

Turco-Persian Influence in the Islamic Art of the Malay Archipelago

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ABSTRACT

In the Islamic history of the Malay Archipelago, the Persian's contribution in terms of the artistic repertoire influence towards the shaping of the Malay's Islamic art has rarely been discussed by scholars. This is troubling as much of the Persian land (Iran & Iraq) from the 10th until early 13th century was inhabited by the Turkic people from Central Asia who were heavily influenced and thoroughly 'Persianised'. Therefore, the art historical method was employed in this study to analyse the artistic connection between the Malay Archipelago with the Turco-Persian Dynasties in Iran. The findings indicate that there is a strong artistic connection with the Turco-Persian Dynasties, namely the Ghaznavid Dynasty (977-1186CE), Seljuk Sultanate of Rum (1077-1308CE) and the Candarogullari Beylik in Kastamonu, Anatolia. Although a small fraction of the Ghaznavid and Seljuk Islamic art survives, their influence can still be seen in the Islamic art used to adorn the Mahmut Bey Mosque in Kastamonu which is slowly deteriorating in time. The Mahmut Bey Mosque is a vital piece of evidence as the surviving Islamic art used to adorn the mosque is a combination traditional Turkic art with the the Seljuk and Ghanavids forms of Islamic art, in which influence of previous religion practiced by the Turkic people such as Tengrism and Buddhism are also evident. These influences were then brought to the Malay Archipelago where it is then acculturated in the existing Malay art culture, particularly in woodcarving and masonry of early Islamic tombstones.

Keywords: Turco-Persian, Malay Art, Islamic Art, Malay Archipelago, Mahmut Bey.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Malay Archipelago which today consists of modern Indonesia, Peninsula Malaysia, Thailand, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei is a gateway that connects east and west by sea. Due to its strategic location, the Malay Archipelago had been frequented by international traders, merchants, royal and political convoys as well as religious missionaries. Although much of the international connection had been examined and studied thoroughly by scholars in the past, one aspect had been left out and rarely been discussed in detail, that is Persia's connection with the Malay Archipelago in terms of Islamic art. In recent years, the Persian or Arab-Persian connection had only been examined from a religious literary point of view, where the focus was more concerned on the religious text related to Sufism,

intellectual traditions, epics, classical literary, Persian loanwords, meanings and philosophical concepts in the Malay language as well as political, royal court culture, administration and trade (Lubis 2018; Heriyanto 2018; Esfandiar & Rahman 2018; Alatas 2018; Al-Attas 2011, 1966; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2010; Gibb 2010a). Even though it is acknowledged that the Persians had a significant contribution in culture (Alatas 2018; Hilarian 2018; Al-Attas 2011; Gibb 2010a), the Persian influence in Malay Islamic art has not been established, which to my knowledge has never been elaborated in depth. This cultural gap was also noticed by Hilarian (2018), where he stated that although Persian cultural contribution from West Asia to Southeast Asia is significant, it is often neglected (2018: 15). He based his argument on the negligence of the European scholars who have may misrepresented the enormous role played by the Persians as they were

grouped together in the all encompassing umbrella of 'Islamic civilization' after the Arab conquest of Iran in 642 CE (Hilarian 2018: 16). While Hilarian suggested in his analysis that the early Persian traders in the 6th century CE and the later *Farsi* speaking India Sufi missionaries had play a role in disseminating Persian influence to the *Lautan Melayu* (the Malay sea), his analysis is however focused on musical instruments. In addition to this, the query of the 'Persian' identity has not been truly answered in a satisfactory manner. This is due to the reason that the Persian lands was not solely inhabitant by the Arabs, Arab-Persian, Persian or the *Farsi* speaking Indians as there was also a huge migration of Turks from Central Asia to Baghdad, Iraq during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mansur (r. 754-775 CE). These Turks would later establish their own dynasty – such as the Seljuk Dynasty (1037-1194 CE) – that is known historically as a "Persian Dynasty" that practices Turco-Persian culture. Therefore, what is referred to as "Persian" might also be referring to the Turkic Dynasties that existed in Anatolia, Iraq, Iran and also India which established ties with the Malay Archipelago before the establishment of the Malacca Sultanate in the 15th century.

2. PERSIA AND THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

The relationship between the Persian people or the land of Persia (*Parsi*) with the Malay Archipelago has been established long before the advent of Islam. It is believed that this relationship had started in the 3rd century CE where Persian traders and merchants from the Parthian Empire (247BC – 224CE) had already been frequenting ports in the Malay Archipelago (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2010). According to Wheatley (1961), it is said that there were a total of 500 Persian traders who inhabited the Tun-Sun port located at Prachuap Khiri Khan in the western provinces of Thailand, while others suggest Chumphon or Ranong in the southern Thai province near the Gulf of Thailand/Siam, bordering the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. It is interesting to note that one of the early Malay kingdoms near the Malay-Thai isthmus is the Kingdom of Langkasuka, which is believed to exist from the 2nd century until the early 16th century in Patani, southern provinces of Thailand (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2010; Gallop 2005; Wheatley 1961). Intriguingly, Patani, Kelantan and Terengganu – all of which are located in the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula – shares the same artistic characteristics, development and repertoires in their form and style of Islamic art known as the 'East Coast' style, in which Patani had the finest art, Terengganu owned the finest artistry while Kelantan was in between (Gallop 2005, 2002). In addition to this, the red Quran cover, illumination, book binding, calligraphy script, arabesques and the page layout system of the Qurans from the east coast also has evidence of Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal (all of which are Turkish-Turkic

lineage) influences that is on par in terms of artistry and technical finesse with the Ottoman, Persian and Indian production (Ros Mahwati & Zuliskandar 2018, Ros Mahwati 2018; Gallop 2018; Dzul Haimi 1997, 2007).

The Parthian Empire was later succeeded by the Sasanian Empire which ruled from 224 CE until 651 CE, making it the longest-lived Persian dynasty and the last Persian imperial dynasty before the Muslim conquest in the mid 7th century (Fattah & Caso 2009; Wiesehöfer 2001). According to Wiesehöfer (2001), the Sasanian's greatest extent encompasses all of present-day Iran and Iraq and extended from the eastern Mediterranean which includes Anatolia and Egypt until Pakistan, and from parts of southern Arabia to the Caucasus and Central Asia (Wiesehöfer 2001). It is believed that due to the empire vastness, its cultural influences had extended far beyond its territorial borders which includes India, Turkestan, China, Syria, Asia Minor, Constantinople, the Balkans, Egypt, Spain, Africa and helped shape European and Asian medieval art (Durant 2011; Matteo 2002; Kianush 1999). Furthermore, the Persian culture had also become the basis for much of the Islamic culture, particularly in art, architecture, music, literature and philosophy through out the Muslim world (Zarrinkoob 1999, 1975), where Islamic art was treated as the true heir to Sasanian art (Kianush 1999).

Similar to its predecessor, the Sasanian Empire further strengthened and controlled the existing sea trading routes to Southeast Asia and China in the 4th century as Persian ships sailed towards Vietnam and southern China through the Malaysian Peninsula (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2010; Wheatley 1961). However, after the demise of the Sasanian Empire by the Rashidun Caliphate (632-661 CE), and later the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) in Baghdad, the sea trading route towards the east was dominated by the Arab merchants. There were two main sea trading route, the first is via the Red Sea, while the second is through Iraq and Syria that requires a combination of land, river and sea travel to reach the Persian Gulf (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar Ramli 2010). These routes were later improved by the Abbasid after their capital was moved in 762 CE from Kufa to Samarra, near the Tigris River in Baghdad which allows them to control the Tigris River that connects the Persian Gulf directly (Zuliskandar & Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 2009; Hattstein & Delius 2004). Consequently, there exists several ports in the Malay Archipelago that were often frequented by Arab-Persian traders from the middle east during the Abbasid period, such as Kataha (Kedah) in the north of the Malay Peninsula, as well as Lamuri (Aceh), Takuapa and *Zabaj* (Palembang) in Sumatera, Indonesia (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2018). It is for this reason that a coin dating from the Sasanian period (224-651 CE) in the 5th century was found in Yarang, Patani as well as

two coins from the Abbasid period (750-1258 CE) where one of them is dated 848 CE, during the reign of Caliph al-Mutawallid (847-861 CE) (Zuliskandar & Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 2009; Srisuchat 1990). Furthermore, archaeological findings which consists of Persian and Middle-Eastern ceramics and glass products such as perfume containers or oil lamp as well as beads made from glass or semi precious stone dated from the 8th and 9th century were found in the Bujang Valley, Kedah and Kuala Selingsing, Perak establishes the Middle-Eastern trader's connection with the Malay Peninsula, where the Persians were pioneers (Zuliskandar & Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 2009). While other ancient ports that were also visited by the Arab and Persian traders includes Kota Cina in Sumatera, Patani and Chaiya in Thailand, Singapore, Tioman Island (Tiyuman) in the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, Melaka, along with Kota Tinggi and Johor Lama in Johor (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Zuliskandar 2018).

In addition to this, Abū Zaid of Siraf (c. 916 CE) who was one of the early Arab traveller to the Malay Peninsular had mentioned "*Kalāh*" – which is most likely to be located in Kedah or Takuapa in the Tambralingga region of northern Kataha (Kedah) around the 8th and 9th century (Zuliskandar & Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 2018) – where he reported that it was one of the most important trading port in the Malay Peninsular and a prosperous town inhabited by Muslim from India and Persia (Hilarian 2018). Similarly, Ibn Khurdādhbih (c. 844-8 CE) had also reported about a port named "*Kalāh*" (known by the Chinese as *Ko-lo*) that was important to the Arab and Persian seafarers as they conducted trade there with the Chinese and Malay merchants in the 9th century (Hilarian 2018; Wheatley 1961). Moreover, Abū'l-Fidā reported that the town of *Kalāh* was inhabited by Muslims, Indians and Persians (Wheatley 1961: 221). Lastly, al-Mas'ūdī (c. 943 CE) reported a large scale of Muslim migration consisting of 120,000 or 200,000 Arab and Persian merchants and traders in 877 CE whom fled Khanfu (Canton) and sought refuge in *Kalah* (Kedah) and Palembang (Al-Attas 1969: 11). It is also interesting to know that Ayut'ia or Ayutthaya in Siam (founded in 1350 CE), present day Thailand was known by Arab travellers who wrote navigational tracts for mariners coasting the Malay Peninsular during the 15th and 16th century as *Shahr Nawī* or *Shahr-i-Naw* in Persian which translates as "New Town" (Al-Attas 1966: 3). These reports together with many others clearly highlights the Persians presence in the Malay Archipelago from the 8th until the 16th century.

However, there is a probability that the "Persians" mentioned in Arabic sources could have also be referring to the Turks in Iran, Iraq and India. This is due to a large influx of Turkic people from Central Asia in Baghdad that were brought in by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-775 CE) as Turkish slaves (Mamluks)

to serve as the caliph's army (Eaton 2019; Hattstein & Delius 2004). After the Abbasid Caliphate had fractured to autonomous dynasties, the Turks had slowly gain status and dominance, where the ruling power in Iran and Iraq were transferred first to the Iranian Buyids (945-1055 CE), then the Seljuks Turks (1055-1194 CE) who captured Baghdad in 945 and 1055 CE respectively (Richards 2020; Hattstein & Delius 2004). These Turkic Dynasties – including the Ghaznavid (977-1186 CE) whose territories include Iran, Afghanistan, much of Transoxiana and the northwest Indian subcontinent – were heavily influenced and thoroughly "Persianised" in terms of culture, language, literature and habits (Meisami 1999). It is for this reason that these Islamic Turkic Dynasties were regarded as a "Persian Dynasty" despite of their Central Asia Turkic origin (Ziad 2006).

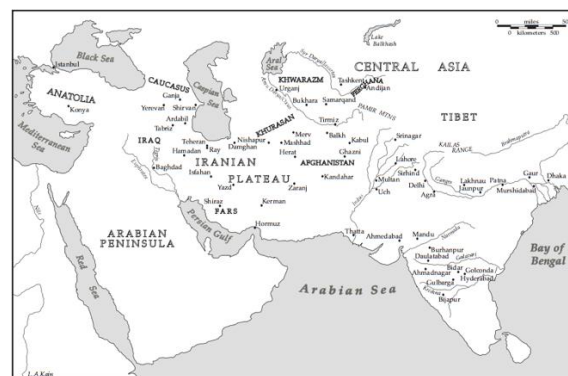


Figure 1: Map of the Persianate world (900-1900 CE)
Source: India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765 (2019)

In addition to this, India during the period of 1000-1765 CE was considered as the Persianate age of India, where Persian or Turco-Persian cultural influences, particularly Turkic military prowess, Islamic religion and Persian culture; had spread throughout the Indian subcontinent (Eaton 2019; Asher & Talbot 2006). These Turco-Persian culture were disseminated by several Turkic Dynasties such as the Ghaznavid (977-1186 CE), Ghurids (879-1215 CE), Delhi Sultanate (1206-1525 CE), Tughluq (1320-1412 CE) as well as the Mughal Dynasty (1526-1857 CE) who were either of Turkic, Turkish, Turco-Mongol, Persian or Kurdish origin (Asher & Talbot 2006; Chandra 2004; Jackson 1975). It is for this reason that Haw (2018) stated that although the term "*Dashi*" (or sometimes spelled "*Ta-shi*") in Chinese records refers to the Arabs in general during the 12th century, the term was a wide-ranging name for many countries where those known are only a particular few (Haw 2018). Therefore, Haw suggest that "*Dashi*" would might as well include parts of what is now Pakistan and even north-west India, in which by the 12th century, Lahore had become the capital of the Muslim Ghaznavids who themselves were of Turkic origin (Haw 2018). This indicates that there is a probability that the *Dashi*, Arab-Persian or Persian in historical sources could also include the Turco-Persian Islamic dynasties in Iran, India and also Anatolia.

Furthermore, Ibn Battuta had also reported in his *Rehlah* that the people in Sumatera and *Tawalsi* had similar traits with the Turks in terms of culture, language, appearances and military practices (Gibb 2010a). He also mentioned that the king of *Tawalsi* is against the king of China, while the princess of Kailūkari (a port city in *Tawalsi*) named Urdujā spoke Turkish and wrote the *Basmala* on paper in Arabic using pen and ink as well inquiring Ibn Battuta about India (Gibb 2010a). Although various opinions exist as to the location of *Tawalsi*, Kelantan is one of the probable locations as the region was ruled by a king named ‘Raja Sang Tawal’ (*sanskrit. Thavala Singha*) and his princess is named ‘Arduja Wijayamala Singha’ which might be referring to Urdujā whom Ibn Battuta met (Al-Ahmadi 1985). Other than Urdujā, Sultan Ahmad (1319-1406 CE), the grandson of Sultan Al-Malik Al-Salih from the Samudera Pasai Sultanate had also inquired about Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq (1325-1351 CE) from the Delhi Sultanate in India who was also of Turkic origin (Gibb 2010a; Jackson 1999). However, before Ibn Battuta reached Samudera Pasai, he had first visited Kastamonu (*Qastamūniya*) and the Mahmut Bey Mosque during his travels in Asia Minor and South Russia where he met the Sultan of the *Candarogullari Beylik*, Süleyman Bey and prayed together with the Sultan in the Mahmut Bey Mosque (Gibb 2010b; UNESCO 2014). This shows that the two lands were already connected by the sea trading routes which had existed prior to Ibn Battuta’s visit as the Sultans of the Malay Archipelago were already acquainted with the Turks together with its culture and language (Gibb 2010a, 2010b).

In addition to this, there is a historical legend that narrates the intimate relationship between the sultanate of Samudera Pasai and the Langkasuka kingdom during the reign of King Bharubhasa/Sultan Mahmud, where this cooperation had given birth to the ‘Chermin Empire’ in 1339 CE which encompasses the northern part of the Malay Peninsula, Champa and Samudera Pasai with its capital in Langkasuka, Patani (Tun Suzana 2011). This relationship is evident based on the Malay *syair* inscribed on the Minye Tujuh tombstone dated 1380 CE which is believed to belong to a king’s daughter in Minye Tujuh, Aceh as it mentions that the deceased is from the “*Bhasa clan*” which possesses “*Kedah and Pasai*” (van der Molen 2008: 52), where “*Bhasa clan*” is understood as belonging to the family or related to King Bharubhasa of Langkasuka. This is not surprising as the legend mentioned that King Bharubhasa had accepted Islam in the hands of a *ulama* who has family ties with Sultan Al-Malik Al-Zahir (1297-1326 CE) and the king’s sister, Puteri Chendana, was the empress of Sultan Al-Zahir. Moreover, Noorhaiza Noordin who is a master woodcarver (*adiguru*) in Malay art had stated that the Islamic art found in Aceh and south Sulawesi (Makassar) has many

and obvious similarities with the Langkasuka motif that is found in Kelantan, particularly on royal tombstones and religious buildings (Noorhaiza, personal communication, March 17, 2021).

Although it is known that the Ghaznavid’s had initiated a major expansion of the Islamic realm towards the east as far as the southern island of the Philippines and the Seljuk’s towards the west in the 11th century (Asher & Talbot 2006), this study focuses on the Islamic art used in the Mahmut Bey mosque located in Kastamonu, Anatolia which is still in the domain of the Persianate world. This is due to the reason that the Islamic art utilized in the mosque is a combination of the aforementioned Turk dynasties together with several Buddhism and Tengrism influences that has still survived and preserved in great condition. Hence, the art history approach would be adopted in this study in order to analyse and discuss the connection between the two lands in a detailed and historical manner.

The art history method is an approach that identifies Islamic art in a specific place and period in a detailed manner in terms of development, influence and movement of the art that is transferred from one place to another by means of human involvement in activities such as trade, territorial expansion, political, emigration and the spread of the Islamic religion (Blair 2006; Hattstein & Delius 2004). In addition to this, Grabar (2006) provides a more detailed definition of the art historical method where he described it as a method that analyses the different qualitative variations of “things” made by man that can be measured in terms of the manufacturing techniques or other connotations: to style – such as proportion, composition, colour; and to mode – which is a complex combination of style and subject matter. This method is often employed by experts in the field of Islamic art such as Whelan (1990) and Blair (2006) in the study of Islamic calligraphy, and also Hattstein and Delius (2004) to name a few in the general survey of Islamic art. This method is favoured as it examines the unique characteristics of the Islamic art found in a particular region and its influence in other parts of the Islamic world. This method is also essential as it combines art and history in its approach since it is impossible to study Islamic art if it is removed out of the historical context.

3. CONNECTION BETWEEN ANATOLIA WITH THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

Although it has been discussed that the Malay Archipelago’s connection with the Persianate Dynasties in Iran and India shows close ties with the Seljuk’s and the Ghaznavid’s, it is however difficult to analyse its artistic connection as there are only several surviving evidence of their Islamic Art that still survives. For example, only a small fragment of the elaborate marble panel carved with foliate arabesques decoration

consisting of full and half-palmettes from the palace at Ghazna (11th century) that survived, as well as the decorative marble panel on the cenotaph of Mahmud of Ghazna (12th century) which consists of a horseshoe-shaped arch and intricate carvings (Waley 2018; Hattstein & Delius 2004). In addition to this, there are also other monuments that were erected by the Ghaznavids, Ghurids and other Turkish dynasties in Iran and India which consist of arches, towers, *madrasa*, mosques and tombs to name a few (Hattstein & Delius 2004). Although significant, these monuments were mainly decorated with Quranic inscriptions bands written in Kufic script and superbly carved terracotta scrolls, *muqarnas*, geometrical design, interlaced knots, rosettes and arabesques that exhibits only to a certain degree of the Islamic art used during the period. Regardless of this, the Islamic art motifs that was used by the Turkic Dynasties such as the Karakhanid, Ghaznavid and the Great Seljuk on architectural monuments and objects consists mainly of geometrical patterns, lotus flower, palmettes, *rūmī* (foliate scroll or arabesques), tendrils, lozenge shapes as well as braided and interlaced knot motifs (Blair & Bloom 1996; Aslanapa 1973). According to Aslanapa (1973), these motifs were continued to be employed in the Rum Seljuk Sultanate (1077-1308 CE) and the Islamic art of the Ottoman but were later combined with local and other influences to create their own special preference and form of Islamic art. For instance, Nemlioğlu (2009) stated that the Islamic art and architecture of the Mahmut Bey Mosque had also influenced the Ottoman's.

As for the Seljuk's, most of their monumental architecture along with its capital and artistic centre were located in the city of Merv, Central Asia even though they were rapidly expanding towards Iran from Transoxiana. Even so, a large number of Seljuk buildings and monuments have survived greater in Anatolia rather than Iran and Central Asia (Hattstein & Delius 2004). Due to this, the Mahmut Bey mosque in Kastamonu, Anatolia, is vital in this discussion as the region was under the rule of the Rum Seljuk Sultanate (1077-1308 CE) – the successor of the Great Seljuk Empire (1037-1194 CE) – starting from the reign of Sultan Alaeddin Key Kubad (Kayqubad I) (1220-1237 CE) until the slow demise of the sultanate after their defeat with the Mongols in the battle *Köse Dağ* in 1243 CE (Cahen 2014; Zaporozhets 2012). With the decline of the Seljuk and the rise of the Mongol-Ilkhanate, the land of Anatolia was fractured and ruled by several small Turk Oghuz tribe chiefs where they eventually established small principalities known as the "Anatolian Beyliks" in the late 11th until 13th century (Zaporozhets 2012; Köprülü 1992). The Mahmut Bey Mosque which was build in 1366 CE by Kasim Bey from the *Candarogullari Beyliks* (1292-1462 CE) in Kastamonu was one of the Anatolian Beyliks who ruled the

Paphlagonia region which includes Sinop in the black sea region and also the region of Zonguldak, Bartın, Karabük, Samsun, Bolu, Ankara and Çankiri from 1292 CE until 1461 CE (Yücel 1980).

In addition to this, the Mahmut Bey Mosque is listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO under the cultural category in 2014 due to its uniqueness, authenticity and originality, where it is considered as a masterpiece of Turkish Islamic art and architecture (UNESCO 2014). Although the exterior appearance is rather simple, the interior is heavily decorated with Islamic art drawn on wooden surface using a technique known as "*kalem işi*" (pencil drawing/decoration or brushwork technique) where the motifs are drawn on ceilings, pillars and columns – mostly wooden surfaces (UNESCO 2014; Nemlioğlu 2009). Other than this, there are also carvings on the wooden main door which is considered as another important and outstanding part of the Mahmut Bey Mosque as the decorative elements were carved intricately by Amel-I Abdullah bin Mahmud El nakkaş from Ankara (UNESCO 2014; Nemlioğlu 2009). Due to this, the mosque is considered both unique and special by UNESCO in terms of the richness of the Islamic art decorations and particularly preserved in better condition compared to other mosques in Anatolia that are bigger, such as the Eşrefoğlu Mosque, Afyon Great Mosque, Arslanhane Mosque and Sivrihisar Mosque (UNESCO 2014). However, even though there are various motifs in the interior of the Mosque, this study will only highlight two motifs which stands out from the rest and has close resemblance with the Islamic art found in the Malay Archipelago, that is the lotus flower motif (RB-RT 6) (Figure 2) and the *rūmī salbek* motif (P-R1) (Figure 5).



Figure 2: (left & middle) The lotus flower (RB-RT 6) motif in Mahmut Bey Mosque. Both image and motif tracing by author, Muhammad Uzair Ismail (right) Sultan al-Malik al-Salih's tombstone **Source:** <https://digitalcollections.nyp1.org/items/510d47dd-d3d3-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99> (al-Malik's tombstone)

The lotus flower (RB-RT 6) motif shown in Figure 2 above (left and middle) is a motif that is found extensively in the Mahmut Bey Mosque that adorns the wooden beams that supports the ceiling. This motif has

three different variations which are similar but with its own distinct differences, in which the one showed here is the most complete, beautiful and preserved compared to others. This motif comprises of three parts; the lower bottom which has a *rūmī* inside the tear-drop shape, the middle part which looks like a human or animal body that has two feet, two arms or wings and one head while the upper part of the motif is topped by the lotus flower bud. According to Doğanay (2012) and Aslanapa (1973), the *rūmī* – which is named after the word ‘Rum’ that denotes Anatolia – is similar to the arabesque as it consists mainly of foliate scrolls or vegetal tendrils and was used extensively during the Seljuk period. However, there are several scholars who believe that the *rūmī* had originated from Central Asia and is actually a stylized form of the wings, body and legs of an animal. One of which is Nemlioğlu (2009) – who is a Turkish scholar who analysed the Islamic art motifs and technique inside Mahmut Bey Mosque – where she stated that the Islamic art decorations for the Mahmut Bey Mosque was brought by the Turks from Central Asia (Nemlioğlu, personal communication, June 25, 2019). This is particularly interesting as the lotus flower motif and the *rūmī* shown above (Figure 2) has a mixture of both vegetal scroll and stylized form of an animal, which is most likely to be the double-headed eagle as it was adopted by the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and the Anatolian/Turkic beyliks of medieval Anatolia in the early 13th century from the Byzantines that symbolizes power, dominion and royalty (Soucek 1997). The same analysis could also be attributed to the middle part of the lotus flower motif (RB-RT 6) as the characteristics of the double-headed eagle is more apparent, but with shallower wings and a single head which can be deduced to reflect the *Candarogullari Beyliks* stylized preference of the Seljuk’s symbol, which is topped by the lotus bud crown.

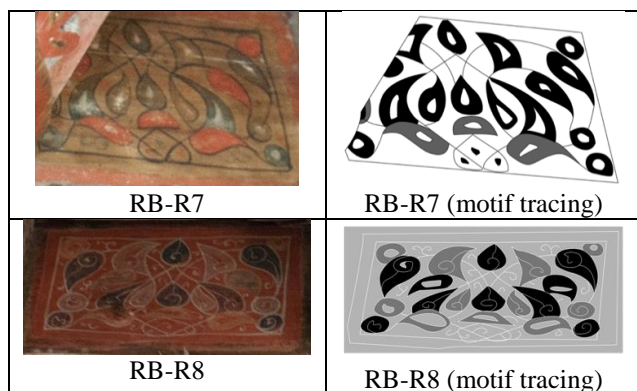


Figure 3: Image of *Rūmī* motif inside Mahmut Bey Mosque (RB-R7 and RB-R8). Both image and motif tracing by author, Muhammad Uzair Ismail

Although the *rūmī* inside the teardrop shape in Figure 2 is relatively simple, there are several other examples in the Mahmut Bey Mosque which are quite intricate and shows the full characteristics of the *rūmī*, such as the RB-R7 and RB-R8 *rūmī* motif (Figure 3). These motifs – particularly the RB-R7 – is larger and a

more refined-complete version of the *rūmī* compared to the *rūmī* of RB-RT 6, where the form, characteristics and composition is visibly seen. Furthermore, these *rūmī* shares similar characteristics to the Islamic art used to adorn Sultan al-Malik al-Salih’s (1297 CE) tombstone in northern Aceh, Sumatera and also the *Bunga Langkasuka* or *Kelopak Dewa* motif (Figure 4) commonly used in woodcarving in the east-coast region of the Malay Peninsular. Even though there are earlier dated tombstones and Sultan al-Malik al-Salih is not considered as the first Muslim ruler in Sumatera (Al-Attas 2011: 20), Al-Malik tombstone is the most decorated in terms of the variety of Islamic art motif available, while others are more focused on the epigraphy. However, it should be noted that when these motifs are described as similar, it is not in the sense of a direct copy, but similar in terms of traits, form and characteristics of the *rūmī*. This can be seen particularly in the wings and the onion-shaped lozenge in the middle part of the RB-R7 and RB-R8 *rūmī* which is constructed by joining two half palmette leaf and topped by the lotus bud. Even so, the *Bunga Langkasuka* motif (Figure 4) is much fiercer, intricate and sophisticated if compared to the Mahmut Bey’s *rūmī*.



Figure 4: (left) The Langkasuka Kelopak Dewa motif in the form of lotus bud used for the mimbar of Surau Langgar, Kelantan (right) Lotus flower motif wind panel by Malaysian woodcarving master (adiguru), Noorhaiza Nordin **Source:** Spirit of Wood: The Art of Woodcarving (2003) & Nuansa Ukiran Kayu Melayu (2015)

This suggest that the *Bunga Langkasuka* and *Kelopak Dewa* had been altered to suit the local’s artistic preferences without completely altering the physical denotations of the motifs, but certainly connotes different meaning and symbolism. In addition to this, the placement and stylization of the motif – particularly the lotus flower motif (RB-RT 6) if we were to compare it with Al-Malik’s tombstone – is different, where the wings of Al-Malik’s tombstone are curved upwards and stylized to have a cloud-like appearance, while the lotus bud or a simplified form of the *rūmī* is placed at the middle-bottom base of the tombstone. The lotus motif which is situated at the middle-bottom base of Al-Malik and other *Batu Aceh* type tombstone was identified by Yatim (1985) is interesting, because both Al-Malik and the Mahmut Bey Mosque uses the lotus flower as their main floral motif (Nemlioğlu 2009; Yatim 1985). This might have caused the Turco-Persian influence to be easily accepted by the Malays by means

of acculturation as their artistic repertoires were similar since the Turks and the Malays practiced Buddhism before Islam. In addition to this, there is another motif and element which ties the Turkic connection with the Malay Archipelago, that is the knot motif known as *band-i Rumi* or Anatolian knot.

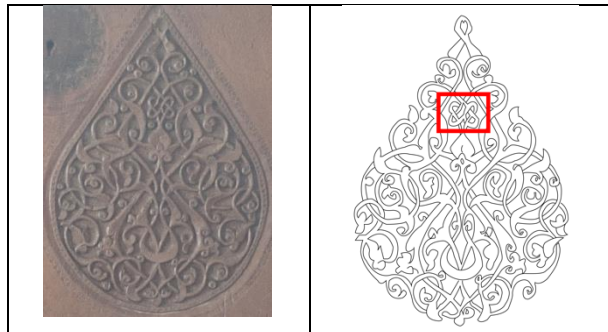


Figure 5: The P-R1 *rūmī* motif carved on the wooden main door of Mahmut Bey Mosque. Both image and motif tracing by author, Muhammad Uzair Ismail

The P-R1 motif shown above (Figure 5) is a stylized *rūmī* composed in a water drop shape known as “*Salbek*” (Persian) or “*Salbaks*” (Turkish) (Onat 2017). It is a part of a bigger composition that is usually added at the lower and upper part of the rounded-shaped medallion known as “*Shamsāh*” or “*Shamsa/Semse*” which translates as sun and is also decorated with *rūmī* (Abbas 2018; Onat 2017). The *Salbek* and *Shamsāh* are commonly combined to symbolize the sun and its light which is used primarily for Quran illumination (Onat 2017) – particularly on the front piece – and also on architecture, such as the P-R1 motif that is carved on the main wooden door of the Mahmut Bey Mosque. However, the most interesting motif in this overall composition is the knot motif, known as *band-i Rumi*. The *band-i Rumi* which is located in the upper-middle part of the P-R1 composition, on top of the lotus bud (highlighted as red box), is relatively interesting as the knot motif is also found extensively used by the Turkic Dynasties in different stylization, size and combination. Although the example shown here is relatively small, there are other bigger knot motifs with different stylization found inside the Mahmut Bey Mosque. However, this knot motif – which is inside the P-R1 motif – would suffice for this analysis as the form and size is similar to the knot motif found on Al-Malik’s tombstone that is placed on top of the pomegranate like-shape (see Figure 2). Nonetheless, the knot motif (*band-i Rumi*) is also found on other tombstone, objects and architecture as well, such as mosques, *madrasah*, palaces and noble or respected individuals to name a few. Although it can be argued that the knot motif is a common motif that can be found in Buddhist, Byzantine and Celtic art, but the context, stylization, placement, grouping and association hints towards a more intimate connection with the Turks from Central Asia compared to others, as much of the Islamic art influences in the Malay Archipelago came from the “Persians”, which is now understood as referring to the Turkic Dynasties in

India, Iran and Anatolia that practices Turco-Persian culture.

4. CONCLUSION

It is without a doubt that the Persian influence in the Malay Archipelago was brought by the Turks or Muslims who practice or were themselves influenced by the Turco-Persian culture. These Turco-Persian influences would then help shape the formation of Malay Islamic art and culture by means of acculturation, where some of the best examples can be seen particularly in Aceh (Sumatra), Kelantan, Terengganu, Patani, south Sulawesi and to lesser degree, Borneo and Jawa; that is mainly used to adorn royal tombstones as well as religious buildings and objects. Therefore, this analysis indicates that the Malay Archipelago is a part of the bigger Muslim Persianate world that is evident by the Islamic art motifs used. Even so, this study only offers us a small fraction of a larger effort to explore and analyse the artistic connection between the Malay Archipelago with the Turco-Persian Dynasties in India, Iran-Iraq and also Anatolia from a visual and art historical perspective. Hence, the Turco-Persian influences in the Malay world should be recognized and highlighted in future studies related to the Malay Islamic art and architecture in addition to the Hindu-Buddha influences.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

The main content of this paper is based on the research and analysis conducted by Muhammad Uzair Ismail with critical feedback and advice from Zuliskandar Ramli and Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria. In addition, all photographs and outline tracing of the motifs inside Mahmut Bey Mosque in Kastamonu were taken and done by Muhammad Uzair Ismail.

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