



مؤتمر الابداع والابتكار والتنمية فى العمارة والتراث و الاداب والفنون

## The Significance of Ornaments and Motifs In Heritage Buildings of Alexandria, Egypt

**Nermin Saad Fathalla**  
*Lecturer, Interior Design Department, Faculty of Fine Arts,  
Alexandria University, Egypt*  
*Nermin.Saad@Alexu.edu.eg*

### **Introduction:**

Ornaments and motifs in architecture are elements that which added to an otherwise merely structural form, usually for the purpose of decoration or embellishment, it's the language through which architecture communicates with a public. Utilizing those decorative elements and motifs is considered as an intellectual communication throughout the characteristics of architectural styles.

The importance of the study is Identifying and understanding the range of ornamental design principles used in previous times which signifies the transformations of eras. Styles of ornamentation studied in reference to the specific culture which develops unique forms of decoration, or modified ornaments from other cultures.

Very few researches have been undertaken to study such decorative elements, hence the objective of the study was to understand, record and analyze the existing wide variety of decorative ornaments which were spread in Alexandria, mainly two distinctive styles which were the Neoclassic and Art Deco styles.

This was done through case studies where data was collected by using survey as a main method, throughout several heritage buildings during the late 19th century and the early 20th century of cosmopolitan Alexandrian era.

The research discusses these abundant vast ranges of motifs used in ornaments and embellishments which have an importance to grant an identity to buildings therefore identity of the city, also to emphasize distinctive features of elements, sometimes with no function, but exist merely to be a work of art, considered as ramifications to the past, arousing people's nostalgic feelings.

**Keywords:** Ornaments - Motifs - Identity - Heritage buildings - Alexandria, Egypt

## **1- What are Ornaments and Motifs in Architecture?**

Ornaments and motifs are the language through which architecture and design communicates, it's the desire to celebrate. A formula for the use of ornaments in architecture and design must be based on the close connection of all elements that play a role emphasizing the goals and function of the construction and the meaning of order, contrast, rhythm, proportion, harmony, scale and unity of the whole and abstraction.

The wide range of ornaments and motifs usually used in facades of neoclassic and eclectic styles buildings such as columns capitals, pediments emphasizing entrances and windows, entablatures, cornices, friezes, architraves, panels, brackets, gratings (fer forge), balustrades, patterns, decorative reliefs and others inspired of renaissance architectural ornaments mostly like foliage and geometric patterns.

Art Deco also used, which had a mix of many different styles, united by a desire to be modern, using nature motifs like shells, flowers, geometric, angular, stepped and radiating ornaments.

## **2- Heritage Buildings of Alexandria, Egypt**

Classical styles were wide spread to a great extent in architecture in the nineteenth century in cosmopolitan Alexandria, especially in villas and several storey buildings with a distinct identity representing time.

The research paper is concerned with buildings found in downtown of Alexandria city, where Neoclassicism was wide spread, also integration of different styles to Eclecticism such as Venetian, Revivals (Classical revival, Gothic revival, Greek revival, Neo Islamic, Neo Romanesque ...) and Art Deco Styles.

Neoclassic architecture was an architecture style produced by the neoclassical movement that began in the mid eighteenth century as a reaction against the Rococo style also outgrowing of some classicizing features of the Late Baroque. Intellectually Neoclassicism was a desire to return to the perceived "purity" of the arts of Rome, Greek and renaissance classicism. Subsequently wide spread in Egypt at the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

A wide range of Neoclassical, Eclectic and Art deco ornaments and motifs were used in such buildings especially on facades. Also ornaments and motifs of Eclectic styles which were consistently subject to variation and modification, promoting variety over order, a license for invention, and an architectural classification that allowed for flexibility, expansion, and variation to conceptualization of the five orders.

### **3- The Significance of Ornaments and Motifs in Heritage Buildings of Alexandria:**

Ornamentation is the most evident characteristic to identifying architecture, recognition of the style identity, a visual documentation of time, emphasis of different types of architectural elements such as entrances, windows and columns, entablatures, as shown in examples of figures (1-16).

Ornaments and motifs used in heritage buildings were certainly classified in antiquity also facilitate connectivity between different sections of a building. They also add an aesthetic value to the structure. In addition ornamentation and motifs are important aspects for revelation of feelings and reminiscences of the past times with its nostalgic ramifications.

### **4- Research Methodology and Analysis:**

This research includes analytical descriptive study of heritage buildings' ornaments and motifs, for identifying and understanding their design principles through place, time and the different expressions they resemble.

The study focuses on ornamental elements both its inherent form and beauty, this was done through analyzing the historical importance of such ornaments and motifs across downtown Alexandrian heritage buildings.

### **5- Cases Studies in Heritage Buildings of Alexandria:**

The study took place at several old streets in Alexandria Downtown such as rue Fouad, rue sheriff, the Latin District, Ramleh station District and Mansheia districts.

Architectural subjects included designs for buildings exteriors, including decorative ornaments and motifs; Styles were a range of neoclassic era, revivals in architecture such as, Gothic Revival, and Art Deco style. Data was collected by using survey as a main method, throughout several heritage buildings during the late 19th century and the early 20th century of cosmopolitan Alexandrian era. The following cases studies representing photos illustrating how wide-ranging these aesthetic concerns, Analyzing each aspect and significance.

CASE STUDIES; Figures (1 to 16) illustrates the main features and characteristics of ornaments and motifs found on facades of heritage buildings in downtown districts of Alexandria;





















## 6- Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Alexandrian ornaments of heritage buildings especially those of antiquity must be well preserved codified and easily reproduced.
- Alexandrian ornaments of heritage buildings may best serve as landmarks and aids in districts distinction through the city.
- The importance of studying and considering the cultural and symbolic significance of ornament and its subsequent reinvention in order to identify and understand the range of ornamental design principles used in previous times which signifies the transformations of eras.
- Recreating ornaments and motifs according to the study recommending specialists work on these elements within the principles of rhythm , in order to reach a contemporary ornamentation of building.
- Suggesting new contemporary architectural elements, in the future, as a practical application, to borrow those forms of beauty from our past.
- We should regard our inheritance, not blindly following them but employing them simply as guides to find the true paths to grant the unity and identity of the future constructed buildings.
- Ornaments and motifs are strong elements of design for reminiscences of nostalgic feelings and an Impact of forming our personal memories.
- It is important to preserve heritage buildings, trying to reuse or rehabilitate most of them into public use functions such as cultural centers, for the next generations to understand and appreciate the meaning of antiquity and to preserve the identity of Alexandria.

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**Note: Photos Captured by Author**