



# Trade, Politics, and Sufi Synthesis in the Formation of Southeast Asian Islamic Architecture

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The Nusantara region, known as *Bilad al-Jawah* in Arab and Persian texts and whose Muslim community was collectively called Jawi in Malay, contains the world's largest Muslim community today. It encompasses the southern half of Southeast Asia and is home to speakers of Austronesian languages. Islam became established as a local cultural force relatively late in this maritime region; around the beginning of the Islamic era Javanese and later Sumatran Malay rulers constructed temple complexes to the Hindu and Buddhist creeds and were patrons of Buddhist centers of learning. Their maritime empires shaped the region's shared aesthetic and linguistic bases, which were inherited by the multiethnic actors behind the pan-Nusantara Islamic culture that flourished in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. This is reflected in the use of the Malay language in trade and in religious literature and diplomacy, and of the Javanese-Indic (or Hindu-Javanese) synthesis in architecture built for Muslim communities. The legacy of the East Javanese Majapahit Empire (1294–1527) was particularly formative for the region's early Islamic architecture.

Surveying selected historic Nusantara monuments, this chapter will explore the bases for claiming the formation of a Nusantara Islamic architecture and how the Nusantara case can be situated within larger discussions regarding the constitution of Islamic architecture in general. The exact processes behind the Islamization of such a large maritime region are complex, but they include changes in trade

hegemony with the political decline of the pre-Islamic trading empires of Nusantara, the charismatic role of Arab proselytizers, including those based in Indian and southern Chinese ports, and the popular appeal of orthodox Sufi orders (*tariqas*).

### Southeast Asian Islamic Architecture?

The vast archipelago region, or Nusantara, inevitably forms the focus of a survey of “Southeast Asian” Islamic architecture, in contradistinction to the predominantly Buddhist mainland. During its fourteenth-century apogee, the Hindu–Buddhist East Javanese empire of Majapahit united Nusantara through acts of subjugation, tributary relations, and claims of suzerainty. In contrast, during the Islamic period the region comprised various regional Muslim polities that developed in the aftermath of the disintegration of Majapahit and, before that, two other pre-Islamic Malay-speaking Sumatran empires oriented to maritime trade – Srivijaya (Palembang) and Malayu (Jambi) along the Straits of Melaka (then known as Selat or Sea of Malayu)<sup>1</sup> (see Map 38.1). Nonetheless, there existed a Java-oriented emic conception of the maritime region as attested by the



MAP 38.1 Map of maritime Southeast Asia indicating places mentioned.

names “Dwipantara” (tenth century) and “Nusantara” (fourteenth century) coined by Javanese polities (both terms denoting “Among-the-Islands,”<sup>2</sup> while the term *Bilad al-Jawah* emerged by the early thirteenth century in Indian Ocean Muslim circles for this region.<sup>3</sup> This latter term remained current into the twentieth century to denote Islamic maritime Southeast Asia. The geographic *nisba* (a part of Arabic names indicating a place of familial or individual origin) “al-Jawi” was commonly used by Southeast Asian Muslims abroad, with more specific *nisbas* denoting town of origin (Map 38.1).

While there are grounds for considering the region as a field of study, what permits one to speak of a “Southeast Asian Islamic architecture”? In *The Formation of Islamic Art*, Oleg Grabar attempted to outline the problematic for a self-critical study of early Islamic art. Southeast Asia provides an interesting context for the study of the kind of “symbiosis” between the “local” and the “pan-Islamic” that Grabar refers to. He considered neither maritime Southeast Asia nor neighboring southern India and southern China. Yet the locally rooted visual culture of these maritime Asian regions illustrates his observation that in areas where Islamic art was not “one that overpowered and transformed ethnic or geographical traditions,” it became rather “one that created some peculiar kind of symbiosis between local and pan-Islamic modes of artistic behavior and expression.” Further, Grabar (1987: 2) contended that Islamic art was “like a special overlay, a deforming or refracting prism which transformed ... some local energies or traditions.”

The nature of the “local” in the formation of Southeast Asia’s Islamic art needs some explanation. If by the term “classical” we mean, after Grabar (1987: 11), the “wide cultural acceptance of certain forms as identifying the culture’s functional and aesthetic needs, repetition of standardized forms and designs, quality of execution at various levels of artistic production, [and] clarity in the definition of visible forms,” then the “local” element comprised both an autochthonous-Indic classicism and a pan-regional vernacular based upon such features as Malay as a literary medium and lingua franca that itself attained the status of the “classical.” The first known local Islamic polities emerged in the late thirteenth century in northern Sumatra within a Malay-speaking maritime civilization previously centered in southeast Sumatra’s Buddhist polity of Malayu, dominated politically by East Java’s Majapahit. The oldest extant Southeast Asian Islamic text, a semi-historical genealogical romance (*hikayat*) from Pasai, which ends by describing Pasai’s defeat by Majapahit in *c.* 1360 (Hill 1960), is written in classical Malay rather than in Pasai’s local Acehnese language.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asian Indic classical art and architecture demonstrated the original synthesis of autochthonous conceptions of the cosmos and those from Indic religions, primarily Shaivism and Mahayana Buddhism, since the earliest extant examples that date from the seventh century. Scholars such as Philip Rawson and James Fergusson emphasize that the expression and content of Southeast Asia’s Indic art are local and original, distinct from anything in India, and that Java’s unique interpretations of Hindu and Buddhist concepts are

particularly outstanding, surpassing the Indic art of the rest of Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, given its long history of about a thousand years and the bias for Indology among colonial scholars, a glance at surveys of Southeast Asian art betrays a bias for the study of its remarkable Indic synthesis.<sup>5</sup> Southeast Asia is not accorded an important place in even the more recent global surveys of Islamic art and architecture.<sup>6</sup> As a corollary of this situation, historians of Southeast Asia such as Clifford Geertz (1968) and of Islamic art such as Ira Lapidus (2002) have tended to dismiss Islamic art in this region as merely imitative – even degenerative – of its Indic legacy.<sup>7</sup> This despite clear evidence that forms for Islamic use in Southeast Asia reworked the enduring bases from the region's pre-Islamic art and architecture, such as that of fourteenth-century Majapahit. This historiographic peculiarity is somewhat analogous to the prevalence of Iranocentric positions in the study of South Asia's early Indo-Islamic architecture, and the consequent emphasis on a rupture with indigenous South Asian architectural traditions (Flood 2007; Patel 2004)

Grabar's notion of the role of symbiosis in the formative period of Islamic architecture enables the proposal of an alternative, more nuanced narrative to oppose the dim view of Southeast Asian Islamic art described above. Southeast Asian Islamic art was not simply a direct continuation (or degeneration) of the region's pre-Islamic art. New sources of symbolic signification derived from the Islamic cultures of the West provided conceptual bases – or in Grabar's terms an “overlay” – that “transformed” local traditions in the formation of independent Southeast Asian Islamic traditions. Three historiographical and methodological problems are discussed in the ensuing sections, in reference to principles that underlie different kinds of architecture. Focus is given to subregional distinctions and interactions.

### Range and Scope of Existing Surveys

In the urban context of various fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Muslim-ruled maritime principalities that flourished in the region, various palaces, water gardens containing diverse structures, and public works were constructed. Some port-cities like Melaka, Demak, Aceh, Banten, Brunei, Banjarmasin, and Makassar became centers of new Muslim maritime empires. Meanwhile important religious and funerary complexes were also deliberately sited away from urban centers, following a long-established tradition of *patapan* (meditation retreats) in Java. These built works are neglected in existing region-wide surveys. Many existing surveys of Southeast Asia's Islamic architecture are also geographically limited (typically to Java) and do not provide a holistic regional overview. Those that attempt a regional outlook focus only on mosques without placing them in the context of the architecture of other Islamic structures (A. Halim 2004; Dijk 2007, O'Neill 1994; Sumalyo 2000). While Behrend (1984) also discusses palaces (*kraton*) and garden complexes (*taman*), and a recently completed doctoral dissertation

includes a number of burial complexes (Wahby 2007), both works are restricted to Java rather than dealing with the broader Nusantara region. Existing surveys also tend to be descriptive rather than analytical (A. Halim 2004; Zakaria 1994), or they have analyzed typology but neglect a comparative regional perspective (Budi 2004; Wahby 2007). There is no attempt to discuss the factors relevant to the formation of Islamic art and architecture in the region.

### The Sense of a Region

Ties of diplomacy and trade have linked the maritime communities of Nusantara and West Asia since the pre-Islamic period (Meglio 1970). Islam added a new dimension to these longstanding links – Muslims from Southeast Asia traveled to Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Central Asia for scholarship and were affiliated with various Sufi orders.<sup>8</sup> The antiquity and extent of these links are slowly emerging from the sources.<sup>9</sup> Nusantara's Muslim polities also cultivated links with contemporary West Asian centers of Islam, whether these were represented by the Ayyubid rulers of Egypt,<sup>10</sup> Persian scholars from Delhi,<sup>11</sup> sixteenth-century Ottomans rulers, or the sharif of early seventeenth-century Mecca.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, despite these connections, Southeast Asia's Muslim communities operated within an autochthonous pan-regional Islamic tradition. One of the best-known early Southeast Asian Islamic scholars, Shaykh Hamzah al-Fansuri (of Fansur [Pancur], Barus, northwest Sumatra), who died in 1527 and was buried in Mecca (Guillot and Kalus 2008), declared that he was “neither Persian nor Arab” and, for the benefit of his brethren from the region, wrote in Malay, the regional lingua franca, rather than in his native dialect, and translated works into Malay (Riddell 2001: 108). Rare glimpses into the art of the illuminated manuscript or letter in Islamic Southeast Asia reinforce this sense of differentiation-within-engagement. The few extant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents include those where Arabic script was used alongside older regional scripts – the illumination of these manuscripts, while modeled on Perso-Arabian precedent, was distinct in color scheme and local motifs.<sup>13</sup> Annabel Gallop's study (2003) of several letters written before 1650 shows that Malay letter-writing in the Islamic period had its own epistolary conventions that were not borrowed from Persian or Arabic styles, while Southeast Asian Qur'ans are distinct and, more importantly, can be divided into several subregional traditions (Gallop 2007).

Southeast Asia's cosmopolitan Muslim communities also operated within an older Hindu-Buddhist syncretic regional culture that included distinct sub-regional traditions. The region's earliest autochthonous Islamic artifacts are fourteenth- and fifteenth-century tombstones. These come from the region of Pasai/Aceh in northern Sumatra where they were produced under a string of early local Muslim port-polities, and from the Majapahit capital in East Java.<sup>14</sup> Their motifs

remained current into the twentieth century, and point to the reworking of Javanese-Indic and local forms and motifs for an unprecedented artifact type, indicating a situation consistent with later developments, namely that Southeast Asian Islamic art owed its complex web of associations and formal innovation to a “classical” pre-Islamic regional culture that was already well formed, and upon which regional variations had accrued.

### Categories and Contexts: Mosque Halls and Mausolea

The existence of a recognizably distinct regional tradition with yet further sub-regional differentiation warrants a more detailed and rigorous consideration of Southeast Asia as a field of study for Islamic architecture than has thus far been attempted. Zakaria Ali's (1994: 383, 407) “pure and diluted dichotomy” model in *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia* is by far the only pan-regional framework to have been devised, but its notion of a dichotomy between the “Javanized form of Islamic art” as “issuing from the diluted half,” and “the Malay form” as “issuing from the pure half” ignores the shared pre-Islamic bases for form and ornament between the two traditions and does not address how Southeast Asia's artistic cultures have coalesced or combined in the fluid maritime context. These may be more accurately understood through the framework of typology and model variations (even apart from questions of the ascribed Hindu or Islamic affiliation of forms and concepts), which will be demonstrated in this chapter through examples that reveal a far more complicated scene.

#### *Beyond Demak: Model Variations and their Multiple Genealogies*

The *tajug* mosque is a case in point. The *tajug* is the most widespread form of the Southeast Asian mosque, characterized by a square plan and a tiered pyramidal-hip roof (*tajug*). It is structurally distinct from the ritual cock-fighting pavilion (*wantilan*) and the deity tower (*meru*), two building forms with which it is often compared (Figure 38.1). Existing surveys hold up the Friday mosque at Demak in northern Java as furnishing the *tajug* mosque prototype, where four principal columns (*soko guru*) support the top tier of a three-tiered pyramidal-hipped roof (Dijk 2007; O'Neill 1994). This assumption is problematic, as it does not acknowledge the great diversity of both outward form (number and profile of roof tiers) and structural format (number and arrangement of core columns) in early mosques that indicate that there were multiple models of *tajug*-type mosques with distinct genealogies from various pre-existing autochthonous regional traditions that are related yet differentiated.

The disregard for rigor in understanding Southeast Asian architectural typology and history also explains why several accounts of the *tajug* mosque identify Chinese pagodas or Malabari or Kashmiri mosques as antecedents, based on

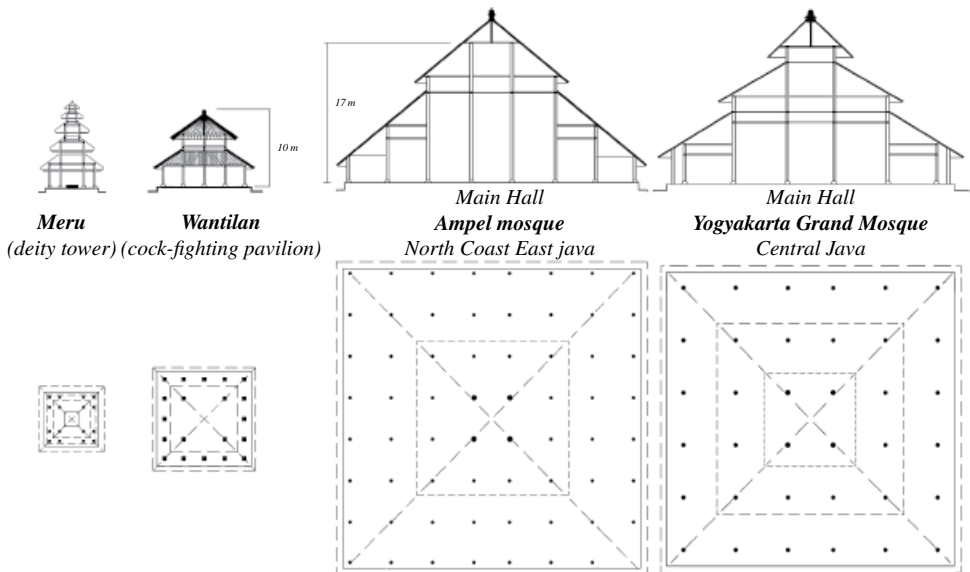


FIGURE 38.1 Structural distinction between the *tajug* hall (mosque), *wantilan* (cockfighting pavilion), and *meru* (deity tower).

superficial outward resemblance – claims which, from the perspective of structure or construction, are spurious.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Shokoohy (2003: 247–248) has not ruled out the possibility of Southeast Asian influence upon the characteristic wooden, multitiered Malabari mosque, given its peculiarity in the Indian architectural context. This raises the possibility of multidirectional cultural flows between early modern South and Southeast Asia.

The *tajug* roof is also used for the Javanese mausoleum building called the *cungkup*, a new type that was composed of a chamber raised on a high base containing graves. This inner chamber is surrounded by a perimeter gallery whose surrounding lean-to roof eaves are deliberately kept very low in sharp contrast to the elevated central tomb pavilion, as seen in the sixteenth-century *cungkup* of Sunan Bonang in Tuban. There may also be an adjoining antechamber, as seen in the sixteenth-century mausoleums of Sultan Hasanuddin next to Banten's Royal Mosque, and of Sunan Gunung Jati at Gunung Sembung complex, near Cirebon.

There is evidence to suggest that the *tajug* form had already appeared east of Java before or around the time of Demak mosque's construction in the fifteenth century. In the Sulu region of the southern Philippines, a mosque purportedly built in 1380 in Simunul, Tawi-Tawi (Lico 2008: 74–75) features four thick round timber columns (*soko guru*) carved in low relief, the only remains from its original structure.<sup>16</sup> In Maluku (the Spice Islands) at Hitu, Ambon we find the Wapauwe Mosque, which reputedly dates from 1414 and retains archaic decorative details in its thick thatch roof corner eaves, the use of (periodically renewed)

bamboo walls, and an old timber finial (*tiang alif*). The widespread acceptance of the *tajug* mosque form from an early period and its ready adaptation to regional variants may indicate its resonance with older notions of the apposite form for a ritually important building.

This supposition is supported by the fact that the etymology of variant names for the same features on the *tajug* roof that remain current centuries after their original meaning has been forgotten indicate that this pavilion form signified sanctity. The finial ornament (*memolo*) in Javanese is the “elixir of life” (*brahma-mula*); the ridge form is curiously called the “ridge of the som” or *perabung som* in Melaka (Abdullah 1978), after the elixir of life (*soma*) (Figure 38.2). “Tajug” was also the pre-Islamic name for the town of Kudus (al-Quds) in Pesisir, Central Java, where the term in addition signified the “holy.” Local accounts relate that pre-Islamic Tajug/Kudus was already a sacred place (Ashadi 2006: 66). And while the term denotes the roof form in Javanese, in the Sundanese language of West Java *tajug* denotes the mosque itself, while in Banten the term denoting a mosque is *bale* or meeting pavilion. Wahby’s (2007) postulation that the centralized dome favored in some medieval Anatolian monuments influenced the *tajug* mosque appears plausible, but it does not recognize the *tajug* form’s deep roots in older local traditions (Figure 38.2).

(a)



(b)



FIGURE 38.2 Roof ornaments and symbolism. (a) Memolo finial ornament from one of the pavilions in Kudus complex, Central Java. (b) Mustaka finial and Perabung Som ridge ornament, Pengkalan Rama mosque, Melaka.



In addition, column and roof configurations are also markers of ritual potency in cult buildings from tribal, non-Muslim groups at the eastern “fringes” of Southeast Asian Muslim maritime society, such as the Ifugao, Timorese, Sumbanese, and Halmaherans (Waterson 1997). The miniature roof tiers atop Banten Royal Mosque (1566, rebuilt 1615) allude to this (Figure 38.3a).

(a)



(b)



(c)



FIGURE 38.3 Roof form. (a) Banten royal mosque, North Coast (Pesisir) West Java, miniature upper tiers of the tajug roof. (b) Limo Kaum mosque, West Sumatra, Minangkabau roof form and central tower. (c) Lubuk Bauk mosque, West Sumatra, Minangkabau roof form with four projecting gables and central tower.

Meanwhile, the term *surau*, which denotes a small prayer hall in Malay and Minangkabau, is etymologically linked to the Batak term *parsuroan* for an animist shrine (Waterson 1997). A single central column, called the apex column (*tonggak macu*), supports the top *tajug* roof tier Minangkabau mosques, surrounded by either four or eight columns. The apex column may also be built as a central tower (see Figure 38.3b). In fact, the structural and formal aspects specific to Minangkabau mosques in west Sumatra indicate their independent development based on Sumatran models of sacred buildings. This point appears to be supported by the fact that Minangkabau mosques may also feature four projecting gables on the middle or top *tajug* roof tier, akin to the chief's residence (*rumah anjung-anjung*) and the ritual pavilions (*geriten*) of the neighboring Karo Batak (Figure 38.3c).<sup>17</sup> This parallel between Minangkabau and Batak built forms used for different ritual purposes strengthen the hypothesis of their derivation from an older Sumatran ritual building type suggested by the term *surau/parsuroan*. The significance of these structural and formal distinctions is missed in existing surveys that do not apply a rigorous typological analysis and are further constrained by the Demak-as-prototype framework. The two oldest extant examples of Minangkabau mosques are the late sixteenth-century Jao Mosque and the seventeenth-century Syekh (Shaykh) Burhanuddin Mosque. *Suraus* in Minangkabau may also be built in the form of the Minangkabau house form with distinctive upturned saddle-back (*gonjong*) gable roofs.

Two fifteenth-century mosques from Cirebon, north coast West Java further undermine the Demak-precedence hypothesis. The Small Prayer Hall (Langgar Alit) in Kraton Kasepuhan, along with the Minangkabau examples just mentioned, point to an alternative tradition featuring a single central post, a type that appears to have been considered sacred or ritually significant in Majapahit Java. Early mosques may well have begun as small five-pillared structures like Cirebon's Langgar Alit, while one of the five ritually important pavilions found in the Elevated Ground (Siti Hinggil) court of the same palace complex is also built with a sacred central column (Figure 38.4a, b).

The pavilions of Kasepuhan's Siti Hinggil court are likewise noteworthy for their different column configurations set on high brick bases of various designs, while the Siti Hinggil court in the neighboring junior Kanoman palace features a pavilion built entirely in plastered brick that retains the sacred central column formation. Numerous pavilions and gateways of classical Majapahit design are also found in the sixteenth-century terraced burial complex of Gunung Sembung, where Syarif Hidayatullah (Sunan Gunung Jati), founder of Cirebon's Muslim dynasty is buried. These extant Cirebon pavilions give a sense of the variety of pavilion types being built during the early Islamic period and how the mosque hall was an emerging form that could be developed from a number of available types. This supposition appears to be strengthened by the distinct structural and formal type seen in Java's second key historical mosque from Cirebon, Sang Cipta Rasa, the royal mosque of Kraton Kasepuhan (1480) – a rectangular plan hall with

(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

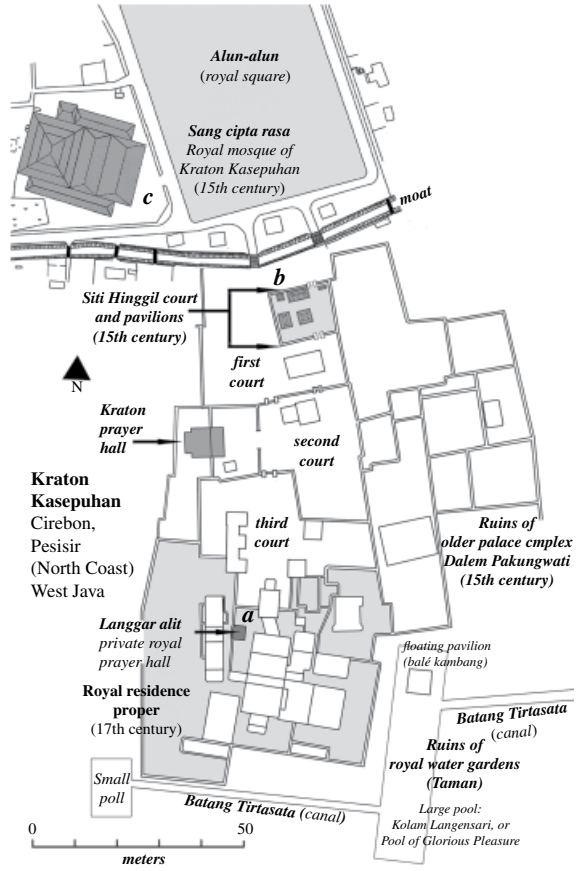


FIGURE 38.4 Kraton Kasepuhan (palace complex) in Cirebon, West Java. (a) Central column of Langgar Alit, private royal prayer hall in Kraton Kasepuhan. (b) Five-columned pavilion in the Siti Hinggil court, Kraton Kasepuhan. (c) The Sang Cipta Rasa royal mosque of Kraton Kasepuhan. (d) Plan of Kraton Kasepuhan and the alun-alun royal square of Cirebon, with Sang Cipta Rasa mosque.

12 main columns supporting the top tier of a three-tiered hip roof (Figure 38.4c). It may represent an attempt to adapt another building type for a mosque hall – one that never caught on.

Two other features of early mosques further undermine the thesis that Demak provided the prototype of the *tajug* mosque type. Raised timber platform floors (*panggung*) feature in sixteenth-century *tajug* royal mosques in Brunei, Banjarmasin, Kotawaringin, and Ternate.<sup>18</sup> A Dutch print of Ternate from 1599 shows a three-tier *tajug* mosque, which was described in the accompanying text as being built “on 36 poles twice the thickness and height of a man” (Zakaria 1994: 253–254). Meanwhile five-tiered *tajug* roofs – involving different structural formats from Demak’s *soko guru* principle – were common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples, judging by the illustrations or descriptions of the royal mosques of Aceh, Jepara, and Brunei, as well as the Old Mosque at Bitay near Aceh, all no longer extant. A Spanish source records that in 1578 Brunei had a *tajug* mosque “five stories tall and built over water.”<sup>19</sup> The aforementioned Banten Royal Mosque has two miniature tiers above its three-tiered roof (see Figure 38.3a), while an early nineteenth-century west Sumatran mosque called Limo Kaum boasts a 55 m tall five-tiered tapered *tajug* roof in the Minangkabau manner (see Figure 38.3b).

### *Beyond “Traditional” Wooden Structures*

Another fundamental methodological problem concerns the situation of Southeast Asian Islamic architecture in modern scholarship between two simplistic temporal categories: an earlier “classical period” for which study is focused upon brick or stone edifices of the Austronesian-Indic synthesis developed chiefly in Java and Sumatra, and a later “traditional” one focused upon wooden domestic architecture (Imran 2013). As mentioned above, existing surveys discuss only mosque halls, which are seen in isolation and are narrowly understood as examples of wooden traditional or vernacular architecture. Yet, the region’s mosques and tomb complexes, royal pleasure gardens, and palace complexes are not so easily classified into “classical” masonry forms or “traditional” wooden construction, for they often combine both materials and methods of construction. A focus on the wooden halls of mosques and mausolea also divorces them from their context in complexes of masonry construction (discussed in the section on Courtyard Morphology and Gateways, below). Such combinations are, in fact, a feature of classical pre-Islamic architecture to begin with.

In fact, mosque and mausolea halls may not be built entirely in wood. Stone walls were a feature of the Melaka and Banten royal mosques; the former’s laterite stone blocks, coated with lime plaster, were dismantled by the Portuguese in 1511 (Pintado 1993), while the latter, observed in 1598, burned down in 1615 (Dijk 2007: 48). Palopo Mosque (1603) in Luwu, south Sulawesi, features exceptionally thick walls of interlocking dressed stones and moldings characteristic of Javanese temple (*candi*) construction. The plastered stone walls of the mosques

of Buton and of Katangka near Makassar are of such great thickness that they give the impression of having been intended as fortresses. Yet other thick brick or stone walls were built as screens surrounding timber pavilions, with the roofs supported by wooden columns that stand independently of these screen walls, in the manner once found in Majapahit structures and still seen today in Bali. This is the case in Cirebon's Sang Cipta Rasa Royal Mosque, whose brick and stone walls enclose the central prayer chamber, independent from the structural columns holding up the roof.

The large seventeenth-century royal mausoleum buildings and tall grave bases of Makassar are also noteworthy. They are built of interlocking stones and are given horizontal moldings in the manner of Javanese stone temple construction from before the sixteenth century (Figure 38.5). Such grave forms are, interestingly, not found in Java.

Intricately carved wooden panels or stone screen walls are a common feature on fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Javanese Islamic buildings and compounds. Geometric ornamental patterns may also be formed by staggering or omitting brick courses to create various kinds of relief patterns and openings (Figure 38.6a). Terracotta and stone wall medallions were already used on Javanese *candi* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example, in Candi Panataran, but truly remarkable examples with original motifs may be seen in the mosque of Mantingan and Cirebon's Sang Cipta Rasa (Figure 38.6b, c). They display both geometric endless knot motifs, as well as landscape scenes of mountain retreats with pavilions or caves for meditation – these themes were also found in Majapahit Javanese figurative art. Carved scenes of landscapes or abstract geometric patterns in relief are featured on panels, medallions, and roundels that are framed within wall panels or segments. The remarkable set of panels seen in the mosque of Mantingan, however, have lost their original context and are today set into a plain concrete wall. Fifteenth-century Vietnamese blue-and-white tiles of various designs produced specially for the Javanese market have been found in the Majapahit capital and other Majapahit sites, as well as in several mosques such as Demak and Kudus (Figure 38.6d) (Guy 1989; Takashi 2008, 2009). In Cirebon and other Pesisir sites, Chinese and Delft ceramic plates are often set into niches in brick walls as part of a brick or plaster decorative schema (Figure 38.6e). Many of these ornamental systems and motifs appear to have been unique to Javanese Islamic structures. The pre-Islamic motifs found in Majapahit architecture and in tombstone art are also applied to pillar bases and as wall decoration, as seen in Cirebon's Kraton Kasepuhan (Tjandrasasmita 1975a).

### *Intra-Regional Interactions*

In addition to continuities with Majapahit architecture, another feature of early Islamic architecture in Southeast Asia is the degree of regional variation. Two examples indicate the importance of intra-regional architectural interactions in

(a)



(b)



FIGURE 38.5 Royal funerary stone monuments from Makassar, South Sulawesi. (a) Mausoleum buildings around Katangka mosque. (b) Tall grave in Tallo' Citadel.



FIGURE 38.6 Ornament. (a) Ornamental brick patterns and ceramic plate inserts, Siti Hinggil compound wall, Kraton Kasepuhan, Cirebon, West Java. (b) Terracotta medallions on the brick wall of Sang Cipta Rasa royal mosque of Kraton Kasepuhan, Cirebon, West Java. (c) Stone medallions of Mantingan mosque, near Jepara, Central Java. (d) Blue-and-white custom-made Vietnamese wall tiles at Demak, Central Java. (e) Ceramic plates in plasterwork decorative schema, Kraton Kasepuhan gateway, Cirebon, West Java.

the eastern archipelago. The mosque of Palopo (1603) in Luwu, South Sulawesi, presents an interesting confluence of Javanese construction and a structural format associated with the architecture of Minangkabau in the highlands of Sumatra. The area's Islamization is attributed to Minangkabau proselytizers (Pelras 1994), and the mosque's top roof tier is supported by a single central pillar (made from the local *cinnagori* hardwood) characteristic of Minangkabau mosques. The walls, meanwhile, are of fitted stone in the manner of Javanese *candi* construction, with Greek cross-shaped ventilation openings in the qibla wall after similar openings created on Javanese brick wall designs by the omission of brick courses – in Palopo the same effect is imitated by incising the stone.

The mid-sixteenth-century mosque in Buton is built with a hip roof, with the ridge in the direction of the qibla axis. Islamization of the area is attributed to a proselytizer from Patani. This might explain why the Buton mosque follows the plan, though not the exact roof form, of an overlooked tradition – that of Patani mosques, as seen in the seventeenth-century Teluk Manok and the smaller Surau Aur. These rectangular halls are typologically related to the Buddhist monastery hall (*vihara*), which would have been a feature of the earlier Buddhist Malay polities (Bougas 1986, 1992; M. Zamberi 2001). Some Bangkok mosques built by Malay and Javanese communities,<sup>20</sup> as well as some Cham mosques (built by the people of Champa, present-day central Vietnam), are built in forms and decorative motifs that are more overtly reminiscent of contemporary Buddhist halls of Cambodia and Thailand.

### Islam as “Overlay”: Discursive Re-signification Beyond Mosques

One oft-quoted basis for synthesis in Southeast Asian Islam comes from metaphysical speculation and theological debates in orthodox Sufism. A prominent role is accorded in texts and popular tradition to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Wali Songo proselytizers, Muslim saints who converted the populace, particularly in negotiating the position of the pre-Islamic arts and *adat* – an Arabic loanword to denote pre-Islamic norms, practices, and customary laws. Orthodox Sufi orders in the sixteenth-century Islamic intellectual centers of northern Sumatra and Pesisir Java produced mystical texts and Javanese “Suluk” literature that contained both pantheistic and monistic elements (Riddell 2001; Zoetmulder 1995), while both Islamic orthodoxy and orthodox Sufi mysticism variously attempted to discredit, contest, or incorporate existing meditative and ascetic practices of Shaivite and Buddhist mendicants and ascetics (Braginsky 2004; Ricklefs 2006; Riddell 2001).

A Persian-influenced notion of Islamic kingship that arose around the twelfth century, encapsulated in the expression “Shadow of God on Earth” and linked to ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili’s notion of the “Perfect Man” (*al-insan al-kamil*) (Milner 1983), represented a particularly productive “special overlay” of spiritual doctrines.



These doctrines provided space for Southeast Asian Indic and autochthonous expression within Muslim kingship and imperial culture. Southeast Asian Muslim rulers, whether of thalassocracies or theocracies, could thus set themselves up as the locus for mystical potency and spiritual exemplars and intermediaries in religious piety through the design of royal pleasure gardens and palace complexes whose idealized depictions of cosmic order were previously linked to Hindu-Buddhist notions of, for example, the Javanese ruler as “Siwa-Buddha” or the Hindu god Indra, or to indigenized Indic ideas of the ruler as a deified ancestor upon his death. This is most strikingly seen in the Perso-Islamic terms and allusions employed in Aceh’s Taman Ghairah, which will be discussed later.

Islamic symbolic references have also been articulated in purely local terms, challenging Grabar’s notion of Islam as a “special overlay.” Perhaps the clearest example comes from the consolidation of three calendars by Sultan Agung of Mataram, Central Java, in 1633 – namely the Indic Śaka calendar, the indigenous *pasaran* five-day cycle, and the Hijri calendar – to form what is now known as Anno Javanico (Taun Jawa). Javanese Muslim graves, buildings, and manuscripts were almost invariably dated using this system. Merle Ricklefs (2006) cites this remarkable consolidation as an example of a distinctly Javanese Mataram Islamic “mystic synthesis,” since it allowed the continued observance of pre-Islamic auspicious days alongside adherence to Islamic ritual cycles. In fact, syncretism of Islamic and local ideas and concepts also existed long before Sultan Agung’s initiative and in ways that were deeply rooted in autochthonous cultures that existed away from imperial centers (Brakel 2004; Johns 1981; Jones 1979).

### *Taman – Gardens as Microcosmos*

The *taman*, intended as both pleasure garden and as a symbol of cosmic order and harmony for spiritual retreat, is an especially interesting subject for the study of the reworking of pre-Islamic symbolism and spiritual practices. In the *taman*, elaborate artificial landscapes of pools, water channels, and waterworks intended both for aesthetic enjoyment and for irrigation are complemented by architectural structures representing a mountain, to create settings that act as aids (*yantra*) to meditation (*samadhi*).

Denys Lombard’s (2010) study on the symbolism of the *taman* and its links to pre-Islamic imagery of the garden in tenth-century Javanese literature and narrative reliefs discusses two eighteenth-century Javanese *tamans*, namely Sunyaragi near Cirebon, and Taman Sari in Yogyakarta. For Lombard (2010: 62), these common themes indicate that “there existed in Java ... a consummate art of the garden,” and also that “the Javanese have had their own interpretation of the garden.” However, Lombard’s survey omits two older sixteenth-century Javanese examples from Banten and Cirebon, and a third, seventeenth-century *taman* from Aceh, in northern Sumatra. These earlier examples also share the same basic forms and themes, suggesting that the distinct form of the garden that Lombard

observes for Java also extended beyond the two Javanese examples used as the basis for his observation. More significantly, they were found in the context of the palace and/or pleasure gardens of the sultans of Aceh, Banten, and Cirebon and exhibited the Islamic overlay of signification that Lombard did not have occasion to refer to.

One characteristic motif of the *taman* is the floating pavilion (*balé kambang*) – a building set on a raised mound representing a mountain set amidst an artificial lake or pools representing the sea. Thus, the name of the *taman* in Banten, Tasekardi, combines the Javanese term for lake and the Arabic for the earth, referring to the two primal elements of sea and mountain represented by a large rectangular brick pool of about five hectares, and an artificial island set in the middle, containing the ruins of a pier and a two-story stone structure. The pool irrigated the surrounding fields and its water was also channeled via a 6 km-long canal through three purifying chambers to the palace in Banten town where it is fed into the bathing pool Rara Denok and to various water spouts and fountains (Behrend 1984). Banten was founded in the early sixteenth century by one of the Wali Songo, Sharif Hidayatullah (Sunan Gunung Jati), a proselytizer of Arab descent who had arrived from Pasai (Azra 2006: 53). The subsequent rulers of Banten, who were his descendants and who built these structures, styled themselves Maulana and, later on, Sultan.

Before founding Banten, Sharif Hidayatullah had also established a Muslim dynasty in Cirebon in the fifteenth century. The ruins of his predecessor's palace, the Dalem Agung Pakungwati, contains a series of brick-walled courts with pavilions and several pools. The adjacent palace complex built by his descendants, Kraton Kasepuhan, contains a *taman* comprising a series of pools and structures which has escaped existing surveys by Behrend (1984) and Lombard (2010). A mound named Gunung Indrakila (Indra's Mountain Abode) is found adjacent to a channel called Batang Tirtasata that links two pools; the larger pool, called Kolam Langensari (Pool of Glorious Pleasure), contains a *balé kambang*.<sup>21</sup>

Taman Ghairah, the royal gardens of Aceh, is described in detail in an Acehnese Malay court text, the *Bustan al-Salatin* (Garden of Kings). While the form of the *taman* belongs to Javanese tradition, Persian and Arabian symbolic names jostle with those derived from indigenous, Javanese, and Indic sources. Said to be laid out during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thani (r. 1636–1675), it contains a diverted river Dar al-Ishqi (the Kruëng Daroy today), a mosque called Ishqi Mushahadah (The Passion of the Declaration of Faith), and a square named Medan Khairani (Square of Virtuousness). In the middle of the latter stood a “tower as a place for sitting in state (*menara tempat semayam*)” called Gegunungan Menara Permata (Mountain of the Jeweled Tower) – this is today known as Gunongan, and only the octagonal 9.5 m high brick structure with the form of a tiered flower-like composition remains, while the columns of copper, silver roof tiles resembling a sago-palm roof, and a pinnacle of pinchback have vanished. There are also artificial pools with man-made islands, and serpent (*naga*) spouts

and bathing places (Lombard 2006: 274–278). In Wessing’s detailed reading, the Gunongan can be related to both Javanese Indic notions of the cosmos and, very obliquely, to Perso-Islamic Mughal paradisiacal gardens (1988: 172).

The cosmic symbolism of mountain and sea seen in the *taman*, represented by pavilions on elevated mounds and surrounding pools, also figures in the mosque complexes. The mosque halls of Cirebon Kasepuhan, Banten, Jepara, Kota Gede, and Yogyakarta (Figure 38.3a and Figure 38.4) are surrounded either on one or three sides by a channel or moat and provided with one or more bridges to the prayer hall. The mosque halls can thus be read as an element representing mountains within a landscape charged with cosmic symbolism, particularly when they lie within elaborate complexes with pools and burial grounds of kings or the venerated saints (Wali Songo) of Java.

### *Courtyard Morphology and Gateways*

The story of how different Wali Songo (the symbolically named “Nine Saints” of Java) proselytizers were responsible for the preparation and erection of Demak Mosque’s four principal columns is an oft-repeated one in connection with the *tajug* mosque myth of Demak-as-precedent. However, columns, gateways, and other architectural elements were also imbued with Islamic references in more explicit ways. The various pillar configurations in the pavilions of the Siti Hinggil courtyard of Kasepuhan palace in Cirebon are given parallel Javanese-Sanskrit and Arabic names by which they can be read to either signify Indic or Islamic meanings (Imran 2013).

Kasepuhan contains a hierarchy of layered spaces marked in each instance by a mosque. Thus its royal mosque stands to the west of the city’s square (*alun-alun*) fronting the palace’s northern (front) entrance; a medium-sized private mosque stands in front of a smaller square in its semi-private courtyard for state and judiciary functions, and the Small Prayer Hall (Langgar Alit) is found in the private domain of the complex (see Figure 38.4a). These layers are replicated in Kanoman to a lesser degree.

Walled courtyards with gateways were also a feature of sixteenth-century palaces in Aceh and Banten. In fact whole cities were built in this morphological pattern. A Surabaya map of 1678 depicts with remarkable accuracy the surviving courtyards of the fifteenth-century Ampel complex in Surabaya, and indicates that courtyards once characterized the whole city, of which none survive today. Small by Javanese standards but among the oldest Muslim satellite centers inserted into an existing Majapahit-era port-city, the Ampel complex thus emerges as a precious remnant of a historic morphological feature. According to tradition, the five gates of the Ampel courtyards represent the five pillars of Islam, and are assigned their respective associations according to their position within the complex.<sup>22</sup> The saint (Wali Songo) who founded the settlement, Raden Rahmat (Sunan Ampel), was from Pasai. He is said to have established Ampel-Gading as a satellite Muslim center near Surabaya with the consent of the Majapahit ruler. The same situation

is found in later, more elaborate Javanese Islamic complexes that are terraced into hill slopes – they were established as satellite religious and educational establishments near existing towns or cities.

The Ampel complex and the Kasepuhan and Kanoman palaces are fifteenth-century examples of the *panataran* (courtyard) complexes that are laid out on level ground, as are later, more elaborate sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mosque-and-tomb complexes at Bonang, Kadilangu, Kudus, Mantingan, and Kotagede. On the other hand, *pundhen*-type (terraced hill slope) mosque-and-tomb complexes are exemplified by the following sixteenth-century examples: the 10 terraces of Cirebon’s Gunung Jati complex at Gunung Sembung, the Sendang Duwur complex near Lamongan,<sup>23</sup> the seven terraces on the Giri Kedhaton site, and the terraced approaches to the Giri complex near Gresik, as well as the elaborate seventeenth-century royal mausoleum complex at Imogiri.

Arabic names were also used to invoke connections to the Islamic heartlands in the dramatic exposition of Majapahit architecture seen in the Kudus (al-Quds) mosque-and-tomb complex on the north coast of Central Java (Figure 38.7). An Arabic inscription from 1549, dated in the Hegira, names the mosque “al-Aqsa, [built] in al-Quds” (i.e., Jerusalem) by the fifth Imam of the Demak Mosque, recorded as al-Qadi Ja’far al-Sadiq, a namesake of the fifth (according to the



FIGURE 38.7 Kudus minaret and several old brick gateways to the complex, Central Java.

Isma'ili) Shi'i imam (Kalus and Guillot 2008). Its unique red-brick minaret, assuming the profile of east Javanese *candi*, or more accurately the signal-drum tower of Javanese (and Balinese) temple complexes, has assured Kudus a place in popular memory. A nearby example at Mount Muria (al-Marwah or Moriah) which has escaped proper architectural or historical discussion is the burial complex and madrasa (*pesantren*) of another proselytizer, Raden 'Umar Said alias Sunan Muria.

### Temporal Paradox and Political Posturing

The preceding discussion has reviewed the need to go beyond a monolithic view of Southeast Asia's traditions of Islamic architecture (even while it is viewed as a regional unit) by demonstrating, through a number of examples, the inadequacy of existing methodological and taxonomic frameworks and the role of a rigorous typological framework in revealing the significance of subregional model variations. Further, pre-Islamic traditions enjoyed continuity and even further elaboration through their adaptation to new purposes. In particular, their re-signification through the overlay of Islamic or Islamized meaning suggests a certain trajectory – but a word of caution must here be inserted against any teleological assumption. For while Sufi mysticism and Perso-Islamic kingship furnished concepts that legitimized pre-Islamic motifs and forms through their re-signification and associative resonance in the new religious milieu, such “overlays” (after Grabar) in fact enabled pre-Islamic elements to be reworked in ways that surpass their original pre-Islamic usage. Contra Grabar, such syntheses may be motivated by factors other than adaptation to the tenets of the newly adopted faith. They were also driven by a desire to integrate pre-Islamic expressions of spiritual potency – both autochthonous and Indic – and to highlight the Muslim polity's inheritance of the mantle of prestigious pre-Islamic imperial centers, particularly that of Majapahit.<sup>24</sup>

Further, as Southeast Asian Muslim polities became more powerful and entrenched, there was a marked enunciation and elaboration of pre-Islamic ideas and forms. In what may be termed a temporal paradox, craftsmen in the service of seventeenth-century Muslim patrons elaborated pre-Islamic forms and ornamental vocabulary more than a century after the demise of Majapahit and other pre-Islamic polities, whereas the earliest Muslim polities that coexisted with Majapahit have left behind far simpler forms. This process was heightened even further in the eighteenth century, which lies beyond this chapter's scope.

These developments run counter to the assumption of a linear trajectory from an “early” phase to a “transitional” phase leading to a fully-fledged Islamic art, with a corresponding decrease in the contribution of indigenous and Indic expressive vocabulary. Instead, Nusantara's Muslim polities adopted what may be called “political posturing” by emphasizing continuities with pre-Islamic imperial culture even as they articulated connections to a new religious framework.

Perhaps the most striking examples of posturing is seen in how zoomorphic figures feature prominently as the royal mounts of some Muslim rulers. Their use may indicate an appeal to the image of Indic deity mounts and indigenous mythology of the sea serpent (*naga*) or other creatures. Among the oldest specimens is a magnificent sixteenth-century boat inscribed with the name “Sultan Abdul Malik, Tuban” (a port in north coast Java) preserved as fragments on Selayar island, south Sulawesi, featuring an elaborate *naga* head 110 cm high with ornate wings and a 1.5 m long tail (Reid 1990a: 99). In Cirebon, two old royal carriages assume the fantastic shapes of hybrid animals: the late sixteenth-century Singhabarwang from Kasepuhan and the Paksinagaliman from Kanoman, inscribed with the date 1530 AJ or 1608 on its neck. A local zoomorphic calligraphic version of the lion of ‘Ali (Macan ‘Ali) serves as the royal emblem and appears on the flag of Cirebon accompanied by his sword Dhu’l-Fiqar. Large Garuda and Jetayu bird-form mounts, respectively Vishnu’s mount and a warrior in the Ramayana, were still being used for wedding or circumcision processions for the royal princes of the Sultanates of Patani, Kelantan, and Terengganu in the northeastern Malayan Peninsula in the early twentieth century (Sheppard 1972).

## Conclusion

The posturing and the negotiation between local, pre-Islamic, and Islamic traditions seen in the royal mounts can be discussed more satisfactorily through a cultural and historical perspective on the regional polities between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>25</sup> The same is true of the broader architectural traditions discussed in this chapter. The responses in Islamic art and architectural production to the legacy of earlier, formative polities and to the opportunities presented by their demise, the perceived relationship between Islamic and pre-Islamic political cultures, and the posturing adopted by alternative or rival centers, found expression through the development of art and architecture. A historiography of Southeast Asian Islamic architecture before the seventeenth century would ideally be built upon the analysis of physical innovations against the underlying textual bases of re-signification and negotiation of (sometimes conflicting) systems of meaning and symbolism, as well as a detailed and critical analysis of the historical background of political and socioeconomic changes and their broader contexts. However, the prospect for a synthetic and comprehensive survey is still hampered by the near absence of detailed catalogues of objects and buildings and analyses of extant texts from the period.

## Notes

- 1 Selat, Malay for “Straits,” is rendered *Salahit* in Arab and Persian texts, while the name “Sea of Malayu” appears in Kurdhadhbih’s Persian account. See Andaya 2008.
- 2 The best treatment of this topic is Laffan 2009.

- 3 Laffan 2009.
- 4 Rawson 1967: 203 and Fergusson 1962. Rawson states forthright that “although the modes [of Hindu-Buddhist or Indic art in Southeast Asia] may be Indian the expression and content are local” (1962: 7).
- 5 See Bussagli 1989; Frederic 1965; Munsterberg 1970; and Rawson 1967.
- 6 See Blair and Bloom 1994 and Tadgell 2008.
- 7 According to Geertz (1968: 11), “Islam did not construct a civilization, it appropriated one,” while Lapidus (2002: 216) claims, “Indonesian and Malayan regimes perpetuated a non-Islamic culture of imperium with little more than Islamic titles.” Flood (2007) and (2009) has also noted the dismissive stance towards hybrid forms that continued pre-Islamic motifs in the South Asian and West Asian contexts.
- 8 See Bruinessen 1994 on the Kubrawiyya link of Jawi students, and Riddell 2001 on Hamzah Fansuri’s link to the Qadiriyya and Shams a’-Din al-Sumatrani’s link to the Naqshbandiyya.
- 9 A fourteenth-century text from Aden mentions a certain Mascud al-Jawi, who was inducted into the Qadiriyya order there and was particularly esteemed for his capacity for mystical communication via *dhikr* (remembrance) (Laffan 2011: 4–5).
- 10 The two rulers of Pasai adopted the regnal names al-Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh (Merah Silau, d. 1297) and Malik al-Zahir (d. 1326), as indicated on their tombstones – see Zakaria Ali 1994: 223. These names correspond to Al-Malik as-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (1205–1249), Ayyubid ruler of Egypt from 1240 to 1249; and Al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqdari (1223–1277, r. 1260–1277), fifth Mamluk ruler of the Egyptian Bahri line of the Mamluk dynasty.
- 11 Ibn Battuta, who visited Pasai in 1346, noted that the court hosted Persian scholars from Delhi and took an active interest in scholarly discussions with Sufi theologians (Hall 1977: 226).
- 12 The Bantenese sent a dispatch to Mecca in 1630 which returned in 1638, to obtain an explanation for three religious tracts, and confer title of Sultan upon the ruler (Laffan 2011: 17). Aceh cultivated commercial and diplomatic ties with the Ottomans in the 1530s and 1560s.
- 13 A manuscript kept in the Museum of Cape Malays in Cape Town and attributed to Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari, has interlinear text in Bugis Lontara’ or Sulapak Eppa script accompanying the Arabic text; a letter from the Sultan Ternate dated 1521 (Ab Razak Ab Karim (1994)) and two seventeenth-century Banten letters to the king of Denmark (Voorhoeve 1975) have also survived.
- 14 See Damais 1968; Lambourn 2003, 2004; Montana 1997; and Othman 1988.
- 15 For a useful summary of these earlier views and speculations, see Budi 2004.
- 16 Lico 2008 includes an old photograph of the mosque before the construction of the present concrete hall around these columns (p. 75).
- 17 The four projecting gables identify mosques built by the hierarchical Koto Piliang clan confederation (*lareh*) of the Minangkabau, as opposed to the egalitarian Bodi Caniago confederation. For a detailed typological discussion see Sudibyo (1987).
- 18 See Atmodjo 1999: 90 for Banua Lawas Mosque near Banjarmasin, and Hidayat and Widodo 2005: 126 for Sultan Suriansyah Mosque, Banjarmasin. Both are reputedly built by Khatib Dayan from “Demak,” though this reference is anachronistic.
- 19 As recorded by the Spanish Alonso Beltran. See Nicholl 2002: 47–51.
- 20 See Sudwilai 2001 for images of Bangkok mosques.

- 21 These names are indicated in a manuscript supplied by Kraton Kasepuhan in the author's collection.
- 22 This popular tradition is well known locally and has been commented upon in several local news articles, but it has not received any academic study.
- 23 On this remarkable complex, see the monography by Uka Tjandrasmita (1975b).
- 24 The chronicles of the region's Muslim polities reflect such concerns, especially Babad Demak, Sejarah Banten, Babad Cirebon, and Babad Tanah Jawi.
- 25 These developments include the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511 and Pasai in 1520; Majapahit's demise following an attack on its capital in 1527, traditionally said to have been by a combined force of Pesisir Javanese Muslim port-polities led by Demak; and finally the disintegration of Demak itself following the death of its third sultan Trenggana in 1546. Also relevant is the notion of a seventeenth-century crisis for maritime Southeast Asian polities and trade posited by Anthony Reid (1990b). See also Robson 1981 and Graaf and Pigeaud 2003.

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