

# MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

PRESENT ISSUES AND FUTURE IDEAS

عمارة المسجد:  
قضايا الحاضر و أفكار المستقبل



Editors

Prof. Mashary A. Al Naim | Dr. Hani M Al Huneidi | Dr. Noor Hanita Abdul Majid



مركز الأبحاث الإسلامية  
Abouli Al Fozan Award



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# THE DIMINISHING OF INDIGENOUS ARTISTIC TRADITION IN THE DECORATIVE ARTS OF THE MOSQUES IN *DUNIA MELAYU*

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE mosques in *Dunia Melayu* are valuable historical evidence left by the Islamisation process, as they are indicative of the establishment of Muslim populations in the region, and thus often record the people's socio-economic and political aspirations. Many scholars embarked on the study of mosques; mainly due to the academic fascination of such wide-range architectural vocabularies emerging from mosque design as being the trademark for Islamic architecture. The mosque, says Robert Hillenbrand in the opening paragraph of *The Mosque in the Medieval Islamic World*, "is the Islamic building par excellence, and as such the key to Islamic architecture" (Hillenbrand, 1985).

Unlike their counterparts in the Islamic mainland, the vernacular mosques of *Dunia Melayu* however lacks the "grandeur" in architecture as well as ornamentation. In fact, these mosques are distinguished for their simplicity and lack of decorations (Lombard, 2000a; Pijper, 1985). Compared to the mosques in the mainland Muslim world during the same period, vernacular mosques in *Dunia Melayu* are relatively small in size and humble in appearance. Mosques of gigantic scale only appeared in the region during the post-colonial and pre-independence periods.

The absence of decorative arts in these mosques is seen by some as in line with the concept of "humility" in Islam (Lombard, 2000a); or as an effort by the Muslims to accentuate the religious spirit in the mosque by leaving everything of worldly nature outside of its doors (Pijper, 1985). However, to some sceptics, it is the nature of austere Islamic teachings that "killed" creativity in mosque architecture. Graaf and Pigeaud, while acknowledging



the contributions of the *wali* in reliving certain aspects of performing arts such as *wayang kulit* (shadow play) which was, at one time instrumental in the propagation of Islam, blamed the *wali* as being responsible in the “secularisation of art from religion” (Graaf and Pigeaud, 1985).

A quick survey on contemporary mosques of post-independence *Dunia Melayu* will quickly demonstrate that most decorative arts seen in these mosques are mainly imported from elsewhere. With the exception of woodcarving panels found either as movable partitions or decorative elements of the *mimbar* and *mihrab*, the rest of the decorative schemes are either direct reproductions from popular motifs and materials elsewhere, or locally installed as the product of craftsmanship not inherited from local artisans.

For the last two decades, morphological and typological studies of historic mosques of *Dunia Melayu* have mainly focused on the form, or factors influencing the forms. Very few studies have been done either on the interior qualities of these mosques, the ingenuity of their decorative elements or the construction systems employed. There has been no study performed on the formation or development of Islamic artistic culture in mosque architecture of the region.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to analyse the changes taking place in the decorative arts of the mosques built between 15th to 20th centuries. This study aspires to understand how the decorative arts of mosques in *Dunia Melayu* evolved. While Hillenbrand considered the birth of Islamic art to have begun with the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), where the outstanding Great Mosque of Damascus (b. 709–715) took its form less than a century after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) (d. 632), this study attempts to find the genesis of Islamic art in the context of *Dunia Melayu*. As the oldest extant mosque known of this region was built in the 15th century (i.e., 8th centuries after the foundation of the Great Mosque of Damascus, and in the same period that witnessed the establishment of the last Islamic dynasty, the Ottomans in Turkey), it is critical to understand why the earliest mosque in *Dunia Melayu* took the form that it had; how this form was later transformed into a completely different model and how the artistic tradition was affected by these changes.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Visual documentation and analyses were conducted on the oldest extant mosques by initially following the routes of Islamisation, that naturally brought the study to the establishment of the most important centres in *Dunia Melayu* between the 15th and the 20th centuries (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1

Map of major urban centres, 16th and 17th centuries.

(Source: Cribbs, 2000)

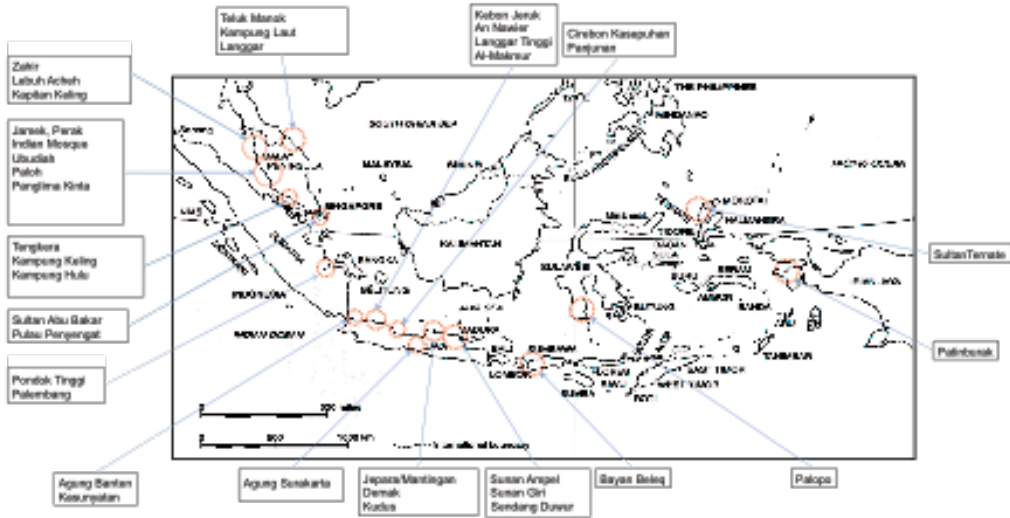


FIGURE 2

Distribution of selected mosques for analyses.



The 15th century was selected as the beginning period for investigation as it recorded the establishment of many Muslim sultanates. In addition, the earliest surviving mosques of the region belong to this period. The 18th century, as many authors have agreed<sup>1</sup>, was the watershed in the history of *Dunia Melayu* that marked the beginning of European political interference in regional affairs. As such, it is critical to study the effects of this leap in history on the artistic and architectural vocabulary of this region. The period selected (i.e., the 15th century through the 20th century) is a huge time span in itself, and thus requires samples to be short-listed only after the process of filtering. In addition, it is necessary to define the limits of material under discussion by adopting a suitable methodology. By arranging them in chronological order, the earliest surviving mosques of each city were identified. The 40 mosques finally selected for this study were filtered from a list of more than 100 mosques found either through literary studies or fieldwork.

## VISUAL SURVEY OF DECORATIVE ARTS IN MOSQUES OF *DUNIA MELAYU*

The survey looks for decorative elements in mosques, both ornamental and architectural. Two dimensional decorations are often found applied on structural elements such as columns and beams, as well as interior and exterior surfaces such as the walls and floors. They include carvings, ceramic works, paintings or illustrations that utilise techniques and colours that could be studied for their origins and influences.

Three-dimensional decorations are found in the design of gateways, and any 3D figurative or non-figurative artworks. The motifs used are studied based on the types known such as geometric pattern, floral-vegetal, zoomorphic, and cosmos. The survey also looked for decorative schemes in typical mosque elements such as *mimbar* and *mihrab*. Based on the visual survey and archival studies conducted, decorations in Island Southeast Asian mosques were mainly concentrated in structural elements and *mimbars*. As vernacular mosques have non-loadbearing walls, the *qiblah* wall including in it the *mihrab*, were susceptible to being replaced. In many cases, change was necessary, as vernacular materials such as wood tend to rot. The study

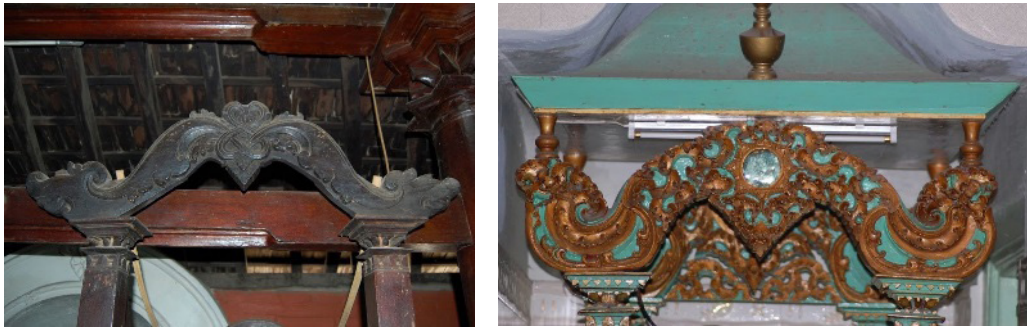
<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Barbara and Leonard Andaya in *A History of Malaysia* (1982); Ricklefs in *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (2001), *Mystic Synthesis in Java* (2003), and *Polarising Javanese Society* (2007); Steinberg (ed.) in *In search of Southeast Asia* (1987); Khoo Kay Kim in *Malay Society 1874-1920* (1974), *Malay Society: Transformation and Democratisation* (2001); Anthony Reid in *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (2000); Roelofs in *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago* (1962).



also found that the majority of the *mimbars* in the mosques selected are made from wood and are movable rather than fixed, with the exceptions of a few mosques such as Masjid Menara Kudus (15c), Al-Mansur (18c), and Kampung Baru (18c). All of these mosques have inbuilt *mimbars*.

### *Mimbar*

An interesting feature in some of the *mimbars* of the 15th and 16th centuries is the *kala* or *padmasana* design, which is found in four of the old mosques. The *mimbar* is designed in the form of a *padmasana* or throne (as it is known in Hindu culture), with four posts supporting a stylised *kala* with curled ends forming an arch to the entrance of the *mimbar*. This design is found in Sendang Duwur, Giri, Demak, Cirebon, and Panjunan. By the 16th century, however, none of the *mimbars* were designed in the same style.



**FIGURE 3**

*Padmasana* design in the *mimbar* of Masjid Sunan Giri (left) and Masjid Merah Panjunan (right).



**FIGURE 4**

The *mimbar* of Masjid Agung Cirebon Kasepuhan.





## Mihrab and the Qiblah Wall

There were not many original *mihrab* found in the mosques of the 15th and 16th century period. However, those that survived demonstrated peculiar designs. The *mihrab* of Masjid Agung Cirebon (Figure 5) is made from white marble with intricate detailing and sculptured pilasters topped with lotus buds supporting a curved-form portal with *surya Majapahit* emblem at the centre and curled clouds trimming. Masjid Menara Kudus original *mihrab* was in the form of *Paduraksa* (closed gateway) exhibiting strong influence of Javanese-Hindu artistic tradition.



FIGURE 5

The *mihrab* of Masjid Menara Kudus (left) and Masjid Agung Cirebon (right).

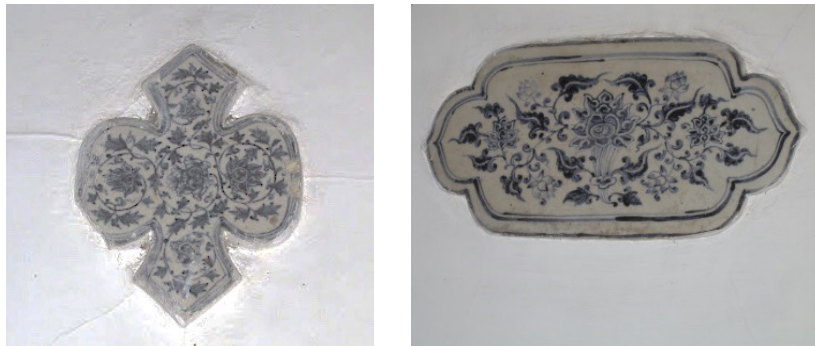
## Architectural Decorations

### Medallion Wall Tiles

Other than the *mimbar* and *mihrab*, mosque decorations were mainly found in structural or constructional elements such as the wall, beams, and pillars. Unique to the mosques of the 15th and 16th century was the method of installing decorative tiles to the walls like medallions, whereby they are not used as wall covering but spaced out almost evenly forming a continuous pattern. This practice is believed to have been inherited from pre-Islamic traditions of temple decorations (Hall, 2000; Iswahyudi, 2007). Annamese ceramic tiles with various motifs and colours are found in the walls of Masjid Mantingan, Masjid Agung Demak, Masjid Menara Kudus, and Masjid Merah Panjunan (Figures 6 to 8). In Masjid Mantingan, however, instead of ceramic tiles we found coral-carved panels decorating the entry facade of the prayer hall (Figure 8).



**FIGURE 6**  
Annamese ceramic tiles on the wall of Masjid Merah Panjunan.



**FIGURE 7**  
The tiles at Masjid Agung Demak.



**FIGURE 8**  
Masjid Mantingan.



### Wood-Carved Structural Elements

Intricate woodcarving patterns are often found on columns and beams of the mosque, in particular the *soko guru* which – to the Javanese people – represents power and strength (Sumintardja, 1989a). The most prominent feature in the mosque design is often the *soko guru* with its roof framing system. The jointing systems which utilised *catokan* (mortise and *tenon*) without the use of nails have resulted in magnificent details in craftsmanship (Figure 9). Such applications echo the ingenuity practices of traditional civilisations whereby ornamentations – in principle – must be attendant to architecture (Jones, 1856); thereby producing a beautiful architecture with structural clarity (Figure 10). Examples of mosques employing these techniques are Masjid Agung Demak, Masjid Agung Cirebon Kasepuhan, and Masjid Merah Panjunan.



**FIGURE 9**

*Soko guru* and beam design in Masjid Agung Demak.



**FIGURE 10**

Structural features in umbrella configuration of Masjid Merah Panjunan.



## 2D and 3D Ornamentation and Motifs

### Floral and Vegetal Motifs

Floral and vegetal motifs composed in the forms of meandering clouds, spiralling tendrils which spring out of a central urn, a flower or a seed are the dominant theme in decorations on wood elements. John Guy in his assessments of Chinese and Vietnamese ceramic wares found in Trowulan as well as in the mosques of 15th century identifies that the design composition of the flowers and meandering leaf motifs find its origin in the decorative repertoire of Yuan and early Ming China; many elements in which are drawn from Middle Eastern Islamic design (Guy, 1989). The possibility of Chinese influence in early mosques' decorative arts is strengthened by the fact that many early Muslim missions and patrons were of Chinese origin; in addition to the existence of Chinese shipbuilding yard in Semarang as well as woodcarving guild in Jepara.

Many floral and vegetal motif decorations however were composed in narrative style, especially those found in tomb mosques. In addition, some of these motifs were those taken from pre-Islamic periods but given new meaning and application.



(a) **Mosque:** Masjid Sendang Duwur  
**Location:** Tomb  
**Medium:** Wood  
**Motif:** Flower, leaves



(b) **Mosque:** Masjid Sendang Duwur  
**Location:** Tomb  
**Medium:** Stone  
**Motif:** Flower, leaves, tendrils





(c) **Mosque:** Masjid Mantingan  
**Location:** Wall  
**Medium:** Coral  
**Motif:** Water lily, lotus



(d) **Mosque:** Masjid Mantingan  
**Location:** Wall  
**Medium:** Coral  
**Motif:** Water lily

**FIGURE 11(a)–(d)**  
 Flora and vegetal motif in 2D and 3D decorative arts.

## Calligraphy

The earliest employment of the Arabic calligraphy in *Dunia Melayu* is found on the tombstones spread across the archipelago, and in particular in the epitaphs of the group of old graves found in Pasai and Gresik. Coincidentally Gresik, where two of the earliest tombstones were found, was also the site of Masjid Sunan Giri (original building founded in the 15th century), one of the oldest surviving mosques in *Dunia Melayu*. The early discovery of the use of calligraphy in monumental art in both of the tombs may have explained the presence of the Arabic calligraphy in the old mosque of Gresik, which this research found to be the only vernacular mosque to incorporate Arabic calligraphy as part of its decorative scheme.

In Masjid Sunan Giri, the calligraphy incisions were made on the wooden wall panels, main columns and beams at a height just below the ceiling level of the mosque, making it difficult to capture a clear photographic image. Arabic scripts of Allah and 'Ali (Figure 12), and Allah and Muhammad (Figure 13) were arranged in geometric, symmetrical composition. The fact that 'Ali is singled out in the decorative scheme indicates that the influence of *Shi'ite* teaching had penetrated Gresik, perhaps through Persian traders. It is also probable that the patron commissioning the calligraphy work was someone with a Gujarat and Southern Indian connection, as, according to Q.S. Fatimi, during the Muslim period they were integral parts of the

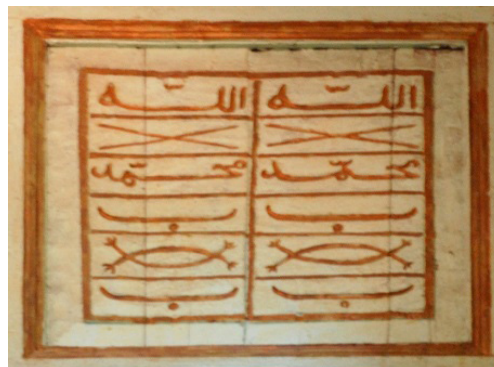


same cultural unit known as *Dakan* (Deccan), which were “the closely-knit, all-India organisation of the *Sufi* orders and the general employment of the Persian language as the lingua franca of Muslim culture” (Fatimi, 1963, pp. 35).



**FIGURE 12**

Arabic scripts of Allah and 'Ali.



**FIGURE 13**

Arabic scripts of Allah and Muhammad.

An illustrious narration documented by Raffles in *History of Java* informs us that the mosque of Giri was built by Raden Paku, who was of Arab descent, at a time when the Hindu Majapahit king was still in reign. It also indicates that around the 15th century there was already a group of influential Muslims in Gresik, whose presence was recognised by the Majapahit king, a story that was corroborated by the presence of the old tombs. In addition, the relationship between Sunan Giri and the Majapahit king was evidenced through the existence of the Majapahit regalia, the eight-pointed *surya Majapahit* (Sun of Majapahit) in the mosque decorative scheme.





**FIGURE 14**

Calligraphy placed at the centre of the eight-pointed *surya Majapahit* regalia.

At the main columns (*soko guru*) where the main beams meet the main central column, small calligraphic writing in medallion design is placed at the centre of the eight-pointed *surya Majapahit*, surrounded by a stylistic arrangement of vegetal in the form of a stylised butterfly and *kalamakara* (Figure 14). The same medallion-like arrangement of the calligraphic design can also be found above the main entrance door (Figure 15). This time the calligraphic writing of the verse of the *Qur'an* placed on the door lintel was more legible, containing the verses from *Surah al-Munafiqun*, (63):9–10.



**FIGURE 15**

The calligraphy of verses from the *Qur'an* placed on the door lintel.

The calligraphic style found on the door lintel is more angular and closely resembles the monumental *Naskhi* script that replaced the angular *Kufi* after c. 1250 (Begley, 1985, pp. 14). According to B. Moritz in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1913, pp. 338–390), the *Kufi* calligraphic style disappeared from practical use by the end of the 13th century, to be replaced by the round script *Ta'liq* (later developed into *Nasta'liq*).



The absence of the *Kufi* calligraphy in this mosque, as opposed to its presence in the previously mentioned tombs, suggests that the mosque artistic style could have belonged to a later period (i.e., after the diminishing of the *Kufi* influence). However, within the same mosque, there is a marked difference between the calligraphy found on the upper wall panels of the interior of the mosque and the one decorating the door frames. While the wall panels exhibited a rigid and almost “immature” calligraphic style in a unique geometric composition that is incomparable to any other samples found by this research, the design of the door frames suggested that they were products that closely resembled the stylistic Deccan (or *Dakan*) monumental calligraphy prevalent after the 13th century.

This difference suggested that the decorative scheme of the mosque may have been executed by different people, probably at different periods. Given that Masjid Sunan Giri (which is present today) is the mosque that was reconstructed by Sunan Prapen in 1544CE, 40 years after the death of Sunan Giri (Moehammad Habib, 2001, pp. 59), the difference in the periods of the mosque construction (and reconstruction) and the dates inscribed on the headstones indicate that there was a progressive change in stylistic preferences across the periods. It is also most likely that the calligraphy found in the Masjid Sunan Giri was probably executed by non-native Muslims who lived or transited in Gresik during that period.

### **Zoomorphy and Narrative Art**

Peculiar to the mosques of 15th and 16th century was the presence of 2D and 3D zoomorphy ornamentation carved in stone or coral. Most of these motifs were found applied in the decorative arts of tomb mosques, such as Masjid Sendang Duwur and Masjid Mantingan. Masjid Sendang Duwur in particular bore evidence of the transition between pre-Islamic concepts and their applications in the Islamic context. The mosque exhibits three dimensional forms in the stone crafts which were original borrowings from the Hindu-Javanese temple arts: such as *candi bentar*, *paduraksa*, and *stupa*. It is also the only surviving mosque of the transition period which employs a range of zoomorphic motifs in its decorative scheme. However despite the consistency with Hindu-Javanese art repertoire, according to Uka Tjandrasasmita (1984) the winged gate is a developed gate archetype which is not found in the old Hindu temples of Java. This signifies an initial attempt by early Muslims to develop an old repertoire into a new form and meaning.







**FIGURE 16**  
Winged gate of Masjid Sendang Duwur.



**FIGURE 17**  
The concept of resting place in Jannah, depicted here with Geroda wings guarding the entrance with the Eternal Tree, Kala Makara, clouds, hills, and plants motifs.



**FIGURE 18**  
Wings carved into pedestals near entry to the tomb.



## DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

In general, the study found that the most artistic period was the 15th and 16th centuries, when mosques exhibited a variety of motifs and techniques of execution (Chart 1). During this period, most decorative applications were concentrated on structural items such as the beams and columns, as well as the *mimbar*. The 15th to the 16th centuries also witnessed the widespread use of ancient motifs such as scenery, narrative, zoomorphic, cosmos, crown-stupa-nanas, and cloud. However, this pattern gradually decreased in the 17th and 18th centuries (Chart 2). By the end of the 19th century, basically all ancient artistic traditions had diminished, only to be replaced by more Islamic motifs such as calligraphy, floral-vegetal, and geometric pattern (Chart 3).

CHART 1

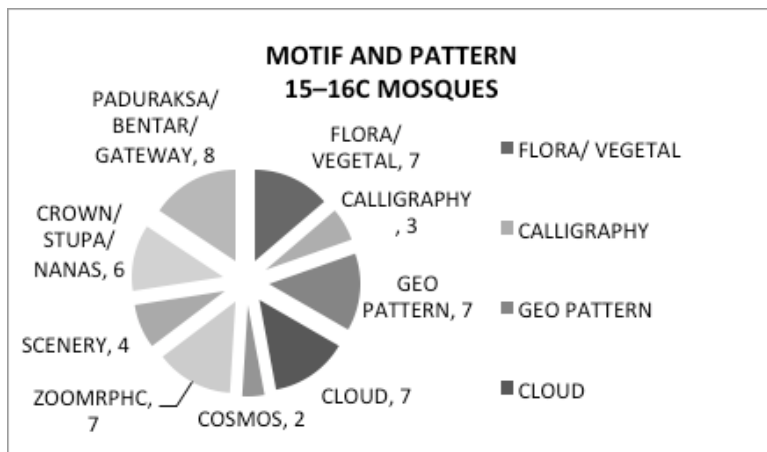


CHART 2

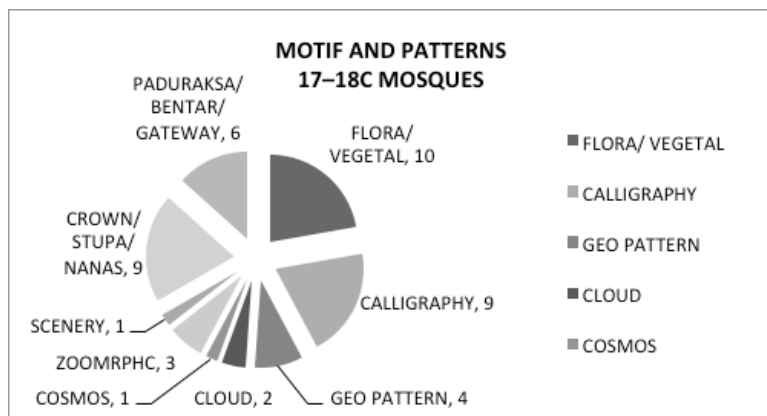
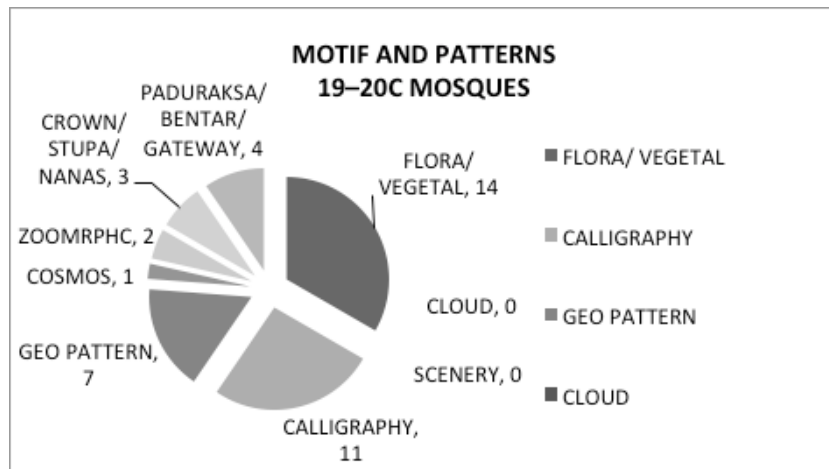


CHART 3



The mosques of the 15th and 16th century marked some distinguished vocabularies in the mosques' decorative elements. These mosques displayed a range of ornamentation motifs, styles, and applications which in themselves were evidence of fine craftsmanship. Despite the fact that the mosque's art of this period was considered as a continuity of pre-existing building tradition exhibited in the borrowings of architectural grammar and adoption of motifs with symbolic meanings; it is also undeniable that they were courageous attempts in defining new languages of Islamic tradition by adopting, reappropriating and inventing new meanings to pre-Islamic applications.

The initial endeavour however was never met with constructive efforts that could have enabled the development or flourishing of distinctive local Islamic idioms. Islam, underlines Hasan Ambary, only adopted the pre-Islamic building tradition both in techniques and in its aesthetics and did not introduce a new cultural tradition (Ambary, 2001). The mosques of the post 16th century period were notable for their plainness and lack of decorative elements. Apart from the sharp diminishing of decorative elements associated to Hindu-Buddhist tradition, the mosques of this period were in fact stripped of any kind of meaningful embellishment.

The detachment of decorations from the mosques persisted for a considerable period of time, only to be replaced by mosques of gigantic sizes and alien architecture in the 19th and 20th century period. Based on the analysis done, it could be ascertained that after the 16th century, there has been no developments on any of the traditional building techniques,



materials, designs, or didactic functions; in fact what is evident in the mosques of the nineteenth and twentieth century is a copied version of pre-16th century tradition without any inventiveness and in some cases; a complete replacement of architectural vocabulary with total disregard of local cultural tradition.

### “ISLAMIC ART” IN THE *DUNIA MELAYU*

When Islam arrived at the shores of the *Dunia Melayu* in the 16th century (and even earlier), the western part of the Islamic world has already achieved building technology advancement in their mosque architecture and decorations. The congregation mosque Masjid-I Jami' of Isfahan (built 1310 during the Saljuqi rule) was an example of the elegance in the application of dynamic geometries which Oleg Grabar proposed as being the product of a particularly inventive designer in Isfahan during that period (Grabar, 1990). Based on his knowledge that the poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam had identified the properties of pentagon; Grabar anticipated that he could have well been the one who designed the mosque. When Islam sets its foot in the coastal regions of the Malay Archipelagos, the well-proportioned structures and aesthetically pleasing spatial and structural innovations have become the trademark to major Islamic centres (Holod, 1988).

Records kept in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum Library in Istanbul entitled *Risale-I Mi'mariyye* (Treatise on Architecture) inform us on the frequent meetings and discussions (*majalis*) held between artisans and builders (architects); whereby artisans were known to consult mathematicians and mathematicians were known to have written guidelines on the principles of forms and structures. A 16th century Ottoman geometer was recorded as teaching his apprentice artisans from a book written by Abu'l-Wafa' al-Buzajani (940–998AD) the famous mathematician-astronomer; dedicated especially for artisans entitled *Kitab fima yahtaju ilayhi al-sani' min a'mal al-handasa* (The book on what the artisan requires of geometric constructions) (Ozdural, 1998).

The advancement of building sciences in the era of the Ottoman rule in Turkey is evident in the works of Sinan (1489–1588), the chief architect of the Ottoman Caliphate, who had built more than 70 mosques in his lifetime. In a rare autobiography written by an architect, he underlined the critical relationship between piety and creativity when he said:





There is no art more difficult than architecture, and whosoever is engaged in this estimable calling must, to begin with, be righteous and pious. He should not begin to lay the foundations if the building site is not firm, and when he sets out to lay the foundations he should take great care that his work be free from defect and he reach the firm ground. And, in proportion to the abundance or paucity of piers, columns and buttresses, he should close up the domes and half domes that are on top of them, and bind the arches together in an agreeable manner, without carelessness. And he should not hurry in important matters but should endure in accord with the import of the saying “Patience brings one victory!” in order that, with God’s help, he finds divine guidance for the immortality of his work. And in this there is no doubt.

(Gulru Necipoglu (ed.), 2006)

It is unfortunate that there has been no evidence linking the advancement of technologies in Isfahan or Istanbul to the building developments of the *Dunia Melayu*. Even with the assumptions of some scholars that Islam came to this region from India, the architectural developments depicted in the Delhi-Imperial Style (12th–16th century) or the Mughal style (post 16th century) (Hasan, 1994) has not in any way impacted the building traditions of the Muslims in this part of the world. Despite the initial contacts of the *Dunia Melayu* with the material cultures of the western part of the Muslim world, as indicated in the presence of Gujarati marble stone designs and the calligraphy works in Masjid Sunan Giri, there was literally no cultural interactions whatsoever after the 16th century – either from the west or from the east.

It is difficult to disentangle European’s pursuits for economic monopoly in the 16th century from its military and political encroachments onto the existing population. Through warfare, fortifications and trade monopoly, by 1650 the Europeans had gained control of the region’s vital ports and products (Reid, 2000). For the first time, the Europeans had managed to secure the commercial posts from their traditional rivals – the Moors or Saracens – and effectively isolated the ISEA from the rest of the world (Day, 1904).

In many cases recorded in the history, the Europeans aggressions were not confined only to commercial rivals. In the face of local oppositions they resorted into destroying often the finest material culture which was symbolic of the people’s civilisational achievements. When the armies of Albuquerque attacked Malacca in 1511, they destroyed the palace, the





mosque, and massacred the Malays to the extent that “the city looked like a cemetery” after the assault (Teixeira, 1961). For more than a century, there were no religious houses in Malacca, except those belonging to the Portuguese.

Similarly, when Jan Pieterszoon Coen destroyed Jayakarta in 1619, he burned the *kraton* and the mosque inside its walls; to the extent that during the V.O.C. era (1619–1799) there was no mosque in the old city of Batavia; nor were there any Chinese temples or Catholic Churches (Heuken, 1983). The Dutch aggressions towards the Muslim communities in the trading ports were recorded when in 1628 and 1629, under Coen’s order, two assaults were launched on Japara burning all ships, killing all Gujerati merchants who could be found, destroying the English lodge and carrying off the Chinese by force to Batavia (Meilink-Roelofs, 1969).

In Banten, the Dutch assault was recorded in the destruction of the Banten royal Palace Sebakingsing in the 17th century, which ruins are left intact until today (Ambary 1977; Guillot *et al.*, 1990). In Aceh, in the wake of Sultan Iskandar Muda’s rebellion, the Masjid Baitur-Rahman was attacked in 1873–1874 to ruins. There is no archaeological evidence left of the original mosque except in the drawings of Francois Valentijn (1724–1726) which suggested that its architecture was similar to the surviving mosque in Indrapuri. However, the remnants of the royal pleasure gardens could be traced in the form of an elevated, walled enclosure square opening onto gardens dominated by the *gunungan* (mountain-like structures) (O’Neill 1994). In Malay Peninsula, the Malay leaders were well informed of the nature of British actions against any kind of rebellion. In the aftermath of the killing of J.W.W. Birch in 1875, the British Resident of Perak, Maharaja Lela entered his house – “the best house in Perak” – in tears for the last time as he knew it would be burnt down by the British (Gullick, 1987).

These intrusions, in addition to pre-existing internal dissensions among the Malay traditional rulers, have in large imposed a political and economical restraints on the population of *Dunia Melayu*. With the exception of Mataram rulers who were sponsored by the V.O.C., other regional rulers lived in relatively poor and humble conditions. As agreements were negotiated and imposed upon them, the Muslims were left without legitimate or powerful Muslim leaders overseeing neither cultural nor religious developments. The armed confrontation, economical restraints and political unrest effectively precluded the initiation of major building programmes among the Muslim communities (O’Neill, 1994); and consequently affected the formation of sustained Islamic building culture.



## CONCLUSION: THE EROSION AND TRUNCATION OF TRADITIONAL ARTISTIC CULTURE

The findings of this study suggest that the detachment of decorative arts from the mosques of Dunia Melayu beginning of the 17th century was parallel to the absence of any major building activities or architectural developments; as well as the vacuum in legitimate Islamic leadership foreseeing the affairs of the Muslim community. In addition, the 17th century also marked the severed cultural network in effective transmission of Islamic teaching via maritime activities due to the European's commercial and political policies imposed on the region. These factors consequentially brought about the critical importance of the role of patronage in the design, function, and development of a mosque.

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