calligraphy and Islamic motifs. these arts are illuminate and decorate the Kiswah of the Kaaba. Also, the Kiswah of the Kaaba is a sign of respect, honour and reverence for The Holy House. This study is an investigation into the aesthetics of the Kiswah of the Kaaba during the Saudi era. The study aims to expose the aesthetics and spirituality of the Kaaba gown in the Saudi period. The research employed the descriptive method through, using this method, the researcher was able to knowledge about the kiswah of the kaaba as well as about Arabic calligraphy that embellishment the Kiswah by artistically executed. Moreover, this research aims to study the aesthetic value of the Kiswah of the kabab that under the supervision of the calligrapher Moktar Alam. The kiswah of the Kaaba has been selected in the present research due to the uniqueness decorations and composition. The study will provide a source of information to understand and study some history of the kiswah as well as manufactured of the kiswah nowadays. The study concluded that the kiswah of the kabbah in the Saudi era achieve the highest aesthetic aspect of quality master-made. In other words, the kiswah creates artistic and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: Islamic architecture, Arabic Calligraphy, Islamic ornamentation, Islamic art, Islamic civilization

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The kaaba is the holiest site of Islam all over the world as well as the most sacred place according to the Islamic faith. In other words, it is one of the most critical areas for Muslim people. All Muslim people from all over the world are taking their direction to stand for their prayers five times a day. The kaaba is a place for worship Allah. Also, it has been a holy shrine even before the revelation of Islam. The Kaaba has mentioned in the holy Quran many times in different verses "Allah has made the Kaaba, the Sacred House, standing for the people and [has sanctified] the sacred months and the sacrificial animals and the garlands [by which they are identified]. That is so you may know that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and that Allah is Knowing of all things"(5:97).

The Kaaba is the building which pilgrims roam around it during Hajj and Umrah. Also, the Kaaba is considered the first house built on the surface of the earth to worship Allah. According to the Almighty's saying in the Quran "The first house was placed for people who blessed with the blessing and guided to the two worlds" (Al Imran: 96). Before the emergence of Islam, kings have vied to cloak the Kaaba in the best beautiful ornamental cloth through our times ancient and contemporary time. God had commanded prophet Abraham and his son to build kabbah.

Moreover, the prophet Abraham peace be upon him and his son Ismail build Kaaba in compliance with the command says: [raising rules Ibrahim from the house and Ismail our Lord, accept from us, You are the All-Knowing] (Al-Baqarah: 127). The Kaaba remained unchanged until Mecca inhabited some of the Arab tribes claim *Amalek* and drag them who repaired what was damaged by its construction due to time and natural factors. The Kaaba was all the previous period unpopulated until its roof was Qusay bin Kalab, which is one of the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

The custodianship of the Kaaba was passed down later to the tribes of *Jerham* and *Jasra*. The tradition of clothing the Kaaba was followed suit by Arab nobility throughout the pre-Islamic period. The Al-Hemyari king considered as the first man to wear the Kaaba before the emergence of the light of Islam. When the custodianship of the kaaba was passed down to the tribe of the Quraysh, it was clothed single-handed by Qusay Bin Klab, but later the people of Quraysh as a whole community shared in that honour (Almujan,2006).

It was known that the prophet Muhammed PBUH might God bless him wore the kaaba with the Yemeni clothes. Then the caliphs after him, including Abu Bakr and Omar clothed the kabbah with Al-Qabati fabric. The caliph Othman bin Affan covered the kabbah with Al-Qabati and the Yemeni fabric. The caliph Othman was the first leader in Islam who clothed the Kaaba with two kinds of cloth one above the other. During the Saudi era, the clothing of the Kaaba represents an extension of the honourable which was begun by Quraish and continued by the rightly guided caliphs through various periods and times as the most critical manifestations of interest in the house of Allah (al-kabbah). (Almujan,2006)

2.0 THE BRIEF HISTORY OF KISWAH OF THE KAABA

The history of The Kaaba is related to the history of the kiswah. In all ages, throughout history, the Kaaba has been loved respect, honour and revered like no other place of worship or religious institution in the world. Some historians said that the great grandfather of Prophet Muhammad was the first man to cover the Kaaba with a cloth before pre-Islamic time. While some other historians have confirmed that Tuba'a Al-Hemyari, the King of Yemen, was the first man to cover the Ka'aba. Also, Tuba'a Al-Hemyari was covered the Kaaba with different kinds of rough cloth. During pre-Islamic times many people referred the Kaaba as a religious duty. Moreover, the Kiswa was made in pre-Islamic times with straw, or Yemeni clothes, or Coptic Egyptian cloth.

When Islam gained control over Mecca and spread across the Arabian Peninsula, the Prophet peace be upon him clothed the Kaaba with Yemeni fabrics. Throughout history, the righteous caliphs and sultan competed among themselves to cloth the Kaaba. It was known that the caliphs after prophet Muhammad were covered the Kaaba with Coptic cloth. Also, one of the essential things these caliphs did for the Kaaba was to set up endowments to finance the manufacturing of the fabric and shipping it to Makkah.). (Almujan,2006)

The caliph Mu'awya Bin Abi Sufyan was the first caliph who covers the Ka'aba with silk and with Coptic cloth during the Umayyad era. Later on, the caliph Yaziid Bin Mu'awya and Abdul Malik Bin Marwan were covered the Kaaba with the same fabrics. The first Abbasid caliph was clothed the Kaaba is Al-Mahdi. When Al-Mahdi caliph performed Hajj in160H, he ordered that only one covering should remain on the Kaaba. The reason of this action because some people inform the caliph about accumulated coverings on top of the Ka'aba could be to cause the Kaaba to collapse.

During the Abbasid era the caliph Mamoun appeared and he was famous for covering the Ka'aba with red silk, white Coptic cloth and with silk brocade. On the other hand, the caliph An-Nasir an Abbasside was covered the Kaaba with green cloth and with black fabric. From there on the black material prevailed and became the accepted cloth for covering the Ka'aba until nowadays. King Adh-Dhahir Pipers were the first Egyptian ruled after the Abbasside era. This king had the honour to clothe the Ka'aba (Almujan,2006).

The King Al-Saleh Ishmael Qalwuun was the king of Egypt. The king Qalwuun in 751H has donated an endowment to manufacture the black Kiswa for the Ka'aba once a year. For instance, nine villages in Egypt were dedicated as an endowment for the covering of the Kaaba for many years. During the Othman's era, the first caliph was clothing of the honourable Kaaba and a cover for the room of the Messenger of God was Sultan Selim the First. Since that time, the honourable clothing of the Kaaba has been sent annually from Egypt. The Othman clothing of the Kaaba was well-known by very elaborate and decorated motifs of Arabic calligraphy as well as Islamic decoration. All the Ottoman Sultans became responsible for the internal Kiswa of the Ka'aba during the Othman's era. The internal Kiswa was made in the capital of the Ottoman Empire Istanbul.

The King Abdulaziz Bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud decided in 1346H to set up in Mecca a factory for making the kiswah to the Kaaba. Also, the King Abdulaziz was concerned about taking care of the Kaaba because of the holy status of the Kaaba in the hearts of Muslims. The factory for the kiswah was opened in the middle of that year at Umm Al-Jud in Mecca. Moreover, King Abdulaziz ordered to recruit the factory with the most skilled craftsmen. In that same year, the Kaaba was draped by the first Kiswa made at the new factory. This factory became a great honour for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The King Faisal Bin Abdulaziz decided in 1362H to modernize and to renew the factory of the kiswah to begin the work and show it in the most favorable image that suits the sacredness of the Holy Kaaba. In 1397H. the new factory for making the kiswah was installed in Umm Al-Jude in Holy Makkah city. The factory was equipped with advance technology to achieve high quality production of fabrics befitting the clothing of the House of God. Moreover, this factory was supplied with modern machines to prepare the kiswah. For example, a new automated department was introduced with the manual department. Because the manual department considered as the highest artistic value for making the kiswah. On the other hand, the factory of the kiswah despite the availability of the latest modern technologies, it remains to preserve the manual artistic tradition. Because this manual department produced the most elegant design that manifested in the kiswah of the Kaaba. (Almujan,2006)

3.0 THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS OF THE KISWAH OF THE KAABA

The manufacturing process of the kiswah combines the precision creativity of craftsmanship. The Kiswah factory is being continually modernized with the introduction of the most sophisticated technology. The kiswah of the Kaaba goes through an intricate process. In other words, the stages of the honorable kiswah of the Kaaba industry go through a of technical and operational departments, including dyeing, then the automated tissue that contains the Qur'anic verses. Then the laboratory section where they conduct various tests of silk and cotton threads to ensure that they conform to the required standards. Also, laboratory section tests the strength of the silk threads as well as its resistance to erosion factors. After the stage of testing, then it comes to the belt embroidery, sewing of the cladding. (Almujan,2012).

The name of the factory of the kiswah has been changed by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, was issued to change the name of the honorable Kaaba Factory to the King Abdulaziz Complex for the Honorable Kaaba covering in the month of Shaaban 1438 AH. The Saudi government provided the capabilities necessary to manufacture the black silk cladding and give the technicians required to work in various stages. That cladding was well-knitted and well-made and creativity of embroidery.

The first stage of production the kiswah is dyeing. The Kiswah cloth goes through dyeing department first to provide with the best types of natural silk in the world. The factory imported natural silk of the world highest quality. It comes in hanks which threads are covered by natural gum giving the silk a pale yellowish colour. The natural silk is dyed in two stages. The first stage is to remove the glue by washing the natural silk with olive oil soap and some chemicals that constitute an alkaline medium. Then have to wash silk with water several times. After that, the natural silk regains its white colour and becomes ready for the dyeing process. The colour for dyeing the natural silk is black. The black colour is for the outside surface of the Kiswa of the Kaaba. Some chemicals that stabilize the colour are added. These chemicals preserve the colour against light, washing and friction. The threads become stable so that it can bear a whole year of exposure to the hot sun of Makkah and the touch of the multitudes of circumambulation. After finishing the silk is dyed, then the silk is going to transfer to fully automated weaving division. (Almujan,2012).

The weaving stages goes through many steps. Preliminary weaving is the first stage that the thread goes through. The second stage is the manual weaving. The importance of the manually woven for the kiswah is well known internationally. As a result of the process manual weaving a masterpiece of decorative fabric is created to glorifies Allah. The following phrase is written thereon: ("There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah"). The third stage is auto weaving, that makes by modern weaving machines. Through this stage, the patterned cloth is made on the Jakard machines while the plain material is built on the Doby ones.

The Embroided qur'anic verses on the kiswah covering are produced by Thuluth Arabic calligraphy. The thuluth style of calligraphy is to consider the most artistic Arabic calligraphy kind. The handwriting for the kiswah was done by the Saudi calligrapher named Abdul Rahim Amin. Moreover, the kiswah has ornamental patterns. The accomplishment of this embroidery and other required artful work with immense experience talent as well as precision involves considerable time to produce.

Also, the artistic designs and the calligraphy on the Kiswah are intricated. The Kiswah presents the Islamic embellishments and Islamic patterns. The plans for the kiswah contain the elaboration and embroidered Arabic calligraphy on the belt and the curtain. The protruding Jakard patterns on the surfaces of the Kiswa are designed in the same way that contains Arabic calligraphy words. (Almujan,2012).

Through the printing department, the weaving machine is prepared first. The weaving machine consists of two parallel sides of the strong wood. Stretched between these two sides is a rough fabric on which black silk is fixed. On this black silk the belt of the Kiswa, the curtain of the door of the Holly Kaaba and all other embellishments are printed. The printing is done by silk screens method. The preparation of these silks cannot be described here in detail. At this stage, the silkscreen becomes sketched mould ready for printing the design on the cloth hundreds of

times. This is done by using some types of ink prepared in this department to fall through the open bores of the shaplon, delineating the threads and the designs to be printed accurately.

After the production of printing the Arabic calligraphy composition on the cloth of the kiswah, then the most crucial stage that characterizes the Kiswah of the Kaaba comes. The embroidering considered as the most critical stage to gives the kiswah the shape of beauty, grandeur and prestige—the most visible feature knows this stage of the kiswah. Embroidery involved using gilded silver wire threads made by a manual operation performed by Saudi men. This process considered as a work of art in which combine precision with visual beauty executed in such designs and Arabic calligraphic patterns. (Almujan,2012).

On the first outline embroidery, more stitching is done by using yellow cotton thread for the part that will be embroidered later by golden wire thread and white threads for the pieces that will be embellished by silver threads. Stitching is carried out on all opposite direction. The result of this operation is to produce an imposed design of calligraphy patterns. The final embroidered designs and calligraphic patterns appear embossed rising 2.5 centimeters above the surface of the fabric. Once all the pieces of the kiswah are produced through several stages, then the last step comes. Assemble is the final process of the manufacturing of the kiswah. Assembling means to assemble all pieces of the kiswah in a one-hole large portion. The kiswah is produced in several large pieces. Each piece is running in 14 meters in length and a hundred and one centimeters in width.

Each of the four sides is sewn separately according to the length of each party. After the pieces are sewn together, extra care is paid to keep the design on them intact and continuous. Also, the Kiswah cloth is produced by the Jakard machine in a shape of large pieces which are 16 meters long. This machine is considered as the biggest sewing machine all over the world. Moreover, this machine is being an automatic controlled provided with laser equipment that can determine the correct placing of materials. Then it is lined with a cotton cloth that has the same length and width of the kiswah. The embroidered built and the other design are fastened from each side of them to the kiswah fabric by other automated sewing machines. (Almujan,2012).

The kiswah of the Kaaba present extreme perfection and exactness. Thus, the Kiswah becomes ready to be put on the Holy Kaaba on the ninth of Dhul-Hajj, the day on which pilgrims stand on 'Arafat Mount. When they pour down from Arafat and come down to the Holy Mosque at that day the Kaaba magnificent new garment. An estimated 220 kg of gold and silver thread is needed to embroider its Quranic verses. Also, the cost estimates of made the kiswah is valued at around 22 million SAR. The Kaaba kiswah manufactured is an excellent artwork that is presenting accuracy of implementation with quality output.

4.0 DESCRIPTION THE KISWAH OF THE KAABA IN THE SAUDI ERA

The Kiswah of the Kaaba is made of natural silk, of which 670 kilograms are used to drape the entire Kaaba. Also, the kiswah silk is dying in black colour. On the empty black cloth of the kiswah are adorning and decorating the silk by engraved some Quran verses phrases. These phrases are including "Allah, there is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. The Most Loving, the Benefactor. Glory be to Allah and Praise be to Allah and Glory is to Allah the Great". The total of the kiswah cloth is 14 meters high.

The Kaaba has a belt around it running 47 meters in length and 95 centimetres in width. The belt location is on the top third of the cloth of the kiswah. The Kaaba has four sides, each separate side of the Kaaba has certain Quranic verses written on it. The belt is made of sixteen pieces and

surrounds the Kiswah from all sides. On the belt verses from the Quran are embroidered by gilded silver threads covered with gold. The Quranic verses are written by Thuluth style of Arabic calligraphy.). (Almujan,2012)

The door of the Kaaba is draped with a curtain that is exceedingly breath-taking on it is embroidered by an embossed calligraphies style. In the Kaaba, the curtain is written some verses from the Holy Quran and a dedication that has said " this kiswah is made in the holy city of Mecca and gifted to the Kaaba by the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, may Allah accept his offering" The curtain is seven meters and a half in length and three meters and thirty centimetres in width. Muhammad(2000,p65)writes "some Quranic verses that are inscribed on the curtain of the door of the Holy Kaaba highlights the generous and exalted status of the place. At the same time, the verses convey words of mercy, warning and encouragement to every person coming to the illustrious door".

Moreover, under the kiswah belt, there are several rotated pieces, including six verses from the Quran and one-piece is a dedication. Each of these pieces is in a separate rectangle frame. At the same height, there are four square pieces distributed at each corner of the Kaaba. These squares are including Surah of Ikhlas (Purity of Faith). This surah is written inside a circle surrounded by a square shape of Islamic embellishment.

Furthermore, at the same height, there is a 12 shape of lamp pieces. Inside these lamp piece, some phrases are written' you The Alive the Self Subsisting", "The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful", and "Praise be to Allah". All pieces are written under the belt by using the Thuluth style of Arabic calligraphy. Also, all these pieces under the belt are embroidered in protruding designs and interwoven with silver threads covered with gold. All section of Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornamentation that are embodied on the kiswah of the Kaaba from a sublime work of inspiration art and spirituality. Because it has great aesthetic and spiritual values that describe the aesthetic of Islamic art.

The calligrapher of the kiswah is Mokhtar Alim. In 1978 Mokhtar Alim joined the Calligraphy School of the Grand Mosque where he studied for two years. After completing his BA in art education, he worked as a calligraphy teacher for 20 years at different places including Umm Al-Quran University. Also, he holds a Master of Calligraphy. Mokhtar Alim says "One of my teachers recommended me to the Kiswah Factory and I joined it in 2003. I introduced the idea of using computers to print calligraphy. All the calligraphic arts that appear on the Kaaba's kiswah now are the works of the late Bokhari. I only made minor modifications and wrote the names of King Abdullah and King Salman. I also added some calligraphic art to some parts of the cloth," he said. Also, he said that "The computer technology has helped the factory save the data of templates from being lost".

An example of the significance for representation Arabic calligraphy can be seen on the Kiswah of the Kabah. The aesthetic aspects of calligraphy the presenting on the kiswah are rhythm, repetitions and decorative patterns. Moreover, the art of Arabic calligraphy and ornamentation are introducing complexity that holds the worshiper's attention to contemplate on the kabbah. Furthermore, the aesthetic aspects of Arabic calligraphy are movement and dynamism through the intricate lines and forms of Islamic motifs. The Kiswah of the Kabah considered as the most famous sanctuary of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The application of Arabic calligraphy that used on the kiswah demonstrates the importance of Arabic calligraphy art in Islamic cultural identity. The Kiswah of the Kaaba is offering the quality of manufacture and production is embodied in the Saudi era.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The cloth of the Holy Kaaba has a long history. The Saudi era represents an extension of the manufacture of the honourable Kaaba clothed that was started by Quraysh. Also, all caliphs continued to dress the Kaaba through different periods and times. The kiswah of the Kaaba considered as the most important manifestations of interest throughout the ancient time until contemporary time. During the prosperous Saudi era the founders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has embarked on the doors of industry for the cloth of the Kaaba through a private house in Ajjad in Makkah. The first Saudi kiswah was made in Makkah in 1346.

The stages of manufacturing the Kaaba cloth pass through a group of technical and operational departments. Dyeing is the first stage of the production of the cladding in the factory. Then the next stage is the automated fabric which contains the Quranic verses. The third stage is the laboratory section, which performs various tests for silk and cotton threads. In order to ensure their conformity with the standard specifications required. The next stage followed by the printing process which consists of the belt and embroidery section.

The Kaaba is considered the holiest site in the Islamic world as well as viewed as a symbol of sacred Islamic architecture. The Kiswah of the Kaaba presents a unique style of Islamic art and reflects the superiority of God. The Arabic calligraphy that adorns the Kiswah gives the highest quality of aesthetic value and spirituality. Because it possesses a set of Quranic verses and expressions of glorification of God. Moreover, the Kiswah displays a beautiful example of Arabic calligraphy that fulfils the psychological needs of human beings. Arabic calligraphy is considered as a sacred and spiritual art that relates to adorning the Kiswah of the Kabbah. Because this art was associated with writing and memorizing the Holy Quran. The calligrapher Moktar Alam has uses Arabic calligraphy focusing on its religious and aesthetic aspect of the Arabic language to adorn the Kiswah of the kabbah.

The most important characteristic of the Kaaba gown in the Saudi era is the accuracy of the execution and the pinnacle of manufacture. Also, the most striking aesthetic of the Kaaba garment in the Saudi era today is the Arabic calligraphy, which added to it a unique Islamic character. The Arabic calligraphy in the cover of the Kiswah appears in conjunction with organic patterns and motifs. The calligrapher Moktar Alam designed the most elegant form of Arabic calligraphy art by using the *Thuluth* style of writing. The kiswah of the kabbah is notable for its sacred pieces of Islamic art that adoring with the verse of the Quran to convey the spirituality and the message of Islam.

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