

A Review of Documenting Islamic Numismatic Heritage in Malaysia: A Critical Perspective

*Siti Hajar Maizan¹, Mumtaz Mokhtar²

¹ Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

² Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

*siti809@uitm.edu.my¹, mumtaz059@uitm.edu.my²

* Corresponding Author

Received: 22 May 2026; Accepted: 2 July 2026; Published: 1 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Islamic numismatic heritage represents an important yet underexamined component of Malaysia's material, visual, and cultural heritage. Beyond their monetary function, Islamic coins function as authoritative artefacts that communicate religious identity, political legitimacy, and aesthetic values through inscriptions, calligraphic forms, and visual organisation. Despite the presence of significant Islamic coin collections within Malaysian museums and heritage institutions, documentation practices have largely prioritised material properties, chronology, and typological classification, resulting in limited engagement with visual and epigraphic interpretation. This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach through a critical review of existing scholarship and institutional documentation practices related to Islamic numismatics and heritage management. The analysis identifies key challenges, including physical deterioration affecting inscription legibility, inconsistent epigraphic recording, limited aesthetic analysis, and the absence of an integrated visual-oriented documentation approach. These findings indicate that current documentation practices constrain the interpretative potential of Islamic coins as cultural and visual artefacts within the context of Malay Islamic history. The paper concludes that a more integrated documentation perspective, incorporating visual and epigraphic dimensions alongside material data, is necessary to enhance the preservation, interpretation, and scholarly understanding of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to heritage and museum discourse and supports the development of more nuanced documentation practices for Islamic numismatic collections.

Keywords: *Islamic numismatics, heritage documentation, museum practices, Islamic visual culture, coinage*



ISSN: 2550-214X © 2026. Published for Idealogy Journal by UiTM Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-No Commercial-No Derivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Islamic numismatic history represents a crucial aspect of material culture, illustrating the convergence of religion, authority, and visual representation in Islamic communities. According to Blair & Bloom (2003), Islamic visual culture places strong emphasis on epigraphy, calligraphy, and geometric composition as major vehicles of religious and cultural expression. In this context, Islamic coinage functions not only as a medium of economic exchange, but also as a portable visual artefact that communicates authority, belief, and regional Islamic identity. Coins minted under Islamic rule served not only as instruments of economic exchange but also as authoritative artefacts that conveyed religious identity, political legitimacy, and ideological authority through carefully structured inscriptions and visual compositions. Coins, being resilient and extensively disseminated artefacts, hold a distinctive role in Islamic material history, providing significant insights into historical settings, aesthetic inclinations, and governance structures. According to Georganteli & Koukouni (2014),

Islamic coinage also functioned as an important medium of political communication, enabling ruling authorities to circulate ideological messages consistently across regions and trade networks. This demonstrates that coins were not merely economic instruments, but also visual carriers of authority and identity within Islamic societies.

The rise of Islamic coinage in the Malay Archipelago from the 16th century onwards aligns closely with the establishment of Islamic political authority and the expansion of regional commercial networks. Islamic coins circulated in significant centres like Melaka and Aceh, reflecting both regional adaptations and overarching Islamic visual traditions. The utilisation of Arabic script, calligraphic inscriptions, and non-figurative design principles demonstrates a congruence with Islamic aesthetic norms while concurrently articulating regional identities. Consequently, Islamic coins from the Malay region constitute a significant and intricate visual documentation of Islamic impact in Southeast Asia.

Notwithstanding their importance, Islamic coins have frequently been examined predominantly through numismatic, economic, or chronological lenses. Traditional documentation methods often emphasise physical characteristics, like metal composition, weight, minting procedures, and date attribution. Schultz (2011) notes that contemporary Islamic numismatic scholarship increasingly advocates interdisciplinary approaches that integrate visual culture, material studies, and historical interpretation alongside conventional cataloguing practices. However, these perspectives remain relatively underdeveloped within the documentation of Malay Islamic coin collections. Although these qualities are crucial for classification and conservation, they often eclipse the visual and epigraphic aspects of coinage. The aesthetic arrangement of inscriptions, the hierarchy of textual components, and the visual equilibrium of coin surfaces are frequently regarded as peripheral concerns or articulated in a restricted and inconsistent fashion.

Within museums and heritage institutions, documentation is essential for influencing the interpretation, preservation, and communication of artefacts to scholars and the public. Muhamad et al. (2023) emphasise that cultural institutions in Malaysia play an important role in preserving and disseminating cultural knowledge through artefacts, exhibitions, and heritage documentation practices. In Malaysia, institutions possessing Islamic numismatic collections have undertaken significant initiatives to categorise and preserve these artefacts. The lack of a standardised methodology that incorporates visual, epigraphic, and contextual research continues to pose significant obstacles. This limitation is particularly significant because Islamic coins primarily communicate meaning through textual and visual organisation rather than figural imagery, making epigraphic and compositional analysis essential components in understanding their cultural significance (Treadwell, 2015). Documentation techniques differ among institutions, and the focus on material data often constrains the interpretative capacity of Islamic coins as visual artefacts situated within cultural and theological contexts.

These limitations are especially pertinent to Islamic numismatic tradition, where significance is predominantly expressed through language and visual composition rather than visuals. Neglecting systematic focus on inscriptional content, calligraphic form, and compositional layout may diminish the recording of Islamic coins to mere technical artefacts, rather than acknowledging their symbolic and aesthetic significance. This approach limits wider interaction with Islamic numismatics in visual culture, heritage studies, and museum scholarship.

This study explores the problems related to the documentation of Islamic numismatic history in Malaysia. The study identifies significant deficiencies in the successful understanding and portrayal of Islamic coins through a critical analysis of existing literature and institutional recording processes. The study seeks to highlight conceptual and methodological challenges in existing documentation methodologies, emphasising the necessity of integrating visual and epigraphic viewpoints instead of reporting scientific facts. The project aims to enhance ongoing discourse on heritage documentation and to promote more comprehensive methodologies for studying Islamic numismatic collections in Malaysia.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a qualitative research methodology grounded on a critical literature analysis to analyze contemporary documentation practices in Islamic numismatic legacy within the Malaysian framework. The methodology aims to identify conceptual, methodological, and institutional deficiencies in the documentation and analysis of Islamic currency collections, especially concerning visual and epigraphic aspects.

The research entails a methodical selection of scholarly and institutional resources, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, numismatic studies, museum documentation protocols, and heritage management literature. Sources were chosen for their pertinence to Islamic numismatics, visual culture, and documentation methodologies, with a specific focus on research concerning epigraphy, calligraphy, and the material study of coins. Recent and frequently cited publications were prioritised, along with essential basic references in Islamic numismatic scholarship.

A thematic analytical technique was employed for data analysis, identifying and categorising recurring themes and patterns in documentation procedures. The investigation concentrated on three key dimensions:

- i. procedures related to material and technical documentation,
- ii. visual and compositional analysis, and
- iii. epigraphic recording and interpretation.

Issues were analyzed comparably within worldwide academic and Malaysian institutional contexts to discover discrepancies, limitations, and areas for further advancement. Furthermore, institutional practices in Malaysia were examined via secondary sources, encompassing published research and documentation reports pertaining to museum collections. This allows the study to situate theoretical ideas within practical heritage management contexts.

This approach cultivates a critical comprehension of existing documentation deficiencies and advocates for a more cohesive visual–epigraphic framework to augment the interpretative and preservation significance of Islamic numismatic heritage.

3 ISLAMIC NUMISMATICS AS CULTURAL AND VISUAL HERITAGE

Islamic numismatics is widely recognised as a specialised field that extends beyond the study of currency to encompass historical, religious, political, and visual dimensions of material culture. Scholars emphasise that coins produced under Islamic governance were intentionally designed artefacts, authorised by ruling powers and circulated to communicate legitimacy, faith, and administrative control (Samir & Ozery, 2020; Treadwell, 2015). As such, Islamic coins represent one of the most enduring and standardised visual media through which Islamic authority and ideology were disseminated across vast geographical regions.

Unlike numismatic traditions that prioritised figural representation, Islamic coinage is distinguished by its emphasis on epigraphic content and abstract visual organisation. (Sheila. Blair (2006) explains that calligraphy within Islamic visual culture functions not merely as written communication, but also as an aesthetic system that structures visual hierarchy, balance, and symbolic meaning. This characteristic is particularly evident in Islamic coinage, where inscriptional arrangement forms the primary visual element of design. The transition to text-based coinage in the early Islamic period established inscriptions, calligraphy, and geometric order as primary visual elements, reflecting Islamic aniconic principles and theological values (Treadwell, 2015). Grodzki (2014) argues that this transition reflected a broader ideological transformation in early Islamic governance, where visual restraint and epigraphic emphasis became central mechanisms for

expressing Islamic authority and theological identity. Religious declarations, ruler names, titles, mint locations, and dates were arranged systematically to reinforce both spiritual authority and political sovereignty, transforming coins into portable texts embedded within everyday economic life (Samir & Ozery, 2020).

From a visual culture perspective, the aesthetic significance of Islamic coins lies in their compositional structure rather than ornamental excess. The hierarchy of inscriptions, balance between positive and negative space, and proportional arrangement of textual elements demonstrate deliberate design choices intended to ensure clarity, authority, and symbolic coherence (Kholis et al., 2022). These visual strategies positioned Islamic coins as functional yet ideologically charged artefacts, capable of communicating power and identity through restrained but meaningful visual language. Bouchy (2017) further explains that Islamic coinage should be understood as a form of visual communication in which textual arrangement, spatial organisation, and inscriptional emphasis were carefully structured to reinforce religious and political legitimacy.

Within the Malay Archipelago, Islamic numismatic heritage reflects the localisation of broader Islamic visual traditions within regional political and cultural contexts. Kholis et al. (2022) further argue that the circulation of Islamic coins throughout the Nusantara contributed to the spread of Arabic inscriptions, Islamic symbolism, and religious literacy through regional trade and political networks. This demonstrates that Islamic coinage also functioned as a medium for transmitting Islamic cultural values across maritime Southeast Asia. From the 16th century onwards, Islamic sultanates such as Melaka and Aceh issued coins that adopted Arabic inscriptions and Islamic formulas while incorporating local titles, names, and stylistic preferences highlighted by Tamimi et al. (2024). These coins reveal how Islamic visual norms were adapted to suit regional governance structures, trade networks, and socio-cultural environments, resulting in distinctive numismatic identities within the Malay world. According to Abdullah (2020), traditional artefacts within Malay cultural heritage embody distinctive visual identities shaped by symbolic, aesthetic, and cultural values. This perspective supports the understanding of Islamic coinage not merely as economic instruments, but as visual artefacts that reflect regional identity and cultural adaptation within the Malay Islamic world.

Scholarly studies on Malay Islamic coinage highlight the importance of epigraphy as a primary source of historical and cultural information. Inscriptions on coins provide evidence of political authority, religious affiliation, and temporal context, while calligraphic style and layout offer insights into aesthetic priorities and levels of craftsmanship (Kholis et al., 2022). As visual artefacts, these coins function simultaneously as historical documents and aesthetic objects, requiring interpretative approaches that integrate both textual and visual analysis.

Despite this recognised significance, Islamic numismatic heritage has often been marginalised within broader discussions of Islamic art and visual culture. Coins are frequently treated as supplementary historical evidence rather than as central visual artefacts worthy of sustained aesthetic analysis (Samir & Ozery, 2020). This tendency has contributed to documentation practices that privilege typology and material classification over visual interpretation, particularly within institutional and museum settings.

Understanding Islamic numismatics as cultural and visual heritage therefore necessitates a shift in perspective. Coins must be approached not only as economic instruments or historical markers, but as designed artefacts that embody religious values, political authority, and aesthetic principles. Recognising this dual material–visual character is essential for developing documentation practices that adequately reflect the cultural significance of Islamic numismatic collections, particularly within the Malaysian context.

This highlights that Islamic numismatics extends beyond monetary analysis by encompassing historical, theological, political, and visual dimensions. In the Malay Archipelago, Islamic coinage reflects the localisation of broader Islamic visual traditions through Arabic inscriptions, regional titles,

and compositional arrangements. Therefore, Islamic coins should be documented not only as technical numismatic objects but also as visual and cultural artefacts that communicate authority, belief, and regional identity. Characterised by their focus on epigraphy, calligraphy, and organised composition, Islamic coins embody aniconic concepts and serve as portable texts integrated into everyday economic activities. In the Malay Archipelago, these visual traditions were localised by incorporating Arabic inscriptions with regional identities, resulting in unique numismatic representations linked to political and cultural circumstances. Despite their importance, Islamic coins are frequently overlooked in visual culture discussions, which prioritise typology above aesthetic analysis. Consequently, a more complete perspective is necessary, one that acknowledges Islamic coinage as both tangible and visual history to facilitate more thorough documentation and analysis, especially within Malaysian institutional frameworks.

4 DOCUMENTATION PRACTICES IN MUSEUM AND HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS

Documentation constitutes a fundamental component of museum and heritage practice, shaping how artefacts are recorded, preserved, interpreted, and made accessible for research and public engagement. In the context of numismatic collections, documentation traditionally focuses on technical and material attributes, including metal composition, weight, diameter, minting techniques, and chronological classification. These criteria are essential for establishing authenticity, provenance, and conservation requirements, and they form the basis of conventional numismatic cataloguing systems (Samir & Ozery, 2020).

At the international level, numismatic documentation has increasingly incorporated digital cataloguing systems that aim to standardise data recording and improve accessibility. Despite these technological developments, scholars continue to highlight the limited integration of visual and epigraphic analysis within many institutional documentation systems, particularly in collections related to Islamic material culture (Schultz, 2011). Such systems often include high-resolution imaging, controlled terminologies, and metadata structures that support comparative analysis across collections (Treadwell, 2015). Heidemann (2010) notes that comparative numismatic documentation also requires consistency in descriptive structures to support cross-collection analysis and long-term historical interpretation. However, even within advanced documentation frameworks, emphasis frequently remains on typology, material condition, and historical attribution, while visual and epigraphic interpretation is treated as supplementary descriptive information rather than as a primary analytical component (Kholis et al., 2022).

Scholars have noted that this material-centred approach reflects the historical development of numismatics as a discipline closely aligned with economic history and archaeology. As a result, the visual and aesthetic dimensions of coins particularly in Islamic numismatics are often underrepresented within institutional documentation systems (Samir & Ozery, 2020). This limitation is especially significant for Islamic coins, where inscriptions, calligraphic style, and compositional layout serve as the principal conveyors of meaning in the absence of figural imagery (Treadwell, 2015).

In museum contexts, documentation practices directly influence interpretative narratives presented to researchers and the public. Halil et al. (2018) note that exhibition structures and visual presentation strategies within museum environments significantly affect visitors' interpretation and understanding of cultural artefacts. This demonstrates that documentation practices are closely connected not only to preservation but also to the communication of heritage meaning. When documentation prioritises physical measurements and chronological data, the symbolic, religious, and aesthetic values embedded within Islamic coinage may remain insufficiently articulated. As a result, Islamic coins are frequently interpreted as technical historical objects rather than as visual artefacts embedded with ideological and cultural meaning (Samir & Ozery, 2020). Kholis et al. (2022) argue that without systematic attention to epigraphy and visual organisation, Islamic coins risk being reduced to

technical artefacts rather than being recognised as visual expressions of Islamic authority and identity (Tamimi et al., 2024).

Within Malaysian heritage institutions, Islamic numismatic collections are typically documented using cataloguing systems that align with broader museum standards. While such systems provide consistency in recording basic information, they often lack dedicated structures for analysing inscriptional hierarchy, calligraphic variation, and visual balance (Tamimi et al., 2024). Othman et al. (2022) argue that visual communication systems within museum environments directly influence visitors' comprehension and engagement with historical information. In this context, documentation quality and interpretative structure become important components in shaping public understanding of heritage artefacts. Documentation practices may therefore vary between institutions, depending on curatorial expertise, institutional priorities, and available resources, resulting in inconsistencies in the depth and quality of visual documentation.

Furthermore, the condition of numismatic artefacts presents additional challenges for documentation. Physical deterioration, corrosion, and wear frequently affect the legibility of inscriptions and surface details, complicating efforts to record visual and epigraphic features accurately (Samir & Ozery, 2020). In the absence of a structured visual-epigraphic framework, documentation often records such conditions descriptively without fully addressing their implications for interpretation and heritage value (Kholis et al., 2022).

These institutional and methodological limitations highlight the need to reconsider how Islamic numismatic heritage is documented within museum and heritage settings. While material and technical data remain essential, they are insufficient on their own to capture the cultural and visual significance of Islamic coins. Integrating visual and epigraphic perspectives into documentation practices is therefore crucial for ensuring that Islamic numismatic collections are represented in ways that reflect their historical, religious, and aesthetic complexity (Tamimi et al., 2024; Treadwell, 2015).

Collectively, documentation plays a central role in museum and heritage practice, particularly in numismatic collections where it traditionally emphasises material and technical attributes such as composition, weight, and chronology to establish authenticity and provenance. Although digital systems have improved standardisation and accessibility, documentation frameworks continue to prioritise typology and condition, often relegating visual and epigraphic analysis to a secondary role. This material-focused approach limits the interpretation of Islamic coins, where inscriptions, calligraphy, and compositional structure are the primary carriers of meaning. In Malaysian institutional contexts, existing cataloguing practices provide consistency but lack structured methods for analysing visual and inscriptional features, leading to uneven documentation quality. Combined with challenges such as artefact deterioration, these limitations highlight the need for a more integrated documentation approach that incorporates visual and epigraphic perspectives to better represent the cultural, religious, and aesthetic significance of Islamic numismatic heritage.

5 CHALLENGES IN DOCUMENTING ISLAMIC NUMISMATIC HERITAGE IN MALAYSIA

The documentation of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia presents a range of challenges that affect the interpretation, preservation, and scholarly utilisation of coin collections. While museums and heritage institutions have established systems for cataloguing and safeguarding numismatic artefacts, several structural and methodological limitations continue to constrain the effective documentation of Islamic coins, particularly in relation to their visual and epigraphic significance.

One of the primary challenges lies in the physical condition of numismatic artefacts. Islamic coins, especially those recovered from circulation or long-term storage, frequently exhibit wear, corrosion, surface loss, or partial inscriptions. Such deterioration complicates the accurate recording of epigraphic content and visual details, leading to documentation that is often incomplete or descriptive

rather than analytical (Samir & Ozery, 2020). Without systematic visual documentation strategies, the impact of physical degradation on interpretation is rarely addressed in a structured manner (Kholis et al., 2022).

A second challenge concerns the inconsistent recording of epigraphic information. Inscriptions on Islamic coins serve as primary carriers of meaning, conveying religious declarations, political authority, and chronological data. However, institutional documentation practices often record inscriptions selectively or in abbreviated form, with limited attention to inscription hierarchy, calligraphic variation, or layout (Treadwell, 2015). This inconsistency reduces the comparative value of documentation and limits the potential for cross-institutional or regional analysis, particularly within the context of Malay Islamic coinage. According to E. Georganteli (2012), inconsistencies in numismatic recording practices may also limit broader historical interpretation, particularly when inscriptional and visual data are insufficiently documented across collections.

The marginalisation of aesthetic analysis represents a further challenge in documenting Islamic numismatic heritage. This issue reflects the broader tendency within conventional numismatic studies to prioritise classification and chronology over visual interpretation, despite the significant role of composition and inscriptional organisation in Islamic visual culture (Sheila. Blair, 2006). Although scholars acknowledge the visual and compositional significance of Islamic coinage, documentation practices frequently prioritise typological classification over visual interpretation (Kholis et al., 2022). Elements such as script proportion, spatial balance, and compositional symmetry are seldom recorded systematically, resulting in a narrow representation of coins as technical objects rather than as visual artefacts embedded with symbolic meaning (Samir & Ozery, 2020).

Institutional variation also contributes to documentation challenges in Malaysia. Differences in curatorial expertise, institutional priorities, and available resources lead to uneven documentation practices across museums and heritage repositories (Tamimi et al., 2024). While some institutions emphasise historical and economic context, others focus on conservation and display, often without a unified framework that integrates material, visual, and epigraphic dimensions. This fragmentation limits the coherence of Islamic numismatic documentation at the national level.

Another significant issue is the absence of a standardised visual–epigraphic documentation framework tailored to Islamic numismatic heritage. Existing cataloguing systems are largely adapted from general numismatic or museum standards, which may not adequately address the specific visual and textual characteristics of Islamic coins (Treadwell, 2015). Without such a framework, documentation remains dependent on individual curatorial interpretation, increasing the risk of inconsistency and interpretative gaps (Kholis et al., 2022).

Collectively, these challenges underscore the need for a more integrated documentation approach that recognises Islamic coins as both material and visual artefacts. Addressing issues of physical condition, epigraphic inconsistency, aesthetic marginalisation, and institutional variation is essential for improving the representation and interpretative potential of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia. These challenges form the basis for reconsidering existing documentation practices and for exploring more holistic perspectives in the study and preservation of Islamic coin collections.

Taken together, the documentation of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia is constrained by a combination of material, methodological, and institutional challenges that limit its interpretative depth and scholarly value. Issues such as the physical deterioration of coins, inconsistent recording of epigraphic content, and the marginalisation of aesthetic analysis contribute to documentation practices that remain largely descriptive rather than analytical. In addition, variations in institutional approaches and the absence of a standardised visual–epigraphic framework further fragment the quality and coherence of documentation across collections. As a result, Islamic coins are often reduced to technical artefacts, with their visual, symbolic, and cultural significance insufficiently articulated. These limitations highlight the need for a more integrated documentation approach that systematically incorporates visual and epigraphic perspectives to enhance the preservation, interpretation, and

academic relevance of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia.

6 TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED DOCUMENTATION APPROACH

6.1 A Proposed Visual–Epigraphic Documentation Framework

To operationalise the proposed integrated approach, this study suggests a conceptual visual–epigraphic documentation framework that organises numismatic recording into three interrelated dimensions: material, visual, and epigraphic analysis. This framework does not replace existing cataloguing standards but extends them by incorporating interpretative layers essential for understanding Islamic coinage as both material and visual artefacts.

6.2 Framework Structure and Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Components	Purposes
Material Documentation	Weight, diameter, metal composition, minting technique, condition	Establish authenticity, classification, and conservation requirements
Epigraphic Analysis	Transcription, translation, inscription hierarchy, textual content (religious phrases, ruler names, dates)	Interpret religious, political, and historical meaning
Visual Analysis	Calligraphic style, spatial arrangement, symmetry, proportion, positive-negative space	Examine aesthetic structure and visual identity

The integration of these three dimensions allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic coins as artefacts that simultaneously function as material objects, textual records, and visual compositions. Such an approach supports a more balanced documentation structure by positioning visual and epigraphic analysis alongside technical cataloguing data rather than treating them as secondary descriptive elements. By systematically documenting inscription hierarchy alongside compositional structure and material properties, this framework enhances both the analytical depth and comparative potential of numismatic studies. It also provides a structured basis for addressing challenges related to incomplete inscriptions, visual degradation, and inconsistencies in institutional documentation practices.

6.3 Implications for Documentation and Heritage Practice

Scholars have emphasised that Islamic coins should be approached as designed artefacts in which visual organisation plays a central role in communicating authority and religious identity (Kholis et al., 2022). An integrated documentation approach would therefore recognise elements such as inscription hierarchy, script style, spatial arrangement, and surface balance as essential components of numismatic recording. Incorporating these aspects would enable more meaningful interpretation of Islamic coins and facilitate comparative analysis across collections and regions, including within the Malay Archipelago (Tamimi et al., 2024).

From a heritage and museum perspective, integrated documentation supports both scholarly research and public interpretation. As highlighted by Halil et al. (2018) and Othman et al. (2022), interpretative and visual presentation strategies within museum settings significantly contribute to how cultural artefacts are understood and appreciated by audiences. Integrating visual and epigraphic dimensions into numismatic documentation would therefore strengthen both academic interpretation and public engagement. Systematic recording of visual and epigraphic features enhances the transparency and accessibility of numismatic collections, particularly in cases where physical

deterioration limits direct examination of artefacts (Samir & Ozery, 2020). High-quality visual documentation, combined with structured descriptive categories, can also contribute to long-term preservation efforts by providing reference points for monitoring changes in condition over time (Kholis et al., 2022).

Importantly, an integrated documentation approach does not seek to replace existing numismatic standards but to complement them. Material data such as weight, metal composition, and mint attribution remain fundamental; however, their interpretative value is significantly enhanced when contextualised alongside visual and epigraphic analysis (Treadwell, 2015). By balancing technical precision with visual interpretation, documentation practices can more accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of Islamic numismatic heritage. In the Malaysian context, adopting a more integrated documentation perspective would help address inconsistencies across institutions and support the development of shared interpretative standards. Such an approach would also strengthen the positioning of Islamic numismatic collections within broader discussions of Islamic art, visual culture, and heritage studies, where coins have historically received limited attention (Samir & Ozery, 2020; Tamimi et al., 2024).

By foregrounding the need for visual and epigraphic integration, this section underscores the importance of rethinking documentation practices as interpretative processes rather than purely technical procedures. This perspective provides a conceptual foundation for future research and institutional initiatives aimed at enhancing the documentation, preservation, and understanding of Islamic numismatic heritage in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic numismatics by critically re-examining documentation practices within Malaysian institutional contexts. By situating these practices within broader frameworks of visual culture and heritage documentation, the study highlights the limitations of approaches that prioritise material and typological attributes over interpretative depth. It argues that Islamic coins should be understood as cultural and visual artefacts, in which meaning is primarily conveyed through epigraphic content, calligraphic form, and compositional structure.

The findings demonstrate that current documentation practices often insufficiently address these visual and inscriptional dimensions, resulting in a constrained understanding of Islamic numismatic heritage. Challenges related to physical deterioration, inconsistent epigraphic

recording, and institutional variation further limit the interpretative and comparative potential of coin collections in Malaysia. In the absence of a structured visual–epigraphic framework, Islamic coins risk being reduced to technical objects rather than being recognised as meaningful expressions of religious authority, cultural identity, and historical context.

In response, this study proposes a conceptual visual–epigraphic documentation framework that integrates material, visual, and epigraphic dimensions. This framework is not intended to replace existing numismatic standards but to complement them by introducing interpretative layers that enhance both analytical depth and documentation consistency. By foregrounding visual organisation and inscriptional structure as essential components of recording practices, the proposed approach supports more comprehensive documentation, facilitates cross-institutional comparison, and strengthens the long-term preservation and accessibility of numismatic collections.

More broadly, this study underscores the importance of rethinking documentation as an interpretative process rather than a purely technical procedure. Recognising Islamic coins as visual and cultural artefacts is essential for ensuring that documentation practices adequately reflect the intellectual, aesthetic, and historical complexity of Islamic numismatic heritage within the Malay world. In the Malaysian context, adopting a more integrated documentation approach has the potential to improve institutional consistency, support curatorial practices, and reposition Islamic numismatic

heritage within wider discussions of Islamic art and visual culture. This shift is particularly significant in addressing the longstanding marginalisation of coins within visual and heritage studies. As noted by Bouchy (2017), recognising Islamic coinage as a visual communication medium allows numismatic heritage to be positioned more meaningfully within broader discussions of Islamic art, material culture, and visual history.

Future research may extend this study by developing and testing structured visual–epigraphic recording models in museum settings, particularly through empirical analysis of Malay Islamic coin collections. Such efforts would further refine documentation practices and contribute to a more nuanced and sustainable understanding of Islamic numismatic heritage as a vital component of the region’s cultural and intellectual history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Heartfelt and deepest appreciation is extended to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for its continuous institutional assistance throughout the completion of this research. Utmost and sincerest gratitude is especially dedicated to the respected project supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mumtaz Mokhtar, whose unwavering guidance, wisdom, patience, and continuous encouragement have been an immense source of strength throughout this research journey. Her thoughtful supervision, invaluable advice, and remarkable dedication not only guided this study to its completion, but also continuously inspired and motivated every stage of the research process. Her invaluable mentorship, kindness, and endless support are deeply appreciated and will always be remembered with the highest respect and gratitude.

FUNDING

This research is self-funded.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors played equal contributions towards the production of this paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, A. H. (2020). The Design and Identity of Batik Tulis Product Selected of Batik Manufacturers in Klang Valley. In *Ideology Journal* (Vol. 5, Number 2).
- Blair, S. S., & Bloom, J. M. (2003). The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field. In *The Art Bulletin* (Vol. 85, Number 1). <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>.
- Blair, Sheila. (2006). *Islamic calligraphy*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Bouchy Karine. (2017). *The Materiality of Writing* (C. M. Johannessen & T. van Leeuwen, Eds.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315537306>
- Georganteli, E. (2012). Transposed Images: Currencies and Legitimacy in the Late Medieval Eastern Mediterranean. In *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1150* (pp. 141–179). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199641888.003.0006>
- Georganteli, E. S., & Koukouni, I. N. (2014). LNCS 8514 - Designing Personalised Itineraries for Europe’s Cultural Routes. In *LNCS* (Vol. 8514). <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/culture/collections/online->

- Grodzki, M. (2014). *CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM SYMBOLISM ON COINS OF THE EARLY ARAB EMPIRE (7-8th century CE) AN ATTEMPT AT A NEW APPROACH*.
- Halil, N. A., Mohammad, H. M., Rosli, N. E.-H., & John, A. A. (2018). The Exhibition Structure and Its Impact Towards Visitors' Understanding at a Museum. In *Idealogy* (Vol. 3, Number 3).
- Heidemann, S. (2010). *Numismatic-The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*.
- Kholis, N., Yusuf, K., Saefullah, A., Rais, M., Akbar, A., Pinem, M., & Burhanuddin, D. (2022). *Finding Ancient Coins: An Early Numismatic Study on the Spread of Islam from Arab to the Nusantara*.
- Muhamad, N. A., Tahir, A., Ramli, I., & Abu Bakar, S. A. S. (2023). The Development of the Malaysian Cultural Elements Framework. *Idealogy Journal*, 8(1), 176–202. <https://doi.org/10.24191/idealogy.v8i1.421>
- Othman, M. F. S., Narawai, N. F. A. M., & Zakaria, M. S. (2022). *A Study on Wayfinding System in National Museum Kuala Lumpur*. www.publicationethics.org
- Samir, D., & Ozery, M. El. (2020). *The word, shape, and image in early Islamic Numismatics within Cultural Heritage Context*. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/objectsmain.html1/5/20195:28:27AM>
- Schultz, W. C. (2011). Recent Developments in Islamic Monetary History. *History Compass*, 9(1), 71–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00744.x>
- Tamimi, K., Tanjung, M., & Nasution, K. (2024). Inventory of Bandar Aceh Darussalam's Keuh Coins as a Collection of the North Sumatra Quranic History Museum. *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 5(2), 154–168. <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v5i2.2345>
- Treadwell, L. (2015). *Symbolism and meaning on the early Islamic copper coinage of Greater Syria*.