

Strengthening Aswaja Ideology through Qur'anic Calligraphy: A Living Qur'an Study

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Abstract

One of the forms of reception in the study of the living Qur'an is aesthetic reception, namely how people make the Qur'an a text that contains aesthetic values by being accepted and displayed aesthetically, either in writing (calligraphy), reading or sound. . The purpose of this study is to describe the aesthetic reception of the Koran which is used as a beautiful calligraphy ornament at the Baitun Nur PP mosque. Nurul Islam Jember. This field research using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach resulted in a conclusion that the calligraphy ornaments of the Koran in the Baitun Nur mosque were used as a medium for strengthening the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah.

Keywords : Aswaja, Kaligrafi, Living, Qur'an.

Introduction

The Qur'an is not only present as a sacred text that is recited and interpreted but also exists as a living reality within the social, cultural, and religious practices of Muslim communities. Its presence is manifested in various forms, including Qur'anic recitation traditions, religious rituals, the art of calligraphy, and the architectural ornamentation of mosques. This phenomenon constitutes the primary focus of *Living Qur'an* studies, an interdisciplinary field that examines how the Qur'an is received, interpreted, experienced, and actualized in the everyday lives of Muslims. Consequently, the scope of *Living Qur'an* extends beyond textual exegesis (*tafsir*) to encompass the diverse social practices through which the Qur'an becomes an integral part of daily life.

One particularly significant manifestation of the *Living Qur'an* is Qur'anic calligraphy displayed on mosque walls. Traditionally, Qur'anic calligraphy has been understood primarily as an aesthetic element that

enhances the architectural beauty of places of worship while fostering a spiritually conducive atmosphere for worshippers. In certain contexts, however, Qur'anic calligraphy functions not merely as artistic decoration but also as a medium for transmitting religious values, communal identity, and ideological commitments embraced by a particular Muslim community.¹

This phenomenon is clearly exemplified in Baitun Nur Mosque at Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*) in Jember, East Java. Unlike most mosques, where Qur'anic calligraphy primarily serves decorative and devotional purposes, the calligraphic inscriptions in Baitun Nur Mosque represent the ideological values of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Aswaja), which constitute the religious identity of the *pesantren*. The deliberate selection of Qur'anic verses, their placement within specific architectural spaces, and the accompanying interpretive narratives indicate that the calligraphy functions as a medium for internalizing Aswaja values among students (*santri*), congregants, and the surrounding community.²

Previous studies on mosque calligraphy have predominantly focused on its aesthetic, artistic, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions. Research conducted at Raudhatul Mukhlisin Mosque in Jember, for instance, demonstrates that Qur'anic ornamentation primarily serves to cultivate a sense of spiritual devotion and solemnity during worship. Nevertheless, studies examining the relationship between Qur'anic calligraphy and the reinforcement of religious ideology—particularly Aswaja ideology—from the perspective of *Living Qur'an* remain relatively limited. This research gap provides the principal rationale for the present study.

Based on this context, the present study seeks to address two principal research questions: (1) How does the Qur'anic calligraphy in Baitun Nur Mosque of Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School, Jember, represent Aswaja ideology? and (2) What role does this calligraphy play in strengthening Aswaja ideology among members of the *pesantren* community and the surrounding society? Employing the *Living Qur'an* perspective, this study conceptualizes Qur'anic calligraphy not merely as a form of visual art but as a medium of symbolic communication

¹ Ario Putra, "Interpretasi HAM Dalam Ideologi Pancasila Dan Impedansinya Terhadap Persatuan Dan Kesatuan Di Indonesia," *HAM* 13, no. 1 (2022).

² Umi Wasilatul Firdausiyah and Hasan Abdul Wafi, "Spiritual Message of Al-Qur'an Calligraphy in Raudhatul Mukhlisin Mosque Jember," *Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 23, no. 1 (2022).

that transmits religious values and contributes to the construction of a community's collective identity.³

This study offers significant academic contributions by introducing a new perspective within *Living Qur'an* scholarship, positioning Qur'anic calligraphy as an instrument for reinforcing religious ideology. Unlike previous studies, which have largely emphasized aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, this research argues that Qur'anic calligraphy also functions as a medium for transmitting religious values, legitimizing Aswaja identity, and strengthening the religious culture of the *pesantren* community. Accordingly, this study is expected to enrich the discourse of *Living Qur'an* studies, particularly concerning the relationship between Qur'anic calligraphy, sacred mosque space, and the construction of religious ideology within contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological orientation, specifically adopting the perspective of the phenomenology of religion. This approach seeks to provide a comprehensive and accurate description of religious phenomena, including rituals, symbols, worship practices (both individual and communal), theological expressions (oral and written), sacred experiences, religious art, and other manifestations of religious life. The phenomenology of religion emphasizes understanding how individuals or communities perceive, experience, and assign meaning to their religious beliefs and practices. Rather than examining historical or sociocultural differences, this approach focuses on the lived religious experiences shared by members of a particular community.⁴

The research was conducted at Baitun Nur Mosque, Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*), Jember, East Java. The primary object of the study was the Qur'anic calligraphy displayed throughout the mosque, while the research participants consisted of mosque congregants and members of the surrounding community. Data were collected through structured observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.⁵ The structured observation was guided by a

³ Abdul Mustaqim, *Metode Penelitian Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Idea Press, 2019), 109.

⁴ Dalinur M Nur, "Kegunaan Pendekatan Fenomenologi Dalam Kajian Agama," *Wardah* 16, no. 2 (2015): hlm. 125-126, <https://doi.org/10.19109/wardah.v16i2.366>.

⁵ Abdul Mustaqim, *Metode Penelitian Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: CV. Idea Sejahtera, 2015), hlm. 128.

predetermined observation framework specifying the aspects to be observed, the timing, and the research setting. From the standpoint of its implementation, the observation was non-participant and indirect, as the researcher did not actively participate in the religious activities conducted at Baitun Nur Mosque. The observational data focused on identifying how Qur'anic calligraphy functions as a medium for strengthening Aswaja ideology within the mosque environment.

To obtain rich and comprehensive information, this study employed unstructured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to express their perspectives freely and naturally. Interviews were conducted with mosque administrators, religious leaders, members of the pesantren community, congregants, and local residents who were considered knowledgeable about the meaning, function, and influence of the Qur'anic calligraphy displayed in the mosque. Documentary data, including photographs of the calligraphic inscriptions, institutional records, and other relevant documents, were also collected to complement the observational and interview data.⁶

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These analytical procedures were carried out continuously throughout the research process until data saturation was achieved, enabling the researcher to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from the field data.⁷

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation and peer debriefing. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from multiple participants and different sources of evidence, including observations, interviews, and documentary materials. This process enabled the researcher to verify the consistency and credibility of the collected data through cross-validation across various sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives. In addition, peer debriefing was undertaken through discussions with academic colleagues possessing relevant expertise in Qur'anic studies and qualitative research. These discussions served to critically examine the researcher's interpretations,

⁶ Subana Marsetyo and M Sudrajat, *Statistik Pendidikan* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2000), hlm. 29.

⁷ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2016), hlm. 246.

analytical procedures, and preliminary findings, thereby enhancing the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research results.⁸

An Overview of *Living Qur'an*

Etymologically, the term *Living Qur'an* is composed of two words: *living* and *Qur'an*. The word *living* refers to something that is alive or actively present, while *Qur'an* denotes the divine revelation of Allah.⁹ Accordingly, *Living Qur'an* refers to the manifestation of the Qur'an as a living presence within Muslim society. This concept differs from *Living Tafsir*, which primarily concerns the manifestation of Qur'anic interpretation and the practical expression of exegetical understandings.

The notion of the Qur'an as a living reality emphasizes how Muslim communities engage with the Qur'an in their everyday lives. In this perspective, the Qur'an is not merely regarded as a sacred text to be recited and interpreted but as an active force that shapes social practices, religious experiences, and cultural traditions.¹⁰ The interaction between the Qur'anic text and social reality emerges through processes of understanding, interpretation, and practical application. Such interactions are manifested in various forms, including the recitation of specific verses or chapters during religious ceremonies, the use of Qur'anic passages for spiritual healing and protection, and numerous other devotional practices that integrate the Qur'an into the daily lives of believers.

Historical evidence demonstrates that these forms of interaction have developed dynamically and exhibit considerable diversity across Muslim societies. According to Abdul Mustaqim, the dynamic and varied expressions of Qur'anic engagement arise from differences in patterns of thought, social cognition, and the socio-cultural contexts that shape the lived experiences of Muslim communities. Consequently, the reception and actualization of the Qur'an are continuously negotiated through changing historical, cultural, and religious circumstances.¹¹

In summary, *Living Qur'an* studies may be understood as an academic inquiry into the social phenomena surrounding the presence, reception, and actualization of the Qur'an within a particular

⁸ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017), hlm. 178.

⁹ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Ranah-ranah Penelitian dalam Studi al-Qur'an dan Hadis* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2007), xiv.

¹⁰ Abdul Mustaqim, *Metode Penelitian Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, 104.

¹¹ Abdul Mustaqim, *Metode Penelitian Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, 104.

community. Rather than focusing exclusively on textual interpretation, this field investigates how the Qur'an functions as a lived reality that informs religious behavior, cultural practices, communal identity, and the everyday experiences of Muslims.

Reception Theory in *Living Qur'an* Studies

Etymologically, the term *reception* derives from the Latin word *recipere*, meaning "to receive" or "to welcome." In literary studies, reception refers to the process through which readers receive, interpret, respond to, and assign meaning to a literary work.¹² Thus, reception theory emphasizes the active role of readers in constructing the significance and value of a text rather than treating meaning as something fixed within the text itself.¹³

Initially, reception theory emerged as an influential approach in literary criticism, focusing on how readers' responses shape the interpretation of literary works. Within this framework, readers play a decisive role in determining the meaning and significance of a text. As Ahmad Rafiq argues, a text acquires its social meaning and significance only through the process of being read, interpreted, and experienced by its audience.¹⁴

Subsequently, reception theory was adapted to the field of *Living Qur'an* studies. In this context, reception refers to the ways Muslim communities receive, interpret, experience, and respond to the Qur'an in their daily lives. Such responses may include interpreting Qur'anic verses, implementing their teachings in everyday practice, reciting the Qur'an in devotional contexts, producing artistic expressions inspired by the Qur'an, or attributing particular religious functions to specific verses. Through this perspective, reception theory provides an analytical framework for classifying the various forms of interaction between Muslim communities and the Qur'an.

¹² Nyoman Kutha Ratna.S.U, *Teori, Metode dan Teknik Penelitian Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009), 22.

¹³ Rachmat Djoko Pradopo, *Beberapa Teori Sastra, Metode Kritik, dan Penerapannya*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 7.

¹⁴ Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception of The Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of The Place of The Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community", *Disertasi* (Amerika Serikat: Universitas Temple), 144.

According to Ahmad Rafiq, Qur'anic reception can be classified into three principal categories: exegetical reception, aesthetic reception, and functional reception.¹⁵

First, exegetical reception. The term *exegesis* refers to the explanation or interpretation of a religious text. Historically, exegesis was employed in ancient Greece to interpret divine messages or prophecies. Within *Living Qur'an* studies, exegetical reception denotes the acceptance of the Qur'an through acts of interpretation and explanation. This form of reception is manifested when individuals or communities seek to understand the meanings of Qur'anic verses and subsequently construct religious knowledge based on their interpretations.

Second, aesthetic reception. Aesthetic reception concerns the appreciation of the Qur'an as a source of beauty and artistic inspiration. In this form of reception, individuals experience the aesthetic dimensions of the Qur'an through various cultural expressions. Examples include producing Qur'anic calligraphy, engraving Qur'anic verses as architectural ornamentation, or reciting the Qur'an with melodious vocal artistry (*tilawah*). Such practices represent expressions of reverence toward the Qur'an while simultaneously highlighting its artistic and aesthetic qualities. Consequently, aesthetic reception regards the Qur'an not only as a sacred text but also as an object of artistic appreciation that can be expressed visually, orally, and architecturally.

Third, functional reception. Functional reception refers to the practical utilization of the Qur'an in addressing the everyday religious and social needs of Muslim communities. This form of reception has its roots in the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, who recited specific Qur'anic verses or chapters for purposes such as healing, protection, supplication, and spiritual well-being. Although the textual structure of the Qur'an remains unchanged, communities attribute particular functions and virtues to certain verses based on religious traditions and lived experiences. Accordingly, functional reception reflects the belief that the Qur'an serves not only as divine guidance but also as a practical source of spiritual efficacy within the everyday lives of Muslims.

¹⁵ Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception of The Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of The Place of The Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community", *Disertasi* (Amerika Serikat: Universitas Temple), 144.

A Brief Profile of Baitun Nur Mosque, Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School, Jember

Baitun Nur Mosque is the principal mosque of Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Nuris*) in Jember, East Java, Indonesia. The pesantren was founded in 1981 by KH. Muhyiddin Abdusshomad, who also served as the *Rais Syuriah* of the Jember Branch of *Nabhdlatul Ulama* (PCNU Jember). During its early years, the pesantren accommodated only a small number of students (*santri*), who received direct religious instruction from KH. Muhyiddin. The establishment of the pesantren was motivated by his concern that many Muslim students from surrounding areas, including Silo and neighboring districts, were pursuing their education in Christian schools. In response to this situation, he initiated the establishment of a formal educational institution integrated with the pesantren system.¹⁶

Before establishing the institution, KH. Muhyiddin sought guidance from several prominent Indonesian Muslim scholars, namely KH. As'ad Syamsul Arifin of Sukorejo Islamic Boarding School (Situbondo), KH. Ahmad Shiddiq of Talangsari Islamic Boarding School (Jember), and KH. Hasyim Zaini of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School (Probolinggo). Following their endorsement, he held consultations with Ahmad Nur Salim, one of his students studying at the University of Jember, together with several community leaders, including the principal of SDN Antirogo 4. As a result of these deliberations, the first formal educational institution, NURIS Junior High School (SMP NURIS), was established in 1983. In the following years, the foundation expanded by establishing NURIS Senior High School (SMA NURIS), NURIS Vocational High School (SMK NURIS), NURIS Outstanding Islamic Junior High School (MTs Unggulan NURIS), NURIS Outstanding Islamic Senior High School (MA Unggulan NURIS), and most recently Ma'had Aly NURIS, an undergraduate-level institution specializing in Ash'ari theology (*'Aqidah Ash'ariyyah*).

All students enrolled in the formal educational institutions under the NURIS Foundation—including SMP, MTs, SMA, SMK, MA, and Ma'had Aly—are required to reside within the pesantren. At present, the total number of students, teachers (*asatidz*), and administrative staff affiliated with the foundation exceeds 4,000 individuals.¹⁷ The pesantren is located at Jalan Pangandaran No. 48, Antirogo Village,

¹⁶ <https://pesantrennuris.net/sejarah-nuris/>, diakses pada tanggal 5 Oktober 2021.

¹⁷ Sumber data berasal dari rekapitulasi yang tercantum di kalender NURIS tahun 2021.

Sumbersari District, Jember Regency, East Java. It is bordered by residential and commercial areas to the north, agricultural land and a pharmaceutical vocational school to the south, rice fields to the east, and a river to the west.¹⁸

Since the establishment of the pesantren, religious activities such as *istighāthah*, the recitation of *Sūrah Yāsīn*, *tahlil*, and congregational prayers were initially conducted at Nurul Islam Mosque, situated across the road to the west of the pesantren complex, adjacent to the residence of KH. Muhyiddin Abdusshomad. However, in 2015, the pesantren constructed a new mosque within the boarding school complex. Named Baitun Nur Mosque, it was officially inaugurated in December 2015. The inauguration ceremony was attended by the mosque's principal benefactor, Drs. KH. M. Noor Tijhany, a philanthropist residing in Singapore. According to Ustadz Imam Sainusi, approximately 80 percent of the construction costs were financed through donations from KH. M. Noor Tijhany, while the remaining funds were contributed collectively by the pesantren foundation, its leadership, students' parents, alumni, and supporters.¹⁹

Constructed at an estimated cost of approximately IDR 3.5 billion, Baitun Nur Mosque stands prominently at the center of the main male dormitory complex and has become one of the iconic landmarks of Pesantren Nuris. With a capacity of approximately 1,000 worshippers, the mosque serves not only as the primary venue for daily congregational prayers but also as the central location for a wide range of religious, educational, and institutional activities organized by the pesantren and its affiliated educational institutions.

¹⁸ Wawancara dengan Ust. Imam Sainusi di PP. Nurul Islam, 20 Mei 2022.

¹⁹ Wawancara dengan Ust. Imam Sainusi di PP. Nurul Islam, 20 Mei 2022.

Figure 1. Front View of Baitun Nur Mosque



Qur'anic Calligraphic Ornaments in Baitun Nur Mosque

Like many other mosques, one of the most distinctive architectural features of Baitun Nur Mosque is the presence of Qur'anic calligraphic inscriptions adorning the upper sections of its interior walls. According to Ustadz Imam Sainusi, every Qur'anic verse engraved within the mosque was selected under the direct guidance of KH. Muhyiddin Abdusshomad, the founder and caretaker of Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Nuris*). The selected verses were subsequently designed and skillfully engraved by Mufid, a senior alumnus of the pesantren who is widely recognized for his expertise in Islamic calligraphy. As Ustadz Imam Sainusi explained: "Cak Mufid is one of our alumni who possesses exceptional expertise in Islamic calligraphy. He has even served as a judge in national-level Qur'anic calligraphy competitions."²⁰

Ustadz Mufid explained that he began studying Islamic calligraphy in 1984 while he was a *santri* at Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Nuris*). As one of the pesantren's first-generation students, he recalled that his interest in calligraphy originated from a direct instruction given by KH. Muhyiddin

²⁰ Wawancara dengan Ust. Imam Sainusi di PP. Nurul Islam, 20 Mei 2022.

Abdusshomad, who recognized the need for a student capable of producing beautiful and accurate Arabic handwriting.

As Ustadz Mufid recounted:

"At that time, I learned calligraphy to write the classical Islamic texts (*kitab*) studied in the pesantren. Over time, I expanded my work to canvas and eventually to various other artistic media."²¹

Here is a more academic and natural version suitable for an international journal article. I have also removed the evaluative sentence ("These works reflect his significant contribution..."), as it is generally inappropriate in scholarly writing unless it is supported by empirical evidence.

Ustadz Mufid received formal training in Islamic calligraphy from Ustadz Faiz Abdul Rozak, an internationally recognized calligrapher from Bangil, Pasuruan, East Java. Inspired by his mentor, he later participated in numerous national Qur'anic calligraphy competitions, earning several prestigious awards, including **Second Place** in the National *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* (MTQ) held in Bali in 2000.

The calligraphic works of Ustadz Mufid are not confined to Baitun Nur Mosque at Pesantren Nuris. His Qur'anic inscriptions are also displayed in several mosques throughout Jember Regency, including the mosque of Dr. Soebandi Regional Hospital (RSD dr. Soebandi), Rambipuji Mosque, and Nur Inka Mosque within the headquarters of Infantry Brigade 9 (Brigif 9) Jember. The presence of his works in these religious institutions demonstrates the broad recognition of his expertise in Qur'anic calligraphy and his active involvement in the visual expression of Islamic religious spaces across the region.

Unlike many mosques, where the calligraphic inscriptions typically feature verses concerning the establishment of prayer, the *Asmā' al-Husnā* (the Most Beautiful Names of Allah), or well-known chapters and verses such as *Āyat al-Kursi*, *Surah Yāsin*, and *Surah al-Wāqī'ah*, the Qur'anic calligraphy displayed in Baitun Nur Mosque presents a distinctive selection of verses. Rather than emphasizing passages that are commonly encountered in mosque ornamentation, the inscriptions were deliberately chosen to convey specific religious values and educational messages consistent with the vision of the pesantren.

²¹ Wawancara dengan Ust. Mufid di Antirogo Jember, 25 Mei 2022.

Among the Qur'anic passages engraved on the walls of Baitun Nur Mosque are Qur'an 31 (Luqmān): 17–19:

يَا بُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ. وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ. وَاقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاعْظُمْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ.

"O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and be patient over whatever befalls you. Indeed, that is among the matters requiring steadfast determination. Do not turn your cheek away from people in arrogance, nor walk upon the earth with pride. Indeed, Allah does not love anyone who is self-deluded and boastful. Be moderate in your walk and lower your voice, for surely the harshest of all voices is the braying of a donkey." (*Qur'an* 31:17–19)

Figure 2. Qur'anic Calligraphy of Qur'an 31 (Luqmān): 16–17



Another Qur'anic passage featured as a calligraphic ornament in Baitun Nur Mosque is **Qur'an 17 (Al-Isrā')**: 23–25. These verses emphasize the fundamental principles of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and filial piety, highlighting devotion to Allah alongside kindness and compassion toward one's parents

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبُلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا
أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا. وَخَفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ
الدَّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا. رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمْ
إِنْ تَكُونُوا صَالِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ لِلْأَوَّابِينَ غُفُورًا.

"Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you show kindness to your parents. If one or both of them reach old age while with you, do not say to them even 'uff,' nor rebuke them, but speak to them with gracious words. Lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they raised me when I was young.' Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, then surely He is Ever-Forgiving to those who constantly turn to Him in repentance." (*Qur'an* 17:23–25)

Figure 3. Qur'anic Calligraphy of Qur'an 17 (Al-Isrā'): 23–25



Strengthening Aswaja Theology through the Calligraphy of Qur'an 42:11

In addition to the Qur'anic verses conveying moral values and ethical teachings discussed above, the mosque also features calligraphic ornaments containing verses that serve as theological foundations for the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah (Aswaja). As is widely recognized, Pondok Pesantren Nuris is one of the Islamic boarding schools in Jember Regency that is prominently known for its identity as the "Fortress of Aswaja."

Founded by Kyai Muhyiddin, the pesantren not only emphasizes its students' proficiency in reading and understanding the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) and developing competence in the natural sciences, but also equips them with a comprehensive understanding of the scriptural foundations of Aswaja doctrine. This theological education is intended to prepare students to critically engage with and respond to the growing influence of radical and extremist ideologies that have become increasingly widespread in contemporary society.²²

Instruction and reinforcement of Aswaja doctrine and ideology at Pondok Pesantren Nuris are implemented by incorporating Aswaja Studies into the formal curriculum as a local-content subject, spanning from the *Ibtida'iyyah* level to the *Ma'had Aly* level (equivalent to an undergraduate degree). This curricular approach ensures that students develop a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the theological principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah throughout their educational journey.

Beyond the formal curriculum, Aswaja values are further strengthened through study circles and scholarly discussions coordinated by the Nuris Aswaja Center (NAC), a specialized institutional unit dedicated to promoting Aswaja thought. The NAC is also responsible for enhancing students' rhetorical and dialogical skills by facilitating the production of Aswaja-themed digital media, including monologue videos, podcasts, and short films. These initiatives are intended to cultivate students' ability to communicate and defend Aswaja teachings effectively in contemporary public and digital spheres.

²² <https://nu.or.id/pesantren/pesantren-nuris-benteng-aswaja-di-jember,ofjh6>, diakses pada 15 Mei 2022.

Reinforcing Aswaja Creed through the Calligraphy of Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11

In addition to the Qur'anic verses conveying moral and ethical teachings discussed above, Baitun Nur Mosque also features calligraphic inscriptions of verses that serve as foundational textual evidence for the theological doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Aswaja). Pesantren Nuris is widely recognized as one of the leading pesantren in Jember Regency committed to preserving and promoting the theological tradition of Aswaja, reflected in its institutional identity as the "Fortress of Aswaja" (*Benteng Aswaja*). Founded by KH. Muhyiddin Abdusshomad, the pesantren not only emphasizes students' mastery of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and modern sciences but also equips them with a comprehensive understanding of the theological foundations of Aswaja. This educational orientation is intended to prepare students to respond critically to the emergence of radical and extremist religious ideologies in contemporary society.

The reinforcement of Aswaja teachings at Pesantren Nuris is implemented through multiple educational strategies. Aswaja is incorporated as a compulsory subject within the formal curriculum, ranging from the elementary (*Ibtidā'iyyah*) level to Ma'had Aly, an undergraduate-level institution specializing in Islamic studies. Beyond classroom instruction, the pesantren also promotes Aswaja values through scholarly discussions and public engagement activities coordinated by the Nuris Aswaja Center (NAC). This institution is responsible for strengthening students' intellectual, rhetorical, and dialogical competencies by producing educational media on Aswaja in various formats, including monologues, podcasts, and short films.

Beyond these educational initiatives, the reinforcement of Aswaja theology is also manifested through Qur'anic calligraphic ornaments displayed throughout Baitun Nur Mosque. The selected inscriptions function not merely as decorative elements but as visual representations of the theological principles embraced by the pesantren. One of the most significant examples is Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11, which states:

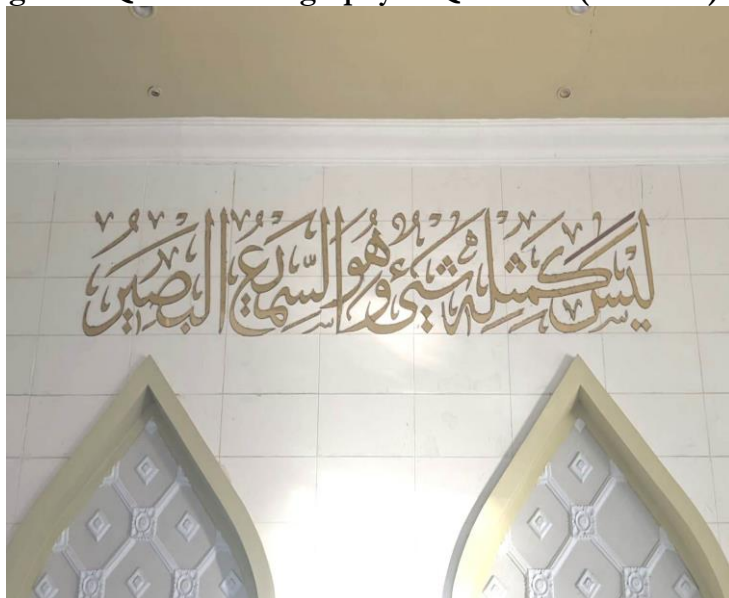
لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

"There is nothing whatsoever comparable to Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (*Qur'an 42:11*)

Within the theological framework of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, this verse constitutes one of the principal textual foundations for affirming Allah's absolute transcendence (*tanẓīh*). By emphasizing that nothing resembles Allah, the verse rejects anthropomorphic

conceptions of the Divine while affirming His perfect attributes. Its prominent placement within the mosque's calligraphic program reflects the pesantren's deliberate effort to reinforce the core theological principles of Aswaja through visual engagement with the Qur'anic text.

Figure 4. Qur'anic Calligraphy of Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11



Classical Muslim scholars have regarded Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11 as one of the clearest scriptural affirmations of Allah's absolute incomparability. The verse unequivocally declares that Allah is utterly unlike His creation in every respect and is therefore transcendent beyond all forms of resemblance or anthropomorphism. For this reason, Imam al-Zarkashī classified this verse among the *muhkamāt* (clear and definitive verses) concerning the Divine Essence. Accordingly, whenever the literal wording of *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous verses) appears to imply similarities between Allah and His creation, their meanings must be interpreted in light of the definitive teaching of Qur'an 42:11, which affirms Allah's absolute transcendence.²³

The belief that Allah bears no resemblance whatsoever to His creation constitutes one of the fundamental theological principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Aswaja). Within this theological framework, KH. Muhyiddin Abdusshomad deliberately selected Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11 as one of the Qur'anic passages engraved on

²³ Lihat al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Maktabah Dar al-Turas), Vol. 2, 71.

the walls of Baitun Nur Mosque. The inclusion of this verse reflects an intentional effort to reinforce the doctrinal foundations of Aswaja through the visual presence of the Qur'an within the mosque's sacred space.

Meanwhile, Ustadz Musyfiq Alamsyah, one of the Aswaja instructors at Pesantren Nuris, explained that the belief in Allah's absolute incomparability with His creation constitutes one of the core theological doctrines taught to all students. He stated, "The doctrine that Allah is completely distinct from His creation is introduced to students from the elementary (*Ibtidā'iyyah*) level. As explained in '*Aqidat al-'Awām*, one of Allah's necessary attributes is *mukhālafatuhu li al-ḥawādith*—that is, His absolute dissimilarity from all created beings."²⁴

This explanation is consistent with the testimony of Zahron Afifuddin, a student from Sidoarjo, whom the researcher interviewed during the fieldwork. Zahron explained that he had already memorized Qur'an 42 (Al-Shūrā): 11 through both the formal Aswaja curriculum and the *diniyyah* (religious) classes. However, because the verse is prominently displayed on the western wall of Baitun Nur Mosque, he encounters it every time he enters the mosque. According to him, the continual visual exposure has reinforced his memorization and deepened his understanding of the verse.²⁵

A similar perception was expressed by another student, Zaki Fahmi, from Ledokombo, Jember. He remarked:

"I believe this verse must be very important if it is displayed on the mosque wall. Our teachers have explained that every Qur'anic verse engraved throughout the mosque was personally selected by KH. Muhyiddin."²⁶

These findings demonstrate that the aesthetic reception of the Qur'an, manifested through calligraphic ornamentation within Baitun Nur Mosque, serves a function that extends beyond architectural decoration. From the perspective of *Living Qur'an* studies, the calligraphy operates as a medium for transmitting theological knowledge, reinforcing the doctrinal identity of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Aswaja), and continuously reminding students of its core theological principles through repeated visual engagement with the Qur'anic text. The calligraphic inscriptions therefore embody not only

²⁴ Wawancara dengan Ust. Musyfiq Alamsyah di PP. Nuris, 22 Mei 2022.

²⁵ Wawancara dengan Zahron Afifuddin, di PP. Nurul Islam Jember, 18 Agustus 2022.

²⁶ Wawancara dengan Zaki Fahmi, di PP. Nurul Islam Jember, 18 Agustus 2022.

an aesthetic appreciation of the Qur'an but also a pedagogical and ideological instrument embedded within the pesantren's educational environment.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Baitun Nur Mosque at Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Nuris*) functions not only as a place of worship but also as a medium for the transmission and reinforcement of the theological principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (Aswaja). The deliberate selection of Qur'anic verses displayed as calligraphic inscriptions reflects a conscious institutional strategy to internalize Aswaja values among students. Through their continuous visual engagement with these inscriptions during daily religious activities, the Qur'anic calligraphy becomes an educational instrument that reinforces theological understanding and strengthens the collective religious identity of the pesantren community.

The findings further reveal that the function of Qur'anic calligraphy extends beyond its *conventional* aesthetic role. Within the perspective of *Living Qur'an*, the calligraphic inscriptions simultaneously embody aesthetic, pedagogical, and ideological receptions of the Qur'an. Rather than serving merely as architectural ornamentation, they operate as a symbolic medium through which Qur'anic teachings are continuously communicated, remembered, and reproduced in the everyday religious life of the pesantren.

The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating that Qur'anic calligraphy can function as an instrument of ideological transmission and theological formation. While previous *Living Qur'an* studies have *predominantly* examined calligraphy from aesthetic, artistic, or spiritual perspectives, this study shows that the strategic placement and selection of Qur'anic verses also serve to institutionalize Aswaja doctrine and cultivate a shared theological consciousness. Accordingly, this research expands the scope of *Living Qur'an* scholarship by highlighting the role of sacred visual culture as a mechanism for sustaining religious identity and ideological continuity within contemporary Islamic boarding schools.

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