


# Evaluating the Visual Values and calligraphy rules in Writing Sols Inscriptions of the Hashti, Grand Mosque of Mozaffari in Kerman

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## Abstract

The inscription is one of the elements that holds a special importance in Islamic architecture. It is an element that, in addition to its semantic aspect, can also enhance the visual and aesthetic beauty and grandeur of the architectural space. This has prompted Muslim artists to engage in the writing of inscriptions in the form of calligraphy, and in some cases accompanied by decorative motifs, in order to display and propagate the word of God and the great individual of religion, and to present a sacred space with spiritual and mystical attractions in mosques and holy places. Among the Islamic scripts, the sols script is one of the most important calligraphic items, which has been the focus of inscription artists from the Ilkhany period to the present day, due to its valuable visual capabilities and characteristics. This research focuses on the Sols inscriptions located in the Hashti of the Mozzafari Mosque in Kerman, which are in the form of scrolls and cover the entire Hashti, in an effort to explain the general principles of visual and calligraphic rules used in the art of inscription, which is an important branch of the art of calligraphy, to examine the inscriptions in accordance with the principles and rules of the aforementioned technical and executive constraints. The findings of this study, which are descriptive-analytical, show in the writing of the Sols inscriptions; Visual and qualitative principles such as the composition of the seat, balance and proportionality of the form of letters and their proximity to the inscription, the order and harmony of repetition and sequence in the relationships between the letters, whether in singularities and in connections, and in relation to other components of the inscription has been of attention by a calligrapher artist was aware of inscriptions techniques. In the meantime, the content of the inscription and the proportion of its concepts to the characteristics of the Hashti have increased the visual impact of Sols inscriptions in presenting a magnificent, subtle and spiritual space.

**Keywords:** Mosque, hashti, inscription, Calligraphy, rules, Sols script

## 1. Introduction

The Muzaffari Grand Mosque of Kerman, a distinguished example of 8th-century AH Islamic architecture, features remarkable decorative elements—most notably its inscriptions. These inscriptions, which span several Islamic eras including the Muzaffarid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods, showcase a range of calligraphic styles such as Kufic, Sols, Naskh, and Nasta'liq. Executed in materials including brick, tile, and mosaic tilework, they adorn entrances, iwans, façades, and mihrabs. Despite their aesthetic and historical richness—particularly those executed in Sols during the Muzaffarid period—the artistic and calligraphic value of these inscriptions has often been overlooked in architectural studies. The Sols inscriptions in the mosque's vestibule (hashti) represent one of the earliest and most influential examples of mosaic tile calligraphy. This study considers the historical and functional context of these inscriptions, emphasizing the distinctive requirements of architectural inscription in contrast to manuscript calligraphy. Factors such as spatial limitations, the number and type of words, the skill level of the artisan or calligrapher, and available materials all necessitated creative adaptation of classical calligraphic rules. Recognizing these factors is essential for a nuanced evaluation and appreciation of the inscriptions.

The calligrapher of the Muzaffari hashti inscriptions demonstrated both technical mastery and creative sensitivity, skillfully overcoming structural and material challenges to produce Sols inscriptions of striking visual impact. These works not only enriched the mosque's architectural identity but also influenced inscriptional practices in the later Safavid and Qajar additions to the same complex. Research Objectives To identify the visual principles and rules of the Sols script and evaluate their application in the vestibule inscriptions of the Muzaffari Grand

Mosque. To assess the visual literacy and technical knowledge of the Sols calligrapher in the context of architectural inscription. To explore the interplay between the visual characteristics of Sols, the use of color, and the semantic resonance of the verses from Surah al-Hashr within the vestibule's spatial setting.

## 2. Research Questions:

Which visual and calligraphic principles did the inscription artists prioritize? To what extent does the calligrapher's mastery of Sols and inscription techniques manifest in the vestibule inscriptions? How do the visual aesthetics and color interactions of the Sols script reinforce the meanings of the selected Qur'anic verses in relation to the atmosphere of the vestibule?

## 3. Research Review

Previous scholarship on Sols inscriptions in Islamic religious architecture has provided valuable insights, though most studies focus on the Safavid period and beyond. In fact, the use of Sols in architectural inscriptions began during the Ilkhanid era, evolved through the Timurid period, and reached its pinnacle under the Safavids.

The Muzaffari Grand Mosque of Kerman, built in 750 AH during the Muzaffarid dynasty (contemporary with the late Ilkhanid period), represents an early phase in the architectural application of Sols script. Existing research on the mosque has primarily examined its Kufic inscriptions, as seen in the works of Reyhaneh Bairami, Farzaneh Farrokhfar, and Farid Ahmadzadeh. Recent studies have explored the stylistic development of Sols inscriptions in the Safavid-Qajar periods and the visual organization of major examples in the Razavi Shrine. However, the Sols inscriptions of the Muzaffari Mosque's vestibule—among the earliest examples executed in mosaic tile—remain underexplored. This study aims to analyze their visual qualities and calligraphic structure within the historical framework of 8th-century AH religious architecture,

preceding the script's full stylistic maturity. The research considers architectural constraints specific to inscriptional design—limited precedent, spatial dimensions, and material challenges—and assesses how these shaped the calligrapher's creative adaptations. Special attention is given to ligatures, rhythmic structures, and stylistic choices that heighten the inscriptions' visual effect. Principles such as composition, baseline (korsi), proportion, repetition, and rhythmic sequence are analyzed to reveal how they contribute to the inscriptions' visual dynamism and spiritual resonance. Ultimately, this research positions the Sols inscriptions of the Muzaffari Mosque as a pivotal transitional moment in Islamic calligraphic ornamentation, bridging early experimentation with later refinement. It also offers a model for understanding the integration of sacred text, visual form, and spatial experience.

#### 4. Research Methodology

This descriptive-analytical study investigates the Sols inscriptions in the vestibule (hashti) of the Muzaffari Grand Mosque in Kerman through a combination of literature review, fieldwork, and photographic documentation. Based on established visual and calligraphic principles, the research analyzes the structure of letters and words to evaluate their adherence to classical calligraphic aesthetics. To enhance precision, graphic design software (Photoshop and Illustrator) was used to deconstruct and analyze the compositional structures of the inscriptions, enabling detailed examination of how Sols letterforms were adapted for architectural use in mosaic tile technique.

The article is organized into nine sections:

- Introduction to the Sols script and its visual characteristics
- The role of inscriptions in Islamic architecture
- Review of key calligraphic principles relevant to architectural design

- Architectural overview of the Muzaffari Grand Mosque Functional
- Analysis of the vestibule (hashti) in Iranian-Islamic architecture
- Thematic study of Qur'anic verses inscribed in the vestibule
- Visual-calligraphic analysis of Sols inscriptions (composition, proportion, rhythm)
- Symbolic interpretation of color in tilework and its relation to the inscribed verses
- Discussion of key findings and stylistic choices in the Sols inscriptions

The study demonstrates how visual rhythm, repetition, and structural harmony reflect both the spiritual essence of the Qur'anic verses and the disciplined aesthetic of the Sols script. Through detailed visual mapping, it reveals the creative strategies employed by the calligrapher to maintain harmony and coherence within architectural constraints.

#### 5. Research Findings

Sols, one of the most distinguished scripts in Islamic calligraphy, has undergone significant historical transformation. Originating from modifications to Kufic, it emerged formally in the late 3rd century AH through the innovations of Ibn Muqla Shirazi, who established its geometric foundations and classified it among the six canonical scripts. Later, Ibn al-Bawwab and Yaqut al-Musta'simi refined its structure and codified its rules, endowing Sols with elegance, rhythm, and visual authority. The name Sols ("one-third") is believed to refer to its balance between circular and linear forms. The script is characterized by graceful flow, strong vertical strokes, and elongated curves ending in delicate flourishes—features that convey both majesty and sanctity. Its use in mosque inscriptions, Qur'anic texts, and religious manuscripts has endowed it with profound spiritual symbolism. Architectural inscriptions (katibah)—large-scale writings executed on tile, wood, metal, or stone—serve

as both historical records and visual expressions of faith. From the 8th century AH onward, Sols gradually supplanted Kufic as the dominant script in architectural ornamentation due to its superior aesthetic flexibility and visual harmony. In Iranian-Islamic architecture, the hashti is the transitional space immediately after the main entrance, mediating the movement from the exterior to the sacred interior. Typically octagonal, square, or cruciform in plan, it regulates circulation and symbolizes spiritual transition. Richly adorned with stucco, brickwork, glazed tiles, and inscriptions, it reflects both aesthetic intention and architectural hierarchy. The hashti of the Jameh Mosque of Muzaffari in Kerman is a dim, square space designed to induce spiritual reflection through a gradual modulation of light. A turquoise tile band encircles the space, inscribed with verses 20–23 of Surah al-Hashr in white Sols script on a lapis-blue background, framed with arabesque motifs.

These verses emphasize divine attributes such as knowledge, mercy, majesty, and purity, encouraging contemplation of God’s unity and power. Their recitation is recommended in Islamic tradition for spiritual purification. Placing these verses in the hashti symbolically prepares worshippers for entry into the sacred interior, guiding them from the temporal to the divine through both word and visual form. This study highlights the harmony between aesthetic principles and spiritual expression in these inscriptions. The calligrapher’s mastery is evident in the deliberate variation of letterforms, spacing, alignment, and diacritical placement, ensuring both balance and legibility. A key focus is composition (*tarqīb*), regarded as the highest rule in calligraphy—particularly in architectural contexts. In the northern panel (Image 1), for example, different forms of the letter *nūn* were selected for four divine names, achieving visual balance through alternating elongated and compact shapes. Vertical, diagonal, and horizontal axes were mapped to analyze structural equilibrium (Image 2).



Image 1 – Variation of the letter *nūn* (“ن”) in words such as *Mu’min*, *Muhaymin*, *Subhān*, and *Yushrikūn* in the northern panel.

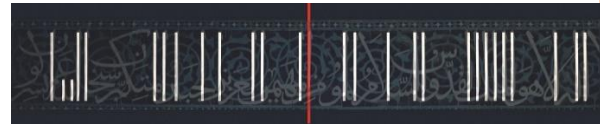


Image 2 – Vertical line alignment analysis across the northern panel composition

To prevent overcrowding, diacritical dots were omitted from certain words (Image 3), while in other panels, additional dots were used to fill empty spaces. Elongated letters such as *sīn* (“س”) and *bā’* (“ب”) further supported structural harmony, while adaptive lettering maintained coherence amid spatial limitations (Image 4).



Image 3 – Removal of diacritical dots from the words *Muhaymin*, ‘*Azīz*, *Subhān*, and *Yushrikūn* to prevent overcrowding in the composition of the northern inscription panel.



Image 4 – Dual rendering of the letter *yā’* (“ی”) in the word *Alladhī*, adapted to the spatial limitations of the northern inscription panel.

The concept of *kursī*—alignment guidelines—was employed to anchor the composition and unify letter placement (Image 5). Proportional harmony was achieved by adjusting letter sizes according to spatial conditions (Image 6), while formal similarity enhanced rhythm and visual unity (Image 7).

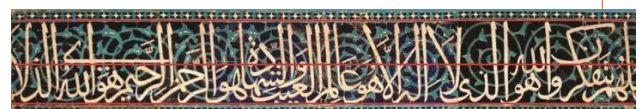


Image 5 – Use of a central *kursī* (guideline axis) to create order and coherence in the placement of letters

and words within the limited space of the eastern inscription panel



Image 6 – Due to spatial constraints and the density of words, the reversed elongation of the letter yā' in the word 'Alī is shorter than other extended letters. The letter rā' in Lerayatah is written smaller than surrounding letters, and the word Khashyah appears more compressed than others. These stylistic adjustments maintain structural balance and prevent overcrowding within the inscription on the southern panel of the octagonal chamber. (Source: Author)



Image 7 – Establishing proportion, harmony, and structural elegance through the selection of visually similar letters: the connected forms of alif and kāf, the pairing of sīn and nūn, the resemblance between mīm and mīn, the parallel strokes of nūn and rā', the curves of zayn and rā', and the connected shapes of jīm and hā'—all purposefully chosen in the northern inscription panel to create a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing composition.

Repetition and fluid connections (Image 8) evoke rhythmic movement, further amplified by arabesque motifs (Image 9). Color symbolism plays a pivotal role: white script against lapis-blue backgrounds evokes purity and divine transcendence, while turquoise arabesques contribute serenity and spatial depth.



Image 8 – Evocation of rhythm through the successive connections of numerous, uniformly curved letters in the northern inscription panel.



Image 9 – Analysis of the northern inscription panel, highlighting recurring elements and their impact on the composition's dynamism.

In the Thuluth (Sols) calligraphy adorning the octagonal chamber (Hashti) of the Mozafari Jameh Mosque, the calligrapher sought to uphold visual principles and the foundational rules of Islamic calligraphy. Compositional balance was achieved through the use of a horizontal kursī (guideline axis), while proportionality emerged from the deliberate selection and juxtaposition of letter forms within the inscriptions. Order and harmony were realized through repetition and sequencing, evident in the relationships between letters—both isolated and connected. Creative approaches in the joining of letters and the distinctive shaping of Thuluth script characters significantly enhanced the visual quality of the inscriptions. Another key finding of this study is the interplay between the themes and meanings of the Qur'anic verses (the concluding verses of Sūrat al-Ḥashr) and the spatial function of the Hashti, together fostering a sublime, serene, and spiritually charged atmosphere within the mosque's architecture.

Analytical Table of Sols Inscriptions in the Octagonal Chamber of Mozafari Jameh Mosque

Location of Inscription	Type of Kursi	Balance	Proportio	Creative Connections	Verse Number & Theme
Western Panel	Horizontal	Yes	Yes	Yes	20—Promise of Salvation
Southern Panel	Horizontal	Yes	Yes	Yes	21—Educational Message to Humanity
Eastern Panel	Horizontal	Yes	Yes	Yes	22—Emphasis on Monotheism
Northern Panel	Horizontal	Yes	Yes	Yes	23—Expression of Divine Names

## 5. Conclusion

Crafting refined inscriptions in Islamic architecture demands more than technical proficiency—it requires a profound understanding of visual principles and calligraphic aesthetics. At the Mozafari Jameh Mosque, the inscription calligrapher demonstrated exceptional mastery of the Thuluth script, creating compositions that

balance form, proportion, and spiritual resonance. Through the strategic application of horizontal kursī alignment, careful selection of letter forms, and rhythmic connections, the artist achieved harmony across the inscription panels of the mosque's octagonal chamber (Hashti). Creativity played a central role: innovative methods of letter connection and shaping elevated the aesthetic impact of the inscriptions. These formal decisions were not arbitrary but deeply informed by the spatial context and the thematic content of each panel. The final verses of Sūrat al-Ḥaṣhr, inscribed within the panels, further enrich the sacred atmosphere, reinforcing the architectural function of the Hashti as a space of reflection and reverence. Since the Ilkhanid period, Thuluth script has held a prominent position in Islamic architectural decoration due to its elegance and rhythmic visual flow. Although the Mozafari inscriptions date to the 8th century AH—an era with relatively few Thuluth precedents—the calligrapher clearly possessed mastery over composition, letter variation, and the visual grammar of the script. By embracing principles such as balance, repetition, sequencing, and unity, the artist created calligraphic works that seamlessly integrate tradition with innovation. This study underscores that Thuluth inscriptions serve not merely decorative purposes but also convey spiritual and aesthetic meaning. It calls for renewed appreciation of their narrative role within Islamic architecture and encourages further exploration of the design potential of calligraphy in shaping sacred space.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization and writing of this article. All authors approve the content of the manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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