

## A STUDY ON THE MOSQUE *MIMBAR* MOTIFS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Mimbar* is the place where a khatib delivers sermons before Friday prayers begin. Undeniably, *mimbars* built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are difficult to find in today's world. Many motifs and visual symbols which can be found in the mosque's *mimbar*, such as flora, fauna, geometry, cosmos, and calligraphy, are highlighted to add more aesthetic value and uniqueness to the *mimbar*. Hence, this study aims to identify mosque *mimbar* motifs, analyze the influence and examine the classification of the motif in the Northern Region of Malaysia. This research uses qualitative methods based on observation and interviews. Based on the finding, this research found that every design of individual *mimbars* of different mosques had an internal and external meaning. Therefore, this research contributes to the future generation and nurtures their knowledge regarding the extrinsic values of the *mimbar's* aesthetics and the intrinsic meaning of its motifs that could contribute to the development of mosque *mimbar* motifs in terms of art and architecture in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Mimbar*, Motif, Mosque, Aesthetic, Northern Region

### INTRODUCTION

Building architecture and design are constantly evolving around the world. These developmental changes are the result of environmental factors. Human life in this world is in sync with the evolution of both nature and man. The natural environment also influences human behavior, which shapes local cultures. Thus, art and culture can inspire humans in producing architecture and design which are still evolving today alongside advancements in human thought.

In Malay cultural history, different theories were produced by local and oriental historians regarding the presence of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. There were various methods of spreading Islam, namely its values and practices of it, into the Malay world. Traders from Persia, Arabia, India, China, and the Malay Archipelago had spread Islam and its historical perspective. Malays were fascinated by those international relations which impacted the development of Islam, including the practice of intermarriage, moral values, leadership attitudes, and ideas of thought.

Islam arrived in the Malay Archipelago even before the Malaccan Malay Sultanate had existed. This demonstrates that Islam had been spreading in the region for the past 500 years. Islam's

widespread influence on local culture is reflected in the designs of old buildings and ancient mosques in the Malay Archipelago. This is because Islamic preachers from all over the world had visited the Malay Archipelago. Islamic teachings had spread and influenced the elements of local designs, incorporating Islamic design into it. They bring cultural elements from their home country, which they then syncretize with.

The beauty of the interior and exterior design of the mosque were attractive to the locals due to the pre-existing values and practices of the local community at that time. Some mosques display the values and culture practiced by a community from outside of the local community. Examples of this can be seen in the earlier mosques after the 15th century which exhibited numerous Hindu architectural elements after the arrival of Islam (Abdul Halim Nasir, 1995). According to Zainudin and Norhayati (2012), they also brought their influence on culture to the mosques they build. As a result of such cultural diversity, various types of decorative features of mimbar mosque designs had been produced.

The designs and motifs that appeared in the Malay world symbolize the maturity of the society in ancient times. Each type of motif has its meaning. Its decorative motifs are based on philosophy, legend, and history. Some of these symbols exist in visual design, while some do not. The motif is defined as the repetition of a design or decorative pattern. These visual symbols are usually decorative forms and colors. The basic pattern or motif is repeated according to the suitability of the position in which the carving is done. According to Othman (2000), 'motif in the art of wood carving means a piece of jewelry that is carved in two or three dimensions, then arranged and composed into a specific pattern or decorative pattern.' These motifs can be seen on the mimbar, mihrab, doors, windows, walls, and ceilings of the mosque.

### **Problem Statement**

The lack of research on the design of mosque pulpit motifs in Malaysia is due to the development of architecture today. Sculptures in the Malay world are no longer used as decorative designs on doors, palaces, mosques, and houses as artistic and aesthetic art. Due to the lack of documentation in this field of study, the historical heritage of the past has been forgotten.

According to Syarifah Fatimah Zubir (1980), society now lacks an understanding of the symbols and meanings associated with artistic elements from traditional handicrafts such as wood carving. Therefore, the understanding of the meaning of wood carving art greatly influences sculptors and spectators, especially craftsmen, in understanding the actual value of motifs and patterns.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The philosophy of Malay art can be appreciated by understanding its art and architecture. Art and architecture are expressions of its culture and worldview. The richness of its vernacular art and architectural legacy was influenced by the natural surroundings of seas and forests. The aesthetical conception in Malay art and architecture was formed by the intellectual

understanding and complementarity between man and the environment. Malay artists and craftsmen had created some of the world's most magnificent and finely crafted timber structures.

Before the arrival of Islam in the 13th century, Hindu and Buddhist beliefs influenced the art of carving. Many of the carvings made at the time used Hindu and Buddhist motifs to honor the gods. Since the 16th century, when Islam first arrived in the Kingdom of Langkasuka, the art of carving has evolved in terms of motif, meaning, and purpose.

Wood carving is a traditional Malay art form in which sculptors carve the surface of the wood to shape a motive. Flora, fauna, cosmos, geometry, and calligraphy are among the five types of motifs used on wood. Engravings, in general, do not resemble direct flora objects but are created in symbolic form to resemble the object. It is a carpentry art that existed in Peninsular Malaysia before the 16th century.

Sculpting is a Malay heritage art that has been practiced for centuries and has a high civilizational value. Aesthetic value is based on composition, motif selection, and carved forms. This process is engraving art is closely related to the philosophy of divinity and the universe. Carvings are also used on Malay houses to add aesthetic value and support the look of the building's joints.

Carving art inspired by Hindu beliefs, such as '*stupa*', '*makara*', and '*gunungan*', are still practiced today. However, flora and khat motifs influenced by the *Langkasuka Tua* style replaced Hindu animals and deities. *Stupa* carvings can be found in Malay house architectural elements such as *butons* or at the house gates. The '*gunungan*', on the other hand, resembles a mountaintop or a tree of wisdom (the tree of life), which is commonly used as a status symbol placed on a palace gate, *mimbar*, or grave.

There are two types of decorative designs that have been used to decorate mosques, namely wood carvings, and calligraphy. Decorative designs of wood carvings are usually located at the head of doors, windows, hallways, *mimbar*, and roofs. Wood carvings may consist of a single pattern or a full pattern. Single pattern motifs indicate independent, unbound, and interconnected styles. There are elements of flora, fauna, calligraphy, cosmos, and geometry. The movement of a full pattern is minimal but still exhibits complexity and has a frame. The complete pattern combines all the elements in one complete engraving form. This pattern emphasizes the elements of flora with stems, leaves, flowers, and fruit. These wood carving elements would also consist of living things, elements of the cosmos, calligraphy, and flora.

Datuk Rizuan Abdul Hamid (1998) said the first mosque *mimbar* was used in Prophet Muhammad's house in Madinah when his followers increased. The *mimbar* allows the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. to stand at a higher level than his followers to ease them in listening to the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.'s voice and to make the sermons more straightforward for greater clarity. The *mimbar* is an essential element of the mosque. This can be seen through its function related to mosque activities. For example, most *mimbars* functioned as a platform to deliver the *khutbah*. Mosques during Friday prayer (Solat Jumaat) uses a *mimbar* for the *khatib* to deliver his *khutbah*. A Khatib uses a *mimbar* to position him above the *jemaah* (listeners). It allows

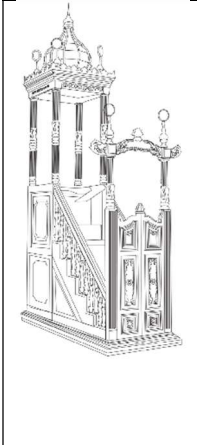
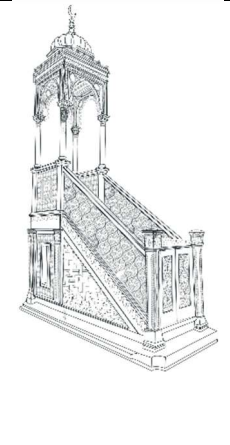
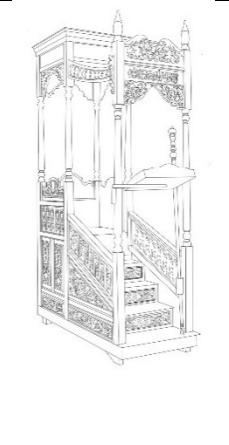
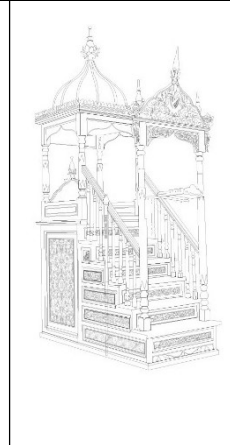
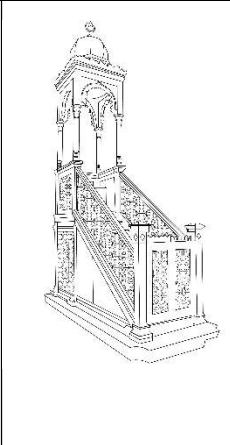
him to better project his voice to the audience or listeners. At the same time, eye contact between *khatib* and *jemaah* (listeners) can be established. Between these factors, it ensures the *jemaah* (listeners) can concentrate and better understand the contents of the *khutbah* delivered by the *khatib*.

## METHODOLOGY

The figure below shows the method used for conducting qualitative research, involving library studies and field studies. In this study, the data collected are the motifs found on the *mimbar* of old mosques in the Northern region of Malaysia, such as Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Perak. This descriptive and observational research can provide insight to the researcher for specific questions with interviews, observation, record analysis, and literature review.

For secondary data collection, the researchers conducted a secondary data analysis consisting of journals, academic theses, books, and articles related to *mimbar* and mosque architecture. This research was conducted to collect information on the motifs found in the *mimbar* mosques within these four regions. At the end of this study, this study will find various motifs in mosque pulpits.

## DATA ANALYSIS

				
Masjid Negeri, Perlis (1904)	Masjid Zahir, Kedah (1912)	Masjid Ilmiah Kg Seberang Baru, Kedah (1951)	Masjid Kota Raja, Kedah (1880)	Masjid Kapitan Keling, Penang (1801)

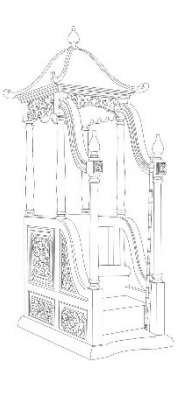
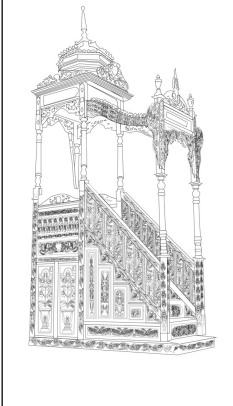
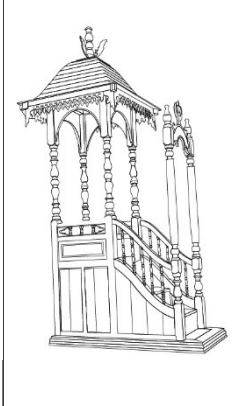
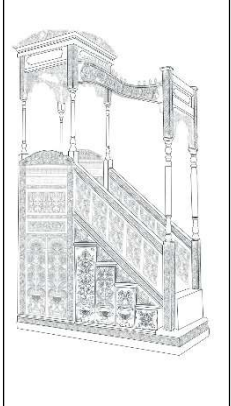

				
Masjid Lebu, Aceh, Penang (1808)	Masjid Panglima Kinta, Perak (1898)	Masjid Teluk Memali, Perak (1908)	Masjid Paloh, Perak (1912)	Masjid Ubudiah, Perak (1913)

Figure 1.1: List of Mosque Mimbar in Northern Region, Malaysia

Table 1.1: Identify of Mosque *Mimbar* Motifs

Mosque	Flora Motif	Fauna Motif	Geometry Motif	Calligraphy Motif	Cosmos Motif
<i>Masjid Negeri, Perlis</i>	<i>Bunga Raya Bunga Biji Anggur Ketam Guri Bunga Rama Bunga Matahari Bunga Lawang Pucuk Bunga Teratai</i>	-	<i>Lebah Bergantung Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon Star
<i>Masjid Zahir, Kedah</i>	<i>Bunga Pecah Lapan</i>	-	<i>Arabesque Lebah Bergantung Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon
<i>Masjid Ilmiah Kg Seberang</i>	<i>Daun Padi Pucuk Paku</i>	-	<i>Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon

<i>Baru, Kedah</i>					
<i>Masjid Kota Raja Kuala Muda, Kedah</i>	<i>Bunga Pecah 4 Bunga Cina/Lotus Daun Ketumbit Bunga Lawang Bunga Kiambang</i>	-	<i>Pucuk Rebung Lebah Bergantung Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	
<i>Masjid Kapitan Keling, Penang</i>	<i>Bunga Pecah Lapan</i>	-	<i>Arabes Lebah Bergantung Stupa / Button</i>	-	<i>Moon Star</i>
<i>Masjid Lebu Acheh, Penang</i>	<i>Daun Ayam Berpaksi Bunga Pecah 4 Bunga Matahari</i>	<i>Sisik Naga</i>	<i>Stupa / Button</i>	-	-
<i>Masjid Ubudiah, Perak</i>	<i>Bunga Pecah Lapan</i>	-	<i>Arabesque Stupa Lebah Bergantung</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	-
<i>Masjid Panglima Kinta, Perak</i>	<i>Bunga Kesidang Kerak Nasi Bunga Matahari Bunga Kemboja Acanthus Leaf Daun Bunga Matahari Bunga Tanjung Daun Pucuk</i>	-	<i>Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	-

	<i>Paku Bunga Sakura</i>				
<i>Masjid Paloh, Perak</i>	<i>Daun Sesayap Bunga Matahari Bunga Kemboja Acanthus Leaf Daun Bunga Matahari Bunga Tanjung Daun Pucuk Paku Bunga Kesidang Kerak Nasi Bunga Sakura</i>	-	-	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon Star
<i>Masjid Teluk Memali, Perak</i>	<i>Daun Sesayap Bunga Matahari</i>	-	<i>Pucuk Rebung Stupa / Button</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon Star

## RESULT DATA ANALYSIS

 Table 1.2: Categories of Mosque *Mimbar* Motifs

<b>Flora</b>	<b>Fauna</b>	<b>Geometry</b>	<b>Calligraphy</b>	<b>Cosmos</b>
<i>Bunga Raya Bunga Biji Anggur Ketam Guri Bunga Rama Bunga Matahari Bunga Lawang Pucuk Bunga Teratai Bunga Kerak</i>	<i>Sisik Naga</i>	<i>Arabesque Stupa / Button Lebah Bergantung</i>	<i>Khat Thuluth</i>	Moon Star

<i>Nasi</i>				
<i>Acanthus leaf</i>				
<i>Bunga Tanjung</i>				
<i>Bunga Kesidang</i>				
<i>Daun Ketumbit</i>				
<i>Daun Sesayap</i>				
<i>Daun Padi</i>				
<i>Bunga Sakura</i>				
<i>Daun Pucuk Paku</i>				
<i>Bunga Kemboja</i>				
<i>Daun Ayam</i>				
<i>Berpaksi</i>				
<i>Bunga Kiambang</i>				
<i>Bunga Pecah 4</i>				
<i>Bunga Pecah 8</i>				

The results of this research that had been conducted by the researcher found that there are various types of motifs in Northern Region *mimbar* mosques like flora, geometry, calligraphy, and cosmos motifs. The flora that were found are *Bunga Raya* (hibiscus), *Bunga Biji Anggur*, *Ketam Guri*, *Bunga Rama-Rama*, *Bunga Matahari* (sunflower), *Bunga Lawang* (star anise), *Pucuk* (bud), *Bunga Teratai* (lotus), *Bunga Kerak Nasi*, *Acanthus leaf*, *Bunga Tanjung* (*mimusops elengi*), *Bunga Kesidang*, *Daun Ketumbit*, *Daun Sesayap*, *Daun Padi* (paddy leaf), *Bunga Sakura* (cherry blossom), *Bunga Kemboja* (frangipani), *Daun Ayam Berpaksi*, *Bunga Kiambang*, *Bunga Pecah 4*, *Bunga Pecah 8*, *Daun Pucuk Paku* are the most flora motifs that have been used at the mosque *mimbar*. The selection of floral motifs is based on appropriateness and composition, characteristic uniqueness (Mohd Pakarul 1980, Muhammad Affandi, 1995). Only one fauna motif found 'Sisik Naga' was stylized in Masjid Lebuh Acheh in Penang. The calligraphy motif that has been carved in this *mimbar* is *Khat Thuluth* and moon and star are the most often Cosmos motifs that have been used. It is shown that Islam was spread in the Malay world since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Flora and calligraphy motifs are most widely used because they are in line with Islamic teachings that prohibit the use of figurine-shaped motifs. The results of the study also found that the motives used were selected from plants around the area.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has proven that *mimbars* in mosques within the Northern Region of Malaysia consist of the same motifs in their wood carvings, i.e. flora, geometric, calligraphy, and cosmos-inspired designs compared to other shapes. These motifs were present because of core local beliefs and faith, supported by several important factors such as religion, beliefs, practices, philosophy, and environment. The 4 above-mentioned motifs are the foundational motifs found in wood carvings on *mimbars* of the mosques within the Northern Region. The use and placement motifs in wood carvings are not random in nature, rather, they are used with purpose, discipline, and design. Craftsmen always look for ideas and inspiration to create



carvings with more detail and quality as a way to maintain Malay wood carvings' prestige and uniqueness, not plagiarized from outside influence. Malay wood carvings can be found beyond the borders of Malaysia as even foreigners would request carvings to be exhibited for others to see the beauty of Malay wood carvings. Each motif created has its own meaning. Craftsmen, and even spectators, can appreciate the specific intricacies of the various designs, as each element of a motif has functions beyond the extrinsic values of beauty, but also intrinsic values forming the essences of life through the designs.

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