

The Representation of Hajj in Rural Egyptian Murals: Symbolism and Community Identity

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Abstract:

Visual arts represented Hajj pilgrimage practices throughout history with diverse artistic materials across the Islamic communities, reflecting its deepened spiritual and communal significance. Rural Egyptian societies, especially in Upper Egypt, represent a vibrant artistic model through murals painted on villagers' houses and public spaces which offer unique insights into their local cultural expressions of al-Hajj. Despite the richness of their symbolic and social meanings, these Egyptian Hajj mural representations, and their contributions of our local, self-educated local artists – they remain understudied in the scholar landscape. drawing on a personal reading in the visual traditions of art in rural Egypt and focusing on the mural artwork of Eid Al-Salwaway, a self-taught muralist from Kom Ombo, Aswan, this research examines how these mural paintings articulate spiritual devotion, communal values, and local Islamic identities.

The research will employ quantitative visual and cultural analysis methodologies to explore the recurring motifs, symbolic narratives and stylistic characteristics extraordinary to rural Egyptian murals. The research will compare these modern murals to historical representations of al Hajj throughout different manuscripts miniatures and paintings from diverse Islamic regions, the study positions the local Egyptian artistic practices within broader Islamic visual culture.

The findings of the study illustrate that Hajj murals play as powerful tools for enrichment communal identity, introspective deep-seated cultural narratives, religious beliefs, and local artistic traditions. This research subsidizes to broader conversations within the Islamic art studies and visual anthropology, promoting how artistic representations mediate community practices and cultural identity formation in rural Egyptian contexts.

Keywords

Hajj art; communal identity; Islamic symbolism; visual anthropology; Eid Al-Salwaway; cultural narratives; Upper Egypt art; religious art.

Introduction:

Pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth pillars of Islam- faith- alongside Shahadah (confession of faith), Salat (prayer), Zakat (charity), and Sawm (fasting). The Hajj is a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and their submission to God (Allah). The word Hajj means "to attend a journey", which connotes both the outward act of a journey and the inward act of intentions (Adelowo, 2014, p. 395). Hajj represents a central importance not only as a religious practice but as a culture expression and collective memory. Throughout Islamic art history, Muslim artistes have visually documented and represented in various forms and artistic media, ranging from illustrated manuscripts in Persian and Ottoman traditions to modern photography and public murals across the Muslim world, each presenting unique insights in the communal and

cultural meanings associated with this exceptional sacred journey. These representations have not merely served to depict sacred rituals, but to embody spiritual values and convey communal narratives tied to Islamic identity (Peters 1994; Rahimi & Eshaghi 2019). The act of artistic visualizing Hajj demonstrate the Hajj's centrality not only as a religious obligation but as a pivotal practice shaping communal identities, social values, and cultural memories.

As Reem Al Faisal observed "It is difficult to capture the Hajj in text or visually since it is larger than any possible description ... As you perform one ritual after the other, you slowly discover the rythm of the universe." (Al Faisal, as cited in Highet, 2012, p. 56). This sense of the pilgrimage's magnitude inspires attempts to commemorate the experience visually, especially in the murals painted across Egyptian villages. In rural Egypt, especially in small villages along the Nile Vally, Hajj murals are considered distinctive visual tradition that continues to decorate houses facades and public walls as powerful visual expressions that are deeply intertwined with local traditions and religious beliefs and communal pride. As a person who grown up in Sohag, Upper Egypt, I witnessed the impacts of several of Hajj murals which adorned homes like that my grandfather, to commemorate his return from Mecca, that formed impressions through their spiritual resonance. These murals were usually depicted by self-taught local artists, featuring rich symbolism and images of the Kaaba, mosques, transportation symbols (camels, planes), Qur'anic calligraphy and decorative Islamic motifs that reflect the spiritual and communal significance of the journey. These artworks demonstrate not only personal expressions but also as public markers of social status and call for pride. Despite their prevalence and cultural importance, these murals, did received limited attention in academic studies of Islamic art. Many mural artists, and particularly the local, self-trained artists, remain anonymous, and their practices undocumented and unacknowledged till this moment.

This study addresses this scholarly gap by investigating the visual representations of al-Hajj murals in the indigenous mural traditions rural Egypt, positioning them within broader context of Islamic artistic different representations throughout different historical periods. The study will explore how local mural artists express and emphasizes communal identities and spiritual values through their artwork, with special focus on the self-taught muralists form rural regions in Egypt. as a case study.

The study addresses three guiding questions:

1. How is the Hajj visually represented in Egyptian village mural traditions?
2. What cultural, spiritual, and symbolic meanings do these murals carry within the local community?
3. n what ways do these indigenous artworks reverberate with or diverge from other historical and regional depictions of the pilgrimage

Research Objectives:

This study examines the visual arts of the al-Hajj in rural Egyptian mural practices. It focuses on their symbolic meanings and cultural significance seeking to understanding how sacred experiences are interpreted into visual language and ingrained in communal memory and identity of the local rural Egyptian populations. Particularly, the research aims to:

Specifically, the research aims to:

1. Investigate the symbolic motifs and visual programing used in Hajj murals, with focus on recurring images such as the Kaaba, the Prophet's Mosque, transportation imagery, Qur'anic verses, and associated spiritual symbols.

2. Explore how mural art serves as a medium of spiritual expression and religious commemoration, transforming private devotion into shared cultural narratives.
3. Analyze the role of these murals in reinforcing communal identity and social cohesion, particularly in how they honor the status of returning pilgrims and reflect the village's connection to broader Islamic practices.
4. Document and interpret the contributions of local, self-trained artists, with a focus on Eid Al-Salwaway as a case study of indigenous artistic expression rooted in faith, memory, and vernacular creativity.

Methodology:

This study adopts a descriptive analytical methodology in order to explore the visual symbols and their connection with the Hajj. The research methodology depending on visual and cultural analysis, aiming to interpret the representation of the Hajj pilgrimage in rural Egyptian murals and to contextualise these depictions within broader Islamic art traditions. The research focuses on the systematic analysis of documented visual materials, including photographic archives of house murals, published exhibition catalogues, and scholarly studies on Islamic art and pilgrimage.

The visual material examined includes murals adorning on the façades of village homes in rural Egypt, particularly those created by self-taught artists such as Eid Al-Salwaway in the Aswan region. These murals are analyzed through a combination of iconographic and thematic approaches, attending closely to recurring motifs such as the Kaaba, the Prophet's Mosque, transportation images (e.g., planes, camels, ships), textual inscriptions and Quranic verses. The study considers symbolic contents to understand how meaning is constructed visually and how religious narratives are interpreted into community-based visual language. The study uses a comparative approach in addition to the Egyptian examples, referencing pictures of the Hajj from other parts of the Islamic world, including maps and manuscript paintings from the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. This will help to figure out how the local Egyptian mural practices complement, differ from, or reinterpret traditional Islamic visual practices in a contextualized way. The research methodology is informed by theoretical frameworks from ritual studies, material religion, and visual anthropology, particularly those that emphasize how religious practices are mediated and remembered through visual culture (Grimes 2006; Cooke & Lawrence 2005; Rahimi & Eshaghi 2019). By centering visual analysis as both a methodological tool and a form of cultural interpretation, the study intends contribution to broader discussions about the role of vernacular religious art in sustaining communal memory, spiritual meaning, and Islamic cultural identity interpretation.

Literature Review:

Hajj pilgrimage practices were depicted in several visual art representations throughout not only Islamic art history but also in cultural history. Artists and scholars have documented the variations of artistic forms that depict this sacred journey, stretching from medieval manuscript miniatures and Ottoman pilgrimage scrolls to contemporary photographic and digital prints. These artworks not only depicted the phases of the pilgrimage but also rendered as tools for religious teaching, personal cult, and communal memory. Michael Wolfe (2004), for instance,

notes that the visual encoding of Hajj has historically functioned as both a narrative of spiritual transformation and an affirmation of Islamic unity, shaped by regional aesthetic languages and material practices.

Islamic visual culture used the Hajj as a platform for social expression and spiritual adherence. Complex interconnections of faith, identity, and holy geography have been articulated through Hajj imagery in various artistic illustrations. In the Islamic tradition, the imagery of pilgrimage is not just a way to narrate, but also a rich performative language that is used to inscribe and convey collective memories and spiritual aspirations, according to scholars like Venetia Porter and Moya Carey.

In contemporary Egyptian rural art, Luitgard Mols and Nils Arne Pedersen (2015) highlight in their research on pilgrimage materiality how localized commemorations of Hajj, such as textiles, painted objects, and murals, serve not only as markers of religious status but also as visual assertions of community affiliation. Their emphasis on material religion and "home-bound sacredness" is particularly relevant for understanding how rural Egyptian murals inscribe sacred journeys into domestic and village local life.

The relationship between media, space, and ritual in Islamic cultures has been the subject of recent research. Beyond its visual purpose, ritual studies provide theoretical tools for comprehending these murals. Ronald L. Grimes (2006) highlights the significance of "ritual media," explaining that many media, including murals, textiles, and photography, are used to extend and re-perform the visual memory of religious acts, like the Hajj. The pilgrimage experience itself is ritually extended by these visual remembrances, maintaining its spiritual effects in the home and community. Similarly, Rahimi and Eshaghi (2019) describe how Islamic rituals, including pilgrimage, are "spatialized" in everyday material culture, embedding sacred practices into the lived and built environment. Their work expands on the idea of ritual spatiality, confirming that Islamic pilgrimage practices do not remain confined to Mecca but are extended and reimagined through artistic and social rituals in the local home community. Their study provides a theoretical lens through which Hajj murals in Egypt can be interpreted as visual extensions of sacred space and ritual experience.

The literature on rural religious art in Muslim societies, reveals how local artists visually articulate doctrinal themes in culturally specific idioms. Cooke and Lawrence (2005) note that Muslim communities often adapt global religious forms to local contexts through networks of expression such as calligraphy, music, and public imagery. Egyptian Hajj murals exemplify this phenomenon: they adopt universal symbols like the Kaaba, the Prophet's Mosque, camels, airplanes, and Qur'anic verses, while translating them into an aesthetic language rooted in folk traditions.

To fully appreciate the importance of Egyptian murals there is value in situating them within a larger narrative in the tradition of Islamic pilgrimage art. For example, *Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Lārī's* 16th-century Ottoman illustrated guide *Futūḥ al-Ḥaramayn* includes finely executed images of Mecca and Medina (British Library MS Or. 6362), Figure 1. These illustrations simultaneously provided pilgrims with ritual instruction while reinforcing spatial familiarity with the holy sites. While Egyptian murals are not intimately connected to the topography of Mecca and Medina, they do serve to situate the sacred journey while visually mapping the importance of that journey onto the viewer's consciousness, (e.g. Figure 2,3).

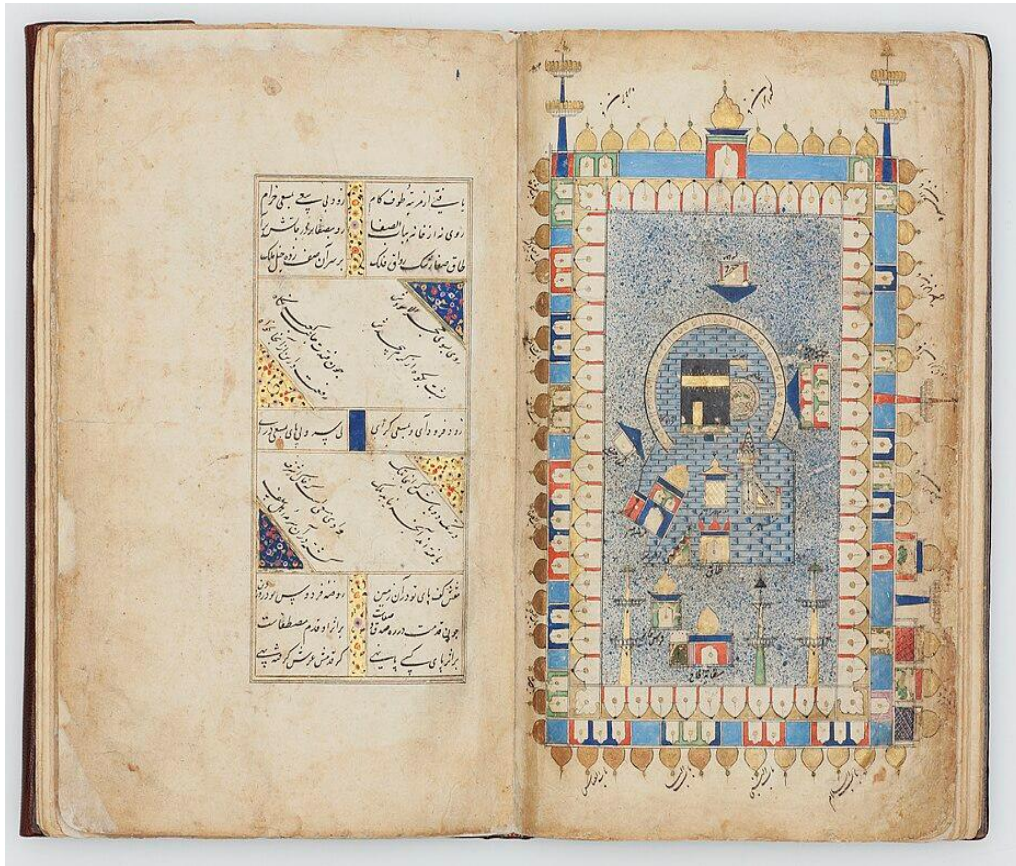


Figure 1. Illustration of the Great Mosque (al-Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca from *Futūḥ al-Ḥaramayn*, a 16th-century Persian guidebook for pilgrims authored by Muhyi al-Din Lari.



Figure 2. Hajj mural in Rod El Farag, Cairo, Egypt, painted by an unknown artist. Photograph taken in 2024 by Aliaa Nassar.



Figure 3. Hajj mural in Qaluiob, Qluibia Government, Egypt, painted by an unknown artist.

Photograph taken in 2024 by Aliaa Nassar.

Persian miniature traditions like those in Safavid manuscripts of *Khamseh* by Nizami include pilgrimage scenes that contain narrative and mystical symbolism (Freer Gallery of Art, 16th century), and portray spaces with pilgrims as spiritual seekers, usually with cosmic backgrounds, Figure 4. Egyptian murals similarly employ narrative composition, depicting sequences of travel and arrival, but more emphasizing communal piety and social status over mystical union, Figure 5.



Figure 4

Figure 4 Persian miniatures depicting the Kaaba, such as those with verses from Nizami's *Laila and Majnun* in Nastaliq script, illustrate the interweaving of literary and spiritual traditions (Qatar National Library, n.d.)



Figure 5

Figure 5 Hajj mural in Wahet Paris, Wadi- Al Jadid Government, Egypt, painted by an unknown artist. Photograph taken in 2024 by Aliaa Nassar.

A more directly relevant comparative tradition is the Ottoman-era Hajj textiles and calligraphic banners, some of which were commissioned by sultans or communities, which were intended to bless pilgrims and sanctify sacred space. These objects utilized either descriptive text, Qur'anic verses, or stylized depictions of the Kaaba, and references to the five pillars of Islam, via embroidered or block-printed images on cloth. As the Khalili Collection Hajj collection

shows, these textiles served both commemorative and protective functions, optionally represented in it being on display in homes, in mosques, or by the pilgrims themselves while traveling (Khalili Collection n.d.). The devotional intent of these objects, use of sacred imagery, and accessibility to a broader public make them particularly relevant comparisons for Egyptian village murals. Each of these types of objects prioritize visibility, communal recognition, and ritual significance, transforming ordinary material (the surface for commemorative murals and the cloth for textiles) into sacred memory and thereby a spiritual status of prestige.



Figure 6 Hajj mural in *Al-Tramsah Village, Qena Government, Egypt*, painted by an unknown artist. Photograph taken in 2024 by Aliaa Nassar. "وَإِذْ قَالَ النَّاسُ بِالْحَجِّ يَا تُؤَكُّوْا جَالًا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ"

Contemporary collections like the Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage demonstrate how the pilgrimage has been materially memorialized through calligraphic textiles, ceramics, amulets, and maps throughout Islamic societies (Khalili Collection n.d.). The visual culture of Hajj at Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage consists of over 5,000 objects of manuscripts, textiles, certificates, photographs, and decorative arts.

The objects in this collection provide contexts for understanding about Egyptian murals as part of a multi-layered continuum of devotional art, but doing so in a specific, relatively informal, and idiomatic manner. These artifacts, historically both elite and devotional craftsmanship, offer comparative points for analyzing rural Egyptian Hajj murals.

For example, the collection includes embroidered *Sitarahs* (curtains) for the Kaaba and the Prophet's Mosque, and some produced in Cairo at the time, which are key devotional objects. The monumental textiles have Qur'anic calligraphy along with medallion decoration, and fulfill both liturgical and representative purposes, embodying the sacred through text and design. While the murals produced by rural Egyptians have no intention to echo *Sitarahs*, they tend to depict banding found in textiles as well as decorative form of script, suggesting a shared vocabulary of sanctification and veneration, Figure 6.



Figure 7 *Sitarah for the Door of the Ka'bah*, dated 1236 AH (1820–21 CE), Cairo. This monumental textile is crafted from black silk with red and olive-green silk appliqué, and relief-embroidered in silver and silver-gilt wire over card and cotton thread padding.

Dimensions: 505 x 275 cm. Accession Number: TXT 474.

Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage.

For centuries, and every year during the Hajj, the covering of the Kaaba (the *keswa*) would be transported on the back of a camel from Cairo to Mecca, making a perilous journey inside the ceremonial palanquin known as the *mahmal*, which was draped in richly embroidered, luxurious textiles. This tradition continued up until the era of President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the twentieth century and was always marked as a major annual event in the streets of Cairo, accompanied by celebrations and attended by many officials. Upon the completion of the pilgrimage, the *mahmal* would return to Cairo carrying the used *keswa*, which was typically cut into small pieces and distributed among nobles and princes as a form of blessing (*baraka*), Figure 7.

One example in the Khalili Collection, dated 1867–76, bears emblems of state sponsorship and spiritual prestige. This is echoed in Egyptian village murals that often depict camels carrying pilgrims or a stylized *mahmal*, suggesting how local artists visually participate in national and spiritual narratives of pilgrimage (Khalili Collection, TXT 442), Figure 8, 9, 10, 11.



Figure 8. Mahmal, late 19th century, Cairo. This ceremonial palanquin was used in the annual Hajj caravan procession from Egypt to Mecca. The mahmal, elaborately decorated and richly embroidered, symbolized both royal patronage and the collective spiritual journey of the Egyptian Muslim community. Accession Number: TXT 442.

Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage.



Figure 9. Mahmal, late 19th century, Cairo. This ceremonial palanquin was used in the annual Hajj caravan procession from Egypt to Mecca. The mahmal, elaborately decorated and richly embroidered, symbolized both royal patronage and the collective spiritual journey of the Egyptian Muslim community. Accession Number: TXT 442.

Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage,



Figure 10. *The Return of the Mahmal from Mecca to Cairo, 1893.* This wood engraving, produced in Germany, illustrates the ceremonial return of the Egyptian mahmal—a richly adorned, empty palanquin symbolizing royal patronage—following the Hajj pilgrimage. The print is based on an 1876 oil painting by Konstantin Makovsky. Dimensions: 34.5 x 52.5 cm. Accession Number: ARC.pt 123.

Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage



Figure 11. Mural by self-taught artist Taha Shehatah, depicting detailed scenes from the Hajj journey, including the procession of *al-Mahmal*.

Other relevant artifacts like pilgrimage certificates issued to an Egyptian pilgrim, Ḥajj ‘Abbās Karārah in 1930, (Figure 12). These documents were not only legal evidence and religious records but represent visual mementos, often decorated with images of the Kaaba and the Prophet's Mosque. In village murals, the same representational material is expanded into personal and collective memory into public space (Khalili Collection, ARC CT 12). This evidence was used for Certifying the pilgrim and giving them the claim of having voyaged to perform the Hajj, thus adding status to the individual into the community, , the Egyptian murals we see from rural Egypt acted in a contemporary manner for these certificates in a folk tone, like in the foyer of a building in the Fayoum area of Upper Egypt, where community celebrate the pilgrim for returning from Mecca (Figure 13,14).



Figure 12. *Pilgrimage Certificate of Hajj 'Abbas Kararah, Egypt, 1930 or earlier.* This certificate, part of Kararah's series titled "Collection [of drawings] of Islamic Holy Sites," features illustrations of the Holy Sanctuaries at Mecca and Medina, as well as the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The printed text indicates that Hajj 'Abbas 'Abd al-'Aziz Kararah visited Mecca on 29 Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1348 (28 April 1930) and Medina on 19 Dhu'l-Hijjah 1349 (7 May 1931). Dimensions: 45 x 64 cm. Accession Number: ARC.ct 12.

Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage.



Figure 13

Figure 13 Hajj mural from the entrance of an apartment building in Fayoum, Egypt, painted by an unknown artist. Photograph taken in 2023 by Aliaa Nassar.



Figure 14

Figure 14 Hajj mural from facade of local house, Akhmeim, Sohag, Egypt, painted by an unknown artist. Photograph taken in 2023 by Aliaa Nassar.

While these Khalili objects were created in elite or institutional contexts, their symbolic content, the centrality of the Kaaba, presence of sacred text, procession of pilgrims, recurs in Egypt's vernacular mural traditions. This underscores how popular religious art participates in a transregional and transhistorical visual dialogue, adapting formal motifs to local aesthetic sensibilities and community values

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art traditions to examine how rural Egyptian murals articulate a uniquely situated expression of the Hajj. It aims to make up the gap in the literature by focusing on the indigenous visuality of the pilgrimage and the artistic agency of self-taught muralists, whose works blend religious narrative, communal memory, and indigenous aesthetics into public expressions of Islamic identity.

Discussion and Analysis

Vernacular Hajj Art in Upper Egypt: Context and Meaning

The practice of painting murals commemorating the Hajj on village houses in rural Egypt represents a rich intersection of religious devotion, communal memory, and vernacular art. People in the villages commission a muralist to create a mural to record their pilgrimage to Mecca. The murals are distinctly and locally contextualized and embody specific representational and performative features that exist within, but are differently informed from, the collective cultural space (and thus tradition) of the more formal and canonical traditions of Islamic art as represented in manuscripts and/or mosque architecture. Scholars such as Mols and Pedersen (2015) and Rahimi and Eshaghi (2019) have observed that such artistic practices localize holy experiences, embedding the gloriousness of pilgrimage within the familiar fabric of home and neighborhood. For many Egyptian families, the completion of Hajj is not only a spiritual fulfillment but also a source of pride or prestige moment of social prestige, often publicly marked through visual display. The iconography of these murals is both recognizable but also creative: the images that are regularly used that comprise the mural have a localized accessibility. the Kaaba, the Prophet's Mosque, groups of doves, camels, palm trees, airplanes, and Quranic verses frequently appear, painted with a distinctive folk aesthetic. These images become social markers, testifying to the household's piety, perseverance, and place within the larger Muslim umma. As noted in comparative studies of material religion, the act of making and displaying such murals is itself a ritual extension of pilgrimage, transforming domestic architecture into a public expression of faith (Grimes 2006; Khalili Collection n.d.).

The Self-Taught Artist as Cultural Mediator: Eid al-Salawawi

A remarkable example of local artistic agency is seen in the life and work of Eid al-Salawawi, widely recognized as one of the most respected Hajj muralists in Upper Egypt, specifically in Kom Ombo, Aswan. Al-Salawawi was born and raised in a very small village, and in many ways was not formally educated as an artist (Figure 14). He learned to make Hajj murals as an observer and through community apprenticeship employing simple and local materials such as homemade brushes made from palm fronds and natural pigments from the local environment (Drouiche, 2018).



Figure 14. Eid al-Salawawi while painting a Hajj mural in Kom Ombo, Aswan, Egypt.

His murals are vibrant and colorful, feature bold outlines, and are positioned with a narrative style. He often begins by sketching the focal point, the Kaaba, but then draws in an assortment of secondary elements representing pilgrimage, like depicting ships, planes, or camels. In some murals, he adds celebrations of return, with villagers dancing with "mezmar" (traditional reed pipes) or preparing food, or processions of people welcoming back the long-awaited return of the Hajj. Al-Salawawi's murals are not merely decorative but deeply participatory; villagers often commission al-Salawawi to memorialize their Hajj with personalized details, such as names and date.



Figure 15. Eid al-Salawawi painting a Hajj mural in Kom Ombo, Aswan, Egypt.

Labbayka Allahumma labbayk, labbayka la sharika laka labbayk, "Here I am, O Allah, here I am. Here I am, You have no partner, here I am."

Al-Salawawi's artistic reputation now extends beyond his village. Few researchers and journalists have documented al-Salawawi's process as a living repository of Upper Egyptian cultural heritage (El-Shamaa, 2019; Patrimoine d'Orient 2020). Therefore, his murals create an important case study regarding self-taught artists mediate between inherited tradition and contemporary social change.

Motifs in Murals and Visual Documentation

The Hajj pilgrimage is not only a spiritual journey for Egyptian Muslims but also the catalyst for an elaborate cycle of community rituals and social festivities that begin well before departure and continue long after return. In Upper Egyptian villages, these communal practices are integral to local identity and find powerful visual echoes in mural art.

The farewell of the departing pilgrim is a lively community celebration. Villagers gather at the home of the future "hajj" to share food, ululate, and play music. The mezzmar (a reed instrument), piercing melodies fill the streets as the pilgrims left the village while escorted by the hajj hiring (Figure 16). The celebration features processions, the exchange of gifts, and the preparation of festive foods and sweets, embedding the spiritual significance of the journey within tangible acts of community solidarity. Upon return from pilgrimage all these actions are repeated with greater exuberance, homes once again over decorated, and the "hajj" returned as the bearer of blessing for the entire village.



Figure 16, 17 . Different Hajj murals by Eid al-Salawawi in Kom Ombo, Aswan, Egypt.

These traditional rituals and their material culture have also taken deeply rooted in Hajj murals of Egypt. Muralists often represent the *mahmal*, either visible sitting atop a richly caparisoned camel or, being carried as part of a festival procession, amongst other figures on the walls of village houses. Other depictions appear in mural compositions, such as musicians playing the *mezzmar*, women putting together celebratory meals, or giving and receiving gifts, which bind these thematic pieces together to represent visual narrative of the pilgrimage and the broader community experience surrounding it (Figure 17).

Historic photos from the Khalili Collection (e.g., ARC.pp 10) provide deeper visualization, showing the real-life processions and ceremonial moments that influence muralists within their artworks, (Figure 18).



Figure 18. *Photograph of the Procession of the Mahmal, early 20th century, Egypt.*
Dimensions: 21 × 27.2 cm. Accession Number: ARC.pp 10.
Source: Khalili Collection of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage.

The existence of these same motifs in both murals and photographs indicates an ongoing artistic conversation between the lived ritual, historical memory, and artistic translation. The ritual, through mural painting, is recollected and celebrated visually in making sure the new generation knows and acknowledges the community and spiritual significance of Hajj.

Preservation, Challenges, and the Future of the Tradition:

The future of Hajj murals in Upper Egypt is precarious. Changing aesthetic preferences, and the spread of new construction materials have led to the slow disappearance of mud-brick house facades and threatening the continuity of this unique tradition. In the meantime, local efforts to document and preserve Hajj murals through scholarly writing, and digital preservation efforts have raised awareness about their artistic and cultural importance (Patrimoine d'Orient 2020; Mols & Pedersen 2015).

Artists such as Eid al-Salawawi are critically important for this chain of transmission, self-taught artists who exemplify the vernacular Islamic art tradition, with the communities in their villages and the creative adaptation of popular religious expression despite social and historic change.

Findings:

This research, grounded in the visual analysis of murals, photographic archives, and primary documentation, indicates various important aspects in how Hajj is represented in Egyptian village art traditions:

Diverse Iconographic Motifs:

The murals consistently feature a constant set of base symbols, the Kaaba, the Prophet's Mosque, camels, groups of doves, palm trees, ships, trains, and airplanes, evidencing a common visual language that connects individual households to the wider Islamic world. These depictions show a chronological evolution, while older murals show steamships and trains, the recent ones depict airplanes and buses visually mapping an historic journey along transportation routes, where the traditions of Hajj are modernized.

Community and Artistic Participation:

The production of Hajj murals is revealed as more of an effort and participatory practice that included the identified artists like Eid al-Salawawi, or even the anonymous local artists, and even, in a few examples, pilgrims themselves. These collective engagements ensure a multiplicity of artistic styles - vary from strongly stylized, to more narrative art to naïve designs. The repetition of motifs could be identified across villages, revealing strong aesthetic traditions as well as artistic innovations.

Ritual and Social Context:

The painting of murals is entangled in a continuum of pre- and post-Hajj rituals, such as musical parades, food practices, and preparations for the celebration of the mahmal and keswa embroidery. These social practices are not only depicted in murals, but also represent part of the pilgrim's living experience in rural Egypt. Our research documents that murals are lasting visual representations for a communal celebrations and supporting social coherence, as well as illustrating spiritual significance.

Connection to Broader Islamic Traditions:

Comparison to photographic materials, the Egyptian village murals situate in a larger continuum of Islamic pilgrimage art. Motifs seen in Egyptian rural murals, such as the mahmal, keswa, means of transportations, reflect themes present in both elite and local artistic contexts throughout the Islamic world.'

Adaptation and Resilience:

It has been noticed that the pressures of modernization and changes in building materials, might faster the decline of the tradition of Hajj mural paintings, mural paintings in rural Egypt at risk. Countable efforts by researchers, artists, and documentarians to celebrate these murals considering their value as cultural heritage legacy and living religious tradition.

Research Findings:

This article demonstrates that Hajj murals in rural Egypt represent are not simply artistic decoration; they are dynamic, living, layered documents of collective faith, social history, and cultural creativity. By including these works in the scholarly conversation, this study filled a critical gap, shedding light on a visual tradition often overlooked by the canon of Islamic art history.

In their evolving visual language, these murals narrate the stories of spiritual yearning, collective status, and village unity, linking a sacred journey to the quotidian lives of the Egyptian communities. The analysis illustrates how local artists like Eid al Salawawi, anonymous artists, maintain these traditional creative practices ensuring that communal memory and creativity remain central to local identity.

The study compares local murals in rural Egyptian villages with broader Islamic visual traditions; exposes the ways in which local artistic practice both participate in and reshape the Islamic art practice. These murals re-contextualize and re-interprets the symbols of the Islamic visual tradition. Hajj murals are not artifacts of pilgrimage; the murals are living, active sites

where sacredness and quotidian intersect, and where communal belonging continues to be reshaped.

As Hajj rural murals face pressures of modernity and changing tastes, they are more than relics; they are a living heritage. The study's documentation and analysis demonstrate the urgency for preserving not only the physical artifacts, but the creative voices and cultural practices that fuel religious life. This project provides researchers and artists the opportunity to think about both Islamic art and local one with new lens for understanding the dynamic and deeply rooted nature of rural communities.

Recommendations:

Based on the study analytical descriptive study, the researcher recommends several recommendations to support the preservation and continued scholarly studies of Hajj murals arts in rural Egyptian communities.

Preservation actions: It is important to actively support community led- programs and efforts to document or preserve the murals of Hajj, considering rapid urban development and the decline of building materials in our Egyptian rural regions. Hajj Egyptian murals should be considered as part of our intangible cultural heritage.

Support for local artists: Providing support, recognition, and training for self-taught artists, will not only enhance mural traditions, but also empower their communities and create means to promote continued visual storytelling with mural art into the future. Local community arts or arts centers, and local heritage grants, could also support continuity.

Education integration: That the rural Hajj murals have some recognition in art education through school and university educational recognition in heritage education could lead to cultural pride and integrational transmission of the visual traditions across generations rooted Islamic values and rural identity.

Digital access to archiving and research: Digital archiving, with academic, museum and cultural heritage institutions should be considered. Digital documentation and preservation these unique artistic practices, will provide access to visual collections for the paintings and interviews of artists for scholars and community members.

Comparative studies and collaborations: Promotion of comparative studies of other forms of Islamic pilgrimage art and practice located in different cultural contexts in the world will support the scholarly discourse of Islamic pilgrimage art and enrich Egypt's creative agency to the visual heritage of Islamic culture.

Community engagement and public awareness: Engagement in public exhibitions, community based cultural festivals will raise the awareness of the spiritual and artistic value of the Hajj murals, while also reinforcing a sense of belonging and collective memory in Egyptian society.

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أغسطس 2025

مجلة العمارة والفنون والعلوم الإنسانية - المجلد العاشر - عدد خاص (13)
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