The Arabesque as a cultural interface for contemporary packaging design in the Arabian Gulf

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THE ARABESQUE AS A CULTURAL INTERFACE FOR CONTEMPORARY PACKAGING DESIGN IN THE ARABIAN GULF
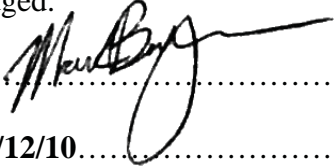
by

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The University of New South Wales

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ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the graphic symbol as an interface for communication in a local as well as globalized environment. Specifically the research examines the arabesque as a cultural interface for contemporary packaging design in the Arabian Gulf by addressing the graphic application of the arabesque as a cultural, religious and social element in the design of selected food and beverage labels.

The aims of this research include a brief investigation in the history and evolution of the arabesque in traditional and contemporary visual culture; a semiotic and visual investigation in the meaning of the arabesque; the graphic application of the arabesque in contemporary packaging design; and the arabesque's potential as a cultural interface.

This research is informed by a review of published sources on the definition, history and evolution of the arabesque as an ornament; a typology of the arabesque as a visual motif; a semiotic analysis of the arabesque in the context of traditional Islamic culture and globalization; three case studies of arabesque designs in selected contemporary food and beverage label designs from the Arabian Gulf; and the incorporation of the arabesque in the 're-design' of three contemporary packaging designs followed by an online survey of graphic responses from participants in the Gulf region.

The research is framed by discourses on visual culture and meaning making (Grabar; Ali; Kuhnel; Berger and Luckmann; Kazmierczak) and the semiotics of Arab cultural identity in a globalized world (Boutros; Fox and Asfour; Said; Sebeok and Danesi). Analysis and interpretation of the survey data demonstrate a positive response to the potential of the arabesque as a cultural interface for contemporary packaging

design in the Arabian Gulf, particularly in cross-cultural communication, and marketing. The survey participants' responses also raised unexpected issues for the graphic designer regarding the context and ethics of applying cultural symbols to the marketing of consumer products.

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Thanks to David Hess, Terry Monaco, Adam Shane and Rabih Khreizat for your gracious assistance in facilitating the survey portion of this research.

Thanks to all the anonymous participants who took time out to complete the online survey in both Qatar and Kuwait. Without your feedback my research findings would not have been made possible.

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GLOSSARY

Arabism   *Arabism* refers to Arab culture and identity. It is used here to describe the collective interests, customs, culture and ideologies of the Arab people and their worldview.

Arabize   To *Arabize* means to make someone or something Arabic in form, style or character.

Arab expatriate An *Arab expatriate* (also described as *expatriate Arab*) as it relates to this study refers to an Arab person living in the Arabian Gulf who has citizenship or heritage in another Arab country, such as those nations in North Africa or east of the Mediterranean Sea.

Arabian Gulf The *Arabian Gulf* is the geographic area on the East coast of the Arabian Peninsula, which includes the nations of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Arab-Islamic The term *Arab-Islamic* refers to something (art-form, style, object, worldview) that adheres to the religion of Islam while at the same time coincides with Arab identity and culture.

Arab-Muslim An *Arab-Muslim* is a person who is of Arab ethnicity who professes faith in Islam.

Arab world   The *Arab world* refers to Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Yemen, Oman) and the nations on the East coast of the Mediterranean Sea (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria). It consists of 25 countries in total, but this thesis focuses on Arabian Peninsula in particular.

Archival   *Archival* as used in this work refers to the collection of historical artworks, whose creation date is recorded and archived along with the place it is located.

Contemporary   *Contemporary* refers to the present time or age. In this work it refers to art made by living artists from the mid 20th century until present, with the available materials of this period.

Cross-cultural   The term *cross-cultural* is used here when dealing with two or more different cultures. This process is described in the context of communication, and how message systems from one culture can function successfully in another.

Cultural   The use of the word *cultural* in this study denotes a distinct way of living built up by a group of people as it relates to the shared knowledge, values and lifestyle of a society.

Ethnic   *Ethnic* refers to a group of people whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage, culture or way of living.

Geographical	As it relates to *geography*, or the specific areas of the Earth. This study focuses primarily on the geographic area of the Arabian Gulf.
Globalization	*Globalization* is the process by which regional societies or cultures are integrated by a global network of communication, ideology or trade.
Gulf	When *Gulf* is used to in this study it is referring to the people and/or region of the Arabian Gulf (see *Gulf Arab* and *Arabian Gulf*)
Gulf Arab	A *Gulf Arab* is a person who is a natural born citizen of a nation in the Arabian Gulf, which may include one of the following nations: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE or Saudi Arabia.
Interface	An *interface* is a point of connection, or bridge between an individual and meaning. This study observes design as an interface for the re-construction of meaning by particular individuals.
Islamic	Derived from the word *Islam,* the religion of the Muslim people. Use of this word in this thesis is to describe someone or something as having been influenced by the monotheistic faith of Islam.

Label   A *label*, as referred to in this study, is a piece of paper, plastic, metal, or other packaging material affixed to a container used to house a food or drink substance for consumption.

Local   *Local* as it appears in this study refers to a either a *Gulf Arab* person or the geographic area of the *Arabian Gulf*

Meaning-Making A term used by Elzbieta T. Kazmierczak which simply refers to the construction, or design of meaning.

Motif   A *motif* is a recurring form or shape in a design or pattern. It is used in this study to refer to the arabesque; an Arab type of motif.

Ornament   *Ornament*, or *Ornamentation* as used in this study refers specifically to the arabesque, an Arab type of surface decoration used to enhance the appearance of objects. It this work *ornament* is also considered to possess meaning.

Palmette   A *palmette* is an ornament of radiating petals that visually resemble the leaves of a palm tree. It is referred to in this study as being rendered to appear abstract.

Rosette   A *rosette* is a rose shaped decoration. In this study it used to refer to geometric star configurations.

Social text   A *social text* is a term used by Marcel Danesi that refers to an overriding text used to inform an entire culture. It is referenced in this work to describe graphic design as a visual narrative,

language or text that serves to inform and reinforce shared values and beliefs of a religious society.

Traditional   The word _traditional_ is referred to in this work as an inherited pattern of thought or action brought about by a certain culture. It is a particular way of doing things that has been passed down from the generations.

Westernization   _Westernization_ is the process whereby regional societies come under or adopt Western culture. This thesis considers Westernization primarily in matters such as consumerism, graphic design, religion and ideology.

Worldview   A _worldview_ is the overall understanding a community possesses about reality and the world in which it exists. This study looks at worldview in the context of culture, and how a set of commonly shared values and beliefs provide meaning to life.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

What does it look like for a packaging label designed for consumers in one culture to be cross-culturally transformed so as to attract consumers in another? Having worked as a graphic designer in Qatar prior to this research, I often pondered various ways in which contemporary design could be better served in the Arabian Gulf through the integration of local artistic expression. My interest in this area was initially conceived during the formative years of my life, where I lived as an expatriate in both Saudi Arabia and Qatar. While there I acquired a deep interest and appreciation for Arab culture, people and the traditional arts.

In my research I refer to this region in Figure 0.1 as the Arabian Gulf rather than the Persian Gulf primarily because my interest on the Arab nations of Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia on the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

My experience in the Arabian Gulf incited my curiosity of graphic design in the modern Arab supermarket. When grocery shopping I noticed that food and beverage labels rarely employ elements of Arab art and ornamentation in the way they have typically been expressed through other, more established mediums. The lack of cultural specificity in packaging design makes regional supermarkets appear strikingly similar to those in America and the West, with the exception of particular local brands and their packaging. I find this particularly intriguing given the rich artistic heritage from which the Arab people could so easily draw inspiration and identity. On this point I explore the role traditional arabesque design can play in enhancing the communication, meaning and visual appeal of contemporary food and beverage labels among local consumers in the Arabian Gulf.

The arabesque is among the most prevalent and versatile design facets in Islamic art, known best for its role as surface decoration. It has traditionally been described as an Islamic form of vegetal ornament comprised of abstracted elements inspired from nature. Muslim artisans have for centuries used this particular motif in the embellishment of architecture, pottery, metalwork, wood and stone carvings, Quran manuscripts, carpets and other textiles in the Arab world. The arabesque's widespread presence upon objects and monuments of antiquity has enabled the style to fully permeate visual culture in the Arabian Gulf.

At the same time the visual landscape in the Gulf nations has changed in recent decades due to globalization and the subsequent Western influence in the region. One of the primary places to be affected by this global phenomenon has been the local supermarket. The graphic designs used on packaging labels and other advertising devices contain visual messages which may not take into account the shared lifestyle, values or beliefs of the local Gulf community. As such, there exists a disconnect between what has been designed on labels and the particular audience it intends to attract.

A great deal has been written previously on the role of the arabesque in Islamic art as well as its early development as a visual element in areas such as Iran and Central Asia. However, it appears that no research has been fully carried out as to its contemporary development and application in the Arabian Gulf. Neither has the arabesque been assessed as having significant influence over the way Gulf Arabs visually interact with and respond to particular food and beverage products. This may be because arabesques have traditionally been considered Arab-Islamic surface decoration and not an active visual language able to communicate culture specific meaning through contemporary advertising.

Fig. 0.1: Map of the Arabian Peninsula focusing on the Arabian Gulf

The present work hopes to fill this gap by answering the question 'Do traditional arabesque motifs positively affect the way Gulf Arab consumers respond to food and beverage labels in the globalizing Arabian Gulf?' Through a process of symbolic manipulation, this research seeks to transform the appearance of everyday labels designed for consumption in the West so as to be culturally suited to consumers in the Gulf. To do this, I endeavor to explore answers to the following questions: What are the initial sources that lead to the construction of the arabesque? (Chapters 1-2), What cultural and religious meaning does the arabesque possess? (Chapter 3), What place does the arabesque have in contemporary society in the Gulf? (Chapter 4-5), and How does the arabesque affect the communication of a label in the Arabian Gulf? (Chapter 5-6). I intend to address these questions by exploring the arabesque as a social, cultural and religious construction.

Three aims underpin this research. The first aim is to identify and explore traditional arabesque design through its archival and contemporary application. To achieve this, I provide a historical review of both the cultural and religious worldviews to initially inspire the development and physical nature of the arabesque style. This is followed by a visual typology of how the arabesque has been visually represented on objects through the ages.

The second aim is to determine the meaning of the arabesque though the method of semiotic analysis. My intention here is not only to expose the mythologies encoded in characteristic arabesque motifs, but also to uncover how those meanings on a selection of labels advertise and promote a particular way of life for Gulf Arabs in the midst of globalization. The intended outcome is to perceive of the arabesque as a cultural and religious symbol, capable of communicating culture specific meaning to local consumers in the Gulf region.

The third aim of this research is to 're-design' existing brand labels to incorporate the arabesque as a form of symbolic manipulation and to observe how Gulf Arabs residing in the Arabian Gulf respond to them. The outcome will be case studies of product brands that already employ arabesques as part of their packaging design in the Gulf region. It will then explore the symbolic reconstruction of three different brand labels to include characteristic arabesque design. Gulf Arab consumers in the nations of Qatar and Kuwait will be invited to survey the 'arabesque' versions of each label. Participant response will provide the insights needed to analyze how Gulf Arabs interpret and respond to the presence of the arabesque on modern packaging labels.

Several research methodologies are utilized throughout this study. The first includes a historical and visual survey by which to analyze the physical characteristics of traditional arabesque design. The second is through case study analysis. This investigates existing labels which already utilize the arabesque in graphic design. The third method used is an online survey, whereby I can collect and analyze consumer responses to the 'arabesque' versions for select food and beverage product labels.

Overall, this thesis examines traditional arabesques not as quintessential Islamic art, but as Arab-Islamic graphic design. While there are numerous visual elements of significance in the Arab world, this study focuses exclusively on the arabesque motif. I also restrict its contemporary application to packaging labels for contemporary food and beverage products. Moreover, this research limits itself to examining consumer response to the arabesque in the context of the Gulf nations of Qatar and Kuwait.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One is devoted to determining the origin and formation of the arabesque. The chapter seeks to discover the initial sources that lead to the ornaments development and physical attributes. Additionally, it consists

of a comprehensive review of existing literature to assist in defining the arabesques foremost characteristics.

Chapter Two observes visual examples of how the arabesque has been portrayed through archival and contemporary motifs. Drawing on scholarly insight, the first section traces the evolution of the arabesque through its use on various objects and surfaces throughout antiquity, including it's appearance in architectural scrollwork, Quran manuscripts and illustrations, woodcarvings, tiles, carpets and textiles. The second section focuses on contemporary renditions of the arabesques so as to clearly identify the flexible nature and application of the design.

Chapter Three investigates the arabesque by means of semiotic analysis. The first part of the chapter describes the arabesque as possessing a symbolic function within Arab-Islamic culture. It examines the ways in which arabesque designs can function as a visual catalyst for enabling the reconstruction of meaning by Gulf Arabs. The second part concentrates on the particular myths conceived from the Arab-Islamic worldview, exposing how they are represented and encoded in the visual structure of characteristic arabesques.

Chapter Four is concerned with framing the continuing cultural and semiotic impact of the arabesque in the context of globalization. The first section discusses the effect of globalization on Arab social life and the subsequent influence on the region's visual landscape. The second part identifies both the need and desire to culturally align labels for distribution in the Gulf; proposing the presence of arabesques can further enhance Arab identity in the midst of globalization.

Chapter Five focuses on the arabesque in conjunction with contemporary label design. It observes and examines case studies of existing food and beverage labels to

employ the arabesque as part of its design composition. The chapter provides analysis of how arabesques can successfully harmonize with a label's existing design elements. It also describes the arabesque's potential to advertise and persuade consumer perception of a given product based on it familiarity.

Chapter 6 focuses on the studio component of this research, which includes the re-design of three existing brand labels to incorporate characteristic arabesque designs. The chapter provides rationales for each design, as well as interpretation of consumer feedback from Arab participants living in the Gulf nations of Qatar and Kuwait via an online survey.

The final part of this thesis consists of the conclusion, where I both summarize my research and discuss the findings from the data collected via the online survey. It is hoped that this research will shed new light on the arabesque through Gulf Arab responses to the label re-designs. This will guide future designers with the necessary visual language from which to cross-culturally align product labels for effective meaning making in the Arabian Gulf.

CHAPTER ONE

Origin and Formation of the Arabesque

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Origin and Formation of the Arabesque

Our journey into the origins and formation of the arabesque commences with a historical review of the primary influences and forms of thought that first led to the ornaments development in Islamic Arabia. The chapter observes the cultural and religious environment in which the arabesque began to take shape, identifying the internal and external worldviews to contribute in forming the arabesque's primary physical attributes. In addition, I draw upon the literature of scholars of the arabesque so as to more accurately assert my own views in regards to its most characteristic visual structure.

1.1 The Formation of the Arabesque Motif

The Prophet Mohammed's rise to eminence in the Arabian Peninsula during the formative period of the 7th century is what brought about the establishment of the monotheistic religion of Islam. David Wade, in his book *Pattern in Islamic Art* recognized Mohammed as having not only introduced the divine revelation of Islam to Arabia, but through the nature of his prophetic mission became the chief catalyst for inadvertently directing the way in which the arts of Islam would flourish (Wade 1976, p.7). This new message, along with the knowledge, attitudes, values and ideals it contained, forever changed the way Arabs perceive, interpret and thus express the world around them. As a direct result, Islam without question has become the foremost contributor in the establishment of a visual culture in the Arab world.

Although the majority of what was accomplished in the arts of Arabia was not developed in the Peninsula *per se*, the connection of the Islamic Empire and Arab caliphate to their homeland made it inevitable that the arts of Islam would fully permeate Arabian visual culture. Since Arab-Muslims could draw little from their Arabian past given the nature of the new faith, it follows that they sought to borrow from the rudimentary forms of visual grammar found in the themes of Byzantine and Sassanian heritage in order to address their identity and increasing presence in the world. Once the Byzantine provinces of Egypt and Syria were overtaken, it was only a matter of time before the Caliphs took invested interest in foreign representational modes, sending out emissaries into the heart of Byzantium to collect artworks based upon the classical ideas of philosophy and science, even though some contained images of great conviction to the Islamic spirit. As the Arabs became more acquainted with the cultures of Byzantium, they came to favor Greek mathematical knowledge and the visual aesthetics that affirmed divine unity.

History reveals that the visual symbolic systems used in the evolving Islamic Empire were first derived from Byzantine geometric themes in Christian mosaics, which now serve to identify and symbolize the power, greatness and individuality of the Islamic world. Oleg Grabar makes note on this point that in none of these instances of Islam's assimilating foreign themes do we find use of human or animal representations, even though practically all symbols and images of power in antiquity tended to centre around human or animal symbols (Grabar 2005, p.20). More will be said of this later in this chapter. As we will repeatedly see throughout this section, the adoption and development of Graeco-Roman and Sassanian Persian artistic principles and ideas was a huge contributor in the formation of characteristic arabesque motifs, not only through influences brought in via ancient trade routes, but through the rapid spread of Islam.

In light of their new faith and worldview, the Arabs were limited in what they could use from their pre-Islamic culture. Poetry, music and a preoccupation with the phenomena of the heavens were some of the main themes that pre-existed in the region. With a majority of the desert population being nomadic Bedouin tribes whose way of life led to extensive wandering and sea faring, it is easy to see why they would have such a fascination with stars, moon and the whole of the cosmos. The absence of tree coverage and rare cloud sightings left nothing but unhindered access to the heavens above. Stars became increasingly important with the advent of Islam, as Muslims everywhere were able to know, five times a day, the exact direction in which to pray. Abas and Salman record that 'from the 9th century up until around the 15th century, astronomy was the most passionate intellectual activity in the Islamic world' (Abas and Salman 1995, p.11). This was cultivated to a greater extent in the visual arts as Muslims learned of and were trained by artisans and philosophers of the Greek culture.

These pre-Islamic associations and interests were enough to contribute to the direction the arts took in Islamic Arabia, alongside the many existing forms they encountered and borrowed from within the conquered territories. Ernst Kuhnel points out that this happened nowhere as clearly and unequivocally as in the case of the arabesque, in which the Islamic world view found its most expressive artistic manifestation (Kuhnel 1949, p.5). From this we can appreciate the role Arabism played in the formation and evolution of the arabesque. We can think of it as a conglomeration of Arabism, Islamism, Coptic, Hellenistic, Byzantine, and Sassanian, along with additional influences that came about at different places and times. Without these contributing factors the arabesque would not have developed the way it did, nor would it have held such an important place as a cultural signifier in the Arabia. Refer to Chapter 2 for further analysis.

1.2   The Non-Figurative Nature of the Arabesque Motif

Observing the context and conditions from which the arabesque was developed helps us to understand its significance within the visual culture of Arabia. It is often argued that abstraction was forced upon the arts of Islam by a religious prohibition against figurative art. While there is some precedence for such a belief, it is viewed as misleading and misses out on a deeper and more significant point. While there is no direct theological grounding opposing pictorial art in the Quran, scholars clarify that it is mainly the 'worship' of idols that has been traditionally condemned, not merely their portrayal, as countless figural illustrations are found accompanying religious manuscripts in Muslim provinces throughout history. In fact, much has been written in conjunction to Arab painting and the pictorial aspects of Islamic art, yet this is a whole other subject on its own. Within the realm of the arabesque, however, they often take on a flat, symbolic style often reduced to a silhouette as to avoid 'recreating' life.

A fundamental reason for the non-figurative nature of the arabesque is centred on the premise that the natural world did not create itself, but was rather the exclusive handiwork of the one divine creator. It is assumed, therefore, to exceed the role of artists to imitate nature as perceived or experienced with the human eye. Kuhnel asserts that it would be contrary to the will of God to make permanent the earthly forms originally intended to be temporal (Kuhnel 1949, p.5). In this way, the spirit of the arabesque removes itself from mirroring themes in nature, re-directing its focus to formulating images that can be construed from the imagination. This of course does not discount the fact that the arabesque was first inspired by natural phenomena, but as we will continue to see these forms are intentionally reworked so as to further its natural associations, appearing abstract.

There is no singular motif from which to fully characterize the arabesque. It is an expansive expression rich in diversity and infinite in its innovative potential. In the collective work, *Islam and the Arab World* Richard Ettinghausen elucidates that Islamic design traditions in particular are comprised of several differing styles that have continued to develop and evolve from the end of the 7th century through to the early 19th century, after which time they came under serious challenge from European concepts (Lewis 1976). Furthermore, forms that are commonly perceived as being characteristic of Islamic civilizations vary extensively depending on the town, region, and century in which they were fashioned – since the Islamic world far exceeds the geographic region of Arabia. Grabar further advocates that the arts of Islam would more accurately be defined at different places and times throughout history by adjectives such as 'early', 'late', 'classical', 'Iranian', 'Arab', 'Spanish', and so forth, to aid in contextualizing the immense diversity surrounding those styles that serve to identify the whole of the culture (Grabar 1973, p.1-2). Additional variations in form and approach continue to develop and change in contemporary use on account of the unique nature of individual artists and their distinctive ingenuity in representing traditional themes, as well as the increasing need to adhere to social and global trends.

It has only been within the last century that scholars have taken an invested interest in analyzing and recording the copious amount of art forms produced throughout the lifespan of Islam. Early studies were mostly conducted in the foreign languages of Austrian, German, French and Arabic and later translated or expounded upon in English. Alois Riegl, the Austrian art historian (1858-1905) appears to be among the first to critically analyze the parameters of the arabesque, which he attempts to characterize in his 1893 publication titled *Stilfragen*. For Riegl, the principle features of the arabesque, as summarized by Terry Allen in 1988, were the geometrizing of the

stems of its vegetation, the particular vegetal elements used and the fact that these elements can grow unnaturally from one another rather than branching off from a single, continuous stem (Allen 1988, p.3). This was followed by Ernst Kuhnel's 1949 publication *Arabesque,* written in German, as well as more recent publications. My investigation is based chiefly upon the insights of Riegl, Kuhnel, Ettinghausen, Grabar, Ali, and Burckhardt, to name a few, who drew knowledge of Islamic art and heritage not only by their own examination of visual forms from ancient times, but also through researching, cross referencing and reiterating both archeological evidence and concepts from countless essays written by Arab and European scholars in their own language.

1.3   Distinguishable Characteristics of the Arabesque Motif

Consequently, the intention here is not to dissect every subtle variation of the arabesque found in antiquity, but rather to, in a more general sense, identify those motifs that I feel best characterize the style as a whole. As such, my focus is on the unifying factors that make the enormous diversity of the arabesque immediately recognizable: the core ingredients essential to its visual structure. My hope is that in doing so we can pin point its underlying nature and not be distracted by the infinite ways in which it can manifest.

In distinguishing these harmonizing similarities, we find that the arabesque typically consists of regular shapes of vegetal and geometric forms arranged in an endless, repeating pattern (Fig 1:1). The vegetal forms are inspired and embodied in the organic life found in nature, such as spiraling tendrils, vines, flowers and leaves. The geometric forms are comprised of various arrangements based on the circle, square, and triangle, often transforming into the symmetrical form of a star or flower petal. Much of the Arab geometric motifs can be traced to the ideas of Pythagoras, who taught that

mathematics is directly linked to structure of the universe. While the vegetal and geometric aspects can be fashioned independent of one another, many motifs found in antiquity can be seen utilizing a combination of both. In his book *The Arab Contribution to Islamic Art*, Wijdan Ali writes that the overall purpose of the arabesque throughout history has been to decorate blank spaces by filling it in a continuous, repetitive way that is not only visibly aesthetic and beautiful, but also imbued with spiritual implications signifying the infinity of God (Ali 1999, p.16). It is for this reason that the arabesque plays a dominating role in the aesthetics of Arab archival and contemporary visual motifs.

The arabesque is best known for its coiling, furcating branches, and interlacing vine arrangements juxtaposed with geometric design (Fig 2:8-9). Doris Behrens-Abouseif described it as, 'floral patterns stylized to abstraction and geometricized' (Behrens-Abouseif 1999, p.145). The vegetal aspect was actually first inspired by the botanical personality of the grape vine. The rhythm in which it weaves around in alternating curves and spirals, manifesting the growth of vines and leaves in an infinite variation lends itself particularly well to abstraction. According to Kuhnel, arabesque motifs 'can present themselves as being squat or stilted, compact or loosely composed, smooth or with a rough surface, ribbed, feathered, or pierced, painted, round or convoluted, simply outlined or with a spirited contour' (Kuhnel 1949, p.7). He only advocated that they not be found in isolation, always having the appearance of growth through obligatory bifurcation. Through maintaining this consistency, order and a sense of liveliness can be achieved to create calyx or palmette forms, as well as cartouches and medallions that come as byproducts of arabesque arrangements in architecture and textiles.

Fig. 1.1: Door Panel (Geometric and Vegetal Arabesque forms)

This flexibility is encouraging of artistic diversity as well as representative of hidden archetypal meanings, guiding the imagination to ponder on the Garden of Paradise and eternal life. For instance, Daud Sutton, in his book *Islamic Design,* records that spirals are primordial and universal symbols, intimately related to life and its cycles (Sutton 2007, p.14). Encoding underlying mythic themes pertaining to Arab-Islamic worldviews underpins the way in which arabesques are visually expressed and understood. While scholars such as Kuhnel, Riegl and Allen would deny that any symbolic function could be associated to the arabesque, others like Grabar and Ettinghausen assert that characteristic decorative motifs often possess a measure of social, intellectual and religious meaning, as Muslim artisans used specific works of art to express certain ideas (Kuhnel 1949, p.9; Necipoglu 1995, p.62; Tabbaa 2002 p.75-76; Grabar 2005, p.20). In Chapter 3 we will discuss how attaching codified messages to the abstract vegetal and geometric forms gives them the potential to act as visual parables, concealing a deeper reality rather than depicting it openly.

1.4   Calligraphy in the Arabesque

It was during the Abbasid Caliphate (750 – 1258 AD) that the arts of Islam, and more specifically the arabesque, began to take on its own shape. Prior to this time the arabesque had not fully crystallized and had mainly incorporated foliate scrollwork based upon motifs within the conquered territories. This is evidenced in the mosaics and other abstract ornamentation found the Dome of the Rock, the Great Mosque of Damascus and other places dating to the Umayyad dynasty. We will look at this in more detail in Chapter 2. Passionate to create abstract forms that would serve to identify themselves as a power, the Umayyad world at the beginning of the 8th century focused on the development of Arab calligraphy, the script used to document the divine

teachings of the Quran. Before this time they had followed the methods and traditions of the Near East, but with the creation of a Muslim coinage devoid of imagery and entirely inscribed with Arabic, Caliph Abd al-Malik changed the official language from Greek to Arabic.

Calligraphy is considered to be the purist of all Islamic visual expression, and the only form never to have been influenced by foreign artistic traditions outside central Arabia. It has infused every facet of the Islamic arts, including architecture, textiles, artifacts, and numerous other everyday items, as it is regarded as the highest of all arts; the personification of God's word as recorded in the pages of the holy Quran. Although most scholars will typically categorize traditional calligraphy as its own genre, its tendency towards abstraction and adaptability as taking on vegetal and geometric characteristics would suggest it being a part of the arabesque. While the Arabic script plays a huge role in Islamic Art and Arab visual language as a whole, both spiritually and linguistically, a great deal has already been written on the subject and as such will not be central in my investigation.

This chapter has made reference to the primary sources which have been instrumental in the creation of the arabesque, namely Islam, Arab culture and the external influences of the Byzantine Empire and Sassanian Iran. It has identified the leading socio-cultural and religious ideologies which have contributed to the development of the ornament. In the next chapter we will further examine the arabesque through a visual typology of how it has been portrayed on objects throughout the ages. From this we will obtain a more holistic understanding of the arabesque, and how we can continue to apply the design in contemporary contexts and media.

CHAPTER TWO

Typology of the Arabesque in Historical and Contemporary Motifs

CHAPTER TWO

Typology of the Arabesque in Historical and Contemporary Motifs

In order to visually grasp the nature of the arabesque we must first observe how it has been portrayed upon the objects of antiquity. This chapter provides both an analysis and literature review of varied arabesque motifs ranging from the 5th century to the modern era. My objective is to obtain a comprehensive awareness as to the diversity of the ornamental style and its adaptability upon different mediums. This is achieved in exploring the arabesque within the context of when it was crafted in Arab-Islamic history, thus tracing its evolution and use through the ages. A look into the past will provide the needed insight for continued visual representation of the arabesque style.

2.1   Early Development of the Arabesque Motif

A good place to begin would be to observe pre-Islamic foliate scrollwork of a late antique cornice dated back to the 5th century (Fig. 2.1). Decorated with acanthus leaves, this motif reveals a very natural arrangement of sharp leaves branching off from a central vine that curls back on itself in a linear fashion at regular intervals. It looks very much like a coiled palm frond scrunched within a tight space. In his analysis of this particular scrollwork, Kuhnel notes that this architectural ornamentation cannot be regarded as arabesque, as it does not meet the criteria of taking on an abstract or unrealistic form. It is visibly foliate with no intention of concealing this identity, following the style of the Romans as evidenced by the sharply accentuated acanthus leaves. Conversely, in observing a motif of a similar composition a few hundred years

later, Kuhnel notes that this Hellenistic painting from Turkestan has been so greatly transformed from its original floral state that it would be difficult to guess its natural inspiration (Fig. 2.2). Having said that, it also cannot be considered arabesque, as it does not continuously regenerate nor interlace, yet comes strikingly close. These subtleties become increasingly less important as we later examine contemporary motifs, as only trained scholars of ornament are able to distinguish between these minor variations in style.
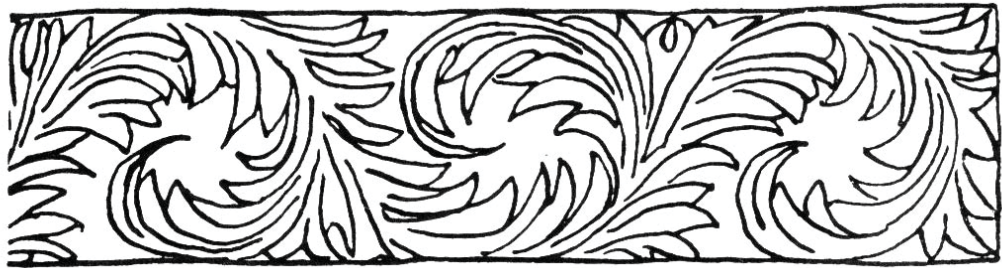
Fig. 2.1: Late Antique Cornice, 5th Century
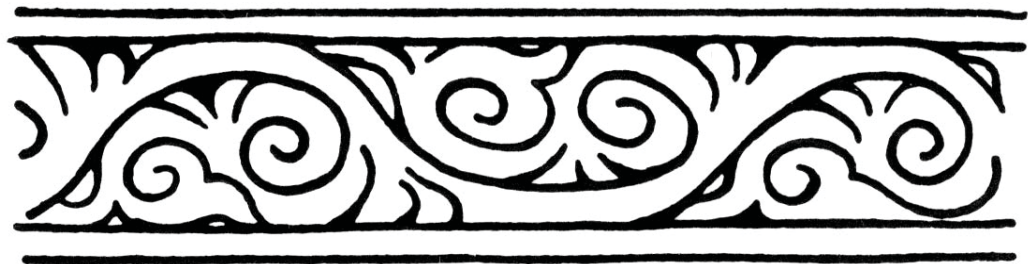
Fig. 2.2: Painting from Turkestan, 7th to 9th Century

The Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus were most probably the first major artistic undertakings of the Umayyads. As mentioned earlier, its ornamentation followed Byzantine and Sassanian traditions, yet was selective in its

choice of subject matter. The art of the Ummayads was of great importance, as they gathered together the repertoire or ornament that became the patent for later developments of the arabesque. In observing the glass mosaics that cover the spandrels and soffits of the Domes interior, we find a motif that bears a realistic resemblance to a tree with leaves and fruit (Fig. 2.3). Ettinghausen records this enormous hybrid flower design as being originally developed by stone carvers of Sassanian Iran (Ettinghausen 1977, p.20). We can also see the beginning of what appears to be a geometrical design along the spandrel bordering the vertical plant composition. The vast ensemble of decorative motifs throughout mosques and other architecture of this era followed a similar style mimicking real forms. It can be thought of as a stepping-stone toward what would later be accomplished in arabesque design during the Golden Age of Islam.

During the Abbasid reign in the middle of the 9th century, the Islamic character of the arabesque became more pronounced and recognizable apart from foreign forms. Here Muslim Arabs fashioned their first stage of surface decoration, a perfect style of art that would serve to identify them as a people, a religion and a political power. In his highly regarded work *The Grammar of Ornament,* Owen Jones provides evidence of this abstract ornament from within the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, built in 876 AD. While preserving subtle traces of its Greek origin, it is a new creation, free from the stigma of directly imitating borrowed styles depicting nature (Fig. 2.4). The abstracted outline of this scrollwork along with its branching out in a regenerative, symmetrical rhythm makes it among the first motifs to embody the spirit of the arabesque. As noted by Kuhnel, the inspiration of the acanthus leaf and grape vine is no longer overtly detectable in this rendition.

According to Kuhnel, it was in the art of the book and the Quran manuscripts in particular that the decorative possibilities of the arabesque were most exploited. The

Fig. 2.3: Dome of the Rock Mosaic, 691

Fig. 2.4: Scrollwork in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, mid 9th Century

reason for this is that for centuries, the arabesque was the exclusive decoration of the holy book, and continues to play a dominant role (Kuhnel 1949, p.27). As such, I find it sensible to examine motifs derived from this medium. The ornament of a Quran frontispiece dated to the beginning of the 10th century indicates an early use of a geometric interlace ornament. This was a common element in the pages of early Quran manuscripts. Contained within a rectangular framework, the motif is constructed of two squares within a circle, looping at the ends with sides that weave over and under each other to appear interlacing (Fig. 2.5). The shapes also take on the form of an eight-pointed star, a basic structure common within more elaborate arabesque motifs. Even though it does not appear similar to the vegetal scrollwork mentioned above, its arabesque style is distinguished by the fact that it can expand over large surfaces in a continuous motion and invade vacant spaces. Geometric arabesque is of equal stature to that of vegetation, as both are abstracted not only to conceal hidden themes but also to accomplish a perfected regenerative function.

2.2   Geometry in Arabesque Motifs

A new and more complex style of arabesque arose in the Muslim world during the latter part of the 12th century based around intricate star configurations. In most decorative motifs of this era, geometry was used alongside vegetation, with abstracted floral forms filling the gaps created by the geometric grid. This is evident in the complex ornamentation of a Quran manuscript produced in Valencia, Spain in 1182 AD (Fig. 2.6). Lines curve and interlace along an underlying hexagonal or octagonal web encircled by elements that weave over and under to produce what appears to be a blooming flower effect. Star and square shapes manifest as a result of the composition. The fact that it was crafted in Spain does not negate its relevance to the visual culture of
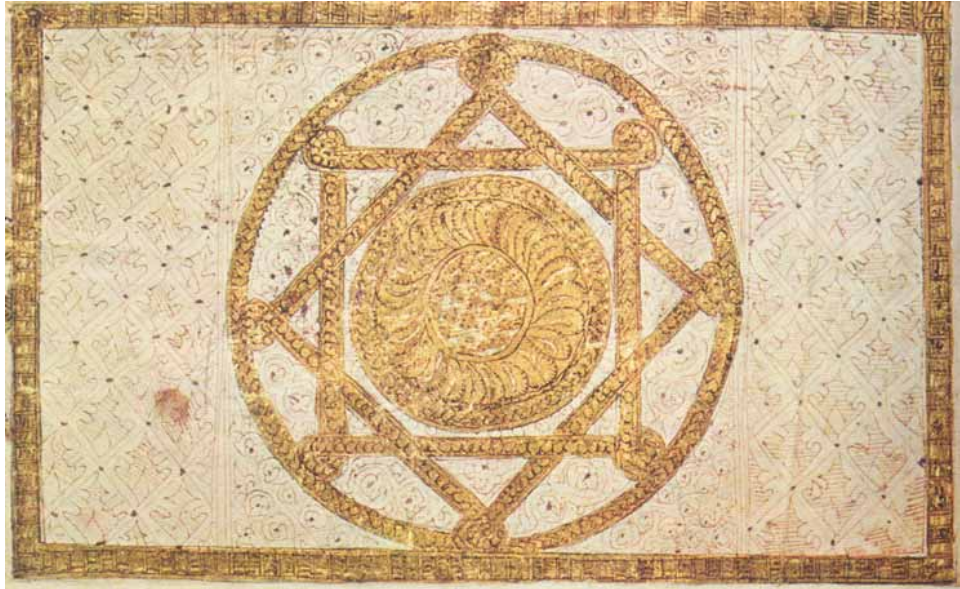
Fig. 2.5: Quran frontispiece, possibly Syria c. 900
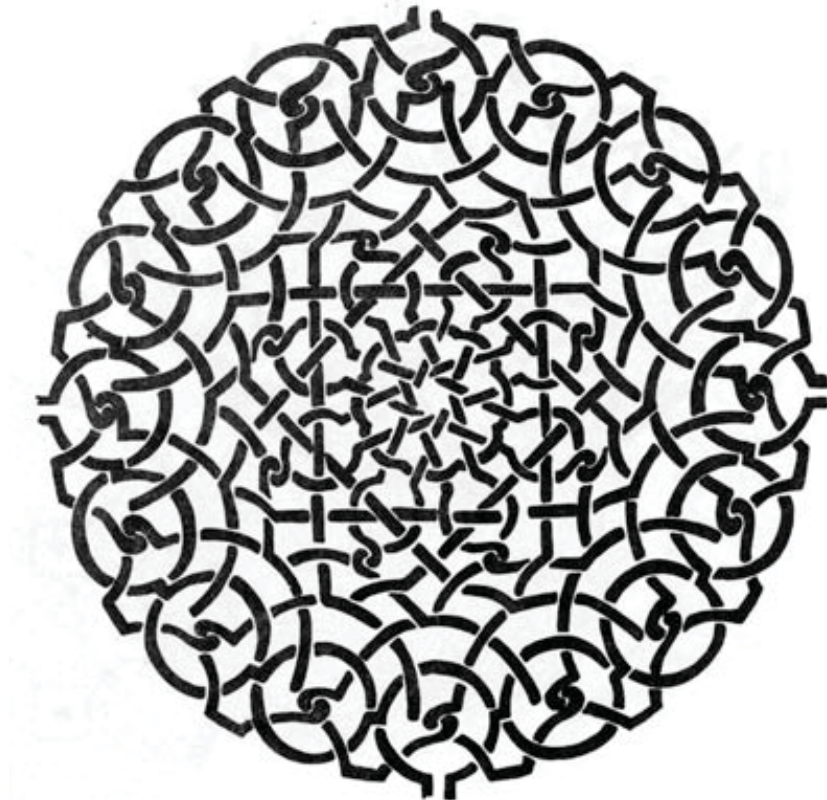
Fig. 2.6: Arabesque from a Quran Manuscript. Valencia, Spain 1182

the Arabian Peninsula, as it was constructed in conjunction with the spirit of the arabesque and Arab-Islamic thought. The nature of the Islamic empire and its ties to the motherland allowed for the arts of Islam, regardless of region, to reflect the creed and lifestyles of the Arab people.

In a decorative page from a Quran of the same year in Spain we see a similar composition of even greater complexity (Fig. 2.7). Unlike the previous manuscript, this design is based around an eight-pointed star, which was the basic unit encompassing the entire motif in Fig. 2.6, as formed through the overlapping of two squares. It is not uncommon for this particular star shape to be used to produce distinctive geometric rosettes as the foundation for a variety of arabesque motifs. Petal shapes are arranged around a central star created by the basic eight-point unit, taking upon the appearance of a crystalline flower. Through use of interlacing lines, this pattern expands outwards in what could potentially be an infinite arrangement, formulating further stars and symmetries in its wake. As the pattern circumference approaches the edge of the square framework, the lines deviate from their purely geometric path, evolving in form to take on the appearance of Arabic calligraphy. Additionally, vegetal arabesques are woven within the blank areas left by the geometric interlace, thus filling every aspect of the composition with an abstract pattern. In comparing Fig. 2.6 with Fig. 2.7, it is clear that artistic ingenuity was granted to the Islamic artisan within the constrains of the arabesque, even though it may seem to be limiting the imagination to express ideas only through abstract ornament.

The detail from a 14th century Quran frontispiece in Egypt is testament to the nature of the arabesque transcending geographic areas. Rosettes surround a twelve-point star as its most rudimentary unit for the whole composition (Fig. 2.8). Islamic artisans were not limited, however, by the number of points on a star, as motifs can be found
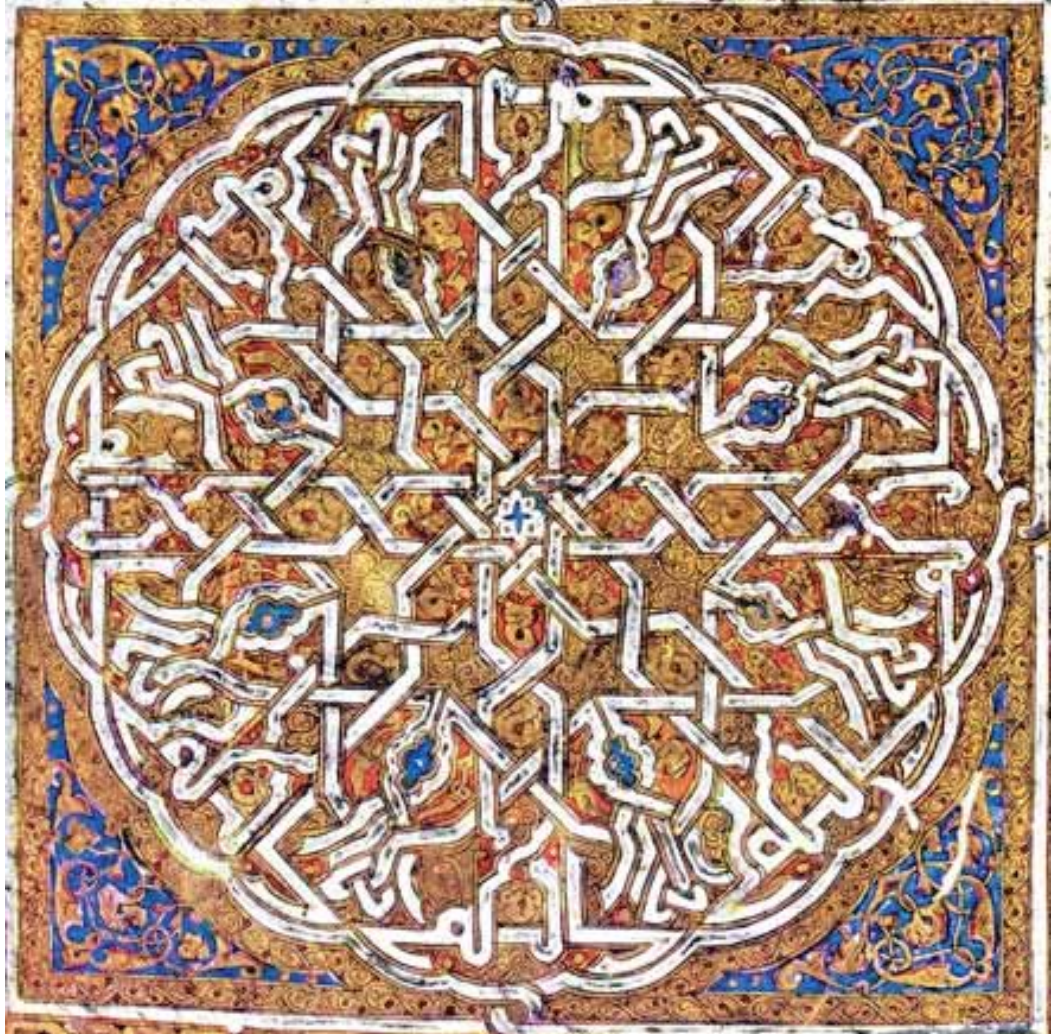
Fig. 2.7: Quran Decorative Page. Valencia, Spain 1182
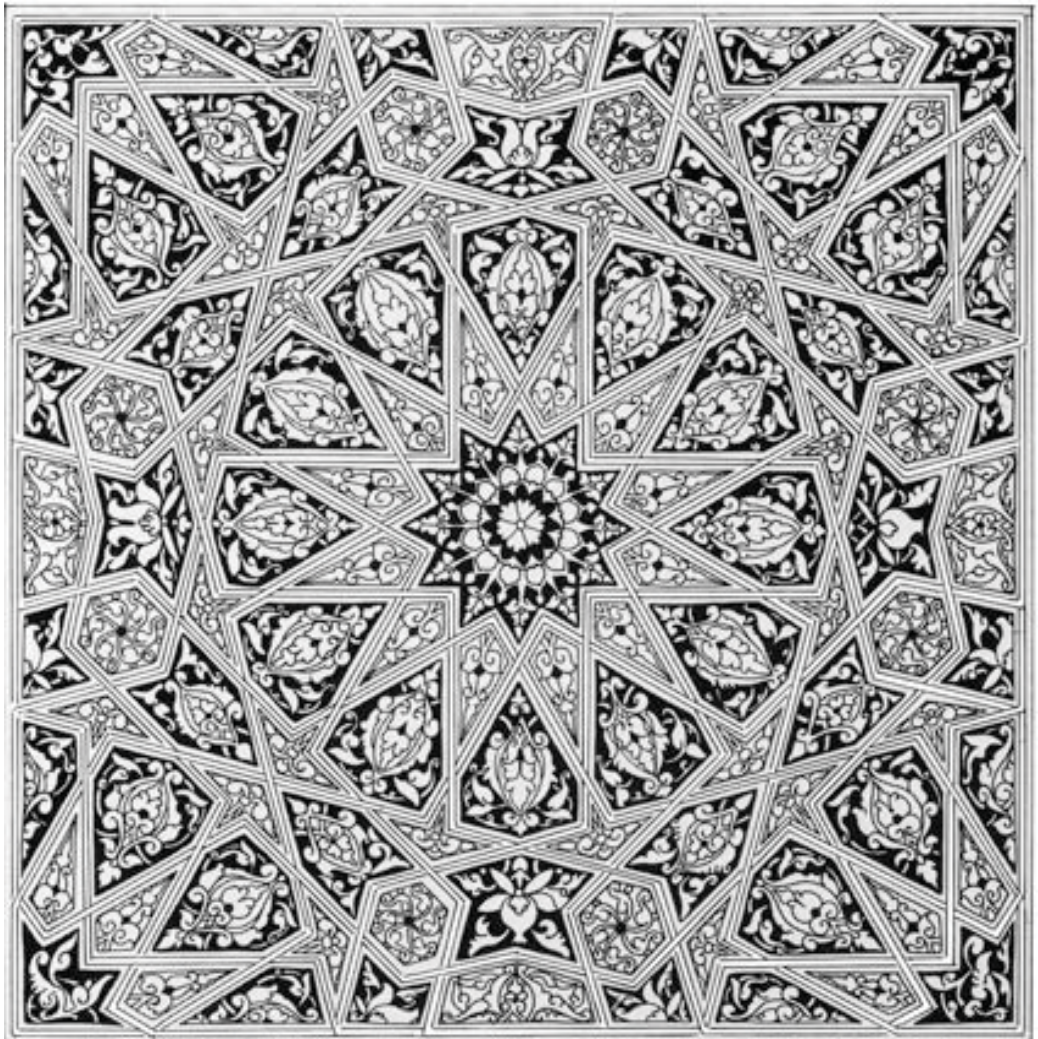
Fig. 2.8: Twelve-Fold Rosettes from a Quran Manuscript, Egypt 1356

displaying ten and fourteen fold rosettes, as well as several other less notable arrangements such as five and seven fold rosettes. Patterns can take on further arrangements depending on the sharpness of the stars points. While each is technically diverse in the way it is composed, to the untrained eye they can be strikingly similar, if not identical. Take as a case in point the ten-fold pattern on a manuscript of the same century in Egypt (Fig. 2.9). When observed quickly in relation to the twelve-point grid, the composition does not seem to indicate any drastic differences in style. Yet when technically analyzed, one can clearly identify the decagon star as being the product of two overlapping hexagons, resulting in the corner rosettes merging as the pattern repeats, as well as the bifurcation of interwoven vine knots with attached leaves within the rosette petals. Conversely, the dodecagon motif maintains a full circular rosette due to the nature and construction of its basic star, establishing a surrounding boarder of new shapes before duplicating itself in every direction. The nature of the isolated vegetation is also substantially more compact, giving the impression that the stems and leaves fold back on top of themselves. In this way, signification embedded in arabesque compositions has the potential to communicate similar messages on a surface level to many, as well as deeper meanings to a few, depending on the viewer's knowledge of the visual language. We will explore this further in the next chapter.

Versatile in its capabilities, the arabesque adorned the surfaces of virtually every medium available to artisans, including walls, doors, windows and domes; dishes, cups and vases; carpets cloths and lamps. It was engraved, painted and plastered on wood, marble, stone, pottery, metal, textiles and paper stucco. It was an interface people both saw and interacted with on a daily basis. The detail from a 15th century door and cabinet from the Mosque of Qaytbay in Egypt demonstrates the arabesques adaptability to different mediums (Fig. 2.10). This particular piece is actually a painted version of
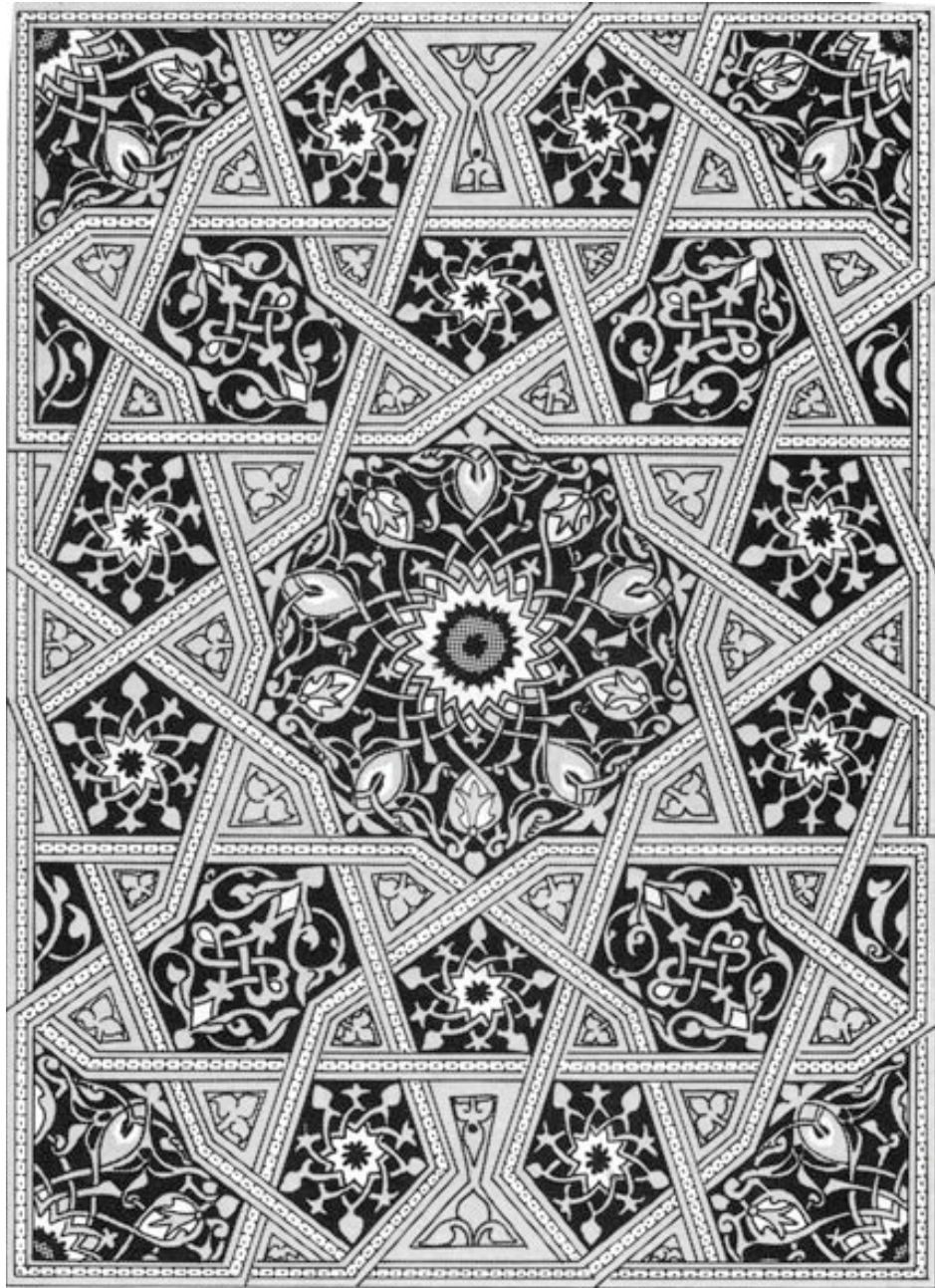
Fig. 2.9: Ten-Fold Rosettes from a Quran Manuscript, Egypt 14th Century
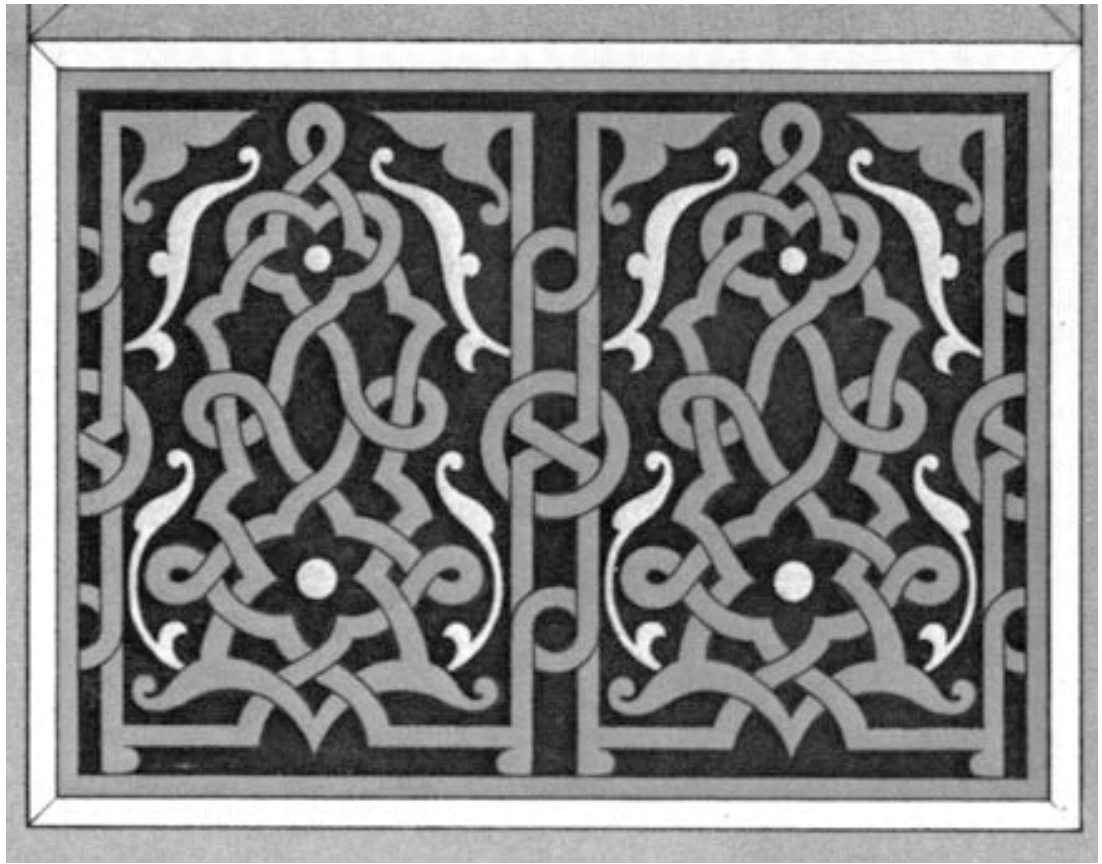
Fig. 2.10: Mosque of Qaytbay Door and Cabinet Decoration 15th Century

what was originally engraved in wood. We can see that the motif originates around a six-pointed star, yet has been trellised to produce a continuous weaving line that loops around and form what appears to be unreal palmettes in each panel, all the while maintaining the symmetry of the motif. Additional coiling vines are included to complete the composition. This motif unveils the endless possibilities and variations arabesque design can take when vegetation invades the structure of a geometric grid. A marble inlaid work dated between the 14th and 18th century is yet another example of an arabesque design that sustains the harmony and symmetry of ten fold pattern, all the while adjusting its appearance to include bifurcated stems and leaf features (Fig. 2.11). Both compositions are structurally different, yet are based around the same methods of construction and adaptable to a myriad of mediums.

It was in the beginning of the 16th century that much of the Arab-Islamic world became incorporated under the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire. Despite this massive transition, the Ottomans continued to be inspired by the visual culture of previous Islamic traditions. At this point, the arabesque style was fully matured and mastered by Islamic artisans. Only minor enhancements in composition, complexity and usage have been developed since, with the overall spirit remaining fixed to pre-Ottoman rule. A marble mosaic from Mamluk, Egypt fashioned only decades before to the Ottoman conquest displays a unique rendition of a purely geometric ten-fold pattern producing rosettes and other new shapes (Fig. 2.12). It is similar yet technically separate from the earlier motif in Fig. 2.8. Nearly a century later under Ottoman rule we see a carpet design that transforms a basic eight-point star into a star shaped medallion, made up of palmettes that extend out towards every point (Fig. 2.13). Each medallion repeated throughout the carpet is filled with vegetal arabesques similar to those fashioned for earlier Quran manuscripts. Carpet designs such as this may appear aesthetically

Fig. 2.11: Inlaid work, 14th- 18th Century
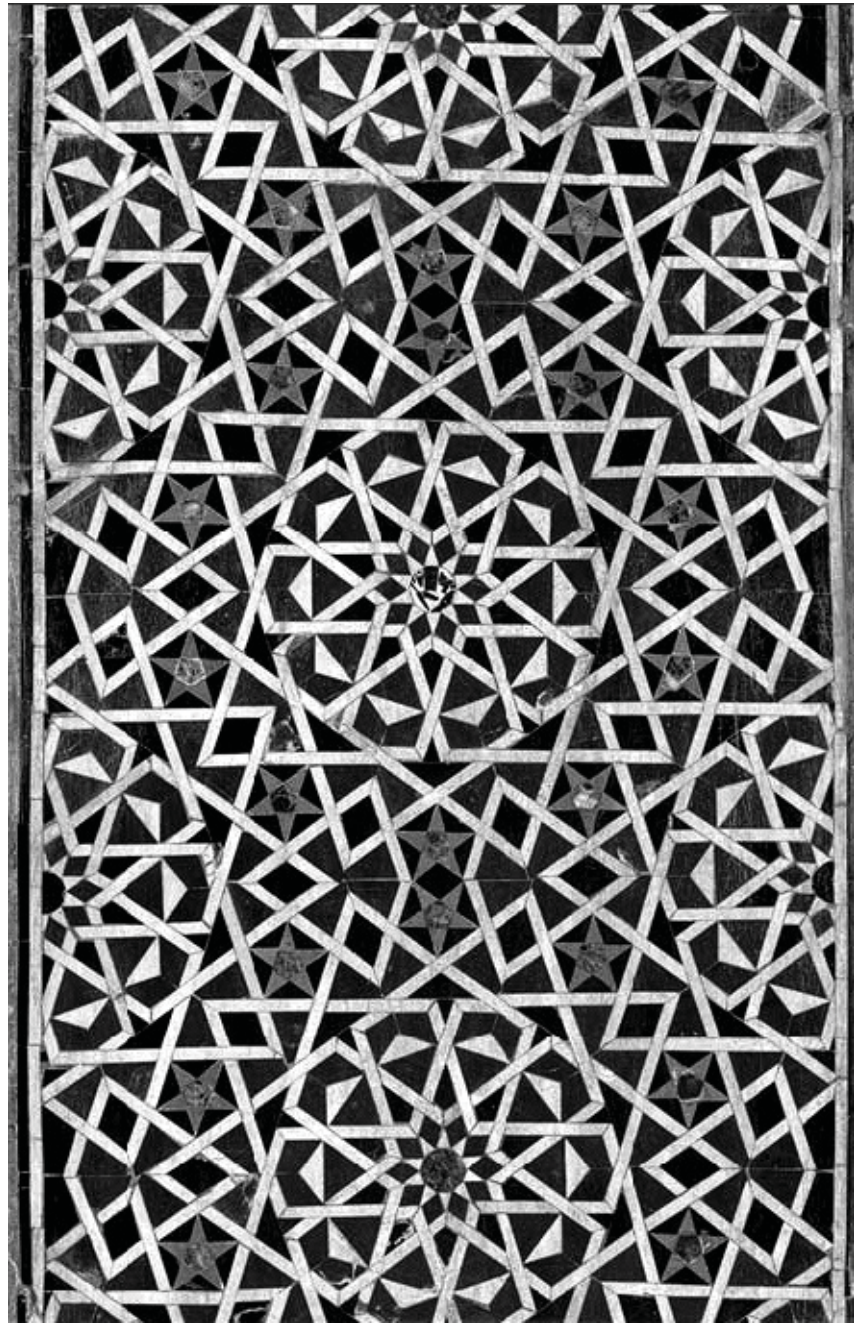
Fig. 2.12: Dado Panel: Polychrome marble mosaic, 15th Century Egypt
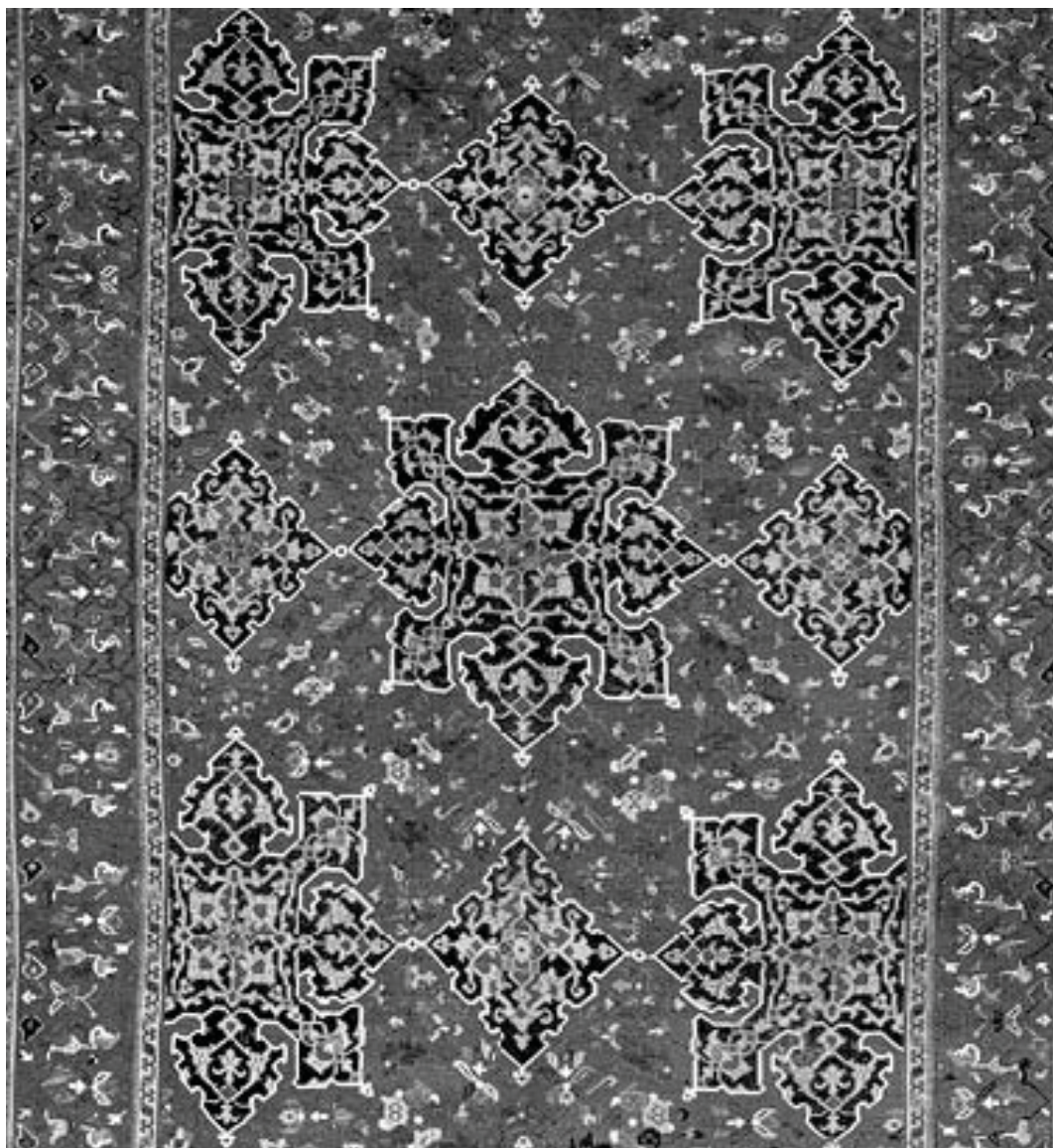
Fig. 2.13: Carpet**,** Ottoman Ushak, Anatolia. 17th Century

different from other abstract motifs; yet maintain the same underlying premise from which all arabesques are constructed. This design would have been one of many familiar to those residing in the Peninsula during this era, as the whole region was considered Ottoman territory. Later arabesques leading into the 18th and 19th centuries followed in the traditions of former times, producing little that would seem to deviate from the style of these archival motifs. There is no doubt that the artistic achievements from other sectors of the Islamic world, such as India, China and later innovations from the West continued to influence the aesthetic nature of the arabesque well into the modern era.

2.3   Contemporary Applications of the Arabesque

As modern advances in technology and innovation developed in Europe throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the arts and ideals of the Islamic East became increasingly challenged by Western ideologies. For three hundred years the Ottoman Empire rejected European printing developments, refusing to embrace their modern methods. This was the product of continued religious and cultural animosity between the Christians of the West and the Muslims of the East, credited chiefly to the 11th century Christian crusades in the Levant. Cultural, political and economic conflicts within the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 18th century did not aid in healing this schism, nor did it profit the continuation of the Arab arts. After years of Christian evangelistic efforts in the region to print bibles in the Arabic language, the printing press was finally adopted in Lebanon in 1734. What followed in this arena was predominantly the printing of Quranic texts and other Arab literature, with less emphasis placed on evolving the arabesque for use in contemporary mediums. Having said that, the Muslim world readily embraced block printing as well as the late 18th century German invention

of lithography, as it was not only more suited to printing traditional calligraphy over the less extravagant Arab type, but also was conducive to producing stamps with arabesque patterns. The carved lead and woodcuts used to stamp the pattern mainly use a linear vegetal arabesque composition of bifurcated leaves and miniature rosettes; not nearly as beautiful nor elaborate as used in traditional mediums (Fig. 2.14).

Fig. 2.14: Arabesque block printing for Quranic manuscripts, 18th Century Lebanon

Wijdan Ali records in his book *Modern Islamic Art* that even at the start of the 12th century, the Arabian Peninsula continued to be geographically isolated from outside

cultural influences, Islamic and secular alike, with the exception of the region containing the cities of Mecca and Medina, known formally as the Hijaz. The Bedouin people gratified their need for artistic expression through crafts, including weaving, embroidery, silver and gold jewelry making, wood carving, and decorative paintings on boats, walls, doors of houses and mosques, not unlike outside Islamic expressions of which they would have had limited knowledge. What minimal influence did exist came primarily from the East, evidenced through imports of pottery and glass. In fact, central Arabia and the Gulf have been in close association with Persia throughout history as a result of proximity, rich trade and consistent intermingling. Ali emphasizes that it was not until oil was discovered that the West began to take a more invested interest in the desert lands of the Arabian Peninsula, which consequently had a tremendous impact on the Islamization, westernization and modernizing of traditional artistic expressions in the Peninsula (Ali 1997, p.119-120).

Western art concepts began to seriously take root in the lives of Arab community in the 1950's with the introduction of a modern educational system. Through government funded scholarships, Western art trends were further employed and provided opportunity for Arab students in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf to study art abroad in countries such as England, Italy and often as close as Iraq. Their return resulted in the implementation of learned western art theories from the European renaissance into their countries evolving artistic movement. Despite these influences, Ali records that many Arab artists focused on grounding their art in Islamic artistic heritage - combining archival geometric and floral arabesques with calligraphic painting in an attempt to meld their local culture in a somewhat modern rendition (Ali 1997, p.120-124). In a sense,
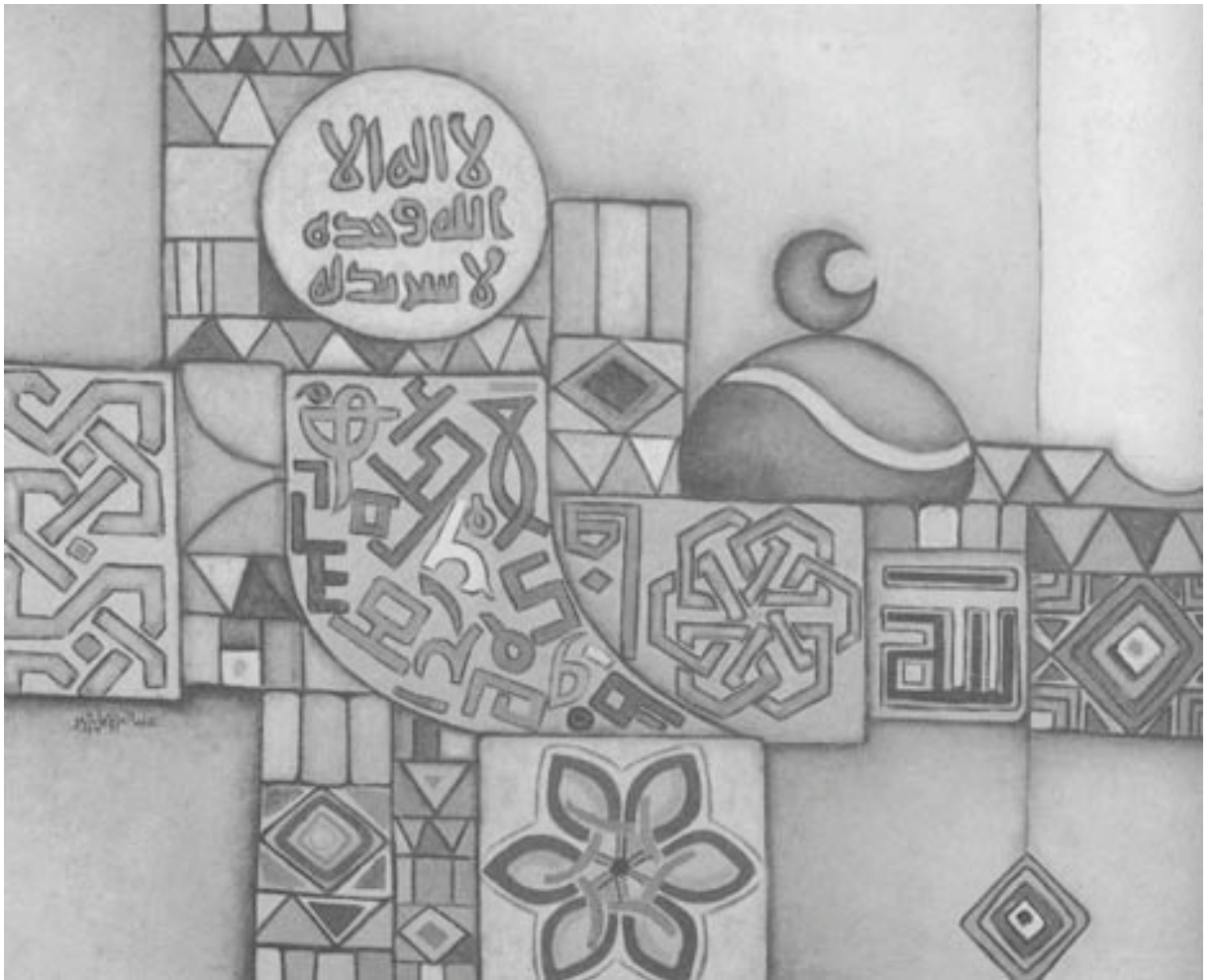
Fig. 2.15: Abdel Aziz Ashour oil on Canvas – Saudi Arabia 1962

western ideologies are responsible for breaking the laws pertaining to the formation and structure of arabesque design. Saudi artist, Abdel Aziz Ashour's oil on canvas (1962) is just one example of a contemporary motif that utilizes elements from traditional Islamic ornament (Fig. 2.15). Here we encounter a breaking away from Kuhnel's initial criterion of an arabesque as only ever appearing in isolation. Ashour's geometric interlace adheres to antique trends juxtaposed with Bedouin and calligraphic styles, yet is segmented in a sort of cubist rendition as influenced by Western art movements. Since the 1960's, the modernization of traditional arabesques has become increasingly commonplace in the contemporary graphic design of the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, many similar works are reminiscent of local scenes and customs, which go beyond the scope of this paper.

2.4   Defining the Arabesque

As the Arabian Peninsula continues to develop and be influenced by Western concepts into the 21st century, laws pertaining to the structure of arabesque design are persistently challenged and explored. Elements in style are altered to such an extent in some cases to where its subtle complexities have been remodeled in accordance with Western design trends. Basic units are selected from within traditional motifs for corporate branding and are often used alongside comparable motifs as part of a collage. This is evidenced in the graphics applied to currency in the Arabian Gulf, as well as on posters, billboards and other mediums used for advertising in contemporary society. The arabesque is frequently manipulated at will with no coherent sense of order or unity. That said, the characteristic signifying nature of these designs remain recognizable as being arabesque to the untrained eye. This modernization and revival of traditional Arab ornament is comparable to producing new varieties of typefaces, yet still utilizing the

same alphabet. For this reason I have chosen to focus on the signifying themes of arabesque motifs in antiquity, rather than merely the infinite ways in which its form can manifest. Given the modern renditions of arabesque design that will be investigated further in the following chapter, I feel it necessary to customize our definition of arabesque design. By outlining past definitions derived from scholars of archival arabesque motifs I feel I can more solidly assert my own hypothesis regarding its future use.

Although Grabar is for the most part silent as to what distinguishes the parameters of an arabesque, he does allude to it being an exclusively western term, primarily used to describe unreal vegetal motifs in Islamic art (Grabar 2006, p.347). Similarly, Kuhnel and Riegl, renowned for their exhaustive interrogations of this 'Arab style', indicate there being a separation between the geometric and vegetal varieties of arabesques, restricting their analyses to only vegetal ornament that is of sufficient abstraction, sinuousness and interconnection (Tabbaa 2002, p.74). Ettinghausen and Dimand understood it as vegetal designs of palmettes, where each leave grows out of the tip of another in an unending continuous pattern (Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, p.66).

In a broader sense of the word, Burckhardt proposed the arabesque as being inclusive of ornamentation in stylized plant forms and strictly geometrical interlacing work, as the two are often found juxtaposed (Burckhardt 1976, p.76). Likewise Ali and Behrens-Abouseif described it as being inclusive of both vegetal tendrils and geometric pattern, as throughout antiquity the two appear inseparable. Each communicates abstractly the Divine Unity and the ultimate goal of existence, which are themes of significance (Chapter 3). Moreover, contemporary artists would argue that calligraphy

is a type of arabesque, as it is the most pure of all Arab-Islamic art, and often arranged to appear floral or geometric.

It is clear that behind every attempt to define the arabesque there exists a bias due to agenda. It is also evident that little has been written of the arabesque since having been influenced by western concepts post World War II. As indicated through the analysis of archival and contemporary arabesque motifs, my investigation is inclusive of purely vegetal and geometric abstract ornament, displayed as rhythmic undulation. I acknowledge the role Arabic script plays within arabesque motifs, yet this will not be central to my research. Furthermore, I would like to propose that the arabesque is not limited by the elements that make up its visual structure. It is instead determined by the signifying themes from which it was first conceived. Modern executions of the style may alter its outward appearance, yet the significance for meaning making remains. Since the 7th century, arabesque design has steadily developed and evolved on the blank surfaces of virtually every medium available using the technology of the time, none of which have ever been completely alike.

This chapter has taken a comprehensive look at how the arabesque has continued to evolve and be represented on both antique and contemporary mediums. I have provided my own analysis as to the different types and elements of the arabesque, as well provided valuable insights from reputable scholars of the Arab-Islamic ornament. I have accomplished this in a chronological sequence so as to elaborate on the historical journey of arabesque design from the 7th century until now. In the next chapter we will observe how the floral, geometric and even calligraphic elements found in the arabesques visual make up are not merely visual tools by which to decorate, but are representative of underlying mythological themes rooted deep in the Arab-Islamic culture.

CHAPTER THREE

Mythologies and Semiotic Analysis of the Arabesque

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The arabesque has until now been investigated in light of its historical origins and physical attributes. In this chapter I will delve deeper into what I have come to understand as the religious and cultural mythologies encoded in characteristic arabesque design. Mythologies, as described by semiotician Roland Barthes, 'tap psychically into ancient themes that continue to inform our daily life schemes' (Danesi and Perron 1999, p.259). My purpose here is to investigate those mythologies in Islamic Arabia and determine how they manifest themselves through the visual formation of arabesque motifs. This will in turn strengthen our perception of the ornamentation as an underlying mechanism for meaning making in the Arabian Gulf.

For Kuhnel, to attach any symbolic function to the arabesque would be to misunderstand its character, as a hieratic sublimation of natural forms contradicts totally the conceptual attitude of Islam (Kuhnel 1949, p.9). Likewise, Riegl assumed the arabesque to play a purely decorative role, which Necipoglu viewed as being more a product of his time (Necipoglu 1995, p.65). Grabar too saw the methodological problem with assigning meaning to the abstraction, claiming it devoid of cultural specificity, and thus meant purely for beautification and visual pleasure (Grabar 1973, p.189). This assessment was conceived from the notion that similar ornamentation has always existed in every culture and civilization, and is therefore solely decorative. Be this as it may, Ettinghausen, and later Grabar document the Arabs as having initially chosen specific subject matter from foreign arts to communicate certain ideas and clearly identify the power of the Islamic world (Grabar 2005, p.20). Despite religious

conviction concerning the signifying nature of the arabesque and its direct association with Islam, the visual structure of the abstract ornament can be accurately viewed as a composite of mythic code imbued with hidden archetypal meaning. As a result, we redirect our attention away from the subtleties of the designs composition to consider its potential as a vehicle for communication.

In her 2003 article 'Design as Meaning Making', Elzbieta T. Kazmierczak proposed designs be redefined from finite, fixed objects of aesthetic and practical consideration to semiotic interfaces enabling the reconstruction of meaning by receivers (Kazmierczak 2003, p.45). In the context of this thesis, the arabesque is not merely an attractive motif used to decorate blank surfaces. It is also a symbol, a collection of signs that contain cultural and religious mythologies pertaining to the Arab-Islamic worldview. It is the visible manifestation of the values, beliefs and behaviors held by the majority in the Arabian Peninsula. In this context, the arabesque operates as a codified message device, or interface for communicating important religious and cultural meaning to select readers in the region.

3.1   Semiotics

Semiotics, a term derived from the Greek word *sema* 'marks, signs', is involved with interpreting the meaning of signs in everyday life, thus relating directly to cognition. It is the quest for symbolic meaning, of myth and fantasy. Arthur Berger describes signs as being anything – a word, an object, a pattern etc – that can be comprehended as substituting for something else (Berger 2000, p.35). Therefore everything in existence is eligible as a sign. For Kazmierczak 'the whole of human experience, without exception, is an interpretive structure mediated and sustained by signs' (Kazmierczak 2003, p.47). Semiotics attempts to decode the signs hidden in

texts, thus exposing their potential for meaning making in culturally specific contexts. For this reason I propose the arabesque, when viewed as a type of sign that Danesi refers to as a 'social text', lends itself particularly well to the semiotic method (Danesi 2004, p.247).

Instead of only analyzing signs and the way they relay messages, or codes and the various ways signs are organized or combined, my focus deals with culture. That is, the ways in which signs and codes of arabesque design operate within the cultural context of the Arabian Gulf. This stems from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman's assessment that all of reality is a social construction, and as such our very understanding of reality is cultural. They assert that human thought is directly linked to the social context in which it was developed. As such, culture unconsciously shapes our opinions and positions on life, ultimately affecting the way we view the world (Berger and Luckman 1966).

With this in mind, we can begin to understand how the socio-cultural/religious mythologies in the form of arabesque motifs influence Arab worldviews, as they are features of prominence in the Arab world. Whether in the home, at the markets or during the five visits each day to the mosque for prayer, local society in the Arabian Gulf is bombarded by the visual language of the arabesque. This is especially true of modern society. Before investigating the impact the arabesque has on the formation of cognitive style through contemporary modes in the Gulf, we first must address its possible meanings by use of semiotic analysis.

3.2 Meaning in the Arabesque

The nonfigurative nature of the arabesque leaves it open to mass interpretation if unaware of the myths embedded in its visual language. As discussed in Chapter 1, its

structure is predominantly composed of abstracted vegetal and geometric variants characterized by its 'infinite correspondence'. The vegetal aspects of the design, including interlacing vines, bifurcating stems, leaf palmettes and others were assimilated into the core structure of the design to signify underlying cultural themes and their contextual meanings. Therefore each element has the potential to function independently as a socio-cultural and religious sign. When combined as a social text, the traditional motifs correspond to the conscious or unconscious worldviews of the Arab-Islamic majority. Likewise, geometric arabesques composed of circles, squares, stars and various polygons also possess a measure of individual as well as corporate meaning within proper cultural contexts.

Among the most pronounced reoccurring themes in Islamic art is the concept of Paradise as a fertile garden. The reasoning behind this is easily understood when viewed through the lenses of the Islamic worldview. Similar to Christianity, Islam approaches life on earth as being a preface to eternal life, the realm where true reality exists. Everything we do on earth will ultimately determine what happens to us when we die, and therefore imagery pertaining to the visual attributes of Heaven plays an important role in the daily life of the believer. The source of such imagery comes directly from explanations of Paradise according to the Muslim writings of the Quran and *hadith*. They describe the landscape of Paradise as being abundant and beautiful, filled with spring water and shade. It is often referred to as a 'garden', complete with trees, flowers, fountains and rivers (Quran 15:45, 64:9). Moreover, it is described as containing date palms, grapevines, pomegranates and copious amounts of other kinds of fruit. (Quran 23:19, 55:68).

It is evident through these notions of eternity that Islamic artisans adopted vegetal and floral forms in arabesque motifs for the decoration of buildings, textiles,

ceramics, metalwork and so on to signify the ultimate goal of existence for the Arab-Muslim. For Mohammed Khazaie, every object and surface to possess a vegetal arabesque motif is part of a literal or symbolic depiction of Paradise (Khazaie 1997, p.190). In a sense, to paraphrase Kazmierczak, arabesque designs as signs are cognitive interfaces, as they point to a greater reality than its physical form and cause believers to contemplate on the eternal rewards that follow a righteous and God-fearing lifestyle (Kazmierczak 2003, p.47). For this reason we see arabesques on the interior walls of mosques, as well as Quranic manuscripts, prayer rugs and other religious material, as it operates as an cognitive interface from which believers are emotionally and spiritually stimulated via the messages encoded in its visual form.

The vegetal variant of the arabesque is not the only signifier of Paradise. Rosettes created as a product of geometric star patterns also call to mind the beauty of the garden, as it takes on the appearance of an abstracted flower. Not only does it refers to Paradise, but also evokes the Arabs general love and appreciation for flowers.

Even more pronounced than the Islamic heavenly garden is the perception of the divine creator himself through traditional arabesque motifs. Abas and Salman assert that the major concern of art for civilizations of antiquity was to represent God visually through images (Abas and Salman 1995, p.10). Since the nature of the Islamic faith deterred Arabs from creating figural representations of God like other religions, they engaged in depicting God abstractly through select ornament.

The Quran directly refers to Allah as 'the light of the heavens and earth' (Quran 24:35). As such, the only natural image of Allah in which Muslim artisans are even remotely willing to employ is that of *Nur*, meaning light. Here we begin to see the correlation between the geometric star motifs in arabesque ornament and the essence of

how God is regarded through the Islamic worldview. Could it be by mere chance that one of the most prominent aspects of the arabesque happens to symbolize the Islamic perception of the divine creator? While every culture has a history of associating with stars on some level, each has interpreted and related to them differently depending on the cultural lenses from which they view reality. It would follow then that Islam's ancient love for astronomy and the cosmos was first triggered by a desire to better understand God and his creation. Islam translated these relationships into signifying forms by means of adopting and further developing geometric patterns.

The cosmos by definition presuppose an ordered universe. According to Keith Critchlow in his book *Islamic Patterns*, the overriding principle for Islam is the unity of existence and therefore of the universe (Critchlow 1976, p.57). What better form of abstraction to adopt than geometry, which consists of the logical ingredients of the circle, square, triangle and other basic geometric forms. The mathematics of geometry not only operates as a language of the universe, but also encapsulates the essence of God as described in the Quran and *hadith*. The significance ascribed to each individual shape within a given motif is central to establishing divine unity, order and perfection in Islam. Combined, these unifying features communicate spiritual meaning to local readers in Islamic Arabia.

While geometric shapes are universally known, they can be interpreted differently depending on ones social construct of reality. For those raised with the Islamic worldview, Critchlow records that the circle signifies cosmic unity, and is therefore above all other geometric forms (Critchlow 1976, p.58). From the circle all other shapes can be assembled. The triangle symbolizes human consciousness and the principle of harmony. It is the geometrical expression of two entities and their reconciling relationship (Critchlow 1976, p.30). Squares represent our physical

experience on earth, while the hexagon signifies heaven. Six-pointed stars commonly found in arabesque motifs of antiquity serve as symbols of perfection and light. When united to form various complex arabesque patterns of infinite correspondence, they represent the nature of God in the most abstract of ways.

Moreover, there is a mindset preserved since ancient times that beauty comes about only when all parts of a structure are harmoniously balanced and in order. In Islam, ornament must be based upon some sort of inner logic of proportion for it to be truly beautiful. Both the vegetal and geometric aspects of the arabesque follow this principle. The *hadith* describes Allah as beautiful and loving beauty. Since God is believed to be perfect in all of his parts, should not also the ornament made to express him? God is perfect, logical and beautiful; therefore art must possess the same characteristics. When all mathematical constraints required in creating geometrical motifs are satisfied, then and only then are they seen to be beautiful.

To determine whether or not these symbolic associations were intentionally assigned to the vegetal and geometric arabesques of antiquity goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, my intention is to conceive of the arabesque as a trigger for cognition in the social context of the Arabian Gulf. Necipoglu saw arabesque patterns as igniting religious, metaphysical and mystical resonances with certain viewers, which permits us to approach the ornamental style as an interface for meaning making (Necipoglu 1995, p.65-66). According to Kazmierczak, all designs are interfaces, as viewers organize – consciously or not – the physical patterns of design into patterns of relations (Kazmierczak 2003, p.47). It is through these relations, or cultural worldviews that viewers infer meaning from a particular design. When perceived as a semiotic device, arabesque design is not merely decorative filler on everyday objects, but a composite of

thoughts and inferences that are interpretive on a variety of levels, depending on who sees them.

The mythologies proposed in this chapter by no means account for every possible interpretation of the arabesque, as we will continue to observe. That being said, as an effective design mechanism within Arab culture, it possesses certain shared denominators common to most viewers in the region. Since these myths have dominated Arab social life for centuries, it follows that the people would have come to understand them through use of their senses. Canadian communications theorist, Marshall McLuhlan described the encoding and decoding of mythic themes is fashioned by what he called 'sense ratios'. The types of codes or media employed in a cultural context determines what sense ratio dominates (Sebeok and Danesi 2000, p.35). It would appear through our investigation in Chapters 1 and 2 that the arabesque, as a visual interface, was frequently applied to every blank surface in order to communicate and sustain cultural and religious values and ideals, thus increasing the visual sense ratio in society.

In the next chapter, we will explore the semiotic effects arabesque design can have on local society in the Arabian Gulf. In light of Western developments in the region, I will explore the way in which arabesques correspond to cultural needs and desires of the Gulf Arab consumer. In addition, we will explore how the signifying nature of the ornament can contribute to enhancing Arab identity in the midst of globalization when applied to food and beverage labels in the 21st century.

CHAPTER FOUR

Enhancing Arab Identity in the Midst of Globalization

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In the process of applying arabesque design to modern food and beverage labels in the Arabian Gulf, we fall witness to a merger of local design with a global medium. The practice takes from what is local and uses it to speak through a global surface platform. This chapter seeks to frame the continuation and semiotic impact of traditional arabesque design within the context of globalization. In doing so, I endeavor to uncover how vegetal and geometric motifs on labels not only advertises and promotes Arab identity, but further enhances the design within the greater global village. As a type of Arab graphic design, arabesques have the power to communicate cultural meaning by tapping into specific needs and desires of the local Arab population in the Gulf region. Its inclusion on labels represents how tradition can co-exist harmoniously with contemporary aesthetics, acting as a visual gateway in which local consumers can interact with their own cultural identities. Recognizing and including such cultural nuances has the ability to affirm feelings of familiarity and security for local society amid the visual chaos of modern packaging designs.

As we have come to discover, arabesques are age-old design interfaces made up of cultural and religious meanings core to worldviews held in the Near East for over thirteen centuries. The ornamentation's most characteristic features maintain prominence in Arabia today as a crucial form of surface decoration and visual culture. In addition to its inclusion upon surfaces from antiquity, the style is increasingly being implemented within corporate identities, print, web and other advertising mechanisms of the 21st century. This recent evolution and advancement of the style testifies to the

impact and influence Arab design continues to have on local communities in the Arabian Peninsula and the greater Middle East. Concurrently, since the rapid spread of globalization in the 1960's and the earlier discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region following the Second World War, much of the visual landscape in the Arabian Gulf has changed (Fox, et al 2006, p.5). What used to be seemingly distant and untainted by the advancements of modernization and the industrial age has quite suddenly evolved to appear much like it. Daniel Lerner asserts in *The Passing of Traditional Society* that the Middle East was forced into modernization, a Western invention, as a consequence of the West's presence and personal interest in the area. Lerner identifies that where Western values and thought are resisted in the Arab nations, notions of modern power, wealth, institutions and consumer commodities are welcomed as improvements to be assimilated into the cultural framework of society (Lerner 1958, p.47).

4.1   Globalization in the Arabian Gulf

Regardless of its effect on local culture in the Gulf both positive and negative, globalization permeates all aspects of Arab social life. It is, as Zygmunt Bauman put it, 'the inevitable fate of the world, an irreversible process' (Bauman 1998, p.1). Egyptian professor and scholar of Arab culture, Gaber Asfour, effectively describes globalization as incorporating the nations of the world into a singular system; a system which is closely monitored by the business interests of the hegemonic United States (Fox, et al 2006, p.141). These interests provide useful insight as to why the Gulf has adopted much of the consumer culture of the West into their socio-economic lifestyles. Major cities such as Kuwait City, Doha, Manama, Jeddah and Dubai look much like American cities, with American chain restaurants, clothing stores and supermarkets (Hammond

2005, p.256). To a large extent, this rapid change can be attributed to the increased number of expatriates and foreign businesses now based in the Gulf States. This is normative of a globalizing society. John W. Fox records that in 2006 expatriate residents made up nearly 33 percent of the total Gulf population. In the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait, the percentage of expatriates continues to be in the majority (Fox, et al 2006, p.3). Some might even suggest that today there are more cultures present in the Middle East than almost anywhere else on the planet (Boutros 2009, p.16). Nonetheless, this radical invasion of outside influence and change has significant impact on the everyday routines of Arab local culture.

Fox records that traditional culture and social systems in the Gulf counteract these insurmountable odds by controlling and strictly enforcing what is culturally acceptable; selectively filtering the advancements that can be made. While it is evident that Arab society readily embraces the material benefits and consumer luxuries that follow globalization, they continue to steadfastly cushion themselves from permitting Western ideologies to filter down and potentially contaminate the traditional familial structure (Fox, et al 2006, p.3). This is done to protect the three primary things all Arab people hold close to their hearts, which include their faith, their family and their culture (Boutros 2009, p.12). The rejection of Western values challenges global advancement in the Gulf, as Western thought and worldviews are often contained in the graphic interfaces of material consumer products.

The Arabian Gulf is not the only area of the world to have to confront the challenges of globalism within local culture. When compared with nations across the globe, such as Japan, China, Hong Kong and Singapore we discover that the uniformity of global design is not generally as attractive to the ordinary consumer. According to Aldersey-Williams, ideas pertaining to one's national identity are far more powerful in

people minds (Aldersey-Willams 1992, p.10). While it may seem to be in the best interests of business to converge national tastes and cultures so as to become universally standard, this does not appear to be happening as companies may have hoped. The different ways in which individuals conduct their everyday life routines such as eating, drinking, working and playing remain culturally distinct, whether it is in the Middle East, Asia or elsewhere. Thus, as Aldersey-Williams puts it 'the products that help people do these things will and should continue to reflect the different ways they do them from country to country, even if many manufactures would rather they did not' (Aldersey-Willaims 1992, p.8). We increasingly see this in the packaging designs for products throughout Asia and the greater Middle East during Chinese New Year and Holy month of Ramadan, at which time designs tend to appeal more to regional character or style.

On these points, Asfour asserts that many Arab thinkers deem it necessary to re-examine the future of Arab culture in relation to outside influences. As consumerism and materialism continue to abound, so do the foreign concepts used to promote them. Asfour observes that as nations and individuals included within the global network proceed to fall victim to the hegemony of Americanization, what often results is a negation of local cultural traits, practices, beliefs and national identities (Fox, et al 2006, p.142). Western consumer products come fully equipped with their own set of codified messages, designed to communicate their own worldviews and appeal to the social desires of receivers in the West. These opposing messages can be sent entirely through osmosis when viewed in the East, seeping into traditional social life undetected as visual landscapes gradually collide to appear more Western. Understandably, this level of change over time can be overwhelming for Arabs committed to the local community, as it can upend social meanings and generate a superfluous dependence on actions

outside their control. It is in an attempt to counter the supremacy of western ideologies that we are now beginning to encounter a revival of traditional techniques within global consumer products in the Arabian Gulf. In a sense, globalization has empowered local design and visual culture to evolve so as to be assimilated upon the surfaces of western consumer products.

Mourad Boutros writes in his 2009 publication, *Arabic for Designers,* that for graphic design to be truly successful it must be inspired by its environment and talk to its people (Boutros 2009, p.116). If communication is the driving force of all graphic design, then it stands to reason that global designs would assimilate localized symbols with their respective identities so as to be immediately recognizable to its intended audience. As seen in previous chapters, arabesque design as a visual language carries with it rich cultural identity; influencing how people in Arabia view not only themselves, but the world around them. Rather than watching idly as globalization reshapes cultural norms and upends visual meaning making systems, Arabia can manipulate incoming design interfaces on advertising merchandise such as for food and beverages by contributing their own visual vocabulary and cultural texts. The vocabulary and texts being the rhythmic undulation of vegetal and geometric elements of which make up the arabesque.

Arab architect Ibrahim Jaidah of the Arab Engineering Bureau in Qatar is an excellent example of a practitioner whose purpose is to create contextual meaning in design. In all his works he attempts to embrace modernity while simultaneously retaining Arab national identity. Perhaps his most well know work is that of the Barzan Towers located in Doha, Qatar, which is a high rise office building of blue glass. The buildings first nine floors adopt a distinct traditional Arabian architectural style while the remaining twenty-one stories above that is modern glass. It is a brilliant masterpiece

that links the traditions and culture of Arabia with the global demands of the modern age in a creative and iconic way. It is not a matter of old vs new, but of the two working together in a beautiful and meaningful way.

The peoples of the Arabian Gulf have entered a chapter in history where they must reach a balance between tradition and the realities of the global world so as to better understand who they are as a people in the global village. From the vantage point of design and communication, a global awareness of the values associated with the Islamic faith and Arab culture is becoming increasingly important (Boutros 2009, p.12). Achieving equilibrium in design creates room for the arabesque to evolve upon contemporary surfaces, thus influencing cognitive style by means of emotional advertising appeals on contemporary consumer labels.

4.2   Emotion in a Label's Advertising Appeal

What I mean by advertising appeal is essentially an approach used by brands to capture consumer attention and to influence their feelings toward a certain product, service or cause. George Belch describes this approach as being something that moves people, speaking to their innermost needs and desires (Belch 2008, p.266). Most contemporary media today is made up of both rational and emotional elements, as are labels for food and beverages. The rational portion of the label is comprised of information about the product it contains. This includes the name of brand, its sensory benefits such as taste and smell – motives for buying like health and nutrition along with other criteria such as the quality and efficiency of the product. It focuses on the benefits of the product itself. The informational aspect of a labels appeal is an integral part of its overall composition and purpose for communication, and cannot be overlooked. It is also the part of the label that would most likely remain unchanged

from how it is positioned in the West - language excluded.

When arabesques are used, however, they directly influence the emotional portion of a labels advertising appeal. Often the arabesque will have nothing to do with the product itself, and have everything to do with attracting a target consumer. As a symbol, the arabesque evokes feelings that relate to consumers social and psychological needs for engaging with a product. It speaks more to consumer desires rather than just their immediate needs. These emotions, if properly targeted, can often transcend rational knowledge of the products features. It would seem that within the realm of modern consumerism it is not enough for us to merely have need for something; we have to want it as well. In her book, *Advertising as Communication,* Gillian Dyer writes that such advertising attempts to manipulate people into buying *their* own way of life, as well as goods (Dyer 1988, p.7). In this way, the semiotic significance of the arabesque interface transforms labels in the Gulf by making them more desirable to consumers. This notion is examined and tried to a greater extent in the following chapters.

Fig. 4.1: Alfathi halal pie with lamb liver

To illustrate the emotional impact traditional Arab ornamentation can have on consumers, let us observe the Norwegian brand of Alfathi, which utilizes arabesque design as part of its overall label composition (Fig. 4.1). While this range of product is not sold in the Arabian Gulf itself, its purpose is to draw the attention of Arab-Muslim consumers living in Norway to a special halal meat product. The product is unique in that it honors the strict requirements set in the Islamic faith for slaughtering and preparing meat. In a sense, the arabesques on the label do reflect subtle aspects of the product without being directly linked. Yet this rational knowledge of the product is not what first allures the consumer. Instead, a mythic code comprised of interlacing twelve-point star rosettes is used on the label so as to create an emotional connect with consumers of an Arab or Islamic background. Even if the Arab consumer is a non-Muslim and has no perceivable need for the unique meat product, the familiarity of the Arab social text may be enough to create an emotional connection between the consumer and the product.

Belch notes nostalgia as being a powerfully motivating emotion in advertising, as it can evoke positive feelings for the consumer based on their current or past values, as well as their heritage (Belch 2008, p.270-271). It reminds people of who they are and where they have come from, thus establishing an emotional connection. This is becoming increasingly significant in light of the rapid spread of globalization and Western ideals in the Gulf, as well as worldwide. I came to better understand this when conducting interviews with Arab supermarket owners in Sydney's western suburbs. When asked how consumers of Arab ethnicity respond to the food and beverage products in their shops, one owner observed that while older generations generally go for products that they know, younger consumers will generally look to the packaging. Not being aware of the quality of certain brands, youth will be drawn to the Arabic

design and/or language on the label and decipher that it must be good. Their knowledge of cultural design signifies to them, consciously or not, that the product is authentic.

4.3   Utilizing Local Creative Diversity

When adorned with cultural signs, packaging becomes part of the Arab legacy – a continuation of tradition and Islamic values. It honors individual culture by ensuring the continuation of a particular art form. While some modern scholars may disapprove or even reject the notion of a contemporary arabesque and its affiliation with Western aesthetics, its semiotic function for meaning making can hardly be refuted. Edward Said is among the most recognized for his view that Western attempts to try and make sense of the Middle East and its culture are inaccurate (Said, 1973 p.56-57). In his controversial 1973 publication 'Orientalism', Said contends that Western scholars have created erroneous generalizations regarding the East, which only serve to empower European prejudices and assume superiority over the Arab world. Yet, regardless of how Western nations have tampered with traditional arabesque design, if its most rudimentary visual characteristics remain intact its legibility is sure. In a time where western advancements and ideologies dictate global norms, designs that honor the continuation of local traditions can in part aid in bridging the gaps of misunderstanding and intolerance that divide orient and occident.

Moreover, Asfour writes that a utilization of local creative diversity in modern aesthetics not only establishes a respect for national identities, but insures a mutuality among nations and cultures, helping to provide counter values to westernization of the Gulf (Fox, et al 2006, p.143). In this way, the marriage of arabesque design and the label transforms how Arab consumers experience global products and their brands. Products such as AlFathi halal meat and numerous others are viewed and interpreted

differently by Arabs when harmonized with arabesques. Instead of being spoken at by a foreign voice, consumers feel as though they are spoken to. Belch re-emphasizes that by utilizing a unique set of psychological characteristics that would not typically be associated with a product communicates culturally specific feelings, images, meanings and beliefs, which ultimately increase its appeal among consumers. For many, such cross-cultural advertising design can, as Zirinski put it, turn *bid'a* (an undesired innovation or product) into *halal* (a religiously legitimate act), when properly aligned with the values, behavior and attitudes of the target group (Zirinski 2005, p.9). This will become increasingly apparent in Chapters 5 and 6.

In this chapter I have explored the semiotic impact of arabesque design within the global village and its place in enhancing Arab identity. While globalization poses a new set of challenges for the Arabian Gulf, their adoption of material goods has opened up a whole new realm in which traditional design such as the arabesque can flourish. Through strategic utilization of local ingenuity and design we can transform the way products are advertised and communicated in the Gulf, all the while preserving tradition and visual culture. The subject of the next chapter is to evaluate arabesque design more directly as a visual message interface for meaning making when applied to contemporary food and beverage labels. This will be achieved through observing various case studies of existing labels that employ the arabesque. In doing so, we will discover how these original mythic themes and symbols continue to resound in the signifying orders of modern society in the Arabian Gulf. As a result of increasing the visual sense ratio in the Gulf with known signifiers, we can determine the arabesques potential for continued cross-cultural communication in the region.

CHAPTER FIVE

Case Studies of the Arabesque on Existing Labels

CHAPTER 5

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Robert Opie describes the label as one of the most abundant of art forms in the modern era, and considering the number of people it reaches, the most influential (Opie 2001, p.6). He refers to the supermarket in his book *The Art of the Label* as a 'gallery of commercial art' where thousands of designs are on display. Such diversity is unmatched at any other time in human history. Yet unlike the art forms of the distant past, the function of the label has, and always will be, to draw attention to itself by means of visual signs; advertising and persuading target consumers to the product it contains.

Limiting my investigation to labels of select consumer goods enables me to focus more acutely on the semiotic relevance and impact of utilizing arabesque motifs in contemporary Arabia. In this chapter, I explore case studies of existing food and beverage labels within the context of the Arabian Gulf that employ arabesque ornament as a means of enhancing cross cultural communication. The design's underlying ability to both advertise and persuade will also be discussed. It is my belief that in the same way that arabesque design relays cultural mythologies when affixed to the blank surfaces of antiquity, so now does it continue to speak visually, consciously or unconsciously, to receivers through product labels in the contemporary Arab world.

When viewed in juxtaposition with the contemporary label, the status of the arabesque is altered from its earlier use, leaving it open to a new realm of potential connotations. Not only is this because we are dealing with surfaces of disposable consumer products instead of lasting household furnishings and architecture, but also because of the countless product types and diverse brand elements in which it can be

combined. When applied to global brand labels, the arabesque no longer takes on a dominating role as on traditional objects, but is merged within a composite of seemingly dissimilar signifiers of no apparent relationship. For instance, a milk product label communicates the content of the product despite cultural signifiers, as would a potato chip label and so on; while neither corresponds rationally with the arabesque. The text, typography, colors, images, nutritional information, branding and shape of a given label, irrespective of traditional motifs, all contribute to the visual communication process, indicating to receivers that a product contains what it says it does. Even subtle variations of the same product transmit supplementary meaning – e.g. milk as full cream, low fat or skim, and potato chips as original, salt and vinegar, BBQ etc).

The purpose here is not to analyze the infinite interpretations Arab receivers may have of a given product label on the shelf of a supermarket, but to realize that brand differences impact the way in which particular label designs are received and understood. The job of the arabesque interface is to cut through or bypass additional or opposing meanings, whatever they may be, and connect with receivers on a more personal and culturally specific level. While products will continue to communicate their contents and brand image, be it milk, potato chips, soft drink or others, the integration of the arabesque will enhance the products overall message in the cultural context of the Arabian Gulf, thus increasing a products cross-cultural effectiveness.

When united within an existing brand label, the arabesque also possesses the ability to persuade consumers into performing a desired action. The brand elements not only work in tandem to communicate the contents of a product, but are also arranged in such a way as to make the product stand out and sell itself. Vance Packard in his book *The Hidden Persuaders,* argued that persuasion is very effective when product characteristics begin to look the same or standardized. This need is increased as more

and more products line the shelves. Packard goes on to say that most companies strive to make distinct product differences so that their brand is the one that stands out from amongst the rest. If not, labels run the risk of appearing 'the same' or 'equally good' (Packard 1981, p.25). This is where the arabesque operates as an interface for cognition, as its primary function on a label is to tap directly into the unconscious mind of consumers in the Gulf region.

Moreover, Clyde Miller confirms through his book, *The Process of Persuasion* that clever persuaders use word or picture triggers to evoke desired responses in specific target groups. He continues by stating that all of us are creatures of conditioned reflex, in that we react to certain stimuli without thinking based upon our life circumstances or cultural environment (Packard 1981, p.27). It would follow then, that in order to better persuade people to purchase certain items, graphic designers would need to emphasize such signifiers as the arabesque.

5.1   Case Study 1: Coca-Cola Label

To get a concrete grasp of how Arab ornamentation can merge with existing brand labels and their respective elements to both persuade and generate culturally specific meaning, we turn to our first case in point; the Coca-Cola label. Coca-Cola is an international soft drink that is sold in over 200 countries worldwide. It is, in my opinion, one of the most successful brands in history to culturally customize its label exterior, all the while maintaining a consistent brand image. No matter where you are in the world today, people are familiar with the Coca-Cola brand. Yet despite its success and global brand recognition, it is evident the Coca-Cola Company found it beneficial to take their packaging to the next level so as to attract and engage certain cultural markets.

During the last decade, Coca-Cola has developed seasonal packaging graphics for its labels to be used throughout the Middle East and other Islamic nations in acknowledgment of the holy month of Ramadan (Fig. 5.1). This is the Islamic month of fasting in which Muslims refrain from eating, drinking and engaging in other excess activities from sunrise to sunset and is then followed by nights of breaking the fast with feasting throughout the night. As a result, Ramadan is also known to be the peak month of consumerism in the Gulf, making it an ideal time for companies to strategically market their products and promote traditional aesthetics. In fact, Andrew Hammond makes mention in his book *Pop Culture Arab World* that Arab governments have to stock up on foreign goods well in advance to accommodate the mass consumption that occurs during the holy month (Hammond 2005, p. 256).

Careful and close inspection of the Coca-Cola label reveals a subtle use of arabesque in the form of geometrical star patterns amongst other elements pertaining to Ramadan, Coca-Cola and its overall brand guidelines (Fig. 5.2). On the surface, the motif is made up of a basic five-pointed star, surrounded by petals that expand outward into a type of contemporary rosette. This design is then replicated and placed above, below and on either side of each other to appear as a continuous, unending pattern. The placement and rotation of crescent slivers into this geometrical framework creates a faint perception of an intertwining vine lattice and unnatural flowering affect of infinite correspondence, following the criterion set forth by Kuhnel and Riegl. Yet, whether or not its physical construction matches that of traditional motifs is not the main issue. The point is that on an underlying level its basic characteristics are reminiscent of those cultural mythologies outlined in Chapter 3, and will thus affect the cognitive style of the consumer on some level.

Fig. 5.1: Ramadan Coca Cola Label

Fig. 5.2: Ramadan Coca Cola Label (arabesque)

At the same time, it is equally true that the more accurately the visual structure of the arabesque conforms to that which is known from traditional motifs, the more consistently it will trigger similar thoughts in different receivers. As Kazmierczak proposed in her article, meaning undergoes three stages of development, all of which aid in defining its effectiveness. This process involves a designer, a design and a receiver (Kazmierczak 2003, p.48). Following her assessment, the designer defines the intended meaning by encoding known signifiers onto the label itself. This is realized in this study through the creation and application of the arabesque on labels. The concluding stage of the semiotic-cognitive sequence is where the consumer, or receiver interacts with the label design through visual engagement – either at a supermarket or at home.

According to Wilson Key in his book *The Age of Manipulation,* humans label consciously, but symbolic significance remains at an unconscious level (Key 1993, p.149). Similarly, semiotician and communications theorist Marcel Danesi advocates that advertising in general is interpretable on two levels – a surface level and an underlying level. The surface elements are the actual text; the signifiers, the codes, the visual triggers – that when juxtaposed weave messages that link directly to the underlying level. This level is where signification and meaning take place. Advertisements composed of signs can produce an array of possible connotations depending on the unique vantage point of a receiver. At this underlying level, arabesques on advertizing labels can not only evoke, but also strengthen mythic themes pertaining to local worldviews and lifestyles rooted in the unconscious, mythic part of the mind.

In 2009, Coca Cola released their annual label design following the same premise as the first (Fig. 5.3). This latest composition incorporates a collage of cultural

signs, including lamps, dune shaped clouds, circles, crescent moons, stars, soccer players and inlaid arabesque patterns of identical structure to Fig. 5.2. These signifying surface elements link to mythic themes pertaining to the Islamic holiday, along with selectively targeting specific consumer groups within the culture (i.e. male youth involved in soccer etc). The arabesque however, while playing a minor role in the composition, unites these other more contemporary signs together within the context of Arabic tradition.

Fig. 5.3: 2009 Ramadan Coca Cola Label

Whether or not the arabesque is the leading feature on a product label or displayed discreetly behind other signifying elements, I believe it has the potential to subconsciously persuade select consumers to varying degrees. As Key put it, symbols influence human perception, feeling and behavior, all of which circumvent conscious thought and logic (Key 1993, p.154). As a result of its noticeable prominence within society, consumers may not consciously decipher the slight presence of arabesque design upon contemporary labels. Instead, the ornamentation operates as a subliminal technique of communication whose purpose is not only to enhance product sales, but also to communicate and promote cultural ideologies and personalities.

5.2   Case Study 2: Chips Oman Label

Let us consider as a second case in point, the Al Jufair Food Industry L.L.C. product of Chips Oman. Originating in the Sultanate of Oman, Chips Oman is a popular potato chip brand found in supermarkets throughout the Arabian Gulf. In celebration of its 25th Anniversary in 2009, Chips Oman incorporated a large geometric palmette medallion as part of its label composition (Fig. 5.4). The ornamentation has no regular association with the brand, yet its presence aids in distinguishing the product as a purely Arabic art form amid the clutter of foreign labels. Aspects of the applied medallion are characteristic of the arabesque, causing it to possess similar meaning to traditional Arabic ornament at an unconscious level. On the surface, the elements around the circular section of the medallion are not joined, but constructed using geometric shapes that repeat around a central circle. This is accompanied by other vegetal elements including mini palmettes and separated grass like shapes. On the right and left side we begin to see more of an interlacing vine arrangement that falls in line with the definition

of a vegetal arabesque, where leaves and stems bifurcate outwards in a spiral like movement, according to Kuhnel, Riegl and Ettinghausen.

Fig. 5.4: 2009 Chips Oman Bag

When incorporated as part of the Chips Oman label design, the arabesque has the ability to change the way in which consumers in the Gulf interact with the product. The same can be said for the seasonal Coca-Cola label. This is because the arabesque

elements function as a sign that represents something significant in the culture. The use of such skillful representation is what Marcel Danesi claims advertising is all about (Beasley and Danesi, 2002, p.153). For Chips Oman and Coca Cola, the label exterior has been modified from merely communicating the contents of the pack, to engaging the needs and desires of the target group. They are able to connect with consumers visual senses to a greater extent now having associated known food or beverage labels with culturally significant stimuli.

5.3   Case Study 3: Maamoul Al- Hijaz Label

The third case study selected for this chapter is the packaging for Maamoul Al-Hijaz, a date biscuit brand that incorporates arabesque elements as part of its overall label design (Fig. 5.5). The Maamoul Al-Hijaz brand originates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and is a product of the Alkaramah Dough Production Company. It can be found on the shelves of supermarkets throughout the Arabian Gulf. The primary difference between this product label and that of Coca-Cola and Chips Oman is that Maamoul Al-Hijaz contains a product that is traditionally known as an Arab food. Dates are a fruit that thrive in desert areas where summers are long and dry. In fact, the date palm is regarded to be among the oldest fruit trees in the Arabian Peninsula, and as such is widely used in Arab cuisine (http://www.icarda.org/aprp/datepalm/, 2010). In this respect the arabesque possesses an even greater measure of semiotic significance when used in conjunction with a date product, as it involves the use of Arab ornament to draw attention to a predominantly Arab delicacy.

Fig. 5.5: 2009 Maamoul Al- Hijaz Packaging Label

Upon viewing the Maamoul Al- Hijaz label, one of the first things I notice is the top image of the biscuit product itself, which has been used to represent the central rosette in what could potentially extend into a larger geometric pattern. Surrounding the image of the biscuit is a repeating vegetal motif that is comprised of interlacing vines and leaves that coil around each other. They appear to grow outward to produce two symmetrical leaf-like palmettes. The overall composition takes on the appearance of medallion, similar in appearance to the central element in the Quran frontispiece in Fig 2.5. Moreover, the Maamoul Al-Hijaz label background consists of a singular interlocking spiral motif that has been replicated to fill the entire composition. When closely examined this particular design is not representative of the spirit of the arabesque as defined in Chapters 1 and 2, as it does not follow characteristic abstract

vegetal or geometric themes. Yet to the untrained eye of the consumer these subtleties may go unnoticed, especially when the primary focus remains on the biscuit medallion.

Although the particular content of a food or beverage product is not central to this present investigation, it does play an important role in how consumers respond to and interpret certain product labels, irrespective of whether arabesques are used. The Maamoul Al-Hijaz date biscuit label is unique in that it combines the cultural aesthetic of the arabesque and relates it to not only a locally owned brand, but also to a traditional Arab food. Unlike the Coca-Cola and Chips Oman brands, the relationship between the arabesque motif and the Maamoul Al-Hijaz brand is not so dissimilar. Instead the arabesques complement the product itself, strengthening the brands cultural significance and potential for effective meaning making. It lets the Arab consumer know that the product is in fact an Arab product, and thus a local product. As such, the biscuit labels use of the arabesque aids in communicating to Gulf Arab consumers that Maamoul Al-Hijaz actually contains a product that directly corresponds to their cultural cuisine and consumption lifestyle.

While it is not the point of semiotic analysis to determine whether arabesque on labels will induce consumers to buy a particular product, it is indeed more likely that the underlying subtext of the surface ornament will connect more with receivers than if it were not used at all. These examples are intended to demonstrate the process of semiotic analysis itself, and how the use of representational stimuli can operate as an interface for cross-cultural meaning making. In the next chapter I demonstrate the effectiveness of the arabesque on labels by surveying how Gulf and expatriate Arabs living in the Gulf nations of Qatar and Kuwait interpret and respond to the graphic re-designs of global products.

CHAPTER SIX

Cultural Response to the Arabesque on Label Re-Designs

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Cultural Response to the Arabesque on Label Re-Designs

This chapter seeks to actualize the semiotic effects arabesque design can have on premeditated cognition when harmonized with existing brand labels in the Gulf. It focuses on the audience, or target market of culturally constructed label designs and how the presence of arabesque motifs can have a positive affect on the way consumers interact with modern packaging. The consumer market considered in this investigation is, as stated throughout this thesis, the native cultural group residing in the Arabian Gulf whose ethnicity is predominantly Arab and whose core belief system is centered upon the Islamic faith. To more acutely understand the arabesque's potential for cross-cultural communication and meaning making upon packaging in Arabia, it needs to be assessed via local response. Having established the visual structure of the ornamentation and the messages encoded within, we now observe how consumers interpret and respond to these semiotic interfaces when visually confronted with cultural ornament upon the surface of packaging labels.

For this purpose I have re-designed the face of three different brand labels to be anonymously surveyed by Arab participants in the Gulf nations of Qatar and Kuwait. While my focus is centered predominantly on the response of Gulf nationals, the study also includes participants of other Arab nationalities. From this data we can come to better appreciate the power arabesque design has in specifically communicating to locals in the Gulf region. To remain impartial in the collection of data, the survey was made available to Gulf consumers of varied age and lifestyle. The participants include students of English, design, science, commerce and finance, along with teachers,

engineers, lawyers, businessmen, bankers, marketers, and accountants. Each arabesque label version viewed by this variety of Arab consumers is based upon an existing food or beverage product already found in supermarkets in the Gulf.

It is important for me to also acknowledge the diverse nature of consumers in the Gulf region. While participants are all of Arab ethnicity residing in the Gulf area, they are also very much unique as individuals with varied preferences in purchase. They are of mixed gender, differing social class, economically, ethnically as well as politically. In his book *Lovemarks,* Kevin Roberts looks at what makes for the long-term success of a brand. His premise centers around love, suggesting that without there being an emotional connection to a particular product, consumer interest will ultimately fade (Roberts, 2007). The use of arabesques seeks to enhance this emotional connection among the varying demographics.

The labels were presented to participants in the form of an online survey; comprised of three separate sections. Every section contained two versions of the label it displays. One version showed the original label as it currently exists in supermarkets, while the other demonstrates what it might look like when adopting characteristic arabesques. The labels were accompanied by a series of questions geared to extract the participant's cognitive response or opinion of each design. It should be noted here that all responses to the labels in this chapter have been determined through conscious decision. The results do not account for the semiotic significance that may have occurred at a subliminal level. Malcolm Barnard writes that design is 'often taken for granted, passing unnoticed and unremarked as it blends in with the visual culture of everyday life' (Barnard 2005, p.1). It is typically at this unconscious level of perception that visual communication affects cognitive style – leading us to gravitate towards those mythic themes of familiarity and cultural significance. To evaluate the realm of the

unconscious would require the actual manufacturing of these cultural re-designs, assessed primarily by their increase in sales (such as for the Coca-Cola label mentioned in Chapter 5). This would prove highly insightful for graphic designers and marketers alike, yet its execution extends beyond the parameters of this study.

I chose to 're-design' the labels for these products rather than create entirely new ones for the primary reason that their branding is already familiar to the Arabian market. This study has no wish to consider the array of potential connotations that individual brand and design elements have on labels and their corresponding products. While they unquestionably influence meaning, my aim is rather to examine how the application of cultural codes to existing brands can effectually align any label composition to communicate with the particular markets beliefs and values. When packaging labels take into account the cultural identity of the primary receiver, even a seemingly undesirable product has the potential to be transfigured so as to appear desirable.

6.1   Consumer Recognition and Usage of the Brands

The selection of these three brand labels was also strategic in that each of them represents not only a different product, but also varying degrees of popularity, usability and familiarity for the Arab consumer. Since my primary focus is not on the particular target groups which make up the broader Arab market, (such as age, gender etc) I have tried to include labels of a diverse brand range. For instance, Pringles (Fig. 6.2a) is a popular, globally recognized potato chip brand, Amy's soup (Fig. 6.5a) is a less well known canned food, and Almarai skimmed milk (Fig. 6.8a) is a staple, locally owned brand. Fig. 6.1 shows how recognizable and frequently used these brands are in Arabia based on the results of the survey.

Fig. 6.1: *Table: Recognition and Usage of the Pringles, Amy's and Almarai brands*

Brands	Brand recognition (%)	Brand usage (%)		
		Always	Sometimes	Never
Pringles	88.5%	5.7%	**74.3%**	20.0%
Amy's	10.9%	0.0%	9.0%	**91.0%**
Almarai	89.6%	**41.8%**	31.2%	27.0%

Note: Percentages are based out of a certain number of respondents per brand. Pringles = 70 persons, Amy's = 55 persons, Almarai = 48 persons. Respondents include both Gulf Arab and expatriate Arab views.

6.2   Arabesque Label for Pringles Chips

The first label examined here is the arabesque version for Pringles original potato chips, a popular American brand with a significant global presence (Fig. 6.2b). Pringles products are available in a variety of different flavors, typically distinguished by the overall color of the label design. In this original flavor, the base color for the label is red, supported by the yellow-brown hue of the potato chips themselves. The arabesques I have created are colorized to partner with the existing design so as to communicate alongside the established brand. The nature of the arabesques in this label is twofold, in that the ornamentation appears in both 'infinite correspondence' as well as separately in the form of individual elements. Across the top portion of the label behind the logo I have placed a two dimensional geometric motif presented as an endless repeating pattern. Careful inspection of the pattern will reveal its construction using circles and squares resulting in the creation of symmetrical star like shapes. Following the rudimentary characteristics of the arabesque style, I broke the traditional mold of the unending pattern and proceeded to place individual 12-point star rosettes and abstracted vegetal forms with coiling, bifurcating leaves along the sides and base of the label composition. The intention here is to represent traditional arabesques in a new and

Fig. 6.2a: Original Pringles Chips Label

Fig. 6.2b: Arabesque version of Pringles Chips Label

contemporary way, all the while maintaining its most basic and abstract visual structure as was established in Chapter 1.

When asked what consumers felt the main difference was between the original label and the one displaying arabesques, many from the Gulf noticed the background as having changed, specifically in its design. A number noticed the geometric shapes in particular, equating them to the Arab style of design and to the holy month of Ramadan. One individual accurately described the new designs as being Islamic decoration.

Several expatriate Arab consumers in the Gulf also consciously equated the arabesques to Ramadan, suggesting it as 'appropriate for the season' and 'appealing to Arab-Islamic taste'. The Pringles arabesques were also described as 'oriental', 'eastern', 'Muslim graphics' and simply as 'decoration'. A Moroccan consumer put it best, commenting that the arabesque version was 'more catchy for Arabic regions because it contains Arabic-Islamic geometrical designs'.

Fig. 6.3: *Chart: Gulf Arab response to the presence of arabesque design to Pringles label*
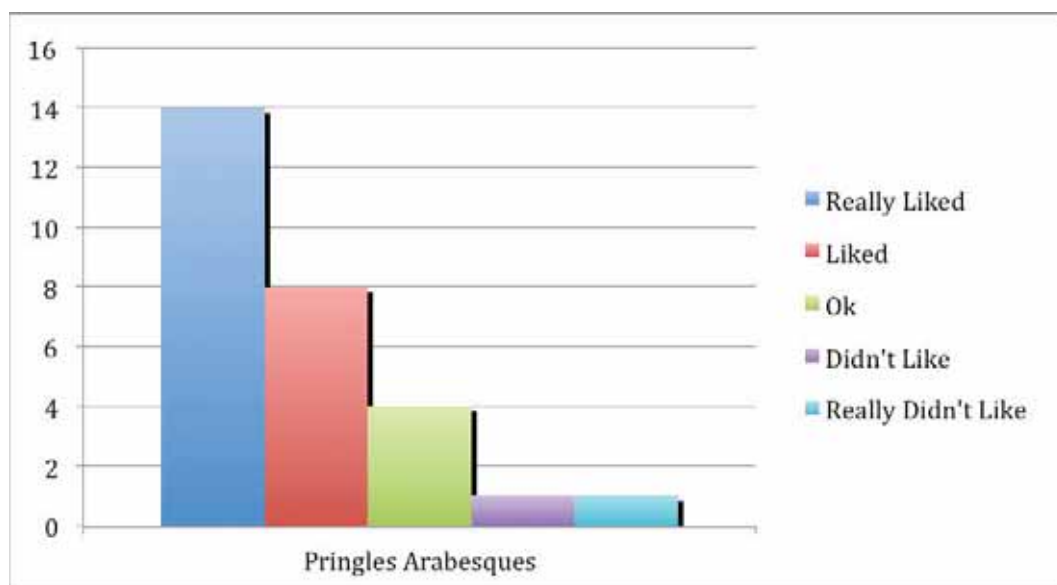
Note: Data reflects the response of 28 consumers native to nations in the Arabian Gulf.

Fig. 6.4: Table: *Which Pringles label do you prefer?*

Label	Gulf Arabs (28)	Other Arabs (42)	Total (70)
Original	14%	52%	37%
With Arabesques	86%	48%	63%

After making note of the changes, consumers were given the opportunity to indicate their level of approval to the arabesque version of the Pringles label. Fig. 6.3 demonstrates how the Gulf Arabs responded. More than two thirds of the people 'liked' or 'really liked' the addition of arabesques. When asked what label they would be more inclined to purchase if given the opportunity, 86 percent of the participating 28 Gulf Arabs chose the arabesque version (Fig. 6.4). Many described the re-design as being more 'appealing', 'festive', 'exciting', 'fashionable' and 'eye catching'. Other responses included 'I like it', 'it looks better to me', and 'its an upgrade'. One person said they noticed the change in design and wanted to try it out, while another acknowledged the new design by suggesting it be limited to use in Arabic countries only.

Those who did not approve of the arabesque version of the label said they favored simplicity. This type of response was more prevalent among expatriate Arabs in the Gulf, where just over half the respondents were keener on the original label. They felt that 'less is more' and that the original was simple and straight to the point; clearly defining the product and brand. One person indicated that they did not like the presence of arabesques because of its association with a product that was not traditionally an Arab food. A few others felt strongly that such traditional forms of art should not be used to try and sell western products.

These were some of the concerns that arose during the survey process that I had

not considered in my initial research. Do arabesques mislead consumers about the content of a given product when they seem to have no practical correlation? Could the assimilation of traditional Arab ornamentation upon contemporary food and beverage labels effectively breach ethical boundaries? These are legitimate issues that deserve further consideration and study. Yet, from a semiotic, communicative perspective, out of 70 Arab consumers both from the Gulf and surrounding nations, a total of 63 percent responded favorably to the arabesque re-design of the Pringles label (Fig. 6.4). Observations included 'its more dynamic', 'it fits the season of Ramadan in my country', 'its lovely', 'beautiful' and 'fascinating'. Feedback of this stature verifies the design's significance as an influential method of visual communication in the Arabian Gulf. The question arises however, as to just how and when it should be utilized when in conjunction with product graphics.

6.3   Arabesque Label for Amy's Soup

The second label we examine here is for Amy's Soup. Similar to Pringles, the soup brand utilizes a unique background color for each flavor in their product line, which in this case happens to be dark green. The re-design of Amy's vegetable barley soup in Fig. 6.5 incorporates a more traditional form of the arabesque, following in line with the color scheme of the original label. As we saw in Fig. 6.1, Amy's is a relatively unknown brand in the Gulf, advertising a product that is less popular to Arab consumers. The arabesques in this label composition appear two-dimensional and are based around 12-point star rosettes that repeat continuously in every direction, filling the background space. Small five point stars are created in the wake of the pattern enhancing the symmetry of the motif and linking it more directly to the Islamic view of God's perfect nature and the whole of the cosmos. This is coupled with the presence of
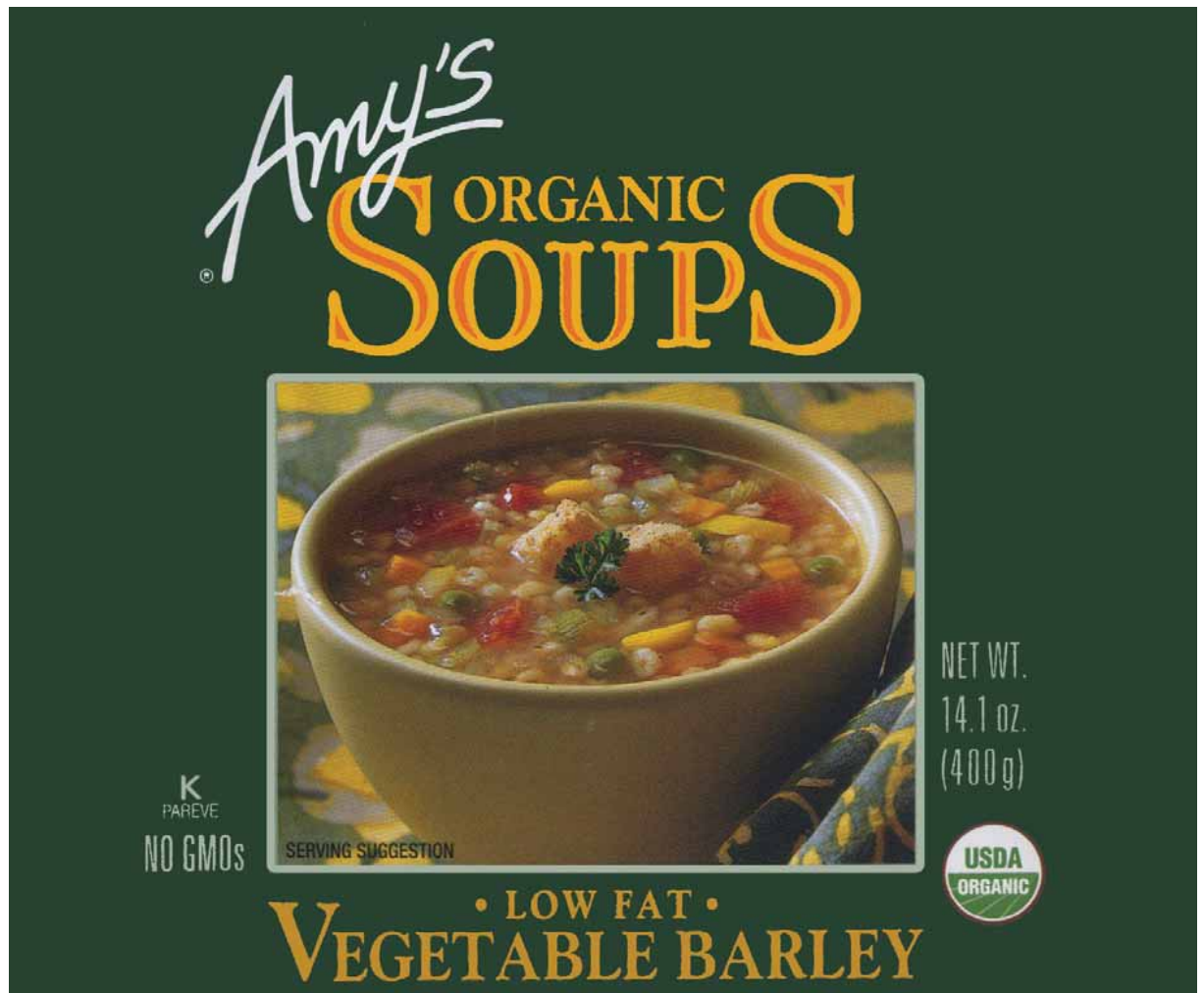
Fig. 6.5a: Original Amy's Soup Label
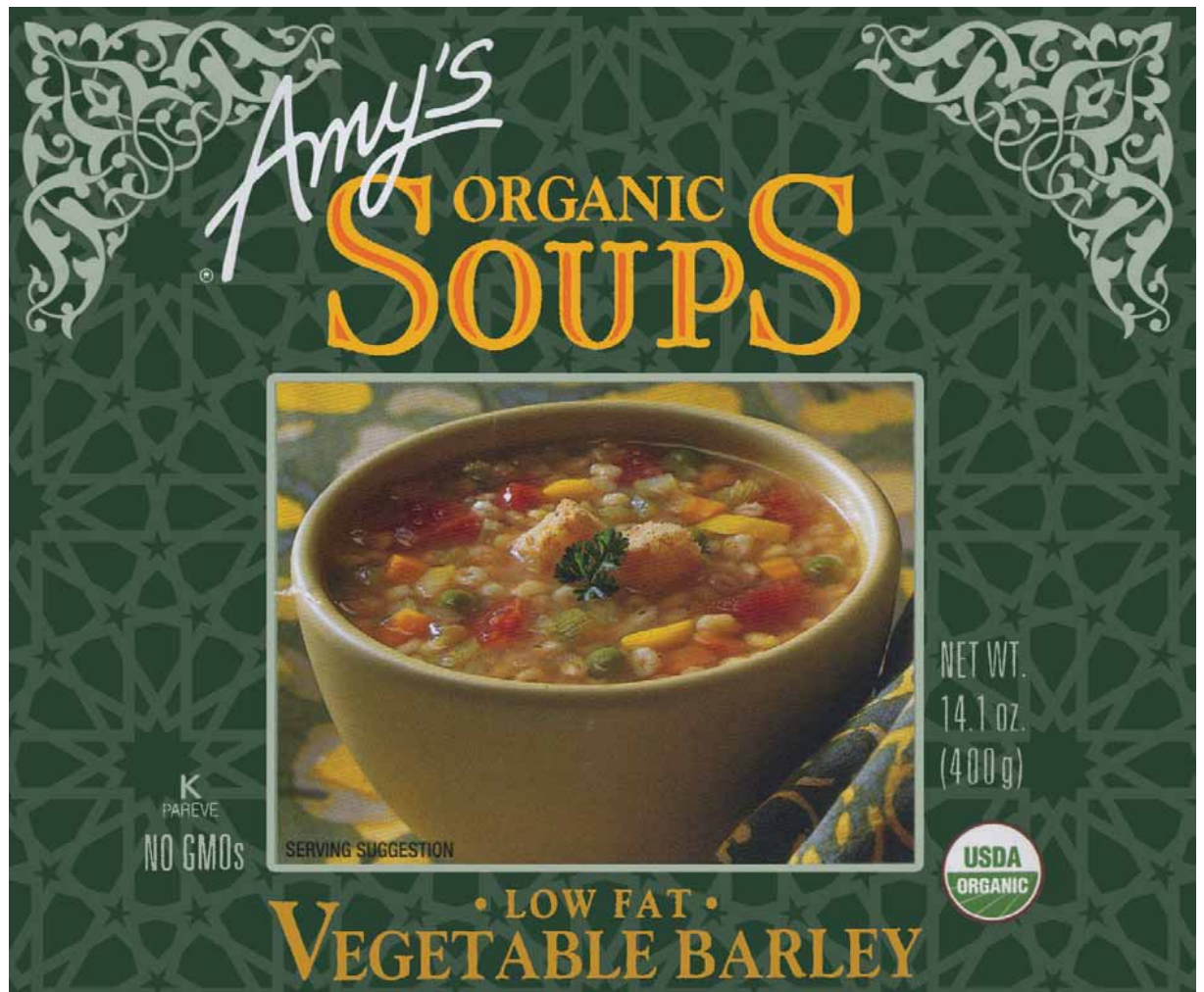
Fig. 6.5b: Arabesque version of Amy's Soup Label

interlacing vine arabesques with abstracted leaves, similar in style to those seen within the ten fold rosettes from the 14th century Quran manuscript analyzed in Chapter 2. Overlapping the two foundational characteristics of vegetation and geometry within a singular design aids in making the ornament all the more prominent within the label. The style reflects the basic visual structure of traditional motifs found in antiquity so as to insure meaning is more accurately relayed.

The difference most Arab consumers deduced when comparing the original label with the arabesque version was the background design. A few were more specific in their response, acknowledging the arabesques as an Islamic/Arabic design. From a total of 23 Gulf Arab consumers, an overwhelming 17 indicated that they either 'liked' or 'really liked' the arabesque version (See Fig. 6.6). When confronted with the question of which label they would rather choose when in a supermarket, 74 percent of Gulf consumers said they would go for the Arabesque version of the soup label (See Fig. 6.7). Consumers described it as being more attractive and 'classy', generally commenting that they liked the design on the label more so than without it.

Fig. 6.6: Chart: *Gulf Arab response to the presence of arabesque design to Amy's label.*
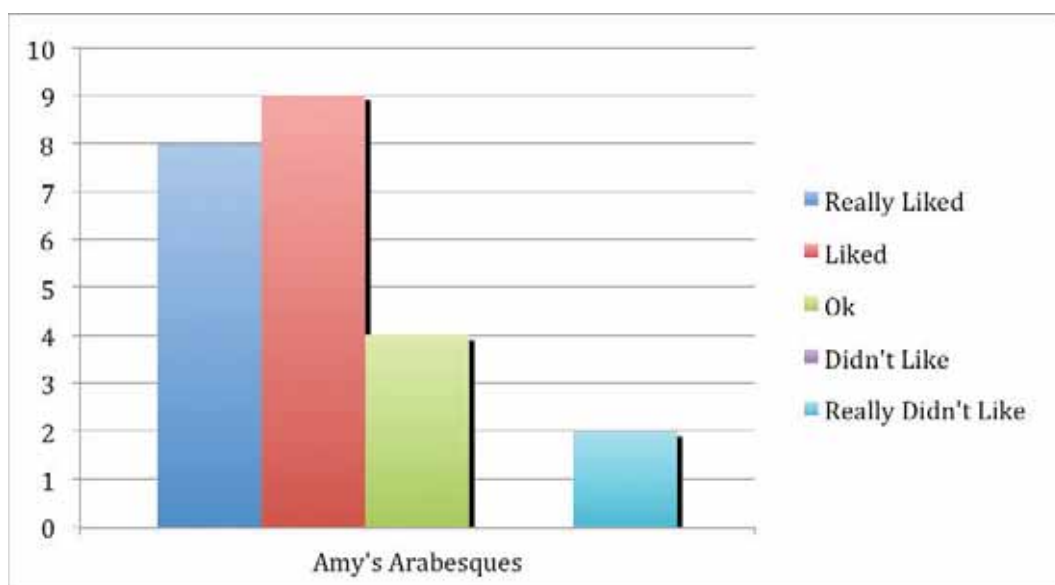
Note: Data reflects the response of 23 consumers native to nations in the Arabian Gulf.

Fig. 6.7: *Table: Which Amy's label do you prefer?*

Label	Gulf Arabs (23)	Other Arabs (32)	Total (55)
Original	26%	62.5%	47%
Arabesque Version	74%	37.5%	53%

It is interesting to observe by comparison that the majority of expatriate Arabs actually preferred the original Amy's label, even though most had never encountered the brand before. Again, it was the simplicity of the overall composition that led most to their decisions. Fig. 6.7 reveals the striking contrast with the Gulf Arab response, which indicates the complete opposite view. It would seem that consumers from the Arabian Gulf have a more favorable response to the presence of such culturally specific graphic design than do those Arabs from surrounding nations. I did not anticipate how vast this disparity would be. While arabesques make up a significant portion of the visual culture in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, these nations also possess a much richer and more diverse heritage. Not only are these societies much older in terms of civilization than the desert nations of the Peninsula, their populations are also not predominantly Muslim. In a sense we come full circle from where we first started in this investigation, discovering the extent to which religion plays in the signifying nature of arabesque design.

6.4   Arabesque Label for Almarai Milk

My third and final analysis looks at cultural re-design of Almarai's skimmed milk label. Almarai's range is very consistent in its visual appearance, variations in type being mainly in the colorization of the pink section seen on the skimmed milk label in

Fig. 6.8. All other brand colors remain the same. The application of arabesques to the Almarai label is very subtle, intended to blend within the existing composition so as to appear as a cultural extension of the central milk splash. Since this is a commonly used brand and product in the Arabian Gulf, familiar to most, I wanted the arabesques to only partially accent the existing design. Geometric rosettes are placed behind the product name, intended to balance out the more prominent vegetal arabesques bursting out from behind the top of the Almarai logo. The abstracted interlacing vine arrangements reinforce the natural aspects of the product itself, as they signify growth and the abundance of life found in the gardens of paradise (See Chapter 3). The ultimate intent was to distinguish the product as an Arab brand, causing consumers to reflect on their traditional heritage and overall cultural identities.

When decoded by Gulf receivers, new graphics, Arabic design and Arab lines where among the main observations of the arabesque re-design. A surprising 76 percent of the 21 Gulf Arab respondents said they would prefer to purchase the milk label displaying their traditional motifs (Fig. 6.10). Of those consumers, 14 expressed that they either 'liked' or 'really liked' the visual composition of the milk label (Fig. 6.9). One person noted that the use of Islamic decoration made the label appear more striking, while another simply liked its 'new face'. Overall, many felt the arabesques made the label more appealing.

Fig. 6.10 indicates once again the enormity of the opposing view expatriate Arabs have towards the cultural re-make compared with the positive response from targeted Gulf Arabs. Here, only 37 percent of expatriate Arabs preferred the presence of characteristic arabesques. Most felt the arabesques distracted them from the milk product, continuing to affirm their preference for simplicity. An Egyptian consumer said he liked the original better because it was more direct – having no connection with

Fig. 6.8a: Original Almarai Milk Label

Fig. 6.8b: Arabesque version of Almarai Milk Label

race or religion. He felt that it attended more to basic human needs rather than to only select people groups, therefore being more universally accepted within the global village. This is a valid point to consider given the nature of globalization, as not all consumers in the region are Gulf Arab. In a sense, attaching specific graphic codes like the arabesque to staple products such as milk might be seen as counterproductive. Instead, it may prove more useful only on certain products at possibly different seasons or occasions – such in the examples of Coca-Cola and Chips Oman in Chapter 5. These are issues that I hope will be investigated further in additional studies, as there is much more we could gain from discerning the particular use of such powerful cultural graphic design.

Fig. 6.9: *Chart: Gulf Arab response to the presence of arabesque design on Almari's label*
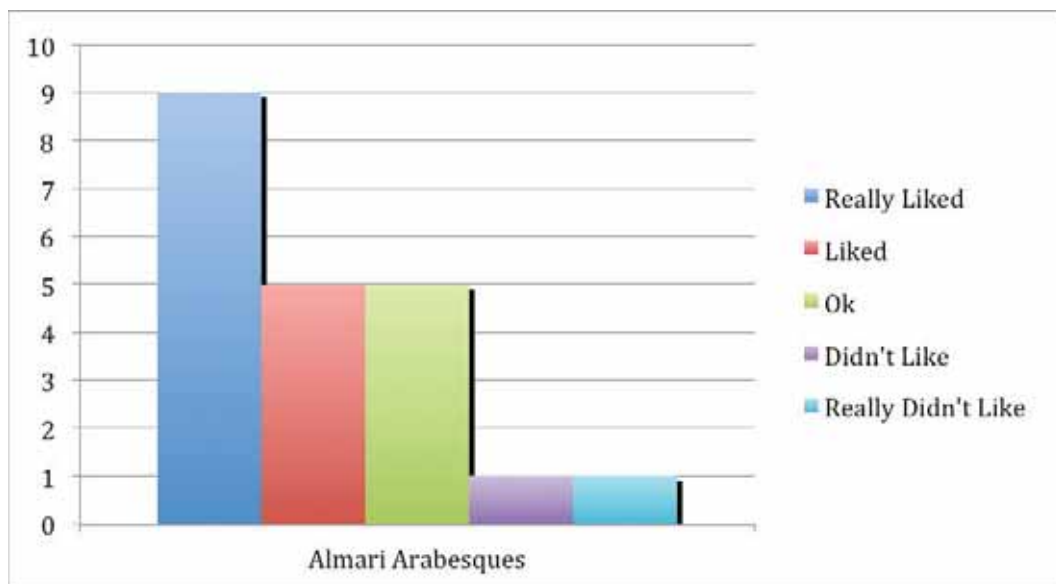
Note: Data reflects the response of 23 consumers native to nations in the Arabian Gulf.

Fig. 6.10: *Table: Which Almari label do you prefer?*

Label	Gulf Arabs (21)	Other Arabs (27)	Total (48)
Original	24%	63%	46%
With Arabesques	76%	37%	54%

6.5   Connection to Arab Tradition and Identity

Having observed the cognitive responses of consumers from Qatar, Kuwait and other Gulf nations, the semiotic function of arabesque designs is undeniable. Locals in the Arabian Gulf respond favorably to Arab-Islamic ornament on contemporary surfaces. The ornaments effectiveness for cross cultural communication and meaning making is sure. This is evidenced to an even greater extent when consumers were asked to describe what the arabesque versions of all three labels made them think of most; the product/brand, or Arab tradition/identity. Interestingly, in Fig. 6.11 we see that 77 percent of Gulf and expatriate Arabs alike associated the Pringles re-design to their traditions and cultural identity. For Amy's soup 71 percent and Almarai milk 54 percent thought first of Arab identity over the brand and product elements.

It may be that due to the familiarity of the Almarai brand consumers were already accustomed to associating the label with the product - resulting in a less dramatic gap in response. It is interesting to note, however, that a greater portion of expatriate Arabs linked the arabesque version of the label to their cultural heritage and identity than did Gulf Arabs in each case. Although, the opposite reaction occurred when it came to label preference. Yet, given the prominence and respect the arabesque has in the Gulf compared to surrounding nations, it is highly plausible that the style is able to appeal more to Gulf Arabs while not distracting them from the product itself.

What is unusual in this chapter is that some expatriate Arabs considered the idea of applying cultural symbols to western products to be unappealing or unethical. Such feedback was unexpected, but was revealed by select consumers in the survey. One participant's reason was that the products themselves did not reflect a type of traditional Arab food or beverage, such as in the case of Maamoul Al-Hijaz date biscuits in Chapter 5. Others felt images relating to race or religion should not be used on labels, as it detracts from the message of a product, causing it to loose its global appeal. While these participants may have disapproved of the arabesque re-designs, they were still able to visually recognize the arabesque as a cultural symbol, even though they were from Arab nations whose visual culture and belief system may not be limited to Islamic signification. This could explain why Gulf Arabs had a more favorable response to the arabesque versions of each label than did expatriate Arabs. Nevertheless, such issues raise a flag for further research, as graphic designers need to be culturally sensitive and aware when designing cross culturally.

Fig. 6.11: *Chart: What the Arabesque version of each label made all Arab consumers think of most?*
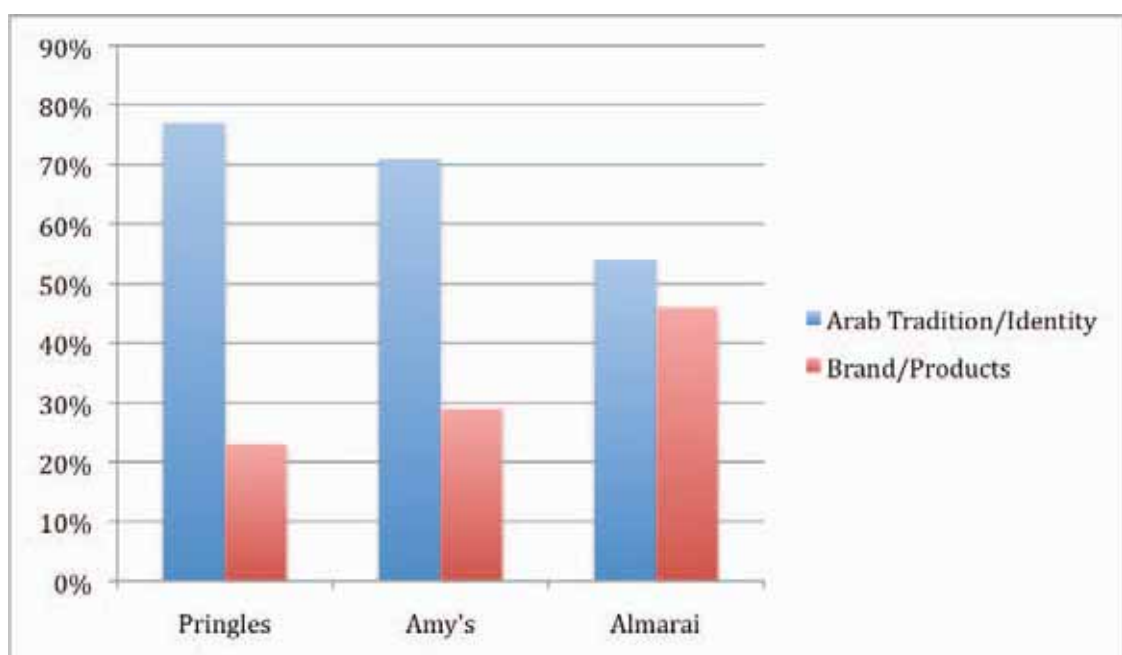
This chapter has identified how Gulf and expatriate Arabs consciously respond to cultural graphic design when integrated within existing food and beverage label designs. It considered the target receiver, or consumer, and observed the way in which they visually interpret and respond to the presence of Arab ornament on material consumer products. Their cognitive semiotic responses confirmed earlier research, which proposed arabesque design aids in localizing foreign products so as to make them more meaningful and desirable in particular geographic areas. The online survey led to the conclusion that while Arab-Islamic ornament is effective in advertising cross culturally by affirming and appealing to a cultural and religious way of life, it would be better served within the globalizing region on select products during certain seasons throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined arabesque design as a cultural interface for graphic design in the globalizing Gulf nations of Qatar and Kuwait. In order to demonstrate this, it was my aim to first identify the characteristic nature of the arabesque by exploring both its historical and contemporary application. This led me to explain the historical origins, formation and evolution of the arabesque and then to review examples of its structure in a visual typology of the ornament through the ages. Once defined, my second aim was to discover through semiotic analysis the cultural and religious mythologies encoded in the arabesques most characteristic elements. They were found to correspond with the values, beliefs and behaviors of the Arab-Islamic worldview that initially shaped its creation. I also came to understand how the arabesque is able to engage particular cultural needs and desires of Gulf Arab consumers in the midst of globalization. On this basis I examined the ways in which arabesques contribute to meaning making when applied to food and beverage label design in the Arabian Gulf.

The third aim of this research was achieved in my re-design of existing brand labels to include characteristic arabesques. This included a survey of how Gulf Arab consumers responded to the designs. First I analyzed case studies of labels employing characteristic arabesques, which lead me to examine the graphic applications of the arabesque and its potential to influence consumer opinion. As a visual language, the ornamentation was explained as advertising Arab-Islamic mythologies, thereby transforming a label's overall message so as to attract the attention of Gulf Arabs consumers. When surveyed, most Arab participants confirmed this notion by acknowledging the presence of arabesques in the reconstructed labels for Pringles chips, Amy's soup and Almarai milk. This was demonstrated primarily through participant's

conscious approval of each label, the majority of which were Gulf Arab. Responses also indicated that Arab tradition and cultural identity were among the main associations consumers thought of when visually encountering the re-designed labels.

The arabesque's Islamic connotations played a huge role in how the labels were interpreted and received by consumers in this study. Numerous participants commented that the arabesque renditions made them think of the holy month of Ramadan. In the Gulf, this is typically the time of year when cultural design is most utilized in contemporary aesthetics and additional forms of advertising. As we saw in Chapter 5, this was the season in which Coca-Cola employed the traditional ornament as part of its brand label. From a marketing perspective, employing distinct religious signification assists in making products both relevant and culturally acceptable for certain consumers at particular times. Arab response in this study would suggest this to be especially true during religious holidays and special cultural occasions; as was the case with Chips Oman label in celebration of its brands 25th anniversary.

While the majority of Gulf Arab participants preferred the presence of arabesques in all three re-designs, a fair portion of expatriate Arabs did not. This could be for numerous reasons, some which may or may not include the westernization in the Gulf, contrary religious views or the general dislike of my artistic reconstruction of the ornament in each case. Since the surrounding Arab nations of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria are not exclusively Muslim nations, nor are they limited to Islamic visual culture, religious difference would definitely effect one's interpretation of the ornament. That said, expatriate Arabs predominantly commented that they favored simplicity over the chaos of the arabesque re-designs. This could be merely individual preference, or the influence of globalization in areas where western ideologies are more readily embraced. Nevertheless, it remains evident that the arabesque's strong Islamic

associations provoked Gulf Arabs to emotionally connect with the arabesque version of each label, thus affirming the arabesques potential for effective advertising and meaning making in the region.

In the context of globalization it is important to remember that while Gulf Arabs govern their own land, they are still in the minority. Package designers in the Gulf need consider this before transforming labels for staple products used by everyone to include such culturally specific stimuli. We learned from expatriate responses in the survey that this could actually be counterproductive for a brand's widespread advertising appeal. Cultural communication should not take the place of overall meaning in every instance. Nor should we assume that arabesques be applied to every label on the market. In this way we learned that a greater selectivity as to when arabesques are used on labels should be taken into account. For instance, during Ramadan, national holidays or in promotion of a particular Arab food or beverage product as we saw in Chapter 5 with Maamoul Al-Hijaz date biscuits.

In doing so, label designs are given the opportunity to advertise and honor Arab ingenuity and identity through employing arabesques, yet not at the expense of any. Seasonal use would help rectify concerns expatriate Arab consumers had of packaging labels breaching ethical boundaries by using arabesques in their advertising appeals. In recent years it has become common practice to employ arabesque motifs, calligraphy and other cultural design and signification to contemporary advertising in the Gulf, be it on billboards, posters or in corporate branding and subsequent collateral. Regardless, this research prompted 3 percent of those surveyed to raise concern with the idea of using culture to sell products. This was an unforeseen issue revealed through participant response in this research and is a subject further exploration.

The primary limitation of this research was the inability to assess how Gulf Arab participants would unconsciously respond to the label re-designs in Chapter 6. Such an endeavor would require more time and resources allotted to this present work. It would also include having the re-designed labels be properly manufactured and positioned for sale in supermarkets across the Arabian Gulf. This is a key issue for further research, as findings in this area will only strengthen the discoveries made in this study.

Additionally, this thesis poses more questions as to why the new label designs increase interest in the products, which is a potential area for further research. Moreover, the development of new contemporary arabesque patterns with reference to cultural connotations on packages could be explored further through the testing of specified consumer response. The intent could be to interrogate graphic design as a narrative rather than just through visual examples.

This brings me to the end of my semiotic investigation of the arabesque in conjunction with contemporary food and beverage labels. Based on the findings in this study we can boldly conclude that arabesque design can positively contribute to cross-cultural communication in the Arabian Gulf by directly influencing the way Gulf Arabs interpret and respond to consumer label designs. Similarly, the use of tradition and the vernacular in design enhances Arab identity by paying respect to its visual culture in the midst of globalization. It is my hope that this investigation will contribute to graphic designers, offering them a greater understanding and cultural literacy for Arab-Islamic values and beliefs as uncovered through its graphic design. Additionally, this study has endeavored to provide insight on the semiotic effect and advertising merit of culturally aligned graphics for consumers in the Arabian Gulf.

APPENDIX A

Studio Work:

3-D Arabesque Label Designs

Fig. A.1: Arabesque version of the Pringles Chips Label applied to packaging

Fig. A.2: Arabesque version of the Amy's Soup Label applied to packaging

Fig. A.3: Arabesque version of the Almarai Milk Label applied to packaging

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

General Questions for All Participants (Questions 1 – 5)

QUESTION 1:

What is your age?

    a. 16 – 25
    b. 26 – 35
    c. 36 – 45
    d. 45+

QUESTION 2:

What is the country of your nationality?

    a. Qatar
    b. Kuwait
    c. Other (please specify)

QUESTION 3:

Select the languages you can read.

    a. Arabic
    b. Farsi
    c. English
    d. French
    e. Other (please specify)

QUESTION 4:

What do you study?

    a. Science
    b. Design
    c. English
    d. Nothing
    e. Other (please specify)

QUESTION 5:

Which of the following do you normally notice first when looking at a food or drink label?

    a. Colors
    b. Logo/Corporate Identity
    c. Text
    d. Pictures
    e. Design (extra graphic elements)

Pringles Chips Label Design (Questions 6 – 12)

LABEL 1: Pringles Chips (Original)

QUESTION 6:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of potato chips before?

    a. Yes
    b. No

QUESTION 7:

How often do you buy this brand of potato chips?

    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never

LABEL 2: Pringles Chips (Arabesques)

QUESTION 8:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Participant can write response here.

QUESTION 9:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

   a. Chips
   b. Connection with nationality
   c. Arab Identity
   d. Party Food
   e. Other – Participant writes response)

QUESTION 10:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

   • LABEL 1 (original)

      - I really liked it
      - I liked it
      - It was ok
      - I didn't like it
      - I really didn't like it

- LABEL 2 (arabesque)

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

QUESTION 11:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

a. LABEL 1
b. LABEL 2

QUESTION 12:

Why did you choose this label?

Participant can write response here.

Amy's Soup Label Design (Questions 13 – 19)

LABEL 1: Amy's Soup (Original)
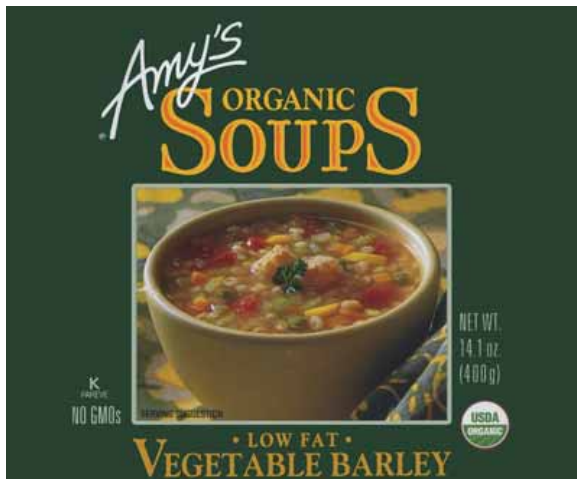
QUESTION 13:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of soup before?

a. Yes
b. No

QUESTION 14:

How often do you buy this brand of soup?

    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never

LABEL 2: Amy's Soup (Arabesque)
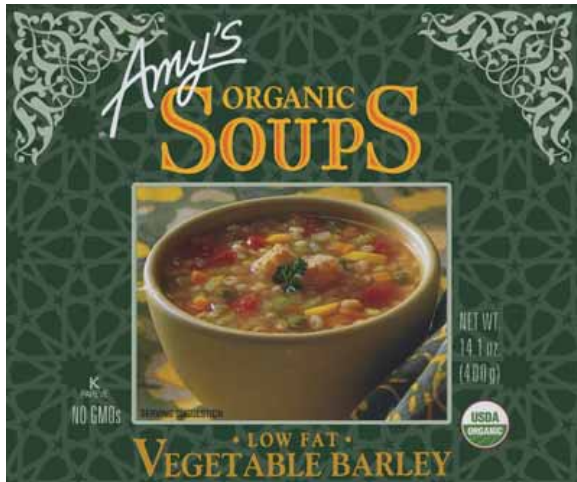
QUESTION 15:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Participant can write response here.

QUESTION 16:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

    a. Soup
    b. Connection with nationality
    c. Arab Identity
    d. Warm Healthy Food
    e. Other – participant writes response

QUESTION 17:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

    • LABEL 1 (original)

        - I really liked it
        - I liked it

- It was ok
- I didn't like it
- I really didn't like it

- **LABEL 2 (arabesque)**

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

QUESTION 18:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

    a. LABEL 1
    b. LABEL 2

QUESTION 19:

Why did you choose this label?

Participant can write response here.

Almarai Milk Label Design (Questions 20 – 26)

LABEL 1: Almarai Milk (Original)

QUESTION 20:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of milk before?

    a. Yes
    b. No

QUESTION 21:

How often do you buy this brand of milk?

    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never

LABEL 2: Almarai's Milk (Arabesque)

QUESTION 22:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Participant can write response here.

QUESTION 23:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

    a. Milk
    b. Connection with nationality
    c. Arab Identity
    d. Cows
    e. Other – participant writes response

QUESTION 24:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

- LABEL 1 (original)

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

- LABEL 2 (arabesque)

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

QUESTION 25:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

a. LABEL 1
b. LABEL 2

QUESTION 26:

Why did you choose this label?

Participant can write response here.

APPENDIX C

Survey Results

APPENDIX C
Survey Results

This survey examines culture and packaging design as part of a research Masters project undertaken at the School of Design Studies, Faculty of the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. The research complies with university ethics requirements with the approval number HREA No. 10 054. Taking part in the survey will confirm consent in participation. Thank you for your participation.

The aim of this survey is to investigate how people respond to graphic design on food and drink packaging. There are no right or wrong answers, just your personal response to the design.

General Questions for All Participants (Questions 1 – 5)

QUESTION 1:

What is your age?

  a. 16 – 25
  b. 26 – 35
  c. 36 – 45
  d. 45+

Participant Response:

Age		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
16 – 25	▬▬▬▬	34.3%	24
26 – 35	▬▬▬▬▬	45.7%	32
36 – 45	▬▬	12.9%	9
45+	▬	7.1%	6

QUESTION 2:

What is the country of your nationality?

    a. Qatar
    b. Kuwait
    c. Other (please specify)

Participant Response:

Nationality	Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Qatar	21.4%	15
Kuwait	18.6%	13
Other (please specify)*	60%	42

* Other nationalities to participate in the survey included Egypt (21) / Lebanon (13) / Syria (3) / Jordan (2) / Morocco (1) and Sudan (1).

QUESTION 3:

Select the languages you can read.

    a. Arabic
    b. Farsi
    c. English
    d. French
    e. Other (please specify)

Participant Response:

Language	Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Arabic	84.3%	59
Farsi	2.9%	2
English	94.3%	66
French	25.7%	18

QUESTION 4:

What do you study?

    a. Science
    b. Design
    c. English
    d. Nothing
    e. Other (please specify)

Participant Response:

Study Topics		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Science	▬	17.4%	12
Design	▬	8.7%	6
English	▬	14.5%	10
Nothing	▬	14.5%	10
Other (please specify)*	▬▬▬▬	55.1%	38

* Other areas of study indicated by participants included: Finance / Business Management / Commerce / Computer Science / Business / Computer Development / MBA / French / IT / Operation Management / Accounting / Engineering / Banking / Teaching / Telecommunications Engineering / Insurance.

QUESTION 5:

Which of the following do you normally notice first when looking at a food or drink label?

    a. Colours
    b. Logo/Corporate Identity
    c. Text
    d. Pictures
    e. Design (extra graphic elements)

Participant Response:

First Notice		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Colours	▬▬▬	44.3%	31
Logo/Corporate Identity	▬▬	30%	21

		Percent	Count
Text	▬	8.6%	6
Pictures	▬▬▬▬	35.7%	25
Design (extra graphic elements)	▬▬▬▬	41.4%	29

Pringles Chips Label Design (Questions 6 – 12)

Total number of participants: 70

LABEL 1: Pringles Chips (Original)

QUESTION 6:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of potato chips before?

c. Yes
d. No

Participant Response:

Recognition		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Yes	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	90%	63
No	▬	10%	7

QUESTION 7:

How often do you buy this brand of potato chips?

    a. Always
    d. Sometimes
    e. Never

Participant Response:

Usage		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Always	▬	7.1%	5
Sometimes	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	74.3%	52
Never	▬▬	18.6%	13

LABEL 2: Pringles Chips (Arabesques)

QUESTION 8:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 70 who participated in the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Written Response
	I see the design and decoration does not fit the product ad
	design
	Ramadan Special
	stfu
	do know
	The beautiful design with the Ramadan theme on Label 2.
	label to i think is for ramadan
Qatar	this designs is better than the first one this designs says abt festival or time to celebrat.its like a advetisement of qatartelecom(Qtel)..hope i helped..
	background
	Label 1 - no design Label 2 - with design
	extra graphic
	the back ground of the page
	new design and triangl shapes takes plce there
	That there are different drawings surrounding the potato chips which looks nicer..

	One has designs around it, one does not.
Other GCC	THE SECOND HAS BETTER BACKGROUAND
	The second design where some Islamic decoration
Kuwait	the background
	m3aja2
	The backround
	background
	label 2 is more fancy
	There is more colours
	arabiean crap
	colures
	i see arabic style
	design
	LABEL 2
Egypt	back ground

Label 1 is more beautiful than label 2.

The design number 2 is with textures background

some traditional drawing about ramadan

Islamic Background

wall paper

oriantel

background

down design

background in lable 2 appropiate to ramadan month

background

Label is is more Islamic

Label 2 is busy with islamic or eastern patterns while lable 1 is simple.

background

Arabic design background

Label 2 have more shapes than label one and different background than label one

background

Background

Arabsic desgin around pringles

label 2 has a more oriental theme

adding oriental Background

background

designs. artwork

Background

lots of extra arabic/muslim type graphics

colors,,,

Lebanon the whole background is filled with graphics and arts. it is too condensed

The Islamic Architecture in the Background

The backround design

just the Background

It took more of an Arabic & Islamic look with the added designs

The background is different, the Label 1 is just red

different design

The back ground of the image has changed basically the theme is still as is. Actually the new back ground is referring to Ramadan in an Arabic and an Islamic taste.

more decoration

	the background design which is the logos and shapes
Syria	Some additional Eastern decorations.
	Label 2 has an arabic design
Jordan	design in the back
	Arabic design
Morocco	label 2 is more catshy for arabic regions people coz becouse it containes arabic-islamic geometrical designs :p
Sudan	the background

QUESTION 9:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

   a. Chips
   b. Connection with nationality
   c. Arab Identity
   d. Party Food
   e. Other – Participant writes response)

Participant Response:

First thoughts		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
Chips	▬	14.3%	10
Connection with Nationality	▪	5.7%	4
Arab Identity	▬▬▬▬▬	61.4%	43
Party Food	▪	7.1%	5
Other *	▪	11.4%	8

* Other responses included: Islamic Design / Islamic Decorations / Design / Ramadan / New Oriental Spices / Ramadan / Many Drawings / Arabic Designs or Islamic.

QUESTION 10:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

- LABEL 1 (original)

    - I really liked it
    - I liked it
    - It was ok
    - I didn't like it
    - I really didn't like it

- LABEL 2 (arabesque)

    - I really liked it
    - I liked it
    - It was ok
    - I didn't like it
    - I really didn't like it

Participant Response:

Total response by all 70 participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	8	24	32	6	0
Label 2 (Arabesque)	19	22	12	13	4

Response by 28 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	2	9	13	4	0
Label 2 (Arabesque)	14	8	4	1	1

QUESTION 11:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

   a. LABEL 1
   b. LABEL 2

Participant Response:

Total response by all 70 participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (70)
LABEL 1		35.7%	25
LABEL 2		64.3%	45

Response by 28 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (28)
LABEL 1	▬	14.3%	4
LABEL 2	▬▬▬▬▬	85.7%	24

QUESTION 12:

Why did you choose this label?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 70 who participated in the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Chose Label	Written Responses
	1	Because it is the form of the potato slices and covered with a clear and non-decorated
	2	it's new
	2	Its more appealing.
	2	stfu
Qatar	2	colours
	2	i dont know just because it looks good like helloooo....
	2	no answer
	2	coz its says festive mood and hapy

	2	i like design
	2	Coz its nice with a design
	2	looks good
	2	because its more eye catching
	2	because i know that somthing changed and want to try it
	2	more exciting and looks nicer..
	2	I liked it.
Other GCC	2	LOOKS BETTER TO ME
	2	i liked the design
Kuwait	2	looks new and fashion
	1	it is clean and clear
	2	Looks better
	2	nice background
	2	it looks nice
	2	Because of the new design. I think in arabic countries only

	1	cause I used to it
	2	which better
	2	i think it upgrade
	1	it looks like the original one
	2	madri

	1	may be realy
	1	Because label 1 is simple
	1	because is very clear and not noisy and I can focus on the main picture
	2	have more color n drawings
Egypt	1	Simple
	2	more beuty
	2	
	2	lovely
	1	More origami
	2	arabic style design

	1	simple
	1	It's simple
	1	Less is more - simplicity winns especially for labels
	2	it likes original
	2	it is nearer to my culture
	2	It looks more attractive, i like the colors
	1	simple (easy to recongnize)
	2	It fits the season of ramadan in my country..
	1	its smiple
	2	label 1 is very plain, label 2 is more cheerful
	1	if there is no changes in the flavor, no need to make it this way.it looks odd for me
	1	more simple
Lebanon	1	clear, unsophisticated, right to the point, attractive
	1	it is simple
	2	seems more appealing

|		
	2	I like the design and colors,
	1	better logo and not related to arab tradition/arab food
	1	Less Noise in the design, plain, simple, with strong Reddish color that emphasizes on appetite.
	1	Simple and clear
	1	More simple and to the point
	1	I felt more comfortable with it, simple & straight to the point
	1	For his simplicity
	2	looks fresh and yummy
	2	As mentioned recently the label shows an Arabic and an Isalmic taste, and since we are in Ramadan you may imagine.
	2	more dynamic
	2	becasue it looks better
Syria	1	Because the Eastern decorations not for marketing purpose. it's an art
	2	latest edition
Jordan	1	trying to use culture design to sell chips doesnt appeal to me
	2	I liked the design

Morocco	2	same reason
Sudan	2	because its fascinating

Amy's Soup Label Design (Questions 13 – 19)

Total number of participants: **56**

LABEL 1: Amy's Soup (Original)

QUESTION 13:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of soup before?

a. Yes
b. No

Participant Response:

Recognition		Response Percent %	Response Count (56)
Yes		12.5%	7
No		87.5%	49

QUESTION 14:

How often do you buy this brand of soup?

    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never

Participant Response:

Usage		Response Percent %	Response Count (56)
Always	▪	1.8%	1
Sometimes	▬	8.9%	5
Never	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	89.3%	50

LABEL 2: Amy's Soup (Arabesque)
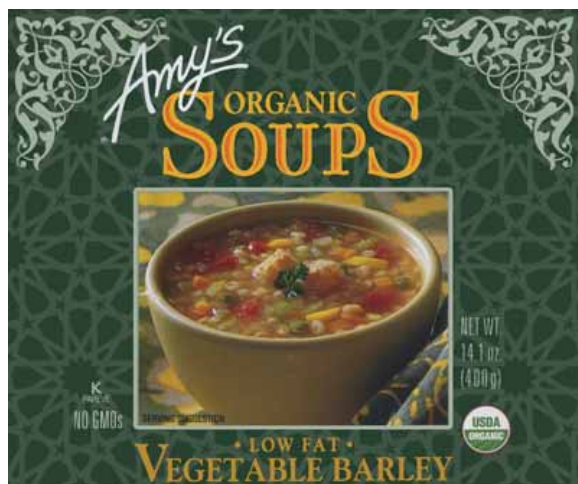
QUESTION 15:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 56 who participated in completing the Amy's section of the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Written Response
	A lot of Islamic Decoration
	design
	design difference
	don t know
	....
	fghjfghjfhjfhj
Qatar	background
	Label 1 without design Label 2 with design
	looks classy
	color
	arabic design
	the drawings at the back ground of the poster..
	Label 2 has designs on it.

Other GCC	differences design

	ahhh this is nicer
	Backround
	also background
	arabic tradition in label 2
Kuwait	More background design
	none
	disgin
	i see its more detailed
	design

	Label 2 with textures backgroun
	Islamic Design
Egypt	oriantel
	the background

background

background

Label 2 is more Islamic

Lable 1 simple. Lable 2 Busy

Arabic design background

the design of label 2 is different than label one

background

Background

Arabsic one

label 2 has an oriental theme

background design

graphics

more design

Lebanon

background design

label 2 is more atractive,

change in the background/ the picture's style and origin

The Islamic Architecture background in Label 2

The design

Background

Again the same thing of previous label (pringles)

background is designed

different design

Just the background no less no more.

	the background design
Syria	Additional decorations
	arabic design
Morocco	design it shows that its an arabic kind of food wihtout even reading the brand name or the name of this food
Sudan	the background, graphics

QUESTION 16:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

   a. Soup
   b. Connection with nationality
   c. Arab Identity
   d. Warm Healthy Food
   e. Other – participant writes response

Participant Response:

First thoughts		Response Percent %	Response Count (56)
Soup		23.2%	13
Connection with Nationality		14.3%	8
Arab Identity		48.2%	27
Warm Food		5.4%	3
Other *		8.9%	5

* Other responses included: Islamic Decoration / Needs Aroma / Oriental Soup / Ramadan / Not Comfortable Sharing

QUESTION 17:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

   • LABEL 1 (original)

      - I really liked it
      - I liked it
      - It was ok
      - I didn't like it
      - I really didn't like it

   • LABEL 2 (arabesque)

      - I really liked it
      - I liked it
      - It was ok

- I didn't like it
- I really didn't like it

Participant Response:

Total response by all 56 participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	7	23	15	11	0
Label 2 (Arabesque)	13	16	12	7	8

Response by 23 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	1	8	9	5	0
Label 2 (Arabesque)	8	9	4	0	2

QUESTION 18:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

a. LABEL 1
b. LABEL 2

Participant Response:

Total response by all 56 participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (56)
LABEL 1		46.4%	26
LABEL 2		53.6%	30

Response by 23 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (23)
LABEL 1	▬▬	26%	6
LABEL 2	▬▬▬▬▬	74%	17

QUESTION 19:

Why did you choose this label?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 56 who participated in completing the Amy's section of the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Chose Label	Written Responses
	1	For there is soup on the cover of a lot of unnecessary decoration of Islamic
Qatar	2	design
	1	Simple
	2	pictures
	2	.....
	1	jkghjkghjk
	2	i like the background
	2	because its attractive

	2	classy
	1	better
	2	because its look testy
	2	looks nicer..
	2	I liked it.
Other GCC	2	i like the design
Kuwait	2	color is matching (Y) and it is nicer than the original one, very good job
	1	Better look
	2	also background
	2	it looks nice
	2	Because of the background
	1	it looks more pro
	2	much better
	2	well it kinda better and has good graphic
	2	i like

Egypt	1	it is quiet and clear
	1	Simple
	1	good
	2	arabic design cover
	1	simple and compatable
	1	simple
	1	simple
	2	as previous
	2	the background of the label is way better than the first one
	2	i like arab art it looks breaty
	1	Simple as a soup..
	2	more attractive for the eyes
	1	it gives the impression that its more healthy
	2	much better
Lebanon	1	clear

	1	more simple and clear
	1	seems much simpler to prepare
	2	i like it more than # 1
	1	arabs are not good with soups
	1	LEss noise
	2	more attractive
	1	more simple and not hurting the eyes
	1	Again, simple & i do not find any need to change the design
	1	coz it's simple
	2	looks fresh and familiar
	2	Just for the sake of Ramadan and traditional look and feel.
Syria	2	better
	1	as per i said before, it's an art.
	1	original
Morocco	2	bcz i like its disign

		looks more simple
Sudan	1	

Almarai Milk Label Design (Questions 20 – 26)

Total number of participants: **49**

LABEL 1: Almarai Milk (Original)

QUESTION 20:

Look at LABEL 1. Have you seen this brand of milk before?

   a. Yes
   b. No

Participant Response:

Recognition		Response Percent %	Response Count (49)
Yes	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	89.8%	44
No	▬	10.2%	5

QUESTION 21:

How often do you buy this brand of milk?

   a. Always
   b. Sometimes
   c. Never

Participant Response:

Usage		Response Percent %	Response Count (49)
Always	▬▬▬▬▬	42.9%	21
Sometimes	▬▬▬	30.6%	15
Never	▬▬	26.5%	13

LABEL 2: Almarai's Milk (Arabesque)

QUESTION 22:

What differences do you see in the designs for LABEL 1 and LABEL 2?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 49 who participated in completing the Almarai section of the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Written Response
	The use of decoration in Islamic Declaration landscape light gave strikingly
	design
	Introduction of design
	don t know
	more design and it look sick
Qatar	design
	Label 1 its normal art Label 2 with design
	more graphics
	color
	new shapes are there in label 2
	the drawings are different..
Other GCC	some Islamic decoration
Kuwait	kteeeeeeeeeer a7la if you remove the design that is above the dark blue

Backround

arabic art at the top and the pink place

i ont know

Background

I can see

the arebian disgin

it has arabic lins

noting

Label 2 with texture background

Arabic Design

oriantel

Egypt   the background

more Islamic

Lable 1 simple and direct. Lable 2 oriental.

as previous

some graphic design in label 2 but not in label one

background

tradaional one

label 2 has an oriental theme

graphics

not a big difference in the background.

background designs

design

change in style and targeted customers

design

Lebanon

Arabic design inside

The arabic designs

the design above

design

The look and feel are still the same with the traditional touch within the lines appearing for sure showing the Ramadan and Islamic taste.

	the pink label and some of the background
Syria	Additional ornaments
	the Arabic design
Morocco	both os them nice coz they contain arabic wrightimg and bcz we know its an arabic company so we buy it even if it was not designed as label 2

QUESTION 23:

What does the design for LABEL 2 make you think of most?

    a. Milk
    b. Connection with nationality
    c. Arab Identity
    d. Cows
    e. Other – participant writes response

Participant Response:

First thoughts		Response Percent %	Response Count (49)
Milk	▬▬▬▬	40.8%	20
Connection with Nationality	▬▬	16.3%	8
Arab Identity	▬▬▬	32.7%	16
Cows	▪	4.1%	2
Other *	▪	6.1%	3

* Other responses included: Islamic Decoration / Ramadan / Refreshing

QUESTION 24:

On a scale from 1 to 5, rate what did you think of LABEL 1 and 2.

- LABEL 1 (original)

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

- LABEL 2 (arabesque)

  - I really liked it
  - I liked it
  - It was ok
  - I didn't like it
  - I really didn't like it

Participant Response:

Total response by all 49 participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	14	18	15	1	1
Label 2 (Arabesque)	16	11	13	7	2

Response by 21 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label	Really Like	Like	Ok	Didn't Like	Really Didn't
Label 1 (Original)	7	5	8	0	0
Label 2 (Arabesque)	9	5	5	1	1

QUESTION 25:

Which would you rather buy if you saw these 2 labels in the supermarket?

a. LABEL 1
b. LABEL 2

Participant Response:

Total response by all 49 participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (49)
LABEL 1	▬▬▬	44.9%	22
LABEL 2	▬▬▬▬	55.1%	27

Response by 21 Gulf Arab Participants by number

Label		Response Percent %	Response Count (21)
LABEL 1	▬▬	23.8%	5
LABEL 2	▬▬▬▬▬	76.2%	16

QUESTION 26:

Why did you choose this label?

Below are the actual unedited responses of all 49 who participated in completing the Almarai section of the online survey. I have categorized them by nationality.

Participant Response:

Nationality	Chose Label	Written Responses
Qatar	2	The use of decoration in Islamic Declaration landscape light gave strikingly
	2	design

	2	Appeal is much better.
	1	colours
	2	coz it is sick
	2	design
	2	with new design
	2	modern
	2	design
	2	becaues it new face design
	2	nicer..
Other GCC	2	i like the Islamic decoration
	2	Arabic Milk, that i don't drink! but the design is very nice
	2	Looks good
Kuwait	2	arbic art
	1	its nicer
	2	Background

	1	the second one looks bad
	1	i liked it
	1	well it just dont intrest me
	2	i like

	1	It is clear, make me feel with tasty milk
	1	simple
	2	good
	1	much simpler, bright colors
Egypt	1	Direct - with no connection ties to race or religion. Attends to basic human needs rather than race bonds so it is more global and more connecting with the world.
	1	it is clearer
	2	because i just like the graphic design on the 2nd one
	1	make you think about clear milk label 2 not
	1	more cherfull
	1	no specific reason

	1	clear
	2	Both labels are nice.
	1	i liked the simplicity
	1	I prefer the label milk to be simple
	1	it was targeted to another kind of customers
Lebanon	1	clear and simple
	2	It looks more arabic for the LOGO and the place it is from
	1	It's just simple
	1	In fact both of them are nice
	2	better
	2	again the Arabic and Islamic taste on the theme
	1	first one looks better, second looks ugly
Syria	1	same same
	2	latest edition
Morocco	2	nice

APPENDIX D

Arab Supermarkets visited in Sydney's Suburbs

APPENDIX D

Arab Supermarkets visited in Sydney's Suburbs

HREA No. 09 2 095

- o **Valleyview Continental Groceries & Spices**

  Shp40/ 83 North Tce, Bankstown 2200

- o **Bankstown Lebanese Bakery & Mixed Business**

  287 Chapel Road, Bankstown NSW 2200

- o **Rana Supermarket**

  2/128 Edgar Street, Bankstown NSW 2200

APPENDIX E

Ethics Approval Forms

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel

Date:	26/06/2009
Supervisor:	Associate Professor Leong Chan and Mr Ian McArthur
School:	School of Design Studies
Title of Project:	The use of Arabic visual culture and symbols in the branding and promotion of products for consumption by Middle Eastern communities in Sydney
Reference Number:	**09 2 095**
Investigators:	Mr Mark Buschgens
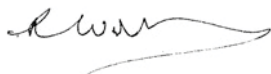
The Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel has recommended to your Head of School/Unit/Centre and the Human Research Ethics Committee that this project, being of minimal ethical impact, may proceed. This approval is valid for 12 months from this date.

....

Associate Professor Bob Walker
Acting Convenor
Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel

....

Ms Liz Williamson
Head
School of Design Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
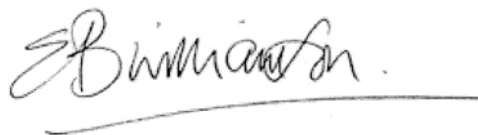
Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel

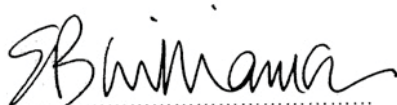|	
Date:	23/04/2010
School:	School of Design Studies
Supervisors:	Associate Professor Leong Chan, Mr Ian McArthur
Title of Project:	An online survey to test the visual effectiveness of arabesque design as a semiotic cognitive interface when applied to food and beverage labels in the Arabian Gulf
Reference Number:	**10 054**
Investigators:	Mr Mark Buschgens

The Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel has recommended to your Head of School/Unit/Centre and the Human Research Ethics Committee that this project, being of minimal ethical impact, may proceed. This approval is valid for 12 months from this date.

Annie Cossins
....
Dr Anne Cossins
Deputy Convenor
Arts, Humanities & Law Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel

....
Ms Liz Williamson
Head
School of Design Studies

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