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Strengthening Comparative Islamic Acculturation in Museum Heritage across Asia and Europe

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Abstract

Background: Islamic acculturation has developed as a dynamic process through which Islamic values interact with diverse cultural systems across different regions. However, most studies remain geographically limited and lack a comparative intercontinental perspective that connects material culture and museum heritage across Asia and Europe.

Methods: This study employs a qualitative comparative approach using interpretative analysis of museum-based cultural heritage in Indonesia (Ronggowarsito Museum), Egypt (Ismailia cultural heritage context), and Portugal (Algarve Islamic legacy). Data are derived from secondary sources, museum documentation, and relevant scholarly literature, with a focus on material culture, architecture, and symbolic representations of Islam.

Results: The findings reveal distinct patterns of Islamic acculturation across regions. In Indonesia, Islamic values are strongly integrated into symbolic and ritual material culture. In Egypt, Islamic heritage reflects a synthesis of social practice, historical continuity, and colonial interaction. In Portugal, Islamic presence is primarily preserved through architectural remnants, toponymy, and linguistic traces of the Andalusian legacy.

Discussion: The study demonstrates that Islamic acculturation is not uniform but context-dependent. In Asia, it tends to be adaptive and symbolic; in Africa, it is historically layered and socially embedded; while in Europe, it is largely residual and materialized through heritage fragments. These differences highlight the flexibility of Islam in engaging with diverse civilizational environments.

Conclusion: Islamic acculturation operates as a transregional cultural process shaped by historical interaction, material heritage, and local reinterpretation. Museums and heritage sites function as critical spaces for preserving and interpreting these diverse Islamic cultural expressions.

Novelty: This study offers a strengthened comparative framework of Islamic acculturation across Asia and Europe by integrating museum heritage analysis, providing a transcontinental perspective rarely addressed in Islamic Studies literature.

Keywords: Islamic acculturation, museum heritage, comparative Islam, Indonesia, Egypt, Portugal.



INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic acculturation has increasingly emphasized the dynamic and adaptive nature of Islam as it interacts with diverse cultural systems across different regions. Across Asia, Africa, and Europe, Islamic acculturation has produced distinct historical and cultural trajectories shaped by local cosmologies, socio-political contexts, and material environments. In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Islam developed through processes of cultural negotiation that resulted in hybrid symbolic and ethical forms (Nasution & Arum, 2024; Khumairoh et al., 2025). In North Africa and the broader Middle Eastern context, such as Egypt, Islamic heritage reflects long-standing historical continuity intertwined with social practices, environmental conditions, and modern development challenges (Eladawy et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in Southern Europe, particularly in Portugal, Islamic presence is largely preserved in residual forms, including architectural heritage, urban infrastructures, and cultural traces shaped by historical transformation (Dias, 2022; López-Bravo et al., 2022). These variations demonstrate that Islamic acculturation is not uniform, but deeply contingent upon regional historical and cultural contexts.

Despite these diverse trajectories, existing scholarship on Islamic acculturation remains largely dominated by textual, intellectual, and socio-religious approaches. In the Indonesian context, studies have explored the synthesis between Islamic teachings and local traditions, particularly in Javanese Islam, emphasizing symbolic integration and ethical localization (Cipta, 2020; Mahamid & Hidayatulloh, 2024). Other studies highlight the influence of Islamic values on social institutions, economic traditions, and communal practices (Hadi et al., 2024; Mufidah, 2025). While these works significantly contribute to understanding Islamic transformation, they tend to prioritize textual and discursive dimensions, leaving the material and visual aspects of Islamic civilization underexplored.

This limitation becomes more critical when considering that Islamic civilization is not only transmitted through texts and discourse, but also embodied in material forms, spatial arrangements, and visual-symbolic representations. Cultural objects, architectural forms, and heritage landscapes function as semiotic systems through which Islamic values are encoded and reproduced in everyday life (Jarrar, 2024; Hakimi, 2025). Moreover, interdisciplinary studies in cultural heritage and anthropology demonstrate that religion is continuously constructed through material engagement and lived practices (Arsil et al., 2021; Setinawati et al., 2025). However, existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined how these material forms operate within institutional contexts, particularly museums, as sites where meaning is actively produced and structured. In this regard, museums represent a crucial yet under-theorized space for understanding Islamic acculturation as a materially grounded and epistemologically mediated process. Museums do not merely preserve cultural artifacts, but also shape narratives, organize knowledge, and construct representations of religious and cultural identity. Studies on heritage and transculturation processes show that cultural meanings are continuously negotiated and reinterpreted within institutional and social contexts (Baby-Ramírez et al., 2025; Mustafayeva et al., 2025). Nevertheless, within Islamic Studies, museums are still often treated as passive repositories rather than as active sites of knowledge production and cultural interpretation.



Addressing this gap, this study adopts a comparative approach by examining museum-based Islamic heritage across three distinct regions: Indonesia, Egypt, and Portugal. These cases represent different civilizational contexts—Asia, Africa, and Europe—each reflecting unique trajectories of Islamic acculturation. The Ronggowarsito Museum in Indonesia illustrates the integration of Islamic values within symbolic and ritual material culture. The cultural heritage context of Ismailia in Egypt reflects historical continuity and socio-environmental interaction. Meanwhile, the Islamic legacy in the Algarve region of Portugal represents residual forms of Islamic presence preserved through architecture and cultural memory. The central problem addressed in this study is the lack of a systematic and comparative analysis of how Islamic acculturation is materially represented, interpreted, and epistemologically constructed across different regions. Therefore, this research shifts the analytical focus from purely textual and socio-cultural perspectives toward material culture and museum epistemology as key frameworks for understanding Islamic civilization.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Islamic Studies with material culture theory and museum heritage analysis within a transregional comparative framework. By positioning museum collections as active sites of meaning-making, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic acculturation as a dynamic, material, and institutionally mediated process across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship on Islamic acculturation increasingly conceptualizes Islam as a historically situated and culturally adaptive civilization that evolves through continuous interaction with local belief systems, cosmologies, and social structures. Across different regions, Islamic acculturation has produced diverse forms of religious expression shaped by specific historical trajectories and socio-cultural environments. In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Islam developed through processes of cultural negotiation that resulted in hybrid forms of religiosity characterized by symbolic integration and ethical localization (Nasution & Arum, 2024; Khumairoh et al., 2025). In other contexts, such as the Middle East and North Africa, Islamic practices are embedded within long-standing historical continuities and socio-environmental dynamics (Eladawy et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in European contexts, Islamic heritage often persists in residual and material forms shaped by historical transformation and cultural memory (Dias, 2022; López-Bravo et al., 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate that Islamic acculturation is inherently plural and context-dependent.

Despite these advances, much of the existing literature remains dominated by textual, intellectual, and socio-religious approaches. In the Indonesian context, scholarship has extensively explored the synthesis between Islamic teachings and local traditions, particularly within Javanese Islam. Studies on figures such as Raden Ranggawarsita highlight the integration of Islamic mysticism with indigenous philosophical systems (Cipta, 2020), while manuscript-based analyses demonstrate how Islamic metaphysical concepts, such as *wahdatul wujud*, are localized within literary traditions (Mahamid, 2024). Additionally, research on social and institutional transformations shows how Islamic values influence economic practices, calendrical systems, and communal traditions (Hadi et al., 2024; Mufidah, 2025).



However, these approaches largely privilege textual and discursive dimensions, leaving the material and visual aspects of Islamic civilization insufficiently theorized.

This limitation is also evident in broader interdisciplinary studies. While research on cultural landscapes and spatial transformations highlights the coexistence of pre-Islamic, Islamic, and colonial influences within specific regions (Ansori et al., 2023; Permana et al., 2025), material culture is often treated as illustrative rather than constitutive of meaning. As a result, the transformation of Islamic ideas into material forms—such as artifacts, architecture, and ritual objects—remains underexplored within Islamic Studies.

In contrast, recent developments in the anthropology of religion and cultural heritage studies emphasize the importance of material culture in understanding religion as a lived and embodied phenomenon. Material objects are increasingly understood as active semiotic systems that produce and mediate meaning rather than merely reflecting belief systems. In Islamic contexts, material culture serves as a bridge between abstract theological concepts and everyday practices, shaping how religious knowledge is experienced and transmitted (Jarrar, 2024; Hakimi, 2025). Studies on food heritage and embodied cultural practices further demonstrate that Islamic values are deeply embedded in sensory and material dimensions of daily life (Raji et al., 2017; Arsil et al., 2021), while socio-anthropological approaches argue that religious identity is continuously constructed through material engagement (Setinawati et al., 2025).

However, the role of museums as institutional spaces for the production and mediation of Islamic meaning remains relatively underdeveloped within Islamic Studies. Although broader heritage scholarship recognizes museums as active epistemic institutions, Islamic material culture is still frequently approached as static heritage rather than as curated and interpreted knowledge (Liasidou et al., 2025). Studies on religion and cultural infrastructure suggest that institutions play a significant role in shaping religious narratives and social meaning (Chenchenko, 2023), while research on transculturation highlights how cultural meanings are continuously negotiated within institutional and social contexts (Baby-Ramírez et al., 2025; Mustafayeva et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the specific role of museums in constructing Islamic heritage narratives remains insufficiently examined.

This gap becomes particularly significant in comparative contexts. While individual case studies exist—such as Islamic cultural heritage in Indonesia, socio-environmental Islamic contexts in Egypt, and architectural legacies in Portugal—there is still a lack of integrative analysis that connects these regions within a unified comparative framework. Consequently, Islamic acculturation is often studied in isolation, limiting broader understanding of its transregional dynamics. Based on the reviewed literature, three major gaps can be identified. First, Islamic acculturation studies remain overly reliant on textual, historical, and sociological frameworks, with limited engagement with material culture as a central analytical category. Second, museum institutions have not been adequately theorized as epistemic spaces where Islamic meaning is actively constructed and mediated. Third, there is a lack of comparative approaches that connect different regional experiences of Islamic acculturation within a single analytical framework.



Responding to these limitations, this study positions museum collections as epistemic objects that mediate Islamic acculturation through material representation and curatorial practices. By integrating Islamic Studies with material culture theory and museum epistemology, this research shifts the analytical focus toward the material production of Islamic meaning across different regions. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic civilization is not only conceptualized in texts and doctrines but also materially embedded, visually articulated, and institutionally constructed within heritage spaces. In doing so, this study contributes to emerging debates in Islamic Studies and heritage scholarship by offering a transregional comparative perspective that situates Islamic acculturation within interconnected civilizational contexts across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design within the framework of Islamic Studies to analyze how Islamic acculturation is materially represented and institutionally mediated across different cultural regions. The study focuses on three cases—Indonesia (Southeast Asia), Egypt (Middle East/North Africa), and Portugal (Europe)—which represent distinct historical trajectories of Islamic civilization and its material manifestations. These cases are not treated as isolated examples but as interconnected sites of analysis that reflect broader patterns of transregional Islamic acculturation.

The unit of analysis in this research is museum-based cultural heritage, including material artifacts, architectural representations, and curatorial narratives associated with Islamic traditions. The Indonesian case emphasizes Islamic-Javanese material culture preserved in museum collections, particularly those reflecting symbolic and ritual integration. The Egyptian case examines Islamic heritage within urban and institutional contexts shaped by layered historical influences, including Islamic, Ottoman, and colonial periods. The Portuguese case focuses on the legacy of Islamic presence in Southern Europe, particularly in the Algarve region, where Islamic heritage is preserved through architectural remains, spatial traces, and cultural memory. Data are collected through qualitative document analysis, drawing from three main sources: (1) peer-reviewed academic literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, (2) museum documentation and exhibition records, and (3) scholarly works on cultural heritage and Islamic material culture. This multi-source approach enables triangulation of data and strengthens the interpretative validity of the analysis.

The analytical method used in this study is thematic comparative analysis. The data are systematically coded and categorized into three main analytical dimensions: (1) material-symbolic expression, which includes artifacts, ritual objects, and visual representations; (2) architectural heritage, referring to mosques, built environments, and spatial configurations; and (3) institutional representation, which encompasses museum narratives, exhibition strategies, and curatorial practices. These dimensions are then compared across the three regions to identify patterns of similarity and difference in how Islamic acculturation is constructed and represented.

The interpretation is guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining Islamic acculturation theory, cultural hybridity, and museum epistemology. This framework allows the



study to conceptualize museums not merely as repositories of artifacts, but as epistemic institutions that actively construct, organize, and disseminate knowledge about Islamic civilization. Through this approach, the study examines how Islamic meanings are encoded in material forms, interpreted through institutional practices, and recontextualized across different historical and cultural settings. Overall, this methodology prioritizes analytical comparison and conceptual interpretation over purely descriptive accounts. By positioning Indonesia, Egypt, and Portugal within a single comparative framework, the study provides a transregional perspective on Islamic acculturation, highlighting how material culture and museum practices mediate the diversity of Islamic expressions across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

RESULTS

The analysis of museum-based Islamic heritage across Indonesia, Egypt, and Portugal demonstrates that Islamic acculturation operates as a multilayered cultural process shaped by historical trajectories, material expressions, and institutional interpretations. Rather than appearing as a uniform or linear phenomenon, Islamic acculturation emerges as a differentiated set of practices through which Islamic values are localized, preserved, or transformed depending on regional and civilizational contexts (Tamimi Arab, 2021; Akbarnia & Suleman, 2023). The findings indicate that material culture plays a central role in mediating Islamic meaning, functioning not only as a representation of religious identity but also as an active site of interpretation and cultural negotiation.

In the Indonesian context, particularly as reflected in the collections of the Ronggowarsito Museum in Central Java, Islamic acculturation is characterized by a strong pattern of symbolic integration between Islamic teachings and pre-existing Javanese cultural systems. This pattern reflects the long historical process through which Islam was not introduced as a rupture, but rather as a continuation and reinterpretation of local cosmological and cultural frameworks. This finding is consistent with previous studies that describe Javanese Islam as a culturally adaptive form of religiosity that emphasizes hybridity, negotiation, and localization of Islamic values (Setinawati et al., 2025).

Material artifacts preserved in the museum, such as keris, wayang figures, ritual objects, and mosque architectural models, demonstrate how Islamic meanings are embedded within indigenous symbolic systems (Tolia-Kelly et al., 2016; Akbarnia & Suleman, 2023; Sánchez-Climent, 2024). The keris, for instance, which historically functioned as a metaphysical object associated with spiritual protection and ancestral power, undergoes a reinterpretation in Islamic context as a symbol of moral discipline, inner strength, and ethical integrity. This transformation does not eliminate its pre-Islamic symbolic associations but reorganizes them within an Islamic ethical framework. Such processes illustrate how material culture serves as a medium through which religious meaning is continuously re-signified rather than replaced.

Similarly, wayang, as a traditional performance art deeply rooted in Javanese cosmology, functions as a significant medium of Islamic acculturation. The narratives performed in wayang have been gradually infused with Islamic moral and ethical teachings, including concepts of justice, humility, patience, and devotion. This integration does not displace the original cosmological structure of wayang but expands its interpretive horizon to include Islamic ethical



discourse. In this sense, wayang becomes a cultural bridge through which Islamic values are communicated in ways that remain accessible and meaningful within local cultural sensibilities (Tilley et al., 2006; Dein, 2024). This reflects broader anthropological insights that material and performative culture play a critical role in shaping lived religious experience

The museum's architectural collections further reinforce this pattern of symbolic integration. Models and representations of mosques such as the Masjid Agung Demak and the Kudus Mosque illustrate how Islamic architectural principles were adapted to local Javanese cosmological concepts. The tiered roof structure commonly found in Javanese mosques, for example, symbolizes spiritual ascent while simultaneously reflecting indigenous understandings of cosmic hierarchy. This architectural hybridity demonstrates that Islamic space in Java is not merely a reproduction of Middle Eastern models but a localized reinterpretation shaped by existing cultural logics. Such findings resonate with studies that emphasize the role of spatial and architectural adaptation in shaping Islamic cultural landscapes (López-Bravo et al., 2022; Jarrar, 2024; Hakimi, 2025).

In addition to symbolic integration, the Indonesian case also reveals a pattern of negotiated continuity, where pre-Islamic cultural elements coexist with Islamic meanings within the same material system. Ritual objects such as ceremonial vessels, water containers, and purification tools demonstrate how Islamic ritual requirements were adapted to local aesthetic traditions without eliminating earlier cultural forms. This coexistence suggests that Islamic acculturation in Java operates through selective incorporation rather than cultural replacement. Pre-Islamic cosmological elements continue to exist, but they are reinterpreted within an Islamic ethical and spiritual framework. This dynamic reflects the broader historical nature of Javanese Islam as a negotiated cultural system rather than a fixed doctrinal structure (Cipta, 2020).

Furthermore, this pattern is supported by broader studies of Indonesian cultural landscapes, which highlight the layered coexistence of pre-Islamic, Islamic, and colonial influences in shaping spatial and cultural structures (Ansori et al., 2023; Permana et al., 2025). Within this layered structure, Islamic values are not isolated from earlier traditions but are continuously reinterpreted through them, resulting in a complex cultural synthesis that is both adaptive and enduring. In contrast to the Indonesian case, the Egyptian context—particularly as reflected in the cultural and historical landscape of Ismailia—demonstrates a different trajectory of Islamic acculturation. Here, Islamic heritage is characterized by continuity of religious orthopraxy and institutionalized religious identity rather than symbolic hybridization with pre-Islamic traditions. Islamic acculturation in this context is embedded within a long civilizational continuum that includes Pharaonic, Roman, Ottoman, and colonial layers, yet Islamic identity remains structurally dominant in shaping cultural expression and social practice.

Material culture in Ismailia reflects a stronger alignment with Islamic orthodoxy and institutional continuity. Architectural forms, museum collections, and urban cultural representations emphasize Islamic civilization as a coherent and continuous historical tradition. Rather than reinterpreting pre-Islamic symbols, Egyptian Islamic heritage tends to preserve Islamic identity through standardized ritual practices and institutional frameworks. Daily religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and communal worship function as key markers of cultural identity, reinforcing continuity rather than transformation. This pattern aligns with



broader studies that emphasize the role of institutional structures in maintaining religious continuity within Islamic societies (Amin et al., 2025; Chenchenko, 2023).

Unlike the Indonesian case, where Islamic acculturation involves significant reinterpretation of local cultural forms, the Egyptian context reflects a more stabilized model of Islamic identity. Material culture in this setting serves primarily to reinforce religious continuity rather than to facilitate symbolic negotiation. Museums and heritage institutions emphasize historical preservation and civilizational continuity, positioning Islamic culture as an enduring framework rather than a hybridized system. This distinction highlights how Islamic acculturation can function both as adaptation and as preservation depending on socio-historical context.

The Portuguese case, represented by the Algarve region, provides yet another distinct pattern of Islamic acculturation, characterized primarily by historical memory rather than living religious practice. Islamic presence in this region is preserved through architectural remains, toponymic traces, and archaeological artifacts associated with the period of al-Andalus. However, unlike Indonesia and Egypt, Islamic acculturation in Portugal does not function as an active cultural or religious system in contemporary society. Material remnants such as Silves Castle and other architectural structures serve as historical markers of Islamic civilization rather than components of an ongoing religious tradition. These remnants are primarily interpreted through heritage and tourism frameworks, transforming Islamic presence into cultural memory rather than lived experience. This form of acculturation reflects what can be described as heritage-based Islamic memory, where Islamic influence is preserved through material traces rather than active cultural practice. Similar dynamics of heritage preservation as cultural reconstruction can be observed in studies of Islamic architectural memory and historical landscape conservation (Hakimi, 2025; Jarrar, 2024).

In this context, Islamic acculturation in Portugal operates at a temporal distance from contemporary religious life. Unlike the Indonesian and Egyptian cases, where Islamic values are actively integrated or maintained within social practice, the Portuguese case represents a post-Islamic cultural condition in which Islamic heritage is reconstructed through historical interpretation. This demonstrates that Islamic acculturation can persist beyond the presence of a living Muslim community, functioning instead as a form of cultural and architectural memory.

Across the three cases, a broader pattern emerges in which material culture functions as a central medium of Islamic acculturation. In Indonesia, material artifacts actively reinterpret Islamic values within local symbolic systems; in Egypt, they reinforce continuity and institutional stability; and in Portugal, they preserve historical memory of Islamic presence. This comparative pattern demonstrates that material culture operates at multiple epistemic levels: as a medium of reinterpretation, a mechanism of continuity, and a form of historical preservation. These findings are consistent with broader theoretical perspectives that emphasize the active role of material culture in producing and transmitting religious meaning (Eladawy et al., 2024; Baby-Ramírez et al., 2025). Overall, the results suggest that Islamic acculturation is not a singular or uniform process but a plural and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by geography, history, and institutional structures. Museums and heritage



sites in all three contexts function as critical epistemic spaces where Islamic meaning is constructed, negotiated, and preserved through material representation. This highlights the importance of material culture as an analytical lens for understanding the diverse trajectories of Islamic civilization across different regions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic acculturation across Indonesia, Egypt, and Portugal cannot be understood as a uniform cultural process, but rather as a differentiated set of historical and material negotiations between Islam and local cultural systems. By situating museum heritage and material culture at the center of analysis, this study extends existing scholarship on Islamic acculturation that has traditionally been dominated by textual, doctrinal, or sociological approaches (Nasution & Arum, 2024; Khumairoh et al., 2025). The comparative evidence suggests that Islamic meaning is not only transmitted through religious discourse but is actively constructed, stabilized, or preserved through material forms embedded in specific cultural and institutional contexts.

One of the most significant theoretical implications of the findings is the confirmation that Islamic acculturation is fundamentally a material process rather than solely an ideological or textual one. In the Indonesian case, Islamic meanings are not abstractly imposed but are continuously negotiated through objects such as keris, wayang, and mosque architecture. These artifacts function as semiotic systems that encode Islamic ethical values while preserving pre-Islamic symbolic structures. This supports anthropological perspectives that emphasize material culture as an active agent in religious meaning-making rather than a passive reflection of belief systems (Arsil et al., 2021; Setinawati et al., 2025). It also reinforces recent arguments that religion is best understood as “lived and embodied practice” rather than doctrinal abstraction.

The Indonesian findings resonate strongly with earlier studies on Javanese Islam that highlight cultural hybridity and symbolic integration as defining characteristics of Islamic acculturation in Java (Cipta, 2020). However, this study extends that argument by demonstrating that hybridity is not only intellectual or ritual in nature but is also materially institutionalized through museum curation and heritage interpretation. Museum collections, particularly in institutions such as the Ronggowarsito Museum, do not simply preserve cultural objects; they actively construct narratives of Islamic civilization through selective representation and interpretive framing. In this sense, museums function as epistemic institutions that shape how Islamic history is understood and transmitted across generations.

This interpretation also aligns with emerging heritage studies that emphasize museums as knowledge-producing spaces rather than neutral repositories of artifacts (Chenchenko, 2023; Liasidou et al., 2025). The Indonesian case demonstrates that museum curation plays a critical role in stabilizing hybrid Islamic identities by framing pre-Islamic and Islamic elements within a coherent cultural narrative. The coexistence of symbolic continuity and religious reinterpretation reflects a broader pattern of negotiated cultural transformation rather than linear Islamization. This challenges earlier assumptions in Islamic Studies that tend to treat



acculturation as either assimilation or resistance, suggesting instead a more dynamic model of cultural translation.

In contrast, the Egyptian case reveals a different modality of Islamic acculturation characterized by continuity and institutional stabilization rather than symbolic hybridization. Islamic heritage in Ismailia reflects a strong alignment with orthopraxy and religious institutional frameworks, where Islamic identity is maintained through ritual practice and standardized cultural forms. Unlike the Indonesian case, where Islamic values are embedded in pre-existing symbolic systems, Egyptian Islamic acculturation emphasizes the preservation of a coherent religious tradition that transcends historical layering.

This finding is consistent with scholarship that highlights the role of institutional religion in maintaining continuity within Islamic societies (Amin et al., 2025; Chenchenko, 2023). In Egypt, institutions such as religious authorities and heritage organizations play a central role in reinforcing Islamic identity as a stable and continuous civilizational framework. Material culture in this context does not primarily function as a site of reinterpretation but as a mechanism of cultural preservation and religious reinforcement. Museums and heritage sites emphasize historical continuity rather than cultural hybridity, positioning Islamic civilization as an enduring tradition rather than a negotiated cultural formation.

From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that Islamic acculturation in Egypt operates within a paradigm of “structured continuity,” where material culture supports the reproduction of established religious norms rather than facilitating symbolic transformation. This contrasts with the Indonesian case, where material culture enables reinterpretation and localization of Islamic meanings. The difference between these two models highlights the importance of institutional frameworks in shaping the direction and intensity of acculturation processes. The Portuguese case introduces yet another dimension to this discussion, namely the transformation of Islamic presence into historical memory. In the Algarve region, Islamic heritage exists primarily in the form of architectural remnants and toponymic traces associated with al-Andalus civilization. However, these material traces no longer function within an active religious or cultural system. Instead, they are interpreted through heritage and tourism frameworks that detach Islamic meaning from lived practice.

This form of acculturation can be understood as “heritage fossilization,” where Islamic civilization persists as a material residue rather than a living tradition. This finding extends existing studies on Islamic heritage in post-Islamic contexts, which emphasize the role of archaeology and memory in reconstructing historical Islamic landscapes (Hakimi, 2025; Jarrar, 2024). Unlike Indonesia and Egypt, where Islamic values are either actively reinterpreted or institutionally preserved, the Portuguese case demonstrates that acculturation can persist even after the disappearance of religious practice itself. This observation has important implications for understanding the temporal dimensions of Islamic acculturation. It suggests that acculturation is not limited to the presence of living religious communities but can also operate as a form of cultural memory embedded in material landscapes. In this sense, Islamic acculturation in Portugal reflects a post-religious phase of cultural transmission, where meaning is reconstructed through historical interpretation rather than contemporary practice. When compared systematically, the three cases reveal a continuum of Islamic acculturation



modalities rather than discrete categories. Indonesia represents an integrative model characterized by symbolic negotiation and cultural hybridity. Egypt reflects a continuity-based model grounded in institutional stability and ritual preservation. Portugal represents a heritage-based model where Islamic presence is maintained primarily through material memory. This typology challenges binary frameworks that oppose “pure Islam” and “syncretic Islam,” offering instead a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic civilization adapts across different socio-historical environments.

Importantly, material culture emerges as the central analytical thread connecting all three cases. Across contexts, artifacts, architecture, and spatial heritage function as mediating structures through which Islamic meaning is constructed and transmitted. In Indonesia, material culture enables reinterpretation; in Egypt, it reinforces continuity; and in Portugal, it preserves historical memory. This multi-functionality of material culture supports theoretical arguments in cultural anthropology and heritage studies that emphasize objects as active participants in meaning-making processes rather than passive historical remnants (Eladawy et al., 2024; Baby-Ramírez et al., 2025). Theoretically, these findings contribute to the broader redefinition of Islamic acculturation as a materially grounded and institutionally mediated process. Rather than viewing acculturation as a purely cultural or theological phenomenon, this study demonstrates that it is deeply embedded in the production, curation, and interpretation of material heritage. Museums play a particularly important role in this process by functioning as epistemic spaces where Islamic meaning is constructed and stabilized. This insight aligns with recent scholarship that critiques the passive conception of museums and instead positions them as active agents in knowledge production (Liasidou et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the comparative dimension of this study highlights the importance of transregional analysis in Islamic Studies. By examining Asia, Africa, and Europe simultaneously, the study demonstrates that Islamic acculturation cannot be fully understood within a single regional framework. Instead, it must be approached as a global and historically layered phenomenon shaped by diverse civilizational encounters. This expands existing literature that has largely focused on regional case studies without sufficient comparative integration. In practical terms, the findings also suggest that heritage management and museum curation play a crucial role in shaping public understanding of Islamic civilization. The way artifacts are selected, interpreted, and displayed directly influences how Islamic history is perceived and transmitted. This underscores the importance of critically engaging with museum epistemologies in order to better understand how cultural and religious identities are constructed in contemporary societies.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that Islamic acculturation is a dynamic and multi-layered process that operates through different modalities of material engagement. Whether through integration, continuity, or memory, Islamic civilization is continuously reconstructed through material culture and institutional frameworks. By situating museums at the center of analysis, this study offers a new interpretive lens for understanding the global diversity of Islamic acculturation and highlights the need for further interdisciplinary research at the intersection of Islamic Studies, material culture, and heritage epistemology.



CONCLUSION

This study has examined Islamic acculturation through the lens of material culture across three distinct geographical and civilizational contexts: Indonesia (Ronggowarsito Museum), Egypt (Ismailia cultural setting), and Portugal (Algarve Islamic heritage). By moving beyond textual and doctrinal approaches, the research demonstrates that Islamic acculturation is best understood as a materially grounded and institutionally mediated process in which Islamic meanings are continuously produced, negotiated, and preserved through cultural artifacts, architectural forms, and museum narratives.

The findings show that Islamic acculturation is not a single or uniform phenomenon, but a plural process shaped by different historical trajectories and cultural frameworks. In Indonesia, Islamic acculturation takes an integrative form in which Islamic values are embedded within pre-existing Javanese symbolic systems. Objects such as keris, wayang, and mosque architecture illustrate how Islamic ethics are localized through cultural reinterpretation, producing a hybrid yet coherent cultural expression of Islam. In Egypt, Islamic acculturation is characterized by continuity-based processes, where Islamic identity is maintained through institutional structures, ritual practice, and orthopraxy. Here, material culture primarily reinforces religious stability rather than symbolic transformation. In contrast, the Algarve region in Portugal represents a heritage-based form of acculturation, where Islamic presence persists mainly as historical memory preserved in architectural remnants and cultural traces of al-Andalus civilization, rather than as a living religious tradition.

Based on these findings, the study proposes a comparative typology of Islamic acculturation consisting of integrative (Indonesia), continuity-based (Egypt), and heritage-based (Portugal) models. This typology challenges simplistic dichotomies between “syncretism” and “orthodoxy” by showing that Islamic acculturation operates along a spectrum of material, institutional, and historical configurations. It also highlights that material culture is not merely a reflection of religious life, but an active medium through which Islamic civilization is interpreted and transmitted across time and space. The study also contributes to Islamic Studies and heritage scholarship by emphasizing the epistemic role of museums and heritage sites. Museums are shown to function not only as repositories of artifacts but as knowledge-producing institutions that shape how Islamic history and identity are constructed. Through curatorial practices and interpretive frameworks, museums actively mediate the relationship between Islamic pasts and contemporary cultural understandings.

For future research, this study suggests the need for deeper ethnographic engagement with museum curatorship and visitor interpretation in different cultural contexts to further understand how Islamic meanings are produced and received. Expanding the comparative framework to include additional regions in Africa, Central Asia, or the Americas would also strengthen the global applicability of the proposed typology. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of culturally sensitive museum curation that acknowledges the layered and plural nature of Islamic heritage, ensuring that Islamic material culture is represented not as a fixed narrative but as a dynamic and evolving tradition.



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